Introduction

So I say it again and again, pleasure is shared.[1]

The modern idea of pleasure is primarily individualistic: indeed, modernity is often characterized (and criticized) as the moment which legitimized individual pleasures, rather than transcendent ends, such as God, family or society. The argument of this book, however, is that there is a counter-strain of thought in Enlightenment philosophy and in Wordsworth's poetry, in which pleasure is considered as inherently communal rather than private or solipsistic. The book seeks to retrieve this almost-forgotten idea about how pleasure might register a feeling of collective dependence and interaction, and might be generated from a feeling of community.

Pleasure is a remarkably mobile term, moving between different intellectual and theoretical domains with great ease. It is one of the most basic and yet little-studied facets of eighteenth-century feeling, both ubiquitous and complex in the period: pleasure appeared in almost all areas of British, French and German thought, from theology to the luxury debates, epistemology, science and aesthetics, to education and the new political economy.[2] In particular, pleasure is the common ground of both eighteenth-century aesthetics and political philosophy. We have long been accustomed to viewing the early eighteenth century as a period when the problem of how and why we take pleasure in nature and art was first formulated in a recognizably modern way. We also see the eighteenth century as a period heavily invested in the problem of sociability: how people compete, sympathize and depend on one another. And utilitarianism, which attempted to re-vision social structures in order to produce the greatest 'felicity' of the greatest number, emerged in the late eighteenth century. Pleasure reaches across all these fields. The question of how exactly pleasure and sociability might be related to one another was a burning question for a host of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers, and a question whose political and poetical contours, as well as its legacies, are traced in this book.

My procedure is to explore the idea of pleasure and some cognate terms, including happiness, bliss, joy and interest, in a selection of eighteenth-century philosophical texts and novels, before making an extended case-study of Wordsworth's poetry and prose. The book thus offers a speculative, conceptual exploration of pleasure. It is concerned with pleasure not as the umbrella term for quite different activities – the pleasures *of* wine, sex, dancing, card-playing, botanizing – but with 'pleasure' itself as a single, contested and *philosophical* idea.[3] Part of my argument is that we must – indeed, can only – understand pleasure's charged intellectual and political history by reading its usage closely in selected texts. Today's neuroscientists claim to be approaching a full biological picture of mental affect, a definite understanding of what pleasure *is*. Yet, from an alternative point of view, pleasure is not a 'concept' that one can finalize, as the analytic philosopher Leonard Katz suggests in his modest and open-ended definition: 'pleasure is something biological, psychological, and experiential which remains in large part unknown, the nature or category of which it is inappropriate to stipulate a priori'.[4] The only thing we can be sure of as regards pleasure, Katz claims, is that humans have a 'natural basic capacity to refer to it': we seem to have an innate capacity to have a 'good feeling' and to note this, and to communicate about it.[5] Even such a minimal definition, does, however, alert us to the critical and theoretical possibilities that pleasure opens up: themes of anthropology, communicability and universality that are explored historically and theoretically throughout this book. Although the meanings of pleasure are explored progressively and dialectically in each chapter, I would like first to set out some provisional ideas about the cluster of terms centrally in play in this book. In the rich tradition of histories of words and concepts (Raymond Williams, C.S. Lewis and William Empson), I offer some brief notes on the etymology of the terms and some of their philosophical incarnations. The chapters to follow will complicate these definitions through a series of close literary and theoretical readings.

KEYWORDS

Pleasure

The history of the word 'pleasure' does not show dramatic or very clearly defined shifts in usage, unlike, for instance, other aesthetic and emotional terms such as envy, altruism and the sublime. A brief tour of four

definitions – the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), Locke's *Essay*, Johnson's *Dictionary* and Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* – introduces the positive and negative valences of the word, and its long association with the ideas of will, power and force, which, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, all inform the way it mediates between individual and community.

The *OED* describes how our Middle English word is derived from Old French, *plesir*, *plaisir*, from the Latin *placere*, to please. 'Pleasure' appears to carry both a neutral sense from the fourteenth century ('The condition of consciousness or sensation induced by the enjoyment or anticipation of what is felt or viewed as good or desirable; enjoyment, delight, gratification') and an unfavourable one from at least the early sixteenth century ('Sensuous enjoyment as a chief object of life or end in itself. Opp. *business*. Sometimes personified as a female divinity'). Its second main signification is in terms of will ('How one is pleased or wills in reference to any action contemplated; that which is agreeable to one or in conformity with one's wish or will; one's will, desire, choice'). This (now less common) usage reveals something of a Janus quality to the word, because the *OED*'s definition 1c ('In strictly physical sense: The indulgence of the appetites; sensual gratification') has implications of the loss of rational will and the dominance of appetite.

