Chapter Five  Between Ancients and Moderns: The Career of Pleasure

The focus of this chapter will be to chart the trajectory of pleasure in the modern period. The idea is to lay bare important shifts in the career of pleasure, taking into account its use and function in the arts and literature with special notice.

Pleasure after the Greeks

Soon after the Hellenistic period, the emphasis on pleasure lost its ground, and there began a different trajectory. The links to the ancient world have been lost, even when they were discovered in the 16th century, through Sextus Empiricus’ *Origins of Pyrrhonism*, the influence was limited only to further the agenda of that century, that of Galilean science and Cartesian metaphysics. Consequently, pleasure began to be understood from different standpoints, in psychology, ethics, metaphysics (Spinoza), and aesthetics. But, the emphasis on treating it in relation to the unifying character of persons and personalities has faded. Its meaning was largely fixed and limited to the commonsense view of gratification, supposedly localisable in some part of the mind. However, people did admit many differences in pleasure, both of degree and quality. At any rate, more than anything else, the sway of empiricism was powerful enough to regulate the understanding of pleasure completely.

In 1646, Descartes ran an extensive correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, the granddaughter of King James. The Princess had by then read the *Meditations* with keen interest, which in a way led her to develop a very rewarding friendship with Descartes. There are fifty nine extant letters of their correspondence, a treasure trove of immense value for posterity. Around the same time, the Princess began to suffer severe bouts of depression and she hoped that the older and wiser Descartes may provide some relief from her melancholy. The master recommended that she may read the stoic Seneca’s *De Vita*
Beata, translated as *On the Happy Life*.\(^2\) It merits speculating on the reasons why Descartes chose this text, rather than any other ancient text. Seneca’s reputation is not the only reason why a Stoic text was considered worth recommending. It is suggested that Descartes shared strong sympathies with Stoicism, especially of Seneca’s kind, for in terms of morals, he believed that the best model would be of the kind which will have passions and desires under the control of reason (Curley). Satisfaction, interior harmony, keeping desires under the control, exhibiting virtue, all these are a few moral assumptions rife in many views of antiquity.\(^3\)

The recommendation to Princess Elizabeth, considering all odds, is something that meant to provide her a therapy of sorts, rather than a serious minded inquiry into Cartesian philosophy. The task of the moral philosopher, as Descartes viewed it, is to offer some form of therapy aiming to teach the true use of reason in a person’s life; and such a use of reason consists in how wisely and judiciously it succeeds in controlling passions. We do not know if the therapy worked for the Princess, but the correspondence did raise a few questions forcing Descartes to write a book, which became the last major published work of his lifetime, *The Passions of the Soul*. There is an interesting ambivalence on Descartes’ part. He begins his work with a serious castigation against the ancient views of ‘passions’ by which he most probably meant the tripartite psychology developed by Plato, which continued to remain influential with some modifications until much later (Curley). We are aware of the *Republic’s* division of the soul into three parts, the rational, appetitive and the spirited. Descartes, despite his sympathies for a Stoic moral view, is not too charitable to its predecessors, for he was outright opposed to any view of the soul which complicates the matter. The soul must be some simple, indestructible, indivisible unit of an individual, distinct from the body (Curley). If one accedes to a view that the soul should be divisible
into different parts, describing its physiology, it straightaway loses its soul like character. To be more precise, Descartes refutation of the ancient view of psychology must be understood against the backdrop of a more fundamental change that has in a sense defined the temper of his times, namely the mechanist models of the mind and the matter. It is not intended that some blanket claims should be made connecting the Cartesian mind/body distinction and the emergence of modern mechanist world view, for the picture is much more complex. The picture of the soul Descartes developed in his latest book reveals that, a complex sequence of internal movements mediates a thought in the soul, whose corporeal seat is some pineal gland in the brain, and its manifestation in the body in the form of action. The body, on its side, can also build up its perceptions, sensations and affections through its bodily channels and cause the soul to be tempted, pushed or forced. Thus the impressions originating in the body, through senses, depending on their power can engineer changes in the soul, by extension will, because the latter cannot impact passions on its own. It should be remembered that for Descartes passions are purely a matter of body and its excitations; the soul, in contrast, is the autonomous seat of rational principles and reason only (Curley 90-92). This is an overly brief and brisk review of the Cartesian position. But it serves our purpose. The disengaging the soul form the body, it becomes plausible to establish mechanical relations—of causes and effects—between them.

Now the ambivalence is about the relationship between therapy and explanation. By therapy Descartes meant that one should know about passions better so that they can be tamed well; and such knowledge comes from how best one succeeds in assembling the facts about bodies and souls to fit the model of explanation in terms of causes and effects. The therapeutic interpretation is likely to disappear once we supplement it, as Descartes does, with a mechanist model of psychology. Thus something in particular has changed in
how Descartes chose to receive Seneca. He retained the elements of happy life, as components of morality, along with the idea that reason must remain a superior faculty. However, he braced them up with a view of psychology that does not support them. He wants to retain the idea of therapy, but the change he brought in the way the mind-body relation was conceived was radical enough to leave nothing to take care of the elements of therapy. The point of this entire exercise is to have a glimpse of the profound change pleasure underwent at one point in the course of its history, i.e. the Cartesian moment. It is important to understand that ancient views of psychology, with their tripartite divisions and the ambiguity allowed over the body-soul relationship⁴, were thought out in response to how philosophers in the antiquity understood the nature and the structure of moral life. The most important feature of moral life for them was that it is ridden with conflicts, of desire/interest contra laws/obligations, and what one needs is a way of managing one’s internal resources so that conflicts should not be portrayed in terms of the stronger element ruling the weaker. On the contrary, if we are to uphold a different view of the soul, as Descartes does, we perhaps need to articulate the shape of moral life in an altogether different manner. In this different view neither happiness nor pleasure are sought to be ‘explained’ in the same manner as they were explained or explored in the ancient thought.

We are already familiar about this aspect from part one. The upshot of this exercise is to suggest that Descartes marks the clearest break in robbing what were earlier taken to be the customary elements of moral life—virtue, happiness, pleasure and rational desire—of their props and stilts in the view of the soul they needed.

**Ancient and Modern Views of Pleasure: A Contrast**

It is by now clear that ancient views about are very different from the modern ones. On the face it, there is nothing novel about these categories—ancient and modern, for they
correspond to how histories of philosophy organise their facts chronologically, namely ancient, medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary. However, the distinction noted here goes beyond these conventional divisions, for it should be noted that the contrast is between ancient and modern views, but not medieval and early modern or Hellenistic and contemporary views. There is much at stake in what appears to be a conventional distinction of convenience; the contrast is not simply between two different periods of times in history, however much drastically they may have been far apart, but between two very different orientations, attitudes and inquiries with divergent sets of methodological assumptions.

As we saw in the previous part, ancient philosophy in general is more of a person centred enterprise, and it allowed greater latitude towards its methods. Its basic orientation was teleological. In contrast, modern philosophy, whatever is said to have begun with Descartes, became an apologist for a certain view of the world in which the primary character of motion was construed in mechanical terms. From these central differences, which constitute the doctrinal considerations specific to each paradigm, many other peripheral differences follow. Pleasure is a concept whose chequered career began as one of the central concepts of ancient views on selfhood and personality, only to gradually lose such status to very different views. The modern ideas of self and personality provide no comparable status to pleasure in their architectonic and the reasons are complex, and are to do with causes which are both historical and philosophical.\(^5\) We shall not investigate these in any detail, for that is beyond the scope of this project. For our purposes, it suffices to note the crucial markers of the difference between ancient and modern philosophy, so that we could assess the implications of this division for pleasure. A word of caution is due here. The above excursus should not leave an impression that all those views which came after
Descartes or the 16th or 17th centuries will necessarily be only modern. They are no doubt modern in terms of chronology, but they may bear neither the distinct imprint of mechanist psychology nor they may treat pleasure as eminently dispensable. By means of this distinction it is only meant to suggest that there is one paradigm of thought, namely modern, which eclipsed a lot of other valuable dimensions of pleasure. And, besides, not everyone shares this paradigm, as we shall soon discover.

