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Pleasure is uniquely Human

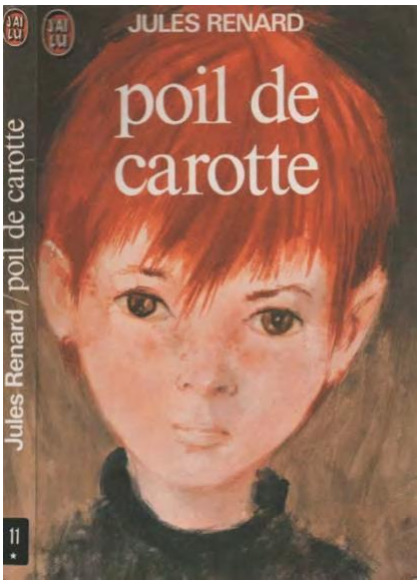
Georges M. Halpern, MD, DSc

On revient toujours **à** ses **premières** amours

(We always come back to our first loves…)

Coming back….

"**Poil de Carotte**" is a famous novel, written by Jules Renard. It is also a movie: "Bullied by his matriarchal mother, abused by his siblings, ignored by his father, Poil de Carotte's childhood is as miserable as it could be. An illegitimate child, he is the main reason for the enmity which exists between his parents, who continue to live together just to keep up appearances. Realizing *this, and unable to endure any more cruelty, Poil de Carotte decides to kill himself…".*



Of course, that wasn't me, or my family! But all ginger heads or red haired were singled out, called "carrot's hair", and/or bullied. And I was the only one with red hair in the area! It was difficult at times, and spending two years into refugee's camps didn't help. However, it made me feel both unique and able to survive.

I was an avid reader; my father took me at task and gave me one –only ONE- book Le Petit Larousse Illustré, a comprehensive dictionary with pictures; I had to learn by heart a number of pages every day. I loved it and could have been a world champion of the spelling bee.

This also strengthened my visual memory and served me all my life.

The Pleasure of Survival

We/I made it. Hunger, alone with my sister (18-month younger) and a moronic teenager, in Aiguebelette (Savoie) in 1942: with info from my classmates, I quickly learned how to catch, kill and bleed, skin (we sold the fur to the local pharmacist vs. arthritis; cash only; no questions asked), and cook cats or rabbits (same taste); get ripe fruits (got shot in my ass with cartridges loaded with rock salt) from the neighbors' orchards; comb blueberries; identify, pick and cook all sorts of mushrooms; glean wheat ears abandoned after the harvest and make a decent bread out of fresh flour; and –on top of that (thank you Mr. Larousse!) be the first of my class.

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Then on the night of December 21-22 (longest of the year) our parents a appeared, and told us" Pack!". Then a "gazogène" car drove us to swamps; that's where in the middle of a pitch-dark night, had to stumble, get under 3 razor wires, but we crossed the French-Swiss border -while being shot at by the French gendarmes. We were arrested by a Swiss border patrol whose uniform was exactly identical to the German except for the buttons: they displayed the Swiss cross instead of the German eagle holding the swastika. My sister Françoise was less than six years of age: she saved us.

The Pleasure of Food

At the Rothohe refugee camp, in the Bernese Jura, we were assigned a corner with straw on the floor. There were possibly over a hundred people there, in a huge hall that had been a sanatorium, with 2 restrooms and newspapers as toilet paper. There were 4 sinks with icy cold water. My father erected a makeshift screen with military blankets to provide some privacy. There was nothing to do. We could get out in the snow, the mud or the rain for less than 2 hours a day. The barbed wires were electrified and many a morning, while Captain Schmidt called out our names at 06:00, one of his "kapos" switched off the juice to recover a body –someone, desperate or bored had thrown himself onto the razor wires.

People talked; they talked night and day. They mostly talked about food, about recipes, restaurants, parties, and they described in detail incredibly complex recipes. Our daily soupy meal was barely edible; I did not care. I was always hungry. I would have eaten the straw, the newspapers, anything. And listening to, dreaming of these elaborate dishes was an incentive to make sure that I would never again have a bad meal. Food, good food, great food was my quest, and remains immensely important to me.

One of the major foods consumed in Western [and other] societies is bread; it is a basic, tradition-filled, and inexpensive food item. And since it is part of our daily intake, the industry has for decades focused on its quality to make it whiter, sweeter, softer, toast-able, never-to-rot, and –above all- bland. Bread is more and more an anonymous, cardboard-tasting support for "no-cholesterol" artificially colored spread-able concoctions. But traditional bread does exist: it is crusty, tasty, flavorful, quite rich in fiber and magnesium, wholesome, and basic: wheat flour, leaven, water, salt –and the loving art of the baker. The best baker in the world –so declared Smithsonian magazine- was my late friend Lionel Poilâne. His bread (now baked by his daughter Apollonia) is "rich in selenium and magnesium; its salt is harvested in Guérande, tastes like violet, and provides iodine and magnesium; the natural leaven (starter of sourdough) results in better taste and digestibility, and is a precious source of vitamins. Poilâne supports sustainable farming: no nitrates, no pesticides, and his bread is hand made. The loaves are baked in Poilâne wood-heated [XIXth century] oven".

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But this description does NOT bring back the flavor, the crustiness, the texture, the taste, the pleasure you experienced when you bate into this large toasted tartine of Poilâne's bread... Medical articles miss the emotional, rewarding dimension.

Never underestimate pleasure

In 1991, I published a study demonstrating that live active culture (LAC) yogurt consumption is associated with a five-fold increased production of γ-IFN by PBMC.

Then, in 1993, we demonstrated that regular consumption of LAC yogurt –but not "heat- killed" yogurt- over the course of one year resulted in a significant reduction of the number of days during which the subjects suffered on symptoms of allergic (pollen) rhinitis. But in 1997 I went back to the subjects' files and redid some calculations and conducted interviews; I found that our "best" responders, i.e., subjects who demonstrated the highest levels of γ-IFN, in the LAC yogurt groups, were the most creative for delicious recipes of smoothies and yogurt shakes. "The pleasures of the table are for every man, of every land, and no matter of what place in history or society; they can be a part of all other pleasures and they last the longest, to console us when we have outlived the rest".

The Pleasure of/with Meals

"The primary requisite for writing well about food is a good appetite. Without this, it is impossible to accumulate within the allotted span, enough experience of eating to have anything worth setting down. Each day brings only two opportunities for field work, and they are not to be wasted minimizing the intake of cholesterol".

Food intake is an essential human activity regulated by homeostatic and hedonic systems in the brain that has mostly been ignored by the cognitive neurosciences. It was probably too trivial, too banal, or even sinful. Yet the study of food intake integrates fundamental cognitive and emotional processes in the human brain, and can provide evidence on the neural correlates of the hedonic experience central to guiding behavior. This hedonic experience is related to qualia, which has been described as "the hard problem of consciousness". Fortunately, recently neuroimaging has identified the medial anterior part of the orbitofrontal cortex as the strongest candidate for linking food to hedonic experience. Pleasant, but not unpleasant odors were found to activate a medial region of the rostral orbitofrontal cortex; other candidate brain regions such as the anterior cingulated, the insular cortex and ventral striatum could be part of hedonic networks in the human brain.

Marian Apfelbaum - © Histoire de l'INSERM

But what about patients subjected to hospital fare after surgery? In a seminal study, Marian Apfelbaum demonstrated that artsy and tasty food shortens hospital stay of surgical patients by an average of 3 days. All constituents/calories were identical in both the abject diet provided by the central hospital kitchen, and the elaborate dishes shining on china produced by a dietician-turned-chef.

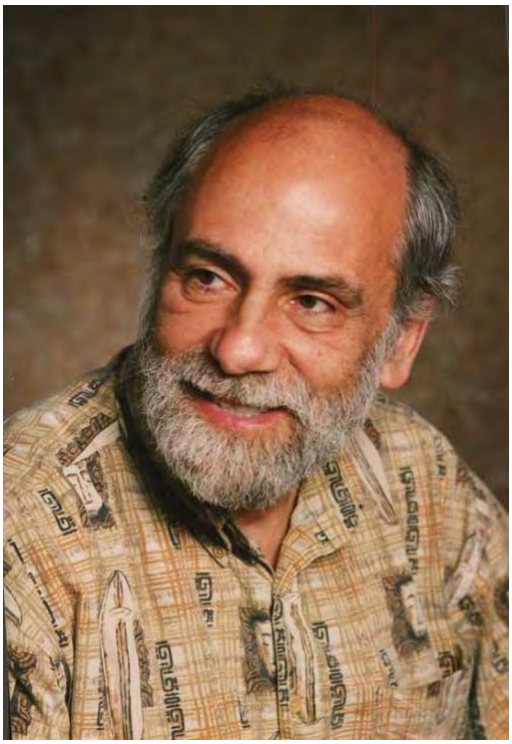
Why is that? The group of Apfelbaum tested the effect of the palatability of a meal on the post-prandial release of several gut hormones or neuropeptides that are known to have an effect on intake and satiety. Hormonal response was determined in plasma during the 3 h after a highly palatable and energy-rich meal, or after the same meal served cold in a poorly acceptable form, as well as while fasting. The early post-prandial pancreatic polypeptide and neurotensin response was significantly higher after the highly palatable meal than after the cold one. Post-prandial levels of beta-endorphin were elevated only after the cold meal and were associated with an elevated response of ACTH, a marker of stress. J.C. Melchior et al. suggest that beta-endorphin might be secreted in response to an aversion towards the non-palatable cold meal. This could, subsequently, inhibit the cephalic phase of pancreatic polypeptide response and the early post-prandial response of neurotensin by a central anticholinergic effect. This study evidenced an effect of palatability on the modulation of the digestive hormonal response after a meal.

Food intake is a regulated system. Afferent signals provide information to the central nervous system, which is the center for the control of satiety or food seeking. Such

signals can begin even before food is ingested through visual, auditory and olfactory stimuli. One of the recent interesting findings is the demonstration that there are selective fatty acid taste receptors on the tongue. CCK inhibits food intake in human subjects. Enterostatin, the pentapeptide produced when pancreatic colipase is cleaved in the gut, has been shown to reduce food intake. This peptide differs in its action from CCK by selectively reducing fat intake. Enterostatin reduces hunger ratings in human subjects. Bombesin and its human analogue, gastrin inhibitory peptide (also gastrin-insulin peptide), reduce food intake in obese and lean subjects. Circulating glucose concentrations show a dip before the onset of most meals in human subjects. When the glucose dip is prevented, the next meal is delayed. The dip in glucose is preceded by a rise in insulin, and stimulating insulin release will decrease circulating glucose and lead to food intake. Leptin released from fat cells is an important peripheral signal from fat stores that modulates food intake. Leptin deficiency or leptin receptor defects produce massive obesity. This peptide signals a variety of central mechanisms by acting on receptors in the arcuate nucleus and hypothalamus. Pancreatic hormones including glucagon, amylin and pancreatic polypeptide reduce food intake. Four pituitary peptides also modify food intake. Vasopressin decreases feeding. In contrast, injections of desacetyl melanocyte-stimulating hormone, growth hormone and prolactin are associated with increased food intake. Finally, there are a group of miscellaneous peptides that modulate feeding. Beta-casomorphin, a heptapeptide produced during the hydrolysis of casein, stimulates food intake in experimental animals. In contrast, the other peptides in this group, including calcitonin, apolipoprotein A-IV, the cyclized form of histidyl-proline, several cytokines and thyrotropin-releasing hormone, all decrease food intake. Many of these peptides act on gastrointestinal or hepatic receptors that relay messages to the brain via the afferent vagus nerve.

