

Leonardo DiCaprio, Meet St. Augustine

By Daniel Ross Goodman

On Sunday, Academy Awards handicappers say, Leonardo DiCaprio has a good chance of winning an Oscar for his performance in Alejandro González Iñárritu's "The Revenant." The movie, which chronicles the trials and (approximately) 12 life-threatening labors of a real 19th-century frontiersman, is almost as torturous to sit through as it must have been for the actors to make.

If the actor wins an Oscar for 'The Revenant,' it will affirm what the theologian wrote about our enjoying depictions of suffering.

While we squirm in our seats, Mr. DiCaprio, as Hugh Glass, survives brutal cold, a vicious bear mauling, Indian attacks and other dreadful deprivations, all so that he can live to kill the man who murdered his son.

It is much more of an "eye for an eye" Old Testament story than a "turn the other cheek" New Testament story, in terms of its ethical sensibilities and its violence. The biblical book of Numbers even grants explicit permission for an "avenger of blood" to kill the murderer of a relative (although accidental killers may escape to a designated City of Refuge).

As Mr. DiCaprio undergoes his ordeals, we spectators take it in for our viewing pleasure. But isn't this bizarre? Why do we enjoy—or at least pay to see and stay to watch—these depictions of gruesome vio-

lence, suffering and misery that no one would wish to suffer himself or watch in real life?

These questions have been asked before. The first person to put this dilemma into written words probably was St. Augustine of Hippo, about 16 centuries ago. In his extraordinary autobiographical work of emotional and spiritual introspection, "The Confessions," Augustine diagnosed the problem of spectatorial compassion. He asked: Why do we tend to love actors' portrayals of misery when we would never wish such suffering upon ourselves?

As an adolescent, Augustine was, like many of us, swayed by passion and recklessly romantic—"I was in love with love," he wrote. He was also an avid theatergoer, and it is safe to assume that a young Augustine transplanted to 21st-century America would love the movies. But he would also ask himself the same questions about the attractions of on-screen suffering, and give the same explanation, as he did regarding the theater in his era:

A man likes to be made sad by viewing doleful and tragic scenes so he can experience from them a sense of grief, and his pleasure actually exists in this sense of grief. He exclaimed: *Quid est nisi miserabilis insania?* What is this but wretched madness?

Madness it may be, our indulgence in pain and anguish as entertainment. But if Mr. DiCaprio does win an Oscar on Sunday, he will join a tradition of actors rewarded for suffering on celluloid, including Nicolas Cage, who won the Best Actor trophy for playing a suicidal drunk in "Leaving Las Vegas" (1995), Adrien Brody, the hunted protagonist in the Holocaust film "The Pianist" (2002), and Tom Hanks, the wronged

lawyer dying of AIDS in "Philadelphia" (1993). Although she wasn't an Oscar winner, Maria Falconetti is considered by many to have set the standard for on-screen suffering in 1928 with "The Passion of Joan of Arc."

Augustine's explanation of why such roles resonate is a positive one. He says that it comes from a natural impulse for compassion, and that crying for another reminds us of our innate goodness. We don't really desire to see misery—we hunger for

a chance to exercise compassion. When we see suffering depicted in a movie, our empathetic itch is scratched, giving us the sensation that we have exercised true empathy.

Yet just as artificial sweetener doesn't satisfy the human body's inborn need for the nutrients that naturally sweet fruit supplies, emotions experienced in a cinema don't satisfy the soul's deeper desire to extend compassion to real human beings who are genuinely in need of it.

Never mind about that, St. Augustine might say. It is good to remind ourselves from time to time that we possess these deep natural reservoirs of compassion. The surge of feeling that audiences experience is the human psyche saying: Don't leave your compassion in the theater—carry it outside to the real world, where it is sorely needed.

Mr. Goodman is a writer and a rabbinical student at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in New York City.

The Donald, and His Wallet, Are Untested



BUSINESS WORLD

By Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Republicans and even Donald Trump supporters might figure the time has come to pull out the stops and challenge the Trump steamroller, especially after Friday's bizarre Christie endorsement. Somebody ought to spend a very large amount of money to blanket the airwaves with negative Donald Trump ads, and not just to test whether Trump fans can withstand withering exposure to their man's contradictions, lies and peccadilloes.

Also needing to be tested is whether Mr. Trump himself can stand it, and perhaps as important, whether he really is willing and able to produce the financial resources needed to fight back in an all-out, high-dollar "air war," as practitioners call it when the zero-sum nature of electoral battle necessitates spending large sums to change the votes of small numbers of voters.

The ad campaign is easy to envision, starting with a quote from Abraham Lincoln, "You can fool some of the people all of the time." Because, yes, this attack ad is partly an attack on Trump's supporters, not their values, but their judgment about who represents a viable vessel for their values.

They say they like Mr. Trump because he tells it like it is, except he doesn't. They say he is politically incorrect, but he is factually incorrect.

He claimed to have warned that the Iraq war would be a disaster and opposed it, but his plain words on the Howard Stern radio show in 2003 demonstrate no such thing.

