

## Blissed Out – On Hedonophobia

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### Difficulty With Pleasure

We have difficulty with pleasure, which makes it hard for us to know or tell the truth about much of what we do and why we do it. Part of our difficulty with pleasure comes from the fact of the professionalisation of it. When Montaigne withdrew from the world to devote himself to contemplation of the world and of himself, it is plain that this was no monkish renunciation, but rather a determination to devote himself unswervingly to the highest, most sustained and sustaining pleasure he could imagine. Montaigne was able to do this because he was possessed of plenty of money and therefore of leisure. If he had instead been offered the Chair of Contemplation Studies at the University of Louvain, it is a pretty sure thing that the work he produced would have been considerably less pleasurable, both for him and us – less various, less amused and amusing, less joyous – than the essays he produced in his long and vigorous retirement from the world. It is an awkward thing to be professionally committed to the study of forms of pleasure, as professors – using the word in the broadest sense – of art, literature and music might reasonably be thought to be. Such persons, along with critics, curators and other mediators of the pleasurable arts, tend to want to emphasise the earnestness and utility of what they do. The point of any theory of art produced under professional circumstances, or the kinds of professional circumstances that operate in our kind of society, is overwhelmingly likely to be that it emphasises the things other than ‘mere’ pleasure that art may be thought to offer – typically, nowadays, the value of analytic instruction, laying bare the operations or effects of wickedness (in the form of various sorts of abstract systems of power, capitalism, colonialism, etc) or of encouraging resistance to various unpalatable forms of social and political arrangement. Art is overwhelmingly construed as helping us to see, or to feel good things, and, if we take pleasure in such things, it is the accessory or subordinate pleasure of a duty well-performed.

We are, in fact, today beset by the ravening beast of earnestness. The least bad thing about this is that it is dull and enervating. The worst thing about it is that it provides so many opportunities for bullying and coercion. The demotion of pleasure allows those who put themselves on the side of duty and requirement – and this is to say, those who are appointed or take themselves to be appointed professionally or administratively to do so – to insist that we sign up to their patterns of duty and requirement.

But another part of our difficulty with pleasure is in the inflation of it. For a time, we had in our house a Passion Box. If we were a nineteenth-century evangelical household, this would have been filled with penitential coppers following tantrums, backtalk and other outbursts of inappropriate passion. But in our house, the Passion Box and thereafter the funds of *Médicines sans Frontières*, was incremented by a 50p

piece every time we heard somebody on radio or television advertising declaring their ‘passion’ for hang-gliding, Thai food or, as it might be, passion-flowers. Do not for a second think that I underestimate the capacity of *passiflora* to inspire the deepest of pleasures and consequently of attachments. It’s just that the word passion has now become effectively useless at evoking such feelings; flapping at them with the futile extravagance of a picnicker at a wasp.

But it is not just a matter of the casual routinisation of pleasure. A more fundamental problem may be its systematic availability. We have become a society devoted to play and entertainment. I do not mean this in the kind of blimpish sense that might have been employed by any killjoy or Savonarola at almost any point in history, against any particular group, whether it be concupiscent clergy or the rakish aristocracy or even the feckless working class crowding into the cinemas in the 1950s, which so disquieted left-liberal critics of a Leavisite or Adornian stamp. What seems to be new is that we have indeed become for the first time a society that is organised not around work and production but around play and entertainment. Adorno was right to see play and leisure as inseparable from labour, since our economies are dedicated to and sternly orientated around the production of pleasure. It is not so much that we have moved from a production to a consumption based economy as that what we primarily produce is play, pleasure and entertainment. Pleasure and leisure used to be marginal - variously snatched, harboured and rescued from a background of routine work. Now the production and distribution of pleasure-surplus has become economically structural. The fact that the production of pleasure is such grindingly hard graft, and that the consumption of pleasure something like an economic responsibility, is another reason for our difficulty of pleasure.

