

**Paweł Oleksak**

Nicolaus Copernicus University

**THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE ADDICTIVE SPORTS ROUTINES IN DAVID  
FOSTER WALLACE'S *INFINITE JEST***

**Keywords:** David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, psychological automatism, addiction, modern sport

**Introduction**

This article<sup>1</sup> examines the themes of sport and addiction in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Its aim is to show how by juxtaposing these topics the author discusses philosophical issues. The author was one of the most popular American writers of the turn of the twenty-first century. The themes of his works "ranged from the ethics of boiling live lobsters to John McCain's 2000 presidential primary" (King 2), which include the issues of sport. The exploration of his point of view on philosophy as well as psychological and sociological research attempts to unravel the reasoning behind the novel's preoccupation with these two, at first sight, distant themes. Wallace often blurs the boundaries between the positive and negative aspects of sport. Particularly in the novel *Infinite Jest*, he engages in a philosophical reflection concerning the ambiguity of the frail boundaries separating sports and addiction. As a writer and ex-practitioner of tennis, he offers unique "interpretations of particular athletes, sports, and events" (King 2) which powerfully impacts the readers. In order to find the relation between sports and addiction in Wallace's novel, the concepts of pragmatism, the three spheres of existence, and psychological automatism are discussed. These terms are associated with philosophy and the

early research on the unconscious which by the idea of self-improvement bind together the discussed themes.

### **Philosophical Background**

In *Infinite Jest*, the main threads are intertwined with a discussion of the two characters, Marathe and Steeply, about the mentality of American society. The characters create the philosophical background for the whole novel. Especially, their debates over choices in life (Wallace 1996: 318) and the delayed gratification (428) resonate with a wide spectrum of pragmatist and existential theories. The two names that recur in the research conducted by other scholars<sup>2</sup> on the philosophical context of *Infinite Jest* are James and Søren Kierkegaard. A brief analysis of these two philosophers' main thought will allow us to notice the common points with *Infinite Jest's* sections about tennis as they share the same element of spiritual self-improvement.

William James, in his discourse, posits that only the things that are definable, in terms of being drawn from experience, should be the subject of the philosophical inquiry (Copleston 1965: 331). For James, pragmatism is not merely a method of determining otherwise indeterminable disputes but also a theory of truth (James 1909: 196). If the practical consequences of two theories are the same then the theories, he assumes, are one and the same theory, different only on a verbal level. Thus, James is focused on practical consequences but only from the perspective of the relation between what precedes and what follows. Pragmatism emerges also as a theory of truth, even though the truth, in his opinion, is a feature of beliefs, not things. Therefore, the logical validity is assigned only to propositions, not things or facts themselves, i.e. only the proposition articulating certain facts can be true or false. Thus, "truth is a relation between one part of the experience and another" (Copleston 1965: 336), which means that the truth of an idea is the process of validation. For example, if following a plan validates it, the process of verification establishes the truth of the idea. James is aware that most of the truths we live

by are unverified, though potentially they are still verifiable. He calls them truths “*in posse*” (James 1909: 205), i.e. in the process of potential becoming. Therefore, even timeless truths that precede any verification are merely pragmatic truths *in posse* which rest on the basis of verified truths. In this context, the problem of delayed gratification discussed in *Infinite Jest* resembles *in posse* approach when the choice is assessed by postponed results.

