

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

**VIRTUE AND VIDEO GAMES:
FALSE PLEASURE IN THE DIGITAL
AGE**

A dissertation submitted by

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Abstract

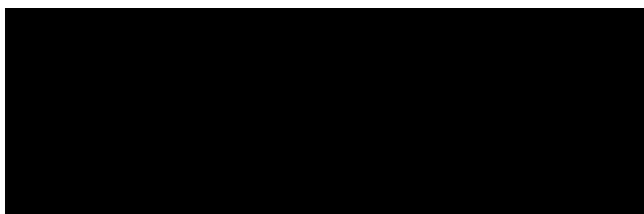
This thesis examines video games as objects of pleasure and assesses the negative claim that certain video games can detract from the good life. It argues against the claim that all video games are ‘wastes of time’ or that they provide a kind of *false pleasure*, while recognising the heterogeneous nature of modern video games. To do so, this work focuses on the pleasure derived from these objects. It questions the nature of pleasure itself arguing that while some pleasures are essential for the good life, other pleasures can be detrimental to its pursuit. It argues that certain pleasures that detract from the good life can be considered *false pleasures*. Drawing on an analysis of the writings of Plato and Aristotle, this work proposes an original taxonomy of *false pleasure*. The taxonomy proposes four broad categories of false pleasure, they are: *false pleasure of belief*, *false pleasure of experience*, *false pleasure of negative consequence*, and *false immoral pleasures*. These categories are applied to video games to discover whether certain video games provide false pleasure. It is argued that while some video games in certain circumstances can be considered false pleasures, it does not hold that all video games are false pleasures.

This thesis also questions the broader role mass media and technology has on the experience of pleasure in the modern world. It draws upon the writings of the Frankfurt School theorist who provided arguments critical of modern mass culture. I argue that these theorists considered mass media to systematically mislead individuals into making mistakes regarding pleasure and that these mistakes serve a political and social function. It is argued that the Frankfurt School critiques provide useful examples of the political and social function of false pleasure. However, it is shown that some of their concerns are not new, rather they echo the concerns of Plato and Aristotle and can be accommodated within the proposed taxonomy of false pleasure.

This work concludes that the notion of false pleasure is important when considering what makes the good life. However, the argument that all video games are false pleasures does not stand up to philosophical rigour. Moreover, it is shown that some video games, rather than being impediments to the good life, have a beneficial role to play in its pursuit.

Certification of Dissertation

I certify that the ideas, analyses, and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Signature of Candidate

05 / 10 / 2017
Date

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Preface

The work in this thesis began by considering whether or not video games are a worthwhile pursuit in the aim of the good life. While these games provide pleasure, the question became whether this is the right kind of pleasure to pursue and, moreover, whether it is possible to distinguish between kinds of pleasure. This led to a review of the literature surrounding pleasure and the ways in which certain pleasures can be mistaken. In the work of Plato there was found a distinct analysis of what he considered to be *false pleasure*. Similarly, in Aristotle there were found certain pleasures that he considered to be detrimental to the good life—though he did not use the term *false pleasure*. Both Plato and Aristotle made cases for differentiating between types of pleasure and recognised that while some might be necessary for the good life, others should be considered wrong, bad, or even *false*. While the notion of false pleasure was discussed by these ancient philosophers, further reading found that there was very little work done on a modern interpretation of false pleasure. This thesis is intended to fill this gap in the philosophical literature.

The issue addressed in this work is not necessarily what pleasures we should pursue, but rather how we should know which *not* to pursue if our aim is the good life. The argument for *false pleasure* is latent in many discussions and discourses which focus on how we should live our lives; it is implicit in discussion of drug use for example. We inherently see problems with a life of *soma*-like drug consumption such as in Huxley's *Brave New World*, which produces pleasure for the individual, but not to the extent that we would call their life *good* or well lived. The problem is that often the differences between pleasures are not necessarily made explicit. In the literature,

there is lacking a clear consensus of why some pleasures over others should be considered if our aim is the good life.

There are many ways in which pleasure has been recognised in both a common language sense and on a deeper philosophical analysis. This thesis does not intend (nor could it) to give a unified theory of pleasure. Rather the purpose of the taxonomy of false pleasure is to give specific examples of the ways in which pleasure can go wrong (however we conceive of pleasure). By doing this this work is by no means giving a definitive list of false pleasure as there may be many more examples outside of what is provided here. The aim is rather to give some further understanding of what we mean when we call something a false pleasure and the ways in which false pleasure can plausibly be said to manifest.

When thinking about pleasure a problematic occurs which is a key point in this thesis: on the one hand, we are told pleasure is important for the good life and in some cases for happiness; on the other hand, we are told that some forms of pleasure are not good to pursue. What is not clear is how we should distinguish between kinds of pleasure. While this is a topic that has been written about since the time of Plato and Aristotle, it appears that there has been little modern work into categorising the ways in which different pleasures might be beneficial or might deceive. While many philosophers have different conceptions of which pleasure should not be pursued, there is lacking is a clear consensus of these pleasures and the reasons for why they should be considered wrong to pursue. The determination of false pleasure has a role to play in practical reason—not as a rejection of pleasure but as a form of practical advice. To address this, this work proposes a taxonomy of *false pleasure*, using Plato's terminology. This topic is particularly important in the modern world where so many goods are ostensibly designed for the pure enjoyment of the user. As new objects of

pleasure come into the world it is important to have a fundamental working foundation of false pleasure.

The first part of this work will be dedicated to the problems of false pleasure, and the formulation of a taxonomy, while applying this taxonomy to modern objects of pleasure, specifically video games. Video games are a topic of interest because they are one of the newest and possibly least understood media forms. Coupled with this, they have been the target of many criticisms regarding the value of pleasure they provide. It is evident that these games do often provide pleasure for their audience, but this pleasure is sometimes criticised as being, amongst other things, a ‘waste of time’. This part of the thesis will examine the arguments against video games in consideration of the taxonomy of false pleasure proposed, to see if these criticisms hold for certain games. This begins with the overarching normative question, are some video games false pleasures? To answer this, we must think of what are false pleasures or whether there such thing as false pleasures at all. This necessarily requires analysing examples already given by past authors, this descriptive account will assist in answering the fundamental normative question at the centre of this thesis. It must also be stated, that the topic of video games in general is a broad one and as such every issue raised by it cannot be covered in this thesis. There are many elements to video games which unfortunately will not be included here, such as their social benefits. The analysis of video game play will primarily focus on the individual’s response to the pleasure these games provide.

Following the development of a taxonomy of false pleasure and its application to video games, this thesis will turn to the Frankfurt School critique of modern popular culture. This critique holds special interest as it questions the nature of the pleasure provided by modern mass entertainment. Similarities will be drawn between the

Frankfurt School critique and the taxonomy of false pleasure provided in this thesis. Though this school's critique focuses on television, radio and music; its fundamental ideas are such that they might be applied to objects such as video games. This analysis will be done so as to form a deeper understanding of the role pleasure plays in modern society.

The debates over the pleasure derived from video games and other forms of media and entertainment speak to deeper issues: in what capacity are we able to judge the value of pleasure, both for ourselves and for others? The purpose of this work is to find the reasons the judgements we make about pleasure and to discover why and in what circumstances certain pleasures could be considered false. To begin we will look at the history and debates regarding video games, in order to understand their use and their perceived negative influence.

Introduction

Nature of the Problem: Debates Over Video Games

The aim of this thesis is to examine the nature of pleasure in the modern digital world and how objects of pleasure can influence individuals lives for better or worse. It will do this, in part, by analysing video games as modern objects of pleasure; objects which have often been criticised for the pleasure they provide.¹ Video games have often been criticised in the media for the perceived negative influence they have, particularly, on young people. Media reports of video games are generally directed towards parents of video game owners and often run the line that they are ‘murder simulators’, or that they are a ‘waste of time’ taking time away from young people and their pursuit of something more ‘worthwhile’.²

When mainstream media outlets do cover video games they often do so in a way that questions their legitimacy as a form, they are often seen as children’s toys that need to be constantly monitored by worried parents. As the *Guardian*’s games editor Keith Stuart notes, discussing the perception of games in mainstream media ‘...when I write stories for the newspaper. As a games specialist, I have to shed years of assumptions about what people know, and it’s hard not to end up with an article that basically just

¹ It should be recognised from the outset that there is inherent difficulty in discussing “video games” as a whole due to their heterogeneous nature. It is recognised that, at times, the similarity between two video games might be limited to the fact they both use a screen and interface. This thesis will primarily be focused on games for entertainment and pleasurable purposes while keeping in mind that the different pleasures games provide can vary as much as the games themselves do.

² David Grossman, ‘Trained to Kill’, *Christian Today*, August 1998.
http://www.waldorflibrary.org/images/stories/Journal_Articles/RB6201.pdf, accessed 25 April 2017; John Condry, ‘Video Games Can Waste Children’s Time’, *Cornell Cooperative Extension*, Cornell University, np.
<http://washington.cce.cornell.edu/home-family/parent-pages/leisure-time/video-games-can-waste-childrens-time/>, accessed 15 June 2015.

explains what games are'.³ Columnist and television presenter Charlie Brooker wrote of his time reviewing games, 'whenever I told people what I did, they pulled pained, sympathetic expressions and automatically began treating me like some kind of adult baby ... Because games are for kids, right? So I was essentially a grown man reviewing Mr Men books...'.⁴ Because by some video games are merely seen as toys there appears to be a reluctance to take them seriously as an area of study, the few times generally that a game is talked about in-depth is when it contains absurd levels of violence, often bordering on the satirical.

Video games, along with other forms of mass popular culture, have been subjected to criticisms in many moral and political forms. Many of these criticisms, and debates regarding this medium, focus on the *content* of certain video games; namely the violence, sexism and crime portrayed in some games and the undue influence this might or might not have on the player. Before we look at the content of video games, and their ethical implications, I feel it important to look at the broader implications of video games as a source of pleasure. We cannot deny that video games offer a type of pleasure, but the common argument against them is that this pleasure is being created to the overall detriment of the individual; in this way, what is being created is a kind of *false* pleasure. Strikingly in 2013, the *American Psychiatric Association* tentatively classified 'Internet Gaming Disorder' as a condition warranting 'more research and experience' before it could be recognised as a formal disorder.⁵ This condition, along

³ Keith Stuart, 'Charlie Brooker on why video game television is so hard to make', *Guardian*, 30 November 2013, para. 11 <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/nov/29/charlie-brooker-video-game-television> accessed 25 March 2015.

⁴ Charlie Brooker, 'If critics want to ban Grand Theft Auto because it lets you kill virtual people, what world do they live in?' *The Guardian*, 2008, para. 2, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/may/12/games>, accessed 25 March 2015.

⁵ American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5 Fact Sheet: Internet Gaming Disorder, <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/educational-resources/dsm-5-fact-sheets> accessed 20 July 2017, p. 1.

with gambling addiction, are the first non-substance addictions to be considered by the association.⁶

When discussing the issues surrounding video games, it is important to note that not all games are alike, nor that is, should they be treated as a one monolithic whole. It is not my intention to define categorically what is a game or what is not, nor is it to list every variety of game; but think it is sufficient to say that when talking about *video games* we are not just discussing one thing. For example, video game researcher Miguel Sicart distinguishes between: single player, multiplayer, and massively multiplayer online games.⁷ Single player games can be seen to be games of skill or of story driven adventure, in which the player develops a skill set to complete problems, puzzles or to defeat computer opposition. Multiplayer games are games that pit one player against another, or have them work in cooperation. In this type of games skills and problem solving are still being developed however the competition or collaboration is now with another human player rather than just a computer. One way to view multiplayer games is to see their similarity with sport. The third is the online game in which players from all over the world can interact in one massive online simulated environment. In these games, individual players create and develop their own character and work toward objectives and goals alongside hundreds or thousands of other players, each interacting in the same virtual space. While these are three distinct types of ways to play games, some games will crossover, i.e. there are single player games that can be played in multiplayer mode etc. These categories, however, might not cover more recent games, such as mobile games, which are often multiplayer but have different characteristics to traditional multiplayer games.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Miguel Sicart, *The Ethics of Computer Games*, Massachusetts, 2009, p. 19.