Hence the phenomenon of compulsive pleasure or, as we know it more familiarly, addiction. In this sense, we might perhaps take addiction to be the most representative hedonopathic form. Addiction literally means an assignment, or giving over; an addict, is one who is addictus, from ad and dicere, made over, appointed. The earliest uses of the word in English suggest a voluntary giving over of oneself – ‘the state or condition of being dedicated or devoted to a thing, esp. an activity or occupation’, as definition 1a of the word addiction has it. The fact that the earliest example of the word in English is modified by the word ‘overmuch’ suggests that it does not automatically have that meaning of excessive devotion, though it seems quickly to have acquired it.

Addiction stands to pleasure as obsession does to devotion. If every era has its signature illness – hysteria for the late nineteenth century – multiple personality disorder for the 1950s – then the representative malady of our time may well be obsessive-compulsive disorder. Like obsession, addiction provides a kind of anchor amidst a world otherwise experienced as dizzying, but tediously unvarying distraction. Addiction may be regarded as a kind of extreme brand loyalty. An addictive relation to a pleasure can also come about when the pleasure moves from being marginal to being structural, when we start to need to count on pleasure, and the uncertainty of the pleasure becomes a source of extreme anxiety. Pleasure turns oddly on the hinge between freedom and slavery. When my pleasures are for me, they remain non-addictive. When I become dependent on my pleasures, they are no longer me, I am for them. They become hard labour, that to which I have been assigned or made over.

So, on the one hand, we have a world in which the production of pleasure is seemingly more central than ever before and, on the other a world in which we seem only to have the most parched language for the discussion or acknowledgement of pleasure.

### **Such Pleasure That Pleasure Was Not the Word**

It would be easy to represent this situation in terms of the loss of spontaneity. But pleasure is rarely spontaneous, and when it is it may be in proportion ephemeral and unsustaining. Pleasure in fact has the reputation of being the ephemeral itself, and we are consequentially often enjoined, by Stoics, Christians and other wet-blanket otherworldians of every denomination to turn aside from the impermanence of pleasure to the lasting virtues of truth, duty.

It is tempting to believe that, if our problems with pleasure come from the fact that they are no longer marginal but structural, no longer fleeting, but a permanent part of the scene, then pleasure might or even should be rescued by being restored to marginality. The principal form which this has taken in contemporary cultural theory, especially that inflected by French thought of the later twentieth century, is through the promotion of *jouissance*, or the principal of excess.

Barthes, it is well-remembered, proposed that there were two kinds of reading pleasure. The first was the pleasure produced by texts that adapt themselves to readerly expectations – it is the pleasure of recognition, concordance, adequation. The second, provided by the “text of bliss”, is the pleasure not of recognition, but of discomfiture and dissolution. As opposed to the text which complies with readerly requirements and expectations, the text of bliss provides the ecstatic exhilaration of that which destroys coherence and thwarts expectation. This is a formulation that by now has its own homeliness, since it belongs to such a ploddingly familiar pattern of thought. Underlying it ultimately is Kant’s distinction between the beautiful, which is subject to pre-existing concepts, and the sublime, which escapes all measure, and all concept.

The voluptuary principle of *jouissance*, ‘such pleasure that pleasure was not the word’, in Beckett’s sour phrase, that flourished in the 1980s has given way to the somewhat more austere pleasures of the event, in the work of Alain Badiou, but the structure of the concept is the same – the event being that which escapes from all determination, all formulation, and all precedent. The mood-swings – between the austere, pinched abstractness of an Althusser or a Badiou and the libidinous engorgements of a Bataille or Lyotard, seem to match the polarisation of greed and craving abstention in relation to appetite, in that contemporary oscillation between obese exorbitance and anorexic emaciation we might call anorbesity. What governs this is the suspicion of the allegedly normalising and disciplinary form of moderation, and the consequent inability to conceive value other than in terms of excess or immeasurability.

Underlying all this is a familiar principle, so familiar as even to have become an addictive routine, which sees its highest vocation in the desecrating and honouring of

principles of absolute excess, or infinity, which alone, we are assured, will free us from the locked routines of the administered world. In response to moderated and compulsory pleasures, we are to embrace immoderate pleasures that go beyond every measure.

