Subjectivity (2024) 31:97–116
https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-024-00179-w

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Rich addiction

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Accepted: 14 February 2024 / Published online: 6 March 2024
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Abstract
Examining the author's own experiences of narcotics addiction reveals certain aspects of the addicted mentality that have strong ethical valence. In general, this shows that addiction is not a state fundamentally characterized by lack. The rudiments of this position are found in some contemporary philosophy of addiction; also, it is contrasted with a common widely held mistaken view. Addiction should instead be understood in continuity with and as illuminating the nature of human personhood and subjectivity. Under a phenomenology specific to the author's experience, addiction appears as a mode of experience that has an unmanageable overflow of narratives created as discourses concerning people, events, thoughts, and feelings; narratives embodied in assemblages of objects; and narratives appearing as mental images. These considerations suggest that pre-reflective connection to the world can be profoundly illuminative but also can isolate is from the world and, further, that our ethical values form from within our lives and not as an artificial addition. Our historical, narrative self-understanding has existential and moral import. Thus, addiction by its extremity exemplifies the ceaseless ethical activity of personhood.

Keywords Addiction · Ethics · History · Moral philosophy · Narrative · Personhood

A personal, yet philosophical account

For about a decade in the middle of my life, I was addicted to a narcotic. The years to which I gave this addiction were dark, dense, and fast at times; some of them, melancholy yet voluptuous; some of them, a lucid delirium. I had no tragedy, however, and was safe enough to survive. When my addiction ceased to be active and as I was recovering, I returned to the academic career of my younger decades, bringing ideas with which bitter experience had beaten me. To diminish my regrets, and

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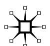
for the purpose of living fully anew, I found work again as a philosopher, driven by these ideas to give shape to what I had learned about moral life and its temporal, logical, and ontological structure in the perfect but weird, complete but weak, carefully controlled but rather cracked manner we call philosophy.[1] Developing my work in my specialties as a philosopher, I take as a core moral experience and source of understanding what I learned about addicts, like myself, and about addiction, to which I return and from which my thinking often kicks off.

In this paper I will use an important truth I have realized about addiction to argue for some of the claims that guide my work in moral philosophy, namely, that our ethical values so thoroughly constitute our human behavior that they are present in abundance even amidst the desperately thinned and narrowed circumstances of addicted life. Even in such circumstances, we live in a web of norms that we form by means of story-telling in a way that addiction helps us to understand, because addiction very much concerns certain exemplary kinds of narrative. Understanding this requires a phenomenological account of some aspects of addiction that I believe I can provide by examining my own experience. The constraints of addiction as I experienced them help to show how the phenomenology of our historical, narrative self-understanding has existential and moral import.

It is common for people to think of the addict's moral life as failing and thereby empty or in the course of emptying. They often regard the addict as hollowed out, as a zombie. But the addict's life is not empty; it is full and striving. A lot goes on in the small space of the addict's mind, just as it does in the heads of professional philosophers. Instead of thinking of the life of an addict as zombie-like, I will argue that its actual fullness tells us something profound about what human moral life is and the way in which we constitute personhood upon it. Grasping this value of this notion of fullness for personhood, to which an improved understanding of addiction can give us access, can help to deepen the ways in which contemporary philosophy engages issues of moral change. The approach of moral philosophy to addiction may be said to have been begun by Frankfurt (1971, 1987). Frankfurt's work stimulated others to think about the role of the will in personhood (Cuypers 2000). Moral change has itself become an object of increasing interest on both the individual and social levels (Appiah 2020; Baker 2019, 2022). While the gathering wave of descriptive ethics has made progress in this matter (Hämäläinen 2019; Callard 2018), observations from a subjective phenomenology of addiction, so far as I have the experience that enables me to provide them, tells us something about the ways our lived experience is value-laden and value-making that I have not noticed in normative ethics, or a least tells us this in a compelling, revealing, and interesting way. I will apply some aspects of the model of narrativity as developed in the philosophy of history to illuminate the moral richness of at least one addict's world (Elgabsi and Gilbert 2020; Luft 2007). The broad range of human conception and production that this approach affords means that within its frame narrative is not solely verbal but

[1] In this paper, I use "ethics" and "moral philosophy" interchangeably (although I prefer the latter term), and I likewise especially use "moral" and "ethical" interchangeably.



instead encompasses all the ways in which we create actions, objects, images, and texts in order to express and to communicate experience.

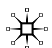
Owen Flanagan, a philosopher and recovering addict, frames his use of his own experiences in terms of his address to an audience of professional philosophers, a situation like this in which I now write, and in conveying a re-experience of ‘what it [his drug use] was like at the beginning and at the end…to be the man who was dying’ (Flanagan 2011, p. 274). In my addiction, I shared his peril. But the experiences I will describe occurred all along the middle of my use and are neither origin nor conclusion. Like Flanagan, I will ‘“bracket”’ out questions of causation and constitution’ (Flanagan 2011, p. 279) but not because I fear, as he does, that these sides of the matter will cloud the phenomena I wish to describe nor because I have the same epistemological concerns that Flanagan has in his paper, but because I regard ethics as first philosophy and the process of the formation of ethical values as the more fruitful field of phenomenological inquiry.

Within the frame of moral philosophy as first philosophy, addiction presents many features other than the ones I will focus on of the kind that Antonio Escohotado has done as much as virtually anyone else to explore (Escogotado 1999). Recently, Carl Hart, a professor of psychology, has stated that his uses of heroin did not impair his academic or personal life (Hart 2019). In what I shall say about addiction, I do not intend to say that addiction is good, or desirable, or pleasant, or fruitful, or that it is the opposite of these things, being bearable or sustainable; also, I speak neither for nor against the use of chemicals in the search for ecstatic wisdom (Evans 2017). Instead, I will speak out of my own experience, observation, and thought in order to urge philosophers and others to think truthfully and productively about substance addiction as well as about our human ways of values-making.