These categories also do not take into consideration genres of games, some of which might appeal to certain players and not to others. Some players might only wish to play racing games, others strategy, or action games; some might only wish to play specific sports games, text-based games, or games set in space; others might only wish to play games on their phone on the bus, or on their PC at home; some like to play with others online, some by themselves. The vast number of ways in which video games can now be played, along with the different styles, genres, and number of new games becoming available, mean that trying to write about video games as a whole is an almost impossible task. Being such a relatively new media the question is also raised of how to approach the study of different video games. Sicart asks, regarding ethics and video games, if we can apply older forms of philosophical analysis to this media, or is there something in certain video games that makes them unique objects. For example, can we place theories of sport onto multiplayer video games, as they both feature competition between one or more players? Or are there characteristics which differentiate them from sport? Should games with a strong narrative feature be analysed in a similar vein to literature or film studies? These questions, while important for a conceptual analysis of different video games, will not be the focus of this thesis. I mention them now only to foreshadow some of the difficulties that can be encountered when exploring arguments for or against different video games. To begin to understand some of arguments surrounding these games we must take a deeper look at their history as an evolving media form. We will focus on historical arguments for why some have criticised this media form and the pleasure it provides. The purpose of exploring these arguments is to find why we should consider video games to be false pleasures.

There are many examples of the argument that video games are in some way a false pleasure; and it is important to consider the merits of these criticisms. Recently

John Condry of Cornell University gave advice to parents on video games in which he stated, 'take a conservative stance, until proven otherwise. Assume that playing video games is generally a waste of time, but it's ok for children to waste an hour on them here and there.'⁸ Criticisms of video games have been around for as long as the games themselves. Since the introduction of coin-operated video games in arcades in the 1970's, they have caused controversy for their perceived negative effects. The arcade game *Space Invaders* released in 1978 prompted an unsuccessful attempt in Japan to have the game banned as it was argued it inspired truancy in the school age population.⁹ This game was so popular it was claimed that (most probably apocryphally) the country was forced to mint more coins as a direct result of a shortage due to the *Space Invaders* arcade cabinets.¹⁰ In the UK in 1981, Member George Foulkes, put forward a Private Member's Bill to put restrictions on arcade games, the motion stated that children 'become crazed, with eyes glazed, oblivious to everything around them as they play the machines.'¹¹ Foulkes' Bill was put forward to put restrictions on arcade games, blaming them for childhood addictions that lead children to steal from their parents, to 'miss school and give up other normal activity to play 'space invaders'.¹² He also stated that the money being made off these arcade machines was essentially 'blood money extracted from the weakness of thousands of children'.¹³

The heart of the argument put to the House was that children of all ages were turning to blackmail and theft to feed their addiction to arcade games. The purpose of this bill though was not to ban arcade games outright, as the member stated such a

⁸ Condry, 'Video Games Can Waste Children's Time', para. 13.

⁹ *Electronic Games Magazine*, 'Can Asteroids Conquer Space Invaders?', Winter 1981, p. 31
http://www.digitpress.com/library/magazines/electronic_games/electronic_games_winter81.pdf, accessed 25 March 2015.

¹⁰ Steve Bloom, *Video Invaders*, New York City, 1982, p. xvi.

¹¹ United Kingdom, House of Commons, 'Control of space invaders and other electronic games', *Debates*, 20 May 1981, vol. 5, col. 288.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

measure would be too ‘Draconian’ and that adults should be able to make their own decisions. Rather the bill aimed to make operators and owners of these machine apply for a special license. The bill was defeated, but only narrowly. Foulkes stated that the problem was only getting worse and rejected the idea that it would ‘solve itself in time’. A rebuttal to this bill came from member Michael Brown, who stated ‘If I have glazed eyes, it is perhaps because I am the one hon. Member who is an avid player of "space invaders". I make no apology for the fact that before I came to the House early this afternoon I had an innocent half pint of beer in a pub with a couple of friends, put lop [sic] in a machine, and played a game of "space invaders".’ ... I also ask Opposition Members to remember that many thousands of young people could be doing many worse things: tramping the streets, engaging in violence—all the things that we in this House oppose’.¹⁴

In America when a video game parlour was planned in the city of Westport, Connecticut in 1983, opponents argued that it ‘would mesmerize their youngsters, rob them of their lunch money, provide them a center for illicit drug traffic and cause the downfall of youth baseball, music lessons and, yes, even the very Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of the community’.¹⁵ A newspaper report at the time stated that ‘Officials of adjacent Fairfield blame the popularity of [arcade game parlour] Arnie's Place for the closing of their teen center, where youths came to play Ping-Pong and shuffleboard’.¹⁶

In the early 1980’s a case was presented to the Supreme Court in the United States, in which the city of Mesquite, Texas wished to ban minors playing coin-operated

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ William E Geist, ‘6-Foot-5 Pac-Man Is Scoring in Westport’, *New York Times*, 1983, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/27/nyregion/6-foot-5-pac-man-is-scoring-in-westport.html>, accessed 25 April 2017.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

machines if not accompanied by an adult. An attorney at the time, Elland Archer, representing the *City of Mesquite*, in the case against *Aladdin's Castle Inc.* a company wishing to open a gaming arcade in the city, asked how irrational it was to want to protect Mesquite against perceived evils, he stated:

The playing of a pinball machine or a game of billiards, when viewed in abstract, is not harmful. Unfortunately, these games are not played in the abstract. ... Idleness is likewise good in the abstract. Without some idle time to refresh our minds and bodies, we would wear out. But, as with food, not all idleness is helpful. Children that are taught to act in a responsible manner by being assigned duties at home, required to attend school at designated times and use their money for useful purposes, all other things being equal, grow into more responsible citizens than those that are encouraged to forgo responsibility for idleness.¹⁷

Responding to this Bloom states, 'In other words, children who play amusement games will become irresponsible adults and, looking at the broader picture, these irresponsible adults will ultimately undermine the system under which we live'.¹⁸ The case against *Aladdin* eventually proved unsuccessful as the City of Mesquite could not prove there was harm to children by playing these coin-operated games.

These cases are early examples of arcade games being vilified as negative influences on young people. These arguments were, predominantly, against arcades where people of all ages could congregate, in order to play these games. Young people had to leave their house and venture to wherever it was these games were located. The perceived threat here was that young people could congregate unsupervised, waste their money on games, lose their sense of self, and succumb to state of lazy idleness as opposed to productive or wholesome endeavours. It appears that arcade games were at

¹⁷ Bloom, *Video Invaders*, 1982, p. 119.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 119–120.

least partly to blame for juvenile delinquency, young people were being drawn to these arcades by the pull of the games.

In the mid-to-late 1980's this emphasis on arcade parlours shifted when video gaming consoles could be purchased for the first time to be played at home. Parents could now supervise their children activities, however, some criticisms of video games carried over into this domestic setting. Instead of the criticism of arcade games causing youths to congregate in gangs, home video game consoles became targeted as isolating pursuits. Children would not want to leave their house, but rather stay inside playing these games. British television presenter Jeremy Paxman summed up the argument: 'Horrified, uncomprehending adults claim that this obsessional, solitary vice is producing a generation of teenage mutants suffering from a form of cultural autism'.¹⁹ The criticisms of home console games continued into the 1990's and, as graphics developed and more outlandish games were being created, the perceived threat from this growing medium also grew. In this time games were criticised for being too violent, for promoting antisocial behaviour, and even for sending out subliminal manipulative messages to their players.²⁰

In 2014, the game *Grand Theft Auto V (GTA V)* was pulled by *Target* and *Kmart* Australia after an online petition received over 40,000 signatures of support. The game enables player to be immersed in an interactive world, meaning players can engage in acts such as violence, car theft and other crimes. It was released on September 17th, 2013, and subsequently pulled by *Target* on December 12th, 2014, over a year after its release. Opposition to the game focuses on the ethical conduct of the characters, specifically concerning the level of violence against women portrayed. The petition to

¹⁹ Charlie Brooker (director), *Gameswipe*, video recording, London, 2009.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

against the game stated: ‘we appeal to you as women survivors of violence including women who experience violence in the sex industry to withdraw Grand Theft Auto V from sale’. The reason the petition gave in opposition to this game was that it:

encourages players to murder women for entertainment ... misogynistic GTA V literally makes a game of bashing, killing and horrific violence against women ... The game spreads the idea that certain women exist as scapegoats for male violence. ... Games like this are grooming yet another generation of boys to tolerate violence against women. ... Please [*Target*] put ethics before profit and make a strong statement that you do not condone sexual violence, sexual exploitation or the abuse of women as ‘entertainment’.²¹

GTA V sold approximately 11.21 million copies in the first 24 hours of release; to date it has sold approximately 45 million copies resulting in revenue of approximately US\$1.98 billion worldwide. According to Guinness World Records *GTA V* holds six records, including fastest entertainment property to reach \$1 billion, and highest revenue generated for an entertainment product in 24 hours. The campaign against *GTA V* was successful in removing the game from both *Target* and *Kmart* stores in Australia, but is widely available from other stores and online. This withdrawal of a game due to pressure from advocate’s raises an ethical question regarding what games should individuals be able to play.

As previously noted, Miguel Sicart asks if we ‘should we consider those issues as new or as old ethical dilemmas? Is there a radical novelty in the ethical questions posed by computer games?’²² Matt McCormick in his article *Is it wrong to play violent video games?* argues that Utilitarian and Kantian ethical concepts do not have

²¹ Nicole Survivor, ‘Target: Withdraw Grand Theft Auto 5 – this sickening game encourages players to commit sexual violence and kill women’, <https://www.change.org/p/target-withdraw-grand-theft-auto-5-this-sickening-game-encourages-players-to-commit-sexual-violence-and-kill-women>, accessed on 26 April 2017.

²² Sicart, *Ethics of Computer Games*, 2009, p. 16.

substantial objections to violent video games, however on Aristotelian virtue ethics objections can be made.²³ He argues that if simulated violence in a game environment impacts the character we should be developing, it could be immoral, he states ‘engaging in simulated immoral acts erodes one’s character and makes it more difficult for one to live a fulfilled eudaimonic life’.²⁴

Australia has a history of banning video games primarily because there was not an R18+ system of rating in place for video games until 2013. Games are often banned due to violence, but there was also a game entitled *Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure* which was banned for encouraging the player to graffiti walls. The Federal Classification Review Board, which banned the game, argued that it gave users tips and positive reinforcement for the offence and that ‘it was a game against the law of all the states in Australia’.²⁵ The banning of some games relates to their ethical content, and whether individuals should be allowed to play a game in which they are encouraged to break the law. There can be parallels draw here in terms of censorship relating to novels or films, and to what extent the public should be protected from perceived offensive or immoral content.

While we have here focused on the negative arguments regarding video games in the past, there are also reasons to think the image of certain games might be changing. Video games are becoming more ubiquitous, with scientists looking at video games and their possible benefits. A Canadian game is helping to cure lazy-eye by having the player use both eyes in-sync.²⁶ It has been argued that the playing of certain action

²³ Matt McCormick, ‘Is it wrong to play violent video games?’ *Ethics and Information Technology*, vol.3, 2001, pp. 277–287.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 277.

²⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ‘Computer game refused classification over graffiti tips’, 15 February 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081208100926/http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200602/s1570754.htm> accessed on 19 September 2016.