### Thinking Pleasure

Pleasure has the reputation for being spontaneous, unreflective. And yet pleasure must also be taken, which is to say, taken account of. Dickens captures this very well in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in a scene in which the character Tom Pinch sits in a bar in Salisbury:

All the farmers being by this time jogging homewards, there was nobody in the sanded parlour of the tavern where he had left the horse; so he had his little table drawn out close before the fire, and fell to work upon a well-cooked steak and smoking hot potatoes, with a strong appreciation of their excellence, and a very keen sense of enjoyment. Beside him, too, there stood a jug of most stupendous Wiltshire beer; and the effect of the whole was so transcendent, that he was obliged every now and then to lay down his knife and fork, rub his hands, and think about it. (Dickens 1991, 66)

That this is a comic moment might aptly remind us of Freud's complex negotiations with the economies of laughter. The essence of the Freudian theory of the comic, which significantly is not focussed on the unbound energies of spontaneous hilarity, but on the geared machinations of the joke, is that it involves the differential investment of quantities of psychic labour, in order to manufacture a tension that can be profitably released as laughter. This is a local application of the general economic principle in Freud that there is no pleasure – or at least no pleasure as sweet – without the overcoming or outwitting of obstacles.

Pleasure is never simple – it is always in fact duplicitous (at least). In this it does not resemble pain, which is immediate, self-announcing and self-interpreting. Pain can be diffuse, and difficult to describe, but there is rarely any doubt that it is there. Perhaps this is why pain has so often been thought of as the guarantee of the real, for example in Fredric Jameson's principle that 'History is what hurts. It is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis' (Jameson 1981, 102). Pleasure, and the desire for it seem, by contrast, much less certain or self-evident, and much more intrinsically difficult simply to experience. You seem to have, like Tom Pinch, to give it some thought.

Whereas pain saturates and yet also abolishes time, pleasure is intimately intermingled with temporal experience, from which it borrows. The anticipation of pleasure, even if it is in the negative form of the retreat of pain, gives tone, texture and extension to time. It is hard to think of a pleasure that does not involve or require some kind of protention or retrospection. So, where pain is absolute, pleasure is relative. Pleasure can never be wholly *en-soi*, or in itself, it must always be in part *pour-soi*, for itself, which is to say, it must involve some minimal form of

reflexivity. It is for this reason that it seems to make sense to say that one might suddenly become aware that something is, or was pleasurable, but it does not seem easy to conceive how one might be in pain without realising it. There are two contrary ways of thinking of this. First of all, one might say that pleasure is never fully aware of itself, that it is not until it is represented in some way that it can be recognised as pleasure. But I would prefer to say that pleasure is always compound in form, that is, it always involves some kind of estimation or taking stock. This implies that pain or difficulty are not the opposites of pleasure, but part of its repertoire.

One of the principal forms of pleasure's reflexivity is the subjecting of it to metric and quantification. The conjoining of work, pleasure and number is nowhere better evidenced than in the development of modern sport. Before the massive and ramified codification of sports that took place in the later nineteenth century, almost exclusively in England, not insignificantly the most advanced industrial nation in the world, little account was taken of measurement or scoring in sport. A medieval football match between two villages, which might last all day and lead to many broken heads and limbs, ended when one team scored. There was no opportunity to go for an equaliser, no change of ends, no best-of-three or penalty shoot-out. Victory was absolute, crushing and final. Though we may try to pretend that we have lost something vivid and precious in the replacement of the all-or-nothing excess of carnival sports by rules and scoring systems, in fact this is part of a process of redistributing the capital of pleasure. The Bataillean pleasures of the excessive and the immoderate are often, perhaps usually both anti-democratic and aristocratic.

