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# Christianity's *Addiction*:

# Voluntary Enslavement and the Paradox of the Will

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

by

Lucas Miles McCracken

Committee in Charge:

Professor Thomas Carlson, Chair

Professor Joseph Blankholm

Professor David Walker

June 2023

The dissertation of Lucas Miles McCracken is approved.

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Thomas Carlson, Committee Chair

June 2023

*For Kenneth Miles McBrayer (August 15, 1952 – September 11, 2001)*

*The ultimate punishment of us creatures—the punishment of addiction—consists in this: neither can we deny our desire for happiness (because of our unchangeable nature), nor can we attain happiness (because of our incurable defect).*

*Hugh of Saint-Victor, "On the Fall of Man"* (Paris, 1137)

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# ABSTRACT

Christianity's Addiction: Voluntary Enslavement and the Paradox of the Will

By Lucas McCracken

What exactly is *addiction*? Lawmakers, psychiatrists, and addicts themselves have contested the definition of *addiction* for centuries, and they consistently arrive at a fork in the road: Is addiction a willful crime or a congenital disease? Some argue that addictive behaviors are an individual's free choice, and thus they have justified punishing addicts for their bad decisions (think the Reagans' "Just Say No" campaign). Others insist that addiction is not a willful crime to be punished, but a medical condition to be treated (think Alcoholics Anonymous' 12-step program). Despite these many inquiries and debates, one significant aspect of the concept of *addiction* remains unexamined—its deep theological history. These familiar debates about the nature of addiction—whether inherited disease, willful crime, or paradoxically both—raged for over a millennium in Latin theology before the term ever appeared in American psychiatric manuals. My dissertation, "Christianity's Addiction: Voluntary Enslavement and the Paradox of the Will," studies the empirical origin and discursive history of the persistent concept of *addiction*, whose peregrinations from ancient Roman pecuniary law, through the history of Latin theology, to contemporary psychiatry have created substantive linkages among ostensibly disparate discourses. I show how theologians writing in Latin between the second and seventeenth centuries constructed Christian doctrines of sin and salvation upon the metaphorical premise that *we are all addicts*—a term they borrowed from ancient Roman law, denoting debt-slaves. My dissertation (1)

uncovers how the concept of addiction came to pervade Latin Christianity as a controlling metaphor for the human condition; (2) phenomenologically re-describes the experiences of addiction autobiographically recounted by theologians such as Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Martin Luther, and John Calvin; and (3) demonstrates the role this legal metaphor and its economic logic played in the historical development of the idea of the "free will" within Western theology.

Introduction

# THE CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF ADDICTION

## § 1 – Christianity's Addiction

Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430) is a patron saint of recovering addicts, because he was one. As he details in his famous *Confessions,* Augustine spent much of his youth drinking, vandalizing, frequenting the public baths, and, above all else, womanizing—at one point even hinting that he couldn't help himself from having sex inside a church. In his words, he wasted away his time enjoying "a carnival of carnal pleasures [*afluentia carnalium voluptatum*]" (*Confessiones*, book 6, chapter 16, section 26).[1] And yet, carnal pleasures eventually caught up with him as he chased them. Even before he converted to Christianity, he began to get burnt out by his over-indulgent lifestyle and disgusted with his own behaviors. Augustine tells us that he tried to get himself together and focus on advancing his career and taking care of his family, but he couldn't seem to get a hold of himself. His mother and his friends worried about him, and he worried about himself. Augustine tried to change his behavior, but couldn't:

> I sighed for freedom, but I was bound—not by chains imposed by someone else, but by the chains of my own choices [*mea ferrea voluntate*] . . . A perverse will serves desire, and by serving desire, habit is formed [*dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo*]—and habit that goes unresisted

[1] Augustine, *Confessiones* in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XXXII: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Primus,* 659-868. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1879.

> becomes necessity [*dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas*]. By these links, connected to one another (hence my term 'chain'), a harsh bondage held me under restraint (*Confessiones*, book 8, chapter 5, section 10).

Augustine knows that he is free to make his own choices, and yet he finds it impossible to just say no to the desires that possess him. Augustine's will is free, but he can't control himself. "Willing and unwilling was I, partially both and fully neither. I was at odds with myself and dissociated from myself," he laments (*Confessiones*, book 8, chapter 10, section 22). Seeking a way to describe this paradoxically voluntary bondage and its comorbid self-dispossession, Augustine confessed in an Easter sermon to his congregants that he had been "totally addicted to the pleasures of the body [*totus corporis voluptati addicitur*]" (*Sermo 162/A*, chapter 2).[2] Over the course of his prolific theological career, Augustine would theorize addiction as a congenital disease that we are nevertheless personally accountable for.

While Augustine's reference to addiction here evokes contemporary psychiatric diagnoses, he is using the concept as a metaphor borrowed from ancient Roman law, where the term *addictio* meant debt-bondage. In Roman law, if a judge found someone guilty of defaulting on a loan, he could authorize the defrauded creditor to bind the delinquent and take them as a bondsman. The judge's sentence authorizing the creditor to take the defaulter away in chains was referred to as an *addictio*; hence, the convicted debtor was known as an *addictus*. Importantly, Roman law distinguished between *addictium* (debt-bondage) and *servitium*

[2] Augustine, *Sermones de Diversis* in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Tomus XXXIX: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Quintus, Pars Altera*, 1493-1638. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1865.

(enslavement). Unlike a *servus*, an *addictus* had supposedly entered debt *by choice* and had therefore chosen servitude freely. Addiction was thus differentiated from slavery through the implicit idea of the individual free will and described as "voluntary enslavement." Legally speaking, the addict was guilty of their own bondage in a way the slave was not, because they had opted into the debt in the first place. When Augustine confesses that he is an addict [*addictus*], he suggests metaphorically that he has voluntarily disowned himself for the sake of short term pleasure or, in other words, that his bondage to pleasure results from his own free choice. He's an addict, not a slave, because he is freely enslaved. Throughout his career, Augustine extrapolated from his own life experience and used the concept of addiction as a metaphor for the sinful human condition—in particular, to diagnose what he saw as people's futile pursuit of lasting happiness in transient pleasures.

This concept of addiction, seemingly so contemporary, actually originates in ancient Christian theology. Several of the earliest and most influential Roman theologians—such as Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155 - 220), Ambrose of Milan (339 - 297), and of course Augustine himself (354 - 430)—used the Roman legal metaphor of addiction in this way to articulate nascent Christian doctrines of free will, original sin, and salvation. In fact, Christian theologians writing in Latin from Rome all the way through the Reformation consistently used the metaphor of addiction to describe the

human condition. Doing whatever one wants, they taught, is its own kind of ironic bondage—that is, addiction. In short, after Augustine, the metaphor of addiction became shorthand for the predicament of sin itself. Given the pervasiveness of this metaphor across Latin theological history, we should note, as philosopher of religion

Devin Singh alerts us, that "metaphors can contribute to a legacy of substantive linkage and potent affinity between disparate discourses . . . Metaphors linger, ossify, and become embedded in social understandings and resultant institutions" (*Divine Currency*, 18-19).[3]

In this dissertation, I unearth the buried theological history of *addiction* to show how Latin theologians's persistent use of the metaphor of addiction initiated and sustained "a legacy of substantive linkage" between Roman financial law and Christian theology and, in turn, between Latin Christian theology and the various American discourses that deploy this ancient concept of *addiction* today—namely, psychiatry, drug law, and self-help recovery culture. By tracing a lineage of reference and citation from Tertullian through John Calvin, I show how theologians writing in Latin between the second and the sixteenth centuries constructed Christian doctrines of sin and salvation upon the metaphorical premise that *we are all addicts* and, thus, how they structured Christian thought and practice according to the language and logic of Roman pecuniary law. I detail how the legal concept of addiction shaped Christian thinking about the human condition and the role it played in key theological debates about free will and the nature of sin during the Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation periods. In conclusion, I show how these inherited theological conceptualizations of addiction were transposed into the ostensibly secular discourse of early American psychiatry and how they continue to shape the way we think about free will, recovery, and punishment today.

Latin theologies of addiction and modern psychiatric diagnoses of addiction are so strikingly consistent with one another in both language and logic that I

[3] Devin Singh, *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.

suspect we are not dealing with a case of simple conceptual resonance, but a case of conceptual transference and repetition, whose original impetus we have neither remembered nor worked through. Over the last several decades, continental philosophers of religion have helped us see the different ways that ancient Christian ideas persist within modern, secular discourses. In *Worlds Without End*, Mary-Jane Rubenstein shows how the ostensibly secular "Big Bang" theory uncannily parallels the creationist account of the universe's origin. Jeffrey Kosky's *Arts of Wonder* demonstrates how secular works of art engender mystical experiences that demand traditionally religious language to describe them. Thomas Carlson's *Indiscretion* describes an "apophatic analogy" between Heidegger's notion of Being-towards-death and Pseudo-Dionysius' description of the believer's relation to God.[4] By calling our attention to the ways that Christian language and logics reappear in secular aspects of life, these philosophers of religion help us see how Christianity suffuses the world in unlikely ways and places.

In my research on the conceptual history of addiction, beyond identifying the analogous structure between Christian descriptions of sin and psychiatric theories of addiction, I have asked: If there is an analogous structural relation between Christian theologies of sin and modern theories of addiction, then what historical continuities between ancient theology and modern psychiatry have made these uncanny conceptual resonances possible? Furthermore, what experiences of self—specifically of desire and decision-making—have led us to reach so consistently for the concept of addiction to describe our collective predicament? I have begun

[4] Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Worlds Without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Jeffrey Kosky, *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. Thomas Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

responding to these questions by tracing *addiction*'s peregrination through different discursive domains and tracking the gradual accretion of meanings that has resulted in today's overdetermined concept. Analyzing the transposition of *addiction* from legal to theological to psychiatric discourses will help us understand how Latin theological ideas, inherited through the history of Western empire, continue to condition ostensibly secular modern thought and practice.

By taking a representative sample of theological texts between Rome and the Reformation and cross-referencing the original Latin texts against their predominant translations into English, French, Italian, Spanish, and German, we see that variations of the term *addicere* have been ubiquitously erased from the Latin theological record. Translations of these writings from Latin into modern European languages during and after the Reformation have imprecisely rendered the technical term *addictus* as *slave*, *enslaved*, *condemned*, or *sold*, and forms of the verb *addicere* have been translated variously as *to decide*, *to adjudge*, *to put up for sale*, *to award to*, and others. While context often demands that translators use strategically inexact phrasings, such choices often come with a cost. These renderings of *addicere* are plausible, but they have created lacunae in our understandings of addiction's conceptual history as well as the broader history of Western theology. The translational elision of *addiction* from Latin theology has obscured not only the specific sense of the Church Fathers' central legal metaphor—and hence Latin theology's debt to Roman pecuniary law—but also, by extension, the deep Christian legacy of the modern concept of addiction.

Because this dissertation ultimately studies the life of a metaphor, I proceed both chronologically and according to the structure of a metaphor itself. Rhetorician

Armstrong Richards parses a metaphor into three constituent parts: (1) the tenor, (2) the vehicle, and (3) the ground. The tenor is the subject to which attributes are being ascribed; the vehicle is the predicate whose attributes are being ascribed to the tenor; and the ground is the unstated quality shared between the tenor and vehicle. In the case of Christianity's *addiction*, the tenor is *sinner*; the vehicle is *addict*; and the ground, as I will argue, is a *lack of self-possession*—the idea that sinners, like addicts, have voluntarily dispossessed themselves. In Chapter One, "The Ground of Addiction," I explore the ancient origins of the term *addiction* in Roman pecuniary law, and I argue that the codification of debt law in early Rome inaugurated a legal subjectivity predicated on a twofold premise: every citizen possesses themself as private property by virtue of having individual freedom of will. In Chapter Two, "The Tenor of Christianity," I show how early Roman theologians between the second and fifth centuries first incorporated the Roman legal concept of addiction into nascent Christian orthodoxy to describe humanity's sinfulness. I contend that Roman theologians forged the disease-crime ambiguity that remains at the heart of addiction today, as they used the concept of addiction to articulate the paradoxical doctrine that sin is both generationally inherited (like a congenital disease) and willfully committed (like a crime). Together, these two chapters will demonstrate how Tertullian, Ambrose, and Augustine got the vehicle of *addiction* rolling on Roman ground to convey the tenor of Christianity.

After clarifying the structural components of the metaphor in its historical context, I will proceed to the more phenomenological section of my dissertation, which studies the experiences of desire, decision-paralysis, and self-conflict that theologians have used the addiction metaphor to describe. Chapter Three, "*De*

*Libero Arbitrio Addicti: In Partes Secatus* [The Addict's Free Will: Divided in Shares]," studies how Augustine of Hippo developed the central theological concept of the individual free will through his extension of the addiction metaphor in his writings on original sin and the origin of evil. I argue that as Augustine used the metaphor of addiction to articulate his ideas about the human condition, he imported the concept's grounding Roman legal subjectivity, predicated on self-possession and individual free will, into his theological anthropology. In Chapter Four, "*Confessions* of a Recovering Addict," I retranslate Augustine's enormously influential spiritual autobiography, *Confessiones*, through the heuristic of his own obscured addiction metaphor and, accordingly, redescribe his conversion story as an addiction recovery narrative. I show how Augustine's *Confessions* inaugurates the paradigmatic addiction narrative, whose language and logic modern addiction memoirs inherit and repeat.

In Chapter Five, "*Addictio ad Absurdum*," I demonstrate how medieval theologians, inheriting Augustine's internally ambivalent conception of addiction, debate the delinquency and disease models of addiction from the eleventh to to the thirteenth century. I argue that these debates about the meaning of addiction—whether conceived as congenital disease or willful delinquency—produce competing understandings of selfhood, justice, and the role of the Church in salvation that precipitate the Reformation. Finally, in Chapter Six, "The Reformation of Addiction," I show how Protestant theologians in the early sixteenth century deployed the concept of addiction in a novel way. For over a thousand years within Latin theology, the term *addiction*—ambiguously interpreted as debt-bondage and birth defect—unambiguously connoted sin. As such, the self-dispossession of

addiction signified a state of degeneracy that required either redemption or recovery. However, Martin Luther and John Calvin strangely used the term *addiction* to describe *both* the sinful attachment to worldly pleasure as well as the righteous love of God. I argue that these Protestant theologians, by insisting that there is no alternative to addicted subjectivity but only different forms of addiction, think of the self as inherently dispossessed and, in so doing, resist the Roman legal subjectivity that grounds the logic of personal accountability.

While the entire dissertation moves chronologically from Rome to the Reformation, Chapters One and Two are primarily historical chapters that lay the empirical and philological groundwork for my study of addiction in Latin theology. Chapters Three and Four, still grounded in these philological findings, are more phenomenologically oriented. They focus on the subjective experiences that the concept of addiction has been perennially used to describe. Chapters Five and Six return to an historical perspective to detail the consequences on Christian thought and practice of that concept's deployment as a hermeneutic for experience. I am not primarily interested in charting the changing usages of the word *addiction*. Rather, I believe we need to get a feel for the experiences historically captured by the metaphor of addiction and, then, to understand the practical and institutional implications of mediating experience through the language and logic of Roman financial law, which has offered a ready-to-hand heuristic for understanding the self and its freedom for nearly two millennia.

## § 2 – The Limitations of Definition

Today, the word *addiction* brings to mind some repetitive behavior that has gone beyond habit and become compulsive and all-consuming. In popular parlance, we can become addicted to substances, like drugs, alcohol and certain foods, or activities, like gambling, sex, shopping, video gaming, social media scrolling, eating, and even exercising. The addict is someone who cannot stop themself from engaging in some behavior despite its deleterious effects. As Augustine described, addiction begins as an autonomous choice but, through repetition, becomes an automatic tick. Thus, addiction has long been described as *voluntary enslavement*. For instance, maybe an addict chose to drink alcohol because they enjoyed its effects, but, by repeatedly choosing to imbibe, they gradually became unable to choose *not* to drink. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, "the initial decision to take drugs is typically voluntary, but with continued use, a person's ability to exert self-control can become seriously impaired. This impairment in self-control is the hallmark of addiction."[5] In this way, addiction blurs the line between freedom and compulsion; the addict repeatedly chose to do what they wanted until they no longer had a choice *but* to do it. A common quip within recovery culture goes: "Addiction is the only prison where the locks are on the inside."

These days, we tend to think of this paradoxical "self-enslavement" as a psycho-somatic medical condition. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* defines addictive disorder as "a cluster of cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms," which are classified into four groupings: (1) impaired control over substance use, (2) social and occupational impairment as a result of substance use, (3) self-harmful use of the

[5] National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Drug Misuse and Addiction," July 13, 2020. https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/drug-misuse-addiction

substance, and (4) increasing physiological tolerance for the substance's effects. The addict experiences intense and persistent cravings for a certain pleasure; they organize their time around procuring that pleasure, even at the expense of their social and occupational life as well as their physical and mental health. Despite acknowledging their behavior's deleterious effects on themselves and those around them, the addict repeatedly tries and fails to change their behavior (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 483).[6] This is the basic picture of addiction today.

If we have a standard definition already, then what do we stand to gain by asking after the meaning of *addiction*? With this dissertation, I hope to show that definitions are useful underrepresentations of the truth of language. Like the Mercator Projection of the Earth, definitions help us navigate the world efficiently, but they always distort reality by compressing it to two dimensions.[7] "Only something that has no history can be defined," the philologist Friedrich Nietzsche warns us (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, 53).[8] Precisely because we have a standard definition of addiction, we don't really understand it. By compressing addiction into a two-dimensional definition, we deny the concept's depth, which is to say its

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[6] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition*. Arlington, Virginia: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

[7] In information theory, data compression refers to the process of encoding information using fewer bits than its original representation. Most compression methods cause some information to be lost from the original representation. These methods are known as "lossy compressions" (as opposed to lossless compressions, which are more difficult to achieve). Lossy compressions save memory storage capacity and speed up data transfers, but they do so while incurring a loss of source fidelity—hence, lossy. Rate-distortion theory is the branch of informatics that studies the trade-off between source fidelity and encoding efficiency to theorize optimal compression qualities: representing data with the maximum efficiency (i.e. the minimum bits) possible, while incurring the minimum lossy distortion (i.e. maintaining the maximum source fidelity). I believe the definition of *addiction* is a particularly lossy compression, and I'm trying to decompress (or unzip) this lossy compression so we can theorize the cost of the loss.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Ed., by Ansell-Pearson, trans., by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

history. As hermeneutician Hans-Georg Gadamer says, "We are emphasizing a dimension that is generally ignored by the dominant conception that the . . . sciences have of themselves," for they operationalize concepts "without expressly reflecting on their origin and justification" (*Truth and Method*, 397).[9]

Thinking with Nietzsche, our words are sedimentary; they form slowly as deposits of meaning layer upon one another over long spans of time. Again, Nietzsche specifies, "All concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated defy definition" (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, 53). With stratigraphy in mind, today's medical definition of addiction only scratches the surface, as that definition itself is the product of gradual processes of semantic deposition long underway. Conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck explains this semantic sedimentation:

> No author can create something new without reaching back to the established corpus of the language, to those linguistic resources created diachronically in the near or more remote past and shared by all speakers and listeners. Understanding or being understood presupposes such prior knowledge of how the language has been used . . . What is new can be understood for the first time only because of some recurring feature, some reference to a previously unquestioned, accepted meaning ("A Response to Comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," 63).[10]

By defining *addiction*, we obscure the "prior knowledge of how the language has been used" on the basis of which this medical conception has been formed. Thus, if

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[9] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans., by Weinsheimer and Marshall. London: Continuum, 2004.

[10] Reinhart Koselleck, "A Response to Comments on the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe," in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte*, eds. Lehmann and Richter. Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1996.

we want to come to grips with addiction, as opposed to defining it, then we must core sample the deeper layers of meaning obscured beneath its surface-level definition and discern the "recurring features" that render the concept coherent across its many layers. This is the task of conceptual history.

### § 3 — On Conceptual History

My dissertation is therefore historical, hermeneutical, and phenomenological. Beyond compiling a chronological compendium of *addiction*'s different usages over time, I have tried to understand, first, the material conditions and discursive contexts within which the concept of addiction gradually solidified and, second, how the concept of addiction itself has mediated reality for those who have interpreted their experiences through it. In this way, my dissertation studies the diachronic feedback loop between concepts and the lived conditions of their deployment. In my view, this is the unique task of conceptual history. The concepts we deploy today have been shaped by the material and discursive conditions of their development, and when we interpret reality with the concepts we inherit, we shape the world in the image of those pasts. Intellectual historian Jan Ifversen reminds us that we must maintain "sensitivity towards the polysemic or blurry nature of conceptual meaning" because "when concepts enter new fields and emerge in the shape of new verbalisations, earlier meanings tend to live on" ("Conceptual History: The History of Basic Concepts," 125).[11] Thus, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and history must work in tandem.

[11] Jan Ifversen, "Conceptual History: The History of Basic Concepts," in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics*, eds., Wodak and Forchtner. London: Routledge, 2017.

In brief, phenomenology purports to study human experience; however, because our experiences are always mediated (better yet, constituted) by the way we represent them to ourselves through language, in order to conduct phenomenology, we must study the linguistic concepts through which we interpret our experiences. Thus, for phenomenology we need hermeneutics, which studies language's constitutive mediation of experiential reality. However, because we *inherit* the concepts through which we experience the world from deep discursive traditions, in order to practice hermeneutics, we must study the history of those concepts' sedimentary development. Hence, to understand human experiences holistically—that is, including the way they are constituted by the traditional concepts through which we interpret and represent them—we have to think phenomenologically, hermeneutically, and archaeologically altogether.

Thinking through the relation between language and experience, Koselleck claims that "what has happened, and has happened beyond my own experience, is something that I can experience merely by way of speech or writing" ("Social History and Conceptual History," 27).[12] In other words, as soon as an empirical event becomes past, which is instantaneously, concepts become our primary means of (re)experiencing it through re-collection or re-presentation.[13] Phenomenologist Martin Heidegger, whose work deeply informed Koselleck's conceptual history, elaborates an even more radical thesis in *Being and Time*. He argues that human

[12] Reinhart Koselleck, "Social History and Conceptual History," in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Spring, 1989), pp. 308-325.
[13] "Even if language may—in part—have been only a secondary factor in the enactment of doings and sufferings, as soon as an event has become past, language becomes the primary factor without which no recollection and no scientific transposition of this recollection is possible. The anthropological primacy of language for the representation of past history thus gains an epistemological status" ("Social History and Conceptual History," 27).

beings do not first sensorially encounter "some naked thing which is present-at-hand" and afterwards "throw a signification" or "stick a value on it" (*Being and Time*, 190).[14] Rather, our experiences are always already *interpretations* of the things we encounter. Put differently, our sensory experiences are always already infused with meanings. Moreover, the ways we interpret the world, or the meanings of our experiences, are informed by the discourses we inherit, which is to say the traditions we embody. Thus, there is no "pure experience" but only contextually mediated experience. In this way, according to Heidegger, "discourse . . . underlies interpretation" (*Being and Time*, 203-04). Heidegger ultimately contends, since interpretation is our mode of Being-in-the-world, "discourse is constitutive for Dasein's existence" (*Being and Time*, 204). Together, Koselleck and Heidegger suggest that language and experience are indissociable, which binds together hermeneutics and phenomenology.

"In no case," insists Heidegger, "is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a 'world in itself', so that it just beholds what it encounters." Rather, "Dasein is constantly delivered over to this interpretedness, which controls and distributes the possibilities of average understanding . . . the understanding which has thus already been deposited in the way things have been expressed" (*Being and Time*, 211).[15] Building on Heidegger's theory of the discursive constitution of experience, Koselleck

[14] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans., MacQuarrie and Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962.
[15] Heidegger elaborates: "The everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed."

emphasizes that the inherited concepts through which we interpret the world carry the past into the present:

> A new concept may be coined to articulate experiences or expectations that never existed before, but it can never be so new not to have existed virtually as a seed in the pregiven language and not to have received meaning from its inherited linguistic context ("Social History and Conceptual History," 34).

To understand human experiences, then, we have to examine not only the empirical givens, but also the concepts through which they are interpreted and represented as well as the processes through which those interpretive concepts themselves have been formed. In this way, Koselleck continues, "theology and religion, law, custom, and tradition each posit the *framework conditions* [*Rahmenbedingungen*]" for any concrete experience. To specify Heidegger's claim that "discourse is constitutive for Dasein's existence," Koselleck suggests here that theology, religion, law, custom, etc. constitute who we are, since they bequeath the concepts through which we experience the world and ourselves. Thus, he theorizes, "in the enactment of events, synchrony and diachrony cannot be separated empirically. Conditions and determinants . . . reach from the 'past' into the 'present'" ("Social History and Conceptual History," 34 and 30).

For example, consider a situation where the bare empirical datum is that a person's father has died. If that person thinks (a) that their father's soul has gone to Heaven and Jesus' death has ensured that they will eventually be reunited eternally, (b) that their father's *atman*, only temporarily animating his human body, will transmigrate or reincarnate into yet another form according to his karma, or (c) that their father has no enduring metaphysical substrate and his inanimate biological

remains will simply decompose, then this person will have a drastically different experience of that empirical situation. Because the stories we tell about the empirical facts determine our experiences of them, the facts never tell the story of experience. In fact, Heidegger and Koselleck go so far as to refuse the difference between data and interpretation to begin with, or empirical experience and meaning. These are not separate yet co-constituting elements, but simply one and the same reality. For a robust understanding of human experiences as simultaneously sensory, linguistic, and historical phenomena, we have to examine the empirical data, the concepts or narratives through which the person metabolizes those empirical givens, and the histories of the metabolizing concepts' themselves, because each element is inseparable from the others. This is the threefold project I have tried to accomplish in my conceptual history of addiction.

**§ 4 –The Core of Addiction**

As I cited previously, Singh suggests that shared metaphors can create "a legacy of substantive linkage and potent affinity between ostensibly disparate discourses." Connecting this insight with Heidegger's and Koslleck's perspective on the discursive constitution of experience, we can infer that shared metaphors also create a legacy of homologous experiences, or a potent phenomenological affinity, among historically and geographically disparate people—say, between Roman Christians and contemporary Americans. If indeed our interpretive concepts constitute our experiences, then stable concepts shared across history will create experiential, and not only conceptual, continuities among distant people. These

experiential resonances, in turn, ensure that the inherited concepts retain their descriptive power across time and space, thus threading traditions together and rendering them recognizable as such, not simply through shared concepts but also, and thereby, through shared experiences. As I see it, this is the feedback loop between language and experience that we call a discursive tradition.

Taking Singh's claim in this phenomenological direction, I can formulate my overarching question: What is the experiential substance of the "substantive linkage" that addiction's transposition has created among Roman financial law, Latin theology, and various American discourses on consumption and consumer freedom? Overall, I argue that because Roman financial law furnished the concept of addiction through which Latin Christians interpreted their existential condition and articulated their struggle for righteous selfhood, Roman law set the framework conditions for Latin Christian experience. Likewise, I will suggest in conclusion that because Latin Christianity, in turn, furnished the concept of addiction through which many Americans interpret their existential condition and articulate their struggle for healthy selfhood, Latin Christianity has set the framework conditions for American experience. Put differently, I contend that addiction's discursive transmission has created an isomorphism among Roman debtor, Christian sinner, and American consumer that we can observe in the textual record of these discourses. Each of these figures struggles self-consciously against addiction. Because *addiction*'s ground is pecuniary, which is to say proprietary, the Roman debtor, the Christian sinner, and the American consumer each fight for some degree of self-possession.

To be sure, theologians temper their idealization of the self-possessed individual by insisting that although we should work to retain a hold over ourselves

through willful self-control, we never actually own ourselves, since we remain God's property alone. American consumerism involves a more extreme narrative of total self-ownership that differs meaningfully from classic Christian notions of disciplinary self-possession. However, they both remain recognizably unified by the idea of a self-possessed individual who, by virtue of their free will, determines their choices and must be held accountable for their actions—that is to say, they remain unified by their inheritance of the Roman legal subject. The experiential substance of *addiction* that links these disparate discourses and peoples is this struggle to retain self-possession, conceived as solvency, salvation, and sanity.

*Addiction*, at its core, represents self-dispossession—legally, spiritually, or psychologically, depending on the context. *Addict*, then, for two millennia, has named a self that has dispossessed itself. The financial notion of propriety, or property, as the ground of the concept, governs the metaphor's logic in each domain. As anthropologist Joseph Blankholm warns us, "Our metaphor's materiality can pattern how we think and act" ("Genealogy's Bad Blood").[16] The conceptual history of addiction bears out this insight. Philosopher Mark C. Taylor, who has made his career unveiling the uncanny conceptual resonances between ancient Christian and contemporary secular discourses, claims in his pioneering book *Erring*, "The principle of ownership pervades all realms of life" (*Erring*, 28).[17] The very logic of individuality, Taylor argues, "implies an economy of ownership in which *one* seeks

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[16] Joseph Blankholm, "Genealogy's Bad Blood," Political Theology Network, 30 April, 2020. https://politicaltheology.com/genealogys-bad-blood/. Making this point, Blankholm cites Gil Anidjar's book, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*. Blankholm suggests that metaphors help determine our "conceptual ontologies." The map of what's thinkable and not within a particular discourse depends in large part on its (often implicit and accidental) structuring metaphors that carve out paths for thought. His article examines the limits of "genealogy" as a metaphorical heuristic for academic critique.

[17] Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

security by struggling against dispossession, impropriety, and expropriation. Any subject that is not fully self-possessed, completely proper, and totally autonomous is not really (a) (it)self" (*Erring*, 130). This struggle for selfhood that, according to Taylor, spans thousands of years, is precisely a struggle against addiction. Taylor's thesis, interpreted through Blankholm's point about the power of metaphor, testifies to the extent to which ancient financial metaphors have conditioned how we conceive of selfhood. I argue that addiction's transposition from Roman law through Latin theology into American law, psychiatry, self-help, and marketing has helped ensure that "the principle of self-ownership pervades all realms of life." In other words, the conceptual history of *addiction* that I lay out in my dissertation does not simply corroborate Taylor's claim that self-ownership is an historically pervasive norm. I believe this research helps tell the story of how self-possession became the dominant Western ideal of selfhood through the hemispheric proliferation of the concept of addiction. Beyond agreeing with Taylor, I try to show how the truth that he discerns came true and how we live with the consequences.

*Addiction* has represented a chain of analogously negative states within each domain of its usage: *delinquency* (Roman law), *sinfulness* (Latin theology), and *pathology* (American psychiatry)—each metaphorically equated with the other on the ground of self-dispossession. These negativities of *addiction* imply positive correlates in each domain of its transposition: *credibility* (Roman law), *righteousness* (Latin theology), and *healthiness* (American psychiatry)—each metaphorically equated with the other on the implied inverse ground of self-possession. Thinking with Taylor, we can read *addiction*'s conceptual history as a photographic negative that, when brought carefully to light, reveals an ideal of

selfhood that runs like a red thread through distinct yet mutually reinforcing Western discourses: *the self should be a sole-proprietorship*.[18] In the negative, *the self should not be a cooperative*.[19] Addiction's history demonstrates how the characteristically Western belief that the self-possessed self is credible, righteous, and healthy, whereas the self-dispossessed self is delinquent, sinful, and pathological originally formed and how it was sustained over time.

This inherited concept of addiction has, over the course of the twentieth century, come to govern the narrative relations among our bodies, our behaviors, and the objects of our consumption. Accordingly, we continue to assume the Roman legal presuppositions about selfhood that undergird the concept of addiction itself—namely, that the proper self possesses itself. While *addiction*'s denotation has shifted metaphorically from 'debt-slavery' to 'substance dependence', the terminology, grammar, and subtext of the statement has remained in place on its proprietary ground. Our concept of addiction is an inherited financial metaphor, and its proprietary logic still conditions the way we think about who we are. Insofar as we conceive ourselves as subject to addiction, we presuppose ourselves to be possessors of our own selves, executors of our own wills, and hence individually accountable for all our (trans)actions.

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[18] A sole-proprietorship is a form of business entity in which one person (1) owns all the assets, (2) assumes all the debts, (3) enjoys full control over business decisions, (4) is entitled to all the profits, and (5) is therefore subject to unlimited liability (Wex Legal Dictionary, Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, "Sole-Proprietorship").

[19] A cooperative is a legal entity that is collectively owned and controlled by a group of constituent members. Typically, the owning members are themselves producers and/or consumers of the cooperative's products or services. As such, the cooperative's benefits are distributed proportionally to each member's participation, and each shareholder is subject to limited liability for the cooperative's debts (See International Cooperative Alliance, "Statement on the Cooperative Identity" and Digital Media Law Project, "Cooperative Corporation").

Thinking back to Freud's theory of repetition compulsion, he acknowledges that we typically adopt "the ostrich-like policy of repression" when it comes to what haunts us, and, accordingly, we underestimate the importance of examining the origins of our deepest problems." "Thus it can happen," says Freud, "that the patient does not know under what conditions his phobia breaks out" ("Remembering, Repetition, and Working-Through," 152).[20] Unearthing the buried origins of addiction, I hope, will make us face the conditions under which our longstanding phobia of self-dispossession originally broke out and how it was sustained over time. In service of that therapeutic goal, as I work through the conceptual history of addiction, I highlight how the Latin Christian tradition itself, despite conveying this Roman concept of addiction and its attendant criminalization of self-dispossession, nevertheless provides plenty of resources for imagining a healing ideal: the self as collective property. While Latin Christians argued that humans do possess themselves insofar as they have the free will to make their own decisions, they always couched this observation in the more fundamental claim that we owe ourselves to God as well as the Church community. In other words, Latin theologians did perpetuate the Roman legal idea that individuals possess themselves by virtue of their free will, which makes them liable to individual accountability. However, they also resisted that idea of Roman legal subjectivity by simultaneously maintaining that individuals only possess themselves insofar as they were given themselves by God in and through the Christian tradition and community. For millennia, Latin theologians taught that God has given us ourselves as a loan; thus, even while we

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[20] Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repetition, and Working-Through," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 12, 1950 (145-57). Originally published 1914.

possess ourselves, we are not our own, because we are out in the world on loan, and we owe ourselves back to the community that forms and sustains us.

However, the majority of Latin theologians never fully reject the ideal of a self-possessed individual, capable of self-control and responsible for their own deeds; thus, the notion of *addiction* that we receive nevertheless carries within itself this ancient Roman proprietary conception of selfhood. Hence, when we reach for this inherited concept to diagnose behaviors, write laws, design institutions, tell stories about ourselves, and interpret our everyday experiences, we import its constitutive presuppositions into our world: that proper selves possess themselves, that freedom means self-possession, that bad deeds are debts, and that justice requires payback. "What appears to be reality," warns Freud, "is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 13).[21] As inheritors of a Western world thoroughly infused with Latin Christianity, Roman-Christian language and logics mediate our experiences, inform our self-understandings, and structure our laws and institutions—all whether or not we are practicing Christians.[22] However, since we do not have a thorough understanding of the theological history that shaped *addiction*, we cannot clearly discern how we have interpreted and made ourselves in terms of the Roman-Christian past that principally constituted this continually dominant concept. If we do not account for addiction's Roman-Christian history, then we will remain haunted by the legal-theological past that has set the

[21] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans., Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1961.
[22] Blankholm succinctly explains this point in his book, *The Secular Paradox: On the Religiosity of the Not Religious*: "In French, Christianity takes a different suffix: *le christianisme*. The -ity suffix used in English blurs the boundary between a particular tradition, consciously affirmed—an -ism—and a broader inheritance in which even non-Christians find themselves. Christians inherit the Christian tradition, but even as a non-Christian, so do I."

terms in and on which we encounter and make the world. Furthermore, by not engaging the theological history of addiction, we fail to avail ourselves of thousands of years of reflection on a predicament that continually perplexes us today. How is it that we are free, but not in control of ourselves?

Scientifically stipulating definitions does not liberate us from the histories we inherit in language; it ensures that we repeat the past, but blindly. In the words of Gadamer, "a consciousness of the history of concepts becomes a duty of critical thinking," because, as Koselleck warns, to remain ignorant of our concepts' constitutive histories is "to hypnotize oneself and . . . to succumb to a self-produced ideology." This dissertation—only part of a comprehensive conceptual history of addiction—will help us come to terms with the staying-power of our Roman-Christian past. I hope my scholarship on addiction, which textually reconstitutes this forgotten past, will help us "remember" and work-through the recurrent conflicts over self-dispossession and cooperative freedom that have shaped the individualists we've become.

## § 5 – Historiography of Addiction

Scholars did not begin digging into the history of addiction until the infamous American Drug Wars of the 1970s and 1980s. In a 1971 press conference, Richard Nixon declared that "public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse." After this declaration, Nixon outlined a government plan to combat addiction along two contradictory axes—"enforcement and treatment."[23] On the one hand, Nixon

[23] Richard Nixon, Press Conference 17 June 1971. Richard Nixon Foundation, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8TGLLQlD9M&t=4s.

speaks of addiction as a prevalent crime to be aggressively policed; on the other, as a contagious disease to be compassionately cured. Are addicts victims of a congenital disease or perpetrators of a willful crime? Do addicts need healing, or must they pay penance? Do they belong in hospitals or penitentiaries? This oxymoronic disease-crime conception of addiction, foregrounded by the infamous U.S. Drug Wars, brought scholarly attention to the history of the confusing concept itself.

Sociologist Harry Gene Levine pioneered historical studies of addiction with his 1978 article "The Discovery of Addiction."[24] While principally focused on alcohol, Levine sought the historical origins of the "disease concept" of addiction. Surveying seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discussions of alcoholism, principally among Christian prohibitionists, Levine finds that addiction in the American colonies signified a state of moral degradation, like gluttony, rather than a medical condition—better treated by a minister than a physician. He identifies the American statesman and pioneering psychiatrist Dr. Benjamin Rush as the "discoverer" of addiction. Rush first articulated what has become the standard modern "disease concept of addiction" in a series of psychiatric treatises written around the turn of the nineteenth century. However, Levine notes that although Rush described addiction as a "disease of the will," he did not develop a robust etiology or diagnosis of addiction itself, but rather focused on its social and political consequences as an American pandemic. Levine's article inaugurated critical historical studies of addiction by pointing out not only the relative recency of the disease concept of addiction but also the way our contemporary medical understanding of addiction had been informed by the politics of the nineteenth-century Temperance Movement

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[24] Harry G. Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in America," in *Journal of Studies on Alcohol,* Vol. 15 (1978). pp. 493-506.

In 1998, addiction treatment expert William White offered the first encyclopedic study of how clinicians have conceived and treated addiction in the United States. White's sweeping book, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America*, is especially important because it traces the popularization of Rush' disease concept of addiction throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[25] In an effort to destigmatize addicts, White details how self-help groups and treatment centers across the U.S. progressively appropriated the language of "disease" to shift conversations about addiction from a moral to a medical lexicon. *Slaying the Dragon* also examines U.S. legal history and shows that while treatment centers and addicts themselves spoke of addiction as a disease, U.S. lawmakers criminalized addictive behaviors and prosecuted addicts, statutorily contradicting the disease conception of addiction. In effect, White, building on Levine, demonstrates that Nixon's "enforcement-treatment" policy dichotomy represented a century's long conflict between clinicians and politicians about the meaning of addiction—disease or crime?

In the same year, historian Marianne Valverde published *Diseases of the Will: Alcohol and the Dilemmas of Freedom*.[26] This book, working with much of the same social historical data as Levine and White, offers perhaps the first major theoretical breakthrough in the historical study of addiction. Valverde not only observes the disease-crime conflict and identifies its roots in American history, she goes further and asks why addiction was neither completely medicalized nor completely criminalized. In other words, apart from the discursive processes that

[25] William White, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America*. Bloomington, IL: Chestnut Hills Health Systems, 1998.
[26] Marianne Valverde, *Diseases of the Will: Alcohol and the Dilemmas of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

have produced the disease-crime conflation, what does this enduring ambivalence within the concept of addiction itself have to teach us about the selves that medicine tries to cure and that law tries to regulate? Valverde argues that:

> Questions of addiction have been and continue to be important sites upon which the complex dialectic of personal freedom and control/self-control has worked itself out historically. The working-out, however, has not been a linear process, nor a neatly dialectical one. The Freudian metaphor of "the compulsion to repeat one's traumas" is a more appropriate descriptor of the history of addiction/recovery than any teleological framework . . . The history is full of unwitting repetitions of old dilemmas (*Diseases of the Will*, 5).

The disease concept of addiction tends towards a deterministic model of human behavior, while the crime concept of addiction emphasizes personal freedom and individual agency. Setting the sides aside, Valverde argues that this debate itself about the nature of addiction, which recurs in the Temperance Movement, the Prohibition Era, and the Drug Wars, manifests a deep concern—or, in her words, a trauma—regarding the nature of free will.[27] Conceiving addiction as a disease destigmatizes addicts by suggesting that, in some way, they really couldn't help their behavior. However, by the same token, the disease concept also asserts a biological

[27] Valverde's theory points us to Freud's 1914 essay, which I've cited prior, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through." In this essay, Freud describes an individual psychological dynamic that Valverde seems to identify in discursive history: "The patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it." Freud's formula is that the traumatized patient "repeats instead of remembering." Valverde details how we repetitively act out the question of the will—its freedom or determination—through periodic cultural conflicts surrounding addiction. The Freudian logic of her claim suggests that the idea of the will itself, or the question of the will itself, represents some early social "trauma" that dogs us like a ghost. As Freud elaborates years later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "The impression [patients] give is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some 'demonic' power, but psychoanalysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early influences . . . This 'perpetual recurrence of the same thing' causes us no astonishment . . . when we can discern in [the patient] an essential character-trait which always remains the same and which is compelled to find expression in a repetition of the same experiences."

determinism that disturbs many. Criminalizing addiction, though it grants individuals a robust autonomy by implying that each person has the power to determine their own life outcomes, also thereby burdens them with singular guilt when things go wrong. Valverde's important work shows that the disease-crime debate about the nature of addiction ultimately evidences a longstanding American difficulty in conceiving selfhood neither in terms of total determinism nor in terms of pure voluntarism, but somewhere in the middle.

Levine, White, and Valverde together forged the field of historical addiction studies; however, each of their histories of addiction essentially stop in the late-eighteenth century with Benjamin Rush. While Levine and Valverde discuss conceptions of alcohol in the preceding centuries, they do not trace the term *addiction* itself into any preceding discourses. As a result, their scholarship leaves uninvestigated the deeper history of the term itself in pre-American contexts. On an empirical level, it remains to be inquired where *addiction* came from and how it entered into American discourses on drugs and alcohol in the first place. On a theoretical level, we must also wonder how *addiction*'s earlier conceptualizations have borne upon the distinctly American histories of addiction elucidated by Levine, White, and Valverde.

Engaged in these very questions, cultural historian Susan Zieger "change[s] the question and pursue[s] the meaning of addiction differently, primarily considering it neither as a set of events in the lives of individuals nor as a medico-scientific phenomenon to be weighed and measured but rather as an idea that has changed throughout its cultural and literary history." Zieger's 2008 book *Inventing the Addict* begins by asking, "What if the 'past' that inheres in addiction

were collective, historical?" (*Inventing the Addict*, 3).[28] Zieger's work details representations of addiction in nineteenth-century British and American literature to show how a nexus of cultural norms governing class, race, and sexuality, forged the medico-scientific concept that we use today. Zieger shows how nineteenth-century temperance authors, by representing the addict's degradation in terms of black chattel slavery (self-enslavement), oriental luxury (self-indulgence), feminine feebleness (weakness of will), and indigent profligacy (self-dispossession), reinforced whiteness, masculinity, and middle-class self-making as ideals of modern selfhood. In this way, our concept of addiction both emerged within the context of and reinforces these norms. While Zieger's research does not dispute the diagnostic efficacy or physiological substrate of the condition we call addiction today by exposing the concept's contingent formation and ideological function, it does elucidate "the discursive conditions of its possibility," making us reflect on the attendant normativity of our inherited scientific concepts (*Inventing the Addict*, 30). In my reading, by interpreting nineteenth-century addiction narratives as "bildungsromans in reverse," Zieger uses the literary history of addiction to illuminate the kinds of selves that today's stigmatization of addiction implicitly encourages us to become—namely, self-made (white) men.

In a similar methodological vein, literary scholar Rebecca Lemon opens her 2018 book *Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England* with the apt observation that "much of the effort to understand addiction in a modern setting overlooks or radically shortens its history, approaching addiction as if it were a

[28] Susan Zieger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.

universal or modern phenomenon" (*Addiction and Devotion*, 2).[29] Lemon's recent work scours various literary publications in English going back to the mid-sixteenth century and uncovers earlier usages of the term *addiction* that significantly predate the modern medical conception. In fact, the discussions of addiction she examines in texts like *Doctor Faustus*, *Henry IV*, and *Othello* even occasionally portray addiction as a kind of moral achievement. In her words, *Addiction and Devotion* tells "the more compelling half of the addiction story . . . [that] addiction represents a singular form of commitment and devotion, worthy of admiration as much as censure" (*Addiction and Devotion*, 6). Her work helps destabilize the idea that addiction is a relatively recent scientific "discovery" by showing how the modern concept itself has been formed through centuries of religious and literary discourse in Early Modern England—discourses that both resonate with and sometimes contradict contemporary understandings of addiction as a dangerous disorder.

Building on Lemon's work, etymologists Richard Rosenthal and Suzanne Faris have recently offered an even more comprehensive survey of *addiction*'s past. In their 2019 article, "The Etymology and Early History of Addiction," they examine the origins of the term *addiction* in ancient Rome in an effort to clarify the term's constitutive ambivalence between freedom and compulsion:

> Is this seeming contradiction a new phenomenon, like the slang reversal of meanings where 'bad' is the new good, or does it represent something much older, perhaps a misunderstanding or corruption of the word? Or is there a history of conflicting meanings, and if so how far back does it go? Is there an

[29] Rebecca Lemon, *Addiction and Devotion in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

underlying meaning that has remained constant? A primary or prototypic addiction? ("The Etymology and Early History of Addiction").[30]

Rosenthal and Faris find that ancient Romans used *addiction* in both religious and legal contexts, where the word functioned in a contradictory way. Similarly to our English verb *to sanction*, the Latin *addicere* could mean either 'to permit' or 'to punish'. For instance, in a religious context, a military officer could supplicate Jupiter for divine affirmation to carry out a given plan, and Jupiter would convey an *addiction*—like a proclamation—authorizing him to act. In a legal context, however, a Roman judge could declare an *addiction*, enslaving a delinquent debtor to their defrauded lender, in the sense of a legal sentence. Originally suggesting both permission and punition, Rosenthal and Faris claim that *addicere* has always been a contronym—a word at odds with itself. They conclude that the "contradictions in the word are inextricably intertwined" and that we should therefore abandon the term in clinical settings because of its inherent ambiguity. "Without a clear way to 'pin down' its clinical usage and define it properly," they say in closing, "it will continue to hinder our understanding" ("The Etymology and Early History of Addiction").

I believe that the reverse is true. We have struggled to understand addiction precisely because we have pinned it down and defined it, which has thwarted a more holistic, historical comprehension of the concept itself in all its layers. Zieger's and Lemon's attention to pre-medicalized literary usages of addiction and Rosenthal and Faris' excavation of addiction's ancient origins have significantly improved our diachronic knowledge of the concept, yet there remains an immense gap in our knowledge of addiction's past between first-century Roman law and

[30] Richard Rosenthal and Suzanne Faris, "The Etymology and Early History of "Addiction'," in *Addiction Research and Theory*, 27, No. 5 (2019). 437-449.

sixteenth-century English literature. This vast lacuna in our understanding of addiction's history gives way to a series of questions, both empirical and theoretical, that animate this dissertation.

On the empirical side: (1) How did the term *addiction* move from its origins in ancient Roman law to sixteenth-century English literature? (2) Over the course of its history, how did *addiction* transform from debt-slavery to substance abuse disorder? On the theoretical side: (1) How does *addiction*'s conceptual history elucidate the ambiguities of its contemporary usages, particularly the disease-crime conflation? (2) What experiences have people in the past used the concept of *addiction* to describe, and are those phenomena the same or different from the experiences we represent with the concept of addiction today? (3) What are the conditions of possibility of addiction? In other words, what must we presuppose about a human being such that they can become an addict? Ultimately, thinking of Valverde's historical trauma theory, by unearthing *addiction*'s history, we can't help but repeat the perennial question: What is a person's *will*, and is it free?

If, at its core, *addiction* means self-dispossession, then I argue here that we are all indeed addicts. We are not our own. Thus, while we each have free will, we do not enjoy full control of ourselves, because we are collectively owned and operated by a host of constitutive members, or shareholders. As I try to show through addiction's conceptual history, the self is an irremediably cooperative enterprise, jointly possessed by a fluctuating group of participant members—each of whom shares a hold on our free will. In this regard, I agree with the ancient teaching of the Latin theologian —*we are all addicts*—and yet I do not see this state of self-disownership as delinquent, sinful, or diseased. In fact, I think admitting we're all addicts, in a

way, would help us begin to heal pathological elements of our society that are predicated upon the fiction of self-ownership.

Above all, I believe coming to terms with the conceptual history addiction can help us reconsider the atomizing accountability system of crime and punishment that these ideas underpin today. If I am an addict ontologically, only a part-owner of myself, then my misdeeds cannot be understood as (trans)actions of a free will that I privately possess and thus for which I am solely liable. If someone commits a misdeed, then perhaps all that person's cooperative shareholders should bear *limited* liability for the debt incurred, proportional to their participation in that person's harmful trans(action). No *one* should be subject to unlimited liability, because no one is their own. If I am collectively owned and operated by the different parties to whom I am accountable and on whose behalf I act—which is to say, if I am an addict—then I am always some kind of "we," and my will is never fully mine, even though it is free.

Chapter 1

# THE GROUND OF ADDICTION

We inherited *addiction* from ancient Rome, which means this set of syllables—əˈdɪkʃ(ə)n / [uh]-[dik]-[shuhn]—along with the complex significations it carries, has settled on the tip of our tongues after crossing continents, traversing oceans, and changing languages over the course of 2,500 years. This astounding fact prompts the question: How does a concept travel? Structural linguists have studied this phenomenon for many decades, and while there are numerous means of conceptual peregrination, one principal mechanism is metaphorization. The word *metaphor* itself etymologically means 'to carry across' [*meta* + *pherein*]. At base, metaphorizing means using the word for one thing to describe a different thing in order to make a comparison between the two; thus, while metaphors are literally false equivalencies, they are nonetheless figuratively meaningful and extremely potent.

Importantly, this use of language not only approximates the two named objects, but also thereby implicitly links their respective semantic fields. For example, if I say metaphorically, "The author's writing is clear," I do not mean that the writing itself has a constant refractive index from any viewing angle of less than 2.5 degrees. Likewise, if I say, "The author's writing is opaque," I am not saying that electromagnetic radiation does not penetrate it. Nevertheless, the statement is easily understood. The metaphor communicates something physically false yet figuratively meaningful by using physical terms (clarity and opacity) to describe the quality of the writing (understandability). In this way, the metaphors link the broader domain of optics (light's interactions with matter) with hermeneutics (textual interpretation). As linguist Eve Sweetser reports, "Metaphor is a major structuring force in semantic change" because, as this example illustrates, "metaphor operates *between* domains." In other words, when the same word or concept is used metaphorically to convey meaning in different semantic contexts, the word itself spans the gap between them and thus connects the different domains like a bridge. In my example, the clarity/opacity metaphor bridges hermeneutics and optics and gives the concept of *transparency* its characteristic polysemy—of physical objects (see-through, minimally refractive), of texts (comprehensible, coherent), or of people (honest, predictable).

The Roman legal concept of *addiction*, which referred to debt-bondage, was transposed into theological discourse when Roman Christians began to use *addiction* as a metaphor for the sinful human condition. Thus, to understand *addiction*'s journey across time, space, and semantic domains, we have to study, first, the workings of that metaphor. As I have noted in my introduction, rhetorician

Armstrong Richards breaks a metaphor down into three parts: the tenor, the vehicle, and the ground. When we use a metaphor, we equate the subject (the tenor) with a predicate (the vehicle) to assign unstated qualities that are intuitively associated with the predicate (the ground) to the subject. For instance, if I say, "The woman is a fox," then I'm equating the woman (tenor) with a fox (vehicle) to assign the unstated qualities we intuitively associate with foxes—sleekness, slyness, attractiveness—(ground) to the woman. If someone doesn't associate foxes with these qualities, then the metaphor will be either nonsensical or misunderstood. In other words, without a sense of the metaphor's ground—that is, a familiarity with the vehicle's underlying associations, which are historically informed and culturally contingent—then metaphors are hard to interpret.

To understand the metaphor, "The woman is a fox," it does not suffice to know that *fox* denotes a carnivorous mammal of the canid family; rather, one must be intuitively familiar with the associations that foxes provoke in the cultural context of the metaphor's deployment. That is to say, the metaphor's coherence requires that the listener has a sense of what *fox* symbolically presupposes so that they can infer what qualities the speaker is attributing to the woman, which are obviously not reducible to *fox*'s literal denotation. In the same way, if we want to understand the Latin theological metaphor, "*Homo est addictus*," it will not suffice merely to point out that *addictus* used to denote debt-slave (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de Erroribus Abelardi*, VI, 15). Knowing the historical denotation of *addictus* gives us a starting point, but grasping the deeper meaning of the metaphor requires that we uncover the ideas and feelings contextually associated with debt-slavery which Roman theologians attributed to sin through their metaphor's equation of the two

conditions. American cultural historian Trysh Travis succinctly summarizes such an approach in her study of Alcoholics Anonymous:

> I am interested in the ways in which a metaphorical construction comes to have the power to organize reality for the people who are exposed to it . . . I believe that understanding the material conditions and the communications structures through which a metaphor—or any other discursive formulation—moves is a crucial factor in explaining its power. The physical forms that encode and embody literary meanings not only influence the ways and the extent to which such meanings can circulate, but also tacitly instruct audiences on how, and how seriously, to engage with them (*The Language of the Heart*, 58).[31]

In short, to understand the formation and effects of a metaphor, we must start from the ground up. Thus, I begin with the following two questions to develop a sense of *addiction*'s ground: First, under what social and material conditions did the Roman concept of *addiction* emerge and circulate? Second, by dint of the social conditions of its emergence and circulation, what ideas and feelings were associated with or undergirded *addiction*? Another way of asking: On what ground(s) did the Roman concept of addiction form, and what presuppositions, therefore, undergirded addiction?

## § 6 – The Oral Origins of Addiction

Over the last two decades, scholars have pressed the limits of the archaeological record to recover the earliest identifiable meaning of the Latin term

[31] Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press. 2009.

*addicere* by tracing it back to ancient Roman religion. According to these studies, before *addictio* referred to debt-slavery, the verb *addicere* was first used in the context of a ritual practice called "the taking of auspices." In this practice, typically a priest or a government representative would symbolically ask Jupiter, the supreme divinity, to weigh in on a given decision faced by the auspicant or the community they represented. Through this ceremony, "Jupiter was thought to give or withhold his assent to nearly every aspect of Roman public life, from the creation of priests to the election of magistrates, from holding assembly of citizens to passing legislation. He was to be consulted every time a magistrate crossed the sacred boundary of the ancient city, every time an army in the field crossed a river, and every time a general contemplated joining battle with the enemy" (*Roman Republican Augury*, 2-3).[32] Auspicants, also known as augurs, were designated interpreters of Jupiter's will. While the details of the ceremony are difficult to reconstruct from its scattered mentions among Roman writers, it seems that the auspicant would go to the site of observance and pronounce a formula carefully describing the parameters of the auspication (what's the problem, what's the desired outcome, etc.), and silently await Jupiter to communicate his will, which the auspicant discerned by observing the flight paths of birds from the site of auspication.[33]

*Auspicium*, a contraction of *avis* and *spicium*, literally means 'birdwatching', and *auguria*, although less clear, is likely contracted from *avis* and *gero*, referring to 'the direction of the birds'. If the auspicant spotted birds flying from the "left part of

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[32] Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy, *Roman Republican Augury: Freedom and Control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2019. 2-3.

[33] For the most-cited mentions of auspication among Roman authors, see: Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.24.37, Cato, *Origines Fragments* 8.12; Cicero, *De Divinatione*. 2.71-4; 2.77-8; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 2.6.1); Pliny, *Naturalis Historiae Libri* 28.17; Seneca (*Naturalium Quaestionum Libros*, 2.32.6); and Servius *Commentaries on Vergil's Aeneid*, 12.260

the sky" the answer was affirmative; from the "right," it was negative; and if their direction was unclear (an *avis incerta*), then the sign was ambiguous, a "maybe" (*signum dubitum*). In this context, left and right (*sinistra et dextra*) were defined in reference to Jupiter's imagined point of view. As Varro explains, the gods' abode was thought to be located in the north, and they looked southward upon the world from their celestial seats; thus, the east was on their left, the west to their right.[34] Since the sun rises in the east, that part of the sky was seen as propitious, so easterly (or leftward) birds were deemed more favorable than westerly (or rightward) ones. To denote the positive answer, the auspicant employed the word *addicere*. He would announce, "*Aves addicunt* [the birds addict]—which is to say, "Jupiter decrees." Similar to our juridical verb 'to sentence', *addicere* literally means "to dictate to; to pronounce unto" (*ad* + *dicere*). A more precise term than its root verb, *dicere* ["to speak"], *ad-dicere* denoted not merely a statement but what today we might call an edict. These Jovian addictions were called "impetrative" (*auspicia impetrativa*)—an archaic synonym to our *imperative*—because they functioned as binding decrees: "Public auguries were signs with a permanent effect, in that they were thought to change the status of the thing to which they pertained, such as a temple or a priest: things altered in this way were said to be 'inaugurated'" (*Roman Republican Augury*, 2).

