Chapter 14

Philosophy and Other Addictions: On Use and Abuse in the History of Life

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From the levers and pumps that inspired Enlightenment models of the heart and lungs, to twentieth-century accounts of the computational brain, our self-understanding of the dynamics and potentialities of human life is interwoven with the evolution of technology. Configurations of the human around metaphors drawn from technology nonetheless tend to differentiate us from machines, introducing causal gaps that leave mechanical and deterministic explanations of our behaviour under-determined. More recent emphases on our structural openness to the outside ensure that we can never quite be reduced to automata, always retaining, in Kantian terms, a potential for *autonomy* that cannot be automated away by the causal overriding of free will. For both Peter Sloterdijk and Bernard Stiegler, for example, the effect of technology is to reinvent and bring about changes in the function of human organisms that would otherwise risk enslavement to biological drives: 'anthropotechnological' media 'tame' and 'sublimate' the unthinking, instinct-led beasts that dwell within us.[1] But as Stiegler repeatedly observes in reference to the ambivalent therapy-toxicity of the technological object as *pharmakon*, both cure and poison, the very technologies that 'liberate', or 'disautomate', us, can also induce regression to pathological modes of automation, most notably in the form of addiction.[2] His claim is consistent with contemporary neurobiology, which is moving away from the idea of addiction being rooted in a combination of genetic pathology and a 'disease' of brain chemistry triggered by a narrow range of potent addictogens, and towards understanding it as an extreme case of experiential learning. Sometimes criticized for an excessive dilution of the concept, emerging research treats addiction as an increasingly negative feedback loop that takes hold when (neuro)plastic life adaptively reshapes itself around environmental sources of stimulus most associated with potential reward — be they opioids, digital screens, or even books.[3] Building on

[1] Peter Sloterdijk, 'Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27 (2009), 12–28 (p. 16).
[2] Bernard Stiegler, *La Société automatique, 1: L'Avenir du travail* (Paris: Fayard, 2015), pp. 45–48 (§12).
[3] A much more extensive reading of the overlaps between Stiegler and current addiction science is given in Gerald Moore, 'The Pharmacology of Addiction', *Parrhesia*, 29 (2018), 190–212; and Gerald Moore 'Addiction Epidemics

this, and on other advances in the ecological approach to addiction, let us go further and posit that nowhere is the rewriting of our interiority by our prostheses more pronounced than in technology's capacity for monopolizing attention, pushing the dopamine system to 'automatize behaviour' around *pharmaka* that distract us from the instabilities of the surrounding world.[4] Evidence for the impact of increasingly intense modes of technological stimulation is found in what we might speculatively diagnose as historical waves of addiction, coinciding with periods of 'disadjustment' between the technological reorganization of society and the social and political norms that govern our consumption of technology. This is one way of making sense of Catherine Malabou's recent claim, made though reference to the 'biohistory' of Daniel Lord Smail and the 'psychotropic' bases of capitalism, that 'history is the history of addictions', beginning with the trade in dopamine-arousing spice and sugar and culminating in the chronic, manic, consumption of the Anthropocene.[5]

With its eternal return to weakness of the will and to the transcendence of reason over the appetites, we can read the history of philosophy as a series of responses to the threat of nervous automation posed by becoming locked in to the craving for dopamine. But what if philosophy, too, were susceptible to becoming an addiction — an antisocial bad habit whose pretensions to a higher form of love and meditational retreat were just another technique of anxiolytic withdrawal? The pursuit of disautomation works by attaching ourselves to forces that stand outside the habitual, narrowing, attentions of the addict, but these new attachments can also turn pathological.

Varieties of Automation

The concept of life and, above all, of specifically human life, has evolved alongside the history of technology, the dialogue between biology and our exosomatic organs dating back at least as

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from Athens to Fake News', *New Formations*, special issue on *Automation Anxiety*, ed. by Ben Roberts and Patrick Crogan (forthcoming). Both articles also defend these newer approaches against the accusation of emptying out the meaning of addiction.

[4] On the 'automatization of behaviour' as a learned response to dopamine cues, see Barry J. Everitt and Trevor Robbins, 'From the Ventral to the Dorsal Striatum: Devolving Views of their Roles in Drug Addiction', *Neuroscience and Biobehavioural Reviews*, 37 (2013), 1946–54 (p. 1950).

[5] Made in the closing comments to a paper given at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, 2015, which Malabou is in the process of working into a fuller treatment of addiction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDdTqr-5APg> [accessed 20 February 2019]. The published version of the paper is 'The Brain of History, or, The Mentality of the Anthropocene', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116, 1 (2016), 39–53.

far as Aristotle. The systematic zoological observations Aristotle undertook on the island of Lesbos are frequently cited as the birth point of the scientific method, but, for Georges Canguilhem, the Stagirite's artifactual environment was also of decisive significance. 'Genuine working artifacts', meaning simple automata, became more common from around the time of Aristotle, and he makes several references to them in his later biological writings.[6] In *De motu animalium*, he observes that 'the movements of animals' are comparable with, but strictly irreducible to, 'those of automatic puppets, which are set going on the occasion of a tiny movement (the strings are released, and the pegs strike against one another)', but lack both the accompanying qualitative change in sensation and the internal origin of motion that would characterize organic life.[7] Without really existing mechanical contraptions to serve as the contrastive model against which he could develop a theory of life, it has been argued, he could not have arrived at the idea of 'soul', or 'vital principle', through which he differentiates the living from that which might only appear to be alive.[8] As Canguilhem puts it:

> L'assimilation de l'organisme à une machine présuppose la construction par l'homme de dispositifs où le mécanisme automatique est lié à une source d'énergie dont les effets moteurs se déroulent dans le temps, bien longtemps après la cessation de l'effort humain ou animal qu'ils restituent.
>
> The comparison of the organism to a machine presupposes man-made devices in which an automatic mechanism is linked to a source of energy whose motor effects continue well after the cessation of the human or animal effort they reproduce.[9]

And yet in Aristotelian circles, as in those of Plato before him, we also see glimpses that we, too, are intermittently susceptible to an automation that trumps autonomy, via the ingestion of psychoactives whose effect on our behaviour lasts well beyond the immediate moment of consumption. (Pseudo-)Aristotle's 'Problema XXX', on melancholy, muses, for instance, on the

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[6] Sylvia Berryman, 'Ancient Automata and Mechanical Explanation', *Phronesis*, 48, 4 (2003), 344–69 (p. 356).
[7] Aristotle, 'Movement of Animals', in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, 1092 (701b1-15).
[8] Berryman, 'Ancient Automata and Mechanical Explanation'.
[9] Georges Canguilhem, *La Connaissance de la vie* (Paris: Vrin, 2009), p. 135 [106 in the original pagination]; *Knowledge of Life*, ed. by Paola Marrati and Todd Meyers, trans. by Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 79–80.

effect of *pharmaka* like wine, while indicating that their transformation of subjectivity is differentiated from mere mechanical automation by its accompanying changes at the level of experience.[10]

Canguilhem proposes that automata exerted a similarly decisive influence on the formulation of Cartesian dualism.

> Quand Descartes cherche des analogies pour l'explication de l'organisme dans les machines, il invoque des automates à ressort, des automates hydrauliques. Il se rend par conséquent tributaire [. . .] des formes de la technique à son époque, de l'existence des horloges et des montres, des moulins à eau, des fontaines artificielles, des orgues, etc.
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> When Descartes turns to machines to find analogies in his explanation of the organism, he invokes spring-loaded and hydraulic automata. He is thus a tributary [. . .] of the technical forms of his age: of the existence of clocks and watches, water mills, artificial fountains, pipe organs, etc.[11]

Off the back of this reading, Ian Hacking has proposed that modernity began, not so much with Descartes's *cogito* in 1641, but with 'the invention or proliferation of free-standing machines' that made it possible to envisage isolating the soul from a mechanical body.[12] The Cartesian epiphany becomes but one moment in the more protracted emergence of a modern technical system grounded in the mechanization and automation of work, already hinted at in Aristotle, and which lays down a firmer foothold in the Renaissance before intensifying alongside the growth of industrialization. But this history of the machine set apart from the soul still tells only half the story — that of envisaging mind and body as metaphysically distinct. The other half cuts in the very opposite direction, concerning the permeability of the subject's interiority: no longer irreducibly free and a site of resistance to external automation, but itself automatable, lending itself to reorganization by habits that penetrate to the innermost core of the nervous system.

The ensuing modernity bears witness to a series of attempts to salvage something of humanity from subjection to ever more invasive forms of habituation, whose manufacture

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[10] Aristotle, 'Problems, Book XXX', in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, II, 1499–1500 [9–23].
[11] Canguilhem, *La Connaissance de la vie*, p. 136 [106]; Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life*, p. 80.
[12] Ian Hacking, 'Canguilhem amid the Cyborgs', *Economy and Society*, 27, 2–3 (1998), 202–16 (p. 207).

moreover becomes both a powerful engine of the consumerist economy and the palliative precondition of our adaptation to the traumas of capitalist exploitation. Modern anxiety incorporates not just the uncanniness of mechanicity and the broader social effects of its reordering of society, but also and perhaps moreover a parallel history in which we are vitiated and restructured by *pharmaka* in the fullest sense, encompassing both the tools and machines that organize the economy and society, and the pharmaceuticals that, by one means or another, keep us well enough to cope with their demands. This is the history of capitalism as what we might call 'dopamining'. From the refining equipments and techniques of preparation used to enhance the potency of agricultural crops, to the printing of books and the mass production of televisual screens that, via the hand and the eye, interface with the brain, this history consists, on one hand, in the cultivation of a long line of increasingly accomplished technologies for the delivery and exploitation of dopamine hits. The successive waves of stimulation for sale provided by these dopamining technologies take the edge off the labour of adaptation that, on the other hand, pushes us towards addictive, anxiolytic habits as a way of coping with the economic instability of accelerating rates of technological change and the perpetual reorganization (now 'disruption') of social norms. Pathologies pertaining to these manufactured habits don't really get diagnosed under the modern rubric of addiction until the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries. The coalescence of amateur experimentation into the formalized disciplines of the modern medical sciences is profoundly intertwined with the birth of the pharmaceutical industry from the engineering and commercial exploitation of ever more powerful forms of pain medication. The medicalization of pathological consumption as a disease and subsequent addiction-specific modes of therapy like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) are even slower to take off, emerging only between the nineteenth and late twentieth century — and even then with decidedly mixed success. But we can find proto-addiction therapies at work as early as Plato, in a deployment of reason against weakness of the will that can speculatively be traced to the context of an addiction epidemic at the end of the fifth century BCE.[13] A comparable practice is at work in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which might similarly be read as a response to the disadjustment of an early industrial society firmly marked by automation, both technological and of the nervous system. Kant identified resistance to such automation with the capacity to anchor

[13] See Bruce K. Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in the Poverty of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 321; Gerald Moore, 'Automations, Technological and Nervous' (forthcoming).

oneself to a point of externality standing outside the tightening grip of the addict's dopamine craving, albeit in what would amount to advocacy of a higher form of therapeutic addiction. In so doing, he sets the pattern for what would follow with AA's 'god'.