Søren Kierkegaard’s fundamental premise is that there is no direct analogy between people’s behavior as a group and as individuals (Copleston 1963: 340). The group is sunk in the common consciousness and emotions, performing actions its members would never perform as individuals. For this reason, Kierkegaard criticizes the traditional approach to philosophy, which generalizes human experience, approaching people collectively as humankind. In his opinion, a crowd, is fundamentally the untruth, because it renders the individual irresponsible. Kierkegaard in his philosophy presents three spheres of life (Kierkegaard 1942: 448). The first one is described as the aesthetic. Its main feature is operating on the level of intuition, emotion, and impulse. However, it should not be exclusively linked to the primitive. For example, artists operate in the same realm of romantic play of emotions. What makes this sphere so distinguishable is the absence of universal, fixed moral standards, and the presence of a desire to enjoy a limitless sensual experience. The aesthetic man can discriminate only on an aesthetic basis. His goal is to strive after the absence of all limitations other than imposed by his own taste. He despises everything that limits his range of choice, never giving definite form to his life. However, over time, he becomes more and more conscious that he is something more than an organism with the capacity for sensual enjoyment. The longer he lives in this state, the more despair he feels, knowing there is no alternative in the sphere he operates (Kierkegaard 1992: 203). At this point, he faces two choices: he can either remain in despair or, by the act of choice, commit himself. What differentiates this philosophy from others is the explicit requirement of continuous acts, not mere thinking, to maintain one’s

choice. Kierkegaard names it “the act of existing” (Kierkegaard 1942: 84), suggesting that the true existence resembles more being an actor than a spectator (Copleston 1963: 347). The second sphere presented by Kierkegaard is the ethical one. Accepting moral standards and obligations gives a form of consistency in the ethical man’s life. This makes him what Kierkegaard calls “the tragic hero” (Kierkegaard 1939: 109). The heroes deny themselves to express the universal, just like Antigone, who gave up her life in defense of the unwritten natural law. The ethical man, however, does not understand sin. He is able to identify the weakness but thinks it can be overcome by the power of will. In that sense, he thinks that he is morally self-sufficient. Eventually, he may realize his inability to fulfill the moral law. In consequence, he becomes aware of guilt and sin. Overcoming this state is only possible by the act of faith, by relating oneself to God (Copleston 1963: 347). According to Kierkegaard, there are two types of “existence” but only one type of a truly “existing individual” (Copleston 1963: 348). To achieve this a person needs to affirm oneself as a spirit. Kierkegaard notes that “[e]xistence is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, and the existing individual is both infinite and finite” (Kierkegaard 1942: 84). He states that the true form of existence requires pursuing active living, directing his life by deciding between alternatives. In essence, “[a]n existing individual is himself in process of becoming” (Kierkegaard 1942: 368). This bottom line resonates with the major theme of *Infinite Jest* which is “the significance of making a voluntary choice rather than following an involuntary compulsion” (Carlisle 89).

In *Infinite Jest*, Steeply in a Jamesian manner defines the cravings of the American society (James 1979: 201), saying “our whole system is founded on your individual’s freedom to pursue his own individual desires” (Wallace 1996: 423). This example presents a consumer attitude towards life which is oriented to gain as efficiently as possible and to collect the largest profits with minimum efforts and inconvenience. William James in his writings regards individual happiness as a condition to the well-being of the whole society. The

philosopher states that “the best simply imaginary world would be one in which every demand was gratified as soon as made” (James 1979: 201). However, he leaves room for the future re-evaluation of the choice that might assume that the initial decision has been incorrect. To sum up, his theory is concerned with short-sighted behavior that prioritizes immediate gratification and not paying much attention to the social aspect of human life. In this context, it is interesting to consider an aspiring athlete in the light of James’s philosophy. The outcome of daunting routines cannot be known in advance but they are the only valid way to have a chance of success. Therefore, training routines seen as the only right path to achieve success, are being pragmatically justified, as *in posse*. However, due to the delayed verification, the years of practice for the vast majority of young athletes who do not succeed turn out to be in vain. Thus, what was seen as pragmatic at first becomes unpragmatic. Such narration can potentially bring spiritual destruction for young unfulfilled apprentices.

