

[Note: this is the talk as presented for a particular audience with a limited amount of time. Thus please contact me before quoting or citing at [adam.swenson@csun.edu](mailto:adam.swenson@csun.edu)]

**Adam Swenson**  
**Hurts So Good: What's bad about masochistic pain?**  
**Center for Sex and Gender Research**  
**California State University, Northridge**  
**24 April 2009**

François Jacob writes that the pleasure center has been located, somewhere in the brain or in the spinal cord. A miracle: it is immediately juxtaposed with the center of displeasure....What marvelous naïveté. And where would one locate masochism, in pleasure or displeasure?<sup>i</sup>

—Jean Baudrillard

Up against the wall of the barn, tormented by Clayton's pliers, Daddy Bob Allen's character Andy has an epiphany:

The word pain, along with a regiment of other words like pleasure, arousal, eroticism, submission, Master, slave... all sorts of words were beginning to undergo a quantum shift in meaning. Andy suddenly realized the fires in the cave were from stacks of burning dictionaries. Pleasure pain? Until that very moment, the term had no meaning for Andy. In a way it still didn't. Though he now knew with breathtaking certainty that pleasure and pain could inhabit the same act at the same time, there was no way he could explain the concept to any other uninitiated soul.<sup>ii</sup>

As is the nature of pain, Andy probably will never be able to fully explain the concept. But in today's talk I want to provide some tools to help him should he decide to try.

Some people seek out pain in sexual or quasi-sexual situations. In some cases, they are after the pain itself. For them, the experience they seek would be worse if it did not include pain. In many cases, this has to do with the relationship between the pleasure and the pain they experience. That relationship is our topic today.

Now, focusing on the relationship between pleasure and pain in masochistic experience may give short shrift to some of its most profound aspects. Those for whom these are deeply spiritual or intimately bonding experiences may find this discussion hollow. That's a fair point. Someone might feel similarly at a talk allegedly exploring her religion that focused only on the robes, rituals, and real estate, without ever mentioning God.

Still, robes, rituals, and real estate are themselves interesting, and they are part of the religious practice. And making some progress on the roles of pleasure and pain in masochism may help set some philosophical groundwork for exploring the more important components elsewhere. Moreover, it is extremely common for many writers, from psychologists to philosophers to those with intimate experience with these pains, to characterize the phenomena in terms of a relationship between pain and pleasure. Here are some examples.

In his early work, Freud wrote that

He who experiences pleasure by causing pain to others in sexual relations is also capable of *experiencing pain in sexual relations as pleasure*.<sup>iii</sup>

The philosopher David Seligman argues for the claim that

Cases of masochism do indeed exemplify *pleasant pains*.<sup>iv</sup>

where masochism is understood as

Pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure in suffering physical pain.<sup>v</sup>

In the *Leatherman's Handbook*, leather icon Larry Townsend writes that

Everything within an SM exchange is done with the intent of producing physical or emotional pleasure. [Townsend 19]

And in the widely regarded *Urban Aboriginals*, Geoff Mains claims that

To leathermen pain is no second-rate substitute; pain is enjoyable because *it is pleasure*. [Mains 51]

It's thus worth trying to figure out what's good about masochistic pain.

## **Approach**

So, my ultimate goal is to show that sometimes a pain can be intertwined with a pleasure in ways which make the pain itself good. But I'm going to begin the argument quite far back with some discussion about what pains are. This isn't to get a running start. My strategy is instead more boa-constrictor than cheetah. I will proceed by progressively encircling the position that such pains aren't possible so that the only way out is to deny my account of pain's nature. And, this, of course, is where I think I have the tightest grip. Thus after giving this account, the next step will be to show that there is nothing wrong with the concept of these good pains. I'll then explain what such pains would look like if there were any. Only then do I begin tightening the coils by giving some examples which seem to meet these criteria.

## **Terminology**

Let's begin with a few notes about terminology and concepts. Most of these—both philosophical and non-philosophical—are in several ways contentious. But I'll mainly just stipulate their uses here.

