PLEASURE AS SELF-DISCOVERY

Samuel Clark

Abstract
This paper uses readings of two classic autobiographies, Edmund Gosse's *Father & Son* and John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, to develop a distinctive answer to an old and central question in value theory: What role is played by pleasure in the most successful human life? A first section defends my method. The main body of the paper than defines and rejects voluntarist, stoic, and developmental hedonist lessons to be taken from central crises in my two subjects' autobiographies, and argues for a fourth, diagnostic lesson: Gosse and Mill perceive their individual good through the medium of pleasure. Finally, I offer some speculative moral psychology of human development, as involving the waking, perception, management, and flowering of generic and individual capacities, which I suggest underlies Gosse and Mill's experiences. The acceptance of one's own unchosen nature, discovered by self-perceptive pleasure in the operation of one's nascent capacities, is the beginning of a flourishing adulthood in which that nature is fully developed and expressed.

Introduction

Edmund Gosse was ten before he read a novel, and its effect on him was overwhelming:

> It is remarkable that among our books, which amounted to many hundreds, I had never discovered a single work of fiction until my Father himself revealed the existence of Michael Scott's wild masterpiece. So little did I understand what was allowable in the way of literary invention that I began the story without a doubt that it was true, and I think it was my Father himself who, in answer to an inquiry, explained to me that it was 'all made up'. He advised me to read the descriptions of the sea, and of the mountains of Jamaica, and 'skip' the pages which gave imaginary adventures and conversations. But I did not take his counsel; these latter were the flower of the book to me. I had never read, never dreamed of anything like them, and they filled my whole horizon with glory and with joy … It was like giving a glass of brandy neat to some one who had never been weaned from a milk diet … I must not define too clearly, nor endeavour too formally to insist on the blind movements of a childish mind. But of this I am quite sure, that the reading and re-reading of *Tom Cringle's Log* did more than anything else, in this critical eleventh year of my life, to give fortitude to my individuality, which was in great danger – I now see – of succumbing to the pressure my Father brought to bear upon it from all sides. My soul was shut up, like Fatima, in a tower to which no external influences could come, and it might really have been starved to death, or have lost the power of recovery and rebound, if my captor, by some freak not yet perfectly accounted for, had not gratuitously opened a little window in it and added a powerful telescope.[1]

I shall argue that Gosse's liberating joy, together with a parallel example from the life of John Stuart Mill, offers a partial answer to an old and central question in value

[1] Edmund Gosse, *Father & Son* ed. Peter Abbs (London: Penguin, 1983 [1907]), pp. 170-2.

theory: What role is played by pleasure in the most successful human life—the life which goes best for the person whose life it is?

One familiar answer to that question, offered by psychologists including Daniel Kahneman, by politicians and public-policy lobbyists including Richard Layard, and by philosophers including Epicurus, Jeremy Bentham, Roger Crisp, and Fred Feldman, is hedonism.[2] Pleasure's role is that it is the currency of success: pleasure is a character of subjective experience; distinct instances of pleasure are fungible; all pleasure and only pleasure is intrinsically good for us.

That familiar answer meets equally familiar objections: that there is no such unitary thing as pleasure to play the role suggested; that different pleasures cannot be measured on any common scale, nor therefore compared, summed, or traded; that some pleasures—the pleasures of cruelty, for example—are bad for us; that some things which are not pleasures—virtue, knowledge, friendship—are good for us. But nonetheless, the hedonist seems to be on to something, even if she exaggerates it. Pleasure is an important part of human success, not always easily achieved, and a life completely lacking in pleasure would not be a good life.

> One can bring no greater reproach against a man than to say that he does not set sufficient value upon pleasure, and there is no greater sign of a fool than the thinking that he can tell at once and easily what it is that pleases him. To know this is not easy, and how to extend our knowledge of it is the highest and the most neglected of all arts and branches of education. Indeed, if we could solve the difficulty of knowing what gives us pleasure, if we could find its springs, its inception and earliest *modus operandi*, we should have discovered the secret of life and development, for the same difficulty has attended the development of every sense from touch onwards, and no new sense was ever developed without pains.[3]

Hence my question: if pleasure is important, but not because it is the currency of success, why and how and when is it important? What part does it play in a human life which goes well?