Preferences and Prejudices about Food

On these days of mega mergers among the manufacturers and carriers of information – and education-, the tendency to "unify", i.e., make monotony the gold standard, is an Orwellian reality. And it can grow on fertile ground: two studies explored Americans' tendency to simplify nutrition information. Substantial minorities of separate samples of college students, physical plant workers, and a national sample considered a variety of substances, including some essential nutrients [salt and fat], to be harmful at trace levels. Almost half the respondents believed that high-calorie foods in small amounts contained more calories than low-calorie foods in much larger amounts. Many subjects classified foods according to a good/bad dichotomy, and almost all subjects confounded nutritional completeness with long-term healthfulness of foods. To account for these results, the authors suggest the following heuristics and biases: dose insensitivity, categorical perception, a "monotonic mind" belief [if something is harmful at high levels it is harmful at low levels], and the magical principle of contagion.



Paul Rozin - © David Nussbaum

But what about other human beings for whom food is a critical contributor to physical

well-being, a major source of pleasure, worry and stress, a major occupant of waking time, and, across the world, the single greatest category of expenditures? Paul Rozin et al published in 1999 the first study on the way food functions in the minds and lives of people from four cultures. Adults and college students from Flemish Belgium, France, U.S.A. and Japan were surveyed with questions dealing with beliefs about the diet-health link, worry about food, the degree of consumption of foods modified to be "healthier" [e.g., reduced in salt or fat], the importance of food as a positive force in life, the tendency to associate foods with nutritional vs. culinary contexts, and satisfaction with the healthiness of one's own diet. In **all** domains except beliefs about the importance of diet for health, there are substantial country [and usually gender] differences. Generally, the group associating food most with health and least with pleasure is the Americans, and the group most food-pleasure-oriented and least food-health-oriented is the French. In all four countries, females, as opposed to males, show a pattern of attitudes that is more like the American pattern, and less like the French pattern. In either gender, French and Belgians tend to occupy the pleasure extreme, Americans the health extreme, with the Japanese in between. Ironically, the Americans, who do the most to alter their diet in the service of health, are the least likely to classify themselves as healthy eaters. These differences may influence health and may partially account for differences in rates of cardiovascular diseases, a.k.a. the "French paradox". But why do we like fat? Dietary choices are strongly influenced by the taste and texture of foods. Fats are responsible for the sensory properties of many foods and greatly contribute to eating pleasure. Although diets rich in fats tend to be more flavorful and varied, they also are high in energy. Because excessive fat consumption has been associated with higher rates of obesity and coronary heart disease, nutrition education efforts have focused on replacing dietary fats with grains, vegetables, and fruit. However, preference for high-fat foods appears to be a universal human trait, and in the absence of efficient physiologic mechanisms regulating fat intake, fat consumption appears to be determined simply by the amount of fat available in the food supply. Fat consumption at national levels is determined largely by economic variables such as urbanization or income. The question is whether appropriate nutrition education and intervention programs can surmount these barriers; but facing the humungous ever-present incitation of the fat-laden food industry we should remain skeptical about the success rate of such programs.

Good Digestion of Pleasurable Food may Prevent Cancer, and Alleviates Pain

A group of the University of Leiden, in the Netherlands, studied the effect of vasoactive intestinal peptide (VIP), peptide histidine-methionine (PHM), and secretin on spontaneous cell-mediated cytotoxicity of peripheral blood mononuclear cells against tumor target cells. VIP stimulated cytotoxicity against CaCo-2 human colon cancer cells, whereas less effect was seen against K-562 erythroleukemia cells. Depletion of CD16+ natural killer cells almost completely abolished cytotoxicity and subsequent VIP incubation did not change residual activity. In contrast to PHM, which hardly influenced cytotoxicity, secretin was found to be more effective especially against K-562 target cells. These observations suggest a modulating role for the neuropeptide VIP in the cellular immune response against tumor cells, especially from the colon, resulting in increased activity of CD16+ natural killer cells. Secretin seems to be less potent in modulating cellular cytotoxicity. These findings support the concept that gastrointestinal peptides can play a role in the regulation of cellular cytotoxicity against tumor cells, and, as mentioned earlier, palatability of food is a major stimulant of the secretion of these peptides. This should help the elderly who are more prone to malignancies. Indeed, taste and smell losses in the elderly can reduce appetite and lead to inadequate dietary intake. Although these chemosensory deficits are generally not reversible, sensory interventions including intensification of taste and odor can compensate for perceptual losses. One method for "treatment" of chemosensory losses involves sensory enhancement of foods with flavors and monosodium glutamate (MSG).

Amplification of flavor and taste can improve food palatability and acceptance, increase salivary flow and immunity, and reduce oral complaints in both sick and healthy elderly Studies, conducted by S.S. Schiffman, show the effects of sensory enhancement with flavors and/or MSG on food intake, satisfaction, immunity, and salivation in the elderly. The results of these studies indicate that amplification of taste and smell can improve food palatability and acceptance, improve lymphocyte counts, increase salivary flow and increase secretion rate of salivary immunoglobulin A (sIgA). Eating flavor-enhanced foods also led to improvement in one anthropometric measure (grip strength). In another study, the elderly residents ate flavor-enhanced foods for 3 wk. and the identical foods in unenhanced form for another 3 wk. Half of the subjects received enhanced food first and unenhanced food second; for the other half, the order was reversed. Six flavors were utilized throughout the study: roast beef, ham, natural

bacon, prime beef, maple and cheese. These flavors were primarily odors; they were virtually tasteless and contained no NaCl or sweeteners. The immune and functional improvements (i.e., increased T and B cell counts and improved grip strength) found in the study occurred as a result of intensifying the flavor of some but not all foods at a meal. Subjects ate more of the flavor-enhanced foods and less of the unenhanced foods. As a consequence, they consumed the same macro- and micronutrients on the enhanced and unenhanced arms of the study. That is, they consumed the same nutrients on both arms of the study; the only difference between the foods consumed during the enhanced and unenhanced arms was the flavor level experienced by the subjects. Yet, flavor enhancement improved immunity and grip strength! Similar results were found in an additional study that used MSG and flavors to intensify both taste and smell simultaneously. The improved immune status produced by flavor enhancement may result from one or more of the following four possibilities. First, direct neural-immune connections exist between those parts of the brain that subserve olfaction and the immune system. Thus, olfactory stimulation could boost immune function directly via these connections. Second, the elevated flavor levels may lead to greater release of digestive enzymes and produce better absorption of micronutrients. Third, there may be phytochemicals in the flavors that directly improve immunocompetence due to their biochemical actions. Fourth, flavor enhancement may improve mood, leading to reduced circulating cortisol: cortisol, the stress hormone, is known to suppress the immune status. The results of one experiment showed that application of sugar (taste alone) and flavor (taste and odor combined) to the tongue induced significantly higher secretion rates of sIgA than the application of water in both young and elderly subjects. In addition, flavor application produced significantly higher absolute concentrations of sIgA than sugar application alone. Secretion rates of sIgA in young persons were significantly higher than those in elderly persons. In another study, the increase in sIgA secretion rate for the elderly subjects at 30 and 60 min for each food with MSG was greater than that observed when the same food was consumed without MSG. The short-term increases in sIgA secretion rates in these two experiments may be due to the following: 1) the elevated salivary flow caused by reflex secretion of saliva containing sIgA, and 2) possible neural-immune interactions that induced elevated absolute concentrations of sIgA (in the flavor condition in the first experiment). Schiffman also tested flavor preferences in 13 patients who were undergoing or had recently completed chemotherapy (10 subjects) or radiotherapy (3 subjects) for breast cancer. In a single-blind study, patients were given two samples of a food to taste and were asked which one they preferred. For all items, the majority of cancer patients preferred the flavor-enhanced food to the unenhanced food. None of the patients reported an

aversion to the foods that were tested. During testing, several cancer patients indicated that the odors reminded them of pleasant times in the past. Thus, flavor amplification might potentially reduce complaints about foods, not only because they improve sensory qualities, but because they trigger pleasant memories. Odor signals are processed in the "limbic system" of the brain, which also processes emotions and memories; furthermore, this portion of the brain interacts with the immune system, which may be advantageous for cancer patients. These observations and concepts have been confirmed by others: adding flavor enhancers to the cooked meals was an effective way to improve dietary intake and body weight in elderly nursing home residents, in the Netherlands. Indeed, nutrition –and pleasure of eating- is a major factor influencing immunity in the elderly; in seniors, decreased T-cell, B-cell subsets and functions, and innate immunity are all strongly related to protein nutritional and micronutrient status. Stress after stress, and anhedonia at meals, pushes the elderly to frailty.

Sugars and fat play a unique role in the human diet. The selective choice of sugars and fat as chief energy sources seems to be influenced less by the body's energy needs than by the sensory appeal of sweet and fat-rich foods. This appeal typically holds not only across individuals, but also across cultures. Although many behavioral, social, and cultural factors play major roles in diet selection, people respond primarily to the sensory qualities of food ("**We eat only what we like**"). Some clinical studies have reported that individual food choices, and therefore the macronutrient composition of the diet, are influenced directly by the central nervous system. However, broader population-based studies point to the central role of taste in determining food selection. Survey studies have shown that the global consumption of sugars and fat is further determined by such variables as income, socioeconomic status, and the availability of sugars and fat in the food supply. Nutrition intervention strategies aimed at promoting dietary change in communities ought therefore to consider not only physical health, but also, and most importantly, the sensory pleasure response, and a wide range of demographic, economic, and sociocultural variables.

Palatable sweet ingestion produces a morphine-like analgesia in both rats and human infants. To determine whether palatable sweet ingesta induces antinociception in human adults, 60 Canadian university students (30 men, 30 women) were exposed to a pressure algometer both before and after consuming either a sweet soft drink, filtered tap water, or nothing (Experiment 1). Pain

responsivity was assessed with four pain measures: threshold, tolerance, and visual analogue scale (VAS) ratings of intensity and unpleasantness. Results showed that women who consumed either soft drink or water reported increased pain tolerance and VAS ratings at post-treatment compared with those receiving nothing. However, differences between groups were not found for men. Moreover, compared to men, women reported lower pain thresholds and tolerances and rated the pain as more intense. In Experiment 2, 40 women consumed either nothing or foods that they rated previously as palatable (chocolate-chip cookies), unpalatable (black olives), or neutral (rice cakes). Women who consumed the palatable sweet food showed increased pain tolerance compared with those receiving the unpalatable food, the neutral food, or nothing. These data demonstrated that "palatability-inducedantinociception" (PIA) occurs in human adult.

Chocolate Beats Prozac®

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Although addictive behavior is generally associated with drug and alcohol abuse or compulsive sexual activity, chocolate may evoke similar psychopharmacologic and behavioral reactions in susceptible persons. A review of the literature on chocolate cravings indicates that the hedonic appeal of chocolate (fat, sugar, texture, and aroma) is likely to be a predominant factor in such cravings. Other characteristics of chocolate, however, may be equally as important contributors to the phenomena of chocolate cravings. Chocolate may be used by some as a form of self-medication for dietary deficiencies (e.g., magnesium) or to balance low levels of neurotransmitters involved in the regulation of mood, food intake, and compulsive behaviors (e.g., serotonin and dopamine). Chocolate cravings are often episodic and fluctuate with hormonal changes just before and during the menses, which suggests a hormonal link and confirms the assumed gender-specific nature of chocolate cravings. Chocolate contains several biologically active constituents (methylxanthines, biogenic amines, and cannabinoid-like fatty acids), all of which potentially cause abnormal behaviors and psychological sensations that parallel those of other addictive substances. Most likely, a combination of chocolate's sensory characteristics, nutrient composition, and psychoactive ingredients, compounded

with monthly hormonal fluctuations and mood swings among women, will ultimately form the model of chocolate cravings. Dietetics professionals must be aware that chocolate cravings are real. The psychopharmacologic and chemosensory (beneficial) effects of chocolate must be considered when formulating recommendations for overall healthful eating and for treatment of nutritionally related health issues.