John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689) makes pleasure a building block of knowledge, one of the 'simple ideas of both sensation and reflection', alongside pain, power, existence and unity.[6] Pleasure is a general term for what we now might call 'positive affect': 'satisfaction, delight, pleasure, happiness', Locke says, are 'still but different degrees of the same thing'.[7] Locke argues that 'they join themselves to almost all our ideas . . . there is scarce any affection of our senses from without, any retired thought of our mind within, which is not able to produce in us *pleasure* or *pain*'.[8] Pleasure has been 'annexed' to objects, ideas and thoughts by God, the better to awaken our faculties and ambitions from an otherwise idle state, a 'lazy lethargic dream'.[9] When he returns to the topic later in the *Essay*, he emphasizes that pleasure and pain are 'two very considerable' simple ideas, but notes that 'they cannot be described, nor their Names defined; the way of knowing them is, as of the simple *Ideas* of the Senses, only by Experience'.[10] Despite this ineffability, they are central: all the passions and even 'good and evil' may only be understood as rooted in pleasure and pain.[11]

Samuel Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary* definition is somewhat less positive, in line with the pessimistic comments on the elusiveness and evanescence

of happiness in his novella *Rasselas* and in the *Rambler* essays. He divides pleasure along a spectrum of volition:

> PLEA'SURE. *n.f.* [*plaisir*, French.]
>
> 1. Delight; gratification of the mind or senses.
>
> 2. Loose gratification.
>
> 3. Approbation.
>
> 4. What the will dictates.
>
> 5. Choice, arbitrary will.[12]

His examples of usage are gloomy: 'A cause of men's taking *pleasure* in the sins of others, is, that poor spiritedness that accompanies guilt' (South); 'Now Daphne's dead, and *pleasure* is no more' (Pope). One noteworthy aspect of his definition is the ambiguous way that pleasure stands for both loose gratification, a porous, weak-willed subjectivity, and its opposite, absolute power, domination of one subject over another (surviving in the phrase 'At Her Majesty's Pleasure'). These themes emerge particularly in my reading of Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, as well as in Wordsworth's engagement with power and mastery in *Home at Grasmere* and *The Prelude*.

Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* contains a 3000-word long essay on pleasure (in volume XII, 'Parlement – Polytric', 1765), which has been attributed to Diderot himself. It appears to be influenced by Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* (1699), which Diderot translated in 1745, and Lévesque de Pouilly's *Théorie des sentiments agréables* (1749). In the *Encyclopédie*'s definition, pleasure is a force driving human behaviour, analogous to the forces of motion underlying the universe:

> ***Pleasure*** (Ethics.) Pleasure is a feeling of the soul (*un sentiment de l'âme*) that makes us happy, at least during the time we are experiencing it . . . If there is only one way in which nature manages the material universe, then it is thus only through pleasure that she manages human beings. She has taken care to attach an appeal to those exercises of the organs of the body that do not weaken them, to those occupations of the mind that do not exhaust it by extended and lively disputes.[13]

The stress on motion and movement is particularly interesting, and is witnessed in Rousseau's *Emile* and in Wordsworth's *Prelude*. The entry contains some conventional classifications of pleasure as bodily and mental, but this extract from the beginning resonates strongly with the history of Epicurean and other materialist thought, and in particular with the influence of Spinoza, whose legacy takes us to 'joy'.

