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Lack, Escape, and Hypervirtuality: On the Existential and Phenomenological Conditions for Addiction

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Abstract: This article provides the existential and phenomenological conditions for addiction by applying the concepts of lack, escape and 'hypervirtuality' in new ways to the subject matter. There are five sections. The first is a brief review of some of the most relevant literature. The second lists the main general characteristics of addiction, gleaned from the literature, as well as discussing a possible general definition, namely wants that have become (damaging) needs. The third provides the existential conditions required for addiction to be understood as a human phenomenon to which we are all susceptible, albeit to greatly differing degrees and objects. Here I stress the ideas of transcendence, desire, lack and escape one finds in the early writings of Sartre and Levinas. The fourth fills this idea out with a key phenomenological notion of hypervirtuality, inspired by Husserl. This latter, fifthly and finally, explains the rising power of new technologies and how many are increasing and providing new opportunities for addictive behaviour.

Keywords: addiction; escape; existential; hypervirtuality; lack; phenomenology

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1. Addiction: A Brief and Selective Review

West and Brown [1] (p. 153) list no fewer than eighteen different kinds of theories on addiction. Obviously, the fact I am unable to cover all of these here is quite an understatement. What I will do, nonetheless, is trace some of the key points and movements with regard to how theories of addiction have been presented and developed over time. One will see largely neurobiological and psychological foci that have now rightly expanded into other fields and considerations, as I too plan to do.

A standout piece in the history of the theory of addiction is by Becker and Murphy. A combination of economics and psychology, the authors' provocative and influential 1988 article claims that although addictive behaviour might seem to present challenges to any theory of rationality, a 'theory of rational addiction' is in fact possible—and even is predominant—when one looks to the essentials of addictive behaviour. This is because such behaviour is 'usually rational in the sense of involving forward-looking maximization with stable preferences' [2] (p. 675). In other words, being hooked on one or a small number of goods is consistent with rationality conceived as 'a consistent plan to maximize utility over time' [2] (p. 675) because such people plan ahead and are dedicated to maximizing their use and enjoyment of their desired good(s) in a sturdy, considered and highly committed manner.

The authors also note this theory is advantageous because it covers more than just the hard, physical drug addictions. Indeed, for the authors there are many objects and activities one can be addicted to: '[p]eople get addicted not only to alcohol, cocaine, and cigarettes but also to work, eating, music, television, their standard of living, other people, religion, and many other activities' [2] (pp. 675–676). This is going to be a chief issue I will have to work out.

Emanating from this article was a much more strictly focused endeavour to articulate addiction only as properly possible with regard to hard, physical drugs, often with the

concomitant idea that addiction is ultimately a (brain) disease. One standout work with this kind of focus is Goldstein's book, originally appearing in 1993. Here the author names [3] (pp. 5–7) 'seven drug families' of nicotine, alcohol and similar liquids, opiates, cocaine and amphetamines, cannabis, caffeine, and hallucinogens. There are no other addictive items for Goldstein, and although he does allow addiction to be a 'behaviour' [3] (p. 20), the key underlying all of this is a neurobiological one, because 'in the final analysis psychology *is* biology' [3] (p. 21). In this manner, when it comes to policy addictive substances must be treated from a public health perspective, with the dual aims of reducing both supply and demand, depending on how personally and socially damaging the drug is (most are quite high except for caffeine supposedly).

Although Goldstein allows addictions to be behaviours, there is never a mention of a behaviour such as chronic gambling, perhaps because it is or was harder to pin down in a neurobiological manner. Moving on from this, Elster and his colleagues present a more nuanced account on this note. In his own book [4] Elster articulates a more layered approach to addictive behaviour, not least its relation to our emotions, thereby showing that although there is clear neurobiological foundation, there also exists a continuum of motivational states from very visceral and physical on one hand, to more mental and reflective on the other (see: [4] (p. 3)). Moreover, an additional emphasis on cognition shows how one of the main hallmarks of addiction, namely ambivalence (which moreover is a phenomenon Becker and Murphy's theory cannot account for), is possible at all, and actually makes the interaction between basic urges, our environment, and our thoughts and emotions thereupon a more complex and subtle issue than a simple brain disease. Indeed, such emphases ultimately show that 'emotions and cravings might sometimes be so strong as to short-circuit rational choice, or even choice altogether' [4] (p. 12) because 'addiction results when the reward system of the brain is hijacked by chemical substances that played no role in its evolution' [4] (p. 53). Here, although the brain is still at the bottom of everything, more intricate psychological elements are seriously considered as well.