Compared to this, Kierkegaard provides a more comforting approach. According to his philosophy, a never-ending stream of choices, for which one needs to take responsibility, improves one’s ethical behavior. The sports drills are, in this context, the tools for “becoming” in the Kierkegaardian sense. Whereas James is concerned with the provability of the choice’s correctness, Kierkegaard regards it as irrelevant. According to Kierkegaard’s philosophy, *Infinite Jest*’s drug addicts are essentially aesthetes. Most of them are caught in the moment of depression. Players in the tennis academy can also be seen as aesthetes who pursue aesthetic benefits of entering professional tennis. However, the trial they endure to do so confronts them with their choice and its consequences on a daily basis. One approach is to adhere to the rules and believe in a higher power (i.e. coaches, the system, parents), whereas the other is to isolate in self-consciousness.

In *Infinite Jest*, the process of transformation of an aesthetic man into an ethicist is presented through Don Gately’s experience. Initially, Gately is

the aesthete who remains passive in the situations of choices and potential commitments. He turns into a criminal who gradually becomes addicted to substances. However, in a drug and alcohol recovery facility, Gately becomes a full-fledged ethicist. He is ready for commitment and each day confirms the choice he has made. Following the addiction recovery program teaches him responsibility. Working as a warden in the facility proves to be another step to become a responsible person.

Wallace tries to extend the notion of constantly repeated self-commitment because he does not notice any hint on how to choose. He finds the solution to this lack of advice in a series of clichés (Wallace 1996: 320). Some of them are the need for guidance from a loving father or the need for sincerity (Carlisle 199). In a less convoluted way, Wallace also explains the significance of the banal in his commencement speech “This Is Water” (Wallace 2009), where he explains how he wishes people to make conscious choices through their daily existence. According to him, “banal platitudes can have a life or death importance” (Wallace 2009: 9) but it is difficult to notice because of the default self-centeredness of one’s mind. By a conscious act of choosing the stance towards daily situations, people can avoid frustrating misery (Wallace 2009). However, human nature is vulnerable to compulsions and resistant to change. It is easier to ridicule the wisdom of clichés rather than follow them. Focusing on practicalities and personal gains leads people back to themselves, leaving them in physical and spiritual isolation, but it only intensifies the lonely character of these pursuits (Carlisle 486). Wallace identifies these problems and promotes choosing awareness over denial. He advises effort over passivity, emphasizing the significance of becoming vulnerable through connection with other people (Wallace 2009).

### **The Functions of the Unconscious and Pierre Janet**

Discussion about addiction in relation to sports in *Infinite Jest* requires introducing the notion of psychological automatism to enable further

argumentation. The term comes from the early research on the unconscious, conducted by French psychologist, Pierre Janet. In his time, the four aspects of the unconscious were demonstrated: the creative, conservative, mythopoetic, and dissolutive (Ellenberger 317). The creative function serves as the matrix of new ideas. The conservative function stores a great number of memories, often inaccessible to voluntary recall. The mythopoetic function is the subliminal region of the self where narratives and fantasies that appear mythic or religious in nature are perpetually constructed. In this function, the unconscious is continually occupied with creating myths and fictions, which can appear in dreams. Sometimes it takes a form of exceptional occurrences like daydreams that develop spontaneously in the background of the mind, or even more uncommonly sleepwalking and hysteria. The dissolutive functions of the unconscious include two sets of phenomena. One is made up of actions that in the past were enacted consciously but have become automatic, for example, habits. The other consists of the disjointed parts of one's personality, which may lead to "parasitic existence" and collide with normal processes (Ellenberger 318). The dissolutive functions were the starting point for Janet's extensive occupation with autonomous elements of the subconscious mind (Ellenberger 318). The manifestations of this psychological phenomenon, automatism, were classified into two groups: total automatism (Janet 1889a) and partial automatism (Janet 1889b). Total automatism extends to the subject as a whole, whereas partial automatism suggests that a fragment of the personality is detached from the conscious awareness and leads to autonomous, subconscious development (Janet 1889b: 151–152). It can modify the manifestations of normal thought but cannot oppose it (Janet 1889b: 151). The same psychological mechanism gradually brings about the complete dissolution of the mind (Janet 1889b: 152). Janet generally devoted the rest of his work to various forms of partial psychological automatism.