In what follows we shall go over a few important ways of differentiating the ancient views of pleasure from their modern counterparts.

1. Most of the ancient views on pleasure we are familiar with are highly systematic in nature. In contrast, most of the modern views in circulation are non-systematic in nature, apart from a few systematic ones, like the ones the 19th century utilitarian tradition developed (Gosling and Taylor).

2. Almost all major philosophers in antiquity, except for Stoics, provide a constructive role for pleasure in their ethical views. The value conferred on pleasure depends on the relative emphases concepts like virtue and happiness receive in their comprehensive ethical views. There is no corresponding role for pleasure in modern ethics. In any case, modern ethics—Kantian or Utilitarian—is much unlike ancient ethics.

3. Ancient philosophers did not limit pleasure to a self-gratification view, but embedded it in the context of rational thinking and personality. Therefore, it was possible in ancient philosophy to argue for defensible forms of hedonism. To talk about pleasure is to talk about its place among many other things which have a role is shaping a personality. That was indeed one of Plato’s objectives in writing the Philebus. Modern discussions of pleasure, in arts and literature, do not consider it in any important sense as something that contributes to our understanding of persons and personality.

4. Modern views of pleasure very rarely depart from one form of empiricism or other. Ancient views are non/anti-empiricist in character in that they do not insist on viewing pleasure as a psychological phenomenon simply.

5. Pleasure among moderns is primarily a quantitative category which admits differences of degree and not kind. Thus, there can be pleasures of many kinds, mild, intense, elevating, and possibly a range of other, what are called, ‘subjective’ states, but they must
admit one single scale of measurement. As yet there is nothing like, what Keats called, a "pleasure thermometer". However, it is in principle possible, given the empiricist assumptions. In contrast, pleasure admits many categories and divergences among ancient thinkers, but which are not weighed upon by any stringently conceived unitary measure. Chapter three addressed this issue in great detail.

6. For moderns pleasure is an epiphenomenal feature of experience, something like an effect, and it is equated with happiness. In contrast, ancients do not restrict the value of pleasure to any one segment of human experience, as sensation or agreeable feeling. Pleasure for them is connected with the project of a person's life. Therefore, pleasure is not the same as happiness—eudaimonia, but it is connected with happiness in terms of complex analytical relations.

7. Ancient views of pleasure are essentially teleological in nature, while, certain modern views are mechanical in that they draw on a mechanist psychology.

8. Ancient thinkers understood pleasure in a broader framework of hedonism. Moderns also, like Bentham and Mill, did make an effort to understand pleasure under the aegis of some form of hedonism, but to be made serviceable to their utilitarian ethical views. Ancient hedonism, at least the one we had studied in part one, is much more nuanced than its modern counterpart.

9. In the ancient world, the range of resources mobilized to understand pleasure is phenomenal: images, metaphors, analogies, all from the common stock of everyday perception and experience. This is only part of the matter. The most impressive aspect is the manner in which all these were employed in the service of a theory of pleasure, never mind even if the theory fails. The idea then was to encourage some healthy kind of methodological pluralism. In contrast, in modern times, one of the major thrusts regarding mental phenomena was to explain them, to bring them under some plausible account of causes and laws. Therefore, methodological monism becomes the most preferred recourse.

10. Finally, a historical point. For very complex reasons we cannot attend to now, Christianity quite successfully engineered many attitudes and beliefs advocating rigorous forms of austerity. This forms the religious angle to abstaining sensual indulgences, which later led to very shallow kinds of hypocrisy and prudery in the late 19th century. The ideology of asceticism had percolated deep into modern social consciousness forcing certain kinds of pleasures, sensual primarily, to be valued as lowly and inferior. Though the problem was to do with social and religious milieu, sensual pleasure became its nub.
Therefore those, in the late 19th century and early 20th century Europe like Gide and Wilde, who sought to revolt against this morality, conducted their revolt by pushing sensual pleasure up the ladder of values. It was a sort of reversal of values. Pleasure received a new kind of attention, since it was construed as celebratory of the true dimensions of self, unrestrained by the artificial compulsions of societal norms. This kind of interest in pleasure resonates in the ancient world also, as Foucault’s work testifies, but with an essential difference: pleasure here is an offshoot of a repressive system, while in the ancient world it was a systematic feature of moral life.\(^\text{10}\)

The above list is not comprehensive, but it lays out in detail all the major differences between ancient and modern views of pleasure. Apart from philosophers, pleasure did attract considerable attention from artists and poets. We shall look at some of these tendencies in the subsequent sections. So far the contrasts have been made with no special reference to art or its conditions. The best starting point for a discussion of pleasure derived from aesthetic encounters is mimesis. At least in the Western tradition, mimesis marks the moment when there was for the first time an attempt to grasp the basic ontological structure of the world with reference to what is considered its image, \emph{phantasia, eidolon}.\(^\text{11}\) This contrast built into the idea of imitation, between what is real and what is not, in a way worked quite positively in favour of a theory of art, in that what is non-real is understood to be connected with what is real in very complex ways. Besides, it became a means of explaining why pleasure seems to naturally follow acts of attending to literary and art works. To be further specific, as we shall see in the next section, pleasure offered a foothold for mimesis which is otherwise on the verge of appearing obsolete.

**Mimesis and Pleasure**

Despite Socrates’ reputation as a conservative in matters of religion and morals, ironically, he was indicted precisely on charges of ‘impiety’ and morally corrupting the youth.

Interestingly, we hardly find in the entire Platonic corpus, wherever Socrates was made to
play an important role, any references to gods being either condemned or blasphemed. Instead, gods were praised, and on many an occasion, Socrates provides definitions of the divine. In addition, Socrates vociferously argues against the portrayal of gods in Homeric epics as deceitful, self-centred and unjust, for gods are not susceptible to the kind of follies that we humans are. They must be perfect, truth-like and beautiful, since they represent the ultimate symbol of perfection itself.

In the second Book of the *Republic*, while discussing the kind of education citizens of this ideal republic must receive, Plato expresses, of course through Socrates, these views about gods. Citizens must not read or listen, or watch anything that is straightaway blasphemous, and condemnatory of gods and their authority over human beings. On the contrary, Homer’s epics depict gods as being deceitful, with the intent of beguiling human beings. The reason Socrates cites to call these attributes of gods worth denouncing is not that gods could indeed deceive us; on the contrary, if gods are capable of deception, it means they could project “false appearances” about themselves, which, in other words, amounts to their willingness to lie. Socrates says, at 382a, “no one is willing to tell falsehoods to the most important part of himself about the most important things, but of all places he is most afraid to have falsehood there” (*Complete* 1020). If one entertains falsehood about anything in this world or any other world, it amounts to having a “true lie” within oneself, “the ignorance in the soul of the man who is deceived” (1020). Here lie and ignorance are equated, thus making lying an affair of not-knowing. But, as we know, lying is much more a serious offence than ignorance, for not knowing something is hardly an offence of any serious moral consequences, barring a few exceptions. Lying becomes culpable, as we are aware, only if it originates in an intention to implant a false claim or belief in somebody else. However, Socrates does not talk about any such malicious intention at all. In any case,
it is clear that, apart from intentions of whatever kind, lying entails stating or accepting falsehoods to be true. What seems to be Socrates' emphasis is the element of untruth in a lie, rather than the various factors that contribute to this untruth, including deliberate attempts to mislead and misguide others. In other words, portraying gods as deceitful does not become sacrilegious because there is a moral offence here; but because there is a violation of the essential character of gods themselves. This implies that truths, whether about history, biography, science and cosmos, in so far as we know them, must be stated truthfully. This definition of 'lying' hardly corresponds to our commonsensical assumptions. It is indeed commonplace that lying is a phenomenon where truths are withheld deliberately. Nonetheless, one might still argue that there are intrinsic connections between being moral and being a god. In any case, that is a different issue altogether.