In this paper I pursue a distinctive account of one of the roles (not the only role) of pleasure in human life, which respects the hedonist's intuition about its importance without making it the sole currency of success. I shall argue that pleasure is sometimes a medium of self-discovery: what one takes pleasure in can diagnose her individual nature, and therefore her individual good. My argument for that account is also distinctive, in that I use readings of two classic autobiographies to motivate and describe that role for pleasure, and I shall begin by defending that way of proceeding.

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[2] Daniel Kahneman, 'Objective Happiness' in Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, & Norbert Shwarz eds, *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (London: Penguin, 2006); Brad Inwood & L. P. Gerson trans. & ed., *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings & Testemonia* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994); Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals & Legislation* ed. J. H. Burns & H. L. A. Hart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970 [1781]); Roger Crisp, *Reasons & The Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006): chapter 4; Fred Feldman, *Pleasure & the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, & Plausibility of Hedonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

[3] Samuel Butler, 'On Knowing what Gives us Pleasure' in John Gross ed., *The Oxford Book of Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 [c. 1880]), p. 263.

Why Autobiography?

Why use autobiographies in an attempt at value theory? In the first place, some autobiographies are great works of literature, and great works of literature are importance resources for understanding human life, as has been argued—and, more importantly, demonstrated in practice—by Martha Nussbaum, Bernard Williams, and others.[4] It is tempting to stop my general justification at that point, and rely on my particular results; but I do have four further general reasons for thinking that autobiographies are valuable here.

First, many philosophical accounts of human success are simplistic, in that they fail to represent or explain at least the following complexities. Successful life as a human being involves many distinct goods. They include some pleasures, but also, for instance, aesthetic and emotional experience (even when painful or non-pleasant), knowledge, friendship, individuality, self-command, self-expression, health, and the development and use of generic human capacities (sexual, perceptual, athletic, intellectual…).[5]

Further, many of these goods have complex internal structures. Taking one example from the partial list of goods just offered, consider self-expression, as pursued in the life of a musician. Unlike some pleasures – say the pleasure of smoking cigarettes, which is at best one-dimensional – becoming a better and more individual musician is a process of deepening or opening out, in which new possibilities become available gradually, as some position is achieved from which they can – only now – be grasped. The expressive skills of the jazz improviser are achieved by rigorous practice on scales, changes, and standards, and by hard exploratory work playing with other musicians. John Coltrane's ability to play within a mode and recognizably as himself, for instance on Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, is not immediately available to a starting saxophone player, and its complex character as a self-expressive good is shaped by its developmental history.

As that last point suggests, the many goods also have complex relations of dependence and exclusion. Some of the distinctive goods of music are dependent on earlier goods: Coltrane's late, free music on *Interstellar Space* or *Ascension* was achieved partly through his earlier mastery and gradual transformation of bop, for instance on *Giant Steps*. More, pursuing the good of aesthetic self-expression has costs. At the very least, it has *opportunity* costs: the dedicated musician cannot also wholeheartedly pursue the good of family life, amongst other losses. Anthony Storr argues that lives can revolve either around the hub of intimate relationships, or of solitary creativity, and that either can be highly successful at cost to the other possibility.[6] There may also be more direct exclusions: the self-shaping demands of music are different from those of, for instance, visual art, and developing in one might prevent the highest development in the other.

These complexities are not just momentary, but occur over time in human lives structured by biological and other kinds of growth and decline. That is:

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[4] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy & Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Bernard Williams, *Shame & Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[5] I intend this as a set of reminders, not as a complete list. One attempt at a comprehensive catalogue of goods is William K. Frankena, *Ethics* (2nd edn, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973), pp. 87-8. Another is Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities, for instance in *Women & Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). My reminders draw on both.

[6] Anthony Storr, *Solitude* (London: Harper Collins 1997).

philosophical accounts of human success often fail to reflect the obvious facts that humans start as children and then grow up and grow old, and that this process has a complex structure over its duration, on which success and failure depend.[7]

Putting these complexities together, we might tentatively think of the human good as having a tree-like structure through time: a central trunk with branches, travelling down any of which excludes travelling down the others, and each part of which supports its own further extension. We can then see autobiographies – accounts of lives lived, and of causal and other relations between different goods and bads, over time – as offering some necessary temporal and developmental complication to our thinking.