A contrast is detectable between pleasure and pain in respect of measure. Where measurement can help to control or diminish pain (assigning to a particular pain a value on a scale running from 1 to 10, for example), measurement can and is commonly used to intensify and prolong pleasure. The work of Freud provides some of the richest material on the economic structures that pleasure employs, or that subjects employ to get or keep or manage pleasure. Measurement is a form of management.

That the economics of pleasure can extend far beyond the coordination of work and leisure is demonstrated in Peter Sloterdijk's arguments in his *Rage and Time* (2010) for the constitutive role of anger management in 20th-century politics. Anger, he points out, tends to ecstatic but politically wasteful eruptions of tension-reducing violence. If anger – the resentment of the proletariat at their systematic immiseration, say – is to be turned to political account, it must be concentrated and coordinated. Anger is a kind of affective capital that must be accumulated in anger-banks. This borrows from the logic of Christian eschatology, which requires the put-upon soul to suffer and be still, keeping their anger in trust with the Deity, who, declaring 'Vengeance is mine' monopolises all anger until the final climactic purgation of the Day of Wrath. But now it is the Party or the State that monopolises the right to express anger, but must also ration it, in order to keep the anger-banks well-stocked. The pleasure and unpleasure of anger are subject to the most complex kinds of coordination.

## Taking Stock of Pleasure

We have convinced ourselves, especially the we that is presupposed and presumed upon among a gathering of non-mathematical persons, that, whatever else it may do, the mathematisation of the world must pose a threat to our humanity and freedom. ‘I am not a number’ roared the Patrick McGooohan character at the beginning of each episode of the 1960s cult series *The Prisoner*, ‘I am a free man’. If there is one binding article of faith among those in the humanities, and there are of course many, it is that there is a deep and dangerous antagonism between the realm of number and the realm of words and images. The realm of the qualitative must be secured against the deadening incursions of the quantitative. The presence or prominence of number is the great discriminator between the sciences and the humanities. The more the realm of number expands, we fear, and thereby also reassure ourselves, the more the realm of the human diminishes. We know it, we are sure of it, we have no need to think about it any more, indeed we cannot waste or risk time thinking about it, lest we cease to be able to think with it. (Might one risk the suggestion that we find it hard to associate pleasure and number because we are so many of us casualties of an educational system, sustained by a long and blundering set of prejudices, that failed to make this association possible?)

In his *Art of Discovery* of 1685, Leibniz looked forward to the day when calculation might take the place of disputation: ‘The only way to rectify our reasonings is to make them as tangible as those of the Mathematicians, so that we can find our error at a glance, and when there are disputes among persons, we can simply say: Let us calculate [*calculemus*], without further ado, to see who is right’ (Leibniz 1951, 51). A defining strain preparing for the contemporary allergy to number in the humanities is the Romantic protest against the powerful efforts to put social and political reasoning on a firm basis by employing calculative reason, especially in the philosophical form of utilitarianism. A central figure in that history is Charles Dickens, whose critique of utilitarianism is embodied in the figure of Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, who is introduced to us as

A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over....With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. (Dickens 2008, 8)

Jeremy Bentham was not the first, but was certainly the most systematic and influential exponent of utilitarian philosophy, that is the philosophy that insists that the value of anything is to be defined wholly and without residue in terms of its utility, or its tendency to produce ‘benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness’ (Bentham 1907, 2). I am one of his sect. I stand before you an unrepentant utilitarian, if also, I hope, a more versatile one than Thomas Gradgrind. Quantity and measurement are at the heart of utility, since the utility of an action or idea arises when ‘the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it’ (Bentham 1907, 3). Bentham did in all earnestness, and to the quick derision of many, propose what he called a ‘felicific calculus’ that would allow one to calculate the exact quantity of pleasures and pains. Since

Bentham's single governing moral principle was the production of pleasure and the reduction of pain for the greatest number, such an effort at quantification was unavoidable.