To capture this aspect of lying, Socrates proposes another species of lying, namely a verbal lie. A lie used specially to misguide others, and this includes lies that children are told about goblins and demons, and lies a company’s board of directors tell their shareholders. There is a willing, and therefore culpable, intent to transmit false things, while we are aware of what is true. Socrates considers this permissible in a republic only in so much as they serve strategic and pragmatic purposes, like against one’s enemies (382 c-d). Lies, when used wisely, have their own uses. Now comes the crucial observation, that one can make do with lies when we are not too sure about the truth, say, about gods. Socrates says, “it is also useful in the case of those stories we were just talking about (about gods), the ones we tell because we don’t know the truth about those ancient events involving gods. By making a falsehood as much like the truth as we can, don’t we also make it useful” (1021). Lying is much like fiction then. The education of citizenry requires that they are shaped and trimmed to be ideal citizens, who could exercise their intelligence and wisdom, and
perform at the excellence (virtue, arete) of their roles, both personal and social. Such an education needs inculcation of values and attitudes through different channels of cultural transmission. And stories and drama, in ancient Greece, had undoubtedly a very prominent role in the education of its citizenry. Thus, for the purposes of education, lying could act as an efficient means. Unwittingly, Socrates is committing himself to a defence of art, which of course he would soon repudiate in book ten. That need not concern us here. What is important is the equation that Socrates works out between lying and art—story telling, narratives, and theatre.

At any rate, the issue of more substantive interest is whether this equation is a correct one. Does art sustain relations with a phenomenon like lying? After two whole millennia, Oscar Wilde says invoking Plato, “lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art” (Wilde 992). What is in fact common to both Plato and Wilde is their joint rejection of mimesis, i.e. mimesis; the notion that art imitates something else, either life or the world of objects. Plato’s rejection of mimesis only marginally frees art, for there are bigger stakes for the moral, the political and the pedagogic interests of the polity. In case of Wilde, the freedom of art is literally unfettered. One only needs to follow the trail of observations and convictions, sometimes taking on argumentative traits, Wilde wove into his dialogue “The Decay of Lying”. Most notably:

Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life’s imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy (987).

Both in Plato and Wilde, and indeed for many others in between, mimesis meant an explanation of art and literature in terms of its relationship with what it is not, either life or nature. Mimesis describes the relation between the words of a literary work and the actions and events they recount. Works of art, being essentially a form of representation, like a mirror, aim to capture what is ‘out there’ whose independent existence is not in question.
The subject of this ‘out there’ could be emotions felt in the innermost recesses of heart, or birds biting into grapes, colours, athletes and so on. We are familiar with this as the realist paradigm of representation. This is not to obscure the fact that mimesis may have to contend with phenomena which are not easily representable. However, since art and life are interlinked in multitudes of ways, many a time defying our descriptive and analytical attempts to track this relationship, it seems mimesis is the best that one could ever contrive to explain art and its place in life. But, this is only partially correct; for, it is beyond doubt that mimesis did as much disservice to art as the service that was claimed on its behalf.

It seems like an impasse, for mimesis is caught between the crossroads of being a useful category only at the expense of dispensing with art altogether. To say the least, at no point in the history, after its origin in Plato, there was a uniform definition that is historically resistant to changes in the practice of art. Hence, in a sense, contending that there is one definition of mimesis, unique to both Plato and Wilde is apparently nonsense. What they share are certain tendencies and common questions, but not details about mimesis as a justifier of art’s relationship with life.

So far we have just been examining the concept of mimesis only without any recourse to what it is meant to explain at all, that is art. Since there are clear indications in the history of art and literature that mimesis fails to gauge the resolve and the mettle of the newest forms of art, we need a post-mimetic conception of art. Duchamp’s Fountain, by now the proverbial representative of avant-garde art, is an instance of mimetic art definitely, but a misnomer perhaps. What about the impressionists and their blurred lines and patchy colours? Joyce is perhaps too much of a mimetic artist when he enters the world of his characters, and the ‘stream of their consciousness’. From Laurence Sterne’s piquant humour to Lukacs’ celebration of reality in the nineteenth century novel to the
extravagances of modern and postmodern forms of writing mimesis seems to have steadily
lost its explanatory character. In any case, this is not to deny that the realism of Dickens
and Zola's naturalism have found much to draw from mimesis. Each variant of these genres
and types, sometimes defying any attempt at a typology, does exhibit different gradations
of proximity and distance from a certain view of mimesis. What then is the utility of
mimesis, if not just to explain the much maligned realism? I shall subsequently argue that,
notwithstanding the attempts made by people like Abrams to situate mimesis among
different other patently non-mimetic conceptions of art, there is something about mimesis
that transcends the role of laying out the principles of art.\textsuperscript{15} As already indicated, mimesis
has in it an effort to explain how art is related to life. Plato finds a modest use of it, but he
is very much aware of its pernicious uses as well\textsuperscript{16}, while Wilde finds no use of it at all,
instead charges it with a malicious intent to clip the free-reigning imagination of art.

If we take it on board that art is a form of lying, a species of insincere speech or expression,
then mimesis could at its best be some sort of an order or principle of organisation latent
and also manifest in the form of art.\textsuperscript{17} One could further argue that the sources of this order
lay in life itself, and art is a means of extracting them. Then, the usual stipulations about
verisimilitude will not hold as a principle of art any more. Oscar Wilde is still too far apart
from this, for he demands that art must give rules of the game meant for life, much like
Stevens' edicts in his poem "Notes toward supreme fiction" that art "must be abstract" and
that it "must give pleasure" (380-409). Notwithstanding, if art is a lie, it is so only in a
qualified sense; that is, paradoxically, a lie whose import is not completely unconnected
with the truth about life, whatever it is. In case of Plato, this truth relates to the education of
citizenry; in case of Wilde, it relates to the 'instinct' to expression by way of foraging the
resources of imagination and self-understanding. These are symptomatic of the complex
patterns of relationship that bind art and life, crossing far beyond the provisional glosses of mimesis as a "mirror of reality'.

In the recent history, since the rediscovery of Aristotle’s Poetics during Renaissance, mimesis entered the vocabulary of criticism and art extensively. To reiterate the point already made, mimesis was made synonymous, at various points, with the imitation of nature, or representation purely, or sometimes with expression and imagination. And these equations were worked out under the aegis of very sophisticated attempts to treat mimesis in quite a sympathetic light, however, the advent of Romanticism did much to devalorise these views, thus causing a permanent rupture of sorts. In a sense the anti-mimetic gestures and tendencies began to get articulated more and more vigorously. It then seems like a series of inevitable changes that is part of a sustained interest in the concept of mimesis, since Renaissance at least, which has reached its climax in the hands of the twentieth century artists. Now, it is time to question whether these changes are so momentous as to call for a total rejection of mimesis altogether.\textsuperscript{18} I shall argue, rather cautiously, acceding to these changes as momentous still, that the concept of mimesis still retains its character and value despite a great number of serious shifts and turns in the climate of art. I shall do so by way of addressing a very important concern in Aristotle’s Poetics.

It is now time to visit Aristotle’s Poetics which seem to have written the propaedeutic, not Plato in fact, for mimesis for the rest of the debates on art. We shall do so by examining a short extract from the translation of Poetics.