My second reason for thinking that autobiographies are useful here is that there is a dispute between those accounts of human success which emphasize our possession or enactment of particular goods (hedonism, and also for instance the broadly Aristotelian tradition in W. D. Ross, John Finnis, Philippa Foot, and others),[8] and those which emphasize our reflexive relations to our possessions and actions (L. W. Sumner's view that the successful life for me is the life with which I am rationally satisfied as a whole; Harry Frankfurt's view that it is the life in which I wholeheartedly desire to have my desires).[9] My view is that both sides in this dispute are importantly half-right; the further question to ask is about the relations and tensions between possession and reflexivity. Autobiographies, as – on one hand – performances of self-conscious attention to the particular possessions and actions of a life, and – on the other – accounts of the discovery and development of those possessions and the roots of those actions, in their contexts, offer a rich source of material for pursuing that question.

None of this is to claim that autobiographies are unreflective or theoretically innocent: autobiographies – perhaps especially great autobiographies – are obviously not value free data. My third reason for thinking autobiographies valuable here is that they are themselves a kind of ethical reflection. Specifically, they enact the kind of ethical reflection which is the starting-place for classical ethical thought, and which involves: first, stepping back from the immediate and quotidian, and taking up a separated point of view on my own life. A diary kept at the time is not an autobiography, which requires that I as autobiographer take on 'a double character' as both investigator and object of investigation.[10] Second, considering how I have come to have my attitudes, projects, and pleasures. Third, judging my life as a whole: to what extent and in what parts was it successful, and to what extent and in what parts a failure?[11] I take this reflective and evaluative character seriously in what follows. My

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[7] Honourable exceptions to this generalization include Michael Slote, *Goods & Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); David L. Norton, *Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); J. David Velleman, 'Well-Being & Time', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72(1991).

[8] W. David Ross, *The Right & The Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930); John Finnis, *Natural Law & Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[9] L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, & Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and other works.

[10] Roy Pascal, *Design & Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 71. The point about diaries is also Pascal's.

[11] This characterization of classical ethics draws on Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): chapter 1.

aim is not to make use of autobiographical texts as if they were just long and complex thought-experiments, but to respect autobiographers as thinkers, and to think with them about success and failure.

My fourth reason for using autobiographies is their particular relevance to the aspect of success I'm concerned with in this paper: pleasure. Self-development – the partly self-managed achievement of what and who one is – by some combination of discovery and creation, is a central focus of autobiography; and – I claim, and will try to show in what follows – pleasure has a distinctive role in that development, and especially in its development in the face of oppression.

These reasons, however strong or weak, are additional to my main point: the use of autobiographies here is justified, if it is, by what it reveals about the role of pleasure in human life. I now begin to pursue that question, by moving on to my readings of particular autobiographies.

Mill & Gosse

John Stuart Mill was almost destroyed by a crisis in which his life lost its point and savour, but his joy in love and poetry directed him out of despair. Edmund Gosse was recovered to himself out of affectionate oppression by delight at a novel. Mill's description of his crisis is revealing about his own value theory, and especially about the extent to which he is really a hedonist.[12] But both their experiences, recorded and self-analyzed in Mill's *Autobiography* and Gosse's *Father & Son*, are important for the question I am pursuing here. To work towards uncovering what exactly they reveal about pleasure in human life, I shall describe the two crises, consider four accounts of what we should learn from them, and decide for the fourth.

John was the son of James Mill: philosophic radical, crusading journalist, East India Company official, and friend of Jeremy Bentham. James Mill and Bentham were advocates of the 'greatest happiness principle' that the purpose and justification of human action is to maximize everyone's pleasure and minimize everyone's pain, and Mill was educated very intensively at home to be best possible advocate for that principle and for the radical social change it demanded: he was reading Greek by the age of three and writing histories of Rome by six, but he took no holidays, played no games, and had no friends his own age. By his twenties, he was an incredibly active lobbyist and public intellectual. But then he had a 'mental crisis', the trigger for which was when he asked himself:

> 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered: 'No!' At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down … I seemed to have nothing left to live for.[13]

Mill recovered from his crisis, but after his recovery he had different and more complex life-goals: he still thought that the purpose and justification of action was human well-being; but the things which made his life worth living again – poetry,

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[12] See Samuel Clark, 'Love, Poetry, & the Good Life: Mill's *Autobiography* & Perfectionist Ethics', *Inquiry* 53(2010).

[13] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* in John M. Robson & Jack Stillinger eds, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* vol. 1: *Autobiography & Literary Essays* (Toronto/London: University of Toronto Press/Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 139.

especially Wordsworth's nature poetry, and meeting his eventual wife Harriet Taylor – now seemed much more important parts of well-being than they had before.