One of the main messages and lasting influences of Elster's work is the relation of addiction to choice, which is stressed as 'intimate and complex' [4] (p. 190). This is because there are very basic, automatic urges and cravings that are nevertheless often mediated by emotions and personal reflections. These themes continued and then some in a collaborative effort by Elster with other key experts. One edition in particular presents a theoretical conundrum of addiction as '*voluntary self-destructive behaviour*' [5] (p. 1). It is an eclectic mix of views, including: Ainslie focusing on '[e]xperiential underworlds' [6] (p. 77) brought about through the dissociation inherent in much addiction; an interesting 'visceral account of addiction' [7] (pp. 235–264) highlighting 'factors includ[ing] drive states such as hunger, thirst, and sexual desire, moods and emotions, physical pain, and, most importantly for addiction, craving for a drug' [7] (p. 235); as well as Elster's own nuanced account of gambling and addiction [8] (pp. 208–234). In these pages, one already sees that the theme of addiction goes way beyond the merely physical. No one denies physical, neural processes are essentially involved in addiction. However, as the years progress the role of the environment and complex psychological structures and behaviours involving rationality, choice and value all come to the fore much more. These elements necessarily have physical components of course—most of all our 'lived bodies' (*Leibe*), including the brain. However, a full phenomenological and existential analysis will also furnish more crucial details, which can actually be highly complementary to the insights from fields such as neuroscience, not least because such analyses provide the special experiential contexts, structures and lived everyday dynamics of the topic under study. This is to say, although the brain is always in a constant and changing dynamic with its body and environment, a more first-hand experiential analysis could fill out the links between the latter two considerably more.

One such noteworthy work in this regard is Heyman [9]. He makes a simple but crucial observation that '[m]ost people who use addictive drugs do not become addicted to them' [9] (p. 21). This is essential because it means '[t]he behavioral effects of drugs vary as a function of the setting and the individual' [9] (p. 21). In other words, the environment as

well as individual predispositions, histories and personalities are key factors in addictive behaviour; on its own the brain cannot be addicted to anything. Indeed, Heyman gives a nuanced account that covers how the inherent plasticity of our central nervous system means it, and the brain, are always already culturally and environmentally influenced to astoundingly large extents (see, for instance: [9] (pp. 41–42)). On top of this, the book provides social and dynamic psychological elements in order to show addiction as a 'disorder of choice' [9] (p. 173) that 'transform[s] a voluntary user into an involuntary one' [9] (p. 91).

Having said all of this, Heyman, like many others, still views addiction as a disease and as involving exclusively physical drugs. Running counter to this, there are also works that have gone beyond these confines. Relatively early on, Levine [10] already argues how alcoholism as an addiction was not present in early colonial North America; it was 'discovered' as so in the 1830s, and then rediscovered later because of the ethical climate of the time. Much more recently, one of note is an edition by Bartlett and Bowden-Jones [11]. This starts to delve into the possibility of 'digital dependence' from various angles. Indeed, this focus provokes a challenge: why should addiction—if it is in fact a behaviour as all seem to agree—be restricted to physical, chemical drugs like caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, opioids and the like?

Of course one worry is that anything can then be categorized as an addiction—that it would lose its specificity and would certainly no longer be able to be classified as a 'disease' one needs to treat, at least in all cases. This will take some consideration, for although there are clearly very chronic cases that are so uncontrollable and destructive that the 'disease' label is quite apposite, it is my contention that the more general structure and roots to addictive behaviour need to been investigated much more if we are going to understand how we *all* have a tendency to addiction to various degrees and objects, and that the great majority of us are indeed hooked on at least a couple of things—although, crucially, often not at all in a (highly) destructive manner. I will contend that this general tendency is thanks to our existential makeup, which then, phenomenologically speaking, comes to experience classes of privileged objects acting as hypervirtualities in our lives. Hereby, although we like to pretend we could easily do without many things, when push comes to shove we often manifest addictive characteristics to varying degrees and consequences. In this sense, although the label 'disease' might still work in certain chronic cases, here I intend to show that addiction is so prevalent—and the tendency actually universal—that it is better to move away from such nomenclature, which stigmatizes certain people about a phenomenological structure and existential condition we all ultimately possess.

Some phenomenology of this kind has already been published. Actually, von Gebsattel's inaugural work [12] already contains some very incisive analyses on the destructive tendencies (cf. [12] (pp. 230, 232}) of 'addiction' (*Sucht*), the despair involved [31] (p. 232), as well a peculiar form of emptiness [12] (pp. 227–229, 232) that needs to be filled in by the drug or behaviour.