²⁶ Joshua Ostroff, ‘This Canadian video game could cure lazy eye. Yes, really’, *Huffington Post*, 23 March 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/03/23/dig-rush-ubisoft-lazy-eye_n_6888904.html accessed 25 March 2015.

games increase function in certain areas of the brain.²⁷ When searching for specific objects in a sea of shapes, regions of the brain linked with attention showed less activity in people who had played certain action games over those who had not, ‘a sign that their brains were performing the task more efficiently’.²⁸ People who played certain games were also able to better ‘rotate an image mentally’, an improvement which could be useful for ‘activities as varied as navigation, research chemistry and architectural design.’^{29,30} While strategy games which have built into them long-term planning and management have been linked to positive self-regulation and self-control.³¹ Businesses have also been using games for recruitment purposes. The company ‘Starfighter’ has created a game in which potential programming candidates play a game that puts their abilities to the test, the top players being selected for interviews.³²

The perception of games might be slowly changing, many newspapers and website have technology sections of their publications, which feature articles relating to video games. However, while this might be a step in the acceptance of video games, there are still certain stigmas lingering. A survey of the articles published from the *Sydney Morning Herald* regarding video games still show that there is a general lack of cohesion of where we should place video games in the cultural cannon. Headlines from these articles range from the alarming: *Violent video games: fun hobby or mass murder*

²⁷ Daphne Bavelier and Richard J. Davidson, ‘Brain training: Games to do you good’, *Nature*, 2013, Vol. 494, no. 7438, 2013, p. 425.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 426.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 425.

³⁰ Jing Feng, Ian Spence and Jay Pratt, ‘Playing action video game reduces gender differences in spatial cognition’, *Psychological Science*, 2007, vol.18, no.10, p. 850.

³¹ Alessandro Gabbiadini and Tobias Greitemeyer, ‘Uncovering the association between strategy video games and self-regulation: A correlational study’, *Personality and Individual Difference*, vol. 104, January 2017, pp. 129–136.

³² Hal Hodson, ‘Video games beat interviews to recruit the very best’, *New Scientist*, 18 March 2015, <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22530132.400-video-games-beat-interviews-to-recruit-the-very-best.html>, accessed 25 March 2015.

training tool? and *Video games make kids eat more: study.*^{33,34} To the surprised: *Video games are good for kids. Really?*³⁵ To the positive *Let the kids play their video games, it's good for them!* and *Teachers re-evaluate value of video games.*³⁶ While these are only a cherry-picked sample of a few of the articles that this newspaper publishes around video games they show the range of views that video games have in one section of the mainstream media. It also shows that since the game *Pong* was released in 1972, and since *Space Invaders* in 1978, there is still little consensus presented in sections of the media of how we should view video games.

The various arguments against video games, and their perceived threat, appear to be based around the notion that the pleasure they provide comes at a high cost; that this pleasure can either override any sense of rational autonomy in the individual playing, or erode the players very moral character. These arguments have at their heart the claim that, even though these games are pleasurable, *this is not the right kind of pleasure to pursue*. Understanding this claim and the ways in which it might be plausible will be the focus for the rest of this thesis. This will mean exploring the specific ways in which pleasure can mislead, and to have it think that it is adding to our quality of life when it might not be. Once we understand the different ways in which pleasure can go wrong, we can apply this to the arguments against video games, to assess their truthfulness. To consider how we should think about video games, and

³³ Mark Daphin, 'Violent video games: fun hobby or mass murder training tool?' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 2011, <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/games/violent-video-games-fun-hobby-or-mass-murder-training-tool-20110822-1j5ya.html> accessed on 25 March 2015.

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Video games make kids eat more: study', 5 May 2011, <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/games/video-games-make-kids-eat-more-study-20110505-1e9ei.html> accessed on 25 March 2015.

³⁵ Will Oremus, 'Video games are good for kids. Really?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 November 2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/video-games-are-good-for-kids-really-20131119-2xska.html> accessed on 25 March 2015.

³⁶ Amy McNeillage, 'Let the kids play their video games, it's good for them!' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/games/let-the-kids-play-their-video-games-its-good-for-them-20141108-11ibrf.html> accessed on 25 March 2015; Josh Jennings, 'Teachers re-evaluate value of video games', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/teachers-reevaluate-value-of-video-games-20141130-11jw0i.html> accessed on 25 March 2015.

specifically the pleasure they provide, it is important to consider the role which pleasure plays, or should play, in our conception of the *good life*. The following chapter will focus on the different ways pleasure has been thought of in the past, which might illuminate how we should think of pleasure in the modern world.

Chapter 1 – Pleasure’s Role in the Good Life

1.1. Different Conceptions of the Good Life

The question “*what is the good life?*” is an important one, not just from a philosophical standpoint, but also across a broad range of disciplines. Both medicine and economics, for example, incorporate a version of this question in certain areas of decision making. When we discuss what the good life is, it is important to think of just what it is we are thinking. Are we asking what is the very best way for me to live *my* life, or, are there some objective criteria by which we should judge the good life? It is common to think of what it is to live the good life, even if we do not directly think in those terms. When we read about the lives of others in a work of fiction, or see lives depicted on film, we often relate to the characters portrayed, in either a positive or negative manner. We take from these characters elements of what we think is good about their lives and try to avoid how we think they go wrong. As we will see the good life is something that has been discussed throughout the history of philosophy. It is important to consider what views on the good life have been given, and furthermore to our enquiry, what role pleasure should play in this life.

As mentioned above, there are practical aspects to the question of the good life. In medicine, the question of *quality of life* arises when discussing end of life care; and, economists often talk of *standards of living* when judging the strength of an economy. The philosopher Fred Feldman points out that ‘medical personnel are often called upon to give evaluations of “quality of life”’.³⁷ He gives the example of a foetus discovered

³⁷ Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism*, Oxford, 2004, p. 14.

with a serious abnormality. In this case, he states the ‘parents might want to know about the quality of life the baby would enjoy (or suffer) if allowed to live’.³⁸

We can also find similar ethical issues at the other end of a person’s life, for example, when a person is diagnosed with a terminal disease. There might come a point when a decision must be made about the quality of life this person will have despite their illness. Quality of life in this case can have an impact on decisions made regarding treatment, how this treatment will make the patient feel or how much they still might be able to enjoy their life. The issue of euthanasia is in part based around an individual being able to decide what is and what is not a good life for them. Similarly, the family of a coma patient might have to decide on the future well-being of their loved one if they regain consciousness, taking into consideration the possibility of physical or mental impairment. The family might have to make a judgement on what a good life for their loved one would consist.

Questions of the good life also arise in economics where *quality of life* and *standard of living* are distinct terms. Standard of living, ‘generally refers to the level of wealth, comfort, material goods and necessities available to a certain socioeconomic class, in a certain geographic area’.³⁹ Quality of life, on the other hand, refers to an individual or group’s rights and freedoms in their country: freedom from slavery, torture and discrimination; the right to free movement; freedom of religion and thought; or freedom to marry whom one chooses are included here. Fontinelle claims that while these two areas might overlap knowing the difference can affect how individuals or

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Amy Fontinelle, ‘Standard of living vs. quality of life’, *Investopedia*, 2008, para.1, <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/financial-theory/08/standard-of-living-quality-of-life.asp> accessed 25 April 2015.

businesses evaluate which country to invest money.⁴⁰ If this is our goal then the questions of what makes a good life in this case have practical benefit.

In 2005, the *Economist Group* (the sister company of the *Economist* newspaper) began what it termed the ‘quality-of-life index’, which ranked the countries of the world by subjective life-satisfaction and objective quality of life determinants.⁴¹ This study has since changed name to the ‘where-to-be-born index’ most recently conducted in 2013. Measurements in this area focus on aspects of life such as national wealth, crime rate and unemployment. While factors such as these can have an impact on the good life, they do not necessarily show what kind of life is a good one to lead. The factors taken into consideration in this index might make it easier for us to live a good life, for example, a person with money is in a better position to be able to help others, which we can consider as undoubtedly good. However, we can certainly imagine someone being born in a country that ranks high in the ‘where-to-be-born index’ that leads a life that we would not consider to be such a good life. Conversely, we can imagine someone born in a country on the lower end of this index lead an exemplary life. Environmental, social and economic factors as they are, indexes such as these might reflect objective factors relating to quality of life as it is, but do not necessarily get us closer to finding what factors of quality of life we should aim for, those that will bring us closer to the good life.

Kekic when discussing the ‘where-to-be-born index’ refers to this as *The Lottery of Life* this might well be an apt name when discussing the good life.⁴² Kekic quotes Warren Buffet as saying that he attributed all his success to being born in

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See: *The Economist*, ‘The Economist Intelligence Unit’s quality of life index’, *the Economist Intelligence Unit*, available online, https://www.economist.com/media/pdf/QUALITY_OF_LIFE.pdf, accessed 27 April 2017.

⁴² Laza Kekic, ‘The lottery of life’, *The Economist*, 21 November 2012, <http://www.economist.com/news/21566430-where-be-born-2013-lottery-life> accessed 25 April 2015.

America during the 1930's; the right place at the right time.⁴³ We can see that we can be helped along by good fortune in pursuing the good life and that some in the world will get greater opportunities than others. On our pursuit of the good life we can also encounter misfortune, as philosopher Peter Adamson notes 'we must also consider that there are elements on the road to happiness that are somehow out of our control'.⁴⁴

Even in our pursuit of the good life we can, through no fault of our own, be hindered by circumstance, Aristotle recognises this, and 'sees being happy as more like being blessed than being content'.⁴⁵ If we consider this difficulty, then it seems what we should be looking for when we look for the good life is what is in our power to make our lives 'good' or valuable. Aristotle begins his ethics by stating that the 'good' is the end at which things aim; for example, the end of medical science is health therefore we can consider health to be a *good*. Aristotle also invites us to think of component parts that make up what he considers a *faculty*; these components are *skills*. The *skill* of physiotherapy comes under the *faculty* of medical science. The faculty of medical science is what Aristotle considers a *master art*; the end of this master art should be considered preferable to that of the subordinate *skill* (in this case the skill being physiotherapy). The end of physiotherapy might be increased movement in a certain muscle; this is done with a view to the end of medical science, which is overall health. The end of the master art provides the motivation for the skill; I have an aim of being healthy therefore I am motivated to receive attention on an injured hamstring.

Something similar happens when we consider what makes up the lives we live, if we have the overall goal of the good life then this should provide us with motivation

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Peter Adamson, *Classical Philosophy: A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps Volume 1*, Oxford, 2014, p. 272.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

to pursue what makes up the good life. This raises two questions, what is the ‘good life’ that we should be aiming at, and what can we pursue with this end in mind?

There are various formations of what makes up the good life; Feldman outlines various aspects that we can think about when we say a life is good.⁴⁶ We could mean a *morally* good life doing things that are in line with a moral standard. A *causally* good life in that our life somehow has a cause to make another’s life, or life in general, beneficial. An *aesthetically* good life or beautiful life which, Feldman states is a little less clear, but generally means a life that we can look at as making for a good film or play.⁴⁷ This means a life that we might see as tragic appeals as being romantic; this life might be attractive for others though less than ideal for the one who lives it. We can consider an *exemplary* good life, one that if we were to ask what exemplifies human life, we might put on a pedestal or in a museum as typifying human existence. We could also think of a life of *personal well-being*, this would be outstanding in a sense of welfare or wellbeing for the one who lives it, what we could consider for ourselves a ‘life worth living’. While this list seems like a fair starting point for formations of the good life, Feldman notes that it is not exhaustive.⁴⁸

Two further accounts of the good life, that have relevance to the discussion of false pleasure, should be mentioned here. Firstly, is what can be called a *mental state* account of the good life, in which positive or pleasurable mental states contribute to the good life while time spent on frustrating pursuits does not. The other is an *achievement* based account, in which the focus of a good life is on what is achieved over and above pleasant mental states. The reason I mention these theories of the good life is that one may argue that the notion of false pleasure cannot be separated from one’s idea of what

⁴⁶ Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

the good life is. However, I disagree and will attempt to show that in fact the different theories of false pleasure should be used to inform discussions of the good life, rather than the other way around. We will first briefly examine the achievement account of the good life.

