Hurts so good: What's bad about masochistic pain?

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?

—Jean Baudrillard
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**Freud**
He who experiences pleasure by causing pain to others in sexual relations is also capable of experiencing pain in sexual relations as pleasure.

**Seligman**
Cases of masochism do indeed exemplify pleasant pains.
Masochism: Pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure in suffering physical pain.

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

**Mains**
To leathermen pain is no second-rate substitute; pain is enjoyable because it is pleasure.
### Approach

Scene: An interaction involving the causation of masochistic pain.

Top: The person providing the pain

Bottom: The person receiving the pain

### Terms and Concepts

**Masochistic pains**

The sought after pains that occur in sexual or quasi-sexual contexts.

**Masochists**

Those who seek to experience masochistic pains.
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What Pains Are

Stories Set Boundaries

Rough sufficient condition

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

Story principle

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.
Authority

Authority principle

If the sufferer of pain x says that x has value\textsubscript{n}, then x has value\textsubscript{n}.

Scarry

For the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiable 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.'

Virginia Woolf

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

Romanticizing Pain

Summary

- We need a way of identifying what makes up a pain.
- The answer: If there's a good story about how something affects a pain's value per se, then that thing is part of the pain.
- We start looking for such stories from certainty about the pain's value.

Algolagnic pains

Pains that are good per se partly in virtue of their connection to pleasures.
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**Economic masochism**

A person is willing to endure the pain in order to get the much greater pleasure afterwards.

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The pain-pleasure barrier could be thought of as the 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.

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.

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**Pain as contrast**

1. 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.
2. Even the absence of stimulation can be pleasurable when the pain fades.

**Punishment**

**Could There Be Algolagnic Pains?**

**Freud**

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.
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**Evaluate use**

- x is a pleasure → x is good

**Taxonomic use**

- 'x is a pleasure' → 'x belongs to a certain category of mental state'

**First interpretation**

- Pleasure Pain
  - Pleasure: X is good
  - Pain: X is like a certain kind of mental state

**Second interpretation**

- Pleasure Pain
  - Pleasure: X is like a certain kind of mental state
  - Pain: X is like a certain kind of mental state
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Third interpretation

Algolagnic pain

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

Three Structures

Shared Root Cases

Mental state x

Pain

Pleasure
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Concomitant cases

Pleasure  Pleasure-related  Pain

Fusion cases

Pain  Pleasure

Shared Root Cases

Mental state x

Story: Pain

Cause/explain: Pleasure

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.
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Concomitant cases

- Pleasure
- Pleasure-related
- Pain

Concomitant case example

The context in which a pain is applied has a lot to do with how it’s felt. [If I 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.

Fusion cases

- Pain
- Pleasure

Ecstasy

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.
Agony

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

Ecstasy and Fusion

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.

Ecstasy and Fusion

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.