Stemming out from such work are many other more recent phenomenologically inspired analyses, some discussing addiction under the idea of compulsive behaviour [13] and self-determination [14], others focusing on how the experience of time is modified and disturbed in addictive behaviour and recovery therefrom [15,16], and yet others taking a Binswangerian-inspired *Daseinsanalyse* approach for both addiction [17] and the process of recovery [18]. There is also a short taxonomy of behavioural addictions—including 'pathological gambling, kleptomania, pyromania, compulsive buying, compulsive sexual behaviour, Internet addiction, and binge eating disorder' [19] (p. 252)—that starts to class this category as quite clearly beyond mere physical drugs. Finally, there exist concrete works (notably [20]) that provide a positive, 'meaning-centred' approach to treating addiction, based on various existential and phenomenological insights.

All of these works however fail to provide any underlying existential and phenomenology structure or preconditions for addiction, even though some claim to do precisely that

(cf., for instance: [15] (p. 1024)). In another piece, Moskalewicz [21] does indeed provide a more thoroughgoing structure, but then the matter of addiction only has a marginal focus.

Finally, a quite recent work [22] dedicates a whole book to the issue, using various phenomenological and hermeneutical thinkers to try and give a more complete picture of addiction, not least the role technology is now playing as well. The problem, however, is that the main existential and phenomenological thinker Schalow uses is Heidegger. I want to show insights from Sartre, Levinas and Husserl are much better for capturing a proper essence.

2. An Essence to Addiction? Wants Felt as (Damaging) Needs

Before I can give such an existential and phenomenological account in the subsequent sections, I first need to provide my own conception. This is inspired by the literature, but also goes beyond it.

I think eight main characteristics to addiction can be gleaned from current theories. Elster [4] (p. 59) lists even more, and also immediately says they cannot define addiction completely. Be this claim as it may, it is still crucial to provide this cluster of main characteristics—a kind of Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance' if you will—wherefrom I can then go to on give a specific definition.

First, all addiction usually starts with some kind of pleasurable stimulus. Although one's first cigarette, for instance, may not be wholly pleasurable, provoking coughing and even nausea, there is nevertheless some kind of hit, fix or 'buzz' that appeals to many. More generally, this can be the hit of nicotine, caffeine, alcohol and the like on the side of physical drugs; or money, victory, as well as social and online prestige ('likes') on the side of more behavioural activities. In neurobiological and evolutionary terms, all these stimuli tap into our natural reward system (see: [3] (p. 52)).

Second, once one has partaken numerous times, a craving is often set up. Because the activity is (largely) pleasurable and even useful (e.g., staying awake), one becomes accustomed and ends up wanting it regularly. Such cravings on the side of physical drugs can be extremely visceral and strong, but there are also more psychological varieties. Actually, because we are lived bodies (*Leibe*), I contend that *all* of our feelings are psychophysiological, some just more on the side of physiological (example: opiates), others more on the side of psychological (examples: one can even be hooked on a person, one's job, or a particular song).

Third, closely related to craving is the well-accepted idea of tolerance; the more one engages in the activity the more one needs to up the dose. This, again, can vary greatly on the psychophysiological spectrum, from a heroin addict needing ever-higher doses that would have in fact killed him in the first place (cf. [3] (p. 87)), to a gambler needing to place ever higher and riskier bets.

Fourth, by this stage it should be clear that dependence has set in—one seems to need the drug or activity; one does not feel quite right without it, and one deep down and intuitively knows it would be rather, or even incredibly hard, to stop, even though a common trait is to also fool oneself into thinking one can quit at any time and easily (denial), that one does not really 'need' it.

Fifth, with dependence and the objective harms (cf. [4] (p. 68)) that often come with it, whether to one's own self or others, this usually leads to ambivalence with regard to the behaviour, a desire to stop or at least reduce, and then often a recurrent inability to do so. This characteristic ultimately points to the issue of self-control (cf., also: Schlimme, 2010) and addiction as a struggle of choice with regard to very strong and often overpowering urges and habits that have started to cause damage in one way or another.

Sixth, with ambivalence comes the attempt at abstinence or at least reduction, and here withdrawal symptoms manifest. These can be on the more physiological side once again, like headaches and fatigue from both caffeine and nicotine withdrawal, to more psychological ones, like irritability from the same.