Poetry in general can be seen to owe its existence to two chief causes that are rooted in nature. First, mimetic activity is instinctive to humans from childhood onwards, and they differ from other creatures by being so mimetic and by taking their first steps in learning through mimesis. Second, all men take pleasure in mimetic objects. A practical indication of this is that we take pleasure in contemplating the most precise images of things whose sight in itself is painful, such as the forms of the basest animals and corpses. Here too the reason is that learning gives great pleasure not just to philosophers but similarly to all men, though their
capacity for it may be limited. Hence people enjoy looking at images, because as they contemplate them they understand and infer each element (e.g. that this is such-and-such a person). Since, if one lacks familiarity with the subject, the artefact will not give pleasure *qua* mimetic representation but because of its craftsmanship, color, or for some other such reason (Halliwell 34).

There are principally two claims in the above extract. One, that there is something called a mimetic instinct, as part of human genetic or biological endowment. Two, an element of pleasure is inalienable from the interaction that constitutes the relationship between objects imitated and their connoisseurs. The first claim is perhaps true, as we learn from the example of children, though we are not too sure if this is by and large a dominant instinct. In any case, it is a fact related to human behaviour and not art. This is in a sense preparatory for the moment when Aristotle sententiously states that ‘art is an imitation of action’, the slogan that kept art and life bound together in one prism for the two subsequent millennia nearly. It appears that the truth of the second claim is at a drastic remove from the first claim, for mimetic objects could engender not pleasure alone but many other responses at once. Why not disgust or some such strong reaction? However, Aristotle invokes pleasure to explain the reaction to objects of imitation that is prior any other reaction. In other words, the attempt here is to establish a fundamental relation between objects of imitation and those who savour them; a relation much more basic than any other psychological reaction, the initial reaction indeed. Any instance of mimesis that fails this test has to revisit its own terms that render it to be a case of imitation. Therefore, in a sense, although there might be strictures of craft and expression evidently, regarding emplotment and various other principles of tragedy, pleasure supersedes these descriptive and normative claims in terms of its primary importance for the value of art.

The crucial reason Aristotle cites here is not craftsmanship or other technical factors, but a *whole* of ‘mimetic representation’ itself—its structure and representational content—that is
crucially linked with our efforts of understanding in general. As it were, Stephen Halliwell notes, “pleasure in mimesis rests on a cognitive foundation”, in that “pleasure, understanding and emotion are interlocking concepts in the scheme of Poetics” (Mimesis 203). Thus, the pleasure that is due from mimetic objects does not depend on whether they are construed as lies or true imitations of objects and events, but in relation to how a person attending to them recognizes through imagination—an impeccably cognitive function—whatever those objects are supposed to represent.¹⁹ The pleasure springs from this recognition, a tacit acceptance of what the work has to offer underlined by an active acknowledgement of the conditions and relations that place artworks in the world. What assumes superior importance is the quality that renders a work essentially an artwork. Then, mimesis is a matter of representation in general, with quite varying degrees of freedom admitted for it in bringing out the very event of representation. This definition does not restrict mimesis to relations and modes quite stringently drawn from a preconceived and pre-given reality. This latitude and liberality does not quite amount to altogether snapping the relationship between pleasure from mimetic objects and other cognitive functions. In short, Aristotle links the more primordial pleasure-seeking-character, of which we had occasion to study in detail in part one, with the prerequisites of understanding art. Therefore, the attribute that mimesis cannot relinquish, or the one that makes it a concept serviceable for arts and literature across history, transcending the vagaries of conflicting construals of the very being of art itself, is that, recalling Wallace Stevens, “it must give pleasure”. More importantly, this is in line with Nelson Goodman’s advocacy, elaborated in the beginning of chapter four itself, that the aesthetic must be subsumed under the cognitive.

Now what is left, rather crucially still, is to examine how this cognitive link that Aristotle proffers can be of some use to mimesis. It has been noted already that in recent times
mimesis lost its bearing and fell into a total disrepute. What in effect Aristotle suggested is that there is an aesthetic function served by mimesis, that of giving pleasure, which accompanies its cognitive functions. But, on the contrary, if mimesis is taken to be something whose function is not to 'explain' art, but to furnish the aesthetic function, thus bringing it closer to the view that it is a latent principle of organisation of artworks, then the value of mimesis appears in line with other functions artworks furnish for us. The pleasure factor here, though in terms of order it comes after mimesis, is actually what explains mimesis rather than the other way round. Thus, in other words, pleasure is the one factor that cannot be relinquished even if we choose to alter the definitions and interpretations of mimesis. This is because mimesis must always go along with an idea of recognition.

Initially this section began with a short review of a few definitions and analyses of mimesis and a few attitudes towards them, of Plato's and Wilde's in particular. There have been anti-mimetic stances right from the time mimesis had emerged as a concept, which only seem to have aggravated lately. And these stances have various motivations, sociological, historical, political, artistic and educational. In the face of this onslaught, one saviour is pleasure, provided there is a willingness to engage with the arts and literature, as Nelson Goodman does for example, in their own right; it is to grant them a dimension whose import cannot be simply subsumed under interpretations of a moral, sociological, materialist, and historical kind. What is needed is to unpack the relations that govern how cognition and pleasure are implicated in each other. Now we know why it is important to make this sojourn with mimesis before we are to embark on a more extensive treatment of pleasure. In the recent aesthetic tradition, this seemingly simple Aristotelian observation of the relation between mimetic art and pleasure has been taken to unprecedented levels.
Pleasure in general was never confused with pleasure in aesthetic contexts. Both of them were treated independently, as Aristotle's observation in *Poetics* makes it clear. But, since one of the presuppositions of this investigation is to begin with pleasure per se, taken as a unitary category, which manifests in many forms, the task then will straightaway amount to unpacking the analytical and conceptual relations that bind different forms of pleasure under one single head. It is here presupposed that there is one such masthead for pleasure, overruling the seemingly disjunctive commonplace distinctions. At any rate, this is not to overlook the more empirical fact that there is no single genus called pleasure, which is the same across the board. For instance, the pleasure of a horror film, comparable to the pleasures of tragedy, are no doubt very different from the pleasures of watching Escher's pictures. At any rate, a recourse to psychology is no big help here.

"It Must Give Pleasure": The Legacy of the Aesthetic Tradition

In the beginning of the 18th century, around the first decade, much before Kant, Joseph Addison published a series of essays entitled "Pleasures of imagination". The subject of these essays was pleasure, as one understands it in association with fancy and imagination, the qualities much needed for art and creativity. By the time of Addison, imagination gained enough currency to be called the main spring of creativity, for it found adherents across the board, from Hume to Hutcheson. There is a distinct recognition that art and literature involve imagination, of a very peculiar kind. But, it must not be forgotten, the reigning paradigm in this century was Neoclassicism, and the principles of art it hosts. It is not that Neoclassicism, or its continental variant Classicism, with their emphases on orders, unities and nature, would still be hospitable to imagination, which seems to be often associated with Romanticism. Addison captures it well when he writes that "there is still
something more essential, to the art, something that elevates and astonishes the fancy, and
gives a greatness of mind to the reader, which few of the critics besides Longinus have
considered" (174). And this something is closely akin to, as a sort of family resemblance,
to what we have been long preoccupied, pleasure. Addison, in the course of his exploration,
as indeed many luminaries of the 18th century did, weaves many collateral themes like
beauty, nature and art into his discussion, thereby somehow economizing the scope of
concepts and resources that pleasure in the context of art may have to deal with. To say the
least, the same economy continues more or less in our discussions of aesthetics. There are
no doubt experiences of pleasure attached to visual perception of beautiful and pleasing
objects, either in nature or in art. And it seems so thoroughly a naturalized phenomenon of
our perceptual relations with objects that we think it hardly merits any kind of interrogation.
It is as natural as the pang of hunger or thirst. But, having said this, it must still be
mentioned that pleasure derived from aesthetic encounters often carries itself in an exalted
manner, being closely associated with the value of art. Neither hunger nor thirst could
inspire one to ascribe values of the highest order of such a kind. It appears that this
evaluative dimension of art, owing to its pleasure giving character, is out of keel with rest
of our valuings, which are by far prompted by need and utility. In contrast, for many artists
and poets, pleasure is the only reason why a work of art must be attended to; the value of
art depends on whether contemplating it would be accompanied by pleasure. I may be
wrong in my metaphor of accompaniment, but there is a way in which pleasure and art go
along.