In the context of recent addiction studies

The present essay is a work of first-person philosophy, drawing implications of my private experience as contributions to my own thinking and to the thinking of others. Outside of this, developments in the study of addiction in other fields do not have the same aim as I have; nor do they spring from the same higher-order commitments as those my work supports as a matter of moral philosophy. And in large measure philosophical work does not depend on harmonizing with work undertaken for other purposes. True knowledge from various sources ought to stand in some kind of unity, but the nature and extent of this is extremely complex and far from well understood. Philosophy and the other ways of investigating human experience and natural phenomena are not fundamentally crucial to one another in the sense that undertaking one need not require undertaking others, although all these ways of understanding and modes of knowledge must surely interrelate in some realm that as of today we do not much grasp.

On the one hand, the results of this study in first-person philosophy do cohere with some of the interests of recent work on addiction in various natural and especially social sciences. They can add to the ‘enrichment’ that some look to from hermeneutic studies (Vandermeuse 2011, p. 304). Even if my approach is not



technically phenomenological, it stands as much apart from positivistic approaches that 'generalize facts' as does Vandermeuse's approach (Vandermeuse 2011, p. 306), recognizing that 'caring and connecting with others' remains the desire of many (and perhaps virtually all) addicts (Vandermeuse 2011, p. 313). More broadly, much more is at stake here than 'the interactions of a chemical agent with a human physiological system' because 'it is indispensable to consider addicts' subjective perceptions of drugs, drug effects, and their wider social lives' (Weinberg 2011, p. 299). This is sometimes called 'the appreciative turn' (Weinberg 2011, p. 301). The hermeneutic approach is used in this context as ontology and certainly not as moral philosophy (Vandermeuse 2011, p. 306 et passim). This then operates in a sphere different from my own—different and not necessarily worse or better.

On the other hand, a significant recent approach carries some of these endeavors into a different register. The posthumanist point of view meets the voluntarism of a focus on subjective experience with a refusal to 'reduce all learned behavior to a singular faculty of judgment, subjectivity or self' (Weinberg 2011, p. 305). Furthermore, the posthumanist approach robustly attends to the affordances and constraints of material objects and forces (Fraser et al. 2014, pp. 13–14). This draws upon the work of John Law, who regards addiction-causing substances 'non-human agents residing in the bodies of those who are addicted' (Law 2011, p. 307), which in turn stems from or is related to the work of Bruno Latour and to 'new materialisms.' We can see the ontological and posthumanist approaches roughly united in Cameron Duff's idea that we approach aspects of addiction as 'atmospheres': 'Atmospheres conjure an ontology of the interstitial; an interval, space or disjuncture between matter and non-matter, between subject and object, nature and culture' (Duff 2016, p. 62, referring primarily to recovery).

From the posthumanist approach, I must dissent. While posthumanism has a powerful message about our responsibility for ourselves, I do not think an ethical point of view can be sustained without a robust concept of personhood that anchors it in moral obligation (Spingsted 2005). My core commitment is to the tradition of philosophical personalism (Burgos 2018; LoLordo 2019), refracting it through the work of a number of twentieth- and twenty-first century philosophers (Gilbert 2019). This means (among other things) that I regard personhood (which is to be distinguished from the self) as the most important object of our attention (Callinicos 2004, pp. 33ff.), that the concept of personhood as a core of subjectivity illuminates not solely our individual lives but our collective life as well and also the interrelations of the human and other-than-human worlds, and that attending to this is first and foremost a moral project. Further, it steps aside from the problems of free will and determinism that play a large role in discussions of addiction. Finally, it releases ethics from dependence on epistemology and ontology. Arguing these claims is of course beyond the purpose of this paper and my reach through it. Instead, here I develop the consequences of what I saw and learned in addiction in order to add to the concept of the moral agency of persons. Yet by aiming to develop a humanist idea of personhood that is distinct from Cartesian subjectivity the observations and ideas in this paper can add to and make good use of the posthumanist critique of humanism. In this way, I hope the meaningfulness of the experiences I report here reaches across from philosophy to sociology, psychology, and biology to enrich their studies of

addiction with a stronger understanding of the moral position of the human person as exemplified by the addict. While there is interesting overlap between the posthumanist and personalist approaches (as noted in one instance below), in writing first-person philosophy I must hew to the insights that addiction and recovery gave to me in leading to personalism in the preset matter and many others.

The overflow of narratives in the experience in addiction

To grasp the richness of the addicted mind, we must certainly move away from any versions of the addict's loss of will. Louis Charland expresses this view quite completely when he says that decisions to use addictive substances (he is writing about heroin) 'usually nullify any semblance of voluntary choice' (Charland 2022, p. 41). In opposition to such notions, Hanna Pikard stresses that 'drug consumption, even in addiction, typically remains purposive.' Because 'Pleasure reduced is not pleasure eradicated,' she points out, 'there would seem to be pleasure from drugs in addiction for most addicts' (Pikard 2010, pp. 739, 742). By grasping this, we more easily see that 'the psychology of addiction is similar to the psychology of ordinary, non-addictive temptation in important respects' so that we can 'explore the ways in which these parallels can illuminate both addiction and ordinary action' (Dill and Holton 2014). But we can take this a step further: Doug McConnell turns our attention to addicts' narratives as their constitution of themselves, through 'causal, teleological, or thematic approaches,' whether broad or narrow, thick or thin, short-term or lifelong in character.