Seventh, with the powers of withdrawal, the memories and feelings of old pleasures, plus our inherent capacity for magical thinking (cf. [23]) and for creating pseudo reasons—or even legitimate reasons—why to reengage, relapse often occurs. This can be momentary or total, and it is always a danger (albeit to varying degrees) no matter how long abstinence has been successful. Indeed, the issue of relapse, especially from a neurobiological perspective, remains quite a conundrum (cf. [3] (pp. 256–260)), for even the slightest memory or errant thought can trigger it and undo years of hard-fought abstinence. Hence the rather demoralizing expression 'once an addict, always an addict'.

Eighth, encapsulating a number of these points is a general and intriguing discounting of the future (cf. [8] (p. 225); [24] (pp. 190–191)). Most addictive behaviours, through the cravings and the immediate pleasures they promise, sink down into the immediate enjoyable moment and to hell with the long-term consequences. Such consequences can be of health, like when one knows too much sugar, tobacco, alcohol and the like might ultimately kill you; of finances, like when one blows one's life savings on a gambling binge; or personal and social, like when one hardly leaves one's room and does not engage in any other activity except for playing various videogames for weeks, months, or even years on end.

Such are the main characteristics of addiction. Objective harm was at one point mentioned. A clear example of this is how a lifelong and chronic alcoholism can have absolutely dire consequences for one's physical and mental self, finances, as well as one's family and friends. It can destroy pretty much everything. On the other hand, I also want to say that one can quite easily and lightly be addicted to coffee without it really damaging anything in any serious manner. In fact, stimulants like caffeine can actually increase focus and productivity. Some may argue that this makes us simply good products of capitalist society, but this is another matter. What is relevant here is that even in this case one still seems to 'need'—or strongly want?—one's morning cup in order to function properly and supposedly 'normally'. This, as I will explain, is addictive behaviour just as much as an utterly destructive alcoholism, at least in its basic structure.

Many, if not all, addictions are culturally conditioned. For instance, nowadays it is still acceptable, and even promoted (think of Jack Ma's '996' campaign—working twelve hours a day (9 a.m. to 9 p.m.) six days a week), to be a 'workaholic'. Perhaps, in a years to come, when we have more modest four-day working weeks, this will be viewed with perturbation, that these people were ill—it was a kind of work-addicted madness. The main point to consider here is that, although various addictions at any given societal period, or even within a particular culture or economy, can of course vary enormously in terms of content, amount, and the consequences for one's life, if my feeling is correct there must still be a common denominator—a phenomenological 'essence'—holding all of this together.

Addiction often comes close to habits. Smoking, for instance, is considered at best a bad habit these days; drinking four cups of coffee a day is (still) considered a rather innocuous and socially acceptable one; and going to the gym for two hours every single day is usually considered a good, admirable habit or pastime. All of these can be addictions too though, so wherein lies the difference between habit and addiction? I would say addiction is a subsection of habit, or a stronger and more radical cousin if you will. Indeed, there are habits that are not addictions, such as my habit of getting up at ten in the morning. However, all addictions involve the repetitive nature which is the hallmark of habit, albeit often less automatic and implicit. In a way, damaging addictions are when there is an aberration of habit, where the object or activity overtakes other more balanced and healthy interactions with the world, its objects and people.

Another key difference, and for me one of the essential features of addictive objects and behaviours, is the almost-magical (cf. [23]) capacity they have to turn wants into needs. Under this conception, addiction is when a previous want has become a need, with the personal and societal consequences of this need—especially in terms of damage it does to one's health, person, relations, and surroundings—determining how acceptable or not it is to you and others.

Let me explain further. Here one must understand needs in a strict, naturalistic sense: as humans we have needs of water, food, shelter, healthcare, some basic sociality and education—in short things strictly necessary for survival and basic wellbeing. This means everything else, from this perspective, are wants. We need to eat, but we do not, strictly speaking, need to eat a certain type of sugar. We need to drink, but of course we do not need to drink coffee or beer. We *like* eating sugar, drinking coffee and beer—so much so, in fact, that they are often misconstrued as needs. They are not though; they are strong wants, and because of the psychophysiological effects they have on us, we can become utterly hooked on them. One could of course try to forego one's morning cup of coffee, or one's afternoon chocolate bar, or not check one's Facebook account for a whole week—but there will always, I contend, be withdrawal symptoms somewhere on the broad psychophysiological spectrum I have outlined. In this manner, addictions are wants that have come to be felt as powerful needs.

This means addiction is a tendency in all of us, and it depends on the person, objects, amount, and consequences to render it chronic and damaging or not. Considering this, I might 'need' my morning cup of coffee, but it is not going to kill me; a sedimented and chronic alcoholism however ultimately will. Hereby, addictions vary greatly depending on the object, frequency, amount, as well as the consequences it has on one's person and surroundings within a given societal and cultural environment. In short, addictions can range from really quite positive and constructive, to rather light and innocuous, to utterly consuming and obliterating.