An *achievement* account holds that what is important to the good life is results. Time spent on un-pleasurable but ultimately successful attempts to solve practical problems is beneficial to the good life. For example, one can imagine someone striving for years to complete a medical degree, the time spent on this endeavour may not always be pleasurable (and in fact might at times be downright painful) however, overcoming difficulties and successfully graduating is an achievement worthy of contributing to the good life. While an account such as this is persuasive, it only holds for a relatively short period of time in the overall scheme of an individual's life. If we were to take another example of someone who was, against their will, put to hard labour for their entire life we could say they would certainly be able to achieve much; I would hesitate to add, however, that they are experiencing a *good life*. One problem with this view is that the person living this life might not be satisfied with or even like the achievement filled life they are living.

I suppose it is conceivable for someone to take the position that achievement and achievement only is the guiding principle by which they judge their life to be good, even if it contained no pleasure or enjoyment.⁴⁹ That someone could be perfectly miserable but still be living the *good life* seems (at the very least) to be problematic. I would argue that for the achievement account to succeed it must be implicit that achievement and success should bring with them their own kind of pleasurable

⁴⁹ This is reminiscent of Plato's argument that the virtuous man is happy even when being tortured on the rack, discussed in the following section. Aristotle incidentally argues against Plato on this point thinking the tortured man's existence could not be considered in any way a *good life*.

satisfaction. The struggle of attending medical school might “be worth it” one day when the student experiences the pleasure and satisfaction that comes with graduation. Feldman argues against an achievement account that philosopher Derek Parfit called *objective list theory* in which the good life is equated with achieving a certain set of pre-determined criteria such as knowledge, virtue or justice.⁵⁰ Each of these things then add value to a life and ultimately add up to living a good life. Feldman, however, writes ‘surely a man might have lots of knowledge and virtue and yet have a life that is not in itself good for him’.⁵¹ He imagines being told that acquiring virtue and knowledge will make your life better. In accordance with this advice you go about acquiring knowledge and acting virtuously, to the extent that you are knowledgeable and you are virtuous. After this period of extensive education and training, however, you find that knowledge and virtue leave you remarkably *unsatisfied*. Feldman argues that on the objective list account your life is going well, even if you feel your personal welfare ‘going downhill’.⁵²

The achievement account presented here leaves little room for *enjoyment* of this life, rather one can theoretically be miserable yet still be living the *good life*. Ideas presented in the taxonomy of false pleasure will cast doubt on this account of the good life. It will be shown that sometimes we work toward certain goals which do not maximise our happiness or overall well-being yet we pursue these goals nonetheless under the false impression that they will be ultimately beneficial. As will be shown in Chapter 3, the taxonomy of false pleasure offers reasons for why an achievement account of the good life may be problematic at a fundamental level. This includes the possibility of holding erroneous beliefs about what achievements will bring future

⁵⁰ Feldman p.19

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

happiness. This is an example of how the theory of false pleasure can be used to inform discourse on the good life or what type of pleasure the good life should contain.

The other account of the good life to be mentioned here is the *mental state* account, in which pleasurable feelings and states of mind contribute to the good life. This is a hedonistic view of the good life in which *the good* is based on an individual's experience of pleasure. Such an account is defended by Feldman, who argues that the good life is one that is good for the person who leads it; the question of the good life, he states, is 'a substantive axiological question about what sort of life is good in itself for the one who leads it'.⁵³ He defends a hedonist view that pleasure should be the good and, when we think of a good life, we should balance the amount of pleasure and the amount of pain we accrued in the lifetime. The versions of hedonism that Feldman defends, however, do not give all pleasures the same value. I believe there is still room to argue that, even if one thinks that pleasure should be the aim of the good life, it is possible that individual's might make mistakes in the pleasures they pursue. What the theory of false pleasure attempts to show is that even though one can have a positive mental state, one of pleasure, this state can still be detrimental to a pursuit of the good life. It is not enough, then, to say that time spent in *any* pleasurable reverie contributes to the good life for it will be shown that this is not true. Even when we believe we are experiencing a genuine and beneficial form of pleasure we can be deceived by this very experience. If we consider the plausibility of false pleasure, then we can consider its implication for the good life; I will argue that false pleasure can negatively impact the quality of life, taking away from its value in a similar way that pains do. With this said there will also be examples of false pleasure that are not necessarily *detrimental* to the good life but are still not the truest form of possible pleasurable experience.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 15.

In order to understand better the hedonistic position and the position pleasure has been said to play in the good life, we will now look at its ancient origins. Feldman's modern take on hedonism has its ancient predecessors, the two main hedonistic schools of ancient Greece were the Epicureans and the Cyrenaics. Both schools held that pleasure should be our aim or end, however as we will see, even though they agreed on this their views about what kind of pleasure to pursue differed.

1.2. Pleasure's Role in the Good Life

We turn now to pleasure's role in the good life. Many different important philosophies and theories of the good life include pleasure as a necessity, however the role of pleasure and the types of pleasure to be pursued often differ. For example, Plato in the *Republic* argues that a virtuous man even if he is being tortured on a rack, mocked and ridiculed, is happy due to his virtuous nature. Aristotle, however, disagrees and considers that this tortured man could not be happy no matter how virtuous he is.⁵⁴ Plato also notes in the *Philebus* that lives consisting of just wisdom, or consisting of just pleasure, are not complete lives in themselves, rather a third state that combines pleasure and wisdom is to be desired. In the conclusion to the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle states that pleasure, rather than being an activity or pursuit in itself, is something that accompanies an activity, such as eating chocolate or playing an instrument well. In this way pleasure is a kind of 'secondary phenomenon', it seems on this view that pleasure cannot be pursued in pure isolation and it must accompany an activity.^{55,56}

⁵⁴ Adamson, *History of Philosophy*, p. 271.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 275.

⁵⁶ Unless we consider something akin to Robert Nozick's (1974) experience machine, in which pleasure centres of the brain are stimulated without the activity from the recipient. It is not clear that this direct injected pleasure regardless is desirable as a pursuit. We could consider the next closest thing to this pleasure machine some form of drug use, where a drug acts directly upon our bodily system.

We will come back to Plato and Aristotle's concepts of pleasure and how it fits into their views of the good life, but first it is important to look at hedonism and in particular two schools of ancient thought, Epicureanism and Cyrenaicism, that put pleasure front and centre in their views of good life. Focus on these two schools here is meant as a starting point for a discussion of how pleasure has been seen to fit into the good life. We are most concerned in this thesis with coming to an understanding of the role of pleasure in the good life, the views of the Epicureans and Cyrenaics give different perspectives on the ways in which pleasure was considered in ancient times. This section is not meant to give a comprehensive overview of all the ways in which pleasure has been viewed by the ancients, nor could it, but rather it gives a starting point so that we can begin to think of the importance of pleasure in the good life. Along with this it is important to see that even within so-called 'hedonistic' schools of thought there have been long debates over the *correct* (and conversely *incorrect*) ways of experiencing pleasure.⁵⁷

The notion of hedonism today conjures images of lavish, excessive feasts and unrestrained debauchery; however, for the ancients such as Epicurus, placing pleasure as the end or the good, did not necessarily include *all* pleasures *all* the time. Hedonism was a recognition that pleasure often drives the activities we pursue or would do if we had full control over our lives. Undoubtedly there are things that each of us must do that are not pleasurable but nonetheless are done as a matter of necessity. However, if we had free choice over our actions then the decision of what to pursue might be based on the relevant pleasure gleaned from differing activities. We might consider this when

⁵⁷ In the interest of brevity, it has been necessary to limit the number of authors and schools of thought in this section. A more general discussion of pleasure in ancient philosophy requires its own full and separate treatment far beyond the scope of this work. As such it has been necessary to omit many ancient views of pleasure, the ones focused on here I consider as holding archetypal views of pleasure and its relation to the good life. This section is not meant to be a definitive treatment of pleasure in ancient philosophy.

we think of what to do with our free time or 'leisure time', in this time it becomes a matter of doing what our will desires and it most often happens that this will pursues the pleasurable.

Both the Epicureans, who followed the teachings of the eponymous Epicurus, and the Cyrenaics, who based their views on the philosophy of Aristippus and his grandson (also named Aristippus), sought to formulate how to live the happiest life. Both schools placed pleasure as the aim of the good life or the way to live the happiest life. However, even with this commonality the two schools ended up with vastly different ways of achieving this aim.

We will begin by looking at Epicurus, to understand the role he gives to pleasure, we must understand his philosophical view of the good life. In Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* the philosopher sets out four rules by which to live in order that we can live a happy life.⁵⁸ On Epicurus' view we must 'practise what produces happiness, because when we have it, we have everything', Epicurus' four rules are therefore the 'basic ingredients for a happy life'.⁵⁹ These four rules are: don't fear the gods; don't fear death; master your desires; and live wisely.

For Epicurus, the key to leading a happy life is the elimination of, and freedom from, fear, pain and anxiety; and a focus on pleasure as the 'beginning and end of the happy life'.⁶⁰ Fear of the Gods or fears of death are pointless and foolish in Epicurus' eye, these fears can only lead to anxiety, an anxiety of which we in this mortal life can never alleviate. Epicurus claims that all good and bad in this world comes to us through sensation, but death being the cessation of sensation should be nothing to us. Because we cannot feel anything when death comes, there is no point worrying about it during

⁵⁸ In Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book 10*, sect. 122, (trans. R. D. Hicks), Cambridge, 1925.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 123.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 129.

our lives, this alleviation of worry and knowledge that 'death is nothing to us' is reason for happiness in our mortal life.⁶¹ For Epicurus we should be happy, and comforted in the knowledge that death is nothing to us 'because when we exist, death is not present, and when death is present, we do not exist ... death does not exist for the living, and the dead no longer exist'.⁶² This knowledge also carries over for thoughts of the eternal or of immortality, we are not made happier by thinking that there can be a form of immortality 'life is not improved by adding infinite time; removing the desire for immortality is required'.⁶³ We must have knowledge that one day we will die, but we must not fear it or have it as a cause for anxiety, only be happy in the life that we do have. We cannot be immortal beings because immortality, for Epicurus, is reserved for the Gods.

Epicurus allows for the existence of the Gods as he argues we have 'preconceived notions of them', however the Gods, like death, are not to be feared.⁶⁴ Epicurus states that people embellish their ideas about the Gods with 'false beliefs' to suit themselves and others that think alike. He argues, 'they commend those who share their own ways, and condemn those who do not'.⁶⁵ We should not listen to what other say about the Gods as, for Epicurus, they attribute their own notions and ideas to the Gods revelling in enemy's misfortunes as signs of punishment, and celebrating their own, and allies, good fortune as rewards from the Gods. We should 'revere the Gods', but should not fear them and should only believe of the Gods that which is helpful to us leading a happy life.⁶⁶

For Epicurus, the happy life is that which is free from fears and anxieties of that

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 125.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 124.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 133.

which we cannot control, this freedom leads to wisdom, the ‘one who is wise neither renounces life nor fears not living’.⁶⁷ Once we shed our fears and anxieties we are free to focus on that which makes the happy life. For Epicurus, there must be a balance in the body and mind, a balance between pain and pleasure. This balance is constantly being tested, ‘everything we do is for the sake of freedom of pain and anxiety ... It is when we feel pain that we must seek relief, which is pleasure’.⁶⁸ The cessation of pain and anxiety is what is needed for ‘perfect well-being of the body and soul’.⁶⁹ This view is reflected in Epicurus' *Principal Doctrines* or *Principal Beliefs*, the third belief reads:

3. Pleasure reaches its maximum limit at the removal of all sources of pain. When such pleasure is present, for as long as it lasts, there is no cause of physical nor mental pain present – nor of both together.⁷⁰

This precept shows a key element to Epicurus' view of pleasure, that pleasures can be divided into two categories which have come to be called *katastematic* (passive) pleasures, and *kinetic* (active) pleasures. Diogenes Laertius points out that this distinction differentiates Epicurus' view of pleasure from that of Aristippus and the Cyrenaic school. The Cyrenaics do not recognise *katastematic* pleasures, but only *kinetic* or active pleasures.⁷¹ Here he quotes Epicurus as saying in *On Choices* that ‘freedom from anxiety and the absence of pain are *katastematic* pleasures, while joy and delight are regarded as pleasures in motion and action’.⁷²

The third of Epicurus' *Principal Doctrines* seems to relate to *katastematic* or passive pleasures. This type of pleasure results from the absence of pain or anxiety from the mind and body, this could be thought of as peace of mind. It is interesting to note

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 126.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 128.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 139.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 136.