Analyzing actions of *Infinite Jest's* characters in accordance with Janet's theory of psychological automatism, we can assume that the dissolutive

function of the unconscious binds the ideas of athletic training's and rehab's impact on spiritual self-improvement. In both cases, the participants take advantage of the subconscious mind as a means to reach their goals. As this function means that practicing and repeating certain actions leads to developing habits, it is important to note that the dissolutive function of the unconscious suggests that once developed, the habit cannot be easily abandoned (Ellenberger 318). This is precisely the approach that tennis players are supposed to rigidly hone at *Infinite Jest's* tennis academy by continuously repeating elements of their game. They want to make certain actions automatic, releasing extra space of awareness. As a consequence, the actions become neurologically embedded and under unconscious control. This is also the exact opposite of the residents of what *Infinite Jest's* drug and alcohol recovery facility are working on. They are taught to admit no control over addiction and they need to learn a whole new routine, mode of operating, to go through their lives without relying on substances. However, the omnipresent parasitic existence of the habit is what makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to overcome.

### ***Infinite Jest* and the Addictive Character of Sports**

It is possible to say that addiction is closely tied to participation in, either professional or amateur, competitive sports as they both require devotion and sacrifice. Different kinds of sports involve a spectrum of drills performed on a regular basis in order to achieve satisfactory results. Many sports, including tennis, aside from its technical aspects require also physical endurance. As Abel Nogueira et al. state in the review entitled: "Exercise Addiction in Practitioners of Endurance Sports," the excessive practice of endurance activities "can lead to adverse physical and psychological effects seriously prejudicial to health, to the extent that individuals are unable to control this behavior" (1). The research mentioned in the paper "confirmed that excessive practice could encourage the appearance of addictive behaviors and health problems" (1). Although the



observations of these behaviors were specifically centered on running and endurance sports, the general “obsessive passion and dedication to sports activities may be predictors for addiction to exercise” (1) in terms of other sports as well. Noteworthy is the fact that “owing to terminological confusion and the variety of tools used to measure addiction, figures for prevalence differ widely among studies” (1). This proves that there are still no clear universal methods to measure addiction, which leads to problems in defining and diagnosing such pathologies. Methodological vagueness and blurred boundaries between addiction and exercise contribute to the fact that abusing sports activities is not yet acknowledged as a behavioral disorder.

Nogueira et al. explain that the original meaning of the term ‘addiction’ referred to the excessive and uncontrollable consumption of psychotropic substances. It was a gradual process of applying it to a larger group of ‘behavioral addictions’ (1). According to Federica Pinna, addiction is not based solely on taking substances (Pinna et al. 380). She gives an example of gambling, which involves risky behavior and falls into the category of impulse control disorders. Nogueira et al. state that “[a]lthough addiction to exercise is not recognized as such, different authors consider that it could fall into the category of behavioral addictions” (1). They also refer to a few different sources to identify the problems of methodologies regarding addictions. Amongst others, they mention approaching addiction to physical exercise as “a multidimensional maladaptive pattern that leads to a disability or a clinically significant affliction” (1) and a sub-category of potentially addictive behaviors. They continue by stressing the analogical stages characteristic of all other common types of addiction, namely the “inability of controlling their behavior because of the pleasure that undertaking this activity brings them, regardless of any negative consequences” (2). What makes it difficult to consider it as addiction is the social acceptance of sport as an activity beneficial for health, even for people prone to addictions.