This definition also means there is no clear-cut distinction between addict and non-. In most of the literature there is such a distinction. One exception is West and Brown [1] (p. 229), who claim addiction is a 'social construct' and thus has 'fuzzy boundaries'. Normally, though, most theories echo Heyman [9] (p. 27) in making a clear distinction between drug use and drug 'abuse' or misuse, between non-addict and addict.

I want to steer away from this. I contend we all have tendencies to addictive behaviour—some much more (an 'addictive personality') and some much less admittedly—but I dare say that when taking any person there is at least one activity or product on which they are hooked; on which they feel like they need, and from which abstinence will raise some kind of withdrawal. In very pedestrian terms, we all have wants that have come to be felt as needs, from the morning cup of coffee to checking one's Facebook page.

Such use does not have to be misuse because it does not damage us or our environment too much, or not at all—or it can even be highly productive (e.g., a highly successful career in business). However, with certain objects and the amount of time and intensity devoted to them, rather mild, innocuous, or even positive addictive tendencies can become sedimented into more chronic and damaging behaviours. This is the next level of addiction; although there is only a difference in degree, and not in nature, in the basic structure, on this level the activities are damaging and chronic because wants have in fact become *anti*-needs. Akin to Sartre's idea of 'anti-value', these are activities that end up doing serious damage to one's self or one's surroundings. This can be the chain smoker who ends up dying of lung cancer, or the sugar junkie who succumbs to a heart attack caused by his obesity, to even an emotional and social recluse who leaves his home ten times in seven years (Billy Brown) because they are just so utterly hooked on videogames. Here the amount and consequences are key; when extreme and pernicious it is a case of harmful addiction, where a want has become an all-consuming, damaging need that ends up stunting, or even obliterating, more original needs—hence the term 'anti-'need, because the chronic behaviour goes against and in fact supplants more basic ones.

Under this conception, addiction is a universal human condition that can be lived out in various ways. There is no fine line between addict and non—-we all are hooked on various things, and what determines use from misuse and abuse is not non-addict from addict, but rather light, enjoyable, and consequentially innocuous or positive activities on one side, to chronic, tormenting, and ultimately fatal ones on the other. Just what the basic structural conditions are for such a universal tendency is the next piece in this puzzle.

3. Transcendence, Desire, Lack, and Escape: The Existential Conditions for Addiction

To provide the structural roots for addiction, existentially I will discuss Sartre's concepts of transcendence, desire, and lack in conjunction with Levinas's notion of escape. Starting with Sartre, I believe it is key to emphasize his well-known theory of desire as lack. Briefly and simply put, the Sartrean conception of human consciousness ('being-for-itself') is a spontaneous, automatic, and ceaseless transcendence towards objects it is not. It is a principle of translucency that allows whole hosts of objects appear for and to it. Such objects can be things of the perceptual world, other people, plus a whole host of mental objects like images, ideas, concepts and the like. Consciousness, in itself, is 'nothing' for Sartre; actually it is the production of nothingness (Sartre's technical concept of freedom or 'nihilation')—consciousness is the type of being that never ever coincides with itself; there is always a gap between it and that which it is conscious of. This in fact is the very definition of consciousness. Indeed, it is this principle of non-coincidence (cf. [25] (p. 98)) or intentionality (consciousness *of* something) that makes consciousness what it is, a ceaseless awareness of, and movement towards, objects it is not, from cups and chairs to unicorns and mathematical truths.

This automatic transcendence towards the world, its things and people, as well as objects of one's own mind, means consciousness itself is always empty; there is nothing 'in' consciousness (see: [26] (pp. 5–7)). In this manner, consciousness is always already engaged with other objects that are full on their own and can thereby give consciousness the feeling of fullness, at least for a while. This is the ontological foundation of all desire (and value) for Sartre, with the former necessarily and originally experienced as '*a lack of being*' ([25] (p. 109)). We desire and want things because we ourselves are not them, and we are, moreover, nothing on our own. From basic bodily needs like food and water, to social interactions and desires, to lofty thoughts and ideals, desire is the gargantuan realm of all human endeavour and action ('projects') for Sartre. It is the only reason we value things, the only reason we get up in the morning. Were we full and complete, we would be utterly self-sufficient and in no need of anything. We simply would not move; we literally would not need or want to. In this manner, desire as lack necessarily stimulates us to want all types of objects, and puts us into action to obtain them.