⁷² *Ibid.*

here, that for Epicurus this peace of mind is when pleasure has reached its *maximum*, if we take this to be true then it seems for Epicurus that maximum pleasure can only come from *katastematic* pleasures. This means maximum pleasure is not based on *kinetic* pleasures that bring us joy and delight 'pleasures in motion and action', but rather on freedom from pain and anxiety.⁷³ In this way, Epicurus thinks that maximum pleasure should not be based on external pleasures that could bring us joy and delight, but rather on those that free us from pain and anxiety, those that still the storms in the soul.⁷⁴

Our lives are made up of constant choices and decisions we must make in order to tip the scales the way of pleasure until we no longer feel pain. However, while pleasure is the 'beginning and end of the happy life', not all pleasures are worthy of pursuing.⁷⁵ Some pleasure might not be worth pursuing in that they lead to greater pain, conversely, we might pursue some pains if the outcome is greater pleasure. Epicurus' Principal Doctrine reads:

8. No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but some pleasures are only obtainable at the cost of excessive troubles.⁷⁶

For Epicurus no pleasures are bad, but sometimes we have to endure pains for greater pleasure.⁷⁷ Conversely, we might have to avoid some pleasures, if they are to bring us greater pain. Other pleasures of indulgence are also to be avoided, these include drinking and revelry, sexual enjoyment or feasting on fancy cuisines, in order to decide choices and avoidances 'sober reasoning' is required, this 'liberates us from the false beliefs which are the greatest source of anxiety'.⁷⁸ Epicurus recognises that some

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 128.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 129.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 141.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 129.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 132.

pleasures are less worthy of pursuit than others, however, by accepting that no pleasure is bad in itself, it would seem the Epicurean can indulge in any pleasure they wish, providing a greater pain is not the reward. On this Epicurus argues 'when we say that pleasure is the goal, we do not mean the pleasure of debauchery or sensuality ... for it is not continuous drinking and revelry, the sexual enjoyment of women and boys, or feasting upon fish and fancy cuisine which result in a happy life'.⁷⁹ These pleasures in and of themselves are not bad, as Epicurus states, all pleasures are 'naturally good', what is important here is our freedom to make choices regarding the pleasures to pursue.⁸⁰ It would seem that the pursuit of drinking and revelry, sexual enjoyment or feasting if they did not result in greater pain, would be acceptable; however, these pleasures are sure to disrupt our ability for 'sober reasoning' which is required for every choice and avoidance we make. It is these choices and avoidances that 'liberate us from the false beliefs which are the greatest source of anxiety'.⁸¹ By choosing to avoid pleasures which interfere with our sober reasoning, we are increasing our *katastematic* pleasures, eliminating that which causes us pain and anxiety.

In relation to, for instance, sexual enjoyment or feasting, these are what Epicurus would term *kinetic* (active) pleasures, those that bring us joy and delight. While these certainly are pleasures, they do nothing to remove sources of physical and mental pain, and so do not impact our *katastematic* pleasure. It is not possible for these pursuits to help pleasure reach its 'maximum limit', therefore these pleasures might not be worth pursuing, if maximum pleasure is our goal.⁸² Interestingly though, in Principle Belief 10, Epicurus states that if the debauched man's pleasures eased all pain and

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 130.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 132.

⁸² *Ibid.* 139.

anxiety in both mind and body, then there would be no reason to reproach him.⁸³

Key to Epicurus' view of pleasure is freedom to make choices, and wisdom to make right choices, in order to know what choices to make, we must have clear recognition of our desires. Epicurus makes distinctions between desires, those that are natural and those that are vain. Of the natural desires, some are necessary and some are unnecessary, of those that are necessary some 'are necessary for happiness, some for health, and some for life itself'.⁸⁴ It is only by recognising these desires, that we can make a choice based on that which will bring us 'comfort and peace of mind'.⁸⁵ Natural desires, for Epicurus, are those that are easily fulfilled while 'vain desires are insatiable'.⁸⁶ If we are to have to choose between a plain meal and a luxurious feast, the plain meal offers the same pleasure as the feast, as long as the pain of hunger is removed. Accustoming oneself to a life of simple pleasures is healthy, going without luxuries enables us to better appreciate them when they appear, just as bread and water 'offer the greatest pleasure for those in need of them'.⁸⁷ For Epicurus, we should be wary and wise in the decisions we make, while he grants that pleasure 'naturally good' and the 'greatest good', in that it is the removal of pain and leads to the 'perfect well-being of body and soul', we can be mistaken in which pleasures to pursue. 'Not every pleasure should be chosen ... but not every pain to be avoided', we must weigh all pleasures and pains against each other, and consider all consequences before making a decision, in a word, we must live *wisely*.⁸⁸

The basis for living wisely, for Epicurus, is prudence; prudence being the 'art of

⁸³ *Ibid.* 142.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 128.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 131.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 130.

practical wisdom'.⁸⁹ From prudence all other virtues spring; we cannot possibly live a pleasurable life if we do not live prudently, as well as honourably and justly. We can also not live prudently, honourably and justly without living pleasurably, for Epicurus the virtuous life and the happy life are inseparably connected. Epicurus claims that no one can be better off or more content than the wise person who does not fear either the Gods nor death, and who understands the natural goal of life. Someone who recognises pleasure as the greatest good, that it is easily and simply fulfilled, and recognises that pain is fleeting if intense and easily balanced if prolonged.⁹⁰

When recognising the decisions to make in life, Epicurus' wise one recognises that the greatest choices come from within, rather than being based on any preconceived time scale, or those ideas resembling fate. It is choice, rather than chance or fate, that 'deserve either praise or blame because what is decided by choice is not subject to any external power'.⁹¹ It is better to suffer a setback while acting wisely, than acting foolishly and have miraculous luck.⁹²

Following the *Letter to Menoecus* Diogenes Laertius continues the section on Epicurus, by contrasting Epicurus' view on pleasure with that of the Cyrenaics the school founded by Aristippus and formulated by his grandson Aristippus the younger. As mentioned Diogenes Laertius points out the difference between the two regarding pleasure, in that the Cyrenaics do not recognise *katastematic* pleasures, but only *kinetic* pleasures.⁹³ They also disagree, according to Diogenes Laertius, in that the Cyrenaics consider the 'pains of the body to be worse than the troubles of the mind' as those who do wrong are 'bodily punished'.⁹⁴ Epicurus, however, feels that the pains and troubles

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 132.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 133.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 134.

⁹² *Ibid.* 135.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 136.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 137.

of the mind are worse, because the pains of the body are fleeting and only feel 'present infliction', whereas the mind feels 'the past, the present and the future'.⁹⁵ Along with this, Epicurus feels the pleasures of the mind, greater than the pleasure of the body. Epicurus shows that pleasure is the greatest good, by stating that animals 'from their moment of birth are delighted with pleasure and distressed by pain by their natural instincts, without need of reason'.⁹⁶ We choose virtues too on account of pleasure and not for their own sake, 'just as we take medicine for health'.⁹⁷ Diogenes Laertius also states virtue is 'inseparable from pleasure, while everything separable from pleasure is expendable'.⁹⁸

The greatest difference between the Epicurus and the Cyrenaics, appears to be how they both concern themselves with pleasure. While both sides see pleasure as the greatest good, Aristippus and the Cyrenaics indulge in pleasures, which Epicurus would not. These include pleasures of instant gratification, feasts of food and the flesh are to be enjoyed for the Cyrenaics, as Diogenes Laertius notes, they only recognise *kinetic* or active pleasures, pleasures of motion and action. Epicurus recognises that, while there are many pleasures and certainly pleasure is the greatest good, not every pleasure is worth pursuing. The wise person should instead show temperance and consider all consequences before making a decision with respect to the pursuit of pleasure. Just as all consequences should be taken into account, so as we can avoid pleasures which might lead to greater pain, we must also avoid pleasures of debauchery and sensuality. Only sober reasoning in these matters can lead to a happy life. Where both the Cyrenaics and Epicurus seem to cross, is they both desire freedom, 'freedom from pain

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 138.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

in the body and turmoil in the soul'.⁹⁹

For Epicurus, this freedom comes from choosing that which equates to the greatest pleasure in the long term, and avoiding that which can cause anxiety. Sober reasoning liberates us from false beliefs, which are a great source of anxiety. Freedom also comes from choosing the simple in life, as Epicurus claimed, the simple meal brings as much pleasure as a feast to one that is hungry. He also states that choosing to do without luxuries, and leading a simple lifestyle frees us from the need or want of extravagances or luxuries. In this freedom, we are able to appreciate luxuries more if they come along, but we are also 'fearless' against any change or misfortune which might take them away.¹⁰⁰ Freedom from pain and anxiety is what Epicurus regards as a *katastematic* pleasure, one that is a passive pleasure.

Aristippus also seeks freedom, and recognises the pursuit of pleasure as the greatest good. While Epicurus might have been wary of choosing some pleasures, Aristippus felt any and all pleasures be fit to pursue. Not recognising *katastematic* pleasures, Aristippus felt no need to pursue a course which might alleviate pain or anxiety, rather his method was to fill his life with more pleasures. Aristippus felt freedom came, not from denying oneself of pleasure or being free from pain or anxiety, rather freedom came from being in control of one's pleasures, that is 'what is best is not abstaining from pleasures, but instead controlling them without being controlled'.¹⁰¹ In this way one is free to pursue any pleasure one likes, as these pleasures are not controlling you, you are not being enslaved by your pleasure, rather you are the master of yourself and in total control of the pleasures you choose to pursue. Aristippus

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 132.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 131.

¹⁰¹ Tim O'Keefe, 'Cyrenaics', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/cyren/> accessed 29 March 2016.

found a type of freedom and flexibility, he is not unwillingly pursuing pleasure nor is he losing self-control.

We now turn to look at Aristotle's view on pleasure. It must first be stated that pleasure plays an essential role throughout Aristotle's work. While he does not go to the extremes of the hedonists—that pleasure should be the only thing worth pursuing—he does consider it important and necessary for the happy life. This view does not hold that pleasure is *the* good, as the hedonists do, but it is certainly *a* good. Pleasures can come in the form of those of the body, and those of the mind or intellect. Pleasures of the body are the most common, so much so that, Aristotle argues, most people believe these to be the only pleasures in existence for these are the only pleasures they have experienced.¹⁰² A study of pleasure is important for any investigation into ethics because, as Aristotle remarks, 'moral virtue and vice are concerned with pleasures and pains, and most people hold that pleasure is a necessary adjunct of happiness.'¹⁰³

According to Aristotle, it is understandable that we should pursue pleasure, as pleasure perfects the activities with which we concern ourselves; this in turn perfects our lives which is something we should all desire.¹⁰⁴ It is not enough to ask whether we go about our daily business for the sake of pleasure, or whether we should aim at pleasure for the sake of our lives, they are too closely linked to be separated; there is no pleasure without activities and each activity is completed by pleasure.¹⁰⁵ With pleasure playing such an important role in the aims of our lives, it is little wonder we should find ourselves questioning what pleasures are right to pursue; and that in the interest of the aim of the perfect life some people are led astray by the pursuit of the wrong types of pleasure.

¹⁰² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1153b.20, (trans. H. Rackman), Cambridge, 1934.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 1152b.1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 1175a.1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 1175a.1-20.