He claims thousands of New Jersey residents who are Muslims were televised cheering the attack on the World Trade Center, but

there is no evidence that such cheering took place, much less video suggesting it did.

He has become a fierce critic of ObamaCare though he previously endorsed single-payer. His conversion on abortion, the Second Amendment—on everything but eminent domain—is mainly an impressive tribute to his fealty on eminent domain.

The Donald may be as surprised as anybody by the way his campaign has taken fire—his utterances certainly suggest so.

Trump's supporters need to see whether he can fight and survive the coming 'air war.'

He likes riding the wave and may be unable or unwilling to get off. He launched this adventure purely to accrue value in his lifelong personal brand-building pursuit.

That doesn't mean he ever seriously thought about being president, having to do the job. And one way that might become apparent is when, after winning the nomination and celebrating his personal triumph, he turns to the GOP and its donor armies to see what they are willing to do to win him the presidency. If it's not as much as he would like—if he would actually have to fulfill his promise to finance his own honest-to-goodness presidential campaign, which could cost \$1 billion—that's when things get hinky.

What we've been watching the past half-year may be an accident of personality, public mood, celebrity and social media, and democratic accidents don't always end happily.

In 1970, Chile held a presidential election and Salvador Allende, an avowed Marxist, won with 36% of the vote, a smaller percentage than

he received (39%) in losing six years earlier. Chile's center and right, instead of combining their vote as in previous races, backed separate candidates, giving the presidency to a man whose radical socialist intent was unendorsed by 64% of the electorate.

Jonathan Haslam of Harvard archly subtitled his book on this Cold War episode, "A Case of Assisted Suicide." Mr. Allende died of a self-inflicted gunshot as a U.S.-backed military coup converged on his presidential palace. To this day, graying American liberals still moan about the thwarted will of the Chilean people. A more appropriate lesson might be the danger, in a democracy, of mistaking an accident of electoral machinery for a mandate.

OK, it's an extreme example, but there are lesser kinds of democratic accident. Mr. Trump winning the nomination but not being keen to serve as president is one. Mr. Trump not being willing to bankroll the promised electoral campaign and basically handing the election to Hillary Clinton is another.

In an otherwise prescient post from Dilbert creator Scott Adams last summer that took Mr. Trump's presidential hopes seriously from the get-go, one prediction has not panned out: "I would expect him to dial back his crazy-sounding stuff as his poll numbers grow."

That he hasn't is one reason to doubt his commitment to going all the way. Ditto his failure to unlimber his wallet. Ditto his failure to lay out serious policies. Ditto his unwillingness to mollify the tire-kicking, less-protesty kind of voter by trying to signal that he actually has given sentient thought to how to form an administration and set actionable priorities.

What began as a scheme to become more famous is in danger of running away with the country. The consequences even Mr. Trump does not appear to be ready for.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

PUBLISHED SINCE 1889 BY DOW JONES & COMPANY

Rupert Murdoch
Executive Chairman, News Corp.

Gerard Baker
Editor in Chief

Robert Thomson
Chief Executive Officer, News Corp.

William Lewis
Chief Executive Officer and Publisher

Rebecca Blumenstein, Matthew J. Murray
Deputy Editors in Chief

DEPUTY MANAGING EDITORS:

Michael W. Miller, Senior Deputy;
Thorold Barker, Europe; Paul Beckett, Asia;
Christine Glancey, Operations; Jennifer J. Hicks,
Digital; Neal Lipschutz, Standards; Alex Martin,
News; Ann Podd, Initiatives; Andrew Regal, Video;
Matthew Rose, Enterprise; Stephen Wisnefski,
Professional News; Jessica Yu, Visuals

Paul A. Gigot, Editor of the Editorial Page;
Daniel Henninger, Deputy Editor, Editorial Page

WALL STREET JOURNAL MANAGEMENT:
Trevor Fellows, Head of Global Sales;
Chris Collins, Advertising; Jason P. Conti, Legal;
Suzi Watford, Marketing and Circulation;
Joseph B. Vincent, Operations;
Larry L. Hoffman, Production

DOW JONES MANAGEMENT:
Ashley Huston, Chief Communications Officer;
Paul Meller, Chief Technology Officer;
Mark Musgrave, Chief People Officer;
Edward Roussel, Chief Innovation Officer;
Anna Sedgley, Chief Financial Officer;
Katie Vanneck-Smith, Chief Customer Officer

OPERATING EXECUTIVES:
Nancy McNeill, Corporate Sales;
Steve Grycuk, Customer Service;
Jonathan Wright, International;
DJ Media Group:
Almar Latour, Publisher; Kenneth Breen,
Commercial; Edwin A. Finn, Jr., Barron's;
Professional Information Business:
Christopher Lloyd, Head;
Ingrid Verschuren, Deputy Head

EDITORIAL AND CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS:
1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y., 10036
Telephone 1-800-DOWJONES

DOW JONES
News Corp.