

**ADDICTION AND ACTION: ARISTOTLE AND AQUINAS
IN DIALOGUE WITH ADDICTION STUDIES**

A Dissertation

by

KENT J. DUNNINGTON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2007

Major Subject: Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Addiction and Action: Aristotle and Aquinas in Dialogue
with Addiction Studies. (August 2007)

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The phenomenon of addiction has been a subject of investigation for a number of academic disciplines, but little has been written about addiction from a philosophical perspective. This dissertation inserts philosophy into the conversations taking place within the multi-disciplinary field of “Addiction Studies.” It contends that the philosophical accounts of human action given by Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas provide means for an analysis of many of the conceptual confusions in the field of Addiction Studies, including those surrounding the concepts of choice, compulsion, and habit. It argues that the category of habit in these two thinkers is richer and more complex than contemporary conceptions of habit and that the category of habit in its Aristotelian and Thomistic guises is indispensable for charting an intelligible path between the muddled polarities that construe addiction as either a disease or a type of willful misconduct. Furthermore, it suggests that recognizing the distance between Aristotle’s social context and the modern social context affords powerful insight into the character of modern addiction, and that an exploration of the parallels between the habit of addiction and Aquinas’s development of the habit of charity offers suggestive inroads for thinking about addiction as a moral strategy for integrated and purposive action.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE “SCIENCE” OF ADDICTION

This is a dissertation about addiction, written by a student of philosophy. The central question with which the dissertation deals is that of how to describe and understand addiction as human action. This might provoke an immediate question: Aren't addictions diseases and therefore not the sort of thing that humans *do* but rather the sort of thing that humans *suffer*? The question might be put more trenchantly: What business has a student of philosophy writing a dissertation about addiction? Shouldn't that be left to the experts—the scientists?¹

It may have been a worry such as this that led a member of a hiring committee with which I recently interviewed to ask me how my dissertation counted as philosophy instead of psychology. I found this to be an odd question mainly because, having been immersed in the thought of Aristotle and Aquinas, it seemed to me that neither of them could have the slightest idea how to answer a question like that. For Aristotle and Aquinas, the division of knowledges in contemporary academia would have seemed artificial and arbitrary at best. Aristotle was not only among the profoundest

This dissertation follows the style and format of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed.

¹ That philosophers are worried by these questions may best explain why so philosophers have written little on addiction. To my knowledge, only two monographs have been written by philosophers *qua* philosophers on addiction: Francis Seeburger's excellent *Addiction and Responsibility: An Inquiry Into the Addictive Mind* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) and Bruce Wilshire's *Wild Hunger: The Primal Roots of Modern Addiction* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998). The late philosopher, Herbert Fingarette, has written a well known though highly contested book about alcoholism, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), but Fingarette writes mainly as a participant in the field of alcohol studies. A recent conference entitled “What Is Addiction?” (May 4-6, 2007), hosted by the Center for Ethics and Values at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, is a hopeful sign that philosophy is beginning to enter the conversation about addiction.

“psychologists” of his day; indeed he was its leading “natural scientist.” He believed that we could only come to understand human action as we grasped its similarities with and differences from animal movement. So the notion that something called “philosophy” would have to ask permission before investigating the subject matters of “psychology,” “sociology,” “politics,” and even the “natural sciences” could not have occurred to Aristotle. Nevertheless, such a prejudice is built into the academic curriculum of our day, and I should therefore like to defend my disregard of it.

I eschew the artificial division between the disciplines, not the various findings of the disciplines, and I trust that this dissertation attests a willingness to interact with different disciplines, especially the so-called social sciences of psychology and sociology.² I also interact throughout with the discussions taking place within the biological sciences, but, insofar as the researchers in these fields—especially neurology, genetics, and pharmacology—are assumed to be the “experts” on addiction, I would like in this introduction to briefly articulate both the achievements and the limitations of biological and medical approaches to addiction. I do so by examining, first, how the biological sciences attempt to define addiction; second, how they attempt to assess risk for addiction; and third, the attempts to treat addiction through medical intervention.

² The literature on addiction in each of these fields is vast. The most comprehensive psychological approach can be found in Jim Orford, *Excessive Appetites: A Psychological View of Addictions*, 2d ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2001). To my knowledge, there is not a “standard” text in the sociology of addiction, but one of the seminal works on alcoholism is D.J. Pittman and C.R. Snyder, *Society, Culture and Drinking Patterns* (New York: Wiley, 1962).

Science and the Defining of Addiction

The Institute of Medicine defines addiction as a “brain disease” characterized by “compulsive use of a drug,” which is “manifested by a complex set of behaviors that are the result of genetic, biological, psychosocial, and environmental interactions.”³ The American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association offer similar definitions. The term “substance dependence” is used as an equivalent to “addiction” by each of these classification systems, and it is in fact the related phenomena of “tolerance” and “withdrawal” that have been central to the medical and scientific establishment’s attempts to define addiction.

Tolerance is defined as “a physiological process in which repeated doses of a drug over time elicit a progressively decreasing effect and the person requires higher or more frequent doses of the drug to achieve the same results.”⁴ Withdrawal is the dysphoria resultant on cessation or curbing of the person’s use of the drug, involving the body’s agitation at the disruption of the modified equilibriums it has established through the process of use.

One inroad to understanding the neurological processes behind the tolerance and withdrawal associated with substance abuse is to learn that the human brain produces its own drugs and, in turn, “takes” the drugs it produces: the brain produces neurotransmitters which are absorbed by the brain’s neuroreceptors.⁵ Substances such as

³ Institute of Medicine, *Dispelling the Myths About Addiction: Strategies to Increase Understanding and Strengthen Research* (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1997), 13.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ This information is readily available in numerous sources, but I have found very helpful Avram Goldstein, *Addiction: From Biology to Drug Policy*, 2d. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). A

nicotine, alcohol, opiates, cocaine and amphetamines, cannabis, and caffeine are considered particularly addictive because they either mimic or block the brain's natural drugs. Thus, for example, heroin (an opiate) mimics endogenous opioid peptides (endorphins) and binds with opioid receptors whereas caffeine blocks certain neurons from sending the neurotransmitter adenosine, which is responsible for feelings of drowsiness, to the relevant neuroreceptors. Exactly how this mimicking and blocking activity translates into the positive reinforcing (pleasure-causing) and negative reinforcing (pain-reducing) properties of addictive substances is still only vaguely understood, but the accepted view is that the various drugs set off complex chain reactions that eventuate in the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine, and that it is dopamine which causes the hedonic or anti-dysphoric effects that reinforce drug use.

But how does this process cause tolerance and, subsequently, withdrawal? I adapt and modify an example provided by neurologist Gerald May.⁶ Imagine that someone who is agitated decides to calm down by taking a Valium. As the chemicals from the Valium enter the person's bloodstream, they bind onto certain neuron's (call them "agitation neurons"), thus blocking those neurons from sending their messages of agitation to other relevant neurons (call them "receiving neurons"). These receiving neurons, experiencing a sudden decrease in messaging, respond by trying to stimulate the agitation neurons to get back to work, but, given the blocking effect of the Valium, this attempt at stimulation fails. If the resultant disequilibrium is relatively short-lived,

helpful discussion of the neurology of addiction in layman's terms can be found in Gerald May, M.D., *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), ch. 4.

⁶ *Addiction and Grace*, 80-83.

the neurons can quickly regain their former symbiotic equilibrium, but if the person continues to take Valium, both sets of neurons respond in an extreme way. The agitation neurons grow accustomed to the Valium and change their physical structure in such a way that they are less affected by it. The agitation neurons now require more Valium to be quieted. This is *tolerance*. The receiving neurons change as well, however. Since they continue to experience a lack of messaging from the agitation neurons, they too change their physical structure, increasing the number and sensitivity of their receptors so as to catch as many stray molecules of the “agitation neurotransmitter” as possible. As the person continues to take Valium, both of these physical transformations proliferate, constantly seeking to reestablish the equilibrium that has been lost. Now suppose that the person suddenly stops taking Valium. Immediately, the agitation neurons go berserk. They have grown “stronger” through their struggle against the blocking effects of the Valium, and now they flex their muscles. To make matters worse, the receptors of the receiving neurons have become exceedingly numerous and sensitive in their efforts to capture every last bit of stimulation possible from the blocked agitation neurons. Now that the frenzied agitation neurons are firing hordes of transmitters across synapses to the receiving neurons, the receiving neurons are all-too-prepared to accept them. The person without the Valium is consequently agitated, far more agitated than the original agitation that led him or her to take the Valium. This is *withdrawal*.

Although I have used the example of a chemical substance to exhibit the dynamism of tolerance and withdrawal, this example could be extended to cover any kind of

symbiotic neuronal arrangement, which is to say, tolerance and withdrawal are possibilities with respect to almost any kind of human behavior. Chemicals like Valium can be particularly addictive because they affect the brain in an immediate and extreme way since receptors for these chemicals already exist in the brain but are in no wise prepared for the sudden and radical imbalance that these chemicals introduce. But, structurally, there is nothing taking place in substance addiction that does not take place generally on the neuronal level, i.e., processes of neuronal feedback, habituation, and adaptation. Neurologically, then, so long as tolerance and withdrawal are taken to be the defining characteristics of addiction, there is no basis for limiting the scope of addiction to substance addictions, to the exclusion of what are often referred to as “process addictions”—addictions to shopping, sex, the Internet, religion, etc.

There is a tendency, in the medical and scientific literature, to *define* addiction in terms of tolerance and withdrawal, that is, to *equate* addiction with some level of physiological “dependence.” This will not work, for quite simple reasons. On the one hand, tolerance and withdrawal occur to countless persons of whom we would not say that they are addicted. Surgery patients who are given morphine or some other pain reliever quite often develop tolerance and withdrawal symptoms from the medication, but few of them become addicted. Most of them quit using the medication straightway at the prescribed time, despite the experience of withdrawal symptoms. On the other hand, large numbers of persons whom we would tend to consider addicted experience

little or no tolerance or withdrawal symptoms from their addiction.⁷ For example, many U.S. soldiers used heroin intensively and at length during their tours in the Vietnam War, but the majority of them stopped using upon return, reporting no withdrawal symptoms. Tolerance and withdrawal symptoms, therefore, cannot be considered either necessary or sufficient conditions for addiction.

That is not to say that tolerance and withdrawal are insignificant in relation to addiction, only that they are not definitive of addiction. We can imagine two persons, one who spends a month in the hospital on morphine, the other who spends a month regularly experimenting with morphine, and we can suppose that, at the end of the month, both are subject to similar levels of tolerance and withdrawal. Upon release from the hospital, the first person promptly stops using morphine. The experimenter with morphine does not stop, however, and claims to be addicted. What is the difference between the two? That is the question this dissertation pursues. Whatever the difference, is it not a simple matter of tolerance and withdrawal.

It is interesting to note that, as the evidence has mounted against defining addiction in terms of tolerance and withdrawal, the scientific and medical establishment has relied increasingly on the notion of “compulsion” in offering definitions of addiction. But, to return to the imagined case of the hospital patient and the heroin experimenter, in what sense do we learn what addiction is by being told that the former, upon cessation of morphine use, is not compelled to continue to use whereas the latter, upon cessation of

⁷ This has been demonstrated in a number of separate studies. See, e.g., Mark Keller, “On Defining Alcoholism: With Comment on Some Other Relevant Words,” in *Alcohol, Science, and Society Revisited*, edd. Lisansky Gomberg, Helene Raskin White, and John A. Carpenter (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1982). Nevertheless, this evidence has been largely ignored in much of the medical literature on addiction.

heroin use, is compelled to continue to use? If the difference cannot be fleshed out in terms of differing levels of tolerance and withdrawal, to what might scientists appeal in order explain why one is “compelled” and the other not?

The “Science” of Assessing Risk

In recent years, with rapid advances in genetics, researchers have suggested that the difference between the non-addict and the addict might be explained by differences in genetic make-up. The claim is that some persons are genetically predisposed to certain kinds of addiction. Early advances in the genetics of addiction were the result of studies of the difference in alcoholism rates between fraternal and identical twins. In general, identical twins had more similar rates of alcoholism and alcohol-related problems than did fraternal twins although there was nothing approaching an exact correspondence. In an effort to control for environmental factors, studies were then conducted on adopted children who were separated at birth from their biological parents. In general, adoptees that had at least one alcoholic biological parent were found more likely to be alcoholic than adoptees who did not have an alcoholic biological parent. In one study, the rate of alcoholism in the former group was four times that of the rate of alcoholism in the latter.⁸

More recently, geneticists have succeeded in isolating genes specifically related to certain substance addictions. So, for example, a 2005 study reported that a particular

⁸ See Donald Goodwin, *Alcoholism: The Facts*, 3d. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 13, for a summary of this and several other studies, as well as a general synopsis of findings relating alcoholism to heredity.

variation of the mu-opioid receptor gene led to increased sensitivity to the effects of addictive substances and therefore to higher risk of addiction.⁹ Other studies have demonstrated that a variant of the alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH) gene increases the risk of alcoholism, and that this particular variant is more prominent in persons of European descent.¹⁰ Similar studies are being conducted in genetics laboratories around the world, and new findings are made public on a regular basis.¹¹

However, when we examine the proposed connection between these genes and increased risk for substance addictions, we run into a familiar problem. The connection has to do primarily with three factors. Persons who have these genes exhibit a more immediate and powerful attraction to the relevant drug upon use, and/or develop tolerance to the drug more quickly and severely, and/or experience more acute withdrawal symptoms in the absence of the drug. We have already established that the occurrence of tolerance and withdrawal does not constitute either a necessary or sufficient condition for addiction, and the same can be said for the occurrence of intense hedonic or anti-dysphoric experience of a drug. Many persons experience intense sensory gratification from using a drug but nevertheless do not become addicted. Indeed, such an intense experience may provide powerful reasons *not* to use the drug again, let alone become addicted to it.

⁹ Ying Zhang, Danxin Wang, Andrew D. Johnson, Audrey C. Papp, and Wolfgang Sadec, "Allelic Expression Imbalance of Human Mu Opioid Receptor (OPRM1) Caused by Variant A118G," *Journal of Biological Chemistry* 280 (2005): 32618-32624.

¹⁰ John I. Nurnberger, Jr., and Laura Jean Bierut, "Seeking the Connections: Alcoholism and Our Genes," *Scientific American*, April 2007.

¹¹ For an up-to-date log of the most important findings, as well as a measured assessment of the relevance of these findings to addiction research and therapies, see the webpage of the Genetic Science Learning Center at the University of Utah: <http://learn.genetics.utah.edu/units/addiction/genetics/>

With respect to each of these factors, whether or not a person becomes addicted has to do, not simply with the experiences of gratification, tolerance, or withdrawal, but rather with the significance that the person discerns or invests in those experiences. That is to say, experiences of gratification, tolerance, or withdrawal rarely directly *cause* addictive behavior but rather enter into an agent's rational appraisal of whether or not to engage in addictive behavior. Addiction is "ends-oriented" or "goal-directed."¹² This is why it could never be true to say that genetic research will provide a sufficient causal account of addiction. Therefore, the following optimistic conclusion of Donald Goodwin on this matter is unwarranted:

The ultimate jackpot in alcoholism research would be the identification of a single gene or group of genes that influences drinking behavior...When an "alco gene" has finally been identified, if ever, it may turn out that a single gene determines whether a person is alcoholic or non-alcoholic.¹³

It could never turn out that a single gene or group of genes determines whether a person is alcoholic because genes do not determine persons, as Goodwin's own studies of alcoholism rates in identical twins should have made clear. If genes alone caused addiction, then every person with the ADH1 variant of the alcohol dehydrogenase gene would become an alcoholic, which is of course not the case. Most genetic researchers openly acknowledge this, and many of them implore the general public to recognize the limitations of their research. As Wolfgang Sadée, one author of the study on the mu-opioid receptor gene, points out: "Regardless of what gene variant someone has, everyone has the potential to become addicted. So it is not that some people will be

¹² "At heart all addictions are driven by the same impulses and most accomplish the same goals; you just use a different substance, or take a slightly different path, to get there." Caroline Knapp, *Drinking: A Love Story* (New York: Dial Press, 1996), 123.

¹³ Goodwin, *Alcoholism*, 86.

completely protected against addiction...This finding just points to one of the factors that control susceptibility.”¹⁴

Developments in the genetic research of addiction should not be discounted. They provide us with important tools for the prevention and treatment of various kinds of addiction although the sufficiency of these new tools is often irresponsibly overstated. But these developments do not lessen the fundamental need for an attempt to understand addiction from the perspective of human action. If we discovered a gene that predisposed to courage, would it cease to be important to attempt to understand what is rightly called courage and how courage could be pursued and developed by human agents? Neither Aristotle nor Aquinas would have thought so. In fact, neither of them would have been surprised to hear of a “genetic predisposition” to certain types of human activity since this could only be a more specific statement of what they already believed to be the case, namely that human beings are born with bodily “natures” that predispose them to act in some ways rather than others.¹⁵ Take Aquinas, for example:

But on the part of the body, in respect of the individual nature, there are some appetitive habits by way of natural beginnings. For some are disposed from their own bodily temperament to chastity or meekness or such like.¹⁶

¹⁴ A summary of the study as well as these comments by Sadee can be found in Eva Gladek, “Addiction Gene,” on the Sciencentral webpage at:

http://www.sciencentral.com/articles/view.php3?article_id=218392744&cat=1_1

¹⁵ It is reported that Aristotle said: “Foolish, drunken, and harebrained women most often bring forth children like unto themselves.” Quoted in *Autobiographical Writing Across the Disciplines*, edd. Diane P. Freeman and Olivia Frey (Durham, NC: Duke University press, 2003), 320. I have not been able to locate this passage in Aristotle’s writings. Although both Aristotle and Aquinas believed in natural dispositions to act in certain ways, they differ in their assessments of how determinative such natural dispositions are of human behavior. See my n. 17 in Chapter II for elaboration on this important point.

¹⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1981), 1-2.51.1. Hereafter, all citations from the *Summa Theologica* will be supplied in-text. Thus, 1-2.51.1 denotes *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part (*Prima Secundae*), Question 51, Article 1.

By reason of a disposition in the body, some are disposed either well or ill to certain virtues: because, to wit, certain sensitive powers are acts of certain parts of the body, according to the disposition of which these powers are helped or hindered in the exercise of their acts, and, in consequence, the rational powers also, which the aforesaid sensitive powers assist. In this way one man has a natural aptitude for science, another for fortitude, another for temperance.

Aquinas continues this passage by making a distinction between “inchoate” and “perfect” possession of dispositions, and it is this distinction that enables Aquinas to show why “natural dispositions” cannot fully account for the existence of temperate or courageous persons.

In these ways, both intellectual and moral virtues are in us by way of a natural aptitude, inchoatively,—but not perfectly, since nature is determined to one, while the perfection of these virtues does not depend on one particular mode of action, but on various modes, in respect of the various matters, which constitute the sphere of virtue’s action, and according to various circumstances (1-2.63.1).¹⁷

For Aquinas, then, a natural predisposition to courage, for example, does not thereby remove courage from the “sphere of virtue’s action.” What is the “sphere of virtue’s action,” and what determines its boundaries? For Aquinas, the sphere of virtue’s action is the same as the sphere of human action in general—“moral acts are the same as human acts” (1-2.1.3)—and the boundary of this sphere is marked by the line between voluntary and involuntary action.¹⁸ Voluntary action, in turn, implies knowledge of an

¹⁷ This is an opportune place to clarify how words like “addiction” and “alcoholism” will be used throughout this dissertation. In the contemporary idiom, one might be taken to mean any of three things by saying, e.g., that *x* is an alcoholic: (1) *x* has alcoholism “in the genes” and is therefore an alcoholic whether he or she has ever had a drop of alcohol or not; (2) *x* is a practicing alcoholic, exhibiting the standard marks of alcoholic drinking and behavior; (3) *x* is a recovering alcoholic, but *x* is nevertheless still an alcoholic because he or she is especially susceptible to relapse, his or her brain chemistry has been permanently changed, he or she still engages in “thinking drinking,” etc. Unless otherwise stated, I mean to pick out only (2) when I speak of addiction. Following Aquinas, we might say that (1) and (3) describe “inchoate” addiction whereas (2) describes “perfect” or fully realized addiction.

¹⁸ To be precise, we would have to say that for Aquinas the sphere of human action is circumscribed by the line between the “perfect voluntary” on the one hand and the “imperfect voluntary” as well as the involuntary on the other. Aquinas (1-2.6.2) follows Aristotle (1111b8-9) in saying that animals participate

end, and is epitomized by an agent's ability to give reasons for what he or she does. It is because human beings have, in addition to their desires, the ability to form beliefs about what is suitable to them that they are able to act rather than merely be acted upon. Thus, for instance, though a person may be predisposed to cowardice that person is nevertheless able to perform a courageous action in the face of fear because he or she can recognize that cowardice is not suitable to the end for which he or she strives.

Whenever movement is connected with rationality it becomes action.

To the extent that persons give reasons for their addictive behavior, addiction can and should be investigated as a form of human action. And persons do give such reasons: "We all have our reasons. We're bored or we're restless or we're depressed. We're worried or anxious or stressed. We're celebrating, or we're grieving."¹⁹ Even the frequent claim on the part of addicts that they acted "irrationally" or "insanely" is meant to express how *bad* their reasons for action were, how embarrassingly poor their *rationalizations* were for so acting. Of course, addicts often act impulsively, without deliberation, seemingly "unthinkingly." But rationality is not limited to the exercise of deliberative reason alone. It extends to habit, that philosophically slippery category with which this inquiry is largely concerned, and, through habit, to the very passions and urges that we wrongly—if Aristotle and Aquinas are right—relegate to the purely

in the voluntary to some extent because, even though they cannot know that they act for some end, they nevertheless by nature, i.e. by instinct, do act for an end. Animals act with purpose, but only humans act with intention.

¹⁹ Knapp, *Drinking*, 141.

involuntary. This dissertation seeks to explore the complex structure of the rationality of addiction, to understand addiction as a peculiarly human activity.²⁰

Medicalized Treatment

As scientists have developed more specific understandings of the physiological aspects of addiction, opportunities and means for medical intervention have increased. It is not possible in this brief introduction to mention the wide variety of medical treatments for addiction, which have met with varying degrees of success, but we can gain a general sense of the types of medical intervention available by looking at the case of alcohol addiction.

Medical intervention into alcoholism can be divided into types of detoxification and types of relapse prevention. Withdrawal from alcohol addiction can be immensely uncomfortable, even deadly, and in order for an alcoholic to escape the immediate physical threat posed by advanced alcohol addiction he or she must manage to survive as the alcohol is gradually depleted from the cellular organism. In many cases, the detoxification process must be controlled by pharmacotherapy, involving the use of mild tranquilizers such as Librium. Stopping “cold turkey” is rarely successful unless accompanied by strong external enforcement and support in the form of treatment clinics or inpatient hospital rehabilitation programs.

²⁰ I am therefore highly skeptical of the ease with which many researchers draw conclusions about addiction on the basis of animal experimentation. I am doubtful that it makes sense to speak of animals being addicted. Rats, for example, are quite hard to “addict,” and only become “addicts” through the manipulations engineered by human rationality. For an excellent analysis of the conceptual confusions rampant in this area of addiction research see Stanton Peele, *The Meaning of Addiction: Compulsive Experience and Its Interpretation* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985), ch. 4.

Detoxification is only the beginning of a long process of recovery, and there are several drugs that have been shown to be effective in aiding the recovering alcoholic in this process. The oldest such drug is Disulfuram, commonly known as Antabuse. Disulfuram is a relapse deterrent because, when combined with alcohol, it produces an intensely aversive reaction characterized by nausea, vomiting, dizziness, headache, and difficulty in breathing. One such experience is sufficient to prevent even the most inveterate alcoholic from drinking while on Antabuse, but compliance in regularly taking Antabuse is an obvious problem. Naltrexone reduces the dopaminic reward—the “priming of the pump” phenomena—that accompanies an alcoholic’s initial relapse, thereby preventing a first drink from triggering the drinking binges that are otherwise so common once an alcoholic has relapsed. Unsurprisingly, Naltrexone has not been found to increase abstinence from alcohol although it has been quite effective in curbing the volume of alcohol intake upon relapse. Acamprosate reduces the feelings of anxiety and depression that are associated with protracted abstinence. It decreases craving by diminishing the discomfort associated with sobriety. In one large trial, after a one-year course of treatment, 39 percent of subjects who were given Acamprosate were still abstinent, as compared to only 17 percent of those who were given placebo.²¹ None of these drugs is considered addictive, and, with the exception of Disulfuram, which is toxic to the liver, they have minimal harmful side effects.

It is precisely because these drugs are not addictive that they can play a supporting role in the process of recovery. If they could satisfy the longings and urges that lead

²¹ Goldstein, *Addiction*, 154.

people to drink, they would likely become addicts' new substances of choice. This is readily admitted by addiction pharmacologists who, similar to their colleagues in genetics, continue to insist that these medicines are not "magic bullets." "One of the things that it's most important for people to understand here is that the medicines won't do the work for you," says Mark Willinbring, M.D., Director of Treatment and Recovery Research at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. "People have the idea that [upon taking these drugs] 'I won't want to drink anymore,' that it'll magically make the whole thing disappear. And for the most part that won't work." Charles O'Brien, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine's Center for Studies of Addiction, says: "There's no medication that I could ever conceive of, even in the future, that will take away the need for the struggle, the hard work that's required [in recovery]."²² Despite these cautionary remarks, there is a temptation to believe that science is approaching an ultimate panacea. So, for example, Dr. Matthew Torrington claims,

With the scientific advances we're making in understanding how the human brain works there's no reason we can't eradicate addiction in the next 20 or 30 years. We can do it by fixing the part of the brain that turns on you during drug addiction and encourages you to kill yourself against your will. I think addiction is the most beatable of all the major problems we face. And I think we will.²³

We might contrast this confidence in medicine's capacity to treat away addiction with the skepticism voiced by a recovering alcoholic who reported: "I had access to a

²² From interviews that can be seen in the documentary *Addiction*, recently released (2007) by HBO Documentary Films. The documentary also reports on a new alcoholism drug called Topiramate. The drug is still in clinical trial, but has shown some promising results.

²³ Quoted in Benoit Denizet-Lewis, "An Anti-Addiction Pill?" *The New York Times Magazine*, June 25, 2006.

good medical library, but after a while, I realized the genetics and chemistry of the disease were of no use to me as an alcoholic.”²⁴ What the confidence of the medicalized understanding of addiction overlooks is that addiction can be adequately understood only as we inquire into the character of addictive action *from the agent’s perspective*.²⁵ What the medicalized response to addiction overlooks is precisely the relationship between addiction and rationality. It fails to recognize that addiction, far from being a merely causal outcome of the experiences of pleasure, relief, craving, and withdrawal, is rather a function of the meaning that those experiences take on in an agent’s conception of self and the pursuit of a life suitable to the self.²⁶ Furthermore, this confidence fails to consider why, for instance, addiction is so pronounced in contemporary Western culture and why religious communities and intentional communities like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous play such a central role in most recoveries from addiction. This dissertation seeks to explore such questions, not in an effort to displace the medical treatment of addiction but rather to place it in proper perspective.

²⁴ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., *Alcoholics Anonymous* (“Big Book”), 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2001), 344. Hereafter, *Alcoholics Anonymous* will be abbreviated AA and cited in-text.

²⁵ Much contemporary action theory merely reinforces the scientific tendency to evaluate and describe actions without reference to the agent’s perspective. The prevailing assumption is that actions can be described apart from the descriptions that an agent would give of his or her actions and apart from the meaning that those actions carry in terms of an agent’s life project. This is incompatible with an Aristotelian view of action, for Aristotle believed that two actions that from an external perspective appear identical might nevertheless be very different actions depending on the character of the agent, and in particular the desires of the agent, from which the actions spring. For a critique of contemporary action theory along these lines see Charles R. Pinches, *Theology and Action: After Theory in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

²⁶ Commenting on what is overlooked in any scientific approach to addiction, William Pryor, a former heroine addict and a great-great-grandson of Charles Darwin, quips: “If you gathered a thousand Charles Darwins in a room, each with a word processor, and made them type nonstop for ten years, would they eventually come up with the works of William Burroughs?” In *Survival of the Coolest: An Addiction Memoir* (Bath, Great Britain: Clear Press, 2003), 17.

The dissertation proceeds in four stages. In Chapter II, I present what I take to be the central paradox of addiction and attempt to locate that paradox within the long-standing philosophical paradox of incontinent action. Aristotle is the guide here, and I argue that his response to the paradox of incontinence should lead us to expect a possible connection between addiction and habit. Chapter III is an investigation of habit, drawing heavily on the thought of Thomas Aquinas, and arguing that both Aristotle's and Aquinas's conception of habit is more complex and subtle than contemporary notions of habit and therefore more serviceable for providing an account of addictive behavior. In Chapter IV, I explore the relationship between addiction and the virtue of temperance, and I use the moral philosophy of Aristotle to suggest an important link between modern conceptions of the self and addiction. In Chapter V, I return to the moral philosophy of Aquinas in order to demonstrate and mine a parallel between Aquinas's conception of the virtue of charity and the phenomenon of major addiction. In the Conclusion, I offer some thoughts on the implications of the study for the hope of recovery from addiction.

One more note: although I intend the dissertation to be about addiction in general, the reader may notice that I give more attention to alcohol addiction than to other substance or process addictions. The reasons for this are straightforward. There is more literature on alcoholism than any other addiction, including scholarly literature as well as "folk" literature such as alcoholism memoirs and the texts of Alcoholics Anonymous. Additionally, alcohol is different from the other addictive substances (except caffeine) in that it is legal and is used by a large segment of the population who do not become addicted, and these differences free us from being distracted by certain prejudices that

might obscure our analysis if we attended primarily to less “equal-opportunity” addictions.

CHAPTER II

INCONTINENCE AND HABIT

According to the “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous, alcoholism is “cunning, baffling, powerful” (AA 58). Why this description? The literature of Alcoholics Anonymous is replete with first-hand illustrations of the claim, and the persistent refrain is that alcoholism is baffling because of the “utter inability” of alcoholics to leave alcohol alone, “no matter how great the necessity or the wish” (AA 34). *“The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent... We are without defense against the first drink”* (AA 24). The tyranny that alcohol seems to exercise over the alcoholic’s “power of choice” and “so-called will power” makes alcoholism “cunning” and “baffling.”

The Addiction Paradox

The central paradox of Alcoholics Anonymous (hereafter A.A.), however, is that this admission of powerlessness over alcohol is supposed to be the “First Step” toward regaining, in some sense, a power over alcohol. “The principle that we shall find no enduring strength until we first admit complete defeat is the main taproot from which our whole Society has sprung and flowered.”²⁷ There is a “Higher Power,” which is

²⁷ Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1952), 22. Hereafter, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* will be abbreviated TT and cited in-text.

claimed to be accessible through the alcoholic's admission of powerlessness. The nature of this "Higher Power" is intentionally left unspecified although it is most frequently named as "God as we understand him" (Step Three). Yet, although much of the language about this Higher Power evokes a vague conception of the supernatural—a "Supreme Being" (AA 46), "the Spirit of the Universe" (AA 52)—it is reiterated throughout the A.A. literature that one who is agnostic or even atheist about matters supernatural nevertheless may place hope in some Higher Power. "You can, if you wish, make A.A. itself your 'higher power.' Here's a very large group of people who have solved their alcohol problem. In this respect they are certainly a power greater than you" (TT 27). It is beyond question that A.A. has "worked" for many who are agnostic or atheist about whether there is an "All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence" (TT 49) at work in the world. Later, I shall address the connection between addiction and the "supernatural," but at this point it will be worthwhile to accept the testimony of those who have recovered without any expectation or experience of supernatural help.

The central paradox of alcohol addiction, again, is that alcoholics acknowledge the futility of their own willpower to resist alcohol, yet in a nonmedicalized program of recovery find access to a power sufficient to reinvigorate the once-flaccid will. Two general responses to this paradox have been forthcoming. The first focuses almost exclusively on the near-unanimous claim of alcohol addicts that their willpower or power of choice was insufficient to resist the allure of alcohol. This response accepts as paradigmatic and literal those accounts of addiction such as that reported by William James:

A man who, while under treatment for inebriety, during four weeks secretly drank the alcohol from six jars containing morbid specimens. On asking him why he committed this loathsome act, he replied, "Sir, it is as impossible for me to control this diseased appetite as it is for me to control the pulsations of my heart."²⁸

Attempting to find an explanation for this impotence of the will, the first response concurs with this addict's self-description and labels alcohol addiction a disease, locating the source of the alcoholic's inability to stop drinking entirely outside of the will. The material configuration of the disease, whether it be specified as neurological, genetic, or cellular, overpowers the alcoholic will in such a way that the alcoholic does not act voluntarily when he or she drinks but is rather compelled to drink.²⁹

The second response to the paradox of alcohol addiction focuses almost exclusively on the *de facto* ability of some alcoholics to recover from their addiction, without medical intervention or mystical experience. Insofar as recovery involves the voluntary cessation of drinking, the alcoholic's drinking prior to recovery is considered equally voluntary. The failure of willpower on the part of the alcoholic is construed as a standard case of willful misconduct, akin to countless other actions that involve the capitulation of the will in the face of strong temptation. What is at work in alcohol

²⁸ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1950), 543. Another oft-cited example is Benjamin Rush's quotation of one eighteenth-century drunkard who reportedly said, "Were a keg of rum in one corner of the room, and were a cannon constantly discharging balls between me and it, I could not refrain from passing before that cannon, in order to get at the rum." Quoted in Harry Gene Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 39 (1978): 152.

²⁹ The literature on the disease concept of alcoholism is vast. Its seminal text is E.M. Jellinek's *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism* (New Haven: Hillhouse Press, 1960). The most impassioned and qualified of its contemporary defenders was Mark Keller, late editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. See his "The Disease Concept of Alcoholism Revisited," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 37 (1976): 1694-1717. The Yale Center of Alcohol Studies, which has moved and is now the Center of Alcohol Studies at Rutgers University, and the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse are both deeply invested in this line of pursuit, and most of the articles one finds in the several journals of alcoholism and addiction studies either argue for or assume the disease concept of alcoholism.

addiction, this response suggests, is not that a disease vitiates human willpower, but rather that, due to some kind of moral weakness, the alcoholic repeatedly makes a deliberate decision to drink. If alcoholics do not recover, it is only because they do not really want to. According to this response, “addiction is a choice.”³⁰

Neither response to the central paradox of alcohol addiction is adequate.³¹ The disease concept of alcohol addiction is unable to provide a coherent account of the obvious occurrence of recovery from severe alcohol addiction without the aid of medical intervention. By insisting on the language of compulsion, the disease model is unable to enter into the conversation about the way in which the willpower of the addict is deconstructed and reconstituted through the process of recovery. “No one ought to say the A.A. program requires no willpower,” reads a crucial line in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (TT 61). This line comes in a chapter on the Fifth Step of the A.A. program: “We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs” (TT 55). Specifically, the decision to confide in another is thought to require great willpower: “Here is one place you may require all you’ve got” (TT 61). This offers a profound insight into the role of the will in recovery, an insight to which we will pay considerable attention later in this study. By being directed toward

³⁰ This is the title of a popular book written by psychologist Jeffrey A. Schaler. *Addiction is a Choice* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000).

³¹ Neither the disease concept nor the choice concept of addiction is *solely* an attempt to respond to this paradox. This is especially true of the disease concept, which is arrived at through a number of different investigations—e.g., how should we interpret the evidence for a genetic predisposition to alcoholism?—and serves a number of different functional roles as a theory of addiction. For a fine effort to temper the claims of the disease concept of alcohol addiction while at the same time acknowledging its theoretical and functional worth, see George Vaillant, *The Natural History of Alcoholism Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 376ff.

actions and practices that are within reach of the addict, the will to resist alcohol is *indirectly* reconstituted and reinvigorated.

It is significant that the language of “disease” is never used in the A.A. literature,³² although numerous editions of the Big Book were produced after the “canonization” of the disease concept from the early 1960s on. Alcoholism is referred to at times as an “illness,” but this is rarely in a medicalized context. Illness is taken to be an appropriate metaphor for the progressively self-destructive behavior of the alcoholic (AA 30), just as the state of mind of the acting alcoholic is said to be “plain insanity” (AA 37).³³ The first chapter of the Big Book, entitled “The Doctor’s Opinion,” contains a letter from a Dr. William Silkworth, who writes that “the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy” (AA xxviii). Yet this proposed allergy is supposed to explain the intense cravings uniquely experienced by alcoholics and not their consistent failure to resist giving in to the cravings. Furthermore, Dr. Silkworth’s medical speculation is never endorsed in the Big Book. It is only said that “his explanation makes good sense” (AA xxvi).

The language of “compulsion” is not used in A.A. literature either, for A.A. rightly recognizes that to conceive of alcoholic behavior as compelled would call into question the very possibility of a non-medicalized recovery. The picture of a total incapacity to stop drinking is reserved only for those “rare” cases in which even an apparently sincere effort to apply A.A. principles results in failure. These are “usually men and women

³² Except in the “Personal Stories”—autobiographical testimonies from recovering alcoholics—in the latter half of the Big Book.

³³ Cf. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way” (AA 58). Interestingly, the physical inability to stop drinking is traced to a constitutional lack of self-awareness. Here again we note the insight that the reconstitution of alcoholic willpower requires the ability to exert willpower over aspects of the addict’s life other than drinking, in this case the relentless pursuit of honest self-appraisal.

The disease concept of alcohol addiction, therefore, is incapable of dealing with the central paradox of addiction and recovery. The notion of disease, with its corresponding suggestion of a physiologically determined compulsion to drink, cannot explain the alcoholic’s failure to resist alcohol, for in doing so it would explain too much. It would also explain why alcoholics are incapable of recovering without medical intervention, which is evidently not the case.³⁴

On the other hand, the choice concept of addiction is unable to deal with the paradox of addiction and recovery for different reasons. Simply put, it makes intelligible the possibility of recovery only by denying the reality of addiction. On the choice

³⁴ It has been argued that effective treatment without medical intervention does not rule out the possibility of disease. For example, Vaillant argues that “effective treatment of early coronary heart ‘disease’ probably depends far more upon changing bad habits than upon receiving medical treatment,” yet we do not thereby rule out calling such a condition a “disease,” *Natural History of Alcoholism Revisited*, 18. Vaillant is correct to point out the elasticity of the concept of “disease.” We probably cannot find a list of sufficient and necessary conditions that would exactly correlate even the uncontested medical attributions of “disease.” We must therefore take these types of arguments on a case-by-case basis. In this case, the salient difference between alcoholism and hypertension is that the central symptom of alcoholism is the inability to consistently choose not to drink, whereas none of the central symptoms of coronary heart disease implicate human choice. If the central symptom of coronary heart disease were an inability to consistently refuse fatty foods, would it make sense to say that it could be effectively treated by changing the “bad habits” of eating fatty foods? If it could be so treated, wouldn’t that call into question its status as a disease? If addiction were a disease, it would be one the primary symptom of which is destruction of human will. There are such diseases—Alzheimer’s comes to mind. But with Alzheimer’s, the only hope of recovery is pharmacological, which is not true of addiction.

model, addiction is merely a name for consistent weakness of will with respect to one substance or activity. In its more cynical moments, which are all too common, the attribution of “addiction” is depicted as a perverse psychological form of rationalization and excuse.³⁵ Addiction is therefore not qualitatively distinct from any other failure of willpower: some people give in to the temptation for chocolate cake, others to the temptation for alcohol. Even the more sophisticated attempts to supply a choice model of addiction reduce addiction in this way. Although it is recognized that alcohol is imbued with great significance to the alcoholic because of his or her psychological, sociological, and spiritual situation, the difference between alcoholic behavior and the behavior of one who occasionally overindulges in sweets is placed along a continuum in such a way as to deny the qualitative singularity of addictive experience.

The overwhelming report of alcoholics and other major addicts flies in the face of this attempt to reduce addictive behavior to a type of weakness of will that is perhaps greater in degree but not qualitatively distinct than other failures of the will. Calling into question the attempts to root addictive behavior in a complex account of all of the factors that can enter into the conscious addictive choice, the Big Book warns against the temptation to think that “ ‘conditions’ drove us to drink” (AA 47). This is not a denial that addictive behavior is at some level voluntary but rather a denial that addictive

³⁵ Defenders of the choice concept of addiction never tire of alleging that the disease concept of addiction excuses addicts from expending the effort to overcome addiction. The assumption behind the allegation, however, is that excuses are the main things that stand between an addict and recovery. The assumption behind the disease concept, on the other hand, is that shame and guilt are the main things that stand between an addict and recovery. Although I think both models of addiction are misguided, the disease concept has the virtue of resting on a truthful assumption, which cannot be said of the choice concept. The last thing an addict who has “hit bottom” wants is another excuse to drink or use.

behavior is akin to other forms of weak-willed choice, which might be more easily explained with sole reference to external “conditions”. As the alcoholic interprets and describes his or her addictive thought and behavior, he or she testifies that the power of alcoholic temptation is qualitatively distinct from any other kind of strong temptation. “The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed” (AA 30). This is, *functionally*, why the disease model of addiction has been so helpful to many addicts. It resonates with the addict’s experience of his or her addiction as something phenomenologically other than everyday struggles of will.³⁶

We may ask whether we should simply take the addict’s interpretation of his or her addictive experience as a given. We shall have a chance later to look more closely at the ways in which culturally mediated patterns of perception and conception affect the interpretation and expression of addictive experience. For now, it will be helpful to proceed taking the testimony of alcoholics and other addicts at their word. Aristotle’s philosophical approach is often characterized as an exercise in “saving the appearances” of everyday experience,³⁷ and this initial exploration into the paradox of addictive experience will be a similar sort of philosophical exercise. For Aristotle, philosophy in the mode of “saving the appearances” entails that “we ought to attend to the undemonstrated sayings and opinions of experienced and older people or of people of

³⁶ It is beyond question that the disease concept of addiction has been enormously helpful to addicts and those who care about them by removing the moral stigma that accompanies the choice concept of addiction, according to which addiction is simply willful misconduct. As Francis Seeburger puts it, “If nothing else, the spread of the disease view of addiction has greatly helped to overcome the illusion that addicts as a group are significantly different from other people when it comes to matters of ethics and morality,” *Addiction and Responsibility*, 68. My practical concern with the disease concept is that it may give addicts a false hope in the power of medicine to aid or accomplish their recovery. It is for the reasons presented in the Introduction that I think such a hope is almost always false.

³⁷ For this characterization, see Martha Nussbaum, “Saving Aristotle’s Appearances,” in *Language and Logos*, ed. Malcolm Schofield and Martha Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

practical wisdom not less than to demonstrations; for because experience has given them an eye they see aright.”³⁸ We may find that the descriptions that addicts offer of their experiences of addiction are not merely undemonstrated but indemonstrable, that there is no philosophical formulation of the range of human action that makes intelligible the types of descriptions that addicts give of their experience. The burden of this and the next chapter will be to show, on the contrary, that addicts’ interpretations and descriptions of their experience can be made philosophically intelligible and that, in fact, though this could never compensate for the terrible carnage it unleashes upon us, addiction does provide us with a number of philosophically suggestive questions and leads.³⁹ To construct this argument, I will depend largely on Aristotle’s philosophy of human action (Chapter II) and Aquinas’s rich account of the nature of habit and its role in human action (Chapter III) although I will push certain of their insights to conclusions that neither of them explicitly formulated.

The argument of this chapter will proceed in three stages. First, I will argue that, following Aristotle, we can offer three broadly differentiated categories for comprehending the range of addictive experience: self-indulgence, incontinence, and compulsion. It will be shown that most addictive experience falls under the broad category of incontinence and that, moreover, all cases of addictive experience that exhibit what I have called the addiction paradox fall into this category. Next, and

³⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1143b11-14. Hereafter, the *Nicomachean Ethics* will be cited in text following the standard line enumeration.

³⁹ “It is a significant fact that in order to appreciate the peculiar place of habit in activity we have to betake ourselves to bad habits, foolish idling, gambling, addiction to liquor and drugs,” John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct, The Middle Works of John Dewey*, Vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 21.

drawing again on Aristotle, I detect three further sub-categories of moral incontinence: incontinence from rational choice, incontinence from early habituation, and incontinence from genetic predisposition (what Aristotle would have termed “nature.”) These differentiations are important for helping us navigate the range of culpability and responsibility that can be attributed to the incontinent addict. Finally, having thus set the stage, I lay out Aristotle’s explanations of incontinent behavior. Aristotle did not offer just one explanation of incontinent action, and if we are to approach any kind of adequate understanding of addictive experience we will need to pay close attention to the variety of ways in which action can go wrong according to Aristotle. The argument culminates in the claim that, of the two identified springs of incontinent action—passion and habit—habit in particular calls for further investigation as a potential source of the singularity of addictive experience.

