“Everyone Gets Everything He Wants”: Desire, Fulfillment, and the Tragic Logic of Will in *Apocalypse Now*

(Your Name)

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I. Introduction: The Paradox of Fulfilled Desire

When Captain Willard opens *Apocalypse Now* (1979) with the line, “Everyone gets everything he wants. I wanted a mission, and for my sins they gave me one,” he states a moral law. Beneath the soldier’s irony lies a metaphysical claim: that desire fulfilled is inseparable from punishment. The first clause universalizes fulfillment as an inevitable structure; the second localizes it as judgment. This essay traces that paradox across traditions: biblical justice and Buddhist causality; Western philosophy’s metaphysics of will; Conrad’s colonial modernity refracted through Coppola; and modern psychology’s confrontation with mortality. Willard’s line, stripped of theology but charged with fatalism, speaks for the modern self: one who always gets what he wants—and must live with what it means.

II. The Fulfillment of Desire as Punishment: Biblical and Buddhist Echoes (Revised, Integrated)

Captain Willard's aphorism—"Everyone gets everything he wants. I wanted a mission, and for my sins they gave me one"—condenses a structure shared across religious philosophies: *fulfillment discloses the truth of desire.* In the Biblical tradition, that disclosure is moral and teleological: a will shows itself to be rightly or wrongly ordered to God and neighbor. In early Buddhist analysis, the disclosure is causal and phenomenological: craving (*taṇhā*) reproduces the conditions of suffering (*dukkha*). Biblical thought reads fulfillment as a test of love's orientation; Buddhist thought reads it as a link in a causal chain. In both, the "gift" of what one wants becomes judgment—not because an external agent inflicts pain, but because the will's orientation or the mind's grasping makes the pain intrinsic to fulfillment itself.

1. Biblical Moral Causality: Grant as Judgment, Desire as Orientation

Biblical writers often frame judgment as *grant* rather than *denial.* Psalm 106:15 is paradigmatic: "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" ((King James Version, 2017)). The dual movement is diagnostic—outward success and inward thinning—and Ecclesiastes amplifies the paradox: a person may receive "riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul," yet it is "vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 6:2, (King James Version, 2017)). Paul then renders this grammar in psychological terms: divine "wrath" appears not as a thunderbolt but as permissive justice—"God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts" (Rom. 1:24), meaning the will is handed over to its own object ((Fitzmyer, 1993)). The punishment is not the absence of what was sought; it is the presence of what was sought—where what was sought cannot bless.

Augustine interiorizes this structure: "Every inordinate affection is its own punishment" (*Confessions* 2.2.2; (Augustine, 1998), p. 47). His distinction between rightly ordered love (*caritas/voluntas*) and possessive desire (*cupiditas*) judges not the matter of the object but the orientation of love ((Augustine, 2003)). Aquinas makes the ontology explicit: any act of will "turned away from the immutable good" (*aversio*) entails privation (ST I–II, q. 19 a. 9), which is why evil is not a

substance but a lack generated by mis-aimed love ((Aquinas, 1947)). Teleology is decisive: the same outward "success" may be damnation or sanctification depending on whether it tends toward God and neighbor (ST II–II). Grace, crucially, can re-order desire; "grant" becomes judgment only when love remains possessive.

Coppola's imagery repeatedly matches this moral psychology without serving as its ground. Kilgore's beachhead—"I love the smell of napalm in the morning"—dramatizes *cupiditas*: finite victory possessed as ultimate, liturgized by spectacle. The sampan search yields a tactical "success," but the crew's affect goes hollow as a wounded civilian is executed; what is granted exposes leanness of soul. In Biblical terms, such fulfillment is revelation: the mission, granted, judges the will that desired it.

2. Buddhist Causal Analysis: Craving Fulfilled, Suffering Renewed

Buddhist doctrine names the origin of suffering as craving. "From craving arises grief, from craving arises fear; for one who is free of craving there is no grief or fear" (*Dhammapada* 216; (Buddharakkhita, 1993)). No personal judge is required; suffering is endogenous to grasping. The *Saṃyutta Nikāya* formalizes this through dependent origination (SN 12.2): conditioned by craving is clinging; by clinging, becoming; by becoming, birth; by birth, aging-and-death ((Bodhi, 2000), p. 536). Fulfillment is never terminal; it propagates the chain. Hence in *Majjhima Nikāya* 75 the Buddha warns that even "conquer[ing] the earth and sea" cannot satisfy the lust for gain ((Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995), p. 608). Desire's completion is not extinction but re-seeding.