Spectres of Vaucanson

In the mid-sixteenth century, a foot-high automaton of a praying monk appears to have been thought so 'miraculous' in its construction that it could make for a fine ex-voto, commemorating the miracle return to health of Spain's crown prince, Don Carlos, presumed to be on the brink of death.[14] A century later, vastly more complex automata were common enough for Descartes to posit that all animal life was basically clockwork, though crucially, he could still rely on the immateriality of the soul to immunize humans against the threat of collapse into mechanical behaviour. By the time his *Meditationes* turned one hundred, however, the dualist defence was beginning to look out of kilter with the age, at least philosophically. The years 1737–40 saw Jacques de Vaucanson build and exhibit revolutionarily lifelike mechanical automata, before turning his attentions to industry and the automation of French manufacturing. His clockwork musicians and defecating duck created panic and suspicions of witchcraft, and his attempts to reorganize the silk trade around punch-card-programmed mechanical looms provoked rioting by guildsmen in the city of Lyon.[15]

If the fears of French silkmen turned, in the first instance, towards unemployment and the prospect of skilled artisans reduced to automata, the thinkers of the age dwelled on a more metaphysical terror, namely the realization that, if replaceable by machines, then machinery was perhaps all we had ever really been. Vaucanson's engineering helped lead the empiricist philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie to conclude, in *L'Homme-machine* of 1747, that 'le corps humain est une Machine qui monte elle-même ses ressorts' [the human body is a self-winding machine], the complex organization of which is alone enough to account for rational thought. He saw further evidence of the absence of a soul in the ease with which states of

[14] Elizabeth King, 'Perpetual Devotion: A Sixteenth-Century Machine That Prays', in *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life*, ed. by Jennifer Riskin (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2007), pp. 268–73.

[15] Simon Schaffer, 'Enlightened Automata', in *The Sciences in Enlightened Europe*, ed. by William Clark, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 126–65 (p. 144).

consciousness can be transformed by such stimulants as coffee, wine, and opium.[16] Hobbes and Spinoza had, by this stage, already grappled with the philosophical implications of human life being reduced to a chain of material cause and effect, the former going so far as to infer the necessity of creating another tier of automation, namely a Leviathanic and absolutely sovereign 'Artificiall man' — by which he meant the state — to prevent our mechanical impulses from tipping society into interminable civil war.[17] Spinoza, later followed by Leibniz, would attempt to square the circle by identifying freedom not with the capacity to override these chains, but with the positive affirmation of our status as 'spiritual automata'.[18]

Although mentioned infrequently, at best, the spectre of Vaucanson's androids also haunts the work of Immanuel Kant, providing a rare glimpse into the technical milieu from which the project of critical philosophy emerges. Famously, Kant's move is to separate out the mechanical determinism of the phenomenal world from that of an unknowable noumenal realm in itself, preserving autonomy in the 'necessary' metaphysical 'postulate' — one that exists beyond the bounds of pure rational comprehension — of an unconditioned causality able to act on phenomena from without the empirical determinations encountered in time and space. The third *Critique* writes of 'two entirely different kinds of causality, that of nature in its universal lawfulness and that of an idea that limits the latter' — 'the tool of an intentionally acting cause to whose ends nature is subordinated, even in its mechanical laws'.[19] In the second *Critique*, this separation of causal powers is presented as a noumenal gap, or opening, that differentiates us from otherwise lifelike automata:

> If a human being's actions [. . .] were not merely determinations of him as appearance but as a thing in itself, freedom could not be saved. A human being would be a marionnette or an automaton, like Vaucanson's, built and wound up by the supreme artist; self-

[16] Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'Homme-machine* (Paris: Mille-et-une nuits, 2000), pp. 24–25; *Man a Machine and Man a Plant*, trans. by Richard Watson and Maya Rybalka (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), pp. 32 [70].
[17] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 10 [2].
[18] Baruch Spinoza, 'Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect', in *Ethics, with Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*, ed. by Seymour Friedman, trans. by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), p. 256 [85].
[19] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. by Paul Guyer, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 290 [5:422].

> consciousness would indeed make him a thinking automaton, but the consciousness of his own spontaneity, if taken for freedom, would be mere delusion.[20]

Faced with the threat that freedom is a 'mere delusion', the function of the noumenon is to salvage humanity from automation, or what Kant more routinely calls 'heteronomy', meaning the antecedent causes of our behaviour that originate outside the mooted noumenal core of the transcendental subject. Kantian philosophy thus inverts the alignment of automation and autonomy: the automaton is one who declines to draw on the spontaneous causal power of reason to wrest themselves free from the automatic, habitual behaviours of the heteronomously conditioned body that lives in hock to the pursuit of pleasure. There is thus a decisive slippage between mechanical automation and the automation of the nervous system. As Kant puts it in his lectures on anthropology, the 'neural stimulus' of alcohol 'does not *reveal* the *natural* temperature', or underlying disposition, of the human condition, but 'rather *introduces* another one' that overcodes free will with causal determinism.[21] Nonetheless, despite the existence of transcendental freedom by default, automation is still the general tendency, rather than the exception. The ease with which heteronomous forces strengthen the mechanical grip of our corporeal being means that the intervention of reason is comparatively rare — and made more so by the prevalence of technological *pharmaka*, including a growing number of industrially produced and intensified intoxicants, able to impinge on our functioning. Notes taken during his lectures on ethics record Kant as having described drunkenness in terms of the short-circuiting of the transcendental by the empirical, leaving the drunkard incapable of acting freely.[22] In a rare discussion of habitual intoxication in the late *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), the abjuration of autonomy is further equated not just with immorality, but with animality and, worse still, 'debasements, even below the nature of an animal', who, after all, has no choice but to live heteronomously. To allow one's actions to be determined by 'fermented drinks' and other narcotics, Kant continues, amounts to such a violation of 'duty to oneself' that the drunk is 'not to be treated as a human being', though he stops short of specifying the (presumably inhumane)