Even in this earliest known context, *addiction* pertains to decision-making and symbolizes human dependence. The ritual of auspication performs the idea that important decisions should not, or cannot, be made autonomously, but depend upon a higher power than the individual deciders themselves. The concept of *addiction*

[34] Varro, *De lingua latina*, V.

stood at odds with self-determination even 2,500 years ago. Consider the story of Rome's founding. According to legend, the brothers Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome, could not choose who, between the two of them, should rule the new city. Unable to pick between themselves, as Ennius explains in his *Annales*, they beseech an addiction:

> Since each wished to rule, they both at once appealed their claims to augural auspication [*auspicio augurioque*]. Remus took the auspices alone and waited for a favorable bird. But handsome Romulus ascended Aventine Hill to seek out the high-soaring types. [...] All the onlookers anxiously wondered which of the two should be ruler. [...] With bated breath the people waited, wondering to which of the two the victory of royal rule should be given by the event. As they waited, the white sun was withdrawing into the depths of the night. But all of a sudden, a ray of light shot forth just when, winging from the left, there flew from the heights a bird, the most favorable by far of the flying prophets. At that moment, the golden rays of the sun shone forth, and three times the forms of four hallowed birds descended from the sky, headed in the propitious and favorable direction. Romulus discerned from their flight that the throne of royalty was to be his; it had been firmly established by the auspication (*Annales*, cited in Cicero, *De Divinatione*, book I, chapter 48, section 107-108).

Romulus and Remus did not decide for themselves; they were decided by an addiction to which they had no choice but to submit. According to legend, Roman rulership depended upon addiction. Given that an addiction represented a decision with binding force, there was an easy transposition of the term *addicere* from augural to juridical discourse. Outside of ceremonial auspication, Roman judges would employ the term *addicere* when announcing their decisions on certain

property law cases. In fact, Roman law restricted the term's use to these two contexts, and there were legal repercussions for overheard unsanctioned utterances.[35]

Roman legal historian Marko Petrak has recently tried to articulate how exactly *addicere* moved from the augural and the juridical. In his article, "*Addicere* en droit romain archaïque: le juge en tant que révélateur de la volonté de Dieu," he contends that "the verb's provenance in the augural vocabulary leads us to the conclusion that, perhaps, in ancient times, the decisions rendered by the magistrate . . . were based upon the taking of auspices" ("Addicere en Droit Romain Archaïque," 26).[36] The fact that legal cases were litigated in the Roman Forum at the foot of the statue of Attus Navius, a legendary augur, suggests that divine auspication grounded legal adjudication. The judge's declaration of a legal sentence possibly ventriloquized Jupiter's addiction. On these grounds, Petrak argues that in early Roman jurisprudence "it was Jupiter himself who adjudicated litigation by sending favorable signs, the birds, on behalf of one of the parties. When the ruler perceived these signs, he would announce the divine judgment to the disputing parties using the expression '*aves addicunt*'." "In this way," Petrak concludes, "the ancient legal procedures of Rome represented, in fact, revelations of the will of God. His will was announced to

[35] See Jerzy Linderski, “Founding the City” in *Ten Years of the Agnes Kirsopp Lake Michels Lectures at Bryn Mawr College*. Ed. Faris & Lundeen. Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr Commentaries, 2006. 88-107. “How potent this formula [*aves addicunt*] was is best illustrated by the following circumstance (reported by the Roman historian Varro): if the praetor inadvertently uttered these words on a *dies nefastus* [day on which government affairs were forbidden] he had to offer a sacrifice of expiation... But if he uttered them *prudens*, on purpose, fully understanding what he was doing, he was...*impius* forever, and his impiety could not be washed away by any expiation. In the realm of augury it must have been also a grave responsibility to say the word *addico* and to make the pronouncement *aves addicunt*” (100).
[36] Marko Petrak, "Addicere en Droit Romain Archaïque: Le Juge En Tant Que Révélateur de la Volonté de Dieu" in *Le Juge Dans L'Histoire: Entre Création et Interprétation du Droit*. Actes des Journées Internationales de la Société d'Histoire du Droit, Ljubljana. June, 2014. My translation.

the world by the augural term *addicere*" ("Addicere en Droit Romain Archaïque," 26). Thus, the power to addict was reserved to the supreme deity alone or to whoever embodied his power on earth. That is to say, whatever addicts exerts a godlike power.

### § 7 – The Codification of Roman Law

While *addiction*'s history begins in oral religious and legal practices, according to the archaeological and textual data that we have uncovered, *addiction* was first *inscribed* in the earliest written record of Roman law—the Twelve Tables—where it specifically referred to debt-bondage. This codification of addiction as debt-bondage marked a decisive moment in the concept's development. As *addiction*'s denotation narrowed to debt-bondage under specific socio-political conditions, the concept accrued new associations. To grasp the significance of debt-bondage in ancient Roman history, and thus the symbolic valences and presuppositions of addiction, we need first to understand the nature and origin of the Twelve Tables themselves. While scholars have debated the Twelve Tables at least since Giambattista Vico questioned their authenticity in his 1744 investigation, some conclusions are nevertheless widely held.[37]

The story recounted by the Roman chronicler Livy (59 BC - 17 AD) goes as follows: After the overthrow of the Roman monarchy and the establishment of the Roman Republic in 509 BC, the plebeian underclass shouldered the two great weights of Roman citizenship—military service and taxation—while the patricians

[37] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans., Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1961. See Michael Steinberg, "The Twelve Tables and Their Origins: AN Eighteenth-Century Debate," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 43, No. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1982), 379-396.

retained exclusive rights over all the governmental decisions. Furthermore, plebeians were subject to uniquely harsh debt-arrangements that threatened them with permanent debt-bondage. What the patricians decided, the plebeians did. Livy writes that the plebeians were excluded from governmental participation "because no plebeians had the privilege of taking the auspices" (*Ab Urbe Condita*, book IV, chapter 6). In other words, the plebeian corps, despite having a mind of its own, moved at the will of the patrician executive lobe because the nobility alone retained the power to addict. However, with such a disequilibrium, Rome could not stand, and a concerted plebeian convulsion forced a reckoning between the two sides:

> The plebs withdrew to the Aventine Hill, where they established a camp without any officer to direct them, and stayed there, neither launching an offensive against Rome nor facing an attack from the patricians. This was the beginning of the plebeian secession. [...] The plebs' absence was all the more problematic for the patricians, as the city could not function properly without the plebeian workforce. Rome's immediate future was considerably jeopardized. There was, for example, no one to take care of harvesting and thus ensure that the Romans would receive their daily supply of food (*The Plebeian Experience*, 7-8).[38]

Authority is helpless without power; judges don't drop axes, and senators don't swing swords. The patricians realized that a backstock of dispensable bodies is

[38] Breaugh, *The Plebeian Experience: A Discontinuous History of Political Freedom*, trans. Lederhendler. New York: Columbia University Press (2013). 7-8. See also David Graeber's discussion of the plebeian secession in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, "The Axial Age of Money." For more on the early history of Roman law with respect to plebeian-patristic strife, see also: Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1788); Ortolan, *Histoire de la Législation Romaine* (1876); Duruy, *History of Rome* (1883); Ihne, *Early Rome* (1886); Buckler, *The Origin and History of Contract in Roman Law* (1895); Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (1967); Brunt, *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic* (1974); Testart, *Aux Origines de la Monnaie* (2002); Momigliano, "The Rise of the Plebs in the Archaic Age of Rome" in *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome* (2005); Schley-Saladin, *Revolution in the Divided City: The Plebeian Social Movement* (2017).

indispensable for the onslaught of the imperial machine, so they bent their necks to the lowdown plebs and offered to reconcile. Likewise, power is illegitimate without authority; executioners don't rap gavels, and gladiators don't debate.[39] Revolution without order spins out of control. "To put an end to the Republic's untenable situation, the senate dispatched to the Aventine Hill Menenius Agrippa, a parliamentarian of plebeian origins known for his oratorical skill. The purpose of Agrippa's mission was to restore Rome's lost unity by bringing the plebs back to the city" (*The Plebeian Experience*, 9). The plebeians ended the standoff by taking their seat at the bargaining table.

With the upperhand from their lowly position, the plebeians' first demand was the right to elect a handful of their own political representatives—the "tribunes of the plebs"—to work as the special protectors of the underclass, each of whom would be vested with the authority to legally advocate for the plebeians, despite lacking actual legislative capacity. However, it soon became clear that the tribunes of the plebs could provide only limited legal protection, so the plebeians issued new demands—above all, for the publication of Roman laws, which had until that point been customary, not codified, meaning they weren't written down.[40] Patricians maintained a monopoly on legal authority principally because the plebeians were not privy to the laws to which they were subject, and thus they had no basis on which they could legally advocate for themselves. The indeterminacy of the laws meant

[39] While judges don't execute, and executioners don't condemn, the American police problematically embody authority (the badge) and power (the gun) simultaneously. In them, there is no separation between law and its enforcement—hence, the hyphenated title "law-enforcement." When authority and power are coextensive in the same body, it's unlikely that justice is served.
[40] For more on the tribunate and its failures, see R.M. Ogilvie, "Introduction" in Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, translated by Aubrey De. Sélincourt. London: Penguin Books. 2002.

patrician judgment was effectively self-authorizing, and plebeians had no grounds for dispute, no standard by which to measure the patrician rulers.

One tribune of the plebs, Terentilius Arsa, spearheaded a charge for the official codification of Roman laws on behalf of the commoners.[41] After a decade-long struggle within the Roman ruling class, reformist patricians attained a major victory when the senate consented that the customary forms of government should be suspended while a special commision of ten, the *decemvirs* (the ten men) would both take on temporary governmental control and be charged with the task of erecting a skeletal constitution of civil rights to raise the Roman body politic from the brink of collapse. The aim of the proposed codification was not to re-form the laws per se, but to form them at all, that is, to fix and define them for the first time—to write them in stone. Livy says the Ten Men faced the task of "writing down the law [*scribendarum legum*]" (*Ab Urbe Condita*, book III, chapter 32).

> What the Tables had to do was to make the Law equal for all, to remove every chance of arbitrary dealing by distinct specification of penalties and precise declaration of the circumstances under which rights should be held to have arisen or been lost and to make such amendments as were necessary to meet the complaints of the plebeians and prevent their oppression in the name of justice. Nothing of the customary law, therefore, or next to nothing, was introduced into the Tables that was not universally recognized as law (*Historical Introduction to the Private Law of Rome*, 52-53).[42]

[41] For more on Terentilius' campaign, see Livy, *History of Rome*, Book III, "Ab Urbe Condita." Thomas Arnold, *History of Rome*; Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Discourses*.
[42] James Muirhead, *Historical Introduction to the Private Law of Rome*, ed. by Alexander Grant. London: A&C Black, 1916. Also see, Rudolf Sohm, *The Institutes of Roman Law*, trans. James Crawford Ledlie, 3rd edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907. 52-53; and Von Bar, *History of Continental Criminal Law*, Vol. VI, Ch. 1, sect. 7, in *Continental Legal History Series*.

Plebeians demanded that *mos* (custom) become *lex* (law), that tradition become text, that convention become code. The simple act of writing down the laws—transforming custom into code—represented a political windfall for the plebeians because it inaugurated what we could interpret as a kind of "due process of law." Roman legal historians Paul du Plessis and Sinclair Bell report that "prior to the enactment of the Twelve Tables . . . the legal order was mainly custom." "While there may have been Royal 'laws' of a certain type, it was the Twelve Tables that marks the true starting point of Roman legal culture" (*Roman Law Before the Twelve Tables*, 2).[43]

The Twelve Tables' codification of Roman legal custom made the law more procedural and thereby mitigated the extent to which patrician authorities could deal arbitrarily with plebeian citizens. Twelve Tables' expert Carlos Felipe Amunátegui Perelló explains:

> The laws are separated from the legislator; they are not merely their will expressed in written form, but furthermore a secular instrument with a validity of their own. Interpretation of the will of the lawgiver will never be a guessing act among the Romans . . . The law is simply a public promise . . . In this sense, the Twelve Tables are the first secular and modern law recorded in Western history separating their nature from the early laws of the kings ("The Twelve Tables and the *Leges Regiae*," 71).[44]

Thus as Livy observes, the Twelve Tables form "the basis of the immense and piecemeal accumulation of [Roman] law" (*Ab Urbe*, book II, chapter 34). While they

[43] Paul du Plessis and Sinclair Bell, "Introduction," in *Roman Law Before the Twelve Tables: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 1-9, ed., Paul du Plessis and Sinclair Bell. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
[44] Amunátegui Perelló, Carlos. "The Twelve Tables and the *Leges Regiae*: A Problem of Validity," in In *Roman Law Before the Twelve Tables: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, 57-76. Edited by Paul du Plessis and Sinclair Bell. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

do not treat matters of civil law (relations between individuals and the state), the Tables at least form the basis of Roman private law (relations between individuals). The tabulation of justice solidified the rules of the law and thereby facilitated accountability; in other words, everyone could count on the law to be just once it was definitively tabulated. Some legal historians claim that the Twelve Tables inaugurated "due process of law" in Western jurisprudence, which is still inscribed in the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.[45] Theoretically, when the law becomes procedural, just outcomes are ensured, because the application of an algorithmic code minimizes the human element in the equation of justice. Justice therefore has an intentional element of inhumanity. The idea is that justice reigns only where the law is a formula written in stone, so no one is responsible for (re)thinking it from the ground up in each case, which lends itself to anarchy.[46]

After the decemvirate "worked to reduce the laws to text [*legibus condensis*]" and drafted ten original tables, which outlined trial procedure, the rights of litigants, contractual relations, and some punitive measures, they "invited the whole population of Rome to read the statutes which were set for for their approval."

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[45] See A. Parfenteva, "Evolution of the Presumption of Innocence" in *We Speak in Legal English,* People's Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, 20 Nov. 2015, 96-97; Jason A. Cook, "Exposing the Contradiction: An Originalist's Approach to Understanding Why Substantive Due Process is a Constitutional Misinterpretation," in *Nevada Law Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 1-28; Fowler Vincent Harper, "Due Process of Law in State Labor Legislation" in *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (Apr. 1928): 599-630; Charles Sumner Lobingier, *The Evolution of the Roman Law: From Before the Twelve Tables to the Corpus Juris*. Printed by the author. 1923, second edition. 71-72.

[46] According to Jacques Derrida, there is for this reason a paradoxical contradiction between justice and responsibility. Justice demands a standard in relation to which something can be deemed just or unjust, and one is truly responsible for a choice only when the rules don't decide for you. Applying a formula might require thinking to achieve the right outcome, but it doesn't demand a decision. Justice is irresponsible, and responsibility is unjustifiable, yet each needs the other. See Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundations of Authority'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Cornell, Rosenfeld, and Carlson. New York: Routledge. 1992. Also see Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* on Abraham's "suspension of the ethical."

According to Livy, "their idea was that the Roman people should have laws that everyone could feel they had set upon themselves [*leges quas omnium tulisse videri posset*], rather than laws they had merely consented to have laid upon them by decree [*non consensus iussisse latas*]" (*Ab Urbe Condita*, book III, chapter 33-34). Setting the law in stone allowed Rome to lay a new footing for the institution of imperial governance, such that all citizens would have solid legal grounds and therefore legal standing. Furthermore, to the extent that the Tables' inscription was (we are told) a public process, the will of each individual citizen was engraved on the new foundation of the Roman legislature. Thus, the Twelve Tables do not merely publish, which is to say both inscribe and publicize, the laws; the Tables also, and perhaps more importantly, publicly monumentalize the commoners' voluntary submission to patrician rule.

The powerful plebeians wished only that tradition would be tabulated, yet the patrician authors knew that their authority would be solidified if it *seemed* [*videri*] to each individual citizen that he had *rendered the law unto himself*, that his obedience was auto-nomous. In other words, if the plebeians felt that they had had a hand in the law's inscription, then compliance to the law would seem like self-determination. To the extent that the patrician authors could create the impression of self-legislation, plebeian subjection to Roman rule would not feel like mere consensual submission, but unlike submission at all—instead, more like mediated autonomy. Such is the genius of empire: violence may be effective, but self-discipline is efficient, and authority at scale demands the latter.

### § 8 – Addiction, Slavery, and Legal Subjectivity

Because unfavorable debt-arrangements contributed considerably to the chronic strife between plebeians and patricians, two of the Twelve Tables deal specifically with debt contracts (*nexi*). Because the Tables themselves are not extant, we cannot quote them with certainty; however, numerous philologists over the last 500 years have collectively reconstructed the text as closely as possible given the empirical constraints by cross-referencing the numerous citations and paraphrases of the Tables by contemporaneous Roman writers.[47] Table VI specifies the following procedure for citizens entering into a private contract, such as a loan: "When a person makes a bond or property transfer, the law will be whatever he attests with his tongue." The Latin itself of the Tables is remarkably terse, which leaves many details up for debate (see Silver 2012, 217-238), but based on accounts of the *nexum* in Cicero, Gellius, and Varro, historian of Roman private law Aleksandr Koptev elaborates the procedure outlined in Table VI:

> The [borrower], having received copper or goods, did not give anything in exchange but only promised to pay back the borrowed copper or to give a certain number of borrowed things, for example oil, wine, or corn . . . Five witnesses testified that the lender delivered money or goods and the borrower swore an oath to pay back the loaned sum with interest. After the debtor had made his oath, he occurred in the condition of *nexus* and the *nexum* began to

[47] See E.H. Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin, Volume III: Lucilius, The Twelve Tables*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938, 424-515; and Allan Chester Johnson, Paul Robinson Coleman-Norton, and Frank Card Bourne, *Ancient Roman Statutes: A Translation with Introduction, Commentary, Glossary, and Index*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas press, 1961, 8-18. The majority of the one-hundred-twenty known Twelve Tables fragments come from the writings of the famous trial lawyer Cicero (106-43 BC), the jurist Gaius (c. 110-179 AD), and the "historian" Gellius (c. 125-180 AD).

> be existent (*nexum inire*) ("Principles of the *Nexum* and Debt Law in the Twelve Tables," 229).[48]

Debtors could not merely swear to repay the loan, but had to put up security for the loan to limit the creditor's default risk. Often, debtors would securitize their debt by putting their own bodies up as surety.

Economist Morris Silver explains that "in order to obtain loans, borrowers must have sworn in a formal ritual (*per aes et libram*) that if they defaulted the creditor might imprison them or make them labor as/like slaves until the debt was repaid (*manus iniectio*)" ("The *Nexum* Contract as a 'Strange Artifice'," 220). Silver is citing another provision of the Twelve Tables that stipulates the process by which defrauded creditors could prosecute delinquent debtors. Table III reads as follows:

> 1. For the repayment of an admitted debt, or an amount adjudged, let the debtor have thirty days of grace.
> 2. Such time having elapsed without repayment, let the debtor be seized by the laying of hands and brought before the judge.
> 3. Unless he satisfies the debt or unless someone else vindicates him on the spot, let the creditor take the defaulter with him; at the creditor's discretion, he may bind the defaulter with either chains or fetters, weighing at least fifteen pounds, or more if the creditor desires.
> 4. It is permissible to let the defaulter live at his own expense; or, the creditor who keeps him bound may give him one pound of grits per day, or more if the creditor desires.
> 5. Unless a compromise is reached, debtors will be held in bonds for sixty days. During that time, they will be brought to the court on three

[48] Aleksandr Koptev, "Principles of the *Nexum* and Debt Law in the Twelve Tables," in *Principios Generales del Derecho Antecedentes Históricos y Horizonte Actual*, 227-246, ed., Fernando Reinoso-Barbero. Madrid: Reuters, 2014. For the debate about the specificities of the statutes, see Morris Silver, "The *Nexum* Contract as a 'Strange Artifice'," in *Revue Internationale des Droits de l'Antiquité*, no. 59 (2012), 217-38.

successive market days, and the amount for which they were judged liable shall be announced.

6. On the third market day, any creditors shall take part ownership[49] of the defaulter.
7. Against a foreigner, ownership will last forever.[50]

The judge's pronouncement authorizing the creditor to "take the defaulter with him" was referred to as an *addictio*, and hence the convicted defaulter, or delinquent, was called an *addictus*—a substantive formed from the past participle of the verb, *addicere*. The delinquent debtor was *delivered unto* (*ad-*) the creditor *by declaration* (*-dictio*) of the judge.[51] The Roman author Gellius (c. 125-180 AD), who claims to be quoting the words of the law, explains that "After the time limit, if the debtors had not discharged the debt, then they were summoned to the praetor's court and by him *were addicted* [*addicebantur*] to the person to whom they were contracted [*vinciebantur*]" (*Noctes Atticae*, book XX, chapter 1, sections 44-45.).[52]

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[49] "The expression *partes secanto* is variously explained: 'let them divide the debtor's functions or capabilities' (Taylor); 'claim shares (*secare ≈ sequi*) in his property' (Nettleship); 'divine price obtained by selling him' (Muirhead); 'divide his family and goods' (Voigt); 'announce (to magistrate; *secunto* from *secere*) their shares' (Schulin). The old Roman writers took it to mean 'cut up debtor's body.' The division may well have been not of the debtor's person but of his property; or rather the enactment may have laid down division of the debtor's body, while custom ordained division of his estate." (*Remains of Old Latin*, 440).

[50] *Remains of Old Latin, Vol. III: Lucilius, The Twelve Tables*. Ed. and trans. by E.H. Warmington. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938. 437-39.

[51] The other usage of *addicere* in the Twelve Tables occurs in Table I, which regulates trial procedure: after two litigants have met and plead their respective cases in public, or if one party does not show up on time, the judge will make his pronouncement [*litem addicito*]; literally, the judge will render the addiction. After the era of the Twelve Tables, *addicere* begins to mean something less specific about credit-debt relations and generally refers to a legal transfer of ownership. For example, in the Justinian Code (an historical compendium of Roman jurisprudence compiled under the order of Emperor Justinian circa 550 AD) the word is almost exclusively employed in property law, though not specifically to debt delinquency. *Addicere* becomes the legal speech-act by which a judge transfers property from one owner to another, variously translatable among "to assign to," "to sentence," "to confiscate to," "to order the forfeiture of," "to set over to," "to pledge to," "to condemn to," "to award to," "to adjudge to," "to deal to," etc.

[52] In the Justinian Code (an historical compendium of Roman jurisprudence compiled under the order of Emperor Justinian circa 550 AD) the word *addicere* is exclusively employed in property law, though not always with specific reference to debt delinquency. *Addicere* becomes the legal speech act by which a judge transfers property from one owner to another, variously translatable among "to

In the context of Table III, a judge's *addictio* inaugurated a temporary transfer of ownership, but not a change of social status. When Silver explains the punishment of a defaulted debtor, he makes sure to use a simile: "the creditor might imprison [the *addicti*] or make them labor *as/like* slaves" (my emphasis). The *addictus* would not become an outright *servus*, but occupied an intermediate state between slave and freeman. In short, slavery was a status, whereas addiction was a punishment. As the famous Roman statesman Cicero claims, "Our ancestors' jurisprudence . . . established that no Roman citizen could lose his freedom except by his own authority" [*nisi ipse auctor factus sit*] (*De Domo Sua*, chapter 29, section 77). While Livy does describe the debt-bondsman in terms of enslavement, Cicero's claim makes an important point: in theory no Roman citizen could be chattel to another Roman. On the distinction between *addicti* and *servi*, acclaimed social anthropologist Alain Testart insists that "we can affirm with certitude that *addicti* and *nexi* were legally free" ("The Extent and Significance of Debt Slavery," 190).[53] Likewise, legal historian Geoffrey MacCormack explains that "the act by which a person became a *nexus* was voluntary"; as such, *addicti* were paradoxically "free" slaves ("*Nexi, Iudicati*, and *Addicti* in Livy," 353).[54] In other words, although convicted defaulters were unequivocally bound by their *addictio*, they had, in principle, entered their bondage willfully by consenting to the debt-contract in the first place. Moreover, *addicti* retained their legal status as freemen such that they

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assign to," "to sentence," "to confiscate to," "to order the forfeiture of," "to set over to," "to pledge to," "to condemn to," "to award to," "to adjudge to," "to deal to," etc.

[53] Alain Testart, "The Extent and Significance of Debt Slavery," in *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 43, Supplement: An Annual English Selection (2002), 173-204.

[54] Geoffrey MacCormack, "*Nexi*, *Iudicati*, and *Addicti* in Livy," in *ZSS*, 84 (1967), 350-355.

could theoretically recover the freedom by repaying their outstanding debt—usually through labor.

French historian Henri-Alexandre Wallon's 1847 work, *Histoire de l'Esclavage dans l'Antiquité*, offers a citation that illuminates the legal distinction between *servus* and *addictus* observed by Silver and Testart. Wallon explains that Quintilliann, a first-century Roman rhetorician and teacher, trying to draw out the "rhetorical nuance" between *addiction* and *slavery*, makes the following clarification:

> The *servus* cannot obtain his freedom against his master's will [*servus invito domino libertatem non consequetur*]; the *addictus* can recover it through payback, even against the master's will [*addictus soluendo citra voluntatem domini consequetur*]. The slave is beyond the law, but the law still applies to the *addictus* [*addictus legem habet*]. What is reserved to the freeman alone—his first name, last name, and nickname—all these are retained by the *addictus*" (*Institutio Oratoria*, volume III, book VII, section 26-28).[55]

The *addictus* was free, but had given himself away and was no longer his own—the voluntary slave. Although they were indeed beholden to their creditors, *addicti* retained the requisite *legal freedom* to potentially recover their *practical freedom*. According to the procedure delineated by Table III, the *addictus* could recover their freedom in one of two ways: the *addictus* could satisfy the debt (*iudicatum facit*) through a compromise between him and the creditor (*ius paciscendi*), or a third-party could *vindicate*, or *redeem*, the defaulter (*in iure vindicit*).

Roman law established what would become the core of the word *addiction*, which has remained shockingly consistent throughout the last two millennia, even as

[55] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans., H.E. Butler. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1921.

the term has been transposed into many different contexts and languages: to say that someone is an *addict* or *addicted* communicates, at base, that they are not their own, that they do not own themselves. Addicts, expropriated of themselves by themselves, are not the executors of their will but merely witnesses to its authorized appropriation by some other. Those who are *ad-dicted* do not dictate their own acts; their acts are *dictated to* them by forces beyond their own control—namely, by their owners. Addiction, from here onward, has been about possession, property, and proprietorship, which is also to say, ownership or authenticity. The addict is someone who lacks all of the above; they are owned, propertyless, improper, disowned, delinquent, and fraudulent. *Addiction* does not describe just any state of servility. More precisely, it denotes a servitude that is not reducible to coerced submission, and which therefore has been historically differentiated from slavery. Legally speaking, if paradoxically, *addiction is voluntary enslavement*.

The addict is indeed enslaved, but the conceptual distinction is that their enslavement is their own fault. When the borrower agrees to secure his own debt, he voluntarily submits himself to the potential enslavement as the enabling risk of the loan. Because the law is public and codified, he knows full well what he's getting himself into.[56] The needful plebeian theoretically has options (even if no viable alternatives); thus, on the assumed basis of his freedom of choice to borrow money or not, responsibility for the debt arrangement and thus guilt for its infraction can be assigned to the "individual," on whose singular shoulders the punishment therefore falls. That is to say, you become addicted by your own willful (de)fault, but, once

[56] "The style of the XII Tables is thoroughly rugged and archaic—short, pregnant sentences, evidently intended for the comprehension of the vulgar, and suitable for transmission from mouth to mouth, framed in the imperative mood" ("Are the XII Tables Authentic?" in *The Juridical Review*, *Volume XVII*. Edinburgh: William Green & Sons. 1905. 100).

addicted, you are no longer the executor of your own will. Through the legal concept of addiction, the fault of enslavement can therefore be attributed to the enslaved person rather than the enslaver. The legal mechanism of addiction shifts the guilt of slavery onto the backs of the enslaved themselves.

In this way, the concept of addiction—as distinct from slavery—presupposes individual self-sovereignty or self-possession as the basis of legal subjectivity. Without the presupposition that each citizen possesses individual freedom of will such that they can voluntarily contract debts and be held solely accountable for their own delinquency, addiction's conceptual specificity collapses. Stated otherwise, Roman citizens could securitize their debts with their own selves only if Roman law presupposed that legal subjects, as such, possessed themselves as property—to be used at will. The concept of addiction thus implies or presupposes a selfhood conditioned by the codification of Roman law: legal subjectivity ≅ self-possession ≅ freedom. As I've noted previously, legal historians have analogized the codification of Roman law to the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution to illustrate the underlying legal philosophy of the Twelve Tables. Thinking with that analogy, historian Saidiya Hartman's critique of American Emancipation and the resultant codification of black rights can shed light on what's at work in the Roman codification of addiction.

Hartman examines the "strategies of individuation constitutive of . . . the rights-bearing subject" to draw out the paradoxical "subjugation that rights instigate" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 203).[57] She argues that the codification of black legal subjectivity in the Fourteenth Amendment inaugurated the "abstract equality . . . of

[57] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.

the freed—as sovereign, indivisible, and self-possessed" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 117). In other words, "chattel becomes man through the ascension to the hallowed realm of the self-possessed" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 123). While the U.S. government's granting of legal subjectivity to black people did mark an undeniable "ascension" from chattel enslavement to rights-bearing subject, Hartman urges us to understand a subtle but important point about that liberation:

> Emancipation announced the end of chattel slavery; however, it by no means marked the end of bondage. The free(d) individual was nothing if not burdened, responsible, and obligated. Responsibility entailed accounting for one's actions, dutiful suppliance, contractual obligation, and calculated reciprocity. Fundamentally, to be responsible was to be blameworthy. In this respect, the exercise of free will, quite literally, was inextricable from guilty infractions, criminal misdeeds, punishable transgressions, and an elaborate micropenality of everyday life . . . The autonomous intending agent was above all else culpable (*Scenes of Subjection*, 125).

The attribution of legal subjectivity, which is to say "the stipulation of will, reason, and consent," to freed blacks newly figured their deeds as debts, which provided the philosophical substructure for other forms of domination: incarceration and debt-bondage (*Scenes of Subjection*, 121). Once formerly enslaved people were granted "formal individual freedom," Hartman says, "the use, regulation, and management of the body no longer necessitated literal ownership, since self-possession effectively yielded modern forms of bonded labor" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 120).

The Thirteenth Amendment itself reflects Hartman's thesis: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall*

*have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction" (United States Constitution, Amendment XIV). If we read between the lines of the Thirteenth Amendment, then we can discern that while it prohibits *involuntary servitude*, it expressly protects what is implicitly considered *voluntary servitude*—either punishment for crime or debt-bondage. "The espousal of volition only secured the bondage of the freed" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 145). In this way, the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments finally extended the hallowed "proprietorial conception of the self" to freed blacks, and yet, "the constrained agency conferred by the will of contract was apparent; although it was the cherished vehicle of self-ownership, it in fact documented the dispossession inseparable from becoming a propertied person" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 129). This observation leads Hartman to ask:

> Did emancipation confer sovereignty and autonomy only to abandon the individual in a self-blaming and penalizing free society? Regrettably, the bound and sovereign self of rights was an island unto himself, accountable for his own making and answerable to his failures; social relations thereby receded before the singular exercise of the will and the blameworth of the isolated individual . . . The discrepant bestowal of emancipation conferred sovereignty as it engendered subjection . . . the double bind of freedom (*Scenes of Subjection*, 133-34).[58]

To be sure, transhistorical comparisons—especially at such temporal and geographic remove—are fraught with potential confusion. Nonetheless, I believe that Hartman's diagnosis of how the codification of rights (1) individuates citizens through the

[58] As Hartman cites, Americans sensed this double-bind of freedom even at the time of emancipation. For instance, Isaac Brinckerhoff remarks in his 1864 book, *Advice to Freedmen*: "With the enjoyment of a freedman's privileges, comes also a freedman's duties and responsibilities. These are weighty. You cannot get rid of them; they must be met."

attribution of self-possession and thereby (2) renders them responsible, capable of guilt, and thus subject to voluntary bondage, elucidates the consequences of the Twelve Tables' codification of addiction.

Historian of ancient slavery Sandra Joshel explains that "in early Roman society

. . . citizen debt-bondsmen, rather than slaves, provided dependent labor for the wealthy. Debt slavery was not a matter of lending money and collecting interest but a means of claiming the labor of the poor" (*Slavery in the Roman World*, 54).[59] In this regard, the Roman codification of addiction and its implicit inauguration of legal subjectivity, as Hartman says of American Emancipation, "enshrined (in)voluntary servitude as freedom." After reviewing the Roman distinction between slavery and addiction, we might still ask again in Hartman's words: "Is not the free will of the individual measured precisely through the exercise of constraint and autonomy determined by the capacity to participate in relations of exchange that only fetter and bind the subject?" To paraphrase her insight in legal Latin: *Is the free will of the individual not measured precisely by its capacity for addiction?* If so, then "does the esteemed will replace the barbaric whip or only act as its supplement?"

Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Hartman cites to support her argument about the Fourteenth Amendment, raises a similar point in his own reading of the Twelve Tables. Nietzsche, actually footnoting the Tables' statute on addiction, suggests that

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[59] Sandra Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. According to Livy, contractual debt-slavery was abolished in 326 BC by the *Lex Poetelia*. However, based on Varro's discussion of the *Lex Poetelia*, scholars have argued that this abolition of contractual debt slavery did not abolish the prosecution of defaulters by *addiction*, but only those loan contracts wherein debtors agreed to pay back debt through slave labor. Morris specifies that "the new law banned only *nexum*-contracts, not the early form of *nexum* in which enslavement was the final step in the debt-default process (Morris 2012, 236-37).

"the main moral concept of *Schuld* [guilt] descends from the very material concept of *Schulden* [debts]. Punishment as retribution did not evolve independently of any assumptions about the freedom or unfreedom of the will" (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, 39).[60] Without presupposing individual self-possession, he clarifies elsewhere, "action could hardly be considered free, and nobody could be held responsible for it" (*Twilight of the Idols*, 178).[61] In this regard, he argues, "the notion of the will was designed essentially with punishment in mind, which is to say the desire to assign guilt" (*Twilight of the Idols*, 181). With Nietzsche and Hartman, we can see that the codification of rights, both in the Twelve Tables and the Fourteenth Amendment, inaugurated "the burdened individuality of the responsible and encumbered freedperson," or, as Nietzsche puts it, "the very conception of the 'legal subject'" (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, 40). Only a freeman can become an addict; addiction is the constitutive burden of individual freedom.

Because debt was such a ubiquitous threat in Roman society, numerous Roman theologians saw the social relevance and real danger of addiction. In both Greek and Latin contexts, Christian leaders lamented the struggles of poverty with their congregations, excoriated the evil of usury, and extolled the virtue of giving alms to debtors.[62] Among the early Latin theologians, Tertullian and Ambrose were the first to discuss debt at length in public sermons that have been preserved. Not only did Tertullian and Ambrose address debt as a practical problem facing their

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[60] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed., Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans., Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

[61] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 153-230, ed., Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans., Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

[62] See Charles Geisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor: A History of Usury and Debt*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, 13-57; and Thomas Moser, "The Idea of Usury in Patristic Literature," in *The Canon in the History of Economics*, 24-45, ed., Michalis Psalidopoulios. New York: Routledge, 2000.

communities, they also described addiction as a microcosm of humanity's cosmic predicament. Augustine, who was a reader of both Tertullian and Ambrose, was less concretely concerned with debt as a social issue, but nevertheless consistently employed their *addiction* metaphor to develop his own theological anthropology. As I have argued, the Twelve Tables' codification of addiction not only brought the concept into orbit with a complex system of associated ideas and affects but reformed the concept on new ground: legal subjectivity, which is to say self-ownership or freedom of will. Thus, when these Roman theologians used addiction as a metaphor for sin, they conveyed to theological discourse not simply the idea of debt-bondage itself, but, with it, the entire conceptual ground of addiction as well—namely the legal subjectivity, freedom of will, and burdensome individuality it presupposed.

In the following chapter, I will show how Roman theologians Tertullian, Augustine, and Ambrose—building on pecuniary metaphors in the earliest Christian scriptures—interpolated the term *addiction* and its constellation of grounding presumptions into Christian theology to make an important point about the sinful human condition. According to them, human sinfulness is not simply an inherited state of spiritual enslavement; more specifically, we have become enslaved *voluntarily* by virtue of the outstanding debt of original sin. That is to say, we find ourselves in a state of bondage owing to our own willful (de)fault. Augustine, a reader of both Tertullian and Ambrose, inherited this addiction metaphor and developed it into a comprehensive conception of Christian subjectivity. Most notably, the metaphor of addiction, or voluntary enslavement, provided Augustine a context within which to work out his famous theory of the broken free will. Thinking again of

metaphors, the long-gone tablets of Roman law still ring true with a haunting familiarity because they ground the tenor of Christianity.

## Chapter 2

## THE TENOR OF CHRISTIANITY

*You are addicted to whatever owns you.*

– 2 Peter 2:19

In this chapter, I analyze the genesis and development of the Christian *addiction* metaphor in the writings of Roman theologians Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155 - 220), Ambrose of Milan (339 - 397), and Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430) to show how the language and logic of Roman financial jurisprudence came to structure their thinking about the human condition. Known as "Church Fathers," Tertullian of Carthage, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine of Hippo are three of the most important theologians in Latin Christianity. Tertullian, as the first Christian to write in Latin, helped establish the vocabulary of Western theology. Ambrose, who was personally connected to two Roman emperors, helped make theological doctrine

more legalistic and Roman law more theologically permissive through his dual career as a Roman statesman and Christian bishop. Augustine's legacy is hard to overstate. Some of his ideas became literal orthodoxy during his lifetime, which meant agreement with Augustine's perspective was enforceable by canon law. After his life, Augustine remained so ubiquitously revered that even during the Reformation, his many works were referenced like holy scripture by both Catholic and Protestant thinkers alike. Moreover, his voice has spread far beyond theology. His writing was a central source to modern philosophers including Réné Descartes, G.W.F. Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida.

Tertullian, Ambrose, and Augustine each described the human condition through the Roman legal metaphor of addiction, yet the concept's significance to their thought and, by extension, to the entire tradition of Latin theology has been hidden for hundreds of years. As I noted in the introduction, workable yet imprecise translations of these ancient texts from Latin into modern European languages following the Reformation have erased the term *addicere* from the record of Western theology. In short, modern translators have often rendered the Latin *addictus* with the misleading near-synonym 'slave' or the even more generic 'condemned' and 'damned'. While these translations still effectively convey the senses of bondage and entrapment that theologians associated with sin, they erase the conceptual technicality of their Roman legal metaphor. Like I insisted in my first chapter, metaphors are misleading if we do not understand the cultural context of their deployment, which is to say, if we do not understand the ground on which the vehicle

conveys meaning. When these theologians metaphorically claim that *sin* is *addiction*, they suggest that sin is *voluntary* enslavement, that sin is our fault.

In this way, the Christian addiction metaphor does not merely communicate that sin is a form of bondage; the metaphor, as such, also conveys addiction's conceptual ground into theological discourse—the legal subjectivity, freedom of will, and hence individual accountability that the concept of Roman addiction entails. In this chapter, I retranslate important selections from these three thinkers' theological treatises, transcribed sermons, and public letters not only to recover addiction's conceptual significance to their shared theological paradigm, but also to show how the metaphor of addiction first prompts theological reflection on the eventually all-important idea of "free will." To accomplish these two tasks, first, I outline the Greek financial metaphors already operative in the Apostle Paul's Epistles that encourage Roman theologians to reach for the pecuniary concept of addiction as they elaborate Pauline theology in Latin. Then, I trace the development of the addiction metaphor within the writings of Tertullian, Ambrose, and finally Augustine, whose extended reflections on addiction lead him to write the first philosophical investigation of free *will* in Western intellectual history.

## § 9 – Pecuniary Metaphors in the Pauline Epistles

The earliest texts in the edited volume that we now call the "New Testament" are not the Gospels detailing the life and times of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), but a collection of letters written by a Christian convert named Paul during the 50s AD, about twenty years after Jesus died. In the decades following Paul's

conversion, he traveled around the eastern half of the Roman empire—primarily modern day Turkey and Greece—evangelizing and establishing churches. Thanks largely to his missionary work, the Christian movement grew from a small group of disciples in Jerusalem during the 30s AD to an intercontinental network of communities spanning the Roman Empire by the mid 100s. The Pauline Epistles, which constitute about half the New Testament, are correspondences sent from Paul to various churches he had founded, addressing ethical problems and doctrinal questions the newly congregated communities were facing. The letters that the churches sent to Paul with their questions and concerns have not survived, so when we read Paul's letters, we are effectively listening to one side of several different conversations. For this reason, the letters are not systematic treatments of Christian doctrine but piecemeal and contextually specific responses to questions raised by different communities. Paul's writings are significant within the conceptual history of addiction because they—as the earliest Christian texts—introduce the pecuniary metaphors of slavery, debt, and redemption into the vocabulary of theology.[63] Paul wrote in Greek, so he never uses the Latin term *addicere*, but the financial terminology he puts into circulation among Christians across the empire laid the groundwork for later Latin-speaking Christians to interpolate the term "addiction" in their own appropriations and extensions of Pauline theology.

In Paul's letter to the new Christian community of Corinth, he warns them not to do business with prostitutes. To get his point across, he reminds them, "You are

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[63] There is a robust body of scholarship among New Testament scholars devoted solely to understanding Paul's slavery and redemption metaphors. See Weiss, *Die christliche Freiheit nach der Verkündigung des Apostels Paulus* (1902); Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (1908); Sass, "Zur Bedeutung von *doulos* bei Paulus" (1941); Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (1990).

not your own, for you were bought for a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). The verb being translated as "bought" is the Greek *agorazein*, which straightforwardly means 'to buy, to purchase' or, literally, "to go to market."[64] Francis Tolmie explains in his study of Paul's financial metaphors that "the most natural background for its metaphorical use here is slavery, in particular the buying and selling of people as slaves."[65] Paul's term, 'to purchase,' serves to communicate simply "that anyone who has been bought by someone else becomes the property of that person. Thus, the focus of the metaphor is . . . on the idea of ownership." Paul uses the metaphor *agorazo* "to signify the fact that [the Corinthians] are the *property* of Christ and the obligations resulting from being bought by Christ"—their new slave-owner.[66] Paul grounds his moral claims about how the Corninthians should behave in the metaphorical statement that Christ has "bought" them, like slaves at auction; therefore, they are not their own. Their very bodies, having been bought by Christ, are not their own property and thus cannot be used at their own discretion. Paul continues, saying that "Your body is a temple," which is to say, a special vessel meant to house Christ's own will. Paul does not specify from what previous owner Christ has bought us, and the term *agorazo* does not imply how they became slaves in the first place—as the term *addictus* would—but it is an unambiguously financial verb that sets Christian theology onto economic grounds.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul employs a more technical pecuniary term. He explains that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the [Jewish] law" (Galatians

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[64] In the Vulgate Saint Jerome translated *agorazo* as *empti*.
[65] Francois Tolmie, "Salvation as Redemption: The Use of 'Redemption' Metaphors in Pauline Literature" in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Van der Watt. Boston: Brill. 2005. 257.
[66] Tolmie, "Salvation as Redemption," 258-59.

3:13). The term rendered here as "redeemed" is Paul's *exagorazo*, which literally means "to buy out of" (*ek* = from, out of + *agorazo* = to buy). This verb would not be used to describe just any purchase. It refers specifically to a payment delivered to recover someone from the ownership of another person, rather than a straightforward commodity transaction. For instance, we would never refer to "ransoming" a loaf of bread from the grocery store, but only a person from captivity. Even more poignant, however, is Paul's usage of the legal term *apolytrosis* in his letter to the Romans. "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption [*apolytrosis*] which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24). "The word *apolytrosis* indicated the buying back of a slave or captive, thereby making them free through the payment of ransom."[67] Paul would inspire the financial vocabulary and logic of Christian theology for millennia to come by employing technical pecuniary language throughout his epistles, most notably in this formula from his letter to the Romans describing the nature of salvation itself.

### § 10 – Tertullian Starts the Vehicle

Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155 - 220 AD) is considered to be the "Father of Western Theology" because he was the first Christian known to write in Latin. Church historian David Wilhite suggests that "Tertullian is arguably . . . the most influential thinker from the whole Christian tradition. As the first Christian theologian to write in Latin, he veritably invented a new vocabulary that would shape

[67] Tolmie, "Salvation as Redemption," 263.

the tradition that came after him. Therefore, his role in the Latin 'Western' tradition should be better appreciated" (*Ancient African Christianity*, 108).[68] Scholars trying to assess Tertullian's significance in Christian history continue to debate the details of his life. From the few surviving sources, we have learned that he was born in Carthage around 160 AD into a Roman family of high status, and he received an excellent education either in rhetoric or law. Some scholars have argued that Tertullian went to Rome as a young man and was trained as a legal consultant (*iurisconsult*). While in Rome, this story goes, he converted to Christianity and then returned to Carthage several years later to lead the newly formed Carthaginian Church.[69] Other biographers of Tertullian claim that he never went to Rome but did study at Carthage's own prominent law school.[70] However, other scholars even deny that Tertullian was a legal expert and insist, instead, that he merely employed legal metaphors by virtue of his training in the art of rhetoric.[71]

Whatever Tertullian's exact relation to Roman jurisprudence might have been, an important word in his "new vocabulary" was the legal term *addiction*, which was not, strictly speaking, "invented" but interpolated via translation. Part of Tertullian's important role in the development of the Western theological tradition was as translator. As he was bilingual and freely moved between Greek and Latin in his writings and sermons, he helped translate the older Greek Christian writings

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[68] David Wilhite, *Ancient African Christianity: An Introduction to a Unique Context and Tradition*. London: Routledge, 2017.
[69] See Ian Balfour, "Tertullian and Roman Law: What Do We (Not) Know?" in *Studia Patristica*, 44 (2017), 11-21 and David Rankin, "Was Tertullian a Jurist?" in *Studia Patristica*, 31 (1997), 335-42.
[70] See Wilhite, *Ancient African Christianity*.
[71] See Robert Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; and Jean-Claude Fredouille, *Tertullien et la Conversion de la Culture Antique*. Paris: Institut des Études Augustiniennes, 1972.

(most notably the Pauline epistles) into Latin.[72] Many of his texts were written to educate catechumens, or beginners in the Christian faith, so he frequently references early New Testament texts in translation and elaborates their meaning in Latin.[73]

Since the Carthaginian bishop was born only 50 years after the Gospel of John was written, almost 200 years before the Council of Nicea would formalize the Christian creed, and 550 years before the official canonization of the Catholic Bible, most of his theological writings attempted to articulate and defend an inchoate orthodoxy in the early church. In one of Tertullian's most important works, *De Paenitentia* (c. 190 AD), he lays out why humans need salvation and how we might attain it. He explains that Adam and Eve broke God's law and brought damnation upon themselves and the rest of humankind for posterity. God, however, has since taken mercy on humanity and offered a means for humans to remit themselves of their guilt and escape the punishment of death. According to Tertullian, individuals can escape the punishment due to humanity through the lifelong practice of repentance. Repentance, he says, is "an emotion of disgust at some previously cherished sentiment" that motivates a striving to "make amends" (*De Paenitentia*, book I, chapter 2).[74]

Tertullian describes Christian salvation as a process of penitent payback, not simply a one-time event of debt-forgiveness. He outlines the quasi legal procedure of salvation as follows, according to the standard English translation: "Repentance is

[72] See Benjamin Haupt, "Tertullian's Text of the New Testament Outside the Gospels," Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Birmingham, 2019. 80-99.
[73] Whether Tertullian was translating Greek scriptures himself or citing an early Latin version of the Pauline letters is difficult to prove (see Still and Wilhite 2013). Biblical scholar J. K. Elliott argues that because "Christians in Carthage knew Paul's letters and the gospels about the year 180, and it is unlikely they knew Greek," it is probable that Tertullian was making his own translations, which could have been "the earliest renderings of the New Testament in Latin" (Elliott 1992, 200).
[74] Tertullian, *De Paenitentia*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus I: Tertulliani Opera Omnia, Pars Prima*, 1225-1247, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1844.

the price at which the Lord has determined to award pardon. He offers redemption from punishment for the compensating exchange of repentance" (*De Paenitentia*, book I, chapter 6). In this important line, Tertullian invokes Roman legal terminology to describe a contractual relation between God and humanity. A more precise translation of his statement would read: "The Lord has decided to addict us, and repentance is the price he has set for our release. He proposes impunity through redemption as compensation for the punishment due" [*Hoc enim pretio dominus veniam addicere instituit, has paenitentiae compensatione redimendam proponit impunitatem*] (*De Paenitentia*, book I, chapter 6).[75]

The Roman legal term *addicere* appears to have entered into Christian theology for the first time here in Tertullian's *De Paenitentia*. Acknowledging the ground of his metaphor, Tertullian goes on to say that "Every deed, good or bad, is a debt to God; for a judge pays back every action, and God as Judge presides over the exacting and maintaining of justice" (*De Paenitentia*, book I, chapter 6). Tertullian explains that Adam and Eve owed God their obedience and, by their original delinquency, have defrauded him of his due. Thus, Adam and Eve—and in them all of humanity—stand trial as defaulters. In Tertullian's metaphor, God confusingly occupies two roles simultaneously. As the defrauded lender (of life itself), God is

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[75] Here is the same sentence according to predominant translations of Tertullian in other European languages: **French—**"*C'est à ce prix que le Seigneur a décidé d'accorder son pardon: c'est moyennant la pénitence qu'il nous propose d'acheter l'impunité*" (Trans. C. Munier. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1984); **Spanish—** "*Pues el Señor ha establecido adjudicar el perdón mediante este precio; propone que debe rescatarse la impunidad con esta compensación de la* penitencia" (Trans. S. Vicastillo. Madrid: Editorial Ciudad Nueva, 2011); **Italian—**"*È proprio a prezzo della penitenza che il Signore ha posto il principio del perdono e l'impunità appunto si può raggiungere, ma solo a patto che noi ci pentiamo*" (Trans. A. Carpin. Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2011); **German—**"*Denn nur um diesen Preis hat der Herr uns Vergebung zuzusichern beschlossen, nur gegen Entrichtung der Buße ist bei ihm*" (Trans. K.A. Heinrich Kellner. Kempten & München: Jos. Köselschen Bucchandlung, 1912). I have been unable so far to find Portuguese and Romanian editions for comparison. The existing Russian translations are based on De Labriolle's 1906 French translation rather than the Latin, so they have the elision built in.

owed an outstanding debt (obedience); as the judge, he has issued an *addictio* binding delinquent humanity to God as his servants. Interpreting Tertullian's metaphorical message in the context of its Roman legal ground, he suggests that God, the defrauded creditor, has extended repentance as a compromise (*ius paciscendi*) with humanity, the *addicti*: "God has inaugurated repentance by rescinding the sentence of his initial wrath, offering to grant pardon" (*De Paenitentia*, book I, chapter 2). Through the ongoing work of repentance, we addicts can repay our debt to God and work towards our own redemption.

About a decade after writing *De Paenitentia*, Tertullian returns to his metaphor more fully in a discussion of debt from his famous polemical work, *Adversus Marcionem*. While he elaborates his interpretation of the biblical policy on exacting interest, he takes the literal discussion of debt and metaphorizes from it to describe the broader cosmic situation of humankind. He explains that God's liberality towards us "consists in loaning [*foeneraverat*] the sunshine and the rain to us," and yet "in return for God's vast generosity" we delinquents "give more readily to the idols than to God Himself the debt that is owed for His gifts" (*Adversus Marcionem*, book IV, chapter 17).[76] Thankfully, God, the ever-generous creditor, "puts up with humans [*homines sustinet*]" through their delinquent ingratitude and offers "retribution proportioned to the due [*retributionem pro meritis*]" that each person renders back to God during their life. "The Creator," he explains, "as the Judge and the Recompenser of just desserts [*judice et dispunctore meritorum*], compels our submission to Him" within a contractual compromise wherein we redeem ourselves by progressive payback of God's loan that is Creation itself.

[76] Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus I: Tertulliani Opera Omnia, Pars Prima*, 1225-1247, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1844.

As Tertullian works through the logic of his *addiction* metaphor, he reflects on the underlying principle that distinguished slavery from addiction—the idea that the latter was a *voluntary* bondage. He sees that the free will is the metaphysical premise of the system of individual accountability that ends in addiction. In other words, if we are held accountable for our deeds as debts, then it must be the case that "will is the origin of deed [*voluntas facti origo est*]. For if any sins are imputed to chance, necessity, or ignorance, let them see to themselves. Without the will, there is no delinquency [*non nisi voluntate delinquitur*]" (*De Paenitentia*, book I, chapter 3). Consistent with MacCormack's claim that "the act by which a person became a *nexus* was voluntary" as well as Silver's observation that "the underlying legal philosophy is that the law is what contracting parties *agree*," Tertullian understands that sin cannot be figured as delinquency, nor damnation as addiction, if people's deeds are not interpreted as expressions of their free wills (*Economic Structures of Antiquity*, 221, my emphasis).[77] In this way, Tertullian's metaphor of *addiction* and *redemption*, which imports the legal subjectivity presupposed by Roman jurisprudence, brings the free will to the fore of Latin theology. While Tertullian does not repeat the term *addicere* throughout *De Paenitentia*, his brief discussion of *addiction* and *redemption* is nonetheless significant because it introduces into Latin Christian discourse a soteriological metaphor that later theologians would rely on to articulate the logic of Christian salvation within a Roman legal idiom.

Here in *On Penitence*, Tertullian grounds addiction in the will for the first time and thus states explicitly what Hartman and Nietzsche indicate: that free will is the basis of legal accountability, individual guilt, and, hence, the precondition of

[77] Morris Silver, *Economic Structures of Antiquity*. London: Greenwood Press, 1995.

addiction, or *voluntary* enslavement. Crime and punishment become a "justice system" according to the logic of Roman addiction that Tertullian explicitly theorizes. When the law is codified and public, everyone in principle knows which punishments follow which crimes. The regularity of an algorithm avoids judicial arbitrariness. This flow-chart model of law, which goes from tightly defined crime to corresponding punishment, is imagined to be "just" according to the logic of Roman addiction: if each person's will is free and the law is public knowledge, then any crime someone commits is their own individual choice; by voluntarily committing the crime, they likewise voluntarily submit themselves to the corresponding punishment that, in principle, is known in advance. The "justice" of this system is that punishments are therefore, in theory, voluntary self-punishments—or, we could say, penitential. Criminals volunteer themselves for punishment by voluntarily committing their crimes.[78]

Tertullian's successor as the bishop of Carthage, Saint Cyprian, was also one of the first Christians writing in Latin. Cyprian had studied the Church Father's

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[78] G.W.F. Hegel's theory of justice is both paradigmatic and symptomatic of this Roman Christian notion. As he says in his *Philosophy of Right*: "The injury which is inflicted on the criminal is not only just in itself (and since it is just, it is at the same time his will as it is in itself, an existence of his freedom, his right); it is also a right for the criminal himself, that is, a right posited in his existent will, in his action. For it is implicit in his action, as that of a rational being, that it is universal in character, and that, by performing it, he has set up a law which he has recognized for himself in his action, and under which he may therefore be subsumed as under his right" (§ 100). The addition to § 101 clarifies Hegel's point:"When the criminal is met with retribution, this has the appearance of an alien destiny that does not belong to him; yet as we have seen, the punishment is merely a manifestation of the crime, i.e., it is one half which is necessarily presupposed by the other. What is at first sight objectionable about retribution is that it looks like something immoral, like revenge, and may thus be interpreted as a personal matter. Yet it is not the personal element, but the concept itself which carries out retribution. 'Vengeance is mine' is the word of God in the Bible, and if the word *re*-tribution should evoke the idea of a particular caprice of the subjective will, it must be replied that it signifies merely the shape of the crime turned round against itself . . . thus the deed brings its own retribution with it" (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Ed. Wood, trans. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 126-29). For a critical examination of Hegel's claims, see McTaggart, "Hegel's Theory of Punishment" in *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (July 1896), 479-502.

writings and likewise deciphered Christian theology through the metaphor of addiction. Emphasizing the capital punishment that Table III authorized for unredeemed debtors, Cyprian warns that "an ever-blazing hell will burn up the addicts [*Cremabit addictos ardens semper gehenna*], devoured by living flames as punishment; and there will be no source by which they might have either respite or end to their torments. Their souls and bodies will be held in infinite excruciation" (*Liber de Idolorum Vanitate,* chapter xxiv).[79] While Gellius speculated that patrician legislators "made capital punishment dreadful to make good faith in credit sacred," the same seems true of Cyprian's theology—the promised punishment of addicts serves to sacralize good credit.

### § 11 – Ambrose: Addiction Gains Momentum

Ambrose of Milan (339 - 397), who was the son of a Roman government official, served as the governor of the Italian province Aemilia-Liguria before he was elected as the bishop of Milan in 374. During his tenure as governor, Ambrose biographer Neil McLynn recounts, Ambrose "was closely circumscribed by his responsibilities for enforcing the law, supervising the collection of taxes, and maintaining order . . . He represented the savage and relentless face of the late Roman judiciary" (*Ambrose of Milan*, 5).[80] Ambrose himself complains of the "tumult and strife of the courts and the dread of public administration (*De*

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[79] Cyprian, *Liber de Idolorum Vanitate*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus IV: Sancti Thascii Caecilii Cypriani Episcopi Carthaginensis et Martyris, Opera Omnia*, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris 1844. 561.
[80] Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

*Poenitentia*, book II, chapter 8, section 67).[81] Among the provincial governors' administrative responsibilities was maintaining accord among the competing Christian sects, which in Ambrose's jurisdiction were principally Nicene and Arian Christians. When the bishop of Milan died in 374, Arians and Nicenes vied for the bishopric. Ambrose went to the church to stem potential unrest, and he was spontaneously elected by the crowds. After initial refusal, he ambivalently accepted the new post (*Ambrose of Milan*, 44-53).