Addiction and Incontinence

Neither Aristotle nor Aquinas gives particular attention to what we would today describe as addictive experience.⁴⁰ Indeed, there is only one passing line in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 7, which could be taken to indicate an awareness that such a type of experience might require special philosophical treatment. There, Aristotle mentions two types of incontinence that are to be distinguished from the “normal” types

⁴⁰ See Chapter IV for a brief discussion of the “genealogy” of the addiction concept. Most scholars concur that the addiction concept is modern, as argued most succinctly in Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction.” However, scholars have identified in medieval and ancient literature numerous descriptions of behavior that would lead us *today* to apply the label of addiction. See, e.g., John C. Mellon, *Mark as Recovery Story: Alcoholism and the Rhetoric of Gospel Mystery* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995). Mellon argues against the charge of anachronism in ch. 1.

with which he has primarily concerned himself. These two unique types are “incontinence either without qualification or in respect of some particular bodily pleasure” (1148a3-5). There is no reason to identify addiction with “incontinence without qualification”; as the Big Book states, the alcohol addict, for example, may be “perfectly sensible and well balanced concerning everything except liquor” (AA 21). Rather, as this last quote suggests, the alcoholic is one who is incontinent with respect to one particular object, namely, alcohol. The addict is indeed a most extreme and paradigmatic case of this type of particularized incontinence.

Aristotle does not offer an explanation of how these types of incontinence differ from the more standard types, but that he thinks so is clear. Each of these two types of incontinence—incontinence with respect to everything (“incontinence without qualification”) or incontinence with respect to one thing (“incontinence in respect of some particular bodily pleasure”)—is “blamed not only as a fault but as a kind of vice, while none of the people who are incontinent in these other respects is so blamed” (1148a4-5). As will be shown in Chapter III, a crucial insight is intimated in Aristotle’s cryptic claim that incontinence with respect to some particular thing shares in vice in a way that incontinence “in these other respects” does not. But that will have to wait.

The mention of these two unique types of incontinence appears, but is not developed, during Aristotle’s well-known attempt to respond to the problem of incontinent action (*akrasia*), known in contemporary parlance as “weakness of will.”⁴¹

⁴¹ For Aristotle, the fundamental ethical question is not about the difference between right and wrong but rather about how it is possible that we know the good yet do not will it. This is the problem of “*akrasia*” or “incontinence,” which I shall use interchangeably. I avoid the expression “weakness of will” mainly

Insofar as addiction involves a certain type of incontinence—a highly particularized and repetitive one—we should begin by addressing what Aristotle has to say about incontinence in general. It will be my contention that there are resources in Aristotle’s treatment of the more general problem of incontinence that can be extended and deepened to probe the unique nature of addictive incontinence.

First, however, we must inquire whether every type of addictive experience is an experience of incontinence. The incontinent addict is the addict who has (a) the belief that the addictive behavior is bad for him or her and a corresponding desire not to engage in it, and (b) the capacity to some degree *not* to engage in it, but who nevertheless (c) does engage in addictive behavior against his or her own better judgment. Obviously, there are addictive experiences that do not fit this description. Aristotle would have suggested two different types of addictive experience that would fall outside the range of incontinence. First, an addict could lack (a), the belief that the behavior in question is bad for him or her and the corresponding desire to avoid the addictive behavior. The addict who engages in addictive behavior in the absence of (a) would be termed by Aristotle the “self-indulgent” addict. The self-indulgent addict not only engages in addictive activity but also does so wholeheartedly, believing the activity to be a good worthy of pursuit and therefore fully desiring it. The self-indulgent addict does not give in to a temptation that is contrary to what he or she believes ought to be done. Rather, the self-indulgent addict believes that the addictive behavior is what ought

because, since Aristotle did not have a theory of the will, he also did not set out to address the problem of weakness of will.

to be done. There is no internal “tension” as the self-indulgent addict engages in addictive behavior.⁴²

On the other hand, Aristotle would have held that an addict could lack (b) and therefore not be rightly described as incontinent. The addict who engages in addictive behavior in the absence of (b) would be termed by Aristotle a “brutish” or “morbid” addict. It is an open question whether anyone in the contemporary world, other than perhaps feral children, would qualify as brutish for Aristotle. There is no small lack of provincial arrogance in his attributions of brutishness, but what seems to be the characteristic mark of the brute is the incapacity to act rationally. These are persons “who by nature are thoughtless and live by their senses alone” (1149a9-10). The morbid person similarly lacks the capacity to act rationally, but for different reasons. The morbid person is one who cannot rationally guide his or her actions “as a result of disease (e.g. of epilepsy) or of madness” (1149a11). For epilepsy and madness are such that they either temporarily or permanently render the human person entirely a patient, removing all agency.

It is tempting to hear in Aristotle’s language of “disease” and “madness” resonances of the “illness” and “insanity” language of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. There is, however, a decisive difference between what Aristotle means by the notion of a morbid character and what A.A. means by speaking of the illness and insanity of the alcoholic. For

⁴² Harry Frankfurt, in his classic essay “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” in *Free Will*, 2d ed., ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 335, offers a description of what he calls the “willing addict” that closely parallels our Aristotelian notion of the self-indulgent addict. In Frankfurt’s philosophical vernacular, the willing addict is one who experiences no conflict between his or her first-order and second-order desires. The willing addict wants the addictive object and wants to want it.

Aristotle, one who is morbid with respect to some potential human action is removed entirely from the realm of culpability *and* responsibility with respect to that action, whereas, when the Big Book uses this language it *does* mean to question the degree to which a person is culpable for his or her behavior, but it expressly does *not* believe that the “ill” or “insane” alcoholic is free of responsibility with respect to his or her addictive behavior. Intuitively, we see the notions of culpability and responsibility as coterminous, but neither A.A. nor Aristotle—in other cases—does so. As I will argue, the asymmetry is not only philosophically justified but also required for any sufficient characterization of a large segment of addictive behavior. In any event, the “morbid” addict, on Aristotle’s terms, cannot be classified as incontinent since he or she lacks the capacity to act otherwise than he or she does. The relationship of the morbid addict to addictive behavior is precisely the same as the relationship of an epileptic to seizures.

There are addicts who would rightly be classified as self-indulgent or morbid on Aristotle’s terms. Indeed, many addicts go through a self-indulgent phase, which is usually made possible by the fleeting conviction that the addiction can be maintained without any drastic detriment to health or well-being. On the other hand, there are clearly persons who are addicts without any capacity for change. The largest class of such individuals is persons with serious mental handicaps. Interestingly, it seems likely that Aristotle would have put more addicts in this latter class than A.A. does.⁴³ “There

⁴³ This is an important point, and one that requires me to qualify my use of Aristotle in this dissertation. I mentioned in n. 15 of the Introduction that, although both Aristotle and Aquinas acknowledge the existence of natural dispositions to act in certain ways, they differ in their assessments of how determinative such natural dispositions are of human behavior. For many reasons, some having to do with the introduction of the category of “sin” by Christianity and the consequent reassessment of the relationship between natural contingencies and human happiness, Aquinas is much less inclined than

are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest” (AA 58). With respect to the “beggars, tramps, asylum inmates, prisoners, queers, plain crackpots, and fallen women” that many early A.A. groups resolved not to admit to membership, later A.A. wisdom came to see that “thousands of these sometimes frightening people were to make astonishing recoveries and become our greatest workers and intimate friends” (TT 140-141).

What I have called the addictive paradox does not arise for either the self-indulgent addict or the morbid addict. There is nothing paradoxical about the thinking or behavior of the self-indulgent agent in general. The agent is not conflicted about what he or she wants, nor, in normal cases, is he or she unable to bring about those wants. There is no mystery in the fact that some addicts approve in every way of their addiction and therefore pursue it wholeheartedly. With respect to the morbid addict, although there may be on some level a judgment that the addictive behavior is bad, the failure to bring

Aristotle to absolve the moral culpability and responsibility of human persons on the basis of hereditary dispositions. Aristotle’s suggestion of hereditary determinism is on display, for example, in the following passage from Aristotle: “It is surprising if a man is defeated by and cannot resist pleasures or pains which most men can hold out against, when this is not due to heredity or disease, like the softness that is hereditary with the kings of the Scythians, or that which distinguishes the female sex from the male” (1150b12-16). This indicates that Aristotle may have been more sympathetic than Aquinas with the characterization of addiction as determined by heredity. What Aristotle would *not* have accepted is the simultaneous claim that hereditary addicts can be held responsible for their addictions and expected to recover in a nonmedicalized context. Aristotle is too consistent for this. Hereditary determinism removes both culpability and responsibility on Aristotle’s account, as is clear from this and other passages. In other words, if Aristotle were in A.A., he would not allow a Scythian to join, not even a Scythian king. And certainly not women! But, presumably, had Aristotle relinquished his prejudices he would have noticed that not all women are “soft,” and would have retracted the claim that women are by nature determined to be soft. Simply because most addicts show a capacity for recovery, we must consider most addicts incontinent rather than morbid if we are to maintain Aristotle’s consistency. In any event, I am interested in Aristotle’s account of incontinence, not because I am certain that he would have applied it to the case of addiction, but because it seems to me the most adequate entry point for a discussion of the philosophical implications of the possibility of nonmedicalized recovery from addiction.

action in line with such a judgment is a physically determined inability. The addictive paradox, again, is that persons come to admit their own inability to resist the object of their addiction, only to find that they thereby begin to regain that ability. The addictive paradox is, therefore, a paradox about agency. Insofar as the morbid addict is not an agent but is rather a patient, there is no great mystery, although there is great sadness, about the morbid addict's behavior. The addictive paradox applies strictly to the incontinent addict. Indeed, as will be shown, the addictive paradox is really connected to the paradox of incontinence in general, and it is due to Aristotle's careful attention to this latter paradox that he is so helpful for this discussion of the nature of addictive experience.

Before examining Aristotle's attempt to deal with the paradox of incontinence, a few more remarks about kinds of incontinence are in order. Just as we could find in Aristotle three broad categories for thinking about types of addicts, so, I suggest, we can find three sub-categories for thinking about types of incontinent addicts. First, Aristotle speaks of cases of "simple" incontinence (1148a2). "Simple" incontinence is incontinence that is acquired straightforwardly through morally incontinent behavior. To say that the behavior is morally incontinent is to imply some degree of culpability and therefore to suggest that the moral agent had the resources both to know that his or her action was wrong and to do otherwise. The simply incontinent addict is, therefore, always an adult addict whose addictive tendencies can be explained primarily or solely with reference to decisions and actions that were undertaken as a competent adult moral agent. Because the actions that led to the state of incontinence were themselves morally

culpable, the agent is held to be more or less culpable for being in the state of incontinent addiction. I say *more or less culpable* because the degree of culpability depends in large part on the degree to which the simply incontinent person could or should have known that his or her actions might lead to a settled state of character. Aristotle says that “actions and states of character are not voluntary in the same way” (1114b30-31), which means that the simply incontinent person is not necessarily equally culpable for the one or several actions taken singly that eventuate in a settled character as he or she is for the actions that spring from that settled character.⁴⁴ In any event, because incontinent addiction is not necessarily a permanent state (as is, for example, morbid addiction), the incontinent addict may also be rightly assigned responsibility for overcoming his or her incontinent state. He or she *is able to respond* in the face of the incontinent state and is therefore responsible for recovery.

Second, Aristotle speaks of cases of incontinence due to childhood habituation, or, more carefully, due to habituation as a result of activities engaged in when the person could not have been considered a responsible moral agent. The example that he gives is of men who engage in pederasty because they were “victims of lust from childhood, from habit” (1048b30-31). We can suppose that Aristotle, for example, might have included in this category persons who were raised by addicts, surrounded from a young age by addictive behavior, and/or encouraged or allowed from a young age to experiment with addictive substances or behaviors. Similarly, Aristotle says that some

⁴⁴ This raises a thorny set of questions. If a person *knows* he or she is genetically predisposed to addiction, might he or she be more rather than less culpable for becoming addicted? Are ethics professors and moral psychologists, e.g., more culpable than others for becoming addicts since they know so well the relationship between human action and character formation?

persons may be in a state of incontinence due to custom. Addiction as a product of the binge-drinking culture that predominates on college campuses throughout America could stand in as an example here.⁴⁵ Aristotle says that these are not cases of “simple incontinence,” but are rather only called incontinence “by analogy” (1049a1-3). Thankfully, he gives us a clue as to how these types of incontinence are and are not like simple incontinence. “To have these various types of habit is beyond the limits of vice” (1148b34-1149a1). What is implied in this claim is twofold. First, the person who acts incontinently due to childhood habituation or custom is not morally culpable for his or her incontinent state or the behavior that flows from it. In this sense, the person’s state and behavior is “beyond vice.” Second, because the person’s incontinent state and activity is a product of habit, the person is nevertheless in some sense able to respond creatively to his or her situation. Because habit is not nature, but only “like nature” (1152a33), it is malleable, although change requires great effort: the more deeply ingrained the habit, the more difficult will be the process of correction. Therefore, the addict who is incontinent due largely to childhood habituation is not culpable but can be said to be responsible for his or her recovery although this is true to a lesser degree than in the case of the addict who is simply incontinent.

Finally, Aristotle suggests that there may be cases of incontinence due to “originally bad natures.” The text is hard to decipher at this point. On one reading, it appears that Aristotle in speaking of bad natures means only to indicate those cases that can be traced to disease or madness. Thus, we would say of a mentally ill addict, ‘He can’t help

⁴⁵ As John Dewey points out, “custom” is just an abbreviation for “collective habit” or “widespread uniformities of habit,” *Human Nature and Conduct*, 43.

himself, he was just born with a bad nature.’ But Aristotle also seems to include under the category of “originally bad natures” the sorts of things that we would call dispositions, even perhaps “genetic predispositions,” without granting them the status of physically pre-determined necessities. Thus, for example, Aristotle speaks of “the man who is by nature apt to fear everything, even the squeak of a mouse” (1149a6-7). Here, we would be more inclined to say that this man has a cowardly disposition, not coward’s disease or a mental illness that causes cowardice. The notion of dispositional tendencies toward incontinent addiction, then, would represent a third type of addictive incontinence. Matters of culpability and responsibility would be qualified accordingly.⁴⁶

Each of these categorizations could be subjected to extended analysis. This would be especially profitable if one were interested in elaborating a theory on the basis of which legal decisions could be made about the culpability of various types of addictive behavior. That, however, is not the aim of this study. These divisions are set forward only in very schematic terms in order, first, to show how sensitive Aristotle was to the complexity of human action and, second, to prevent the need for constant qualification throughout the rest of this project. I have located the spearhead of our query within the category of incontinent addictive action, and I will speak most regularly of what has been further sub-categorized as simple incontinent action with respect to a particularized object or activity, but it should be apparent throughout that what I say would need to be qualified to adequately cover the further sub-categories. With that proviso, we shall now be concerned with Aristotle’s explanation of how incontinent action is possible at all.

⁴⁶ But see n. 18 for examples of the difficulties involved in making such determinations.

Aristotle on Incontinence

Incontinence is a philosophical paradox in itself. Incontinence can be characterized straightforwardly as what takes place when an agent acts against his or her own better judgment.⁴⁷ It is so patently obvious from first-hand experience that this sort of thing occurs that it may not be immediately apparent why this is paradoxical, but that it is so can be shown as follows. If, as is commonly held, agents act in such a way as to bring about what they believe to be, on the whole, to their greatest benefit, then how can it come about that an agent genuinely believes that one course of action is to his or her greatest benefit and yet chooses to take a contradictory course of action? How can an agent choose to do that which he or she believes to be inferior to another course of action that was open for him or her to take?

In his attempt to respond to the paradox of incontinent action in Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle begins, as he often does, by registering what others have said about the matter. He reports that Socrates responded to the paradox by denying that there was a paradox in the first place. “For *Socrates* was entirely opposed to the view in question, holding that there is no such thing as incontinence; no one, he said, when he judges acts against what he judges best—people act so only by reason of ignorance” (1145b25-28). Socrates’ position, then, is that genuine incontinence does not occur, since in any case of apparent incontinence the agent does not possess the knowledge with which his or her behavior is in contradiction. We always act in accord

⁴⁷ This is the standard contemporary characterization of incontinence, offered by Donald Davidson in his classic paper, “How Weakness of the Will Is Possible,” in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

with our “better judgment,” even though to others observing or to our own retrospective gaze it appears that we should or could have “known better.” Incontinent action, therefore, is simply ignorant action and so not a moral failure.

In accord with his methodology of “saving the appearances,” Aristotle rejects the Socratic response to the problem of incontinence, saying, “this view plainly contradicts the observed facts” (1145b29-30). Before we move on to Aristotle’s own treatment of the problem, however, it will be helpful to point out two distinctive elements of the Socratic response that Aristotle will reject in his treatment of the problem. Both elements are apparent in Plato’s well-known treatment of incontinence in the *Protagoras*. There, Socrates says:

It is not easy to show what it is that you call “being overcome by pleasure,” and then, it is upon this very point that all the arguments [for incontinence] rest. But even now it is still possible to withdraw, if you are able to say that the good is anything other than pleasure or that the bad is anything other than pain. Or is it enough for you to live life pleasantly without pain? If it is enough, and you are not able to say anything else than that the good and the bad are that which result in pleasure and pain, listen to this. For I say to you that if this is so, your position [i.e., that there is incontinent action] will become absurd, when you say that frequently a man, knowing the bad to be bad, nevertheless does that very thing, when he is able not to do it, having been driven and overwhelmed by pleasure; and again when you say that a man knowing the good is not willing to do it, on account of immediate pleasure, having been overcome by it.⁴⁸

In this passage, Socrates states what are to be the central theses upon which he bases his rejection of incontinent action as a genuine possibility. First, he claims that there is one standard of value by which all actions can be measured. Every evaluative term can be cast, without remainder, in terms of pleasure or pain. There is, therefore, no

⁴⁸ Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett, 1997), 354e-355b.

possibility of incommensurability between value judgments and thus no genuine possibility for internal conflict about what is really the better course of action. Second, Socrates claims that the agent is either in possession of knowledge or is ignorant. There are only these two possibilities: simple knowledge or simple ignorance.

Aristotle denies both of these theses. First, he rejects the view that all values are commensurable. He asserts that there are three possible objects of pursuit—the noble, the useful, and the pleasant (1140b30-35)—none of which can be straightforwardly translated into the other.⁴⁹ Second, Aristotle denies that there are only two epistemic possibilities for the human agent, simple knowledge and simple ignorance. He asserts, instead, a number of differentiations of knowledge and error which result in a much more complex account of the various epistemic situations in which the human agent may carry out his or her action.

Throughout his inquiry into the sources of *akratic* action in Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle relies on a specific typology of moral character. The virtuous agent is one who acts in accordance with his or her reason and in whom reason and appetite coincide: the virtuous person rationally approves the good, desires the good, and does the good. The continent (*enkratic*) agent is one who acts in accordance with his or her reason but in whom reason and appetite conflict: the continent person rationally approves the good, desires the bad, yet does the good. The incontinent (*akratic*) agent is one who does not act in accordance with his or her reason and in whom

⁴⁹ Elsewhere, in the *Politics*, Aristotle explicitly denies the “principle” according to which “any good may be compared with any other,” trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1283a3-4.

reason and appetite conflict: the incontinent person rationally approves the good, desires the bad, and does the bad. Finally, the vicious agent is one who acts in accordance with his or her reason and in whom reason and appetite coincide: the vicious person rationally approves the bad, desires the bad, and does the bad. As should be apparent from this classification scheme, the action of the incontinent person is the philosophically puzzling action, given the assumption, which is shared by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, of the ascendancy of reason over appetite.

In the course of Aristotle's treatment of the puzzle of incontinence, two lines of response emerge. There is considerable disagreement in the scholarly literature about what is in fact Aristotle's position on the matter, including whether Aristotle achieves a unified position and whether his position is materially distinguishable from the Socratic position,⁵⁰ but these are not the issues with which we are primarily concerned here. Rather, we are interested in probing each line of response in an effort to see how it might help us elucidate the central paradox of the addictive experience. The first type of response Aristotle proposes is that, sometimes, the reasoning needed to overcome incontinent action is simply not completed due to the interruption of passion. The second type of response he proposes is that, sometimes, although the reasoning may be completed it is not followed due to either the onslaught of passion or the weight of habit. I shall elaborate these responses as they arise in Aristotle's treatment of the problem in Book 7.

⁵⁰ For a lucid and concise treatment of these matters, see Risto L. Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), ch. 1.

En route to offering his first response to the puzzle, Aristotle sets aside a response of those who had tried to maintain the Socratic position without denying the possibility of incontinence. They had proposed a distinction between knowledge and opinion, maintaining that the incontinent agent is one who acts, not against knowledge, but against opinion. Aristotle swiftly dismisses this response, saying that “some men are no less convinced of what they think than others of what they know” (1146b29-30). We can make no consistent claims about the relative strengths of knowledge in comparison to opinion because some people are so zealous that they feel more strongly about what they merely believe to be true than other people feel about what they know to be true. Aristotle accuses the proponents of this response of conflating opinion with indecision. If there is genuine indecision, as is sometimes the case in the realm of opinion, then we are not inclined to call the action that results from such indecision incontinent. But whenever rational evaluation moves beyond indecision, it arrives at a rational judgment. Whether this deliverance is an opinion or knowledge does not matter. What matters is that the agent sometimes acts against his or her rational judgment. *This* is the paradox of incontinence.

Having invalidated the relevance of the opinion/knowledge distinction to the incontinence paradox, Aristotle proceeds by drawing a distinction that he thinks is in fact relevant to the paradox. Although it does not make a difference whether a man possesses a rational judgment in the form of opinion or in the form of knowledge, “it *will*

make a difference whether, when a man does what he should not, he has the knowledge⁵¹ but is not exercising it, or *is* exercising it; for the latter seems strange, but not the former” (1136b32-35). The first type of response to the paradox of incontinence that Aristotle pursues rests on this distinction between a rational judgment possessed but not exercised and a rational judgment exercised. In Aristotle’s terminology, this is the distinction between potential and actual knowledge.

As he develops the significance of this distinction to the question of incontinence, Aristotle depends on an account of action according to which action can always be represented as the causal effect of a practical syllogism. A practical syllogism consists of two premises, one universal and the other particular. The universal premise makes a universal rational judgment, for example, “Everything sweet ought to be tasted” (1147a29). The particular premise makes a particular rational judgment, for example, “This is sweet” (1147a29). Just as when in a theoretical syllogism assent to a conclusion follows from the valid connection of a universal and particular premise, so when in a practical syllogism a valid connection is made between a universal and particular premise an action is the culmination of the syllogism. The conclusion of an agent’s practical syllogism with the premises “Everything sweet ought to be tasted” and “This is sweet” is twofold: first, there is a propositional conclusion, for example, “I will taste this”; second, there is the action of tasting the sweet thing.

⁵¹ Given Aristotle’s argument against the significance of the opinion/knowledge distinction with respect to the paradox of incontinence, it would have been more precise if, instead of using the language of “knowledge” he would always use the language of “rational judgment,” or something similar. In fact, he usually uses the language of “knowledge,” as does Aquinas, but “rational judgment” could always be substituted without changing the argument. Rather, such a substitution would make the arguments more precise.

One of the central controversies in the literature on Aristotle's ethics involves whether the conclusion of a practical syllogism is necessarily an action. This has in fact been the standard reading, and it is defended on the basis of Aristotle's claim that, once a valid connection has been made between the universal and particular premises of a practical syllogism, "the man who can act and is not prevented *must* at the same time actually act accordingly" (1147a30-32, my emphasis). Alfred Mele, however, in several carefully argued papers, has persuasively argued that Aristotle cannot have understood the conclusion of a practical syllogism to be strictly an action. He argues that, at the very least, we must grant that a propositional conclusion mediates between the practical syllogism and the resultant action, even if these two "moments" of practical reasoning cannot be distinguished temporally. Explaining in what sense the conclusion of a practical syllogism is and is not correctly identified with an action, Mele says that if

an agent's forming a "concluding" opinion is virtually simultaneous with his performing the relevant action, then there is an extended sense of "conclusion" in which an (external) action *is* characteristically a conclusion of a practical syllogism. It is not an immediate conclusion; for it is mediated by a concluding opinion [the propositional conclusion]. But it is "virtually simultaneous" with the formation of such an opinion; and, of course, the primary purpose of practical reasoning is, not to arrive at opinions, but to generate action.⁵²

The importance of this claim will be evident shortly as we look at Aristotle's second response to the paradox of incontinence. For now, it is important to see that scholars agree that, for Aristotle, every human act can be represented as the consequence (whether mediated or not) of a practical syllogism. I say that every human act *can be*

⁵² Alfred Mele, "Aristotle on *Akrasia*, *Eudaimonia*, and the Psychology of Action," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985), 377. See also Mele's "Choice and Virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 405-423; and his 'Aristotle on *Akrasia*, *Eudaimonia*, and the Psychology of Action,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985): 375-393.

represented as the consequence of a practical syllogism to underscore the point that syllogistic reasoning need not precede every human action. Often, the construction of a practical syllogism is performed retrospectively to display or assess the rationality of a given action.

Based on this understanding of human action as the consequence of a practical syllogism, Aristotle explains how an agent can *in a sense* possess a judgment yet act contrary to that judgment. Since, on the account Aristotle has begun to develop, all human action can be represented as the consequence of a practical syllogism, it seems as though incontinent action will require the presence, in some sense, of two practical syllogisms: one that, had it been rightly connected in the agent's mind, would have led to right action and another that is connected in the agent's mind that does in fact lead to wrong action. In every such case, the rational judgment that would have led to continent action is possessed by the agent, not actually, but merely potentially, at the moment the incontinent action is performed. More specifically, Aristotle says that it will always be the particular premise of the practical syllogism that may be known potentially but not actually. Aristotle suggests, although he does not clearly distinguish, a variety of ways in which this might occur.

First, the particular premise may be merely potentially known because of a lack of time. The agent may be rushed or rush to act before bringing the particular premise to the "front" of the mind. Second, the particular premise may be merely potentially known because it is not actively brought into the deliberative process. For some reason, the agent simply does not import the particular premise into his or her actual thinking.

Neither of these types of failures is obviously a result of a conflict with the agent's appetite, and they are therefore of minimal interest to Aristotle.

Several more ways in which the particular premise can fail to be exercised involve the relationship between the appetites and reason. A third can be distinguished in the following passage:

When, then, the universal opinion is present in us forbidding us to taste, and there is also the opinion that 'everything sweet is pleasant', and that 'this is sweet' (now this is the opinion that is active), and when appetite happens to be present in us, the one opinion bids us avoid the object, but appetite leads us towards it (1147a32-35).

The particular premise that would lead toward continent action may be merely potentially known because the agent's appetite may lead him or her "toward" the object of appetitive desire, and, by implication, "away from" an actual knowledge of the particular premise that would, in connection with the universal premise prohibiting certain actions, lead the agent to act continently. We could say that what passion does in this instance is to push the one particular premise of a practical syllogism into the "front" of the agent's mind while at the same time pushing the particular premise of another practical syllogism into the "back" of the agent's mind. So, for example, we might have the following two practical syllogisms: on the one hand "Everything sweet ought to be tasted" and "This is sweet"; and on the other hand, "I shouldn't have more than one piece of chocolate cake" and "This would be my second piece." Incontinence could occur given these two practical syllogisms if appetite were to lead us "toward" exercising the first practical syllogism and "away from" exercising the second. Can we replace the language of "toward" and "away from", of the "front" and "back" of the

mind with something less metaphorical? We could try, by following Aquinas, and say that the passions might (a) “prevent” the agent from considering what he or she knows; (b) “distract” the agent from considering what he or she knows; or (c) “pervert” the agent’s knowledge of the particular premise of the prohibitive practical syllogism.⁵³

The following passage offers a fourth way in which an agent’s knowledge of a particular premise might be merely potential rather than actual:

For outbursts of anger and sexual appetites and some other such passions, it is evident, actually alter our bodily condition, and in some people even produce fits of madness. It is plain, then, that incontinent people must be said to be in a similar condition to men asleep, mad, or drunk (1147a14-18)

Passion might be so powerful as to change our bodily condition. Just as sleep affects our bodily condition and makes theoretical and practical reasoning disappear, so the passions might similarly bring about a constitutional change that would make certain exercises of practical reasoning inaccessible. Aquinas’s description is helpful here although it is no less metaphorical. The passions may lead to incontinent action by “fettering the reason: in so far as bodily pleasure is followed by a certain alteration in the body...Now such bodily disturbances hinder the use of reason; as may be seen in the case of drunkards, in whom the use of reason is fettered or hindered” (1-2.33.3). This sort of analysis would obviously apply to addicts’ within-episode (e.g., after the first drink) “loss of control”

⁵³ These are the three descriptions supplied by Aquinas in *De Malo*, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.9, of how appetite can lead a person away from acting in accordance with a right judgment. Cf. Jon Elster, *Strong Feelings: Emotion, Addiction, and Human Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 199, who suggests that emotion may “cloud” or “distort” reason’s deliverances. “Clouding” is presented as a form of distraction from clear reason, and “distortion” as a form of perversion of reason’s evaluation.

over their addictive behavior.⁵⁴ Aristotle does not address at this point the extent to which human action resulting from such activity on the part of appetite is compelled or voluntary although what he says later may suggest that such activity is only an indirect form of moral incontinence. Obviously, given the evidence of within-episode loss of control on the part of addicts, the way in which we analyze the moral status of this type of effect of passion on reason is important.

This concludes the first line of response that Aristotle offers to the paradox of incontinence, the line of response according to which incontinent action is possible because the reasoning that would be needed to prevent it is, although within the reach of the agent, never actually carried out. It should be noted that this line of response is not very far from the Socratic position. In each of the four ways that passion can inhibit right exercise of the practical syllogism, the result is ignorance of the conclusion that could be characterized as “actual” knowledge or “knowledge proper.” Aristotle admits as much: “the position that Socrates sought to establish actually seems to result; for it is not in the presence of what is thought to be knowledge proper that the affection of incontinence arises (nor is it this that is ‘dragged about’ as a result of the state of passion)” (1147b15-18). Like the Socratic position, this Aristotelian diagnosis of incontinence denies the possibility of acting against one’s (actual) better judgment. It is distinct from the plain Socratic position only in that it complicates the character of

⁵⁴ For a comment on the notion of “loss of control” and how it will be used in this project, see Chapter III, n. 1.

ignorance, suggesting that there are several degrees of ignorance rather than simple Socratic “error.”⁵⁵

Elsewhere in the *Ethics*, however, a second line of response to the paradox of incontinence is evident. Aristotle says things that imply that the incontinent agent may reach the conclusion of the practical syllogism that should lead to continent action but nevertheless violate that conclusion. For example, Aristotle says that “the incontinent man acts with appetite, but not with choice; while the continent man on the contrary acts with choice, but not with appetite” (1111b12-15). Again, “he who pursues the excesses of things pleasant...not by choice but contrary to his choice and his judgment, is called incontinent” (1148a6-10). At numerous places throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle makes the same claim, that the incontinent agent is one who acts contrary to his or her choice or rational judgment. Now choice (*prohairesis*), for Aristotle, is the efficient cause of action. “The origin of action—its efficient, not its final cause—is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end” (1139a32-33). This claim would make “choice” identical with the conclusion of a practical syllogism, which is also considered the efficient cause of action. And it would seem that Aristotle did in fact understand choice to be identical to the outcome of practical reasoning. “The object of choice being one of the things in our own power which is desired after deliberation, choice will be deliberate desire of things in our power” (1113a10-12). Given these claims, we are led to believe that when Aristotle says that the incontinent

⁵⁵ Anthony Kenny, in *Aristotle's Theory of the Will* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 160-161, claims that Aristotle supplies three possibilities of error in place of Socrates' simple possibility of error: not having knowledge and therefore being in error; half-having knowledge and therefore being in error; having knowledge but not exercising it and therefore being in error.

agent acts contrary to choice but with appetite he implies that the incontinent agent has in fact connected the premises of the right practical syllogism in such a way as to arrive at a rational judgment—“choice”—but that the agent nevertheless acts contrary to that judgment. Something like this recognition that an incontinent person may actually possess the knowledge needed to act continently seems to be at stake in attributions of denial and self-deception to addicts, and we shall see in Chapter V that the phenomenon of denial is indeed bound up with this line of response to the problem of incontinence.

Aristotle seems to be aware that the claim that the incontinent agent acts against choice does imply an explanation of incontinence that is different than the one offered in the first line of response.

The last premiss both being an opinion about a perceptible object, and being what determines our actions, this a man either has not when he is in the state of passion [the first line of response], or has it [the second] in the sense in which having knowledge did not mean knowing but only talking (1147b8-12).

In the second line of response, therefore, ignorance of the particular premise cannot be seen as the cause of incontinent action since the incontinent agent actually possesses the rational judgment that results from the right practical syllogism. The agent possesses this rational judgment—his or her “choice”—but acts in violation of the judgment nevertheless.

According to this much less Socratic position, the incontinent agent acts against choice. This is a strange saying to our ears. How could an agent act against his or her choice? Isn't an agent's choice always made evident by what the agent actually does? Not so for Aristotle. But how, then, does Aristotle believe that an agent could act contrary to the judgment delivered by right practical reasoning? There seem to be two

ways: first, because of the onslaught of passion; second, because of the power of habit.

Both possibilities are on display in the following passage:

The fact that men use the language that flows from knowledge proves nothing; for even men under the influence of these passions utter scientific proofs and verses of Empedocles, and those who have just begun to learn a science can string together its phrases, but do not yet know it; for it has to become part of themselves, and that takes time (1147a19-23).

This passage sheds light on how an agent might indeed possess the rational judgment that follows from a practical syllogism and yet act contrary to that judgment. First, the agent might be said to be “drunk with passion” in such a way that, despite having arrived at the right conclusion of a practical syllogism, he or she is nevertheless impelled by passion to act contrary to the conclusion. Second, the agent could “have” the conclusion in a sense, yet fail to act on it because it has not “become a part” of him- or herself, it has not become “second nature” to him or her. Here, Aristotle connects incontinent action with habit, which he defines elsewhere as a kind of second nature (1152a31). What seems to be lacking in this type of case is the incorporation of knowledge into action. Insofar as habit is “embodied knowledge,”⁵⁶ a description that seems apt given what Aristotle says about habit, then, in certain cases, what seems to interfere with the incontinent agent’s ability to act in accordance with his or her choice is a wrong habit or at least the lack of a right habit. Thus, Risto Saarinen offers the following explanation of the passage from Aristotle. Some “akratic people are like inexperienced youngsters who cannot yet profit from their knowledge, because they lack

⁵⁶ This definition is offered by William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003), 32.

the proper habits. It is not the lack of knowledge but the lack of a proper integration of that knowledge which causes the right choice not to be followed.”⁵⁷

Proper integration of knowledge into action takes practice. Put differently, following M.F. Burnyeat, “practice has cognitive powers.”⁵⁸ As implied in Aristotle’s example of the beginning science student, we may be told and even come to believe that certain actions are good and noble without yet having really learned that they have this intrinsic value. To really come to understand the intrinsic worth of these actions more is needed than mere “head knowledge,” assent to a proposition. The knowledge must be translated into “heart knowledge” as well. The student of right action must come to embrace in an affective way the actions that he or she has come to believe are right. And this takes time and practice, which is to say that this takes habituation.

The profound advance of this Aristotelian response to the problem of incontinence over that offered by Socrates is in Aristotle’s recognition that knowledge is often habit. Whereas Socrates thinks that it should be enough for continent action that an agent merely possess knowledge, Aristotle recognizes that the knowledge must inform who we are, including our desires, if it is to be effective. For Socrates, the power of knowledge resides in its content, whereas for Aristotle the power of knowledge resides in the manner in which it is possessed by the knower.⁵⁹ Socrates says:

We must realize that each of us is ruled by two principles which we follow wherever they lead: one is our inborn desire for pleasures, the other is our

⁵⁷ Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought*, 15.

⁵⁸ M.F. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), 73.

⁵⁹ For this way of putting it, I am indebted to Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: ‘Phronesis’ and ‘Techne’ in Modern Philosophy and in Aristotle* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 276.

acquired judgment that pursues what is best. Sometimes these two are in agreement; but there are times when they quarrel inside us, and then sometimes one of them gains control, sometimes the other.⁶⁰

But for Aristotle, there is a third principle—habit—that mediates between these two principles, incorporating them into each other. Whereas for Plato, we can never be sure which principle may gain control—“sometimes one of them gains control, sometimes the other”—Aristotle believes that we shape our lives just to the extent that our desires are informed by our knowledge and our knowledge is informed by our desires.

Embodied knowledge, therefore, rather than knowledge simple is required for consistent continent and virtuous action, and incontinent action is often due to a lack of embodied knowledge.

Let us briefly recap the two main Aristotelian lines of response to the problem of incontinent action. First, Aristotle argued that incontinent action might take place due to a failure to complete the reasoning that would have made available to the agent a course of right action. This can happen in a number of ways, including mere lack of time or simple failure of attention to all of the premises that the agent knows potentially. But most often, passion is the culprit, for passion can prevent an agent from focusing on the right particular premise or can lead an agent, by distraction, to allow an important particular premise to slip to the “back” of the mind. Passion can also effect a bodily change so drastic as to prevent an agent being able to think clearly about the action at hand. Second, Aristotle argued that incontinent action might take place even when an

⁶⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, 237d-238a.

agent has arrived at a right rational judgment. Passion can again play the culprit, but it is also possible that the failure is due to some failure of habit.

These two lines of response are correlated by Aristotle's later distinction between two types of incontinence: weak incontinence and impetuous incontinence. "Of incontinence one kind is impetuosity, another weakness. For some men after deliberating fail, owing to their emotion, to stand by the conclusions of their deliberation, others because they have not deliberated are led by their emotions" (1150b19-22). The impetuous incontinent agent does not complete deliberation, and thus acts out of ignorance of a right judgment. The weak incontinent does in fact complete deliberation, arriving at a right judgment, but does not operate on the basis of the right judgment.

Impetuous incontinence is obviously applicable to a number of cases of addictive weakness of will. Take, for example, the case of Fred, as reported in the Big Book of A.A. Fred was an alcoholic who admitted that he had many of the symptoms of alcoholism, but doubted that he needed to become an A.A. in order to put an end to his drinking. Here is Fred's story in his own words.

I was much impressed with what you fellows said about alcoholism, and I frankly did not believe it would be possible for me to drink again. I rather appreciated your ideas about the subtle insanity which precedes the first drink, but I was confident it could not happen to me after what I had learned...

In this frame of mind, I went about my business and for a time all was well. I had no trouble refusing drinks, and began to wonder if I had not been making too hard work of a simple matter. One day I went to Washington to present some accounting evidence to a government bureau...

I went to my hotel and leisurely dressed for dinner. *As I crossed the threshold of the dining room, the thought came to mind that it would be nice to have a couple of cocktails with dinner. That was all. Nothing more.* I ordered a cocktail and my meal. Then I ordered another cocktail...I remember having

several more that night and plenty next morning...[After that] I know little of where I went or what I said and did. Then came the hospital with unbearable mental and physical suffering.

As soon as I regained my ability to think, I went carefully over that evening in Washington. *Not only had I been off guard, I had made no fight whatever against the first drink. This time I had not thought of the consequences at all.* I had commenced to drink as carelessly as though the cocktails were ginger ale (AA 40-41).

This is a standard case of impetuous incontinence. Fred did not even begin to carry out deliberations that might have presented him with courses of action alternative to taking the first drink. As he reports, nothing other than the thought of the cocktail crossed his mind. He did not think of the consequences of his actions. He engaged in no rational “fight” with his first impulse whatsoever.

This is a baffling scenario, and it is repeated in personal stories of addiction. In Chapter III, we shall look more closely at what goes wrong in cases such as these. But cases of impetuous incontinence are not as baffling as cases of weak incontinence, which are even more predominant in personal testimonies of addictive experience. Take, for example, the following recollection of a young female alcoholic.

I picked up a half gallon of whisky one day after work and drank over one-third of it in less than four hours that same night. I was so sick the next day, but I made it to work. When I got home from work, I sat on my parents’ sofa and knew, *I knew*, I would start working on the half gallon again, despite the fact that I was still very ill from the night before. I also knew that I did not want to drink. Sitting on that sofa, I realized that the old “I could stop if I wanted to, I just don’t want to” didn’t apply here, because I did not want to drink. I watched myself get up off the sofa and pour myself a drink. When I sat back down on the sofa, I started to cry. My denial had cracked; I believe I hit bottom that night, but I didn’t know it then; I just thought I was insane. I proceeded to finish the half gallon (AA 324).

This is an extreme case of incontinence. Indeed, the way the addict describes her experience communicates an experience of compulsion, and we can only know that she

was not unqualifiedly compelled because she eventually stopped drinking in a nonmedicalized program of recovery. This seems to be an obvious experience of what in the contemporary scholarship on Aristotle is often referred to as “clear-eyed *akrasia*.” She ‘watches herself’ pour another drink. She knows that she should not drink, but she also knows that she will. This is a powerful depiction of the “divided self,” a phenomenon that is central to addictive experience. And yet this is precisely in line with the character of weak incontinence. This woman was in definite possession of the knowledge that she should not drink, yet she drinks anyway. This is not a case of passion interrupting the deliberative process. In fact, passion does not obviously enter into the picture here at all. She drinks against her own better judgment and *even against what seems to be her predominant desire*. She knows she should not drink. She does not want to drink. Yet she drinks. How is this possible? The bafflement of this kind of case far exceeds that of any form of impetuous incontinence. If, as I have suggested, there is a power other than passion which can give us insight into the nature of weak incontinence, surely accounts such as this one demand an investigation of such a power. And so I contend that, if we are to penetrate the more baffling components of addictive experience, we will need to examine the nature of habit. What I have tried to establish in this chapter is that incontinence in all of its varieties cannot be comprehended on the basis of the features of ignorance or passion alone. The relationship between habit and incontinence may be the source of many of the most perplexing aspects of addictive experience.

Aquinas on Incontinence

In Chapter III, I will be examining the nature of habit. I shall use the thought of Aquinas to carry out this examination since Aquinas develops more fully and carefully a philosophy of habit than does Aristotle. But there may be a worry about this sort of procedure since we have not said much about Aquinas's own views on the problem of incontinence. In fact, Aquinas's views parallel those of Aristotle very closely. There are two substantial disagreements.

The first divergence from Aristotle comes in Aquinas's response to the question of whether the incontinent agent acts "by choice." We recall that Aristotle says explicitly that "the incontinent man acts with appetite, but not with choice" (1111b12-14). And we recall that this caused certain problems for Aristotle's philosophy of human action because it is not clear how appetite can lead a person to act in a certain way without involving in some way or other the agent's capacity of choice.⁶¹ Aquinas answers the question slightly differently, and is therefore able to avoid this problem. Aquinas says that "sinful and virtuous acts are done by choice (*secundum electionem*)."⁶² In some places, Aquinas seems to contradict himself on this point since he frequently repeats, although rarely without qualification, Aristotle's claim that the incontinent agent sins "without choice" (e.g., 1-2.79.4). Aquinas clarifies what he means by this in Article 12 of Question 13 of the *De Malo*. "There can be choice even in a sin of weakness, and yet choice is not the primary source of such sinning, since emotions cause the sinning. And

⁶¹ In fact, Aristotle himself gets tripped up by the problem when he says in a more colloquial context, "That is true, for instance, of incontinent people; for they *choose*, instead of the things they themselves think good, things that are pleasant but hurtful" (1166b8-10, my emphasis).

⁶² *De Malo*, 3.9

so we do not say that such a person sins by choice (*ex electione*), although the person sins while choosing (*eligens*).” Thus, where Aristotle says that the incontinent person acts *against choice with appetite*, Aquinas says that the incontinent person acts *against choice while nevertheless choosing*. Therefore, Aquinas’s position on incontinence would include everything in the two lines of Aristotelian response, but it would add to those responses the further claim that the incontinent will consents to appetitive desire.

Aquinas does not indicate that he considers this to be a serious departure from Aristotle. He seems to think that his “acting against choice while choosing” analysis corresponds quite closely to Aristotle’s “acting against choice voluntarily” (or “willingly,” as Ross translates) (1152a15). Thus, in the *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, Aquinas comments on this passage in Aristotle as follows:

The incontinent person sins willingly enough, for he knows in a way (i.e., in general) what he does and why and the other circumstances. Therefore his act is voluntary. Still he is not bad because he does not act by choice; when he is not in the throes of passion, his choice is the good or equitable. But when passion sweeps over him, his choice crumbles and he wills evil.⁶³

Nevertheless, we must admit that Aquinas’s view of the matter has been influenced by Augustine who, on the standard view, introduced the notion of the will into the philosophical discussion of incontinence.⁶⁴ This introduction of the will into the problem of incontinence leads Aquinas to draw a clearer distinction between the propositional conclusion of a practical syllogism and the corresponding action. The

⁶³ Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C.I. Litzinger, O.P. (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), #1461.