The Pleasure of Wine

In August 1943, we got an offer; Swiss peasants were recruiting children to help during the harvest. I left the camp and was hosted with other children in a barn (more, much better straw!) in Saint-Luc (Valais), a beautiful small village of the Swiss Alps. This is a good wine region. The farmer was also a vintner. He had a large underground cellar that was accessed by a short ladder; there the wine gracefully aged in huge ovoid wooden vats. You would fill your carafe from a large tap, facing you near the bottom of the vat.

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One Sunday, the farmer and his family invited friends and neighbors for lunch; the farmer gave me two carafes and told me to go to the cellar and fill one with “the best white”, the other with “the best red”. I happily obliged, and duly started tasting the

wines in order to pick up the very best. Then I woke up a few hours later, emerging from my first ethylic coma, and having missed the feast of the week, soaked by the spilled – excellent! – wine.

Wine is Health, Medicine, Pleasure, and More

Wine has been part of human culture for >6,000 years, serving dietary and socio-religious functions. It contains a range of polyphenols that have desirable biological properties; these are 5 times higher in wine than in fresh grapes; fermentation dissolves them into wine. Catechin and epicatechin peak at about 2 hours, and half-life is about 4 hours, suggesting that regular ingestion, with food, is good. Indeed, wine may confer protection against adverse effects of some foods. The list of activities of plant and wine flavonoids did not include effects on the central nervous system (CNS) up to 1990, when Paladini et al. described the existence of natural anxiolytic flavonoids. The first of these was chrysin (5,7-dihydroxyflavone), followed by apigenin (5,7,4'-trihydroxyflavone) and flavone itself. Semisynthetic derivatives of flavone obtained by introducing halogens, nitro groups or both in its molecule, give rise to high affinity ligands for the benzodiazepine receptor, active in vivo; 6,3'-dinitroflavone, for example, is an anxiolytic drug 30 times more potent than diazepam (Valium®).

But wine, or wine-derived molecules, is/are not primarily tranquilizer(s). Wine is first-and-above all **Pleasure**. As Robert M. Parker Jr. says it “Part of life is to live it and enjoy it and seize the moment that you find particularly pleasing. ’Fettuccine Alfredo is dangerous for your health. Kung pao chicken will destroy your life’. Holy shit, the first week it's one of the classics of Italian cooking, the next week it's one of the staples of Chinese cooking! These are the people who do studies that your carry-out Chinese meals are saturated in fat.... I'd just like to meet them! I mean, what do they do for pleasure? Pleasure is defined by dining and let us get rid of the Pleasure Police [CSPI] whose business is “the taboo of the week”.

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But the enjoyment of wine is influenced by the shape of the wine glass. This is not only the demonstration done by Georg Riedel, but the result of a study conducted on 99 healthy volunteers: egg-shaped glasses, compared to “tulip” or “beaker” glasses appear to deliver higher intensity and higher complexity of wine bouquet.

And that's why wine lovers learn to taste. We know that the effort we put into understanding and appreciating wine--as opposed to simply enjoying it (or its psychotropic effects) --pays big dividends. Really tasting wine adds an extra dimension to the basic daily routines of eating and drinking. It turns obligation into pleasure, a daily necessity into a celebration of life.

The Pleasure of Music

My parents had decided in 1941 that I was gifted with a musical ear. They chased a small violin, and a music teacher who was literally starving. Ensued years of martyrdom, for the violin, everyone's ears, the rare teachers who dared to approach me, and me: I wanted to read Jules Verne, Jack London, anything, but I hated the violin. Unfortunately, I was somewhat gifted and started collecting awards whenever I was thrown into a contest. What I had discovered was the power of music, the enchantment, the visceral emotions, the tears and the joys. Later, in the late forties, jazz broke the mold. I got into it and am still living through it.

Music Helps: College students were exposed to: either 30' of tone/click, or 30' of silence, or 30' of Muzak, or 30' of radio broadcast (rap). Saliva samples were collected before/after each exposure. The increase of s-IgA was significant after Muzak only! An English group examined whether an acute manipulation of mood to induce negative hedonic tone would be downregulatory, as in the chronic stress paradigm and further, whether induction of positive mood might have opposite effects. Two separate experiments were conducted. In the first, mood manipulation was by mental recall and in the second by music. For both sIgA concentration and sIgA secretion rate there was a significant elevation in response to the mood manipulation by recall regardless of hedonic tone. There was some evidence that for sIgA secretion rate the response was more pronounced for positive mood. Mood induction by music also resulted in significant elevations in sIgA concentration and secretion rate and responses were not distinguished by mood valence. None of the mood induction procedures was associated with changes in free cortisol. In these studies, the authors found no evidence that transient lowering of mood was downregulatory for salivary sIgA. The predominant finding was of sIgA mobilization.

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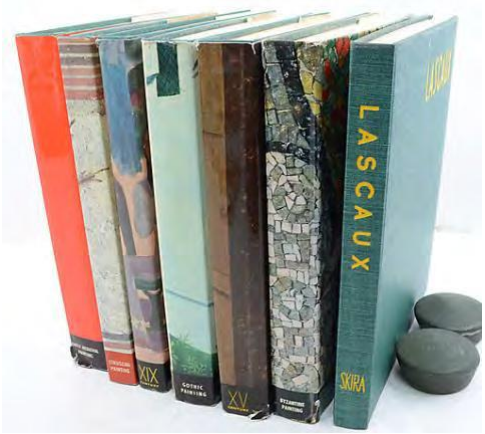
Drum circles have been part of healing rituals in many cultures throughout the world since antiquity. Although drum circles are gaining increased interest as a complementary therapeutic strategy in the traditional medical arena, limited scientific data documenting biological benefits associated with percussion activities exist. The group of B.B. Bittman attempted to determine the role of group-drumming music therapy as a composite activity with potential for alteration of stress-related hormones and enhancement of specific immunologic measures associated with natural killer cell activity and cell-mediated immunity at the Mind-Body Wellness Center, an outpatient medical facility in Meadville, PA. A total of 111 age- and sex-matched volunteer subjects (55 men and 56 women, with a mean age of 30.4 years) were recruited. Six preliminary supervised groups were studied using various control and experimental paradigms designed to separate drumming components for the ultimate determination of a single experimental model, including 2 control groups (resting and listening) as well as 4 group- drumming experimental models (basic, impact, shamanic, and composite). The composite drumming group using a music therapy protocol was selected based on preliminary statistical analysis, which demonstrated immune modulation in a direction opposite to that expected with the classical stress response. The final experimental design included the original composite drumming group plus 50 additional age- and sex-matched volunteer subjects who were randomly assigned to participate in group drumming or control sessions. Group drumming resulted in increased dehydroepiandrosterone-to-cortisol ratios, increased natural killer cell activity, and increased lymphokine-activated killer cell activity without alteration in plasma interleukin 2 or interferon-gamma, or in the Beck Anxiety Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory II. Drumming is a complex composite intervention the potential to modulate specific neuroendocrine and neuroimmune parameters in a direction opposite to that expected with the classic stress response.

A group from McGill University, in Canada, used positron emission tomography to study neural mechanisms underlying intensely pleasant emotional responses to music. Cerebral blood flow changes were measured in response to subject-selected music that elicited the highly pleasurable experience of "shivers-down-the-spine" or "chills." Subjective reports of chills were accompanied by changes in heart rate, electromyogram, and respiration. As intensity of these chills increased, cerebral blood flow increases and decreases were observed in brain regions thought to be involved in reward/motivation, emotion, and arousal, including ventral striatum, midbrain, amygdala, orbitofrontal cortex, and ventral medial prefrontal cortex. These brain structures are known to be active in response to other euphoria-inducing stimuli, such as food, sex, and drugs of abuse. This finding links music with biologically relevant, survival-related stimuli via their common recruitment of brain circuitry involved in pleasure and reward.

The Pleasure of Art

I started with music, but in fact I should have with painting, and all the visual arts. My mother was a remarkable artist. At the age of 19, she was sent from Warsaw (Poland) to the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. She was very talented. She mastered painting, decorative arts of lots of supports and media, ceramics, weaving and knitting, and the rest. She designed special fabrics for the high fashion like Paul Poiret, and painted theater stage sets. We wore unique sweaters, most of the time ashamed of them since we were singled out; but we were also proud: "Vive la Différence!" She painted beautiful watercolors that still serve as a journal through our flights during the Second World War; and she managed to keep them!

She had known and befriended the artists who flocked to Paris between the two WWs, and, later, they came to our house: ManéKatz, Zadkine, Jean and Raoul Dufy (a patient of my father's), Matisse, and many, many more whose names I have forgotten. They brought her their drawings, lithographs, paintings, sculptures. My adolescence was surrounded by art. My mother also collected the first "coffee table" art books published in Switzerland by Albert Skira; I spent innumerable hours reading, absorbing, and memorizing the stories, lives and pictures of the greatest modern artists.



I still do and have a hard time choosing between a great restaurant and a great museum; fortunately, recently great museums host great restaurants!

The Pleasure of Sex

This book is dedicated to all women, the ones I loved, the ones I would have loved, the ones I may love in a not-too-distant future. Sex is my driving force. I always think of a woman, of her body, of her scent, of her taste, of her moaning, of her touch, of her.

(More) Sex is Good (Exercise) - © The Guardian

I once caressed the idea of using sex as a substitute to gym, and an interesting approach to weight loss. The sexual response is a form of exercise that has strong biological and evolutionary components. Few studies have focused upon sexual behavior as exercise. There are parallels between the orgasmic response and exercise. Physiological bases of the sexual response help to explain individual differences in sexual behavior and the well-being that often accompanies states of passionate love, addiction and exercise. Studies suggest that sexual activity is associated with well-being and longevity, yet many health and exercise professionals fail to take account of sexual activity in advancing exercise programs and executing studies; that is, the so-called Ostrich Effect persists. Investigators need to separate the passionate love stage of relationships that are biologically based and last 3 to 4 years from the later stages of long term committed partnerships in which sexual activity continues as a form of exercise, competence expression and fun. Besides people who have sex once or twice weekly have higher levels of sIgA than people who have sex <1/week, or never al all. People who perform sex >3 times/week have low levels of sIgA –the latter may be related to stress. And

sexual pleasure controls pain: in 2 studies with 10 women each, vaginal self-stimulation significantly increased the threshold to detect and tolerate painful finger compression, but did not significantly affect the threshold to detect innocuous tactile stimulation. In one study, 6 of the women perceived the vaginal stimulation as producing pleasure. During that condition, the pain tolerance threshold increased significantly by 36.8% and the pain detection threshold increased significantly by 53%. A second study utilized other types of stimuli. Vaginal self-stimulation perceived as pressure significantly increased the pain tolerance threshold by 40.3% and the pain detection threshold by 47.4%. In the second study, when the vaginal stimulation was self-applied in a manner that produced orgasm, the pain tolerance threshold and pain detection threshold increased significantly by 74.6% and 106.7% respectively, while the tactile threshold remained unaffected. A variety of control conditions, including various types of distraction, did not significantly elevate pain or tactile thresholds. B. Whipple and B.R. Komisaruk conclude that in women, vaginal self-stimulation decreases pain sensitivity, but does not affect tactile sensitivity. This effect is apparently not due to painful or non-painful distraction. Lesbians watching sexually stimulating videos had an increase in γ-IFN production paralleling the number of orgasms. The rise in endorphin rate is prominently associated with orgasm(s), and useful enzymes (e.g., depolymerases) appear in the vaginal secretions when there is an orgasm.