From the 18th century onwards, the type of pleasure that is associated with viewing and
understanding works of art emerged as a problem, collateral to issues related to pleasure
per se, which required serious philosophical efforts to deal with them. One of the important
features of this pleasure is that it is disinterested. This idea surfaced for the first time in the aesthetic thought of Lord Shaftesbury (Glauser and Savile). "Interest" is an ethical notion. For Shaftesbury, as for his contemporaries, it designates the state of well-being or larger good for an individual. Of course it can be used in speaking either of an individual or of society. However, Shaftesbury also uses the term to refer, not to the good, but to the desire or motive to achieve the good (Stolnitz). Thus, the pleasure that lacks any element of interest understood thus, with no self-reference that is egoist or self-serving, as one would find it in the love of god or art, should be disinterested. This is one of the moments when ethics and aesthetics began to drift apart from each other. And, this kind of pleasure was always treated independently, as if it bears no relation to pleasure in general, most famously by Kant. At any rate, Kant developed a very intricate view of aesthetic pleasure deeply anchored in the architectonic of his critical apparatus: that pleasure presupposes an a priori principle of purposiveness without a purpose. Though the theory of pleasure is intended to explain away its "subjective" character, its ulterior motive was to posit a principle that underlies the interaction—as pleasure—that takes place between objects on the one hand and persons on the other hand. This is in line with the general framework of Kantian project. In contrast, Schopenhauer, who followed Kant in many respects, tried to remedy this situation by relating pleasure in aesthetic contexts to his deeply pessimistic view of life, thereby situating pleasure in the much broader context of life in general. Pleasure was thought to consist in a relief from the pain of bare existence, whose basic trait is to be marred with a huge number of unfulfilled desires associated with the particulars of ordinary experience.

The Kantian strain proved to be too strong in leading the further debates in art and aesthetics, until our times, on pleasure on its terms mostly. Its promise became apparent in
its sound theoretical character and neat analytical dismembering of the aesthetic experience. However, Kant's treatment is limited to how he allowed the domain of aesthetic experience to be cordoned off from other spheres of experience. He only deepened this divide by further giving a descriptive account of aesthetic pleasure in terms of a description of the mental activity. This is not to suggest that Kant was wrong, nor to argue that aesthetic pleasure must be forthwith brought into the fold of talking about pleasure in general. Kant made some valid distinctions, but they hold well only vis-à-vis his larger picture of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. It is not intended that a case for pleasure in art must be built from the positions of Kant or Schopenhauer. Instead, this account is just to offer a summary review of the explanatory and the interpretive tendencies about pleasure in art in the last few centuries.

The Ideal of Pleasure and the Purposes of Art and Literature

Though it is true that the meaning of pleasure has radically changed, it still retained its charm and appeal to ignite thoughts of a highly speculative order. Sometimes, as in the case of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, the influence of antiquity was evident and widely acknowledged, but this was not to the extent of purging their senses of pleasure of its very specific modern inflections. In this section we shall examine two scenarios of pleasure in particular: firstly, the case of pleasure, employed as a thematic and a value laden concept by literary artists; and secondly, pleasure as an outcome of interaction with objects of literary study and appreciation. These are two different things, apparently; they are backed by two different evaluative assumptions, one as the ultimate source of value for an artist, and the other as one of the sources of the value of art. In any case, despite differences of sense and significance, what unites them is the fact that these usages are value laden. In the former case, pleasure is attached global significance in view of the evaluative premises it
supports, like pleasure as the ultimate value an artist aspires for; in the latter case, pleasure is assigned only local significance as it is only subsidiary to certain experiences connected with works of art.

There have been sporadic contributions on pleasure by poets and writers featured as flights of meditative thought, to be somehow made sense of in relation to the evaluative dimension of their artistic practice. There must be reasons why pleasure became an issue that deserves intense speculation on the part of creative artists. Besides, these reasons should be of a kind which were employed to justify artists vis-à-vis the purposes of their art. However, none of their pronouncements can be taken to defend a particular stance or viewpoint on the problem of pleasure. But this is not to consign their explorations to mere speculation. Sometimes, as in the case of English Romanticism, pleasure featured in their theories of poetry and what poetry, as an art form, could do to an individual involved in writing poetry.

A sample examination of views on pleasure, especially those propounded by Romantic poets, reveals that they do not betray any significant appreciation of this concept in a systematic manner. However, it is noticeable that pleasure did preoccupy them in an important way. It was invoked to justify their art, and their productions. Sometimes the burden of a philosophy of life was reposed on it, as in Wordsworth. Sometimes it was de-transcendentalised, while sometimes it was equated with pure sensuality. The search for pleasure in modern literature, though not a well-documented issue, occupies a noticeable place. Though its incidence has been sporadic and intermittent, it did feature as a prominent motif and a thematic concern. This interest in pleasure among literary artists ran parallel to philosophers' new found interest in art, in the name of aesthetics, and their efforts to explain away pleasure. Though there was little in terms of the methods poets, as artists,
shared to come to terms with pleasure, there is a common source to their interest and it can be traced to the emerging spirit of the age—widespread secularisation, gradual erosion of values associated with religion, problems of legitimation, a new role for art in society, Romantic and expressivistic tendencies, emphasis on the place of personality in art and its subsequent revocation, talk about the moral and political purpose of art and so forth.

In an essay called "The Social Function of Poetry", T. S. Eliot asserts that the "pleasure poetry has to give" is its obvious function, apart from the more non-obvious ones like "enlarging our consciousness" or "refining our sensibility" (On Poetry 18). Besides, he notes that he is not prepared to go further ahead delving into the nature of the pleasure that it is, than saying that poetry gives it; "simply because any other answer would take us far afield into aesthetics, and the general question of the nature of art" (18). It is clear from this that even among poets and artists pleasure meant something quite important. There is a broad-based consensus that one cannot talk about pleasure in art just like any other pleasure in life; that it is of a special kind and neither artists nor critics can pronounce anything on it without going into arcane matters of art and its philosophy. If this is the state of affairs, and keeping in view Eliot's exhortations, we cannot expect much that is revelatory about pleasure from studying literature. Indeed, breaking ranks with this climate of opinion, Lionel Trilling attempted something quite salutary as late as 1963 in an essay called 'The Fate of Pleasure', published in his collection of essays Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning.

In this essay he goes over a few tendencies and attitudes toward pleasure expressly formulated by literary artists of the nineteenth century, from Wordsworth to Dostoevsky, against the backdrop of the values and assumptions that did characterize the temper of that
century. He spots differences between poets and writers over their definitions of pleasure and traces a significant pattern of change spanning roughly over a century. He states that his purpose in charting the pattern of an "explicit change in the assumptions of literature which everybody is more or less aware of has been historical and objective" (80). As one could already see, Trilling intends to understand pleasure, either as an idea or an attitude, that became a matter of concern for a number of creative artists; and, as he does it, he takes it as it was formulated by these people. He nowhere questions or verifies if all of them were indeed talking about the same thing.

The charm of Wordsworth’s poetry can be due to his diction and the ‘spontaneity’ his verse evidently shows. Besides, we have a number of his glosses over his craft and his beliefs about poetry in his prose writings, the most notable of it is his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*; that they are a sort of intimations, most famously ‘intimations recollected in tranquillity’, "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the book that changed the name and nature of poetry for ever, marking an important moment in the life of culture, Wordsworth writes that the “immediate purpose” of writing poetry is pleasure. This is later echoed by Eliot himself, as we saw a moment ago. So the poet has to choose his words in such a manner that they could induce pleasure in the reader. This, he further adds, is not a simple matter, nor amounts to any “degradation of Poet’s art”. It is, Wordsworth writes,

> an acknowledgement of the beauty of universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, feels, and lives and moves (Wordsworth 23).