⁶⁴ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) has been most responsible for securing this consensus. There is a considerable literature on the idea of the will in Augustine. For some of the important disagreements in the literature see Saarinen, *Incontinence in Medieval Thought*, ch. 2.

propositional conclusion is a judgment, and the “consent” of the will is thought to be necessary to move from judgment to action. Thus, Aquinas’s *ex electione/eligens* distinction implicates the human will in a more explicit manner than does Aristotle’s choice/voluntary action distinction.

Aquinas’s other clear disagreement with Aristotle comes as a result of this first departure. For, since Aquinas clearly asserts the consent of the will as a prerequisite for any human action, and since he insists that the will is a rational appetite, he must conclude that every action, even incontinent action, is performed under the aspect of good (*sub ratione boni*). Thus, whereas Aristotle seems to deny that the forbidden action under the condition of incontinence is judged to be a good, Aquinas claims that during the moment of incontinent action the agent arrives at a particular judgment that the proposed forbidden act is good.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ For the clearest discussion of these central differences between Aristotle and Aquinas on incontinent action, see Bonnie Kent, “Transitory Vice: Thomas Aquinas on Incontinence,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989): 199-223.

CHAPTER III

HABIT AND ADDICTION

Providing a definition of addiction is notoriously difficult. There are as many contemporary “official” definitions as there are fields of research that have a stake in the understanding and treatment of addiction. Psychological, psychiatric, pharmacological, sociological, and medical manuals vie for privilege of place in offering a definition, while insurance and drug and alcohol governance agencies pick and choose among the alternatives. Because of the enormous economic implications of both the sale of addictive substances and the medical treatment of addictions, it is demanded that the definitions on offer be capable of making clear distinctions between who is and who is not addicted. For this reason, the experience undergone by those who are addicted is often overlooked in favor of more “objective” measures.

In this study, however, we are interested in the experience of addiction because we seek to make addiction intelligible as human action, and we suspect that exploring what it is like to be addicted may supply us with important insights into the structure of human agency and the sources of human action. We need not, then, worry about providing an exact definition of addiction before proceeding to talk about it. It is enough that there are very clear cases, which no one—unless he or she denied that addiction was a meaningful concept at all—would fail to describe as addictive behavior. We are interested in asking what the experience of being addicted can teach us about the complexity of human action, and, conversely, how a careful analysis of certain aspects

of human agency can illuminate some of the more perplexing elements of addictive experience.

Despite the ongoing pursuit of a definition of addiction, it is common for experts to specify addiction by listing a number of its characteristic “marks.” Often, the need for clear demarcation of addicts intrudes, and we are told, rather arbitrarily, that if we check “yes” to, say, seven of the ten marks, we are probably addicted. Implicit in this approach is the admission that none of the “marks” is a necessary condition for addiction. Nevertheless, inquiring about the “marks” is the most natural inroad to an exploration of addictive experience, and so this chapter will proceed by doing just that.

Although there is no standard list of the marks of addiction, there is remarkable consensus in the literature on the most prevalent among them. Three marks frame the broad outline of addiction: craving (which encompasses the marks of tolerance and withdrawal outlined in the Introduction), loss of control,⁶⁶ and relapse. These marks are fundamental because they continue to be offered, despite the problems raised in the Introduction, as first-order explanations of addictive behavior. These three marks will be explored in this chapter. The chapter is an attempt to provide the philosophical backdrop that can make the phenomena of craving, loss of control, and relapse

⁶⁶ Although it is the centerpiece of the disease concept of alcohol, the concept of loss of control is often not clearly specified. What exactly do, say, alcoholics lose control over? The ability to resist the first drink or the ability to stop drinking once they’ve taken the first drink? Donald Goodwin, a leading “alcohol studies” expert, contends that “loss of control refers to the alcoholic’s inability to stop drinking once he starts,” *Alcoholism*, 90. But this restriction poses a dilemma on the standard disease view of alcoholism. For if loss of control is triggered only *after* the first drink, why should the alcoholic not simply be able to resist the first drink? This leads to a broadening of the “loss of control” concept to apply to the inability to abstain over time, i.e., the inability to prevent relapse. More often, then, loss of control is meant in this more general sense. The concept itself is deeply problematic, and cannot withstand either analytic scrutiny or empirical testing (see Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, 32-39). I use “loss of control” to locate this more general feature of the addictive experience, one that can only be made intelligible, I am convinced, in terms of habit.

intelligible. In subsequent chapters, I will fill out our account by exploring several other marks of addiction, including shame and guilt, obsession, and denial. The thesis that I will pursue throughout this chapter is that craving, loss of control, and relapse can each be illuminated with reference to Aristotle's explanations of incontinent action as sketched in Chapter II. Craving will be shown to be tied to the way in which passion can interrupt and derail the deliberative process that is constitutive of continent action. Loss of control and relapse will be shown to be tied to the way in which habit holds sway over moral agency even in the face of seemingly successful deliberation.

Passion and Craving

As stated, passion can interrupt and vitiate the deliberative process of prudential action two ways. First, passion can lead an agent "toward" an incontinent action, and, by implication, "away from" a continent action by pushing one practical syllogism into the "front" of an agent's mind at the expense of another, right practical syllogism. This happens whenever strong emotion⁶⁷ "prevents" or "distracts" an agent from considering what he or she knows, or "perverts" an agent's knowledge of the particular premise of a syllogism that would lead to continent action. Second, passion can actually alter our bodily condition in such a way as to "fetter" and "hinder" the use of reason (1-2.33.3). Each of these ways in which passion can derail continent action can be concretized by looking at the role of craving in addictive behavior.

⁶⁷ I use the terms "passion" and "emotion" interchangeably.

Most addictive experience is characterized at some point by the phenomenon known as *craving*. Craving is a complex concept, difficult to define, but two common albeit imprecise distinctions will help to elucidate it. The first, widely assumed and employed throughout the literature, is between “physical craving” and “psychological craving.”⁶⁸ The second is between craving as a result of the hedonic “pull” of euphoria and craving as a result of the hedonic “push” of dysphoria.⁶⁹

Physical craving is the intense and persistent desire to engage in addictive behavior as a means of escape from bodily discomfort. It is therefore driven by a feeling of dysphoria. Its characteristic symptoms can include cold sweats, nausea, and uncontrollable shaking. These bodily experiences are often said to be consequences of physical *withdrawal* from an addictive substance, and the withdrawal consequent on the lack of the substance is said to be evidence of physical *tolerance* and *dependence*. There are addicted persons who experience no physical craving, and there are persons who experience physical craving whom we would not tend to describe as addicted. Nevertheless, physical craving often accompanies the experience of addiction.

Physical craving would seem to be a clear instance of the way in which strong desire can obstruct continent action because it is associated with what Aquinas describes as “a certain alteration in the body” (1-2.33.3). Some bodily pleasures, we are told,

⁶⁸ Both philosophically and biologically, this distinction is finally untenable. In addition, the distinction has often been put to work to fortify the fallacious claim that addiction can be equated with biological dependence and therefore can be comprehended scientifically and healed medically. I am thus hesitant to employ the distinction, but I do so for the simple reason that it correlates certain of our phenomenological intuitions. Therefore, when I talk, e.g., of “physical withdrawal” or “bodily discomfort,” I basically mean that the agent can point to what ails (the head if it’s a headache, the stomach if it’s nausea, the hands if its tremors, etc), and when I talk of “psychological withdrawal,” I basically mean that what ails is not similarly locatable by the agent.

⁶⁹ Elster, *Strong Feelings*, 62, uses the metaphors of “push” and “pull.”

cause a “bodily transmutation” (1-2.31.5). Incontinence in response to this altered bodily state would therefore be an instance of passion’s ability to hinder the operation of reason because of its connection to an experience of a certain bodily state. Addictive substances, accordingly, “are sought as remedies for bodily defects or troubles, whence various griefs arise” (1-2.31.5).

How are we to understand human action in the face of strong visceral desire? We can imagine cases in which bodily discomforts cause desires, even strong desires, which are nevertheless quite easily resisted. Even a very thirsty person can resist the desire to drink from a stagnant pool of water that he or she knows to be infested with harmful bacteria, especially if there is reason to believe the thirst can be safely relieved at a later point. But we can push this example to the point where the power of choice seems to be in serious jeopardy. Simply removing the expectation that the thirst can be relieved in some other safe way pushes us in this direction, and it is not hard for us to imagine a thirst so intense that a normal person would drink what he or she knew to be harmful or even deadly water in the absence of a reasonable hope of future relief. Or imagine the physical discomfort that accompanies the need to urinate. Is there not a point at which the power of choice becomes incapacitated by such discomfort and must relent in the face of the desire to urinate? How are we to analyze the behavior of agents in such circumstances? If an agent believed that urinating outdoors was morally wrong, but nevertheless found him- or herself in such a bind, would we rightly label his or her behavior incontinent (pun intended)? In these cases, there seems to be some point at which the dysphoria of bodily discomfort becomes so intense as to move the agent

beyond the range of normal human action, and to remove the agent's behavior from the realm of moral appraisal.⁷⁰

If this is the case, then we need to ask whether there could be physical cravings so intense that an agent could not be reasonably expected to resist them. It seems to me that this is so. Take, for example, William Burroughs's explanation of why heroin addicts are unable to voluntarily resist taking heroin in the face of certain withdrawal symptoms. "The reason it is practically impossible to stop using and cure yourself is that the sickness lasts five to eight days. Twelve hours of it would be easy, twenty-four possible, but five to eight days is too long."⁷¹ We can imagine a similar explanation of why a person stranded at sea would eventually be practically unable to resist drinking seawater, even if he or she knew it would eventually kill them.

There is, therefore, no great mystery to instances of incontinent behavior that can be explained with reference to intense, what Aquinas calls "vehement" (1-2.31.5), visceral desires. Indeed, we may only be speaking analogously when we label such behavior incontinent.

⁷⁰ Elster, *Strong Feelings*, ch. 5, offers a helpful schematic continuum of human choice. At one extreme are things that we can only describe as happening to us—"reflex behaviors," such as falling asleep. Falling asleep does not count as human choice in any sense; it is simply an event. At the other extreme is "rational choice," in which the agent deliberates on the basis of non-visceral desires, beliefs, and information he or she has about the situation. Between these extremes are the possibilities of "quasi-action," "action without choice," and "minimal choice." Elster gives as an example of a quasi-action someone who finally gives in to an intense need to urinate, and as an example of an action without choice a castaway who finally drinks seawater from extreme thirst, even though he knows it will kill him. A minimal choice is reward-sensitive although not rational; it is instantiated when an agent is not in ideal deliberative conditions but is nevertheless able to exercise choice on the basis of perceived rewards. Most instances of physical craving would put the agent somewhere between action without choice and minimal choice, neither of which can be subjected to unqualified moral appraisal.

⁷¹ William Burroughs, *Junky* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 94.

But not all craving rises to the level of vehemence that would explain apparently incontinent behavior. It is understandable that many addicts must be literally locked up for some period of time upon cessation from their addictive activity since they are practically incapable of resisting the overwhelming push of bodily dysphoria. But at some point, usually no sooner than the evidence of physical craving has subsided, the addict must be released to fend for him- or herself. This is not because the addict is free of craving. Rather, it is because the craving has ceased to be primarily physical and has become predominantly psychological. What difference does this make?

Psychological craving can occur in response to the hedonic pull towards a state of euphoria that is thought to be achieved through addictive behavior, or in response to the hedonic push of certain dysphoric psychological states, such as the experience of shame or guilt, the feeling of being trapped in what seems to be a ruinous life, or a more generalized depression about the vacuity of a life without the stimulating or numbing effect of addictive substances.⁷² Generally, psychological craving is characterized by a mix of euphoric and dysphoric urges.

We have drunk to drown feelings of fear, frustration and depression. We have drunk to escape the guilt of passions, and then have drunk again to make more passions possible. We have drunk for vainglory—that we might the more enjoy foolish dreams of pomp and power (TT 44).

Insofar as they are incentives to incontinent behavior, both types of psychological motivations—euphoric and dysphoric—fall under what Aquinas calls “inordinate concupiscence,” which he describes as “turning inordinately to mutable good” (1-

⁷² In his classic novel, *Elmer Gantry* (New York: Penguin, 1967), 175, Sinclair Lewis describes Elmer’s response to “quitting” two of his addictions. “It was an agony of restlessness and craving, but he never touched alcohol or tobacco again, and he really regretted that in evenings thus made vacuous he could not keep from an interest in waitresses.”

2.82.3).⁷³ Concupiscent desire in general is “caused by love of the object” that is pursued (1-2.25.2), which love can arise in response either to the “good which gives pleasure to the senses” (1-2.30.2) (euphoria) or in response to “the sorrows that arise from the absence of those pleasures” (2-2.141.3) (dysphoria).

For Aquinas, the craving of concupiscence is distinct from the craving due to bodily alteration because the former is an effect of memory, whereas the latter is an effect of some generally locatable bodily transmutation. When we consider pleasure as “existing in the memory,” we see that “it has of itself a natural tendency to cause thirst and desire for itself: when, to wit, man returns to that disposition, in which he was when he experienced the pleasure that is past” (1-2.33.2). Here, Aquinas describes what in the literature of addiction is known as *cue-dependence*: psychological craving is most intensely evoked when an addict finds him- or herself in situations that, in the past, were associated with addictive activity. Of course, one of the marks of the addict is the way in which the addictive activity pervades every aspect of life, which means that, at least at

⁷³ The term “inordinate concupiscence” is not redundant for Aquinas, as it would be, for example, for Augustine. For Augustine, all concupiscence is inordinate desire, but for Aquinas, concupiscence belongs to human beings by nature (hence the designation of the “concupiscible” sensory power), and becomes incontinence, vice, or sin only when it transgresses the bounds of reason. “Since, in man, the concupiscible power is naturally governed by reason, the act of concupiscence is so far natural to man, as it is in accord with the order of reason; while, in so far as it trespasses beyond the bounds of reason, it is, for a man, contrary to reason” (1-2.82.3). There is, then, an important distinction in Aquinas between ordinate and inordinate concupiscence. The distinction should not be confused with another distinction that he makes between “natural concupiscence,” the desire of things suitable to a person, and “acquired concupiscence” (also called “cupidity”) the desire of things “apprehended” to be suitable to a person (1-2.30.3). If a person breaks a religious obligation to fast because that person is hungry, the person acts out of inordinate, albeit natural, concupiscence, since it is suitable to human persons to eat when hungry. If a person attends the ballet, the person is acting out of acquired concupiscence—watching ballet is not something a person needs by nature—but not necessarily acting out of inordinate concupiscence. The category of concupiscence, then, is generally neutral for Aquinas, and may require further specification. Unfortunately, Aquinas does not always supply such specifications, but it is usually clear from the context whether Aquinas means created concupiscence or the concupiscence from Original Sin.

first, there are few times and places in which the recovering addict is not prompted by memory to psychological craving. Nevertheless, as the past recedes, the addictive behavior becomes associated most strongly with the more salient features of the addictive ritual, such as bars, certain people, certain places in the city, or certain kinds of activity. Thus, one of the most-repeated nuggets of A.A. wisdom reminds the recovering addict to be vigilantly aware of the “people, places, and things” that inevitably cue psychological craving for addictive behavior.

What is the relationship between psychological craving and incontinence? For Aristotle and Aquinas, as we have already shown, desire, even when it is not rooted in bodily need, can derail an agent’s pursuit of continent action by making the agent over-consider a certain particular premise at the cost of under-considering, and eventually not considering, another particular premise. The strong psychological desire for an object can “distract” or “prevent” the agent from considering the particular premise that he or she knows potentially but needs to exercise in order to act continently.⁷⁴ This is the reasoning behind Aquinas’s simple but profound insight that “the most effective remedy against intemperance is not to dwell on the consideration of singulars” (2-2.142.3). Since action is always derivative of the consequence of two premises—a universal and a particular or “singular”—dwelling on the particular inappropriate object of desire can have no other effect but to, sooner or later, bring the agent to subsume that particular

⁷⁴ John Dewey colorfully describes the way in which an object of desire can cloud and distract our deliberations: “The object thought of may simply stimulate some impulse or habit to a pitch of intensity where it is temporarily irresistible. It then overrides all competitors and secures for itself the sole right of way. The object looms large in imagination; it swells to fill the field. It allows no room for alternatives; it absorbs us, enraptures us, carries us away, sweeps us off our feet by its own attractive force,” *Human Nature and Conduct*, 135. This is a description of the addictive phenomenon known as *crowding out*.

premise under its corresponding universal premise, bringing about incontinent action.

“When the attention is firmly fixed on one thing, it is either weakened in respect of other things, or it is entirely withdrawn from them” (1-2.33.3).⁷⁵

Are we then simply at the beck and call of our concupiscent desires, including our inordinate concupiscent desires? Aquinas does not think so. This is because the will exercises some power over desire. Although concupiscent desire often comes to us unbidden, as an event in our psychological lives, we are not without resources for dealing with it. The will is capable of directing the intellect away from consideration of the occurrent desire. As human agents, it is within our power to voluntarily choose not to dwell on inordinate concupiscent desires that intrude upon us. “Although the will cannot prevent the movement of concupiscence from arising...yet it is in the power of the will not to will to desire, or not to consent to concupiscence. And thus it does not necessarily follow the movement of concupiscence” (1-2.10.3). For Aquinas, the will is able to move the intellect and therefore is able to direct and redirect the gaze of the intellect. Thus, for example, “the will can avoid thinking about happiness insofar as the will moves the intellect to its activity,”⁷⁶ and, by extension, it is possible for the will not

⁷⁵ Compare William James’s assessment of what the “drunkard” must do to resist temptation. “But if he once gets able to pick out that way of conceiving from all the other possible ways of conceiving the various opportunities which occur, if through thick and thin he holds to it that this is being a drunkard and nothing else, he is not likely to remain one long. The effort by which he succeeds in keeping the right *name* unwaveringly present to his mind proves to be his saving mental act,” *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, 565. James cites Aristotle’s discussion of the “practical syllogism” in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3, as the source of this insight.

The influence of William James on the founder and founding of Alcoholics Anonymous has been well documented. See, for example, Susan Cheever, *My Name is Bill: His Life and the Creation of Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), ch. 21. In particular, James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Mentor, 1958) is one source of A.A.’s central tenet that recovery from alcoholism usually requires some kind of “conversion experience.”

⁷⁶ *De Malo* 6.1

to think about the object of a particular concupiscent desire. The will is thereby able to avoid incontinent action by presenting an “obstacle” to the formulation of the practical syllogism that would lead to incontinent action. It can present an obstacle to this process either “by removing the consideration that induces the will to will it or by considering the contrary, namely, that what is presented as good is not good in some respect.”⁷⁷

Taken singly, then, there is never a case of concupiscent desire that the will is unable to resist by redirecting the gaze of the intellect. However, when we put the matter this way, we begin to see how the psychological craving that accompanies addiction represents a special threat to the will’s ability to resist concupiscent desire, for the desires that constitute psychological craving never come singly. The desire of psychological craving is unlike any other type of desire, not in its intensity—which can vary widely—but rather in its resilience.⁷⁸ Addictive desires are indefatigably persistent. They intrude upon the agent’s consciousness not once or twice but repeatedly. Every effort to direct the gaze of the intellect away from the object of desire or to call the intellect to reflect on the inferiority of the object of desire is met, not by relief from the immediate threat, but rather by a new attacker in a similar guise. If the conflict between the will and non-addictive inordinate concupiscent desire (e.g., the desire for one too many pieces of cake) is a battle, that between the will and addictive craving is a war of attrition. Why does the will play “second fiddle” to resilient desire in such wars, asks William Irvine.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ R. Jay Wallace, in “Addiction as Defect of the Will: Some Philosophical Reflections,” in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson, makes much of the distinctively resilient nature of addictive desire.

For the simple reason that they [resilient desires] refuse to fight fairly. The emotions, in their dealings with the intellect, don't use reason to gain its cooperation. Instead they wear it down with—what else?—emotional entreaties. They beg, whine, and bully. They won't take no for an answer. They won't give the intellect a moment's peace. In most cases, the best the intellect can hope for is to withstand these entreaties for a spell. Then it succumbs.⁷⁹

Gerald May puts the same point more succinctly: “Willpower and resolution come and go, but the addictive process never sleeps.”⁸⁰ Psychological craving is the great ally of particularized incontinence simply because it pits a force of seemingly inexhaustible resources against a limited power, the human will. Aquinas encourages the would-be continent agent to resist dwelling on singulars, but psychological craving makes this nearly impossible. As soon as one singular is banished from the scene, another appears. Craving fires volley after volley of singular desires into an agent's consciousness, gradually exhausting the limited power of human will. When we consider the peculiar nature of psychological craving, we are struck by the fact that what comes to seem paradoxical is not the possibility of incontinent addictive behavior but rather the possibility of continence in the face of addictive desire.

Aquinas on the Necessity of Habit

We are now in a position to think about the importance of habit in an account of human action. The problem we face is that of a disparity between the power of certain types of desire and the power of human will. Some visceral desires—we have attended to those associated with the physical craving experienced by some addicts—are so

⁷⁹ William Irvine, *On Desire: Why We Want What We Want* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 76.

⁸⁰ *Addiction and Grace*, 52.

intense as to straightway overpower human will. If we take the analogy of a weightlifter, some types of visceral craving are akin to a weight that simply exceeds the capacity of a weightlifter. No matter how strong the weightlifter, there is always a weight that is simply too heavy. Other types of desire—we have attended to those associated with the psychological craving experienced by addicts—overpower human will, not by reason of their intensity but rather because of their resilience. Taken singly, the agent could reasonably be expected to resist this sort of desire, but taken in succession they wear out the agent's endurance. The agent suffers from “weakness of will.” A weightlifter may be able to lift 200 pounds once or twice, even once or twice several times throughout the day. But to expect the weightlifter to be able to do 25 or 50 or 500 repetitions at that weight would be unreasonable. Sooner or later, endurance fails. The weightlifter suffers from “weakness of muscle.” The analogy between “weakness of will” and “weakness of muscle” is an important one because it highlights the fact that “weakness of will” need not imply moral failure. It *may* indicate moral failure just as “weakness of muscle” may—perhaps the weightlifter was lazy in his training. But “weakness of will” is fundamentally a function of the limitations of human will and not of moral failure.

The human will is a power that must be flexed in and through the process of deliberative action. It is not some measureless metaphysical faculty, not some third term separable from reason and appetite. The will, for both Aristotle and Aquinas, is rational appetite, appetitive reason. Practical reasoning is like reasoning in general in that it demands effort: concentration and discipline. Deliberative action is inherently fragile

and unstable because it requires an agent with finite powers to engage in an activity the nature of which is to deplete those powers. Despite the privilege that Aristotle and Aquinas grant to the human person in virtue of its unique rational nature, neither would suppose that the successful moral life is one of constant deliberative engagement. A life that is perpetually involved in dealing with moral crises of action will inevitably be a failure. The problem with such crises, for Aristotle and Aquinas, is not that they are irresolvable, but rather that they tax the moral agent. The goal of moral training is the formation of moral habits, because habit names the possibility of acting well without the exertion that is required of deliberative practical reasoning. Neither Aristotle nor Aquinas would consider crises of the will failures. They are inevitable even for those with right habits, because habits sometimes come into conflict. Deliberative “choice” is what must take place when habits collide. But since an agent is incapable of sustaining indefinitely the kind of vigilance required for right practical reasoning, such crises, although providing opportunity for creative action, must end in failure unless they quickly become integrated into patterns of habitual thought and behavior. “The purest will, the most heroic flexing of the moral muscle, cannot exist for more than a second unless it quickly becomes rooted in ordinary habits.”⁸¹

As Aquinas puts it, habits are not necessary for humans to act, but they are necessary for humans to act well. This claim comes in Question 49, Article 4 of the *Prima Secundae*, on “Whether Habits are Necessary.” This article, which has received

⁸¹ Mariana Valverde, *Diseases of the Will: Alcohol and the Dilemmas of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37. Valverde’s is one of the most philosophically and historically astute treatments of addiction available. It has gone largely unnoticed in the field of addiction studies, perhaps because of its genealogical and feminist mode of engagement. I am indebted to Peter Ferentzy for directing me to Valverde’s work.

comparatively little attention, is crucial for everything that Aquinas goes on to say about the role of the virtues in human action. In this article, Aquinas makes the ambitious claim that habit (*habitus*)⁸² must be included as an irreducible component of any ontology that is adequate to the scope of human action. His claim of irreducibility is the ambitious one, and Aquinas understands that in order for it to be established, he must respond to the argument, which seems implicit in most contemporary action theory,⁸³ that all that is required for a full account of human action is the posit of human will.

Habit implies relation to an act. But power [i.e., the power of the will] implies sufficiently a principle of act: for even the natural powers, without any habits, are principles of acts. Therefore there was no necessity for habits [in a complete ontology] (Obj. 2).

The objection is simple: there is nothing that “habit” explains that “will” has not already explained. Taking any one human action, we seem to be able to explain that action solely by referring to the power of human will. Habit therefore becomes superfluous as a principle of explanation, and, if so, not a necessary component of an ontology of human action.

Aquinas responds to this objection with two claims, but before doing so he states the nature of a habit and what kinds of things might be said to need them. “Habit implies a disposition in relation to a thing’s nature, and to its operation or end, by reason of which

⁸² How to translate *habitus* is a perennial question of Thomist scholarship. Anthony Kenny, in the definitive Blackfriars translation of the *Summa*, argues that it should be translated as “disposition” rather than “habit.” For reasons I will address shortly, this seems to me to be an unhelpful and misguided translation. I will therefore, and despite all of the possible confusions that result from the contemporary use of the word “habit,” continue to use habit for Aquinas’s *habitus*. It should become clear throughout the exposition how Aquinas’s use of the term differs from contemporary usage.

⁸³ I have found only one essay on the theme of habit in what would be considered contemporary “action theory,” Timothy Duggan’s “Habit,” in *Time and Cause: Essays Presented to Richard Taylor*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (London: D. Riedel, 1980). As an exercise in analytic philosophy, however, this article is limited to how people use the word “habit” today. It is therefore an example of the attenuated conception of habit that Aristotle and Aquinas help us move beyond.

disposition a thing is well or ill disposed thereto.” The space for such a disposition is only possible (1) where there is a distinction between a thing’s being and that thing’s activity; and (2) where there is more than one activity to which a thing stands, at any one time, in potentiality. Condition (1) means that there is “no room for habit” in God, because there is no potentiality in God: God’s action is identical to God’s being. Condition (2) means that there is no room for habit in nonrational things, including nonrational animals, because, given the set of conditions in which such things find themselves, they are always determined by nature (in the case of animals by “instinct”) to respond in one way to any given situation. Once we know everything about an animal’s needs and the circumstances the animal is in, we already know how the animal will respond. The animal, therefore, is never at one time actually open to more than one course of action.

There is “room” for habit, therefore, only in rational animals, namely in human beings,⁸⁴ whose existence is not identical with their activity and who may be actually open to various alternative courses of action. Habit, we are told, *could* make sense as an explanation of why a particular human agent acts one way or another, since we cannot explain the action simply with reference to the agent’s essence (as with God) or simply with reference to some determined causal connection between the agent’s needs and his or her enviroing surroundings (as with animals). But this is not enough to establish Aquinas’s ambitious claim. He is arguing, not that habit *can* be an explanation of human activity, but that, in order to explain the full range of human action, we *must* at times

⁸⁴ Aquinas thinks there is room for habits in angels, too (1-2.50.6).

offer an explanation in terms of habit. How so? Aquinas provides two arguments for this position.

First, he says, what stands in need of explanation is not merely each single event in an agent's history of action, taken separately, but also the fact of an agent's ability to act consistently (whether "well" or "ill") over a prolonged period of time. Postulation of human will explains why it is *possible* in a given situation that an agent act in any of several ways, but it cannot explain, what is also true, why it is sometimes *probable* that an agent will act one way rather than another. Why does this need explanation? Because human will is not a logical construct but rather a human power. Human will is embodied and executed through the material conditions of human personhood. As Aquinas puts it, although will is a function of the soul, the operations of the will proceed "from the soul through the body" (1-2.50.1). We cannot, therefore, pretend that the will, since rooted in the immaterial soul, is unconstrained by the body. This is why Aquinas says that habits of the will, although primarily habits of the soul, are secondarily habits of the body (1-2.50.1). Like the intellect and the sensitive appetite, the rational appetite is subject to alteration, corruption, and exhaustion. How else can we account for Aquinas's clear position that transmutations in a person's body will affect a person's will? Deliberative choice is carried out, not by transcending the desires naturally conditioned on our material existence, but, through the exertion of the intellect, by ordering those desires. The will has a structure, susceptible to being trained and conditioned, but also, then, susceptible to breaking down. Given this fact, the consistent exercise of the will in any one direction is in need of explanation. A principle of

explanation beyond the mere power of human will is needed to account for how the will perseveres in courses of action that would exhaust the will were it operating purely through deliberation.

Second, Aquinas says that we need a principle of explanation over and above the existence of a power of will because human action is highly complex. In any human action, “several things should occur, capable of being adjusted in various ways.” Human action entails “the adjustment of several things which may vary in their relative adjustability...Wherefore, since there are many things for whose natures and operations several things must concur which may vary in their relative adjustability, it follows that habit is necessary.” Will, therefore, is not a simple but a complex power, requiring the cooperation and coordination of a number of different powers. Execution of the will requires the bringing into alignment of various powers at work in the agent, or else the exertion required to act in the face of contradictory impulses. Whenever this latter is required, Aquinas says that the agent is in a state of internal violence. Both the incontinent and the continent moral agent are subject to this internal violence, and, because of the limited power of human will, perseverance in the face of internal violence cannot be expected. *Violentia non durant*.⁸⁵

Habit supplies the needed principle of explanation on both counts. Habit explains how the will can act consistently and successfully without being worn down by the weight of desire or tripped up by uncoordinated desires, because habits qualify and

⁸⁵ John Dewey shows the necessity of habit with a helpful metaphor: “A savage can travel after a fashion in a jungle. Civilized activity is too complex to be carried on without smoothed roads. It requires signals and junction points; traffic authorities and means of easy and rapid transportation. It demands a congenial, antecedently prepared environment. Without it, civilization would relapse into barbarism in spite of the best of subjective intention and internal disposition,” *Human Nature and Conduct*, 19.

coordinate desires. The importance of this point cannot be overstated, and it is often overlooked in studies of Aquinas's moral theology. Many habits, and in particular many of the virtues, cannot be understood apart from the passions to which they give shape and coordination. For Aquinas, habits are fundamentally strategies of desire.⁸⁶ How, more specifically, do habits strategically rectify the problem of limited human will?

Aquinas on Habit

Aquinas says a great deal about habit, both in his *Treatise on Habits* (1-2.49-89) and elsewhere, but we can begin to answer this question by noting four central characteristics. First, a habit is an “accidental quality” (1-2.49.2). Both descriptors are significant. To say that a habit is accidental is to say that an agent does not have it by nature, but rather that habits are acquired in the course of an agent's existence. The quality of habit is therefore “adventitious, being caused from without” (1-2.49.2). To say that habits are “caused from without” is simply to say that they do not proceed automatically from an agent's nature. And to say that habits are qualities is to say that they are modifications of an agent. “Quality, properly speaking, implies a certain mode of substance” (1-2.49.2). When a substance acquires a habit, the substance in its essence persists through the acquisition. The substance is modified but not replaced by something altogether different. We can therefore put the claim that habit is an “accidental quality” into somewhat more familiar idiom by stating that habit is an acquired modification of an agent.

⁸⁶ I owe this way of putting it to Paul J. Wadell, C.P., *The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

Second, habits are difficult to change. “We call habits those qualities which, by reason of their very nature, are not easily changed” (1-2.49.2). That habits should be difficult to change is a necessary correlate to their function, which is to provide stability and consistency to human action. Human action as exercised through the process of practical reasoning is inherently tenuous precisely because that upon which the process is thoroughly dependent, namely passions and judgments, can be easily lost, ignored, or overcome. Incontinent action, we have shown, is possible for this very reason. Therefore, if habits are to provide a kind of constancy not available through unrooted practical reasoning, they must be things difficult to change or lose. If our habits can be changed as easily as our minds or our feelings, they provide no alternative to the shaky character of deliberative reasoning. The more entrenched the habit, the more perfectly it performs its task. Aquinas distinguishes between a disposition and a habit by referring to this characteristic of relative permanence. “Disposition, properly so called, can be divided against habit...as perfect and imperfect within the same species; and thus we call it a disposition, retaining the name of the genus, when it is had imperfectly, so as to be easily lost: whereas we call it a habit, when it is had perfectly, so as not to be lost easily” (1-2.49.2).

Third, habits are qualities “whereby that which is disposed is disposed well or ill” (1-2.49.1). What does this tell us? At first glance, it tells us that there are both good and bad habits. They may dispose an agent to act well or ill. But, they always incline an agent to act either well or ill with respect to some type of circumstance. It would be contrary to the nature of a habit to incline an agent to act, sometimes well, sometimes ill,

with respect to the same type of circumstance. Therefore, what is implicit in the claim that habits dispose an agent to act well or ill is that (a) habits make an agent consistent in his or her actions. Implicit in this claim is the further claim that (b) habits make an agent successful in his or her action. If an agent repeatedly tries but frequently fails to juggle, we would not say that he or she has the habit of juggling. Habit is a success term. If a person has a habit that person is able to consistently and successfully act in a specific way. Aquinas thinks that, in addition to enabling consistent success, a habit disposes an agent to act ill or well because (c) habits make the “thing be done with ease” (1-2.49.2). This characteristic is tightly connected with the others. It is the stable permanence of habit that makes habitual action consistent. This consistency is possible because the action does not tax the agent’s will in the way that deliberative action does. Thus, the ease with which the agent acts habitually is, in addition to being a source of pleasure (1-2.53.1), that which secures the consistency of habitual action. Consistency, success, and ease, therefore, are the characteristics of habit that guarantee that a habit will dispose an agent to act well or ill.

Fourth and finally, as has been already mentioned, habits are characterized by a propensity to act “on cue.” Aquinas says that, because pleasure can be anticipated through the faculty of memory, a person may become disposed in such a way as to react habitually to the slightest provocation of that memory (1-2.33.2). We must be careful, as will become apparent shortly, not to confuse this propensity to act at provocation with instinct. Nevertheless, when presented with the appropriate object, a habituated agent is able to act at once, without effort, and often without any explicit consciousness of what

is being done. Habit is such, therefore, as to require a specific act of the will to prevent the habituated action from being performed upon provocation.

We can now elaborate the concept of habit. A habit is a relatively permanent acquired modification of a person that enables the person, when provoked by the relevant stimulus, to act consistently, successfully, and with ease with respect to some objective.⁸⁷

Before we proceed to state more specifically some of the types of habit possible for human agents, it will be helpful to try in a different way to locate the importance of habit in a philosophy of human action. This can be done by exploring the way in which habit mediates between some of the extremes that bound our conception of human action. First, habit mediates between action and capacity. Second, habit mediates between instinct and disposition. Third, habit mediates between determinism and free will. Fourth and finally, habit mediates between the involuntary and the voluntary. Carefully articulating the nature of this mediation is an important step in avoiding a number of pitfalls that we face, particularly given the contemporary understanding of habit, in trying to decipher its place in Aquinas's theory of human action.

Habit represents a possibility that is, strictly speaking, neither purely an action nor a capacity. Aquinas puts the matter like this: "Habit is an act, in so far as it is a quality: and in this respect it can be a principle of operation. It is, however, in a state of potentiality in respect to operation" (1-2.49.3). This somewhat technical statement can

⁸⁷ Throughout the development of this definition, I have been dependent on George Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues: A Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965) and on Robert Brennan, *Thomistic Psychology: A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1941).

be broken down by way of a simple analogy. Every normal human person has the capacity to speak French. Sometimes, human persons actually speak French. But this distinction—between being capable of and actually speaking French—does not enable us to make out all of the important distinctions with respect to French-speaking. For, given this distinction, there is no way to differentiate between my not speaking French at this moment and some Frenchman’s not speaking French at this moment. We both alike have the capacity to speak French. But surely there is an important difference, given that I have never learned French. For when we say that the Frenchman can speak French we mean something different than when we say that I can speak French. When we say that I can speak French, we only mean that it is for me a logical possibility. But when we say the Frenchman can speak French, we mean more than that. We mean that he stands in some intermediate position between having the mere logical potential to speak French and actually speaking French. Habit names this intermediate position. Both the Frenchman and I possess the capacity to speak French. Neither of us (I have stipulated) is actually speaking French. But the Frenchman has the habit of speaking French whereas I do not.⁸⁸

Inside the bounds set by action and capacity, there are two further possibilities between which habit mediates. On the side of action there is instinct, and on the side of capacity, there is disposition. A habit is neither an instinct nor a disposition,⁸⁹ but it

⁸⁸ The example belongs to Anthony Kenny, Introduction to *St Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 22, *Dispositions for Human Acts*, trans. Anthony Kenny (London: Blackfriars, 1964), xxi.

⁸⁹ For Aquinas, *habitus* belongs to the genus of *dispositio*, but can be distinguished from *dispositio* at the specific level (1-2.49.2). Aquinas follows Aristotle in this: “Habits are at the same time dispositions, but dispositions are not necessarily habits,” *Categories*, 9a10-11.

mediates between the two. We can therefore posit the following schematic ontology of action.

Action — instinct — habit (habitus) — disposition (dispositio) — capacity (power)

A habit is like an instinct in that it can make action easy and seemingly effortless.

Sometimes, a habit can make for the possibility of acting without conscious thought, and this is why it is easily confused with instinct. Thus, for example, Brian Davies is careless when he writes that Aquinas “is concerned with the acquiring of character which enables people to act instinctively.”⁹⁰ Aquinas could not have considered this an achievement, since instinct names a tendency toward action that is not in any way responsive to reason.

Davies’s mistake comes from a tendency, present in early twentieth-century psychology, to take motor habits as the paradigm for all habits. If we think of all habits as being patterned upon motor habits, we see how easily habits can be mistaken for instinct, since motor habits are most effective to the extent that we do not mentally focus on how to do them.⁹¹ But Aquinas would insist that even motor habits, which have salient characteristics similar to those of instinct, are different than instinct in that they can be blocked and transformed, usually over much time and with great effort, by the application of reason. Instincts are not like this. Instinct can be transformed only by

⁹⁰ Brian Davies, Introduction to *De Malo* by Thomas Aquinas, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 31.

⁹¹ As William James lucidly described, motor habits are performed in the absence of conscious thought, and, indeed, such conscious thought seems to disrupt the fluidity of their performance: “Our lower centres know the order of these movements [of motor habit], and show their knowledge by their “surprise” if the objects are altered so as to oblige the movement to be made in a different way. But our higher thought-centers know hardly anything about the matter. Few men can tell offhand which sock, shoe, or trousers-leg they put on first. They must first mentally rehearse the act; and even that is often insufficient—the act must be *performed*...No one can *describe* the order in which he brushes his hair or teeth; yet it is likely that the order is a pretty fixed one in all of us,” *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, 115.

operant conditioning, as is the case with animals. “The sensitive powers of dumb animals do not act at the command of reason; but if they are left to themselves, such animals act from natural instinct: and so in them there are no habits ordained to operations” (1-2.50.3). An instinct does not imply the power to refrain from the instinctual action, whereas a habit does imply this power. Animals “have not that power of using or of refraining, which seems to belong to the notion of habit: and therefore, properly speaking, there can be no habits in them” (1-2.50.3). We must therefore be careful to maintain a distinction between instinct and habit, lest by obscuring the distinction we obscure one of the most important characteristics of habit: its responsiveness to reason and, therefore, its connection with the voluntary.

But we must also note the similarities between habit and instinct, and this will enable us to see how Davies and others might confuse the two. For when we say that habit, unlike instinct, is responsive to reason, that should not be taken to imply that habitual actions can be arrested, and habits dispelled (or, on the other hand, habitual actions incited, and habits acquired) simply by performing an act of will. On the contrary, habits, like instincts, take on a life of their own, as it were, and often, “on cue,” provoke habitual actions that are quite recalcitrant to whatever intention, good or bad, an agent might have at the moment. This is why Aristotle says that “habit is hard to change because it is like nature (1152a30-31), and why Aquinas, following Aristotle, tells us that “a habit is like a second nature” (1-2.53.1).⁹² Indeed, as we shall see, it is precisely addictive action’s similarities, in many respects, to the true compulsions of instinct that

⁹² In his *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, Aquinas suggests that a habit, for Aristotle, “brings about a quasi-nature,” #1370.

has lead, given the contemporary loss of a robust philosophy of habit, to the assimilation of addiction to the purely involuntary category of disease. Despite their similarities, however, Aquinas insists that habits are different from instincts because habits are responsive to reason. But when Aquinas says that habits, unlike instinct, are responsive to reason, he is not thinking primarily in terms of the power of rational deliberation to overcome habitual actions “on the spot,” although this is at times possible. Rather, Aquinas is interested in the way in which reason can develop strategies, manipulate circumstances, and inform alternative modes of character in such a way that, gradually and indirectly, given habits can be transformed, and, correspondingly, the actions that flow from them.

On the other side, there is danger of confusing a habit with a disposition. A habit is like a disposition in that it can be changed. But a habit is unlike a disposition in that it cannot be easily changed but only with great effort. Dispositions are different than habits “in the point of being easily or difficultly lost,” respectively (1-2.49.2).

The conflation of habit and disposition has become especially conspicuous in some contemporary efforts to revive the distinctive significance of Thomistic habit. Thus, in his translation of Aquinas’s *Treatise on Habits*, Anthony Kenny chooses to translate *habitus* as “disposition” and *dispositio* as “state,” despite what seems to be the natural English translation of *habitus* as “habit” and *dispositio* as “disposition.” Kenny justifies the translation by warning that we cannot accept at face-value English transliterations of Latin words, such as “action” for *actio* or “habit” for *habitus*, since these English transliterations often bring with them centuries of accreted meaning that should not be

read back into the Latin roots of the term. Kenny's warning is an important one, for we must be careful to arrive at an understanding of *habitus* based on the way in which Aquinas uses it, rather than simply assuming that we already know what he means. Kenny's translation, however, ends up distorting Aquinas's meaning, rather than clarifying it. For when Kenny proclaims what his preferred translation should enable the reader to recognize, the distinction that he draws between Aquinas's *habitus* and our "habit" is not one to be found in Aquinas. "The difference between disposition [*habitus*] and habit," Kenny argues, "might be roughly characterized thus. If one has a *habitus* to φ then it is easier to φ than if one has not: examples are *being generous* and *speaking French*. If one has a habit of φ -ing, then it is harder not to φ than if one has not: examples are *smoking* and *saying 'I say!' before each sentence*."⁹³ Here, Kenny claims that, whereas our contemporary use of "habit" implies a *difficulty in stopping doing* something, Aquinas's use of *habitus* implies an *ease of doing* something. But, it's being hard to quit smoking, for example, is merely the flip-side of the coin, for Aquinas, of its being easy to continue. There is no distinction, for Aquinas, between activities that are easy to do and activities that are hard not to do. Either may fall under the category of habit or disposition, depending on *how* easy it is to do them and *how* hard it is to stop. The ease of action and the difficulty of avoiding action are correlated throughout for Aquinas. It is not accidental that Kenny lists positive tendencies as *habitus* and negative tendencies as habits, for when we attend to positive tendencies we are more surprised if they are performed with ease whereas if we attend to negative tendencies it can be

⁹³ Kenny, Introduction to *St Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 22, xxx.

surprising how difficult they are to resist. If *being generous* is a *habitus* (and it clearly is for Aquinas since it is a virtue), then *being stingy* will have to be one as well (and clearly it is for Aquinas since it is a vice). But we are more inclined to characterize *acting stingily* as something difficult to stop rather than something easy to do. Should we therefore characterize *being stingy* as a habit but not as a *habitus*?

What Kenny's odd distinction obscures is the importance of the question, for Aquinas, of whether, e.g., smoking is in fact a habit or a disposition. Clearly, Aquinas would think that *being generous* and *speaking French* are habits, as well as *being stingy*. It seems equally obvious that he would consider *saying 'I say!' before each sentence* to be a disposition, unless it is a function of some kind of deeply ingrained obsession. But what about smoking? There is no indication in anything that Aquinas says that should lead us to believe he would not consider it a *habitus* in those who find it difficult to quit. The question for Aquinas would be, how difficult? If it is deeply entrenched and requires much effort, creativity, and ingenuity to quit smoking, smoking counts as a habit for Aquinas. If it is not yet deeply entrenched and can be rooted out simply by recognizing that smoking is a problematic behavior, it is probably not a habit but a mere disposition. Often, a tendency is more or less entrenched depending on the degree to which the tendency implicates an agent's emotions. Thus, frequently picking one's nose is more often than not a dispositional tendency, whereas frequently smoking is more often than not a habitual tendency. "The word *habit* implies a certain lastingness" (1-2.49.2). It does not imply any kind of distinction between the ease of doing versus the

difficulty of not doing. “The word *disposition* does not” imply a certain lastingness (1-2.49.2).