As someone who occupied both the highest secular and clerical posts in his province, Ambrose embodied the interface between imperial and theological authority. Historian of theology Andrew Lenox-Conyngham succinctly captures Ambrose's unique position:

> If there was anyone at that time who, because of his or her own experience and ability, might have had an interest in understanding the Church from an institutional and juridical point of view, it was surely Ambrose. He was . . . the first person in the history of the Church to have had experience both of state and of church activity at the highest level . . . Everything points to the likelihood that his approach would be to regard the Church primarily as an organization understood in juridical terms ("The Church in Saint Ambrose of Milan").[82]

Church historian Claudio Morino argues that Ambrose's "practical experience in the courts as both judge and advocate" and his "thorough knowledge of the various edicts, rescripts, and mandates that then comprised the real substance of Roman

[81] Ambrose, *De Poenitentia*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XVI: Sancti Ambrosii Opera Omnia, Tomi Secundi*, *Pars Prior*, 485-544, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1880.
[82] Lenox-Conyngham, Andrew. "The Church in Saint Ambrose of Milan." In *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 5, No. 3 (2006).

law"  contributed to the "theologico-juridical foundation" of his thought (*Church and State in the Teaching of Saint Ambrose*, 48).[83] Ambrose's theological writings, which are rife with Roman legal language, demonstrate this synthesis. Historian of theology Goulven Madec claims that Ambrose's writings are characterized by "the encounter and cohabitation of two cultures, secular and Christian" (*Saint Ambroise et la Philosophie*, 342).[84] Likewise, philologist Louis Swift remarks on "how much the Classical expressions [Ambrose] uses have been infused with new meanings" through his "substantive borrowings" of secular sources for theological ends ("*Iustitia* and *Ius Privatum*: Ambrose on Private Property," 176).[85] In a treatise written at the behest of Emperor Gratian, Ambrose himself defends his rhetorical borrowing from pre-Christian sources: "If anyone thinks that my argumentative embellishments [*colorem disputationis*], drawn from the stories of the poets [*a poeticis fabulis derivatum*], are illicit—lacking anything bad to say about my faith itself and so assailing my language—let them know that not merely phrases but indeed entire verses of poetry have been woven into [*insertos esse*] the Holy Scriptures" (*De Fide*, book III, chapter 1, section 3).[86] I would argue that Ambrose's *addiction* metaphor represents an important instance of this terminological transposition, from Roman law to Christian theology.

As a former public administrator, Ambrose was intimately familiar with the practical problems facing his congregants in Milan. In one of Ambrose's earliest

[83] Claudio Morino, *Church and State in the Teaching of Saint Ambrose*, trans., M. Joseph Costelloe. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1969.
[84] Goulven Madec, *Saint Ambroise et la Philosophie*. Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974.
[85] Louis Swift, "*Iustitia* and *Ius Privatum*: Ambrose on Private Property," in *The American Journal of Philology*, 100, No. 1 (1979), 176-187.
[86] Ambrose, *De Fide ad Gratianum*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus*, *Tomus XVI: Sancti Ambrosii Opera Omnia, Tomi Secundi, Paris Prior*, 549-726, ed., by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1880.

writings, a published sermon entitled *De Tobia*, he discusses *addiction* both to address literally the concrete threat of insolvency and to articulate figuratively the metaphysical threat of damnation. In keeping with both his legal service and the theological vocabulary that Tertullian introduced, Ambrose deployed the metaphor of *addiction* to explain original sin. Ambrose does not explicitly cite Tertullian as inspiration for his metaphorical discussions of addiction; however, it is highly likely that Ambrose encountered this innovative conception of original sin, which meshed with Ambrose's own rhetorical penchant for synthesizing legal and theological language, in the teachings of Tertullian. As Patristics scholar Pio Libby reports, "Ambrose is indebted to Tertullian for much of his theological terminology" ("The Christology of *De Incarnationis Domincae Sacramento* of Ambrose of Milan," 66).[87] One of the most important theological terms Ambrose appears to have inherited from Tertullian is *addictio*.

While Tertullian's metaphor is cursory and leaves the reader to make inferences, Ambrose is more precise. He explains that Eve borrowed the knowledge of good and evil from the Devil, which, like a financial loan, afforded her and Adam a short term future they otherwise could not have enjoyed. "Who is the creditor of sin if not the Devil? By borrowing sin [*mutuata peccatum*] from him, Eve indebted the whole human race with the usury of a guilt-inheritance [*obnoxiae successionis usuris*]. Therefore, like a wicked usurer, the Devil held the debt-contract

[87] Pio Libby, "The Christology of *De Incarnationis Dominicae Sacramento* of Ambrose of Milan: An Analysis in the Context of the Early Patristic Christological and Trinitarian Theology," in *Miscellanea Francescana*, 119, No. 1/2 (2019), 60-98. See also, Mary Finbarr Barry, *The Vocabulary of the Moral-Ascetical Works of Saint Ambrose: A Study in Latin Lexicography*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1926.

[*chirographum*] which afterward the Lord blotted out with his blood" (*De Tobia*, book IX, chapter 33).[88]

Ambrose's metaphor suggests that Eve voluntarily enslaved herself and her human family to the Devil, who assumed ownership over our lives as compensation for the temporary freedom provided by his loan. Insofar as the knowledge of good and evil—originally borrowed from the Devil—gave Adam and Eve a life they otherwise could not have had in Eden's eternity, the Devil repossesses our lives as compensation, ultimately through death, when the bond of mortality comes due. For Ambrose, then, *addiction* becomes another name for mortality and vice versa, unified by the ground of self-dispossession. "There is no difference between interment and interest [*funus et faenus*]; there is no distinction between death and debt [*mortem et sortem*]" (*De Tobia*, book X, chapter 36). Ambrose's iteration of the *addiction* metaphor resolves Tertullian's conflation of God's roles. In *De Tobia*, God is the judge, and delinquent humans owe themselves to the Devil, whose loan (the knowledge of good and evil) gave us a life of our own. Ambrose draws a practical lesson from this figurative retelling of Eve's original delinquency. He warns his parishioners that "You ought not to seek what belongs to another, for thus you fall into debt." Hence, he continues, it is better "to seek a solution from your own resources . . . than to addict your freedom [*quam libertatem addicere*]" (*De Tobia*, book V, chapter 21). While it is odd to see *addicere* used as a transitive verb in this context, Ambrose is invoking a legal reality—that incurring debt can come at the cost of one's personal freedom.

[88] Ambrose, *De Tobia*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XVI: Sancti Ambrosii Opera Omnia, Tomi Primi, Pars Prior*, 793-830, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1844.

Within this financial framing, however, Ambrose confronts a fundamental conceptual problem within Christian theology. On the one hand, Ambrose wants to insist that humanity's addiction is congenital, as Eve's delinquency was passed down to all humanity as a "guilt inheritance [*obnoxiae successionis*]." On the other hand, if he affirms only that humanity's enslavement is an inherited status, totally out of each individual's control, then he risks collapsing the logic of the theological metaphor by reducing addiction to slavery. As Tertullian discussed and as Roman jurisprudence confirmed, the condition of *addiction* is possible only for free people; their individual freedom of will is the premise of their credibility, accountability, and hence a prerequisite of addiction. Thus, Ambrose faces the challenge of preserving the logic of inheritance (original sin) and maintaining the role of the individual free will (sin). In a later treatise that echoes Tertullian's *De Paenitentia*, Ambrose elaborates his doctrine of the free will:

> No one is held to guilt unless he has gone astray by his own will [*Nemo tenetur ad culpam, nisi voluntate propria deflexerit*]. Actions which are imposed upon those who resist are not a crime [*Non habent crimen quae inseruntur reluctantibus*]; the blameworthiness of delinquency follows only upon actions perpetrated voluntarily [*voluntaria tantum commissa sequitur delictorum invidia*] (*De Iacob et Vita Beata*, book I, chapter 3, section 10).[89]

Eve and Adam voluntarily surrendered their freedom, and we inherit their bondage; however, we are also individually guilty of the enslavement we are born into, because we reenact their delinquency freely. In a way, addiction simply isn't a perfect metaphor for the doctrine of original sin that Ambrose wants to assert. While, legally

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[89] Ambrose, *De Iacob et Vita Beata*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XIV: Sancti Ambrosii Opera Omnia, Tomi Primi, Pars Prior*, 625-668, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1880.

speaking, addiction is an individual predicament, original sin is essentially social. By asking the metaphor to contain both individual and generational guilt, Ambrose begins to expand *addiction*'s meaning but creates conceptual difficulties that revolve around the idea of free will. If, according to the nascent doctrine of original sin, we cannot *not* sin by virtue of our inherited addiction to the Devil, then in what sense are we individually free? How do we acknowledge our personal freedom while accounting for our social and historical determinants? In other words, what does it mean to be free, yet not one's own?

In his own *De Poenitentia*, Ambrose employs the debt metaphor slightly differently, but in a way that clarifies his pecuniary theology and the role of the will. Ambrose argues that "He who owes a debt to God has more subsidy [*subsidia*] with which to repay than he who owes a debt to man; for man requires money, which is not always at the debtor's disposal, but God demands our affection [*affectum*], which is always in our power to give" (*De Poenitentia*, book II, chapter 9, section 81). Ambrose figures that we owe God our affection, and thus to invest our love in worldly things—presuming we do so voluntarily—amounts to quasi-financial delinquency. In this iteration of the metaphor, we are debtors to God, not the Devil; however, his general theological point is consistent: our addictions stem from ill-advised emotional investments. In Ambrose's metaphor, we addict ourselves to the Devil for the temporary freedom to sin. He explains that "The Devil buys for himself at auction the volunteer slave [*voluntarium servum*]. The Devil holds no man bound to the yoke of slavery unless he has first sold himself to the Devil as the price of sin" (*De Iacob*, book I, chapter 3, section 10). The impropriety of sin consists in our defrauding God of his due—our affection.

Consistent with the Roman jurisprudence of addiction, Ambrose specifies that although we are bound to the Devil, we are not his chattel but retain a certain degree of freedom. In his sermons, he explains metaphorically that we have become shareholders rather than sole-proprietors of our wills. Maintaining the language of *addiction*, Ambrose says that we share a hold on our wills with all the emotions that partially dictate our behavior. "Whoever is crushed by fear or ensnared by pleasure or seduced by desires or provoked by wrath or brought to his knees by grief is a slave. In fact, every passion is servile." Those who allow themselves to be subject to their emotions "addict themselves to many masters [*multis se dominis addixit*], such that it is nearly impossible to escape the bondage of servitude" (*De Iacob*, book II, chapter 3, section 12). While in *De Tobia* Ambrose linked addiction with mortality, in *De Iacob* he identifies addiction with human affectivity, suggesting a kind of triangular synonymy among addiction, mortality, and affectivity. Within Ambrose's theological anthropology, to be a fallen human means being constitutively dispossessed of ourselves by forces beyond our control—the passions that pull us to and fro and the death that rules our lives. Thus he warns of letting desire fully possess the will in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke. "The ensnaring trap of pleasure," he says, is that "having been addicted [*addictum*] for the price of worldly luxury [*luxuriae pretio saecularis*], the love of pleasure puts us up for sale at the Sin Auction [*vitiorum auctione*]. Thus we find ourselves in a kind of sin market [*nundinae delictorum*]. We are either sold to sin or bought back from sin; Christ buys us back [*Christus nos redimit*]" (*Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, chapter

7, section 113-17).[90] Insofar as we are driven by desire for worldly pleasure, Ambrose teaches, we are "addicted to many masters," since each temptation makes its own claim on our will; we pay for pleasure at the high price of our personal freedom.

Ambrose counterposes the addict, then, to "the man who is the master over his own will [*voluntatis suae arbiter*], judge over his own counsels, agent of his own judgment" (*De Iacob*, book II, chapter 3, section 12). Although Ambrose's student, Augustine, is widely credited as the "discoverer" of the will, Ambrose's questions here about the paradoxical nature of addiction as "voluntary enslavement" first prompt concentrated theological interrogation of the *voluntas*, specifically how its purported freedom undergirds the system of moral accountability. In Ambrosian theology, the problem of addiction is therefore not that we fallen humans have no will of our own, which would annul the logic of individual accountability; rather, our addiction consists in our wills' collective ownership, or, in the language of the Twelve Tables, its being held in shares [*partes secatus*] by the various parties laying claim to a person's decisions. If one's will is not a sole proprietorship, then that person is, in Ambrose's own words, *addicti*. Hence he admonishes us, "Let our will therefore not put us up for sale [*Non ergo vendat nos voluntas nostra*]" (*De Iacob*, book I, chapter 3, section 11). In this way, Ambrose does not resolve the theological oxymoron of voluntary slavery, but reiterates and intensifies it. "This slave has deservedly been subjected to servitude. Whoever is indebted is a slave, as if addicted by the interest of the creditor" (*De Iacob*, book II, chapter 3, section 12). His theology affirms that we inherit the generational bondage that is also our individual faults.

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[90] Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam,* in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus*, *Tomus XV: Sancti Ambrosii Opera Omnia, Tomi Primi, Pars Posterior*, 1527-1850, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris 1845.

To drive home the controlling metaphor of debt-bondage, Ambrose emphasizes that *redemption* is our only hope: "Don't you know that the guilt of Adam and Eve sold you into servitude? Don't you know that Christ did not buy you, but bought you back? [*Nescis quod redemerit te Christus, non emerit?*]" (*De Iacob*, book I, chapter 3, section 12). Consistent with the logic of the Twelve Tables, Ambrose explains that Jesus' redemption can free us destitute debtors from the Devil's terminal proprietorship. Within the pecuniary framing of salvation, Ambrose urges his readers to "Go free with the disposition of an honest debtor [*Solve boni affectum debitoris*]; do not contract yet another liability, but pay your debt to God from the wealth of your faith [*fidei tuae censu*]" (*De Poenitentia*, book II, chapter 9, section 80). Whether we addict ourselves to the Devil, or give ourselves over to God whose debt-buyback frees us, Ambrose's teachings echo Paul's claim to the Corinthians: "You are not your own, for you were bought for a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Ambrose's theology of addiction outlined here would profoundly shape the thinking of arguably the most influential Christian theologian to ever live, Augustine of Hippo. Augustine's importance not only to the development of the Western Church but also to the major movements of Western intellectual history is hard to overstate. His thinking literally became orthodoxy during his lifetime, which meant agreement with Augustine was enforceable by law. In 1244, Christians living in the Tuscany region of Italy established a monastic rule according to his theology, The Augustinian Order, which still exists today (of which Martin Luther was a member). A few decades later after the founding of the Augustinian Order, he was officially canonized as a saint, as centuries of theologians had relied on him as an

authoritative voice on all matters of the Church, from questions as fundamental as the doctrine of the Trinity to his definition of sin as a perversion of the will. Augustine was so ubiquitously revered that during the Reformation, his many works (which had been preserved by over a millennium of meticulous hand-copying), were referenced like Scripture by both Catholic and Protestant thinkers alike. In short, to agree with Augustine was to be in accord with God's truth.

Moreover, his voice has spread far beyond theology. His writing was a central source to modern philosophers including Réné Descartes, G.W.F. Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida.[91] In fact, existential phenomenology as a philosophical movement in the 20th century was largely an extension of Augustine's discussions about the human condition, in particular temporality, into a secular philosophical vernacular. His *Confessions* alone, considered to be the inaugural "autobiography" in Western literary history, has inspired writers from Jean-Jacques

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[91] For Augustine's influence on **Descartes**, see: Clark, "Descartes' Debt to Augustine" in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, Vol. 32 (1992); Hankey, "Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self" in *Augustinian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2001); Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (2002); Hanby, "Augustine and Descartes: An Overlooked Chapter in the Story of Modern Origins" in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2003); and Matthews, *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* (2019). On **Hegel**, see: O'Reagan, *The Heterodox Hegel*; Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (1994); Fackenheim *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (1982); Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood* (1980). On **Kierkegaard**, see: *Augustine and Kierkegaard*, ed. Doody, Paffenroth, and Tallon Russel (2017); Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (2013); Puchniak, "Kierkegaard's Tempered Admiration of Augustine" in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions* (2008). On **Wittgenstein**, see: Gallagher, "Wittgenstein, Augustine, and Language" in *The New Scholasticism*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (1982); Wetzel, "Wittgenstein's Augustine" in *Augustine and Philosophy* (2010). On **Heidegger**, see: Van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*; Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*; Sommer, *Heidegger, Aristote, Luther: Les sources aristotéliciennes et néotestamentaires d'Être et Temps*; Van Fleteren, ed., *Martin Heidegger's Interpretations of Saint Augustine*; Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*; Perrin, "*Les sources augustiniennes du concept d'amour chez Heidegger*"; Carlson, *With the World at Heart*; Camilleri, *Phénoménologie de la religion et herméneutique théologique dans la pensée du jeune Heidegger*. **Arendt** wrote her doctoral dissertation on Augustine, published as *Love in Saint Augustine* and treats him at length in her *The Life of the Mind*. **Ricoeur's** *Time and Narrative* is devoted to a close reading of Augustine's *Confessions*. See **Derrida's** "Circumfession" in *Jacques Derrida*, by Bennington and Derrida.

Rousseau and his like-titled *Confessions* to Fyodor Dostoyevsky, whose famous *Notes from the Underground* was originally titled *Confessions*, as well as the French existentialist Albert Camus.[92] Many see Augustine's confessional self-interrogation as a prefiguration of modern psychoanalytic theory, and Sigmund Freud himself cited Augustine regularly.[93] Some scholars even go so far as to attribute to Augustine the "invention" of the very concept of the "self."[94] Augustine's words could even be heard echoing across the Capitol lawn in Washington D.C. as Joe Biden quoted him to open his 2021 inaugural address.

### § 12 – Augustine: Addiction on the Mainline

Born in present-day Algeria to a patrician family, Augustine (354 - 430) was educated, like Tertullian, in nearby Carthage in the study of rhetoric. By age twenty-nine, Augustine had established himself as a successful rhetorician and teacher in Carthage, but he had ambitions for more. In the fall of 384, just before his thirtieth birthday, he moved to Milan to launch his career across the Mediterranean. As historian Peter Brown explains in his biography of Augustine, soon after Augustine's arrival on the Roman mainland, his mother, Monica, visited his new home to arrange a marriage for him with a Catholic heiress. As part of these

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[92] Kantor, "Confession and Theodicy in Dostoevsky's Oeuvre: The Reception of Saint Augustine" in *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2011). For more on the many iterations of the motif of "confession," see: Coetzee, "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 137, No. 3 (1985); Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (2009).
[93] Herrera, "St. Augustine's *Confessions*: A Prelude to Psychoanalytic Theory" in *Augustiniana*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1989).
[94] Kehr, "The Doctrine of the Self in St. Augustine and in Descartes" in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1916); Taylor, *Erring* (1984); Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (2000); *Augustine Our Contemporary: Examining the Self in Past and Present* (2018).

negotiations, Augustine formally joined the Church of Milan—more a gesture of familial diplomacy than earnest religious conversion. Nevertheless, Augustine was personally baptized by Bishop Ambrose in 387 (*Augustine of Hippo*, 69-78).[95]

Augustine recounts that despite having "absolutely no confidence in the Church" at that time, he admired Ambrose's kindness and listened to his eloquent sermons "with rapt attention" (Augustine, *Confessiones*, book 5, chapter 13, 23). Among Ambrose's oratorical skills, Augustine found his fluency in figurative language to be particularly impressive. In fact, he explains in *Confessions* that Ambrose's figurative language skills contributed directly to his eventual conversion. He recounts that the Christian message began to seem intellectually plausible to him once he had heard "many different passages in the Old Testament figuratively interpreted [*aenigmate soluto*]" by Ambrose (Augustine, *Confessiones*, book 5, chapter 14, 24). One of Ambrose's "Old Testament" sermons whose figurative language Augustine cited as being particularly elucidating is none other than his lecture on addiction, *De Tobia*, published just before Augustine arrived in Milan. Augustine's reading of *De Tobia*—specifically its metaphorical description of original sin as inherited addiction—would prove enormously important to his theological legacy because of a doctrinal controversy over the meaning of sin that came to define the latter part of his career.

After Augustine's time in Milan with Ambrose, he went on to become a bishop of the North African city of Hippo. For the last few decades of his life, Augustine found himself locked in a theological struggle with Pelagius, a Celtic Christian who had immigrated to Hippo from Rome as a refugee from the Visigoths. Pelagius, who

[95] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, Revised Edition with a New Epilogue*. Berkeley: UNiversity of California Press, 2000.

had also studied law while in Rome, became (in)famous across North Africa because he opposed the notion that sin was transmitted congenitally. Pelagius took issue with the following traditional formulation of original sin: We are all born sinners; we therefore cannot help but sin; nevertheless, we are held morally accountable for sinning as if we had a choice *not* to sin. He identifies a contradiction between the dual premises that we are generationally enslaved to sin, yet we freely choose to sin. He refused the former. Heresiologist Pier Franco Beatrice explains that the core Pelagian teaching "is essentially as follows: babies are born without original sin, that is, they are in the same condition as Adam was in the Garden of Eden before he sinned. This is because sin is not something that can be transmitted or passed on" (*The Transmission of Sin*, 19).[96] Pelagius' denial of sin's congenital transmission entails, in his own words, that "all the good and all the evil in us, by which we deserve praise or blame, comes from us and is not born with us; we are born with the capacity for either, and just as we are created without virtue likewise we are created without vice. Previous to any action of our own will, there is nothing in us except that which the Creator has placed in us" (cited by Augustine, *De Gratia Christi et de Peccato Originali*, book 2, chapter 13, section 14).

On these grounds, Pelagius questions the very idea of sin itself. "Is 'sin' a substance or is it a word without a corresponding substance, by which one expresses not a thing, not an entity, not a body, but an act wrongly done. I believe it is the latter" (Pelagius, *De Natura*, cited by Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*, chapter 19, 21). Pelagius' thesis contradicts Ambrose's claim from *De Tobia* that sin is precisely a "guilt-inheritance." In effect, Pelagius saw the aforementioned tension in Ambrose's

[96] Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin: Augustine and the Pre-Augustinian Sources*, trans., Adam Kamesar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

twofold claim that sin is both congenital and voluntary, and he refused the paradox that the Milanese bishop affirmed: that we are addicted by birth and by choice. If we are bound to the Devil by birth, then how can we reasonably be held accountable for our deeds, which are out of our control? Pelagianism scholar Theodore De Bruyn summarizes Pelagius' frustration with the traditional doctrine as follows: "To deny that all can be righteous . . . would be tantamount to a denial of human responsibility, since for Pelagius freedom consists in the ability to choose between good and evil, and human responsibility is predicated upon human freedom" ("Pelagius' Interpretation of Romans," 37).[97] Pelagius ultimately argues that we must be capable of voluntary obedience to God's commands, because "God would not condemn a man for what he could not help but do" (*Letters of Pelagius*, 99).[98] The positive upshot of Pelagius' denial of sin's genetic transmission is the implication that we *do* possess the ability to fully render God the obedience we owe him.

Augustine worried that Pelagius' confidence in the human will devalued the role of the Redeemer in Christian salvation. If we can pay our dues from our own moral resources, then we don't need someone to redeem us. Thinking back to the logic of the Twelve Tables, there are two ways to escape addiction: the addict can either satisfy the debt himself or a redeemer can vindicate him. If the addict can work his own way out of debt, then there is no need for a third-party redemption. In Augustine's view, because Pelagius thought the human was capable of satisfying God's demand for obedience through their own volition, Pelagius' position implied that Christ—the supposed redeemer according to Ambrose and others—was

[97] Theodore De Bruyn, "Pelagius' Interpretation of Romans 5:12-21: Exegesis within the Limits of Polemic, in *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 4, No. 1 (1988), 30-43.
[98] Pelagius, *Letters of Pelagius*, ed., Robert Van de Weyer. Ballina: James Arthur Ltd., 1997.

gratuitous to humanity's liberation from its cosmic debt-bondage. According to Augustine, Pelagianism ultimately posed a Christological problem within the context of salvation's financial framing; no one needs a redeemer if we can pay our own dues.

Augustine, a devout student of Ambrose and reader of Tertullian, reaffirmed their version of original sin, and in so doing extended the metaphor of *addiction* into a total vision of Christian subjectivity. In one public letter, "Against Julian the Pelagian," Augustine quotes from Ambrose's *De Tobia* to reassert the metaphor of addiction as the orthodox description of the human condition:

> Ambrose says . . . "Before we are born, we are stained by contagion [*maculamur contagio*], and before seeing the light we receive the injury of our very origin, we are conceived in guilt [*iniquitate concipimur*] . . . We are conceived in the sin of our parents, and we are born into their delinquency. In his exposition of the Book of Tobias, Ambrose says: "Who is the usurer of sin if not the Devil? By borrowing sin from him, Eve has indebted the whole human race with the usury of a guilt inheritance." Again, in the same work, he says: "The Devil deceived Eve so that she would pledge their inheritance and overthrow her husband" (*Contra Iulianum*, book I, chapter 3, section 10).[99]

According to Augustine, we are bound by our generationally inherited debt to the Devil. However, the bondage we are born into is not reducible to slavery, because we retain a theoretical freedom to escape it. To fully refute the Pelagian perspective, however, Augustine needs to justify why we cannot escape that bondage through our own moral resources and hence why we depend on redemption for our freedom. Here, Augustine leans on another metaphor to help resolve the Ambrosian paradox of congenital but chosen servitude. He argues that our wills are naturally free, but

[99] Augustine, *Contra Iulianum*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XLIV, Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Decimus*, 641-880, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris 1865.

broken by the Fall. Despite the fact that we are, in principle, free to liberate ourselves from the Devil's ownership, we find ourselves maddeningly unable to do so.

Augustine feels his will to be free, but he also confronts the fact that he does not always have full control over himself. He describes this "monstrous condition" of the broken free will in his *Confessions*. "The mind orders the mind to will, and though the recipient of the order is itself, it does not obey . . . What causes this paradox and why does it happen? It is the will itself that commands the will to be [*voluntas imperat ut sit voluntas*], and it commands not another will but itself (*Confessiones*, book 8, chapter 9, section 21). Augustine's confession echoes Paul's own admission from his letter to the Romans: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:14-25). Augustine parses the Pauline paradox by arguing that our wills are free, but fractured. Thus, despite our nominal freedom, we do not have full self-control.

To explain this experiential enigma, Augustine theorizes that "It must be that the will doing the commanding is not whole [*non plena*], and therefore what it commands does not happen" (*Confessiones*, book 8, chapter 9, section 21). His pioneering idea is that we have one free will, split in two—with one half tending towards the eternal and the other tempted by the temporal. However, what's worse, because the world's temptations are so numerous, the part of our will that tends towards the world is pulled in many directions at once. Thus, he specifies, "there will not be two wills, but many" (*Confessiones*, book 8, chapter 10, section 23). Owing to the Fall, we are each born with an individual free will that has been broken into

pieces. Because each of these parts pulls us simultaneously in a different direction, we are ironically hobbled *by* our freedom. Similar to Ambrose's explanation that the will is technically free but part-owned by the passions that each make their own claim on our behavior, Augustine says that our wills are always partially possessed by bodily desires, which threaten to reduce us to their voluntary slaves.

In his argument against Pelagianism, wherein he repeatedly cites Ambrose, Augustine explains that what we inherit congenitally—addiction to the Devil—is manifest experientially as these carnal desires that lay partial claim on our will. We find ourselves bound by the fleshly desires we are born with, theoretically free to resist their demands, but often practically unable to do so. In this way, Augustine preserves the idea of sin as inherited bondage while retaining the legal logic of personal accountability. "Just because someone has evil desires in his heart," argues Augustine, "does that mean he consents to fulfill them? We see, then, that to have evil desires of the heart is not the same as giving oneself over to them [*tradi eis*]. Becoming possessed [*possideatur*] by our desires comes from first consenting to them" (*Contra Iulianum*, book 5, chapter 3, section 11).

In other words, when we choose to habitually submit to our inborn carnal desires, we volunteer for the avoidable enslavement that is addiction: "When a man is said to be given over to his desires, he derives guilt from them because . . . he yields and consents to them, is conquered, seized, drawn, and possessed by them. 'For you are an addicted slave to whatever owns you [*a quo enim quis devictus est, huic et servus addictus est*]" (2 Peter 2:19)'" (*Contra Iulianum*, book 5, chapter 3, section 12). Echoing this theological claim in a sermon on First Corinthians, Augustine warned his listeners that "A person cannot think of anything other than

what his mind is addicted to [*quod sibimet addicit mentem*], for the addicted mind is captive, subdued, drowned, that is, somehow swallowed up by desire and lust." "Because the whole person is absorbed," the bishop continues, "he cannot be said to be his own [*iam dici non possit ipse*]" (*Sermo 162/A*, chapter 2). Augustine tries to refine Ambrose's paradoxical claim that we are addicts by birth and by choice by arguing that our natural-born freedom to do what we want is its own kind of ironic bondage.

Augustine suggests that doing whatever you want is a form of voluntary enslavement when your wants are out of your control; such is the libertine entrapment of addiction. He unwinds the paradox of addiction more fully in his manual of Christian piety, written during the height of the Pelagian controversy:

> It was by the evil use of his free will that man lost his free will and himself. Just as a man who kills himself must, of course, be alive when he kills himself, but after he has killed himself ceases to live; so it was that man sinned by his own free will, but then, once sin overcame him, his free will was lost. "For you are an addicted slave to whatever owns you" This is the judgment of the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 2:19).
>
> And it is true. Isn't the addict's only freedom sinning every time he pleases [*qualis quaeso potest servi addicti esse libertas nisi quando eum peccare delectat*]? For he is freely enslaved [*liberaliter servit*] who willingly does the bidding of his master. Thus, he who is the slave of sin is free indeed—free to sin (*Enchiridion de Fide, Spe, et Charitate*, book 9, chapter 30).[100]

[100] Augustine, *Enchiridion de Fide, Spe, et Charitate*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XL: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Sextus*, 231-288, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris 1865.

This verse from Second Peter is one of Augustine's favorite scriptural citations, and his (mis)translation of the Greek text reveals his commitment to the term *addiction* as an instructive metaphor.[101]

The Greek original reads, "A man is a slave to whatever overcomes him [*Hos tis hettaomai kai touto douloo*]." The main verb, *hettaomai*, literally means *to make inferior*, *to debase*, *to dominate*. Augustine chooses to translate *hettaomai* with the Latin *devictus*, which derives from the martial term *vincere*, *to conquer*. The prefix *de-* conveys thoroughness, completeness, totality; thus, *de-victus* gives the sense of utter domination or total subordination. The verse communicates, then, that whoever is utterly dominated, debased, or subdued by someone (or something) else is rendered servile to them. The word used in Greek to describe this servile status is *douloo*, which means *slave*. *Servus* would therefore be the natural Latin equivalent to the Greek *doulos*; however, Augustine interpolates the past-participle *addictus*, despite the fact that no reference to debt or debt-bondage is implied either by the term *douloo* or *hettaomai*. By contrast, Jerome, translator of the Vulgate and an interlocutor of Augustine, renders *douloo* with its straightforward equivalent, *servus*, and does not include the term *addictus*, which is a more strictly accurate translation.[102] Augustine's consistent and idiosyncratic insertion of the term *addictus*

[101] For other instances of this citation, see *De Civitate Dei*, book 4, chapter 3, and book 19, chapter 15; *De Fide et Operibus*, chapter 24, section 45; *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, book 2, chapter 3, section 8; *De Perfectione Iustitiae Hominis*, chapter 4, section 9; *De Spiritu et Littera*, chapter 30, section 52.

[102] Translations of this verse offer a representative instance of *addiction*'s erasure from theology in non-Latin languages. Thomas Aquinas, for example, cites the verse as, "*A quo quis superatus, huic et servus addictus est*." Desiderius Erasmus, who completed a full retranslation of the New Testament from the Greek in 1517, adapted the prior versions as follows: "*A quo quis superatus est, huic etiam in servitutem est addictus*." Compare these Latin versions to Luther's German translation: "*Denn von wem jemand überwunden ist, des Knecht ist er geworden*." John Wycliff translated the verse into English for the first time in 1382 as "*For of whom ony man is ouercome, of hym aso he is a seruaunt*." Myles Cloverdale, in 1535, departed from English translational precedent by rendering it, "*Off whom so euer a man is ouercome, unto the same is he in bondage*." In each instance, the key term *addictus* is reduced to bondage or slavery, which elides the specificity of the metaphor: *voluntary* bondage.

into Scripture, while linguistically dubious, demonstrates his intentional fidelity to the *addiction* metaphor as able to articulate something importantly precise about the human condition—that we are *voluntary slaves*. Likening the fallen human to the Roman *addictus* allows Augustine to articulate this important anti-Pelagian specification.

However, in Augustine's defense of sin's congenital transmission against his Pelagian challengers, he picks up on a rhetorical conflation latent in Ambrose's *addiction* metaphor. To articulate the idea that our debt-bondage is passed on from person to person by birth, both Ambrose and, in turn, Augustine reach for the language of *contraction* and *contagion*, thereby figuring our inherited condition—*addiction*—as both a fiduciary crime *and* a congenital disease. For example, in the passages from Ambrose that Augustine cites in his anti-Pelagian treatise, Ambrose claims that we are "stained by contagion" at birth because "Eve indebted [*defeneravit*] the whole human race with the usury of a guilt-inheritance." According to the mixed metaphors, *addiction* has become a medical-legal predicament, a disease-crime. This conflation resounds strikingly with our modern notion of addiction.

In Augustine's own expositions of the doctrine of original sin, he, too, vacillates between and conflates economic and medical terminology. One of the verbs Augustine uses to describe the spread of original sin is *contraxit*, *contract*, which was in Latin and remains in English an ambiguously medical-legal verb.[103] *Con-trahere* literally means *to draw together*, and it can mean both *to enter into a*

[103] See Peta Mitchell, *Contagious Metaphor*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012. 81-100.

*legally binding agreement* (such as a loan) and *to transmit a disease*.[104] In *Contra Iulianum*, Augustine insists that "infants born physically in the lineage of Adam contract the contagion [*contagium contrahere*] of primal death" (*Contra Iulianum*, book 1, chapter 2, section 4). Later in the same work, he repeats that "infants, having just been born, have not sinned at all; however, they have, through their birth, contracted the contagion [*contagium contraxit*] of Adam's primal death" (C*ontra Iulianum*, book 1, chapter 3, section 6). Augustine warns that "the words of Pelagius will condemn you" unless you affirm that "sin is contracted by human reproduction [*peccarum ex humana propagatione contrahitur*]" (*Contra Iulianum*, book 1, chapter 5, section 19.)

Within Augustine's argument against Pelagius, he contends that our addiction is a *contractual* predicament in two conflated senses: a congenitally contagious debt delinquency. In Augustine's mixed metaphors, to be born an *addictus* is to have contracted guilt. On the one hand, Augustine insists that our inherited bondage is a quasi-financial problem wherein we do not have full self-ownership, since our wills are partially possessed by the diabolical desires we are born with. However, on the other, he also figures this paradoxical condition of the fractured free will as a "disease of the mind [*aegritudo animi*]" and a "sickness that brings its own punishment" (*Confessiones*, book 8, chapter 9, 21 and book 9, chapter 30, 40). In

[104] The first major study on Roman theories of contagion is K.F.H. Marx's 1824 University of Göttingen dissertation, *Origines Contagii*, which synthesizes a host of primary Latin sources. Conjugations of the verb *contrahere* appear throughout the primary sources Marx cites to describe the spread of disease. For more on classical idioms of contraction and contagion, see also, Nutton, "Did the Greeks Have a Word For It? Contagion and Contagion Theory in Classical Antiquity," in *History in the Comic Mode*, 137-62. New York" Columbia University Press, 2007; Gourevitch, "Les faux-amis dans les textes médicaux Grecs et Latins" and Grmek, in *Médecins et médecine dans l'Antiquité*, ed. Sabbah. Saint Étienne: L'Universitaire de Saint Étienne, 1982; Grmek, "Les vicissitudes dans notions d'infection, de contagion et de germe dans la médecine antique," in *Textes médicaux latins antiques*, ed. Sabbah. Saint Étienne: L'Universitaire de Saint Étienne, 1984.

another published redress of the Pelagian heresy, he affirms that our inherited bondage is "a sickness [*infirmitatem*] engendered in us by the corruption of our nature in the first man" (*De Haeresibus*, chapter 46, section 19).[105]

Because Augustine figures our fallen condition—*addiction*—both as debt-bondage and disease, he metaphorizes salvation accordingly as both redemption and healing. Insofar as addiction signifies debt-bondage, Augustine frames salvation as follows:

> The loan agreement held you down. The Devil, you see, had shackled his debtors. The One who came was not one of the Devil's debtors. He paid what he did not owe, and canceled our contract. By what payment was the bill we owed rendered null? The blood of the Just One . . . Christ was sent to death not because he owed anything, but to pay up for the debtors . . . He paid what he did not owe; he liberated the debtors; he canceled the ancient contract; he drew up a new set of papers. What need is there for us any longer to settle accounts with the old contract? Acknowledge your Redeemer, and don't willfully stack up any further debts (*Sermo 110/A*, chapter 7).[106]

Within the context of the debt-bondage metaphor, Augustine offers a simple prayer for salvation:"O Good Merchant, buy us [*O Bone Mercator, eme nos*]!" (*Sermo 130/A*, chapter 2). Only within this financial framing, where sin is *addiction*, does salvation become *redemption*.

However, insofar as addiction also refers to a congenital disease that we helplessly contract from birth, Augustine says, too, that we need "a healing of the

[105] Augustine, *De Haeresibus ad Quodvultdeum*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XLII: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Octavus*, 21–50, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1865.
[106] For the English translation, see Augustine, *Sermons*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III, Volume 11*, ed., John E. Rotelle, trans., Edmund Hill. Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997. 99.

soul from the defect of sin [*sanatio animae a vitio peccati*], and through health of the soul," he continues, "we will have freedom of will [*per animae sanitatem libertas arbitrii*]" (*De Spiritu et Littera*, chapter 52, section 30).[107] In addition to God the Good Merchant, whom Augustine beseeches to buy us back from our debt-bondage, he also frequently asks God the Physician to heal our fractured wills.[108] "Let the Physician come and heal the sick," he prays. "The Physician, who is he? Jesus Christ our Lord" (*In Ioannis Evangelium*, tractatus 3, chapter 3).[109] Christ is the Redeemer, who has annulled our primordial debt by paying with his blood to satisfy our deal with the Devil, but Christ also medically mends our broken will with his healing grace. Judged individually guilty of defaulting on an inherited debt, we have been punished with a disease of the will that is curable only by the redemptive blood-money of our physician.

The conflicting metaphors become confusingly entwined in the word *addiction*. In a theological context where *addiction* metaphorically represents both debt-bondage and congenital disease, the patron prayer of addicts could eqully be "Oh Good Merchant, buy us" as "Let the Physician come and heal the sick." Latin Christian theology founds itself upon the paradox that although we inherit sin (like a congenital disease), we are still individually guilty of it (like a crime). By describing this disease-crime condition of inherited yet voluntary sin with the term *addiction*, Augustine forged a recognizably oxymoronic definition of *addiction*—the disease one

[107] Augustine, *De Spiritu et Littera*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XLIV, Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Decimus*, 291-318, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1865.
[108] See Rudolph Arbesmann, "The Concept of *Christus Medicus* in Saint Augustine, in *Traditio*, 10 (1954).
[109] Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XXXV: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Tertius, Pars Altera*, 1379-1996, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1845.

can get punished for having. Redemption and healing—the two most salient ways of describing salvation in the wake of Augustine—are metaphors in tension, but both ostensibly solve what he describes as *addiction*, the disease-crime. Congenital disease and fiduciary crime are completely different predicaments, but Augustine uses the same word to denote both, thereby transforming the term into the antagonym we recognize today. The Roman vehicle of *addiction* is at odds with itself because of the mixed metaphors that it simultaneously conveyed through the course of Christian history. Only God's love can heal the fractured will, yet only Christ's redemption can pay our debt to the Devil. The oxymoronic idea that addiction is a hereditary birth defect punishable by law as a willful crime appears not to be a recent scientific hypothesis but Augustine's metaphorical articulation of the ancient doctrine of original sin.

While Tertullian and Ambrose use the metaphor of addiction in limited contexts to figure original sin as delinquency, and hence salvation as redemption, Augustine expands the metaphor into a complex heuristic for understanding Christian selfhood and the paradoxical condition of being individually free, yet lacking self-mastery. The central Christian tension between sin as both volitional and unpreventable twisted the concept of *addiction* into an instructive oxymoron that expresses the paradox of individual free will. *While our wills are free, they are not our own; they are divided in shares among all the parties (social, material, and affective) that lay claim to our decisions*. This paradox of the will—freedom without self-ownership—exemplifies the broader ambiguity of human individuality. The theoretical in-dividual is evidently divided within and against itself; one's own self is not one's own. In the following chapter, I examine how Augustine's elaboration of

the addiction metaphor prompted him to reflect at length on the underlying legal principles of self-possession and free will that ground the metaphor itself.

## Chapter 3

## ***DE LIBERO ARBITRIO ADDICTI: IN PARTES SECATUS***

*[THE ADDICT'S FREE WILL: DIVIDED IN SHARES]*

*I was at odds with myself and dissociated from myself.*

*– Augustine of Hippo, Confessiones*

In the years following Augustine's formative encounter with Ambrose, as he developed his theology of addiction, Augustine published the first ever treatise devoted to the concept of free will, titled *De Libero Arbitrio* [*On the Free Choice of the Will*].[110] In this book, Augustine tries to work out some of the conceptual knots within the doctrine of addiction concerning human agency, moral accountability, and the origin of sin. On the one hand, Augustine's doctrine of addiction says that we cannot help but sin because of the congenital defect that runs in our human family; however, it also insists that we have individual freedom of will, such that we are each personally guilty of the sin we nevertheless cannot avoid. The paradox of addiction is that while we are undeniably free agents, we do not have full self-control. Augustine's theology unrelentingly affirms both sides of this paradox—*we are free but cannot control ourselves*—and his questioning revolves around this axiomatic enigma. If we can't control ourselves, then in what sense are our wills actually free? In reverse, if we have free will, then why can't we control ourselves? How, in Augustine's words, "can one and the same mind, at the same time, will and act despite itself" (*De Duabus Animabus contra Manichaeos*, X, 14, 17)?[111]

In this chapter, I try to show that Augustine's paradox of addiction indexes something phenomenologically true about human existence: that the self is at odds with itself. However, as I will argue, the fact that the self's internal heterogeneity

[110] Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XXXII: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Primus*, 1221-1299.
[111] Augustine, *De Duabus Animabus contra Manichaeos*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XLII: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Octavus*, 93-110, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1865.

appears to Augustine as both a conceptual and an existential *problem* is symptomatic of the Roman legal subjectivity that he presupposes by grounding his theological anthropology in the proprietary concept of addiction. The idea that the self both has free will and yet never fully controls its own actions neither appears as a conceptual paradox nor poses an existential problem unless one has presupposed—as the Roman concept of addiction does—that the self, as such, is self-possessed. In other words, if we refuse the Roman legal presupposition that each individual possesses themselves, then the paradox of having freedom of will yet only partial self-control dissolves in a different solution. By contrast, consider the alternative conception of selfhood that philosopher of religion Thomas Carlson helps us envision:

> I am not, as liberal thought may want to hold, first an individual who "by nature" possesses itself and its freedom—instantiated originally in the body as first property—only then, after the fact, to enter by consent and contract into social and political relations (intended to protect life and property); I am constituted relationally from the beginning (*With the World at Heart*, 152)[112].

By not presupposing self-ownership like Roman law, Carlson's conception of the self faces neither a conceptual paradox nor an existential problem in the idea that the self has free will, but does not enjoy full control over itself. Insofar as the self is "constituted relationally" and hence never possesses its own self as private property, its free will is collectively owned and operated as well. In a cooperative, no *one* shareholder makes operating decisions; neither, therefore, is any *one* shareholder answerable for the cooperative's dealings. In other words, if I believe that my will,

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[112] Thomas A. Carlson, *With the World at Heart: Studies in the Secular Today*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

while undeniably free, is not my sole property but, instead, cooperatively owned by all the people I'm accountable to and on whose behalf I act, then I would have no trouble recognizing that my freedom does not entail self-possession.

As I will demonstrate, Augustine himself actually articulates this state of collective self-ownership and the co-operation of the free will with remarkable sensitivity; however because he interprets that condition *as/with addiction*, it appears to him as a delinquency to be redeemed and/or a disease to be healed, rather than a morally neutral ontological feature of human existence. In short, the proprietary concepts that Augustine inherits from Roman law haunt the phenomenological insights about selfhood and free will that he articulates through them. Thus, in this chapter, I close-read Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio* to show that his reflections on addiction provide important phenomenological insights about the social, historical, and affective constitution of the self as well as the cooperative ownership of the free will. However, I also highlight how even as Augustine articulates these experiences and the insights they yield, he himself struggles against them, since the Roman legal concepts through which he interprets them render them paradoxical and problematic. We will try to learn, then, what Augustine's analysis of addiction and the free will has to teach us about the cooperative ownership of the free will, the diffuseness of agency, and thus the limits of liability. However, we will also attend to the way Augustine's heuristic metaphor of addiction and its proprietary ground, even while it uniquely allows him to discern these ontological aspects of human existence, automatically pathologizes and/or criminalizes them by virtue of the metaphor's Roman ground and hence the tenor it conveys.

## § 13 – The Genesis of Addiction

*De Libero Arbitrio* essentially tries to answer a single question: Where does evil come from?[113] In other words, first, who is the responsible party for the sorry state of the world, and what is the basis of their culpability? Second, who is to be held accountable when things go wrong, and why? This metaphysical question—implicitly at stake as well in the inaugural codification of Roman law—is paramount to Christian theology because of a basic doctrinal dilemma: Nothing happens against the will of God, since he controls everything, and because God is just, he only wills what is good. In Augustine's words, "We believe that everything that exists comes from the one God." Moreover, "If you know or believe that God is good (and it is blasphemous to think otherwise), then He does not do evil" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 1, section 1). However, experience tells us that many evils or injustices occur each day. If nothing happens against the will of God, and God wills only what's good, then who is responsible for all this suffering, injustice, and pain? The reality of evil seems to contradict either the doctrine of God's omnipotence or that of his justice—or, worse yet, to unravel monotheism itself. Does God wish to eradicate evil but cannot? Then he is not omnipotent. Can God eradicate evil but does not care to? Then he is not good. The orthodox Christian must maintain both that God *wills* to eradicate evil and that he *can* eradicate it, while nevertheless accounting for its enduring presence in the world. This conceptual problem within

[113] At the age of 23, Albert Camus wrote his dissertation at the University of Algiers on "Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism." In the last chapter, simply entitled "Augustine," Camus remarks on the "extreme fecundity of Augustine's obsession with the problem of evil." "It is by beginning from this point of view that [Augustine] has been able to develop his most original doctrines"—the foremost of which being the free will ("Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism. Trans. Ronald Srigley. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2007. 119).

Christian apologetics has come to be known as "theodicy," which literally refers to the difficult task of "justifying God."[114]

Any theologian who comes to the defense of God must find a way to acknowledge the perennial reality of evil while absolving God of any responsibility for it, despite God's ability to do away with evil (omnipotence) and his willingness to do so (justice). Augustine squares this circle with the idea of the individual free will. He explains that God granted humans autonomy, and they have poorly governed themselves, leading to all sorts of sufferings in the world. In effect, we bring punishment on ourselves by freely making bad choices. However, this thesis raises a deeper question for the famous confessor: "Why did God give human beings free choice of the will [*liberum voluntatis arbitrium*]?" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book II, chapter 2, section 1). He explains that God wanted to be loved. "God, having been unloved, made souls [*Deus non dilectus faciat animos*], who, through loving Him, would be complete. God gives being to those who do not yet exist, and He provides happiness to those who love Him, thanks to Whom they exist [*amantibus eum a quo sunt praestat ut beatae sint*]" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 20, section 57).

God created humans with the sole purpose of loving him, obeying him, and attaining happiness—all of which, in Augustine's theology, amount to the same thing. For Augustine, the good life, which is also the happy life, is one lived in loving obedience of God's rule. Obeying God's rules for life thus reduces down to one fundamental precept: "Eternal law commands us to turn our love aside from temporal things and to turn it, purified, towards eternal things" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 15, section 32). Submission to God's rule essentially entails loving

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[114] G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy* (1710).

him rather than, in our addiction, loving the things of the world. Jesus himself informs us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment" (Matt. 22:37-38). However—and here's the crux of the matter—for humanity's love of God to be *true*, says Augustine, we must be able *not* to love him; that is, we must be free to turn away from him and towards the finite things of the world. Likewise, no actions can be evaluated as *good* (to our credit) or bad (delinquent) unless they are freely chosen. In this way, according to Augustine, true love as well as moral goodness imply freedom of choice (*libero arbitrio*) as their condition of possibility. "If human beings lacked free choice of the will, how could there be good? . . . For what does not come about through the will would be neither sinning nor acting rightly. Consequently, penalty and reward would be unjust if human beings did not have free will" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book II, chapter 1, section 3). Here, Augustine philosophically reverse engineers the legal subjectivity presupposed by the concept of addiction through which he has conceived his selfhood. Taking this self-possessed legal subject as a starting point, the existential significance of human lives depends upon individual freedom of will; without it, existence would amount to nothing more than a puppet show that God puts on for himself—and it means nothing to be loved and obeyed by inanimate objects. "Hence, God had to have given free will to human beings," so that he could feel truly loved by his creation (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book II, chapter 1, section 3).[115] Echoing Tertullian's claim that "without the will, there is no sin" as well as Ambrose's thesis that "no one is held to guilt unless he has gone astray

[115] The extent to which humans are "free" not to love God is significantly compromised by the fact that God does, we should remember, threaten to damn for eternity those who do *not* love him. The prospect of eternal conscious torment seems like leverage that renders the whole "free choice" narrative totally void, but this often goes unaddressed.

by his own will," Augustine asserts where there are free willing individuals, "there ought to be justice in punishment and reward" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book II, chapter 1, section 3). In other words, Augustine sees the implicit Roman legal idea that freedom of will constitutes the possibility of credit and debt, merit and blame—in short, of liability—that sets the stakes of individual human life.

Humanity's freedom to do otherwise than to love and obey God, however, allows for the necessary possibility of going astray from him, which is to say, the possibility of "evil." The Greatest Commandment cannot be fulfilled unless it can also be broken. Adam and Eve could never have *truly* loved or obeyed God if they had not simultaneously been free to betray him. God does not eradicate evil by forcibly turning our love to him, because to compel love is to annul its meaning. As Augustine remarks elsewhere, "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil to exist at all" (*Enchiridion de Fide, Spe, et Charitate*, book VIII). Thus, God is caught in the trap of his own wish to be (freely) loved by his children. Evil—as an irreducible expression of human freedom—is a chronic symptom of God's desire for true love.[116] Through the idea of the free will, then, Augustine answers the question about the origin of evil, preserves God's omnipotence and justice, while absolving him of any moral responsibility for the state of the world. "The will is the cause of sin [*voluntas est causa peccati*] . . . I don't know why you want to look any further" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 17, section 48). *On the Free Choice of the Will* was Augustine's first major theological treatise after his conversion to Christianity, and its central doctrine of the free will is the cornerstone upon which he

[116] Camus writes, "Here, divine grace is absolutely arbitrary: man must only have faith in God. How then can we speak of human freedom? But the difficulty is that our *only* freedom is precisely the freedom to do evil. Saint Augustine's final word on this question, vital for a Christian, is an admission of ignorance. Divine arbitrariness remains intact" ("Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism, 120).

would go on to build what remains Christian orthodoxy to this day: the idea that humanity's freedom of will renders us responsible for the world's injustices and, hence, makes us liable for punishment. By freedom of will, we have become guilty of our own sufferings. This is precisely the addict's plight.

However, Augustine expresses some ambivalence about his own solution. His questions about divine justice lead him to positions that feel theologically tidy, but that do not ring true with the enigma of his experience. It's easy enough to understand that the diversion of our love away from God is metaphysically possible thanks to our freedom of choice, but the more mundane and significant question still remains: Why does our will tend in a worldly direction, away from God, his love, and our happiness? The classic Christian origin story of evil poses the following puzzle: Why is it that we willfully act against our own best interests? Why, in other words, would someone enjoy a loan that they couldn't pay back? Rather than *how* we do evil, Augustine goes on to remark, "The real question is—*Why* do we do evil?" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 3, section 5).

It's one thing to surmise that we are capable of evil by virtue of our freedom of will, but it is altogether a different question to ask why we freely choose to do what we know to be wrong. Humans, he observes, are uniquely and perversely capable of acting against their own best interests in full awareness of their folly. Unlike prevailing philosophical accounts that attribute human misdeeds to ignorance—if only we knew better, we would do better—Augustine does not see the problem of evil as a lack of knowledge. Neither does he conclude simply that people act wrongly because they are "weak-willed" or "undisciplined," which was also a popular notion

during his time.[117] The enigma of his experience is that he knows what's good for him, and he wants what's good for him, but he often freely opts otherwise. The will indeed freely exercises its power of choice, yet often in a bizarrely self-defeating direction. In Augustine's personal context, he wants to be happy, and he knows that happiness is only possible through loving God, and yet he finds himself loving the world instead. Augustine's question, stated generally, goes as follows: If God has made clear from the beginning of time that humanity's ultimate happiness is to be found in his love alone, and all people want fundamentally to be happy (he presupposes this), then why does anyone who believes in God continue to direct their love away from him and towards the things of the world? Addiction prompts the question: Why do people continue to do things that they know are bad for them and wish to quit?

The Fall of Adam and Eve represents the paradigmatic case of an addiction's origin. If God had provided for Adam's and Eve's eternal well-being in paradise, then why did they go astray from him in the first place, under no compulsion to do so and with some awareness of the dire consequences? God directly told Adam, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you do, then you will die," and yet "Eve took the fruit of the tree and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate" (Genesis 2:17; 3:6). This is the archetypal addictive self-sabotage. Who in their right mind

[117] "Weakness of will" is the clumsy English equivalent of Aristotle's Greek term *akrasia*, which is extensively discussed in the seventh book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The prevailing Latin translation for Aristotle's term became Augustine's word *incontinentia*. A weak-willed or akratic person is one who acts against his or her better judgment. Aristotle discusses *akrasia* because Socrates thought it strange that when an agent has knowledge, something could nevertheless master his or her actions. Something violates the assumption of the rationality of the will. See Saarinen, *Weakness of Will in Medieval Thought* (1994) and *Weakness of the Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought* (2011).

would deliberately opt out of their own everlasting well-being and, instead, temporarily enjoy a deadly substance? Augustine admits, "The question disturbs anyone who reflects upon it: 'Did the First Man go astray from God because he was foolish, or did he become a fool because he went astray from God?'" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 24, section 72). Why did Adam willfully eat the fruit against his own best interests? While Augustine is tempted to plead Adam's ignorance of the consequences, he concludes that "The First Man was made such that, although he was not yet knowledgeable [*sapiens*], he could nevertheless grasp the commandment, which he surely ought to have obeyed . . . He did have the capacity to obey, if only he had willed well [*si bene vellet*]" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 24, section 72). Indeed, we often know what's bad for us and do it anyway.

So, again, why did Adam sign his life away for temporary enjoyment? Augustine thinks through the puzzle by asking how the will works in the first place. "The only thing that induces the will to do anything [*voluntatem allicit ad faciendum quodlibet*]," he reflects, "is some impression [*aliquod visum*], and although what someone affirms or denies is in their own power, no one has power over what impressions they are affected by [*sed quo viso tangatur, nulla potestas est*]" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 25, section 74). If, as Augustine observes, the only thing that leads the will to act is what impresses or affects us, and, he continues, we have *no power* over what affects us, then what are we to make of our purported freedom of will? With this question, a core ambivalence enters into Augustine's thinking about human subjectivity between the will and the heart, between self-ownership and self-dispossession.

On the one hand, Augustine says, "There is nothing I sense as firmly and as intimately as my having a will [*me habere voluntatem*] and my being moved by it to the enjoyment of things. If the will that is behind all my decisions is not my own, then what could possibly be called 'mine'?" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book 3, chapter 1, section 3). Or, as he rephrases the same point later in his career, "I am absolutely certain that there is nobody other than myself who wills and who nills" (*Confessions*, book 7, chapter 3, section 5). However, on the other hand, Augustine equally senses that "Love puts the mind in motion" (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, chapter 9, section 15).[118] *Académie Française Immortel* Jean-Luc Marion adeptly articulates both sides of Augustine's dilemma. According to Marion, "nothing defines the self more than the freedom of its decision; nothing belongs to me more as my own than my will . . . I will insofar as I live, and *I* live insofar as *I* will" (*In the Self's Place*, 161).[119] Nevertheless, Marion also confirms that "love determines me more originally than the will. In other words, I am not individualized . . . by the will alone and its resolution," because "the will follows what I love, and what I love precedes my will" (*In the Self's Place*, 184). Augustine and Marion insist that the self *is* itself by virtue of its voluntarity—*volo ergo sum*. Experience confirms that, strictly speaking, nobody wills *for me* or *in my stead*; thus, willing itself authenticates the *mineness*, or *ownness*, of my existence (*In the Self's Place*, 163).[120] In this regard, I am myself

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[118] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XXXVI: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Quartus, Pars Prior*, 67-1028, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1865.