The felicific calculus is set out in chapter four of his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), which is entitled 'Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, How to Be Measured'. There he distinguished 7 different dimensions of the pleasures or unpleasures that might be produced by a given action. These dimensions were: 1) the intensity of the pleasure or pain; 2) its likely duration; 3) its certainty or uncertainty; 4) its propinquity or remoteness; 5) its fecundity, by which Bentham means 'the chance it has of being followed by sensations of the same kind'; 6) its purity, that is 'or the chance it has of not being followed by sensations of the opposite kind' and, finally, 7), its extent, that is, the number of persons whom it may affect (Bentham 1907, 30). Bentham even produced a mnemonic jingle to help his students keep this algorithm in mind:

*Intense, long, certain, speedy, fruitful, pure* –  
Such marks in *pleasures* and in *pains* endure.  
Such pleasures seek if *private* be thy end:  
If it be *public*, wide let them *extend*.  
Such *pains* avoid, whichever be thy view:  
If pains *must* come, let them *extend* to few. (Bentham 1907, 29)

Moral reflection is thereby reduced – or maybe raised – to mathematical reasoning. The usual, and right, thing to say about the hedonic calculus is that it is impossible to do the sums. The usual, but erroneous thing to say about why this is it is that this is because pleasure and number are inimical, or that pleasure is unquantifiable. It is true that one of the real problems with Bentham's calculus is that it presupposes some common measure or single currency, which would allow one in principle to add and subtract between these different qualities. Bentham was frank in his acknowledgement that the closest approximation we have to this common measure is money. It is perhaps for this reason that utilitarian philosophers have sometimes adopted the terms hedons and dolors for the units of felicific currency. Later in the book, in the course of a discussion of the proportioning of offences and punishments, he deals with the objection that 'passion does not calculate', to which his simple and straightforward response is that it is not true. The Benthamite reply to the objection that we cannot quantify pleasure is that we so manifestly and continuously do.

When matters of such importance as pain and pleasure are at stake, and these in the highest degree (the only matters, in short, that can be of importance) who is there that does not calculate? Men calculate, some with less exactness, indeed, some with more: but all men calculate. I would not say, that even a madman does not calculate. Passion calculates, more or less, in every man: in different men, according to the warmth or coolness of their dispositions: according to the firmness or irritability of their minds: according to the nature of the motives by which they are acted upon. Happily, of all passions, that is the most given to calculation, from the excesses of which, by reason of its strength, constancy, and universality, society has most to apprehend: I mean that which corresponds to the motive of pecuniary interest (Bentham 1907, 187-8).

The real problem with the felicific calculus is not that it enforces calculation where none is possible, but that there are so many ways of doing the calculations. The problem, is not that the felicific calculus is too rigid and inapplicable to the circumstances of pleasure, but, as Wesley C. Mitchell observed many years ago, that it is too obliging to them (Mitchell 1918, 180). But this does not diminish the fact that pleasure and measure are in fact tightly intertwined. Far from being the adversary of number, pleasure is, in some wise, its apotheosis.

### **Working With Pleasure**

One of the great sources of pain attaching to the question of pleasure is that we persist in thinking of pleasure as the inverse of work. The harder we work, the less pleasure we have, the less work we do, the more pleasure we will have. We should be cautious and sceptical whenever we find that we find ourselves reasoning on the basis that anything is the opposite of anything else, but particularly when it comes to pleasure. Since pleasure is the motive principle of everything we do, it finds ways of insinuating itself into everything that seems inimical to it. When I was a student, I had a number of menial jobs in factories and the like, and, like many in such circumstances, I found the tedium of the work hugely depressing and fatiguing. Like many another student worker, the way I found to reduce these pains was not to shirk and skive, but to actually to throw myself into the work. I had, say, to spend all day on the de-burring machine, a little wheel that span and removed the rough snags on the side of the little rectangles of copper – ultimately to become printed circuits – that another machine had stamped out. I stood at the wheel with a pile of copper rectangles beside me that was almost my height, and my job was to de-bur them. It was easily possible to do 4 or 5 of these a minute, but it was very hard indeed to carry on doing 4 or 5 a minute for 60 minutes an hour and for seven hours a day. But, if I set myself the task of doing, say 6 or 7 a minute, things changed. Simply varying the number of copper rectangles I managed to de-bur a minute somehow sweetened, or de-burred the task itself, just a little, but, given its soul-corroding monotony, a little was more than enough. And, of course, once I realised that I was getting better at the task, and was regularly achieving rates of 6 or 7 a minute, I began to wonder whether I might not be able to do 8 for, say, three or even four consecutive minutes. This required vigilance and planning. I needed to bring my performance under critical review, assessing the ways in which I picked up the copper oblongs, and even the order in which I did them ((long side first, or short side first?). I laid wagers with myself, devised inducements and rewards for prolonged good performance. For example, after, 10 straight minutes of 8 a minute, I would have made a profit in copper rectangles of between 15 and 20, and therefore in time of between 2 and 3 minutes, which gave me the opportunity to roll and partially consume a cigarette (this was a long time ago, when smoking was a necessary and expected part of any kind of organised labour).