It should come as no surprise that such an existential hole can be filled up with experiences to which we become dependent and hooked. Indeed, if we are a lack that is a never-ending search to be completed, it is no wonder that various objects which satisfy such gaps most successfully grab—and hold—our attention, often to incredibly powerful extents, to the point of addiction.

Attention in a Sartrean framework is quite automatic and pre-reflective. Because of our basic free activity of constantly transcending towards things we are not, we are often consumed by them before we have time to think explicitly. This latter Sartre calls reflection, and indeed in a perhaps surprising but reversed link to Frankfurt's [27] well-known article, for Sartre we are first and foremost spontaneous desiring creatures that then often reflect in a 'second-order' manner to try and quell those desires that are damaging to us. This is the origin of ambivalence within a Sartrean system; the 'freedom of the will' is a second-order, bastardized (cf. [28] (p. 57)) and reflective one that is always having to deal with more basic and more spontaneous drives, urges, and desires (cf. also: [29]).

This conception can be enhanced further through some observations made on Levinas's 1935 essay 'On Escape'. Levinas, too, agrees there is always a more primordial form of being (the '*il y a*', 'there is') to which we have a less-than-peaceful relation. This being has a weight (see: [30] (p. 94)) which, again in good existential spirit, is in contradistinction to our more flightful selves. For Levinas like with Sartre, basic existence is once again an identity; it coincides exactly with itself, like a stone is simply a stone (cf. [30] (p. 98)). Humans, to the contrary, have an intimate and automatic self-reflexive relation; one is never a pure identity, never properly alone, but always alone *with* oneself, which moreover is usually felt with unease. Thus, in our existential fibre we are an automatic flight—an escape and distraction—from this basic non-coincidence with ourselves. Structurally speaking,

we have a 'need of escape' ([30] (p. 99), my translations) because 'escape [. . .] aspires to break the enchainment of me with self' [30] (p. 99). In this manner, escape is the existential mechanism by and through which we flee our basic and unsettling self-reflexivity. We need and take flight into whole worlds of objects because we as selves lack them inherently (cf. [30] (p. 100)). We as selves only have a basic scissiparity that is angst-ridden for Levinas. The world, its things, and ultimately most important for Levinas—others—are all there to rescue and redeem us from our own lonely selves.

One should hereby see how Levinas's characterization of escape and its related concepts fit in quite perfectly with Sartre's own conception of desire as ceaseless transcendence and lack. Moreover, crucially in this context, both existentially ground our inherent tendencies to addictive behaviour. If we are ultimately nothing except a basic flight from ourselves, it is unsurprising that we often lose ourselves in a plethora of objects and experiences, often to quite chronic degrees. Of course this existential structure does not automatically imply we are all addicts; we can and do enjoy many objects and activities without overdose, often thanks to reflection and an explicit will against more basic urges. It does however show how a broad conception of addiction can be explicated and in fact grounded through existential theory. If we are never solid on our own, if we are ultimately condemned to perennially feel like the grass is greener on other sides (see: [31] (p. xxviii)), then it becomes clearer how so many different types of objects, from drugs to people and even ideas, can hook us in quite consumedly. In short, we can get lost in our passions and the objects they fixate on precisely because the movement towards the world and its objects is so inherent and consuming for us.

This existential structure sets up all needs and wants, from the very basic and natural to the chronic and perverse. In this manner, it is not only the framework for addiction, but for need, want, and desire as such. Here, because I have defined addiction as wants that have become (damaging) needs, we can now see how this fits in this existential framework. All in all, there seems to be four broad partitions here, although I would still like to emphasize their fluid and dynamic borders.

First, people have plain needs that need to be satisfied for survival and basic wellbeing. I do not think there can be any question of addiction here; I would find it hard for someone to be addicted to water, for instance.

Second, there are a whole host of wants that many do not become addicted to, including substances to which other people do. Here we want and desire all kinds of things, but a great number of us never feel like we absolutely need them.

Third, there are wants that have become needs, like something as trivial and mundane as a morning cup of coffee. The line between category two and three is fluid here, with many perhaps protesting that they could easily do without their morning caffeine hit. Often, though, when push comes to shove this is a denial and will exhibit withdrawal symptoms of some kind if abstinence is attempted, at least for a while depending on the strength of the object and the addictive hold it has. Here, then, addiction is already operative in this third category under my definition, but because the amount and effects are light or even positive with regard to one's physical and mental health, as well as one's general environment, these are the non-damaging addictions.