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[20] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 85 [5:101].
[21] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. and trans. by Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 65 [172].
[22] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, trans. by Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 81 [27: 288].

ways with which they should accordingly be dealt.[23] Humanity, in this respect, consists in the willingness to accept the responsibility of 'freedom and dominion over oneself' made possible by reason, which is precisely what is surrendered by the subject who 'finds its pleasure and satisfaction in a slavish mind'. The refusal is 'evil', but moreover 'incurable', for the simple reason that 'the sick person does not want to be cured and flees from the dominion of principles, by which alone a cure could occur'. The proto-addict resorts to drink to escape life's miseries, but remains, for all that, reduced to misery by the haunting 'summons to inner freedom' of reason, which leaves him 'groan[ing] in his chains'.[24] With this emphasis on the curative powers of reason, let it be noted how it is rational philosophy — the 'dominion of principles' — and not yet medicine that is charged with treating what Kant classifies as the 'passions'. Equally, it is not quite clear how far (proto-)addictions would really fall into this category. His classification distinguishes between innate inclinations and culturally acquired 'manias', including for dominance and possession, but states of drinking and gambling that 'one does not exactly call these various inclinations or disinclinations so many passions', as much as abuses of '*mere passivity* in the faculty of desire'.[25]

In sliding between two kinds of automation, technological and behavioural, Kant affords us another rare glimpse at the general socio-historical and technological context so routinely elided by the abstraction and transcendence sought in philosophical writing. This is a context where mechanization goes hand in hand with the growth of incapacitating habits of consumption; one that also pre-dates the more recent separation of pharmaceuticals from a broader array of techno-pharmacological intoxicants; where besides alcohol and drugs stand books, deemed similarly capable of short-circuiting the exercise of reason. The splitting of categorical hairs points to an uncertain ontological status and, perhaps in turn, to a world where addictions are emerging into view but not yet squarely in the sights of a philosophical-medical gaze.

Technologies of Addiction

Only a couple of years before La Mettrie mused on the ability of intoxicants to reprogramme the man-machine, and but months after Vaucanson had first exhibited his automata to the upper

[23] Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals, revised edition*, ed. by Lara Denis, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 194 [6:427–28].
[24] Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 166 [266–67].
[25] Ibid., p. 169 [269–70].

echelons of London society, Britain's capital reached the nadir of a 'Gin Craze' whose social and economic impact had become increasingly troublesome over the course of the eighteenth century. In 1743, the average Londoner drank 2.2 gallons of fermented spirits per annum, up from 1.3 gallons in 1729, and only a third of a gallon at the turn of the century.[26] The causes of this rising consumption were multiple, ranging from a ban on imported French brandy and the corresponding deregulation of domestic production, to the development of cost-reducing distillation technologies, the rise of gambling, and the social devastation occasioned by the South Sea Bubble. Perhaps the most visible factor, however, was a massive influx of itinerant workers from the countryside, exacerbated by with the absence of a social system able to absorb their precarious, rootless existence.[27] Agrarian capitalism grew from the increasing enclosure and privatization of once-common land, combined with new agricultural technologies including crop rotation and phosphate fertilizers. Its effect was to create a surplus of rural labour, which gravitated in desperation towards towns, above all London. The newly urbanized, pre-industrial precariat tended to find there neither stable work, nor the kind of welfare support available back home from families and local parishes. But there was enough cheap, effective solace in the city's many gin houses for excessive drinking to generate a crisis of serious ill-health and declining productivity. The historian of narcotics, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, recounts how liquor first entered everyday life via military daily rationing, where its power of 'anaesthetization' set out 'the rudiments of later industrial discipline', by serving 'as a sort of psychological and physiological lubricant to guarantee' the 'smooth functioning' of the early-modern soldier as 'a cog in the wheel of a mathematically and rationalistically organized corps of troops'.[28] The same logic of artificial integration is taken to extremes in the case of the dislocated urban poor, for whom the delegation of life's decisions to an autopilot powered by gin worked all too well — in a formulation of Bruce Alexander that significantly complicates the Kantian separation of reason from intoxication — as a 'rational', 'adaptive' substitute for meaningful psychosocial belonging.[29]

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[26] Jessica Warner, *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason* (London: Profile, 2003), p. 3.
[27] Patrick Dillon, *Gin: The Much-Lamented Death of Madam Geneva* (Boston, MA: Justin, Charles & Co., 2004), pp. 29–37.
[28] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants*, trans. by David Jacobson (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp. 152–53.
[29] Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction*, pp. 62–64.