The Fire Sermon (SN 35.28) names the phenomenology: "The eye is burning, forms are burning, consciousness is burning … with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion" ((Bodhi, 2000), p. 1143). Fulfillment cannot cool what is intrinsically combustible; the heat is the wanting. Buddhaghosa's image—craving clinging to its object "like meat to a hot iron pan"—makes vivid why gratification injures even as it grasps ((Buddhaghosa, 1956)). The "cure" therefore differs fundamentally from Biblical re-ordering: rather than redirecting desire to a highest good, the path aims at cessation (*nirodha*) via disenchantment and practice ((Rahula, 1959); (Gethin, 1998)). From a Madhyamaka angle, Nāgārjuna clarifies why possession fails: the reified aim presupposes essences that analysis dissolves; when the grasped goal collapses as empty, the

shock of its misconceived solidity hurts ((Nāgārjuna, 2013)).

Coppola's river is a phenomenological stage, again descriptive rather than probative. Do Lung Bridge repeats as an almost samsaric loop—built by day, destroyed by night; every "achieved" crossing demands another. The Playboy show promises gratification, amplifies agitation, and leaves the crew more restless: *taṇhā* fulfilled, *dukkha* renewed. In Buddhist terms, such fulfillment is causal: success feeds the next link.

3. Comparative Synthesis: Binding, Punishment, Healing

Placed side by side, the traditions converge on fulfillment-as-exposure while diverging in ontology and remedy.

What binds? Biblical thought names the bondage as sin: love disordered toward finite goods as if ultimate ((Augustine, 1998); (Aquinas, 1947)). Buddhist thought names it as the *kleshas*: craving, aversion, delusion that reconstitute the subject as grasping ((Bodhi, 2000)).

What punishes? In Scripture's idiom, the will is "handed over" to its object ((Fitzmyer, 1993)); grant is judgment. In the Nikāyas' idiom, gratification feeds the next link; cause is consequence. Both understand the sampan episode's "success" as privation: either as leanness of soul (Ps. 106:15) or as another turn of becoming (SN 12.2).

What heals? Biblical teleology proposes grace re-ordering love into charity, so that desire becomes participation rather than possession ((Augustine, 2003); (Aquinas, 1947)). Early Buddhism proposes cessation: disenchantment that cools the fires and breaks the chain ((Bodhi, 2000); (Rahula, 1959)). Gregory of Nyssa's *epektasis* complicates the contrast by imagining an infinite desire transformed into ascent ((of Nyssa, 1978); (of Nyssa, 1954)); Śāntideva's ethical therapy reframes desire as reactivity to be trained ((Śāntideva, 1995); (Gethin, 1998)). Maimonides adds a rationalist variant: fulfillment that multiplies passions obscures the intellect ((Maimonides, 1963)).

Within this synthesis, Willard's line is neither bravado nor cynicism. "Everyone gets everything he wants" states a universal structure: every finite "everything" cannot satisfy a will seeking ultimacy (Biblical teleology), and every conditioned "everything" renews the chain (Buddhist

causality). "For my sins I got one" is the moral-psychological index of that structure: the administrative mission-form returns desire as assignment, and the return unveils the desiring as mis-aimed. The film's images merely instantiate these logics: victories possessed as ultimates thin the soul; gratifications achieved re-seed grasping. Fulfillment thus punishes because it reveals the will or reproduces the chain—and, in either case, points beyond itself to reordered love or cessation as the only ways out.

III. Western Philosophy: Per-Philosopher Analyses

III—Schopenhauer: Will as Lack and Fulfillment as Deflation

Schopenhauer's analysis of willing gives the line's first clause its basic grammar. Will is lack; representation supplies objects that momentarily still the pressure without curing it. Hence satisfaction "at once makes room for a new one," and life "swings like a pendulum" between suffering and boredom ((Schopenhauer, 1969, pp. 312, 319)). The film's "wins"—a beach secured, a sampan inspected, a bridge crossed—illustrate the structure. Each procedural success breeds the need for another. In this light, "everyone gets everything he wants" is descriptive of delivery, not redemption. On this view, "…and for my sins I got one" does not confess a single misdeed so much as the mistake of expecting from fulfillment what fulfillment cannot give. The "sin" is metaphysical: to confuse delivery with deliverance. The line's two halves are internally connected. The first clause names the world's competence at delivering objects; the second registers the punishment endemic to a will that takes attainment as cure.