These exalted words, grandiloquent as they are, will mean little to us if they are not construed word by word, in the maze of contexts provided by his poetry and his life, as Trilling seems to have done. There is something about this statement that pushes it too far
afield from what he says about poetry, as an issue provisionally important for him for the purposes of this poetry collection. Here there is an attempt to confer a certain value on poetry, not from within, but from a location that extends farther and farther into the speculative reaches of human thought. The pleasure one feels is a consequence of 'acknowledging'—an act of recognizing what is perceived with a broad (therefore indirect) sense of approval; an acknowledgement that can only spring from more fundamental source of being human. Therefore, very soon, Wordsworth follows up his talk of 'native dignity' and 'elementary principle' with a contrast between poets and scientists and how their enterprises can be seen in a complementary fashion. There is of course a very 19th century naïveté about these claims. As he sees it, there is a need to justify poetry in the name of a pleasure that is slated to be much too fundamental than mere temporary pleasures. In any case, the important point here is to read these claims as part of a certain view of the relationship between art and life that Wordsworth developed to defend his practice of poetry. Seeking pleasure or giving pleasure are not simple facts about certain activities, but reflect certain larger features of our place in the world. He may well appear to be rather moralistic, but that does not fly against the point he is pushing for. However, by withdrawing this speculative context from Wordsworth, we fail to understand the more serious fact that pleasure here is a value of unique kind, embedded within the contexts, the tendencies, and the beliefs Wordsworth shared along with the temper of his times and society. The pleasure that he talks about does not warrant contrasts and comparisons with pleasures of other kinds. This is a primordial form of self-relation, as Wordsworth captures in terms of an “elementary principle” that correlates with the “native and naked dignity of man”.

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Another perspective would be that Wordsworth is only reiterating the 18th century aesthetic credo of the disinterested pleasure. Art and poetry, it is believed, among many things we deal with, only admit relationships that are devoid of any element of interest or desire. Pleasure derived thus is valuable because it corresponds to the standard for genuine art, for only such art could inspire a pleasurable feeling on our part without any apparent interest. I doubt if this view would do justice to Wordsworth's claims. This is because we cannot equate disinterested pleasure with the one that is "the grand elementary principle" by which one "knows, feels, and lives and moves." It is because the distinct ethical standpoint that the disinterested pleasure implies, as we saw in the previous section, is far too limited in contrast with the much expansive, and what seems like a pre-ethical standpoint, that Wordsworth articulates.

Trilling, in the same essay, views Keats' poem "Sleep and Poetry" as a testament to his equating pleasure with sensuality and a certain kind of voluptuousness. This is a clear evidence for Trilling that a change had already crept in, that an intellectualized and non-sensuous pleasure of Wordsworth acquired the colour of senses. It is indeed true that Keats is celebrating senses, but that reflects his temperament and preferences rather than a fundamental change in how pleasure came to be viewed. Keats is as much a Platonist about values as Wordsworth is. There is perhaps less of an exaltation in Keats, but that does not change the situation drastically. Artists constantly feel the pressure to account for, or propose, highest values both in life and art. It so happens that sometimes both life and art seem to share the same set of highest values, at once.

Trilling very naively assumes that there is a simple and primitive principle of pleasure, in the form of gratification. And, he adds, "it may be said to maintain an antagonism to the
principle of pleasure” (84). This simple assumption is present in his interpretation of both Wordsworth and Keats. But the truth of the matter is that no such simple principle can be assumed to exist. Neither Wordsworth nor Keats, nor Shelly for that matter, seem to admit such a simple principle. It is a different matter altogether that they all talk about pleasure, and sometimes match their talk of pleasure with the language of simple sensations and feelings that keep some fundamental, pre-civilisational truths about human kind in them hiding. To further compound the problems, invoking Freud, Trilling posits another set of impulses which repudiate what we take pleasure to be. He calls them Unpleasure, after Dostoevsky, and traces a small lineament of its deployment in his novella *Notes from the Underground*. The main character in this novella can be best characterized as pathological and he spurns all that is praised and preferred in his times as beauty, sublime and pleasure. The sources of his rejection lie elsewhere, in his personality, the formation of his character and temperament. If we take him at face value, we should construe him to be claiming something that is a total reversal of what Wordsworth and Keats meant. I argue that the contradiction is only a matter of terms and not real import. While there is a deeper speculative angle to Wordsworth’s ideas, the Dostoevsky’s protagonist is preoccupied with a notion of pleasure that is a symptom of his times, rather than being a concept intended to explain the purposes of his art. He opposes pleasure because it goes, as he views it, with the crass culture of scientific materialism and calculative utilitarianism.

My main contention about Trilling’s essay is methodological, rather than substantive. As a true blue cultural critic, he set before himself the task of explaining shifts in the temperaments of a changing culture. Trilling’s literary flourish sometimes obscures the point he makes. Finally, it is indeed difficult to state in precise terms the central claim he is making. As has already been mentioned, his purpose is ‘historical and objective’. His strategy was to trace out and analyse definitions about and attitudes towards pleasure in a
few significant literary texts. But his method of interpretation is 'literary' in a very innocuous sense. He takes what people say at their face value, and does not much attempt to embed them in contexts much larger than what those texts immediately warrant, by way of being literary. His investigations revealed to him that there is a gradual erosion of preference for pleasure, among literary artists, and that there is a burgeoning interest in the dark alleys of unpleasure, an interest which speaks of a genuine spirit to come to terms with true secrets of mind. Gone are the days when pleasure is considered the ideal; and the time has come to embrace the ideal of unpleasure. Opting for this new ideal, Trilling says, is a 'political fact'. If we go by what he explicitly states, then setting up an ideal of pleasure for oneself is naïve, and at its best a sweet and apolitical hope. On the contrary, having unpleasure as our ideal, which seems to be the drift of the literary climate, will bring us closer to reality. Ideal here becomes incarnate as reality. What is troubling about these conclusions is that they betray a deeper confusion at the heart of this thesis. The confusion is about differentiating a philosophical claim from its empirical cousin. Wordsworth meant to defend his innovations in poetry, his art and craft in short, by investing in pleasure the highest order of achievement, a speculative assumption indeed. The basis of this claim lies in the manner in which one could analytically pry apart the multifarious relations that bind mind with its objects, especially those that form in creative endeavours. Of course Wordsworth does not furnish an anatomy of his art, but that is implicit in what he said. Besides, there are no overtones of any religious significance attached to these ideas. On the contrary, the hypothesis of unpleasure is circumstantial in origin. Since pursuing pleasure became synonymous with a crass form of living, motivated purely by self-serving motives and materialist values, and as a profound expression of revolt and rejection Dostoevsky made his hero opt for unpleasure. How can anyone miss the profound irony in the story? This is an empirical claim. Treating both of these as if they are of the same ilk amounts to
not recognizing that they are made from two very different vantage points: one speculative and the other empirical. It is true that there is a shift from Wordsworth to Dostoevsky, but that reflects a change in the beliefs and temperaments of artists and it does not reflect on the concept of pleasure per se.

There are two important points to be noted here:

1. Works of art are said to generate pleasure as a response, the sort of pleasure that Wordsworth hopes his poetry would induce in a reader of his poems.
2. This is different from the pleasure, whatever its specifications, that an artist proffers as the supreme end of life attainable through art and poetry.