The first formulation of alcohol dependence as a 'disease' in need of specifically medical treatment came from the American physician and signatory of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Rush, in 1784, the same year as Kant's famous essay, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?', to which we shall return in due course.[30] The consolidation of capitalism would usher in subsequent spikes in the consumption of intoxicants, including caffeine, which was sourced through the catastrophic off-loading of Indian opium on China, and also cocaine and opioids. In an age still beset by the brutality and boredom of much labour, the later rise of the pharmaceutical industry both commercialized and legitimated the consumption of new forms of pain medication, including laudanum, morphine, and subsequently heroin. The last of these, like the hypodermic syringes that underpinned the rise of morphinism, were initially thought to prevent increasingly documented phenomena of addiction.[31] Much like another intoxicant enjoying a boom period at the time, albeit one less conventionally recognized as such, they were also deemed especially corruptive of the supposedly weaker and certainly less stimulated sex.[32]

We have known at least since Avital Ronell's *Crack Wars: Literature Addiction Mania* (1992) that *Madame Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert, can be read as a novel about addiction.[33] Entrapped by the uninspired rural drudgery of nineteenth-century France, the fate of Emma Bovary tracks that of the stereotypical terminal addict, beginning with the search for escape, excitement, and pain relief, before obsessional pursuit escalates into child neglect, debt, prostitution — a means of repaying her dealer, the pharmacist Homais — and ultimately suicide by overdose. Emma's gateway and drug of choice, and the high she thereafter labours in vain to recapture, is romance fiction, her novels functioning exactly in the terms of what Natasha Dow Schüll, writing on contemporary addiction to gambling machines, describes as the 'zone' opened up by the fetishized prosthesis: the therapeutic space of retreat into which the anxious and dopamine-starved addict withdraws from the chaos of a society that offers little prospect for world-building.[34] In much the same way that, like early proponents of heroin and the syringe,

[30] Lucy Inglis, *Milk of Paradise: A History of Opium* (London: Macmillan, 2018), p. 152.
[31] Ibid., pp. 212–13.
[32] Ibid., p. 229.
[33] Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars: Literature Addiction Mania* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1992), esp. pp.74–75.
[34] Natasha Dow Schüll, *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 2–3.

some still write off the non-pharmaceutical, 'soft' addictions of screens and the digital as mere metaphors for the real deal, there is a temptation to downplay Flaubert's fictitious case study as the product of misogynistic parody.[35] Even allowing for hyperbole, however, Emma's drama is in keeping with the broader experience of the printing revolution, diagnosed by Kant as a product of the automation of thought through the reckless consumption of reading material.

In another instance of disadjustment caused by the inability of social norms to keep up with, and regulate, the effects of accelerating technological change, the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the intersection of a relatively anomic population and a rapid expansion in the supply of books. The combination led to fears that reading had become a 'fever', a 'mania', and even an 'addiction' in continental Europe.[36] In pre-unification Germany, the scale of *Lesesucht* and the thirst for written stimulation were deemed sufficiently dangerous to constitute a subversive menace to the social order, including an existential threat to the viability of the university. The progressive spread of literacy into the middle classes and the decreasing cost of mass-printing technologies generated a 'journal addiction', borne out, in the period 1700–1800, by a twenty-fold increase in the number of periodicals on the market, the majority of which were pitched to a new and 'unlearned "public"'.[37] What Wellmon describes as an 'Enlightenment form of technological disruption' caused a transformation in the hierarchy of social relations comparable to that of alphabetization in ancient Athens. The ready availability of books undermined the epistemic authority of the German university, causing enrollment to drop to the point that over half of them would eventually collapse.[38] The number of new publications dedicated to fiction moreover unleashed governing-class anxieties over inexperienced and unregulated amateur book fiends, able to consume disruptive material in inconspicuous silence. The unpoliceable private space between the page and the eye worked as a conduit for hacking into the brain, whereupon readers' heads could be filled with the kind of norm-violating fantasies that would encourage them to abandon their allotted stations in life.

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[35] See, for example, Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pp.293–94.
[36] Roger Chartier, 'Reading and Reading Practices', in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. by Alain Charles Kors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 399; see also Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), p. 67.
[37] Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment*, pp. 68, 66.
[38] Ibid., pp.164, 161–62.

Critique as (Limited) Therapy

The heteronomic potency of the book is identified at the outset of Kant's essay on enlightenment, which begins with something like wariness towards the unregulated consumption of information that Bruno Latour would later theorize as 'double click'.[39] Kant complains that, in spite of a capacity for reason that allows us emancipation from the 'alien guidance' of material corporeality, we still all too lazily seize the chance for 'a book to have understanding in place of me, a spiritual advisor to have a conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me [. . .] I need not think, so long as I can pay'. So long as I can uncritically consume the answers thrown in my direction by the (unchecked) appearance of authority.[40]

This consumerist, abnegationist mentality is the very opposite of the value that Kant deemed fundamental to the age, namely 'maturity'. Maturity would consist in learning to think for oneself; and more pointedly, in distinguishing between the unregulated consumption of information and the critical engagement with ideas that underwrites the possibility of knowledge. It demands, furthermore, that one — albeit a certain, qualified, one — never surrender autonomy to the heteronomous forces that seize hold of and automate the body and mind. But that does not entail Kant rejecting automation under all circumstances. On the contrary, as he indicates later on in the same essay, the principle of freedom — the notional capacity to exercise one's noumenal-transcendental autonomy, without its causal power being heteronomously short-circuited, as it is in the case of the perennial drunkard — seems to count for rather more than the practice. Criticism can be offered up in private, but in public one must 'act as part of a machine', disciplining the mind and body in accordance with the 'imperative' of 'civil obedience'. Beyond the confines of domesticity, the citizen is bound by respect for the institutions of state, much as the clergyman is required to respect the doctrines of the Church.[41] In saying this, Kant builds towards the argument of his last major work, *Der Streit der Fakultaten* [The Conflict of the Faculties] (1798), on the composition of the university. There, he makes a distinction between the public-facing and 'higher' faculties of law, medicine, and theology, whose subject-matter — namely the 'eternal', 'civil', and 'physical' well-being of the people — necessitates their