III—Nietzsche: Transvaluation versus the Mask of "Truth"

Nietzsche contests Schopenhauer's resignation while preserving recurrence: what corrodes willing is not recurrence itself but a *valuation* that reduces willing to consumption. The task is transvaluation—recasting recurrence as creative affirmation. His warning that the "desire for 'truth' " can operate as a disguised will to command ((Nietzsche, 1990, §34)) is dramatized by the Saigon dossier's sanitary rhetoric: cognition as a mask for domination. In that light, "everyone gets everything he wants" reads as the triumph of a will to order; because no transvaluation occurs upriver, recurrence returns as nausea, not joy. "…for my sins I got one" marks the recognition that correct outcomes without revalued ends deepen rather than cure the malaise.

III—Kant: Maxims, Humanity, and the Irrelevance of Outcomes

For Kant, no accumulation of successes can certify moral worth: the good will is "good … in itself," not "because of what it effects" ((Kant, 1996a, p. 27)). The decisive question is the maxim—can it be willed as universal law, and does it honor humanity "always as an end and never merely as a means" ((Kant, 1996b, pp. 27–33))? The sampan inspection is instructive: meticulous adherence to procedure cannot redeem a maxim that objectifies persons ((Kant, 1996a, pp. 30–33, 72–76)). The first clause is morally mute (efficacy, not legitimacy); the second names exposure of heteronomy in the moment of success.

III—Kierkegaard: Absolutized Projects and Defiant Despair

Kierkegaard defines the self as "a relation that relates itself to itself," sick when it seeks to ground itself "in one's own strength" ((Kierkegaard, 1980, pp. 49, 69–73)). The finite project—to be the one who *has a mission*—becomes absolute, and every success is then consumed as self-grounding. On this register, "everyone gets everything he wants" intensifies rather than relieves the sickness. "For my sins I got one" is not a discrete admission but a confession of wrong willing exposed by fulfillment.

III—Dostoevsky: Independent Desire and Anti-Mechanism

The Underground Man insists "man only wants independent desire," refusing to be a "piano key" in a rational program ((Dostoevsky, 1994, pp. 115, 129–131)). The dossier-machine is the nightmare: an apparatus that *delivers* missions and interprets obedience as authorship. The line's two halves catch the trap: the system supplies occasions to act ("everyone gets …"), and the agent, having sought agency *as such*, discovers in success only the mirror of compulsion. Mission-success reveals heteronomy in the form of efficacy.

III—Sartre: Freedom, Bad Faith, and the Impossible Completion

For Sartre, human reality is "what it is not and not what it is" ((Sartre, 2003, pp. 100–110)); projects tacitly aim at an impossible synthesis—the "project to be God" ((Sartre, 2003, pp. 586–604)). Completion cannot grant ontological closure; it exposes bad faith, whether as pure function ("I am my orders") or as sovereign exception ("I am exempt"). The mission's end therefore punishes by lucidity: the sequence "worked," yet the lack constitutive of the *pour-soi* remains.

III—Beauvoir: Reciprocity as Freedom's Form

Beauvoir internalizes ethics to the structure of freedom: "To will oneself free is also to will others free" ((de Beauvoir, 1976, p. 73)). Authentic projects *open* situations in which others can transcend; efficient means that *close* horizons convict themselves by their very success ((de Beauvoir, 1976, pp. 134–147, 157–161, 164–173)). The first clause reports reliable means; the second is the ethical verdict that reciprocity was excluded from the end.

III—Camus: Absurd Lucidity and Action without Appeal

The absurd is "born of the confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" ((Camus, 1991, p. 28)). To live "without appeal" ((Camus, 1991, p. 54)) is to abandon the hope that completion provides a final court of justification. The Do Lung Bridge cycle—building and erasure—reads like a Sisyphean figure; completion yields knowledge, not meaning ((Camus, 1991, pp. 121–123)). Thus the sentence's first clause can be true; the second names fulfillment as the world's silence.

III—Heidegger: Finitude and the Category Error of Wholeness

Heidegger's claim is ontological: Dasein's "wholeness" is disclosed only in being-toward-death; narrative consummation is a category mistake for finite existence ((Heidegger, 1962, pp. 294–307)). Average everydayness (*das Man*) supplies the rhetoric of necessity that authorizes such fantasies ((Heidegger, 1962, pp. 149–168)). When the sequence "works," the alibi disappears. The first clause names a world of operable equipment; the second registers, in the key of finitude, that such operability cannot yield existential completion.