[119] Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans., Jeffrey Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

[120] Marion seems to be reading Augustine's phenomenology of the will in relation to Descartes' famous thesis *Cogito ergo sum*. While Descartes claims that the self's primary knowledge is the awareness of its own thought, Augustine seems to suggest here that the self's primary knowledge is the awareness of its own will. Augustine's formulation of this principle—which Descartes adapted for his own thesis—is *Fallor ergo sum*. "I err therefore I am." It should be noted that Descartes, a diehard Augustinian in many ways, devotes much of the famous Fourth Meditation to "the will" and its

insofar as I (freely) will. My will is free by virtue of being mine and mine by virtue of its being free. However, as Augustine and Marion think through the enigmatic nature of the will, they confront the essential role of affectivity—what they call love—in the way people (choose to?) behave.

In short, people don't choose certain courses of action without an affective ground for their decisions, which implies that decisions are always dependent flows of feeling even while they are voluntary. In *Confessions*, Augustine offers a hypothetical situation to elaborate this point:

> A man committed murder. Why? *Because he loved* another's wife or his property; or *he wanted* to acquire money to live on by plundering his goods; or *he was afraid* of losing his own property by the action of his victim; or *he had suffered* injury and *burned with desire* for revenge. No one would commit murder without a cause [*sine causa*] . . . Who would believe that? (*Confessiones*, book II, chapter 5, section 11).

In this passage, all the deed's possible "causes" are feelings—love, desire, fear, embarrassment, anger—yet Augustine has insisted that "will is the cause of sin." I suggest that there is an irresolution in Augustine's thinking between the will's freedom and the heart's feelings. Which is behind our actions? His ambivalent attentiveness to affectivity as the ground of action explains why he often describes sin and righteousness both in terms of love rather than will. Augustine claims later in his career that "to discover the character of any people, we have only to observe what they love [*quae diligit*]," rather than how they will, because the will, he implies, is

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purported freedom. "The will," he theorizes, "simply consists in our ability to do nor not to do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward, we are moved to affirm or deny or to pursue or avoid it in such a way that we do not feel ourselves to be determined by any external force" (*Meditations on First Philosophy*).

bound by the demands of love.[121] But he equivocates regularly, sometimes describing sin as love misdirected towards the things of the world, and other times saying that sin is a "wanton will." Augustine's reflections on addiction thus yield a panoply of paradoxes: *We can't control our own free wills because we do not own them outright. Rather, they are part owned by the people, places, and feelings that share a hold on our actions. Thus, we individuals are divided within and against ourselves. We are not our own.*

## § 14 – (Virile) Voluntarity, (Feminine) Affection, and the Nexus of Guilt

The deepest antagonism in Augustine's corpus thus exists between the affectionate heart and the free will. His heartstrings, the ties that bind, compromise the free flights of his will. As the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow remarks in his poem about Saint Augustine, "Whatever hinders or impedes/The action of the nobler will//All these must be trampled down/Beneath our feet; if we would gain/In the bright fields of fair renown/The right of eminent domain" ("The Ladder of Saint Augustine," lines 19-24).[122] The material bonds of effeminate feeling and the abstract freedom of virile voluntarity fight inside him.[123] He resists the

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[121] Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 24.
[122] The right of eminent domain refers to the right of the government, or its representative, to appropriate land at will.
[123] Here, I think about Simone de Beauvoir's unforgettable opening to *The Second Sex*: "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary," a vessel whose being is only to be filled by others. The term "female" is used as an insult, Beauvoir says, "because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in man by woman . . . The word *female* calls to mind a host of images—a vast, round ovum engulfs and castrates the agile spermatozoon; the monstrous and swollen termite queen rules over the enslaved males; the female praying mantis and the spider, satiated with love, crush and devour their partners; the bitch in heat runs through the alleys, trailing behind her a wake of depraved odors; the she-monkey presents her posterior immodestly and then steals away with hypocritical coquetry; and the most superb wild beasts—the tigress, the lioness, the panther—bed down slavishly under the imperial embrace of the male" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans., H.M.

penetrability and porosity of a bleeding heart for the self-sufficient citadel of a strong will.[124] In one extended reflection on the will's freedom in *Confessions*, Augustine decries being "held tightly by feminine bonds [*tenaciter colligabar ex femina*]" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 1, section 2).[125] In relation to his protest against the heart's porosity, the significance of the following backhanded confession should not be underestimated: "Wretched man that I am, I was incapable of following a woman's example [*Infelix ego nec feminae imitator*]" (*Confessiones*, book VI, chapter 15, section 25).[126] The bonds of feminine affection threaten to dock the

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Parshley. London: Lowe and Brydone, 1953. 1). The feminine is associated with being earthbound, tied down, enslaved, engulfed; woman is the "ball-and-chain." The bondage of feminine affection threatens to still the vagabondage proper to masculine freedom.

[124] For an elucidating discussion of Roman-Christian masculinity, see Susanna Asikainen, *Jesus and Other Men: Ideal Masculinities in the Synoptic Gospels*. Boston: Brill, 2018. In particular, see "Effeminacy and Lack of Self-Control," 29-32, in chapter two. For a more concentrated discussion on Greek and Roman associations with penetration, see Mark Masterson, "Studies of Ancient Masculinity," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, ed., Thomas Hubbard, 17-30. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2014.

[125] R.S. Pine-Coffin translates Augustine's phrase as "I was held firm in the bonds of woman's love"; Albert Outler similarly as "I was tightly bound by the love of women." Both of these renderings interpolate the word "love," which is absent from the Latin original. Henry Chadwick is more literal: "I was firmly tied by woman." *Ex femina* is a difficult phrase, partially because of the multivalence of the preposition *ex*, which has a host of possible meanings, from the literal to the abstract—out of, from, by origin of, by reason of, because of, as a result of, according to. Due to the lack of articles in Latin, *femina* is also difficult to render. Woman? A woman? The woman? Female? A female? The female? The feminine? The general tendency among translators of Augustine is to interpret *femina* as an abstract, general category rather than as referring to a specific person to whom he feels bound. It should also be noted that immediately following this statement, Augustine cites Saint Paul's infamous exhortation for bachelors to remain unmarried. "The Apostle . . . very much wished that all men were as unattached as himself."

[126] It's especially interesting to think of Augustine as struggling to reconcile the masculine and feminine inside him given his relationship to his mother, Monica, who helped convert both Augustine and his father to Christianity. He tells us that Monica was learnéd "in the school of the heart" and reflects at length on her role as a community peacemaker (as opposed to his father, whom Augustine tells us was an abuser). "A great gift with which you [God] endowed that good servant of yours, in whose womb you created me, my God, was that whenever she could, she reconciled dissident and quarreling people . . . She cared for everybody as if they were all her own children" (IX, 9, 22).

odysseys proper to masculine freedom.[127] He is sensitive despite himself and sees sin in his affection, which binds him to others and the world.

Augustine draws out through these lines of thinking that the will's characteristic freedom and power are compromised to the extent that it allows itself to be touched by the intractable affections that pull it to and fro. On these grounds, he takes us to the edge of his thinking, but then nervously backpedals from the precipice—what we could call the diffuse agency of a collective will—because he sees, just as Nietzsche saw 1,500 years later, that individual free will is the thread that keeps the tale of addiction and redemption woven together. Here's Augustine reaching the rock bottom of Roman Christianity's financial construal of sin as addiction (i.e. contract violation):

> The will is the cause of sin, but if you want to know what causes the will to sin, then you are looking for a cause of the will itself. If I were able to find this cause, aren't you going to ask about the cause of this cause that has just been found? What will limit our investigation of causes? What will be the end of our discussion and examination? You should not search for anything beyond the root of the matter . . . A wanton will is the cause of all evils. But if you ask again about the cause of this root, then how would it be *the root*? The root would be whatever causes the will. And when you find this cause, you'll ask about *its* cause, and our investigation will have no end. What, in the end, could be the cause of the will prior to the will itself [*ante voluntatem causa voluntatis*]? Either the cause of the will is the will itself, in which case there is

[127] Homer, *The Odyssey*. Calypso, for example, holds Odysseus captive in her house and bribes him with immortality if only he would remain on her island as her husband forever: "The nymph Calypso held him back, deep in her arching caverns, craving him for a husband—cherished him, vowed to make him immortal, ageless, all his days, yes, but she never won the heart inside him, never." Likewise, Charybdis, a massive whirlpool that consumes any seamen that passes nearby, is exclusively referred to as a woman: "Awesome Charybdis gulps the dark water down. Three times a day she vomits it up, three times she gulps it down—the terror! Don't be there when the whirlpool swallows down—not even the earthquake god could save you from disaster."

> no getting underneath the root of the will, or the will is not its own cause, in which case no one is guilty of sin [*peccatum nullum habet*] (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 17, section 48-49).

Despite these denials, Augustine himself has just told us that there are obvious antecedents to the will's directions: our affects, or feelings, are the only things that induce the will to act. He elaborates the very point he's suspicious of: "Whoever wills surely wills *something*. But a person could not will this 'something' unless it had first been prompted extrinsically through their bodily senses or had entered into their mind in some unknown way" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 25, section 75).[128] Augustine warns us not to "search for anything beyond the root of the matter," but the logic of his root metaphor reaffirms the very insight he deploys it to deny. Perhaps Augustine is right, and the free will is indeed the root of our actions; however, if that's true, then affectivity is the seedbed in which it grows.

If I will according to my heartfelt affections, which I have no power to freely choose, then how exactly are my decisions that derive from those feelings free? Furthermore, if I am not free to choose the only things that induce me to act, then how exactly am I guilty as an individual? No one would commit crime without a cause. "Who would believe that?" Augustine can hardly believe some of his own conclusions as he works out the Roman legal logic of his governing metaphor of addiction. Without the grounding concept of the will's individual freedom, guilt looks

[128] Augustine's point here refers me to G.W.F. Hegel's claim from *Philosophy of History*: "The Will is Free only when it does not will anything alien, extrinsic, foreign to itself (for as long as it does so, it is dependent), but wills itself alone. " To me, this is a way of saying that the will is never free, given what Augustine has just said about how the will always and only wills what has been prompted extrinsically. But Hegel goes much further, "The Freedom of the Will *per se* is the principle and substantial basis of all Right—is itself absolute, inherently eternal Right, and the Supreme Right in comparison with other specific Rights; nay, it is even that by which Man becomes Man, and is therefore the fundamental principle of Spirit" (*Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree. New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1901. 552).

different. In other words, if Augustine does not build his theological anthropology on the ground of addiction—that is, self-possession and the causal primacy of the individual will—then sin ceases to appear as individual delinquency. As Augustine himself remarks, if the "the will is not its own cause," then "no *one* is guilty of sin."

The free will often seems subordinate to the internal workings of the heart—a point that Prudentius, a contemporary of Augustine and fellow former student of Ambrose, won't let us forget.

> We know that in a ceaseless series of struggles, conflicting feelings fight hard in the murky dark of the heart. Since the fortune of battle varies, sometimes the virtues emerge victorious and other times, when what's good inside us is bested by the bad, we are dragged away in bondage, addicted to shameful sins [*addicere noxis turpibus*] and *content with our damnation*" (*Psychomachia*, lines 888-98).[129]

Augustine treads carefully here, because this is sacred ground. He recoils from digging into his own radical insights about the possible priority of the heart to the will because of the firm Roman legal grounding of his theological thought. By asking *why* the will tends this way or that—by inquiring after its causes—Augustine begins to compromise the Roman legal subjectivity his addiction metaphor stands on.[130]

The idea of the free will is one cornerstone of the Latin Christian church. By entertaining the idea that the will isn't self-causing, which is to say that selves are not sole-proprietorships but cooperatives, Augustine briefly faces the implication that "no *one* is guilty of sin." Instead, sin and its guilt names a collective condition that

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[129] Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus LX: Prudentius – Dracontius,* 19-88, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1862.

[130] Marion, the consummate Augustinian, similarly acknowledges external factors on behavior but ultimately brings everything back to the will: "Neither the thing itself nor the tempter (who does nothing but play on my voluntary servitude) tempts me, but rather my own will" (*In the Self's Place*, 169).

includes not only ancestors but also God himself. However, the ground of addiction cannot sustain this line of thinking. Without free will, there is no addiction; without addiction, there is no redemption; without redemption, what of the Redeemer? Albert Camus broaches this alternate reality in the final chapter of his dissertation, which is devoted to Augustine and his doctrine of the free will: "The Fall denied, Redemption loses its meaning" ("Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism," 122). If we incorporate the philological findings, Camus rightly suggests that redemption means nothing without addiction, which unravels with a different conception of the will's freedom. *On the Free Choice of the Will* ends abruptly after Augustine arrives at the unthinkable thought that no *one* is guilty of sin—or, even more disturbing, that we and God are cooperatively accountable for this failing business. Augustine seemingly stares into this alternate reality, shudders, blinks, and backs away. Yet the great generosity of Augustine is that he leaves us to read the genius of his denials.

In light of all this, the question still stands: Why did Adam will to eat the fruit and volunteer himself for damnation? If our affects are the only things that induce us to act, then perhaps Adam ate the fruit because he was hungry, or perhaps because he loved his wife, who handed him the fruit and told him it was good. The will has its whys, to be sure, and everyone knows they often enter the mind through the gut or the heart. But this is not the story Augustine settled on. To end the discussion of the will and its whys, he asks rhetorically, "What will limit our investigation of causes?" We can't go on looking for the causes of actions, and then the causes of those causes, etc., to infinity, he argues. Therefore, we must assume the will is self-causing as a matter of practical, but not logical, necessity. What, then, limits our investigation of causes? Why do we stop with the will? Augustine's rhetorical question seems to have

an historical answer. Augustine's investigation of the will stops when he hits the Roman legal ground of his master metaphor. The individual free will—and hence the self's theoretical self-possession—cannot be deconstructed without collapsing the concept of addiction itself, which was built on this very ground. Our investigation of behavioral causes has been limited by the Roman legal philosophy that located guilt in individuals by presupposing their self-ownership and personal freedom of choice, their *libero arbitrio*, as the basis of their legal liability and hence legal subjectivity. To the extent that Augustine thinks in Roman legal terms, he must preserve his ability to say that "evil people are the authors of their evildoing" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 1, section 1).

By contrast, if we understand the will as being co-operated by a morass of external factors rather than privately possessed, then culpability becomes diffuse, impossible to pinpoint within a labyrinth of catalysts or a cloud of probability. That is to say, if we think of the individual's free will as cooperatively owned, then each shareholder bears limited liability for bad outcomes. In this alternate paradigm to Roman Christianity, it would be hard to know who to credit or blame when things go right or wrong. Therefore Augustine, despite his sensitivity to the diffuse induction of human behavior, insists on the legalistic doctrine of individual self-possession and the self-causation it implies: "Even what someone is compelled to do against their will, if they do it, then they do it willingly [*quod quisque invitus facere cogitur, si facit, voluntate facit*]" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 24, section 72). The Roman legal framework conditions of Augustine's theology produce the paradox that troubles him. To maintain the structure built on this ground, he must say that even the involuntary is voluntary. Lo, the circle is square. The legal fiction of

self-ownership limits our investigation of causes because it allows us to point fingers and place blame with exacting precision, if not accuracy: "Because the First Man's sin was in his free choice [*in libero arbitrio*], by divine law there followed a just punishment" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book III, chapter 24, section 72).

### § 15 – Desire's Dominion and the Subdivided Individual

In Augustine's theology, God metes out this "just punishment" congenitally through all the descendents of Adam and Eve, which helps answer the question about *why* we do evil: "The chosen evil of the former [Adam and Eve], belongs by nature to the latter [their descendents]." Because our primordial parents freely willed to turn away from God and towards the fruit of the world, we progeny have, as punishment, been beset with "a condition of will which leads to unhappiness, even against our will" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 14, section 30). In our fallen condition, we seek happiness futilely where it cannot be found—in the things of the world—such that we suffer because of ourselves yet despite ourselves. Mirroring Adam's and Eve's strange choice to consume a finite substance rather than to enjoy eternally the love of God, we today are "bent on acquiring or keeping . . . riches, honors, pleasures, physical beauty, and all the other things that we can fail to acquire despite willing to, and that we can lose against our will"—things that "are subject to the vicissitudes of time" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 15, section 31). Our punishment is addiction, as Prudentius also describes:

> Happy is the man who is able to use with moderation the gifts granted to him, and to enjoy them with temperance. But unhappy is the man who is bewitched

> like a child by the world's lavishness, and who, by all the world's pleasant attractions and the abundant delights of its deceitful curiosities, becomes addicted to empty loves [*inepto addicit amori*]. Happy is the man who detects the deadly poison lurking under its superficial sweetness, the bad concealed under what falsely claims to be good! (*Hamartigenia*, lines 330-335).[131]

For Augustine, the paradox of the free will manifests distinctly in our pursuits of happiness. On the one hand, we will our own happiness, yet, on the other, we willfully act in ways that we know are not conducive to our being happy. We all want to be fulfilled, but by consuming things that we know simply pass through us, we end up with recurrent emptiness in our pursuit of this fulfillment. Thus the human will paradoxically works against itself, as Augustine details in his *Confessions*:

> What is the cause of this monstrous paradox? Why is it the case? . . . The mind orders the mind to will [*imperat animus ut velit animus*], and though the recipient of the order is itself, it does not obey. What causes this paradox and why does this happen? . . . It is the will itself that commands the will to be [*voluntas imperat ut sit voluntas*], and it commands not another will but itself. It must be that the will doing the commanding is not whole [*non plena*], and therefore what it commands does not happen . . . We are dealing with a disease of the mind [*aegritudo animi*] that, despite being raised up by truth, is weighed down by habit. There are two wills, neither of which are whole; what is present in the one is lacking in the other [*sunt duae voluntates, quia una earum tota non est et hoc adest alteri, quod deest alteri*] (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 9, section 21).

The will works at cross-purposes with itself because it was broken by the Fall from Eden. Augustine's pioneering idea is that we have one free will, split in two—one half tending towards the eternal and the other tempted by the temporal. However, what's

[131] Prudentius*, Hamartigenia*, in *Prudentii Carmina*, 128-168, ed., Albert Dressel. Leipsig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1860.

worse, because the world's temptations are so numerous, the part of our will that tends towards the world is pulled in many directions at once. Thus, he concludes, "there will not be two wills, but many [*non duae voluntates, sed plures erunt*]" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 10, section 23). Augustine's insights about the heterogeneity of the will—and hence the self's essential difference from itself—form the heart of his thinking. His most basic phenomenological insight could be stated like this: To be human is to be at odds with oneself.[132] Augustine wants to resist his wants and acts against himself on his own behalf. He feels like he is not his own. Here, Augustine confronts the paradox of individuality. We are supposedly in-dividual, yet we are divided within and against ourselves. Dividedness is paradoxically the hallmark of individuality. In the same way the term *atom* (*a* + *temnein* ≈ in + divisible) belies a misunderstanding of the material reality of atoms, which can in fact be subdivided into constituent parts, the phenomenological realities of selfhood give the lie to the idea of *the individual*. In this way, Augustine's phenomenological reflections on the dividedness of the self threaten to undo the very concept of *individuality* that grounds his theological paradigm of addiction and redemption, which is to say, of sole accountability and thus unlimited liability.

Augustine recounts for us, "I was willing; I was unwilling. Willing and unwilling was I. I was partially both and fully neither. I struggled with myself because I was dissociated from myself, dissociated against my will" (*Confessiones*,

[132] Heidegger draws his preliminary definition of Dasein from this Augustinian principle. To paraphrase *Being and Time*: Dasein is a being for whom, as its mode of Being, its Being is an issue for it. In fact, the philosopher derives many of his key concepts in *Being and Time* from his readings of Augustine and Paul. In this case, see *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, §12, Section B, "The Conflict of Life": "The enactment of experience [i.e. a decision] is always insecure about itself. In the complex of experience, there is no middle ground where there are not also counter-possibilities. Thus, Augustine has to say, 'which side has the victory I do not know' (toward what direction one's own life will incline in the end). In experiencing, a devilish being-torn-apart has been uncovered. 'Look, I do not conceal my wounds.'"

book VIII, chapter 10, section 22).[133] This is the self-dissociation of addiction that we recognize today. Such is the madness of the self-dispossessed self, the subdivided individual, the addict. My self-interest is not always in my own interests, because I am not my own. In keeping with our language here of interests, accounts, and expenses, we should note that Paul introduces his famous passage on self-dissociation—I don't do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate (Romans 7:15)—by first observing that he has been "sold into the slavery of sin [*ego eimi piprasko hypo hamartia*]." For Augustine as for Paul, the fundamental doctrine of the free will and its mortifying multiplicity is bound up with the question of (im)proper ownership.

While Paul simply insists, You are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19), Augustine makes a more nuanced claim along the same lines: "The person who holds fast to temporal things with love and is tangled up with them . . . is controlled by things that he ought to control."[134] The Roman bishop tries to teach us that "property [*pecunia*], under which single name we classify everything we control by right and appear to have the power to sell or give away," has come to own us (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 15, section 32). The impropriety of sin is that we are possessed not only by the other people whom we love, but by our own possessions. In other words, sin inverts the intended proprietary structure of creation, for "God said to Adam and Eve, 'subdue the earth, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over everything living things that moves upon it'"

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[133] "*Ego eram, qui volebam, ego, qui nolebam; ego eram. Nec plene volebam, nec plene nolebam. Ideo mecum contendebam et dissipabar a me ipso, et ipsa dissipatio me invito fiebat.*"
[134] Taco Bell elegantly stages this impropriety in a recent commercial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCV0ah7sFmw

(Genesis 1:28).[135] We fallen humans, subject to a self-interest that is not in our own interests, are not our own; we are owned by what we strive to possess. As Augustine never ceases to repeat, "You are addicted to whatever owns you" (2 Pet. 2:19). In effect, we are addicted to our transient worldly loves—be they the people or things we strive to have and hold on to.

We addicts are well-aware of the self-disowning indulgences of our freedom, yet we cannot get a hold of ourselves once we begin to obey desire. In a sermon given on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Augustine informs his parishioners that the "imperious force of desire entirely subjects a person to its own terms [*imperiosae libidinis conditioni suae subdit*], reducing them to the slave of their own body [*ipsius corporis mancipium pessimum facit*" (*Sermo 162/A*).[136] We do what we want; paradoxically, that is our bondage:

> I sighed for freedom, but I was bound—not by chains imposed by someone else, but by the chains of my own choices [*mea ferrea voluntate*] . . . A perverse will elects desire, and by serving desire, habit is formed [*dum servitur libidini, facta est consuetudo*]—and habit that goes unresisted becomes necessity [*dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas*]. By these links, connected to one another (hence my term 'chain'), a harsh bondage held me under restraint

[135] The Augustinian insight here that we sinners have effectively become dispossessed by our possessions is found at the core of Heidegger's critique of modern technology, which argues that we risk becoming the instruments of our tools. Leading Heideggerian scholar Thomas A. Carlson succinctly describes this ironic reversal whereby humans become dispossessed of themselves by their possessions in his *The Indiscrete Image*: "Overlooked and underplayed within a good part of the discourse on the dangers posed by technology to the human is the distinctive capacity of the human . . . to 'lose' itself—to pass or slip by its 'own' means from its authentic or proper mode of existence, its true self-possession, toward an inauthentic or dispossessed mode of existence, which is taken to 'dehumanize.' After all, who other than the human being runs the risk of invention or activity that threatens to alter so fundamentally the beings at stake?" (*The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude and the Creation of the Human*, 38).

[136] Augustine, "Sermon 162: The Difficult Question" in *Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Sermons on the New Testament, Vol. 5*. 153.

> In this state, I was no longer myself [*ibi enim magis iam non ego*]; I unwillingly suffered what I willfully did [*patiebar invitus quam faciebam volens*]. I was responsible [*ex me*] for the fact that habit had become so embattled against me, for it was by my own will that I reached a state in which I was unwilling to be [*quoniam volens quo nollem perveneram*] (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 5, sections 10-11).[137]

Above is the voluntary enslavement of addiction, laid out in all its irony. Augustine's chronic self-indulgence has converted habit into necessity and hence freedom into enslavement. He has willfully surrendered his own will. Marion's paraphrase of Augustine here succinctly captures the captivity of addiction:

> The violence of habit results precisely from the fact that the very habit that currently contradicts my will is also the result of my will—a prior will, to be sure, but one that gets its present power from its long past, whose powerful momentum still ruins my today. The aporia of man to himself is not the opposition of two wills or dual natures, but this *monstrum* of a single will in conflict with itself" (*In the Self's Place*, 171).

Marion rightly observes that "the *monstrum* is definitively established as a paradox, that of a *sickness of the will*" (*In the Self's Place*, 173). However, what has gone crucially unobserved in the long history of scholarship on Augustine is that this notion of a "sickness of will," this monstrous paradox of voluntary enslavement, has a precise conceptualization: addiction.

Augustine encounters himself as "dissociated from himself" because what he feels is most proper to him—his free will—has been expropriated by forces beyond his control: the desires that own him.[138] To encapsulate this subject position

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[137] Henry Chadwick indicates that Augustine's statement, which I've translated as "I was no longer myself," is a reference to Romans 7:17: "It was no longer I that does, but the sin that dwells in me."
[138] Nietzche argues in characteristically acerbic fashion, "The Church combats the passions by cutting them off in every sense: its technique, its 'cure', is castration. The Church never asks 'How can a desire

succinctly, he reaches metaphorically for the word *addictus*. Recall the teaching from Father Ambrose: "Every passion is servile," and whoever is subject to their passions "is addicted to many masters, such that it is nearly impossible to escape the bondage of servitude." In the same sermon on First Corinthians, given just after the publication of *De Libero Arbitrio*, Augustine warns his listeners that "A person cannot think of anything other than what his mind is addicted to [*quod sibimet addicit mentem*], for the addicted mind is captive, subdued, drowned, that is, somehow swallowed up by desire and lust [*quodam modo absorptio libidinis et concupiscentiae carnalis*]." "Because the whole person is absorbed," the bishop continues, "he cannot be said to be his own [*iam dici non possit ipse*]" (*Sermo 162/A*). Augustine's description of addiction accords in both language and logic with leading Dutch psychologist Ron Dunselman's account of addiction, which reads like an Augustinian homily:

> If we constantly seek to reproduce these [pleasurable] experiences, the desire in our soul . . . can eventually become an intolerant and insatiable tyrant that whines and rages if it doesn't get what it wants, when it wants. If we are unable to resist this, if we are unable to say no because of the strength of our Self is not sufficient, it means we are dominated by our desire and have lost the freedom and independence of the king and have become slaves: we have become enslaved or addicted" (*In Place of the Self*, 4).[139]

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be spiritualized, beautified, deified?'—it has always laid the weight of its discipline on eradication [...] But attacking the root of the passions means attacking the root of life: the practices of the Church are hostile to life" (*Twilight of the Idols*). While I think the core of Nietzsche's critique rings true, I also think the mechanism by which Christian theology has combated "desire" is to redirect and consolidate it upon a single object, God. This is Augustine's movement from "distraction" to "continence," which I will discuss later in this chapter. In my view, "The Church" (to the extent that there is such a monolith) works to sublimate rather than eradicate desire. Perhaps this amounts to the same thing. Traditionally, though, desire plays a huge role in theological imaginations of the believers' relation to God, who is himself often depicted as the "groom" of the Church.

[139] Ron Dunselman, *In Place of the Self: How Drugs Work*. Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 1995.

According to Augustine, this predicament of addiction is sin itself: "Through prideful and disobedient use of his free will, man lives like a beast, addicted unto death and slave to desire [*morti addictus libidinis servus*]" (*De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*, book XII, chapter 21). [140] Just as the beast is bound to bodily urges, the addict is unable to refuse the dictates of desire and hence is bound to the finite pleasures of the world.[141]

By freely opting to love the things of the world, we voluntarily enslave ourselves to the fickle master of desire. We do this instead of submitting to God, whose just rule leads to happiness. We volunteer our wills for this bondage when we habitually indulge our own desires; in other words, we give ourselves away by obeying our selfish whims. Augustine unwinds the paradox of addiction's onset as cited previously:

> It was by the evil use of his free will that man lost his free will and himself [*libero arbitrio male utens homo se perdidit et ipsum*]. Just as a man who kills himself must, of course, be alive when he kills himself, but after he has killed himself ceases to live; so it was that man sinned by his own free will, but then, once sin conquered him, his free will was lost. "For you are addicted to whatever owns you." This is the judgment of the Apostle Peter.

[140] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus: Tomus XLI: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Septimus*, 13-804, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1845.

[141] Foucault points out in his history of madness that "We have now got in the habit of perceiving in madness a fall into determinism where all forms of liberty are gradually suppressed; madness shows us nothing more than the natural constants of determinism, with the sequence of causes . . . for madness threatens modern man only with the return to the bleak world of beasts and things, to their fettered freedom." The association between sickness and the paradox of "fettered freedom" seems to begin in the theological discourses on addiction. Ask yourself, when a dog shits in the middle of the sidewalk during a walk, is it ultimately determined or ultimately free in this action? The animal demonstrates the paradox: the utter freedom to do exactly and only what bodily urge prompts is a form of bondage. This is parallel to the situation of an addict, who is bound to do what they desire, with or without their will. According to Foucault, this "fettered freedom" is what we've come to understand as the definitional core of psychiatric pathology in any form (Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans., Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa. London: Routledge, 2006. 156).

> And it is true. Isn't the addict's only freedom sinning every time he pleases [*qualis quaeso potest servi addicti esse libertas nisi quando eum peccare delectat*]? For he is freely enslaved [*liberaliter servit*] who willingly does the bidding of his master. Thus, he who is the slave of sin is free indeed—free to sin (*Enchiridion de Fide, Spe, et Charitate*, book 9, chapter 30).

Doing whatever you want is a form of enslavement when your wants are out of your control. As Marion explains, "Desire imposes itself on me, by its own initiative, and never at mine. I cannot decide to desire, even though desire can make me decide to do all that I can to fulfill it." "I am powerless," he concludes, "before what I want most essentially" (*In the Self's Place*, 83-85).

Crucially, desire maintains its decisive dominion over the will no matter what is done to satisfy it, because want's gratification is only temporary. Thinking back to Herbert Hoover's observation about the human consumer, because one want satisfied merely makes way for another, desire's grip does not loosen when we serve its ends, but actually tightens each time we obey. The transience of desire's satisfaction ensures that I must serve it again and again—hence the eternal recurrence characteristic of addiction's fix. As Augustine reflects on the human predicament, he realizes that addiction, as he diagnoses it, points to the problem of finitude itself. Satisfying our desires mires us in a cycle of ups and downs that repeats *ad nauseam* because satisfaction never sates; in this way, finitude itself sustains the momentum of the addict's downward spiral. Addiction's entrapment is that we're always moving on to the next pleasure. In Augustine's perspective, then, putting an end to addiction requires a new relationship with loss and this ensnaring cycle of want, gratification, want, gratification. Augustine's interrogation of addiction

and the free will thus leads him into the meditations on love, loss, and happiness that characterize his later thought, most of all the *Confessions*.

In the next chapter, then, I turn to Augustine's *Confessions*, where he walks us through his personal experiences of love and loss, to demonstrate how Augustine understands addiction to be a problem with finitude. While *Confessions* is undoubtedly one of the most studied texts in the Western canon, I believe that we have neglected to interpret Augustine's autobiographical work through his own heuristic metaphor—that is, addiction. As a result, we have only partially understood Augustine's self-diagnosis and the theological anthropology it articulates; moreover, we have underestimated the significance of Augustine's *Confessions* in the discursive legacy of self-help and recovery narratives. In Chapter Four, "*Confessions* of a Recovering Addict," I will redescribe Augustine's classic conversion story in his own terms of addiction and recovery—terms that have grown distant from their sources and too familiar to us—to show us how ancient our contemporary thinking about addiction actually is.

Chapter 4

# *CONFESSIONS* OF A RECOVERING ADDICT

*If you ever wanted one time two times . . . oh thus you loved the world.*

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*

As I outlined in my introduction, building a conceptual history of addiction involves more than compiling a catalog of the term's different usages and delineating the process of its discursive transmissions. On the basis of these philological findings but going beyond them, we also need to understand the experiences that past humans have interpreted through the concept of addiction. Because our interpretive concepts shape our experiences, addiction's remarkable continuity indicates not only analogous *conceptions of selfhood* shared among Roman law, Latin theology, and popular American discourses on addiction, but also analogous *experience of selfhood* among the people who reach for addiction as an important concept for self-representation. As Heidegger, Koselleck, Gadamer, Foucault, and many others have taught us, because concepts and experience are entangled in a mutually constitutive feedback loop that plays out over time, historical continuity in concepts should indicate correlative historical continuity of experience as well—even at great temporal and geographic remove.

Therefore, to the extent that we mediate our own experiences of self-dispossession, the bondage of the will, consumption, and its discontents through the stable concept of addiction that we inherited from the Latin Christian tradition, we will recognize ourselves in Augustine's *Confessions*. When rendered through his own metaphorical heuristic as an addiction recovery memoir, Augustine's conversion story will seem so familiar, so relatable, so seemingly contemporary, that it will appear to be the product of an anachronistic interpretation on my part, which

attributes our modern concepts to his ancient thought and thus fails to account for the contextual specificity of each. However, I argue that we will see ourselves in Augustine's *Confessions* not because I am interpreting his account of addiction anachronistically, but because I am interpreting our idea of addiction precisely *chronistically* in ways we have unconsciously avoided. This historical, hermeneutic, and phenomenological approach—what Jacques Derrida calls hauntology—unsettles us because it brings us into conscious relation to the ancestral ghosts that remain persistently and disturbingly present in our everyday lives and brings our attention to the timeless troubles that haunt all of us.

The phenomenological redescription of *Confessions* that I attempt asks readers to resist two related scholarly compulsions: (1) to insist, out of fear of universalism, that the historical differences between Augustine and us are more fundamental than the commonalities, and (2) to look only for what we can critique. At its heart, *Confessions* gives us the grieving process of a person who wanted, loved, cried, and died more or less like any of us, and who processed those experiences through Latin Christian concepts that he happened to inherit and that, in turn, happened to proliferate and predominate after he was gone. That is to say, on an historical level, we will see ourselves in Augustine because we inherit the language and logics of Latin Christianity that he helped create; on a more basic existential level, though, we will see ourselves in Augustine because we're all human.

To be sure, "Saint Augustine" has become a textual corpus that represents an imperial Christian orthodoxy that warrants critique. However, Augustinus Hipponensis, born to parents Monica and Patricius on November 13, 354, was just another one of us humans trying to write his way out of sorrow whom we should

hear out. The impetus for understanding Augustine's ideas about selfhood and addiction is that it will help us understand ourselves—not only because Augustine's ideas pervaded the intellectual history we inherit, but also because he assiduously diagnosed perennial aspects of the human condition, albeit with the concepts he had available. While the differences of history do make a difference in our experiences, we're all human after all, and that has to mean something. So, we should ask: What experiences made Augustine identify himself as an addict? Surely experiences we can relate to, since we continue to do the same thing sixteen centuries years—not only because we're Augustinian by inheritance, but also because we're human.

### § 16 – Dependence and Finitude

A young Augustine first finds himself lost in the world when he loses his beloved friend to an abrupt bout of disease.[142] Upon the death of his friend, Augustine confesses, "My heart grew dark with grief, and no matter what I looked at, I saw death. My home town had become a torture, and my own home was a strange place of unhappiness; all that I had shared with him was, without him, transformed into a cruel torment. My eyes looked for him everywhere, and he was not there" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 4, section 9). These lines alone reveal the layers of Augustine's revelatory grief. First, he suffers acutely from the loss of his friend ("his heart grew dark 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 strange world of unhappiness . . . he looked for him

[142] A friend who goes strangely unnamed.

everywhere, and he was not there"). Third, and most insidiously, he suffers a mortal anxiety from the realization that the world—no matter how homey—can transform at any moment into such a torture chamber, since "not everything grows old, but everything dies" ("no matter what he looked at, he saw death") (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 10, section 15). The disappearance of his friend makes the world appear differently, in the black light of its lack.

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." At the same time, he finds himself 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 [*ille alter erat*]. Someone has rightly 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" [*unam animam in duobus corporibus*]. So my life was a horror to me. I did not wish to live with only half of myself (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 6, section 11).

Augustine, at a loss, searches (for) himself, "Why, my soul, are you so sad, and why are you distressed?" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 4, section 9). In the midst of a lament over the death of his friend, the answer seems obvious. The cause of his sadness could not be more clear—his friend is lost. However, his "why" asks after something more fundamental. What is my condition such that the loss of my beloved also means the loss of myself? In his words, what is the human condition such that "the lost life of those who die becomes the death of those still living?" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 9, section 14).

The fact that Augustine finds himself lost when he loses his dear friend makes him realize that "we were deeply dependent on one another [*nimis pendebamus ex invicem*]" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 4, section 8).[143] But what was the precise nature of this dependence? Augustine expresses genuine surprise that he himself survives the death of his beloved friend, and the shock of his survival reveals a central paradox of his selfhood: you are what you love. As Marion says: "What I love becomes my *self*, more interior to me than my own ego." When I find myself in love, "I find myself in a self not belonging to me but to which I belong" (*In the Self's Place*, 97-98).[144] Augustine receives himself in giving himself away to what he loves. Put differently, a core part of Augustine's self is other than himself; his insides are on the outside; the intimate is the alien.[145] As a kind of monstrous miracle, he continues living after he loses himself in his friend's death. If you are what you love, and what you love goes away, then what do you become? Without his friend, he is no longer himself, because he was never his own to begin with.

In a state of living death, Augustine says he was "tired of living but scared of dying" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 6, section 11). Yet the impossible fact of the matter is that the heart keeps beating after it breaks, even against the survivor's will. This monstrous paradox demonstrates the precise sense of Augustine's dependence. In losing his friend, he loses something vital to his self yet without which he can

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[143] Our word 'depend' comes from the Latin verb *pendo*, which means 'to hang'. 'De-pend' literally means "to hang from" or, as we still say, to be "hung up" on something or someone. However, another common meaning of Latin's *pendo* is 'to pay' or 'to pay out', which would shift Augustine's sentence into a financial register—"We pay together" or "we pay for each other" just as much as we "hang together" or "hang from one another." These notions of dependence and co-implication culminate in Augustine's central concept of *pondus amoris*, or "the weight of love." For more on the *pondus amoris*, see Carlson, *With the World at Heart*, 64, 73, and 134. See also, Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

[144] Translation modified.

[145] For an elaboration of these points, see, again, Carlson's *With the World at Heart*. Specifically, follow the index entries for *interior intimo meo* and *superior summo meo*.

unwillingly survive: “I had lost the *source of my joy*” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 5, section 10). Returning, then, to his original question—“Why, my soul, are you so sad?”—he realizes that the death of his friend functions like a violent intervention; death cuts him off from the source of his joy and forces him to admit that he suffers a dependence on those whom he loves for his happiness—a vitality whose loss is insufferably survivable. Experience teaches Augustine a fundamental law of the world: "All who love will lose [*Qui amat*, *perdet*] . . . So do not love, lest you lose [*Noli amare, ne perdas*]" (*In Ioannis Evangelium*, tractatus 51, chapter 10). But this is inhuman advice, because "there is no one who does not love [*Nemo est qui non amet*]. The only question is what does he love [*quid amet*]" (*Sermo 34*).[146] As Paul reminds the Corinthians, "If I do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). And yet, to love is to lose. Both are true. Without love we are empty, and with love we will one day find ourselves at a loss. To be filled with holes, filled up and then emptied again and again, with jagged ups and downs—this is the heart's only working condition. Augustine learns these lessons by heart when he loses his friend and finds himself lost.

Admitting that he is dependent on what temporarily fulfills him and inevitably leaves him empty, it dawns on Augustine that “misery is the state of every soul overcome [*vinctus*] by friendship with mortal things and lacerated when they are lost, which causes the soul to become aware of the misery that was its actual condition even before it lost them” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 6, section 11). In other words, the profound happiness he shared with his friend, because it has now

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[146] Augustine, "*Sermo* 34," in *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina, Vol. 38: Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponensis Episcopi, Opera Omnia, Tomus Quintus,* ed., Jaques-Paul Migne. Paris: 1844-64. 210.

mutated into a correspondingly deep grief upon his loss, makes Augustine retrospectively see his past happiness as deceitful or “false.” Carlson aptly elaborates Augustine's philosophical extrapolation from his grief:

> The apparent joys of friendship—shared time and undertaking, both playful and serious; argument and accord; the growth of learning and teaching between one and the other; the heartfelt sharing of affection—can seem to be life-giving and uplifting, but they are in fact, because of their inevitable ending, only grief (*With the World at Heart*, 61).

When the source of joy passes away, “[past] sweetness is turned into [present] bitterness.” In this way, “the lost life of those who die becomes the death of those still living." Like a turncoat, his happiness betrayed him by switching unpredictably to the opposite; like an unfaithful lover, his happiness did not stay true but left him, feeling deceived. His grief shows the happiness of loving the things of the world to be "false" because finite. For Augustine, "staying true" means staying forever, so whatever leaves deceives.

Augustine’s happy memories with his friend, upon his death, unmask themselves as what they "truly" were the whole time: pain lying in wait. To recall the counsel of Augustine's contemporary, Prudentius, "Unhappy is the man who does not detect the deadly poison lurking under the world's superficial sweetness, the bad concealed under what falsely claims to be good!"Augustine feels that “we cannot bear to think of the things which we formerly enjoyed . . . we shrink back from the memory of them" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 5, section 10). In fact, in Augustine's mind, “happy memory” is an oxymoron. The happier the memorialized experience was, the more one grieves its having become a memory, which is to say,

its passing away. Happiness *now* entails grief *later* as surely as what comes up must come down. Such "miserable felicity" is the emotional rollercoaster that defines the mortal condition—or what Augustine in his day called "the comedown of intimacy [*fluxu consuetudinis*] by which my soul suffers sickness unto death" (*Confessiones*, book III, chapter 2, section 3).[147] Augustine is popularly credited with the quip, "Love begins with a smile, grows with a kiss, and ends with a teardrop." Viewed in this light, the enjoyable love of what passes away always "brings its own punishment" (*Confessiones*, book XI, chapter 30, section 40). We reap the loss we sow in love.

The twofold sense in which Augustine has "lost himself" derives from this radical revaluation 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 has become alienated from himself by the mutation of what is most intimate to himself—the memories held closest to his heart.[148] Thus, when he "shrinks back from the memory" of things which he formerly

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[147] *Fluxu* can refer to the flow, stream, or gradual downward movement of some fluid. *Consuetudinis* is a pregnant term; it can refer generally to mundane experience, habit, or custom, like the way we might refer to the "the usual" or the "day-to-day"; however it was also a euphemism for "marital sex." Henry Chadwick translates *fluxu consuetudinis* beautifully, if anachronistically, as "the treadmill of habit," which brings to mind today's notion of "the hedonic treadmill." I prefer to emphasize a different aspect of the ambiguous phrase, which I think helps us see Augustine's view of love in the context of his grief.

[148] In Augustine's Latin, one main verb meaning "to remember" is *recordari*, which etymologically translates to "take again to heart" (*re* + *cordis*), as in the English idiom, "learn by heart" through repetition.

enjoyed, he attempts, futilely, to escape his now uncanny self, self-alienated by the loss that has dispossessed him:

> 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? (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 7, section 12).

What's gone won't leave him alone.[149] Hopelessly, he relocated to Carthage to escape the "strange place of unhappiness" his home had become. However, Augustine tells us, "the greatest source of repair and restoration was the solace of other friends, with whom I loved what I loved as a substitute" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 8, section 13). 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 through its coming and going, time . . . repaired me with delights such as I used to enjoy, and to them my grief yielded" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 8, section 13). While taking refuge from one's grief in the arms of loved ones seems like a healthy way to cope with the loss of a loved one, there is tragedy afoot. His grief is coming full circle, doubling back on itself like the last step of a slip knot.[150]

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[149] Michael Clune says in his memoir of heroin addiction that "addiction is a memory disease." "The secret is that the power of dope comes from the first time you do it," Clune recounts. "It's a deep memory disease. People know the first time is important, but mostly they're confused about why. Some think addiction is nostalgia for the first mind-blowing time. They think the addict's problem is wanting something that happened a long time ago to come back. That's not it at all. *The addict's problem is that something that happened a long time ago never goes away* . . . There's a deep rip in my memory" (*White Out: The Secret Life of Heroin*. Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden. 2013. 14 and 17).

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

Augustine finds solace for his trauma in the very thing that originally traumatized him—"friendship with mortal things." In despair, he realizes that the coping mechanism of substitute enjoyment, despite its immediate relief, mires him in a cycle of suffering.[151] The friendships in which Augustine takes refuge for his sorrow were merely "the causes of new sorrows," for these friendships, too, shall pass (*Confessiones*, book Iv, chapter 8, section 13). 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 friends died" (*Confessiones*, IV, chapter 8, section 13). 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).

**§ 17 – Vanity, Distraction, and Repetition**

At the heart of the matter, Augustine suffers these highs and lows because he sources his joy from finite resources—the things of the world—resulting in an emotional boom-bust cycle. Like a gambler chasing his losses, his pursuit of happiness becomes literal, leaving him both emotionally and physically itinerant. When Augustine's friend dies, he feels forced to depart his estranged hometown, as his source of joy has been exhausted. Because this resource of joy—his beloved friend—is both vital and non-renewable, he must seek a replacement. After the initial period of intense grief, Augustine does precisely that: he finds a new place and new

[151] "The hopelessness [of addiction] was compounded by the fact that the one thing that was bringing me relief, the one thing I counted on to take the pain away, was ultimately destroying me" ("The Missing Link" in *The Big Book*, 283).

friends, whom he "loved as a substitute," thereby restoring himself with joy "such as I used to enjoy." Augustine undergoes this same movement when he loses his longtime lover years later. When Augustine's mother, Monica, arranges a marriage for him in Milan, he is forced to leave his partner of many years, the mother of his child. He recounts that she 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 . . . and I was unhappy" (*Confessiones*, book VI, chapter 15, section 25). Facing yet again the loss of his source of joy, Augustine must look elsewhere for happiness. As heartbroken lovers do, he moves on:

> Because I was a slave of lust [*libidinis servus*] . . . I found another woman . . . and by this new paramour [*satellitio*], the disease of my soul [*morbus animae meae*] was sustained and kept active, either as intensely as before or even worse, so that the habit was guarded and fostered . . . but my wound [*vulnus*], inflicted by the earlier breakup, was not healed. After inflammation and sharp pain, it festered. The pain made me cold and desperate (*Confessiones*, book VI, chapter 15, section 25).

Finding a new source of joy caused the "wound inflicted by the earlier parting" to "fester" because a substitute cannot fill the hole created by the previous loss. Each new source of joy may provide the fix he craves, but a fix is never a cure. Yet another repetition never cures the compulsion to repeat.

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—and the idiomatic sense that it deceives him,

since each time he finds happiness, he finds something to lose.[152] Worldly happiness misleads him as he pursues it. Augustine inhabits his happy place as a tenant; he clings on to what remains impossible to own.[153] Famously, he confesses that his "heart is restless." That is, he cannot settle down with his love but instead “meanders on and on,” lurching after that which unpredictably flees: the finite and fickle happiness of someone who enjoys a love of the world (*Confessiones*, book I, chapter 1, section 1 and book IV, chapter 14, section 26). Inasmuch as Augustine desires happiness in the "land of death," he condemns himself to what he paradoxically calls “this wandering pilgrimage” (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 14, section 15). Unlike a wanderer, he does not travel aimlessly; rather, he aims for a singular yet moving target—temporal happiness.[154] In pursuit of happiness, Augustine ends up running after something that, to his dismay, always ends up behind him, out of his grasp in the past. That is to say, he chases his telos, turning circles in the addict’s cycle.

Always forced to “move on,” the wandering pilgrim is paradoxically trapped in his transience, unable to rest: "What tortuous paths! How fearful a fate for the rash soul that 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" (*Confessiones*, book VI, chapter 16, section 26). Endless movement

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[152] 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.”

[153] ‘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’ (OED).

[154] Elizabeth Wurtzel, in her memoir, *More, Now, Again*, describes her addiction as a misleading chase: "The chase never leads me to anything good—I get into these miserable situations that only last a month or two and leave me obsessed and full of longing—but I always hope against hope" (*More, Again, Now*, 394).

that goes nowhere; this is a cycle. Augustine senses the paradox of an entrapping nomadism when he confesses, “I had attained the joy that enchains” (*Confessiones*, book III, chapter 1, section 1). "This joy [*hoc gaudium*]," he sermonizes, "comes from sickness, not from good health [*de aegritudine est, non de sanitate*]. The same things that diseased people crave when they're sick fill them with distaste when they are well, because it was the disease in them that craved" (*Sermo 255*).[155] Faced with the seeming inescapability of the addict’s cycle—the comeup and comedown of consumption and fulfillment—Augustine concludes that “wherever the human soul turns itself . . . it is fixed in sorrow” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 10, section 15). 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” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 12, section 18).

In this despair, Augustine feels like his eyes have been opened to the truth of mortal life. With the eyes of despair, he sees through everything by looking past the present and fixating on the fact that everything at some future present *will have* passed away. Since he sees clearly what lies on the other side of life—that is, death—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 wind passing through and not returning’” (*Confessiones*, book I, chapter 8, section 20).[156] In other

[155] For the English, see Augustine, "Sermon 255," in *Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Volume 7: Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. Ed. Rotelle. Brooklyn: New City Press. 1992.
[156] 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).

words, as long as we are drawing breath, we are full of hot air.[157] We could say that when Augustine loses what he depends on, he enters a freefall in the pit of despair. However, he gets to the bottom of it and finds the fundamental truth of life's vanity. 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' in the Bible 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. Augustine often relies on such imagery in his sermons:

> Man . . . like smoke against the sky, will fade away, his ballooning vanity blown away by the winds. Thus he will perish, just like smoke disintegrates as it billows upward, puffed up in a cloudy, insubstantial mass. That's what smoke is like, after all: indeed, you can see the mass right there, but there's nothing you can hold on to (*Sermo 22*).[158]

An eternally recurring puff of smoke is our image of addiction's despair. After Solomon's grave dismissal of the world, the author of Ecclesiastes 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?" (*Confessiones*, book I, chapter 17, section 27). According to this perspective, Augustine's love of mortal things and his quest for happiness in the enjoyment of that love means that "[he] had loved vanity and sought after a lie" (*Confessiones*,

[157] 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, could equally be read to suggest the reverse as well: the vapidity of existence.
[158] Augustine, "Sermon 22" in *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Volume 2: Sermons 20-50*.

book IX< chapter 4, section 9). 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). The truth of vanity is a grave matter.[159]

By seeing through all possibilities and apprehending one certainty—the eventual death of all that we love—the landscape of the future appears flattened, reduced to 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, all are equally possible and therefore none preferable. Because Augustine sees a dead loss in all possible emotional investments, he feels noncommittal. “Divergent wills pull apart the human heart while we are deliberating which is the most attractive option to take . . . 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” (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 10, section 24). 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—*qui amat perdet*, all who love will lose.

In the despair of addiction, the future becomes a dead-end, and differences make no difference. The addict is not held at stake in the world of possibilities, because everything has already been decided. Since everything is ultimately a puff of

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[159] 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”).

vapid pleasure, all possibilities hold the same weight, which is to say none. However, the vapidity of life is onerous on the backs of addicts: “The burden of the world weighed me down” (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 5, section 12). Because every attachment to the world 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 dis*cour*aging in the literal sense that it triggers what Augustine considers a heart condition: “the heart is torn apart in a painful condition" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 10, section 24). This condition of the heart’s being torn apart by its noncommittal relation to various vain pleasures, he calls “distraction” (the Latin *dis-trahere* literally meaning ‘pulled-apart’). He 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 dis-appear.

Distraction pulls him apart in a “painful condition” wherein he cannot devote himself wholeheartedly to anything and so gives himself piecemeal to many things. However, distraction also thereby inoculates him against the dreaded comedown of intimacy that only the wholehearted lover undergoes when they lose the object of their devotion. In this way, the state of distraction entails a hardening of the heart, or a resistance to the vulnerability which mortal love entails. This distracted form of loving is what Augustine calls “lust.” A desperate lover resigns to lust when they feel compelled to indulge their desire for affection but cannot countenance the risk of (self-) loss. In other words, someone who fears the risk of love diversifies their

emotional investments so they never find themselves lost in any one loss.[160] However, this means that "all you experience through lust is only partial," which is to say, unwholesome (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 11, section 17).

As with the losses of his friend and his mistress, Augustine's love has, up to this point, attached him to mortal things such that their passing away leads to 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 the insidious trap of insatiable desire. The transition itself is a pleasure" (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 31, section 44). Lust takes pleasure in what is, for love, a source of pain—the transition from one object to the next. 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 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 heart that is left "cold and desperate" by the repetitive process of loss and replacement eventually resigns itself to take pleasure in

[160] Mary Karr, again in *Lit*, 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."

the sorrowful cycle, finally disenchanted with the myth that he will find a one true love, happy everafter.[161]

Augustine's love turns to lust and, correspondingly, his pursuit of happiness devolves into a pursuit of pleasure as he voluntarily enslaves himself to the consumption of what leaves him empty.[162] Here, Augustine has fully descended into addiction. 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; the fact that no matter what or how much 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 (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 31). 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

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[161] Consider the title of Elizabeth Wurtzel's addiction memoir—*More, Now Again*—which actually opens with an epigraph from Augustine's *Confessions*. 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 comes 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.).

[162] The twelfth-century Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux, whom I will discuss later, comments on the predicament of addiction as diagnosed by Augustine: "The restless mind, running to and fro among the pleasures of life, is exhausted but never satisfied; like the starving man who thinks that whatever he stuffs down his throat is not enough, for his eyes see only what remains to be eaten. Thus, man craves continually for what is wanting, and is more anxious over what he lacks than he is happy over what he has. But who can have everything?" "The perverse will hastens in a straight line toward what will afford it the most satisfaction, but vanity makes sport of by taking it down tortuous paths . . . You are running down crooked roads and will die long before you reach the end you're seeking. The afflicted wander in circles [*in circuitu impii ambulant*], because although they reasonably want whatever will satisfy their desires, they foolishly reject what would lead to their true end, which is not consumption but consummation [*non consumptioni, sed consummationi*]" (*De Diligendo Deo*, VII, 18-19. "No Earthly Thing Will Satisfy the Craving of the Human Heart").

possession or consumption 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 like, not with a wish to undergo [them], but out of a lust for experimenting and knowing" (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 25, section 55). This curiosity, Augustine thinks, places entertainment front and center in the daily living of distracted, addicted people: "To satisfy this diseased craving [*hoc morbo cupiditatis*], 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" (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 25, section 56).[163] Since the distracted heart cannot give itself wholeheartedly to anything and therefore gives itself piecemeal to many things, the theater, in Augustine's time, provided an ideal source of pleasure because it offered an emotional connection each time without consequence—a moderate high with no comedown, just a bump.[164] In this way, entertainment (suggestively, *divertissement, diversion, divertimento, divertisment*

[163] The other side of the phenomenon of curiosity (and its correlate, entertainment) is that of boredom. Jean-Luc Marion's description of boredom in *God Without Being* could likewise apply to Augustinian curiosity: "What [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. [. . . ] [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 [Curiosity] deploys its indifference. Strictly, henceforth, nothing any longer makes a difference" (*God Without Being*, trans., Thomas Carslon, 118).
[164] A similar preoccupation is central to David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*: "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).

in the Romance languages) serves to divert the self away from the loss at which it would otherwise find itself.[165] The spectator goes along for the ride on the ups and downs of human life as staged by the actors; however, thanks to the emotional distance of spectatorship, the onlooker does so without actually going through them.[166]

> 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 (*Confessiones*, book III, chapter 2, section 4).

Thus, spectatorial entertainment allows Augustine to "see what experiences are like" without having to commit himself to any actual living, or loving, or loss—the perfect partner for the distracted heart seeking merely to satisfy its curiosity.[167] However,

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[165] Again, compare Augustine's account to a pervasive psychological theory: "At first, it was merely a matter of experiencing the satisfaction, the euphoria of an altered state of consciousness. But once he is addicted, the addict seeks drugs primarily in order to escape the feelings of torment which result from no longer being under the influence. The long-term addict does not take drugs to feel wonderful or 'high', but rather to escape the misery of periods without drugs" (Dunselman, *In Place of the Self: How Drugs Work*).

[166] 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 narcoticizing (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").

[167] Nietzsche devotes section eight-six 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. I look 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

Augustine confesses that scratching the itch of his lusts “like the scratches of fingernails . . . produced inflamed spots, pus, and repulsive sores" (*Confessiones*, book III, chapter 2, section 4). Pleasure catches up with him as he chases it in circles, and he begins to loathe himself. Augustine feels the unique self-disgust of someone who knowingly digs their own grave by scratching the itch of pleasure. Marion calls this self-hatred an essential "symptom of the sickness" that's bound up with "the danger of pleasure" (*In the Self's Place*, 174, citing *Confessiones*, book X, chapter 33, section 50).

**§ 18 – Strung Out**

Augustine comes to terms with his addiction when he begins to feel the ill effects of chronic distraction. Like an addict who endeavors to preserve the high, Augustine’s constant distraction, while initially pleasurable, eventually leaves him "distended" or, as we say, "strung-out" (*Confessiones*, book 11, chapter 29, section 39).[168] Since Augustine kills time through distracting entertainment, his life consists of a daisy-chain of pleasurable episodes, one after another, rather than a continuous

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’ itself, of our so-called high culture.”