This kind of self-constitution differs from the effects of efficient physical or social determinants. How should we understand the force of narratives in the phenomenology of values-making in the case of addiction? McConnell says that

> Self-narratives are not single stories, but collections of many partially overlapping, partially interconnected narrative threads. We create narrative threads whenever there are events in our lives, past and expected, brief or lengthy, that we want to understand or realize.... Because human life typically involves diverse experiences and values, we cannot force everything into a single narrative.... (McConnell 2016, p. 310).

The implication of this is not only, as Marc Levy puts it, that 'Addicted people remain rational agents' and that the 'subpersonal mechanisms' that addicts use are 'partially constitutive' of human rationality (Levy 2019, p. 57). These perspectives bring us to looking at addiction in terms of the capacity for narrative that the altered states generate from the material of the addict's personality and toward her constituting her own personhood.

Let us set this approach within an understanding of the force of narratives in the phenomenology of values-making in general. Finitude is the context of our common fragility and vulnerability and thereby an existential condition, helping us to take an ethical stance toward others. Addicts share the dangers of finitude with every other human. Life in finite temporality makes us narrating or story-telling beings because mutability, its losses and gains, its coming-to-be and passing-away, is the seed of

stories. Although, since finitude is necessary to stories but finite beings can live without stories, at least notionally, it is not logical entailment that pushes us to narrate our experiences. Such necessity as obtains is social and psychic. Nonetheless, we never live in an infinite temporality. Therefore, what we experience always has conclusions of one sort or another, and it is endings that make stories possible and in an effective way unavoidable. An ending—a death, a loss, a conclusive change—already is a story to minds that require unifying categories in their conceptions of things as ours do. The unities we tell are sometimes delusional, as in pareidolia; but delusions, hallucinations, fantasies, paranoia, and other sorts of unconventional narrative unities often characterize states of mind altered by narcotics and psychedelics and are best understood to stand on a gray scale that shades into much of our unaddicted thinking. In making narratives that we otherwise regard as factually wrong, the addict operates in one side-track of our common human experience.

Paul Ricoeur said that our implication in finite time requires a 'call for narration' (Ricoeur 1984, p. 59). This key insight into the connection of experience and narrative has been developed, with alterations, by David Carr, who argues that a close congruity holds between experience and narrative. Narrative is not an extra ornament added to experience; rather, it is part of temporal experience. Narratives change experience by being one of its consequences, by bringing the consequences of actions and events to consciousness and in memory, and thereby through changing the experience, and finally by developing the subsequent thoughts and choices of the agents who hold and respond to experience. In Carr's words:

> As agents acting in the world we try to understand our own actions and experiences as we go along, often revising our own story in the course of the action. So the narrative account of the action, far from moving into a difference universe of discourse from the events it depicts, is located on a continuum of repeatedly revised explanations, understandings, and interpretations that is part of life itself.... Narration in this sense, like the understanding in general of which it is the concretization, does not exist independently of an action which precedes it but constitutes the action. Action does not exist independently of its meaning, and it is narration that gives it meaning by giving it its form and its internal and external coherence. (Carr 2014, pp. 222, 223, 228).

Closeness, or 'continuity,' of story-making and human life itself brackets the distinction between subject and object. In the 'everyday' narration that every person produces, objects enter as mental images comprising, with other elements, the stories guiding feeling and thought. In non-addicts, a demand for resolution accompanies the call for narration. The questions that narrated stories pose to non-addicts tend to include, suggest, or yield possible solutions in one way or another, directly or indirectly. These narratives cooperate with various other cognitive and affective processes to point the actor toward effective action. Seeking resolution is the normative purpose or outcome of narration. Broadly speaking, we regard the absence of coordinated movement toward solutions as neurotic or pathological.

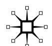
On the basis of Carr's phenomenological view of the continuity of experience and narratives of experience, we can say for present purposes that the addict is engaged, like everyone else, in making narratives as part of her experience of life—that is,

as part of actually living in a human way, altered state of mind or not. But what the addict does differently that inhibits coordinating narratives with other processes in the direction of solutions is this: the addict makes stories in super-abundance. Call it over-abundance; but, however, we judge it, these narratives flow in a profusion that is not consciously managed in the way in way in which non-addicts manage them. They wildly overflow. Nonetheless, they necessarily have complex structures of intention and feeling. They fill the mentality and complicate the lived experiences of the addict. They are what I characterize as rich experiences. To understand addiction and to grasp what we can learn from addiction about the self-constitution of persons in their normative moral agency, we have to look at this overflow of narrative in the manner of phenomenology. This requires a first-person perspective, which I am in a position to provide.

Richness and emptiness

Before detailing some specific experiences that are 'rich,' we should have an overview of what richness and its contrary are. By 'richness' in the context of addiction, I mean a quality of experience, observed in the experience of drug use itself, apart from its causes, whether chemical, psychological, or social, and apart from the whole arc of addiction up through its final result in the addict's life, that is a distinctively intensified form of 'ordinary' experience. This quality includes multiple lines of temporal direction that fluidly overlap each other—a kind of temporality that in fact is common to all experience as underlaying, competing with, or more subjectively real than the supposedly objective chronometric time that aims to represent nature and to organize productive activity. In certain altered states, we obliterate chronometric time, and this effect dominates the addict's activity to a greater and sometimes more conscious degree than a more well-regulated lifestyle allows (Beran 2019, p. 5). As a result, the lines of narration that in non-addicted experience can be delimited and focused toward action, instead lushly proliferate. Cognitive and psychic endeavors other than addiction so also, of course, cause this proliferation in different ways; and humans often revolt against chronometric time because their own actual processes are polytemporal. But my experience in addiction offered access to complications of temporality that on the one hand inhibited activity that resolves problems but on the other hand helped me to understand what is the compelling basis for and nature of deformalized time. I call this the way in which the addict's life proceeds 'richly,' that is, by an altered form of consciousness that causes her stories created under the influence to 'overflow' ordinary psychically compensatory management, leading to more complexly 'rich' temporality. In what ways the wildness of over-proliferation is good or bad is not a core issue here.