The first claim can be generalized to all objects, provided they qualify to be called works of art. The second one is rather tricky, for an artist could, rightfully, deny that the purpose of art is to enable people to attain transcendence. What Wordsworth tried to do in his preface of *Lyrical Ballads* was to connect these two claims into a theory of the value of poetry.

Trilling treats pleasure as a motif in modern literature, and therefore he sets out to examine what he considers to be its variations. This is valuable enterprise in itself. However, one cannot derive generalizations from this analysis that will affect the idea of pleasure. What we looked into so far were a few sporadic reflections on pleasure made by creative writers with no obligation to be systematic or rigorous. Nevertheless, their reflections too acquire importance because they help us understand the reasons why pleasure became a matter of concern and reflection at all. In other words, aside from disciplinary interests, pleasure began to exercise a powerful appeal, as we just saw a moment ago, thereby becoming an issue of great cultural significance. Hence, knowing more about pleasure and its vagaries in modern times is equivalent to an appraisal of the temper and tendencies of culture at large.

We shall address this issue looking at Walter Pater’s ideas about art and its legacies.
The Paterian Moment

In the conclusion of Walter Pater’s celebrated book, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, two ideas stand out. Firstly, experience is supreme; secondly, no theory or philosophy, as instruments of criticism or as points of view, can capture experience in its entirety. Life then is like a flame, fleeting and flickering, leaving only sensations, impressions and images. It is an ‘interval’, and only a few know how best to make use of that interval. The best one could do is to “expand this interval, and get as many pulsations as possible in a given time.” Only a “great passion” could give one this “quickened sense of life” and its “various forms of enthusiastic activity”. This, in short, captures Pater’s aestheticism. By profession he was an art historian and a literary critic. However, he did not believe that art should be understood within the narrow confines of its history, technique and form. The “aesthetic critic” must regard “all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of human life and nature, as powers and forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar and unique kind” (*Renaissance* xx). This is not intended as simply a matter of educating someone who wants to take up understanding and analysing art as his vocation, but as a philosophy of life to those who intend to cultivate “great passions” in life. What separates him from other critics is that he does not put art in a separate department altogether as many later did. Art is not a separate thing, to be dealt with some arcane and specialised instruments. Art teaches important lessons about how one could live a good life, not by devoting to permanent structures or foundations, but by attending to the details of concrete perceptions; for there is nothing beyond the simulacra of perceptions and its constituents. This was in short what Pater believed art could do to a person.
A little after Pater, as his influence began to wane, Arthur Symons, the critic who introduced symbolism into Britain, had the following to say about Mallarme:

Poetry, said Mallarme, is the language of the state of crisis, and all his poems are the evocation of passing ecstasy, arrested in mid flight. This ecstasy is never the mere instinctive cry of the heart, the simple joy or sorrow, which like Parnassians, but not for quite the same reason, he did not admit in poetry. It is a mental transposition of emotion or sensation veiled with atmosphere, and becoming, as it becomes a poem, pure beauty (67-68).

How strikingly similar this is to Pater’s notorious ‘conclusion’ of his *Renaissance.* Mallarme is also advocating, along with Pater, a view of life of essentially fleeting impressions, but arrested in the vision of the poet; that true poetry is when its language matches the pure texture of sensation. But one major difference is that Mallarme pared down his position to laying down strictures for writing poetry, along with furnishing a collateral aesthetic about how such poetry should be experienced. The talk of pleasure found its place in the ecstasies of mind, thus setting a clear path for a highly intellectualised aesthetic which found distinct reverberations in the Modernist credo established by Eliot, Pound and company subsequently. In rejecting romanticism and upholding classicism, modernist critics only took forward Mallarmean advocacies in a novel manner by emphasising on the idea of craft. Crafting verse, in accordance with certain aesthetic principles, became the corner stone for a modernist poet. Consequently, the reader of that poetry is expected to nurture a special awareness of how well crafted it is, and one of the purposes of such poetry is to induce a heightened sense of pleasure. In their rejections, modernists cleansed of their aesthetic all the Paterian traces of an aesthetics of life and reduced all talk about art to cultivating self-imposed formal rigor and producing works of art with a refined understanding of their own medium. Paul Valery, as an apologist for this aesthetic, represents the theoretical high point of this tradition.26
Pleasure, in some form or other, remained a dominant feature of all these poetic and aesthetic theories. Evidently, almost everyone discarded Pater’s avowed interest in equating this pleasure with the pleasure of life. However, they needed something else by way of infusing a notion of value into their aesthetic. This came in the form of a renewed attention on the activity of mind with almost a new sounding emphasis on an exalted and heightened sense of pleasure one reportedly registers in the experience of poetry. In fact, Pater’s hedonism did not disappear but only resurfaced in a different guise, though with very different consequences. Pater’s proposal was to ground not just the value of art and beauty for a critic or an aesthete, but to derive from the engagement with art sources and structures of value, against the backdrop of fleeting appearances. This might seem like giving too much of a place of pride to art in life. What Pater has in common with Modernists was what they took to be the right attitude towards art, viewing it ‘purely’, as something that must remain uncluttered by emotions, though they differed about the axiology. There is a sense in which the human mind could indulge in an act of perception, trying to capture the attributes of an object revealed in imagination as pure sensation. Likewise, what Pater seems to share with Modernists are certain forms of attending to objects in perception, either as poets or as connoisseurs. Subsequently, after Pater, the division between art and life became unprecedentedly sharp. The values of art, which a generation ago appeared to have permeated life, were then restricted exclusively to the world of art only.

The implications of this change are straight and unequivocal. For Pater art defines and circumscribes ethics, while for Modernists, art has no truck with what we customarily associate with the life of morality. One might find Eliot’s description of Pater as being ‘a moralist’ distasteful. But that is how it is. Pater was not alone in being a ‘moralist’ in his times. Almost all the Victorian high priests, Carlyle, Newman, Ruskin, and Arnold were as
much moralists as Pater was, though of very different kinds indeed (Houghton). In fact, the term moralist itself is sometimes inaccurate. They were not giving sermons about leading a good life, but only trying to show that arts and letters have a moral purpose, quite in their own different ways. More accurately, for Pater, engagement with art and literature in certain capacities helps one form a view of life that was in a certain mild sense subversive of the widespread dilettantism. Besides, Pater advocated a view of life, as opposed to many of his contemporaries, that sought anchor neither in the religion nor in the culture of his times. He harked back to ancient Greeks and Romans and tried to revive the youthful culture of pleasure and the celebration of beauty. From what we have discussed so far, it can be said that pleasure, as a category, is employed both as a value of life, as in ethics, and as a value subsidiary to the purposes of art, as in aesthetics. Is it the same concept, after all? If not, it must be possible to understand why Pater assumes that pleasure in art is related to pleasure in life. Of course, one might well contest his intuitions, or call it a mere fanciful idea. But the issue is a valid one.