[168] 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).

thread of meaningful experiences.[169] Pursuing pleasures leave him "strung-out" in a primarily temporal sense. He confesses, “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” (*Confessiones*, book XI, chapter 29, section 39). There is no coherence or consistency to the addict's life of distraction, as it does not string together.[170] 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. For a life to have meaning, it must consist of many different experiences:

> That 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 meaningful. 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 (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 10, section 15).

The structure of meaning is that the past is remembered in the present, and the present is heard with expectation of the future. That stretch or tension held by the

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[169] 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 pleasures 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. 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 in *Being and Time*.

[170] Pete Hamill, in his memoir *A Drinking Life,* likewise describes how his addiction severed his self into incoherent episodes: *"There are permanent holes in my memory about most of those nights. I remember lurching home. I remember the streets rising and falling and lampposts swaying. Or lying in bed while the ceiling moved like the sea"* (311).

mind across the gap between memory and expectation, which is the attention itself, forms the coherence of a self or, in Augustine's example, a sentence. The meaningfulness (of a life as of a sentence) 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 addiction, he is unable to "gather [*colligar*]" himself out of the "old days" (*Confessiones*, book XI, chapter 29, section 39). His past has not been conserved in his present such that he has a meaningful future.[171] Instead, his past holds him back. 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 co-present in his present. An addict's time is out of joint with skips and gaps between repetitions of the past; with a past he can't make up for and a dead-end future, there's no time like the present for another pleasurable episode. In the pursuit of pleasure, each stage on the way relates to the other as a matter of historical contingency rather than according to a consistent pattern that gives the entire sequence meaning—such is the difference between a cacophony and a symphony. The feeling of meaninglessness Augustine describes, the sense that the sequence of one's life is of no con-sequence, characterizes the experience of being strung-out or, in Augustine's Latin, distended. Such is the "repulsive sore" caused by scratching the itch of lust. Augustine's life is a

[171] 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").

"distension" because he "lives in a multiplicity of distractions by many things" (*Confessiones*, book XI, chapter 29, section 39).[172]

Miserable with his love and torn to pieces by his lust, Augustine eventually 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 diseased desires [*desideriis pestilentiosis*]" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 10, section 15). He wants to quit the world, 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.[173] 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." 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

[172] Elizabeth Wurtzel recounts the distractedness that was integral to her addiction: "It is impossible for me to sit and concentrate on any one thing. My writing is all over the place. I get a lot done, but it is all disjointed—the beginning of one section, the end of another chapter, but nothing progresses all the way through anymore. Episodes of deep focus are scattered throughout my scatterbrained excess" (51-52).

[173] As Trysh Travis explains, twentieth-century recovery culture, principally the 12-Step traditions, take aim first and foremost as what they take to be the harmful myth of the *self-made man*: "AA literature devotes itself to denigrating the beliefs and practices dedicated to mass-producing the productive capitalist citizen known as the 'self-made man' . . . The ideal of the self-made man has had an important place in U.S. culture since the early Republican period . . . As white middle-class men's real power of self-determination declined [after the Second Industrial Revolution that preceded AA's formation], popular discourse that trumpeted that power and aimed to bolster it increased proportionally. Body-building, competitive sports, and nature adventures kept the physical body strong and toned; fraternal organizations and the rhetoric of 'muscular Christianity' elevated and purified the spirit; institutionalized racism, sexism, and anti-immigrant activism, along with imperialist rhetoric, trumpeted the white male mind as the repository of 'civilization', and venerated an analogous ideal white male self that was 'the master of my fate . . . the captain of my soul'. This discourse without question afforded middle-class white men unwarranted amounts of privilege. But it also imposed a set of severe moral, characterological, and economic constraints upon them: Ambition was not an opportunity but an obligation, and one that weighed increasingly heavily on masculine shoulders as the twentieth century opened. It was on this way of being in the world that early AA trained its sights" (*The Language of the Heart*, 65-66).

the human lot! That was my state at the time. So I boiled with anger, sighed, wept, and was at my wits' end" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 7, section 12). He cannot get himself together because he is of multiple minds on the matter. 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?" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 11, section 26).

Here, Augustine confronts what David Foster Wallace describes as "a little-mentioned paradox" of addiction recovery, "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."[174] 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 mortality in "the land of death."

Augustine tries to encourage himself, "Do not love the world . . . Let the fire of self-control cure you!" But the voluntary slave cannot opt out of captivity willy nilly. Thus, when "the overwhelming force of habit" asks Augustine, "Do you think you can live without your old loves?" the answer is a resounding "No." If his addiction consists in loving mortal things, then breaking the habit would entail no longer inhabiting the world. Therefore, as much as Augustine believes "that it is your duty

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[174] *Infinite Jest*, 201.

to hate the world and your own life in it," he nevertheless must find a way to live with the hateful condition that "there is no one who does not love" (*In Ioannis Evangelium*, tractatus 51, chapter 10). He cannot just say no to the love that binds him to the world. As Samuel Beckett, an avid reader of Augustinian theology, once quipped, "You're on Earth. There's no cure for that!" (*Endgame*, 53).[175] There is no way for Augustine to liberate himself from the affects that own him, because the will cannot conquer the heart; nevertheless, he must find a way to get a hold of himself. Recovery demands not an inhuman renunciation of desire but a constant negotiation with its power. Pure freedom is impossible, but enslavement is unlivable. There must be a middle ground. Marion succinctly describes Augustine's moderation:

> This implicitly rejects and disqualifies the pretension of the pagan sage to renounce (or to be able to renounce) his desires . . . There is as much illusion and lying in claiming to be able to fulfill desire as there is in pretending to extinguish it. This in-between defines the sole honest condition of man, whose instability now becomes the sole constant (*In the Self's Place*, 88).

This hypertension—in effect, that we cannot live without the heart that will be the death of us—forces a more nuanced reckoning with his addiction. “The reason why grief had penetrated me so easily and deeply,” Augustine 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*” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 8, section 13). According to Augustine's shifting perspective, addiction recovery would consist *not* in avoiding addictive substances altogether but in negotiating a different relationship to them—that is, in finding a way “to love human beings with awareness of the human condition"

[175] Samuel Beckett, *Endgame & Act Without Words I*, trans., Samuel Beckett. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958.

(*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 7, section 12). For Augustine, Christianity introduces, models, and provides the resources for, which 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 addiction. Recovery and conversion converge.

**§ 19 – Intervention and Submission**

It's one thing for Augustine to come to grips with his addiction, but it's altogether another to recover. If Augustine's congenital disease dictates that he remains mired in the cycle of love and loss, fulfillment and vacuity, by helplessly and hopelessly seeking substantial happiness in vain pleasures, then recovery's conversion comes down to this question: How does Augustine willfully turn his love Godward, away from the world? As the Saint has articulated at length, our congenital addiction dictates that the "free" will tends to follow the concupiscent movements of the heart. This improper chain of command is the very condition from which we need to recover: we have voluntarily enslaved our wills to our worldly desires. How, then, even if we know that the resolution to recover stands to save us, can we willfully untether our love from the ties that bind us to the transient things of the world? In other words, if the addict suffers from a "disease of the will," then the addict constitutively cannot inaugurate recovery by an act of will, despite the sober-minded acknowledgement of what's needed.

To affirm that an addict can recover by sheer force of will, that the volunteer slave can opt out of their servitude willy nilly, would be to side with the Pelagian "heretics," who argued that we can, in effect, save ourselves by righteous willpower. Augustine worries that "the Pelagians do not merely defend free choice, but overstate it" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 14, section 27). [176] Steven Tyler, the lead singer of Aerosmith, succinctly voices Augustine's critique of the Pelagian position: "Telling an addict to 'just say no' to drugs is like telling a manic depressive to 'just cheer up'."[177] Sheer willpower can never be a panacea to predicaments that in themselves have compromised the wills' power—be they addiction, depression, or poverty. Augustine, despite championing the individual free will in many ways, never lets us entertain the manly fantasy that we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Especially after the Pelagian controversy, the Saint insists that we addicts cannot save ourselves but remain dependent on some saving grace to help us turn things around. To recover from addiction, we must submit to a higher power.

This is how Augustine recounts the intervention that turns his life around. One day, in the throes of self-loathing, he was at home with his longtime friend, Alypius, when an unexpected and unknown guest knocked on their door and told them the tale of a powerful conversion experience that one of his colleagues had

[176] Augustine, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XLIV: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Decimus, Pars Prior*, 881-914, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1865.

[177] Tyler's elegant insight also makes me think of the inane tagline of Coca-Cola's recent advertising campaign: "Choose Happiness." The Pelagian confidence in individual willpower to reshape oneself and one's world has, despite Augustine's massive influence, come to dominate mainstream (Protestant) Christianity, thanks especially to the spread of New Thought during the 20th century. I will return to tell this story in a later chapter, but it should be noted here. While the notion that health, wealth, and happiness ultimately come down to individual will can be interpreted as empowering, it also imposes an ungodly weight on individuals and their "free" wills. Wherever an individual can be credited for their successes, they can also be blamed for their failures. If health, wealth, and happiness are choices, then sickness, poverty, and sadness are failures of individual will—not social, circumstantial predicaments. That is a crushing weight to place on individuals, even if the empowerment and its heroism are attractive.

undergone. Listening to the story of this man's healing journey stirred up in Augustine a real self-reckoning. "While the man was speaking, my attention turned upon myself," he tells us. "I looked upon myself and was appalled, but there was no way of escaping from myself" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 7, section 16). As his disgust and frustration mount, he walks outside in a fit of anxious self-critique, furious with himself for being unable to turn his life around by sheer force of will. He hates the hypocrisy that comes with his addiction. Literally, Augustine cannot commit to recovery because he is under-decided (*hypo-krinein*); he cannot marshal all the force of his willpower because he is not his own. The dispossessed addict is not the master of his domain but a stranger in his own home. "Divergent wills pull apart the human heart [*diversae voluntates distendunt cor hominis*]." As long as one prefers the good in theory but remains with the bad in practice, the will is "torn apart in a painful condition" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 10, section 24). Augustine feels torn between, on one side, the "old loves" that hold him back and ensure that his future will be a repetition of his past, and, on the other, the love of God that promises to pull him forward into a future beyond his dead-end life of distraction. "I was twisting and turning in my chains hoping they would break completely; I was now only a little bit bound, but still bound" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 11, section 25). Augustine tries to white-knuckle his addiction but reaches the limits of his willpower:

> I said to myself, "Let it be now, let it be now," and by saying this I was already moving towards a decision [*placitum*]; I had almost made it, and then I did not quite do so. Yet I did not relapse into my former condition [*nec relabebar tamen in pristina*], but stood my ground very close to the point of deciding.

> Once more I made the attempt to decide and came only a little short of my goal; only a little short of it—yet I did not reach it and hang on to it. I hesitated to die to this living death and live to true life. Ingrained evil had more hold over me than unaccustomed good. The nearer the moment came when I might turn my life around, the greater the horror of it struck me. Yet I did not turn away, but remained in a state of suspense . . . I felt my past had a grip on me; it uttered wretched cries: "How long is it going to be? Tomorrow! Tomorrow!" Why not now? Why not put an end to my impure life in this very hour? (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 11, section 25 and chapter 12, section 28).

Having reached the limits of his willpower to decide to recover, Augustine requires a higher power to help him escape the chains of addiction. He is brought to ask himself, "Why are you relying on yourself, only to find yourself unreliable [*Quid in te stas et non stas*]?" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 11, section 27).[178] "Cast yourself upon God, and do not be afraid," he encourages himself, "God will not pull away and let you fall.[179] Make the leap without anxiety [*proice te securus*]; he will catch and heal you" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 11, section 27). When it comes to addiction, we all know that admittance is the first step; submission is the next.[180] "As

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[178] "The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success . . . Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful . . . What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding . . . Still, the play does not suit him . . . He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? . . . Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well?" (William Wilson, "How It Works," in *The Big Book*, 62).

[179] "Our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without his aid . . . First of all, we had to quit playing God" (William Wilson, "How It Works," in *The Big Book*, 62).

[180] "1. We admitted we were powerless . . . that our lives had become unmanageable. 2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. We made a decision to turn

I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly, I heard a voice," which says, "pick up and read," so he opens the Bible to a Pauline verse that commands him thus: "Live honorably, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and intemperance, not in conflict and competition. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:13-14). Although Augustine already knew the truth, he had to hear it from someone else before he could take decisive action on his own behalf. "It was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flood into my heart. All shadows of doubt were dispelled" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 12, section 29).[181]

What exactly happened to Augustine in this pivotal moment? A voice cries out; he receives a command; he does not decide but *is decided* by forces beyond his control—the collective will of those who love him. Augustine's mother, his friends, and the trinity of God, all will his recovery, and they decidedly turn his life around. It's hard to say what exactly happened because God's grace works in mysterious ways, but what's clear is that Augustine has had a change of heart, if not exactly will.[182] His love has been turned away from the worldly "bonds of woman" and towards the Heavenly Father. After Augustine recounts his conversion experience, the first announcement he makes to the reader is that "the effect of Your converting

our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*" (William Wilson, "How It Works," in *The Big Book*, 59).

[181] "My eye caught a sentence in the book lying open on my bed: 'We cannot live with anger'. The walls crumpled--and the light streamed in. I wasn't helpless. I was *free*, and I didn't have to drink . . . This wasn't 'religion'—this was freedom! Freedom from anger and fear, freedom to know happiness, and freedom to know love" ("Women Suffer Too," in *The Big Book*, 205-06).

[182] "After they have succumbed to the desire again, as many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery . . . Strange as this may seem to those who do not understand—once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules" ("The Doctor's Opinion" in *The Big Book*, 4th Edition, 2002, xxix).

me to Yourself was that I did not now seek a wife" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 12, section 30). The first step towards freedom is away from his feminine feelings that keep him fettered to the flesh.

Augustine's conversion [*con-vertere*] is literally a "turn towards" God and away from the world. As two modes of coping with the adversities of life, the "turning towards" of conversion offers a therapeutic alternative to the "turning away" of diverting pleasure. 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. An eternal love is an undying source of joy; thus, the broken heart can rest assured that its love will stay true. "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you," Augustine famously offers (*Confessiones*, book I, chapter 1, section 1). Because God's love alone "is the place where love is not deserted," he urges himself and his reader to "Fix your dwelling there . . . for you will lose nothing" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 11, section 16). God's eternality thus offers a solution to the entrapment of mortality. Augustine's claim that "all who love will lose" should be amended: all who love *mortal things* will lose. But all who love God "will lose nothing." Unlike the happiness sourced from the love of mortal things, by whose passing away "sweetness is turned to bitterness," Augustine's love of God therefore provides "a sweetness touched by no deception, a sweetness serene and content." Such is the difference between the "miserable felicity" of worldly love and the "true happiness" of divine affection (*Confessiones*, book II, chapter 5, section 11).

### § 20 – Healthy Dependence, Lasting Fulfillment

God’s steadfast love reveals something essential about addicts and their beloved substances: 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.[183] The addict suffers the “comedown” [*fluxu*s] when the seductive illusion of their joy's substantiality meets the brute reality of its vanity. God, whom the Nicene Creed explicitly characterizes as being “of substance” (*ousia* in Greek), exposes the insubstantiality of both worldly things and the happiness sourced from them.[184] On Easter Sunday of 413, Augustine encouraged his parishioners, "Lift up your spirits to hoping and reaching for the things of real substance. Don't get addicted to worldly lusts [*Nolite vos addicere cupiditatibus saecularibus*]" (*Sermo 121*).[185] God’s substantiality—which consists in his immutability and eternality—ultimately means that his love alone, as a source of joy, is trustworthy. 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" (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 28, section 39). As the devoted Augustinian, Bernard of Clairvaux, says, "The little bit that anybody can acquire must be won by toil, and it's a terror to possess. The

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[183] 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).

[184] “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 Πατρί; Latin: . . . *natum, non factum; ejusdemque substantiae qua Pater est*].”

[185] Augustine, "Sermon 121," in *Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Volume 4: Sermons on the New Testament*. Ed. Rotelle. Brooklyn: New City Press. 1992. 236.

owner knows that he is bound to lose his possessions in the end, although he does not know just when this grief will come." 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 loss. "On this side, torment over the loss of something loved, on that side, ardor to acquire something not possessed" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, book I, chapter 11, section 22). 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 of loss and longing for replacement] where human life is not a trial" (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 28, section 39).

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."[186] Indeed, at the moment of conversion, Augustine recalls feeling "relief from all anxiety flood[ing] into his heart" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 12, section 28). While mortal love "brings its own punishment" by attaching the heartstrings to things that are torn away, "perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment," and there is no self-punishment borne within a love that never loses its beloved (1 John 4:18).[187] Because "the person who enters into the

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[186] "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.

[187] 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).

joy of the Lord . . . will not be afraid," they can rest easy on the solid ground of a dependable happiness (*Confessiones*, book II, chapter 10, section 18, 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]." 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 that enchains"—had formerly entrapped him. It allows him to get off the emotional roller coaster of love and loss.

God's love helps the addict to recover by providing a dependability that 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" (*Confessiones*, book II, chapter 6, section 13). Thus, Augustine's "recovery" paradoxically does not consist in being liberated from his state of addiction and delivered to in-dependence. While he may no longer be hooked on the vain pleasures of the world, he does not become free floating or self-possessed. Recovery simply means transferring his substance dependence to a more dependable substance, whose enjoyment is more substantial. To become free from the fickle directives of worldly desire, we must submit ourselves to the reliable rule of God. For the human being, whose being is radically dependent, freedom is only a permutation of submission.[188]

Thus, for Augustine, the question of a life comes down to this: What will I be addicted to? If I am never my own, to whom will I belong? Or, as he says, "The only question is: What do you love?" Recovery is therefore never a matter of becoming

[188] See Charles T. Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology: *Interior intimo meo*" in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 1999, 27, No. 2 (p. 195-221).

in-dependent, 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). As Jesus says to a Samaritan woman drawing from an earthly well, "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" from our addiction 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: (1) 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 (2) 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 perspective on mortal life's 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 life on the basis 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, or recovered, "changed [his] grief into joy" (Psalm 30:11) (cited in *Confessiones,* book VIII, chapter 12, section 30).

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 (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 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" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 6, section 11). Death, like a 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” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 6, section 11). 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 (i.e. mortal) 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, Christianity's death 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 eternality: “All that is ebbing away from you will be given fresh form and renewed, bound tightly to You” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 11, section 16). In this way, “to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Or, as Augustine paradoxically formulates the point later in his career, “Death, which all agree to be the contrary of life, has become the means by which men pass into life . . . the very act of dying . . . is a precaution against death” (*De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*, book XIII, chapter 4 and chapter 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*] (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 29).

Recall that 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, after his conversion, when his mother died, it was not fitting "to express sorrow" because, according to his faith, she is not "altogether dead." In fact, when Augustine's young 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 dependence on transient things (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 29). Augustine tries to flex his free will against the pathetic pull of his heartstrings: "When I closed my mother's eyes, an overwhelming grief welled into my heart, and it was about to burst forth in a flood of tears until just in time by a forceful act of mental control [*violento animi imperio*], my eyes held back the flood and dried up my tears" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 29).

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 anticipatory repose of faith.[189] As a

[189] 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 gone from Verecundus' home during their stay in Rome, "he became physically ill, and in his sickness departed this life a baptized Christian. So you had mercy not only on him but also on us. <u>We would have felt tortured by unbearable pain if</u>, in thinking of our friend's outstanding humanity to us, <u>we could not have numbered him among your flock</u>. 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" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 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 <u>you released</u>

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 forward to the *end*, in the sense of telos, where what has been lost will be restored. As he teaches in a later work, "The saints' joy at what they assured for themselves . . . outweighed their sadness at the loss of their possessions" (*De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*, book I, chapter 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).[190] 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 significant or meaningful only by signaling or referring to the end which stands apart

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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" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 3).

[190] 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, wordly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable—something, as we say, sufferable. [...] Where the more intellective 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

from it.[191] His therapeutic teleo-logic enfolds finite ends (*fine*) within the eternal end (*telos*) and thereby not only annuls the finality 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, from *metus mortis* to *amor mortis*. He transforms his initial fear of death into a desire for it.

In this way, the paradoxically significant triviality of mortal life and, therefore, mortal death is made lovable in a mode other than fear of loss. The lover who loves in view of the *telos* and not solely in view of the *fine* of the beloved becomes 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?" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 12, section 18, citing Wisdom 5:7). Loving mortal things while looking forward to the (happy) ending allows the recovering patient to overcome the addict's jarring comedowns by locating losses along a progressive timeline, whose end marks their complete recovery. The timetable of recovery therefore stands in stark contrast to the unstable timeline of addiction, which, like a broken heart's EKG, consists of irregular ups and downs.

### § 21 – Withdrawal, or Suffering Recovery

[191] 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.

Yet, however much Augustine performs the outward serenity, even gratitude, that would ideally correspond to his theology of recovery, he nevertheless confesses undergoing an "inward struggle of great agony" when he tries to resist the whelm of grief when his mother dies. He is crucifixed 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?" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 30). 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 tells us that the promise of eternal life is meant to function as a prophylactic against precisely such grief and, thus, plays a fundamental role in his recovery. Augustine tells us, "I was using truth as a poultice to alleviate the pain"—a form of alleviation unavailable to him in his unbelief (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 31).

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" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 30). 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 died and he asked "Why, my soul, are you so sad?" he answered that he was miserable because he "had lost the source of his joy." However, 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" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12,

section 30). This difference of attribution demonstrates the progress in recovery that conversion has catalyzed. According to Augustine's own narration, while his love for his friend was a form of dependence, his love for his mother was merely a form of habituation to her support. Thus, while the loss of the friend on which he was dependent resulted in an all-consuming trauma, the loss of his mother to whom he was merely habituated 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 (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter12, section 31).

His resistance, while a positive sign of recovery, ultimately signals that he remains in the thrall of addiction. He cannot voluntarily free himself from the fetters of feeling. 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 healthy resistance to addiction as his diseased resistance to recovery (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 29).

In the death of his mother, 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" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 12, section 29).

In other words, his sorrow resounds 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 [*reccido*] into my old 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” (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 40, section 65).[192] Every lapse after the Fall (*Lapsus*) is a re-lapse. Sin is another name for the recidivism we can't cure but can only treat—that is, addiction. Augustine's resistance to the grief of his mother's death is an effort not to circle back in the addict’s cycle but, instead, to forge dead 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.” For the recovering addict, "the question does not consist in bearing or not bearing temptation and the torments it imposes; in all cases, it must be borne, and nobody can evade it. The only question is the manner of bearing them" (*In the Self's Place*, 154). Augustinian conversion is therefore not a turnaround but a turning-around, wherein mortals are never abandoned once and for all but progressively loved anew in view of their end, that is, loved “with awareness of the human condition.”

Augustine distinguishes between these two modes of love as “use” (*uti*) and “enjoyment” (*frui*), which he most thoroughly expounds in an extended metaphor from a later text, *On Christian Doctrine*. Recovery is a journey back home from a period of being lost in the wilderness:

[192] Augustine's word, *reccido*, translated here as ‘slip back’ is the root of our ‘recidivism’ and a direct synonym of *re-lapsare*, which he also uses.

> Suppose that we were wanderers in a strange country, and could not live happily away from our homeland, and that we felt miserable in our wandering, and wishing to put an end to our misery, we decided 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 (*De Doctrina Christiana*, book I, chapter 4).[193]

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, he alone can be properly enjoyed, while all of Creation, as finite, is fit only for use.[194]

The use of Creation is to function as a means by which to love God all the more and thus to get closer to him: "If physical objects give you pleasure, praise God for them and return love to their Maker" (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 12, section 18). In short, we properly use mortal things when we love them for the sake of loving

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[193] Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana,* in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus XXXIV: Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera Omnia, Tomus Tertius, Pars Prior*, 16-120, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1865.

[194] "The true objects of enjoyment, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*De Doctrina Christiana*, book I, chapter 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.

God, in whose love alone true happiness lies: “The good things which you love are from God, but they are only good and sweet insofar as they are connected to Him. Otherwise, they will rightly become bitter; for all that comes from Him is wrongly loved if he is left by the wayside” (*Confessiones*, book IV, chapter 12, section 18).[195] "Loving" mortal things in the form of "using" them resolves the dependence of the addict, while simultaneously avoiding the self-defeating impulse to quit the world by sheer strength of will. Through the relationship of use, mortal things no longer function as direct sources of happiness but as indirect means to it. Paradoxically, Augustine suggests that he loves mortal things “not because I love *them* but *so that* I may love you, my God” (*Confessiones*, book II, chapter 1, section 1). In this Augustinian economy of happiness, the people, places, and things of the world, which appear lovable only inasmuch as useful, assume a dispensable role—as opposed to the problematically indispensable status they once held for the 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 dispensable things. From the Augustinian perspective, addicts indeed *ab*-use substances by enjoying them instead.[196] As Carlson explains, "If I seek to enjoy that which is meant

[195] Hannah Arendt suggests that loving others “in God” according to the Augustinian injunction—i.e. for the sake of a telos—amounts 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).

[196] Martin Heidegger says in his commentary on Augustine, "The evils of the day are present and tempting as delights and lovelinesses, and one turns them into enjoyments, whereas they are really the danger for me. What is base pulls down, turns the will into a servant, and has it confirm the falling as what is authentic" (*The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 189).

only for use . . . my love will prove unhappy because bound already to the mourning of its object" (*With the World at Heart*, 63). Such is the mournful enjoyment of addiction and the double-bind of consumption's fulfillment—enjoying a substance and mourning its transience phenomenologically converge in the "miserable felicity" that Augustine diagnoses.

"My sin," he 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" (*Confessiones*, book I, chapter 20, section 31). Life appears to be lived "in vain," then, simply because the addict fails to make proper use of it.[197]

According to Augustine, only when put to proper use—that of loving God—does mortal life become genuinely *frui*tful, which is to say both useful and enjoyable. If, instead, I enjoy the fruits of the world for their own sake, then I lose myself in what Augustine calls "the state of distraction in which I had been fruitlessly divided." Put differently, the fruit of an improperly used life can be ripe only with pain; 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 (i.e. lasting) happiness.[198] In this model of life as a homebound journey, potential sources of

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[197] Elizabeth Wurtzel explains her addiction in Augustinian language: "That's the difference between using and abusing: when you use drugs, they are indeed useful; they help you get through. By the time you are abusing, it's just about the drugs; addiction is its own thing. I do drugs because I do drugs—doing drugs makes you want to do more drugs—and *that's what makes it an addiction. It feeds on itself, it is a closed system, it has no external logic at all*" (131-32). Thinking with Wurtzel, we could say that enjoying something in the Augustinian sense means partaking in something for its own sake, with no external logic, in a closed system. This, she says, is the hallmark of addiction.

[198] 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

enjoyment no longer appear as equally vain possibilities in an errant quest for transient happiness but as temptations that divert us from the "straight and narrow path" that leads to eternal happiness—that is, the road to recovery (Matt. 7:13-14).

### § 22 – The Recovery Timeline

Conversion transforms the spiraliform errancy of addiction into the pilgrimage 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 between progression and regression. Unlike the addict's distracted wandering wherein all possible life paths appear passable because they all lead to the same end (*fine*), the end (*telos*) of recovery allows the addict to say to themself, "Only aim at going forward, not backward" (*Sermo 22*).[199] Simply put, only when you have a fixed destination (unlike the moving target of the addict: transient pleasure) can you take a right or wrong turn. Augustine was wandering because he "had no certainty by which to direct [his] course" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter7, section 17). After his conversion, though, he expresses a 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" (*Confessiones*, book II, chapter 3, section 6).

In this way, starting down the road to recovery generates a value differentiation that resolves the leveling of vanity. Unlike the vain pleasures of

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himself, all the rest can become lovable, no longer by *cupiditas* but well and truly by *caritas*" (*In the Self's Place*, 277).

[199] Augustine, "Sermon 22" in *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Volume 2: Sermons 20-50*.

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 over others insofar as they hasten the desired end. Since Augustine is in recovery, not every form of life is equally attractive, as 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. The recovering addict therefore does not suffer from distraction. The life of recovery becomes a weighty matter rather than pure "smoke and wind," but this burden is not onerous like the addict's former vanity: "I submitted my neck to your easy yoke and your light burden."

As a recovering addict, Augustine undergoes a new internal tension that differs from the constant pull of distracting pleasure. He expresses the tension of recovery 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 [*morbo concupiscentiae*] which I preferred to satisfy than suppress" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 7, section 17). In the resistance of addiction recovery, the self pulls against itself in "a struggle between enjoyments which I should regret and regrets which I should rejoice" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 28, section 39). That is to say, Augustine resists temptation yet, in the same breath, resists this very resistance, because the recovering addict paradoxically suffers the healing that deprives them of what they can't live without; likewise, the recovering addict enjoys the demise that provides them their poison of choice:

> We become withdrawn [*subtrahuntur*] from all other things except God, and there will only be God to delight us. However, the soul will feel restricted in this withdrawal because it has been habituated to being delighted by many things. So the pleasure-seekers—addicted to the flesh and bound by bodily desires [*carni addicta, carnalibus cupiditatibus implicata*], like birds with wings stuck together with the birdlime of evil lusts, unable to fly to God—will say to themselves: What will be my pleasure in God if not eating, or drinking, or sleeping with my wife? What sort of joy will I have apart from these? (*Sermo 255*).[200]

Full recovery, then, as the end of resistance, would mean the consolidation of what is otherwise pulled apart: his will. The recovering addict pulls himself away from the seductive tugs of lust (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").[201]

On the one hand, lust—the misdirected love by which the heart becomes attached to what is passing and multiple—leads to distraction; on the other, charity—the rightly directed love by which the heart clings 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 (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 10, section 24). God says that he will "give us one heart" (Ezek. 36:26). Continence, then, means not indulging one's insatiable lust but saving oneself for the one true love of God, who alone makes us happy in a substantive way. In his attempt to achieve

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[200] Augustine, "Sermon 255" in *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Volume 7: Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*.

[201] 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).

continence, Augustine is fundamentally no different than any recovering addict: he is simply trying to get his shit together—and that's no joke.[202]

Put differently, Augustine resists the temptation of pleasures 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 pleasurable distractions but pursued them errantly because he lacked the pivotal sense of direction by which those enjoyments would appear as a perversion from his road to recovery. 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." Instead, his life was an anthology of stand-alone episodes "whose order I do not understand . . . storms of incoherent events."[203]

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

[202] 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). See, Oceanfront Recovery, "What is the Deal with Bowel Incontinence Problems and Substance Abuse?" (2019); Sunrise House Treatment Center, "Renal and Urinary System Issues Caused by Substance Abuse" (2020)

[203] I use contemporary television vocabulary to highlight the connection Augustine identifies between entertainment and distension. Within television show formats, there is the "series," wherein each episode connects with the others 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), strangely making it a near synonym to 'daisy-chain', which is my other image for Augustine's distension.

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 unwinds. Put differently, it takes time for the recovering addict's resolve against temptation to free him from the hold of the old days. Thus, recovery demands a particular type of vigilance whereby past, present, and future are co-implicated in a meaningful thread. "Keep watch over your heart!" (Prov. 4:23). Always on the watch, the recovering addict must continually 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 him going (*Confessiones*, book XI, chapter 29, section 39). 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.[204] The addict, who is never recover*ed*, but always recover*ing*, must have terminal determination. Without a solution to addiction, all we have is resoluteness. The always outstanding goal of recovery gives him something to hang on to: "Even if your last day does not find you victorious, at least let it find you still fighting, not surrendered and addicted" (*Sermo 22*).[205] In Marion's words, "the recovery that follows conversion is accomplished only

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[204] AA co-founder Bill Wilson similarly insists that the recovering addict cannot let go of their past but must ironically maintain a grip on it in order to move forward: "The first impulse will be to bury your skeletons in a dark closet and padlock the door. The family may be possessed by the idea that future happiness can be based only on the forgetfulness of the past. We think that such a view is self-centered and in direct conflict with the new way of living" (123-23). By keeping the past present in awareness, the recovering addict ushers their progress onward. In this way, "the dark past becomes the greatest possession you have—the key to life and happiness." The incorporation of the past into the progress of recovery, Wilson calls "the miracle of reconciliation" (124).

[205] Augustine, "Sermon 22" in *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Volume 2: Sermons 20-50*.

'*quotidianis accessibus*' (by daily advances), '*de die in diem proficiendo*' (progressing from day to day)" (*In the Self's Place*, 146).[206]

Recovering from addiction means taking steps to be able to have the time of your life without being strung-out. Rather than remaining distended, recovery inaugurates a timeline that strings together one's past, present, and future in a meaningful history, across which time plays itself out as progression towards the end. As opposed to addiction's incoherent distension, the tenacity of recovery comes with a new experience of temporality that Augustine calls "extension" or "reaching-out." Rather than being "pulled apart in distraction" by grasping at straws for happiness in "things which are transitory," he "extends in reach" to the enjoyment of the God, which "neither comes nor goes."[207] Augustine shares his experience of recovery with other addicts in a sermon late in his career:

> Before we cling to the One, we are in need of many things. Either we are extended towards the One, or we are distended among the many . . . The One God, you see, pulls us forward rather than pulling us apart. Many things pull you side to side, but only the One pulls you dead ahead. And for how many days does He go on pulling you ahead? As long as we are here. When we arrive at the end, He gathers us in . . . So when we arrive, we will enjoy the One, and this One will be all for us (*Sermo 255*).

Extension towards this end demands that Augustine resist the tempting enjoyments of earthly things, which are always a distraction from his true goal.

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[206] Marion cites Augustine, *On the Trinity*, book XIV, chapter 17, section 23. *One day at a time* is a foundational AA slogan, and it appears numerous times in *The Big Book*. One anonymous alcoholic reports the following anecdote in the initial stages of his recovery: "I remember telling these [AA] members that this program they outlined sounded like just what I needed, but I didn't think I could stay sober for the rest of my life . . . They suggested I could just stay sober one day at a time. They explained that it might be easier to set my sights on the twenty-four hours in front of me . . . I decided to give sobriety a try, one day at a time, and I've done it ever since." Augustine recovers, in his own words, *quotidianis accessibus*—one day at a time.

[207] Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 29, 39. Citing Phil. 3:13.

If, as we say, time flies when you're having fun, then Augustine's extended resistance to enjoying the world transforms his experience of time. By resisting enjoyment, time no longer flies by him; instead, he tries to fly through time, hastening his way to the end he attempts to reach. In other words, reaching out towards the end reconstitutes time as a quasi-spatial expanse—just like the "strange country" of his metaphor—through which he must progress for him to become "happy without end" (*Confessiones*, book IX, chapter 3, section 6). In this way, the recovering addict "does time" in the double sense that he ongoingly enacts the progress of his life by indefinitely resisting temptation, and yet, in so doing, creates a life of indefinite awaiting or expectation, like a resident of purgatory. By holding the past at a distance and reaching out for the future—thus rendering his life coherent—the recovering addict puts time in motion as pro-gress, a forward march. "Let no one tell me then that time is the movements of the heavenly bodies . . . time is some kind of extension" (*Confessiones*, book XI, chapter 23, section 30). Augustine himself, extending towards recovery, becomes the measure of time: "So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time":

> 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 (*Confessiones*, book XI, chapter 27-28).

Augustine plays tug-of-war with his addiction, tenaciously resisting the pull of his past, he pulls the future of recovery towards him, trying with haste to reach the bitter

end of life as an addict.[208] According to this recovery program, you will be cured of your condition only by reaching the end of 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, on some level, 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!" (*Confessiones*, book X, chapter 40,s ection 65).

Recovery transforms the time of one's life into a meantime. When one lives *now* only in the mode of reaching 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 what you're looking forward to arrives. As such, it has the qualities of being inferior, shabby, and foul compared to the ideal for which one is reaching out. As Søren Kierkegaard, an Augustinian Christian himself, says, "The indefinite as-long-as-it-takes-until has something curiously corrupting about it."[209] 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!" (*Confessiones*, book II, chapter 2, section 2). For the recovering addict, who continually resists temporal temptations and suffers withdrawals for the sake of eternal enjoyment, life is a perpetual *fructus interruptus*—an enjoyment that remains incomplete.[210] Aptly, Marion translates

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[208] In desmology (the study of knot-tying) *bitter end* is a technical term denoting the end opposite the end currently in hand.

[209] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. and trans. Alastair Hannay. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2009. 282.

[210] Nicolas Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love" in *Augustine's Confessions: Critical Essays*. Ed. William E. Mann. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 111: "Has Augustine not overlooked the fact that to resist enjoyment is to open oneself to a new mode of grief? . . . The experience of the saints through the ages is the experience of the presence of God interrupted."

Augustine's *extensio* not as extension, or reaching out, but as extraction, pulling-out, or withdrawal.[211] While recovering addicts suffer from these withdrawals, it is nevertheless the only healthy way to live in the world with this disease of the will. The recovering addict trades the irregular beatings of a broken heart for the consistent frustration of withheld desire.

But what is a heart without its ups and downs? Flatlined. The recovery of conversion does not offer a recovery *from* addiction as such but merely a transference of its object from the finite to the infinite. The substance of God is just something else to give oneself over to, not a releasement from addiction but a transference of ownership from the mortal material to the eternal paternal. The Augustinian recovery program discards any possibility of human independence for the more modest goal of 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 induces a kind of heart failure, but heart failure is precisely what he desired, since, according to his theology, love for the world is an enslaving disease.

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[211] "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).

## Chapter 5

## *ADDICTIO AD ABSURDUM*

Augustine's theology of addiction both indexes and perpetuates a deep ambivalence in Latin Christianity's conception of the sinful human condition and, as a result, the means of our salvation. Despite being free to do what we want, we cannot control ourselves. Better yet, and paradoxically still, we cannot control ourselves *because* we are free to do what we want. Our freedom of will does not afford us total self-control, because, in our state of sin, we are dispossessed of ourselves. We are held in shares by the world's many claimants—the people, places, and things that solicit our attention at every turn and turn us away from God. Augustine articulates these phenomenological insights about human self-dispossession and the cooperative ownership of the free will through the Roman legal metaphor of addiction, which casts our composite selfhood as delinquency and disease. We sinners are not slaves; we are addicts—individually at fault for the bondage we opt into for the sake of short term enjoyment. Augustine describes the condition of addiction as both delinquency and disease to account for the

ambivalence in the doctrine of sin that he inherits from Tertullian, Ambrose, and others: Sin is both voluntarily committed (like a crime) yet generationally inherited (like a disease). Augustine's catachresis suggests that we addicts are individually at fault for the disease we are born with.

Sometimes Augustine stays true to the metaphor's financial ground and describes addiction as debt-bondage. As Ambrose first formulated, we humans borrowed the knowledge of good and evil from the Devil, and while this predatory loan afforded us short term freedom, it ultimately resulted in our becoming addicted to the Devil, whose will we now serve. Hence, we need God the Good Merchant to redeem our debt and save us from this addiction, in the Roman legal sense of the term. At other times, though, Augustine describes addiction as a disease of the will. Also drawing on Ambrose and in contrast to Pelagius, Augustine teaches that Adam and Eve pass on a birth defect, inaugurated by God's mortal curse, that inhibits our ability to choose what's good for us. In this way, our freedom to do as we want works against us. Our mercurial wants pull us in many directions at once, and we cannot, with broken wills, pull ourselves together. Thus infirmed, we rely on God the Physician to heal our broken wills, so that we may gather ourselves out of the temporary distraction of worldly pleasure and concentratedly work towards the lasting happiness of God's love.

This ambivalence within Augustine's own corpus—whether our bad deeds are best conceived as individual debts or as symptoms of a social disease and, hence, whether justice requires payback or rehabilitation—produces a corresponding split among his theological inheritors, who emphasize different sides of Augustine. After Augustine, some Latin theologians, such Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of

Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas, tend to side with the delinquency theory of addiction, while others, like Peter Abelard, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, emphasize the medical. However, this divergence within the Latin tradition does not mark a clean dichotomy, because even theologians who emphasize self-possession, willful delinquency, and individual accountability do not fully renounce the disease concept of sin. Likewise, theologians who foreground the ideas that we are diseased, dispossessed of ourselves, and thus not individually accountable for our misdeeds, they do not abandon the pecuniary framework of redemption either. Thus, while there is an unambiguous debate about which side to emphasize—accountability or healing—contending parties on both sides remain ambivalent about their own positions, because Augustine's conflation of disease and delinquency, which derives from the oxymoronic doctrine of original sin itself, remains irrefutable.

These competing lines of emphasis in the conceptualization of addiction creates important Christological and ecclesiological consequences that help catalyze the Reformation. For those who prefer the delinquency concept of addiction, Christ represents the Redeemer. For those who opt for the disease concept of addiction, He works as a Healer. Accordingly, insofar as sin is delinquency, the Church operates like a fiduciary corporation that facilitates the redemptive transactions among God, the Devil, and his addicts. However, insofar as sin is disease, the Church offers a fellowship for the infirmed. To be clear, neither Catholic nor Protestant theologians renounce either side of the disease-delinquency ambivalence. Although Catholic thinkers tend to think in terms of delinquency and redemption, they also employ medical metaphors. Likewise, in the reverse, Protestant thinkers acknowledge that we are indebted to God; however, they believe that Christ *already* redeemed us, such

that we no longer must make penitential payments to God. The debate about addiction between Catholics and Protestants is thus not a clean dichotomy but a conflict over theological emphases and their ecclesiological consequences. It has long been known that the Reformation formed around these arguments about the means of salvation—penitent payback or divine rehabilitation—but what has been obscured is the fact that these theological conflicts revolved around the disease-delinquency ambiguity of addiction itself.

Medieval and Reformation theologians debated strikingly familiar questions: Is addiction a willful crime or a congenital disease? Does justice demand payback or rehabilitation? Do addicts belong in penitentiaries or hospitals? In this chapter, I show how four important medieval theologians differently appropriated Augustine's ambivalent theology of addiction to demonstrate how competing conceptions of addiction animated the debates over Christian selfhood, God's grace, and the Church's role in salvation that helped precipitate the Reformation. Tracing a centuries-long debate about free will and the nature of sin among Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas, I demonstrate how the Latin theological tradition struggles within itself between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries to resolve the disease-delinquency concept of addiction.

## § 23 – Anselm of Canterbury: Self-Theft and the Unpayable Debt

Anselm (1033 - 1109), known as the Father of Scholasticism—the school of thought that dominated medieval European universities—was a devoted reader of

Augustine, whose many texts had been meticulously preserved and widely proliferated through generations of transcription.[212] As such, Anselm inherited the conceptual paradoxes articulated by the Bishop of Hippo, and he devoted much of his own prolific theological career to deciphering the puzzles within Augustine's thought.[213] As we have seen in the preceding chapters, foremost among the Augustinian aporias is the paradox of the addict's free will: We are free, but we cannot control ourselves. Anselm gives his own account of addiction in his Parable of the Bird, translated here in its entirety:

> One time, there was a boy out in the road playing with a bird, whose foot he had tied by a string. Often, when the boy put slack in the line and the bird was able to fly freely, the bird—wanting to visit the fig tree—would try to fly away. However, holding the line in his hand, the boy would draw the bound bird back. This spectacle delighted the boy. One time, though, the string broke and the bird flew away. The boy lamented, but the boy's father rejoiced.
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> Calling together those who had witnessed what happened, the father asked, "Have you all reflected on my child's amusement?" Acknowledging that he himself had been pondering it, the father said that the boy was playing with the bird similarly to how the Devil plays with people. Having caught men in his snare, the Devil drags them to and from various vices according to his will [*pro sua voluntate*]. Indeed, there are many of us—to put it lightly—who are

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[212] See Clemens Weidmann, "Augustine's Works in Circulation" in *A Companion to Augustine*, 429-449. Ed., Mark Vessey. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012.

[213] Historians of theology Thomas Williams explains that "Anselm was deeply indebted to Augustine, so it is not surprising to find Anselm rehearsing standard features of Augustine's account of evil . . . the appeal to free choice as the origin of moral evil, and the claim that human suffering is justified punishment for the sin of our first parents." However, Williams clarifies that, although "many scholars treat Anselm's account of evil as little more than a recapitulation of Augustine's," Anselm does not merely repeat Augustine's ideas, but appropriates Augustine's concepts in his own way to resolve the problems he sees within the Augustinian framework (Williams, "Anselm" in *The History of Evil in the Medieval Age* Volume 2, 121-134. Ed., Andrew Pinsent. London: Routledge, 2018.

> burning with the flames of greed, lust, and the like, and, because of bad habits, they are addicted [*ex mala consuetudine addicti*].
>
> Occasionally, these people weep when they consider what they have done, and afterwards they promise to stop doing such things, and—like the ensnared bird—they try to fly away. However, because they are on the Devil's leash, with all his bad intentions, he pulls them back into the same vices—unwilling [*nolentes*] as they might be to return. This happens often. They cannot be liberated unless, through great effort on their own part as well as the grace of God, the rope of bad habit is broken [*Nec omnimode liberantur, nisi magno conatu et gratia Dei funis rumpatur pravae consuetudinis*] (*De Similitudinibus*, chapter 190).[214]

As in Augustine, the phenomenon of addiction poses an imbricated array of theological questions. First, how did we manage to get ourselves into the Devil's possession in the first place? Second, with the limited freedom that we nevertheless possess, what can we conceivably do on our own behalf to free ourselves from addiction? Third, what role does God play in our liberation?

Anselm's writings attempt to resolve these three questions about addiction strictly within the financial language and logic that the Roman metaphor itself provides. He tries to untangle the conceptual problems he inherits from Augustinian theology by excluding the disease concept of addiction and developing, instead, an unalloyed financial account of sin and salvation. Anselm, by refusing to conceive of addiction as a congenital disease of the will, maintains a greater optimism in the efficacy of human willpower and, hence, our ability to emancipate ourselves.

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[214] Anselm, *De Similitudinibus*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLIX: Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia, Tomus Secundus*, 605-708, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1854.

Anselm's optimism here, however, coheres with an exacting ethos of personal accountability. If every individual's will is free and capable to make good choices—rather than congenitally diseased—then anyone's addiction is their own fault alone. Anselm's insistence that our bad deeds are not symptoms of a congenital disease but, rather, expressions of our individual wills inclines him to deemphasize forgiveness and healing for the sake of recompense and penitence. This section works through Anselm's understanding of sin, salvation, and the renewed confidence in the will to show how the crime concept of addiction reinforces the ideal of self-possession.

He clarifies the Augustinian account of sin and salvation by, first, revising the addiction metaphor originally suggested by Tertullian and then formalized in Ambrose. In Ambrose, recall, Adam and Eve borrowed the knowledge of good and evil from the Devil; unable to repay this predatory loan, humanity became the Devil's addicts. God, then, pays in blood to redeem delinquent humanity from their addiction to the Devil. Thus redeemed, humanity then gratefully repays God in kind through penitent obedience to his rule. Anselm accepts the financial terms of this soteriological framework, but he deconstructs the addiction metaphor by asking a basic legal question: "Did the Devil have any rightful claim against either God or man that obligated God to act against him on humankind's behalf in this manner" (*Meditatio XI*).[215] In other words, Anselm questions if the Devil had legal standing, such that he and humanity could have together authorized a legitimate loan contract (*nexum*) in the first place.

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[215] Anselm, *Meditationum et Orationum*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLVIII: Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia, Tomus Primus*, 709-820, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1846.

The Archbishop of Canterbury turns the metaphor's legal logic against itself in order to revise and clarify it. If the Devil has no legal standing, then his loan would not be valid, and he would not be entitled to compensation for human delinquency through their addiction to him. Further, if humanity was not rightfully addicted to the Devil, then God did not need to redeem them from the Devil's possession. Nothing would have been owed to the Devil. Anselm insists, "To be sure, God did not owe the Devil anything except punishment; neither did humankind owe the Devil anything" (*Meditatio XI*). Therefore, "the Devil had no claim that obligated God" to liberate humanity from his ownership specifically through redemption (*Meditatio XI*). In short, Anselm argued that the Ambrosian-Augustinian addiction metaphor—otherwise known as the Ransom Theory of Atonement—was not theologically tenable because it granted legal standing and hence property rights to the Devil.

By contrast, Anselm asserts that neither the Devil nor even humankind enjoys any legal standing in God's Kingdom, because, as God's creations, they are his property. "Neither the Devil nor man belongs to anyone except God," he says (*Meditatio XI*). This alternative legal starting point allows Anselm to rethink original sin itself. Original sin was not an ill-advised loan; it was an act of self-theft. He contends that the autonomy enjoyed by both the Devil and humankind is akin to the legally fraudulent freedom of a runaway addict. He explains that the Devil absconded from his rightful servitude to God, and, once escaped, he also tempted Adam and Eve to run away as well:

> One of God's servants . . . persuaded a fellow servant to forsake their common Owner and to come over to him instead. He [the Devil] received this fugitive

> [humankind] as one thief receives another thief. Both of them were thieves, since under the persuasion of the one, the other stole himself from his Owner (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 7).[216]

In this way, Anselm revises the original addiction metaphor by identifying God as the defrauded party rather than the Devil. Humans remain delinquent debtors, but to God, who has loaned them their very being. Rather than falling from Eden, in Anselm's telling, Adam and Eve stole (themselves) away from the ownership of God and addicted themselves to the Devil as payback for the false freedom he gave us beyond God's dominion. Thus, the Devil owns us in the same way a thief owns their plunder—fraudulently. This diabolical self-dispossession, says Anselm, persists across generations, from Adam and Eve through us today.

In one of Anselm's final treatises devoted specifically to articulating theological doctrines in terms of everyday similes, entitled *De Similitudinibus* [*On Likenesses*], Anselm likens the self-stealing impropriety of the human condition to a matrimonial affair:

> The will . . . is caught between God and the Devil in the same way a woman might be in between her lawful husband and an adulterer. Her husband orders her to have intercourse with him alone, but the adulterer persuades her to have sex with him instead. If the woman gives herself to her legitimate husband, she is legitimate and bears legitimate children. However, if she has intercourse with the adulterer, she is an adulteress, and she gives birth to illegitimate children (*De Similitudinibus*, chapter 2).

Anselm's matrimonial metaphor articulates the same proprietary concern. We are God's property, yet we have wrongfully assumed self-ownership by making a

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[216] Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLVIII: Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia, Tomus Primus*, 359-430, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1846.

decision to remove ourselves from his command and to give ourselves, instead, to an illegitimate proprietor, the Devil. We stole ourselves from God and then compounded our crime by giving our stolen selves away to a second runaway.

Since God is the rightful owner of all created beings—the sole-proprietor of creation itself—he is the only party in the entire cosmos who could be defrauded of his due. But what is due to God by his creatures? Or, in Anselm's terms, "What is the debt that we owe to God?" Anselm, echoing an argument in Tertullian, teaches that God has temporarily loaned us our very being, so we owe our selves themselves back to God. "O Lord, because you created me, I owe my entire self [*debeo meipsum totum*] . . . The whole of what I am belongs to you as Creator [*totum quod sum, tuum est conditione, fac totum tuum*]" (*Meditatio XI*). According to Anselm, we must repay God for the being he loaned us by surrendering our wills to him. "The will of every rational creature ought to subordinate itself to the will of God . . . This is the debt that angels and men owe to God" (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 11). By disobeying God's command in the Garden of Eden not to eat the fruit of the tree, Adam and Eve defrauded God of his due obedience. By acting from their "own will" [*propria voluntate*], they assumed fraudulent ownership over themselves, which in turn they signed away to the Devil, who has become our fraudulent proprietor. In this way, Anselm crucially acknowledges the way in which human beings do possess themselves by virtue of their own free will; however, he distinguishes between self-possession and self-ownership. That is to say, because God gave us ourselves, we do *have* ourselves in some significant sense, but we are not our own rightful owners, because we have ourselves on loan from God, our owner.

Anselm argues, then, that humanity faces a twofold debt. First, we owe God our wills for the principal loan of life itself; second, we accrue compounding penalties each time we act against his commandments—that is, according to the Devil's will—and thus further defraud him of the principal due. In Anselm's formulation, "Sinning means not giving God what we owe him," and "we owe compensation in proportion to the measure of the sins" (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 11). To repay the principal loan of life itself, we must obey God's commandments. To pay for penalties that accrue when we obey the diabolical desires that possess us and thus fail to make payments on the principal, we must make further compensation through acts of penitence, which, beyond basic obedience to God's commandments, include "fasting, a variety of physical toils, almsgiving, and forgiving" (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 20). Furthermore, Anselm continues, because we have stolen what was loaned to us—that is, ourselves—we owe God not only (1) the principal debt and (2) the compounding penalties, but also we owe God (3) for the dishonor of the theft itself, or, in today's legal language, we owe God for his "pain and suffering":

> As long as man does not repay what he has stolen, he remains in debt. But it is not enough for him merely to repay what has been stolen; rather, because of the wrong which has been inflicted, man ought to repay *more* than he has stolen. For example, if someone who injures another's health restores it, this restoration itself is insufficient payment, unless he also gives some further compensation for the painful wrong that was inflicted (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 11).

Ultimately, humanity owes God on three fronts: the principal, the penalties, and compensatory damages. By birth, we incur the first; by sin, we stack up the second; and from original sin we inherit third.

However, if the principal debt owed already requires one's *entire being*, then how could the penalties and compensatory damages possibly be paid on top of that? Anselm himself points out, "I owe more than my entire self, but I have no more than my entire self to give" (*Meditatio XI*). In effect, we owe God more than we're worth, so we face an impossible debt. Moreover, because we have signed ourselves over to the Devil's possession, we cannot even begin making payments on the principal, much less on the penalties and damages. As Anselm confesses, "I owe more than my entire self, but I have no more than my entire self to give, and *of what self I do possess, I can't even manage to give all of that*" (*Meditatio XI*). While we owe our wills to God, we have already given them over to the Devil, who in turn has parted out our wills to the various carnal desires that possess us. Even if we miraculously managed to give our entire wills to God, we would still owe the penalties and damages.

Given the extent of human delinquency and our resulting spiritual insolvency, God cannot recuperate his principal loan, the penalties, or the damages. Anselm asks, then, whether God could simply forgive the debts, since they are unpayable in the first place. However, he quickly concludes that debt forgiveness is incompatible with God's justice. "To forgive sin out of mercy alone apart from any repayment of debts would mean letting it go unpunished. But if there is no repayment for sin, then punishment is the only way to bring sin to justice," and there can be no injustice in God's kingdom. In other words, the debt of sin demands either repayment or

punishment; in either case, there is no justice without payback, and there must be justice. "Believe most assuredly," Anselm therefore insists, "that without compensation, God cannot forgive unpunished sin" (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 19). However, not even a lifetime of good works would be enough to compensate for our debts. Thus, we warrant the retribution reserved for those addicts so destitute that even their debt-bound labor is not enough to compensate for the creditor's losses: capital punishment. As Anselm explains, "If man had never sinned . . . man would not have to die" (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 2, chapter 2).[217] Because God's justice forecloses the possibility of debt-forgiveness, and humans cannot possibly repay God everything they owe, the only just option is that we be put to death for incurring debts beyond what we're good for. However, merciful as he is, God implements a debt-buyback, which is to say, a redemption.

Anselm argues that Christ pays with his life to remit the penalties and damages that we owe but cannot possibly pay:

> Compensation for sin requires that the sinner, or someone on his behalf, gives to God something of their own that is not already owed—something that exceeds . . . However, humankind by itself could not make this payment, and without the required compensation, humankind could not be forgiven, lest divine justice let sin go unpunished. Therefore . . . the Son of God became human . . . and while he himself owed nothing, he paid this sum for others who did not have what they were indebted to repay . . . Thus, this Man

[217] Anselm's claim tracks with the Twelve Tables addiction statute. As the Roman chronicler Gellius explains, after an addiction, the addict has an allotted time to work off the debt he owes through debt-bound labor. If, however, the defrauded creditor deems the addict's labor inadequately compensatory, then the addict is put to death. As Gellius notes, "To make good faith in credit sacred . . . they made capital punishment dreadful by a display of cruelty and fearful by unheard terrors" (*Noctes Atticae*, 20. 1. 28-52. Anselm appears to have been trained in classical law. For a study of his educational background, see R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in Landscape*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

redeemed all other humans, since God counted what he gratuitously gave as compensation for the debts all other people owed (*Meditatio XI*).

Anselm's explanation of salvation rehearses the redemption provision of Table III. Either the addict can compensate for their unpaid debts through addicted servitude, or a third party can redeem them, which is to say, step in and pay the addict's debt on their behalf. Christ is the Redeemer because we are addicts. To help readers understand the logic of salvation, Anselm makes a point to call attention to the legal metaphor: "What especially astounds unbelievers is that we call our liberation *redemption*. Indeed, they ask, 'In what captivity, in which prison, under whose power were you being held, from which God could free you only by redeeming you . . . through his own blood?'" Anselm answers "God has redeemed us from sins and from His own wrath and from Hell" (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 6). Because of our delinquency, God had condemned us to the gruesome capital punishment reserved for the most abject addicts, but Christ stepped in to redeem us.

Christ paid with his life to cover the penalties and damages we owe God so that we could be spared capital punishment; however, Anselm stresses, we remain responsible for paying back the principal itself. In other words, Christ paid the excess debts that we never would have been able to work off on our own, but his redemption does not entirely annul our debt to God, for it remains our responsibility to give ourselves back to God for the loan of life itself. Redemption is therefore necessary but insufficient for salvation, which requires our settling accounts with God by paying back the principal—that is, by submitting our wills to God. However, as Anselm has already acknowledged, paying back the principal by submitting our wills entirely to God is nearly impossible in its own right, since we have already given

ourselves over to the Devil. Even having been redeemed and thus exempted from the penalties and damages due, we remain delinquents, given our inability to make payments even on the principal. Anselm thus asks, "If we are unable to pay, then how are we culpable for not paying?" (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 24). To maintain humanity's culpability for sin, despite our apparent inability *not* to sin, Anselm resorts back to the definition of addiction as voluntary enslavement:

> Humankind is blameworthy for not having the ability . . . to avoid sin . . . for we freely did that thing because of which we lost this ability and came into our state of inability [*impotentiam*]. Therefore, our inability to pay God what we owe—an inability that is the reason for our nonpayment—does not excuse us when we fail to make payments (*Cur Deus Homo*, book 1, chapter 24).