Joy

Joy is a Middle English word that comes from Old French and in turn from the Latin *gaudium*; it tends to be thought of as a particularly intense form of pleasure or happiness.[14] Of philosophers, Spinoza most builds on 'joy'; his ethics are centred on *laetitia* (from Latin *laetus*, gladdening, joyful), usually translated as the passion of 'joy'. Joy is meant to represent man's passing from a lower to a higher perfection, and his increase in the power of acting.[15] These ideas later played into Nietzsche's 'gay science' of affirmation, against *ressentiment*. John Locke's definition of joy as 'a delight of the Mind, from the consideration of the present or assured approaching possession of a Good', might also have been influenced by Spinoza, who is increasingly regarded as a central influence on even mainstream eighteenth-century philosophers. Jonathan Israel has argued for the existence of a Spinozist 'radical Enlightenment' (as opposed to a moderate Enlightenment), which, as he puts it, makes Spinoza–Bayle–Diderot supersede the historiographical triumvirate of Hobbes–Locke–Montesquieu.[16] Although Spinoza's place in the period is difficult to analyse for the reason that his very name conjured accusations of heresy and atheism (wittily dramatized in Coleridge's 'Spy Nozy' episode), most of the writers featured in this book had acquaintance with the so-called radical Enlightenment; indeed, to focus on pleasure is to invite that question.

At the same time, attention to pleasure's radical or materialist backdrop does not need to obscure its religious resonances, as they are often intertwined in the texts under discussion. For instance, in one of the most famous Romantic-period poetic uses of the term, Friedrich Schiller's 'An die Freude' ('Ode to Joy', 1785), joy has pagan and Christian connotations, as well as sensual and political ones. The first stanza has a particular resonance for my own arguments about pleasure and community in Enlightenment thought: 'Thy enchantments bind together / What did custom stern divide, / Every man becomes a brother, / Where thy gentle wings abide'.[17] In Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode' (1802), 'joy' has a Christian resonance, rescuing it from what Coleridge saw, in the *Opus Maximum*, for instance, as pleasure's sensualist taint. Wordsworth uses the word 'joy' frequently in his poetry, though typically as an intensifier of 'pleasure', not as its opposite, and perhaps partly for prosodic reasons, given its rhyming versatility over pleasure or happiness. The word 'enjoy' is also an important term; one of its meanings (since the fifteenth century) is to have the use or benefit

of something, thus 'enjoyment' has intimations of ownership and possession that are evident in Wordsworth's poem *Home at Grasmere*.

Self-interest and self-love

Spinoza's *conatus*, the striving to exist, as well as the idea that pleasure derives from the interaction of bodies, may have influenced Diderot's force-based definition of pleasure. Pleasure is sometimes considered as analogous to self-interest and self-love, and indeed the notion of humans as motivated exclusively by self-interest, usually associated with Hobbes and Mandeville, is often seen as one of the great, controversial Enlightenment ideas bequeathed to modernity. My own reading of eighteenth-century texts cautions against a simplistic identification of pleasure and self-interest and against a hard binary of self-interest and altruism, thus offering a footnote to the great conceptual genealogists, Marx and Nietzsche, and later Albert Hirschman. Marx described how individual interest and common interest were only made contradictory through the historical division of labour.[18] Nietzsche argued 'it is only with the decline of aristocratic value-judgements that this whole opposition between "egoistic" and "unegoistic" comes to impose itself increasingly on the human conscience'.[19] Albert Hirschman showed how the idea of interest drifted over two centuries from a notion of a rational decision-making that could counteract the overwhelming force of the passions and appetites, to a narrower notion of economic advancement. As he summarized it, the seventeenth-century realist political maxim 'Interest will not lie' had become, by the eighteenth-century, the crucially broader yet flatter notion 'Interest governs the world.'[20] Hirschman's argument was centrally concerned with how economic activities came to be understood as harmless *doux commerce* as opposed to the context of the violence of the passions out of which interest emerged. It is, however, relevant to my own analysis of how 'pleasure' in the eighteenth century carries a wider range of meanings than simply 'selfishness' or 'individuality'.

Other intellectual historians have recently built on Hirschman's analysis to untangle the semantic web around luxury, self-interest, altruism and 'self-love'.[21] The term 'self-love' in English, 'regard for one's own well-being or happiness' (*OED*), dates from the late seventeenth century. Christian Maurer has shown its growing importance from the 1720s onwards, and identified the various meanings that attached to it: as a hedonistic and egoistic concept; as love of praise; as self-esteem; as excessive pride and as self-respect.[22] The first is especially important for