I shall very loosely use some terminology commonly used in BDSM practice—that is, on a common definition 'Bondage Domination Sadism and Masochism. On my use, a scene is an interaction involving the causation of masochistic pain. In a scene involving two people, the Top is the person providing the pain and the bottom is the person receiving it.

There are many different ways things can be good or bad. I'm only going to be discussing one very specific form. Thus it's worth noting three features of the way I'll use evaluative terms like 'goodness', 'badness', and 'value'.

First, I shall use 'value' to cover all three evaluative valences —good, bad, and neutral. Thus though it can sound weird, both 'pain is bad' and 'pain is good' fall under the heading 'pain's value'.

Second, I'm talking only about the value pain has in itself —or as I shall say the pain's goodness per se. Thus when I say that a pain is good, I'm not referring to, for example, its usefulness in keeping us out of danger. I'm claiming that it is, among other things, in certain ways desirable in and of itself.

Third, I'm only discussing a kind of value a pain has from the point of view of the person experiencing it.

To bring out what I mean, suppose that someone (perhaps a psychiatrist) says it's bad that for masochists pains are good. This does not involve a contradiction. What they mean is something roughly like: it is objectively bad that the masochist's pain is subjectively good. The latter form of value is what's at issue here.

Thus to save words I shall say 'pain x is good', but I shall always mean that 'pain x in itself is good for the person experiencing it from her point of view.' The same goes for 'pain is bad'.

#### Ethics

One cost of restricting ourselves to this kind of value is that my claims here can't directly tell us anything about ethical issues like whether masochism should be considered a pathology. Though our conclusions will shape such debates. For example, if it turns out that masochistic pains can be good per se, then the task for BDSM's enemies will be to explain why it is wrong to consensually create something good in another person.

'Masochism', 'masochists', and 'masochistic pain'

Finally, we shouldn't start with firm definitions of what counts as masochism or masochistic pain. The boundaries of these categories depend partly on our conclusions here. And there are certainly other factors—for example, political considerations—which should influence claims about who are masochists and which pains are masochistic. That said, to get us started, I'll just stipulate that masochistic pains are the sought after pains that occur in sexual or quasi-sexual contexts. Masochists are those who seek to experience masochistic pains.

## §1 Borderlines

### 1.1 What pains are

To understand what's going on in masochistic pain, we need to know a bit about what pains are. I have a somewhat unique answer to this question which I shall just suppose here. In discussing pain's badness, virtually all philosophers use 'pain' to refer to certain types of sensations. This is far too simplistic. On my view 'pain' refers to a complex of a certain kind of sensation and an often large and motley set of mental states with certain relations to the sensation.

For me, a pain can be made up of things like the meanings of the pain, other beliefs, desires, affective states like fear, individual dispositions, mood, jumpiness, and the subconscious perception of environmental variables like the gender of others in the room. This allows us to explain, for example, why the pain of the first incision in a lengthy unanaesthetized surgery is intrinsically far worse than the pain of absentmindedly slicing through the tomato and into your palm.

## 1.2 Stories set boundaries

Thus if pains aren't just sensations, we need an account of their boundaries.

I think we should use a very fine-grained method for distinguishing between different types of pain. I shall say that when two instances of pain have different values, they are two different kinds of pain (though multiple kinds of pain can have the same value).

Tying differences between types of pain tightly to their values in this way suggests that we can identify a pain's parts by asking about how candidate components affect its value. This gives us a crude sufficient condition of something being part of a pain:

If mental state  $x$  affects the value of a pain per se, then  $x$  is part of that pain.

Consider a brain cancer patient who experiences every throb of her headache as the constant reminder of her fate. In this case, the pain's meaning is part of the pain itself. The pain's meaning satisfies our criterion because it helps explain why her headache is so much worse than mine, even though we have the same sensation. It makes sense that a headache which throbs memento mori would be worse than one which ruins a morning.

This suggests that something is part of a pain when it makes sense that it is affecting the value of the pain per se. We can refine our rough criterion into one of the foundations of today's discussion which I'll call the story principle.

STORY: If the presence, absence, or change in mental state  $x$  figures in a good story of the pain's valence or degree of value, then  $x$  is part of that pain.