At this point, the reader may be worried by an analytical vagueness that plagues the distinction between habit and disposition. By what standards are we to decide whether a particular tendency to act has or has not enough “lastingness” to be considered a habit? There seems to be no set of standards that can remove all ambiguity; there will always be borderline cases. But this should not allow us to discount the importance of the distinction for Aquinas. The distinction between habit and disposition is not, for Aquinas, merely arbitrary. “These differences, though apparently accidental to quality, nevertheless designate differences which are proper and essential to quality” (1-2.49.2).⁹⁴

Careful attention to how habit mediates between action and capacity and, particularly, between instinct and disposition, enables us to avoid twin dangers that stalk the language of habit in the contemporary discussion of addiction. One such tendency is to conflate habit and instinct and therefore dismiss the claim that addiction is a habit. This sort of mistake is evident in the following passage from Francis Seeburger.

In the final analysis, there is nothing “habitual” about injecting oneself with narcotics twice a day over a prolonged period. Something that has become habitual is something one has learned to do without thinking about it. That is the role of habit: to allow us to do things without having to bother to think about doing them, or about what we are doing while we do them. Thus, for example, after we struggle long enough with them, the movements and bodily adjustments involved in riding a bicycle or in swimming become habitual to us, so that when we climb on a bike or jump into a swimming pool we don’t have to think about

⁹⁴ Thus, for example, when Donald Goodwin, *Alcoholism*, 54, claims, “There is evidence, in fact, that ‘true’ alcoholism is *not* on a continuum with heavy drinking but a separate entity,” he is not saying anything that cannot be illuminated by Aquinas’s philosophy of habit.

what we are supposed to do; we just do it. That description does not, however, fit the case of someone injecting himself or herself with heroin twice a day. On the contrary...addicts quite consciously invest the whole activity of their drug taking with significance. They tend to ritualize it, sometimes giving even the most trivial surrounding circumstances the status of inviolable rites.⁹⁵

As is apparent from the examples Seeburger gives, he assumes that motor habits are paradigmatic habits, and, therefore, that a lack of thought pertaining to the action under question is a necessary condition of habit. Habit has been conflated with instinct, as an unthinking response in a particular situation. But for Aquinas, this would be an odd restriction on habit, not least because Aquinas believes that one of the faculties of persons that can become habituated is the intellect. Seeburger, in describing how the whole activity of addictive behavior becomes invested with conscious meaning, has noticed a centrally important characteristic of addiction, one to which we will devote considerable attention in Chapters IV and V. He has not, however, given us any reason to think that addictive behavior is non-habitual, on Aquinas's broader understanding of habit.

There is an opposite danger of conflating habit with disposition and thereby dismissing the prospect that addiction is a habit. So, for example, one reads in the literature of AA that certain types of alcoholics discovered that they did not just have a bad habit of drinking alcohol, but that, indeed, they were alcoholics. "By going back in our own drinking histories, we could show that years before we realized it we were out

⁹⁵ *Addiction and Responsibility*, 45-46. It is worth noting, however, that despite this explicit rejection of thinking of addiction in terms of habit, Seeburger, in part because he is careful to avoid the categories of disease and compulsion, cannot help slipping back into thinking of addiction in terms of habit. "The best way to define the alcoholic is not as someone who habitually *drinks*, but as someone who habitually *chooses* to drink," p. 90. I am not sure this is the best way to "define" alcoholic, but I think Seeburger is right that alcoholism has something to do with habit.

of control, that our drinking even then was *no mere habit*, that it was indeed the beginning of a fatal progression” (TT 23, my emphasis). The adjective “mere” is telling here. If one reads this passage further, it becomes clear that a distinction is being sought between those who may be “merely” problem-drinkers and those who are “full-blooded” alcoholics. What distinguishes a problem-drinker from an alcoholic, however, is precisely what distinguishes, for Aquinas, a disposition from a habit. A problem-drinker indeed has a tendency to drink, but, upon recognizing the ill effects of his or her behavior, he or she is able to stop drinking more or less straightforwardly, without drastic measures. The alcoholic, on the other hand, may recognize the nature of his or her problem without being able to root out the tendency to drink simply by deciding to do so. So the problem drinker has a “habit” in the sense that a person might have a “habit” of chewing his nails. “It’s just a bad habit,” we say. But, again, excepting strange neurotic obsessions, Aquinas would not likely consider nail biting a habit, but rather a disposition. Both problem-drinkers and alcoholics have tendencies toward alcohol, but one tendency is easily lost and the other is not. This parallels exactly the distinction that Aquinas wishes to make between a disposition and a habit. Aquinas would say that an alcoholic has a habit, though by no means a *mere* habit (this would be oxymoronic for Aquinas) of drinking, whereas a problem-drinker has a disposition to drink.

Next, it should be increasingly clear how the language of habit mediates between the absolutisms of determinism and free will. Habitual action is like free will in that it connects up at some level with reason. On the other hand, habitual action is like

determinism in that the actions performed by habit do not issue directly from the process of deliberative reasoning that is constitutive of free will. We have already noticed Aquinas's notion of a habit as a "second nature." "A habit is like a second nature, and yet it falls short of it. And so it is that while the nature of a thing cannot in any way be taken away from a thing, a habit is removed, though with difficulty" (1-2.53.2). If something acts a certain way "by nature," that thing is determined to so act. In animals, we call that instinct. A habit is a "second nature" because, although it is not strictly speaking mechanical, it nevertheless proceeds from the agent effortlessly and without exertion of will, apparently "naturally." Mariana Valverde nicely summarizes the way in which habit mediates between determinism and free will. Habits are "patterned acts that are neither fully willed nor completely automatic," which "inhabit the hybrid zone, often known as second nature, that has always been neglected by theology and philosophy."⁹⁶

Valverde's comment about the neglect of the category of habit among theologians and philosophers is interesting given the aims of this study. Such neglect has not always been the case. As Valverde rightly notes, "in Aristotle's time theorizing habit was the fundamental business of professional ethical philosophers."⁹⁷ Valverde overlooks the medieval tradition, including Aquinas, but she rightly points out the relative absence of a philosophy of habit through the modern and "post-modern" period, with the notable exceptions of the American pragmatists, particularly William James, Charles Peirce, and

⁹⁶ Valverde, *Diseases of the Will*, 36-37.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

John Dewey.⁹⁸ What is particularly interesting about the way in which habit was re-introduced into the discussions of early 20th century psychology and the philosophy of human action is the way in which it was brought in as a corrective to an overstatement of the scope of absolute freedom of volition. James, for example, speaks of the “force of habit” precisely to show that most human action is not nearly so “free” as certain philosophies of a vaunted free will would lead us to suppose. But, strangely, in the discussion surrounding addiction, habit is no longer seen as a corrective to an overemphasis on freedom and volition but rather as, in the opposite direction, an opponent to the disease concept of addiction. In a complete reversal, this use of habit aligns habit with the freedom of the will. What is important to see in all of this is that habit genuinely stands midway between both determinism (disease) and free will (choice), and therefore acts as an important corrective in both directions. When we say that addiction is a habit, we are trying to say something different than that addiction is a disease or a choice, although in so doing we are recognizing that salient features of both concepts will factor into our use of the category of habit.

Finally, we could say that habit mediates between the voluntary and the involuntary. For, as we have already mentioned, habits qualify the passions. Craig Steven Titus puts

⁹⁸ I am embarrassed to say that I conceived and outlined this dissertation before reading John Dewey’s remarkable *Human Nature and Conduct*. I had already become convinced that, although William James’s work on habit was immensely important for the renascence of the concept of habit in early 20th century psychology, there was little in his work on habit that had not been covered more thoroughly by Aristotle and Aquinas. Furthermore, I worried that James focused too narrowly on motor habits as *the* paradigmatic habit in terms of which other habits are to be explained. Neither of these criticisms apply to what Dewey has given us in *Human Nature and Conduct*, which is both original and systematic in its outworking. Although Dewey is not a primary interlocutor in this study, I am sure that reading *Human Nature and Conduct* has affected my thinking about habit. I anticipate the opportunity to give Dewey, as well as James and Peirce, more studied attention in future projects on the place of habit in a philosophy of human action.

the point succinctly: Aquinas shows us how habits “instill intelligence in emotions.”⁹⁹

But if this is so, then we cannot easily make the customary distinction between actions as things that we make happen and emotions as things that happen to us, between actions as purely voluntary and emotions as purely involuntary. Habit names the possibility of partial responsibility for and control over our emotions. For both Aristotle and Aquinas, it is within our power, for example, to develop the habit of courage, which is to say that it is within our power *both* to develop our capacity to act in a certain way in a circumstance that calls for courage *and* to develop our capacity to feel a certain way in a circumstance that calls for courage.

We should notice one more way in which habit problematizes our everyday view of the voluntary/involuntary distinction. Both Aristotle and Aquinas are quite clear that habits—“states of character”—are voluntary, as are the habitual actions that flow from them. Aquinas restates Aristotle’s position (1114a12-23) in the *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*.

Evil habits are not subject to the will after they have been formed. He says that because a person becomes unjust voluntarily, it does not follow that he ceases to be unjust and becomes just whenever he may will. He proves this by means of a likeness in the dispositions of the body. A man who in good health willingly falls into sickness by living incontinently, i.e., by eating and drinking to excess and not following the doctor’s advice, had it in his power in the beginning not to become sick. But after he has performed the act, having eaten unnecessary or harmful food, it is no longer in his power not to be sick. Thus he who throws a stone is able not to throw it; however once he has thrown the stone he has not the

⁹⁹ Craig Steven Titus, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude: Aquinas in Dialogue with the Psychosocial Sciences* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 116. A fascinating neurological confirmation of this comes from Christiane Northrup, M.D., who says, “Not only do our physical organs contain receptor sites for the neurochemicals of thought and emotion, our organs and immune systems *can themselves manufacture these same chemicals*. What this means is that our entire body feels and expresses emotion—all parts of us ‘think’ and ‘feel’...*The mind is located throughout the body*,” quoted in Wilshire, *Wild Hunger*, 74.

power to take back the throwing. Nevertheless we do say that it is within a man's power to cast or throw a stone because it was from a principle under his control. So it is also with the habits of vice; that a man not become unjust or incontinent arises from a principle under his control. Hence we say that men are voluntarily unjust and incontinent, although, after they have become such, it is no longer within their power to cease being unjust or incontinent immediately, but great effort and practice are required.¹⁰⁰

There has, in fact, been some confusion among Aristotle and Aquinas scholars alike as to the proper statement of the relationship between habit, habitual actions, and the voluntary. Take, for example, the following three claims, all from eminent scholars.

A habit, for us, is a kind of addiction. For Aquinas, however, a *habitus* puts one's activity more under one's control than it might otherwise be.¹⁰¹

A *habitus*, or disposition, we are told more than once, is what can be exercised at will; but an action, in so far as it becomes a habit, to that extent escapes voluntary control.¹⁰²

Moral *habitus* do not become 'almost or quite involuntary,' but rather they allow us to act more voluntarily.¹⁰³

Davies and Titus say that habits put our activity "more under our control" than it otherwise would be, making us to act "more voluntarily." Kenny says much the opposite: the more habitual an action, the more it "escapes voluntary control." What are we to make of this confusion? The confusion can be addressed if we recognize that we might mean one of two things by calling something more or less voluntary. On the one hand, we might think of the ultimate in voluntariness as being that which is most expressive of an agent's character. Or, on the other hand, we might think of the ultimate in voluntariness as being that which is most susceptible to an agent's immediate control,

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, #513.

¹⁰¹ Brian Davies, Introduction to *De Malo*, 30.

¹⁰² Anthony Kenny, Introduction to *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 22, xxx.

¹⁰³ Craig Steven Titus, *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude*, 120.

i.e., as being that which an agent is most arbitrarily free to do or leave undone. If we take voluntariness in the first sense, habitual actions are indeed the most voluntary of our actions, because they flow, not just from some fleeting deliberative process, but rather from the source of who we are, our characters. If we take voluntariness in the second sense, habitual actions are indeed the least voluntary of our actions, because, since they flow from deeply ingrained habits, they are least susceptible to fleeting deliberations or desires to “do otherwise.”

So, in addition to mediating between the voluntary and the involuntary, habit problematizes our customary assumptions about the relationship between responsibility and “the ability to do otherwise.” We are accustomed to expect a direct relationship between the two: the greater the arbitrary freedom to do otherwise, the greater our responsibility for our action. But for Aristotle and Aquinas, there is in a sense an inverse relationship between the two. Rather than implying that the problem is in some sense “external” to an agent, the loss of immediate control over our actions may tell us that the problem is deeply “internal,” deeper in fact than our cleverness or skill in practical deliberation; the problem may be in a sense one of *who we are*.

I hope that the reader will not at this point jump to conclusions and take me to be implying that addiction, rather than being a disease, is a symptom of moral depravity or an extreme character flaw. I will in fact argue directly *against* these all-too-common views. But what I will be arguing is that addictions, rather than being things, like diseases, that we *have* are more like things that we *become*.

The aim of this inquiry into the mediating character of habit has been to create space between such absolute binaries as action/capacity, instinct/disposition, determinism/free will, and disease/choice, space that can be made intelligible as a locus of habit. But now we must ask more specifically about the kinds of habit that can occupy this space. Habits, we have seen, belong peculiarly to rational animals, namely human persons. But, more specifically, for Aquinas habits belong to persons as qualifications of the powers (or faculties) of human persons. Therefore, we have to ask about these powers separately, whether and how they are susceptible to becoming habituated. Aquinas undertakes this sort of inquiry in Question 50 of the *Prima Secundae*, “Of the Subject of Habits.” There, he responds to questions about whether there are habits in the human body, the soul, and more particularly, the sensitive part of the soul, the intellectual part of the soul, and the will. He answers yes to all five questions, although the body is said to be the subject of habits only analogously and imperfectly. We could, following Aquinas, ask about the capacity for habituation of each separate power of a human person,¹⁰⁴ but this would take us too far from the center of our inquiry. So we shall have to ask about a select number of these powers, mainly those that can be seen to have direct bearing on our thesis that addiction is habitual human action.

¹⁰⁴ George Klubertanz, in *Habits and Virtues*, provides this sort of exhaustive inquiry into the various human powers that are subject to habituation, trying along the way to show the continuities and discontinuities between a Thomistic psychology and the psychology of Klubertanz’s time (1965). To my knowledge, there have been no similar contemporary attempts. Craig Steven Titus, in *Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude* and Adrian Reimers, in *The Soul of the Person: A Contemporary Philosophical Psychology* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), endeavor to put Aquinas in conversation with contemporary psychology, but neither does so with particular attention to Aquinas’s “faculty psychology.”

Broadly speaking, Aquinas analyzes the human person in terms of three “souls,”¹⁰⁵ each of which consists of a variety of powers: the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual souls. We are interested in the capacity for habituation of the vegetative powers and of several of the sub-powers of the sensitive soul: the imagination, the cogitative estimation, and the memory. By asking about whether and in what sense these powers may become habituated, we will begin to understand the force of Aquinas’s claim that habits are necessary because, in order to dispose an agent to act well or ill, “several things should occur, capable of being adjusted in various ways.”

The specific powers of the vegetative soul are the nutritive (the power of preservation), the augmentative (the power of growth), and the generative (the power of reproduction) (1.78.2). Because the powers of the vegetative soul “have not an inborn aptitude to obey the command of reason” Aquinas claims, “therefore there are no habits in them” (1-2.50.3). The digestion, growth, and generation of human persons are not in any sense dependent upon the direction of reason and therefore cannot be seen, strictly speaking, as subjects of habits.

But it may be that these powers are to some extent capable of being manipulated in such a way as to acquire modifications. For example, certain kinds of grasses can sustain human life, though a period of adaptation is required before the nutritive power is capable of assimilating them. More germane to our own study are the physiological modifications that accrue throughout the process of substance addiction. Are these

¹⁰⁵ Although, importantly, Aquinas does not “divide” or “partition” the human person into three parts. This was the position of Bonaventure, but Aquinas makes clear that the human person is one substance (1.76.3-4).

modifications instances of habit? Aquinas would probably not have considered them habits. “We call dispositions those qualities of the first species, which by reason of their very nature are easily lost, because they have changeable causes; e.g., sickness and health: whereas we call habits those qualities which, by reason of their very nature, are not easily changed, in that they have unchangeable causes, e.g., sciences and virtues” (1-2.49.2). The physiological aspects of addiction, therefore, would not be as tied to habit for Aquinas as the so-called psychological aspects. This is because the body can be reconditioned relatively quickly in comparison with the soul. Insofar as addiction is a sickness of the body, Aquinas would consider it in terms of dispositions. But insofar as it is a sickness of soul, we are dealing with full-blown habit.

Modern science has in one sense confirmed, in another sense disconfirmed Aquinas’s reticence to elevate any acquired modification of the body to the status of habit. On the side of confirmation, research has shown that the human brain has a remarkable capacity to recover from damage sustained through drug use. In terms of the capacity for normal levels of information processing and retention, the modifications acquired by the human brain during intense and prolonged drug use are indeed merely dispositional, within limits. On the side of disconfirmation, however, research has shown that certain neurological modifications having to do with the relationship between drug use and experiences of gratification, tolerance, and withdrawal are often permanent. So, for example, when addicts relapse, even after prolonged periods of abstinence, their drug use rapidly elevates to levels of consumption equal to or even greater than the levels of consumption at the time of cessation. This is why relapse is physiologically

distinguishable from the original process of addiction. It seems to me, then, that there are indeed habituations of what Aquinas calls the vegetative soul, although, as we grapple with the relationship between these habits of the vegetative soul and addiction, we must bear in mind the limitations, outlined in the Introduction, of any attempt to comprehend addiction in terms of the phenomena of gratification, tolerance, and withdrawal. It remains true, in the case of the recovering addict as in the case of the experimenter with addictive substances, that addiction (or relapse) is primarily a function of the meaning and significance that those visceral phenomena take on in the agent's view of him- or herself and the life-project he or she envisions.

Among the powers of the sensitive soul are the interior powers of imagination, cogitative estimation, and memory. Imagination is the power that allows for “the retention and preservation of [sensible] forms” (1.78.4). Are there acquired modifications of this power? We must be careful here to distinguish between modifications of the power and the exercise of the power as it eventuates in modifications of the agent's knowledge. Learning takes place through the exercise of imagination, i.e., through the retention of information whether visual, verbal, tactile, or whatever. But this occurs naturally, as it were, and need not imply a modification to the imaginative power. We do, however, seem capable of developing certain habits of imagination. The skilled artist has developed a particular way of “seeing” the world and retaining in imagination that vision. The artist does not have a modified external power of sight—he or she may be as far- or near-sighted as the next person—but the artist has

developed his or her imagination in such a way that he or she “sees” a different world than the next person.

The estimative power enables a function similar to that of the imagination. Whereas the imagination allows for the apprehension of sensible things, the estimative power allows for “the apprehension of intentions which are not received through the senses” (1.78.4). By “intentions,” Aquinas means the insensate qualities of objects, such as a thing’s goodness or badness, suitability or unsuitability. Aquinas leads us toward an understanding of what he means to pick out with the estimative power by first showing how the estimative power must function in animals. There is nothing in a lamb’s sense perception of a wolf to tell it that the wolf is bad, an enemy to be avoided. This information must come from elsewhere, and Aquinas says that it comes from the estimative power, through which animals “perceive these intentions only by some natural instinct” (1.78.4).

Human persons have instincts too. Babies, for example, instinctively cry when a loud bang is made in front of their face. In cases of extreme panic, human beings may act automatically and instinctively from fear. But our instincts are rudimentary as compared with those of other animals. Most of our immediate estimations of the objects and situations we encounter are discursive rather than instinctive *in nuce*. As Aquinas puts it, whereas animals perceive good and evil in objects by way of instinct,

man perceives them by means of coalition of ideas. Therefore the power which in other animals is called the natural estimative, in man is called the *cogitative*, which by some sort of collation discovers these intentions. Wherefore it is also called the *particular reason* (1.78.4).

The cogitative estimative power, therefore, is the site of a “compenetration of reason into sense.”¹⁰⁶ It is the paradigmatic locus of habit as embodied knowledge.

The important difference between the cogitative estimative power and the powers that belong to the intellectual soul—deliberative reason and will—is the immediacy with which the estimative power recognizes objects or situations as good or evil, suitable or unsuitable. The estimation seems to *come with* the sensory experience, although it is of course impossible to perceive good or evil with the exterior senses. Whenever there is an immediate and definite link between a subject’s perception of an object and the subject’s appetency for the object, it is this link that the estimative power explains. In animals, the link comes already forged, a natural instinct. But in human beings the link is forged through reason, although not, as we will see, necessarily at the level of rational deliberation.

Because the cogitative estimation is rarely acting in the absence of other activities, including deliberative rational judgment, it can be difficult to isolate. The most obvious examples are cases in which, in our contemporary idiom, we might say we just have an “intuition” that something is bad or inappropriate or unsuitable or, on the other hand, good, appropriate, or suitable. For instance, when a person at a dinner party lacks tact, we *sense* this immediately, without any need for rational consideration.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, we often might find it difficult to explain in words why we consider this person to be tactless; we just know it when we *see* it. Now this kind of estimation is obviously not a consequence of some explicit rational judgment, but neither is it instinct. It is made

¹⁰⁶ Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues*, 46.

¹⁰⁷ The illustration comes from Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues*, 34.

possible by a long history of learning, learning “manners” from our elders, watching the reactions of persons we trust in social situations, feeling the displeasure of others when we make a social blunder, etc. This is why the estimation is cogitative: it is the product of a “coalition of ideas,” a reserve of discursive wisdom that has become interwoven with the objects of our experience. It is not the product of conditioning, which takes place in the absence of any appeal to reason, yet it operates immediately and without intellectual effort, as if by conditioning. Often, it is the reactions that issue from our cogitative estimations that get mistaken for “instinct.”

As I will argue at length in Chapters IV and V, the habituation of the cogitative estimation is perhaps the single most powerful component of addiction and the addictive experience. The reader might pause, however, to consider what such an argument might require. Take the quite simple case of our ability to “sense” the lack of tact at a dinner party. How would we detail the means by which the cogitative estimation is habituated in this matter? We could only appeal to a complex arrangement of cultural patterns, historical developments, more or less universal psychological needs and reactions, and so on. Because the cogitative estimation is formed by a “coalition of ideas,” and this rarely through straightforward instruction, syllogistic argument, or rhetorical persuasion, any attempt to investigate its informants will necessarily be somewhat general and ideal. In trying to describe how we cannot understand human existence abstracted from its cultural context, Sean Desmond Healy claims, “It is rather as if nature, in denying us exact instincts, gave us, or made us able to develop, social systems as a substitute

instinctual exoskeleton to protect us against the pressure of infinite possibility.”¹⁰⁸ This is not all that “nature” provides, according to Aquinas, for we are also provided with habits, which “protect us against the pressure of infinite possibility” by instilling tendencies and inclinations. But Healy is fundamentally right, for we cannot begin to understand many of these habits, and especially those of the imagination and cogitative estimation, except by probing the “exoskeletons” that subtly implant their rationality so deeply into the self as to seem almost instinctual. The reader should be warned, then, that the arguments of the next two chapters are formally quite different than those of the first two, ranging widely into what might be considered philosophy of culture, philosophical sociology, and philosophical psychology. The transition is somewhat inevitable given the thesis I am trying to defend.

Returning to the investigation of the habituations of specific powers, we move finally to the memorative power, which works in conjunction with the imagination and the estimative power to enable the re-presentation of sensible forms and intentions. Were it not for the memorative power, the accretions to the powers of imagination and the cogitative estimation would be of little significance to human action, for it is through the memorative power that past accomplishments of the imagination and cogitative estimation are brought to bear on present action. But the habituation of memory is essentially derivative of the habituations of imagination and cogitative estimation. Because a person comes to “see” his or her world a certain way, his or her memory

¹⁰⁸ Sean Desmond Healy, *Boredom, Self, and Culture* (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), 100.

records the world a certain way and represents it to the agent as informed by the agent's habituated imagination. "Selective memory" is a function of "selective imagination."

Before making some brief forays into the relationship between habit, loss of control, and relapse, we must summarize one more general point about habit, namely how habits are formed and unformed, how they grow and diminish. Aquinas treats these matters in Questions 51 and 52 of the *Prima Secundae*. In Question 51, we are told that habits are formed by acts. In rare cases, one act is sufficient to form a habit. This is true, we are told, "if the active principle is of great power" (1-2.51.3). It does seem possible that one drink of alcohol or one hit of heroin may be a sufficiently powerful active principle to instantiate a habit. However, cases such as this are probably more rare than we are sometimes led to suppose. The Big Book of A.A. states that "though there is no way of proving it, we believe that early in our drinking careers most of us could have stopped drinking. But the difficulty is that few alcoholics have enough desire to stop while there is yet time" (AA 32).¹⁰⁹

Most habits are caused by the repetition of such acts as would be produced by the habit were the agent in possession of it. For instance, the habit of temperance is produced when a person who is not yet temperate nevertheless performs actions similar to those that would be performed by a temperate person. We cannot say that the intemperate person must perform the *same* actions as would be performed by a temperate person; this is impossible since the intemperate person does not yet possess

¹⁰⁹ Montaigne: "The infancies of all things are feeble and weak. We must keep our eyes open at their beginnings; you cannot find the danger then because it is so small; once it has grown, you cannot find the cure," quoted in Elster, *Strong Feelings*, 29. And, La Rochefoucauld: "It is far easier to stifle a first desire than to satisfy all the ensuing ones," quoted in Irvine, *On Desire*, 56.

the desires that make the temperate person's actions what they are. Nevertheless, if acts that are similar in outward form to those of the temperate person's "be multiplied a certain quality is formed in the power which is passive and moved, which quality is called a habit" (1-2.51.2). If you want to become a skilled basketball player, you must repeatedly do as skilled basketball players do, even though, since you are not skilled, you will not be able to perform the actions with the same success, consistency, and ease that a skilled player does. Over time, however, the repetition of such acts instills skill in the agent, permitting him or her to act as a skilled basketball player.

It is sometimes thought that mere repetition is sufficient for the production of habits, but this is not so for Aquinas. In addition to the outward multiplication of like acts, there must also be an inward "intensity" of intent and focus. Alongside the repetition of external acts, we must also attend to the interior quality of acts. This is because a habit does not merely name the ability to perform external actions, but also some sort of continuity between an agent's actions and his or her intentions and desires. Without attention to the interior quality of acts, we can at best become conditioned, but not habituated. The formation and growth of habits depends on this interior "intensity" of intent and desire.¹¹⁰ "So, too, repeated acts cause a habit to grow. If, however, the act falls short of the intensity of the habit, such an act does not dispose to an increase of that habit, but rather to a lessening thereof" (1-2.52.3). Habituation, therefore, occurs through external and internal exertion. "The same acts need to be repeated many times

¹¹⁰ As we begin to form a certain habit, we are often capable of merely second-order desires, i.e. wanting to want in a certain way. But these second-order desires are indispensable to the formation of right first-order desires.

for anything to be firmly impressed on the memory,” but also, “meditation strengthens memory” (1.51.3).

Habit, Loss of Control, and Relapse

We are at last in a position to begin to explore the connections between habit and addictive behavior. What my analysis thus far has shown, I hope, is that human action is primarily the domain of habit. Not only how we respond, but even the way in which we see the situations we confront and the alternatives open to us are thoroughly drenched in habit. Although the language is slightly overstated, we begin to see how John Dewey could claim,

Concrete habits are the means of knowledge and thought...Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done. “Consciousness,” whether as a stream or as special sensations and images, expresses functions of habits, phenomena of their formation, operation, their interruption and reorganization.¹¹¹

Human action is often the confluence point of passion and rational judgment. Incontinence is possible at this point because of the cunning of passion; passion puts itself under the nose of the deliberating agent, distracting the agent from connecting up the right universal judgment with the right particular judgment. In cases of psychological craving, passion can be so intense or so unremitting that it does not merely momentarily distract the agent from prudential deliberation but veritably clogs the agent’s mind with intrusive thoughts. In the case of such craving for alcohol, for example, the agent must battle constantly and seemingly eternally with the thought of an

¹¹¹ *Human Nature and Conduct*, 123-124.

alcoholic beverage—its taste, its texture, the sound of the ice clinking in the glass, the ambient noise of the bar, the camaraderie of drinking buddies, and so on, seemingly *ad infinitum*.

But even in the absence of vehement or resilient passion, an agent is not secure from the threat of incontinence, for human action is also the confluence point of rational judgment and habit. Indeed, before deliberation begins, habits of imagination, cogitative estimation, appetite, and intellect are already operative, constituting the means by which the agent discerns his or her situation, including the various possibilities for action that it brings with it. Often, rational deliberation is only necessary when there is some conflict between these habits. Under normal circumstances, the habits of the agent enable the agent to act well or ill with ease, success, and consistency. But when there is a conflict between habits, the habits do not thereby vanish. Rather, they vie for precedence as the agent struggles to navigate his or her situation.

Because the territory of continence and incontinence is presented by Aristotle and Aquinas as the territory between the habits of vice and virtue, there is a propensity to envision the territory of continence and incontinence as a sort of habit-free zone in which the primary contenders are pure reason and brute appetites, but this is not so. The territory of continence and incontinence is rather the territory in which habits collide, negotiating and adjudicating their own increase and decrease, their making and unmaking. Since habits are the embodiment of knowledge, reserve “pockets of

thought”¹¹² that fund human activity, the territory of incontinence is therefore the territory in which knowledges collide: the knowledges of deliberation confront the embodied knowledges of habit. This is why incontinence is possible in the absence of vehement or resilient passion.

Although “simple incontinence” may at times be the consequence of the collision of habit, this is preeminently so for the “particularized incontinence” that we associated with addiction in Chapter II. We recall that Aristotle mentions a unique type of incontinence—“incontinence in respect of some particular bodily pleasure”—and says that this type of incontinence is “blamed not only as a fault but as a kind of vice” (1148a3-5). We are now in a position to see the profundity of this claim, which is said in passing without further development. For the consistent failure of the addict can only be explained with reference to the role that habits play in the formation and execution of moral agency. Simple incontinence most often has to do with the cunning and power of passion, but the particularized incontinence of addiction is, although sometimes an effect of passion, characteristically the result of the sway of habit. The territory of particularized incontinence is, therefore, the territory of transitory virtue and vice. As Aquinas saw, “continence is not a virtue but a mixture, inasmuch as it has something of virtue, and somewhat falls short of virtue” (2-2.155.3). Indeed, the guiding premise of Chapter V will be that addiction is best understood as a simulacra of virtue, and that it is

¹¹² M.F. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good,” 80, describes certain habits as “pockets of thought which can remain relatively unaffected by our overall view of things.” I am not sure how long these “pockets” can remain unaffected if they really are in conflict with our *overall* view of things, but they certainly can remain unaffected by the tides of deliberation about, particularly, how we should act at any given time and, generally, about what perhaps *should be* our overall view of things. That is, habits tell us much more about what actually *is* our overall view of things than anything so fleeting as our intentions, deliberations, or introspections do.

precisely because addiction takes the form of a virtue—the most potent, persistent, and complex type of habit available to human agents—that recovery is such a daunting challenge.

It is my contention that the most baffling phenomenon of the particularized incontinence of addictive experience, namely *loss of control*, can be illuminated as we come to understand the ways in which embodied knowledges—certain kinds of habits—exercise far-reaching and colossal power over human action. In particular, habits of imagination and the cogitative estimation play a decisive role in cases of incontinence that cannot be explained with reference to passion. As outlined in Chapter II, these cases of incontinence often occur *even though* the agent possesses the conclusion of the right practical syllogism that can lead to continent action. We described in that chapter how this is possible because of a lack of integration of the knowledge derived through practical reasoning into action. Aquinas puts the point like this in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*:

To understand, it is necessary that those things that a man hears become, as it were, connatural to him in order that they may be impressed perfectly on his mind. For this a man needs time in which his intellect may be confirmed in what it has received, by much meditation. This is true also of the incontinent man, for even if he says: it is not good for me now to pursue such a pleasure, nevertheless, in his heart he does not think this way.¹¹³

Insofar as right action depends at some point on the integration of deliberative knowledge into action, right action meets definite resistance wherever deliberation arrives at conclusions that conflict with knowledges already integrated into human action as habit. Thus, in the most perplexing cases of incontinence, we are confronted, not with

¹¹³ #1344.

reason struggling against appetite or emotion, but rather with free-floating reason struggling against reason as rooted in habits of the imagination and the cogitative estimation. It will take all of Chapters IV and V to show just how deeply such types of reason can be rooted, and such a development is necessary to show how the extreme form of incontinence that is called “loss of control” is possible. The purpose of this chapter has been to provide the theoretical underpinning for the efforts of the subsequent chapters.

Before moving on, one more important fruit of this discussion of habit should be articulated. In addition to the phenomena of craving and loss of control, the third major “strut” of addiction is the phenomenon of *relapse*. Any adequate account of addiction must explain how relapse is possible. How can it be that, after days, weeks, months, or even years of sobriety, a former addict can suddenly resume addictive behavior? My contention is that Aquinas’s account of how habits are formed and destroyed, increased and decreased provides the insight needed to sketch a theory of relapse.

Aquinas says that habits are formed whenever two conditions are met. First, the external act must be repeated. Second, there must be appropriate attention to the interior quality of the acts. Aquinas calls this inward attention “intensity,” and he warns that even though repeated acts tend to cause the development of habits, if “the act falls short of the intensity of the habit, such an act does not dispose to an increase of that habit, but rather to a lessening thereof” (1-2.52.3). Given this understanding of the generation and destruction of habits, if we conceive of the life of recovery as the development of new habits of imagination, cogitative estimation, appetite, and intellect, it is entirely possible

for someone to be engaging in the external acts that are necessary to the development of such habits without thereby developing or maintaining those habits. Because the repetition of external acts is not sufficient to the forming or maintenance of habits, the habits necessary for the life of recovery can be degenerating all the while that an agent carries on like a person in recovery.¹¹⁴ As Robert Brennan puts it, “In the matter of habit, as in the matter of perfection, if we are not progressing, we are deteriorating.”¹¹⁵ Thus the A.A. adage: “If you’re coasting in recovery, you’re going downhill.”¹¹⁶ This is why many of the “steps” of A.A. require inward or “spiritual” work, and, furthermore, why A.A. insists that the life of recovery entails the willingness to “work the steps” as a way of life.¹¹⁷

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition (AA 85).

¹¹⁴ This is the basic process that underlies Olav Gjelsvik’s explanation of nicotine relapse in “Addiction, Weakness of Will, and Relapse,” in *Getting Hooked: Rationality and Addiction*, ed. Jon Elster and Ole-Jorgen Skog (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 58: “The active smoker knows his craving and thus takes all these additional measures to serve his long-term interest. To do this requires time and preparation, training, and conditioning. Nonetheless, the smoker might succeed in quitting. Facing an unexpected craving, brought on by some situation later on, he might not have time to assemble these resources, and he might have lost much of the ability if this ability required training or conditioning that would fade after a while...It will therefore be possible to relapse even if the craving is far from being as strong as at the time of quitting.”

¹¹⁵ *Thomistic Psychology*, 269. The key distinction for Aristotle on this matter is between “endurance” and “continence” proper. “Endurance consists in resisting, while continence consists in conquering, and resisting and conquering are different, as not being beaten is different from winning” (115034-36).

¹¹⁶ William Cope Moyers with Katherine Ketcham, *Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption* (New York: Viking, 2006), 205.

¹¹⁷ In James B. Nelson, *Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 201 n.41, Nelson notes that the Twelve Steps alternate between calls to inward acceptance and appropriation of certain truths and calls to outward action. “There is the repeated recognition that *willingness* must precede our actual decision (willing) to take the steps that will open us to the gift of sobriety.”

Failure to continue to work the steps is referred to as “two-stepping” and is seen to be the primary threat to a recovering addict’s continued sobriety. Because recovery as conceived by A.A. is a technology of habit reformation, it demands this vigilant attention to both the external and internal dimensions of sober action. Relapse is possible because the life of recovery is a life of re-habituation rather than merely a life of re-enactment.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN ADDICTION

In Chapter III, we investigated several powers of human agents taken singly in order to discover which of them were subject to habit. The investigation uncovered what may be called simple habits, habits involving one habit and one power. In concrete human activity, however, powers and their habits rarely act in isolation from one another. Indeed, the fact that human powers do not ordinarily work separately but rather in cooperation with one another created the main obstacle to isolating simple habits. The elucidation of simple habits, therefore, can only be preliminary to a fuller elaboration of the ways in which simple habits combine and cohere to form habit groups, which involve two or more powers and the habits that belong to them.

Habit Groups

The virtue of temperance might be helpfully offered here as an example of the way in which intelligible human action most often involves the combination of a number of simple habits into a coordinated habit group. Temperance is properly a qualification of the sensory appetite, but although temperance substantially resides in the sensory appetite it requires the ordered cooperation of several habits of the different powers of a person. As a modification of the sensory appetite, temperance has to do with the achievement of a consistent and appropriate mode of tendency toward sensible goods. Temperance, therefore, requires habituation of the passions. Temperance has to do not

simply with right action toward sensible goods, but especially with right desire toward sensible goods.¹¹⁸ Temperance implies not only right outward activity but also right feeling. The virtue of temperance entails that the agent neither overreacts nor underreacts to available sensible goods; it entails a proportionate or rightly measured reaction to such goods, both in terms of desire and outward action. But how is this proportionate response to be discovered? Temperance does not consist in eating a set amount of food each day, but rather in eating a suitable amount of food, taking into consideration the individual and his or her circumstances. As Aristotle reminds us, the temperate amount of food for the wrestler Milo will be excessive for the beginner in athletic exercises (1106b4-5). So something in addition to a well-habituated appetite is required for the practice of the virtue of temperance, namely the habituation of intellect that makes possible the formal determination of the suitable amount of food for the agent. Furthermore, once the suitable measure is determined by the intellect this measure cannot be simply imposed on the sensory appetite directly, except by doing violence to the person's agency. The link between intellectual determination of the suitable measure and the sensory appetite's right desire for that measure, the link which consists in the estimation of the suitable measure as good, must be established through habituation of the cogitative estimation. Temperance, therefore, is already seen to require the coordination of habits of sensory appetite, intellect, and cogitative estimation. The habit group of temperance is substantially in the power of sensory appetite, formally

¹¹⁸ For the clearest account of the double-barreled habituation of action and passion that is constitutive of most of the moral virtues see L.A. Kosman, "Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty.

in the intellectual power including the power of the cogitative estimation. We could continue the trajectory and show how habituation of the imagination and memory must also be integrated into the habit group of temperance.

As we have noted, Aquinas says that habits are necessary because “in disposing the subject to one of those things to which it is in potentiality, several things should occur, capable of being adjusted in various ways: so as to dispose the subject well or ill to its form or to its operation” (1-2.49.4). Having noted the complexity of the habit group required to make temperate action consistent and successful, we are again in a position to appreciate the force of this observation. The person who wishes to act temperately but lacks any of the numerous simple habits that coordinate to form the habit group of temperance is like the would-be painter who has developed his or her skills of the palette without bothering to learn the basic laws of perspective that are required to “see” the world in such a way that it can be rendered vividly and effectively. Such a person is not an artist at all, but merely one who may reproduce the work of other artists.

The complexity of habit groups is enhanced when we observe that most habit groups consist of at least two types of habits, those that could be called mastery habits and those that could be called automatism habits.¹¹⁹ Mastery habits are those habits that can be acquired and performed only through the exercise of rational consciousness or volition. Habits of intellect (prudence, science, wisdom, understanding) and habits of will (justice) are the most obvious mastery habits. Automatism habits are those of which it would make sense to say that they could be acquired or exercised in the absence of

¹¹⁹ Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues*, 95.

rational consciousness or volition. Habits of the imagination (including motor habits) and cogitative estimation are the most obvious candidates for automatism habits. To call such habits automatism habits is not to say that they *require* an absence of consciousness or volition for their exercise but only that such would be possible.

Grasping this distinction enables us to understand two important claims made by Aristotle and echoed in a qualified sense by Aquinas. First, we can see in a different light why Aristotle is inclined to say that incontinent action happens contrary to an agent's choice, whereas virtuous action is always the result of choice. For, although temperance requires the conscious exercise of habits of intellect (which need not imply deliberation), incontinent action need not. It is enough for incontinent action that an automatism habit disrupt and derail the cooperation and coordination of habits, both automatism and mastery, that would be required for the performance of temperate actions. It would not make sense, for Aristotle, to explain an incontinent action with respect to sensible goods as the product of coordinated habits of the appetites, cogitative estimation, and intellect, for if such coordination were present the action would thereby qualify as viciously intemperate. Incontinent action is, if not directly a result of passion (impetuous *akrasia*), always a result of the absence of coordination between the powers of an agent that must enter into the performance of any virtuous action (weak *akrasia*).

Second, the distinction between mastery and automatism habits puts us in a position to understand the following analogy, offered by Aristotle and cited by Aquinas, of reason's rule over the sensory powers.

“The reason, in which resides the will, moves, by its command, the irascible and concupiscible powers, not, indeed, *by a despotic sovereignty*, as a slave is moved

by his master, but by a *royal and politic sovereignty*, as free men are ruled by their governor, and can nevertheless act counter to his commands. Hence both irascible and concupiscible can move counter to the will: and accordingly nothing hinders the will from being moved by them at times (1-2.9.2).¹²⁰

Since some habits may function independently of rational consciousness or volition, it becomes possible to imagine a situation in which an agent acts voluntarily (and is therefore not compelled) but does not act in accordance with his or her rationally deliberated desire or volition. With respect to each action taken singly, the agent is always in a position to override automatism habits, but this does violence to agency and depletes the limited power of an embodied will. If the agent relents, the automatism habit does not. It acts “freely” against the orders given by deliberated judgment just as a free person can at times act in opposition to the demands of his or her political sovereign.

We find that our sensory powers...act like free men in a democracy; they can be “persuaded” but not commanded. Here will-and-intellect controls the sensory appetites only very indirectly, by gradually altering the judgment of the discursive [cogitative] estimation and thus modifying the complex image which is eliciting the response of the sensory appetites.¹²¹

The non-despotic control of reason over the sensory appetites leads Aristotle to emphasize again the way in which actions that flow from automatism habits are

¹²⁰ Citing Aristotle in *Politics* 1.2. This metaphor of the relationship between rational and sensible appetites is strikingly confirmed by much contemporary neurological research. For instance, William Irvine, *On Desire*, 95, states: “We do not have one inner self; we have several, and they are capable of making contrary choices...Cases like [those of alien hand syndrome] suggest that our brains have not one center of control, not one part that wills, but multiple decision-making centers that independently come to decisions about what we should be doing with ourselves. They are like army generals who each has his own idea about what the battle plan should be. In most armies, a supreme commander listens to his generals’ ideas and decides what should be done, thereby coordinating their behavior. But if a general is unable to communicate with the supreme commander, he might initiate a combat action on his own—an action that might be at odds with the actions of the other generals and with the battle plan set forth by the supreme commander.”

¹²¹ Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues*, 108.

nevertheless voluntary. We have direct control only over our immediate actions, but because habits of action and passion follow in the wake of the repetition of certain actions, we can be held responsible for the actions elicited from these habits.

Actions and states of character are not voluntary in the same way; for we are masters of our actions from the beginning right to the end, if we know the particular facts, but though we control the beginning of our states of character the gradual progress is not obvious, any more than it is in illnesses; because it was in our power, however, to act in this way or not in this way, therefore the states are voluntary (1114b30-1115a3).

If we utilize Aristotle's and Aquinas's conception of habit to understand the phenomenon of addiction, and particularly that of loss of control, we put ourselves in a position to understand how it could simultaneously be true that an addict loses direct control over his or her choices and yet nevertheless remains in some sense able to respond to that loss of direct control. We put ourselves in a position to understand the nature of the addictive paradox.