While addicts genuinely cannot help but behave in ways that harm themselves and others, they are nevertheless accountable for their compulsive actions, because their present compulsion is itself the result of past voluntary choices. According to this logic outlined by Anselm, addicts must be held criminally accountable for their inability to control themselves.

While Anselm's insistence that we bear individual responsibility for our actions despite our inability to control ourselves seems harsh, this punitive aspect of his theology nevertheless evinces a confidence in human willpower that diverges markedly from the Augustinian analysis of addiction. By denying the traditional presupposition that the Devil has some rightful claim over us, Anselm concludes that our apparent inability to resist his will—that is, our carnal desires—is more the product of habitual submission than metaphysical bondage. In other words, if the Devil had legitimate property rights, then he would outright own our wills, and we

would indeed be helplessly bound. However, he contends, the Devil does not actually own us. Furthermore, he discounts the idea that we suffer some congenital disability of the will that renders us constitutively unable to get a hold of ourselves. Instead, Anselm argues that by habitually submitting to the Devil's will voluntarily, we have created the illusion of self-dispossession and disempowerment, when, in fact, we retain a degree of willpower to remove ourselves from his grip. As he remarked in his Parable of a Bird, "because of bad habits, we are addicted." In Anselm's view, *addiction* is shorthand for breakable bad habits.

In Anselm's own treatise on freedom of will, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, he discusses this exact matter with a student, who questions Anselm's doctrine of individual accountability.[218] Anselm teaches the student that what is true of Adam and Eve is true for all of us: "Although they subjected themselves to sin, they were not able to destroy their natural freedom of choice" (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, chapter 3). Thus, he argues, while we are indeed addicted to sin, we retain enough willpower to resist its temptation. Anselm's student, however, hesitates to accept this claim, saying, "I must insist that in our will there is a powerlessness that nearly all of us experience when we are overcome by irresistible temptation." The student then challenges Ambrose to "reconcile the willpower you claim we have with the powerlessness I know we feel (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, chapter 6). Anselm, in response, questions the student's phenomenological reflection on temptation and the will. "In what way does temptation force the will to will?" Anselm asks. "Does temptation compel the will in such a way that the will could resist, although with great difficulty,

[218] Anselm, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, in *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia, Volumen Primum*, 201-226, ed., Francis Schmitt. Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946. For Anselm's other discussions of the will, see *Liber de Voluntate*, *Dialogus de Libero Arbitrio*, and *Liber de Voluntate Dei* in *Patrologiae Latinae Tomus CLVIII*.

or in such a way that the will is completely unable to restrain itself?" (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, chapter 6). The student admits that temptation, as such, is not compulsion, and therefore, in theory, anyone could just say no [*nolle*], no matter the temptation.

With this admission, Anselm admonishes the student for his pessimism about the power of the human will and his exaggerated sense of helplessness:

> We are accustomed to saying that we *cannot* do something *not* because the thing is actually impossible for us to do, but because it is very difficult. However, this difficulty does not destroy freedom of will. It challenges the will, but it does not conquer it unless the will consents to be conquered. In this way, I think that you are able to see how our willpower is consistent with the "powerlessness" that our human nature feels. Just as difficulty does not at all destroy freedom of will, so this powerlessness—which is really just the difficulty—does not remove the will's ability to persevere in doing what's right (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, chapter 6).

Anselm acknowledges that we are indeed "slaves to sin" and yet doggedly maintains that we are nevertheless free to choose our own actions. "We are both enslaved and free, without contradiction," he insists (*De Libertate Arbitrii*, chapter 11). Reflecting on Anselm's paradoxical claim, the student asks for further clarification "If, then, we are enslaved, then how are we free? Or, if we are free, then how are we enslaved?" This is the paradox of addiction itself—the coexistence of freedom and enslavement. According to Anselm, because we became addicts voluntarily in the first place by habitually making bad decisions to sin, we retain enough willpower to resist sin's temptation, even in our state of disability, which is really just difficulty.

Anselm wants to acknowledge the feelings of entrapment, but he refuses to erase individual self-possession by admitting that we addicts actually cannot control

ourselves. As he teaches in his parable, “through great effort [*magno conatu*]" on our own part, we can work to "break the rope of bad habit." Anselm's conclusion that we "always have the ability to do the right thing, even though it is sometimes difficult," raises the same question at the core of the ancient Pelagian controversy: But what about God's grace? While Anselm believes in human willpower more than Augustine, he does admit that we need outside help to escape addiction. While we are *capable* of breaking our bad habits because our wills are irreducibly free, we often fail to do so, he argues, because we do not know how.

In a subsequent work, *De Concordia Gratia Dei cum Libero Arbitrio* [*On the Harmony between God's Grace and Free Choice*], Anselm says that "having shown how a free will is not bound by any necessity to abandon what's right but is only burdened by the difficulty of doing it," he will now demonstrate how grace assists our liberation. "To be sure, no one can do what is right without willing it; however, no one can will what's right without knowing it, and the only way anyone knows what is right is by means of grace" (*De Concordia*, controversy 3, chapter 4).[219] Anselm points out that willpower is worthless for salvation unless the mind understands what is right to will; likewise, "understanding is worthless unless the will wills what the mind understands" (*De Concordia*, controversy 3, chapter 4). We must know what to do and be willing to do it before we can work effectively to free ourselves. We know what is right only by virtue of God's grace, but actually doing the right thing is our own responsibility. In this way, God's grace and free will cooperate in our

[219] Anselm, *Tractatus de Concordia Praescientiae et Praedestinationis Nec Non Gratiae Dei cum Libero Arbitrio*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLVIII: Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia, Tomus Primus*, 507-540, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1864.

liberation. We cannot break bad habits except through the know-how that God graciously gives us in conjunction with the willpower that we individually muster.

Breaking the rope of bad habit, freeing ourselves from addiction, and escaping the Devil's grip—all of which we can accomplish with goodwill and God's help—involve a process of self-reclamation. God has given us ourselves, and although he remains our rightful owners, we do enjoy the self-possession afforded us by God's loan. However, we have been delinquent with our loan, and rather than giving ourselves back to God, we have given ourselves away to the pleasures to which we are addicted. If we are to begin paying back the principal debt, then as a preliminary step we must first repossess ourselves from the many worldly claimants to which we have loaned ourselves out. In this way, although we ultimately owe ourselves to God, this very debt demands that we strive to recollect ourselves, if only as an intermediary stage that allows us, at last, to give ourselves fully back to our Creditor. At the core of Anselm's financial account of the human condition, there lies an important distinction: We possess ourselves insofar as we have free will to make our own decisions, but we do not own ourselves, because this possession that we enjoy—that is, ourselves—is ultimately a loan from God that must be rendered back to him. Thus, we must exercise our free wills to repossess ourselves from the many worldly parties that we have given ourselves over to, struggle to maintain possession of ourselves from those who continually try to possess us, and progressively give ourselves back to God, who owns us. We cannot give to God what we ourselves do not possess, so self-possession plays a critical role in Anselm's proprietary theology, even though he insists that we are not our own. In this way, Anselm does affirm the ideal of the self-possessed individual even as he insists that we do not own

ourselves.[220] We can see, thus, how Anselm's theology both conveys the Roman notion of the self-possessed and individually accountable legal subject even as he undoes it by refuting the idea that anyone is their own because they belong to God alone.

### § 24 – Peter Abelard: The Disease Concept Revived

Peter Abelard (1070 - 1142), credited as the founder of the modern secular university, was a veritable intellectual celebrity during his lifetime.[221] Both despised and revered for his revolutionary philosophical and theological ideas—above all, his denial of universal truth and his theory of nominalism—Abelard gave popular public lectures in and around Paris for most of his career, attracting philosophical converts from all over Western Europe. In this section, I read Abelard's theological and philosophical treatises together to show how he developed the disease concept of addiction. Based on his unorthodox radicalization of Augustine, Abelard advanced a theory of addiction that denied the propriety of the free will, challenged the very notion of individual accountability, and refuted redemptive accounts of salvation.

In initial agreement with Anselm's novel revision of atonement, Abelard also argued against the Patristic theology of redemption, which described humanity as

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[220] It is not lost on Anselm that the righteous activity of self-repossession therefore poses just as much danger as addiction's delinquent self-dispossession. As we slowly and successfully repossess ourselves from what we're addicted to, the fantasy that we are our own can start to sneak back in. Theologically speaking, *pride* is the shorthand for this fantasy of self-ownership—a predicament just as deadly as addiction because it thwarts the process of payback midway.
[221] For the most comprehensive account of Abelard's role in the development of the university, see Gabriel Compayré, *Abelard and the Origin and Early History of Universities*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902. For Abelard's own account of his academic celebrity, see his autobiography, *Historia Calamitatum: The Story of My Misfortunes*, trans., Henry Adams Bellows. New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1922.

debt-bound to the Devil and redeemed by Christ. In an essay titled after Anselm's famous work, *Cur Deus Homo*, Abelard acknowledges the traditional theory of addiction:

> Some say that we have been redeemed from the ownership of the Devil, who, by deceiving Adam, subjected humankind to himself and gained a control over us that he did not originally have. Therefore, these people say, the Son of God was sent so that he could release humankind from the Devil's ownership . . . Without this redemption, it would have been an affront to the Devil, since he rightfully owned humankind, who had indebted itself to him (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 23, "*Cur Deus Homo?*").[222]

Abelard declares, however, that "humankind was never under the ownership of the Devil" (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 23). He argues that Adam and Eve did not knowingly consent to a debt-contract when they took the knowledge of good and evil at the Devil's behest; instead, he tricked them into a predatory loan. Therefore, Abelard says, "the Devil had no rightful claim over humankind to begin with [*diabolus in hominem nullum jus habuerit* " (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 23).

So far, Abelard agrees with Anselm's prior revision of the Patristic theology of addiction: "The Son of God did not come to redeem humankind from the ownership of the Devil, which was never the case" (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter

[222] Peter Abelard, *Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLXXVIII: Petri Abaelardi Opera Omnia, Tomus Unicus*, 1113-1328, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1855. The first published version of Abelard's *Epitome Theologiae*, entitled *Theologia*, was condemned at the Council of Soissons in 1121. Historians of theology have only recently attended in detail to the biographical relationship between Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard. There was a conference held in Stuttgart in the summer of 2004 specifically to elucidate their connections, and its proceedings have been published, including essays in German, French, and English, in *Anselm and Abelard: Investigations and Juxtapositions*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2006. It remains unclear which texts of Anselm's that Abelard would've had access to, but it seems highly likely that he was reading at least *Cur Deus Homo*, especially since his critiques of redemption come in a section titled after Anselm's work.

23). While Anselm identified God rather than the Devil as the defrauded creditor, he nevertheless stridently maintained the traditional language and logic of addiction and redemption to describe the human condition. Abelard, however, pushes this initial point—that the Devil never owned us—in a different direction. He shifts the metaphorical conceptualization of salvation away from its historically financial ground by cautiously denying the idea that Christ should be conceived as a Redeemer at all. In other words, Abelard hesitates to describe humanity's relationship to God as a fiduciary contract, and, by extension, he avoids reducing the saving work of Christ to a financial transaction. Within the Anselmian financial framework, Christ's death pays the penalties and damages of human delinquency, and our individual deeds represent credits or debits of our moral accounts with God. Because we already owe him our lives, even though Christ redeems the penalties and damages, we must strive to pay back his loan with meritorious works. While Anselm believed that humans were capable of making legitimate repayment to God through meritorious labor, Abelard is much more pessimistic about human willpower.

Opposing Anselm's confidence that "we always have the ability to do the right thing," Abelard flatly asserts, "We can do no good on our own," which is to say, we have nothing of value with which to repay God. Abelard goes so far as to say, "It seems to me that there is no such thing as merits to begin with" (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 34). Presuming that we cannot offer anything of value to God such that we could ever settle accounts with him—even with Christ covering the penalties and damages—Abelard suggests that thinking of God as a moneylender who weighs and measures compensation does little to elucidate the human condition, as it overemphasizes the degree to which we possess ourselves. As an

alternative, Abelard offers the other Augustinain simile for the human-divine relationship

> Our situation is more like a sick person with a doctor, who, once he has prepared the medicine, says to the sick person: "Look, this medicine will restore your health, just get up and take it." Yet the sick person is unable to get up, and he even needs the doctor's help to stand up and take the medicine for himself (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 34).

Thinking along these Augustinian lines, Abelard observes that the deeds we do don't always match our intentions. That is to say, our wills suffer some kind of disability; despite being free, we do not enjoy full self-control. Even if the sick person freely wills to get up and take the medicine, their free will alone is not efficacious to accomplish the act. Unlike Anselm, who rejects his student's idea that the human will suffers a genuine disability, Abelard insists that humans are born with "defects that incline the will to do what should not be done and not to do what should be done [*vitia quae voluntatem inclinant ad aliquid quod minime convenit fieri vel dimitti*]" (*Ethica vel Scito te Ipsum*, chapter 1).[223] Rather than interpreting original sin as an inherited debt, he describes it as a congenital sickness of the will. We may *know* what is good for us, but we cannot *just do it*. In this sense, Abelard rejects Anselm's confidence that we do possess ourselves (without being our owners) in that we make our own decisions and control our own behaviors.

While Abelard's preference for the medical over the financial model of salvation suggests that he might avoid the pecuniary term *addictio* altogether, he—like Augustine—does not discard it but continues to use the metaphor

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[223] Peter Abelard, *Ethica seu liber Dictus Scito Te Ipsum*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLXXVIII: Petri Abaelardi Opera Omnia, Tomus Unicus*, 633-676, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1855.

catachretically to describe the congenital birth defect of original sin. Altogether abandoning the creditary account of Adam and Eve's fall from Eden, Abelard narrates Genesis in a novel way, yet he retains the centrality of the term *addiction*:

> The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is identified as the grapevine, because the wine produced from it—whether consumed moderately or immoderately—acquaints people with good and evil . . . Hence it is understood that this is the bitter fruit in whose consumption our primordial father transgressed . . . This interpretation is borne out by the fact that after eating the fruit of the tree, Adam and Eve immediately felt the urge to lust [*senserunt incentiva libidinis*]. Obviously, this is the effect of wine, as it stirs up an excessive degree of desire . . . Ultimately, by indulging, Adam addicted himself and his posterity to the enjoyment of this vine as punishment [*Denique hujus ligni gustum, in quo Adam excedans tam se quam posteros poenae addixit*] (*Exposition in Hexaemeron*, "*Allegoria*").[224]

In Abelard's telling, humanity's self-imposed punishment for original sin is the congenital addiction to intoxication and the bondage to excessive desires it evokes. Since we are born addicts, he explains, we are "inclined by nature itself or by the constitution of our body to overindulgence [*ad luxuriam natura ipsa vel complexio corporis pronos efficit*]"—not just in alcohol specifically, but in all kinds of pleasures. There are compulsive desires within us that we neither choose nor control—desires that, in fact, we often actively despise, yet that overpower our willpower. In short, the passions we are born with outmatch the efficacy of our wills to just say no. As Abelard remarks, "Where there is true passion, there is no volition [*ubi vero est passio, ibi non est voluntas*]" (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 25). In this

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[224] Peter Abelard, *Exposition in Hexaemeron*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLXXVIII: Petri Abaelardi Opera Omnia, Tomus Unicus*, 731-84, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1855.

way, the problem is not that we cannot do what we want; it is that doing what we want is its own kind of ironic bondage of the will because our wants are out of our control, and we are constitutively dispossessed of ourselves.

Abelard thus makes a paradoxical but radical claim: "Owing to the infirmity of our flesh, we are compelled to will what we absolutely do not will to will [*Ex infirmitate carnis velle coguntur quod nequaquam vellent velle*]" (*Ethica vel Scito te Ipsum*, chapter 3). Abelard acknowledges that "freedom of choice means acting under no external compulsion [*nullo extrinsecus cogente*]," and according to this standard definition, the addict does indeed have freedom of choice, because no outside force forces their hand to indulge (*Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, book 2, chapter 5).[225] Nevertheless, they manifestly suffer a strange kind of bondage. The paradox of addiction is that we act under the *internal* compulsion of the inborn passions that possess us. Thus, we manifestly have free choice, since we are not extrinsically forced, but we are undeniably bound by our internal compulsions. Abelard's paradoxical formulation here tries to capture the congenital self-dispossession of the addict—the fact that the addict's will is divided in shares among the inherent desires that collectively possess it. The addict has a free will, but they do not possess it or, therefore, themselves.

His claim echoes Augustine's self-diagnosis: "Unwilling and willing was I; I was at odds with myself and dissociated from myself." To paraphrase Abelard, because we are animated by wants that we did not choose and often even actively detest, we addicts ironically suffer the satisfaction we enjoy despite ourselves. In his

[225] Peter Abelard, *Exposition in Epistolam ad Romanos*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLXXVIII: Petri Abaelardi Opera Omnia, Tomus Unicus*, 784-978, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1855.

most famous philosophical work, *Sic et Non* [*Yes and No*], which synthesizes apparent opposites, he tries to explain this paradox of addiction. Citing Augustine, Abelard reiterates that doing exactly and only what we want is the ironic bondage of addiction, because our wants are beyond our control: "Isn't the addict's only freedom to sin every time he wants to?" (*Sic et Non*, question 56).[226] In this way, addiction is "the enjoyment through which we incur our own punishment" (*Expositio in Hexameron*, "*Allegoria*"). The curse of original sin is that now we addicts act at our own expense by getting what we want. Acting under internal compulsions, we are bound to do what we want despite ourselves.

This congenital disease model of addiction leads Abelard to ask a destabilizing sequence of questions about the Roman legal ground of his tradition—questions that Augustine entertained but refused to carry through. First and foremost, "If we act according to involuntary feelings, how, therefore, can our actions themselves be called 'voluntary'? I certainly have no idea, unless all we mean by 'voluntary' is that our actions were not predetermined but . . . issued from some sort of will" (*Ethica vel Scito te Ipsum*, chapter 3). Abelard's theory of addiction does not push for predeterminism over pure voluntarism; as a middle ground, it asks us to consider the diffuse causality of human behaviors and the disability of the addict to determine and consolidate their own will. Abelard presupposes that every act comes from some will—phenomenologically undeniable—but, sensing that the will is neither internally coherent nor sovereign over itself, he asks us to ponder two questions that Augustine also faced: (1) Why does the will [*voluntas*] will [*vult*] what it wills, sometimes even

[226] Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLXXVIII: Petri Abaelardi Opera Omnia, Tomus Unicus*, 1329-1610, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1855.

unwillingly? (2) How does our answer about the origin and heterogeneity of the will determine how we conceive of individual guilt?

While Augustine ended a similar set of questions in *De Libero Arbitrio* by ultimately insisting that the will is self-causing ("What could be the cause of the will prior to the will itself?"), Abelard radicalizes Augustine's disease concept of addiction and offers the blasphemous thesis that we suffer a congenital compulsion for overindulgence such that our bad deeds cannot be conceived as individual debts but should be seen, instead, as symptoms of a social disease:

> Perhaps you contend that sin is the will to do an evil deed, and that this will to do evil indebts us to God in the same way that the will to do good justifies us . . . But diligent attention will show that we must think far differently about this point . . . We frequently sin without any evil volition at all . . . thus, we should speak of it as an inevitable infirmity rather than as sin [*non tam ipsa peccatum quam infirmitatibus quaedam jam necessaria dici debet*] (*Ethica vel Scito te Ipsum*, chapter 3).

By questioning the conceptual ground of addiction—that people are the sole owners and operators of their own free wills—Abelard undermines the proprietary legal logic that has structured Latin theology for centuries. If, as Abelard claims, "we cannot identify sin with the will [*peccatum est voluntatem non dici*]," then our bad deeds cannot be figured as individual debts (*Ethica vel Scito te Ipsum*, chapter 3). Put differently, if we resist the embedded idea that each individual possesses their will and consider, instead, that the will has a kind of life of its own that paradoxically exceeds the individual's voluntary control, then we will be able to see that a person's deeds—although willful, to be sure—are not exactly their own.

In a key section of *Sic et Non* entitled, "Sometimes We Sin Against Our Own Wills," Abelard cites Augustine himself to walk us through the radical implications of this disease concept of addiction:

> If, like a disease, the defect that we call 'sin' overcomes a victim against their will, then quite rightly the punishment that follows the sinner—that is, damnation—would be seen as unjust . . . Accordingly one either has to deny that sin has been committed or to admit that it has been committed voluntarily . . . If we only do evil involuntarily, then there is no place for either punishing or admonishing people. Eliminate these, and you have to eliminate Christian law and all religious discipline (Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, chapter 14, section 27; cited in *Sic et Non*, question 145).

Here, Augustine only sees two options. Either we think of people's actions as purely voluntary, in which case we can hold individuals personally accountable, or we think of people's actions as purely involuntary, in which case punishment seems absurd. However, Abelard himself—based on his readings of Augustine—shows how the disease concept of addiction gives us a middle way of thinking about agency and, by extension, about justice. He admits that our sinful acts are not foisted upon us from the outside; they are indeed willful. However, he maintains, we addicts do not have full control over our own wills. We do not enjoy the self-possession that Anselm insists we can maintain. Thus, although we act willfully, our actions are not entirely our own, since our will itself exceeds our possession and control.[227] As Augustine himself sees and Abelard highlights, denying self-ownership and the individual accountability that it undergirds shifts Christian theology off its historically Roman

[227] In the same section, Abelard also cites Isidore of Seville's remark in his *On the Greatest Good*: "Most people do not sin willingly but by necessity, fearing destitution during this life." While Isidore does not echo Abelard's idea that bad actions result from internal compulsion, he does suggest a correlated idea, that people's actions are produced by circumstance more so than chosen freely.

legal ground. "Eliminate these, and you have to eliminate Christian law," Abelard ventriloquizes through Augustine. By exhorting us to conceive sins as symptoms of a congenital infirmity rather than as strictly voluntary debts, Abelard encourages us, accordingly, to think of justice outside of financial categories—that is, as rehabilitation rather than payback.

Although Abelard advances a much more passive account of human agency, he nevertheless insists upon some level of individual accountability, because he is not a total determinist. Abelard urges us to internally resist the disease that sickens our will, even if that resistance cannot in and of itself change our behavior. Righteousness, he argues, does not mean mustering the willpower to just do the right thing, as Anselm argued; however, it does demand "striving against our own defects [*vitiis resistendo*], so that our defects do not lure us into a perverse acceptance of them" (*Ethica vel Scito te Ipsum*, chapter 2). Although sin, he says, is an inevitable symptom of our shared birth defect, so long as we do not simply submit to our addiction but persistently struggle within and against ourselves, then even when we willfully err, we will err despite ourselves. In other words, for the addict not to accrue culpability according to Abelard, they must actively—if futilely—resist their diseased will. Thus, Abelard argues that God does not judge our external actions like a creditor evaluating payments. Instead, "God is called the inspector of the guts and the heart [*Deus dicitur scrutator renum et cordium*]," because he sees our internal struggle, even when, inevitably, the good inside us is bested by the bad (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 34). This futile struggle against ourselves is the best we can ask for given our disability; whereas "submission to the defects . . . is degenerative [*vitiorum subjectio . . . deturpat*]" (*Ethica vel Scito te Ipsum*, chapter

2). We are aided in this self-struggle by Christ, who does not save us by paying our debts in blood but, rather, by showing us how to recover.

If Christ is not a Good Merchant who frees us from fiduciary delinquency by helping pay our debt to God but, rather, is a Physician who helps us recover from the pandemic disease of addiction, then the subsequent theological question is: How exactly does Christ heal us? As we have seen, Abelard rejects redemptive accounts of salvation because he refuses to reduce Christ's work to a retributive transaction. In his *Commentary on Romans*, he forcefully argues against this doctrine:

> It seems so truly cruel and unjust [*vero crudele et iniquum*] that someone would require the blood of an innocent person as payback [*pretium*], or that in any way it might satisfy someone that an innocent person be slain—more unjust yet is the idea that God would accept the death of his own Son as a form of reconciliation with humanity (*Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, book 2, chapter 3).

Instead of the perennially dominant monetary Christologies, Abelard advocates for what has become known as an "exemplarist" theory of Christ. Following his rejection of the very idea of retribution, Abelard counters with this: "The Son of God took on our condition, leaving us an example [*exemplum instituendo*] by his words and his deeds of persevering in our condition unto death" (*Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, book II, chapter 3). He argues that Christ "transformed himself into the infirmed human form so that he could teach us what should be done with our passions [*ut ea instrueret quid in passionibus esset agendum*]" (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 25). Jesus undergoes the passions and temptations of human life, yet he persists through these struggles in exemplary fashion by submitting his will to God. "Christ put the will of God before his own, such that he could say, 'Your

will be done'" (*Epitome Theologiae Christianae*, chapter 25). While we cannot be perfect like Christ, we can strive to imitate him as an exemplar of healthy self-resistance. In other words, Abelard describes Christ as our sponsor in recovery[228]

Although Abelard based his arguments in Augustine's authoritative texts, his radical disease concept of addiction and the implications he drew from it earned him a number of theological rivals. Foremost among his enemies was the famed Cistercian abbot and co-founder of the Knights Templar, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard publicly attacked Abelard's doctrine of addiction and repeatedly solicited Pope Innocent II himself to condemn Abelard's teachings, burn his books, and excommunicate him from the Church. As medieval Church historian Constant Mews reports, "Bernard's urgent letters to Rome had their desired effect. Innocent issued his condemnation of both Abelard and of his teachings on July 16, 1141, imposing a sentence of perpetual silence . . . instructing both Abelard and all those who followed him to be excommunicated" ("The Council of Sens," 374).[229] In the next section, I examine Bernard's refutation of Abelard's teachings and the delinquency theory of addiction that he reasserts.

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[228] According to Alcoholics Anonymous, "Sponsor and sponsored meet as equals . . . Essentially, the process of sponsorship is this: An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through A.A. . . . We find that we need constant, close support as we begin learning how to 'live sober' . . . [Sponsorship] assures the newcomer that there is at least one person who understands the situation fully and cares—one person to turn to without embarrassment when doubts, questions, or problems linked to alcoholism arise. Sponsorship gives the newcomer an understanding, sympathetic friend when one is needed most . . . Many feel it is best for a newcomer to have only one sponsor. Choosing one sponsor helps to avoid the precarious practice of a newcomer going from sponsor to sponsor seeking advice he or she wants to hear" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Questions and Answers on Sponsorship*. New York: AA Grapevine Inc., 2022. 7-11).
[229] Constant J. Mews, "The Council of Sens (1141): Abelard, Bernard, and the Fear of Social Upheaval," in *Speculum*, 77, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 342-283).

## § 25 – Bernard of Clairvaux: The Propriety of the Will

Saint Bernard (1090 - 1153) systematically redresses Abelard's disease concept of addiction in his letter to Pope Innocent II, entitled "A Treatment of Abelard's Errors [*Tractatus de Erroribus Abaelardi*]."[230] While Abelard insisted that we think of sin as a congenital disease rather than as a willful debt and, accordingly, rejected transactional theories of salvation, opting instead for an exemplarist Christology, Bernard flatly rejected Abelard's innovation and reasserted the original Patristic account of addiction and redemption. In an important section of the letter entitled "How the Liberation of Humanity Was Not Just a Matter of Mercy, but also Equity," Bernard begins by asserting, "Humanity was rightfully addicted [*Juste homo addictus*]" to the Devil. However, he explains, "When the Devil laid hands on The Innocent One, he justly lost possession of those who were bound to him. The One who was not indebted [*debebat*] . . . by paying with his life, rightfully released those who actually owed [*debito*] . . . and were under the ownership of the Devil [*diaboli dominio*]" (*Tractatus de Erroribus Abaelardi*, chapter 6, section 15). Humankind was rightfully addicted to the Devil, and Christ paid with his life to redeem us delinquents.

By recovering the original legal sense of addiction and its financial logic, Bernard thus takes issue with Abelard's exemplarist Christology. In a subsequent section, "How Christ Did Not Come into the World Merely to Be Our Example [*Instructionis Nostrae*]," he rejects the idea that "the only benefit Christ gave us was

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[230] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de Erroribus Petri Abaelardi*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLXXXII: Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia, Volumen Primum*, 1053-1072, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1859.

a mere display of virtue." "Where is the redemption in this?" Bernard asks. "Redemption is ours," he clarifies, not through Christ's exemplary life, but, rather, "through his suffering and death" on our behalf (*Tractatus de Erroribus Abaelardi*, chapter 9, sections 23-24). In Bernard's traditional model, which rejects even Anselm's revision, God is not himself the defrauded party; instead, he presides over the cosmic transaction as a judge. As such, Bernard explains that God issued the addiction from which Christ redeemed us. "My Father has addicted me . . . but My Brother has redeemed me [*Pater addixit . . . sed Frater Meus redemit me*]" (*Tractatus Erroribus Abaelardi*, chapter 6, section 15).

Opting for the traditional delinquency model of addiction, Bernard does not emphasize Abelard's merciful idea that sin is the inevitable symptom of a congenital disease of the will. Instead, he maintains that each person bears responsibility for their deeds, which are nothing other than free choices, because, again, although we owe ourselves to God, we do possess ourselves in life. "Humans are not forced to be bad by some external cause; they simply choose to be so at the behest of their own will" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 4, section 9).[231] On this basis, Bernard believes in the justice of individual accountability. "It is only right that people who have done deeds deserving of punishment should be punished" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 9, section 31). On its face, Bernard's statement seems to present a tautology; however, by describing bad deeds as symptoms of a social disease rather than willfully malevolent choices, Abelard has just given us a way to think that, maybe, people who have done deeds deserving of punishment should *not* be

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[231] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Tractatus de Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, in *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus, Tomus CLXXXII: Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia, Volumen Primum*, 1001-1030, ed., Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris, 1859.

punished, but, instead, rehabilitated through personal sponsorship. In Abelard's heretical view, punishing people for their deeds presumes an impossible degree of self-possession. While Augustine and Abelard forcefully articulate the reality of self-dissociation and the heterogeneity of the free will itself, which complicates the individualistic account of agency, Bernard confidently claims that "the will, by virtue of its constitutive freedom, cannot be compelled by any force or necessity to dissent from itself [*dissentire sibi*] or to consent to anything despite itself [*praeter se*]" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 3, section 6). This confidence in the individual free will underpins Bernard's proprietary framework and his prioritization of personal accountability.

Despite his own Augustinian bent, Bernard refuses to entertain the notion that an individual could be at odds with themselves. "It is impossible for the will not to obey itself—no one nills what they will, or wills what they nill; thus, it is impossible for the will not to be free" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 2, section 5). This statement from Bernard contradicts Augustine's basic description of addiction: "The mind commands itself to will something, and even though it itself is the recipient of its own command, it does not perform it. What causes this monstrosity? . . . We are dealing with a mental sickness . . . Unwilling and willing was I" (*Confessiones*, book VIII, chapters 9-10). By contrast, Bernard insists, "It is impossible for a person to will and nill the same thing simultaneously [*Impossibile erat: velle quippe et nolle idem codem tempore non poterat*]" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 12, section 38). This claim, repeated by Bernard, directly negates Abelard's foundational Augustinian thesis that "owing to the infirmity of our flesh, we are compelled to will what we absolutely do not will to will." In his negation,

Bernard fails to see how Abelard's—and even Augustine's—account of the will's heterogeneity does not deny but merely complicates our understanding of voluntarity. Within the disease model of addiction, addicts act volitionally, to be sure, but that is precisely their paradoxical bondage. Of course addicts act willfully, but because their free wills are not under their own control, despite acting willfully, they often act despite themselves. The addict's free will, divided in shares, works against itself, as they do not possess themselves. Within the delinquency model of addiction, though, where every chapter is presupposed to be a measured choice, there is a conflation between voluntarity and self-possession. Using this proprietary heuristic, Bernard cannot see how a willful act may, though willful, be out of one's own control.

From Bernard's perspective, the idea that someone's will could be out of their own control presents a logical absurdity. In fact, Bernard succinctly formulates the latent conflation between freedom of will and self-possession that underpins not only much of the Latin theological tradition but also the Roman debt law whence its structuring concepts derived: "In a way, of course, we are constituted as our own through freedom of will [*Creati quippe quodammodo nostri in liberarm voluntatem*]" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 6, section 18). His theology reduces down to a strictly proprietary set of concerns. "Free will makes us our own [*libero arbitrio nos facit nostros*]; ill will makes us the Devil's [*mala, diaboli*]; good will makes us God's [*bona, Dei*]" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 6, section 18). In this formula, we see that human self-possession forms the metaphysical ground of his theological paradigm. We are given to ourselves by God such that although he owns us, we nevertheless do possess ourselves on loan. Within this logic,

human beings—inherently self-possessed by virtue of their gifted freedom of will—can opt to give themselves over to God or the Devil, or they can struggle to pridefully remain their own. The latter two options offer short term reward but ensure our eventual destitution, while only the former promises an eternal good.

Beginning with Adam and Eve, we have voluntarily addicted ourselves to the Devil for the sake of fleeting pleasure—opting to taste the forbidden fruit even though it means we will surely die. Although Christ has paid our debt to the Devil, we remain so habituated to serving him that, despite being redeemed into freedom and self-possession, we still struggle to control ourselves and remain tempted not to give ourselves over to God. According to Bernard, "the habit of worldliness long implanted in our affections" by our addiction to the Devil keeps us de facto caught in the very bondage from which Christ already redeemed us (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 12, section 41). Bernard thus suggests that we are bound now by nothing other than our own wills, and, in this way, echoes Anselm's assertion that we mistake the difficulty of breaking bad habits with an actual disability.

However, softening somewhat from Anselm's position, Bernard does admit that although "free choice remains intact," in our bondage to habit, we suffer the "privation of two other freedoms—freedom of deliberation and freedom of pleasure" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 8, section 24). While Bernard insists that we are always free to just say no to what's bad for us, he acknowledges that our addiction has hindered our ability to discern what is good and bad for us to begin with, on the basis of which we could rightly choose one over the other. Furthermore, even when we do know what's good for us, our addiction has warped our reward system such that we feel no internal incentive to do it. We "delight in sinning and

delight in having sinned without paying the price," and, ironically, we suffer through remaining steadfast against temptation and doing the right thing. This perverse enjoyment of self-destruction demonstrably inhibits our ability to break bad habits, as we enjoy our destitution and suffer its solution.

Although we are theoretically free to quit our habits willy-nilly, Bernard admits that because of our inability to properly deliberate our decisions and our inability to take pleasure in doing what's right, breaking our bad baits is practically impossible: "Climbing out of a hole isn't nearly as easy as falling into one. By our free will alone, we fell into the hole of sin, but we cannot climb out by our will alone, since now even if we want to stop sinning, we can't" (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 7, section 23). Thus, he argues, Christ saves us from addiction not only by buying us back from the Devil's possession, but also by helping us climb out of the pit of sin we have dug for ourselves. Bernard likens the addict's journey towards liberation to climbing up a steep slope, weighed down by burden of habit:

> What we call free choice—which is to say, human will—stands in between divine spirit and carnal desire. The will, able to go in either direction, stands on the sloping side of a steep mountain, so to speak . . . Without the help of the Holy Spirit, borne down by the pull of its own weight, the free will would tumble headlong down from the precipice. This pull would come from . . . the habit of worldliness long implanted in its affections (*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, chapter 12, section 41).

God helps us resist the pull of our worldly habits by "pouring true wisdom back into humanity to restore freedom of deliberation," which helps us discern right and wrong, such that we can freely choose what's good for us. Furthermore, he "restores humanity to freedom of pleasure" by furnishing us with a renewed desire for our own

regeneration. Bernard retains the traditional idea that Christ pays our debt to the Devil and redeems us from his possession while also acknowledging that, despite our having been redeemed, we remain behaviorally bound in some substantive way that we cannot overcome through sheer force of will.

We enjoy self-possession to some extent, says Bernard, but we nevertheless rely on God's grace to control ourselves, which is distributed through the Christian community that teaches how to deliberate properly over one's decisions. In this way, Bernard both acknowledges that each individual possesses themselves by virtue of their freedom of will, yet he acknowledges that personal accountability involves a cooperative effort not only between God and the individual, but also within the Church community itself, whereby that accountability is upheld. He sees in Abelard's insistence on self-dispossession and his refusal of individual accountability an inevitable dismissal of the community that accountability involves. If we are each individually striving to heal ourselves by following Christ's example, then the Christian community itself becomes less relevant to the process of salvation. Ironically, Bernard's insistence on self-possession and individual accountability thus yields a more robust vision of the importance of the Church community itself, which we see developed in later theologians, like Thomas Aquinas.

## § 26 – Thomas Aquinas: Debt, Indulgence, and the Treasury of Merits

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224 - 1274) was both an academic philosopher, teaching at the University of Paris that Abelard helped found, as well as a committed monk in the Dominican Order. As such, he occupied a middle ground between

Abelard's academic revisionism and Bernard's monastic traditionalism. Embodying different perspectives on the tradition at once, Thomas was a great synthesizer of competing theological viewpoints—including those at play in the longstanding conflict over the meaning of addiction. His two most famous works, the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*—the first written to explain Latin Christianity to theology students, the second, to explain Latin Christianity to nonbelievers—adopt the structure of a formal scholastic *disputatio* to settle questions about the faith. Using this model, first, Thomas identifies a longstanding question or debate within the Latin theological tradition; second, he cites and elaborates the main sides of the debate in their own terms; then, he responds point-by-point to their mutual objections; and, finally, he attempts to settle the debate either by synthesizing the competing perspectives or arguing why he prefers one over the other.

One of the most pivotal questions in the *Summa Theologiae* asks, "Did Christ's Passion effect our salvation by way of redemption [*per modum redemptionis*]?" (*Summa Theologiae*, part 3, question 48).[232] This is precisely the debate among Anselm, Abelard, and Bernard about the means of salvation; at the same time, it is also a question about the orthodoxy of metaphors. If we interpret Aquinas' question about redemption semantically, it is actually asking something profound about the tradition's inherited language and logic: Has Roman debt law furnished the best conceptual metaphor to describe the cosmic function of Christ's life and, thus, to convey the tenor of Christianity? As Thomas' forerunners have already asked, does Christ come to our aid by providing an example of how to live a

[232] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, Leonium Romae Edition, 1903. Corpus Thomisticum, www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html.

good life in our infirmed condition, or does he buy us back from our debt-bondage, either to God or the Devil? For all three of the medieval theologians we have discussed so far, their answers depend on how they understand the predicament of addiction. If addiction is a congenital disease, then Christ helps rehabilitate us; however, if addiction is debt-bondage, then Christ pays with his blood to buy back our freedom. For Thomas to clarify the mechanism by which Christ saved us, he first has to describe the situation from which we needed saving, which means settling the meaning of addiction and consolidating the heuristic metaphor.

For Thomas to confirm that Christ saves us "by way of redemption," he must affirm that we are addicts in the Roman legal sense of the term, because addiction and redemption are two halves of the same metaphor. Indeed, citing Augustine, Thomas begins his answer to this question of redemption by affirming a synthesis of both Anselm's and Bernard's delinquency theories of addiction:

> Humankind was bound by sin in two ways: First of all, sin is its own kind of bondage, as John says, "Whoever sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Or, as we read in Second Peter, "You are an addicted slave to whatever overcomes you [*a quo quis superatus est, huic et servus addictus est*]' (2 Peter 2:19). Since, therefore, the Devil overcame Adam by inducing him to sin [*superaverat inducendo eum ad peccatum*], humankind was addicted in servitude to the Devil [*homo servituti Diaboli addictus erat*]. Second, by sinning, we incurred a debt against God's justice, which we must pay back as punishment (*Summa Theologiae*, part 3, question 48, article 4, *co.*).

In agreement with Bernard and the Patristics, Thomas affirms that by accepting the inducement to sin from the Devil, we have addicted ourselves to him, and yet, on the

Anselmian side, he also acknowledges that we ultimately owe God recompense for our impropriety against him.

Thomas synthesizes both positions, contending that "humanity, by sinning, indebted itself both to God and the Devil . . . Humanity is chiefly bound to God as our sovereign judge and to the Devil as our torturer" (*Summa Theologiae*, part 3, question 48, article 4, *ad.* 2). Our addiction to the Devil keeps us serving his will through sin, whereas God, defrauded of his due, repossesses our lives through death as the ultimate payback. In this sense, Thomas continues, "immediately following sin, humankind was addicted to the necessity of death [*necessitati mortis addictus*]" (part II-II, question 164, article 2, *arg*. 6). Having thus affirmed the financial interpretation of addiction, Thomas responds to the soteriological question by claiming that, as addicts, we were indeed *redeemed*. "Christ's Passion," he teaches, "was a sufficient and even superabundant payback for sin and the debt of humankind [*sufficiens et superabundans satisfactio pro peccato et reatu generis humani*]. His Passion furnished the cost of our liberation from both debts . . . Therefore, Christ's Passion is called our redemption [*nostra redemptio*]" (*Summa Theologiae*, part III, question 48, article 4, *co*.). Faithful to the Roman legal logic, Thomas affirms that Christ *redeemed* us because we were *addicts*—indebted both to God and the Devil.

However, in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, when trying to explain the doctrine that "original sin is transmitted [*traducatur*] from the first parents to their descendants," Thomas faces the complicating doctrinal factor that led Augustine to conflate the delinquency and disease metaphors in the first place (*Summa contra

*Gentiles*, book IV, chapter 50).[233] According to the orthodox doctrine of sin, each of us individually addicts ourselves to the Devil by accepting sin from him voluntarily; in this way, our addiction is the result of our willful delinquency. However, all of us also inherit this addiction by birth, like a congenital disease. These two aspects of sin—its individual voluntarity and its generational heritability—severely strain the structuring metaphor of debt-bondage. In his attempt to explain the doctrine, Thomas begins by explaining that death is payback for the voluntary delinquency of sin, but, trying to convey sin's generational transmissibility, he ends by describing it as a congenital defect:

> Having to die is a payback for humankind's sin. However, payback is justly demanded only when there is guilt [*culpa*]. Therefore, there must be some kind of guilt in every person who suffers this punishment. But everyone suffers this punishment, beginning the very moment of their birth, since being born means being addicted to death [*mortis addictus*]. Even in newborns, therefore, there must be sin, but this cannot be actual sin [*peccatum actuale*], since they do not have use of their free will [*usum liberi arbitrii*], and without free will no sin can be attributed to anyone. One must therefore say that sin was transmitted to them by birth [*sit peccatum per originem traductum*] (*Summa contra Gentiles*, book IV, chapter 50, section 3).

Even back in the fourth century, Pelagius objected that these two premises contradict one another in the way that Thomas awkwardly acknowledges here. Either sin is a choice, and we are individually guilty, or sin is congenital, and we are collectively defective, but not personally at fault. Demanding payback from someone for a debt they did not agree to seems unjust—especially if they must pay with their

[233] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, Leonium edition, revised in light of Taurini edition, 1961. Corpus Thomisticum, www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html.

life. However, in response to Pelagius, Augustine insisted that sin is both a willfully chosen debt *and* a generationally inherited disease. He used the term *addictio* to describe both sides of this oxymoron—hence, the delinquency-disease catachresis. In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas takes on the task of explaining this oxymoronic idea. Specifically, he must justify the difficult doctrine that God holds people criminally accountable for something they are helplessly born with.

Ventriloquizing an outsider perspective, Thomas begins his defense by voicing the apparent tension. On the one hand, "the sin of the first man cannot be attributed to the entire human race" because "we are neither praised nor blamed for anything other than our own actions . . . the things to which we have willfully committed" (*Summa contra Gentiles*, book IV, chapter 51, section 2). On the other hand, "we would never assign guilt to someone who, due to defective origins, was born with leprosy or blindness." Thus, if sin does indeed "flow from the first parents into their descendants by birth," then it cannot be considered a matter of culpability. In Thomas' representation of the objection, then, "there is no way for a blameworthy mistake to be passed down from the first parents to their descendants by birth (*Summa contra Gentiles*, book IV, chapter 51, section 9). Facing this exact problem, Augustine did not so much resolve it as he did condense it into a single concept by using the term *addiction* to describe both the delinquency and disease aspects of sin. Anselm, Abelard, and Bernard each emphasized one side of the doctrine in an attempt to skirt the conceptual dilemma rather than sort it out. While Abelard highlighted the medical ideas of disability and rehabilitation, Anselm and Bernard stressed the financial notions of debt and personal accountability. Siding with

Anselm and Bernard, Thomas tries to resolve the dilemma by returning to the origin of the structuring metaphor itself, Roman debt law.

Thomas' most concentrated effort to resolve the delinquency-disease dilemma actually comes a few years after the publication of *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in an important work called *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo* [*Disputed Questions on Evil*].[234] In this text, he returns to the perennial question: "Are the sins of parents transmitted by birth to their descendants?" The difficulty of the doctrine of original sin comes down to the presumption that holding children accountable for the debts of their parents is unjust because it violates the individualistic sensibility of personal accountability. As a result of this presumption, the addiction metaphor no longer seems to hold when it is extended to describe the heritability of sin. However, on this point, Thomas makes a novel intervention:

> Canon and civil law actually hold that children are liable for the sins of their parents. The children of slaves, even if they are born of free mothers, are nevertheless addicted to servitude [*addicuntur servituti*]. Furthermore, canon law holds that the children of a thief are liable for the thefts of their parent, even if the children did not benefit from the stolen goods and even if no lawsuit was brought against their parent . . . Therefore, the sins of parents are transmitted to their children (*Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*, book IV, article 8, section 15).

Thomas simply denies the presumption that it is unjust to hold children accountable for their parents' debts by citing the laws that allow this. The fact that Thomas makes recourse to civil jurisprudence to solve a theological dilemma generates important consequences. By doing so, Thomas argues, in effect, that the Roman legal categories

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[234] Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae de Ente et Essentia*, *Tomus Secundus*, 1-276, ed., S.S. Leone. Paris, 1883.

that have provided much of the language and logic of Latin theology do not need revision or supplementation—for instance, from medical terminology—because they adequately convey the tenor of Christianity on their own. Augustine and others reached for the medical terminology of congenital disease, contagion, sickness, and birth defect, because they found they were unable to articulate sin's heritability in strictly legal terms. However, Thomas contends here in *De Malo* that the concepts furnished by property law alone suffice to convey the doctrine of sin's heritability, which means that there is no need to make recourse to extra-legal language and logic—especially because mixing metaphors creates confusion. In this way, Thomas reduces the conceptual ontology of theology to proprietary terms.

Thomas' consolidation of the debt-bondage metaphor inclined him to conceive of the Church itself as a fiduciary corporation that facilitates the transactions between God and humanity—God's merciful redemption and humanity's penitent payback. Building on earlier medieval theologians operating within the same metaphor, Thomas helped formalize a doctrine, nascent at the time, known as the Treasury of Merits. This idea was first articulated by one of Thomas' eminent contemporaries, Dominican friar and eventual Cardinal named Hugh of Saint-Cher. Although Hugh's works have not survived, one of his colleagues, a canon law expert named Hostiensis, otherwise known as Henry of Segusio, relays Hugh's description of the Treasury of Merits in his *Summa super Titulis Decretalium* [roughly, *A Comprehensive Guide to Church Law*]. Riffing on the longstanding theological metaphor that innocent blood is a form of liquid capital that God accepts as currency, Henry explains that:

> The Son of God did not just shed a single drop of blood but spilled all his blood for us sinners. Moreover, the martyrs poured out all their blood for the faith and the Church as well; as such, they were punished beyond what their own sins warranted. With this great effusion of blood, everyone's punishments can be covered, and this overflow of blood is stored in a cask inside the treasury of the Church [*hec sanguinis effusion est thesaurus in scrimion ecclesie repositus*], whose keys only the Church possesses. Hence, whenever the Church wishes, she can open the cask and share this overabundance with any of the faithful by granting remissions and indulgences (*Summa super Titulis Decretalium sive Summa Aurea*, chapter 5, section 67).[235]

In other words, because the debts we owe to God for sin can be paid with innocent blood, when virtuous people die—namely, Christ himself, the saints, and martyrs—the Church collects their blood and stores this liquid capital in its treasury.

As Thomas explains in his supplement to the *Summa Theologiae*, "Many people have performed works of payback exceeding the requirements of their debt. They have suffered undue tribulations that could cover the cost of a great number of sins . . . So abundant are these merits that they exceed even the payback that is owed by all who are currently alive—especially thanks to the merits of Christ" (*Summa Theologiae Supplementum*, chapter 25, section 2). Thus, the Church collects in its treasury the extra merit accrued by these virtuous few, which is concentrated in their blood, and debits the fund discretionarily to cover the debts owed to God by the Church's other delinquent members. These discretionary debits from the Treasury of Merits to cover the outstanding debts of delinquent members were known as

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[235] Henry of Segusio, *Summa super Titulis Decretalium sive Summa Aurea*, Venice, 1574. Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon, folio SJ J 171/11. For the only comprehensive study of Henry's *Summa Aurea*, see Clarence Gallagher, *Canon Law and the Christian Community: The Role of Law in the Church According to the Summa Aurea of Cardinal Hostiensis*. Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1978.

indulgences or remissions. Such promissory notes could be bought from episcopal officials by members of the lay members of the Church.[236] In effect, the Church could convert actual coin into innocent blood to help delinquent sinners cover their spiritual debts owed to God.

While certain dioceses of the Catholic Church had been selling indulgences for over a hundred years at this point (mainly as war bonds to support the several Crusades), Thomas' elaboration on the Treasury of Merits helped reverse engineer the theological justification for this contested practice.[237] Around 1268 at the University of Paris, Thomas hosted a days-long public event referred to as a quodlibetal disputation, where literally anyone could walk in and ask him any questions they wanted about theology, philosophy, and the like. As scholars of medieval philosophy Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies explain, "a Parisian quodlibetal disputation presented a willing master with a serious self-imposed challenge. During the first day or part of such a disputation, questions could be orally raised in the presence of a master by anyone (*a quolibet*) about anything (*de quolibet*)" (*Thomas Aquinas' Quodlibetal Questions*, xxv).[238] In the second quodlibetal disputation, Thomas receives a question about how the Treasury of Merits works, and he explains:

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[236] Who retained the right to sell indulgences was a disputed matter.
[237] Episcopal authorities began dispensing indulgences in Northern Europe as early as the mid-eleventh century, though no systematic theological justification emerged until much later. For the early theological history of indulgences, see *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, ed., R.N. Swanson. Leiden: Brill, 2006. For a social history of indulgences, see Alexander Murray, "Religion Among the Poor in Thirteenth-Century France" in *Traditio*, 30, No. 9 (1974).
[238] Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies, "Introduction," in Thomas Aquinas, *Thomas Aquinas's Quodlibetal Questions*, xxiii-1, trans., Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

> The work of one person can satisfy the debt owed by another . . . Christ not only shed his blood for his Church but accomplished and suffered much more than just that. The totality of these things is of infinite value owing to the worth of the person doing and suffering them. Hence . . . there is an infinite amount of merit in the Treasury for others . . . The whole Treasury is under the discretion of him who rules the Catholic Church [i.e. the Pope] . . . So, when the welfare or need of the Church itself demands it, he who rules the Church can share with any member of the Church as much merit as seems suitable to him from that infinite Treasury, either equal to the total forgiveness of their due punishments or up to some determined quantity (*Quaestiones de Quolibet*, part II, question 8, article 2, *co*.).

Within the logic of Thomas' structuring metaphor of addiction and redemption, spiritual righteousness becomes an actuarial practice of balancing budgets and settling accounts. The metaphor itself reduces spiritual life to a strictly proprietary set of concerns and the human-divine relationship to a set of monetary transactions.

While the Treasury of Merits seems to represent a merciless moral calculation that atomizes individuals into separate ledgers, the Treasury could just as well be seen as Thomas' attempt—building on his theological predecessors—to conceive salvation cooperatively. The Treasury itself represents the pooled resources of all humanity, collected and debited by the Pope so that delinquent individuals aren't left to suffer the consequences of their own moral bankruptcy. Those who have more merit—like Christ and the saints—give extra so that those who have less might be born up by communal effort. However, numerous theologians both during and after Thomas' life vociferously objected to what they saw as the reduction of theology to accounting. For instance, the famed logician and Nominalist master William of Ockham refused the idea that we could, in effect, purchase our salvation from God.

He argued that this transactional conception of salvation made it seem like God owed us our salvation, and he wrote in his *Theological Questions* that "God is a debtor to no man!" In other words, God is in no way obligated to compensate humanity for what they do.[239] Similarly, the (in)famous mystical theologian Meister Eckhart decried the "spiritual mercantilism" that he diagnosed within the Church.[240]

However, no theologians would so forcefully and effectively critique the financial framing of Christian life in general and the delinquency theory of addiction specifically, as the two Reformation leaders, Martin Luther and John Calvin. In the next chapter, I show how Luther and Calvin—building on the work of prior theological deviants like Abelard as well as an unlikely ally, Desiderius Erasmus—invert the traditional doctrine of addiction. Rather than interpreting addiction as a delinquent bondage from which we should strive to escape or even a congenital disease from which we need to heal, the Reformers insisted that addiction is the only way to conceptualize selfhood at all. In other words, they argue that there is no self-possessing alternative to addiction, achievable either through healing or payback. To them, addiction, which is to say self-dispossession, represents the only form of life possible.

Chapter 6

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[239] For instance, see William of Ockham, *Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum Ordinatio, Distinctiones XIX-XLVIII*, ed., Girard Etzkorn and Francis Kelley. Saint Bonaventure, New York: Saint Bonaventure University, 1979. Book I, distinction 41, question 1. For a broad elaboration of Ockham's effect on the Reformers, see Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Follow the index entry for Ockham. For a more granular analysis of Ockham's doctrine, see Linwood Urban, "William of Ockham's Theological Ethics," in *Franciscan Studies*, 33 (1973), 310-53.

[240] See Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001. Specifically, see page 131 in the section entitled, "Theology of Grace"; see also, Chapter 6, "Going without a Way: The Return to the Ground," 114-161. Also, see Reiner Schürmann, "Living Without Why," "'God Must'," in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy*, trans., Reiner Schürmann. Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Lindisfarne Books, 2001.

## THE REFORMATION OF ADDICTION

*All living is an obeying.*

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Calls to reform the Church's financial thought and practice did not begin with Luther.[241] In fact, as Luther's movement began in the early sixteenth century, many theologians at the time ultimately blamed the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus for inspiring some of Luther's most revolutionary ideas—in particular, his rejection of the fiduciary function of the Church. Although Erasmus and Luther antagonized each other in printed debates about free will and the nature of sin, their contemporaries quipped, "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched." In one letter, Erasmus replies to this accusation. "'I laid the egg, and Luther hatched it'—an astounding statement . . . The egg I laid was a hen's egg, and Luther has hatched a chick of a very, very different feather" (Erasmus Letter 1528, 16 December 1524, *Correspondence of Erasmus*, volume 10, 464).[242] Despite Erasmus' hesitation to identify with Luther, there was a mutually acknowledged affinity between the scholar and the monk. They both agreed that Latin Christianity had become dominated by

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[241] Medieval historian Robert Schaffern reports that Abelard was actually the first theologian to explicitly critique the sale of indulgences ("The Medieval Theology of Indulgences," in *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits*, 11-36).

[242] Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus, Volume 10: Letters from 1523-1524*, ed., James Estes and trans., R.A.B. Mynors and Alexander Dalzell. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.

financial language, logics, and correlating practices, and they refused the seemingly merciless idea that Christian life was a process of payback.[243]

Like Abelard before them, Erasmus and Luther interrogated the notion that we remain indebted either to God or the Devil. Despite questioning the traditional financial framing of Christian life, they nevertheless retained the term *addiction*. However, unlike Abelard or Augustine, they did not simply use the term *addiction* catachretically to describe the disease of sin. Beginning with Erasmus, they used the concept in a novel way: not only to describe sin, but also to convey the structure of subjectivity itself. In other words, for over a thousand years within Latin theology, the term *addiction*—whether interpreted as debt-bondage or birth defect—unambiguously denoted sin and thus suggested a state of degenerate self-dispossession that required either redemption or recovery. However, Erasmus, Luther, and especially Calvin after them, strangely used the term *addiction* to describe *both* the sinful attachment to worldly pleasure *and* the righteous love of God. Within these thinkers, addiction, which is to say self-dispossession, presented no inherent problem, because that's how they conceived selfhood in general, not just sin specifically.

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[243] I want to emphasize that theological disputes provided only one of many forces that catalyzed the Reformation. Medieval historian Falk Eisermann explains how indulgences emerged not only because of new theological ideas but also thanks to a media revolution in advertising that defined the Reformation era. See Eisermann, "The Indulgence as a Media Event: Developments in Communication through Broadsides in the Fifteenth Century," 309-30, in *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits*. For another media studies interpretation of the Reformation, see also Hitchcock, "Bankrupting Heaven: The Printing Press and the Collapse of the Indulgence Market," in *Human Flourishing*, ed., Greg Foster and Anthony Cross, 87-101. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2020. Hitchcock argues that indulgences, which were issued as literal paper notes, only pervaded Europe to the extent that they did because of improvements to printing technology in the late fifteenth century. He claims that insofar as the Church functioned like a bank, the mass printing of indulgences posed the problem of inflation, because as indulgences proliferated, their value diminished.

Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin did not conceive the struggle for righteous selfhood according to the traditional logic as a struggle *against* addiction and *for* self-possession, because, in their views, addiction is the only conceivable form of selfhood. Accordingly, these three did not counterpose freedom against addiction, but articulated their understandings of freedom through the concept of addiction itself. In their theologies, the perennial Christian questions—How will I be free? How will I be happy? How will I be saved?—reduce down to one fundamental query: To what will I be addicted? From their perspectives, we are either addicted to the pleasures of the world, which is miserable enslavement, or we are addicted to the love of God, which is joyful freedom.

To be sure, Catholic thinkers like Anselm, Bernard, and Thomas also emphasized God's ownership of humankind and refused the prideful notion that anyone was their own. Nevertheless, they did emphasize that, having received ourselves as a loan from God, we do possess ourselves in that we act according to our own free will. Even if I am given myself as a loan, I—a debtor—still possess myself; I am just not my rightful owner. The Protestants I discuss in this chapter also emphasize the perennial point that we are not our own; however, they extend it to an extreme, arguing that the individual has no meaningful sense of self-possession, since they are fully possessed by the alien forces that act upon and within them. Once they shift the ground of selfhood away from self-possession, freedom becomes a permutation of submission rather than an exercise of sovereignty. Moreover, they even debated the degree of freedom each person has to determine their own addictions. Even if there is no alternative to addiction, how does a person become addicted either to worldly pleasure or divine affection? Erasmus held onto the idea

that we possess ourselves just enough to initiate the addictions that determine our lives, while Luther and Calvin held the more extreme position that we are helpless recipients of the addiction that we have no power to initiate or terminate.

By conceiving the self as an addict without any self-possessing alternative—a thesis they see latent in Augustinian thought—they slowly erode the Roman legal ground on which the Latin theological tradition had built its system of moral accountability. If addiction in itself represents both delinquency *and* credibility, sickness *and* salubrity, sinfulness *and* righteousness, bondage *and* freedom—the difference being made only by the object of one's addiction, which is to say one's owner—then self-possession (much less self-ownership) signifies nothing, if not a prideful delusion. In this way, Luther, and Calvin, by negating addiction's negativity while nevertheless preserving the pecuniary concept, allow us to continue conceiving selfhood in terms of possession but ask us to abandon the longstanding notion that any self could exercise any self-control. Again, Catholic thinkers agree that God remains our rightful owner, but because he has loaned us ourselves, we do possess ourselves through the freedom of will that allows us to control our actions and which therefore makes us accountable for our decisions. Luther and Calvin, however, refuse any meaningful sense of self-possession by insisting upon the utter infirmity of our wills and hence our lack of control over our life outcomes. They argue that this irresponsibility liberates individuals—no longer conceived as self-possessing—from the burdensome accountability of Catholic penitence.

### § 27 – Desiderius Erasmus: Addicted to Christ

Although Erasmus (1466 - 1536) made enormous contributions to the history of Christian thought, he was always somewhat of an outsider to the faith. After the plague orphaned him at the age of twenty-one, he reports that he was pressured by his legal guardians to join an Augustinian monastery in the south of Holland. By his own account, Erasmus detested monastic life for a number of reasons. First of all, he wanted to be a university student instead, and his monastic consecration prevented him from reading the Latin classics he had studied as a younger boy. Second, soon after joining the monastery, he had fallen in love with another monk, Servatius Rogerus, who scorned his intense and persistent advances.[244] Most of all, however, he saw monastic life as a hypocritical charade.

In one of his earliest writings from this time, ostensibly a praise of monastic life called *De Contemptu Mundi* [*On Disdaining the World*], Erasmus concludes by actually leveling an attack on the hypocrisy of monastic penitence.[245] Although one may be tempted to imagine that "monasteries are nothing but solitary dwelling places for pious men who disdained the enticements and vices that afflict humanity," Erasmus reports a different story from the inside:

> Many men embrace the monastic profession for no other reason than to live in luxury, consulting the interests of their stomachs more than their spirits. Men whose meager means in the secular world taught them austerity and industriousness give themselves up to laziness and luxury once they get inside the monastery. Men who were impoverished and humble in the secular world rival the pomp and luxury of princes and kings once they have taken the vow

[244] For Erasmus' biographical details, see John Joseph Mangan, *Life, Character, and Influence of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam: Derived from a Study of His Works and Correspondence*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927; Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982; and Richard Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe: The Making of a Humanist 1467-1500*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990.
[245] Erasmus, *De Contemptu Mundi*. Lugduni Batavorum, 1641.

> of poverty . . . Through false vows of poverty, they escape poverty; through false vows of chastity, they satisfy their libido; through false vows of obedience, they become their own masters (*De Contemptu Mundi,* chapter 12).

This bitter rejection of monastic hypocrisy that he witnessed firsthand—between monks' avowed austerity and their actual profligacy—formed the basis of Erasmus' lifelong critique of indulgences, specifically, and the framing of Christian life as a process of penitent payback more broadly. Erasmus came to see the doctrine of penitential payback broadly and the practice of indulgences specifically as a theologically disingenuous strategy to enrich the Church and its subsidiary monasteries rather than a necessary step in salvation. As he remarks in one of his personal letters, "I think it's nonsense to suppose one can buy one's way to heaven. What filthy traffic this is—designed to fill coffers rather than to stimulate piety" (*Opus Epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterdami*, volume 5, letter 1299).[246] Accordingly, he altogether rejected the idea that people could settle their accounts with God by making penitent payments into the Treasury of Merits. "I know what they say in the schools of theology about the Treasury of the Church and how the Pope may dispense from it, but I also know what the theologians say in their private conversations!" (*Opera Omnia*, volume 9, 1159).[247]

After five years inside the monastery, Erasmus was granted a release from his monastic vows, and he went on to study theology, philosophy, and Latin literature at the University of Paris, which prepared him for a prolific writing career, largely spent

[246] Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami, Tomus V: 1522-1524*, ed., P.S. Allen and H.M. Allen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924.
[247] Erasmus, "*Apologia ad Albertum Pium Carporum Principem*," in *Operum Omnium, Tomus Nonus*, 1093-1197, ed., Peter Vender Aa. Lugduni Batavorum, 1706.

critiquing the Church. Among his first widely-read texts was an essay inside his book of adages, enigmatically titled, *Sileni Alcibiadis* [*The Sileni of Alcibiades*].[248] Published in 1515, *Sileni Alcibiadis* reflects on the contradictions between outward appearances and inward realities and levels one of the first and most vicious critiques of the Church from this period. Erasmus argues that the practice of indulgences had reduced the Church to a money-laundering machine, and the clergy, to businessmen in disguise. "How will the priest have the face to teach Christians in the streets and the market that wealth is to be despised, when money is the alpha and omega of his own life?" (*Sileni Alcibiadis*, 187). Above all, Erasmus blames the conflation between spiritual and financial affairs for turning churchmen into investment bankers and Christians into actual debtors. The theological framing of sin as debt-bondage and the corresponding practice of selling remittances, Erasmus contends, "exposes [Christians] to the anxieties suffered by someone behind on their payments to a moneylender" (*Sileni Alcibiadis*, 187). By the time Erasmus arrived on the scene, the debt-bondage metaphor had been building within Latin Christian discourses for more than a thousand years, and, in a strange way, the metaphorical construal that sinners are addicts had become a reality. In his critique of the Church here, Erasmus is highly attentive to the interplay between concepts and reality. The debt-bondage logic of salvation, he suggests, has inspired a unique kind of anxiety. Furthermore, people were spending actual coin to resolve a spiritual debt. In other words, for sinners to settle their metaphysical debt to God, they had to indebt themselves materially to the Church. "It is regarded as an unforgivable sacrilege if someone steals something from a church, but it seems to be a minor offense to

[248] Erasmus, *The Sileni of Alcibiades*, in Thomas More, *Utopia with Erasmus' The Sileni of Alcibiades*, 169-192, ed. and trans., David Wootton. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999.

plunder, cheat, and oppress the poverty stricken themselves!" (*Sileni Alcibiadis*, 181).

Only a year after he published this excoriation of the Church's fiduciary thought and practice, Erasmus would make his most decisive attack on Latin theology's governing financial logic—in particular the idea that Christian life was reducible to a payment plan. Erasmus made this intervention against the Latin theological tradition not through any of his own argumentation, but with a new translation of the Bible itself, which he called the *Novum Instrumentum*, first published in 1516. At this point in Latin Christianity, the only authoritative version of the Bible was Saint Jerome's Latin translation of the Septuagint from 381, called the Vulgate. Officially considered the word of God for more than a millennium, the idea that anyone could improve the Vulgate represented a prideful blasphemy, but Erasmus had spent years teaching himself Greek and reading the New Testament in its original language, and he believed Jerome's translation needed significant revisions. Most importantly, Erasmus targeted a verse in the Gospel of Matthew that had long provided biblical justification for the practice of paying penance and the pecuniary conception of salvation. In this verse, John the Baptist exhorts everyone to prepare for God's imminent judgment. Jerome translates the famous admonishment as follows: "*Paenitentiam agite, adpropinquavit enim regnum caelorum*" (Matt. 3:2).[249] The Vulgate's translation reads, "Pay penance [*paenitentiam agite*], for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near."

Erasmus takes issue with Jerome's all-important phrase *paenitentiam agite* [pay penance] because it introduces transactional logic to the verse that the Greek

[249] Blue Letter Bible, www.blueletterbible.org/vul/mat/3/2/s_932002.

original does not contain. *Paenitentiam agite* translates the Greek imperative verb *metanoeō*, which itself consists of two principal parts: the prefix *meta*, which means 'after', and the verb *noeō*, which means 'to think' or 'to consider'. In the Greek original, *metanoeō*, which functions like a reflexive verb, simply commands the listener to *think again*, *reconsider*, or *re-pent*. Jerome, however, uses the transitive verb *agere* to translate *metanoeō*, and he interpolates a direct object, *paenitentiam*. According to Erasmus, this translational decision distorts the meaning and structure of the imperative and even, as he says, "ruins the Gospel." Rather than urging the listener to inwardly reevaluate themselves, Jerome's version commands the listener to perform an outward act of payback. Along with the *Novum Instrumentum*, Erasmus published his *Annotationes*, which elaborate and justify his revisions. His lengthy but history-making annotation on Matthew 3:2 reads as follows:

> *Metanoeō* — In the Vulgate, this is usually translated as 'pay penance' . . . Laypeople think this means that paying penance according to prescribed punishments somehow compensates for sins that have been committed, because Christians who had publicly sinned used to be cast out of the fellowship and disciplined. In this way, payback, or punishment, which is to say penitence, came to be revered. This idea is no small error among many theologians, who distort something Augustine wrote about repentance, that is, public satisfaction for sins, which is called contrition . . . But the word *metanoeō*, deriving from *metanoein*, means to think back upon the past, to reevaluate [*a posterius intellegendo*]—for instance, when someone has made an error in completing some task and realizes it after the fact . . . Tertullian himself says of the Greek word that repentance does not consist of the outward confession of a crime but in an inward change of mind. In my own opinion, it should be translated, then, as 'Reconsider' or 'Think again' [*Resipiscite, sive, Ad mente redite*], in the sense of being displeased by your

> past self and coming to your senses. Yet the Vulgate says 'pay penance' rather than 'be led to remorse'. I refuse to affirm this barbaric error . . . However, otherwise pious and learned men twist things and pronounce false teachings. And this is the way we do things today. Paying penance has ruined the Gospel [*poenitentiam ab Evangelio profligatam*] . . . The pious tears and ceremonial duties that are somehow imagined to pay for the crime actually destroy any beneficial compensation for the sin, which consists in the act of reconsideration. The Greek term does not suggest punishment, as many people seem to think; it means reevaluation, coming to your senses and being led to remorse (*In Novum Testamentum Annotationes*, 18).[250]

If indeed Erasmus "laid the egg that Luther hatched," then this right here is the egg. By refusing the notion that we must continually pay God back for the debt of sin by compensatory acts of self-punishment as well as literal deposits into the Church's accounts, Erasmus disrupts the fiduciary logic of Catholic thought and practice at the time.

In a public letter critiquing the Church's penitential system and its many behavioral regulations, Erasmus succinctly explains his theological objection to the idea that Christian life consists of a series of installment payments to God:

> The aim of the bishops and the Roman Pontiff, when they approved these regulations, was to addict to Hell [*addicerent gehennae*] everyone who did not observe them . . . God himself is not so stern and irritable that he would throw into hell for minor offenses the same people he redeemed with his own blood. God is well-aware of the infirmity of his creatures and lets a lot of things go ("A Letter by Erasmus Defending his Views Concerning The Prohibition on Eating Meat and Similar Human Regulations," 1205).[251]

[250] Erasmus, *In Novum Testamentum Annotationes*. Basel: Hieronymus Froben, 1540.
[251] Erasmus, *Desiderii Erasmi Epistola Apologetica de Interdictio Esu Carnium deque Similibus Hominum Constitutionibus ad Reverendum in Christo Patrem et Illustrem Principem Christophorum Episcopum Basileensem*, in *Desiderii Erasmi Operum Omnium*, Volume 9, 1197-1214, ed., Peter Vander Aa. Lugduni Batavorum, 1706.

Erasmus elaborates this important point in his best-selling collection of dialogues, called *The Colloquies*. In one of the colloquies, "The Epicurean," Erasmus argues through a fictional dialogue between two men that the whole point of Christ's redemption was to relieve the constant anxiety of owing outstanding debts, which he describes as bondage to the law. One character named Hedonius (which etymologically means "the enjoyer") explains to his interlocutor, Spudaeus (or "the serious one") that Christ's vicarious redemption actually frees us up to enjoy life rather than constantly having to suffer the "bad conscience" of a delinquent debtor, desperately trying to scrape together as much payback as we can afford. If Christians "expect every hour that they might be cast into Hell," he asks, "can there be any enjoyment of earthly things, anything cheerful, when weighed down by such a stone hanging over our heads?" (*The Colloquies*, 344).[252]

Erasmus does not reject the idea that humanity *was* indebted to God; he insists that our debts have already been settled by the redemption of Christ. Thus, he contends that Christian life should not be oriented around penitential payback through behavioral prohibitions; instead, Christians—in the wake of redemption—should embody what he describes as an "Epicurean" lifestyle of serenely enjoying the newfound freedom that Christ has afforded us, without the pressure of earning our own salvation. In the *Colloquies*, Erasmus asserts a radically new thesis based on his claim that our debts have been paid in full: "No one is more Epicurean than a Christian living a pious life [*nulli magis sunt Epicurei quam*

[252] Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, Volume 2. London: Reeves & Turner, 1878. Translation modified. For the Latin, see Erasmus, *Epicureus*, in *Colloquia nunc Emendatiora cum Annotationibus Arnoldi Montani*, 798-820. Amsterdam: Joannem Janssonium, 1658. For a helpful analysis of Erasmus' Epicureanism, see Beert Verstraete, "The Defense of Epicureanism in Erasmus's *Colloquies*," in *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, 27 (Fall 2006), 38-47.

*Christiani pie veventes*]" (*The Colloquies*, 342). He contrasts the truly pious Christian, who is freed up to enjoy life rather than stuck striving to repay debts, to "the bare-footed Franciscan, girded up with a rope full of knots, in a mean and ragged coat, worn to the skeleton by fasting, keeping vigils, and doing labors" (*The Colloquies*, 337). Erasmus suggests that if we rightly interpret the Gospel message—that our debts have been paid—then we can be liberated from the anxiety that we have to buy back our freedom through addicted labor. In apparent disregard for the doctrine of redemption itself, Erasmus argues that the Catholic practice of penitential payback intensifies the anxiety of addiction, which is contrary to the Good News.

However, in his line-by-line commentary on the entire New Testament, Erasmus clarifies the nature of this renewed freedom that Christ's redemption has afforded us. In describing this new freedom, Erasmus introduces a new way of thinking about addiction itself. Although Erasmus has argued that true piety does not involve anxious payback but, in fact, relaxed enjoyment, he makes sure to refine his position: "Because I said you are free from the law, far be it to interpret these words to mean that you may sin with impunity, or to think that the grace of God, which has forgiven your former sins, has given you free license to sin . . . Our servitude has been changed, not abolished outright [*mutata est servitus, non prorsus adempta*]" (*In Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, chapter 6).[253] Erasmus explains, paradoxically, that being redeemed from our addiction to the Devil does not liberate us from addiction *per se*, but actually transfers our addiction to Christ. "Formerly, you were slaves of the most terrible servitude: addicted to false idols and

[253] Erasmus, *In Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos Argumentum*, in *Paraphrases in Omnes Epistolas Pauli Germanas*, Basel: Johann Froben, 1521.

vile desires [*simulacris et foedis cupiditatibus addicti*], but now you have escaped the tyranny of the Devil" (*In Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, chapter 6). Having been liberated from our addiction to the Devil through Christ's redemption, Erasmus claims that we are now "addicted to Jesus alone [*Iesu a quo uno soli addicti*] (*In Priorem Epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios*, chapter 8).[254] We were enslaved in our addiction to the Devil, and Christ's redemption has freed us; however, our renewed freedom does not mean that we are no longer addicts; rather, we are addicts of a different kind. We are indebted to Christ for paying our debts for us; thus, we are addicted to Christ alone. Again, "Our servitude has been changed [*mutata est servitus*], not abolished outright." For Erasmus, the observation that our liberation consists in enslaving ourselves to Christ does not represent a theological innovation. This thesis has a biblical basis, and it echoes throughout the Latin theological tradition, particularly in Augustine. However, the description of liberation as *addiction*, explicitly, does mark a shift in Christian conceptions of freedom.

By claiming that Christian freedom means being addicted to Christ, Erasmus upsets the perennial conceptualization of addiction as inherently problematic. Whether conceived as delinquency or disease, centuries of theologians have agreed on the basic premise that addiction is equivalent to sin, and, accordingly, they have construed Christian life as a process of being redeemed or recovering from addiction. However, Erasmus uses the term *addicere* in a novel way, to describe *both* sin *and* salvation, *both* enslavement *and* freedom. In his commentary on Second Timothy, he explains that because we are addicted to Christ, we no longer have to "worry about making any provisions for our own lives, for all such concerns are taken care of by

[254] Erasmus, *In Priorem Epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios Paraphrasis*, in *Paraphrases in Omnes Epistolas Pauli Germanas*, Basel: Johann Froben, 1521.

the commander. Your only occupation should be carrying out the orders he has given" (*In Posteriorem Epistolam ad Thomotheum*, chapter 2).[255] Self-disownership, he suggests, can be just as liberating as it is enslaving, and for the same reason: the addict is relieved of self-determination. T*he addict is free*—no longer bearing the burden of making their own decisions, decided as they are by their addiction—*because they are enslaved*. In other words, Erasmus maintains the conceptual core of addiction—that the addict is not their own but, instead, owned and operated by that to whom/which they are addicted—yet he describes this self-disownership as freedom itself. What constitutes the difference between sin and salvation, between enslavement and freedom, is not addiction versus the restored self-possession of redemption/recovery; rather, the difference consists solely in the object of one's addiction—that is to say, the character of one's owner.

If we are addicted to the Devil, then we suffer a terrible servitude that results in death, but if we are addicted to Christ, then we attain "the highest happiness" (*In Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, chapter 6). Ultimately, there is no un-addicted state of selfhood within Erasmus' conceptualization, because redemption itself signifies a transfer of debt-bondage from the Devil to Christ. That is to say, selfhood itself is addiction; the only question is to what/whom. We can see Erasmus' reconceptualization of addiction at work in the unique valedictions with which he concludes some of his letters. For instance, in a letter written to one of the most important patrons of his work, the Archbishop of Canterbury William Warham, Erasmus concludes like this: "Farewell, and do number me among those who are most addicted to you with all their hearts [*toto pectore sunt addictissimi*]" (Letter

[255] Erasmus, *In Posteriorem Epistolam Pauli ad Thomotheum Paraphrasis*, in *Paraphrases in Omnes Epistolas Pauli Germanas*, Basel: Johann Froben, 1521.

188, line 87-88, 420).[256] (*Letters of Erasmus*, Volume 1, ed. P.S. Allen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, Letter 188, line 87-88, 420). Within Erasmus' new theological vision, addiction becomes something to affirm and celebrate—neither reducible to delinquency to be redeemed nor disease to be cured. If, as Augustine never ceases to repeat, "You are addicted to whatever owns you," then as long as your owner(s) has (have) your best interests in mind, then addiction can be salutary.

By extending the metaphor of addiction to describe both sin and salvation, Erasmus undermines any pretense to self-possession that runs through earlier theologians, especially those who emphasize an ethos of personal accountability and self-control. Because we are addicts no matter what, no one is their own at any point. Even while we are free, our wills are not our own, since we are addicted. However, this claim that we are always addicts intensifies the perennial Christian question: What exactly is the status of the addict's free will? This question arises within the logic of Erasmus' theology in two forms. On the one hand, does being addicted to the Devil mean that we cannot help but sin, or, despite our addiction, do we retain some degree of free will such that we can *just say no* to sin and addict ourselves to Christ instead? On the other hand, does being addicted to Christ mean that we are no longer able to sin at all, or, despite our addiction, do we retain some degree of free will such that we can *just say no* to righteousness and progressively addict ourselves to the Devil?

The underlying questions remain the same. First, how does one become addicted in the first place—by choice or by dint of some indwelling alien force? Second, does addiction destroy the will entirely or just make controlling ourselves

[256] Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum Desideri Erasmi Roterodami*, *Tomus Unus: 1484-1514*, ed., P.S. Allen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906.

more difficult? In the same discussion where Erasmus first mentions being addicted to Christ, he seems to suggest that, although we are addicted, we retain some irreducible core of self-ownership:

> In part, it's up to you to decide which servitude you wish to embrace, for you cannot hold onto both at the same time. You are free not to addict yourself to anyone [*Liberum nulli in servitute temet addicere*], but once you have addicted yourself to the Lord . . . you must obey Him alone . . . Accordingly, to those who addict themselves to sin [*Proinde, qui peccato sese addicunt*] and surrender themselves to its service, this servitude results in death (*In Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, chapter 6).

To be sure, Erasmus is ambivalent about his own doctrine of addiction. Although he appears to reject the notion of self-ownership entirely by insisting that we are addicts no matter what, here, he says that we are free to choose our own addictions—in fact, not just free to choose our addiction, but even free *not to be addicted to anything*. While Erasmus' novel theology of addiction suggests that we are addicted no matter what, he appears to smuggle self-ownership back in at the last second. However, even within this passage, he hedges this claim. What we end up addicted to, he makes sure to qualify, is a product of our own decisions only "in part [*iam partim*]." Indeed, in his treatise on free will, Erasmus says, "I confess that I have not yet formed a definite opinion on any of the numerous traditional views regarding the freedom of the will" (*De Libero Arbitrio*, 7).[257] Even while Erasmus intentionally interferes with the tenor of his own tradition by using *addiction* to describe both sin and salvation, enslavement *and* freedom, he cannot quite abandon the idea that individuals do exercise self-sovereignty, such that we face a choice between different

[257] Erasmus, "The Free Will," in *Discourse on Free Will*, 3-96, ed. and trans., Ernst Winter. New York: Continuum, 1997.

addictions, or even no addiction at all. As we will see in the next section, Luther, who was a dedicated student of Erasmus' writings, would radicalize Erasmus' doctrine of addiction and carry his thought to an extreme, arguing that we have no choice in our addictions. Whether we remain infirmed in our addiction to the Devil, or God graciously liberates us by addicting us to Christ instead, forces beyond our own choosing act decisively upon our wills—indwelling sin or prevenient grace.

### § 28 – Martin Luther: Addiction Is Not A Choice

Before Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) became a revolutionary protestor, he was a devoted Augustinian monk. Although Luther had committed himself to monastic life voluntarily and with great enthusiasm, he, like Erasmus before him, could not withstand the penitential routine of the monastery. While Erasmus decried monastic life because he saw paying penance as a hypocritical charade from the beginning, Luther was not initially skeptical of the fiduciary framing of salvation. By his own account, Luther ended up breaking from the traditional theological framework of penitential payback not because he never took it seriously, but because he struggled so assiduously within it. In his own words, "I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I must say, if any monk was ever going to get to heaven through monkery, it would have been I. (*Luther's Werke*, volume 38, 141).[258]

Despite Luther's steadfast practice of penitential self-discipline, he ran into a familiar problem:

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[258] Martin Luther, *Kleine Antwort auf Herzog Georgen nächstes Buch* (1533), in *Martin Luther's Werke*, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, *Volume 38*, 135-170. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1912.

> Even in my case, it was enormously difficult to struggle against and escape from my errant ways, ingrained in me by the ways of the world, which, by habitual practice, had practically become my very nature [*longa consuetudine velut in naturam mutatis*]. How true is that proverb, 'Old habits die hard [*Difficile est consueta relinquere*].' Or, as another one says, 'Habit is second nature'. After all, Augustine is right: 'Habit that goes unresisted becomes necessity'" (*Luther's Werke,* volume 54, 183, citing Augustine *Confessiones*, book VIII, chapter 5, section 10).[259]

No matter how hard Luther strived to keep himself in check and compensate for his failures through fasting and other forms of self-discipline, he could not get total control of himself. "No matter how irreproachably I lived as a monk, I still felt like a sinner standing before God with a bad conscience, and I had no confidence that my payback could placate him [*nec mea satisfactione placatum confidere possem*]" (*Luther's Werke,* volume 54, 185). Luther finds himself in a futile cycle. He owes God total obedience, but because he does not have full self-control, even his best efforts to comply are insufficient to cover the balance due. Worse yet, every time Luther strives to give God what he owes him—that is, total obedience—and inevitably fails, he actually racks up further debts through his very effort to render recompense.

As a result, Luther recounts, "I did not love and even hated this just and punitive God [*iustum et punientem Deum*] . . . saying to myself, 'As if it weren't enough that we miserable sinners are already cursed with original sin and laden with all the difficulties of the Ten Commandments, God continues to heap suffering upon suffering" (*Luther's Werke*, volume 54, 185). In short, Luther rages against his being held individually accountable for things he cannot account for. He admits outright

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[259] Martin Luther, *Vorrede zum ersten Bande der Gesamtausgaben seiner lateinischen Schriften*, in *Luther's Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Volume 54*, 168-177. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1928.

that bad habits have become practically part of who he is [*velut naturam*], such that he cannot just white-knuckle perfect obedience, despite his stalwart efforts to do so over his seven years of monastic practice. Luther cannot get full control of his will, yet he believes God will punish him as if he could—as if he is just not trying hard enough to do the right thing. In a way, the conflicting perspectives of Anselm and Abelard fight inside Luther as a monk. Like Anselm, Luther holds himself accountable for all his sins, and he strives to compensate for every delinquent act, and yet he feels the inability to fully control himself that Abelard describes. Caught in the double bind of responsibility without control, Luther begins to crack under the burden of being held accountable for debts that he can't pay.

Thanks in large part to reading Erasmus' translation of the New Testament—particularly the annotation on Matthew 3:2—Luther would find a way out of his existential double bind. In a letter to his mentor and former abbot, Johann von Staupitz, Luther explains his breakthrough. "At the time [in the monastery]," he says, "I was distressed by my conscience and the tortures of those who, through endless and unfounded precepts, teach the so-called method of confession [*modi confitendi*]." However, Luther recounts how Erasmus' *Annotationes* taught him a life-changing etymological lesson that would relieve this torture:

> I learned—thanks to the work and talent of the most erudite men who teach us Greek and Hebrew with such great devotion—that the word *poenitentia* means *metanoia* in Greek; it is derived from *meta* and *noun*, that is, from 'afterward' and 'mind'. *Poenitentia* or *metanoia*, therefore, means reconsidering [*resipiscentia*] and reflecting on one's misdeeds after recognizing the error of one's ways. This reconsideration is impossible without undergoing a change of heart and a change of love [*sine mutatione*

> *affectus et amoris*] . . . Continuing down this line of thinking, I became so bold as to believe that the people who attributed so much value to penitential works had sorely neglected the real *poenitentia*, beyond those trivial acts of payback and laborious confessions. It is evident that they were misled by the Latin terminology, because the expression *poenitentiam agere* suggests an outward deed rather than a change of heart, but this notion does not do any justice to the Greek *metanoein* ("Letter to Father Johann Von Staupitz," 525-526).[260]

Erasmus' revision and etymological annotation on Matthew 3:2, provided Luther the key to unlock a new understanding of Christian life.

Like Erasmus, Luther does not deny that we were debtors to God, he merely insists that Christ's death was sufficient compensation for all of our outstanding debts—and even futures ones—such that we no longer have to live with the bad conscience of a delinquent debtor and strive to make endless insufficient repayments to God. In short, Luther believes that the "good news" of the Gospel itself is that Christ nullifies any contractual, transactional relationship between humanity and God, which could only end in the addict's capital punishment, since our works will never compensate for our debts. In his famous lectures on Paul's letter to the Romans, Luther rehearses the addiction statute from the Twelve Tables to articulate the logic of Christian salvation. "If you owed a debt to your overlord and could not pay it," he explains, "there are two ways in which you could rid yourself of the debt: either he would take nothing and tear up the account, or some good man would pay it for you . . . It is in the latter way that Christ has made us free" ("Preface to the

[260] Martin Luther, *Resolutiones Disputationum de Indulgentiarum Virtute*, in *Dr. Martin Luther's Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Volume 1*, 522-628. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883. For more on Luther's readings of Erasmus, see David M. Whitford, "Erasmus Openeth the Way Before Luther: Revisiting Humanism's Influence on 'The Ninety-Five Theses' and the Early Luther," in *Church History and Religious Culture*, 96, No. 4, (2016), 516-540.

Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans," 82).[261] Therefore, he clarifies in another lecture, "Even though I am addicted to death because of my sin, I am delivered from death no thanks to my own resources, but because of Christ's gift [*Quod igitur ego mortem evado, qui tamen morti ob peccatum addictus sum, est effectus non mearum virium, sed Christi donantis*]" (*Luther's Werke*, volume 40, part 2, 517).[262] As Luther summarizes at the end of his letter to Staupitz on Erasmus' new translation, he feels relieved from the torture of anxious payback because "It is enough for me to have the dear Savior and Redeemer, my Lord Jesus Christ" (*Luther's Werke*, volume 1, 69).

Only a few months after Erasmus' published his translation of the New Testament with its accompanying annotations in 1516, Luther posted the *Ninety-Five Theses* on the Wittenberg Church. The first two theses essentially paraphrase Erasmus' annotation on Matthew 3:2:

> 1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said *poenitentiam agite*, he meant that the entire life of the believer should be one of repentance.
>
> 2. This word cannot be understood to mean the ritual of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy" (*The Ninety-Five Theses*).

According to the Erasmian position Luther developed in the early 1500s, the idea that the life of the faithful should consist of paying penance to God belies a blasphemous lack of faith in Christ's salvific sacrifice "Oh you stupid pig-theologians!" Luther protests in his lectures on Romans, "By your line of

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[261] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Third Edition. Ed., Lull and Russell. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.
[262] Martin Luther, *Psalmus 45*, in *Dr. Martin Luther's Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Volume 40, Part 2*, 471-610. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1914.

reasoning, grace was not necessary!" (*Lectures on Romans*, scholia, chapter 4, section 7, 261-62).[263] Furthermore, he begins to see the penitential payback system as ironically reinforcing a kind of self-involvement that, in his view, runs counter to the spirit of obedience in the first place.

To the extent that I pay penance to God strictly in order to save myself from the death that is owed to us addicts, my ostensibly obedient acts actually manifest my own self-interest more than any loving submission to God. "Even though you keep the law outwardly with works, from fear of punishment or love of reward, nevertheless you do all this unwillingly, without pleasure in and love for the law, but with reluctance and under compulsion" ("Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul's to the Romans," 77). In other words, if what we really owe God is our love, then when we pay penance out of self-regard (fear of punishment or desire for reward), we actually defraud God further of his due through our very efforts to pay him back. In this way, as the Lutheran formula goes, it is possible to perform [*facere*] the law, but not to fulfill [*perficere*] the law.[264] We can outwardly do the deeds of obedience, but, our hearts are not in it, because we're only in it for ourselves. Thus, he argues, striving to earn salvation through paying penance not only evidences a lack of faith in Christ's redemption, but also, to the degree that paying penance is motivated by the desire to save oneself, ritual penance actually deepens one's bondage to sinful self-interest. For explicitly discouraging people from paying penance, Luther recounts, "I am accused of doing harm to others—namely, that I addict souls to Purgatory [*quod*

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[263] Martin Luther, "Scholia on Chapter Four," in *Luther's Works, Volume 25: Lectures on Romans, Glosses and Scholia*, 255-284, ed., Hilton Oswald. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972. For the Latin, see Luther, *Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief 1515/1516*, ed., Johannes Ficker. Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1908.
[264] See Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, in *Luther's Works*, Volume 33. American Edition. 257-66.

*animas ad Purgatorium addico*]—by saying that the payback has been paid back [*poenitentias remitti*]. . . But I am simply making them face the justice and judgment of God, which the Church cannot satisfy [*tollere*] with its treasury keys" (*Luther Werke*, volume 1, 660).[265] Rival theologians worried that Luther's attack on the penance-paying system would cause people to stack up debts that would prevent them from settling accounts with God, but he insisted that the debt has already been paid in full.

Although Christ has paid our debts so that we no longer stand before God as convicted addicts, condemned to die, Luther emphasizes that we nonetheless remain bound to our sinful ways, which, as Luther diagnosed back in his monastic days, have become ingrained in us as unbreakable habits—indeed, practically essential to who we are. Put differently, Christ's redemption has fully justified us before God such that we no longer owe him any payback; however, redemption does not actually change our sinful behavior. We are redeemed, but we still sin compulsively. This theological distinction—that we are already justified, but still sinners [*simul iustus et peccator*]—allows Luther to append the fiduciary and medical frameworks that have historically opposed each other.

He argues that there *was* an essentially fiduciary relation between God and humanity but that it has been fulfilled and annulled by Christ's sacrifice. Redemption's debt settlement has allowed God to transition roles, from defrauded creditor to loving healer. While we are no longer addicts in the financial sense that we owe outstanding debts, we remain addicts in the medical sense that we still cannot help but sin because of the disease of the will that we are born with. Even

[265] Martin Luther, *Ad Dialogum Silvestri Prieratis de Potestate Papae Responsio* (1518), in *Dr. Martin Luther Werke, Volume 1*, 644-686. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883.

after redemption liberates us from addiction (willful delinquency), we still need to be cured of our addiction (congenital disease). Luther tries to resolve the delinquency-disease conflation by explaining that one model comes after the other. In Luther's view, the "good news" of our redemption is that it allows us to reconceive our misdeeds as symptoms of a social disease from which we need healing rather than individual debts that require punitive payback. By reconceptualizing sin—from individual debt to social disease—Luther feels liberated from the onerous moral account-keeping of his Catholic practice, as well as from the looming anxiety of capital punishment.

However, according to Luther, even though everyone has already been justified by Christ's universal redemption, only some people will actually be saved, because the majority of us remain in denial about the congenital sickness that plagues us. Nearly paraphrasing Abelard, Luther returns to the familiar medical simile in his lecture on Romans:

> This is like the case of a doctor who wants to heal his patient, but who finds that the sick man is in denial about his sickness—calling the doctor a fool, indeed sick himself, for trying to "cure" a perfectly healthy person. Because the sick man denies his sickness, the doctor cannot administer his healing and medicine. For he could only heal the sick man if the sick man first admits that he is sick and allows him to cure him, saying, 'I certainly am sick' (*Lectures on Romans*, scholia, chapter 3, section 7, 203).

Consistent with Abelard's medical model, Luther believes that we are helpless to heal ourselves of our congenital addiction by sheer force of will. "Even when a man becomes aware of the disease of sin, he may be troubled, distressed, even in despair .

. . but there is need of another light to reveal the remedy" (*De Servo Arbitrio*, 262).[266] We need healing from a higher power.[267]

For us even to begin receiving treatment from God, we have to take the first step: admitting that we are addicts. This admission, this change of heart, is how Luther positively understands the crucial term *metanoeō* that Erasmus taught him. God, who is no longer obligated to convict us of delinquency but actually wants to heal us of our debilitating disease, demands not that we pay him back [*poenitentiam agite*], but only that we take a hard look at our lives and admit that we are deeply unwell [*metanoeō*]. For Luther, this self-reevaluation and consequent admission that we are sick, that we are powerless, represents the true *poenitentia*. The "change of heart and change of love" that overcomes denial marks the beginning of the lifelong process of recovery:

> Now, it is similar to the case of a sick man who believes the doctor who promises him a sure recovery. From here on, this man obeys the doctor's orders in hopes of the promised recovery, and he abstains from the things that are prohibited [*abstinet ab iis que prohibita sunt*], so that he will neither impede his progress towards the promised health nor worsen his condition. Now, is the sick man cured? In fact, he is both sick and well at the same time . . . He is healthy in hope, but still a sinner (*Lectures on Romans*, scholia, chapter 3, section 7, 260).

Admitting to being sick, following the doctor's orders, and abstaining from forbidden things all help addicts stay healthy; however, so long as they live, they can never recover, because addiction is a congenital disease; it's part of who we are. "This life,

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[266] Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, in *Luther's Works*, *Volume 33, Part 3*, 3-296, ed., Watson and Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.

[267] For a comprehensive review of Luther's medical metaphors and their legacy, see Johann Anselm Steiger, *Medizinische Theologie: Christus Medicus und Theologia Medicinalis Bei Martin Luther und im Luthertum der Barockzeit*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

then," which is to say the Christian life, "is a life of being healed from sin, not a life of sinlessness, with the cure complete and perfect health attained. The Church is an infirmary for those who are sick and need healing" (*Lectures on Romans*, scholia, chapter 3, section 7, 263). In the context of this metaphor, the rules and regulations that define Christian living do not offer ways and means to compensate God for the debts we owe; instead, these doctor's orders serve to constantly remind us that we are sick, always on the brink of relapse, which keeps us steadfast in recovery.

Like Erasmus, Luther also paradoxically claims that recovering from addiction does not annul our status as addicts; rather, we recover from one addiction by becoming addicted to something else—that is, by forming a healthy dependence. In his reflection on baptism, where he discusses the change of heart that begins recovery, Luther asks himself if recovering from sin requires us to take vows of abstinence from all worldly pleasure. "By being baptized, we all make one and the same vow: to fight sin." Whether this fundamental commitment to recover from sin requires us to become straight-edge, like a monk or a priest, Luther ultimately leaves open. However, he does say that, "After the vow to fight sin, you may well get addicted to that kind of life, because you will find it most conducive to seeing through your baptismal commitment [*Praeter hoc autem votum, potes te quoque certo vitae generi addicere, quod tibi commodissimum videbitur, ut in eo illi voto satisfacias, quod in baptismo fecisti*]" (*Concio de Sacramento Baptismi*, 408).[268] Echoing Erasmus' extension of addiction to describe both sinful and righteous, sick and healthy, enslaved and free, states of selfhood, Luther describes addiction recovery itself as an alternative addiction. Whether addicted to sin or addicted to

[268] Martin Luther, *Conciones*, in *Martini Lutheri Opera Latina*, *Volume 3*, 394-473, ed., Henricus Schmidt. Frankfurt: Heyder and Zimmer, 1866.

recovering from that very addiction, Luther suggests that the self is never its own. Even those who are free and healthy are addicts. In tandem with this Erasmian extension of addiction to signify devotion to God, Luther, too, used "most addicted" as a valediction in his personal correspondences: "*Addictissimus*, *Martinus Luther*" (*Luther Werke*, division 4, volume 5, 353).[269] in *Luther's Werke,* Division 4, *Correspondence*, Volume 5, 353).

However, despite this important resonance with Erasmus's description of the human being as constitutively addicted, Luther makes a sharp break from the scholar, who never formally joined Luther's movement. Even while Erasmus resisted the Latin theological tradition by using the term *addiction* to describe both sinful enslavement and Christian freedom, he ambivalently retains some notion of self-possession insofar as he suggests that we can—to some extent—choose our addictions. Recall, he does say that, "in part, it is up to you to decide which servitude you wish to embrace." In fact, just a line later, Erasmus makes the stronger claim that "You are free not to addict yourself to anyone." Luther, taking Erasmus' reduction of selfhood to different forms of addiction perhaps even more seriously than Erasmus himself did, refuses the idea that we can choose our own addictions. In the same way that we are helplessly born with our addiction to sin, Luther insists that no one can opt into addiction to recovery by sheer force of their own will. Just like our original addiction to sin, the salutary addiction that is recovery itself remains beyond our control.

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[269] Martin Luther, "Letter 1585: Luther to Friedrich Victorious in Nürnberg," in *Dr. Martin Luther's Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Division 4, Volume 5,* 352-53. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1934.

According to Luther, the crucial change of heart that begins the recovery process is itself not a choice, but the effect of faith, which is felt as an alien force that works inside us, making us admit that we're sick and transforming our desires from the inside out. Faith, Luther clarifies, does not mean affirming, "I believe," to some knowledge proposition. Rather, "Faith . . . is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us born anew. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different people, in heart and spirit, and mind and powers" ("Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Roamans," 79). Faith, which actually has nothing to do with belief, is a spiritual gift that not only affords us a newfound strength to resist the diseased desires we were born with, but also gives us new desires altogether. Luther insists that no one can conjure their own faith or decide to have faith; it must be given by God. That is to say, the change of heart that addicts us to God is itself beyond our own choosing. We do not decide to addict ourselves to God; we are decided by the addiction we receive without choosing. "The righteousness of faith comes from grace" (*De Servo Arbitrio*, 263). In the same way that we did not choose the degenerative addiction to sin that we were born with, neither can we choose the regenerative addiction to God that will save us.

The famous print debate between Erasmus and Luther on free will revolves around this question that arises within their revolutionary thinking: If we are addicts no matter what, then can we choose our own addictions? Erasmus never quite relinquishes the idea that we might actually be in control, the ultimate arbiter of our own wills, insofar as we can, in part, opt in and out of our addictions. Luther attacks Erasmus for disowning the radical insight that he believes Erasmus himself articulated in his double doctrine of addiction—the idea that true freedom is only a

permutation of the self-disownership that selfhood ineluctably entails. In Luther's radical view, we are of course "free" in the sense that we can volitionally do whatever we want. However, that superficial sense of freedom—doing whatever one wants—rests upon a more fundamental kind of bondage: that our decisive wants come from the compulsions inside us that are entirely beyond our own control, that is, our addictions. Refusing to reduce addiction to total determinism, Luther specifies that the compulsion of addiction does not work "as if the person were taken by the scruff of the neck and forced to it." Instead, he explains, "he does it of his own accord and with a ready will. And this readiness or willingness to act, he cannot by his own powers omit, restrain, or change, but he keeps on willing . . . The will cannot change itself and turn in a different direction, but is rather more provoked into willing" (*De Servo Arbitrio*, 64).While Luther grants that a person's actions are directed by their will, he insists that the will is itself directed by the alien forces inside us—be it sin or faith. This distinction between doing whatever one wants and actual freedom of choice [*libero arbitrio*] allows Luther to claim that, even though we do what we want—or, in fact, *because* we do what we want—"free will lies vanquished and prostrate," at the feet of addiction.

While Erasmus and others are disturbed by the idea that they are not in control of their own choices and worry about the way this claim seems to let people off the hook, Luther reflects at the end of his treatise on the bondage of the will, in a section entitled, "The Personal Comfort in the Doctrine of Bondage": "As for myself, I frankly confess that I would not want free will to be granted to me, even if it could be, nor anything else be left in my own hands to enable me to strive after my salvation " (*De Servo Arbitrio*, 288). Luther tries to tell us that when we think of

ourselves as individually free rather than constitutively addicted, we bear the burdensome fantasy that we are solely responsible for our life's outcomes, and while imagining that we are individually responsible for our own deeds allows us to take credit for our successes, it also makes us guilty when things turn out wrong. This is the crushing burden of self-possession. In other words, the idea that we each possess ourselves—that we could somehow *not* be addicts—undergirds the exacting system of individual accountability that makes everyone anxious about their every choice. Luther tells us that he learned this lesson "through bitter experience over a period of many years" (*De Servo Arbitrio*, 289). And yet, while Luther himself feels a great relief in the thought that he is not the sole author of his deeds but, instead, acts as a medium of forces beyond his control, he does acknowledge that this idea is hard to swallow: "The old Adam must die before you can tolerate this thing and drink this strong wine" ("Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans, 84). Luther ultimately says that experiences of suffering best prepare us to accept the fact that although we may be free to do whatever we want, we are not in control of our own lives.

### § 29 – John Calvin: Addiction's Liberation

Of all the Latin theologians writing between the second and sixteenth centuries, John Calvin (1509 - 1564) developed the most systematic theology of addiction. Building on Erasmus and Luther, he refused the notion that human beings controlled their own lives  and formalized the doctrine of double addiction: whether addicted to worldly pleasures or divine affection, we are addicts no matter what, and

we cannot choose our path. Calvin himself was neither formally trained in theology nor ever a monk. Instead, between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, he studied classical philology and rhetoric at various universities in and around Paris, in preparation for a career in law. During his legal and oratorical studies, he aligned himself with the traditional form of Catholicism regnant in France at the time. However, as he recounts in the preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*, he underwent a conversion experience that brought him into the Protestant fold

> I endeavored faithfully to apply myself to the study of law, in obedience to the will of my father. However, God, by the secret guidance of his providence [*arcano providentiae suae*], eventually gave a different direction to my course. Because I was so thoroughly addicted to the superstitions of Popery [*superstitionibus Papatus magis portinaciter addictus essem*] to be easily extricated from such a profound abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued me and brought my mind to a teachable form . . . Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with such an intense desire to make progress therein (*Commentarius in Psalmos*, volume 1, viii-ix).[270]

After Calvin's conversion experience, which freed him up from his "addiction" to the penitential system, he left off studying law and devoted himself, instead, to learning and elaborating the reformist theology of Luther and his French followers.

Within five years of his conversion, Calvin published the first edition of his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* [*Institutes of the Christian Religion*], where he would develop his doctrine of double addiction. Calvin built his ideas about addiction on the longstanding discussions of the condition among his theological

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[270] John Calvin, *Commentarius in Psalmos*, Volume 1. Ed., Tholuck. London: Black and Armstrong, 1836. For the English version, see Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Ed., and trans., Anderson. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845. xl.

predecessors, but the Roman legal concept occupied an even more central place in his theology than in anyone before him, thanks to his deep knowledge of the Roman sources themselves. In fact, the Roman rhetorician Quintillian who first explicitly distinguished addiction from slavery in his *Institutio Oratoria* (*c.* 95), was a central figure in Calvin's early rhetorical training.[271] Historian of theology Richard Muller reports that "Calvin was steeped in Quintillian and used the *Institutio Oratoria* as a constant reference aid" ("Calvin's Exegesis of Old Testament Prophecies," 73).[272] As a former (outstanding) student of Roman law and rhetoric, Calvin employs Roman legal language more consistently and systematically than any theologians before him—not only elaborating the concept of addiction in his own writings, but also interpolating the term *addicere* into his translations of the Bible itself.

Calvin organizes the *Institutio*—a nearly two-thousand page tome—into four parts that build on one another systematically. First, he diagnoses the condition from which we need saving; next, he explains how Christ has saved us; then, he describes how Christ's salvation changes our actual lived experiences; and, finally, he details the collective practices that celebrate and embody the new form of life made possible by Christ. In this sequence, Calvin deploys the hermeneutic of addiction right away. Setting up the sweep of his theology in a chapter called "Discussion of Human

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[271] As cited in Chapter One, Quintillian explains, "The *servus* cannot obtain his freedom against his master's will [*servus invito domino libertatem non consequetur*]; the *addictus* can recover it through payback, even against the master's will [*addictus soluendo citra voluntatem domini consequetur*]. The slave is beyond the law, but the law still applies to the *addictus* [*addictus legem habet*]. What is reserved to the freeman alone—his first name, last name, and nickname—all these are retained by the *addictus*" (*Institution Oratoria*, VII, 7, 27).

[272] Richard A. Muller, "The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom," in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, 136-66. Ed., Steinmetz. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990. Church historian William J. Bouwsma even suggests that Calvin's title *Institutio* could have been a reference to Quintillian's own *Instititionis Oratoria*, as both texts were meant to be instruction manuals or textbooks for the respective subject matters. See, Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 17.

Nature," Calvin says, "Before we consider the miserable condition to which humankind is now addicted [*miseram istam hominis conditionem cui nunc addictus est*], we should first examine what we were like when we were first created" (*Institutiones*, book I, chapter 15, section 1).[273] In order to explain what addiction is, Calvin first needs to develop the idea of free will.

Calvin explains that humans were originally endowed with free will, a faculty by which they could "direct their appetites and control all their bodily motions [*appetitus dirigeret, motusque omnes organicos temperaret*]." In this state of original integrity, Calvin continues, "humans, by free will, had the power, if they so willed, to attain eternal life" by simply choosing to act in harmony with God's single commandment not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (*Institutio*, book I, chapter 15, section 8). However, as the story goes, "although Man was gifted with the ability to persevere in obedience provided he exercised his will [*libero arbitrio pollebat*], he did not will to use this ability, for if he had thus willed, he would have persevered." Even though Adam and Eve could have just said no to the Serpent's supplication to eat the enjoyable poison, they chose not to. Because Adam and Eve freely chose to disobey God, they "voluntarily brought about their own destruction." As a result of Adam and Eve's voluntary delinquency, we posterity "have contracted from them a hereditary defect" (*Institutio*, book I, chapter 15, section 8). As he formulates subsequently: "Humankind, now deprived of free will, is miserably addicted in servitude [*Hominem arbitrii libertate nunc esse spliatum, et miserae servituti addictum*]" (*Institutio*, book II, chapter 2).

[273] John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis*. London: Thomas Vautrollerius, 1576.

Calvin theorizes that our addiction involves an inversion in the proprietary order of creation itself. Echoing Augustine's observation that we have become possessed by our own possessions, Calvin explains that "God gave us ownership [*dominos*] over all things and subjected things to us such that we could use them for our own advantage [*commoditate*]." However, thanks to our congenital disease of the will, "we get addicted in servitude to the very things that ought to serve us [*rebus externis, quae nobis adminiculo esse debent, nos in servitutem addicamus*]" (*Institutio*, book IV, chapter 13, section 3). In our fallen condition, our wills now strangely serve the very things that we ought to be able to use at will, according to our independent purposes. In other words, the worldly things that we ought to own have come to own us, such that we are no longer our own; we are addicts. In his *Commentary on Hebrews*, Calvin specifies that this impropriety can take many forms. We can become "addicted to money or riches . . . to gluttony . . . or any other pleasures [*addicti pecuniae et divitiis . . . gulae . . . vel aliis deliciis*] (*In Epistolam ad Hebraeos Commentarii*, chapter 12, verse 16).[274] Making the same clarification as Luther and Abelard before him, Calvin explains that addiction does *not* mean being unable to do whatever we want. On the contrary, doing whatever we want is precisely our bondage, because our wants are out of our control. In this sense, we act voluntarily, but we are nevertheless caught in a state of bondage. "We sin by our own choice, since it would not be sin if it were not voluntary. However, we are so totally addicted to sin that we cannot do anything voluntarily except sin [*addicti sumus ita*

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[274] John Calvin, "*In Epistolam ad Hebraeos Commentarii*," in *Ioannis Calvini in Novum Testamentum Comentarii*, Volume 7*,* Part 3, 1-158. Ed., Tholuck. Gustavum Eichler, 1834.

*peccato, ut nihil sponte possimus quam peccare*] (*In Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, Chapter 7, Verse 14).[275] We can do whatever we want, but we are not free.

Calvin's description of addiction, of course, raises the perennial question: To what extent do people have control over their addictive behaviors? Calvin, infamous for his insistence that everything is predetermined, tends to diminish individual agency at every turn. Accordingly, he sides with the medical model of addiction. In his commentary on the first letter of Peter, in which Peter decries the self-indulgent habits he observes among his community members, Calvin lays out his disease theory of addiction:

> Peter does attribute vices to people, but he does not condemn every individual on account of them, because we have a natural proclivity to do these evils [*ad malum natura proclives sumus*]. In fact, more than just having a proclivity, we are addicted [*sed etiam addicti*] . . . such that the enjoyment of the vices he specifies is necessary, deriving from an evil root [*ut necessario isti fructus, quas enumerat, ex mala radice prodeant*]. Everyone has this defective seed [*vitiorum semen*] within them, even if it does not germinate and grow equally in every individual [*sed non omnia in singulis germinant atque emergunt*]. However, this contagion is so spread among the entire human race that the whole world seems infected [*refertum*] (*In Petri Epistolam Priorem*, chapter 4, verse 3).[276]

In this passage, Calvin not only spells out a shockingly modern disease concept of addiction, but also he summarizes the criminological implications of thinking of human behavior symptomatically. Although addicted individuals act volitionally, they inherit determining factors that themselves are beyond all choice; their

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[275] John Calvin, *Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed., Parker. Leiden: Brill, 1981.
[276] John Calvin, "*In Petri Epistolam Priorem Commentarii*," in *Ioannis Calvini in Novum Testamentum Comentarii*, Volume 7*,* Part 3, 171-244. Ed., Tholuck. Gustavum Eichler, 1834.

behaviors might be problematic, but the root of the problem is a social disease rather than a delinquent individual. Calvin asks us, again, to consider the difficult idea that although we undeniably act of our own free will, the will is not, as Tertullian's ancient principle claims, the ultimate origin of deeds [*voluntas facti origo est*]. Recall Augustine's reflection on this very question over a thousand years prior to Calvin: "Either the cause of the will is the will itself, in which case there is no getting underneath the root of the will, or the will is not its own cause, in which case no one is guilty of sin." According to Calvin's disease theory of addiction, the will itself is rooted in the condition we are born with. The implication of Calvin's theory of human agency seems to be that *no one is guilty of sin*. However, this claim should be read very carefully. The point is not that there is no such thing as sin at all. Rather, no *one* is guilty of sin.

We are bound to keep sinning because the wants that determine our wills remain beyond our power to pick and choose. We cannot control ourselves not because we *cannot* do whatever we want, but because we *can only do what we want*. Like Luther, Calvin emphasizes how the disease conception of addiction mitigates our individual culpability, but he does not abandon any notion of individual accountability. In other words, Calvin, too, tries to synthesize the delinquency and disease models in his systematic theology. He argues that we have been liberated from the debts we owe on account of our bad behavior only thanks to Christ, who has compensated for our past and future sins. Thus, only because Christ has already settled all our accounts with God can humanity now relate to its own sins as symptoms of a pandemic disease rather than debts on an individual ledger. This is good news, because it takes the weight of individual moral account-keeping off our

backs. However, if we do not recognize that Christ has paid our debts, we will not be able to live out this liberation. "What is the sum of the Gospel other than this: that we are slaves of sin and death, that we are redeemed and set free by Jesus Christ, and that all those who do not receive and acknowledge Jesus as the redeemer and liberator are damned and addicted to eternal bondage [*aeternis vinculis damnatos addictos*]?" (*Institutio*, book 4, chapter 11, section 1). However, even with our debts having been paid and our no longer "being addicted to death" like an incorrigible delinquent, we nevertheless need healing from our congenital disease.

In keeping with his deterministic understanding of human behavior, Calvin repeats and even intensifies Luther's challenging claim that we are helpless to heal ourselves. We cannot heal ourselves because, in Calvin's mind, the only cure for one addiction is another, and addiction is not a choice. While Calvin consistently identifies sin as a degenerative addiction in keeping with the Latin tradition, he follows Erasmus and Luther in describing devotion to God as an addiction as well, albeit a regenerative one. Owing to our congenital addiction, we all initially find ourselves "addicted to our own base desires [*carni addicti*]" and, although we have all been redeemed, the only people who will actually recover from this disease are those who have been granted "the affection and desire that is produced by faith," which prompts these chosen few "to completely addict themselves to Christ [*totos se Christo addicere*]" (*In Petri Epistolam Secundam*, chapter 2, verse 14 and chapter 1, verse 19).[277] Christ may have redeemed everyone, but only a few will become "addicted to holiness and innocence [*addictum sanctitati et innocentiae*]" and thus recover from their degenerative disease (*In Petri Epistolam Secundam*, chapter 2,

[277] John Calvin, "*In Petri Epistolam Secundam Commentarii*," in *Ioannis Calvini in Novum Testamentum Commentarii*, Volume 7, Part 3, 245-75.

verse 1). As Calvin insists again, because no one can choose their own addiction, only the elect may say, "The Lord has called us, so that he may truly possess us as his own, his addicts [*Dominus nos vocavit, ut tanquam vere suos et sibi addictos possideat*] (*In Petri Epistolam Priorem*, chapter 2, verse 9). In other words, God calls whom he elects, and whom he elects, he addicts. Only these addicts will be saved—saved from one addiction by another. Calvin's doctrine of double addiction teaches that some are saved, and some are damned, but everyone is addicted, and no postlapsarian person possesses themselves.

In Calvin's eyes, the doctrine of double addiction should provide everyone—the damned and saved alike—an overwhelming sense of liberation from the onerous idea that we are individually responsible for our own life outcomes."This knowledge," insists Calvin, "is necessarily followed by . . . an incredible freedom from worry about the future" (*Institutio*, book I, chapter 17, section 7). While we can act volitionally, our futures do not hang in the balance of our own decisions, because our lives are decided by the addictions we receive—for better or worse. Calvin's central claim that the doctrine of double addiction should come as a relief to everyone can be very disorienting to consider. For many, especially modern readers, having no control over the outcomes of one's own life represents the purest form of bondage, not liberation. When success and failure hang in the balance of my own decisions and deeds, I feel pressure to perform. However, when my future stands to be determined by forces entirely beyond my control, and all I can do is wait and wonder, I feel anxious. For many people, the stress of individual responsibility feels much more bearable than the anxiety of total helplessness. However, for Calvin, the

reverse is true. "There's nothing I can do" could be spoken as an anxious resignation or an epiphany of relief, and Calvin feels the latter.