[39] Bruno Latour, *Enquête sur les modes d'existence: une anthropologie des modernes* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012), pp. 136–40.
[40] Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', in *Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 54.
[41] Ibid., p. 56.

subordination to and determination by the established legal, medical, and doctrinal norms established 'on the command of an external legislator',[42] and the 'lower' faculty of philosophy, which alone is granted the 'power to judge autonomously — that is, freely'.[43] Although Kant does not employ the term himself, the higher faculties are effectively 'heteronomous', in the sense of being governed by external causality. Theology derives its power from, and is bound by fidelity to, scripture; members of the faculty of law take their interpretive cue only from the statutory laws of the land. The medical profession is 'freer' than the other higher faculties, insofar as it 'must derive its rules of procedure not from orders of the authorities, but from the nature of things themselves'. To resist the temptation to exploit immaturity through quackery, however, it still needs to be policed and regulated by a 'board of public health'.[44] In addition to being subject to heteronomy, the higher faculties are also deemed liable to inculcate heteronomy in others, by slipping into the kind of seductive metaphysical dogma that Kant elsewhere equates with fanaticism, and which serves to circumvent the thought of, and thereby automate, the masses.[45] The autonomy of philosophy is required to keep this tendency towards dogmatic excess in check, but is itself conditional on the philosopher's criticisms remaining beyond the reach of the public, privately enclosed within the scholarly sphere of the university.[46] Withdrawal from the *polis* and into what might look like hermetic self-containment is built into the very structure of the discipline.

Echoing his earlier complaints about the prevalence of intellectual minority, in the later text, a proto-existentialist Kant concedes that the freedom of philosophy is not for everyone, the 'public' being broadly disinclined to take the arduous route towards a life lived well. 'The people want to be *led*, . . . to be *duped*' and 'naturally adhere most to doctrines which demand the least self-exertion and the least use of their reason'.[47] This general preference not to think elevates the 'businesspeople' of the higher faculties into magicians and 'miracle-workers', who indulge in regressing the masses to automation by demagogically setting forth 'doctrines in keeping with the people's inclinations', and manipulating their 'habits' and 'feelings' by pandering to popular

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[42] Immanuel Kant, 'The Conflict of the Faculties', in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. by Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 248–51 [7:18–23].
[43] Ibid., p. 255 [7.28].
[44] Ibid., p. 254 [7: 26–7].
[45] Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. by Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 57 [2:251].
[46] Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment*, p. 146.
[47] Kant, 'The Conflict of the Faculties', p. 258 [7:31–2].

reckoning with snake oil and cheap maxims of self-help that absolve us from the 'work' of duty.[48] While philosophical learning is not a prerequisite for living 'moderately', philosophy's behind-the-scenes, disautomating, work of critique is fundamental for curbing the hubris of those disciplines which, on account of their potential for rabble-rousing, fanaticism, and exploitation, risk sowing the seeds of insurrection. For the same reason of preserving social stability, however, Kant is by no means against automation — at least, not against the right kinds of automation. His 'account of true enlightenment and its relationship with governmentality hinged on careful specification of the mechanization of the subject', in the words of Simon Schaffer.[49] Just as the addict has effectively abnegated humanity and regressed to (sub-)animality by declining to circumscribe heteronomy through transcendental reason, Kant accepted industrial automation, the disciplinary formatting of workers around the rhythms imposed by the machine, as the lot of those not cut out for freedom. This ambivalence lingers over his concept of freedom, too, insofar as Kant (paradoxically) insists on autonomy being strictly law-governed. All that really differs is the kind of law — empirical or 'moral' — by which one's actions are determined. That the two kinds are distinguished only by what Kant himself acknowledges to be a mere 'postulate' furthermore becomes increasingly problematic in light of ongoing work, most notably by Catherine Malabou, on whether the transcendental can survive in an age of neurobiology.[50]

Recalling Aristotle's suggestion that we are differentiated from mechanical automata only at the level of subjective experience, that is, by the transformations of affect that coincide with the forces acting on our decision-making, Kant states that determination by the moral law will be qualitatively distinct from the experience of heteronomous, mechanical automation. Although grounded in reason, and not empirical, sensory, or corporeal in origin, we might still hazard that autonomy effectively amounts to a superior kind of automation, one marked by 'respect' rather than by the cravings associated with addiction. The distinction is weakened by Kant's admission that autonomous behaviours must first be inculcated and rehearsed to the point of becoming automatic, with 'appraisal of actions by moral laws a natural occupation and, as it were, a *habit* accompanying all our own free actions'.[51]

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[48] Ibid., pp. 257–58, 261, n.1 [7: 30–1, 34].
[49] Schaffer, 'Enlightened Automata', p. 153.
[50] Catherine Malabou, *Avant demain: épigenèse et rationnalité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2014).
[51] Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 127 [5:159].