It is the aim of this and the next chapter to demonstrate that addiction should be understood as an extreme exemplification of the power that habit may exercise over human action. So powerful is the habit of addiction that we may rightfully say that certain addicts have lost immediate control over their own action with respect to the addictive object. The argument will proceed in three stages. First, I explore what may seem to be the most obvious way to give an account of addiction as habit, namely by assimilating addiction to intemperance. I argue that such an assimilation ultimately fails. Second, I inquire into the relationship between habits, in particular those habits called virtues, and the pursuit of the good life. I suggest that Aristotle's account of this relationship presupposes a social context in which a set of social roles, practices, and

expectations govern and dictate an internal ordering of the virtues, and that the social context of contemporary Western culture lacks a similarly ordering set of roles, practices, and expectations. I attempt to show that addiction, because it provides such a powerful ordering energy, is a habit that supplies a peculiarly modern lack. Third, in Chapter V, I contend that there is a lacuna in Aristotle's account of the relationship between the virtues and the good life that arises due to Aristotle's failure to demonstrate how practical reason and the exercise of moral virtue is to be integrated with the more transcendent possibilities of human life, especially the possibility of *theoria*, the life of contemplation. I argue that the theological ethics of Thomas Aquinas removes this lacuna by postulating the theological virtues, especially the theological virtue of charity, and I propose that, understood as an analogue to the theological virtue of charity, addiction is a habit that fulfills with stunning, although ultimately disastrous, efficacy this want for an integration of the practical and transcendent possibilities in human life. Addiction, therefore, can be illuminated by being analyzed as a kind of analogue to the virtue-habit of charity.

Addiction and Intemperance

The question I would like to address in this section is whether or not addiction can be adequately understood as a failure of the virtue of temperance, particularly as an expression of the vice of intemperance. What is temperance? "Temperance," Aristotle tells us, "is a mean with regard to pleasures" (1117b24). Temperance is not concerned with pleasure in general, but rather with pleasures of the body. Those who take

excessive delight in pleasures of the soul, “such as love of honour and love of learning,” are neither called intemperate nor self-indulgent (1117b27-32). Furthermore, temperance is not concerned with every pleasure of the body, but only with some. “For those who delight in objects of vision, such as colours and shapes and painting, are called neither temperate nor self-indulgent,” even though it is possible to delight in these things to an excessive or deficient degree (1118a3-7). Temperance is finally concerned with the pleasures that human beings share in with animals, namely those of touch and taste, but it is especially concerned with these pleasures as they are enjoyed “in the case of food and in that of drink and in that of sexual intercourse” (1118a31-33).

Temperance is, therefore, the virtue that enables a person to achieve proportionate desire and activity with respect to food, drink—particularly intoxicants—and sex. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the virtue of temperance resides substantially in the concupiscible sense appetite and formally in the intellectual power. Temperance is a virtue necessary for the good life because the sensible appetite is not in itself rational. But insofar as human persons are rational creatures and the good life is a life in accordance with reason, the sensible appetites must be made to conform with reason. Aquinas explains: “Since, however, man as such is a rational being, it follows that those pleasures are becoming to man which are in accordance with reason. From such pleasures temperance does not withdraw him, but from those which are contrary to reason” (2-2.141.1). Temperance names the virtue that achieves this conforming of sense appetite to reason.

There are three species of temperance, which correspond to the three objects of temperance: food, intoxicating drink, and sex. Abstinence is the name of the specific virtue of temperance that denotes right moderation with respect to food; sobriety with respect to intoxicating drink; and chastity with respect to sex. A person can lack these virtues by either excessively or deficiently desiring and pursuing each of these sensible goods. Both extremes count as vice, although deficient desire with respect to any of these sensible goods is sufficiently rare that it does not bear a recognizable name. Aristotle says that the person who deficiently desires and pursues food, drink, or sex is “insensible.”¹²² Frigidity about sex would probably represent the most common form of insensibility. But, as Aristotle says, “people who fall short with regard to pleasures and delight in them less than they should are hardly found; for such insensibility is not human” (1119a5-7). The extreme of excess is the commoner vice, so common indeed that it has an accepted name with respect to each of the objects of sensory desire. Excessive desire and pursuit of food is called gluttony; of intoxicating drink, drunkenness, and of sex, lust.

Interestingly, although intemperance is a violation of reason, its possibility depends on reason. Animals, for Aristotle and Aquinas, are not capable of intemperance. A simple argument is sufficient to establish this point: if intemperance names the pursuit of pleasurable goods beyond the bounds ordained by reason, then only a creature that could establish such bounds by the exercise of reason would stand in a position to exceed those

¹²² According to Aquinas, “If a man were knowingly to abstain from wine to the extent of molesting nature grievously, he would not be free from sin” (2-2.150.1). Professor Stanley Hauerwas has mentioned to me on this point the saying of the rabbis that God will not hold him guiltless who has not enjoyed every legitimate pleasure.

bounds. Aquinas, drawing on Aristotle, develops this point by distinguishing between what he calls natural concupiscence and cupidity.

Now a thing is pleasurable in two ways. First, because it is suitable to the nature of the animal; for example, food, drink, and the like: and concupiscence of such pleasurable things is said to be natural.—Secondly, a thing is pleasurable because it is apprehended as suitable to the animal: as when one apprehends something as good and suitable, and consequently takes pleasure in it: and concupiscence of such pleasurable things is said to be not natural, and is more wont to be called *cupidity* (1-2.30.3).¹²³

It does not happen very often that one sins in the matter of natural desires, for nature requires only that which supplies its need, and there is no sin in desiring this... There are other things in respect of which sins frequently occur, and these are certain incentives to desire devised by human curiosity (2-2.142.2).

Reason is, therefore, not only that which can make a person temperate. Reason is also that which may make a person intemperate.

We are now in a position to narrow our scope of inquiry. If addiction is to be assimilated to the vice of intemperance, it will most likely be in virtue of a substantial correlation between addiction and the vice of drunkenness. The vice of drunkenness can be understood as habitually excessive desire and pursuit of the sensible pleasures associated with intoxicants, which pleasures are overvalued as being suitable to the good life. For addiction to fit this bill, we should be able to describe addiction as habitually excessive desire and pursuit of the sensible pleasures associated with certain objects, which pleasures are overvalued as being suitable to the good life. Does this description do justice to the phenomenon of addiction?

In pursuing this question we must recognize the extreme contestability of every available response. For at the heart of this question is a question about the conceptual

¹²³ Natural concupiscence, Aquinas tells us, may also be referred to as common, necessary, or rational concupiscence, and cupidity as peculiar, acquired, or irrational concupiscence.

status of “addiction.” The central question can be put as follows: is “addiction” a natural kind or a historico-cultural construction? Put differently, did the advent of the contemporary use of the *word* “addiction” merely give full expression to a type of experience that had always been or did it rather construct and elicit a type of experience previously nonexistent? Of course, underlying this way of putting the question is a fundamental set of questions about the nature of reality and our ways of knowing reality, and there is no reason to expect that we shall be able to give an answer to the first question that is any more definite than answers we might give to this more fundamental set of questions. Nevertheless, before moving toward a comparison between the vice of drunkenness and the habit of addiction, we must try to orient ourselves with respect to this important genealogical question.

The word “addiction” is an old English word, rooted in Roman law, denoting “a formal giving over or delivery by sentence of court. Hence, a surrender, or dedication, of any one to a master.” Although purely passive in its legal usage, the word came also to denote “the state of being (self-) addicted or given to a habit or pursuit; devotion.”¹²⁴ In the 1611 Authorized Version (King James Version) of the Bible, we read that the members of the house of Stephanus “have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints” (2 Cor. 16.15). In that time, there seemed to be few limitations on what persons might be addicted to. We are told of peoples’ “addiction to hearing” (1641); of a man’s

¹²⁴ *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

“own proper Industry and Addiction to Books” (1675); of “their addiction to agricultural pursuits” (1858); as well as of “his addiction to tobacco” (1779).¹²⁵

In the colonial period, drunkards were occasionally described as addicted to drunkenness or intemperance, but it was drunkenness generally, and not the addiction to it, that was considered problematic.¹²⁶ Although politicians and clergymen alike decried the earthly and eternal suffering to which drunkards were subject, the label of addiction to drunkenness did not pick out any inner experience or condition of the drunkard that was distinct from that experienced by anyone else who was “addicted” to various pursuits. Notably absent from attributions of addiction, which were not in any case particularly common, was any notion that the drunkard was one who had lost control over his or her decisions to drink liquor.

The contemporary concept of addiction was developed and refined in the crucible of the 19th century Temperance Movement. In the face of increased social stigma surrounding drunkenness and the corresponding social pressure to abstain from alcohol, a number of Americans began to report that they experienced overwhelming desires for liquor. The modern conception of addiction was worked out as a response both to these

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction,” 146. Levine’s article is the seminal text for the comparatively tiny segment of addiction studies that seeks to historically problematize the regnant paradigm of addiction research. Most addiction experts see this as the text that must be rebutted and overcome in order to prevent the relativizing of the concept of addiction that they see as endemic to any genealogical inquiry into addiction. It is rarely noted, however, that Levine claims to have located the “discovery” and not the “invention” of the contemporary addiction concept. On the whole, Levine tries to balance historical constructivism and realism. For a defense of Levine along these lines, see Peter Ferentzy, “From Sin to Disease: Differences and Similarities Between Past and Current Conceptions of Chronic Drunkenness,” *Contemporary Drug Problems* 28 (2001): 363-389. For a fair critique of Levine see Jessica Warner, “Resolv’d to Drink No More: Addiction as a Preindustrial Construct,” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 55 (1994): 685-691.

testimonies and to the exigencies of the burgeoning Temperance Movement.¹²⁷ By and large, physicians carried out the development, and it is in the work of Dr. Benjamin Rush that we find the first clear expression of what might be considered the modern addiction concept. Rush's early 19th century contribution to the debate surrounding drunkenness was fourfold.¹²⁸ First, he located the source of addiction in alcohol itself. Second, he described the addicted drunkard's condition as one of loss of control over drinking behavior. Third, he diagnosed addiction to drink as a disease, a claim that would be practically canonized 150 years later by E.M. Jellinek's *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism* (1960). And fourth, he claimed that total abstinence from drink was the only viable cure for the disease. With the exception of the first claim, which has been replaced by the assertion that the source of addiction lies within the addicted person him- or herself (whether because of personality tendencies, environmental risk factors, or genetic predispositions), Rush's elucidation of alcohol addiction has been affirmed and extended to cover an ever-growing catalogue of addictions over the course of the ensuing 200 years.

The transformation of the concept of addiction that took place within the wider Temperance Movement and under the leadership of Benjamin Rush has been well summarized by Harry Levine.

¹²⁷ As has been amply noted, the Temperance Movement was wrongly named. Temperance, or moderation with respect to alcohol, in fact, was not only *not* the aim of the Movement but was attacked by the Movement as the inevitable gateway to drunkenness. One Good Templar tract, for example, astonishingly asserted, "And if there be any difference in the degrees of guilt between moderate drinkers and drunkards, the moderate drinker is worse than the drunkard," quoted in Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction," 159.

¹²⁸ Benjamin Rush, "An Inquiry Into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind with an Account of the Means of Preventing and of the Remedies for Curing Them," reprinted in *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 4 (1943-1944): 325-341.

What was new in the 19th century was the legitimacy of a particular way of interpreting the experience and behavior of drunkards. In colonial society there may have been isolated individuals who felt “overwhelmed” by their desires for drink, but there was no socially legitimate vocabulary for organizing the experience and for talking about it; it remained an inchoate and extremely private experience. In the 19th century the drunkard’s experience was so familiar it became stereotyped.¹²⁹

What are we to make of the results of this cursory genealogical inquiry into the concept of addiction?¹³⁰ Three conclusions seem to me to be justified. First, alcoholic drinking patterns are probably as old as alcohol itself. Although the way in which alcoholics can conceive and represent their experience depends to a significant degree on the language available to them, there is little reason to think that, in colonial America for example, habitual drunkards were much less bound by their habit or any more hopeful of reform. The great Puritan preacher, Increase Mather, was familiar enough with the actual conditions of the inveterate drunkard to call habitual drunkenness “a Sin that is rarely truly repented of, and turned from.”¹³¹ Second, there is reason to expect that the prevalence of such patterns might vary widely depending on a vast number of factors that we might call “culture.” This fact has been firmly established by inquiries into the sociology of addiction,¹³² and so it should be expected to find similar variations across

¹²⁹ Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction,” 154 n.12.

¹³⁰ For further genealogical ventures, see especially Christopher Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 5; Peter Ferentzy, “Foucault and Addiction,” *Telos* 125 (2002): 167-192; Joseph Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*, 2d. ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Stanton Peele, *The Disease of America: How We Allowed Recovery Zealots and the Treatment Industry to Convince Us We Are Out of Control* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1989), ch. 2; David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Revised ed. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002); and Mariana Valverde, *Diseases of the Will*.

¹³¹ Quoted in Levine, “The Discovery of Addiction,” 148.

¹³² The remarkable divergence among the alcoholism rates of various ethnicities has been widely documented. For example, there is a high rate of alcoholism among Irish and a low rate among Jews. For

time. Indeed, one of the central arguments of this and the next chapter is that the prevalence and acuteness of addiction in the contemporary context has to do in large part with the radical distance between modern Western culture and the cultural milieu that informs the moral philosophies of Aristotle and Aquinas. Third and finally, the question of whether and to what extent addictive experience is constructed historically cannot be separated from a philosophical inquiry into the character of such experience as currently undergone and represented. As the enormous influence of the work of Benjamin Rush makes clear, ideas matter, and the attempt to clarify the conditions of possibility of certain kinds of experience may itself become a factor in the subtle transformation of how those kinds of experiences are had and interpreted. We inherit concepts from an array of traditions that are by no means in mutual harmony, and it is part of the work of philosophy to subject our descriptions of the world we indwell to the rigor of analysis in order to see in what ways our tangled inheritance leads us to sometimes rightly describe and other times misdescribe the character of our lives and the reality we inhabit. There is therefore as little reason to insist on the absolute universality and rigidity of certain types of experience as there is to insist on their limitless relativity and malleability.

We return, then, to the question of whether addiction as currently experienced can be assimilated to the vice of intemperance. I submit that it cannot. Intemperance is the state of character according to which an agent inordinately loves the object of his or her desire whereas addiction is the state of character according to which an agent may come, paradoxically, to dislike or even hate the object of his or her desire yet nevertheless

helpful summary of much of the sociological data and an attempt to enter the debate provoked by such data, see Goodwin, *Alcoholism*, ch. 13.

persist in pursuit of it. There is a deep ambivalence in the affections of the addict about his or her object of desire, an ambivalence that does not seem typical of intemperance.¹³³ We can characterize this difference by utilizing the language of first- and second-order desires made prominent by the work of Harry Frankfurt. First-order desires “are simply desires to do or not to do one thing or another.” Second-order desires have to do with wanting “to have or not to have a certain desire of the first order.”¹³⁴ The intemperate person is one whose first- and second-order desires correspond: the intemperate person desires the pleasure of sensible goods and approves of the desire, i.e. desires to so desire. There may come a time at which a conflict emerges between the two levels of desire in a formerly intemperate person. The person may continue to desire the pleasure of certain sensible goods, but wish that he or she did not so desire. Such an agent would be considered either continent or incontinent depending on his or her response to this conflict. The conflict between first- and second-order desire is also prevalent among those who are in the grips of addiction, although this conflict may not be forthcoming until the agent acknowledges the peril of his or her situation. But what seems unique to the case of addiction is that, in addition to the conflict between first- and second-order desires, many addicts experience an intense conflict at the level of first-order desire. At the level of first-order desire, the addict may simultaneously desire and detest the object of addiction, while also having second-order desires not to desire the object of addiction. In Chapter II, we witnessed the testimony of one alcoholic who found herself in just such a situation, and struggled to describe the confounding nature of her experience.

¹³³ Jon Elster claims that “ambivalence is a hallmark of serious addiction in humans,” *Strong Feelings*, 74.

¹³⁴ Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” 323-324.

I *knew* I would start working on the half gallon again, despite the fact that I was still very ill from the night before. I also knew that I did not want to drink. Sitting on that sofa, I realized that the old “I could stop if I wanted to, I just don’t want to” didn’t apply here, because I did not want to drink. I watched myself get up off the sofa and pour myself a drink (AA 324).

Similar reports are common in the memoirs of other addicts. These testimonies cut to the core of the experience of addiction. They could not be made by intemperate drinkers who simply love drink too much. These sorts of statements can only begin to be made intelligible once we have recognized the fact that incontinent addicts are persons characterized *both* by conflicts between first- and second-order desires *and* by conflicts at the level of first-order desire. The phenomenon of the “divided will” that is at its most severe in these sorts of reports is made possible by the addict’s identification of his or her second-order desires not to desire to drink with his or her first-order desires not to drink. As Frankfurt explains,

The unwilling [incontinent] addict identifies himself...through the formation of a second-order volition, with one rather than with the other of his conflicting first-order desires. He makes one of them more truly his own and, in so doing, he withdraws himself from the other. It is in virtue of this identification and withdrawal, accomplished through the formation of a second-order volition, that the unwilling addict may meaningfully make the analytically puzzling statements that the force moving him to take the drug is a force other than his own, and that it is not of his own free will but rather against his will that this force moves him to take it.¹³⁵

How is it possible for a person to simultaneously desire and detest one and the same object? Offering a response to this question will enable us to see from a different angle the difference between intemperance and addiction. Aquinas says: “The appetite is twofold, namely the sensitive, and the intellective which is called the will, the object of

¹³⁵ Ibid., 329.

each is the good, but in different ways: for the object of the sensitive appetite is a good apprehended by sense, whereas the object of the intellective appetite or will is good under the universal aspect of good, according as it can be apprehended by the intellect” (1.80.2). We recall that intemperance is a habit substantially of the sensitive appetite. Therefore, if addiction is to be successfully assimilated to the habit of intemperance, we should find that it has primarily to do with an inordinate desire for certain sensory pleasures associated with addictive objects. But, although many addictions find their infancies in the enjoyment of sensory pleasures associated with the addictive object, advanced addiction is rarely concerned with sense pleasures.

A group of colleagues had piled into a car to drive somewhere for lunch. I was last and sat squeezed in among several others on the back seat. An acquaintance had lit a cigarette which was beginning to upset my stomach. I started to ask him to roll down the window. But he immediately opened it and threw out the cigarette. I said something like, “I’m sorry to spoil your pleasure.” He replied decisively, “It’s not pleasure, it’s smoking.”¹³⁶

Certainly drinking was no longer fun. It had long ago ceased to be fun. A few glasses of wine with a friend after work could still feel reassuring and familiar, but drinking was so need driven by the end, so visceral and compulsive, that the pleasure was almost accidental. Pleasure just wasn’t the point.¹³⁷

When we listen to accounts of addicts, it seems much more likely that the goods they pursue through the practice of their addictions are better understood as “objects of the intellective appetite or will,” goods “under the universal aspect of good.” Nowhere is this claim more indisputably evident than in the frequent testimonies of addicts who formed an addiction, not through the gateway of sensory pleasure, but in fact in spite of the manifest sensory misery occasioned by their earliest acquaintance with the addictive

¹³⁶ Wilshire, *Wild Hunger*, 145.

¹³⁷ Knapp, *Drinking*, 210.

object. Listen to the following testimonies of three addicts, which can only sound grotesquely bizarre to those who have not experienced the power of major addiction.

I don't remember how many drinks I had, and my recollections of the actual events of the rest of the night are fuzzy, but I do remember this much: When I was drinking, I was okay. I understood. Everything made sense. I could dance, talk, and enjoy being in my own skin. It was as if I had been an unfinished jigsaw puzzle with one piece missing; as soon as I took a drink, the last piece instantly and effortlessly snapped into place... The insanity of the disease had already manifested itself. I recall thinking, as I knelt retching in the stall, that this was fantastic. Life was great; I had finally found the answer—alcohol! (AA 320).

Everything changed with my first drink at the age of sixteen. All the fear, shyness, and disease evaporated with the first burning swallow of bourbon straight from the bottle during a liquor cabinet raid at a slumber party. I got drunk, blacked out, threw up, had dry heaves, and was sick to death the next day, and I knew I would do it again. For the first time, I felt part of a group without having to be perfect to get approval (AA 328).

I took to dope from the start, but many people who later become junkies will tell you that the first time, or two times, or even every time they got high, they threw up. Would you order an entrée again if you threw up the first time you ate it? Would you go out on cold nights to dubious streets to buy it? Risk arrest?¹³⁸

Loss of memory, black outs, throwing up, dry heaves, and being deathly ill are not normally considered sensory pleasures, and certainly not pleasures of taste and touch. But neither is understanding, the ability to communicate, being at ease with oneself, being unafraid, and being part of a community. These latter would seem more like objects of the intellective rather than the sensitive appetite. Serious addiction, therefore, simply does not fit the bill of intemperance, which has to do with the pursuit of sensory pleasures of taste and touch. Put simply, intemperance may be understood as a form of

¹³⁸ Ann Marlowe, *How To Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 145

hedonism, whereas addiction cannot. On the contrary, the life of the addict would seem appalling to one who was set on maximizing immediate sensory gratification.¹³⁹

It is because addiction is not concerned with sensory pleasures, but rather with intellectual goods, that the addict may form contradictory first-order desires with respect to his or her object of addiction. The contradiction is made possible by the abstract nature of intellectual goods. The alcoholic can think of a beer as good in one way, bad in another: good for drowning loneliness, good for summoning courage, and so on; bad for spiritual well-being, bad for relationship to spouse, and so on. But the intemperate drinker thinks of a beer only in terms of pleasure, which, as a concrete good, is not susceptible to contrary interpretations. The beer is a source of sensory pleasure, plain and simple, and although at the level of second-order desire the intemperate drinker may wish he or she was not the kind of person that ranked sensory pleasure over, say, the good of sober conversation, the conflict is only between first- and second-order desires and not between competing first-order desires. In fact, if a person, formerly intemperate, were to find him- or herself experiencing a conflict at the level of first-order desire, this would signal that the object of desire had taken on a significance beyond the realm of sensory pleasure. The person may be addicted.¹⁴⁰

There are other important dissimilarities between addiction and intemperance, but we might note here one more stark difference having to do with the role played by

¹³⁹ Interestingly, the experienced intemperate drinker will moderate his or her alcohol consumption, although the “mean” he or she seeks is one determined by a kind of sensory pleasure calculus rather than, as in the case of a temperate drinker, reason. This is because the effects of alcohol on mood follow a roller-coaster pattern. “Anxiety and depression occur not only with hangovers but intermittently during the drinking period itself, if the drinking is heavy and continuous,” Goodwin, *Alcoholism*, 38.

¹⁴⁰ Of course, there are sources other than addiction for this conflict at the level of first-order desires. My point is that intemperance, because it is the pursuit of concrete, sensory goods, is not such a source.

shame and *guilt* in addiction as compared to intemperance. Aquinas counts “shamefacedness” as one of the two integral “secondary virtues” or sub-virtues of the virtue of temperance, along with *honestas*, a sense of moral beauty or decorum the violation of which provokes the response of shamefacedness (2-2.143.1). Shamefacedness “is the fear of something base, namely of that which is disgraceful” (2-2.144.1). Aquinas believes that intemperance will be held in check exactly to the extent than an agent feels ashamed of his or her intemperate behavior. There is, then, an inverse relationship between shame and intemperance: the more pronounced the experience of shame, the less pronounced the temptation to intemperate action. But, in the case of addiction, we see precisely the opposite relationship between shame and the behavior that provokes it. For addicts, shame is not a check on addictive behavior but rather an impetus to it. Describing the self-defeating character of an addict’s shame and guilt, William Cope Moyers writes:

Shame and guilt grew. My self-esteem disappeared. Cocaine and beer tempered these emotions. I began feeling shame. I had no self-esteem...I turned to the only help I thought there was—beer and cocaine.¹⁴¹

Because, unlike in the case of intemperance, the pain and dissatisfaction underlying addictive behavior is greater than the pain provoked by shame and guilt, rather than counteracting the original addictive response to pain, the pain of shame and guilt merely compounds that original pain. William Pryor explains:

It is progressive because addiction feeds on itself, because the precursor pain has been subsumed into the pain of addiction, and the greater that pain, the greater the quantity of stuff needs to be taken, causing greater pain.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Moyers, *Broken*, 147.

¹⁴² Pryor, *Survival of the Coolest*, 213.

The more an addict uses, the more shame and guilt he or she feels. The original pain is compounded by pain of shame and guilt, and the addict uses more to numb him- or herself to the pain.

If addiction is not to be assimilated to the vice of intemperance, this is because addiction does not seem to be essentially concerned with those goods with which the virtue of temperance is concerned, nor is it a response to the same kind of dissatisfaction that motivates intemperate action. But the testimonies of addicts make plain that addiction is powerfully rooted in the pursuit of certain goods, goods that appear to addicts to be uniquely accessible through the practice of their addiction. Addictions are like virtues and vices in this respect, since virtues and vices are habits that empower persons to pursue consistently, successfully, and with ease various moral and intellectual goods. Put simply, virtues and vices are those habits through the practice of which human beings aim at the good life, the life of happiness, or, in Aristotle's terminology, the life of *eudaimonia*. Vices differ from virtues not in light of the subjective role they play in the lives of moral agents but simply in light of whether or not they enable a person to achieve a life of genuine *eudaimonia*. In other words, the virtuous person differs from the vicious person, not because one aims at *eudaimonia* and the other does not, but because one in fact advances into the life of *eudaimonia* and the other does not. As Aquinas helpfully puts it, vicious persons are those who "turn from that in which their last end really consists: but they do not turn away from the intention of the last end, which intention they mistakenly seek in other things" (1-2.1.7). Wherever we have habits of passion and action that connect with an agent's intention of the good life for

human beings, therefore, we are in the realm of the habits of virtue and vice. And, as the excerpts above make patently clear, addictions are the locus of just such a connection. It therefore behooves us, as we try to articulate the type of habit (and habit group) that addiction is, to inquire more carefully into the connection between habits of virtue and the good life for human beings.

Aristotle on Habit and Happiness

According to Aristotle, “human good turns out to be an activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete” (1098a17-19). Again, Aristotle says that “happiness [*eudaimonia*]¹⁴³ is an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue” (1102a5-6). Given these claims, one would expect to learn from the *Nicomachean Ethics* just what this “perfect” and “best and most complete” virtue is, but an incontrovertible answer is not forthcoming.

The issue of Aristotle’s answer to this question has been one of the most prominent in Aristotle scholarship. The debate takes off from the fact that Aristotle seems to assert two quite different answers to the question, answers that seem to be mutually contradictory. For most of the *Ethics*, Aristotle seems to be developing an account according to which the good life for human beings has to do with good action—i.e., the right practice of practical reasoning—but in Book 10 purely contemplative activity is

¹⁴³ Much has been written on how *eudaimonia* should be translated. Ross’s translation, “happiness,” is probably not the best because it could be associated with a kind of “whatever makes you happy” mentality, which was certainly not Aristotle’s view. Aristotle thought you might be enjoying yourself and yet failing to grow in *eudaimonia*. It is probably better translated by “the worthwhile life,” “the life of flourishing,” “the best possible life,” etc., but I use these as well as “happiness” interchangeably.

said to constitute the pinnacle of *eudaimonia*. Although it is not clear from Book 10 that, more than being simply the crowning achievement of a life of *eudaimonia*, the life of contemplation exhausts the fullness of *eudaimonia*, a number of scholars have suggested that just such a claim is being made in a lesser known passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*, in which, it is claimed, Aristotle says that all other virtue is merely instrumental to and in no way constitutive of the life of *eudaimonia*.

Therefore whatever mode of choosing and of acquiring things good by nature—whether goods of body or wealth or friends or the other goods—will best promote the contemplation of God, that is the best mode, and that standard is the finest; and any mode of choice and acquisition that either through deficiency or excess hinders us from serving and from contemplating God—that is a bad one. This is how it is for the soul, and this is the soul’s best standard—to be as far as possible unconscious of the irrational part of the soul, as such.¹⁴⁴

On the other hand, and in seeming antithesis to this passage, Aristotle elsewhere speaks as though the moral virtues, with which he is so deeply concerned throughout the first nine books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, are partially constitutive of, and not *merely* instrumental to, the life of *eudaimonia*.

Now such a thing happiness [*eudaimonia*], above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else, but honour, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose them), but we choose them

¹⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, in *Aristotle: Athenian Constitution, Eudemian Ethics, Virtues and Vices* (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1980), 1249b17-14. J.L. Ackrill, in “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty, 30, rightly notes that in this passage, Aristotle is not addressing himself to the question of what makes virtues and actions good but rather by what standard we decide what “things” are good. The passage is, according to Ackrill, therefore not in contradiction with what he takes to be Aristotle’s considered position that *both theoria* and the practice of the moral virtues are intrinsically good, ends in themselves. It seems to me, then, that this passage from the *Eudemian Ethics* is best understood as an elaboration of Aristotle’s claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that “he is happy who is active in accordance with complete virtue and is sufficiently equipped with external goods” (1101a14-16). The passage from the *Eudemian Ethics* is about how we determine the “sufficiency” of external goods and not about how we determine whether and how some virtue is a component of “complete virtue.”

also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy (1097a37-1097b5).

J.L. Ackrill contends that this passage contradicts the standard reading of the passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*. “That the primary ingredients of *eudaimonia* are for the sake of *eudaimonia* is not incompatible with there being ends in themselves; for *eudaimonia* is constituted by activities that are ends in themselves.”¹⁴⁵ Not only are the moral virtues here spoken of as both goods in themselves and constitutive of happiness, but the life of contemplation, *theoria*, is not even mentioned! It is not obvious to me that the two passages contradict, but scholars tend to read the first passage as implying that the goods pursued by those “modes of choosing” that are most instrumental to the practice of *theoria* are thereby *merely* instrumental goods. In any event, we do seem to have in these two passages two quite different pictures of what constitutes the good life for human beings. The first has been termed a “dominant view,” according to which there is a monolithic end—*theoria*—an end consisting of just one type of activity, and it is the practice of this one activity that is constitutive of the life of *eudaimonia*. The second has been called an “inclusive view,” according to which there are not one but several activities—practice of the moral virtues as well as *theoria*—that are constitutive of the life of *eudaimonia*.¹⁴⁶

Whatever we are to make of this debate, we can distill from it two important questions which, although they are inextricably interrelated, can be treated separately. The first question: If, as J.L. Ackrill contends, the moral virtues are in some way

¹⁴⁵ Ackrill, “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” 19.

¹⁴⁶ See Ackrill, “Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*,” 17, for this characterization of the competing positions. As Ackrill acknowledges, each of these “views” is susceptible to considerable qualification and nuance.

constitutive of the life of *eudaimonia*, how are they to be internally ordered? This question will drive the remainder of the present chapter. The second question: If *theoria* is a component of the life of *eudaimonia*, how is this more transcendent aspect of the good life to be integrated with the practical exercise of the moral virtues? This question will be addressed in Chapter V.

If the moral virtues are in some way constitutive of the life of *eudaimonia*, how are they to be internally ordered? Although this question is intensified by the further question of how the moral virtues are to be ordered toward and integrated with the life of *theoria*, the question stands on its own apart from the introduction of the problem of *theoria*. In fact, modern commentators who are not particularly interested in the detached, cerebral existence that they see in Aristotle's account of the life of contemplation claim that, even without the further complications introduced by the recommendation of *theoria*, Aristotle fails to address the basic question of how the virtues are to be internally ordered in the practical pursuit of *eudaimonia*.

There seem to be two ways in which this failure can be viewed. On the one hand, some modern commentators think that, since he recommends *the* life of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle owes us a principle or rule according to which we could rank various candidates for the good life and by which we could determine in any given situation which of the moral virtues is to have precedence over the others. Such a principle or rule would be needed, the critique runs, to enable us to decide, e.g., which between the life of the statesmen and the life of the philosopher, both vocations that Aristotle commends in Book 10, is really *the* supremely good life for a human being. On the

other hand, some modern commentators locate Aristotle's error, not in his failure to provide a principle or rule by which we could discover *the* good life for human beings, but rather in his seemingly naïve supposition that there could even *be* such a thing as *the* supreme good. Thus, for instance, John Rawls argues that "human good is heterogeneous because the aims of the self are heterogeneous," and that therefore the idea that our lives should be ordered with reference to something called *the* good is a fiction.¹⁴⁷

Alasdair MacIntyre, however, suspects that both of these criticisms tell us more about the state of modern moral philosophy than about any oversight or confusion on the part of Aristotle. MacIntyre provides a different explanation of Aristotle's apparent omission of any explicit account of how the moral virtues should be internally ordered. According to MacIntyre, Aristotle does not provide an explicit answer to the question of the appropriate ordering of goods and virtues within a scheme of life, not because he was at a loss about how to do so, but simply because he was operating in a context in which the right ordering of goods and virtues was already assumed and displayed, namely the Greek *polis*. MacIntyre suggests that Aristotle does not respond to the question of what principle or rule should order the virtues because the question itself is a modern question and one that would have seemed strange to Aristotle. The question assumes that Aristotle writes from a neutral position, confronting a wide array of ways of life from a standpoint external to them all. Given this assumption, Aristotle appears to suffer from the same problem that confronts those who write modern moral philosophy, namely the

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 337.

apparent absence of any uniquely rational way of ordering goods within a scheme of life. But, MacIntyre argues, such a neutral position would have seemed absurd to Aristotle, because Aristotle is operating in a social context in which the variety of social roles and ways of life available to an agent are quite circumscribed. The political life of the Greek city-state is tightly ordered around a shared conception of what such a political community must achieve in order to make accessible to its citizens the goods constitutive of a worthwhile way of life. And the *polis* is organized in such a way that these goods and the right ordering of them can be attained and achieved by excellence within a number of specific social roles and ways of life. Given a person's age, social class, educational background, and such, there is widespread and collective agreement on the social role that a person should be pursuing or fulfilling, whether that be the life of artisan, military serviceman, statesman, or philosopher. The citizens can recognize failure or success both at the level of political arrangement and at the level of individual endeavor because they share a substantive conception of what sorts of practices and relationships are necessarily constitutive of such a worthwhile life. The ethical investigations that Aristotle carries out in the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian* ethics take as their starting point this shared conception, attempting not to establish from scratch a standard or principle of ordering that could radically question and reform this shared conception, but rather seeking to unearth and state the philosophical assumptions about the nature of the good and the life suitable to human beings that this shared conception already concretely embodies. Thus, for instance, when Aristotle frequently poses the question in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "What do we say on such a topic?" he is not

invoking the royal we as a polite form of rhetoric, as in all likelihood it can only be invoked in this dissertation. Rather, Aristotle asks, “What do *we* say?” instead of “What do *I* say?” because he

takes himself not to be inventing an account of the virtues, but to be articulating an account that is implicit in the thought, utterance and action of an educated Athenian. He seeks to be the rational voice of the best citizens of the best city-state; for he holds that the city-state is the unique political form in which alone the virtues of human life can be genuinely and fully exhibited. Thus a philosophical theory of the virtues is a theory whose subject-matter is that pre-philosophical theory already implicit in and presupposed by the best contemporary practice of the virtues.¹⁴⁸

If, as MacIntyre contends, one of the characteristics of modernity is the absence of any necessary social context in which human beings already find themselves partaking of a shared way of life and a set of social roles configured around a relatively shared account of the life of *eudaimonia*, then the question of the right ordering of the activities and other goods of life is a question that becomes explicit and intensified mainly in the modern context. Just to the extent that modern persons see themselves as moral agents confronting a variety of mutually exclusive yet incommensurable ways of life, we should expect the crisis of right ordering of the good life to become more urgent and sharpened. We should expect, that is, that modern persons will be strongly drawn to the sorts of habits that impose an order on their own lives and enable them to achieve a certain ranking of the goods of their lives.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 147.

¹⁴⁹ If, as I will argue, the lure of addiction increases to the extent that we lack other intelligible means of ordering our lives, then we should expect addictions to gather around cultures or sub-cultures in which there is the greatest discrepancy between traditional ways of conceiving and ordering life and the contemporary possibilities open to those cultures or sub-cultures. Thus, we should not be surprised to find that, in America, e.g., addiction is disproportionately prevalent on Indian reservations where few of the

Modern Addiction

Let us now direct the focus of this inquiry into the connection between the virtues and the life of *eudaimonia* back onto the matter of addiction. The thesis that I would like to defend is that addiction can be made more intelligible against the backdrop provided by this exploration of the relationship between the good life and the virtues in Aristotle and of the strangeness of his account from the modern point of view. Gerald May, in his fine book, *Addiction and Grace*, makes the bold claim that “major addiction is the sacred disease of our time.”¹⁵⁰ Excepting the language of “disease,” and putting off until the next chapter the “sacred” dimension of addiction, I think May is profoundly right, although he arrives at his conclusion on very different grounds than those that I am working from. Major addiction, I would say, is the definitive habit of our time.

What is the relationship between addiction and “the modern”? I want to suggest that addiction in its contemporary guise is the foment of a sort of perfect storm in which the gale forces of modernity collide with the abiding and perennial flow—though not without its peculiarly “modern” or “post-Christian” current—of the human quest for transcendence. In the remainder of this chapter, I unpack the implications of the first element of the perfect storm by showing the radical distance between the context for Aristotle’s inquiry into the good life, namely the *polis*, and the contemporary climate of moral inquiry, offering throughout that addiction supplies a type of response to the dizzying lack of any such similar context. The basic argument, which will be all-too-

traditional modes of understanding and ordering the moral life remain and the possibilities that are on offer are in total discontinuity from these traditional ways. See Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁰ *Addiction and Grace*, viii.

brief, is an attempt to articulate the connection between certain interrelated features of modern life—arbitrariness, boredom, fragmentation, and loneliness—and the prevalence of major addiction in modern life. Then, in Chapter V, I explore the impact of the second element of the perfect storm by showing how addiction acts as a sort of analogue to the Thomistic virtue of charity because it makes possible an integration of the practical with the transcendent in human life, an integration that Aristotle fails to achieve. The two arguments are meant to reinforce one another, for it seems to me that addiction has both historically relative and more universal aspects, neither of which taken alone are sufficient to the phenomenon in all its complexity and potency. Both lines of engagement are attempts to display the ways in which and the force with which addiction recommends itself to the cogitative estimation of human persons.

Whatever contemporary Western society may be, it is not the Greek *polis*. Some critics of modernity bemoan this fact, and champions celebrate it, but on this point, at least, both are agreed. How to assess “the modern” is a problem of monumental complexity, and, just as there is not one “Enlightenment,” neither is there one “modernity.” We may nevertheless essay a generalization about modern life upon which there is broad unanimity,¹⁵¹ whether the movement from the ancient to the modern is

¹⁵¹ This is as good a place as any to insert a proviso about my argument in this chapter. This is not a dissertation in history, and, although I have done my best to state what I take to be important differences between the ancient and modern context, it is inevitable that my account is greatly simplified. I am aware, e.g. that the ancient context was *in practice* probably not as harmonious as Aristotle theorized (and he seemed aware of this, too, as I mention in the Conclusion) and that the modern context *in practice* is probably not as fragmented as some of its critics suggest (and as some of its champions, like Rawls, celebrate). See Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) for an excellent effort to contest the polarization that characterizes the discussion of the “virtue tradition” and “liberalism.” Nevertheless, an Athenian reading Aristotle would have found him familiar even if ideal, just as Rawls seems to be describing more or less “our world.” There is a radical difference between the two, and I think we have much to learn by stating the differences in stark terms.

interpreted as an advance or a decline. Whereas the Greek *polis* was organized around a shared vision of the good life for human beings and a relatively rigid and hierarchical set of social roles into which persons were born or trained, modern culture is characterized by the proliferation of visions of the good life for human beings and a consequent landscape in which human persons find themselves arbitrarily free to “realize” themselves in pursuit of one or several of an assortment of disparate “ways of life.” And, therefore, whereas the Greek *polis* was premised on the priority of the common good, modern culture is premised on the priority of the individual good.

In Aristotelian practical reasoning it is the individual *qua* citizen who reasons; in Thomistic practical reasoning it is the individual *qua* enquirer into his or her good¹⁵² and the good of his or her community...but in the practical reasoning of liberal modernity it is the individual *qua* individual who reasons.¹⁵³

The shift that MacIntyre alleges is not the effect of a sort of “top-down” philosophical decision to prioritize the individual over the communal. It is not as though someone suddenly decided that the individual should be determinative of the community rather than the other way around. Rather, the shift is the product of the disintegration over several centuries of any widespread certainty about the nature of human beings and their place in the world. The cast of characters in this historical drama is large, and the attempt to name one protagonist (or antagonist, depending on one’s assessment) probably misguided. Columbus, Luther, Copernicus, Descartes, and Kant are certainly among the major players. But the progression (or regression, again, depending on one’s assessment) is not strictly or even primarily an intellectual one. Throughout Europe and,

¹⁵² We might add, specifically, his or her supernatural good as taught by the Church.

¹⁵³ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 339.

later, in America, doubt took hold and festered at every level of society. What was in doubt, among other things, was the ultimate defensibility of any claim about the *telos* of human existence. The diminishment of widespread agreement on the matter was at first decried and later celebrated, but what *was* quite clear was that the meaning of the common good was being greatly attenuated. The decline of the community is correlative with the decline of what may be held in common, and so modern individualism is merely what comes in the wake of this cultural drama. Undoubtedly, this development has brought with it significant possibilities, but it is also the case that it has made fertile ground for the realization and amplification of habits of addiction.

In her philosophically insightful addiction memoir, *How to Stop Time*, Ann Marlowe makes this intriguing claim about addiction to heroin.

The biggest, darkest secret about heroin is that it isn't that wonderful: it's a substance some of us agree to pursue as though it were wonderful, because it's easier to do that than to figure out what is worth pursuing. Heroin is a stand-in, a stop-gap, a mask, for what we believe is missing. Like the "objects" seen by Plato's man in a cave, dope is the shadow cast by cultural movements we can't see directly.¹⁵⁴

It is precisely these cultural movements, so integral to who we are that we are unable to see them directly, that I am gesturing toward with the clumsy label of "modernity." It seems to me that Marlowe does not put the point quite as strongly as she could. For it is not merely that modern people find it difficult to "figure out what is worth pursuing." Rather, modern people are plagued by an axiomatic skepticism as to whether such a thing could ever be "figured out" at all, regardless of the effort expended. It is not that we cannot recognize viable ways of life; rather, we recognize a proliferating and

¹⁵⁴ *How to Stop Time*, 155.

mutually incompatible number of such options alongside the conviction that there are no rational grounds for choice among them. With the failure of the Enlightenment project to establish a purely rational and therefore universally accessible and defensible basis for determining the normative structure of human life, modern people inherit fragments of past traditions' conceptions of the *telos* of human life without possessing an established way of deciding between these various visions. Ours, then, is a culture in which the decision to pursue one way of life at the expense of others can only be understood as an arbitrary choice, an existential assertion of the self in the absence of any ultimate rationale. Modern persons no longer know what to do because they know all too well how many things they *could* do. One astute addict perceived a connection between his addiction and the threat of modern indecision:

I realized suddenly that I had two diseases—the disease of addiction and the disease of Too Many Options... What if I made the wrong choice?... I had always been afraid to make the wrong choice. I'd look at the two forks in the road and stand there for the longest time, worrying that one or both would lead me down the wrong path. Alcohol and cocaine helped me overcome the anxiety of indecision and the courage to move forward, even if it meant rushing headlong down a crooked path and right over a cliff.¹⁵⁵

According to Sean Desmond Healy, modern people, because of the tyranny of possibility, “lack a sense of purpose and drift around in a state of psychic doldrums waiting for a wind to come up to give them propulsion toward a destination that they themselves cannot identify.”¹⁵⁶ Healy contends that there is no such wind and that, therefore, modern persons are determined, like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's

¹⁵⁵ Moyers, *Broken*, 184-185.

¹⁵⁶ *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, 74.

Waiting for Godot,¹⁵⁷ to wait interminably, but this is not altogether so. Addiction is such a propelling wind, though it is more like a hurricane. Addictive objects stand in for a rationally determinable *telos* because they are able to demand by other means—by means of addiction—a kind of absolute allegiance to a way of life that moderns cannot attain through the exercise of rational inquiry into the best life for human persons.

No one has charted the paralyzing loss of teleology that is endemic to modernity more proficiently and astutely than Alasdair MacIntyre, who sees in Soren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* the fullest expression of the modern dilemma. What *Either/Or* isolated as the distinctively modern point of view was that which envisioned moral and political debate in terms of a conflict between mutually incompatible and incommensurable visions of the life most worthy of pursuit. In *Either/Or*, the conflict is between the life of the aesthete and the life of ethical commitment, but the variety of possible standpoints is by no means limited to these two. What becomes characteristic of all such standpoints in Kierkegaard's modern estimation is the absence of any common criterion that could arbitrate definitively between various contenders for the worthwhile life. Thus, for Kierkegaard, choice is dislodged from the order of objective rationality and inserted into the order of subjective self-assertion. Given a person's age, social class, educational background, and so on, we still know nothing that could help determine for the agent the life that he or she should be pursuing. Whatever form of life is finally pursued cannot be made intelligible as rational choice, but only as a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith."

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954).