understanding the history of the concept of pleasure. As Maurer points out, 'hedonistic' desires aiming at pleasure for the agent are now frequently assumed to be a subset of 'egoistic' desires, which benefit the agent more broadly; in terms of power, pleasure, wealth, security, self-preservation, etc. Maurer suggests that in the early eighteenth century, a contrast between hedonistic and egoistic desires was pointed up by Stoic arguments that an infant has a natural impulse to self-preservation but not to pleasure. 'Self-love' is a theme of my reading of Rousseau, which looks at the presence of 'pleasure' in his concepts of *amour de soi* and *amour propre*. Though Maurer does not make this point, the special complexity of pleasure as a 'selfish' feeling in the late eighteenth century is pointed up by the fact that the word 'egoism' appears only in 1800 ('Generous sentiment and affection in France . . . was lost in selfishness or according to their new word *Egoism*', *OED*). A certain cultural self-consciousness about new theories of a selfish psychology is also registered in one of the first extended elaborations of the concept of 'disinterest', being William Hazlitt's *Essay on the Principles of Human Action: Being an Argument in Favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind* (1805).[23] One aspect of my aim is to chart a prehistory for this early nineteenth-century articulation of selfish pleasure versus 'disinterestedness'.

Epicureanism and hedonism

The brief mentions of Stoicism, above, reminds us of the long afterlives of ancient theories of pleasure and happiness, which quietly echo throughout my study. Classical Greek philosophy from the pre-Socratics to the Stoics devoted much attention to questions of *aisthesis* and *hedone*, *euthumia*, *terpsis*, *eudaimonia*, *aponia* and *ataraxia*. Pleasure is a major theme of Plato's *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Philebus* and of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Magna Moralia*. It is, however, Epicureanism that has been remembered as pleasure's great school; a school whose complexity and reception is presently the subject of long-overdue critical attention.[24] Epicurus' focus on pleasure could be said to stem from his premise of cosmic randomness as well as from his legendary gentleness; our *kosmos* is 'just one among indefinitely many which are generated and destroyed in the infinite and everlasting universe simply as a result of the unceasing motion of atoms in the void'.[25] Without teleology or rational design, humans should be free to pursue (albeit thoughtfully and prudently) their own well-being. In the 'Letter to Menoeceus', Epicurus defined pleasure in terms of our perpetual attempts to avoid pain and fear, and to quieten desire:

For we are in need of pleasure only when we are in pain because of the absence of pleasure, and when we are not in pain, then we no longer need pleasure. And this is why we say that pleasure is the starting-point and goal of living blessedly. For we recognized this as our first innate good, and this is our starting point for every choice and avoidance, and we come to this by judging every good by the criterion of feeling.[26]

The ideal state of the soul is *ataraxia*, which consists in 'confident expectation of bodily pleasure and pleasant memory of it'.[27] The absence of any disturbance of mind or stimulation from *ataraxia* suggested to the Cyrenaics onwards that pleasure is something negative, even deathly.[28] Modern literary critics are more likely to associate this argument with Freud or perhaps Derrida, though I frame the problems of *ataraxia* in terms of the work of Rousseau, Wordsworth and Adorno. One of my key arguments is that this model of still, calm pleasure has a politically utopian aspect in these writers, sometimes in opposition to an image of happiness as 'striving' and 'flourishing' (see the discussion of 'happiness' below). Another aspect of the Epicurean notion of pleasure that (I suggest) is relevant to Enlightenment notions concerns the division between pleasures of change (kinetic) and of stable condition (katastematic); i.e. pleasures that arise in the process of satisfying desire, and pleasures that are enjoyed in equilibrium, in the absence of pain. Partly with reference to Jean-Luc Nancy, I argue that the way that pleasure is characterized, the texture of its description, in these eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century texts has consequences for the political readings we make of it.

Actual references to Epicureanism in the eighteenth century are ambiguous, as they could mean many things, even simply insults. Epicureanism, Epicurism, the Epicure, etc., were terms widely used from the sixteenth century onwards to mean disciples of Epicurus; atheism or irreligion; atomism; materialism; someone who gave himself up to sensual pleasures; gluttony; delicacy of eating preferences. Epicureanism was not necessarily opposed to Christianity: Augustine is sometimes seen as a Christian-Epicurean thinker, and Pierre Gassendi's dissemination of Epicurus was also intended to reconcile him with Christianity.[29] A caution about 'hedonism' and 'atheism' is required. When Leibniz stated that Locke 'is pretty much in agreement with M. Gassendi's system', he was not likely to have been referring primarily to what we now call his 'hedonism', but to his atomism and his cautious claim (in the second edition of the *Essay*) that matter could think.[30] Aside from specialist, now obsolete uses, the words 'hedonist' and 'hedonism', derived from

the Greek *hedone* (pleasure) were not used in English until the mid-nineteenth century (*OED*). Amusingly for Romanticists, the *OED* gives Thomas De Quincey the honour of coinage: 'Gentlemen, I am a Hedonist; and if you must know why I take opium, that's the reason why.'