The delinquency theory of addiction grants individuals a greater degree of agency, but it thus burdens them with guilt when things go wrong. The disease theory of addiction, by contrast, deprives people of self-sovereignty, but it thus relieves them of the burdensome idea that every failure refers back to their own solitary fault. Whether I am irremediably addicted to sin or salubriously addicted to God, according to Calvin, the direction of my future is so entirely beyond my control that I should stop worrying. What else can I do? The prolific Calvinist theologian Arnold Geulincx explains this paradoxical principle as follows:

> If a ship is sailing at full speed towards the west, nothing prevents the passengers onboard from walking towards the east. Likewise, the will of God, carrying all things, impelling everything with inexorable force, in no way prevents us from resisting his will (as much as we can) with complete freedom (*Ethics*, annotation 9 to treatise I, chapter 1, section 2).[278]

We can do whatever we want, but no matter what we do, there's nothing we can do to change the course of our lives, because we're addicts. This intensified theory of addiction claims that no amount of anxious striving will change our condition; it will only tear us up inside and fill us with pointless guilt. "The person who at last laboriously works out their escape after infinite difficulties over a long period of time

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[278] Arnold Geulincx, *Ethica*, in *Arnoldi Geulincx Antuerpiensis Opera Philosophica*, Volume 3. Ed., Land. Martinus Nijhoff, 1893. It's worth noting that Arnold Geulincx was Samuel Beckett's favorite author, and the only English translation of Geulincx's *Ethics* is published with Beckett's personal annotations appended. Beckett says that Geulincx's axiom—*Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*—was his own personal motto. The phrase is hard to translate, but I interpret it as a sardonic inversion of the ancient Roman idiom *Velle posse est* [Where there's a will, there's a way]. *Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis* literally says, "Wherein you have no power, therein you should not will." Or, more freely, "If you can't, don't." I think Beckett's *Endgame* in particular becomes clearer when read through Geulincx's axiom.

does not live a happy life. Whoever calmly enjoys present blessings without this suffering is the happy one" (*Institutio*, book II, chapter 10, section 11). This Calvinist principle, which echoes Erasmus' Christian Epicureanism, applies to both kinds of addicts. Whether we're damned or saved, all we can do is follow the course of our addictions. One just has to hope that God addicts us to himself, because addiction to the right substance can be heaven on earth. As Calvin himself says of those addicted to God, "We are, in a way, already seated in heaven, not entertaining a mere hope of heaven [*non spe nuda*]" (*Institutio*, book II, chapter 16, section 16).

Unsurprisingly, Calvin's theological contemporaries found the doctrine of double addiction untenable and even dangerous. If nothing stands to be won or lost by individuals' own efforts, and everything remains unalterably in the hands of God, then what motivation will anyone have to strive to be good, indeed, to do anything? A belief in the power and propriety of the will seems to hold society together on some level. Luther himself did not disagree with Calvin's claims, but even he criticized Calvin for foregrounding such a subversive idea.[279] Other Protestants, however, outright argued against Calvin's radical refusal of self-possession. For instance, Jacobus Arminius (1560 - 1609), one of the next leading voices in the Protestant movement after Calvin, agreed that we are "contaminated and addicted to a life of sin [*contaminatus et vitae peccati addictus*]" ("Disputation LXIX: On the Sanctification of Man," 91).[280] However, Arminius could not stomach the further

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[279] Whether Luther was a full blown determinist remains a contested question. See, Urban, "Was Luther a Thoroughgoing Determinist," in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 22, No. 1 (1971); Alfsvåg, "Luther on Necessity" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 108, no. 1 (2015); and Vestrucci, "Recalibrating the Logic of Free Will with Martin Luther" in *Theology and Science*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2020).

[280] Jacob Arminius, "Disputation LXIX: On the Sanctification of Man," in *The Works of James Arminius*, Volume 2, ed., and trans., James Nichols. Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853. For the Latin, see *Iacobi Arminii Opera Theologica*, Lugduni Batavorum: Godefridus Basson, 1629. 401.

claim that we cannot, through our own willpower, effectively free ourselves from addiction. "Even though the will is addicted. . . it is capable of good," he claimed. Furthermore, he clarifies, "this capability is not just bestowed by grace; this capability is in us by nature" ("Concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination and the Amplitude of Divine Grace," 356-57).[281] The prolific Dutch reformer refused the notion that God simply elects some people to suffer their addictions forever, with no hope of working their way out; indeed, he was appalled by the idea that God creates degenerative addicts with no intention of healing them. He argued that if we reject the premise that we can overcome addiction on our own, then "you will make God, on account of that rejection, the author of sin . . . It's one thing to kill a creature, because afterwards it ceases to exist . . . but it is a very different thing to addict a person to eternal punishment [*aeternis poenis addicere*], which is even worse than annihilating them" ("Concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination and the Amplitude of Divine Grace, 263).[282]

Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin protested the Latin theological tradition's delinquency theory of addiction, because they thought it overemphasized

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[281] Jacob Arminius, "An Examination of a Treatise Concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination, and the Amplitude of Divine Grace," in *The Works of James Arminius*, Volume 3, ed., and trans., James Nichols. Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853. For the Latin text, see *Iacobi Arminii Opera Theologica*, Lugduni Batavorum: Godefridus Basson, 1629. 768. Note that dominant lineages of American Protestantism, although nominally "Calvinist," sided with Arminius on this point. As historian of American religion R. Laurence Moore explains, "To provide an understanding of working-class religion at the end of the nineteenth century, the ways it appealed to wage earners and its effect upon their commodity choices in the cultural marketplaces, I will need to say something about what the middle classes were trying to sell. A good place to begin is with the consensus scholarly view that Arminian theology, the free-will replacement of Calvinism that was at the core of antebellum revivalism, encouraged the drive towards free-market individualism. Economic ideology and religious ideology reinforced each other" (*Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. 177). Prolific evangelists such as George Whitefield and Charles Grandison Finney were avowed Arminians with respect to the doctrine of free will, despite belonging to nominally "Calvinist" denominations.

[282] For the Latin, see *Iacobi Arminii Opera Theologica*, Lugduni Batavorum: Godefridus Basson, 1629. 687.

self-possession and placed an onerous burden upon individuals to earn their own salvation through laborious payback. In response, they developed the disease model of addiction, emphasizing God's mercy and human passivity in the process of salvation. In this way, they argued against the longstanding idea that addicts can, by their own willpower and aided by the grace of God, get a hold of themselves and turn their lives around. They each insisted that even though people are free, they do not exercise sovereignty over themselves, as if the body were a kind of possession, though a borrowed one—to be used at will. Radicalizing ideas about human selfhood and the bondage of the will that they saw underemphasized within the Augustinain tradition, they demanded their own tradition to recognize that not only are we not our own; more radically, we are constitutively dispossessed of ourselves such that we do not even have ourselves on loan. We don't possess ourselves at all. Whether we are sinners or saved sinners, we are addicts.

While the penitential framework the Protestants sought to critique does partially place the ponderous burden of salvation upon individuals themselves, in so doing, it also incorporates individuals into the larger body of the Church itself. As medieval historian Robert Shaffern explains, "Arithmetic images for indulgences accompanied that of the Mystical Body in the thought of the mid-13th-century Schoolmen" ("The Medieval Theology of Indulgences," 21).[283] That is to say, the medieval theologians' notion of accountability inspired them to think of the Christian community in terms of corporation, not only in the sense of a fiduciary operation but also an integrated body of members. In this way, while thinkers like

[283] *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits*. Saint Bonaventure in particular combined the financial and the bodily metaphors in his *Commentaria in Libros Sententiarum* [*Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*].

Anselm, Bernard, and Thomas begin with the Roman legal notion of self-possessing individuals who are responsible for their deeds, this ethos of individual accountability yields a robustly collective conception of Christian life, where individual accountability forms the fabric of community. Indeed, because we possess ourselves (as a loan from God) and control our actions, we are accountable for what we do. In this way, moral accountability individuates each of us. However, this accountability also connects us to others to whom we are accountable and also whom we can count on to help keep us on track—not only one's immediate church community but also the entire Christian tradition itself, past and future.

By contrast, although the Protestant thesis that we are constitutively dispossessed of ourselves (at least everyone after Adam), totally lacking the freedom to make our own decisions, does liberate us from the burdensome responsibility of being individually accountable for our own deeds, it also thereby dismembers people from their communities of accountability. As Max Weber argues, Calvin's doctrine of double addiction does not produce a sense of liberation, but rather:

> A feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual. In what was for the man of the age of the Reformation the most important thing in life, his eternal salvation, he was forced to follow his path alone to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity. No one could help him. No priest, for the chosen one can understand the word of God only in his own heart. No sacraments, for though the sacraments had been ordained by God . . . they are not a means to the attainment of grace, but only the subjective *externa subsidia* of faith. No Church, for . . . the membership of the external

> Church included the doomed (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 61). [284]

When Reformed salvation no longer requires any penitential payback or moral accounting, we no longer need the community or institution that makes them possible. Thus, through Protestants' very efforts to liberate us from the burden of self-possessed individuality, they engender a new kind of isolation—not individual accountability but social dismemberment.

In both the Catholic and the Protestant case, then, a deep irony unfolds. While Catholic thinkers begin with a theological anthropology that emphasizes individuality, self-possession, and personal responsibility, they develop a highly cooperative vision of Christian life, since individuated legal subjectivity incorporates people into a universal community of accountability. Meanwhile, Protestants begin with a theological anthropology that refutes the very notion of the self-possessed individual, thinking of the self as a helpless nexus of alien forces unable to determine its own actions. And yet, this more collective conception of selfhood dismembers the theoretically relational self from any actual community of accountability and support. In each case, the anthropological premise bears an ironic relation to its ecclesiological implication. Catholics begin with the self-possessed individual and end with a cooperative conception of Christian life, whereas Protestants begin with the diffuse self, dispossessed by the powers that control it, and end with an individual isolated before God. In this way, while the Reformers tried to emphasize the constitutively cooperative nature of selfhood itself, these very ideas engendered an ironically individualistic religious practice. No longer did Protestants pay into the

[284] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans., Talcott Parsons. London: Routledge, 1930.

collective Treasury of Merits for the good of all humankind; instead, they hoped alone that God would addict them. In theory, Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin articulated an anti-individualistic conception of selfhood, but the actual practices that accompanied those revolutionary ideas were, themselves, terrorizingly individualistic, which, to me, represents the tragedy of the Reformation.

Conclusion

# THE PARADOX OF ADDICTION

## § 30 – The Tenor of Christianity Ringing in Our Ears

A millennium and a half after Saint Augustine conflated his metaphors, we remain ambivalent as to whether addicts are diseased or delinquent, whether they need healing or must pay penance, whether they belong in infirmaries or penitentiaries. This familiar ambivalence of addiction is one of our intellectual haunts. From the fourth century through the twenty-first, contending parties have paradoxically claimed that *addiction* is a birth defect that one can get justly punished for having. The Church Fathers could never have known the stakes of their rhetoric, but this striking homology between early Latin theology and contemporary discourse on addiction manifests the structuring force of metaphors that sediment in our thought. As Richards argues in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*:

> That metaphor is the omnipresent principle of language can be shown by mere observation. We cannot get through three sentences of ordinary fluid discourse without it . . . Even in the rigid language of the settled sciences, we do not eliminate or prevent it without great difficulty. In the semi-technicalized subjects, aesthetics, politics, sociology, ethics, psychology, theory of language, and so on, our constant chief difficulty is to discover how we are using it and how our supposedly fixed words are shifting their senses . . . We can take no step safely without an unrelaxing awareness of the metaphors we, and our audience, may be employing . . . Our pretense to do without metaphor is never more than a bluff waiting to be called (*The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 92).

Are addicts invalids who need healing or delinquents who must pay their dues? More generally, if (like the Latin theologians teach) addiction is a microcosm of our broader predicament, then are we individually responsible for our own deeds, or is agency socially and materially diffuse in the conditions we inherit? Furthermore, what is the nature of our individual freedom if our wills are not our own, but, instead, partially possessed by all the parties that lay a claim on our lives? The modern history of addiction represents the afterlife of Latin theology's conflicting metaphors for sin.

Historians of addiction have consistently identified Benjamin Rush (1746 - 1813), considered the Father of Psychiatry, as the originator of the paradoxical disease-delinquency concept of addiction (Levine 1978; White 1998; Valverde 1998, and Arsić 2007).[285] In a series of psychiatric manuals on addiction and other

[285] From 1921 until 2015, Benjamin Rush's face served as the official logo of the American Psychiatric Association—emblazoned on all 5 editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. When the APA rebranded in 2015 in an effort to self-consciously distance themselves from Benjamin Rush, they not only changed their logo but also stopped giving the annual "Benjamin Rush Award" for contributions to the history of psychiatry. See APA, "The New Look of the American Psychiatric Association," (May 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soDtLf8eYAY.

"diseases of the will," Rush claims that "drunkenness resembles certain hereditary, family, and contagious diseases," yet he also asserts that addiction is nevertheless, paradoxically, "the effect of free agency" (*Diseases of the Mind*, 266).[286] Accordingly, for Rush, addicts are seen as both personally accountable for their agentive crimes and yet helpless inheritors of a "palsy of the will" (*Diseases of the Mind*, 270). Insofar as addiction is a congenital disease, Rush recommends that addicts should not be punished alongside other criminals. Instead, he recommends the development of a separate institution, which he calls "sober houses," where addicts can receive treatment rather than suffer punishment. However, insofar as addiction is "the effect of free agency," Rush cannot fully relinquish the notion that addicts should be held individually accountable for their misdeeds through corporal punishment—the threat of which, he says, will stimulate addicts to overcome their palsy.

On the one hand, in a distinctly Protestant vein, Rush advances the disease theory of addiction "to rescue persons affected . . . from the arm of the law, and to render them the subjects of the kind and lenient hand of medicine" (*Diseases of the Mind*, 264). However, on the other hand, Rush cannot let go of the more Catholic optimism that addicts, stimulated by looming punishment, might overcome their own bondage through sheer force of will:

> Persons afflicted with this disorder of the mind should be placed in situations, in which they will be compelled to use their wills in order to escape some great and pressing evil. A palsy of the limbs has been cured by the cry of fire, and a

[286] Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*. Philadelphia: Kimber & Richardson, 1812.

> dread of being burned. Why should not a palsy of the will be cured in a similar way?" (*Diseases of the Mind*, 269-70).

As I have shown, these exact theses—along with the jurisprudential ambivalences they generate—precede Rush's supposedly innovative concept of addiction by more than a millennium. Rush's psychiatric theory of addiction rehearses the concept's theological history. Beyond identifying an interestingly analogous conception of addiction between Latin theology and American psychiatry, I will provide preliminary evidence that Rush actively transposed the concept of addiction from Latin theology into medical psychiatry, and the resultant univocity between theology and psychiatry is no accident.

Rush's psychiatric ideas in general, but most notably his theory of addiction, should not be understood apart from his theological commitments to the Latin tradition. In an 1811 letter to Thomas Jefferson, Rush informs Jefferson of the forthcoming publication of his treatises on addiction and other diseases of the mind:

> I am now engaged in publishing a volume of introductory lectures to my courses of lectures upon the institutes of medicine . . . One of them is upon that part of medical jurisprudence which decides upon the states of mind . . . which should exempt a man from punishment for criminal or felonious acts (*Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1074).[287]

After explaining his forthcoming texts on addiction to Jefferson and promising to send him a copy, Rush then lauds the kindred research efforts of his intellectual mentor, David Hartley, who he says has also "established an indissoluble union between physiology, metaphysics, and Christianity" (Rush 1951, 1073-74).

[287] Benjamin Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Volume 2, ed., L.H. Butterfield. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

Establishing this indissoluble union among different levels of discourse was Rush's intellectual mission.

Rush believed in the univocity of truth—that if an idea were true, it should be verifiable on every level of discourse. In this case, according to Rush, if the theological doctrine addiction were actually true, then it should bear itself out on a physiological level. Rush sought to unify Christian doctrine with psychiatric medicine by theorizing sins as sicknesses, literally verifying the metaphorical claims of his Christian tradition by insisting that these spiritual ailments have a material substrate. Rush's innovation does not consist in the disease theory of addiction itself but, rather, in literalizing the historically metaphorical idea. Rush deadens the addiction metaphor by interpolating it into scientific discourse. However, the internal logic of the theological idea remains consistent: Addiction derives from a congenital defect, yet each individual plays a part in its expression by making their own bad decisions. Thus, addicts should be treated for their disease and yet held accountable for their willful mistakes.

Rush's intellectual quest to unify the empirical truths of medicine and the revealed truths of Christianity began with his experience in medical school. When Rush went to study medicine at Edinburgh in the late eighteenth century—the center of the Scottish Enlightenment—he found his Christian commitments radically challenged by its intellectual culture of epistemological empiricism and ontological materialism. As Rush biographer Donald D'Elia recounts:

> Other graduates of Edinburgh might disavow their orthodox religions altogether after having studied the new scientific curriculum, or perhaps modernize them by adopting intellectually respectable deism or Scottish

> realism. But Rush, in his absolute evangelical faith, would not budge; instead, he assimilated the new rationalistic science, improved it by his future work and thought, and employed it to give his version of Christianity a scientific plausibility ("The Republican Theology of Benjamin Rush," 193).[288]

What, then, was Rush's "version of Christianity" that he brought to Edinburgh and attempted to unify with his scientific theories? While Rush's exact theological commitments remain in need of scholarly elaboration, we know that he was educated in the Calvinist tradition and struggled openly with its doctrines throughout his life.[289]

In his autobiography, Rush discusses at length being tutored as a teenager in both the Latin language and in Calvinist theology by the Presbyterian minister and Princeton academic Samuel Finley (*The Autobiography*, 28-31).[290] In an 1811 letter to John Adams in which Rush again advertises his forthcoming treatise on addiction, Rush refers back to a sermon of Finley's, which had been transcribed and printed amidst Rush's research on addiction, entitled "The Madness of Mankind." Among the madnesses of mankind that Rush's spiritual mentor laments in this very sermon is the insatiability of human desire, familiarly described:

> After drinking to excess, the heart is thirsty; and hunger succeeds the most plenteous repast . . . Sensual joys cloy and surfeit, but do not content; they gratify the brute, but starve the man . . . Yet, see, multitudes of mortals eagerly

[288] Donald D'Elia, "The Republican Theology of Benjamin Rush," in *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 33, No. 2 (April, 1966), 187-203.
[289] See D'Elia, "The Republican Theology of Benjamin Rush," and Robert Abzug, "Benjamin Rush and Revolutionary Christian Reform," in *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, 11-29. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
[290] Benjamin Rush, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His Travels Through Life together with his Commonplace Book for 1798-1813*, ed., George W. Corner. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1948.

> fluttering to grasp joys, which, like airy phantoms, still elude their embraces . . . disappointed, they nevertheless still pursue, still go the tiresome round, and tread the same beaten path, in vain! ("The Madness of Mankind").[291]

In the language of Finley's and Rush's own theological tradition, this particular madness has been described as *addiction* since at least the fourth century. In fact, of all the many theologians who employ the metaphor of addiction to describe the insufferable condition of insatiable desire, Calvin himself, whom Rush certainly read (and likely read in Latin), uses the term more frequently than anyone else. Rush's psychiatric theory of addiction repeats not only the ancient disease-delinquency doctrine of Ambrose and Augustine, but also, and even more tellingly, leans towards the disease theory of addiction developed by the theologians of his own Reformed tradition.

Addiction is inherited through birth, but it's still kind of our fault. Ambrose and Augustine first developed this oxymoronic theory of addiction in fourth-century Rome to explain the doctrine of original sin. The familial heritability of addiction is thus not a modern scientific discovery, but a theological doctrine that we have inherited and secularized. Put differently, our psychiatric concept of addiction represents a theological metaphor that has been literalized, and we remain caught in the paradox of sin itself—congenital yet chosen. Although there are empirical ways to test the genetic factor in what we now call *addiction* using monozygotic twin studies, it should still strike us as exceedingly odd that the *DSM*'s current theory resounds with the tenor of Latin theology: Addiction is genetic, but it's not beyond each

[291] Samuel Finley, *The Madness of Mankind, Represented in a Sermon PReached in the New Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, the 9th of June 1754.* Philadelphia: William Bradford, at the Corner-House of Front and Market Streets, 1754.

individual's willpower to resist. Either Augustine was way ahead of his time, or we remain haunted by our Christian past in ways that are difficult to detect and disturbing to admit.

In 1955, the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association convoked a joint committee to settle addiction's haunting ambivalence, which they say had loomed since the early nineteenth-century temperance movement: *Drug Addiction: Crime or Disease?*[292] Sociologist and addiction theorist Alfred Lindesmith introduces the 1961 edition of the ABA-AMA joint report by observing that "there are two opposing schools of thought" when it comes to the nature of addiction. On the one side, Lindesmith explains, some people "regard addiction . . . as an activity that is properly subject to police control," and thus they advocate a "punitive approach." On the other side, "critics of this view regard addiction as a disease, or something akin to it, for which punishment is inappropriate . . . From this point of view, drug addiction is primarily a problem for the physician rather than for the policeman" (*Drug Addiction: Crime or Disease?*, vii-viii).

The Committee reports that "the advocates of this punitive approach" have controlled policy surrounding addiction for at least the prior century, explaining that "the law has largely acted on the premise, which is supported by some of the earlier writers, that drug addiction was largely a vice, which an effort of the will could conquer. Severe penalties were necessary to compel the will to make the effort to conquer the vice" (*Drug Addiction: Crime or Disease?*, 33). As drug addiction spiked in the United States after the advent of morphine during the Civil War and again

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[292] ABA-AMA Joint Committee, *Drug Addiction: Crime or Disease? Interim and Final Reports of the Joint Committee of the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association on Narcotic Drugs*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961.

after World War II, the federal government instituted increasingly punitive laws surrounding the sale and consumption of narcotics, in hopes that fear of punishment would spur addicts to summon the willpower to just say no. However, the committee observes that despite these increasingly punitive policies, there are still proportionally more addicts in the U.S. than any other nation in the world, with numbers on the rise.

Therefore, they suggest, "The belief that fear of punishment is a vital factor in deterring an addict from using drugs rests upon a superficial view of the drug addiction process and the nature of drug addiction" (*Drug Addiction: Crime or Disease?*, 19-20). While the Committee remains somewhat ambivalent, ultimately reiterating the paradox by recommending that addiction remain within the purview of criminal law as well as medical treatment, the report does suggest that addiction is more like a social disease than an individual crime. The Committee's critique of the punitive model revolves around the axiomatic claim that "drug addicts . . . are incurable by present methods and techniques" (*Drug Addiction: Crime or Disease?*, 5). From the Committee's perspective, punishing people for suffering from a congenital, incurable disease seems more like senseless violence than correctional justice.

The U.S. federal government met the Committee's protestant theory of addiction and its attendant critique of penitential justice with immediate hostility. After the joint report's initial publication, the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics published an aggressive redress against the Committee report, which led the printing and sale of the report to be immediately discontinued. In the Bureau's catholic rebuttal, they deny the notion that addicts suffer from an incurable disease. "This is a flat

statement of a conclusion that we do not think is supported or supportable by reliable data" (*Comments on Narcotics*, 155).[293] Calling the disease theory of addiction a "fraudulent overture" for mercy, the Bureau contends that individuals "become narcotics addicts by self-administration; i.e., *with and by their own permission*" (*Comments on Narcotics*, 66). Therefore, the Bureau concludes:

> Addiction . . . may be considered as a self-induced or, more pointedly, a "disease" resulting from self-abusive indulgence. In this sense, it is not a true disease such as tuberculosis or diphtheria, nor may those who become self-infected be considered unfortunate victims of a disease of contemporary society acquired innocently in the course of normal, moral pursuit of life (*Comments on Narcotics*, 66-67).

Because the Bureau points to individual bad choices, or "the cupidity of the addict," rather than congenital disease as the main driving force in addicts' delinquent behavior, they suggest accordingly that "treatment and rehabilitation" should not serve "as a substitute for criminal confinement and punishment of those addicts who are convicted for law violations. They should pay their debt to society" (*Comments on Narcotics*, 134). The Bureau rests assured that "proper law enforcement and confinement in such instances will do much toward minimizing . . . addiction in the United States" (*Comments on Narcotics*, 134).

### **§ 31 – Dissolving the Paradox**

[293] Advisory Committee to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, *Comments on Narcotic Drugs: Interim Report of the Joint Committee of the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association on Narcotic Drugs*. Washington D.C.: United States Treasury Department, 1959.

Today, delinquency theorists of addiction insist that everyone has the free will to make their own choices, while disease theorists claim that addicts cannot control themselves. Having surveyed the theological history of addiction, I am convinced that each side speaks something true, and the conjunction of these claims is the true paradox of addiction that Latin Christianity teaches, even though it debates which side we should emphasize: We are free, but we can't control ourselves. Both aspects of this paradox seem phenomenologically undeniable. So, what do we do about the paradox of addiction today? When facing an age-old conceptual paradox such as this, we could try to re-solve it by taking a side. We could inflate individual freedom and create a fantasy of self-determination, or we could overemphasize our passivity to circumstance and devolve into total determinism. Alternatively, we could ask ourselves what assumptions we've been making that produce the paradox in the first place.

We identify as "paradoxical" a seemingly self-contradictory proposition; that is to say, a proposition appears as paradoxical when we detect a tension within it. In the case of addiction, the paradox, again, is this: *We are free, but we can't control ourselves*. The apparent contradiction, then, exists between *being free* and *not having self-control*. What, then, are we presupposing about being free that renders it at odds with a lack of self-control? Clearly, we have been presuming that having free will should entitle us to self-control (*Free Will = Self-Control*)—hence the seeming contradiction in the conjunction of the two lemmas of addiction (*Free Will ≠ Self-Control*). However, this notion presupposes that the free will is each person's own possession.

If I begin with different presuppositions about free will and the nature of selfhood, then the paradox no longer demands to be resolved, as it dissolves instead. That is to say, if we begin on the foreign ground that each person's free will is not their private possession but, instead, held jointly among a host of cooperative members, then the will's freedom would not entail self-sovereignty. Because a multitude of other part-owners holds sway over the will that is nevertheless also mine, I act freely but without self-sovereignty, as "my" decisions would reflect inherently collective resolutions—resolutions in which I myself have a say, just not the sole and final one. We each have a free will, but we do not have full self-control, because the free will itself is not one's sole possession. We are free, but we are not our own, so we can't unilaterally dictate our own behaviors, which emerge through the interplay among each self's constitutive members. In different ways, thinkers across the Latin theological tradition struggled to resolve the paradox of addiction in exactly this way. Anselm, Bernard, and Thomas, although they argued that we do possess ourselves individually and enjoy a meaningful degree of self-determination, they also acknowledged that we can achieve our individual freedom and realize our self-control only by integrating ourselves into communities of accountability that teach and form us. Coming from a different perspective, Luther and Calvin call our attention to the ways we are always owned and operated by the outside forces that constitute who we are.

If we think along these lines from the forgotten theological history of addiction, then the paradox of addiction today gives way—still true, but no longer so paradoxical. We are free, but we can't control ourselves. Our modern inability to think about agency in the middle voice—beyond pure activity or pure passivity—has

intensified the paradox of the will that addiction poses. In one of Nietzsche's lesser-known texts, *The Dawn of Day*, he describes our oscillation between voluntarism and determinism—of which the delinquency-disease debate is a microcosm—as "mankind's eternal grammatical blunder," in the sense that we have not conceived of human action in the correct voice (*The Dawn of Day*, 129).[294] In fact, in Latin and its European derivatives (unlike many other languages), there actually is no grammatical voice that conveys the middle—an instance where the subject and object of an action are one in the same. We rely on the reflexive voice to capture this ambivalence, which always maintains the priority of the subject's own activity.

I have laid out the first two thousand years of addiction's conceptual history not to settle the perennial delinquency-disease debate that instantiates these abstract concerns about individual agency and the demands of justice. Instead, the point has been to show how we remain caught in a *perennial but contingent* paradox, whose animating conflict—How can we be free but lack self-control?—was set in motion by the presupposition of self-possession that inaugurated the concept of addiction itself in ancient Roman law. Rather than compulsively repeating the disease-delinquency conflict, as we have done for more than a millennium, we must face the origin of this problem and rethink the ground of addiction itself—the legal presupposition that each person is their own possession to begin with. As Freud theorizes, repetition compulsion—otherwise known as trauma reenactment—begins with an early traumatic event. Without consciously working through the event and its lasting effects, the affected person unconsciously reenacts or recreates the painful

[294] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, trans., J.M. Kennedy. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1911.

experience throughout their life, by transferring the same dynamic onto different concrete situations.

While the Twelve Tables' codification of debt law and the inauguration of legal subjectivity marked an emancipatory moment for the plebeians of Rome, the presupposition of self-possession that undergirded this legal development has proven to be a traumatizing, if empowering, idea. The Tables' addiction statute codified the idea that every citizen is their own property and hence is individually accountable for their deeds. In my view, this notion is superficially liberating but fundamentally punitive. It abstracts people from the material conditions and social collectives that form them, and it burdens individuals with atomized culpability, as if their life outcomes were products of their own will alone. Thinking back to Saidiya Hartman, we should ask ourselves her question:

> Did emancipation confer sovereignty and autonomy only to abandon the individual in a self-blaming and penalizing free society? Regrettably, the bound and sovereign self of rights was an island unto himself, accountable for his own making and answerable to his failures; social relations thereby receded before the singular exercise of the will and the blameworth of the isolated individual (*Scenes of Subjection*, 133).

Under the guise of honoring individual freedom, we have burdened individuals with the fiction that they are sovereign over their own behaviors. As Nietzsche argues, "Men were considered 'free' only so that they might be considered guilty—could be judged and punished: consequently, every act had to be considered 'willed', and the origin of every act had to be considered as lying within consciousness" (*Twilight of the Idols*, 181). This notion of self-possession, says Nietzsche, serves "to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society" from any partial responsibility in how a

person's life unfolds. By imagining that each person is "self-cause" of their own actions, we have empowered people in an incredibly punishing way (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 28).[295] The idea of the self-possessed individual, inaugurated in the Twelve Tables' codification of addiction, instituted a kind of collective trauma, and we compulsively repeat it.

As I believe I have shown, we have repeatedly transferred the concept of addiction onto different situations—from Roman pecuniary law, through Latin theology, to psychiatry, American drug law, and even popular self-help literature. Through reiterations of the concept of addiction, we rehearse the same conflict around self-possession that manifests itself in the disease-delinquency debate. Wherever we begin with the presumption of self-possession, we find addicts, and wherever we find addicts, we also encounter a violent conflict over the nature of addiction itself and the premise of self-possession that produces it as a concept. Freud explains that patients exhibiting repetition compulsion often have "the impression of being pursued by a malignant fate . . . but psychoanalysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early . . . influences" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 16).[296] The concept of addiction is not a universal malignancy fated to pursue humankind across time and space, but the consequence of particular past events, whose dynamic we compulsively reproduce and have learned to cope with. Richards helps us understand how metaphors themselves enact this kind of collective transference:

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[295] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans., Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.
[296] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans.,

> A command of metaphor—a command of the interpretation of metaphors—can go deeper still into the control of the world that we make for ourselves to live in. The psychoanalysts have shown us with their discussions of "transference"—another name for metaphor—how constantly modes of regarding, of loving, of acting, that have developed with one set of things or people, are shifted to another. They have shown us chiefly the pathology of these transferences, cases where the vehicle—the borrowed attitudes, the parental fixation, say—tyrannizes over the new situation. The victim is unable to see the new person except in terms of the old passion and its accidents. He reads the situation only in terms of the figure, the archetypal image, the vehicle (*Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 136).

The concept of addiction, which emerges from the initial trauma of stipulated self-possession, has been repeatedly transferred, which is to say metaphorized, into numerous different situations over the last two millennia. During that span, the vehicle of addiction has conveyed the ground of self-possession into different domains. By each transference, we have recreated the dynamics of Roman legal subjectivity in new and broader contexts. In other words, the transference of addiction from its origin in Roman law through Latin theology, to American psychiatry, and then into American law and popular self-help, has ensured that "the parental fixation"—the ancient Roman insistence that we are each our own—"tyrannizes over the new situation." We cannot escape the long-gone trauma from our collective past, because we compulsively reenact it through the transference of addiction itself, which reiterates the painful notion that we are each individually responsible for our own lives, without any collectivity to fall back or count on.

As Freud teaches, to stop compulsively repeating the same painful dynamic, we have to work through the initial trauma itself. This self-reckoning poses a difficult

challenge because we inevitably become attached to the deep harms that make us who we are. The idea that I am my own man feels good, even while it hurts me. In fact, no matter how much it hurts me, I can barely imagine life without it. The trenchant notion that we are each our own possession, responsible for ourselves and accountable for our deeds, has grown so familiar and so fundamental to the world we live in that it no longer even registers as an historical contingency that might be rethought. Plus, there are ways that it's very empowering to think of oneself as an individual, to believe, as the poet William Ernest Henley famously says in his poem "Invictus," that "I am the master of my fate and the captain of my soul." For these reasons, healing from this trauma would involve a paradoxically painful and disorienting process in its own right. For people who have grown attached to the harms that form them, feeling better feels bad at first, but the pain of understanding ourselves differently might be what we need to stop punishing ourselves and each other so severely.

By consistently describing sin (the tenor) as addiction (the vehicle), the Latin theological tradition conveyed the Roman legal notion of a self-possessing individual (the ground) across Western intellectual history. However, even as Latin theologians relied in some ways on the premise of a self-possessing individual—free to make their own decisions and thus accountable for their deeds—these thinkers also worked against this very idea in a variety of ways. Augustine insists that we do *have* ourselves in some concrete sense by virtue of our freedom of will, but he also acknowledged that we are relationally constituted. That is to say, we do *have* ourselves but only by *receiving ourselves* from others to whom we *give ourselves away*. Augustine's attempts at reconciling self-possession and self-dispossession,

most notably in *Confessiones*, represent Augustine's most significant contribution not only to the history of Christian thought but also phenomenology.

Likewise, Anselm, Bernard, and Thomas articulate a self-possessed individual, but they clarify that we only possess ourselves in the way debtors possess their loan—we have ourselves temporarily, and we never own ourselves. We are self-possessing individuals, capable of self-control and personally accountable, but we owe ourselves to God and belong to the Church. Furthermore, as the Treasury of Merits expresses, they indicate how individual accountability forms the fabric of community. While my deeds are my own, they tip the scales for everyone else. If I am delinquent, then I need meritorious others to account for my lack, and if I am meritorious, then my excess credit can compensate for delinquent others. We are all individually accountable, but each person's transactions in the moral economy of the community affect everyone else. In this way, we each have our own account, but we are never separate. These thinkers' economic heuristic helps us see how every individual (trans)action exists within a broader network of circulation.

Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin directly criticize the premise of self-possession that operates within these medieval thinkers, arguing that individuals cannot freely determine their own actions because they are so thoroughly penetrated by external forces. In this way, they suggest that each person represents a nexus of intervening powers rather than self-possessing individuals. By emphasizing that everyone is an addict, sinner and saved alike, they foreground human passivity in a way that undermines the image of a self-possessing individual who is responsible for their own decisions and accountable for their deeds. By rejecting the idea that we are each personally responsible for the outcomes of our lives, Luther and especially Calvin

believe that we will feel liberated from the onus of individual accountability. However, they often fail to see how this liberation from individual accountability dismembers us from the community into which such accountability incorporates us and places us helplessly alone before God's unpredictable determinations. In this way, their efforts to overcome the individual legal subject that undergirds the Catholic conception of penitential accountability ironically results in perhaps an even deeper, or at least different, sense of isolation than being individually responsible for one's own deeds.

Over the last century, many scholars have shown how the Protestant movement engendered elements of the individualism that has become dominant today, especially in the West.[297] The idea that one's salvation does not consist in meritorious community participation but depends upon one's interior states alone, the refusal of traditional hierarchies, the democratization of authority—all these characteristically Protestant impulses, the argument goes, form the basis of modern liberal individualism. To be sure, certain elements of individualism do derive from Protestant thinkers. However, I think we have overstated the links between Protestantism and individualism, failed to acknowledge the heterogeneity within "Protestantism" itself, and hence underappreciated the conceptual resources that those very thinkers—especially Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin—have given us to resist the basic idea of a self-possessing individual. In fact, as I have shown, their novel

[297] Each in different ways, the following authors align Protestantism with individualism: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904); Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (1966); Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967); Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (1967); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (2003); Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire" (2006); Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (2007); Joan Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (2017).

insistence that we are all addicts denies the very premise of individual self-possession and asks us to rethink selfhood, free will, and responsibility from the ground up.

On the other side of this story about individualism's origins, Catholicism is often, for better and worse, identified with an anti-modern or anti-liberal traditionalism, that deprioritizes individual autonomy and advocates a more heteronomic ethos of community formation. While these descriptions also ring true, I believe we have, in the reverse, overstated Catholicism's antagonism with individualism and hence ignored how the idea of a self-possessed legal subject, free to make their own decisions and hence individually accountable for their deeds, was conveyed through authoritative Catholic thinkers. Rather than deriving purely from Protestantism, I think today's individualism represents a bizarre synthesis of Catholic anthropology and Protestant ecclesiology—a self-possessed individual that stands alone in judgment, responsible for themselves, but without any community to count on. In a way, we've managed to preserve the most punishing elements of each tradition and haven't availed ourselves of the conceptual aids of either. The animating idea at the core of individualism—that is, the idea of the self-possessing individual itself—cannot therefore be pinned upon Latin Christianity, neither its Catholic nor its Protestant members, as I think the idea of the self-possessing individual does not represent a Christian innovation but derives from ancient Roman law and was passed through Christian discourse. Even while Christian thinkers conveyed this idea across history through the Roman metaphor of addiction, they also all resisted it in ways we have not fully appreciated, because we tend to repeat critiques rather than mine resources to build alternative structures.

Epilogue

# THE STATE OF ADDICTION TODAY: ARE WE ALL (BECOMING) ADDICTS?

In 1996, American writer David Foster Wallace published a behemoth novel called *Infinite Jest*. This more than 1,000-page book tells the stories of several addicts as they struggle to recover from the various consumptions that consume them. Wallace's addiction recovery narratives stage an immanent critique of what he once described as: "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."

*Infinite Jest*'s addicted characters embody a constitutive paradox of America's consumeristic individualism. Wallace's narrative shows that while we feel the pressure to be independent, self-determining, and self-made individuals, we make ourselves and actualize our freedom only in and through our consumptive relations of self-surrender and dependence. In short, we find ourselves by losing ourselves in the consumptions that consume us; we come into possession of ourselves by giving ourselves away to what we consume. In this way, according to

Wallace, the average American consumer exists in a state of everyday addiction—so slavishly free that we can't say no to the desires that possess us, so autonomous that serving self-interest has become automatic. Wallace explains his point of view in an unaired interview from 2003:

> In the book . . . characters who become drug addicts, there's a form. 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.[298]

The threefold trap Wallace senses in this dynamic is that we are set on a futile quest: (1) to realize our *individuality* through mass-produced commodities, (2) to actualize our *freedom* through expenditure, and (3) to achieve our *happiness* by satiating desire. In a culture where unregulated consumption represents the paradigmatic expression of individual liberty, the ironic culmination of American freedom is addiction—namely, voluntary enslavement to the pleasures whose consumption consumes us. In this light, as Wallace suggests, the addicts Wallace depicts shouldn't be interpreted as social outliers but as exemplary embodiments of American individualism. *Infinite Jest* deploys the idea of addiction to fictionally but truthfully

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[298] David Foster Wallace, 2003 interview with ZDF, German public-service television station. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGLzWdT7vGc.

depict the traps and ironies of America's individualist freedom and the happiness it falsely promises.

In a 1996 interview on a Boston public radio show, Wallace explained that his concerns about American consumer individualism had intensified after two of his friends, who were living ostensibly happy, comfortable lives, had committed suicide. As a comfortably upper-middle class person himself, he was perplexed by the fact that, for many people, "things are often materially very comfortable," yet those same people still feel a "great sadness and emptiness":

> The sadness is in realizing, for me at about age twenty-seven or twenty-eight, how phenomenally lucky I've been—not only never to have been hungry or cold but also 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 (ZDR Interview, 2003).[299]

The growth of the U.S. economy through consumer capitalism during the twentieth century generated a level of material security for many people that was previously unimaginable, and yet, Wallace intimates, however much material comfort consumerism may have created, it feels pathological as a way of life; it feels like everyday addiction:

> These conditions of hopelessness . . . have to do with an American ideal—and not a universal one, but one that I think kids get exposed to very early—that *you* are the most important, and what *you want* is the most important, and that your job in life is to gratify *your own* desires. It's a little crude to say it that way, but that's something of the ideology here, and it's certainly the

[299] David Foster Wallace, 1996 interview with Christopher Lydon on "The Connection," WBUR Boston Radio, National Public Radio. https://soundcloud.com/radioopensource/david-foster-wallace-on-the-connection-1996.

ideology that's perpetrated by television and advertising and entertainment. The economy thrives on it . . . [The United States] is one enormous engine and temple of self-gratification (ZDR Interview, 2003).

Wallace observes, from the inside, a double-bind created by the expectation that individualistic consumption will actualize one's freedom and ensure one's well-being. He feels sad, and because he is materially privileged, he also feels sad (and guilty) *that he is sad*, since the alleged prerequisites of his happiness have already been attained.

In other words, Wallace tries to articulate that America's consumeristic individualism is a bad promise. "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 it will make you happy" (ZDR Interview, 2003). In this way, American 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.[300] That logic, he worries, inspires a cyclicality wherein consumption feeds into a feeling of emptiness that demands always more consumption to be fulfilled, yet this further

[300] 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 labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his 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).

consumption generates, instead, an ever-deepening sense of 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 (*Consuming Religion*, 1).[301]

The more one consumes, the emptier one feels, because consumption is loss, not gain.[302] "Doing this book," Wallace tells us, "was about why exactly we are so sad, and how we have become so unbelievably selfish, like, lethally selfish, and self-indulgent" (ZDR Interview, 2003).

Wallace's reflections on contemporary American consumerism make us stop and ask: *What is a consumer whose wants have begun to feel like needs? What is a consumer whose desires have become a demand without end? What is a consumer whose optional consumption has become compulsive? Infinite Jest* suggests that the average American consumer finds themselves lost in a state of normalized addiction. He concludes that our individual consumer freedom has evolved into an ironic kind

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[301] Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

[302] 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."

of voluntary enslavement. As historians Janet Farrel Brodie and Marc Redfield remark, "commodity culture seems inextricable from that of addiction" (*High Anxieties*, 4).[303]

As if confirming Wallace's suggestion that we're all (becoming) addicts, marketers and consumer behavior analysts in the last decade have begun interpreting the growing body of neuropsychological research on the mechanisms and processes of addiction as a how-to guide for achieving the practical goal of commercial advertising—a consumer who can't say no. They've begun using treatment-oriented research to generate in consumers what that research itself attempts to cure—compulsive consumption. No longer content with "brand loyalty" or even "brand evangelism," there is increasing discussion of "brand addiction" among marketers and consumer behaviorists alike.[304] Business leadership coach Mike Myatt captures the approach in a 2020 blog post on his consulting firm's website, N2Growth.com:

> When I was in school, economics professors would lecture on using supply and demand to create a business advantage. Business professors would evangelize the strengths of the recurring value and stability of consumable products, marketing professors would espouse the benefits of customer loyalty and relationship marketing, but nowhere do I recall being able to

[303] Janet Farrell Brodie and Marc Redfield, "Introduction" in *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
[304] Fajer and Schouten, "Breakdown and Dissolution of Brand-Person Relationships" in *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1995); Bernheim and Rangel, "Addiction and Cue-Triggered Decision Processes" in *American Economic Review*, vol. 94, no. 5 (2004); Reimann et al., "How We Relate to Brands: Psychological and Neuropsychological Insights into Consumer-Brand Relationships" in *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2012); Martin et al., "On the Road to Addiction: The Facilitative and Preventative Roles of Marketing Cues" in *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 66 (2013); Mrad and Cui, "Brand Addiction: Conceptualization and Scale Development" in *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 51, no. 11 (2017); Cui, Mrad, and Hogg, "Brand Addiction: Exploring the Concept and its Definition through an Experiential Lens" in *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 87 (2018)

> register for a business class on addiction. However, if you think about "Addiction Marketing" you'll quickly realize what the "media pushers" on Madison Avenue and the product development and marketing gurus in the corporate world have known for years—all people have their unique set of vulnerabilities, which, when creatively and effectively exploited, will lead to strong sales and powerful brands.[305]

Myatt identifies Las Vegas, the Beer and Alcohol Industry, and the Tobacco Industry as exemplars of this marketing approach of "leverag[ing] the addictive effects" of their products to maximize revenue. However, he wonders, can this strategy be generalized to the marketing of any product or service, beyond those figured as inherently addictive, like alcohol and nicotine? "Isn't Starbucks using the same tactics as those industries listed above? What about other fast food outlets? What about companies in the luxury products sector?" Doesn't any encouragement to consume, regardless of the intrinsic qualities of the particular consumable, "cater to addictive tendencies?"

Anthropologist Natasha Dow Schüll's *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas* offers the most thorough analysis of this popular marketing approach and its implications for consumer culture at large.[306] Over the last century, it has been neither psychologists nor politicians but casino owners and operators who have developed the most sophisticated understanding of how addictive consumption works. Since Nevada became the first state to legalize "gaming" in 1919,

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[305] Mark Myatt, "Addiction Marketing," May 2020, *https://www.n2growth.com/addiction-marketing/*. For more discussion of "addiction marketing" among sales consultants, see also—Mark Schafer, "Marketing Addiction: A Debate," Episode 127 of the podcast, *Marketing Companion*; "Addiction For Sale: How Marketing and Advertising Promote Addictive Tendencies," December 2020, https://linkadex.com/; Darmoc, "Marketing Addiction: The Dark Side of Gaming and Social Media" in *Journal of Psychological Nursing and Mental Health Services*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2021).

[306] For an early and condensed version, see Schüll's "Digital Gambling: The Coincidence of Desire and Design" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2005).

casino operators have sought "to understand how commercial gambling activities and environments might create the conditions for—and even encourage—[addictive] behavior in consumers" (*Addiction by Design*, 16).[307] Schüll has probed every facet of the casino infrastructure—from randomization algorithms in slot machine software and architectural acoustics to hallways geometry and blackjack stool ergonomics—to understand how casino "designers, marketers, and managers . . . act on others at a distance, delegating to technology the task of soliciting and sustaining specific kinds of human behavior," which is to say, gambling addiction. Members of the gambling industry, she reports, "invest a great deal of resources and creative energy into the project of guiding player behavior through technology, endeavoring to create products that can extract maximum 'revenue per available customer', or REVPAC" (*Addiction by Design*, 21).

Schüll investigates those techniques and technologies of "operant reinforcement" by which game designers, casino marketers, and floor managers addict people to and through their machines. After all, an addict—someone who cannot walk away—is the ideal consumer.[308] She calls our attention to the "fine line between profit objectives and solicitation of addiction behavior" (*Addiction by Design*, 21). While members of the gambling industry insist that individual

[307] Natasha Dow Schüll's *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.

[308] Fittingly, the industry language of "operant reinforcement" (sometimes "operant conditioning") comes from a 1953 neuropsychological study conducted by James Olds and Peter Milner, which demonstrated that "rats learn to return to locations where they have received electrical stimulation to the mesolimbic dopamine system. When provided with opportunities to self-administer by pressing a lever, the rats rapidly became addicted, giving themselves approximately 5,000 - 10,000 'hits' during each one-hour daily session, ignoring food, water, and opportunities to mate. These rats are willing to endure painful electric shocks to reach the level" (Summarized in Bernheim and Rangel, "Addiction and Cue-Triggered Decision Processes" in *American Economic Review*, vol. 94. no. 5 [2004]. 1563). At the Global Gaming Expo (G2E) of 2005, there was a panel titled "Building a Better Mousetrap: The Science of Ergonomics." Bill Friedman's industry standard, *Designing Casinos to Dominate the Competition* says, "Just as the Pied Piper of Hamelin lured all the rats and the children to follow him, a properly designed maze entices adult players." Cited in *Addiction by Design*, 65 and 39.

consumers bear the burden of their own addiction, not the gambling infrastructure that solicits them to consume, their deep investment in techniques and technologies of behavioral compulsion would suggest a more two-sided etiology. Indeed, the fact that sales strategists and consultants in other commercial sectors have begun thematizing addiction as a heuristic for marketing as a whole suggests that addiction is neither solely the product of individuals' bad decisions nor their defective genetics, but a complicated network of factors that's impossible to parse.

The subtext of Schüll's research resonates with Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. She suggests that the way members of the gambling industry apply force from a distance through various technologies to addict consumers to their products offers a microcosm of the broader consumer environment of American culture. Consider this telling gloss of her ethnographic data:

> The gambling addicts I met . . . were remarkably reflexive regarding their own behavior and its consequences. Belying stereotypes of addicts as blind to the futility and destructiveness of their actions, they spoke lucidly and insightfully of their predicament. Mollie reflected: "Is it about money? No. Is it about enjoyment? No. Is it about being trapped? Yes—it is about having lost the plot as to why you are there in the first place. You are involved in a series of entrapments that you can't fully appreciate from inside them." [...] Instead of casting [gambling addicts] as aberrant or maladapted consumers, I include them in the following pages as experts on the very "zone" in which they are caught—a zone that resonates to some degree, I suggest, with the everyday experience of many in contemporary capitalist societies (*Addiction by Design*, 24).

Later, she says even more directly that "if . . . contemporary capitalism is distinguished by strategic attempts to mobilize and derive value from consumers'

affective capacities, then commercial casino design would appear to be a case in point" (*Addiction by Design*, 51).

Schüll's ethnographic insight elucidates the same paradox of consumeristic individualism that Wallace narrates through *Infinite Jest*. As a supremely uninhibited consumer, an addict realizes the central neoliberal ideal of individual market freedom, and yet that freedom is a form of bondage. In the addict, free choice and compulsion are indistinguishable. As social theorist Gerda Reith formulates in her article "Consumption and its Discontents," "The notion of addiction turns the sovereign consumer on its head, transforming freedom into determinism and desire into need. Rather than consuming to realize the self, in the state of addiction, the individual is consumed *by* consumption; the self destroyed" by the very process of its own self-making.[309] While autonomy and automaticity, freedom and determination, seem to have no intersection, addiction is the vanishing point between these parallel lines—the extremity at which they appear to converge. Cultural historian Susan Zieger also observes the same paradox of enslaving freedom that Wallace, Schüll, and Reith see in consumerism's false promise. Zieger argues that "the very pursuit of modern freedom—and in the United States, 'happiness'—construes those ideal states as ones often indistinguishable from the habitual self-gratifications of addiction"

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[309] Gerda Reith, "Consumption and its Discontents: Addiction, Identity, and the Problems of Freedom" (2004). See also her *Addictive Consumption: Capitalism, Modernity, and Excess* (2019), in which she expands on these ideas. For more critiques of consumption in terms of addiction, see also, Alexander, "The Globalization of Addiction" in *Addiction Research and Theory*, vol. 8, no 6 (2000); Schnuer, "Pleasure and Excess: Using Georges Bataille to Locate an Absent Pleasure of Consumption" in *Addiction Research and Theory*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2013); Featherstone, "Luxus: A Thanatology of Luxury from Nero to Bataille" in *Cultural Politics*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2016). Boje and Rosile approach the supply side of the economy through the lens of addiction in their critique of U.S. business management practices, "Death, Terror, and Addiction in Motivation Theory," in *The Passion of Organizing: A Critique of Motivation Theory* (2006)

(*Inventing the Addict*, 30).[310] Philosopher Frank Schalow echoes their insight as well, suggesting that "the story of addiction is more than only the compulsion experienced by the person who is addicted, but instead includes a deeper subtext . . . that is, our control based drive for self-mastery makes us increasingly vulnerable to the capriciousness of our desires, whims, and urges" (*Toward a Phenomenology of Addiction*, 110).[311] When I can *only* do what I want, am I free or enslaved? Put differently, is doing whatever I want a form of freedom when my wants are out of my own control? Addiction is the paradoxical end of individual freedom.

The engineered conversion of America from a needs to a wants culture has been successful to the point of failure, leaving many with unmet needs and others with unmeetable wants. In the diagnoses of Wallace, Schüll, Zieger, and others, the concept of *addiction* uniquely captures the nuances of consumer empowerment and its entrapping liberation. By attending to the term *addiction*, these thinkers reveal an important ambivalence about the root of our predicament. On the one hand, our general state of addicted living appears to be the contingent product of deliberate historical plans and processes, conditional upon the economic and technological developments of the twentieth-century; however, on the other, it seems like addiction has always been latent in our very nature as human beings. Is addiction a pathological form of life that we have the power to willfully avoid, or are we humans helplessly addictive by nature? The complex yet colloquial notion of addiction connotes this very ambiguity revolving around the nature of the human self, the power of desire, and the freedom of the will.

[310] Susan Zieger, *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.
[311] Frank Schalow, *Toward a Phenomenology of Addiction: Embodiment, Technology, Transcendence*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

Using the concept of addiction, we have stigmatized certain behaviors and substances as addictive, created specialized institutions for addiction recovery, and written laws to restrict addictive activities, control addictive substances, and contain addicts themselves. More broadly, apart from the legal and institutional manifestations of the concept, owing to the popularization of the idea of addiction during the twentieth century, we have progressively understood all selves as inherently addicts-in-embryo. As American cultural historian Trysh Travis points out, once the range of possible addictions broadened in the 1980s and 1990s to encompass not only substances but also behaviors (known as "process addictions"), scope of addiction began "to include virtually everyone in the United States" (*The Language of the Heart*, 52). In other words, we today manage all our behaviors in relation to the looming possibility that at any point we can become addicted to something as seemingly benign as exercise. Along the lines that Travis indicates, queer theorist Eve Kosofky Sedgwick remarks that "any substance, any behavior, even any affect may be pathologized as addictive" (*Tendencies*, 132).[312]

The "gradual extension of addiction attribution," Sedgwick argues, "has brought "every form of human behavior into the orbit of potential addiction. Think of the telling slippage that begins by assimilating food ingestion that is perceived as excessive with alcoholism—in the founding of, say, Overeaters Anonymous as an explicit analogue to Alcoholics Anonymous" (*Tendencies*, 131). In view of addiction's seeming ubiquity, she astutely suggests that:

[312] Eve Kosofsky Sedwick, "Epidemics of the Will," in *Tendencies*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993.

> If addiction can include ingestion, *or* refusal, *or* controlled intermittent ingestion of a given substance; and if the concept of 'substance' has become too elastic to be drawn a boundary between the exoticism of the 'foreign substance' and the domesticity of, say, 'food', then the locus of addictiveness cannot be the substance itself and can scarcely even be the body itself, but must be some overarching abstraction that governs the narrative relations between them. That abstract space where substances and behaviors become 'addictive' or 'not addictive': shall we call it the healthy free will? The ability to, let us say, *choose (freely) health*? (*Tendencies*, 132).

Sedgwick suggests that addiction is not merely a popularly known pathology, but part of the story we tell about ourselves, our freedom, and our well-being. As *addiction* has come to name a potentiality that inheres in every self, the self has become inconceivable without addiction. In the words of Brodie and Redfield, "One can only be a modern subject by running the risk of addiction" (*High Anxieties*, 15).

If selfhood entails running the risk of addiction, then we must all keep an exacting account of ourselves. Schüll sees that within this dominant framework, where selfhood itself is addiction risk-management, we must live according to "the methods of financial accounting and managerial productivity," which encourage us to express and evaluate life choices "through a vocabulary of 'incomes, allocations, costs, savings, and even profits'" and, thus, to "apply to [our] own lives the same techniques used to audit and otherwise ensure the financial health of corporations and government bureaucracies" (*Addiction by Design*, 191). Schüll suggests that the average American person's self-conscious potential for addiction has inaugurated a wave of existential actuarialism, wherein "individuals must be extremely autonomous, highly rational, and ever-alert masters of themselves and their decisions," constantly keeping account of their indulgences so they don't slip from

consumer to addict, from autonomy to automaticity, from freedom to voluntary enslavement (*Addiction by Design*, 192). The risk of addiction demands individual accountability.

As an enabling risk of selfhood, the concept of addiction functions like a magnetic pole whose repulsive force orients how we move in the world; and yet, because we live in a world that summons consumption at every turn, addiction attracts even as it repulses us. Seemingly, everyone is inherently pulled towards addiction, and yet this pull repulses us. Addiction's force structures the field of possibilities in which we move. This concept has not only put into motion a distinct set of laws and institutions, but also it increasingly conditions how we relate to ourselves, manage our desires, and actualize our freedom. For those exposed to it, the concept of addiction has shaped experiences and organized reality. As Schalow observes, "By the word 'addiction' we no longer simply mean a clinical or medical diagnosis, but instead designate a broad historical and cultural transformation of our way 'to be' (as well as an individually based problem)." Thus, he asks, "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?" (*Toward a Phenomenology of Addiction*, 4). If this concept has become such an integral part of the way we relate to ourselves, then understanding the meaning(s) of *addiction* is now an urgent matter.

*The proper name does not designate an individual: on the contrary, it's only when the individual opens up to the multiplicities that pervade them through a severe process of depersonalization that they realize their true proper name. The proper name is the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity.*

– Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*