Edmund was the son of Philip and Emily Gosse: Philip was a naturalist and popular lecturer, 'the David Attenborough of his day';[14] Emily was a painter, poet and writer of evangelical tracts; they were founding members of a primitivist Christian group, the Plymouth Brethren. Emily Gosse died slowly and painfully of cancer when Edmund was seven, and he was then raised by his father – somewhat similarly to Mill – to be a saint, or at least to be saved according to Emily's strange and now unchallengeable lights. Edmund – imaginative, self-conscious, emotionally sensitive – eventually found this affectionate and well-meaning oppression impossible to live with. An early crux of resistance was when he first read fiction – one of the many dogmas of Gosse's childhood was that telling or reading stories was sinful, and he was ten before he read a novel, Michael Scott's long-forgotten adventure story *Tom Cringle's Log*.[15] I began this paper with his delighted reaction. Gosse slowly and painfully escaped from his father's control: in later life he was a famous poet, literary critic and journalist; an early champion of Ibsen, Kipling and Yeats; and a close friend of James, Hardy, and Swinburne. As Ann Thwaite draws him, the adult Gosse was a brilliant talker, sympathetic and sensuous, charming and funny, needing company, needing to be liked, and delighted with literature, gossip, his wife and children, and knowing great men; also prone to gloom, touchy, snobbish, apolitically conservative, and not quite a great poet despite immense ambition, knowledge, and technical skill.[16]

A first and obvious point to take from these two crises, and their place in these two lives, is about the importance of choice. According to what I will call *voluntarism*, the successful life is the life of freedom, and freedom is being bound only by one's own choices. So, growth into adulthood is an escape from any demand arising from anything but my own will. On this reading, neither Mill nor Gosse consented to his upbringing – they were too young to choose it – and each therefore rightly rejected it as a tyrannous imposition. But this is inadequate in two ways. First, and in general, the fact that someone can be too young to consent suggests that some features of the successful life cannot be products of consent. In particular, the vital capacity to choose cannot itself be chosen, since it has to be developed out of its lack. Second, the voluntarist reading is at odds with Mill and Gosse's own experiences and with what they went on to do. Mill did not give up his position at the East India Company to write poetry in the Lake District; he and Harriet did not elope. Gosse was as ambitious as his father to explain his work to the reading and listening public. Each accepted a great deal of his upbringing, consensual or not, as everyone has to. Neither Mill's crisis and eventual recovery, nor Gosse's revelatory delight in stories, were primarily to do with consent or its absence: they were matters of self-perception and the demands of an individual nature.

It may seem perverse to claim that Mill, who after all wrote that '[o]ver himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign',[17] was not a

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[14] Stephen Jay Gould, 'Adam's Navel' in *The Flamingo's Smile: Reflections in Natural History* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 100.

[15] Available to download from www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7281 (accessed 25 November 2010).

[16] Ann Thwaite, *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape 1849-1928* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1984).

[17] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* in John M. Robson ed., *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* vol. 18: *Essays on Politics & Society 1* (Toronto/London: University of Toronto Press/Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977 [1859]), p. 224.

voluntarist, and Gosse similarly asserts 'a human being's privilege to fashion his inner life for himself'.[18] But it is worth remembering *why* Mill endorses individual sovereignty: because the self-made, self-expressive individual is better off—is a more successful human being—than the person crushed and distorted by following convention, until 'by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved'.[19] Similarly, what Gosse found wrong with being fashioned by his father rather than by himself was that:

> Certain portions of my intellect were growing with unwholesome activity, while others were stunted, or had never stirred at all. I was like a plant on which a pot has been placed, with the effect that the centre is crushed and arrested, while shoots are straggling up to the light on all sides.[20]

In both cases, voluntarism fails to catch the importance of the expression of nature as against its distortion, constraint, or self-abnegation. This is not to claim that choice is unimportant or that voluntarism is wholly false, but only that a focus on the importance of choice does not catch the insights into human life available from Mill and Gosse.