We began our thesis with an examination of the proposal that one could re-envision the project of ethics by modelling it on aesthetics. This led to the suggestion that such an ethics could come into being in the form of a very personal idea of ethic. And aesthetics here refers to that broad domain of thinking about art and literature in relation to life, conducted either as an artist, or a thinker, or a critic, or an aesthete. If the idea is to come to a new understanding of ethics, what has pleasure got to do with it? One of the key features that sustains this idea is the place envisaged for pleasure in its overall design. By pleasure it is not meant one single thing; but many different kinds and varieties, all at once, but showing no apparent and singular logic that binds them into one. Pleasure in some basic sense corresponds to the primordial structure of directedness that characterizes the teleological
nature of human action, namely, that all of us seek pleasure. A word of caution! This broad concept of pleasure should not be collapsed to the usual empiricist one that we are mostly familiar with. The latter one is purely psychological in character and epiphenomenal in appearance, understood as a state of mind causally related to something else. Additionally, at least in principle it can be measured and quantified. The concept of pleasure Pater employs here is directly inspired by certain departures made in the Greek antiquity, in that pleasure is treated as 'state of soul' but in relation to a full-blooded view of the nature and function of the individual rather than being something instantaneous or a temporary mental state. Thus, any idea of personal ethics needs a certain understanding of pleasure at its centre. In the absence of pleasure it loses its ground as an ethic altogether. This is because the value of our sensations, intentions and actions, which remain outside the sanctions of institutions like religions, communities, groups, castes and sects, depends on how we view them as contributing to our pleasure. The lessons Pater has to offer us, as someone who tried to ground ethics in aesthetics, is that the former is not completely reducible to having a system of morality, but something that takes into account the fact that affections such as passions, desires, and inarticulate urges sometimes, make us the kind of persons that we are. Though it seems, quite deceptively, that Pater is simply pouring out his enamoured sense of art appreciation into a philosophy of life, there is much beyond that. It should be held in view that Pater’s central preoccupation, locatable at a deeper level of his engagement with the arts and literature, is always with culture at large and how it should shape the minds belonging to it. Naturally, his relativist spirit is animated by what he gathered about the nature of personality, as something that is played upon by the vagaries of character and temperament, ever fated to be in a state of permanent indeterminateness.

END NOTES

1 Richard Popkin’s rich history of modern scepticism, The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Bayle, quite sensitively charts these developments.
2 I got this anecdote from Edwin Curley’s book on Spinoza, *Beyond the Geometrical Method*. Though this book is about Spinoza, it includes a brief, but formidable, discussion on Descartes views on the relationship between the soul and emotions. In the rest of the discussion here, I shall closely follow Curley’s arguments and exposition.

3 Stoicism adds a new twist to this entire gamut of ideas by introducing the idea of nature as something that can furnish true guidance for anyone interested in living ethically. Ultimately, happiness—the highest moral indicator, must be something that one should attain by living in accordance with nature. Nature is the best judge of the kinds of proportions an object or phenomenon must be constituted with, which can guide it to the right mode of its flourishing. This in other words is to say that the nature knows best, so better entrust yourself to the course dictated by it. If our desires exceed our potential to achieve them, in whichever the manner, the Stoic counsel, in the voice of reason, would be to limit them because nature has not endowed us with enough potential that is proportionate to the ambition of our desire.

4 The best account of this issue, both historical and philosophical, is Sorabji’s *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death*.

5 Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* addresses some of these concerns. Though Taylor’s basic concern is with the notion of identity, understood in comprehensive terms—metaphysical and historical—the narrative he presents, stretching from Plato to modern times could help one historicize the notion of pleasure in relation to different ideas of self at different points of time.

6 These refers to a conception of psychology whose basic principle of explanation is the cause-effect relation.

7 In chapter six we shall briefly deal with some recent views on pleasure, of Bernard Williams, C. C. W. Taylor, Terence Penelhum who made very guarded attempts to argue for a view of pleasure that cannot be squared to a rigorously empiricist perspective.

8 In a letter he wrote to John Taylor, dated 30th January 1818, Keats coins and uses this interesting phrase to refer to some ‘gradations of happiness’ he underwent attending to a dramatic work.

9 This was Nietzsche’s case later appropriated by Foucault.

10 This point owes to the first volume of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, The will to Knowledge*.

11 For a comprehensive view of the concept of imitation in antiquity, Richard McKeon’s “Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity” is essential.

12 In general, mimesis amounts to ‘realistic representation’, namely the verbal description of experience in such a way that the intentional counterparts created by the words are judged the same or even identical as the world we know through our senses. Realistic is not very explanatory, since at most it comes close to a view of verisimilitude.

13 Derrida quite famously indicted mimesis, in *Dissemination*, as bearing the imprint of “Platonism”, and his attempts to revive a form of anti-empiricist metaphysics from the work of poets like Mallarme who pushed themselves far beyond the defining conditions of mimesis, must be understood in the context of the polemics waged for and against mimesis. The relevant chapter is “The Double Session” (187-196).

14 One could consult Halliwell’s *Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* for a latest account of mimesis with a broad historical sweep and scholarship.

15 The relevant work of Abrams is *The Mirror and the Lamp*.

16 I refer the reader to the section “Plato’s Challenge to the Arts” in chapter four.

17 Gadamer develops a view like this in his essay “Art and imitation” published in his collection *The Relevance of the Beautiful*. Besides, this view is popular in many guises. For instance E. M. Forster says the following in his *Two Cheers For Democracy*: Art is valuable “because it has to do with order,
and creates little worlds of its own, possessing internal harmony, in the bosom of this disordered planet" (59).

18 Prendergast deals with this issue in the context of discussing the 19th century French novel.

19 The most important word in this sequence of argument is "recognition". The pleasure element goes along with the cognitive element in this act of recognition. In chapter six, while unpacking the relationship between literary communication and pleasure, this Aristotelian point will be extended further. But the idea of recognition there admits greater complexity in that it is understood as a tacit element of communication itself.

20 Ferrari, in his article "Aristotle's Literary Aesthetics", offers an extended defence of this claim. Ferrari follows a different tack putting the formalist side of Aristotle's work as the centre of his interpretation, in terms of what makes a work of art successful in its own respects, in contrast with the more usual pedagogic and morally edificatory interpretations of tragedy in the Poetics.

21 Susan Feagin's "Some Pleasures of Imagination" is a recent attempt at connecting pleasure and imagination from a phenomenological perspective.

22 The relevant sections in Critique of Judgement are the first and second moments in the "Analytic of the Beautiful", sections 6, 7, 8, and 9 in particular. For a recent reassessment of Kant’s theory of pleasure, one can consult Rachel Zucker’s article "A New Look at Kant’s Theory of Pleasure".

23 Wordsworth’s Preface to Lyrical Ballads has an imaginative view of the relationship between pleasure and life. We shall discuss it in the following paragraphs.

24 This is in line with the central contention of this thesis that pleasure must understood in the context of a certain understanding of personality.

25 Richard Wollheim’s attempt in his article "Walter Pater as a Critic of the Arts" to properly appraise Pater as an art critic in the light of his philosophy of life is worth every word. It is one of those rare attempts by a philosopher to look at the philosophy side of Pater’s achievement.

26 Valery’s essays "Poetry and Abstract Thought", "The Crisis of the Mind" and "Mallarme" develop his aesthetic ideas. It should noted that Valery as a thinker exhibits great rigor. And his contributions to understanding poetry must be understood from the standpoint of a thinker who is applying the power of his thought to deal with the kind of thinking that poetry is, much like how Heidegger braced himself to confront this question late in his career. Thus, though Valery belongs in the tradition initiated by Mallarme, he shouldn’t be seen merely as an apologist for a certain kind of art and aesthetic.

27 Pater’s achievements as a classicist are evidenced by his work on Plato called Plato and Platonism. He attracted the notice of his times, not just as an art critic, but as someone who commands deep scholarship in ancient sources. The highly encouraging and positive review of this work by Paul Shorey, the legendary American classical scholar and translator, in Dial, bears testimony to his renown. More importantly, Shorey responds quite sensitively to Pater’s non-philological orientation towards Plato’s works combined with an ethical perspective over the conception of life and personality explored in them.

28 There is a longish essay that Pater published on Coleridge, called as "Coleridge’s Writings" in Westminster Review in 1867, republished in his Essays on Art and Literature. Though it is expressly about Coleridge, it is indeed more about Pater himself. In this he clearly states, in a celebratory tone, the influence of the culture, of ‘relatives’ and not ‘absolutes’, that shaped the mind of Coleridge. No doubt his readings of history are tendentious, and in a tell-tale manner bear traces of his German influences, but the larger thrust is quite clear; that his intense preoccupations with art, in whatever form, are underscored by a much grander and serious ideal of culture. In any case, it is beyond the scope of this work to deal with Pater’s ideal of culture in any further detail.