III—Levinas: The Face, Asymmetry, and the First Relation

The face confronts me with an asymmetrical injunction—"Thou shalt not kill"—that resists absorption into my plans ((Levinas, 1969, pp. 33, 199)). The dossier/protocol grammar belongs to *totality*, which reduces alterity to the Same ((Levinas, 1969, pp. 21–24, 33–36)). Within such a grammar, even successful action confirms refusal of the first relation ((Levinas, 1969, pp. 215–219)). "Everyone gets …" states totality's power to furnish effects; "…for my sins I got one" is the accusation that such power presupposes the Other's reduction.

III—Hegel: Recognition Against Possession

Desire is not finally of things but of recognition: "self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" ((Hegel, 1977, §175)). Lordship "gets" obedience and finds it void—submission is not free acknowledgment ((Hegel, 1977, §§187–189)); the "truth" lies with formative work that builds a common world ((Hegel, 1977, §196)). The first clause describes accumulation in the wrong currency; the second is the recognitive bill coming due.

III—Kojève: Desire of Desire and Historical Stakes

Human desire is the desire of another's desire; satisfaction requires being recognized as free by a free other, not merely possessing objects ((Kojève, 1980, pp. 6, 27–34)). Hence the master's "victory" is empty: coerced recognition is not recognition ((Kojève, 1980, pp. 158–164)). "Everyone gets everything he wants" marks an apparatus expert at distributing missions; "…and for my sins I got one" is the discovery that such distribution cannot secure the recognitive relation the human wants.

IV. Conrad, Colonialism, and Modernity

If Sections II and III traced the moral and metaphysical structure by which fulfillment becomes judgment, Conrad and the critical tradition of the twentieth century show how this logic is historically situated in imperial modernity. *Apocalypse Now* refracts Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* through Cold War geopolitics and the American war in Vietnam, translating the desire for a "mission" into the bureaucratized pursuit of domination. In both narratives, the will gets what it wants—empire, recognition, power—and what it wants unmasks the will. The horror is not merely the violence of conquest but the disclosure that conquest was the will's secret object all along.

1. Conrad's Modernity: Illumination and Horror

Conrad's novella organizes colonial conquest as an epistemological allegory: the voyage upriver promises knowledge, but the attainment of knowledge reveals only the vacuum at its core. In Marlow's opening demystification of imperial rhetoric, conquest is "robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale" (Conrad, 1990, ConradHOD1990). Kurtz's dying judgment—"The horror! The horror!"—is the paradoxical consummation of his civilizing project: he gets everything he wants (ivory, absolute command, the image of European virtue) and discovers that desire fulfilled negates the desiring self (Conrad, 1990). The novella's formal strategy—a frame narrative in which the tale loops back on itself—mirrors this structure of return: fulfillment is not progress but recursion.

2. From Conrad to Coppola: Bureaucracy as a Technology of Will

Coppola's adaptation transposes Conrad's private empire into a military bureaucracy that routinizes transgression. Willard's orders are typed, briefed, and accompanied by dossiers; Kurtz's poetry is replaced by radio logs and classified memoranda. The mission is thus an artifact of files, not of metaphysical vocation. In Willard's terms, "for my sins they gave me one": the administrative system internalizes the will's desire for a task and returns it as obligation (Coppola, 1979). The film's mise-en-scène—the air cavalry's Wagnerian assault, the Playboy USO show, the bridge to nowhere—presents modern fulfillment as spectacle: an economy of images where

desire circulates as command and entertainment at once.

Adorno and Horkheimer called this dialectic in advance: the Enlightenment's will to demystify nature turns into domination of humans by technical reason (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). The same rationality that frees us from myth installs the world as object of control. In *Apocalypse Now*, the mission is in this sense an *Enlightenment object*: planned, staged, justified. Its fulfillment exposes the subject as functionary. Arendt's analysis of modern totalitarianism clarifies the disjunction between action and responsibility here: systems generate outcomes that no single agent intends, but which implicate every actor caught within them (Arendt, 1973). Willard's errand-boy status embodies this structure of dispersed agency.