By subjecting my performance to mechanical survey, and calculating outcomes and margins, I escaped the condition of mechanisation to which I was otherwise painfully delivered. At the same time I discovered a further source of pleasure in the reckoning itself. Even if I flagged and failed to reach my targets, even if the breakneck exhilaration doing 8 de-burrings a minute began to pall, I had at least the fact of the calculative perspective open to me. I had a critical relation to the work I was doing, a



relation that, insofar as it was calculative, was in fact playful. Because I was not reduced to my work, I was in fact no longer alienated from it. It was my work. I had thus defeated the purpose of the task, as it seemed to me, which was to obliterate any possibility of my being or doing other than the task itself, and to isolate me in the ongoing, agonisingly homogeneous, oleaginously oozing present of the work. The conjoining of my exertion with estimation had brought time under tension, it had turned my labour into a project. I was not just calculating my pleasure, I was pleasing myself with my calculations.

All students and newcomers to circumstances in which not very exacting work must be done at a steady rate over a sustained period will sooner or later discover the pleasure of subjecting things to measure in order to go beyond it. And most of those tyros will also sooner or later be made forcibly aware that there is in fact a complicating calculation to be made. For I was going to be working in that factory for, at most, six weeks. The people I was working alongside had been in the job for years and much depended for them on their being able to remain in it for many further years. Most of them had found the optimum level of performance, that balanced out all the countervailing pressures and could be sustained, day in and day out, over long periods, even, if necessary lifelong. Though it might well be possible for them to match the blistering rate of production to which I aspired and which I was able intermittently to attain, I was like a quarter-miler setting the pace for a marathon, and it was not going to be possible for them to maintain that rate for the rest of their working lives. I had to be stopped, and, of course, I was. I was forced, by means of various blandishments and ethical humiliations, to ease off, and the work became again, as it had been at the beginning, slow-dripping torture. I had discovered that it was easier to work hard than to take it easy, indeed, that, under certain circumstances, ease was agony.

I became a socialist at that point and alas see no prospect of ever being able to unbecome one, though it was not until later that I realised the kind of socialist I was. I realised that what mattered was not the quality of life that was achieved and how the chances of it were distributed under a given social arrangement. Nor did it fundamentally matter that the people who did most of the work did not get most of the profit, important though that is. What mattered, for the Romantic Morrisian I became, well before ever reading any of the insipid works of William Morris, was not the profit that might be made from work, but the quality of the work that it was possible for people to do, or, at least the quality of the relation they had to their work. I was about to go to university to read English, and, whenever I was faced with reading my way through the *Faerie Queene* or the *Morte d'Arthur*, or, for that matter, the wearisome *News From Nowhere*, or learning a list of Old English verb inflections, I infallibly remembered my hours and days at the de-burring machine, and knew that I was in fact in Paradise, compared with not having work of such a kind to do. The real social divide then, and now, is not between people who are well and badly rewarded for the work they do, but between people who have work that they would do anyway for nothing, and people who would give anything not to have to do the work they do.