One reason for this schema relating everyday delimited narratives in the unaddicted to proliferated fruitless narratives in addiction seems to be that in physiological terms substance addiction is continuous with the healthy and ordinary physiology of the human body. Narcotics and alcohol cause addiction by enhancing normal neurological and physiological processes at the expense of other normal neurological and physiological processes, which are then maintained by the



addict's body until death or recovery. Addiction downregulates some processes and upregulates others. Similarly, healthy bodily processes are maintained 'at the expense of' or, better, in homeostasis with the neurological functions comprising addiction (Maté 2010, pp. 127–128; Foddy and Savulescu 2010; Bateson 1972, pp. 309ff.). The reason for this, as Marc Levy succinctly puts it, is that 'Drugs provide a shortcut. They talk to the brain in its own language—the language of dopamine and peptides, neuromodulators and receptors' (Lewis 2012, p. 2). But these natural processes do not give us a sense of the experience. Richness does.

Thus, the addict lives intensely. In my experience, addicts obsessively think, sometimes profoundly, or joyously, or with grievous regret; and, further in my experience, many addicts are very highly aware that their thinking is both compulsive and strongly, though weirdly, ordered. Our challenge here is to grasp this as alteration (interesting for us and consequential for the addict) of non-addicted experience, revealing something everyday experience generally tends to hide that adds richness to the addict's experience, even if for just a little while. An addict generally feels her body as much as anyone. Her repressed feelings affect her choices and actions just as they do the non-addicts.' Her denial and avoidance imposes results sometimes no less profound than those coming from success in tackling the same issues. Contrary to a common impression, most addicts are not literally numb to impressions from the outside world or to their feelings, as people commonly think. As Pikard puts it, speaking of the purposiveness of the use of narcotics, '…nuances aside, the key point is that drugs have tremendous *value* to people because of what they do for us: they are a means to many valuable ends' (Pikard et al. 2015, p. 2; Pikard 2010, p. 740). Addicts' response to sense impressions and emotions is not less than anyone else's in a general sense, greater than others' in specific senses, less than others' in different specific senses, more pointed here and duller there. 'Addicted people remain rational agents,' as Neil Levy puts it (Levy 2019). Every person is about equally complicated, having some domain of richness within, however, long unseen by other persons or uncounted in the inwardness of the subject. The feeling of always wanting more is not a lack of feeling but positively an intense feeling. The addict's problem is not an insufficient quantity of thoughts. Active addicts have no Sabbath, but they are neither simpler nor smaller nor emptier than others. In general, they are actively, though often ineffectively, evaluating moral issues. It is the differential features that I will illuminate below from my own experiences.

The value of observing this richness—even if it is destructive of the strong features of common human experience out of which it extends—is that it directs us toward the elements of moral agency in the experience of drug use itself, as opposed to the whole story of addiction that has a related but much larger ethical arc. The questions of will and *akrasia* so common in philosophical work on addiction (e.g., Radoilska 2013) are not important in the present inquiry. This concept of richness is, however, consonant with such observations as that of the addict's having a 'certain degree of flexibility' in choice (Burdman 2022), 'a recursive self-prediction process' and 'intertemporal bargaining' (Ainslie 2014)), or even 'systems of desire' (Butlin and Papineau 2016); but it is also a quite separate perspective that is phenomenological rather than neuropsychiatric or transactional. Richness de-emphasizes the very

real 'failure of normal rational effective agency or self-control' in addiction in favor of the 'diachronic psychological space' of the experience itself (Flanagan 2014).

One of the problems of the approaches I wish to avoid is that some of them aim, or seem to aim, to establish unified views of addiction (as in Burdman 2022). Flanagan's view that 'addictive cravings are a disunified hodgepodge and thus that it is not possible to corral cravings for one addiction type into a unified kind' (Flanagan 2020) and Jeremy Pober's that 'addiction is not a natural kind' are closer to the truth (Pober 2015). But the reason I avoid the unifying approach has little to do with whether it is or is not empirically correct. Instead, it is because aiming for unification tends to distract us from the richness of the experience, as it can be unified only by evacuating it of its distinctive content and subjecting it to a naturalistic attitude that privileges chronometric time. There are perspectives from which viewing commonalities in addiction are extremely useful and even profound, as in that of the Twelve Step tradition; but such therapeutic purposes are not well served by deflating the value and appeal of the experience as at least some addicts live it.

The unifying approach of synchronic or structural understandings is really an abstraction about volition or about cognition rather than a concept of experience over time. It omits extended experiences, and yet addiction is a process in time. An addict, whether using or recovering, is not a monotone. The addict from time to time has, does not have, and attempts to have behaviors such as 'internal locus of control' and 'confident self-efficacy' that do not easily fit conceptualized synchronic accounts of free will and unfree activity. Internal failure does not describe the real diachronesis of an addict's thoughts and feelings. As I will show, addiction is very much concerned with diachronesis through the abundance of stories that the addict tells. These are its narratives.