Aristotle dedicates two sections of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to the study of pleasure. In these sections, he outlines defences to those who oppose pleasure, or those who do not think pleasure has a role in the good life. When addressing pleasure, Aristotle does not use the term 'false pleasure', as Plato does in the *Philebus*, however we can infer from reading Aristotle that there are certainly pleasures worthy of the good life and ones which are not. I will argue that though he does not use the term 'false' there are kinds of pleasures Aristotle identifies that do have the quality of being false. Aristotle often refers to pleasure as something to be pursued and its antithesis, pain, as something to be shunned. Before we examine what pleasures could be considered false, we must ask why pleasure should be thought to be pursuable for the happy life—to put it succinctly, *why is pleasure good?*

Firstly, to address this Aristotle, in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, assumes there is such a thing as an unimpeded use of our faculties—for example, the faculty of sight or of hearing. Happiness consists in the exercise of one or all of our faculties and, if it is unimpeded then this must be the most desirable thing. If a faculty or an activity is impeded, then it cannot be a perfect thing, but happiness, to be happiness, must be perfect.¹⁰⁶ The unimpeded use of a faculty is a pleasure, therefore the supreme good must be a pleasure.¹⁰⁷ To take the faculty of hearing, if we can listen unimpeded to a sweet piece of music, then this must be a pleasure and must be a supremely good thing. If our hearing is impaired, through health reasons or otherwise, we cannot say it is perfectly good. Aristotle addresses this further in Book X. He states, pleasure comes when a perfect faculty is directed to the perfect object it is capable of perceiving. To take hearing, when our state of hearing is unimpaired, and we are

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 1153b.1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

listening to a perfect object (a nice piece of music) then the result is perfect and pleasurable.¹⁰⁸ An unfortunate effect of this line of thinking is that, in order to be happy, our lives must be unimpeded in all manner of ways. Aristotle argues that for someone to be happy, they should also have certain advantages, such as ‘goods of the body’ and external goods or ‘gifts of fortune’. Goods of the body might be health or a pleasant appearance and gifts of fortune something akin to good luck. Aristotle states that these qualities are important for happiness only because if one is lacking in these areas this lack might act as an impediment to happiness. Aristotle rejects as ‘nonsense’ the thought that if someone is only *good* then they will be happy, even if they are on the rack or other living through some other tragedy.¹⁰⁹

Aristotle notes that another reason to think pleasure is important, and must somehow be a good, is that both humans and animals seek out pleasure. The fact that most people pursue pleasure makes it clear that it cannot be dismissed from being good. However, Aristotle claims, that people do not all pursue the *same* pleasures as what is good for one is not good for all.¹¹⁰ Because pleasures of the body are the most common, according to Aristotle, they also lead people to falsely believe that these are the *only* pleasures that exist.¹¹¹ He states:

As pleasures of the body are the ones which we most often meet with, and as all men are capable of these, these have usurped the family title [the title *pleasure*]; and so, men think these are the only pleasures that exist, because they are the only ones which they know.¹¹²

Aristotle seems to think that there is an error with regard to an agent’s belief occurring

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 1175a.20.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 1153b.1-20.

¹¹⁰ That we can differentiate between kinds of pleasure is important for the proceeding arguments in this thesis.

¹¹¹ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1153b.20.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

here. Pleasure might still be a good and necessary for the happy life, however if one believes that bodily pleasures are the only ones which exist, then he can also be mistaken in pursuing these pleasure under the impression that they are the only one's necessary for the happy life. That one can be mistaken in the pleasure he pursues and indeed can be mistaken in the very nature of pleasure itself, is a key concern for this thesis and leads us to the problem of *false pleasure*. In the next chapter, we will explore the idea of false pleasure in more detail.

Chapter 2 – Varieties of False Pleasure

2.1. Overview of Problem of False Pleasure

This thesis argues that the notion of false pleasure is one that is inherent in many discourses on the best way we are to live our lives. What is lacking, however, is a systematic analysis of the ways different philosophers, authors and commentators have discussed the topic, and the conclusions they have come to.

It should be noted that this work begins with a normative question, namely “are video games a false pleasure”. From this normative starting point, it is important to consider other related questions. If there is a criticism that video games are a false pleasure, is this true? Might it be true? Are there such things as false pleasures? To answer these questions and the overarching normative question, it is important to survey what different people have said about false pleasure, the different ways it has been viewed through history—this requires a descriptive approach. While the main question is normative, the threads are necessarily descriptive in parts. However, with this said the result will not just be a survey, rather the merits of the descriptive views on false pleasure will be assessed and their merits tested in order to inform the main normative question. As such at the end of each chapter will be a summary of how well the given category of false pleasure relates to video games and whether or not we can determine that certain video games offer a form of false pleasure.

We might very well have an implicit idea of which pleasures should not be pursued; for example, many consider illicit drug taking a pleasure to be avoided, some others might look down at the “mindless” pleasure afforded by television or other mass media. Most people agree that these outlets provide pleasure, be it a physical sensation

or a more reflective pleasurable state of being. However, pleasure itself is not the only quality by which we judge the value of these objects. We might judge them to have less value than other pleasurable pursuits for a number of reasons. For example, illicit drug taking might have a pleasurable sensation associated with it, but the detrimental side effects of this lifestyle are seen to outweigh the pleasure the drug provides. Some might judge that others are ‘wasting their time’ by taking pleasure in something such as television or playing video games; that, despite the enjoyment afforded by these pursuits there are ‘better’ or more worthwhile ways to spend one’s time. In other areas, there are religious viewpoints that argue certain sexual pleasures are immoral and therefore to be avoided. As we proceed we will examine many more examples of pleasures that are considered by some or by many, to be unworthy of pursuit for a variety of reasons. This thesis aims to draw together in a systematic manner these types of pleasures and to extract overarching rules by which we can differentiate between types of false pleasure.

In general, pleasure is often regarded as a necessary part of living a good and fulfilled life, however I argue that some pleasures have the power to deceive. The sensation of pleasure can often trick us into thinking something is beneficial when it is not. It can trick us into thinking something like, “If it makes me *feel good* then it must be good”. The felt sensation of pleasure can often cloud our judgement, leading us to incorrectly judge the value of something. This can be a problem of practical reason as there is difficulty knowing which pleasures should be worthy of pursuit—and part of the good life—and which pleasures might have a negative impact on our pursuit of the good life.

We should be interested in the question of false pleasure in relation to the good life, not because it provides a system through which we can view what the good life

is—such as *eudaimonism* or *hedonism*—but rather because it gives reasons for the way someone could go wrong in their pursuit is the good life. The thesis of false pleasure is not meant to be a refutation of *hedonism*, *eudaimonism* or other conceptions of the good life, but rather it can be a tool used to judge the worth of a pleasurable activity or pursuit in its relation to the good life.

This section will primarily focus on the work of Plato and Aristotle as a starting point for the development of the idea of false pleasure. These two authors are used because they offer original (if occasionally differing) accounts of *false* or *bad pleasure*. It should be noted from the outset that Aristotle does not use the terminology *false pleasure*, but it will be argued that it is inherent in his arguments regarding pleasure. These two authors specifically discussed the nature of *false pleasure*, or at least pleasures they saw as negative, in a way that modern authors have not because of this they offer a logical starting point for the development of a taxonomy of false pleasure. As this work develops it will incorporate later authors ideas on pleasure to compare and contrast them with the views of false pleasure presented by the ancients.

The initial problem when discussing false pleasure is showing how a pleasure can actually be *false*. There seems to be a common understanding that a pleasure is a pleasure is a pleasure; and that while we might be able to differentiate pleasures in terms of characteristics—such as duration or intensity—this is as far as a taxonomical breakdown can go. The notion of *false pleasure* challenges this preconception; it proposes that there are fundamental characteristics which can make a pleasure false. As we will see, trying to convince others of this point of view is a problem Socrates faces when arguing in the *Philebus* for the plausibility of false pleasure.

The initial debate in the *Philebus* is an ethical one, between two views on the best life to live. The character of Socrates champions a life of wisdom and knowledge,

while Philebus—and his spokesperson Protarchus—defend the life of pleasure as the best life to pursue. Socrates argues that we cannot call the pursuit of pleasure the best life as there are so many different forms of pleasure, some good and some bad; and because of this it is nonsensical to say the best way to live is to pursue pleasure. To make his point, Socrates distinguishes between different types of pleasure. He states that there are innumerable things that people take pleasure in and that the inane pleasures that a fool enjoys cannot be said to be the same as the pleasures that the wise man enjoys.¹ To this Protarchus responds that the difference here is not the pleasures themselves, but rather the *source* of the pleasures. Two different pleasures are not in themselves opposite for, he asks, how can pleasure help being of all things most like pleasure, that is, like itself?²

Considering this, Socrates argues that, one colour is like another colour in as far as they are colours, but we do not say that black and white are the same—rather we know them to be opposites.³ He continues that, no one is arguing that pleasant things are not pleasant, or that pleasure is not pleasure, but rather there are pleasures that are bad and pleasures that are good and that these pleasures are unlike each other. Of this argument Protarchus seems unconvinced, he and Philebus' original position was that for 'all living beings enjoyment and pleasure and gaiety and whatever accords with that sort of thing are a good'.⁴ Socrates has tried to show that, if we can say that some pleasures are different—and some are in fact bad—then we cannot still hold all pleasures and enjoyments to be good. However, Protarchus holds firm, asking whether Socrates thinks anyone who holds pleasure to be the good would ever admit some pleasures are good and others bad. Socrates probes further trying to get Protarchus to

¹ Plato, *Philebus*, 12d, (trans. Harold N. Fowler), Cambridge, 1925.

² *Ibid.* 12e.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* 11b.

at least acknowledge there to be some differences between pleasures and that sometimes they can be opposite. Protarchus again holds firm, stating ‘not in so far as they are pleasures’.⁵ This brings the argument back to the beginning, with Socrates trying to show that some pleasures are unlike others and Protarchus holding that all pleasures are alike in so far as they are pleasures.

This then is our central problem. The purpose of the rest of this thesis is to argue, along with the character of Socrates, that there are distinctions to be made between types of *false pleasure*. While the phenomenological sensations of pleasure might at times be similar there are other considerations we must take into account when determining the value of a pleasure. The following chapters aim to show the different ways in which pleasure can be considered to false, beginning with Socrates arguments in the *Philebus* and going beyond to incorporate Aristotle’s ideas on harmful pleasure.

2.2. False Pleasure: Background and Brief Historical Overview

As stated, in his dialogue the *Philebus* Plato and the character of Socrates examine whether a life of pleasure or a life of wisdom is the ultimate good, and which should be the goal of living beings. Through this discussion, Plato concludes that neither of these lives is fulfilling and rather a third state, a mixture of pleasure and wisdom, is desirable.⁶ He asks Protarchus to imagine a life of pleasure with no wisdom and a life of wisdom with no pleasure. He concludes that a life spent in purely in the pursuit of pleasure, without a search for wisdom or knowledge, is a life wasted. That without wisdom or true opinion we would not even be able to know we were experiencing pleasure, and would be living a life more akin to a mollusc or oyster than a human.⁷ Similarly, a life spent on the pursuit of wisdom and perfect knowledge, without being able to be affected

⁵ *Ibid.* 13c.

⁶ *Ibid.* 20e-22b.

⁷ *Ibid.* 21c.

by life's pleasures, is a life unfulfilled. Because neither of these lives are perfect, and both require the addition of something else, neither of them can be the ultimate state to which we should aim. We must conclude then, Socrates states, that a third state is the most desirable, one in which wisdom and pleasure are mixed. Even though we have found which of the three states is best, Plato continues to determine which takes second place. Unsurprisingly Plato posits that it is the life of the mind that, while not *being* the good is rather closer to being the *cause* of the good in the combined life.⁸ And furthermore, that in the mixed life the mind is 'more akin and more similar than pleasure to that, whatever it may be, which makes it both desirable and good...'.⁹ Plato continues that pleasure cannot have any claim to either first or second place, in fact he relegates it to 'even farther behind than third place'.¹⁰ While if we can grant, as Plato did, that pleasure is in some degree or respect a necessary part of the good life—of this eudaimonic mixed state—why is it that he also takes such a dim view of pleasure in general?