3. The Spirit of Domination: Work, Discipline, and Representation

Weber's thesis on the Protestant ethic connects transcendent assurance to immanent compulsion: the anxiety of salvation is displaced into the worldly signs of vocation, productivity, and discipline (Weber, 2002). In Willard's world, vocation has lost its soteriological frame; the residue is compulsion alone. The river journey is a pilgrimage without grace: a labor of proof that can never culminate. Foucault's analysis of modern power makes the continuity plain: discipline produces subjects by normalizing their bodies and perceptions (Foucault, 1995). Willard's training, files, and surveillance are not contingent backdrops; they *are* the conditions under which a "mission" can be willed, received, and fulfilled. The will internalizes the gaze.

If domination requires a world to dominate, representation supplies it. Said shows how the Orient is constructed as an object of knowledge that authenticates Western authority (Said, 1978). *Apocalypse Now* multiplies such representations: the radio's "psyops" patter, military briefings, newspaper clippings, and narration. The hilltop massacre under flares is not only an event but an image of an event; it exists to be seen. Benjamin's "Angel of History" looks back not upon progress but upon "a single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" (Benjamin, 1969). The film literalizes this gaze: moving forward upriver is moving back into debris. Fulfillment of the mission produces a tableau of ruins through which the angel is blown.

4. Recognition, Violence, and the Will to Purity

Fanon reinterprets Hegelian recognition within colonial relation: the colonized subject meets the colonizer's will to purity as violence; the only available agency appears as counter-violence (Fanon, 2004). Kurtz absolutizes this logic. His "methods" are "pure" because they purge ambivalence. He wants an end to contradiction; he wants an act that would finally coincide with intent. To get this is to erase the human. Willard confronts not only a man but the fantasy of unmediated will. Here the line between Section III's existentialism and Section IV's historicity thins: the metaphysics of will finds its historical instrument in colonial modernity. What the will wants (sovereignty) appears in the world as the right to decide life and death.

5. Fulfillment as Exposure: Modernity's Mirror

Read in this frame, Willard's opening line is not merely mordant wit but a summary of the century's critique. "Everyone gets everything he wants"—because modern institutions exist to circulate wants as functions, and because representation manufactures the worlds those wants require. "For my sins I got one"—because the system returns desire as assignment, and the assignment reveals desire's complicity with domination. Conrad supplies the form (a journey into the center where fulfillment collapses into horror). Critical theory supplies the terms (reason as domination, vocation as compulsion, representation as power). Coppola supplies the image: the fulfilled mission as an illuminated ruin.

What Willard learns upriver is what Conrad, Benjamin, and Fanon teach in theory: fulfillment is not closure but exposure. The prize of the modern will is to see itself in the world it has made.

V. Modern Psychology and Death: Desire, Symbolism, and the Shadow

If Section III located fulfillment's burden in the ontology of freedom, modern depth psychology shows why fulfillment so often feels like punishment: the psyche seeks symbolic mastery of death. From Freud's death drive to Lacan's endless deferral of satisfaction, from Jung's shadow to Becker's hero-systems, modern theory repeatedly argues that desire is a defensive formation against mortality. Willard's admission—"I wanted a mission, and for my sins they gave me one"—thus reads as a clinical precis...

1. Freud: Repetition, Drive, and Discontent

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud confronts the anomaly of compulsive repetition. Rather than seeking pleasure, the neurotic repeats the very experience that wounds him; a "daemonic" character of repetition "overrides the pleasure principle" (Freud, 1955, p. 22). Freud hypothesizes a "death drive" that "endeavours to lead organic life back into the inanimate state" (Freud, 1955, p. 38). Fulfillment here cannot satisfy because the drive is not oriented to pl... Three decades later, *Civilization and Its Discontents* reframes the contradiction socially: culture requires renunciation, and the price of justice is repression (Freud, 1961). The subject must sublimate instinct into work and love, but the leftover aggression returns as guilt, which "represents the most important problem in the development of civilization" (Freud, 1961, p. 97). In Willard's case, the "mission" becomes both a vehicle of sublimation and a ...

2. Rank and Fromm: Will, Escape, and Character

Rank's late work recovers will as a positive, creative power rather than merely a symptom of repression. "The will to create is the will to become" (Rank, 1978, p. xx); yet creativity is haunted by separation anxiety. The artist and the hero attempt to "birth" themselves symbolically, staging separations that turn passivity into authorship. This clarifies why missions appeal: they promise individuation through action. Fromm, by contrast, reads modern authoritarianism as a characterologica...