As far as *Infinite Jest* is concerned, Wallace never overtly calls any form of sport an addiction. However, his descriptions of tennis present ideas which resonate heavily with Pierre Janet's research. Gerhardt Schtitt, the coach in *Infinite Jest*, assumes the need of overcoming omnipresent desires with discipline. According to Greg Carlisle's analysis, "Schtitt regards both tennis and life as a tragic cycle of vanquishing and transcending limits" (Carlisle 77). This cycle represents Kierkegaardian thought in the way sport is presented in the novel. As Carlisle notes, Schtitt knew that "the beauty and art of match-play tennis is found not in reducing chaos to pattern but in expansion" (76), which confirms the constant need for transcending boundaries.

*Infinite Jest* enumerates regular day-to-day activities of the tennis academy students: "am drills, shower, eat, class, lab, class, class, eat, exam, lab/class, conditioning run, pm drills, play challenge match, play challenge match, upper-body circuits in weight room, sauna, shower" (Wallace 1996: 95). Thus, the considerable amount of effort that every single student puts into their daily routine is undeniable. The students undergo this mental and physical conditioning to develop a focus on the game and enabling their bodies to work automatically (1996: 117-118). Moreover, the athletes should not get distracted and overshadowed by press and public's expectations (1996: 661). If they become recognizable players they are bound to be under heavy psychological pressure with the very next failure. After this, without prior mental preparation, it is impossible to recover from the shock; therefore, the tennis academy attempts to protect "players from the dangers of being seen as entertainers" (Carlisle 337). Schtitt tries to teach students to "forget everything but the game" (Wallace 1996: 661). His suggestion includes drills that may be seen as an embodiment of what Pierre Janet calls psychological automatism. This mechanism in Janet's theory functions in an analogical way to addiction, i.e. unconscious force pushing a person to do something. It implies a lack of conscious choice, which due to Kierkegaard's thought is seen as something negative. *Infinite Jest* is also concerned with the automatism of rehearsed

movements. Expressions such as “sheer mindless repeated motions,” “[u]ntil you can do it without thinking about it, play,” “sinks the movements themselves down under your like consciousness into the more nether regions,” and “these are autonomous” (1996: 117–118) seem to confirm that the novel and Janet present the same potentially hazardous consequences of extensively repetitive routines.

At one point, the students in the academy are given a motivational speech about repetitive routines:

It’s repetitive movements and motions for their own sake, over and over until the accretive weight of the reps sinks the movements themselves down under like consciousness into more nether regions, through repetition they sink and soak into the hardware. (Wallace 1996: 11)

At a young age, athletes are taught to play to eventually perform motions without thinking: “[w]ait until it soaks (...) This frees the head in the remarkablest ways” (118). However, the drills are compulsory; hence, due to being imposed externally, they are not addictive *per se*. The mechanism shown by Janet justifies positioning drills within the scope of the addiction due to the difficulties with being eradicated. It is the kind of susceptibility to behavioral dependency that lives its own life in the subconscious. Analogically, the recovery program for addicts does not eradicate the need for stimuli. It rather forces patients to admit their helplessness over the existence of the higher power and to make conscious choices for the rest of their lives.

### **The Philosophy behind the Addictive Sports Routines**

In *Infinite Jest* Marathe and Steeply philosophically discuss the issue of choice. The existential context allows for a wider discussion about lifelong consequences of taking certain paths in life. Both sport and drug abuse have potentially critical long-term results. Both of them are also a result of extensively repeated activities and can potentially cause states of no control.

Addiction, including that to sports, may be regarded as an urge to take shortcuts to an instant injection of happiness. When a person does not devote

enough effort to advance into the ethical sphere, according to Kierkegaard, the increasing awareness of that fact causes the growing feeling of despair (Copleston 1963: 342). He describes it as:

the moment his anxious soul thinks it sees daylight appearing, it proves to be a new entrance, and like startled game, pursued by despair, he is thus constantly seeking an exit and forever finding an entrance through which he returns into himself. (Kierkegaard 1992: 203)

Subconsciously, the mind may rebel and seek other ways to avoid this by numbing the conscious mind. Therefore, such a person is vulnerable to addiction. The character of this addiction does not necessarily need to involve substances. It may concern something more abstract, like television, sport, or entertainment in general. Addiction determines and reprioritizes everything else. Hence, the suspension of conscious control becomes gradually more visible in daily life. This lack of control, according to Kierkegaard's theory, is wrong, as it impedes people's conscious choices and limits their freedom.