Fourth, there are wants that have become chronic anti-needs, namely usually very strong addictions which are ultimately highly destructive to one's physical and mental health, as well as to one's social relations. Obviously there can be many gradations between categories three and four, and indeed the path to chronic forms is quite often gradual from two to three to four.

All of these categories are only possible because of the engine of existential desire, where we *are* a foundational lack that constantly seeks all kinds of objects, from enjoyable and healthy to utterly disturbing and fatal. The underlying mechanism is thus escape into things we are not, an inborn, automatic, and pre-reflective flight towards all kinds of objects of want and desire that simultaneously gives birth to our inherent capacity to be hooked on and by quite a considerable number of them to varying extents, degrees, and effects.

4. Hypervirtuality: The Phenomenological Condition for Addiction

Such being the existential foundations for addiction, it is now time to explain it more phenomenologically, as well as relate this conception back to the literature on the matter.

For me, phenomenologically, addiction is essentially experienced as what I would term 'hypervirtuality'. This is to say, whatever the object one is hooked on, and no matter whether the craving is more physiological or psychological, at certain moments and in certain conditions—or in chronic cases pretty much all the time ('the focal point of my whole life'—in [13] (p. 155))—the desired object is so dominant that it is pseudo present to one's mind (and body) to the extent one cannot be rid of it until it is attained ('[o]nce I see it in my mind, it won't go away until I buy it'—[13] (p. 158)), or the craving eventually subsides. An additional small example might be how it is very difficult for many to think straight and start the day properly without a morning cup of coffee. Once sipped, the onsetting withdrawal is abated and one properly 'start' one's day.

Circumstances can however mean such yearnings are not so easily quenched. Think of a gamer at school who cannot think of anything except running home and going back online, or an alcoholic who is violently shaking before the bar opens and she can get her first beer and shot of the day. Underlying all of these, I contend, is a phenomenological notion of 'hypervirtuality' that needs explaining further, and that ties in—or is even the content of—addiction as a form of intense lack, transcendence, and escape.

This idea is not explicitly present, but is nonetheless inspired by, Husserl. For him conscious experience—and especially perceptual experience—is essentially horizonal. Indeed, for Husserl there are always inner (looking closer) and outer (looking beyond) spatial horizons to absolutely everything we perceive (see: [32] (p. 43)), as well as temporal horizons of past, present, and future that all interlock in an incredibly complex dynamic under the rubric of time-consciousness (see, for instance: [33] (§14)). For me, this inherent horizonality can be applied to our own minds and desires as well, whereby something is horizonal—or 'virtual'—when it is present without actually being fully so. Thus when I want a glass of water, the desired object virtually hovers before my mind, stimulating me to go and get it.

Addictions would then be when such virtualities become 'hyper', which is to say more intense and beyond what is strictly necessary or even healthy. Indeed, someone who is addicted to nicotine for instance, and is out of smokes in the middle of the night, is going to find it very difficult to sleep or do pretty much anything until the fix is obtained. It is well known to what lengths people under the influence of such hypervirtuality will go. In this manner, whatever the trigger, whether it be the body's craving in relation to the time of day or situation (e.g., after eating), or some kind of emotional upheaval or event, or a more constant behaviour or way of existing, in all cases the object of one's desire hovers about to such an extent and intensity that it can block out almost everything else, or even arrange all else under subservience to this hyper, privileged desire ('I used to like to sleep, but I found cocaine was better. I used to like to eat, but I found cocaine was better'—in [13] (p. 176)). Here, depending on the nature of the object and the strength of the addiction, the feeling will subside while actually present with the object—a transition from hypervirtual to actual—only for the movement to reverse again after the effects have worn off, or once one has been separated from the object for an intolerable amount of time, which of course is variable.

In this manner, addictive objects and activities, in a plethora of different manifestations from complete chemical euphoria to utter electronic escape, leave such imprints on our desire that when we are apart we simply want more and can think of little else. Then, when chronic and absolute, we no longer (want to) leave the object at all. Indeed, in its extreme addiction as hypervirtuality can structure absolutely everything. Loewenstein [7] (p. 256) in fact notes that 'severe addicts tend to classify people into two categories: Those who threaten to impede access to the drug and those who can serve as tools for obtaining it.' In this manner, when an addiction is particularly severe and persistent, it is a constant and relentless form of hypervirtuality; there is only one thing and it is nonetheless never enough.

It is one specific, hyperprivileged object (or set of objects) that is not only constantly on one's mind; the desire for it also governs all else one thinks and does.