This tells us how to decide whether something is a part of a pain: we look for a good story.

So, when is an explanation a good story? I've come to believe that there is no clear criterion capable of cleaving the good stories from the bad. But reflection on the complexity of what it's like to be in at least moderately severe pain suggests that's exactly how it should be. Indeed, I'm inclined to think that no neat and tidy account of when the story principle is satisfied could be about pain outside of the philosopher's armchair.

### **1.3 Authority**

This doesn't mean we should despair of understanding when a story is sufficiently good to justify including something in a pain. Our hopes for general, powerful, and complete principles shouldn't be too high. But we may find helpful incomplete principles and common structures by exploring actual cases of pain. Thus in figuring out which stories are good we're more like detectives pouring through evidence than metaphysicians.

We're only interested in stories which explain why a pain has the value it actually does have. So, how do we know a pain's actual value? We don't start with furious clawing at intuition and air. We start with the person in pain. Smash your finger in a drawer, step on a nail, wrench your back, get cut, get cancer, lie screaming in a hospital bed, and you are the expert on the subject.

I thus suggest that the person in pain has absolute epistemological authority over her pain's value. That is, we should accept the second foundation which I'll call the authority principle:

AUTHORITY: If the sufferer of pain  $x$  says that  $x$  has value <sub>$n$</sub> , then  $x$  has value <sub>$n$</sub> .

If someone in good faith says that her pain is excruciating, then it is excruciating.

End of story.

Now, claims about first person authority are rightly contentious. But I believe reflection on pain while in pain shows the authority principle to be undeniable. As Scarry writes

For the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present it is that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is 'to have doubt.'

#### Restrictions

The authority principle allows no epistemological restrictions on the sufferer's authority over her pain's value. There are especially no restrictions on rationality, reflection, or competency. No matter how far gone a person is mentally, she still retains authority; even screaming infants have authority. There are of course plenty of places communication or conceptualization of the value can break down. As Virginia Woolf reminds us

The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.

But the authority principle just says that the sufferer is right about her pain's value, not that she can get us to understand what she's right about.

#### 1.4 Implications of the authority principle for masochism

Before leaving pain's metaphysics, I should point out that those who think the masochist's pain cannot be good needn't deny anything I've said so far. For example, it is still open that someone who claims that her pain is good might be

misusing language, insane, self-deceiving, lying about the value, or misrepresenting the qualities of her experience. The authority principle just entails that if she's referring to the pain part of her experience—and it's possible she isn't—her pain is good. Thus nearly all the standard attempts to deny masochists good pain remain available at this point.

## §2 Sources

Return now to the relationship between pain and pleasure. The story principle and the authority principle tell us that to figure out what's going on here we should start with the value of masochistic pains by asking those who have them.

But the authority principle only covers the pain's value; it doesn't confer first-person authority over any other aspect of pain. Indeed, the authority principle doesn't even extend to the character of the pain or to the proper story of its value. She just can't be wrong about how bad or good it is.

Hence, in principle, no one has complete authority over her pain's story. But this important philosophical point must be kept in perspective. Though the narrow scope of ATH does not give those who practice BDSM the last word on how their pains have the values they do, their voices should dominate the conversation.

This is a good place to pause and identify whose voices figure most prominently in my thinking. There's of course lot's of philosophy, psychology, and the usual pain science and neurology. But since I have virtually no experience with the phenomena I'm attempting to discuss today, I've heavily relied on material from members of BDSM communities. This includes porn

—with varying degrees of, shall we say, literary intent— as well as ethnographic works like Geoff Mains' *Urban Aborigines* and pedagogically oriented material like Joseph Bean's *Leathersex*, and Pat Califia's *Lesbian SM Safety Manual*.

The vast majority of my sources come from LGBTQQ BDSM communities. I do have some theoretical reasons for focusing more here and less on heterosexually oriented works like *The Story of O*. But my main reason is just availability. Those who have graciously lent me the large boxes of material my houseguests find so interesting come from these sides of the BDSM world. This of course leaves serious gaps that must eventually be filled. But I suspect that such investigation will only further enrich the diversity of possible masochistic pains and not undermine the possibilities I'm describing today.