Depending on the approach, athletic drills can be regarded as either acquiring a new addiction by inducing psychological automatism or a submission to a higher power. To some degree, the players seem to be caught in a vicious circle, because the automatism may cause addiction, and then the first step of addiction recovery program is to admit powerlessness. The situation proves to be the same with regard to the rehab program for addicts, which, paradoxically, is not designed to overcome the addiction. The goal of the program is to make addicted persons more in control of their urges. Therefore, analogically, it resembles a never-ending cycle of admitting powerlessness to regain control, only to be constantly reminded of the dependence that continually confirms one's identity as an addict.

This would imply further that the treatment does not erase psychological automatism. Therefore, the temptation remains imprinted in the human nature. *Infinite Jest* also presents issues regarding this struggle by introducing the group called 'crocodiles.' They are Alcoholics Anonymous members who remain clean for an extensive period of time and provide mental and material

assistance to the younger members. Their existence is in tune with Kierkegaard's philosophy, i.e. they constantly recur to make conscious choices in order to abstain from alcohol. This could be called the infinite process of becoming but never really achieving pure 'cleanliness.' It resonates with the Kierkegaardian statement that "the striving is infinite" (Kierkegaard 1942: 84). The achieving is continuously approached but "cannot be accomplished once and for all: it has to take the form of a constantly repeated self-commitment" (Copleston 1963: 348). Nevertheless, even when someone is already on the wrong path in life, Wallace presents a character like Don Gately as a role model to follow. Gately becomes successful in his struggle for self-improvement. Even though a series of bad decisions makes him a felon, the novel shows that, with the guidance of right people, there is always hope for redemption and going back to the right path in life.

### **Conclusion**

The above research suggests that sport shows many psychological and social analogies to addiction. By presenting the characters' attitude to sports and addictions in *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace discusses philosophical issues. The never-ending urge for self-improvement is characteristic both of athletes and recovering drug addicts. The philosophies of William James and Søren Kierkegaard are applicable to trace the relations between the characters' beliefs and their progress in the novel. The constant struggle to make right choices and taking responsibility in order to reach perfection seem to be closer to Kierkegaard's philosophy. However, aspiring athletes dangerously oscillate on the brink of compulsive disorder. As a result, they go in the opposite direction to the desired improvement. The novel shows that sport and the process of recovering from addiction share the element of spiritual self-improvement. Both can possibly end in failure, but their chances to overcome obstacles are correlated with one's effort. Therefore, they accurately illustrate the practical applications of Kierkegaardian philosophy. However, at the same

time, according to Jamesian *in posse* assumption, one can never be sure of the correctness of choices unless their long-term consequences become clear. Until then, one can have only hope and good intentions to justify decisions, including these about athletic training.

### Endnotes

1. This article is based on the author's MA thesis entitled "Philosophical Aspects of Addictive Sports Routines in the Literature of David Foster Wallace."
2. See, for example, Ballantyne (2015), Campora (2014), Clare (2018), Dulk (2014), Evans (2013), Hasker (2015), Sher (2015).