3. Becker: Immortality Projects and the Terror of Death

Becker synthesizes psychoanalysis, anthropology, and existentialism into a single claim: culture is a "hero-system" that denies death (Becker, 1973). "The irony of man's condition is that the deepest need is to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation; but it is life itself which awakens it" (Becker, 1973, p. 66). We seek symbolic immortality through achievement, love, or nation; we want missions capable of insulating us from finitude. Hence fulfillment feels like pu...

4. Jung: Shadow, Persona, and the Coniunctio

Jung reframes the problem as one of psychic integration. The persona secures social recognition; the shadow contains repressed traits; the Self symbolizes wholeness (Jung, 1969). Fulfillment constellates the shadow: when we gain what we consciously want, we also summon disowned potentials. Individuation therefore requires confrontation. In *Aion* Jung argues that the ego's inflation—its identification with the Self—generates moral catastrophe; the only cure is dialectical recon...

5. Lacan: Desire Beyond Demand

For Lacan, desire is not biological appetite but a structural effect of language: it is "the desire of the Other" (Lacan, 2006). Demand can be satisfied; desire cannot. The object-cause of desire—*objet petit a*—functions as a remainder that "is never the object of need or demand" (Lacan, 1991, p. 103). Fulfillment is punishment because the subject receives the demanded object only to rediscover that desire persists as lack. The mirror stage shows how ego-ide...

6. Frankl: Meaning as Antidote—and Limit

As a corrective to psychopathology, Frankl's logotherapy proposes meaning as the human being's primary motivation: "Those who have a 'why' to live can bear with almost any 'how' " (Frankl, 2006, p. 104). Yet even Frankl cautions that meaning cannot be *willed* directly; it must be found as a by-product of commitment and love. In Willard's case, the mission furnishes a "how" without a "why"—a structure of action without a transcendent end—and thus cannot supply redemption. Me...

7. Synthesis: The Mission as Psychological Symptom

Across these approaches, fulfillment functions as a diagnostic device. Psychoanalysis reads the "mission" as repetition and displacement; Rank and Becker interpret it as a defense against death; Jung and Lacan see in it the activation of shadow and the return of lack; Frankl reframes it as a failure of teleology. Willard receives exactly what he wants and thereby learns what he is. The diagnosis is severe but not hopeless: the only exit these traditions allow is not more fulfillment but a different rela...

VI. Conclusion: The Mission and the Mirror

Across theology, Buddhist doctrine, modern philosophy, postcolonial critique, and depth psychology, a single structure recurs: fulfillment is disclosure. To "get what one wants" is to discover what one's wanting already was. In biblical terms, the sinner is given over to his desire; in Buddhist terms, craving reproduces the causes of suffering; in existential terms, freedom shows itself as obligation without guarantor; in colonial modernity, the will returns as an administrative function; in the psyc...

1. Hermeneutics of Guilt and the Work of Understanding

Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" does not end in exposure alone; it moves toward a "second naiveté" in which symbols are received again through interpretation (Ricoeur, 1970). The point of reading Willard's line through Augustine, the Nikāyas, Schopenhauer, Conrad, or Freud is not merely to diagnose complicity; it is to refashion understanding so that desire can be taken up differently. Symbols "give rise to thought," Ricoeur insists (p. 347); they also give rise to will ...

2. Desire and Ideology

Žižek's Lacanian account of ideology clarifies how "everyone gets everything he wants" can be true at the level of fantasy while remaining false in life. Ideology, he argues, is not what we consciously believe but what structures our desiring (Žižek, 1999). The subject "knows very well" that fulfillment is impossible, "but still" he acts as if the mission would complete him (p. 32). In Willard's world, the mission-form functions as this fantasy-support: a script that dema...

3. Toward a Discipline of Wanting

The traditions surveyed here do not counsel quietism but discipline. The biblical path names it charity and obedience; the Buddhist path, the Noble Eightfold Path; Kant, duty; Beauvoir, reciprocity; Levinas, responsibility for the face of the Other; Fanon, the struggle for recognition without annihilation. Each proposes that the solution to fulfilled desire is not more desire, nor its annihilation, but the *re-formation* of willing: detachment from possession, attachment to re-

sponsibility. The altern...

4. Last Words

Poetry often says last things best. Eliot's reflection that "the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (Eliot, 1969, Eliot, 1969, "Little Gidding") names the arc of this essay: the mission returns us to the origin of will. Rilke's admonition—"You must change your life"—arrives in another register (Rilke, 2009, Snow trans., 2009). If Willard's sentence is the mission's epitaph, this is its coda. The...

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