### **Romanticizing pain**

Finally, let me just mention a caution about philosophical reflection on pain in general and some caveat lector (Latin for 'listener beware'). I'm at constant war with those who would oversimplify the experience of pain in service of their philosophical theories. But there's also the danger of over-romanticizing the experience of pain. This is a general problem, but it merits especially close attention when we're talking about masochistic pain. It's one thing to be writing about pain in front of a computer, and a far different thing to be at the supersonic end of a 10 foot bullwhip. Every writer faces the danger of losing track of the reality of the experience. But it is especially acute for the uninitiated who attempt to lecture the subject.

## Summary

So, in case you've glazed over, here's the theoretical basis for all the good stuff to come: To make sense of how pain and pleasure intertwine in masochism we need a way of identifying what makes up a pain. The answer is that if there's a good story about how something affects a pain's value, then that thing is part of the pain. We start looking for such stories from certainty about the pain's value and then try our best to make sense of why it should be that way. But we should have no illusions about ever being certain that we've gotten it right, even for our own pains.

### §3

#### Non-algolagnic masochistic pains

We'll now see that not all apparently masochistic practices involve good pains. To streamline discussion I'm going to use the term algolagnia to refer to pains which are good per se in virtue of their being bound up with pleasures. I know that sounds a bit contradictory. But I'll straighten things out later.

Keeping in mind my very loose use of the term 'masochistic pain' to include all sought after pains in sexual or quasi-sexual contexts, there are at least three possible categories of masochistic pain: bad masochistic pains, algolagnic masochistic pains, and non-algolagnic good masochistic pains.

The rest of the talk will be devoted to discussing the first two. The most interesting third category —non-algolagnic good masochistic pains— will have to wait.

#### 3.1 Economic masochism

There are clearly some cases of masochistic pain in which the sought after pain itself isn't good. For example, in cases of economic masochism a person is

willing to endure the pain in order to obtain a much greater pleasure (this is 'economic' just in the sense that they're making trade-offs; it has nothing to do with money). This sounds like what Mains has in mind when he writes that

The pain-pleasure barrier could be thought of as that maximum level in intensity of a stimulus that still remains pleasurable. Towards and at the barrier...small twinges of pain are far *outweighed* by the pleasure. On passing through the barrier pain *overrides* the pleasure. [Mains 58]

Or when another writer claims that

In SM, we also seek pain/pleasure settings precisely because they give us intense rewards. The kiss of the whip stings but gives such a delicious glow to the back. It exhilarates yet calms us.[Pre 21]

In economic masochism, the pain is merely a means to the goal of certain extreme pleasures. Were she able to obtain this particular pleasure without the pain, she would prefer to do so.

### 3.2 Pain as a contrast to other sensations

We may also find non-algolagnic masochistic pains in scenes where the pain is used to sharpen the experiential contrast with a subsequent pleasure. Pat Califia identifies two ways this can work. In the first

Pain... functions in contrast to other sensations the top applies during the scene. A prolonged bout of pain can make subsequent pleasure...that much more intense. [Califia 59]

In the second

Even the absence of stimulation can be pleasurable when the pain fades. [Califia 59]

When pain is used for contrast in these ways the subsequent pleasure is not part of the story of its value. This is unsurprising. If the forthcoming pleasure made the pain less bad, then the sought after pleasure would be less good, and the practice would be self-defeating. Therefore, these are non-algolagnic masochistic pains.

### 3.3 Punishment

We may find non-algolagnic masochistic pain in some punishment scenes. Intuitively, one can't be punished by being given what she wants. Thus in some scenes a pain used for punishment must be bad otherwise the scene won't work. But there may be more subtle ways in which the pain in a punishment scene might itself be good. Something similar may be true of redemptive pain.

#### §4

#### Could there be algolagnic pains?

So far, I've used my picture of the nature of pain to argue that not all masochistic pains are good. Now for the controversial claim: That some are. While I believe that there are several ways this could be true, I'll just talk about algolagnic pains—pains that are good per se partly in virtue of their connection to pleasures.

Many find the idea of such pains absurd. But they owe us an argument for why algolagnic pains are impossible. I'll discuss two such arguments.