If MacIntyre is right, then it is particularly interesting that Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin have turned to the person and work of Soren Kierkegaard for insight into the nature of contemporary addiction. Dreyfus and Rubin paint the distinction between ancient and modern culture as one between non-nihilistic and nihilistic cultures, and they claim that, “for Kierkegaard, the difference between a nihilistic and a non-nihilistic culture is that in a nihilistic culture there are no distinctions between what is important and what is unimportant but in a non-nihilistic culture there are.”¹⁵⁸ The arbitrariness of every distinction between what is and is not important implies the ultimate breakdown of every distinction, rendering any commitment or decision a kind of unconditioned leap. Dreyfus and Rubin contend that the power of addiction lies precisely in its ability to wrest from an agent a sort of absolute devotion in the face of modern indecision.

Identifying oneself as an addict may well be an attempt to obtain the meaning once, but no longer, provided by the authentic commitments made possible by a traditional culture... When someone says, ‘My name is Joe and I am an alcoholic,’ he is acknowledging an identity—that of an addict... We believe that the reason that *addiction* has become the preferred mode of psychological and social understanding for so many people in our culture is that it removes their identity from the realm of arbitrary choice and establishes it as an incontrovertible given... Addictions have become substitutes for commitments in our culture.¹⁵⁹

As heroin addict William Pryor noticed, “Somehow being an addict answered my needs, my pain, *my lack of definition*.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin, “Kierkegaard on the Nihilism of the Present Age: The Case of Commitment as Addiction,” *Synthese* 98 (1994): 9. What Dreyfus and Rubin fail to mention, strangely, is Kierkegaard’s own role in the historical development of “nihilistic cultures.” I am not convinced there are genuinely nihilistic cultures, but cynical cultures there are, and these are characterized by the descriptions offered by Kierkegaard.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶⁰ *Survival of the Coolest*, 3, my emphasis.

This analysis may also explain why any authentic commitment in modern, “nihilistic” society looks suspiciously like an addiction. Precisely because we doubt that anyone could have grounds sufficiently rationally compelling to justify an unwavering commitment to a project or way of life, we can only interpret such commitments as disguised addictions. Since reason cannot compel, addiction is left as the best explanation. As Eve Sedgwick notes,

Like exercise, the other activities newly pathologized under the searching rays of this new addiction attribution are the very ones that late capitalism presents *as* the ultimate emblems of control, personal discretion, freedom itself: beyond the finding of a custom-made telos in work (“workaholism”) there is the telos of making ostentatiously discretionary consumer choices (“shopaholism”); of enjoying sexual variety (“being sexually compulsive”); or even of being in a sustained relationship (“codependency” or “relationship addiction”). As each assertion of *will* has made voluntariness itself appear problematical in a new area, the assertion of will itself has come to appear addictive.¹⁶¹

As Sedgwick’s analysis contends, ours is a contradictory culture in which the deep ambiguity about the possibility of justified commitment is matched in intensity only by the ideologies of opportunity, self-realization, and self-control. As one alcoholic recalls, “the ambition to succeed was instilled in me by my Scandinavian parents who came to this country where opportunities were so great. ‘Keep busy; always have something constructive to do’” (AA 348). Addiction names the point of impact between these contradictory impulses since it facilitates a single-minded pursuit of fulfillment in the absence of a rationale. Addiction, like Existentialism,¹⁶² the philosophical impulse

¹⁶¹ Eve Sedgwick, “Epidemics of the Will,” in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 132-133.

¹⁶² Fyodor Dostoyevsky, also identified as a precursor to the Existentialist movement, depicts brilliantly the paralysis that confronts modern persons in his novel, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York: Penguin, 1980). “Obviously, in order to act, one must be fully satisfied and free of all misgivings beforehand. But take me: how can I ever be sure? Where will I find the primary reason

bequeathed by Kierkegaard, is produced by a culture in which we are at one and the same time told to “Be all that you can be,” and to “Have it your way.” The collision of an ethos of self-realization with the philosophy of freedom as arbitrary fiat of will results in the wreck that is modern addiction.

Sedgwick contends that this problematic is specific to “late capitalism,” which raises another obvious difference between the ethos of “modernity” and that of the Greek *polis*, namely the encroachment of capitalist economics into every aspect of modern life. Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that the virtue of temperance in particular is threatened by this development.¹⁶³ In modern capitalist society, there is little conception of a substantive set of goods or virtues that are necessary constituents of a worthwhile life, and therefore the means to such a life can only be understood instrumentally, with capital mediating as the great arbiter of “value.” Thus, insofar as the intemperate behavior of some is productive of such “value,” in the form of capital, for others, it is useful to these others that persons should be intemperate. Their own acquisitiveness, justified in terms of the “value” taken to be instrumental to any worthwhile way of life, makes the vice of intemperance in others amenable to their purposes. It no longer makes sense, as MacIntyre thinks it would have in the *polis*, to question whether the vices of other citizens corrupt and damage the common good that is a necessary prerequisite for attainment, on the part of any individual, of the good life.

for action, the justification for it? Where am I to look for it?...You know, ladies and gentlemen, probably the only reason why I think I’m an intelligent man is that in all of my life I’ve never managed to start or finish anything,” pp. 103-104.

¹⁶³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 88.

It does seem to me that addiction can be partially understood as a function of late capitalism, but not in the direct way in which intemperance might be. There are two kinds of response to the “waiting” for a compelling purpose that, we recall, Healy (and Beckett) claimed to be characteristic of modern culture. I have already claimed that addiction is one kind of response. But the dominant response of our culture is simply to ignore the crisis by means of distraction. Consumerism is an expression of a wish to be distracted from the terrifying prospect that we don’t know who we are or what we’re for. The pursuit of constant titillation that is the pulse of consumerism is the enthronement of the immediate over the teleological. Intemperance is one form of such distraction from the teleological, the attempt to make do with contingent sensory gratification in the absence of necessary purpose. But whereas intemperance can be understood as the expression of a certain kind of consumerist pursuit of immediate pleasure, addiction consists of a backlash against the notion of a self who consumes by arbitrary fiat of the will whatever seems to provide immediate gratification. Addiction is a sort of rejection of consumerism’s enthronement of the immediate over the teleological, of the contingent over the necessary.

It is certainly true that many addictions find their *beginnings* in the pursuit of immediate gratification and in the desire to be distracted from a crisis of meaning. But addiction is addicting rather than merely distracting exactly because it provides the kind of propelling and purposive force the absence of which was the cause of the original pursuit of distraction. Intemperate people consume to distract themselves from a lack of purpose, but addicts find purpose at precisely the moment in which they recognize that,

rather than consuming their objects of choice, they are in fact consumed by those objects. Addiction provides what consumers do not believe exists: necessity.

Intemperance is to addiction what the immediate is to the teleological, what contingency is to necessity. Major addiction is, therefore, both a response to the absence of teleology in modern culture and a kind of embodied critique of the late capitalist consumerism that is both an expression of and a condition of this absence.

We have been speaking of the need for distraction from a crisis of meaning. But to put the modern predicament in terms of a crisis of meaning, though true as a matter of fact, might lend the wrong impression that modern persons are vigilant in their expectations for a resolution of the crisis. But that is not necessarily the case. For modern persons are not only plagued by the absence of a teleology, but also by the belief that a resolution to the crisis is not forthcoming since the only imaginable sources of such a resolution—Aquinas's Faith, Kant's Reason, Hegel's History—are the very things that modernity has called into irremediable doubt. Modern persons, therefore, are not so much desperate as bored.

Ironically, with the recession of any widely held conception of the common good and the consequent transformation of the social sphere into an arena for individual projects of enjoyment and achievement, boredom ensued. It was Kierkegaard, too, who remarked that the root of what ails modern society is boredom.

Boredom is the root of all evil. Strange that boredom, in itself so staid and stolid, should have such power to set in motion. The influence it exerts is altogether magical, except that it is not the influence of attraction, but of repulsion... What

wonder, then, that the world goes from bad to worse, and that its evils increase more and more, as boredom increases, and boredom is the root of all evil.¹⁶⁴

Lest it be supposed that boredom is a uniquely modern problem, we should remember that the early Christian Church Father, Origen, speculated that boredom caused the Fall. But there is something specific to modern boredom. The material payoff of capitalism, of course, has meant that many modern people are sufficiently distanced from the mere necessities of survival that they have the problem of “spare time.” Boredom, in this sense of not knowing how to occupy spare time, is the privilege of the bourgeoisie, who, because their energies are not expended on staying alive, must confront what to do with their time. As Aristotle remarked, “the noble employment of leisure is the highest aim which a man can pursue.”¹⁶⁵ It is therefore of interest that Rozanne Faulkner characterizes addiction as a “leisure malfunction,” and proposes that training in how to spend leisure time well is fundamental to the process of recovery.¹⁶⁶

But, although capitalism has perhaps produced a larger class of people with the “problem” of leisure time than any other social arrangement, the problem of leisure time is not unique to the modern context, as is clear from Aristotle’s concern with how it should be well spent. The problem seems to run deeper, then, than the mere fact that modern people have spare time. The problem, in fact, is that the idea that one should spend one’s leisure time in a “noble” way is itself odd to modern people. Modern

¹⁶⁴ Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. David F. Swensen, Lillian Marvin Swensen, and Walter Lowrie, in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 22. Martin Heidegger has contended that boredom is the predominate mode of modern Being-in-the-world. See *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Manheim (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1961). For a literary analysis of the history of boredom, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: A Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁵ *Politics* 8.3

¹⁶⁶ Faulkner’s work is cited and described in Wilshire, *Wild Hunger*, 114.

bourgeois persons have leisure, yet they lack the ability to determine what would count for the noble employment of it, since they lack the ability to determine the kind of people they should be and the kind of lives they should lead. Thus, leisure time is thought to be a time for hobbies or, more tellingly, “diversions.” How strange, then, to the modern ear that Aristotle answers his own question, “What ought we to do when at leisure?” with the response: “Clearly we ought not be amusing ourselves, for then amusement would be the end of life.”¹⁶⁷ For Aristotle, we only know how to spend our leisure time if we know what our lives are for and the end to which our lives are to be directed. Because modern persons lack such a conception of what their lives are for, their leisurely pursuits can only be efforts that may distract from the crisis occasioned by such a lack. That is to say, modern leisure can only instantiate rather than assuage the deep boredom of modern existence. It is for this reason that I am wary of Faulkner’s suggestion that people get addicted because they don’t have sufficient hobbies. One alcoholic, who offers a self-description in order to confound those who think that addiction only occurs on skid row, describes himself as “father, husband, taxpayer, home owner...clubman, athlete, artist, musician, author, editor, aircraft pilot, and world traveler.” He seems to have no shortage of interesting hobbies, socially acceptable ways to fill his leisure time. But, he recounts, “There would be times when the life of respectability and achievement seemed insufferably dull—I had to break out” (AA 382).

¹⁶⁷ *Politics*, 1337b35-36.

This deep boredom—what Healy calls “hyperboredom”¹⁶⁸—is uniquely modern. It is quite other than the boredom of earlier ages, which was characterized, according to Healy, by a disenchantment with one’s particular place in the social schema. This “standard” boredom is seen as remediable to the extent that society as a whole is still believed to carry within itself the resources for constructing a worthwhile and meaningful life. But in the case of modern “hyperboredom,” society itself is “under indictment for failing to provide meaning.”¹⁶⁹

The mental state of the sick alcoholic is beyond description. I had no resentments against individuals—the whole world was all wrong. My thoughts went round and round with, What’s it all about anyhow? People have wars and kill each other; they struggle and cut each other’s throats for success, and what does anyone get out of it? Haven’t I been successful, haven’t I accomplished extraordinary things in business? What do I get out of it? Everything’s all wrong and the hell with it. For the last two years of my drinking, I prayed during every drunk that I wouldn’t wake up again (AA 225).

The absence of every shared or ultimately justifiable *telos* makes modern persons uniquely bored. Because one can do anything, there is nothing to do. It is not only, as in the case of standard boredom, that a particular way of life seems pointless; the search itself seems pointless, and therefore boring. “Hyperboredom” names the paralysis effected by modernity’s inability to justify one commitment over against others.

According to William Burroughs, “You become a narcotics addict because you do not have strong motivation in any other direction. Junk wins by default. I tried it as a matter of curiosity.”¹⁷⁰ But this does not quite get to the heart of the matter, for one could read Burroughs to be saying that “junk” is one among many possible “diversions”

¹⁶⁸ *Boredom, Self, and Culture*, ch. 3.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷⁰ *Junky*, xv.

that could have won “by default,” as though some people who are bored take up golf and others take up “junk.” There is a *reason* that junk wins by default, and it is the reason that major addiction is the definitive habit of our time. Addictions provide strong motivation in a definite direction in a way that is otherwise inaccessible to the modern person who can find no final criterion to justify activity in a definite direction and for whom any such movement can only be a provisional and conditional sally. Unless, that is, it is a movement that contains within itself its own propulsive impetus and energy—unless it is an addiction. Burroughs gets much closer to the heart of the matter when he says, contrary to what we are lead to believe about addiction, “the point of junk to a user is that it forms the habit.”¹⁷¹ If there is a uniquely modern disease, it is the dis-ease of modern boredom, for which addiction is one of the rare proven antidotes.¹⁷²

Modern boredom is not merely a bourgeois privilege. What is unique to the bourgeois is the way in which modern boredom is pressed upon it in the crisis of leisure time. But modern boredom presses on those who are not so “burdened” with leisure time as well.¹⁷³ These, too, live their lives under modernity’s shadow, and, although

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷² There is a well-known line in the Big Book that reads, “Our liquor was but a symptom” (AA 64). It comes in the context of a discussion of the Third Step, and, although the Big Book is not clear what exactly the liquor is a symptom *of*, the standard interpretation is that alcoholism is a symptom of some more fundamental flaw. I do not think that is necessarily the case. But I do think addiction is “but a symptom” of this more fundamental dis-ease characteristic of, although not exclusive to, modern existence.

¹⁷³ One interesting hypocrisy of contemporary society is the tendency to reserve the disease concept of addiction for wealthy addicts and to persist in thinking of poor addicts as morally depraved. “Wealthy addicts are considered sick while poor ones are seen as vicious,” Gregg Franzwa, “Aristotle and the Language of Addiction,” in *The Languages of Addiction*, edd. Jane Liliensfeld and Jeffrey Oxford (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 25. Donald Goodwin makes a related point when he contends: “There is another reason why Prohibition is unpopular: it is unfair. The rich have never been denied alcohol: Prohibition invariably discriminates against the poor. It also discriminates against minorities. This partly explains the chaotic, crazy quilt pattern of drinking laws in the USA. It is no accident that Mississippi and Oklahoma were the last of the dry states, and in most of the south, restrictive and sometimes bizarre laws

their lives are filled with the daily grind of survival, these struggles are accompanied by the constant question, what is it all for? As portrayed in Charlie Chaplin's classic film, *Modern Times*, modern working-persons find themselves caught up in vast institutions and bureaucracies that use them like cogs in a machine. From the factory employee to the middle manager, modern workers are placed in roles that demand that they perform "act-fragments,"¹⁷⁴ insofar as the agent often has no conception of what the ultimate outcomes of his or her act might be, let alone any investment in the worth or meaning of those outcomes. As John Dewey saw, "We live in a world in which there is an immense amount of organization, but it is an external organization, not one of the ordering of a growing experience, one that involves...the whole of the live creature, toward a fulfilling conclusion."¹⁷⁵ The modern worker is busy, but lacks purpose.

As the lives of modern persons are increasingly fragmented by the partitioning off of work from leisure, of the public from the private, of the religious from the secular, of the young from the old, of the local from the national, and so on, it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine how the activities and commitments of an individual life can amount to an ordered whole. For modern persons who are "spread thin" by their disparate and disconnected responsibilities, there is a deep desire for some unifying principle—as evidenced by modern philosophy's criticism of Aristotle—that can supply integrity in the place of compartmentalization. If the modern person, and in particular the modern working-person, is "the kind of person to whom it appears normal that a variety of goods

still exist. These blossomed in the post-Civil War period out of the desire of southern whites to deny alcohol to their former slaves," *Alcoholism*, 153.

¹⁷⁴ Wilshire, *Wild Hunger*, 13.

¹⁷⁵ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1981), 81.

should be pursued, each appropriate to its own sphere, with no overall good supplying any overall unity to life,”¹⁷⁶ the modern addict is a person for whom such heterogeneous goods can only appear burdensome because devoid of any connective thread. In the absence of such a thread, addiction tempts, offering a release from the welter of responsibilities that lack a unifying rationale. It is not at its heart a release sought out of sloth, however, but out of discontent. Thus, when Bruce Wilshire contends that addicts are people who “demand the rewards without doing the work,”¹⁷⁷ there is a sense in which he puts the matter backwards. It is true that addiction in many ways stunts emotional growth, and that therefore addicts in recovery must learn again or for the first time the discipline required to weather the inevitable challenges that every life, whether ancient or modern, must face. But modern addiction is only derivatively a demand for rewards without work, for it is rooted more fundamentally in the suspicion that modern work is without rewards.

If some modern persons suffer because they cannot find good reasons to become entangled in the business of life, others suffer from a kind of entanglement that is nevertheless rootless and without meaning. Addiction provides a response to both kinds of suffering. Addiction provides a response to the underwhelming life of boredom that plagues the bourgeois in its leisure time by making one thing *matter*. And addiction provides a response to the overwhelming life of boredom that plagues the working class with fragmented and compartmentalized striving by making *one thing* matter. For those who are bored with nothing to do, addiction stimulates by entangling and consuming; for

¹⁷⁶ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? What Rationality?*, 337.

¹⁷⁷ *Wild Hunger*, 234.

those who are bored with too much to do, addiction disburdens by simplifying and clarifying.

We mention one final connection between modern life and modern addiction, namely loneliness. The alienation and loneliness endemic to modern individualism has been theorized and documented by intellectuals and social critics in every field of inquiry imaginable. One thinks here of the devastating analyses of the young Karl Marx in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*,¹⁷⁸ or, more recently and popularly, of the sociological inquiry into American loneliness carried out in David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*.¹⁷⁹ Charles Taylor contends that modern loneliness is the product of "industrialization, the break-up of earlier primary communities, the separation of work from home life, and the growth of a capitalist, mobile, large-scale, bureaucratic world, which largely deserves the epithet 'heartless.'"¹⁸⁰

Whatever the complex origin of modern loneliness, one thing is clear: lonely people make good addicts. As *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* so simply puts it,

Almost without exception, alcoholics are tortured by loneliness. Even before our drinking got bad and people began to cut us off, nearly all of us suffered the feeling that we didn't quite belong. Either we were shy, and dared not draw near others, or we were apt to be noisy good fellows craving attention and companionship, but never getting it—at least to our way of thinking. There was always that mysterious barrier we could neither surmount nor understand. It was as if we were actors on a stage, suddenly realizing that we did not know a single line of our parts. That's one reason we loved alcohol too well. It did let us act extemporaneously (TT 57).

¹⁷⁸ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978).

¹⁷⁹ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965).

¹⁸⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 292.

The connection between loneliness and alcohol addiction is illustrated almost *ad nauseum* in the “Personal Testimonies” of A.A.’s Big Book. It is by far the most common theme. We have already heard from some. Here is a sampling of several more.

I had never been inside a bar until one evening some fellow students persuaded me to go with them to a local cocktail lounge. I was fascinated...It was pure sophistication...But more important than anything else that night, I belonged. I was at home in the universe; I was comfortable with people...Not only was I completely at ease, but I actually loved all the strangers around me and they loved me in return, I thought, all because of this magic potion, alcohol. What a discovery! What a revelation! (AA 447).

Whatever the problem, I soon found what appeared to be the solution to everything...A stop at a local bar began the evening. I ordered a beer from the waitress and as I took the first sip, something was immediately different. I looked around me, at the people drinking and dancing, smiling and laughing, all of whom were much older than I. Suddenly, I somehow felt I belonged (AA 282).

Although I wasn’t too thrilled with the taste, I loved the effects. Alcohol helped me to hide my fears; the ability to converse was an almost miraculous gift to a shy and lonely individual (AA 359).

In her biography of the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill W., Susan Cheever reports that Bill W.’s own addiction to alcohol was fueled by this thirst for companionship. “He never forgot the warmth of the tavern and the way the men there seemed to melt together into one person—a person immune to loneliness.”¹⁸¹

Ironically, the search for belonging that finds its answer for so many alcoholics in the fellowship of the bar eventuates in near-total isolation. Alcohol, once the elixir of conviviality and camaraderie, is a jealous friend. “From that first night at the bar a year earlier, I had made a profound decision that was to direct my life for many years to come: Alcohol was my friend and I would follow it to the ends of the earth...Now

¹⁸¹ *My Name is Bill*, 39.

alcohol had become the only friend I had” (AA 447). Solitary drinking or use becomes the pinnacle of major addiction.

Peter Ferentzy, in an article on the difference between the preindustrial experience of “chronic drunkenness” and that of contemporary alcohol addiction makes the fascinating observation that before the turn of the 18th century solitary drunkenness was rare.¹⁸² Yet this alarming fact can begin to be made intelligible if we understand that the modern rejection of teleology and with it the loss of a shared conception of the good life for human beings had to entail a transformation of the nature of friendship. For, as is so clear in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, friendship was for Aristotle a basically moral undertaking, with the relationship of true friendship defined primarily in terms of common goals, a shared pursuit of certain specified goods. For Aristotle, the primary benefit of friendship is not affection but growth in virtue.

This Aristotelian view of friendship disappeared along with the disappearance of a common good. It no longer seems justified to expect that friends would need to agree with one another about the more substantive matters of life. Friendship comes to be primarily an expression of affection—what Aristotle would have called a friendship of pleasure—or an exercise of career positioning and posturing, of “networking” and “schmoozing”—what Aristotle would have called a friendship of utility (1157b37-1158a3). For Aristotle, neither of these forms of friendship are true friendship because

¹⁸² Ferentzy, “From Sin to Disease,” 382. Philippe Aries writes: “The historians taught us long ago that the King was never left alone. But in fact, until the end of the 17th century, nobody was ever left alone. The density of social life made isolation virtually impossible, and people who managed to shut themselves up in a room for some time were regarded as exceptional characters.” Quoted in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 291.

they lack any necessary connection to a person's growth in virtue and attainment of a life worthy of human beings.

Addiction offers a two-fold response to the modern transformation of friendship. On the one hand, to the extent that affection and "social capital" mediate modern friendships, addictive substances lubricate this mediation, as many of the testimonies above have shown. Indeed, probably more than any other factor, it is the capacity of addictive substances to evoke strong affections or repress strong disaffections that represents their most immediate appeal. Under the influence of addictive substances, many people feel more free to express affection and more confident that they are receiving it.

On the other hand, precisely because, as we have already shown, addiction is able to supply an animating and necessary purpose otherwise inaccessible to thoroughly modern persons, addicts do in a sense share with one another an unqualified and unconditional allegiance to a common goal. Addicts often find it hard to develop meaningful relationships with non-addicts, and in this respect they are more Aristotelian than modern. Similarly, addicts are more Aristotelian than modern in that they are willing to terminate friendships whenever those friendships are no longer conducive to or, worse, are preventive of their singular pursuit. But there is one definite sense in which addictive friendship is unlike Aristotelian friendship. Aristotle thought it impossible to exercise virtue and therefore live a worthwhile life without friends, but addicts, at least before it becomes clear that the game is up, are convinced that they can, if need be, go it alone.

Alcohol or other addictive objects are, therefore, partners in fundamental relationships and, to the extent that they do, addicts commune with one another because they share, not so much a common goal, but a common friend. Ann Marlowe brilliantly expresses this aspect of addiction in her memoir of heroin addiction.

Like travel to faraway places, heroin served as a way of rendering my solitude beside the point. Doing it alone added no opprobrium; that was the least of my worries. And it made sense; the drug was a companion...Being high allowed me to enjoy being alone without loneliness...When I stopped getting high, what bothered me most was my relapse into loneliness, or into the awareness of it...Dope made it easier for me to stay at home; dope was a home, a psychic space that filled the essential functions of the physical construct, providing a predictable comfort and security. Heroin became the place where, when you showed up, they had to let you in.¹⁸³

To the extent that A.A. is one of the few places in contemporary society where, quite literally, when you show up they have to let you in, we begin to understand why intentional communities like A.A. are among the few modern remedies to modern addiction.

There is much more that should be said about the relationship between friendship, addiction, and recovery, but we shall save some of this for the Conclusion. To complete this chapter I want to state briefly the intent of the foregoing analysis of modern addiction. My intent is not primarily to indict modernity by showing its horrible effects, although this must have seemed at times what I was up to. I do not think the movement from the ancient through the medieval to the modern is in any unqualified sense a movement of decline. I am quite aware that the ancient and medieval worlds were rife with pain and unhappiness as has been and will be the case with any age. And I am

¹⁸³ *How to Stop Time*, 140, 179.

more than willing to acknowledge the ways in which modernity represents a cultural advance. My point has been to make intelligible the simple fact that addiction is by all accounts rampant in the modern age to a degree unparalleled in any other. I have had, therefore, in order to make this argument, to concentrate on those aspects of modernity that give rise to the deep discontent to which modern addiction is a response. For it is only by showing how addiction constitutes a profound response to our deepest needs as modern persons that we begin to grasp the force with which addiction recommends itself to a cogitative estimation the purpose of which is to ascertain the suitability of certain objects of pursuit to the needs of an agent in a particular set of circumstances. It may very well be that, on the whole, things are better today than they have ever been. I have no idea how we could make that sort of judgment, and that is not an argument I am interested in pursuing. If my argument were put in the service of a larger argument against modernity *per se*, the only conclusion for which I could be held accountable is that the datum of major addiction would have to be entered into the equation on the “cons” side of modernity, not as an historical accident but as one of its necessary bitter fruits.

CHAPTER V

ADDICTION AND CHARITY

In the last chapter, we raised a question about Aristotle's ethics that will lead us, in this chapter, into a discussion of the more universal, less peculiarly "modern," aspects of addiction: If *theoria* is a component of the life of *eudaimonia*, how is this more transcendent aspect of the good life to be integrated with the practical exercise of the moral virtues? The relationship of the practical to the transcendent in Aristotle's account of the good life presents a difficulty because it is not clear what one has to do with the other. If we take the life of *theoria* to be the peculiar *ergon* of man, we are left with an unfortunate inference, aptly drawn by Thomas Nagel. If practical reason and the moral virtues serve only "to support the individual for an activity that completely transcends these worldly concerns," then it follows that

the purest employment of reason has nothing to do with daily life. Aristotle believes, in short, that human life is not important enough for humans to spend their lives on. A person should seek to transcend not only his individual practical concerns but also those of society or humanity as a whole.¹⁸⁴

The problem is one of integration and, as Kathleen Wilkes suggests, the lack of integration eventuates in a picture of the good life for human beings that can only lead to frustration.

[Aristotle's] psychology tells us that man is hybrid—caught in a constant tug-of-war between the claims of his divine and his hylomorphic nature; his theology tells us that the divine element is not commensurable with the hylomorphic (see 1154b20ff.). The contemplative life is fully attainable only insofar as man can become god-like, and the constant and irremovable block to this is that he is

¹⁸⁴ Nagel, "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*," 11.

biologically an animal. But the mixture of the divine and the animal is not a stable one; there could be no compromise effected between such disparate elements. No man may attain full divinity, but once he has tasted it in part he is, as it were, foredoomed to try for the impossible. Frustration is then evidently a permanent fact.¹⁸⁵

Given Aristotle's psychology and theology, his account of the good life, it appears, can only involve a fitful vacillation between the exercise of practical rationality and the exercise of *theoria*. There is, then, a certain lacuna in Aristotle's account of the relationship between the virtues and the good life, which consists in a failure to describe how the life of practical action is to be integrated with the pursuit of *theoria*, how the practical virtues are related to the virtue of *sophia*.

This lacuna in Aristotle's account of the life of *eudaimonia* finds a quite definite resolution in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. For it is Aquinas who provides a thick account both of the ways in which the life of practical activity is integrated with the human pursuit of the divine and of the means by which the various goods of human life may be rightly ordered to achieve this integration. The account that Aquinas gives is rooted in his postulation of the theological virtues, particularly his treatment of the theological virtue of *caritas*, or charity, which is the supernaturally infused virtue that capacitates human beings for participation in the life of God and thereby orders each of the other virtues to God.

The question I am after in the chapter is this: What is it supposed to be about charity that befits charity to play this integrating and ordering role? The question I am *not* after is whether or not such a habit as charity actually exists or is accessible to persons. The

¹⁸⁵ Kathleen Wilkes, "The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amelie O. Rorty, 352.

latter is an important question in and of itself, but its answer does not bear directly on the argument of this chapter. For the argument of this chapter is that, however we answer this question of whether there *really* exists a habit befitted to achieve this tall order, there is at least one quite undeniably existent habit that *appears* befitted: addiction.

Aquinas on Charity

Charity, Aquinas tells us, is friendship between human beings and God. It is a friendship based on God's communication of his happiness to human beings. More specifically, charity is "the love that is based on this communication" (2-2.23.1). The possibility of charity, for Aquinas, is grounded preeminently in God's movement toward persons rather than in persons' striving after God. Charity "is not founded principally on the virtue of a man, but on the goodness of God." It is therefore an "infused virtue," one for which human beings do not have a "natural" capacity (2-2.24.2). By an act of supernatural grace, God creates in the human soul the love that draws human persons toward God. Thus, charity is a "supernatural virtue." It is the strongest and most intense of all virtues, including the other supernatural virtues of faith and hope. "No virtue has such a strong inclination to its act as charity has, nor does any virtue perform its act with so great pleasure" (2-2.23.2).

How, for Aquinas, does the virtue of charity make possible an integration and ordering of the good life? We may answer this question by noting how the virtue of charity differs from the virtue of *sophia*, that virtue through which *theoria* is practiced. We recall that, due to the Aristotelian psychology and theology, the life of *theoria* could

not be integrated with the life of practical reason because of the incommensurability between the knowledge attained through contemplation and the practical knowledge through which the agent navigates his or her practical affairs. The life of *theoria* is purely intellectual, and, therefore, is the locus both of a separation between the finite knowledge of the knower and the infinite object of knowledge *and* of the separation between knowledge of the divine and the knowledges of the senses.

Charity, on the other hand, is not in the intellectual faculty—this is faith—but rather in the appetitive faculty. And the appetitive faculty differs, for Aquinas, in a very important respect from the intellectual faculty: the appetitive faculty is infinite. Aquinas puts it tersely: “Rational concupiscence is infinite” (1-2.30.4). There is, in each of us, a longing¹⁸⁶ that, according to Aquinas, cannot be sated by any finite thing. Paul Wadell explains the significance of Aquinas’s position.

If grace comes from God’s side, desire comes from ours. Thomas grants that if we were finite in every way God could not be our joy, for we cannot “reach out to more good” than we can hold. But there is, he contends, one way we are not finite: we have unlimited desire. We are limited in every way but one—we have unlimited desire, unlimited longing. Our desire is the one thing about us that is not restricted and we know this. We feel the ongoing hunger for something infinitely good, we are stalked by the longing for something perfectly blessed and precious. Though we are limited, we want unlimited good, though we are restricted, we want to love unrestrictedly... This is why Thomas says we “can reach out to the infinite” (*ST I-II*, 2,8). We seek the infinite through the openness of desire, and only something indefectibly good will satisfy this desire.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ In *Love in the Ruins* (New York: Avon Books, 1971), 148, the Catholic novelist Walker Percy has his middle-aged and depressed protagonist report: “Forty five. It is strange how little one changes. The psychologists are all wrong about puberty. Puberty changes nothing. This morning I woke with exactly the same cosmic sexual-religious longing I woke with when I was ten years old. Nothing changes but accidentals: your toes rotate, showing more skin. Every molecule in your body has been replaced but you are exactly the same.”

¹⁸⁷ Paul J. Wadell, C.P., *The Primacy of Love*, 61.

Charity makes possible, therefore, an actual union with or participation with God that could not be attained in this world through knowledge. Because the act of the intellectual power “is completed by the thing known being in the knower,” *theoria* is not able to participate fully in God. This is the “frustration” which Kathleen Wilkes claimed to be endemic to Aristotle’s psychology and theology. But “the act of an appetitive power consists in the appetite being inclined towards the thing in itself,” and since the rational appetite of human beings is infinite, charity makes possible a genuine union with an infinite God in this life (2-2.27.4).

Moreover, the union with God made possible by charity flows outward into a love of other things. “We must assert that to love which is an act of the appetitive power, even in this state of life, tends to God first, and flows on from Him to other things, and in this sense charity loves God immediately, and other things through God” (2-2.27.4). As Aquinas explains, “God is the principal object of charity, while our neighbor is loved out of charity for God’s sake” (2-2.23.5). The life of charity does not therefore involve a separation between the transcendent and the imminent but rather institutes a link between the two. The movement toward God that is constitutive of charity does not imply a movement away from the this-worldly but rather a more sufficient movement toward the goods of this world as well. Moreover, as we love the things of this world out of charity, our activity transforms us into the love we seek to be. For Aquinas, it is not just that, loving God rightly, we love all other things rightly; it is also that, as we rightly love other things, these most ordinary activities transfigure our desires, making us ever more open and submissive to the love that God graces us with.

It is because charity makes this integration possible that charity also constitutes a principle of order that is otherwise lacking amongst the moral virtues. Aquinas states straightforwardly that “no order is assigned to the other virtues” (2-2.26.1), a worry that we found being expressed especially by modern commentators on Aristotle’s ethics. Aquinas believes that the virtues may be acquired to some extent independently of one another, and that, with respect to the natural virtues, it would be possible for a person to possess one or another of the virtues in markedly greater degree than others. For Aquinas, however, charity remedies this potential unevenness among the natural virtues and removes the worry about a lack of an ordering principle. Charity achieves this because charity informs and orders every other virtue. Without charity, for Aquinas, the virtues lack the specific kind of directedness that they require, but charity provides precisely this directedness by being the efficient cause of all of the other virtues.¹⁸⁸

Charity is called the form of the other virtues not as being their exemplar or their essential form, but rather by way of efficient cause, in so far as it sets the form on all, in the aforesaid manner...Charity is compared to the foundation or root in so far as all other virtues draw their sustenance and nourishment therefrom... Charity is said to be the end of other virtues, because it directs all other virtues to its own end. And since a mother is one who conceives within herself and by another, charity is called the mother of the other virtues, because, by commanding them, it conceives the acts of the other virtues, by the desire of the last end (2-2.23.8).

Aquinas does not give many detailed examples of the way in which charity orders the other virtues. We are told that “the aspect under which our neighbor is to be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbor is that he may be in God” (2-2.25.1);

¹⁸⁸ For a lucid account of what is entailed in Aquinas’s claim that charity is the efficient cause of the virtues, and of the resultant relationship between charity and knowledge in human action for Aquinas, see Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), especially ch. 5.

and that “we can love irrational creatures out of charity, if we regard them as the good things that we desire for others, in so far, to wit, as we wish for their preservation, to God’s honor and man’s use” (2-2.25.3). Charity makes us to love ordinally God, our neighbor, ourselves, our enemies, our bodies, and irrational creatures (2-2.25).

Importantly, charity does not operate as some abstract principle by the application of which we speculate about the right ordering of the life of practical virtue. Rather, the supernatural virtue of charity comes with this ordering implicit, as it were. As we increase in charity and our love of God becomes more intense, Aquinas claims, the right ordering of all other loves follows naturally. Charity thus profoundly simplifies the moral life, not by making the practice of moral virtue irrelevant to the life of *eudaimonia*, but rather by habituating us to rightly order those practices as well as to rightly determine the significance of the goods of this life that we pursue.

Addiction and Charity

I want now to turn to what I take to be the less historicist, more universal aspect of addiction by arguing that addiction is in important respects analogous to the habit of charity as conceived in Aquinas’s theological ethics. So that this claim be not merely speculation, I would like to try to display what I take to be the salient similarities between the two.

I am by no means the first to remark a connection between addiction and humanity's quest for the transcendent.¹⁸⁹ The eminent Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, who played a significant though unintentional role in the formation of Alcoholics Anonymous,¹⁹⁰ judged that addictive "craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness; expressed in medieval language: the union with God."¹⁹¹ Jung found it significant that the Latin term for "alcohol" is *spiritus*. "You use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula [for recovery] therefore is: *spiritus contra spiritum* (spirit against spirit)."¹⁹² We might attempt to expand Jung's insightful though cryptic claim by displaying the similarities between the theological virtue-habit of charity and the habit of addiction.

First. Aquinas claims that charity is friendship, the energy that flows from relationship between a lover and the beloved. Contrary to Aquinas's claim that "it would be absurd to speak of having friendship for wine or for a horse" (2-2.23.1),¹⁹³ it is

¹⁸⁹ Peter Ferentzy claims, "Essentially, craving is modernity's substitute for spirits, demons, or other mystical constructs," "Foucault and Addiction," 169. I am not sure what to make of this claim, but it offers a potential connection between the last chapter and this one.

¹⁹⁰ There is a line of descent from one of Jung's patients, a man named Roland H., through Roland's friend Edwin T., and on to Edwin T.'s drinking buddy, Bill W., the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. What was reported to Bill W. by way of Edwin T. was Jung's statement to Roland H. that there was for him, as for other chronic alcoholics, no hope of recovery excepting the rare possibility that Roland "become the subject of a spiritual or religious experience—in short, a genuine conversion." In a letter to Jung, which can be found along with Jung's response in *The Language of the Heart: Bill W.'s Grapevine Writings* (New York: The A.A. Grapevine, 1988), 276-281, Bill W. claims that it was the severity of this counsel that prodded him toward his own conversion and the eventual formulation of the First Step of Alcoholics Anonymous. See also Cheever, *My Name is Bill*, ch. 15. The two "grandfathers" of A.A. are therefore William James and Carl Jung.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Seeburger, *Addiction and Responsibility*, 105.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Aquinas follows Aristotle here in denying that one could be friends with wine because friendship implies wishing well for the friend: "for it would surely be ridiculous to wish wine well; if one wishes anything for it, it is that it may keep, so that one may have it oneself" (1155b29-31).

remarkable that the language that addicts find most transparent to their own experience of addiction is the language of relationship, friendship, and love affairs. Caroline Knapp, for example, has written a poignant memoir of her own struggle with addiction entitled, simply, *Drinking: A Love Story*.¹⁹⁴ And one A.A. member puts tersely what so many others testify when he recounts his addiction in terms of his relationship with “my best friend, alcohol” (AA 329).

When you’re drinking, liquor occupies the role of a lover or a constant companion. It sits there on its refrigerator shelves or on the counter or in the cabinet like a real person, as present and reliable as a best friend.¹⁹⁵

The bottle was my friend, my companion, a portable vacation. Whenever life was too intense, alcohol would take the edge off or obliterate the problem altogether for a time (AA 309).

I was never lonely when I was using, even when I was separated from the people I loved most in the world, because my best friends were always with me. Cocaine was my running buddy, my soul mate, my faithful lover, my reliable colleague, my fun-loving playmate who tagged along everywhere I went. Alcohol and cocaine were always there for me, they never let me down.¹⁹⁶

Second. Charity is an infused virtue. As Aquinas explains with his oft-repeated principle that “grace perfects nature” (1.1.8), to say that charity is infused is not to say that it does violence to the natural capacities of human persons. Rather, charity is the supplementation of our natural powers, expressed through acquired habits, with a habit that empowers us to achieve a type of activity that is beyond natural human capacity. Although charity does not destroy our acquired habits, neither does it merely utilize those other habits as vehicles for its own ends.

¹⁹⁴ Tragically, Caroline Knapp died from lung cancer in 2002, six years after writing what, in my opinion, is the most insightful and honest alcoholism memoir and, alongside Ann Marlowe’s *How to Stop Time*, one of the best addiction memoirs to date. She was 42.

¹⁹⁵ Knapp, *Drinking*, 96.

¹⁹⁶ Moyers, *Broken*, 185.

It seems to me that this arrangement is importantly analogous to the habit of addiction. In what sense might we say that addiction is an “infused” habit? At the superficial level we observe that addiction is often in part a function of ingesting a foreign substance into a person’s body, much as the love of God that is charity is said to be “poured forth in our hearts” by God (2-2.24.2). But, more saliently, we have noticed, particularly in several of the “drunkalogues” from Chapter IV, that addiction may take hold as the result of one intense experience. Does this not call into question the claim that addiction is a habit since habits are developed over time? Not so for Aquinas: “If an act be very intense, it can be the generating cause of a habit” (1-2.51.3). Addiction may at times be like certain religious conversions, in this respect, that the experience is one of being overcome and encountered by some power external to the self. Similar to the memories that many converts have of the exact place and time of their conversions, one alcoholic observed, “I don’t think most moderate, social drinkers remember so clearly the night they had their first drink” (AA 370). Just as the habit of charity may be poured forth instantaneously in a moment of conversion (although this is not the only way charity is claimed to be poured forth), so the habit of addiction may take hold instantaneously as if coming from some power external to the agent (although this is not the only way addiction is generated).

Third. Aquinas says that charity orders the moral life because it is the form of every virtue. He says that “charity is called the form of the other virtues not as being their exemplar or their essential form, but rather by way of efficient cause” (2-2.23.8). How might one virtue be the efficient cause of another? Aquinas offers a hint when he

explains that “since charity has for its object the last end of human life, viz., everlasting happiness, it follows that it extends to the acts of a man’s whole life, by commanding them, not by eliciting immediately all acts of virtue” (2-2.23.4). The distinction between efficient cause and formal cause parallels this distinction between commanding and eliciting. For if charity were really the formal cause of every virtue, then every virtue would simply *be* charity (as Augustine seemed to think), and *ipso facto* charity would *elicit* all acts of virtue. But Aquinas does not think that charity is the formal cause of all the virtues, but rather their efficient cause.¹⁹⁷ Charity therefore commands the acts of all the other virtues. Aquinas explains how one virtue can command another: “Nothing hinders the proper elicited act of one virtue being commanded by another virtue as commanding it and directing it to this other virtue’s end” (2-2.32.1). And, Aquinas contends, this is what Aristotle has in mind when he says that “if one man commits adultery for the sake of gain and makes money by it, while another does so at the bidding of appetite though he loses money and is penalized for it, the latter would be held to be self-indulgent rather than grasping, but the former is unjust, but not self-indulgent (1-2.18.6; 1130a23-28). In the former case, we should say that the vice of avarice commands the vice of lust to elicit the action of adultery whereas in the latter case we should say that the vice of lust commands the vice of prodigality to elicit the action of financial carelessness. In parallel fashion, therefore, charity commands the

¹⁹⁷ Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 193, explains that Aquinas continued to use the language of “form” even after he rejected the thesis that charity is the formal cause or exemplar cause of the virtues, primarily to maintain continuity with Peter Abelard’s widely accepted dictum that charity “informs all the virtues.” However, Sherwin explains that “in his mature presentation of this traditional doctrine, although he retains the language of form, he deeply modifies its meaning. He continues to describe charity as the form of the virtues, but denies that charity acts on the virtues as a formal or exemplar cause. Instead, he now proclaims that charity is solely the efficient cause of the virtues,” p. 202.

other virtues to act as being directed to the end that charity seeks. Charity commands acts of justice, temperance, courage, etc. *for the sake of* the realization of charity's end, friendship with God. In this way, charity orders all virtue because it supplies the specific directedness toward a unified substantial end which the virtues otherwise lack because they are at best directed to an abstract end (happiness or *eudaimonia*) which is always open to alternative specifications.

Addictions exert enormous control over human persons because they supply this need for an ordering principle. I want to argue that, like Thomistic charity, addiction is a habit that commands all other activities of persons and directs each of those activities to a unified and substantial end. The person in the grips of major addiction finds that he or she operates in a profoundly simplified moral terrain, in which every activity, every relationship, every object of value is reinterpreted and invested with meaning only as it relates to the end of the practice of the addiction. Listen, for example, to the following testimonies of addicts.

It was frightening that drink was being substituted for more and more of the things I really enjoyed doing. Golf, hunting, fishing were now merely excuses to drink excessively...Never having enough, always craving more, the obsession for alcohol gradually began to dominate all my activities, particularly while traveling. Drink planning became more important than other plans (AA 349).

I had entered the drinking life. Drinking was part of being a man. Drinking was an integral part of sexuality, easing entrance to its dark and mysterious treasure chambers. Drinking was the sacramental binder of friendships. Drinking was the reward for work, fuel for celebration, the consolation for death or defeat.¹⁹⁸

To me, taking a bath was just being in a place with a bottle where I could drink in privacy (AA 297).

¹⁹⁸ Pete Hammill, *A Drinking Life: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 146-147.