These considerations might lead us instead, second, to take a stoic lesson from my two autobiographical fragments.[21] For stoics, flourishing adulthood – the life of *real* freedom and obligation – is the acceptance of necessity. The wise person plays the part given to her by providence or chance as best she can, and does not try to second-guess its author. Stephen Clark criticizes the voluntarist account of human success as the rich adolescent male fantasy of freedom as unlimited power, bound only by one's own choices: as if all obligations were contractual; as if the only demands a person needs to feel and be subject to are the demands he himself makes of himself; as if he could never discover rather than create obligations.[22] Against this adolescent fantasy, Clark offers the philosophical pagan argument that successful human adulthood has its roots in the demands of nature not in choice. Growth into maturity is 'coming-to-oneself' in the 'para-political' life of friends, family, household, craft-association, clan, and so on in widening circles:

> It is this network of 'voluntary associations' and their corresponding obligations – obligations which are not simply what any individual chooses that they should be – which continues to provide us all with a sense of who and what we are.[23]

Freedom and obligation have their roots, not in choice, but in the demands of human nature – and especially in humans' nature as creatures who, unlike many other kinds of creature, have both long dependent childhoods and deeply political adulthoods.

If the stoic is right, then Mill and Gosse's lives were failures, and the lesson we should take from them is a warning. Just as Mill was about fully to take up the responsibilities of adulthood in the East India Company and in leadership of the

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[18] Gosse, *Father & Son*, p. 251.
[19] Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 265.
[20] Gosse, *Father & Son*, p. 211.
[21] I use 'stoic' only as a handy label; I do not mean to make any ambitious interpretive claims about ancient stoicism.
[22] Stephen R. L. Clark, *Civil Peace & Sacred Order* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): chapter 3.
[23] Clark, *Civil Peace*, p. 67.

philosophic radical movement, he broke and turned to his own private and trivial passions. Gosse could and should have become a missionary, as his parents wanted, but he wasted his powers in writing gossipy literary columns for the *Daily Telegraph* and pursuing lucrative lecture tours in the United States. Or perhaps, at least in Mill's case, there is a more sympathetic reading available. Perhaps the stoic road to success is more complex than I have so far suggested: our local networks are embedded in wider circles of responsibility, and sometimes the shift to the next circle out is difficult and traumatic. Mill's crisis, then, was a breakthrough from a too-narrow circle into a greater one – it was his first step into his eventual adulthood as an open-minded reformer speaking to the whole public through his writings, rather than a narrow sectarian speaking only to fellow enthusiasts.[24] There is some truth in this version of the stoic lesson, but it does not catch everything: in particular, it fails to explain Mill's experience either of losing his sense of his life's meaning or of regaining it – it does not explain the developmental role of pleasure, of Mill's losing his old pleasures and gaining new ones, or of Gosse's overwhelming, revelatory joy at storytelling.

So, perhaps the significance of pleasure should point us in the direction of, third, a developmental hedonist lesson, according to which the successful life involves a mutually-reinforcing relation between desire and pleasure. On this interpretation of Mill's crisis and Gosse's revelation, they begin with one set of desires, to be a reformer of the world or a bringer of souls to Christ; they get pleasure from satisfying them; and, duly rewarded, they continue to desire those things. Then, for whatever reason, the connection breaks: Mill can no longer get pleasure from his activism or Gosse from his pious witnessing, and so they lose themselves. They have nothing left to live for. But then, luckily, they find some other desires and pleasures – love and poetry, stories – to sustain them. According to this third lesson, it does not matter what our desires are desires *for*, so long as we have some desires and take pleasure in their satisfaction. Desire is an arbitrary means to pleasure. The successful life is the life where we want something, get it, and are pleased by it – it could be what moved the adult Mill or Gosse, but it could just as meaningfully be fame and fortune, or philosophic radicalism, or missionary work, or for that matter collecting stamps. Wanting and pleasure in getting are what matter, not what we want. This is importantly half-right, at least in emphasizing the role of pleasure; but I also want to reject it, in favour of a final lesson.

The problem with hedonism in this case is that neither Mill nor Gosse understood his crux as just a move from one arbitrary set of pleasures to another: each experienced it as a liberation and as a self-revelation. Liberation from his father's control and from the education which had shaped him; revelation of deep-rooted needs which had been starved by that education. According to this final, diagnostic lesson, Mill and Gosse have artificial, alien desires which cannot sustain them. Mill's 'irrepressible self-consciousness' is a moment of self-perception which reveals not only the inadequacy of his current life-plan, but the seeds of a better one in his individual nature. Gosse's pursuit of literature is a matter of vital self-expression; it is the delighted release of elements of his nature which had been caged and starved.