Does semen have antidepressant properties? Ney hypothesized in 1986 that semen may have an effect on mood in women. Many of the compounds present in human semen, e.g., testosterone, are absorbed through the vaginal epithelium, and testosterone is absorbed more quickly that way than through the skin. Gordon G. Gallup Jr. and his group demonstrated that the level of depressive symptoms among sexually active female college students (SUNY Albany) is related to the consistency of condom use. Females who had sex without condoms, and therefore would be more likely to have semen in their reproductive tract, evidenced fewer depressive symptoms. Consistent with the hypothesis that there may be something about semen that antagonizes depression, females who were having sex without condoms also showed lower depression scores than those who were abstaining from sex altogether. There was no difference in the (increased) depression scores between condom users and abstainers, demonstrating that it is not sexual activity per se that antagonizes depression. It would be interesting to investigate the possible antidepressant effects of oral ingestion of semen, or semen applied through anal intercourse (or both) among both heterosexual couples as well as homosexual males.

The Pleasure of Caring

Of course, I treated patients. Every physician does. I first **cared** for them. Our medicine chest was tiny when I was in medical school, in the early-mid fifties. Most were later proven to bring "comfort", i.e., be placebos. Therefore, we touched, hugged, listened, and kissed the cheek or the brow when we parted.

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My father was exceptional at caring. He –and I later on- had a large number of patients who were survivors of the Holocaust. I assisted him. He would first embrace them, and never hide the tears he was (I still do) shedding. Time was not an issue; neither was money. Trust, understanding, digging for the clue, talk, listening, common acquaintances, memories good or bad; then the touching, the hand warmed first by rubbing, the attention to modesty, the caress of the tattoo; he was never tired, always available. He cared for every single human being.

The Pleasure of Healing

My friend Dr. Philippe Stora, a rheumatologist, once told me: “You are a healer”. I am not sure. What I aim at is teaming with a patient and find the very best solution to her global problems within her community, beliefs, family, culture, and financial means. I strongly believe that medicine is a vocation, an art, a science in the making, and a need to the ones who are the most...in need. Healing is what the patient will ultimately tell you.

It will come from a very subtle and complex set of measures: care certainly; trust; belief; elimination of guilt; empowerment of the individual and close relationships; support from the community with rapid (re)insertion; and many more. I saw members of the Libyan armed forces, demented aggressive criminals, French draftees back from torture missions in Algeria with delirium tremens, pedophile priests, battered prostitutes, Marquesan sailors who wanted to lift heavy crates with a fractured limb, the future king (now defunct) of Saudi Arabia, the president of Lebanon, lots of homeless with lice and chilblains; I saw the poor, the abandoned, the good, the bad, the evil. I tried to heal all of them, each one at a time, each one as a part of myself.

The Pleasure of Health

Healthism is the new religion. The problem is that no one can really define health. The World Health Organization has a typical arcane bureaucratic definition. Most physicians will tell you that health is the absence of disease; then what about illness, or sickness? But everyone wants to be healthy. At any price. Billions of dollars are spent on health, with desperately poor results. Whole libraries and bookstores fill with health-oriented or health-supportive literature. The Internet is replete with health(y) recipes. After sex, health is the feast of spam. And none of this works. None.

Health is the pleasure of feeling healthy, well, moving, doing everything you want without pain, restriction or trouble. Your body is yours; it is happy; it is silent and does not complain. Health is beaming pleasure in your body, your mind and your spirit.

Moderate, a.k.a. Pleasurable, Exercise vs. Exhaustive Exercise

Acute exercise is followed by a mobilization of white blood cells, mainly induced by increased levels of catecholamines and cortisol, both stress-related. NK-cells react the most intensively; they can increase fivefold after intensive exercise. Additionally, a weak acute-phase reaction occurs. Most of the time, these changes normalize over twenty-four hours. The humoral immune system may react differently from the pre-exercise levels up to seventy-two hours. Repeated physical exercise, which is typical in sports, is followed only by small changes of immunologic parameters under conditions of rest. Epidemiological studies give clues that the rate of upper respiratory tract infections in athletes can be described by a j-shaped curve. Moderately active subjects have the lowest rate of infection.

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The influence of exercise on health creates mainly functional changes. But after eccentric exercise immunological cells can be seen in the muscle, as they try to remove destructed tissue. A group at the University of Paderborn, Germany, investigated whether moderate or exhaustive endurance exercise influences cytokine levels in whole-blood culture supernatants after stimulation.

Moderate exercise influenced the IFN-gamma production (PHA-stimulated), which **increased** significantly from 974 (391) pg./ml before exercise to 1450 (498) pg./ml 24 h later. Thirty minutes after **exhaustive** exercise the IFN-gamma level in the supernatants (SEB-stimulated) was **significantly decreased** (from 14470 (11840) pg./ml before exercise to 6000 (4950) pg/ml after exercise). The IL-1beta and TNF-alpha production per monocyte was also **significantly reduced after exhaustive exercise.**

After intense long-term exercise, the immune response is characterized by concomitant impairment of the cellular compartment, and increased inflammation. Thus, low concentrations of lymphocytes, suppressed natural immunity, suppressed lymphocyte proliferation, and suppressed levels of secretory IgA in saliva are found simultaneously with high levels of circulating proinflammatory and anti-inflammatory cytokines. The underlying mechanisms are multifactorial and include neuroendocrinological (stress) and metabolic factors. The clinical consequences of the exercise induced immune changes have not formally been identified, but the exercise effect on lymphocyte dynamics and immune function may be linked to the exercise effects on resistance to infections, frequency of allergies and malignancies, and the cytokine response may be linked to muscle damage or muscle cell growth. Moderate, pleasurable exercise across the life span seems to increase resistance to upper respiratory tract infections, whereas repeated strenuous.

The Pleasure of Love

Love is more, much more than sex. Love is happiness mixed with enlightenment, pleasure and a “je ne sais quoi” that defies definition and remains exclusively yours. Your love is no one else’s love. Love is given. It makes you feel walking on clouds, dancing in the rain, cuddling in warmth, beaming in the night, feeling so –oh! so-much better. I do not know if other mammals experience human love; I do not think so. Biology tells us that love is possibly the most effective and efficient form of pleasure to benefit health, and singularly our immune response.

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B.R. Komisaruk and B. Whipple define “love” as one's having stimulation that one desires. The nature of the stimulation can range on a continuum from the most abstract cognitive, to the most direct sensory, forms. Thus, this definition of love encompasses having an emotional bond with a person for whom one yearns, as well as having sensory stimulation that one desires. They propose a neural mechanism by which deprivation of love may generate endogenous, compensatory sensory stimulation that manifests itself as psychosomatic illness. In addition, they also propose a neuroendocrine mechanism underlying sexual response and orgasm. The latter includes vaginocervical sensory pathways to the brain that can produce analgesia, release oxytocin, and/or bypass the spinal cord via the vagus nerve. They present evidence of the existence of non-genital orgasms, which suggests that genital orgasm is a special case of a more pervasive orgasmic process. The better our understanding of love, the greater is our respect for the significance and potency of its role in mental and physical health.

The Case for Pleasure

"We are what we eat" ...and drink. What patients eat, drink, consume will either help or worsen their condition. Food is medicine, and many medicines were (are) foods, as we know from the Asian traditions. But the single one **major** variable that **never** appears in any medical study is the **role of pleasure.**

Stress vs. pleasure

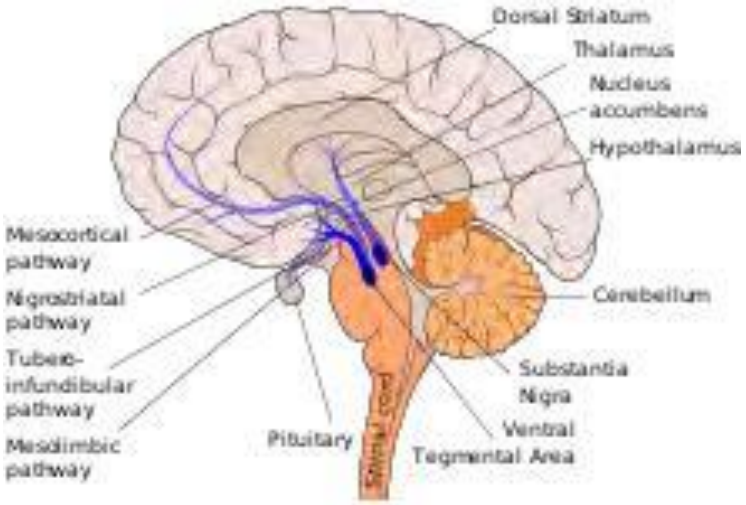
The notion that stress makes you sick and belief makes you well has been part of the popular culture for thousands of years. These ideas are universal throughout the cultures. In Western culture this notion held away from before the time of Hippocrates, when the Greeks built temples to Asclepios, the god of healing, all the way through the modern times when Norman Cousins and Norman Vincent Peale have espoused the idea that laughter and positive thinking heals. But recent studies cast doubts on previous assumptions pointing to hypercortisolemia causing immune suppression. It is now apparent that adaptive changes result from chronic stress and depression that lead to a hypoactivity of the glucocorticoid receptors on immune cells and in limbic regions of the brain. Depression and Anhedonia are associated with hypersecretion of proinflammatory cytokines and hyperactivity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis impacts health by modulating the rate of cellular aging. There is now evidence that psychological stress –both perceived stress and chronicity of stress- is significantly associated with higher oxidative stress, lower telomerase activity, and shorter telomere length, which are known determinants of cell senescence and longevity, in healthy premenopausal women. Women with the highest level of perceived stress have telomeres shorter on average by the equivalent of at least one decade (9-17y) of additional aging compared to low stress women! The observation of people aging suddenly after major psychological stress, e.g., bombing of Dresden on February 13, 1945, has now a biological confirmation.

A positive attitude and an active coping style may be very important to keep a healthy immune response. This is of particular relevance for HIV+ subjects. A study was conducted at the University of Miami, Florida, to examine the hypothesis that a psychosocial model was associated with natural killer cell cytotoxicity (NKCC) in HIV-1 infection. A sample of 62 HIV-1 seropositive homosexual men at CDC stages II

and III were given a psychosocial battery assessing life stressors, social support, and coping style. Active coping style was directly and positively associated with NKCC, and trends toward a negative relationship of life stressors and a buffering effect of social support on lives stressors were also observed.
The results suggest that (1) control variables should be included with psychosocial models and that (2) psychosocial factors, especially active coping, may have a deterrent effect on loss of NK cell function. Active coping style may merit a specific focus in future research of life stressors and the immune system.

Hence, can guilt make you sick? To answer this question, G. Lowe et al. conducted a study: before producing saliva samples for sIgA assay, 30 subjects listed their pleasurable activities and rated them in terms of pleasure and guilt. Guess what: levels of sIgA were higher in those subjects with high ratios of pleasure-guilt scores!

Pleasure Pathways and Possible Addiction



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The reward/reinforcement circuitry of the mammalian brain consists of synoptically interconnected neurons associated with the medial forebrain bundle, linking the ventral tegmental area, nucleus accumbens, and ventral pallidum. Electrical stimulation of this circuit supports intense self-stimulation in animals and, in humans, produces intense pleasure or euphoria. This circuit is strongly implicated in the neural substrates of drug addiction and in such addiction-related phenomena as withdrawal dysphoria and craving. But this circuit is also implicated in the

pleasures produced by natural rewards (e.g., food, sex). Cannabinoids are euphorigenic in humans and have addictive liability in vulnerable persons but were long considered "anomalous" drugs of abuse, lacking pharmacological interaction with these brain reward substrates. It is now clear, however, that cannabinoids activate these brain substrates and influence reward-related behaviors.