Happiness

In modern everyday usage, happiness is often thought of as a broader, narrative and temporal concept compared with the more fleeting and bodily experience of pleasure; I explore these differences historically in relation to Wordsworth's *Excursion* in Chapter 5. The relation and priority of happiness and pleasure is a longstanding philosophical controversy that may originate in Aristotle's discussion of *eudaimonia* (variously translated as 'happiness', 'flourishing', 'well-being'). In the history of the idea of happiness, as Darrin McMahon has revealed, the Enlightenment was central, as it helped shift what was once a predominantly luck-based or tragic conception (as suggested by the Middle English root of happiness, 'hap', (un)lucky occurrence) to a self-determining and universalizing notion, i.e. the idea that we can find, increase or threaten our own and others' happiness. More recently, much research has been conducted into 'happiness' and 'well-being' in neuroscience, economics and sociology; this has been accompanied by works of popular philosophy and intellectual history, many of which have disparaged 'pleasure' in favour of 'happiness' as a supposedly ethically richer concept.[31] Though I believe that all these terms must be seen as existing in a rich and productive matrix, part of my argument is to defend the basic, Enlightenment notion of 'pleasure', and to question the ethical presuppositions of its dismissal.

Utility and utilitarianism

For Bentham, no fan of poetry or linguistic ambiguity in general, all the terms I have discussed above were completely interchangeable, signifying only pleasurable sensation; nonetheless, he accorded the concept of pleasure absolute priority in his social philosophy. The impact of Bentham's massive yet fragmentary publication, *The Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) was somewhat lost that year in the din of the French Revolution, and Bentham did not figure prominently in the British cultural imaginary until Mill promulgated his work in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, Bentham stands at the (rationalistic) extreme of a long tradition of thought on pleasure's

definition, distribution and maximization: in its attempts to 'spread' pleasure widely and fairly, utilitarianism was one of the most significant destinations of the earlier ideas of pleasure-as-social traced in this book (although within Bentham's strict individualism there could be no such thing as 'communal feeling' or 'community'). Comparisons with Wordsworth's ideas about pleasure are made in Chapters 3 and 5.

Bliss, delight, comfort

The word 'bliss' has an old link with 'blessing', and thus connotes gifts, gratitude and God, all of which I discuss in Chapter 4 in relation to *Home at Grasmere* and *The Prelude*. 'Comfort', on the other hand, appears to lose its primarily religious sense (to strengthen against temptation and affliction) over the course of the eighteenth century, gaining instead a physical, sensual designation (material and physical well-being).[32] Indeed, the *OED* lists the first modern instance of 'comfort' as occurring in Wordsworth's *Excursion*. 'Delight' has a lovely etymology: spelled as delite until the sixteenth century, it comes from the Italian *dilettare* and in turn from the Latin *delectare* (to charm, delight), which is rooted in *lactare*, suckling. Delight has a long link with poetic theory, following Horace's definition of poetry's aim as *aut delectare aut prodesse est* (either to delight or to educate); but as this book shall argue, the specific Enlightenment inflection of this old prescription is to make that delight *shared*.

Contentment, complacency

Content and contentment, distantly linked to 'contain', refer to a state of being stopped or satisfied. Subsequently, perhaps since Nietzsche's extolling of human striving and excess in the mid-nineteenth century, such pleasant containment has tended to be interpreted negatively by modern theorists. I explore this question in my discussion of *Home at Grasmere*. 'Complacency' is a particularly interesting Wordsworthian pleasure-word, which in his poetry carries a positive sense of both mutuality (as in the Latin derivation *complacere*, pleasing-with) and calm content. He might have taken this usage from Milton, credited with the first use of 'complacency' in 1643; the *OED* also cites *Paradise Lost*'s use of the older word 'complacence' with positive connotations of mutuality. (Another Miltonic word with similar communal and Christian inflection, 'congratulation', appears regularly in Wordsworth's poetry, as I discuss in Chapter 4.) But the alternative meaning of 'complacence'