This lesson is related to but distinct from the three possibilities I have rejected. In the first place, this is not voluntarism: it is to do with freedom, if to be free is to be

[24] This is how Richard Reeves reads the crisis in *John Stuart Mill: Victorian Firebrand* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007).

self-directed rather than other-directed, but it is not to do with choice. The self which directs here imposes itself from inside. It is not chosen; it comes as a shock.

This is not hedonism: pleasure is important, but its role is not to be the currency of success. I am not saying that the goodness of the rebellious expression of nature *is* the pleasure it gives: I am claiming that this particular pleasure is diagnostic, not constitutive, of the good, in much the same way that pain is diagnostic of damage, fear is diagnostic of danger, or sorrow is diagnostic of loss.[25] The pleasure that Mill takes in the love and poetry which allow him to escape despair, or that Gosse takes in his imaginative engagement with *Tom Cringle's Log*, is a perception of their goodness, that is a perception of their constitutive role in a flourishing life; pleasure therefore identifies goals of resistance and rebellion against their particular, local networks of obligation. Mill's pleasure in Wordsworth's poetry, for instance, is a perception of a demand of his nature, the root of a demand which is unchosen, but which can properly stand as Mill's own against the goals imposed on him by James Mill and by Bentham.

The diagnostic lesson is also not stoic, in that it recognizes the importance of resistance. The stoic is right, first, that a flourishing adulthood of freedom and obligation depends on the acceptance of nature, not (or not only) on consent; but Mill's nature or Gosse's nature, which could properly stand against their ordained places in the para-political world, revealed themselves through the medium of pleasure. The stoic is also right that 'I did not consent' is not always the last word against some demand – sometimes my choice is irrelevant, or outweighed by some other consideration. But lack of consent has historically been, and is still now, an important justification of resistance to oppression; and resistance to oppression is not something we can do without. Adult political and para-political worlds are often corrupt, poisonous, hugely destructive of some or all of the people who are shaped by them. Consider the world of slaves and masters: to grow up into a life of slavery and slave-holding is to grow up broken. This is obvious in the case of slaves, whose central human capacities – for self-command, for forming equal adult relationships, for having a say in how their communal lives work – are systematically crushed and distorted by enslavement. Orlando Patterson argues that to be a slave is to be an outsider to the central para-political networks of human life; to have had one's ties of birth and allegiance deliberately cut; to be socially dead.[26] Of course, slaves form their own networks against social death – from music-making to surreptitious reading to insurrection to revolution.[27] It is perhaps less obvious, but I think true, that to grow up a slave-*holder* is also to grow up broken: the master's central capacities for imaginative sympathy and, again, for forming equal adult relationships are crushed and distorted. The stoic has an important point, but she is only half right: some forms of social life are disastrous, and we need some account of resistance or rebellion against our local families, friends, craft-associations, and clans. Slavery is one

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[25] I was prompted to these analogies by Jesse Prinz, *Gut Feelings: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[26] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery & Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[27] For a powerful autobiographical account of individual resistance to enslavement, see Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself* ed. Houston A. Baker Jr (London: Penguin, 1986 [1845]). For communal resistance, see for example C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture & the San Domingo Revolution* (new edn, London: Alison & Busby, 1980).

example of this point, but there are also distorting and destructive forms of friendship or of parenthood, as demonstrated by James Mill or Philip Gosse.

Summing up: voluntarism, stoicism, and hedonism offer variously inadequate lessons to take from Mill and Gosse; I claim that their experiences and autobiographical self-analyses identify a distinctive pleasure, a revelatory joy, which diagnoses their individual human good.

Growing Up

For all I have said so far, this could just be an idiosyncrasy of Mill and Gosse's odd and extended childhoods, or even just a polemical feature of how they chose to represent those childhoods forty years after the fact. That would still be an interesting discovery about two individuals' attempts at self-understanding, but I do want to claim wider human significance for the point. I want to say that we have learned something important in reply to the question I started with: What is the role of pleasure in the best human life? In this final section, I try to make explicit and to generalize what we have learned, by offering some speculative moral psychology of development which makes sense of Mill's and Gosse's experiences. My starting place is a point I made in 'Why Autobiography?' above, that our account of the good life needs to recognize the variety and developmental complexity of human goods. With that in mind, I shall sketch one element of human development from childhood to adulthood.