This idea has already been pointed to in a good deal of the literature. Elster [4] (p. 69) speaks how '[m]any drugs have a tendency to crowd out all other activities'. Waal [34] (p. 143) speaks of the 'Siren-like appeal of [...] drugs' where one's rational-choice system becomes 'truncated and distorted' to the privilege of certain special, desirously hypercharged objects. Loewenstein [7] (pp. 245–246} talks of the increased value addictive objects accrue, as well as how they change one's time horizon towards the present, thereby discounting any serious future considerations. West and Brown [1] (p. 7) speak of 'an abnormally and damagingly high priority to a particular activity' that is moreover felt compulsively. Heyman [9] (p. 28) talks of a 'shift in priorities', most notably to local and immediate gratifications from more measured, global, and long-term ones. Finally, Moore [35] (p. 68) speaks of how 'circuits not liked to the dopamine craving fall into disuse and are 'pruned' away, narrowing attention more and more tightly around repetition-compulsion'. For me, all of these references speak to the hypervirtual nature of addiction; in the moment of desire and craving, it is all one can think of, with the duration depending on the nature, circumstances, and severity.

5. Closing Remarks: Technology, Hypervirtuality, and New Addictions

I have put forward existential and phenomenological conditions that explain what is basically required in our makeup and experience for us to become hooked on so many objects, from rather innocuous things such as caffeine, to even beneficial things such as a certain exercise, hobby, job, or person, to utterly destructive things such as the more traditional chemical drugs that still dominate much of the addiction literature. All in all, I have also explained how addictions are when wants become felt as (damaging) needs, ultimately due to our existential makeup as inherent transcendence, desire, lack, and escape. Here, the 'damaging' depends on the particular amount, the object or set of objects, as well as the personal and social repercussions. Moreover, when addicted—and this can range from certain moments in the day to the whole of one's life—the phenomenological experience is best characterized as 'hypervirtuality'; a craving sets up the object hovering before us, us desperately wanting it to be had usually as soon as possible. This is very visceral with hard chemical drugs. However, I have also contended that any form always has some psychophysiological characteristics and symptoms of withdrawal and unease if the desire is left unsatisfied. In this manner, I need my morning coffee just like an alcoholic might need her morning beer and shot. Of course, the degree and effects are different—and yet I have still shown how the underlying factor is a want has come to be felt as a (desperate) need.

This much should be clear. What is left is that new technologies, and particularly digital screens, are opening up new universes for addictive behaviour where the notion of hypervirtuality is becoming even more pronounced and even more literal. Most of us 'need' our phone in the sense that we would find it very hard to function in today's world without it. One could argue that phones and other related devices are social needs nowadays; it is becoming increasingly difficult to do even basic things without them. It is also clear that phones and the like are not only blurring the distinction between mind and machine, where they are often felt like an extra body part; they have already become our memory stores, story boxes, image libraries, and entertainment centres. Phones are quite simply taking up and over functions that our and other people's minds used to do, and then some. This has the effect of blurring the very distinction between mind and machine, which looks quite set to continue.

Addiction to porn, online gaming, and gambling are all already clear instances that present grave problems for a not insignificant number of people, even to the point of suicide (e.g., Jack Ritchie, one of a growing number of people who kill themselves as the result of a gambling addiction, now made much more accessible through smartphones). More generally, however, as the technological and captivating powers of these devices continue to

augment, one would do well to be wary of our tendency to get lost in objects that ultimately might severely damage our physical and mental health. Today's current screen culture is already yielding generations who are increasingly image-conscious and actually often put more store and time in this universe than 'irl'. This of course is not necessarily a bad thing; what is bad is when cleverly and captivatingly designed apps, websites, and contents start to blur one's very notion of worthwhile and not, productive and damaging, true and false, genuine and fake, real and not. Mechanistically all the seemingly innocuous colours, buzzes, clicks, chimes, rings, swooshes, swipes, scrolls, likes, hearts, kisses, smileys and so much more are making it increasingly easier to get lost in these worlds, with research on the social and psychological consequences still playing serious catch-up. This is why it is important to reconceive addiction as including not only classical cases such as nicotine, alcohol, opiates and the like, but also new ones such as gaming, series and more generally a swiping and liking culture that is constantly developing more and more hook-like elements, often rather harmless and entertaining, but also ones not so once one slides too much down the slippery slope of our strong addiction-prone foundations.

This article has established some of the main phenomenological and existential foundations for addiction, and the next step would be to investigate these relatively new realms more in depth, realms which share the underlying structures and dynamics, but also introduce new experiences, contents and risks as well.

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