There are, of course, under some circumstances, pleasures to be had from the remission or abstention from work. But the receding of work altogether leads to the kind of nightmare that opens up for Philip Larkin in his poem 'Toads Revisited'. The later poem, written in 1962, reflects on why it is that, although 'Walking around in

the park/Should feel better than work', there is a creeping horror in the prospect 'Being one of the men/You meet of an afternoon:/Palsied old step-takers./Hare-eyed clerks with the jitters,/Waxed-fleshed out-patients/Still vague from accidents' (Larkin 1990, 147). 'Toads', the poem recalled in 'Toads Revisited' begins 'Why should I let the toad *work*/Squat on my life?' (Larkin 1990, 89). The sadder, wiser counterpart poem ends 'Take me by the arm, old toad;/Help me down Cemetery Road' (Larkin 1990, 148).

Michel Serres evokes the strange interpenetration of hard and soft work in *The Parasite*: Work flows from me like honey, like the spider's web... I work hard, I don't work at all; it comes easily, just like what an animal does when it follows its own instinct in doing this and that. I am a bee, or a spider, a tree (Serres 2007, 87). I am my work, I am, as the cliché has it, fulfilled by it, because I am not it, which is to say, when I have a non-necessary relation to it. My work can fulfil me only when it is not wholly me, or I am not wholly it, when it actually releases me from the condition of having to coincide with myself. Work is nonalienating, when it allows me to encounter and enter into my own otherness to myself. When I am not my work, when I am, as we so idly say, alienated from it, when my work is merely what I must do, in order that I have the wherewithal to be able, in some other time and place, after work ceases, to buy back, then I am alienated, not from identity, but from this possibility of non-self-coincidence. It is not that one relation to work is qualitative and the other merely quantitative, as we might think; it is that one gives the opportunity for complex forms of measure, which is therefore to say, pleasure, and the other does not, beyond the bleak equality of  $1=1$ , I am that I am, I am that which I must do.

Much of our contemporary difficulty with pleasure comes from the fact that the relations between work and leisure have become so blurred and uncertain. The response we should make is not to try to clarify or reassert the difference, but to enter into it. Because we are not as sensitive as we might be to the complex economies of work and play, our reasoning about the kinds of reasoning that are at work all the time in our experiences of work and leisure and the pleasure that runs back and forth between them, is fuzzy and impoverished.

For perhaps the thing that gives us the greatest difficulty with pleasure is that pleasure has no obvious or permanent contrary. This is because of the many ways in which pleasure proves itself able to get on the other side of itself, to inhabit and turn to its own account, the many things that seem inimical to it, even and especially, as Freud shows in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, death itself. It is not possible to be any kind of rational human being without some complement of masochism, the deriving of pleasure from pain or, perhaps more precisely, the intensification of pleasure through it.

## **Difficult Pleasure**

Let me recall the itinerary I have followed. I have suggested first of all that we have various kinds of difficulty with pleasure, a difficulty that comes from the increasing abundance and availability of pleasures, forcing more and more people to internalise the limits and forms of regulation that scarcity had previously provided, as well as from the formalisation of pleasure that is a concomitant feature of the increasing

abundance. This has produced a kind of Romantic blur and blunder about the ways in which pleasure is in fact intertwined with number and measure. Rather than attempting to rescue or purify pleasure from the difficulties it has got into, I have wanted to emphasise the paradoxical fact that pleasure is in fact entangled with, and even in some sense dependent upon difficulty. If we have difficulty with pleasure, this is in part because we seem constituted to get such pleasure from difficulty. Rather than an idealising or essentialising quarantining of absolute pleasure, I recommend an enhanced utilitarianism, which cleaves to the principle that only utility can determine value, but recognises that there is no single unified currency, or principle of mensuration by which pleasures can be totted up, even as pleasure is, *ab initio*, and ever more irreducibly as time proceeds, utterly suffused by quantity and number. Leibniz was right, though not for reasons that he is likely to have approved. If we are to understand and account for our pleasure, then measure is indispensable. *Calculemus*.

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