The reason for Plato's view regarding pleasure progresses as the dialogue continues. He develops a taxonomic view of pleasure, breaking it down into kinds and sub-kinds. From this he determines that many pleasures are either 'impure, false or untrue', with only a very few being 'pure' pleasures.¹¹ This is one possible reason for Plato's distrust of pleasure, while pleasure might be required for the eudaimonic mixed state, it is only a very specific type of pleasure that is acceptable. Many other things we consider to be pleasures Plato actually considers to be deceptive, impure pleasures. His

⁸ *Ibid.* 22d.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 22e.

¹¹ David Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 2013, p. 76.

aim in the rest of *Philebus* is to explain taxonomically the ‘division of pleasures into impure and pure and correspondingly into false or untrue and true’.¹²

It is important to understand how Plato views pleasure and pain. Pain, for Plato, is a ‘*disruption* of nature’ and pleasure is *restoration*. He states:

... when, in us living beings, harmony is broken up, a disruption of nature and a generation of pain also take place at the same moment ... but if harmony is recomposed and returns to its own nature, then I say that pleasure is generated...¹³

Plato gives the example of hunger or thirst as disruptions and pains; and eating and drinking as restorative pleasures.¹⁴ We can also find pleasure and pain in the anticipation or expectation of what is to come in the future. The ‘sweet and cheering hope of pleasant things to come’ and the ‘fearful and woeful expectation of painful things to come’.¹⁵ It is from an analysis of these ‘anticipatory’ pleasures and pains that Plato first introduces the idea that certain pleasures can be *false*.

Given here is a sense of the kinds of false pleasure Plato identifies, these will be examined in further detail in the subsequent chapters. This initial analysis is based on David Wolfsdorf’s work, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, in which he identifies four kinds of *false* pleasure in the *Philebus*.¹⁶ The first two false pleasures identified relate to the belief we take in an object. If we believe something to be the case when it is not, and if we take pleasure in this belief, it follows that the pleasure we have taken is in a mistaken or false belief. Plato argues that not only is the belief false, but the pleasure taken in it is also false. He begins his discussion of false pleasure by

¹² *Ibid.* p. 102.

¹³ Plato, *Philebus*, 31d.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 31e-32a.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 32c.

¹⁶ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 80.

focussing on *anticipatory pleasures*. For example, if I expect to win a prize and take pleasure in this belief, and then if I subsequently *do not* win then the pleasure I had taken was in a false belief. This is the first false pleasure that Wolfsdorf identifies, he terms it as 'representationally false imagistic pleasure' where the *belief in* an object or image gives this object the quality of falsehood.¹⁷ In the dialogue, Protarchus objects to this position arguing that while we can call the belief false, no one would call the actual pleasure false. It is up to Socrates to justify his position and defend his point that the pleasures themselves can be true or false. How he does this will be explored in further detail in the following chapter.

The second kind of false pleasure Wolfsdorf identifies he terms 'representationally false pleasure' where the *object itself* gives rise to a false belief.¹⁸ In this case the object of my belief might be true, however I mistake how much pleasure it will bring me. False pleasure kind 2 occurs when a quality of the object of belief causes us to believe incorrectly. While the first two kinds of false pleasure have certain similarities, there is a key difference that makes them unique. This difference is found by looking at the source of the falsity in either kind.

In kind 1 the falsity is found in our belief or opinion of an object or some source of pleasure, as Socrates states 'these opinions, being true or false, imbue the pains and pleasures with their own condition of falsehood'.¹⁹ In this sense, it is not the object or source of pleasure that makes a pleasure false, rather it is *our* opinion or belief of that object that can be deemed false. This differs with kind 2, in which a quality of the object *itself* causes us to believe falsely. Giving an example of sight to explain kind 2 Socrates states 'seeing things from too near at hand or from too great a distance obscures their

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 100; this is false pleasure *kind 1*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; this is false pleasure *kind 2*.

¹⁹ Plato, *Philebus*, 42a.

real size and causes us to have false opinions'.²⁰ In kind 2 a quality of the object itself and its relation to another affective condition (pleasure or pain) cause us to be mistaken in our belief, leading to a false opinion. For example, I might believe winning a prize will bring me pleasure, but if I am currently unhappy I might overestimate just how much pleasure it will bring.²¹

Wolfsdorf identifies two further kinds of false pleasure in the *Philebus*. kind 3 occurs when we mistake the 'natural state'—a state of calm without pleasure or pain—as a pleasurable state. Socrates claims that some people say that 'the pleasantest of all thing is to live all one's life without pain', however he feels this is a mistaken belief.²² For example, if we say that there are three states of opinion regarding something: an opinion in the affirmative; an opinion in the negative; and, one that is undecided—then we cannot say that the undecided is closer to the affirmative nor to the negative. Just as if there are three states of being, one painful, one pleasurable and one neutral; then we cannot say this neutral or natural state is closer to the pleasurable or painful states. In kind 1 and kind 2 the feeling of pleasure is real, however in kind 3 there is no real feeling of pleasure, only an absence of pain that is mistaken as pleasure.

The fourth kind (kind 4) of false pleasure, relates to 'mixed pleasures' and the purity of a pleasure that is felt. Wolfsdorf argues that there are three sub-kinds of pleasure in this kind, in fact, he states, 'false pleasure kind 2 turns out to be a sub-kind of false pleasure kind 4'.²³ According to Plato pleasure and pains can be of three kinds: of the body (somatic); of the soul or mind (psychic); or a combination of both (psychosomatic). According to Wolfsdorf there are three sub-kinds of false pleasure kind 4:

²⁰ *Ibid.* 41e-42a.

²¹ This will be further clarified in Sections 3.2 and 3.5.

²² Plato *Philebus*, 43d.

²³ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 89.

- (1) false bodily pleasure simultaneously mixed with bodily pain;
- (2) false anticipatory pleasure mixed simultaneously mixed with bodily pain;
- (3) false psychic pleasure simultaneously mixed with psychic pain.²⁴

In these case the ‘purity’ of a pleasure is compromised. For a pleasure to be part of the good life, it must not be mixed with any form of pain, otherwise it would not be highest form of good possible. Whether Plato’s arguments regarding false pleasure succeed will be examined in the coming chapters. For now, it is sufficient to say that Plato’s challenge of pleasure raises, amongst other things, some interesting questions regarding the relation of pleasure to belief, as it attempts to disentangle the different ways we experience pleasure. To summarise Plato’s categories of false pleasure, as outlined by Wolfsdorf.²⁵

- False Pleasure kind 1 – False Pleasure of Belief; on part of the subject in which a belief does not become truth. E.g. thinking I will win the lottery when I will not;
- False Pleasure kind 2 – False Pleasure of Belief; on the part of an object in which the amount of pleasure one will experience is mistaken. E.g. overestimating the amount of future pleasure I will experience;
- False Pleasure kind 3 – False Pleasure of Neutral State. A state in which an absence of pain is mistaken for being pleasurable;
- False Pleasure kind 4 – False Mixed Pleasures:
 - kind 4 (1) – false bodily pleasures simultaneously mixed with bodily pain;
 - kind 4 (2) - false anticipatory pleasure mixed simultaneously mixed with bodily pain;

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 100.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 99-100.

- kind 4 (3) - false psychic pleasure simultaneously mixed with psychic pain.²⁶

While the false pleasures outlined by Plato are closely related to *the truth or falsity of belief*, we turn now to a different treatment of pleasure taken from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

As stated, Aristotle devotes two sections of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to an examination of pleasure in Books VII and X. According to Richard Kraut, Aristotle holds that 'a happy life must include pleasure, and he therefore opposes those who argue that pleasure is by its nature bad'.²⁷ However, like Plato, Aristotle does not hold that *all* pleasures are necessary or essential for the good or the *eudaimonic* life. As we will see Aristotle holds that the pleasure of contemplation and the pleasure from living the virtuous life are the highest form of pleasures. Other forms of pleasure can in fact act to derail the virtuous life and others again are characteristically only enjoyed by the 'vicious' person. These latter pleasures are largely based on the bodily sensations or the sensory experience of pleasure and, as we will, see should be avoided if we are to live the good life. Many of the pleasures Aristotle describes are not necessarily categorically bad—or bad in themselves—but rather they are bad because of the way they are used. While Aristotle does not use the term 'false pleasure', as Plato does, I will argue that there are sufficient grounds to say that certain pleasures Aristotle deems unfit for the *eudaimonic* life can further be deemed as *false*.

As we have seen, for Aristotle, pleasures of the body are the most common and that many people think these to be the only pleasures worth pursuing. The reason for this is that the sensations from bodily pleasures are often the most intense pleasures.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 100.

²⁷ Richard Kraut, 'Aristotle's ethics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2017 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/aristotle-ethics/>, accessed 14 July 2017.

Considering the gratification felt from bodily sensations it is little wonder that these pleasures are the most often pursued. Aristotle states that bodily pleasures also have the effect of driving out pain, therefore they are desired by so many.²⁸ A person suffering from great pain, be it mental or physical, often believes that the remedy for their pain is to be found in pleasure of one kind or another. Generally, these are bodily pleasures, because these pleasures offer instant and intense gratification; and the more extreme the pain felt by the individual, the greater the excess of pleasure pursued. It should be noted that not all bodily pleasures are to be considered bad, many bodily pleasures are necessary pleasures, such as the pleasure of satisfying hunger.

I argue there to be five ways pleasures can go wrong on Aristotle's view. These categories are:

- *False pleasure of excess;*
- *False artificial or harmful pleasures;*
- *False immoral or unethical pleasures;*
- *False pleasures of an immoral source; and,*
- *False alien pleasures or distractions.*

Firstly, we will look at pleasure of excess. Aristotle notes there are states and activities which are good in certain degrees, however it is possible that this good can be exceeded.²⁹ He refers here particularly to bodily pleasures which can be pursued to such a degree that their good is outweighed by the pain they bring. This is an occurrence with which many might be familiar, be it an extra slice chocolate cake or having one drink too many. Aristotle views the temperate person as being one who can keep their excessive desires in check. On the other hand, the intemperate or bad character is made

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1154a.20.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1154a.1.

by pursuing this excess. In this case, it is not the pleasures themselves which are bad, rather the degree to which they are pursued.

If we think of this along the lines of pleasure accompanying an activity, then because the activity in this case brings with it so much pleasure then the pursuit of this activity is the continued pursuit of this pleasure. But Aristotle also thinks that pleasure completes an activity, if this is the case then it might be that pleasure reaches a high point. When we pursue an activity beyond this point, the pleasure begins to fade, and we might not even know if we are pursuing pleasure anymore. For example, when eating a meal, we can indulge and gain pleasure from this meal; however, this pleasure quickly fades if we keep eating and eating to excess. It is this excess I will argue that has the element of falsity.

The next way in which the pursuit of pleasure can go wrong, on Aristotle's view, are pleasures that he considers artificial or harmful. As stated, bodily pleasures hold an attraction for those who can find pleasure in no other kind.³⁰ Because of this some people seek the intensity of pleasure in many different places, and in doing so they create a thirst for these pleasures which was previously not there. Aristotle states there is no problem when the pleasures pursued are innocuous, but it is bad if the pleasure produces harmful results.³¹ At certain times people might create in themselves the need for a certain pleasure, this pleasure is felt to be good because it drives out another pain they have. However, if the pleasure that is introduced itself causes further pain, then this is an artificially harmful pleasure. An example might be someone who turns to drug taking to drive out a pain they have, while this might be pleasurable for a time, in the long term the drug taking becomes an even more devastating force on their lives.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 1154a.20.

³¹ *Ibid.* 1154b.1.