Phenomena of 'three riches'

The value of keeping hold of the idea of richness in addiction is that it illuminates something deep in the self-constituting phenomenology of the formation of values in moral agency. But in order to explain that, I will describe three groups of phenomena that I observed when I used substances in addiction. What I describe is also found in non-addictive, or 'non-compulsive,' use. What makes these phenomena of addiction, rather than of simple use, is that they arise from repeated use, wholly setting aside whether that use is compulsive or not, whatever that might mean. Kevin Aho's fascinating paper, 'Notes from a heart attack,' describes the experience and effects of his heart attack from his subjectivity by using the valuable and conventional topics of alterations, which he calls 'wounds,' in spaciality, temporality, relations with one's self, and relations with others (Aho 2019). While I will refer to these, I take a different approach because the experience of neurochemical trauma I describe is different from his infarction and also because my approach and goal here,

unlike his, is to make an ethical argument.[2] The narcotic I chiefly used so repeatedly as to create a body of aberrant experience was methamphetamine. It is no part of my purpose or ability here to consider whether addiction to other substances issues in these phenomena as a matter of fact. But I do suggest that the specific phenomenology below uncovers a 'richness' in addiction that is important for us to bear in mind our individual and social relations with addicts but on a larger scale illuminates something in all experience, especially in so far as addiction is a very wide category of obsessive behavior common to much of human endeavor.

I rely on these experiences in developing my philosophical work because they but provoked deep realizations and decades of reflection that inform my work in moral philosophy. Nonetheless, I recognize that they are thin and my suffering light in relation to the misery that many addicts endure. In what follows, 'I' chiefly refers to the subject of my own experience blended with everything I learned then and since then about the first-person experience of other addicts whom I observed using this drug.

Narratives about persons

The social world alters from the hyperfocus that speed engenders. This begins with the perception that by metabolizing speed I make a commitment involving both sacrifice as loss and desire as potential gain. These comprise the commitment into which use of the drug projects me, which I do know is a substantial commitment of time both during and after use, even when I pretend that this is not the case.

I am giving up that time for the sake of satisfying desires. Instantly I am launched into this project by hyperfocus on the narratives about myself and others within the context of my desires or similar goals that first shoots up to form my intended activity for the time span that the experience commandeers. This activity includes talk as well as actions. Usually this was one loose narrative that expressed how I viewed myself in connection with other persons whose character and company I had expected to cooperate with the fulfillment of my desires. I need hardly say that things usually did not go according to plan.

The failure to accomplish aims, though it was a dominant part of the experience, is as interesting for present purposes as the story-telling that developed as reception of the experiences that unfolded in subsequent events. Whether the range of affects that informed the desires on which I initiated use was wide or specialized, behaviors in the social circumstances tightly clustered on one or a very few emotions or opinions; however, the tight group at center stage could and did frequently alter. One group moved off into the wings, and another troop took over. This was the case whether I used alone or with others (as I usually much preferred to do). In both situations, the experience was interpersonal: that is, other persons were deeply involved in these narrative whether they were present or absent and even whether

[2] For this reason, my approach will differ as well from such phenomenologucal approaces to addiction as those of Schalow (2017) and Westin (2020).

they were real or not, but often so self-focused as not to be intersubjective.[3] These narratives were the unspooling of my desires and of the current, remembered, or anticipated experiences associated with them. Since others who were present also elaborated their interests by the same or similar means, the actions we took toward one another, along with intervening events, exponentially augmented the number of stories in play. Each became aware to one extent or another of the other's story-lines. Both harmony and conflict arose in narration by conversation and in narration by actions that created and developed the stories, we continued to narrate until exhaustion or interference or decisions by participants ended the occasion. Thus even with and despite hyperfocus, the narratives proliferated. More precisely, they ramified into sub-plots and alternative plots. These were intensely felt by each person. This included subjective feelings of acceptance and rejection that provoked more interpersonal narrative actions and discourse by which the phenomena constituting my experience increased in number and in depth.

The attendant lurch of speed-induced hyperfocus was of course conditioned by preceding experiences, but phenomenologically this was the beginning of a sense of freedom. The desire for freedom was distributed across the other desires that accompany use. A sense of privacy and often privilege was a part of this. Taking this drug felt generally like creating a life that, even if I knew that it could not be as much under my control as I wished or expected, was determined by me as a choice to enter a temporality freed from chronometric progress and a spatiality freed from the constraints of the public world. One effect of this perception of freedom is that the range of narratives was notionally unlimited, so that even though each person had their preferences the situation was fluid. If the participants were so open as to be suggestible, the experience often was much better than if they were not. Stubbornly pressing one's own storyline despite the interests of others usually led to disconnection. But because the perception of freedom was so strongly in the anticipation of freedom, intentions or openness were strong forces, very occasionally co-present. Whichever dominated, the speed-fueled actors recursively extended and amended their storylines: the narratives they wanted their actions and the actions of others to perform or their verbal discourse to describe, accounting for them as ideas, or emotions, or perceptions, as memories or as hopes, as tall tales or jokes or visions.