Some writers' general theories of mental processes have led them to deny the possibility of algolagnic pain. For example, in his later work on masochism, Freud claimed that all (primary) masochism was economic masochism because

if the mental processes are governed by the pleasure principle in such a way that their first aim is the avoidance of unpleasure and the obtaining of pleasure, masochism is incomprehensible (EPM, 159). [Noyes 145]

Similarly, Reik held on theoretical grounds that masochists' pleasure lies only in the expectation of the pain, and not the experience of it.

Fair enough. I'm not going to critique entire theories. My concern is to explain on independent grounds that they are wrong about masochistic pain. They can either explain exactly where my arguments go wrong or adjust their theories.

The whole idea of algolagnic pain has also been is threatened on a more conceptual front. Many philosophers have argued that the ideas of pleasure-pain, pleasant pain, and other concepts within the ambit of algolagnic pain are logically incoherent. That is, it is a logical contradiction to assert that something is both a pain and a pleasure. These arguments are plausible and widely accepted. But they show far less than their proponents believe. Thus to defend the possibility of algolagnic pains, let me explain.

In this context, terms like 'pain', 'painful', 'pleasure', 'pleasant', 'pleasurable', and the like have an evaluative and a taxonomic use.

On the evaluative use, 'pleasure', 'pleasurable', and 'pleasant' are used like synonyms for 'good'. Hence 'x is a pleasure' can be used interchangeably with 'x is good'. The same goes for the other terms.

On the taxonomic use, these terms identify a certain kind of mental state. Hence saying 'x is a pleasure' is roughly the same as saying 'x belongs to a category of mental state which has certain defining characteristics.' Different theories then give different lists of these characteristics.<sup>vi</sup>

Given this distinction, there are three interpretations of terms like 'pleasure pain'. Only one raises the problem of logical incoherence.

On the first interpretation, the first term is used evaluatively and the second is used taxonomically. Here 'x is a pleasure pain' just says that x has something in common with certain other mental states and that x is good. Either half could be false —x might be bad or x might have nothing in common with pains. But that would be a mistake about the experience, not a logical contradiction.

On the second interpretation, both terms are used taxonomically. That is, 'x is a pleasure pain' asserts that x has the distinctive features of two kinds of

mental state (and belongs to both categories). Such mental states might never occur. Whether they could is part of what's at issue today. But what matters is they can't be ruled out as logically contradictory.<sup>vii</sup>

On the third interpretation, both terms are used evaluatively. This use is incoherent. Here lies the alleged logical contradiction. Nothing can be both good and bad in the same respect.

But all this shows is that as long as we don't interpret apparent cases of algolagnic pains in this way, remain logically free to see whether there are any.<sup>viii</sup>

## §5 **Algolagnic pains**

Thus algolagnic pains are possible. To find out if there are any we need to examine why such pains would be good. Algolagnic pains, if they exist, will have a certain kind of structure so that in general:

x is an algolagnic pain only if x is good and some pleasure-related mental state y figures in x's story.

The task is thus to say what these pleasure-related mental states might be and how they could figure in a pain's story.

Here's how I'll proceed. I'll first describe in abstract structural terms three seemingly possible relationships between pleasure-related mental states and pain-components. I'll then take a few examples of pleasure-related mental states and suggest how they might fit into these relationships and thereby play a role in determining a pain's goodness. By the STORY principle, this means that these pleasure-related mental states would be parts of the pain. These would be algolagnic masochistic pains.

## 5.1 Three structures

First, in SHARED ROOT cases, some non-affective mental state plays a similar causal or explanatory role for both the pain and the pleasure, without the pleasure and the pain overlapping in any way. By ‘non-affective mental state’ I mean that they’re not pleasures or things like excitement or feelings of warmth that usually go along with pleasures. Put more abstractly, these cases have the structure:

SHARED ROOT: There is some non-affective mental state  $x$  which causes or explains the presence and/or value of the pleasure, and  $x$  is part of the pain’s story.