Tobacco is worse than anthrax in the social psyche of the healthists. However, a recent Swedish study confirms that the herb of Jean Nicot can reduce the allergic burden in both children and adults. The method was a cross-sectional study of present and former smoking habits in relation to atopic disorders from data on 6909 young and middle-aged adults (16-49 years) and their 4472 children (3-15 years) from the Swedish Survey of Living Conditions in 1996-97. The authors observed that the prevalence of allergic asthma and allergic rhino-conjunctivitis decreased, in a dose-response manner (P = 0.03 and P = 0.004, respectively), with increasing exposure to tobacco smoke in the adult study population. This pattern was little changed when potential confounders (sex, age, education, domicile, country of birth) were entered into a multivariate analysis: the adjusted odds ratio (OR) for allergic rhino-conjunctivitis was 0.5 (0.4-0.7) for those who smoked at least 20 cigarettes a day and OR 0.7 (0.6-0.9) for those smoking 10-19 cigarettes, compared with those who reported that they never had smoked Former smokers had a tendency for a slightly lower risk: OR 0.9 (0.8-1.0). In a multivariate analysis, children of mothers who smoked at least 15 cigarettes a day tended to have lower odds for suffering from allergic rhino-conjunctivitis, allergic asthma, atopic eczema and food allergy, compared to children of mothers who had never smoked (ORs 0.6-0.7). Children of fathers who had smoked at least 15 cigarettes a day had a similar tendency (ORs 0.7-0.9). This study demonstrates an association between current exposure to tobacco smoke and a low risk for atopic disorders in smokers themselves and a similar tendency in their children. Smoking habits and atopic disorder in parents should not be considered independent variables in epidemiological studies of the connection between exposure to tobacco smoke and atopy in children.

What makes people happy in 2024?

A team of psychologists and economists reported in Science what many of us know but don't always admit: watching TV is a very enjoyable way to pass the time, but taking care of children is often as much fun as housework. The study asked 909 women living in Texas to use a novel questionnaire that probes the moment-to-moment emotions that constitute an ordinary day: the Day Reconstruction Method, with a diary listing everything from reading the newspaper in the morning to arguing with coworkers over lunch or falling asleep with the socks on. Each activity was relived the next day and rated using 12 scales: how the subjects felt at the time, whether criticized, hassled, worried or warm, friendly, and happy. In general, the group had a slow start but soon experienced mild pleasure that increased through the day, with bouts of anger, anxiety or frustration. Sex, socializing with friends, and relaxing were rated most enjoyable; while commuting, housework, or facing a boss, were the least pleasurable. These women rated TV-watching high on the list, ahead of shopping and talking on the phone.

One of the most consistent findings in the study was how little difference money made (these data would probably look very different in a survey conducted in Hong Kong!). Job security, too, had little influence (this would be heresy in France!). And, contrary to previous research, it was found that divorcees reported being slightly more cheerful during the day than did married women (great news for the Christian Right!).

When did Pleasure Start?

Michel Cabanac answered this question. Gentle handling of mammals (rats, mice) and lizards (Iguana), but not of frogs (Rana) and fish (Carassius), elevated the set-point for body temperature (i.e., produced an emotional fever) achieved only behaviorally in lizards. Heart rate, another detector of emotion in mammals, was also. accelerated by gentle handling, from ca. 70 beats/min to ca. 110 beats/min in lizards. This tachycardia faded in about 10 min. The same handling did not significantly modify the frogs' heart rates. The absence of emotional tachycardia in frogs and its presence in lizards (as well as in mammals), together with the emotional fever exhibited by mammals and reptiles, but not by frogs or fish, would suggest that emotion emerged

in the evolutionary lineage between amphibians and reptiles. Such a conclusion would imply that reptiles possess consciousness with its characteristic affective dimension, pleasure. The role of sensory pleasure in decision-making was therefore verified in iguanas placed in a motivational conflict. To be able to reach a bait (lettuce), the iguanas had to leave a warm refuge, provided with standard food, and venture into a cold environment. The results showed that lettuce was not necessary to the iguanas and that they traded off the palatability of the bait against the disadvantage of the cold. Thus, the behavior of the iguanas was likely to be produced, as it is in humans, through the maximization of sensory pleasure. Altogether, these results may indicate that the first elements of mental experience emerged between amphibians and reptiles.

The Commercial Exploitation & Abuse of Pleasure

The only natural thing in a diet cola is the water –and maybe some of the caramel. The active ingredient is phosphoric acid (pH: 2.8); it will dissolve a nail in <4 days. It washes calcium away from bones. To carry the concentrate, trucks must place the **hazardous** material card –just like explosives! Distributors use it to clean their trucks engines. But Coke and Pepsi have marketing and promotional budgets that exceed the GNP of most countries. With their collection of soft drinks, they are the major vectors for the perversion of taste, and subsequent addiction to the sweet taste.

Adam Drewnowski studied preferences and cravings for sweet high-fat foods observed among obese and bulimic patients, assuming that they may involve the endogenous opioid peptide system. The opioid antagonist naloxone, opioid agonist butorphanol, and saline placebo were administered by intravenous infusion to 14 female binge eaters and 12 normal-weight controls. Eight of the binge eaters were obese. During infusion, the subjects tasted 20 sugar/fat mixtures and were allowed to select and consume snack foods of varying sugar and fat content.

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Naloxone reduced taste preferences relative to baseline in both binge eaters and controls. Total caloric intake from snacks was significantly reduced by naloxone in binge eaters but not in controls. This reduction was most pronounced for sweet high-fat foods such as cookies or chocolate. No consistent effects on taste preferences or food intakes were observed with butorphanol. Hence, endogenous opioid peptides may well be involved in mediating taste responses and preferences for palatable foods, notably those rich in sugar and fat. Then, just remember these facts: ketchup at McDonalds is much sweeter; it contains much heavier corn syrup. Only soft drinks are served. Vegetable oils "boil" the fries, and potatoes have a glycemic index that is much higher than sucrose. Based on several studies, Bartley G. Hoebel, of Princeton University, could claim that Fast Food is "**as addictive as heroin**"!

Another major evidence came from Children's Hospital, in Boston, MA: D.S Ludwig and his group examined the relation between obesity in children – "the new American epidemic"- and the consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks. They enrolled 548 ethnically diverse schoolchildren (age 11.7 years, SD 0.8) from public schools in four Massachusetts communities, and studied them prospectively for 19 months from October 1995, to May 1997. They examined the association between baseline and change in consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks (the independent variables), and difference in measures of obesity, with linear and logistic regression analyses adjusted for potentially confounding variables and clustering of results within schools. They found that for each additional serving of sugar-sweetened drink consumed, both body mass index (BMI) (mean 0.24 kg/m2; 95% CI 0.10-0.39; p=0.03) and frequency of obesity (odds ratio 1.60; 95% CI 1.14-2.24; p=0.02) increased after adjustment for anthropometric, demographic, dietary, and lifestyle variables. Baseline consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks was also independently associated with change in BMI (mean 0.18 kg/m2 for each daily serving; 95% CI 0.09-0.27; p=0.02). Hence, consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks –and only that- is associated with obesity in children.

The evidence a contrario was demonstrated recently in the U.K.: a targeted, school-based education program produced at 12 months a reduction in the number of soft drinks consumed and was associated with a reduction in the number of overweight and obese children (-0.2% in the active group; +7.5% in the control group). Small changes in energy intake and output seem to have a major impact on obesity risk. The intervention in these six primary schools in southwest England was simple, involved no teacher training, and could easily be implemented by a health educator working in several schools. Schools can play an important role in obesity prevention

in children. Then, if sugar-sweetened, calorie-laden drinks are the culprits, why not switch to quasi- zero calorie sweeteners, e.g., aspartame? Again, the group of Marian Apfelbaum looked into the potential differences –and benefits- of aspartame drinks[65]. Since it has been claimed that sucrose intake induces a rise in beta-endorphins, and in an attempt to discriminate between the sensorial and metabolic effects of sucrose intake in this process, the effects of two chocolate drinks were compared: one sweetened with 50 g of sucrose, the other with 80 mg of aspartame. Plasma beta-endorphin concentrations were more elevated after the aspartame drink than after sucrose or fasting, while insulin increased after drinking as much with aspartame as with sucrose. The authors suggest that the increase in beta-endorphin after aspartame-sweetened chocolate is related to insulin secretion in the absence of marked changes in blood glucose or with a direct effect of aspartame itself on beta-endorphin liberation. In other words, aspartame is potentially more addictive than sugar, and will increase the risk of obesity!

Another –growing- area of crass commercialism and depressing growth is the distribution of wine. One must not forget that the great appeal of wine is that it is a unique, distinctive, fascinating beverage and different every time one drinks it. But current industrial "winners" are fail-safe, technically correct, split-polished – in short, wines for fans of Velveeta cheese, Muzak, and frozen dinners.

Resting the Case for Pleasure:

"No sane man can afford to dispense with debilitating pleasures; no ascetic can be considered reliably sane. Hitler was the archetype of the abstentious man. When the other krauts saw him drink water in the Beer Hall, they should have known he was not to be trusted!" (A. Liebling)

Pleasure is not an "extra", or bonus bringing a little more soul to certain of our acts; it is a fundamental part of animal life. It is just as difficult to define as spirit, but nonetheless man is very conscious of it; it intervenes in relation with "need" in the regulation of major homeostatic functions.

Pleasure is a potent drive inducing forms of behavior adapted to physiological needs, especially in the case of temperature regulation and food-and-water intake. Subjects try to maximize their pleasure –just like rats! Sensory pleasure is an incentive to useful behavior, and maximization of pleasure the answer to physiological conflicts –a.k.a. stress.

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In AEON recently, Sam Dresser wrote an essay titled ***How to think about pleasure***. Here it is, slightly edited:

Sir Joshua Reynolds famous portrait of Dr Johnson (Rex)

> Over breakfast one April day in 1778, James Boswell asked Samuel Johnson why he gave up booze. Dr Johnson replied that he didn't like to lose power over himself but assured his friend that he would one day drink again when he grew old (he was 68 at the time). Boswell replied: *'I think, Sir, you once said to me, that not to drink wine was a great deduction from life.'* To which Dr Johnson answered: '*It is a diminution of pleasure, to be sure; but I do not say a diminution of happiness. There is more happiness in being rational*.'
>
> It is a common notion, even in our own day, that pleasure is in some sense a distraction from happiness – or that it doesn't lead to the kind of happiness that *really matters*. Pleasure, in and of itself, is 'lower' than the real heavy hitters, such as Truth and Virtue and Wisdom and God, those hallowed founts of *authentic* happiness. It is universal – indeed inherent – that we humans are drawn to pleasure. Yet pleasure-seeking itself is often seen as an indulgence, and therefore rings with a kind of selfishness, even a kind of confusion. Pleasure doesn't last, the idea goes, but Truth does, or Rationality does, or Wisdom does, and so those are the things that we ought to seek.

PLEASURE IS UNIQUELY HUMAN

Whenever and wherever they are found, moralists and their dreary ilk often describe their own times as characterized by debauched hedonism. But does it accurately describe our time? Are we in the thrall of a love affair with pleasure? I don't think so. Even if more people are more comfortable than they used to be, it's still hard to admit to doing something pleasurable *just because* it's pleasurable. More often, pleasure is excused as a little reward, a diversion, a break from the demands of the 'real world'. Pleasure is something that will allow you to work harder, to catch your breath before returning to the turmoils of life. Searching for pleasure for pleasure's sake is an act tinged with shame and, when it's admitted to, excuses ought be made.