One significant kind of human good is the class I will call *capacities*: internally-grounded abilities to engage in natively human and individual activities, functionings, and achievements.[28] Growing up into a flourishing human adult is a process involving the gradual waking, development, and eventual flowering of various capacities which partially constitute the human good. They include, for example, the perceptual and motor capacities that we can see developing in newborns, as they gain control over their eye and head movements, learn to pick out faces and language-using voices, and so on. They include the aesthetic, emotional, and imaginative capacities, and the capacity for self-command, which we hope for in an adult, and which are disastrously crushed and distorted by slavery. They also include the self-expression of individual drives, powers, and temperaments: Mill's aesthetic and emotional sensibility; Gosse's literary sensibility.

The development of capacities is *development* rather than mere *change* because it has targets it can hit or miss. One basic way in which development can go wrong is the failure to flourish of some central capacity, when some generic or individual activity, functioning, or achievement is stunted or constrained. But if it is not to go wrong, development requires *management* as well as the absence of stunting or constraining factors, and that management is as various as the goods it manages.

[28] The term 'functionings' is meant to recall Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's work on capabilities, but their *capability* is a broader concept than my *capacity*. To have a capability is really to be able to engage in some human functioning, and one can lack capability just because one lacks means (one is too poor to buy decent clothes, and therefore cannot appear in public without shame) or because of institutional barriers (one is female in a misogynistic culture, and therefore cannot earn money to support oneself). Capacities, as I use the term, can be necessary conditions for capabilities (to have a voice in government, one must have a voice), but they are, specifically, internally-grounded conditions. See further Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Some capacities are managed by largely non-conscious feedback processes, but others can be managed by conscious comparison with an ideal – the aspiring musician with a picture of John Coltrane taped inside her saxophone case – or by negotiation with others. For Mill and Gosse, there is an important shift from having their development (mis)managed by others, to taking it over for themselves.

Further, and picking up another point from 'Why Autobiography?', about reflexivity: we have *various and gappy self-perception* of our own capacities. We can turn our attention on some of them but not others, and some in more detail than others, and we use many different media or modes for that perception. For instance, we have very little self-perception of our capacity to see the world as a three-dimensional space – we just make use of it, indeed it just imposes itself on us. Daniel Kahneman has argued that many of our moral judgements are made by fast, non-conscious heuristics whose workings we cannot directly perceive, and whose results therefore appear to us as 'intuitive'.[29] Some of our capacities – character-traits, like charisma or pomposity – we typically perceive through others' reported perceptions of us: I cannot typically find out that I am pompous except by being told that I come across that way. What I have proposed in my account of Mill and Gosse is that our pleasures can also be a medium of self-perception: what Gosse is describing in his first encounter with fiction is the delight – the glory and joy – of opening new eyes, of gaining a new sense; what his pleasure reveals to him is a demanding liberation. Gosse's suddenly woken capacity and Mill's gradual recovery from despair move their lives onto new tracks, against self-alienation and towards freedom. This is a motivation for resistance experienced as a peculiar and distinctive pleasure, and the medium of self-perception of the woken capacity is that pleasure in its own operation.

With that schematic account in place, what I want to say about the diagnostic role of pleasure is that Mill's and Gosse's developmental cruxes are exemplary occasions on which a need for expression of some central individual capacity is revealed by pleasure in that capacity's nascent operation. That is: our pleasures are diagnostic of our individual good. Pleasure is a mode of self-perception which identifies what is missing or undeveloped in Mill and Gosse's lives, and points and pulls them towards better lives. The general claim I tentatively derive is that the acceptance of one's own unchosen nature, discovered by self-perceptive pleasure in the operation of one's human and individual capacities, is the beginning of a flourishing adulthood in which that nature is fully developed and expressed. One can manage one's own development – that is, one can gain freedom understood as self-direction – by paying attention to and being guided by one's diagnostic pleasures, and one can find in those pleasures a motivation for resistance to parental, educational, and other kinds of oppression. Pleasure opens a window through which we can glimpse our own possible flourishing.[30]

Department of Politics, Philosophy, & Religion
County South
Lancaster University
LA1 4YL
sam.clark@lancs.ac.uk

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[29] See Alex Voorhoeve, *Conversations on Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): chapter 3.

[30] I would like to acknowledge the generosity and patience of audiences in Lancaster, Liverpool, London, and York, and especially to thank Derek Edyvane and David Martin for valuable discussion.