Second, in CONCOMITANT cases, some attitudes and states which are often concomitants of pleasure—for example, excitement, happiness, contentment—are parts of the pain but are not parts of the pleasure itself. In these cases

CONCOMITANT: There is some mental state  $x$  which is normally associated with pleasure but which is not itself a pleasure and  $x$  is part of the pain’s story.

Third, in FUSION cases, a pleasure, or some of its constituent parts are part of the pain. In these cases,

FUSION: There is some mental state  $x$  such that  $x$  is part of pleasure  $p$  and  $x$  is part of pain  $q$ , and  $p$  and  $q$  occur at the same time.

Notice that in distinguishing between these categories I’m assuming a traditional picture of pleasure as a relatively simple sensation. Other views may allow it to be more nuanced in ways analogous to the complexity of pain on my view. I suspect that the more nuance we allow pleasures, the more the lines between these categories will blur. And, I think, more cases will move toward the FUSION end of the spectrum. But that wouldn’t undermine the possibility of any of these structures.

## 5.2 SHARED ROOT **algolagnic pains**

Beliefs about an experience's meaning and some perceptual states might be two examples of the mental states which connect pain and pleasure in Shared Root cases.

For the former, think of a marathon runner crossing the finish line. Her belief that she has won is the source of her pleasure. It also may be part of the story of the value of the pain in her screaming muscles—the pain might be attenuated by the belief its pay-off was worth it.

A BDSM analogue might occur when the knowledge that his Top's whip expresses her love gives the bottom pleasure. And, this belief might lead him to experience the pain as an intimate gift, and thus good per se. [Wings quotes]

For the latter, think of the pleasure we normally get from being around loved ones. The pleasure doesn't come from their presence alone. We might not notice that they've entered the room. It comes from the perception that they are there.

So, perhaps some masochistic pains are best interpreted along these lines.

For example, consider the claim that

Given involuntarily, and in an atmosphere of distrust, pain is torture, whatever the motive....But given consensually, between equals, pain can be a most incredible form of love....If we were tied down against our wills by some asshole we didn't trust... that whip would feel very unpleasant. [Mains 49 (or 48?)]

Trust, mutuality, and consent are not pleasures. But they are part of the explanation of why the pain is a form of love—which might mean that it is good per se. If the 'unpleasant' at the end is read taxonomically—as saying that the feeling has a certain character—then trust, mutuality, and consent would also be responsible for the pleasure one experiences.

This reading may be a bit of a stretch. Nonetheless, I hope it sheds some light on what the structure of SHARED ROOT cases might look like.

### 5.3 CONCOMITANT **algolagnic pains**

Some obvious examples of CONCOMITANT cases involve sexual arousal. Here, the general arousal one feels—the excitement, shifts in mood, warmth, increased sensitivity over all, et cetera—that accompany sexual pleasures are parts of the algolagnic pain. Consider the common observation that

The context in which a pain is applied has a lot to do with how it's felt. [If I [and please note that I am reading] slap you suddenly when I meet you in the street, as a stranger... you probably won't like it. But [if] I start slapping your ass when you're sexually worked up...you might really get off on it. [Mains 49]

The 'it' here that one is getting off on is presumably the pain. Hence the picture seems to be that the sexual arousal, but not a specific sexual pleasure, is a source of the spanking's goodness. That would be a CONCOMITANT case of algolagnia.

#### [Anticipations of pleasure in algolagnic pain](#)

Before moving onto cases of FUSION it may help to give an example of this distinction in action by separating some very similar cases involving anticipation.

We saw earlier that in some BDSM scenes, the goodness of the anticipation of pleasure does not involve an algolagnic masochistic pain.

But this may not always be what's going on. In some scenes while a person is in pain her anticipation of the pleasure to come could affect the pain's value.

There are two different cases here. In the first, the anticipation itself is pleasurable. Depending on the details, this could be either a CONCOMITANT case or FUSION case of algolagnic pain.

Alternatively, even if the anticipation of the pleasure is not itself pleasurable (though Plato and others deny this is possible), it still might affect the pain's value by, for example, imbuing it with a certain meaning. That could be a SHARED ROOT case of algolagnic pain.