Lord Byron gave our tense relationship with pleasure a memorable couplet: '*O pleasure! you're indeed a pleasant thing / Although one must be damn'd for you, no doubt*.' Those who give in to pleasure have often been compared, unkindly, to animals. The Greek Stoic Epictetus told those who identified pleasure with goodness to go '*lead the life of a worm, of which you judged yourself worthy: eat and drink, and enjoy women, and ease yourself, and snore.'* Friedrich Nietzsche located a being that, for him, was perhaps even lower than the worm: '*Man does not strive for pleasure,'* he wrote. *'Only the Englishman does.*'

This isn't true of all pleasures, however. The trouble for Dr Johnson, as he was quick to explain, was '*sensual pleasure. When a man says, he had pleasure with a woman, he does not mean conversation, but something of a very different nature.'* (You can almost see the wink on his vast face.) The pleasures he disdains are the bodily pleasures, the ones we get from aged whisky and taking off your boots after a long hike. The pleasures that count, for Dr Johnson and for many other thinkers, are the pleasures of the mind. These are the pleasures that are pure, unmarred by the Earth. They're to be kept clean and separate from the pleasures of the body, which are for the lower sorts of people. Or, as Dr Johnson rather flatly put it: *'[T]he greatest part of men are gross*.'

Pleasure is a surprisingly slippery idea, surprising because it seems so obvious what it is. But trying to actually nail it down is like nailing down a cloud. Regardless, that makes it more important to reflect on pleasure – its value, its nature, and the places that people have found it. My hope is that, by thinking through what pleasure is, by analyzing and probing and querying it, perhaps you'll be more likely to find it in the places you least expect (but no promises, of course).

Pleasure is everywhere and yet it's hard to work out quite what it is

The sheer variety of ways that people procure pleasure is unsettling, as well as a testament to the plasticity of our species. The differences can be small – I can't understand why people like to watch golf – and the differences can be great, especially across cultural and temporal gulfs – the pleasure people once got in attending the afternoon execution seems, to me, a bit odd.

Think of pleasure in your own life. What is common to all of the things that give you pleasure? The throughline between warm scarves and charity work and calling your grandmother; between the cool side of the pillow, the sad-happiness of nostalgia, the pop of a champagne bottle opening – what could it be other than that these are all, in their way, pleasing? So, the question is: if

pleasure can be found in all these sundry ways, then what *is* it? And the most common answer is a tad ho-hum: stuff that feels good. Stuff that you like. The experiences that make you say: '*Yep!* There *it is*.'

Many philosophers have accepted this, or a version of it, and have taken it to mean that there's not a whole lot more to be said about the nature of pleasure (moralising about how others go about *getting* pleasure, of course, is a different story). Pleasure is what it is. Its very heterogeneity, its inconceivable variety, has led many to conclude that it's an elementary component of our existence, or an absolutely simple experience. Edmund Burke said it was so simple it was '*incapable of definition*'. John Locke held that pleasure '*cannot be described … the way of knowing [pleasure] is … only by experience*.'

This view of pleasure as unanalyzable, it seems to me, makes the nature of pleasure even stranger given its ubiquity in our lives. Can it really just be, as William James held, that 'pleasures are generally associated with beneficial … experiences? Does *that* definition truly exhaust pleasure? Maybe. When a significant number of philosophers, usually a loquacious bunch, throw up their hands and say that pleasure is too simple to describe, you know that the idea is an odd one. As Elizabeth Anscombe once wrote, the idea of pleasure even '*reduced Aristotle to sheer babble'*, and she was right, as far as I can tell.

Perhaps the problem, as so often, lies with language. Pleasure occupies a prime position in a very crowded constellation. Nearby, you'll find joy, delight, happiness, satisfaction and, perhaps a bit further on, ecstasy, euphoria, exaltation, bliss. Pleasure might just be stretched too thin, operating as a kind of catch-all for all the fine gradations of positive experience. (Plato thought so.) But, if asked *what it is* that makes an experience positive, I would be hard pressed not to fall back and say, well, it's the experiences that give me pleasure.

The pleasures of the mind are good, the pleasures of the body, not so much

Nowadays, many philosophers enjoy delicate concept carving, in which definitions are given so precisely that no counterexamples could be found. Ideas are divided and subdivided, and *isms* blossom and war with one another. But, traditionally, pleasure was rather bluntly cleaved into the two kinds of pleasures that I mentioned earlier: bodily pleasures and the pleasures of the mind. The division of pleasure mirrored the division of a person: the body was separate from the mind or the intellect or the soul, or whatever you would like to call that thing that makes you *you* (but isn't your body). Bodily pleasures include easing into a warm bath, Arizona Iced Tea, and vigorous masturbation; while among the pleasures of the mind are imagining retribution on your enemies (and maybe your friends), feeling at one with nature, contemplating the higher truths and, naturally for philosophers, philosophy – which has often been called the highest pleasure.
Why is it that the bodily pleasures have accrued such a poor reputation? Plato, as usual, had the first, very loud, say on the matter. His views shift over the course of the dialogues, but some general themes stand out. Bodily pleasure, he says, is often connected to pain and, because pain is a bad thing, so too is bodily pleasure.

PLEASURE IS UNIQUELY HUMAN

The relationship between pleasure and pain is intimate and tempestuous indeed. Plato said that sometimes you feel pleasure precisely when you're relieved of a pain. Before Socrates was executed, he noticed that the bonds that he was kept in hurt him, but once released '*pleasure seem[ed] to be following*'. Bodily pleasures can also straightforwardly lead to pain, in the case of repetition or overindulgence. If I have one brownie, I'm feeling pretty good about things, but if I have 50, I'm in a dark place, re-examining my life decisions. Finally, pleasure also usually comes from fulfilling some desire. But Plato considered desires themselves painful, because they identify what in our lives is lacking. As Emily Fletcher put it in her excellent analysis: *'[W]e always experience pleasure against a backdrop of pain.*'

Bodily pleasures also receive the brunt of the blame for leading people astray, and this is Plato's other criticism (which would be taken up with gusto by later Christian moralists seeking to shape the actions of others). This is the idea that bodily pleasure, and the seeking of bodily pleasure, produces false beliefs because, through bodily pleasure, the body comes to seem more important than the soul (the false belief par excellence for Plato). In another foreshadowing of the Christian view, Plato wrote in the *Phaedo* that your body is the '*prison*' of your soul. There's a fast and essential distinction between the two, and a struggle between them as well. Whenever you indulge yourself in the pleasures of the flesh, you become '*an accomplice in [your] own imprisonment'* because it gives you the misguided impression that this fleshy, soul-entombing jail is somehow a good thing. *'[E]very pleasure and pain provides*,' Plato went on, '*another nail to rivet the soul to the body and to weld them together. It makes the soul corporeal, so that it necessarily believes the truth is what the body says it is*.' The soul is the way to truth, and therefore the body and its pleasures are distractions leading to falsity and confusion.

The pleasures of the mind, however, are free of most, if not all, of the blemishes that make bodily pleasures unworthy of philosophers. The pleasures of the mind are '*pure*'. They're usually unconnected in any intrinsic way to pain, and they have to do with the soul, which bears upon your inevitable journey into the afterlife. Plato thought that the greatest pleasure of the mind is the pleasure of learning – particularly of the virtues. By avoiding the pleasures of the flesh and instead learning of the virtue and wisdom, your soul will attain '*its own ornaments, namely, moderation, righteousness, courage, freedom, and truth, and in that state [await your] journey to the underworld*.'

But what exactly is *pleasurable* about the pleasures of the mind? Thinkers have long made the connection between the pleasures of the mind and the great things unseen, usually God. More interesting, of course, is how they're described in a secular context. William James called intellectual pleasures '*the subtler emotions*': '*Concords of sounds, of colours, of lines, logical consistencies, teleological fitnesses*,' he wrote, '*affect us with a pleasure that seems ingrained in the very form of the representation itself*.' These are '*cognitive acts*', but ultimately not so different from the bodily pleasures, and he notes that when we're enthralled by a great pleasure of the mind, it tends to lead to pleasures of the body. We should be wary, as with most distinctions, of drawing the line too thick.

You can find pleasure where pain isn't

Next to the Christians, the Stoics were – and perhaps *are*, given the recent resurgence of interest – the great denigrators of bodily pleasure. Not all of them, but it's a suspicion that commonly invades their lofty view of the Universe. Virtue, for the Stoics, was all-important, the *summum bonum* of life – at least if you're wise – and anything that got in the way of the pursuit of virtue was treated warily at best. *Pathē* (passions) were to be avoided, and pleasure was a significant contributor because it confuses clear thinking and creates untoward desires. The pleasures of the flesh were haughtily detested, a view that the Christians took up with verve.

Their rivals in the ancient world were the Epicureans. Pleasure was the centre of Epicurus' thought. This wasn't pleasure in a positive sense, not a seasoning on the meat of life itself. It's pleasure as an *absence*.

Cicero, writing of Epicurus' ideas, glossed the notion like this:

The pleasure that we pursue is not that kind alone which directly affects our being with delight and is perceived by the senses in an agreeable way. Rather we hold that the greatest pleasure is one that's experienced as a result of the complete removal of pain.

Or, as Adam Smith later put it: '*What can be added to the happiness of the man who is in health, who is out of debt, and has a clear conscience?*'

This view applies both to bodily pleasures and to pleasures of the mind. Epicurus thought that the pleasures of the flesh consisted, for instance, in *not* being thirsty. What is the analogue to pleasures of the mind? He determined that the primary weight on our souls was the fear of death, which he sought to disabuse us of with an elegant little formula: when you are alive, death is nothing, and when you are dead, life is nothing. Once this is truly understood, then the weighty, wearying fear of death will be alleviated – and its absence is a great pleasure.

Though it is a moderate and negative view of bodily pleasure, it amounts to a fairly robust defense. It is an approach to life that tends to cultivate the materiality of our lives, to allow us to take joy in the physical humanness of being human. A line can be drawn from Epicurus to Valla to Erasmus to Montaigne to Voltaire to Hume to Mill to Russell: a life-affirming, world-accepting tradition that urges us not to fear the pleasures of the flesh (in moderation, of course). As Montaigne wrote: '*I, who operate only close to the ground, hate that inhuman wisdom that would make us disdainful enemies of the cultivation of the body.*'

Nature provides pleasures: both high-minded ones and just getting away from it all

Francesco Petrarca - © National Trust

On another April day, this one in 1336, Petrarch decided to go for a hike up Mont Ventoux, in Provence. It's not an easy task – an 18-hour round trip, more or less, up to a bald and very windy peak (hence the mountain's name). This ascent has since taken on the aspect of myth, a moment that seemed to herald the arrival of humanism, because it was supposedly the first time that someone had climbed a mountain simply for the pleasure of doing so. '*My only motive,'* Petrarch wrote*, 'was the wish to see what so great an elevation had to offer.'*

His account is filled with allegory and heavy-handed allusions to St Augustine's own conversion experience a millennium earlier. But it's still the moving testament of a man on a mountain, taken in by the beauty of a singular landscape. He looks south towards Italy and is affected by memories of the ancient Romans. He looks west towards the Pyrenees and north towards Lyon and, even though he can't actually see these places, he knows that they are there and that he's standing tall above them, all of Europe at his feet. Naturally, he '*stood like one dazed'*.