Even today I vividly remember what it was like to organize my whole life around smoking. When things went well, I reached for a cigarette. When things went badly, I did the same. I smoked before breakfast, after a meal, when I had a drink, before doing something difficult, and after doing something difficult. I always had an excuse for smoking. Smoking became a ritual that served to highlight salient aspects of experience and to impose structure on what would otherwise have been a confusing morass of events. Smoking provided the commas, semicolons, question marks, exclamation marks, and full stops of experience. It helped me to achieve a feeling of mastery, a feeling that I was in charge of events rather than submitting to them. This craving for cigarettes amounts to a desire for order and control, not for nicotine.¹⁹⁹

As each of these testimonies displays, addiction simplifies and orders life by narrowing the focus of the addict onto one object, one “final end.” This phenomenon is sometimes overlooked because of the contemporary definition of addiction in terms of “loss of control.” But what each of these testimonies, and especially the last, make plain is that the lure of addiction lies precisely in its ability to give the addict a sense of being in control of his or her life and of being able to assess and evaluate every possible course of action in terms of one definite end that eclipses every other contender for absolute allegiance. Paradoxically, the addict loses control over his or her addiction exactly to the extent that this ordering and controlling power of addiction insinuates itself into the agent’s view of the world by converting the agent’s cogitative estimation. This is another source of the deep ambivalence characteristic of major addiction. Through rational deliberation and persuasion, the agent may come to believe that his or her addiction has destroyed his or her life by wresting control from the agent him- or herself. But the cogitative estimation is not easily convinced, for it is precisely because of its ordering and controlling power that the object of desire has become an addicting object.

¹⁹⁹ Elster, *Strong Feelings*, 64.

When William Burroughs describes the life of the heroin addict as being “measured out in eyedroppers of morphine solution,”²⁰⁰ we are likely to recoil in disgust. We fail to recognize, however, that the strength of the addiction resides, not primarily in the heroin on in the sensory pleasures that it provides, but rather in this simplicity and beauty of having one’s life measured by one standard, harmonized with one melody, directed to one end.

Addictive objects are addictive because they enable a person to regulate his or her life. This is why, among the various classes of mind-altering substances, very few persons are addicted to hallucinogens like LSD or mescaline. Hallucinogens are unpredictable in their effects, such that the user can never know what type of “trip” to expect. Because hallucinogens cannot provide a regular experience, they cannot regulate the rest of experience. They lack the sameness and singularity of experience in light of which an addict might come to understand and interpret the worth of the rest of his or her activity. It is because hallucinogens cannot provide the “artificial sameness,” which, according to Stanton Peele “is the keynote of addictive experience,” that they so rarely trigger the ordering habit of addiction.²⁰¹

Understanding the power of addiction to enable an addict to gain a sense of control over his or her life and order the activities of that life to one substantial end puts us in a position to understand the sorts of lame “excuses” that alcoholics and other addicts find

²⁰⁰ Burroughs, *Junky*, xvi.

²⁰¹ Stanton Peele and Archie Brodsky, *Love and Addiction* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1975), 52. Given my thesis that addiction is an analogue to charity, Peele and Brodsky’s book is interesting. However, whereas I am arguing that addiction can be illuminated by Aquinas’s account of charity, they are arguing that much of what we call “love” is really a counterfeit of addiction. This raises the important question of how addiction differs from genuine love, to which we shall turn in the last section of this chapter.

for engaging in addictive behavior, what *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* calls “the invention of alibis.”

We had made the invention of alibis a fine art. We had to drink because times were hard or times were good. We had to drink because at home we were smothered with love or got none at all. We had to drink because at work we were great successes or dismal failures. We had to drink because our nation had won a war or lost a peace. And so it went, *ad infinitum*” (TT 47).

If *anything* can count as an excuse to use, then nothing seems like a legitimate one. But there is more going on here than the mere invention of alibis. The fact that anything can count as an excuse to use is a function of the power that addiction has to incorporate every aspect of an addict’s life into its own rhythms and rationales. It really *is* the case for the alcoholic that the “good times” are vacuous without alcohol, that the hard times are unbearable without alcohol, that loneliness doesn’t feel lonely with alcohol, that loving relationships are mediated by alcohol, that success can only be celebrated with alcohol, that only alcohol can insulate from the rejection of failure, and so on. To be an alcoholic is to enter into such a relationship with alcohol that everything else in life makes sense only if it is accompanied by alcohol. Like Thomistic charity, addiction transfigures the most ordinary activities into meaningful transactions.

Aristotle claimed that the practice of *theoria* was the best of all human activities because, among other reasons, “it is the most continuous, since we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can *do* anything” (1177a22-24). But even if it is the most continuous form of activity for Aristotle, it is nevertheless not altogether continuous. It is disrupted by our having to “do” things, and, even if it were possible to continue to contemplate while “doing” things, we have shown that for Aristotle the one would have

no bearing on the other, and this is the source of another, deeper discontinuity. Thomistic charity resolves these discontinuities because, when infused with charity, the “doings” of an agent are not merely instrumental to some separate activity of charity but rather are partly constitutive of charity in that doing things out of charity is both an expression of and a maturation of the agent’s friendship with God. Even though Aristotle praises *theoria* as the “most continuous” activity available to human beings, he would have found it odd and irresponsible to advise anyone to “contemplate continually,” for even the most virtuous person has to survive and the things required for survival cannot count as contemplation. But given that practical activities can be performed in charity, Aquinas does not find it odd or irresponsible when St. Paul advises the faithful to “pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5.17, AV).

If the informing nature of charity makes possible Paul’s otherwise impossible admonition to “pray continually,” the informing nature of addiction makes possible what alcoholics call “thinking drinking”—the amazing capacity of the alcoholic to orient all of his or her thoughts and activities around the governing center of addiction.

My friend Gail, who’s a professional chef, used to get up at five A.M. and stand in her shower obsessing about what she’d drink that night, and when she’d be able to drink, and how and how much and with whom. She did this daily, obsessing in the shower about booze every morning at five A.M.²⁰²

I had lived my entire life under the influence of mood and mind-altering substances. It wasn’t that I was high on drugs every minute of the day—I was sometimes clean for several days at a time—but my obsession with drugs altered my perspective and my feelings about everything else, including my love for Mary, my relationship with my parents and siblings, my job, my soul, even my God. I hadn’t just become addicted—addiction had become *me*.²⁰³

²⁰² Knapp, *Drinking*, 141.

²⁰³ Moyers, *Broken*, 140.

Addiction exploits “the instinctual need for one-pointedness; it distils the complexity of human experience into something essentially simple; it channels all needs into one.”²⁰⁴

This is the mark of addiction sometimes called *obsession*.

A fourth and final analogy between charity and addiction. Aquinas contends that charity is conditioned on the infinitude of human desire. Because “rational concupiscence is infinite,” only charity, communion with the Infinite, can satisfy our hunger for wholeness. “We seek something so lovely that in possessing it we want no more.”²⁰⁵ And charity is supposed to provide this satisfaction because it offers a good that exceeds the natural human capacity for happiness. In what sense is addiction a quest for this completion and, furthermore, an expression of the conviction that such completion lies in a very real sense beyond our natural human limitations?

We have already noted Jung’s opinion on this matter: he believed that addiction was in fact a function of “the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness; expressed in medieval language: the union with God.” One could quote the testimonies of addicts interminably on this point.

Most alcoholics I know experience that hunger long before they pick up the first drink, that yearning for *something*, something outside the self that will provide relief and solace and well being.²⁰⁶

[Addictive desires] have more to do with the soul than the brain. They illuminate the yearning for wholeness, for perfection, for making everything feel good and right again. They’re about the deepest human hunger and thirst to experience rapture, joy, heaven.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Pryor, *Survival of the Coolest*, 132.

²⁰⁵ Wadell, *The Primacy of Love*, 39.

²⁰⁶ Knapp, *Drinking*, 55.

²⁰⁷ Moyers, *Broken*, 207.

Addicts are persons who seem unable to deny that “rational concupiscence is infinite.” The deep yearning for completion that is characteristic of addiction manifests itself in various ways, each of which parallels closely features of Thomistic charity. We shall look briefly at the extremism of addiction, the perfectionism of addiction, and addictive pursuit of ecstasy.

In a question on “Whether in Loving God We Ought to Observe Any Mode?”

Aquinas states an important difference between charity and the acquired moral virtues.

The end of all human actions and affections is the love of God, whereby principally we attain to our last end, as stated above (Q. 23, A. 6), wherefore the mode in the love of God, must not be taken as in a thing measured where we find too much or too little, but as in the measure itself, where there cannot be excess, and where the more the rule is attained the better it is, so that the more we love God the better our love is (2-2.27.6).

Unlike our other appetites, appetites for food, drink, sex, human friendship, pleasure, wealth, health, and so on, Aquinas contends that our appetite for God need not, indeed should not, be subjected to any measure. Temperance is to love the sensory pleasures of taste and touch with measure. Justice is to love the good for another with measure. Courage is to love the goods of life and honor with measure. But charity is to love God without measure. In fact, the measureless love of God that is charity, since it rightly orders all other acts to its own end, has the quality of imposing measure on every other habit. If we love God without limit, Aquinas thinks, we will find that we love every other good proportionately, according to the right measure. Charity, therefore, directs us toward an object that we are to pursue without restraint, and charity promises us that extremism in this one direction will translate into right action in every other direction. Furthermore, it is precisely because the object that charity seeks after surpasses all

natural human capacity in terms of its truth, goodness, and beauty that charity can be an unbounded virtue. The extremism of charity, according to Aquinas, is an expression of the surpassing goodness of its object, God.

Addiction is, almost by definition, a habit of extremism. It is, in this sense, like any other vice, which, as we recall from Aristotle, is the extreme on either side of the mean that is virtue. But addiction is a totalizing extreme in a way that vices are not, as evidenced by its own power to capture and redirect any other virtue or vice to its own end. Addicts simply cannot get enough of that to which they are addicted. There is no such thing as the addictive “mean” or “moderate addiction.”

Enough? That’s a foreign word to an alcoholic, absolutely unknown. There is never enough, no such thing...More is always better to an alcoholic; more is necessary. Why have two drinks if you can have three? Three if you can have four? Why stop?²⁰⁸

Is the extremism of addiction a function of some surpassing or exceeding quality of the end it pursues? What, exactly, are addicts seeking when they engage in addictive behavior? Part of the purpose of this and the previous chapter has been to demonstrate that addicts are in search of a kind of order and integrity that seems to elude them in their day-to-day lives, whether because of the arbitrariness of modern culture or because of some deeper, more universal human longing. What seems clear is that the addictive search is a search for something beyond the quotidian, the mundane, the little pleasures of the daily grind. Francis Seeburger argues,

An addict is a person who wants *more*. Not ‘more of the same,’ more of the daily round of gains and losses, of goods and services that suffice for most of us most of the time, but ‘more’ in the sense of something altogether different,

²⁰⁸ Knapp, *Drinking*, 53.

something no longer measurable by such everyday standards—something ‘more than all that.’”²⁰⁹

We might say that addicts are persons who are unsatisfied with the *eudaimonia* that is countenanced by Aristotle, and which is ultimately rejected by Aquinas as a merely proximate form of happiness. Addictive desire is not *for* any proximate good but rather *against* every merely proximate good and for a good that is beyond the proximate. Addicts seek a perfection of happiness, rather than an approximation or measure. Addicts are, as the Big Book describes them, “all or nothing people” (TT 161). They seek comprehensive happiness, nothing less than perfect contentment. This is why abstinence seems to be the only really successful response to addiction. Addicts are simply not capable of imagining a life in which they pursue their ends moderately, in which the goods of addictive behavior are watered down and interspersed with more mundane pleasures in an attempt to provide a manageable way of life.

To me, the idea that a budding alcoholic can learn to drink moderately sounds like a contradiction in terms. (I rarely, if ever, drank moderately, even at the beginning.) It also seems to ignore the more deeply-rooted, compulsive pulls a drinker feels toward alcohol; these are needs that don’t respond well to the concept of moderation.²¹⁰

If addiction does not secure perfect contentment—as it manifestly does not—then, the addictive mind tends to think, perfect happiness must be discovered through some other extreme pursuit. Abstinence may be the expression of addictive perfectionism. It is precisely because addicts are characterized by a relentless perfectionism that the literature of A.A. frequently reminds the recovering alcoholic that a slip along the path

²⁰⁹ *Addiction and Responsibility*, 114.

²¹⁰ Knapp, *Drinking*, 119.

of recovery does not license full relapse. “We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection” (AA 60), recovering addicts are told. But this is a piece of advice that goes against the fundamental picture of the addict with which A.A. and other abstinence recovery models work. It is because A.A. believes that addicts are inveterate extremists and perfectionists that they so adamantly reject recovery models that champion methods of “harm reduction” by helping addicts learn to moderate their drinking rather than requiring complete abstinence of the recovering addict.²¹¹

The addictive pursuit of a something “more than all that,” a something *beyond* the limitations of the self, is ultimately a pursuit of ecstasy. Charity, and the theological virtues in general, are supposed to be *ecstatic* virtues in that the agent who possesses these habits is at one and the same time the subject *and* the object of the habit. Charity, for example, inheres in the soul of an agent, but the action that is made possible through the habit of charity is really a derivative action, one that derives from a more fundamental activity on the part of God. Charity is possible only so long as God continues to pour forth his eternally self-sufficient love into the soul of the one whom he has befriended. Charity is therefore a habit that one suffers fundamentally and enacts derivatively.²¹² Whereas the moral virtues entrench and solidify the agency of the one who *possesses* them, charity displaces the agency of the one in whom it is “poured forth”

²¹¹ For a fascinating account of the warring factions in the recovery movement, and a thorough attempt to assess the merits of the several distinct recovery philosophies, see Lonnie Shavelson, *Hooked: Five Addicts Challenge Our Misguided Drug Rehab System* (New York: The New Press, 2001).

²¹² Paul Wadell says, “The more charity grows in us, the harder God is to resist, because if we grow in such passionate love for God we cannot help but suffer God’s love more completely,” *The Primacy of Love*, 91.

by *taking possession of the agent*.²¹³ Whereas the moral virtues direct the gaze of the agent to his or her own sufficiency, charity redirects the gaze of the agent to a sufficiency external to him- or herself. Charity is, therefore, the realization of ecstasy, the movement beyond the confines of the self to a reality that comprehends the self but is not contained by the self. This is why Aquinas speaks of charity as a habit of “participation” (2-2.24.5). And this is why, for Aquinas, the saint differs so profoundly from the hero. For the saint recognizes that he or she is not at the center of the story whereas the hero is the one upon whom the story depends. The saint, to the extent that he or she exhibits the virtue of charity, becomes not more but less visible, both to him- or herself and to others whereas the hero becomes more visible to him- or herself and to others.²¹⁴ Charity is a habit of ecstasy, whereas natural courage,²¹⁵ for example, is a habit of self-realization and self-control.

Addiction, like charity, is a habit of ecstasy. Bruce Wilshire contends that “addictions are acts of violence directed at our own insignificance.”²¹⁶ If Wilshire is right about this, then the designation “drug abuse” is a euphemism; some form of “self

²¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson: “The one thing we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves...to do something without knowing why or how,” quoted in Wilshire, *Wild Hunger*, 63.

²¹⁴ I owe these ideas about the differences between heroes and saints to Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004), 43.

²¹⁵ The qualifier “natural” is important here, for Aquinas thinks that with the infusion of charity, it is the case *both* that the acquired moral virtues are informed by charity *and* that another “set” of the moral virtues are infused. I must admit that I have yet to grasp why Aquinas thinks he must also postulate the infused moral virtues. I side with Scotus in thinking that the infused moral virtues would be superfluous, given that charity already informs the acquired moral virtues. For an attempt to defend Aquinas on this point, see Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), ch. 5. In any event, whether because informed by charity or infused, Aquinas would think that the courage of the martyr-saint is importantly different than the courage of the Greek warrior-hero.

²¹⁶ *Wild Hunger*, 14. Wilshire claims that addiction is an expression of our “hunger for ecstatic connectedness” (vii).

abuse” is at stake. But, although Wilshire argues that the way to move beyond addiction is by coming to grips with our own significance, one could read this differently. For it may be that we are, relatively speaking, insignificant. And, further, we may believe that the contentment for which we yearn does indeed lie outside of ourselves, only to be realized through some ecstatic movement. This was the position of the Christian theologian Augustine, and the way in which he expresses his view is of particular interest to our inquiry. Augustine prays:

You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you... Who will enable me to find rest in you? Who will grant me that you come to my heart and *intoxicate* it, so that I forget my evils and embrace my one and only good, yourself?²¹⁷

Addiction, then, might be understood as the quest for this ecstatic intoxication. The addict, recognizing his or her own insignificance and his or her own insufficiency to realize perfect happiness, seeks to be taken up into a consuming experience, seeks to be the object rather than the subject of experience, craves to suffer happiness rather than make it.²¹⁸ There is, then, a striking parallel between the would-be saint and the addict.

As Francis Seeburger claims,

the genuine opposite of the addict is not the saint, but the lukewarm, complacent, comfortably ‘decent’ person represented by the rich young man of the Gospel.... The alcoholic or other addict stands in the shadow of the saint. In

²¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), I.i (1), v (5), my emphasis.

²¹⁸ When a friend of mine who is an EMT heard about my dissertation, he told me about his first run-in with major addiction. He was called to transport to the hospital a man—a heroin addict—who was nearly dead. When he got to the house, the man was huddled shivering and unresponsive in a corner surrounded by piles of rotten trash and, nearer, used syringes, lighters, spoons, all the paraphernalia of heroin addiction. When I asked my friend what that experience was like he said that it was terrifying but that he thought it was the first time he really understood what worship looks like.

contrast, those who have never been addicted only because they lack enough passion for it are not even in sainthood's vicinity.²¹⁹

The pull of addiction is this pull toward ecstasy, the expression of a deep discontent with the life of "just so" happiness, and the pursuit of an all-consuming love.²²⁰ Addictions are addicting just to the extent that they tempt us with the promise of such a perfect happiness, and they are enslaving just to the extent that they mimic and give intimations of this perfection. As Ann Marlowe puts it, "addiction isn't just a possible outcome, it's a partial motivation for drug use. Putting it another way, if heroin were nonaddictive, it wouldn't be a good enough metaphor for anyone to want to try it."²²¹

The Habit of Addiction

It may be helpful at this point to clarify what is and is not being argued. I am *not* attempting to provide a straightforward causal account of why people engage in any number of addictive activities. The reader who is looking for this will certainly be struck by the abstract and ideal nature of my arguments about the connections between modernity and addiction and between charity and addiction. Isn't it much simpler than all that? Don't alcoholics drink because they hurt and drink takes away the pain? Don't crack addicts smoke because they lead lives of squalor and misery and crack offers an escape? Don't cocaine addicts use because they can't take the pressure that their lives

²¹⁹ *Addiction and Responsibility*, 108, 112.

²²⁰ This may explain why, for example, those of us who lack the desperation or courage to pursue ecstasy into major addiction nevertheless are so mesmerized by reading addiction memoirs. Witness the recent national fascination with James Frey's lurid addiction memoir, *A Million Little Pieces* (New York: Anchor, 2005), which, after being elevated to the status of an Oprah Winfrey Book of the Month, was discovered to be fraudulent. It is interesting to ask why it could be so lucrative to write or even fabricate an addiction memoir, the more lurid the more lucrative.

²²¹ *How to Stop Time*, 180.

impose upon them and cocaine makes them feel capable, sufficient? The answer to all of these questions is yes although in concrete cases each of these explanations would be too general. People use drugs and engage in addictive behavior because of rejection, the loss of a child, family neglect, sexual abuse, divorce, getting fired, ridicule and humiliation by peers, depression, the pressure of living up to a parent's expectations, anger at an overbearing authority, and on and on.

Rather than offering an account of why people engage in addictive behaviors, I am attempting to offer an account of why they become addicted to those behaviors, why it is, that is, that addiction takes on a life of its own, has its own rationality and rhythm, and persists regardless of change in more immediate circumstances. I am trying to articulate, not the power of alcohol or crack or heroin or pornography or shopping, but the power of addiction. My argument has been that addiction is a habit informed, as all habits are, by rationality, and I have been trying to probe the structure of this rationality. I suggested in Chapter III that addiction is substantially a habit of what Aquinas calls the cogitative estimation, and in Chapter IV and this chapter I have been trying to display how addiction insinuates itself into the cogitative estimation by supplying an order and integrity to an addict's life, order and integrity that we as human beings, and particularly as modern human beings, crave. This is why I have paid much attention to the constructive and positive potential of addiction and said relatively little of the destruction and havoc it wreaks. Addiction is mysteriously powerful, but if we fail to ask in what that power consists, then we make it not only mysterious but also foreign. I hope my arguments in the last two chapters have made addiction less foreign, giving us

ways to think about the pull that addiction has on all of our lives. That is, I hope the last two chapters have shown how near, rather than how far, each of us is to the major addict.

I should also like to reassert the status of my arguments connecting addiction to charity. It is not my intention to turn addiction into a backhanded apologetic for a Thomistic theological ethics, or to insist that addiction can only be supplanted by charity.²²² Rather, the point of the argument is to demonstrate how addiction operates as a moral strategy, fulfilling a particular function in the moral life. Aquinas, of course, offered a philosophical and theological account of charity because he had to make sense of what scripture meant by saying that the love of God is poured forth into the hearts of the faithful. But I have tried to show that it is also true that charity fills a lacuna in the thought of Aristotle. Aquinas's account of charity is of interest because it offers a detailed account of what a habit would need to empower us to do if it were to fill that lacuna.

In *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, one reads: "Our sponsors declared that we were the victims of a mental obsession so subtly powerful that no amount of human willpower could break it" (TT 22). How, more specifically, does addiction so subtly yet powerfully enlist the allegiance of rationality and thereby become a "mental obsession"? And, if we can answer this, how does this put us in a position to understand the recalcitrance of addiction to "human willpower"? Whatever means it employs, addiction

²²² Although wary of natural theologies that start from something called "the human condition," I must admit that Reinhold Niebuhr's contention that the doctrine of original sin is the one Christian doctrine for which we have indisputable evidence has recurred in my thinking throughout this project. Trying to account for the pain that he believes is behind all addiction, William Pryor, who is not a Christian, writes: "But what of that original pain? This is something mysterious. We all have a pain at the root of us. It has been called original sin. It's the burden of being here," *Survival of the Coolest*, 213.

does not insinuate itself through rational deliberation. It is not as though the addict, when confronted by the choice whether or not to act on his or her addiction, determines through deliberation that, all things considered, acting on the addiction is in his or her best interest. Indeed, the paradox of addictive action is that it so often is performed in the face of rational deliberation to the contrary. At any rate, addictive behavior is rarely preceded by calm deliberation: “The truth, strange to say, is usually that [the alcoholic] has no more idea why he took that first drink than you have” (AA 23). The behavior of the addict becomes baffling, frighteningly so, precisely because it seems disconnected from the control that agents exert through deliberation. This is why addicts often speak of ‘watching themselves’ pour another drink or take another hit. It is the essence of the “loss of control” phenomena, and it is why addiction is experienced as a kind of enslavement or bondage, as a depletion rather than an enhancement of agency. Rational deliberation is powerless in the face of it. Caroline Knapp describes her own deluded and failed attempt to subject her alcoholism to the searching rays of discursive thought.

Child of an analyst that I am, I’d add insight to the list of remedies [I tried]—and I did, all the way to rehab. Tease out the *reasons* you drink—the hidden rages and fears, the psychological roots—and the problem will resolve itself. *Think* your way to mental health; turn it over to the psychiatric couch.²²³

But addiction takes on a rationality of its own, a life that cannot be taken hostage simply by retracing the deliberations that precede addictive action.

Interestingly, though, Knapp does not conclude from this failure of the discursive searchlight that addiction is without its reasons or that addiction is fundamentally irrational. On the contrary, she claims that addiction is the enactment of a certain

²²³ Knapp, *Drinking*, 117.

knowledge. “Over time, over many, many drinks, that knowledge is incorporated, the lessons folded into the soul: Liquor eases. Liquor soothes and protects, a psychic balm.”²²⁴ This knowledge seems unhelpfully vague, but Knapp insists that any attempt to move beyond this level and to describe some more particular knowledge that addiction enacts can only be dishonest.

There is no simple answer. Trying to describe the process of becoming an alcoholic is like trying to describe air. It’s too big and mysterious and pervasive to be defined. Alcohol is everywhere in your life, omnipresent, and you’re both aware and unaware of it almost all the time; all you know is you’d die without it, and there is no simple reason why this happens, no single moment, no physiological event that pushes a heavy drinker across a concrete line into alcoholism. It’s a slow, gradual, insidious *becoming*.²²⁵

The condition of being both “aware and unaware of [the object of addiction] almost all the time” sounds at first like an admission of self-deception or denial. Knapp speaks candidly about denial, and we shall have something to say in the last section of this chapter about the centrality of self-deception to addiction, but self-deception is not the only way to interpret this phenomenon of being simultaneously aware and unaware. We might also think about the difference between rationality at the level of deliberation and rationality at the level of habit. We have already described how addiction, as it entrenches itself in the cogitative estimation of an addict, takes on an ordering function in the life of the addict, such that every other activity and good is rendered in terms of the calculus of addiction. But rarely is this ordering function spelled out at the level of

²²⁴ Ibid., 59.

²²⁵ Ibid., 9.

explicit consciousness.²²⁶ Addiction may play this informing role without entering in as a term of syllogistic reasoning, without, that is, factoring into an agent's deliberative reasoning. In a remarkably insightful chapter entitled "*In Vodka Veritas*," Knapp tries to convey the way in which alcohol can become a mental obsession so subtle that we don't notice its becoming.²²⁷

It's the equation we all lived by, every single alcoholic I know:

Discomfort + Drink = No Discomfort (61)

Fear + Drink = Bravery (66)

Repression + Drink = Openness (69)

Pain + Drink = Self-Obliteration (70)

The mathematics of self-transformation (61). At heart alcoholism feels like the accumulation of dozens of such connections, dozens of tiny fears and hungers and rages, dozens of experiences and memories that collect in the bottom of your soul, coalescing over many many drinks into a single liquid solution (69).

We might add to the equations:

Fragmentation + Addiction = Identity

Arbitrariness + Addiction = Consuming Purpose

Boredom + Drink = Stimulation

Vacuity + Addiction = Meaning

Finitude + Addiction = Ecstasy

These are the equations, the reasons, that habituate the cogitative estimation. It is not the "many many drinks" so much as these "connections" made and "equations" solved over the course of many drinks that make up the "acts" that, with much repetition, habituate the cogitative estimation.

For the normal drinker, a drink is a drink. For the alcoholic, a drink is a life.

Addiction is not something that an addict *has*, like a cough or a fever or even a disease.

²²⁶ The notion of "explicit consciousness" as a "spelling out" is the centerpiece of Herbert Fingarette's analysis of self-deception, which we shall explore in depth shortly. Fingarette, *Self-Deception* (London: Routledge, 1969), 38-39.

²²⁷ I have drawn from several parts of this chapter to assemble a concentrated version of the case that she makes in narrative prose. The page number for each line or lines is in parentheses.

Addiction is a way of life. It is the habit of seeing the world a certain way and of being in the world a certain way. It is a habituation of perception, passion, and imagination: the way that an addict perceives, feels, imagines—all of this is mediated by the meaning that his or her addiction has taken on in the cogitative estimation. Addiction, like most habits, instills intelligence in the emotions and imagination.²²⁸ Every act, even the most menial act, that a practicing addict performs carries within itself this intelligence, this far-reaching and fundamental rationality of addicted being-in-the-world. “The life of an addict constitutes a vocation.”²²⁹ Addiction is a “whole philosophy of life” (TT 25).

Neurologically, this means that addiction is not primarily about the relationship between those specific neurons to which addictive substances may attach thereby mimicking or blocking other “natural” neurotransmitters. These chemical reactions account for the processes of tolerance and withdrawal, but, as was shown in the Introduction, tolerance and withdrawal are at most *results* of addiction. Neurologically, addiction entails the interrelation and interdependence of vast systems of cells that have to do with comfort, confidence, identity, meaning, purpose—in short, the terms of all of those “equations” performed, corroborated, and recorded by the addict’s cogitative estimation.

A person who becomes temporarily addicted to narcotic painkillers in the hospital may be able to withdraw from the drug more quickly and with much greater serenity than another person can withdraw from the loss of a job or a loved one. The first person’s addiction, although chemically intense, involves perhaps only a few million cells directly. It has not had time to influence such larger systems of cells as those having to do with the meaning of life, self-image,

²²⁸ As Professor John J. McDermott has put it to me in conversation, for the alcoholic alcohol is a pedagogue.

²²⁹ Peele and Brodsky, *Love and Addiction*, 58.

and basic security...It is not so difficult to understand how our addictions can come to rule our lives. Each of our major addictions consists not only of the primary attachment itself; it also includes the involvement of multiple other systems that have been affected by it. To put it quite simply, addictions are never single problems. As soon as we try to break a real addiction, we discover that in many respects *it has become a way of life.*²³⁰

The subtlety and the power of addiction now come into focus as twin aspects of its nature as a habit group substantially in the cogitative estimation but implicating the imagination and memory, and often the “vegetative soul.” It is subtle because it pervades every aspect of the addict’s being such that he or she cannot step away from it, as it were, to locate it in one chain of reasoning or in one facet of consciousness. And it is powerful because, whenever the addict focuses his or her power of deliberation on the object of addiction, in an effort to overcome addiction by *thinking* his or her way out it, the object elicits a world of meaning, a whole inchoate and inarticulate “philosophy of life” that overflows and eludes straightforward practical reasoning. It is the nature of habit in general to be recalcitrant, to a greater or lesser degree, to the immediate and fleeting deliverances of deliberate reason, but this is especially true of habits of the cogitative estimation. For habits of the cogitative estimation can operate as automatism habits, to draw on a distinction that was made in Chapter III, and thus they can operate quite apart from the conscious mental efforts of an agent, often in spite of those efforts.

Addiction, become an automatism habit of the cogitative estimation, incorporates the object of addiction into a way of life so pervasively and seamlessly that the very effort to excise it often merely confirms and strengthens it. The first step of A.A.—“we admitted we were powerless over alcohol”—is an acknowledgment of this paradox of

²³⁰ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 84-85, my emphasis.

addicted agency. The alcoholic in recovery must come to recognize that, precisely in attempting to exert control over his or her addiction, he or she solidifies and entrenches the addiction. The harder he or she tries to straightforwardly will not to drink, the more certain becomes his or her failure, because in focusing on the object of addiction he or she incites a watertight *weltanschauung* that can only be entered through the practice of the addiction. John Dewey recognized this paradoxical relationship between the habit of addiction and the strivings of rational deliberation, though he does not put it in those terms.

The hard drinker who keeps thinking of not drinking is doing what he can to initiate the acts which lead to drinking. He is starting with the stimulus to his habit. To succeed he must find some positive interest or line of action which will inhibit the drinking series and which by instituting another course of action will bring him to his desired end...The discovery of this other series is at once his means and his end. Until one takes intermediate acts seriously enough to treat them as ends, one wastes one's time in any effort at change of habits.²³¹

One of the great insights of A.A. and of the twelve-step recovery model in general is the recognition of the addictive habit's recalcitrance to direct deliberation and willpower. It is for this reason, for example, that only one of the twelve steps—the first—even mentions alcohol. The other eleven steps can be understood as exhortations to “find some positive interest or line of action which will inhibit the drinking series and which by instituting another course of action will bring [the addict] to his desired end.” That is to say, the wisdom of the twelve-step programs is in the recognition that the habit of addiction can only be supplanted through the development of another habit that is as pervasive and compelling as the habit of addiction. One way of life can only be

²³¹ John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 28.

supplanted by another, and for this reason A.A. is rightly understood by its members to be a way of life. “The program is a plan for a lifetime of daily living” (AA 317).

Working the steps is not some magic formula that prevents the alcoholic from drinking while leaving him or her otherwise the same.²³² Rather, working the steps is about becoming the kind of person who does not perceive the world as an addict. This is at the heart of the A.A. adage that the Fellowship is not mainly about teaching you how to quit drinking but about teaching you how to live sober. The addict who thinks of the steps strictly as means to an end will almost inevitably relapse. Becoming the kind of person who can work the steps as a way of life must be for the recovering addict an end in itself. The method is one of indirection. The addict takes on responsibility for aspects of his or her life that may be under more immediate control, that may not trigger the automatism of addiction, and, in so doing, finds that he or she has indirectly responded to the addiction.

Is Charity an Addiction?

We have been investigating addiction without first offering a definition of it. We have focused instead on several prominent “marks” of addiction—tolerance, withdrawal, craving, loss of control, relapse, obsession—in an attempt to state philosophically how these marks can be illuminated by the conception of addiction as a habit, as a peculiar possibility of human action. But we have not tried to carefully circumscribe the domain of addiction, or to say what could and could not count as an addiction. Can a person be

²³² The drug Antabuse (Disulfuram), mentioned in the Introduction, is the attempt to provide such a magic formula, which is why it almost inevitably fails to accomplish lasting recovery.

addicted to caffeine, shopping, exercise, a cause, a religion? Rather than delimit the boundaries of addiction, I have tried to focus instead on its center and to argue that addiction is a habit of the cogitative estimation according to which the object of addiction is invested with meaning that extends to every other aspect of an addict's life. I have argued that addiction is a habit that, like charity, informs all other habits by determining the end toward which those habits are directed. I have sometimes spoken of "major addiction" as a way of picking out this totalizing and pervading feature of the habit of addiction. I think it unlikely, for example, that coffee could be the object of a major addiction.²³³ If we speak of an addiction to coffee, we tend to be focusing on tolerance and withdrawal as constitutive of addiction, a tendency that, as I suggested in the Introduction, distracts us from those aspects of addiction that give alcoholism or crack-cocaine addiction, for example, their frightening power and allure. It is also possible, of course, for addictions to manifest some of the characteristics I have focused on and not others. For instance, I am convinced that smoking plays an important ordering and integrating role in the life of the smoker, but I am doubtful that nicotine addiction has much to do with ecstasy. I have tried to get at the center of what I take to be the most extreme and dominating addictions we know of, those in which "loss of control" seems the only way to describe the addictive behavior, in the hopes that other less severe addictions can nevertheless be illuminated by such a procedure. As I suggested in Chapter III, most current attempts to define addiction are driven by

²³³ It is interesting to note, however, especially in light of our arguments in Chapter IV about the historically relative dimension of addiction, the description offered by one Victorian writer of the long-term effects of coffee: "The sufferer is tremulous and loses his self-command; he is subject to fits of agitation and depression. He has a haggard appearance. As with other such agents, a renewed dose of the poison gives temporary relief, but at the cost of future misery," quoted in Elster, *Strong Feelings*, 128.

economic or political strategies directed toward the health-care industry's responsibility to fund certain kinds of treatment programs, which is not in itself an illegitimate enterprise. But that is not our interest here, and so I have avoided the urge to make definitive statements about what should and should not be counted as an addiction.

Although my own focus may call into question the status of certain addiction-attributions such as caffeine addiction, in general the consequence of this focus will be a widening rather than narrowing of the domain of addiction. For there is no reason to suppose that substances are the only objects of desire that could play a totalizing role in an agent's life. Substance addictions rightly receive the attention that they do because of their visible tragic effects, both on the lives of addicts and those who care about them, but in some ways substance addictions are the less insidious kinds of major addictions precisely because they grow harder and harder to ignore. Other major addictions enslave quietly but are no less destructive of the humanity of those taken hostage. What is the nature of this destruction, if it cannot be measured in concrete terms like the health of the human organism or the loss of family, job, or life? I shall attempt to answer this question by way of answering another question, namely whether or not charity might be an addiction. As it turns out, this question can be approached by asking yet another, not so strange, question: Is A.A. an addiction?

The charge that A.A. and other twelve-step programs simply substitute one addiction for another is not uncommon.

The Minnesota Model, as the Hazelden method is now called, certainly does help addicts find less damaging lifestyles without any chemical support. But they are still addicted lifestyles: AA meetings become the crutch—in rooms thick with

chain-smoked cigarette fumes, you have to go on and on describing yourself as a recovering addict or alcoholic.²³⁴

I became as compulsive about A.A. as I had been about drinking, which was necessary because I had been told to spend as much time at meetings as I had drinking (AA 396).

A.A. often becomes an alternative way of life, which is as intensely focused on abstinence as their former lives had been focused on alcohol. This passionate and complete reorientation is not a unique phenomenon; it is rather like what critics of sects would call ideological re-education or a modest form of elective brainwashing.²³⁵

These are suggestions of “substitution,” which raise the suspicion that A.A. is merely another “dependence.” To the extent that “dependence” is synonymous with “addiction,” as it is in most addiction literature, these claims amount to accusations of “substitute addiction,” the phenomenon in which one addiction is merely replaced by another and the root problem of addiction itself is left unaddressed.²³⁶ In a sense, A.A. acknowledges that it is a “substitute” for addiction. Responding to the hypothetical alcoholic’s question, “I know I must get along without liquor, but how can I? Have you a sufficient substitute?” the Big Book responds: “Yes, there is a substitute and it is vastly more than that. It is a fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous” (AA 152). In what sense is A.A. a “substitute” for addiction? Is it a “substitute addiction”? How could we tell?

Although I have not attempted to define addiction, I have certainly put one of the “marks” at the center of my account. Major addictions, I have argued, are characterized by a totalizing obsession with the object of addiction that, through the habituation of the

²³⁴ Pryor, *Survival of the Coolest*, 198.

²³⁵ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, 88.

²³⁶ “We realize that the word ‘dependence’ is as distasteful to many psychiatrists and psychologists as it is to alcoholics. Like our professional friends, we, too, are aware that there are wrong forms of dependence...But dependence upon an A.A. group or upon a Higher Power hasn’t produced any baleful results” (TT 38).

cogitative estimation, pervades absolutely every aspect of an addict's life. If we take obsession as *the* constitutive mark of addiction, i.e. as both a necessary and sufficient condition for the attribution of addiction, then we would be lead to the conclusion that the non-addictive life is the life that is obsession-free, a life of neutrality or detachment. This has indeed been the conclusion drawn in a large segment of the recovery movement, and it is often associated with Buddhist or other Eastern religions. Francis Seeburger, for instance, argues that "the nonaddictive mind is a detached mind," and "the nonaddictive mind is an abandoned mind."²³⁷ Seeburger approvingly cites the thirteenth century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, who "praised detachment as the highest of all possible virtues, greater even than humility or love."²³⁸

If we accept the claim that the nonaddictive mind is the detached mind, and its converse, that the attached, dependent, or obsessed mind is the addictive mind, then it becomes hard to imagine how A.A., which presents itself quite straightforwardly as a "way of life," a substitute for addiction, and that upon which a recovering addict must "depend," can be anything but a substitute addiction. Harder still to imagine is how a life of charity, the pinnacle of Aquinas's theological ethics, can appear as anything but another form of addiction, since it promises, not detachment, but on the contrary, ecstatic participation in the consuming fire of the divine love.²³⁹ If, as Paul Wadell claims, "to love God in charity means we lose control over our life precisely where the risk is

²³⁷ Seeburger, *Addiction and Responsibility*, 173.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

²³⁹ Josef Pieper, in *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston and Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997) cites Aquinas's *Commentary on Isaiah* to the effect that "*caritas*, because it consumes everything and transforms everything into itself, [is called] a fire."

greatest: we lose control over our self,”²⁴⁰ how is the saint really different than the addict who loses control over his or her life by submitting to the object of his or her addiction?

I am convinced that, despite their similarities, there is an important difference between the active addict and the recovering addict, between the addict and the would-be saint. I am therefore lead to reject the view according to which addiction is equated with any all-consuming singularity of intent and purpose. How might we distinguish between the life of addiction and the life of charity, or between the life of addiction and the life of A.A.?

We have explored to varying degrees most of the major “marks” of addiction, with one important exception. We have said very little about denial, that mark of addiction that is sometimes, like obsession, taken to be in and of itself a sufficient condition for addiction.²⁴¹ And, although I do not believe *either* obsession or denial *alone* are sufficient conditions for addiction, taken together they are constitutive of the essence of addiction. How so?

Denial is a form, indeed the predominant form, of self-deception. Like that of incontinence, the problem of self-deception presents a paradox to philosophers intent on representing it in a non-contradictory way. In fact, the two paradoxes are intimately related, although the former has received the greater attention in the scholarly literature. Herbert Fingarette has written one of only two contemporary monographs on the subject,

²⁴⁰ Wadell, *The Primacy of Love*, 91.

²⁴¹ “You often hear in AA meetings that denial *is* the disease of alcoholism, not just its primary symptom,” Knapp, *Drinking*, 136.

and his analysis provides a helpful point of departure for our own inquiry into the relationship between addiction and the self-deception that is denial.²⁴²

After surveying an assortment of articles that attempt to provide an analysis of self-deception, Fingarette concludes that previous efforts have failed to disentangle the paradoxical nature of self-deception because they have all characterized self-deception in terms of belief and knowledge, and, in turn, they have characterized belief and knowledge in terms of “perception” language such as “appear” and “see.” Given this framework, consciousness is understood to be an essentially passive power. Thus, A.R. White can claim that becoming conscious is “not something we do. Despite what philosophers sometimes say, there is no such thing as an ‘act’ of awareness or consciousness.”²⁴³ Given this picture of consciousness, self-deception can only remain paradoxical, because this picture prevents us from grasping one of the central features of self-deception, namely purposiveness. For if self-deception is characterized as an agent’s simultaneously holding two incompatible beliefs, and if belief is construed passively, as a “seeing” rather than a “looking,” then we are without resources for explaining how it makes sense to say that one agent simultaneously believes and disbelieves some proposition. Furthermore the analysis breaks down, because the normative claims that accompany attributions of self-deception—“she believed such and such, but she should have known better”—are incompatible with the picture of believing and knowing as things that happen to agents rather than things that agents do. If belief is

²⁴² Fingarette, *Self-Deception*. The other monograph on the subject is Alfred Mele’s *Self-Deception Unmasked* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Disappointingly, Mele fails to mention Fingarette’s fine work, which only confirms the suspicion that Mele’s title may be over-ambitious.

²⁴³ Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, 38.

always something that happens to us rather than something we do, how can we ever be culpable for it?

Fingarette asserts that we can only begin to make sense of self-deception by recognizing that “consciousness is not a ‘seeing’ but a ‘looking.’”²⁴⁴ He denies A.R. White’s contention that becoming explicitly conscious is not something we do, suggesting that White is misled to this conclusion by the conventional association of consciousness-language with the language of vision. Pointing out that the language of vision is metaphorical, Fingarette suggests that there might be a different metaphor in terms of which we could interpret consciousness, and that, furthermore, this different metaphor affords a satisfactory and insightful account of self-deception.

The model I propose is one in which we are doers, active rather than passive. To be specific, the model I suggest is that of a skill...To become explicitly conscious of something is to be exercising a certain skill...The specific skill I particularly have in mind as a model for becoming explicitly conscious of something is the skill of saying what we are doing or experiencing. I propose, then, that we do not characterize consciousness as a kind of mental mirror, but as the exercise of the (learned) skill of “spelling-out” some feature of the world as we are engaged in it.²⁴⁵

The affinity of Fingarette’s analysis to a philosophy of habit is startling, for “skill” is the language of habit. Fingarette neither claims nor disclaims that an analysis of consciousness in terms of skill or habit is original with him, but that it is not should be plain from the exposition of Aristotle on incontinence carried out in Chapter II. In fact, the difference between Fingarette and those contemporary philosophers who analyze self-deception in terms of the passive reception of belief and knowledge into

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 36.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

consciousness parallels closely the difference between Plato's and Aristotle's treatment of the relationship between knowledge and incontinence.²⁴⁶ Aristotle's ability to "save the appearances" of incontinent action is grounded in his account of knowledge as a type of skill or habit, and it is Plato's inability to see a distinction between abstract and embodied knowledge that prevents him from acknowledging the reality of incontinent action.²⁴⁷

After specifying more fully what "spelling out" and "engagement in the world" amount to, Fingarette proposes that self-deception should be understood, not as the simultaneous maintenance of two mutually incompatible beliefs, but rather as an agent's purposive avoidance of spelling-out some feature of the world in which he or she is engaged, when the agent is readily *able* to spell out that feature. "In general, the person in self-deception is a person of whom it is a patent characteristic that even when normally appropriate he *persistently* avoids spelling-out some feature of his engagement in the world."²⁴⁸ There is nothing particularly paradoxical about this, but it does lead to a further question, one that Fingarette thinks the standard accounts of self-deception, because they largely ignore its purposive element, rarely ask: Why would an agent intentionally and persistently avoid spelling-out some feature of his or her engagement with the world? Fingarette has argued that "rather than taking explicit consciousness for

²⁴⁶ I owe this point to Professor Stanley Hauerwas.

²⁴⁷ Just as, after the medieval period, the American Pragmatists are unique in their recognition of the centrality of habit to an adequate philosophy of human action, so are they—and especially William James—responsible for re-emphasizing that consciousness is an exercise of agency. Thus, for example, it is axiomatic for James that consciousness is selective: "[Consciousness] is interested in some parts of these objects [i.e., features of the world in which we are engaged] to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects—*chooses* from among them, in a word—all the while," *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, 224.