#### 5.4 FUSION algolagnic pains

I argued earlier that 'pleasure pain' could refer to cases where pain and pleasure fuse. To help completely close the door on linguistic concerns about these cases, it's worth noting that, prior to the rise in popularity of these terms in value theory and philosophy of mind, the English language already had at least two terms that seem apt for FUSION cases of algolagnic pains.

The OED defines ecstasy as

1. The state of being 'beside oneself', thrown into a frenzy or a stupor, with anxiety, astonishment, fear, or passion....
4. An exalted state of feeling which engrosses the mind to the exclusion of thought; rapture, transport....the expressions ecstasy of woe, sorrow, despair, etc., still occur

and it defines agony as

1. b. Intensity or paroxysm of pleasure.
4. a. Extreme bodily suffering, such as to produce writhing or throes of the body.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that agony, ecstasy, and FUSION algolagnic pains always overlap. But since these older terms are very common in descriptions of masochistic pain, a couple of examples in which they are used to describe amalgams of pleasure and pain should suffice for illustrating what FUSION cases might involve.

One writer reports that

I'd always thought that ecstasy was just extreme pleasure, but it's pain too. I remember during one scene, after a really heavy work-out, floating off in ecstasy while getting flicked and drifting back to reality while laughing at

the irreconcilability of it all. Of the freedom to get such pleasure from punishments that once had hurt me. [26] [from formerly abused by father]

Similarly,

There comes a point...when anything goes. Pain of any form *becomes sheer ecstasy*. Needles through the flesh. Hot candle wax dribbled over alligator clips. The most extraordinary pressure on muscles or connective tissue. The frontier between pain and pleasure has been crossed. [Mains 58]

[FUSION cases vs. economic masochism](#)

The difference between FUSION cases and cases of economic masochism can be very subtle. And given the amount of room the STORY principle leaves for uncertainty, we probably shouldn't expect that a person will always know which kind of pain she is in. Still, I suspect that there is a deep difference. Let me close with one final case.

[Ecstasy and Heavy flogging](#)

Sam whimpers some, but it is as much contentment as pain. Moments of resistance, the tautness of muscles; these soon give way. The intensity continues to rise....Against the raw bark of the whip, Sam now screams out his pain....[His] mind is beyond hiding the pain. It lives and it is ineffable; each scream helps to relieve it. If there is any moment of doubt in a scene, of wanting to turn back, it is now, just when the reality of the pain has emerged, and grins, but has not yet blossomed into ecstasy. One wants to go on, but the urge to retreat is great....[Soon] Sam no longer screams to relieve the pain: he has crossed that barrier that separates fantasy and reality. Each stroke of the whip no longer sears but bursts into waves of ecstasy to which he can only abandon himself: And as his mind rolls outwards into those wonderful vaulted heavens, his body moves to receive and caress each stroke as it comes down. "Oh please Sir" he whimpers. "Oh thank you Sir." Once again, God is speaking with Sam. In this bloody reward, David senses catharsis and a mind spun free. And once liberated, Sam is now free to reinhabit himself on his own terms....[47-8]

---

<sup>i</sup> Jean Baudrillard, the ecstasy of communication 51 [in counterpleasures]

<sup>ii</sup> [Allen 78] First ellipsis and all italics original.

<sup>iii</sup> [contributions] [ref in Feldman p.86]

<sup>iv</sup> [feld 86; allegedly 74-75]

<sup>v</sup> He is quoting [James Drever (ed.), A Dictionary of Psychology (Baltimore, Md.; Penguin Books, 1952), p. 164]" [Seilgman 71]"

---

<sup>vi</sup> Of course, some writers invoke the evaluative use to draw the boundaries of the category. Distinguishing between these uses doesn't preclude these accounts; it helps clarify what they're doing. These accounts can adopt only one of the following interpretations; but they are not the only possible views.

<sup>vii</sup> [fn about the usual metaphysical difficulties —e.g., why there couldn't really be cat-fish]

<sup>viii</sup> Writers who draw pleasure's boundaries via its connection to goodness are committed to this interpretation, and are thus right to reject pleasure-pains. But we need not have conceded their account of the boundaries of pleasure or pain.