The pleasure Petrarch found in nature was in its immensity. He was lost in its vastness, overwhelmed by nature and his little place in it, hardly more than a speck of pollen in the wind. But he was also towering above the continent: '*I beheld the clouds under our feet,*' he said. He is, at once, insignificant, and all-powerful: an unsettling tension where you can sometimes find the subtle pleasures of the sublime. William Wordsworth was one of the first to illuminate this peculiar sensation, which he did most famously in his poem '*Tintern Abbey'* (1798):

– And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

But you can also find in nature a very different kind of pleasure, almost entirely at variance with the sublime. That is the pleasures of isolation, of solitude, of being freed, for a spell, from the drudgeries of '*society*' and its countless goddamned '*people*'. Alone in nature, you can play as a hermit for a bit, which I think can allow you to recover a sense of your own uniqueness. As Byron wrote: '*There is a pleasure in the pathless woods, / There is a rapture on the lonely shore*.' Though he went on to acclaim his love of all nature, it is the *pathlessness* of the woods that caught his interest: the pleasurable fact that, out here, no one's tread before. In that way, perhaps, nature can help remind you of the indelible pleasure of being yourself.

Taking pleasure in the pleasure of others

Schadenfreude is a bottomless reservoir, of course. Whether you drink from it with embarrassment or pride, it is still wonderfully pleasing to see your enemies fail – and most people have enough enemies, who do enough inexcusable stuff, that this particular spring of pleasure will never run dry. But what about its rather less provocative opposite: taking pleasure in the pleasure of others?

It's been observed that when a child gives a gift to another kid, they themselves become happier. And the Buddhist idea of *muditā* captures the phenomenon: it is the joy we feel when others are well. We are an essentially social species, and many philosophers have held that human nature cannot be fully realized without other people: being *with* one another is an indispensable part of being a human in the first place. If that's the case, it makes a lot of sense that we would '*naturally*' find the happiness of others pleasing to us. Of course – *of course* – a huge amount rides on whom we're talking about here. Yes, it's obviously pleasurable to gift a friend a top-notch loofah. But if you're genuinely pleased by, say, seeing Kim Jong-un's boyish excitement at attending a basketball game, then we need to have a serious talk about the world.

Setting aside dictators and jerks, why is it pleasing to make others pleased? Philosophers, particularly in the 18th century, had a winningly simple answer: because it is good. Or, more precisely, because *that* is what goodness itself is – the increasing of pleasure in the world.

Moral exhortations the world over have often boiled down to something like a common denominator: be not a nuisance to those you happen to be passing this life with, and, if you can, be a positive force for letting people get on with it. For instance, take these lines from a 4,000-year-old Babylonian advice book, amusing in their familiarity:

PLEASURE IS UNIQUELY HUMAN

Be pleasant to your enemy.
Do not utter slander; speak well of people;
Do not say nasty things; speak favorably.

The question is *why* people should act well. The answer has long been found in the divine and the otherworldly: because God's judging you and he's got a very sharp memory; because if you're a wretch there are some hellish surprises in store for you; because my interpretation of the Bible says so. What is radical about the philosophers who identified pleasure with goodness, then, is that they brought morality into the real world, there for it to be seen and tested, even quantified.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, was among the first to link the idea of the goodness of pleasure with the essentially social nature of humans. In *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), he made '*public good*' in and of itself a virtue, necessary for all those who would aspire to dignity and gentlemanliness.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury. - © Wikipedia

And while he argued that it was moral to try to increase the pleasure of others – primarily by means of material generosity – he also said that it felt good to give. Indeed, he held that the joy of increasing pleasure was itself the very highest pleasure. '*The very outward features, the marks and signs which attend this sort of joy [of giving], are expressive of a more intense, clear, and undisturbed pleasure than those which attend the satisfaction of thirst, hunger, and other ardent appetites*.'

This is, I think, a pleasure of the mind, but it is a pleasure of an unusually humane sort – the pleasure of seeing your own humanity in the humanity of others.

- Pleasure is ridiculously hard to define, partly because it seems so simple.
- Plenty of philosophers have been wary of the pleasures of the body and have upheld the pleasures of the mind. Of course, that doesn't mean they were right.

- One way of defining pleasure is by viewing it as an absence of pain. This tradition reaches back to Epicurus and continues to be a useful way of defending the pursuit of pleasure.
- People have often sought pleasure in nature, whether it be to feel the sublime immensity of the world or to get away from all those dickheads back home.
- Taking pleasure in other people's pleasure is a sure route to becoming a decent sort of person.

Pleasure and the value of this life

Pleasure is never settled. Indeed, pleasure itself suggests a process, a fluidity, a striving. Pleasure once attained, whether bodily or intellectual, tends not to last. It is pleasing to kick your opponent's ass at chess; it is pleasing to have finished working out – but, like the great majority of pleasures, these quickly fade, then to be sought after again. It is the seeking – the pursuit – of pleasure that usually matters more than the nature of pleasure itself. Behavior, always tinged with ethical value, is more shaped by the seeking and maintenance of pleasure than anything else.

Because the value and pursuit of pleasure are such ineluctable parts of how you go about being a human, it deserves serious reflection. Is bodily pleasure too much of a preoccupation? Are you getting enough pleasure overall? Where else can pleasure be sought? And so on. But more than these pragmatic queries, thinking about pleasure can often lead to some downright serious considerations, like this beef Wellington of a question: how much do you value your temporary life on Earth?

That might seem like a dramatic leap, but it's actually a natural development. Historically, those who have most loudly denounced pleasure are those who claim to view their lives as a temporary stop along the road to eternity. Asceticism doesn't require that you believe in another world or an afterlife, but it's far easier to self-flagellate if you do. Ostentatious denunciation of pleasure – especially other people's pleasure – is a reliable sign of someone who reproaches their own humanness and thinks that real value is to be found beyond the horizons of this Earthly plane. The denial of pleasure goes hand in hand with the denial of value in this life.

And those who enjoy pleasure, who search it out and cultivate it, are naturally more likely to appreciate and value the here-and-now material world. The freethinkers of France in the 17th century well attest to this. They were among the first to loudly value this world at the expense of the next. They set the grandeur and beauty of Earth against the wispy ineffabilities of heaven and found that they very much preferred the former. Charles de Saint-Évremond embodied the tradition, living well and long, and when he died in 1703, his epitaph read: *'He was passionately fond of life, knew little of God, and nothing of his soul*.' (It is no surprise to find him condemned by theologians such as Jean Le Clerc as a '*shallow Epicurean*'!)

More incisive than Saint-Évremond was his friend the courtesan and philosopher Ninon de

Lenclos. She affirmed, more bravely and beautifully than any contemporary, the pleasures of the flesh and the joys of the material world. She outright hated asceticism, particularly its Christian variant, which she felt helped to deny women their rights, because it helped to deny women their pleasures.

Towards the end of her life, she received a letter from Saint-Évremond, which captured her view of the world: '*Wealth, power, honour, and virtue contribute to our happiness, but the enjoyment of pleasure, let us call it voluptuousness, to sum up everything in a word, is the true aim and purpose to which all human acts are inclined.*' She loved and demanded the pleasures of the world – and made it better in return.

The nature of pleasure, pain, and their endless rippling effects on philosophy, is a huge subject, and I can hope to have given only a small taste of it here. For more, I would suggest starting out with the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's entries on pleasure and hedonism – this site is a gold-standard in philosophy, and an excellent place to go for a host of other philosophical topics as well.

On hedonism, Michel Onfray is a very intriguing writer. He's a Frenchman who's written some 60 books, many of which have not been translated into English. I can, however, recommend his short book *A Hedonist Manifesto* (2006), translated by Joseph McClellan – lively, polemical, extremely debatable. Onfray argues that hedonism, properly understood, is the best way to live if one really is a thoroughgoing materialist. (A more academic, modern-day defense of hedonism can be found in the work of Fred Feldman.)

Catherine Wilson's book *How to Be an Epicurean: The Ancient Art of Living Well* (2019) is the most recent entry on this subject, which gives a comprehensive overview of Epicurus, his thought, and its application to contemporary problems of life. She also wrote *Epicureanism: A Very Short Introduction* (2015). Both are recommended.

For the history of the idea of pleasure and the many attempts by philosophers to grapple with it, try out *Pleasure: A History* (2018), edited by Lisa Shapiro. This is an entry in a wonderfully stimulating series called 'Oxford Philosophical Concepts' (the series is edited by Christia Mercer). Emily Fletcher's essay on Plato, '*Two Platonic Criticisms of Pleasure*', is especially good.

Plato discusses pleasure and its attendant idea of desire in several dialogues, but his most famous meditation is probably on Diotima's ladder in the *Symposium*, which you can learn about through this short on Aeon Video.

Aeon magazine has naturally dealt with many of the ideas taken up in this Guide. Of particular note is Julian Baggini's Idea on the high and low pleasures, and how the low pleasures, in fact, allow us to be '*fully human*'. Daniel Callcut's Essay '*Against Moral Sainthood*' dwells on the messiness of life compared with the ethereal perfections of moral categories, and Eric Schwitzgebel's Essay '*Cheeseburger Ethics*' calls attention to the fact that ethicists are no more ethical than the rest of us. Over on Aeon Video, check out our interview with Morten Kringelbach on pleasure and the good life.

A bit further afield, Theodore Zeldin's book *An Intimate History of Humanity* (1994) deals indirectly with pleasure and pain but is an absolute treasure trove of acute and surprising observations about the history of our emotional lives and the ways in which we relate to one another. A rare pleasure indeed.

Why Pleasure Is Important

In the June 10, 2015, of IDEAS.TED.COM, Ben Lillie has a conversation with Psychologist Paul Bloom who studies the nature of pleasure. He discusses how knowing the history of an object can profoundly affect your enjoyment of it:

> We have a biological adaptation called *"essentialism*," which is a particularly clever and important adaptation that drives us to focus on the deeper aspect of things. For instance, it matters, when you look at people, not to be entirely moved by what they look like, but also to be influenced by what you believe to be their histories and their hidden properties. For food, it matters where it came from and what it touched. For animals, you want to know what they can do to you and how they behave, not just their surface appearance. For these reasons, I think we've evolved to have an essentialist bias.
>
> Having said that, a lot of the specific phenomena I talk about are what scholars like Stephen Jay Gould call "spandrels"— biological accidents. They're built from an innate basis, but they aren't themselves adaptive.
>
> In my TED Talk, *The origins of pleasure*, I discuss briefly our attraction to objects that have been in contact with celebrities, such as George Clooney's sweater. I don't think that that's an adaptation in any sense of the term. I certainly don't think that those individuals in the past who liked objects that were touched by celebrities reproduced more than those who didn't. My view, then, is that the general bias towards essentialism is an adaptation, but some of its most interesting manifestations are accidents.
>
> I wouldn't deny that a lot of what matters about **wine** is its chemical composition. After all, if somebody hands you a glass of gasoline, you're not going to like it, even if they also tell you that it's from a thousand-dollar bottle of wine.
>
> So, plainly we have sense organs that give us information about things. Plainly the reason why we like things more than others is because of their superficial qualities. It would be crazy to deny that. The strong point that I'm making, though, is that for all of our pleasures, even those that seem the most sensory — like the taste of wine or sexual orgasm or stepping into a hot bath — your beliefs about the true nature of these experiences will always make a difference.

So wine is a good example. Like I said, part of your response to wine is based on its chemical

properties. But how you experience it will always be affected by your beliefs about what you are drinking. Now this opens you up to being fooled. Given that we're creatures who respond to the history of things, we can be exploited. You could be lied to about the price of wine, you could be lied to about where your sweater came from, you could be lied to about whether your painting is an original or a forgery, and so on. This is the bad news. On the other hand, our essentialism opens up a world of pleasurable experience that no other creature has. Our essentialism is why we have art, for instance. Other creatures might respond to colorful patterns, but they can't be moved by an act of creation because they aren't essentialist.