For each I the narratives ramified and reproduced. But because the intensity of hyperfocused intention could not live in the realm of freedom that the subjects had projected, at least not for longer than the brief occasions that good luck brought, the forces of external reality, nutrition, and neurochemistry combined to erect a labyrinth of open and closed paths that caused the stories I developed as my experience through speed to shift and alter. In equal measure, the narratives that others enacted, blocked, and provoked by the external and the social situations, created a rich overflow of narratives that I now see and propose as constituting the density of the experience. This explanation is no more than an outline of the layers of the interactions

[3] Here, I understand 'intersubjective' as denoting human relations from the point of view of constitutive subjectivity and 'interpersonal' as denoting human relations among agents in the widest sense of the many affordances their faculties allow in dyadic and social contrexts.

of our stories, generalized from the very many events that tumbled into consciousness as the hours passed, gaining the complexity of history. But it indicates that the confluence of narratives occupied the busy hours and that the possibilities of complication were so many that they could not be managed in reality by the reactive dystonic ego.

Narratives of assembled objects or tasks

One of the many worthwhile ways to look at the practices of collecting objects is to regard them as arising from the desire to possess narratives, since each object usually comes with its history that the collector combines with the story of her acquisition and ownership of it into a narrative. These narratives can be deep and complex, with tremendous implications for understanding civilizations and culture and powerful resonances with the psyche of the collector. Collecting is also a strange phenomenon because on occasion it features greed, obsessive possession of property, secrecy, hostility, extravagant though admirable quests, lifelong commitments and quick passions, sheer luck and thorough knowledge, theft and burglary, deception and larceny, and sophisticated expertise along with brute criminality. But all in all, it is founded on a most common human practice: the projection of parts of our selves onto objects. Hence onto the outward world come concepts, feelings, desires, regrets, memorializations, and hopes; these fall upon objects and, as if they were a light from behind precious things, render them shadows of the psyche. As is often the case, the crazy illuminates the normal here: manic assemblages by using addicts is an exemplary extreme of a perfectly ordinary practice.

On one occasion an addict whom I was visiting opened what I thought was the door to a small closet in his home in order to show me the computers he had acquired. Like Aladdin's cave, a large room surprised me by sparkling with hundreds of junked computer parts. They were collected to be cannibalized or re-used to make other computers that eventually ended up stored next to their ancestors. One should be forgiven for thinking that he rarely ever completed any of these projects, to judge by his actions in other areas of his life. Also, I saw addicts assemble many projects that involved supposedly inventive manual tinkering with devices that had intricate legible mechanisms. This led to the spectacle of watching speed addicts at 3am in 24-hour home improvement mega-stores buying gadgets and materials for what we called 'tweaker-builder projects.' The key phenomenological aspect in this was the group of feelings that following the logical course of something, such as a mechanical or electronic force, through transfers, gates, cogs, and switches, gave rise to in the ego. These summoned, satisfied, and expanded feelings of intelligence, competence, control, and sometimes the sense of possessing secret, even unique, knowledge or power. Those who are drawn to 'figuring out' the truths that conspiracies kept secret and 'connecting the dots' to penetrate the hidden powers of the world of human affairs practice a substantially identical behavior.

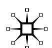
Because objects do not think back at us, it is possible to see somewhat more clearly in these behaviors than in interactions with others the structural continuity of narratives with experience. Here the two become homologous. Actor-Network

Theory provides an illuminating contrast. It makes the homology into an ontological theme, especially when applied (however, fruitfully) to the relationship between addicts as human actors and narcotics as object-actors (Westhaver 2011); new materialisms, object-oriented ontology, and speculative realism theorized expanded agency. Yet the real hermeneutic here is not between persons and objects but between persons and other persons in each others' lives, of which collecting things and tasks is an abstraction suited to various purposes of the unconscious or the partly conscious, such as avoidance and denial or, on the other hand, exploration and resolution by proxy. Under the theory of personal agency that I use, it is not the case that entities without consciousness co-create our experience, feeling, and thought through their affordances and constraints. This issue is beyond the scope of this paper, so here I must merely stipulate my point of view. Although inanimate and otherwise external entities are important to this side of speed addiction, each object and task is best understood to be a story from the real history of the psyche that reflects the treachery and love to which each person is subjected. The proliferation of one task into many and of one material thing as the object of libidinal desire into many enriches, sometimes bitterly, the experience of the addicted I by multiplying the issues that are important to us with many variations. This same disinhibited overflow of life-stories that projection enabled also could, under the influence of speed, make satisfaction unlikely because mechanisms, just like unreal people or illusions about real people, separate the ego from shared normative experience. Collecting itself we can take as the unawares expression of the call to narrative that lies deep within human experience.

Narratives of images

Here, I will report an inward experience of my own. I do not know whether others had this experience or whether it has been studied as neurology, although it has not been discussed in the philosophy or phenomenology of addiction to the best of my knowledge.

Both during acute intoxication on methamphetamine, all through the long comedown after the acute period, and even for days after that, I found that when I closed my eyes to rest a series of images flashed in my mind's eye. It needed no act of will to set this going; I just watched the slide show in my head. Each picture held for less than a second. The sequence lasted for many hours. Their number was unlimited, and the sequence never slowed for as long as I was not fully asleep. I quickly observed that each was different from the others, with no repetitions as far as I could determine. But what was most remarkable was that I had never seen any of these images with my eyes open—that is, with my external vision. In the course of the hours in which I was high I often looked at many hundreds of images. Those appearing when my eyes were closed had similar topical content—but they never, ever were any images I had seen with my eyes open. Each was wholly new to me. It did not even seem to me that any was a bricolage of parts of the external images I had seen, although, as I say, there was a sortal similarity.