If the distinction between 'heteronomous' and 'autonomous', deterministic and free, causality begins to break down, then what is to stop us from wondering whether the philosopher's fetishistic pursuit of the moral law couldn't also serve as the object of an addiction? Such a reading would be in keeping with the earliest uses of the term. Although connoting servitude and habituation, the word 'addiction' acquires its predominantly negative undertone only over the course of capitalist modernity, its consumerist-era diagnosis as an (inherited) disease serving to insulate the majority against fears that their consumption is pathological. In a Christian tradition stretching from Saint Paul to the King James Bible of the early seventeenth century, one would still speak favourably of being submissively 'addicted . . . to the ministry of the saints' (1 Corinthians 16:15).[52] Religious experience has been identified with the dopamine highs more typically associated with intoxication, and is also thought potentially addictogenic.[53] Current neuroscience attests to the positivity of some addictions, highlighting the 'striking similarity' between pathological dependence and forms of automatized habituation associated with neuroplastic learning.[54]

The same mentality of affirming superior modes of addiction permeates throughout the history of philosophy, which, like Christianity, has revolved since Plato around the elevation of baser compulsive drives into a higher form, most notably the sublimation of *eros* into *agape*. In line with the idea that addiction is pharmacological, which is to say, can have therapeutic value in itself, both Stiegler and Malabou also write of the replacement of toxic addictions with 'better', more therapeutic ones.[55] And Kant, too, is inevitably no exception to this philosophical mainstream. His move is to substitute enslavement to and automation by the mechanistic causality of the passions with non-passionate voluntary servitude before a moral law that nonetheless still claims to draw its authority from an external source of causality, namely God. As Kant writes in both the second and so-called 'fourth' (posthumously published, unfinished) *Critiques*, it is the speculatively necessary postulation of God that underwrites the distinct existence of an ('unconditioned') self-positing subject of transcendental freedom, that is, a

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[52] As discussed by Alexander, *The Globalization of Addiction*, pp. 29–30,

[53] Michael A. Ferguson, Jeffrey S. Anderson, and others, 'Reward, Salience, and Attentional Networks are Activated by Religious Experience in Devout Mormons', *Social Neuroscience*, 13, 1 (2018), 104–16; see also Cheryl Zerbe Taylor, 'Religious Addiction: Obsession with Spirituality', *Pastoral Psychology*, 50, 4 (2002), 291–315.

[54] See, for example, Ann M. Graybiel, 'Habits, Rituals, and the Evaluative Brain', *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 31 (2008), 359–87 (p. 369).

[55] Malabou, 'The Brain of History', p. 52; see also, for example, Bernard Stiegler, *Mécréance et discrédit, 3: L'Esprit perdu du capitalisme* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), p. 116 (§24).

subject able to wrest itself free from the automations of heteronomy; God who exists as the point of externality to which we can anchor ourselves and so break out of the vicious circle of the addict's craving.[56]

From here, we might go further still and suggest that Kant's invocation of God as an idea presages that of Alcoholics Anonymous, most famously immortalized in the 'suggestions' of the *Twelve Steps*. AA's legendary programme for disautomation repeatedly outlines how allowing oneself to 'depend upon a Higher Power' preconditions the gaining of 'true independence of the spirit'.[57] The third step recounts how the organization's early adopters 'made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*', in a formulation that has caused consternation since its first publication in 1939.[58] Its stated intention is to extend the method of self-treatment to non-believers, though the remainder of the text strongly indicates that atheistic adhesions to the maxim will performatively lead any atheist towards true belief. The examples chosen to illustrate the breadth of possible interpretations of 'Him' are nonetheless philosophically interesting. Comparing dependence on God to a householder's dependence on electricity, or to that of a polio sufferer on their iron lung, the overt message is that God can be treated as a kind of supplementary help, or prosthetic will, allowing the concupiscent to outsource their own defective agency to a force that, like the *pharmakon* of the addict, effectively desires on their behalf. What matters more, of course, is whether this kind of treatment — of 1) generating a point of exteriority that stands outside the addict's automated craving for their specific stimulus of choice; and 2) of supplanting worse with better addictions — works. Recent research suggests that 2) does not, or does so only rarely: sticking rigidly to what has been reified as the dogmatic prescriptions of the *Twelve Steps*, it is argued, offers a differential success rate of just over 5 per cent, up against the commonly cited 50–80 per cent success rate of 'spontaneous' (untreated) remission.[59] Tried and trusted AA methods of religiously attending meetings, accepting powerlessness, abdicating one's will to God, and counting days of abstinence merely reinscribe the very neuronal pathways that identify the

[56] Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, ed. by Eckart Förster, trans. by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 230 [21:25–6].
[57] *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1953), p. 36.
[58] Ibid., p. 34.
[59] Lance Dodes and Zachary Dodes, *The Sober Truth: Debunking the Bad Science Behind 12-Step Programs and the Rehab Industry* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), pp. 53–56.

addiction as the go-to behaviour of choice, accelerating 'ego fatigue' and the risk of relapse.[60] There is thus a question over whether the method of inculcating a new and supposedly better addiction really goes far enough in creating an exit point from automation by something worse. Returning to 1), a promising alternative might therefore consist in empowering addicts to explore a multiplicity of ways of living, exposing addled brains to greater varieties of stimulation, so as to reverse the effect of neuronal pruning and the narrowing of attention around a single and overriding object of focus.