### References

- Ballantyne, N., & J. Tosi. 2015. "David Foster Wallace on the Good Life," in: S.M. Cahn & M. Eckert (Eds.), 133–168.
- Boswell, M. (Ed.) 2014. *David Foster Wallace and "The Long Thing": New Essays on the Novels*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Boswell, M., & S.J. Burn (Eds.) 2013. *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cahn, S.M., & M. Eckert (Eds.) 2015. *Freedom and the Self: Essays on the Philosophy of David Foster Wallace*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Campora, M. 2014. *A Kierkegaardian Reading of David Foster Wallace*. Los Gatos: Smashwords.
- Carlisle, G. 2007. *Elegant Complexity*. Los Angeles and Austin: Sideshow Media Group.
- Clare, R. 2018. "An Exquisite Corpus: Assembling a Wallace Without Organs," in: R. Clare (Ed.), 1–15.
- Clare, R. (Ed.) 2018. *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Copleston, F. 1963. *A History of Philosophy Volume VII*. New York: Doubleday.
- Copleston, F. 1965. *A History of Philosophy Volume VIII*. New York: Doubleday.
- Dulk, Allard den. 2014. "Boredom, Irony, and Anxiety: Wallace and the Kierkegaardian View of the Self," in: M. Boswell (Ed.), 43–60.
- Ellenberger, H. F. 1970. *The Discovery of the Unconscious*. New York, Basic Books.
- Evans, D.H. 2013. "'The Chains of Not Choosing': Free Will and Faith in William James and David Foster Wallace," in: M. Boswell & S.J. Burn (Eds.), 171–189.
- James, W. 1909. *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism*. London: Longmans Green & Co.
- James, W. 1979. *The Will to Believe: And Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Janet, P. 1889a. *L'automatisme Psychologique. Première Partie: Automatisme Total, [Psychological Automatism. Part One: Total Automatism]*,

- [http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/janet\\_pierre/automatisme\\_psychologique/janet\\_automatisme1.pdf](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/janet_pierre/automatisme_psychologique/janet_automatisme1.pdf), DOA 14.04.2021.
- Janet, P. 1889b. *L'automatisme Psychologique. Deuxième Partie: Automatisme Partiel*, [Psychological Automatism. Part One: Partial Automatism], [http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/janet\\_pierre/automatisme\\_psychologique/janet\\_automatisme2.pdf](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/janet_pierre/automatisme_psychologique/janet_automatisme2.pdf), DOA 14.04.2021.
- Hasker, W. 2015. "David Foster Wallace and the Fallacies of 'Fatalism,'" in: S.M. Cahn & M. Eckert (Eds.), 1–29.
- Kierkegaard, S. 1939. *Fear and Trembling*. Translated by R. Payne. London, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. 1942. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by D. F. Swenson. London, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. 1992. *Either/Or*. Translated by A. Hannay. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- King, K. R. 2016. "The Spirituality of Role and the Role of Athlete in the Tennis Essays of David Foster Wallace," *Communication & Sport* 2016, 1–20.
- Nogueira, A., O. Molinero, A. Salguero, & S. Márquez. 2018. "Exercise Addiction in Practitioners of Endurance Sports: A Literature Review," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9: 1484.
- Pinna F., B. Dell'Osso, M. Di Nicola, L. Janiri, A.C. Altamura, B. Carpiniello, & E. Hollander. 2015. "Behavioural addictions and the transition from DSM-IV-TR to DSM-5," *Journal of Psychopathology* 2015: 21, 380–389.
- Sher, G. 2015. "Wallace, Free Choice, and Fatalism," in: S.M. Cahn & M. Eckert (Eds.), 31–56.
- Wallace, D. F. 1996. *Infinite Jest*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Wallace, D. F. 2009. *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

### Abstract

This article addresses the themes of contemporary sport and addiction as seen through the prism of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Its purpose is to examine how by juxtaposing these topics the author discusses philosophical issues. The theoretical part briefly describes the philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard and William James, as well as Pierre Janet's pioneering research on the subconscious. These theories are used in the analysis of the relationship between the beliefs of the novel's characters and their personal development. In the analytical part, the author tries to show the addictive traits of sport as represented in *Infinite Jest*, relying on the research in sociology and psychology. The analysis of this research shows a common socio-psychological basis of sport and addictions as they share the same element of spiritual self-improvement.