What I came to understand about this phenomenon was that my conscious and unconscious mind and all my perceptual, cognitive, affective, and intellective faculties cooperated in to create new visual narratives about what I had previously experienced. They entered into the project as an ordinary matter of their own functioning, automatically. It was an ordinary function even though the neurotoxicity of the chemicals I ingested was a physiological cause and the experiences of people, places, and things provided the raw material. I was artefacting visual narratives that were wholly congruent to and continuous with experience, though they were different in what we might call their 'substance.' But unlike 'healthy' experience, I was effortlessly artefacting at an astounding pace and intensity.

Each image was a narrative and that all the images collectively formed a narrative. This is the only explanation for another stunning fact about these images: each and every one of them was entirely intelligible to me. By this, I mean that each was a legible story. I did not verbalize each story because they fled so quickly, but I knew (and still know) what was the meaning that each had for me. I also knew the meaning of the meta-narrative. Other people (unknown to me and unnamed) and my social world filled the stories as the contents of most of the images. And yet the experience was as inwardly subjective as possible. From this, I further conclude that this story-telling was a hermeneutic engagement with experience, even though not primarily verbal. Recall the words of David Carr that I quoted above:

> ...a continuum of repeatedly revised explanations, understandings, and interpretations that is part of life itself.... Narration in this sense, like the understanding in general of which it is the concretization, does not exist independently of an action which precedes it but constitutes the action. (Carr 2014, pp. 222–223)

Carr is trying to pinpoint a wavering relationship between narrative and action. Narration does not *equal* all the 'action' of our lives; rather, it has congenitality, consubstantiality, and creativity in relationship to experience that logical operators and inference from evidence do not express. 'Hermeneutic' is probably the best word we have for this relationship. The experiences I have described are thick instances of the complexly shifting co-generation of understanding and actions. These image-stories had meaning for me beyond their sense as effects of psychic and physiological causes. Their ridiculous abundance itself expressed matters meaningful to me: my production of them was wild and unmanaged just because of the issues they portrayed, and in various ways, they intensified the same issues. The resultant dysfunction is that addictive use of this narcotic in my case almost always detached me from any normative projects engaged with by others, even though I desired to take up mutual enterprises and had imagined that methamphetamine would help me to do so. This is just how ontologically close these stories were to the actions of life they revisited, probed, and revised.

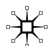
Toward the phenomenology of values formation

Although I describe these three 'richnesses' here because they were the most prominent features of my own private experience, they combine in ways that give us a strong insight into the experience of the formation of moral values.

Interacting in various ways throughout the experience of being high, they can be viewed in a unified perspective because they used narratives of words and images and of thoughts and emotions in ways that combined to direct two spheres of the formation of moral life. In my experience, the raveled operation of these ways of being in the speed-altered brain held these two spheres in deep tension. Understanding this is a way of learning about moral life from phenomenological observation.

The first moral sphere in which the kinds of experience can be understood is broadly parallel to Henri Bergson's schema of the fundamental non-chronometric temporality in which the whole of our creative spirit lives as opposed to the narrowed, regulated chronometric time that enables us to focus on accomplishing tasks. Both are real, and both are valuable. But certain experiences reveal the *durée* beneath our task-oriented schedules. All three phenomena are the kind of experience that reveal narrativity, object-identification, and imagination that our everyday lives frequently inhibit us from enjoying. That is, they bear material and ideational affinities to many of the illuminative practices through altered states of consciousness common in human cultures. The non-quotidian profundities they seem to lead us to often, as here, are constant bases of reality or of existence that we never realized or forgot. As objects of description here and there from methamphetamine addiction, they appear as just so many spinning hypnotic spirals. But if we can think of them as objects of phenomenological research, they direct our attention to the resources from which personal agency draws in creating or miscreating the polytemporal worlds individual and collectives constitute and the values that structure or fail to structure those worlds. As is so often the case, failures reveal ignored truths and unrealized opportunities.

But there is another side of the matter that, while unifying the three phenomena as strongly as their deixis of a common context, specifies something about the method of phenomenology that arises out of the failures of becoming lost in the strong creative power of altered consciousness. In attending to and focusing on both the intentional and hermeneutic components of our relations to persons, things, and ideas, we risk a narcissism that produces failure. Because these phenomena are so rich, they tend to compel focus on one's self and elision of others. Just as they show a creative substratum to everyday consciousness, so too do they also show an anti-creative effect of our intentionality, even though it comprehends actual externally existent objects, and of our hermeneutic situation, even though it comprehends other actual persons one lives with. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that rousing one's self to face the antitype of objects and situations in the world and the rebarbative reality of the needs of others requires unending effort. Absorption in the subject's own consciousness is narcissism, and the richness of intentional life when twisted in a certain way is subject to becoming narcissistic. The phenomena of addiction I underwent tells us this, for they hypno-spiral the agent to explore, or at least just immobilely watch and hear, her inner narrative fecundity. She then resists interactive encounter with actual other persons because under the addiction-caused phenomena I describe she lack the capacity to succeed at interaction; and, when it passes over into narcissism, it cannot tolerate this failure. The Other is illegible, even more frustratingly than in everyday states of mind. Narcissism is in fact the bundle of



behaviors that obviate failures lest they decompensate the fragile psychic economy of the narcissist.

Our primitive, unreflective, non-inferential, pre-conceptual constitution always encompassingly joins our consciousness and the world—recognition of which has been the core of phenomenology as well as of American Pragmatism and of most forms of modern idealism—and becomes the context in which our capacity to create values and live with them in private and public normative web. But when we suppress the barriers that remove us from more direct awareness of the primordial reality, we can become entranced by its intensity and lose both practical effectiveness in the world and concrete progress of our relations with others. This might be one reason why we seem to be built so as to focus on what is present to us in our historical courses of life. It can be a peril to balance our need for spiritual illumination with the morality our humanity calls for. Although I regard my experience of methamphetamine as a very low-level kind of illuminative or mystical experience, it does brightly show the narcissism to which such projects can lead, in the forms of mind-controlling cults, carrying lines of thought to extremes of inhumanity, excessively subjectivized self-realization, and even simple arrogance and pride.