Here's another case: We find a face more attractive if we like that person. So, is that stupid? Is it a cognitive illusion? I don't think so. Yes, if you start with a core belief saying the only thing that should matter about attractiveness is bone structure and facial geometry and the clarity of skin and so on, then it's a mistake to respond on the basis of liking. But who says that it's only the superficial that should matter? I don't think there's anything wrong with a pleasure that goes deep.

"*Does knowing that this is where our pleasure comes from change how we "should" approach our pursuit of pleasure?*"

I've often wondered that, and I think it does in a couple of ways. For one thing, if I'm right, it makes respectable some aspects of pleasure that people have often been ashamed of. Art is a good example. Some people think that to prefer original artwork or to be interested in who created the art is a sign of some sort of moral or intellectual laziness or snobbery. I don't think that's true at all. I think caring about who the artist is and how the painting was created and where it came from is just part and parcel of what it is to be a human being who is reacting to art. At the very minimum, then, what you learn from the science of pleasure can help you have a better understanding of your own pleasures.

The only practical implication I can think of for this work is: if you want to enhance the pleasures of your everyday life, one way to do so is through knowledge. If you want to enjoy wine more, the trick is to learn more about wine. If you want to enjoy art more, the trick is to learn about art. The more understanding you get, the richer your experiences will be. I think music is the perfect example of this. For young kids most classical music sounds terrible (and for some people it will always sound terrible). But the more you listen to it, the more you will understand it, and the better it will sound to you. Like everything else I talk about, this is a real, visceral, phenomenological change. It's not like you say, "*Oh this music is boring and unpleasant but now I know a lot about it.*" It's that "*it no longer sounds boring and unpleasant; it sounds rich and nuanced and exhilarating*."

"That feeds into that old question about whether learning the science of biology kills the beauty of the flower. You would argue that it enhances it quite a bit."

I would. Now many people do worry that science kills beauty, but I don't think this is true at all. It is just not true that studying something from a scientific point of view diminishes the richness of it. It's just not the case that scientists who study sex lose interest in sex or evolutionary biologists find that they no longer love their children.

"It's funny to present as an empirical claim, which clearly it should be, but it's rarely ever presented that way."

Yes, and I do think it's worth studying. My own view is along the lines of what Richard Dawkins said in his book *Unweaving the Rainbow* — it will turn out that the serious study of someone enhances one's appreciation of its beauty, it doesn't diminish it. Certainly, this is true when you look at the human mind. When you start to explore research into psychology, neuroscience and cognitive science, it turns out that the mind is just so much cooler than you could have ever imagined.

A personal example I can think of actually comes not from psychology, but from cosmology. I was once in a terrible mood, and I just happened to stumble on a book by Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes*, about the origin of the universe. I brought it with me on a hike and read it while stopping for lunch — and man, I just thought it was incredible! It cheered me up so much. It struck me that the scientific ideas he talked about it were so much cooler than, say, the religious ideas. The religious ideas of creation of the universe are basically that some big guy made it. Religions have held these ideas because they're natural and intuitive and commonsensical, but the cosmological ideas aren't any of that. They were just gorgeous.

When I read work by someone who has thought deeply about something, it could be a scientist or philosopher or theologian or art critic, I end up with more of an appreciation of that thing. As a rule, studying something, knowing a lot about it, enhances your pleasure, it doesn't reduce it. I don't think Robert Ebert hates movies.

"You talk about how we don't like forgeries because the history isn't what we thought it is, but do you know of people who get attracted to the idea of forgeries and who collect good forgeries?"

Yes. My claim is that history matters. And in the normal course of things an original is worth more than a forgery because an original is more creative and so on. But you can think of exceptions. In fact, we've had laboratory studies showing that even your normal person under the right circumstances will find the forgery more valuable than an original.

As a real-world example, take *The Supper at Emmaus*. When it was discovered not to be by Vermeer, but to be a forgery, its value dropped horrendously. I looked for where it ended up when I wrote my book and I found it was in a traveling exhibit on forgeries. It would never regain its value. On the other hand, it will develop its own special value because it now has a distinct history as a famous fraud.

Christ at Emmaus by Hans Van Meegerens

We find the appeal of negative history in other studies — I talked about the George Clooney sweater study, but we also did a Bernie Madoff study. We asked people to name somebody that they really don't like and asked what they would pay for a sweater that was worn by them. Now some people say, "*Absolutely nothing."* They don't want anything to do with it. But others will pay a lot. There's also something called murder-abilia, where people want Jeffrey Dahmer's sweatshirt and John Wayne Gacy's finger painting and so on. I think that that sort of history can be valuable too, at least for some people.

Much of what I end up doing for a living involves studying fairly subtle laboratory effects. But one thing I like about this topic is that the effects aren't subtle at all — our intuitions concerning forgeries and history are so often incredibly strong. There are Vermeers right now on sale that people worry are van Meegerens. Nobody says "*Who cares?".* The difference is an extraordinary amount of money, a deep shift in our emotional and aesthetic responses.

There's a wonderful story of this person who had his Picasso tested to see if it was forgery; and found out the paints were from a period they couldn't be made from, so it had to be a mistake. In fury, he destroyed it, smashed it up, and threw it in a dumpster. He discovered later that the person who tested it was mistaken.

*"You can't see me, but that produced a visceral reaction at the thought of that that painting being destroyed***."**

But if the story had ended that he threw out the painting and it actually was a forgery, you'd think, "*Yeah, well ok..."*

"This presumably applies to things that aren't objects as well. Does the fact that I know you're a Yale professor affect my perception of your ideas?"

Yes. I think that it does. The issue here is messy, because there are all sorts of considerations having to do with status and association that don't work in exactly the same way as for paintings. But certainly, your belief about where an idea comes from will affect how you evaluate it and how you appreciate it. The same idea from two very different people will be interpreted in two very different ways, based on what you know about the people.

"It seems like that has immediate implications in policy more than anywhere else."

It does, and in part it's common sense. If we're talking politics and I say, "*my friend told me such and so*" versus "*A Nobel Prize winner told me such and so*," you would respond differently. The value of an idea is so strongly related to who you think has it.

There's a nice study by Geoffrey Cohen who told people about imaginary welfare policies. One of them is insanely generous by American standards and the other insanely strict. He told the subjects that they were either by Republicans or Democrats. It turns out that the subjects didn't care at all about the merits of the policy, whether it's strict or lax; they just cared who said it. If you're a Democrat and think it is a democratic policy you'll say "*Oh, this is terrific. This is so smart*." You won't even know this is why you like it; you'll think that you are moved by the merits of the proposal itself. We're influenced in ways we don't know by the source of things.

"Is there a way of thinking about that fact without me getting incredibly depressed?"

Why would you get depressed about it?

"At face value, it tells me I'm not nearly as capable of making a rational evaluation of things as I think I am. Then it leads me to think that maybe, if I extrapolate this probably past where I should, maybe there isn't a lot of rationality going into our policy decisions at any level."

A lot of people draw that conclusion. You're right, we are subject to a lot of these biases to some extent. Some of these biases are benign or even good, like seeing someone you know as more positive than a stranger. Others are sinister and stupid and terrible. But here's the thing: we are such smart creatures that when we're troubled by a bias, we can change the world so as to exclude the contaminating factors we are worried about.

Here's an example: When people listen to auditions from a symphony orchestra, music sounds different from a woman than from a man. It doesn't sound as good from a woman. But this perceived difference isn't due to a real difference in skill; it has to do with unconscious sexist biases. The solution here is fairly clear, and it's what they've done in symphony orchestras — you have men and women audition behind a screen. Once you do that, the problem disappears.

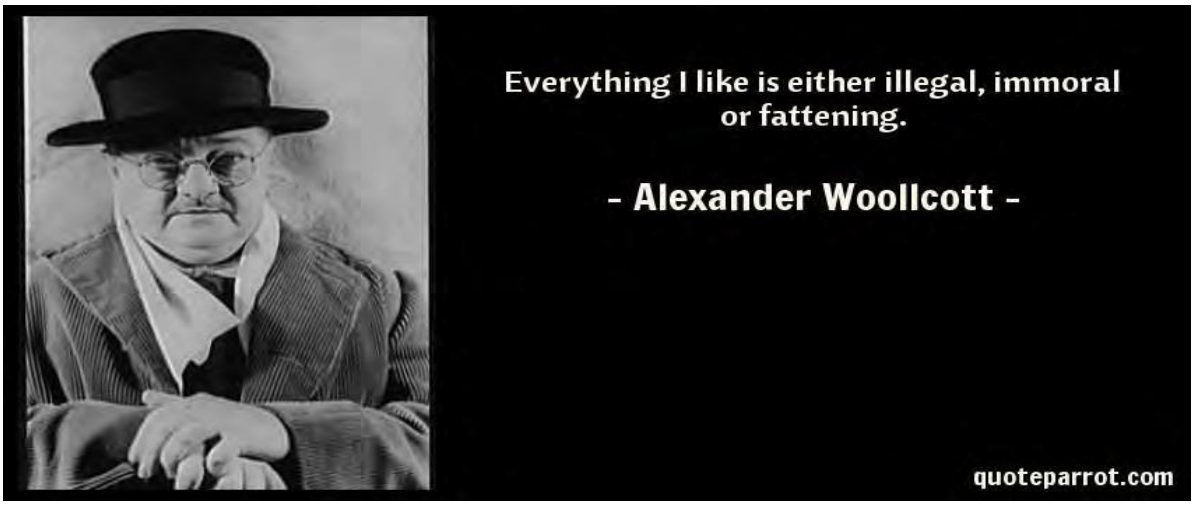
"So maybe a conclusion is we need to think more about the fact that this happens so we can put the screen up when it's called for."

Yes, exactly. But in some cases, you choose not to put a screen up. One could have a museum and decide not to tell anybody where the paintings came from, but I don't think that's the right way to do things. I think it's worthwhile knowing whether it's a Chagall or a Picasso or whoever. Now, people might disagree. But in any case, we're smart enough that if we find some sort of influence morally troubling, we can work to make this influence go away.

"Was there anything that you wanted to talk about, that you really wanted to get across that didn't make it into the talk?"

I think the one thing that I wish I could have discussed is that the depth of pleasure is a good thing. It makes it possible to get pleasure from art. It makes it possible to enjoy fiction, which is a topic I didn't touch on at all in my talk. I think it enhances the pleasures of sex, the pleasures of food, the pleasures of music.

I think that the presence of essentialism in humans and the absence of it in other creatures is something that really matters. The life of a chimp, for instance, is much less pleasurable than a human's can be, because a chimp can't appreciate things in an essentialist sort of way. This is the good news. The bad news is that humans can experience miseries that no other animal can appreciate.



Alexander Woollcott (January 19, 1887 – January 23, 1943) was an American critic and journalist known for his involvement in the Algonquin Round Table and his writings in The New Yorker magazine. He was just expressing common wisdom when he wrote: "All the things I really like to do are either illegal, immoral, or fattening." Which also means that popular culture is often an inspiration for (plagiarist) writers or journalists…

But we should be vigilant: bigots are everywhere. My late friend Bernard Zacharias, trombonist of the Sidney Bechet & Claude Luter jazz band, created an imaginary

principality in the heart of France; its motto was Stultitia cinget.

Since I am [mostly] dealing with nutrition, remember that misinterpretation of reliable scientific findings is a major cause of abnormal nutrition behavior. Overreaction to health messages may precipitate such conditions as anorexia nervosa, or nutrient toxicity. Adverse food reactions, real or more often imagined, lead to restriction in food selection. Excessive austerity in food –and wine- use negates the pleasure of eating, a useful mechanism in food choice ensuring food diversity – and pleasurable health.

It is not by chance that most people toast as Salute/Salud/Santé....

References

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(Other References Available Upon Request)