²⁴⁸ Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, 47.

granted, we must come to take its absence for granted; we must see explicit consciousness as the further exercise of a specific skill for a special reason.”²⁴⁹ What reasons might an agent have for purposely *not* exercising the skill of spelling-out some feature of his or her experience?

The reasons that motivate self-deception, according to Fingarette, have to do with matters of personal identity. Self-deception is the response of an agent who finds him- or herself engaged in the world in some way that he or she recognizes to be incompatible with the “person” or the “self” that the agent takes him- or herself to be. “Self-deception turns upon the personal identity one accepts rather than the beliefs one has... In general, the self-deceiver is engaged in the world in some way, and yet he refuses to identify himself as one who is so engaged; he refuses to avow the engagement as his.”²⁵⁰ Consciousness, therefore, is a selective activity correlative to the activity of constituting an identity, and self-deception is a function of this activity to the extent that the formation of identity entails the avowal *and* disavowal of certain of one’s engagements in the world.

Ironically, and contrary to our cherished intuitions, self-deception, rather than signaling lack of character or integrity, is parasitic on the quest for integrity. “The less integrity, the less there is motive to enter into self-deception. The greater the integrity of the person, and the more powerful the contrary inclination, the greater is the temptation to self-deception.”²⁵¹ Furthermore, and relatedly, rather than signaling a lack of

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 42.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 67.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 140.

sincerity, self-deception is only intelligible as a consequence of an agent's striving for sincerity and authenticity of self. "We feel [the self-deceiver] is not a *mere* cheat. We are moved to a certain comparison in which there is awareness of the self-deceiver's authentic inner dignity as the motive of his self-betrayal."²⁵²

Generally, therefore, the problem of self-deception is not a function of lack of character but on the contrary, the manifestation of moral earnestness. One of the great achievements of the propagation of the disease concept of addiction has been its ability to call into question the moral stigma attached to addiction, to counteract the prevailing assumption, especially heightened in the aftermath of the Temperance Movement, that addiction is an extreme form of moral depravity. Surprisingly, however, if we take addiction as a kind of habit-group, and the skill or habit of denial as a constitutive habit of that habit group, we get the same result. To the extent that addicts find reason to deceive themselves about their addictions, addiction cannot be characterized in terms of moral weakness. It may represent a type of moral mistake or error, but addiction cannot be made intelligible as a kind of moral weakness. This insight allows us to make sense of a fact that, on the model of addiction as choice out of a morally weak character, is utterly incomprehensible, namely the ability of numerous addicts to recover by practicing the Twelve Steps, which are nothing if not a fundamentally moral undertaking. If the defining characteristic of the addict is moral weakness, how could the addict be expected to appreciate, let alone practice, the demands of honesty, humility, and selflessness that are determinative of the twelve-step program of recovery?

²⁵² Ibid.

Paradoxically, to the extent that addicts are self-deceivers, they evidence a capacity for just this type of moral endeavor. Self-deception signals the presence of genuine virtue. But when virtues are disordered toward an insufficient end, they become simulacra that damage the agent and others exactly to the extent that they harness the vital energy of genuine virtues.

At the heart of addiction is a fundamental contradiction, and it is a contradiction that is ultimately its own undoing, holding out the hope of recovery. The enslaving force of addiction, I have argued, resides in its perverse promise to empower a moral agent to integrate and order his or her life around one all-consuming end. But the integration and resultant identity that addiction enables is unmasked as a lie insofar as the agent comes to recognize that his or her addiction demands that he or she disavow commitments and identifications that he or she knows must be included in any life that aspires to the total sufficiency of the life of *eudaimonia*. Precisely because it provides a simulacrum of that in the name of which an agent must finally disavow his or her engagement with it, addiction is the most compelling lie there is and therefore the most insidious and aggressive motive of self-deception. Self-deception is the red flag, the evidence that the totalizing obsession of addiction is a devastatingly deficient obsession because it cannot make good on its promise to incorporate those commitments that an agent already recognizes to be integral components of any legitimate claimant to a worthwhile way of life. Addiction achieves integrity and internal order only by demanding the rejection of certain goods that the incontinent addict is ultimately unwilling to disavow. In turn, the addiction, which has already through the power of its lie insinuated itself in the addict's

cogitative estimation, must itself be disavowed. Denial, therefore, testifies simultaneously to the power of addiction's promise and the acknowledgement that the promise is a lie. This is the wisdom behind the A.A. adage: "You are only as sick as your secrets."²⁵³

Those persons who are not already committed to the reality of certain nonaddictive goods as necessary constituents of any life that deserves the title of *eudaimonia* are therefore without hope for recovery. They have no leverage against addiction. But it is also true that they have no motive for self-deception. The true cynic or nihilist holds no hope of recovery, nor is he or she self-deceived. But then we must ask, can the cynic or nihilist be addicted? It seems to me that the cynic or nihilist cannot be addicted, for recognition of addiction is a type of moral achievement, and the attribution of addiction ultimately a normative claim.²⁵⁴ Without commitment to certain goods as constitutive of the life of human flourishing, there are no grounds to distinguish the insatiable appetite to eat when hungry from the insatiable appetite to guzzle alcohol when craving. There is no basis for calling the former a "natural appetite" and the latter an "addiction."

We are now in position to complete the argument against detachment as the necessary antidote to addiction. The analysis of self-deception has put us in a position to see that addiction cannot be understood strictly as any dominating obsession, but rather as any dominating obsession that, through the production of self-deception, bespeaks its own inadequacy as a dominating obsession.

²⁵³ Moyers, *Broken*, 225.

²⁵⁴ Gary Watson notes the inescapably normative dimension of addiction attributions in "Disordered Appetites: Addiction, Compulsion, and Dependence," in *Addiction: Entries and Exits*, ed. Jon Elster (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).

Self-deception, though not a failure rooted in moral weakness, is nevertheless a kind of failure, and if we grasp the source of this failure we also begin to grasp how a person might have the ‘purity of heart to will one thing’²⁵⁵ without thereby being an addict. If the denial that is self-deception is not a failure of moral weakness, what is it a failure of? Drawing on the work of Fingarette, Stanley Hauerwas and David B. Burrell have argued that the failure of self-deception consists in the insufficiency of the stories we tell about our own identities.

What the self-deceiver lacks is not integrity or sincerity but the courage and skill to confront the reality of his or her situation. Self-deception is correlative with trying to exist in this life without a story sufficiently substantive and rich to sustain us in the unavoidable challenges that confront the self.²⁵⁶

Addiction is not merely any and every dominating and all-consuming purpose. Addiction is any and every dominating and all-consuming purpose whose insufficiency to sustain the self in his or her pursuit of a worthwhile life is manifested in denial. This is why addicts are notoriously poor at meditation, and why A.A. so frequently recommends meditation as central to the life of recovery. Meditation forces us to reflect on the stories that we tell ourselves about our lives, and it therefore represents a very real threat to any addiction since it threatens to reveal the insufficiencies of those stories. To the extent that would-be saints are exemplars in the practice of meditation, there is

²⁵⁵ “Aquinas readers have to reckon with his singleness of purpose. ‘Purity of heart is to will one thing,’ said Kierkegaard. Very differently John Rawls has written that ‘Although to subordinate all our aims to one end does not strictly speaking violate the principles of rational choice..., it still strikes us as irrational, or more likely as mad.’ The examples which Rawls has just given of those who have in this way given their allegiance to one dominant end are those of St. Ignatius Loyola and of Aquinas. What Rawls says is an instructive measure of the cultural distance separating the protagonists of modernity from Aquinas. Interestingly, however, those protagonists often enough do not take Aristotle to be similarly alien or mad,” Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 165.

²⁵⁶ Stanley Hauerwas and David B. Burrell, “Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer’s *Inside the Third Reich*,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, edd. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 207.

reason to doubt that charity is an addiction. To substantiate the claim that A.A. or the twelve-step recovery model in general is merely a substitute addiction it would need to be shown that those who “work the steps” are in fact engaged in the world in such a way that necessitates denial, and in order to substantiate the claim that charity is an addiction it would need to be shown that would-be saints are thereby self-deceivers. This, I think, has not been shown.

I do not mean to imply that discovering an all-consuming purpose sufficient to prevent self-deception is a simple task. It is without question the most perilous of moral endeavors. As Iris Murdoch says,

That a belief in the unity, and also in the hierarchical order, of the moral world has a psychological importance is fairly evident. The notion that ‘it all somehow must make sense’, or ‘there is a best decision here’, preserves from despair: the difficulty is how to entertain this consoling notion in a way which is not false. As soon as any idea is a consolation the tendency to falsify it becomes strong: hence the traditional problem of preventing the idea of God from degenerating in the believer’s mind.²⁵⁷

Murdoch’s work in moral philosophy is a relentless assault on humanity’s tendency to console itself by interposing a fantasy between self and reality, and, for Murdoch, there is no greater source of such fantasy than the insistence on a totalizing monism.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 56-57.

²⁵⁸ In the end, of course, Murdoch is a monist in the Platonic tradition, but she insists that the Good is that which enlightens us to see the contingent particularity of what is and prevents us from imposing our own pet theory on the reality that confronts us.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: TOWARD AN AESTHETIC OF RECOVERY

Let me restate the argument as concisely as possible. Addicts seeking recovery face a paradox: they are unable to overcome their addiction through straightforward exertion of will, but the admission of this powerlessness can be the first step in an indirect reformation and reinvigoration of their power to overcome their addiction. To understand this paradox we tried in Chapter II to understand the nature of the first part of the paradox, how it is possible that someone fail to do what he or she judges is best to do. This led us to the classic philosophical paradox of incontinent action and into the thought of Aristotle, who tried to offer an explanation of incontinent action. We noticed that addiction, understood in terms of incontinence, is a uniquely particularized kind of incontinence that Aristotle mentions only in passing, and so we bracketed the question of how particularized incontinence differed from more standard kinds of incontinence. After delimiting our inquiry by surveying the relation of incontinence to indulgence and morbidity, and then the relation of simple incontinence to incontinence from early habituation and originally bad natures, we located in Aristotle two lines of response to the paradox of incontinence. One line of response lead us to passion as a source of incontinence, what Aristotle called impetuous incontinence. The other response led us to habit as a source of incontinence, what Aristotle called weak incontinence. Because the cases in which what we called the addiction paradox was most paradoxical were those cases in which passion could not be identified as the culprit, we determined that

we might investigate habit more thoroughly as a possible key to the nature of addictive incontinence. We noted in this connection Aristotle's crucial insight into the distinction between abstract and embodied knowledge.

We began Chapter III by noticing parallels between Aristotle's account of impetuous incontinence and the mark of addiction called *craving*. We noticed that what is most salient about addictive craving is its resilience, and this led us to a recognition that at the heart of incontinent action is the limitation of embodied human will. This transitioned us into Aquinas's account of the necessity of habit to any adequate ontology of human action, and we found that habit is necessary because it enables human persons to perform certain actions consistently, successfully, with ease, and on cue. Each of these characteristics of habit was shown to be crucial to Aquinas's account of how habits explain the ability of human agents to act well over a prolonged period of time despite the natural limitations on human will. Insofar as addictive incontinence pointed to the inability of addicts to act well over a prolonged period of time, we confirmed that habit might hold the key to a more adequate understanding of the addiction paradox. In order to defend this insight against the contemporary reticence to interpret addiction in terms of habit, we then had to show how the contemporary understanding of habit was both attenuated and confused. We showed how habit mediated between many of the polarities that have characterized the addiction debate, including the polarities of act and capacity, instinct and disposition, determinism and free will, the involuntary and the voluntary, and, finally, the disease and choice models of addiction. We then set out to explore specifically the types of habits that might be related to addictive incontinence,

focusing on Aquinas's account of the habituation of the body, the imagination, the cogitative estimation, and the memory. We claimed that the burden of the two remaining chapters would be to establish the thesis that addiction is substantially a habit of the cogitative estimation, and we warned that, due to the very nature of Aquinas's account of the cogitative estimation and its habituation, this would require a wide-ranging and speculative exercise in the philosophy of culture and philosophical psychology. To conclude the chapter, we noticed that what Aquinas had to say about the ability of certain habits to function automatically offered insight into the mark of addiction known as *loss of control*, and that what Aquinas had to say about the role of inward "intensity" in the growth and destruction of habits offered insight into the mark of addiction known as *relapse*.

After beginning Chapter IV by expanding our account of habits to cover what we called habit groups, and noticing how habit groups made sense of Aquinas's claim that right human action required an extensive coordination of a number of separate human powers, we moved on to a discussion of the relationship between the habit group of intemperance and the phenomena of addiction. In addition to noting the distinctly different role played by *shame* and *guilt* in addiction as compared to intemperance, we argued that addiction was not best understood as an extension of the habit of intemperance because intemperance is concerned with sensible goods whereas addiction, contrary to what many suspect, is concerned primarily with moral and intellectual goods. We saw that addictions were, in this respect, like habits of virtue the purpose of which is to equip an agent to pursue with consistency, ease, and success the moral and intellectual

goods constitutive of a worthwhile life. This led us into a more careful examination of Aristotle's account of the relationship between the virtues and the good life, and our examination prompted two questions: First, how does Aristotle suppose that the virtues are to be internally ordered so as to capacitate an agent for the good life? And second, how does Aristotle suppose that the moral virtues are to be integrated with and ordered to the practice of *theoria* or contemplation, which is for Aristotle at least partly constitutive of any life worthy to be called happy. We set out to address the first question, putting the second off until the final chapter. We found, following Alasdair MacIntyre, that the question of how the virtues are to be internally ordered did not arise for Aristotle as a question for philosophical speculation since Aristotle took himself to be articulating the philosophical assumptions implicit in the ordering that the virtues already took on in the tightly circumscribed life of the Greek *polis*. This led us to reflect on the unique urgency of such a question in the modern context and to inquire whether there might be a connection between the urgency of this question and the acuteness of modern addiction. We claimed that modernity is characterized by the absence of a similarly circumscribed social context in which there is widespread consensus on a substantive view of the common good and the conviction that individual good could only be derivative of common good, and that this loss eventuated in a crises of arbitrariness, boredom, fragmentation, and loneliness. We then explored the ways in which addiction supplies a response to each of these breakdowns in modern society. At the heart of the argument was the contention that addiction supplies a unique response to the crisis because it brings with it its own propulsive force and incontrovertible rationale, features

that modern persons find lacking in their efforts to establish more socially acceptable commitments. We concluded that addiction is the definitive modern habit because of its ability to persuade the cogitative estimations of modern persons that it offers a suitably meaningful way of life in the absence of other legitimate contenders.

In Chapter V, we returned to the question earlier posed to Aristotle: How is the exercise of practical rationality to be integrated with and ordered to the transcendent possibilities of human existence realized through the practice of *theoria*. We argued that this question, unlike the first one posed, does expose a shortcoming in Aristotle's articulation of the life suitable to human beings. We went on to suggest that Aquinas's theological ethics overcomes this shortcoming by postulating the theological virtues, specifically the virtue of charity. We set out not to defend the legitimacy of this postulation but rather to explore the ways in which it functioned structurally as an integrating and ordering principle. We found that Aquinas's *caritas* is distinct from Aristotle's *theoria* in that the former is an appetitive habit and the latter an intellectual habit. Aquinas argued that whereas we are limited by a finite intellect, human desire is infinite and therefore can be a genuine point of contact with an infinite God. Moreover, charity, unlike *theoria*, integrates the practical and transcendent dimensions of human existence by transforming practical activity from a mere means to the future pursuit of *theoria* into an actual exercise of charity that is therefore both informed by and contributive to the habit of charity. We then proposed that addiction is a perennial temptation to human beings to the extent that it mimics the integrative and ordering capacity of Thomistic charity. Like charity, addiction equips an agent with the

singularity of purpose—the *obsession*—to order every other activity to one final and substantial end, and, like charity, addiction extends to an agent the promise of ecstasy. We argued that the habit of addiction is produced by the repetition over time of active “connections” made in the mind of an agent between the needs occasioned by the deficiencies of the modern social context or the universal human desire for transcendence and addiction’s apparent ability to meet these needs. But that lead us to a question of whether any singularity of purpose that could meet these kinds of needs was by that very token an addiction. We closed the chapter by arguing that this need not be the case, for in addition to its ordering and integrating energy, addiction is also the impetus to *denial*. We suggested that denial is the evidence that a particular obsession cannot make good on its promise to integrate and order a worthwhile life, and we left open the possibility that there might be dominating commitments that need not bespeak their own inadequacy through the production of self-deception.

As was mentioned in Chapter III, and as will have been apparent to the reader, an important shift occurs between Chapters III and IV. I move from a careful explication of Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s philosophies of human action into a much different sort of engagement with their work. I tried to state why this sort of transition is dictated by the kind of argument I am making, but my occasional reference back to the “cogitative estimation” as outlined in Chapter III may have seemed at times forced. The simple reason for this is that the language of “cogitative estimation” is not our language, nor is it even front and center in the language of Thomas. In each case, we could have described the matter differently by speaking, for example, of the ways in which

addiction recommends itself to an agent through appeal to an agent's "tacit knowing" rather than to an agent's "propositional reasoning."²⁵⁹ There are a number of ways to get at this distinction, many of them more intuitive and familiar to us than the distinction in Aquinas's faculty psychology between the intellect proper and the cogitative estimation. But I have preferred to refer back to the cogitative estimation in order to reiterate that, whatever the proper denotation of the source of this knowledge, that source is deeply susceptible to habituation. I think this point needs to be reiterated and underscored because there is a temptation to think that the source of our "tacit knowing," to use Polanyi's description again, is in some sense primordial or unconditioned, and this is not so.

Were this a more "normal" kind of dissertation, I would feel content to leave the argument where it stands, but this is not a normal dissertation, at least not a normal philosophy dissertation. I do not think that any genuine intellectual endeavor is ever *just* an intellectual endeavor, but such a possibility is beyond question when the theme is addiction. My interest in addiction is intensely practical, as I hope my close attention to the first-hand reports of addicts has made clear. I am, like almost every modern person, one who has experienced the extraordinary allure and destruction of addiction, both on my own life and over the life of entire communities in which I have lived and worked. I would not have set out to think more carefully about addiction if I did not hope to find

²⁵⁹ The notion of "tacit knowledge" comes from Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967). Although Polanyi broke new ground by showing how tacit knowledge could not be kept separate from the more "objective" knowledges pursued in modern science, the idea that our rationality extends beyond the propositional or discursive is by no means new. William James called it the "sentiment of rationality" and offered a classic analysis in "The Sentiment of Rationality," in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

something helpful and hopeful to say about it, and so in the last several pages of this conclusion, I would like to offer a few very brief attempts to mine some of the implications of my arguments for the hope of recovery.

Character and Recovery

To a certain extent, the Big Book of A.A. traces the failure of addiction to a failure of character. It offers the following analysis of how addicts are made.

But whenever we had to choose between character and comfort, the character building was lost in the dust of our chase after what we thought was happiness. Seldom did we look at character-building as something desirable in itself, something we would like to strive for whether our instinctual needs were met or not. We never thought of making honesty, tolerance, and true love of man and God the daily basis of living (TT 72).

Does this not contradict my argument, for have I not argued, first, that addiction is not a form of intemperance and, second, that the very possibility of denial among addicts evidences a degree of character? I have argued for both of these conclusions, but the assessment of A.A. does not necessarily contradict these conclusions. For I have also argued, first, that the predominant response of modern persons to the crisis of meaning in modern culture is a kind of consumerist intemperance and, second, that most addictions find their beginnings in the exercise of such intemperance. The upshot of my overall argument in relation to these points is, first, that although addictions may begin as diversions they become much more than diversions and they therefore represent a surmounting of the modern suspicion that diversion is all there is, and, second, that addicts as a group are probably not any less “moral” and probably have just as much “character” as do nonaddicts as a group. In places, the texts of A.A. imply that the

addict is uniquely or specially bad, and, if this were the position of A.A., it would represent one point of disagreement.

Character is an ambiguous word. It can be offered as a purely descriptive name of that distinctiveness in light of which we can make relatively accurate predictions of how a particular person will respond in a given situation, or it can stand as a normative evaluation of the degree to which a person is able to confer shape and meaning on his or her existence rather than merely reacting to the immediate desires of each passing moment. Lack of character in this latter sense is inevitable to the extent that a community or society is unable to explain why it might be intrinsically valuable for a person to discipline his or her desires. If pain of punishment or pain of physical suffering are the only reasons that a culture can provide for why anyone should discipline or curb specific desires, that culture lacks the resources for forming people of character since character is predicated on the assumption that certain goods of human existence are inaccessible to any person determined by his or her most immediate desires. That is not to say that there are no modern people of character—the modern inheritance includes, alongside the pervasive skepticism about the ultimate defensibility of every point of view, a cross-section of traditions that nevertheless maintain to varying degrees some claim on modern persons. To the extent that any of us, whether addicts or not, are still prone to self-deception, we see evidence of the sway that certain visions of the good still exert on modern persons. To say that there is a crisis of character in modernity is only to say that the problem of character is one that plagues our society as a whole, and not the class of addicts in particular.

But there is one important way in which major addicts differ from non-addicts with respect to character. For non-addicts it remains a genuine option to live without character in this latter sense, but this is no longer true for addicts. Major addicts, at least major substance addicts, are faced with two stark options: recover or die. The development of character—and on this A.A. is undoubtedly right—is therefore indispensable to the hope of recovery. Why should that be? The answer given by A.A. is a simple one: we are addicts because when faced with challenges that demanded moral courage we escaped into addiction; if we are to be anything other than addicts, we will have to become the kind of people capable of confronting the challenges of life. This is true, but it does not quite get at the crux of the matter, for addiction and character are not the only two options. There is also distraction, diversion, intemperate indulgence. Why not recover from addiction by becoming a consumer, by finding a worthwhile hobby, by taking more vacations?

The central thesis of my argument has been that in important respects addiction is unlike that response to the world characterized by distraction in immediate titillation because, more akin to our normative understanding of character, it does in its own twisted way enable an agent to confer shape and meaning on his or her existence since it brings with it its own impetus, ordering end, integrative energy, and world of meanings. Because of this, the life of distraction and diversion would in a very real sense constitute a loss of meaning for the addict, and it is therefore unlikely that such a life could provide a rationale as compelling as the rationale of addiction. There is, then, this strange blessing in the curse of addiction, that addiction blocks off the way of easy diversion and

indulgent distraction and forces the addict, if he or she is to survive, to develop an alternative way of being in the world that provides a similarly substantive and compelling rationale as that provided by addiction. It is this blessing in a curse that recovering alcoholics point to when they say that they are “grateful alcoholics.”

I can now understand how some things, which once seemed like major disasters, turned out to be blessings. Certainly my alcoholism fits that category. I am truly a grateful alcoholic today. I do not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. Those events that once made me feel ashamed and disgraced now allow me to share with others how to become a useful member of the human race (AA 492).

It’s been ten years since I retired, seven years since I joined A.A. Now I can truly say that I am a grateful alcoholic. Had I not become a drunk, I would have become another sober but sad statistic (AA 543).

“Character” names the alternative to being an addict or a “sober but sad statistic.”

Dewey said that “character is the interpenetration of habits.”²⁶⁰ The development of nonaddictive character in a process of recovery therefore demands the development of new habits, particularly the development of new habits of imagination, cogitative estimation, and memory.

Friendship and Recovery

“After what we have said, a discussion of friendship would naturally follow” (1155a3-4). The appearance of this first line of Book 8 in the *Nicomachean Ethics* seems as unlikely a transition there as it must seem here. In the preceding seven books of the *Ethics*, Aristotle has discussed the nature of the best life for human beings, the role of the moral and intellectual virtues in this best life, and the characteristics of

²⁶⁰ *Human Nature and Conduct*, 29.

continent and incontinent action. He mentions friendship hardly at all. Why, then, would it seem “natural” for Aristotle that a discussion of friendship should follow a discussion of the types of actions and habits that make up the best possible life for human beings? The answer is straightforward. Aristotle thinks that there are two ways that a person can develop good habits: he or she can live in a city-state with good laws or he or she can have good friends, preferably both.

If we take Aristotle as our guide, and if the development of new habits of character is entailed by the prospect of recovery, then we would be lead to believe that addicts in recovery might need a new group of friends. We could also, of course, suggest that addicts in recovery might move to places with better laws. This would be an extreme case of what folks in A.A. refer to as the “geographical cure.” But our discussion of modern addiction in Chapter IV should have suggested the unlikelihood that the laws that govern any large community in the modern world could be derivative of a sufficiently robust conception of the common good to form substantive moral character. Interestingly, Gilbert Meilander contends that Aristotle leans heavily on his account of friendship’s role in the moral life in Books 8 and 9 of the *Ethics* because he had over time (we must remember that the *Ethics* is a series of lecture notes that Aristotle prepared for his students over the course of his time in Athens) come to doubt the commitment of the Athenian *polis* to the common good and a life of virtue.²⁶¹ Whatever

²⁶¹ Gilbert Meilander, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 71. Meilander’s argument is supported by 1180a25-33: “In the Spartan state alone, or almost alone, the legislator seems to have paid attention to questions of nurture and occupations; in most states such matters have been neglected, and each man lives as he pleases, Cyclops-fashion, ‘to his own wife and children dealing law.’ Now it is best that there should be a public and proper care for such

we are to make of this contention, it raises the question: How does Aristotle suppose that friends can help one another toward virtue?

En route to answering this question, Aristotle asserts that there are three types of friendship: perfect friendship, friendships of utility, and friendships of pleasure. The latter two are said to be friendships only incidentally and to the extent that they resemble perfect friendship (1157b1-4). Aristotle describes each of these friendships as follows:

Now those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other. So too with those who love for the sake of pleasure; it is not for their character that men love ready-witted people, but because they find them pleasant...Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves (1156a10-14, 1156b7-9).

These descriptions raise important questions about how to rightly describe the nature of the friendship that is necessary to recovery from addiction. That special friendships are in fact necessary is almost universally acknowledged. Just as the overwhelming majority of addicts testify to loneliness as the defining pain that addiction, for a time, numbed, so the overwhelming majority of addicts testify to the power of loving friendships as the single most important factor in their recoveries from addiction. Although such friendships need not be restricted to the “fellowship” of Alcoholics Anonymous, that is of course the most obvious place to look for reports of the friendships of recovery.

matters; but if they are neglected by the community it would seem right for each man to help his children and friends towards virtue, and that they should have the power, or at least the will, to do this.”

But the most compelling part of A.A., the part that made me want to try this sober thing, was the laughter, the pure joy of the laughter that I heard only from sober alcoholics” (AA 333)

I found my tribe, the social architecture that fulfills my every need for camaraderie and conviviality (AA 336).

A.A. is my home now...I no longer feel alone (AA 346).

The thing that kept me sober until I got a grip on honesty was the love in the room of Alcoholics Anonymous. I made some friends for the first time in my life. Real friends that cared, even when I was broke and feeling desperate (AA 468).

Aristotle’s descriptions of the three kinds of friendships raise at least two important questions about how to understand these testimonies. The first question, one that has been raised by John Cooper, has to do with the stringency of Aristotle’s definition of “perfect friendship,” for it almost looks as though people would already have to be perfect in virtue to participate in this kind of friendship.²⁶² Cooper rightly argues that this is not Aristotle’s position, as is clear from several passages. For example, Aristotle claims that with each kind of friendship, including “perfect friendship,” “a better man can make friends with a worse” (1162a37), which would imply that at least one of the parties of a perfect friendship need not already be perfectly virtuous. Cooper contends that Aristotle’s point is not that a determinate level of moral goodness must exist in both parties for the friendship to be a friendship of the highest kind, but only that the friendship be based on a mutual admiration for the moral character of the other and a mutual desire for the moral growth and well-being of the other. Cooper therefore

²⁶² John M. Cooper, “Aristotle on Friendship,” in Amelie O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, 304.

suggests that it would be clearer if these highest forms of friendship were called “virtue-friendships” or “friendships of character.”²⁶³

But this raises another question with respect to the friendships that are so central to the life of recovery. How are we to describe friendships that are based on the expectation on the side of one party that the other party may help him or her develop nonaddictive character? Is this a friendship of utility, since at least one party enters the relationship on the basis of some good—namely growth in moral character—that he or she can receive from the other(s)? It seems to me that this kind of relationship, which I want to suggest should characterize the relationship between addicts new to recovery and those, usually former addicts, who are recovered (or rather, to use the language of A.A., have been recovering addicts longer), is a kind of hybrid between Aristotle’s friendship of character and his friendship of utility. For these relationships are characterized on one side (the “newcomer’s”) by a love that is based on the character of the other party but not necessarily by any concern for the well being or growth of that other party, and, on the other side (the “veteran’s”), by a love that is based on a concern for the well being or growth of the other party but not necessarily out of admiration or respect for the character of the other party. This is then a kind of unevenness that Aristotle does not think should characterize the best forms of friendship. But, although this is a hybrid type of friendship, it is nevertheless on the way to a perfect friendship of character to the extent that growth in character entails growing in the capacity to care for others *for the sake of the other* and to the extent that as one grows in character it

²⁶³ Ibid., 307-308. Cooper lists several places in which Aristotle himself supplies less stringent descriptions of “perfect friendship.”

becomes increasingly possible for the other party to recognize and admire that character. That is to say, effective friendships of recovery will be those that aim directly at the development of friendships of character.

I raise the question of how to rightly describe friendships of recovery not because it is terribly important for us to find a label for friendships of recovery, but because I think it might help us understand a potential pitfall of friendships of recovery. There is always a danger that friendships of recovery be merely friendships of utility. This is the case whenever the friendship does not genuinely involve, on both sides, a willingness and desire for moral transformation. This is, it seems to me, the danger in the notion of A.A. or similar recovery groups as “support” groups. There is of course nothing at all wrong with receiving support from friends; it is surely one of the central practices of genuine friendship. But one can receive support without the slightest interest in or willingness to change.²⁶⁴ Friendships of recovery must include support, but they require more than support. They require a mutual desire to become different people.

Still, how does Aristotle think that friendship transforms people and informs character? Space is short, so let me briefly mention four of Aristotle’s insights and try to connect them with concrete practices in the twelve-step recovery movement. First, Aristotle says, “A certain training in virtue arises also from the company of the good” (1170a11-13). We are not accustomed to think that training is part of friendship. Training is something that we do “on the job,” and friendship is our escape from the

²⁶⁴ A devastating indictment of the threat that “support groups” pose in a therapeutic culture is offered in a novel by Chuck Palahniuk entitled *Fight Club* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996). The book was made into a movie of the same title in 1999.

tedium and paternalism implied by “training.” But Aristotle thinks that one feature of certain types of friendships is that they will involve training. We should not be surprised, for training is skill language, habit language, and indeed Aristotle thinks that certain friendships will be characterized by a sort of master/apprentice relationship. This insight, although somewhat foreign to popular conceptions of friendship, is familiar to recovering addicts in the A.A. tradition. One of the more important pieces of advice offered to newcomers—*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* calls them “novices” (TT 60)—is that they find a “sponsor,” usually someone who has “worked the steps” for a number of years and has developed habits of character, which the newcomer can emulate, and out of which the sponsor can advise and encourage the newcomer. The philosophical assumption behind the sponsor/novice setup is ancient and deeply Aristotelian, but somewhat alien in our context where the moral life is most immediately associated with learning certain abstract rules or principles that we can apply to “dilemmas.” The assumption is, in the words of one A.A., “It is easier to act yourself into a new way of thinking than to think yourself into a new way of acting” (AA 366). This is why it is rarely enough that one simply receive the advice and instruction offered at A.A. meetings and read from the Big Book. The recovering “apprentice” needs a “master,” or several. “I learned how to be a good A.A. member by watching good A.A. members and doing what they do” (AA 521).

Second, Aristotle says, “There is nothing so characteristic of friends as living together” (1157b19-20). This, too, seems to be a bit overstated given our contemporary lifestyle. That our careers might physically separate us from our friends is taken to be a

matter of fact, and a relatively minor setback to friendship that is mitigated by the rapid advances in communication technology. Would Aristotle have felt the same way if he could have been “on-line”? I suspect that he would have. For Aristotle believed that physical proximity, actually sharing space-time with our friends, is essential to friendship not simply because we delight in the company of our friends, which after all can be still be had although perhaps to a lesser extent “long-distance.” Aristotle believed that character friendships required sharing life together because persons who are striving to live well need to be affirmed and confirmed in their conviction that the activities in which they are engaging are worthy of their time and energy. Paul Wadell puts it this way:

One cannot afford to tire of virtue because to become disengaged with its activities is to begin a deterioration of self no one can long endure. Friendship is especially crucial because without the support and reassurance of others who are involved with us in the virtuous life, we invariably grow disenchanted with the very activities we cannot afford to doubt.²⁶⁵

That members of A.A. actually meet in rooms and sit around tables and share coffee every or nearly every night of the week is not merely incidental to the recovery of its members. I think the importance of place and dailiness for the success of A.A. cannot be overstated. Many nonaddicts are surprised to hear from a recovering addict who has been sober for 10 years that he or she attends A.A. meetings four or five nights of the week. But that they do is essential, not only to their own sobriety, but particularly to the efforts of newcomers and “novices.” When an A.A. with his 10-year chip puts his shoes on, gets in his car, drives to the rented room or church basement, gets the coffee

²⁶⁵ Paul J. Wadell, C.P., *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 59-60.

brewing, sits through the meeting quietly, stays after to talk with old friends and skeptical newcomers, locks up the room, gets in his car and drives home, none of the intentionality that accompanies each of those actions is lost. Every basic act testifies and sanctifies the worth of the shared endeavor. Recovery friendships require shared life.

Third, Aristotle says, “Not only does a man in adversity need people to confer benefits on him, but also those who are prospering need people to do well by” (1169b16-18). Today, we think that the prospering person has no *need* of friends. He or she may enjoy them, but not need them. But Aristotle did not think this way since Aristotle believed that prospering was not a state of mind but a kind of activity. The happy person for Aristotle is the person of virtue and the person of virtue is the one who performs virtuous acts, so the virtuous person needs friends with and for whom he or she can act well. Thus the importance in A.A. of the Twelfth Step, the requirement that alcoholics in recovery actively carry the message of hope to others who are addicted. The importance of the Step is not merely or even primarily proselytization; the A.A. is warned not to place great stock in either his successes or failures at welcoming addicts into the program. The importance of the Step is grounded in the recognition that habits of nonaddictive character must be solidified, deepened, and gratified by exercising them on friends. “Practically every A.A. member declares that no satisfaction has been deeper and no joy greater than in a Twelfth Step job well done” (TT 110).

Fourth and finally, in the chapter on our need for friends with and for whom we can practice virtue, Aristotle says, “Man is a political creature” (1169b17-18). He echoes

this claim in the *Politics*: “Man is by nature a political animal.”²⁶⁶ Not only are we moderns inclined to doubt this; we are especially inclined to doubt that this has anything to do with friendship. We tend to think of the “political” as a more or less incumbent aspect of our “public” lives, with friendship providing gratification in our “private” lives. Many modern people think the best way to keep your friends is to resist the temptation to talk about “politics,” or “religion.” But for Aristotle friendship is a political exercise because friendship depends on the survival and flourishing of a community in light of which persons can recognize the worth of the projects they pursue. We think that even if the wider community disintegrates we still have our friends, but Aristotle would think that our friendships lose their power to transform to the extent that they become merely “private.” I am convinced that intentional communities of recovery like A.A. are among the few exemplars that we have in modern culture for how to retrieve the priority of the common over the individual good. A.A. puts it in the starkest terms: “It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not” (TT 130). The first “Tradition” of A.A. states that “our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity” (TT 129), and it is in the constant recurrence of the “we” in each of the Steps—“We made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves”; “We made a list of all persons we had harmed”; etc.—that we can envisage once again the significance of the “we” of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ *Politics*, 1253a3.

²⁶⁷ The retrieval of the priority of the common good over the individual good is in tension with A.A.’s expressed goal of making its members productive members of society to the extent that one can be productive in our society only by elevating the individual over the communal.

This wasn't a course of self study, I quickly learned, for the emphasis was never on "I" or "mine" but always on "we" and "ours." "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable" reads the first step of Alcoholics Anonymous. It would take me a long time to realize how critically important that word *we* is to life-long recovery—and how a self-centered focus on *I* can literally be life-threatening—but even in those first days at Hazelden I began to glimpse the reality that recovery happens within a community and not in isolation.²⁶⁸

Vision and Recovery

In his memoir *Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption*, William Cope Moyers tells of a letter he received from his father, Bill Moyers, the nationally famous journalist and one-time aid to President Lyndon Johnson. William Cope was already in the pit of crack-cocaine addiction and, though neither his father nor the rest of his family knew this, they could tell that something was wrong. Worried, Bill Moyers wrote to his son, expressing his concern and offering some fatherly advice: "Time speeds by like a bullet, and I hope you make within it space for those pursuits that give you such inner satisfaction—feeding the birds, the walks with your wife and your dog, good movies, dinner with friends," and so on. William Cope Moyers has this to say about his response to the letter: "My father had good reason to be worried about me, but I bitterly resented his assessment of my life and wanted to laugh out loud at his solutions. He wanted me to feed the birds? Was he kidding?"²⁶⁹ This response encapsulates the absurdity of the idea that a major addict could recover simply by finding other things to do with his or her spare time. The point is not that feeding the birds is not worthwhile—it may even be

²⁶⁸ Moyers, *Broken*, 161.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

a “noble” way to spend leisure time; surely dinner with friends is. The point, rather, is that *from the addict’s perspective* nothing could seem a more preposterous and laughable alternative to smoking crack than feeding the birds. And this because of what my argument has meant to demonstrate, that addiction, despite its horrific effects, carries within itself an impetus, an ordering end, an integrating energy, a meaning, a world. How could feeding the birds replace that?

My point, again, is not to ridicule people who feed birds. My point is, rather, that diversions can’t replace addictions because activities have meaning only to the extent that an agent sees them as expressive of who he or she is, what he or she desires, or what he or she desires to desire. What William Cope Moyers needed was not more time with birds or even his wife but a transformation of vision that could make feeding birds and walking with his wife appear beautiful, as they clearly did for his father. This is not to suggest that we create beauty and therefore create goodness and truth, but only that with respect to our actions beauty has a kind of priority over the good and the true. “It is as if we can see beauty itself in a way in which we cannot see goodness itself...I can *experience* the transcendence of the beautiful, but (I think) not the transcendence of the good.”²⁷⁰

The habit of addiction informs a certain vision of the world and a certain intake of beauty, which is to say that addiction is a kind of aesthetic. There is, despite all of its

²⁷⁰ Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 60. Aquinas’s doctrine of the “unity of the transcendentals” is that truth, goodness, and beauty are simply different modes of being. Thus, to the extent that something is real, it is true, good, and beautiful (1.16.4). In the order of being, truth precedes goodness which precedes beauty, but in the order of intention beauty indicates the good which indicates the true. This is at least the case with respect to actions that take their cue from sense perception. Aquinas limits the beautiful to that which can be perceived by the senses of sight and sound (1-2.27.1), which may be true of Murdoch too, depending on how we interpret her use of “experience.”

horror, a sustaining liturgy to the life of the addict that makes accessible certain experiences of beauty. There is a liturgy of the bar, a sacred ritual of shooting up, and sacred rites of passage into addictions of all kinds. These liturgies shape addicts to see the world in a particular way, and the iron grip of addiction is correlative to the compelling beauty of the objects that addiction enables addicts to see. Part of my argument has been that the power of addiction lies in its fraudulent offer to the addict, not just of one or several objects of desire that might be pursued alongside other things, but of a comprehensive and self-sufficient world in which everything of worth can be accessed through the practice of the addiction. The poet Holderlin's line, "It was no person you wanted, believe me, it was a world," rings true of the addict.²⁷¹ It is not cocaine or liquor or sex that an addict wants, it is a world. Recovery depends on vision because the addict must come to see the beauty of, and therefore desire, a different world than that which he or she saw as an addict. Recovery therefore requires not so much willpower as an alternative aesthetic, one that is more compelling than the aesthetic of addiction.²⁷² "We are not so free that we can suddenly alter ourselves, for what we can see and thus desire compels us... What we need is not will but a reorientation of the

²⁷¹ Quoted in Wilshire, *Wild Hunger*, 9.

²⁷² This is not to say that two aesthetics cannot overlap. Although Mariana Valverde does not talk in terms of an aesthetic, she makes several interesting points that highlight the role of an aesthetic in recovery. For instance: "A.A. actually encourages the sort of plain English—peppered with homey folk-sayings, somewhat trite metaphors, and the occasional four letter word—that reminds the observer of the institution inhabited by many A.A. members in their previous life, namely the bar or pub," *Diseases of the Will*, 30. And, commenting on the success of the Salvation Army throughout the Temperance Movement, she says, "Unlike more middle-class sectors of the temperance movement, the Army realized that preaching temperance would be useless if no alternative places of leisure-time recreation were provided: hence, their brass-band music, which stood in sharp contrast to the well-bred choirs and organs of traditional churches. Unlike most middle-class temperance organizations, the Army usually attempted to provide alternatives to the evils of pubs and saloons, not just to close them down, going so far as to make Army meeting halls look and feel like pubs rather than churches," p. 90.

vision to a more compelling object.”²⁷³ Thus the centrality of meditation to recovery, for meditation is an exercise in seeing anew and seeing differently.²⁷⁴

When such thoughts break in, we might recall, a little ruefully, how much store we used to set by imagination as it tried to create reality out of bottles. Yes, we reveled in that sort of thinking, didn't we? And though sober nowadays, don't we often try to do the same thing? Perhaps our trouble was not that we used our imagination. Perhaps our real trouble was our total inability to point imagination toward the right objectives. There's nothing the matter with *constructive* imagination; all sound achievement rests upon it. After all, no man can build a house until he first envisions a plan for it. Well, meditation is like that, too; it helps to envision our spiritual objective before we try to move toward it (TT 100).

I fear that, in my effort to underscore the rationality of addiction, I may have left the reader at times feeling that addiction sounds pretty good. As I have said, plenty has been written on the misery of addiction, and I did not think that would need to be reasserted. But it is important to bear in mind that addicts ultimately seek recovery because they are miserable and because they cannot imagine going on as addicts. This moment is often referred to as “rock bottom.” It is true of the alcoholic, for example, that “he cannot picture life without alcohol” (152). But it is also true once he has hit “rock bottom” that he cannot picture life *with* alcohol either. This is important to remember lest we despair of being able to imagine an aesthetic that could genuinely come to seem beautiful to the addict. It need not be the beatific vision. Ann Marlowe says, “Doing dope doesn't sound like so much fun in my account. And in retrospect it wasn't. It was just a little

²⁷³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 33, 41.

²⁷⁴ This may also explain the remarkable success that some innovative recovery programs have had by introducing addicts to fine art and inviting addicts to make art. One such program is the “Art Works 945” project at the Urban Ministry Center in Charlotte, NC, which, I am proud to say, is run by one of my friends, Liz Clasen. For information on the Center and the Art Works 945 project, see: <http://www.urbanministrycenter.org/programs.html>

more fun than the other life, lived without dope.”²⁷⁵ If this is true, it should calm any anxieties about the hopelessness of recovery. But it also points out a certain imprecision in the term “recovery,” for, as William Pryor has noted, “recovery” presumes that the addict is trying to return to what he or she was before becoming an addict, but part of the reason he or she became an addict is because of how he or she saw the world before becoming an addict. What is needed is not so much recovery as discovery.²⁷⁶

What can we say specifically about an aesthetic of discovery/recovery? Can we name its constituents? Probably not. If we speak of recovery from major addiction there is quite evidently not one aesthetic of recovery but many. The one feature that they all share in common is that they involve a picture of a whole way of life, although this need not imply that such a way of life is ordered to one dominating end or even that it subscribe to a teleological account of human life. I hope that my discussion of charity in Chapter V has made clear that an aesthetic of recovery *could* include such a dominating telos, and I hope it may have made intelligible why so many addicts find that their recovery depends on a discovery or renewal of their belief in, or even friendship with, God. But I also hope that my discussion has made it clear that the nonaddicted person need not be committed to some all-consuming end. He or she must simply—although it is far from simple—find a way to live honestly, to be in the world in such a way that he or she need not disavow through denial his or her activities. It should be clear that the failure to live honestly threatens the person with one dominating *telos* indeed every bit

²⁷⁵ *How to Stop Time*, 145.

²⁷⁶ *Survival of the Coolest*, 197.

as much, probably more so, than the person who does not subscribe to or find reason to believe in such an ultimate purpose.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions says that the goal of recovery is “learning how to live in the greatest peace, partnership, and brotherhood with all men and women, of whatever description,” and it calls the process “a moving and fascinating adventure” (TT 77). This is an outline of an aesthetic of recovery, and it does not entail a commitment to either “monism” or “pluralism.” The language of “adventure” is key because adventures take us to new places and allow us to see and experience things that we have never seen or experienced before.

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