Ethical and other conclusions

The structure of psychic failure to which methamphetamine addiction leads in my experience is, broadly, as follows. Among the contents of the world of experience that comes from the drug's physical effects into personal consciousness, the most quickly, even instantly, forceful is the emergence of many beliefs and desires that the user does not entertain so consciously as to act out. The pressure of these motivates the user to set aside her customary self-governance about them and, instead, to perform them. By 'perform' I mean the completed somaesthetic adventure that creative performance implies: embodied psychically powerful, interpersonal, drawn from deep within the actors, enacted as spoken, sung, tactile, and gestural, and frequently reliant on props, scenery, and other objects. But the nature of repression and disinhibition is such that the scripts and scenarios to be performed are very many more than anyone can experience with care and attention and then resolve. This is the unmanageable overflow of narratives I have described. Finally, their density disconnects the user from the care for self and others that normative projects require in order to issue in satisfaction.

Yet despite the non-normative character of this behavior, it is deeply involved with ordinary regulation of norms concerning what must be directly taken up and what must be sublimated or elided. It takes up the oscillation between these approaches to our desires and emotions by which we normally live and super-charges it, with the result that oscillation becomes conflict that the user battles by overproduction of narratives and that ultimately evades any sort of denial by altering the user's life. As rich addiction, this activity takes place even in states of unawareness, denial, neurological disease, despair, and other differences from what we generally call health or well-being. Thus even the most intensely internal, or inward, activity of moral life takes place within a constitution connected to the external world not only by our

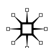
collection and archiving of experiences but also by what we think and feel about these experiences, whether consciously or unconsciously.

If this is correct, it describes continuity between personhood as controlled narrativity and personhood as uncontrolled narrativity. In both cases, meaningfulness is not something added to or a dressing-up of (as Carr puts it, above) of the activities of our organic or psychic personal existence. Instead, excess narrativity helps us to see that ‘explanations, understandings, and interpretations’ (again, in Carr’s words) are a part of our actions and practices. Therefore the ethical values that arise in the form of the meaningfulness of stories and of histories are also not merely objects of inspection but are a real part of what our subjectivity amounts to. They are a condition of experience and its limit.

Here consciousness and the world are congruent with one another. Both the act of morally valuing and those things thus valued are jointly present and co-equal in narrativity as the form of all historical awareness. The world is not the case that persons operate upon the external scene, the first as agent and the second as patient. We are, it seems, always busily engaged in the challenge of devising, consider, and telling using our story narratives in such a way as seems helpful in trying to be happy, just, and good.

Furthermore, rich addiction throws additional light on the nature of stories. While they are necessarily connected to finitude in that finitude is a pre-condition of the lives and forms of cognition they require, in another respect they point beyond finitude. A story tells us what an experience feels like by recounting the experience and narrating the feelings and thoughts attendant to it. But it can have an additional element: hearing or telling the story itself is an experience that provokes feelings and thoughts. This element does something more than make an experience intelligible to others. It can, as a form of deliberation or of contemplation extending over a lifetime, generations, and millennia, lead a conscientious person to make changes in manner of life, to seek deeper understandings, and to think of reality from the points of view that infinite reflexivity can suggest. It enriches the community of subjectivity, of human personhood. The delirious multiplication of narratives in addiction that I have described can be understood, at least in part, as an addict’s endeavor to become free of undesirable circumstances that seem rigidly determined, to freely find new ways to understand the world, and to stumble toward greater spiritual freedom.

Some will argue that my broader conclusions are based on a body of aberrant and self-destructive behaviors. Aberrancy is worse than useless as a disqualifying criterion since it assumes a body of prescriptive principles, or at least intuitions, rather than argues for them. As to self-destructiveness: this is a tendency perfectly common to all humankind; and, however, unwholesome, *thanatos* is a fundamental drive. Addiction allows us to study it under magnification and by a strong spotlight. One of the benefits of first-person philosophy is that it can give us a passport to fresh views of overlooked truths. Our unconscious drive to destroy what we love or need as well as what we hate and resent must become a chief object of the inquiry of moral philosophy along with phenomenology, social and political thought, psychology, anthropology, and history.



If self-destructive substance addiction and decisions and also acts by addicts to save themselves from self-destruction are not theoretically unique and efficient definers of addiction, then the concept of rich addiction shows us that all states of mind of moral agents are rich. Causally, all states of persons are rich, in the sense that each and every one of them is caused by the infinite chain of influences and forces that we are subject to and that we generate. Phenomenally, all states of persons are rich in that narratives constitute them. This is true whether one includes free will or does not include it among the decisive factors. There are no un-rich states. To use an older language, all states are mixed, even though we find it prudent or necessary, or so we believe it to be, to judge them rigidly—as for instance by enthusiastic acceptance or by harsh rejection. States are mixed whether we use such sharp judgments only upon on occasion or systematically in the large patterns of moral choice we call moral values or ethical systems. The force of persons as moral agents never thins out.

Funding The author did not receive funding from any organization for this work.

Data availability No data or code is involved in this paper.

Declarations

Competing interests There are no financial or non-financial interests that are directly or indirectly related to this work, nor are there any potential conflicts of interest, nor does the author have any competing interests.

Ethical approval No ethics approval has been required.

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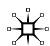

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