Salve Christina

Philosophy takes shape in response to the changing nature of automation, not just differentiating us from mechanical simulacra, but creating a space and moreover an agency through which to combat the *pharmaka* that take hold of and reprogramme the body. Yet the artifactuality of the will, namely the ease with which it is shaped, and freedom attenuated, by *pharmaka* makes for an ambivalent fascination. Kant's reaction to Vaucanson and the printing revolution offers one example of philosophy's role in what Stiegler terms 'disautomation', the creation of new techniques of critical learning to wean us off the bad habits of outsourcing desire to technology that works in our place. It serves as a mechanism for the reorganization of technologically diasdjusted societies. But philosophy, too, is forever at risk of becoming just another bad habit, a means of retreat from the chaos it is otherwise charged with stilling.

Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* records the tale of a Greek philosopher in Rome who exerted such powerful charms that 'he instilled in the young men of the city a fierce passion which caused them to banish all their other pleasures and pastimes, and succumb to love of knowledge'.[61] But what would it even mean to be debilitated in this way? Referencing Plato, Jean-Pierre Vernant wrote of the discipline that it was born in, and will forever continue to occupy, the ambivalent space between the *polis* and the debauchery of the symposium; between political engagement and its very opposite, namely withdrawal into the private intoxication of abstract intellectualism.[62] On a similar note, Bernard Stiegler has told me on more than one occasion that 'il arrive un moment où il faut arrêter de faire la philosophie pour être un citoyen'

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[60] Marc Lewis, *The Biology of Desire: Why Addiction is not a Disease* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), pp. 15–16, 184–85.
[61] Plutarch, *Roman Lives*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 30 [Cat22].
[62] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 60.

[there comes a time when one needs to stop being a philosopher and start being a citizen]; when, in other words, one needs to stop looking to the sublatory potential of philosophical solutionism to do away with the weight of the world, and just get stuck in with collective projects to alleviate it. Like everything else, in other words, philosophy is pharmacological, both therapeutic and toxically intoxicating. We see the curative side of what he has begun to call *panser/panser*, or *pænser*, on show in his recent writings on madness. Stiegler analyzes at length the role that reading and especially writing have played in carving himself an escape route, by turns from prison, addiction, and institutionalizing bouts of depression, and above all from entrapment in the constitutive nothingness of our interiority. As he puts it in *Dans la disruption* (2016) and again in *Qu'appelle-t-on panser?*: 'Écrire, c'est-à-dire de travailler — c'est-à-dire de *me* soigner [. . .] j'avais tenté de me soigner en prison par cette "technique de soi" que l'on appelle écrire, mais aussi lire — deux pratiques d'un autre *pharmakon*' [Writing, which is to say, working, which is to say, taking care of *myself* . . . I had tried to take care of myself in prison by means of this 'technique of the self' that we call writing, but also through reading — two practices of another *pharmakon*];[63] 'Penser, c'est panser le *pharmakon* qui *transduit* de manière toujours quasi-causale (et *jamais* de façon *simplement* causale) les pulsions de vie et de mort en tant qu'elles forment dans l'exosomatisation' [Thinking is salving the *pharmakon* that quasi-causally (and *never simply* causally) cuts across the drives of both life and death insofar as they are formed in exosomatization].[64] To think — through writing — is to heal, by creating through technology a point of exteriority that takes us back outside of ourselves, a (retroactively, or 'quasi'-, causal) future that acts on the present by transporting us beyond the entropic, tightening noose of short-term impulses. And yet herein, in the second quotation, one also tastes the poison of this philosophical *pharmakon*: a language that writes more for itself than for the *polis*; whose function is *self*-medicatory, over and above communicational; one so obscure and hermetically intricated as to risk collapse back into the heady zone of its composition, at the cost of undercutting its ambitions towards super-philosophical citizenship.

It is perhaps to keep such intoxications at bay that French philosophy, in the wake of Derrida, has come to speak of philosophy's need to break out of itself, to become *anti*- or *non*-philosophical, by disautomating its inheritance of past habits. Badiou and Laruelle are the most

[63] Bernard Stiegler, *Dans la disruption: comment ne pas devenir fou* (Paris: Les Liens Qui Libèrent, 2016), p. 300.
[64] Bernard Stiegler, *Qu'appelle-t-on panser? L'Immense régression* (Paris: Les Liens Qui Libèrent, 2018), p. 85.

explicit proponents of this approach, though they — and particularly Laruelle — can hardly be absolved from the accusation of getting high on their own writing.[65]

An alternative kind of ambassador to the *polis* might look something like Christina Howells, as a deconstructive existentialist but moreover as a person. Her published work is often only implicitly political, at best, and her thoughts on passion and freedom only occasionally cross over into ideas of addiction.[66] But she is remarkably free of those traits that characterize the philosophy addict, the one who preaches against the *esprit de sérieux* while simultaneously clinging to an inviolable core of their own thought; who teaches the lightness of being while wearing their work so heavily as to prevent them from living. The mentality is captured in the Sartrean motto of *qui perd gagne*, which she habitually recites to the overwrought and underworked in her function as teacher and therapist to all and sundry, be they her students, colleagues, random acquaintances, or the retinue of eccentric protégés she has redeemed and cultivated over the years. I count myself lucky to have numbered among at least two of those categories, and to have been coaxed out of hermetic intellectualism by her habit of never doing philosophy in abstraction, always treating it as a technique of anthropology, for the interminable analysis of everyday life.

[65] See, for example, Alain Badiou, *Nietzsche, L'Antiphilosophie 1: Le Séminaire 1* (Paris: Fayard, 2015); François Laruelle, *Principes de la non-philosophie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996).
[66] See, for example, Christina Howells, '*Le Défaut d'origine*', in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. by Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 150.