The following two forms of pleasure Aristotle argues against I consider to be pleasures of immorality: either *in-themselves* or *from their source*. According to Aristotle, it has been argued fallaciously that because some pleasures are scandalous that this shows that *all* pleasures are not good.³² Aristotle offers several defences against this argument. If we cannot call immoral pleasures good in any way we might firstly deny that pleasures such as these are pleasant at all. Aristotle argues that because immoral pleasures are only pleasurable to ‘ill-conditioned’ or vicious people, they are not actually pleasant at all.³³ These only appear to be pleasurable to those under a certain condition, but are not pleasures in themselves. Aristotle argues these are only pleasurable to some, in the way that a medicine might be healthy for a sick man, but the same medicine would be harmful to a healthy man; or in the way that something might look white to someone with a disease of the eye, is not actually white.³⁴ Aristotle argues that people who find pleasure in depraved or immoral acts are in a way deficient or deluded into thinking that these acts are truly pleasurable.

Aristotle’s second response to the argument is to say that while the actual pleasures might be desirable, their sources can render them undesirable.³⁵ Here, the source of a pleasure is as important as the pleasure itself. If we can say that the source of a certain pleasure is bad or wrong, then the pleasure resulting must also be bad or wrong. While we can consider that wealth is a pleasure and is desirable, it must be considered an undesirable pleasure if it is gained at the expense of betrayal or another immoral act. Aristotle states that we can say that pleasures differ in kind, that pleasures which are sought from noble and virtuous sources differ to those derived from base

³² *Ibid.* 1173b.20.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

sources.³⁶ Aristotle tries to show that not every pleasure is to be desired and that there are pleasures that are desirable in themselves and which can be distinguished from baser pleasures by their qualities and their sources.³⁷

This argument has similarities with the distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures, which has occurred in much philosophical debates regarding pleasure, as is most famously written about by John Stuart Mill. As we will see, difficulty can arise when trying to form clear rationales for why certain pleasures should rank above others. A difficulty also arises in the first of Aristotle's two points regarding immoral pleasures, and that is knowing exactly what should constitute scandalous, depraved or immoral pleasures. These points will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

The final false pleasures to consider are those that Aristotle terms 'alien pleasures'.³⁸ He claims we must consider the intellect and the senses as separate and as such both are going to have pleasures of different kinds that perfect them.³⁹ Because there are pleasures of many different kinds, they often vie for our complete attention and focus. Pleasures that infringe on the progress of other activities are *alien pleasures*. Activities we should be focused on can be hindered by the pleasures derived from other activities. These alien pleasures are not necessarily bad in themselves but rather because they are preventing us from achieving something else and in doing so, Aristotle argues, these alien pleasure can act as pains. He states that, activities are sharpened by their pleasure, the more we enjoy something the more we will do it and the better we will become at it. If something is painful to do then it is less likely that we are attracted to it. He gives the example of someone who does not enjoy doing maths, the more he finds

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.* 1174a.1.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 1175b.1.

³⁹ This is similar to Plato's notion of pleasures of the soul and pleasures of the body.

it unpleasant the more likely he is to stop doing maths altogether.⁴⁰ The pain associated with the activity destroys our desire for it. Aristotle states that alien pleasure can work in the same way, our desire for the pleasure of these alien activities impairs our ability to focus on other occupations, which might be less pleasurable but are nonetheless important. If we are to follow Aristotle here, then we can say that if these pleasures act more like pains and take away from other possible pleasures, then they have an element of falsity to them.

2.3. Outline of Varieties of False Pleasure

From the works of both Plato and Aristotle, we can begin to formulate different varieties of false pleasure. What follows is an original attempt at systematising the way various authors have viewed false pleasure. While there has been writing on individual authors views on false pleasure; there has not been an effort to draw together the various strands of philosophical arguments on the topic. This thesis aims to fill this conceptual gap, by providing a *taxonomy of false pleasure*. This taxonomy is not intended to be exhaustive of every example of false pleasure, but rather it proposes broad categories and subcategories by which we can examine different false pleasures. The originality of this conceptual work is that it draws a framework from previous philosophical writing, that will go on to answer what is meant by a *false pleasure*. This taxonomy will be initially be divided into four categories: *belief*, *experience*, *negative consequence*, and *immorality*.

Firstly, according to Plato, pleasures can be false if based on—or associated with—false beliefs. These pleasures form our first category of false pleasure: *False Pleasures of Belief*. False pleasure of belief occurs when a pleasure is based on a belief

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1175b.1.

of a certain state of affairs—if this belief is based on a falsehood then the pleasure is also based on a falsehood. I will argue that false pleasures of belief can be further divided into: false beliefs formed due to the individual or *subject*; and false beliefs formed due to a quality of the *object*. False beliefs due to the subject can also be of objects or states of affairs in the *future, present or past*.

Secondly, following Aristotle, false pleasure can occur in regard to the sensory experience of pleasure, or what I call *experientially false pleasure*. In this category I place Aristotle's notions of *excess* and *alien* pleasures. Along with these two types of false pleasure, I also place Plato's false pleasure of the neutral state (kind 3), and false mixed pleasures (kind 4), as both require some form of sensory or bodily pleasure. This category differs from *false pleasures of belief* as *experientially false pleasure* is based on a sensory experience of pleasure. With this said it will be shown that a belief can influence, positively or negatively, our felt sensory experience.

Thirdly, I argue that pleasure can be false if it results in *negative consequence*. This is based on Aristotle's notion of *artificial* or *harmful* pleasures. These pleasures are of the kind that, while appearing to be good in the moment, cause the subject further pain or harm in the future. As we will see, these types of false pleasure can also be *self-regarding* or *other-regarding*. *False pleasures of negative consequences* can be in *belief* or *experience* but must have negative consequences for the subject, when balanced against the initial pleasure (self-regarding). In some case the pleasure may have harmful consequences for other as well (other-regarding). This is a separate category from *false pleasures of belief* as false pleasures of belief may not necessarily have harmful consequences for the subject. *False pleasures of negative consequence* require the false pleasure to have a negative overall effect on the subject (or another) that out balances the pleasure gained. This category is distinct from *false experiential pleasures* as false

experiential pleasures do not necessarily need to have negative consequences (i.e. *false pleasure of the neutral state*) but there may be case in which both *false pleasure of experience* and *false pleasure of harmful consequences* are present (i.e. *false pleasure of excess* or *false alien pleasures*).

The fourth and final category of false pleasure is that of *immoral pleasures*, also based on Aristotle's account. Immoral pleasures can either be immoral *in-themselves*, or due to their *source*. I shall argue that pleasures which are immoral *in-themselves* include the taking of pleasure in *enacting cruelty* or the *viewing of cruelty*; the pleasure of *Schadenfreude* (in which a person enjoys the suffering of another, even though they know they should not); and *self-reflexively* immoral pleasures which are taken in immoral acts for the reason that they are immoral. The pleasures which are immoral due to their *source* might not be false in themselves, but false because of immorality in either the way they have been achieved or in their motive.⁴¹ This category I consider to be as separate but the pleasures in it can be of *belief* or of *experience* but must be malicious in nature. False immoral pleasures are predominantly other-regarding as the subject's actions in some way harm another, pleasure is taken by the subject in this harm. This category then must overlap at times with false pleasures of *negative consequence* as a pleasure such as one taken in inflicting pain on another must have negative consequence for this other person. However, it may be possible to imagine immoral pleasures which do not necessarily have negative consequences.

The taxonomy of false pleasure is so far formulated as:

- *False Pleasures of Belief*;
 - False Pleasure Kind 1, (*Plato*);
 - False Pleasure Kind 2, (*Plato*);
- *False Pleasures of Experience*;

⁴¹ For a clear diagram of the taxonomy of false pleasure, refer to *Appendix A*.

- False Pleasure of *Excess*, (*Aristotle*);
- False *Alien Pleasures*, (*Aristotle*);
- False Pleasure of *Neutral State, Kind 3*, (*Plato*);
- False *Mixed Pleasures, Kind 4*, (*Plato*);
- *False Pleasures of Negative Consequence*, (*Aristotle*);
 - *Self-regarding*;
 - *Other-regarding*; and,
- *False Immoral Pleasures*, (*Aristotle*);
 - False Immoral Pleasures *In-Themselves*, (*Aristotle*);
 - False Immoral Pleasures from their *Source*, (*Aristotle*);

These initial categories will be further expanded upon as this thesis progresses. The completed taxonomy is shown in Appendix A. In the following chapters, we will look in detail at these categories, and determine the reasons for why these forms of pleasure should be considered not only bad or wrong, but also false. This will make use of arguments not only from Plato and Aristotle, but various authors who have written on the nature of pleasure, and the ways in which pleasures can have the capacity to deceive or impede our experience of the good life.

There are many ways in which pleasure has been recognised in both a common language sense and on a deeper philosophical analysis. This thesis does not intend (nor could it) to give a unified theory of pleasure. Rather the purpose of the taxonomy of false pleasure is to give specific examples of the ways in which pleasure can go wrong (however we conceive of pleasure). By doing this this work is by no means giving a definitive list of false pleasure as there may be many more examples outside of what is provided here. The aim is rather to give some further understanding of what we mean when we call something a false pleasure and the ways in which false pleasure can plausibly be said to manifest.

The taxonomy developed is intended to be of use in matters of practical

philosophy and applied ethics. Interest in developing this taxonomy came from thinking about video games, but it has become apparent that the notion of false pleasure has more general applications. With this in mind, this thesis will apply the taxonomy to modern uses of pleasure, namely the question we began this thesis with: whether video games are a form of false pleasure. Each of the next four chapters will conclude with an application of the taxonomy of false pleasure to the topic of video games. From this, we aim to find which criticisms of video games succeed, which do not, and why. This will be done to find the value or worth of these modern objects of pleasure. This work will be done in order to both defend video games being considered false pleasures and, moreover, to consider that certain games have a role to play in the good life.

Following the taxonomy of false pleasure and its applications to video games, Chapter 7 of this thesis will turn its focus to the critique of modern mass culture put forward by authors from the Frankfurt School. This will be done, in part, because this critique represents one of the most philosophically comprehensive attacks on modern popular culture and the pleasure it provides. It will also be done because, while the taxonomy of false pleasure is concerned primarily with personal or individual pleasure, the Frankfurt School critique points to broader political concerns related to the consumption of pleasure in modern culture. With this said, certain similarities will be found between the taxonomy of false pleasure I present, and the critiques of writers such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. Before we get to these authors, we must detail the arguments for the varieties of false pleasure already identified.

Chapter 3 – The Illusion of Pleasure: False Pleasure of Belief

When we think of pleasure, we often limit our thinking to the sensory experience of pleasure. Pleasures such as those of a delicious taste, sweet smell or beautiful sound. As we have briefly touched upon, however, these are not the only pleasures that we should consider. This chapter will explore the form of pleasure that is taken in *belief*, be that of an object or a certain state of affairs. The chapter will follow Plato's argument that pleasures of belief can be considered false, if the beliefs which they are based are determined to be false. The distinction will first be made between pleasures of belief and those of sensory pleasures, drawing on the work of Fred Feldman.¹ It will also be argued that there are different and distinct false pleasures of belief, originating from different sources of falsity. The types of false pleasure this chapter will cover are:

- 1) *False anticipatory pleasure*;
- 2) *False pleasure of belief: present sense*;
- 3) *False pleasure of past belief*; and,
- 4) *False Overestimation of future pleasure*.²

3.1. Differences Between Pleasures of Belief and Sensory Pleasures

Fred Feldman, in his work *Pleasure and the Good Life*, makes the distinction between two types of pleasure, they are: *sensory* pleasure and, what he terms, *attitudinal* pleasure.³ According to Feldman *sensory* pleasures are those that bring with them pleasurable sensations; he states they are 'things relevantly like feelings of heat and

¹ Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, p. 55.

² Please refer to Appendix A for a diagram of the taxonomy of false pleasure.

³ *Ibid.* p. 55–58.

cold; feelings of pressure, tickles, and itches; the feeling you get in your back when getting a massage.’⁴ *Attitudinal* pleasures differ, Feldman claims that ‘a person takes attitudinal pleasure in some state of affairs if he enjoys it, is pleased about it, is glad that it is happening, is delighted by it’.⁵ Attitudinal pleasures, then, are based on the attitude of an individual towards a certain object or state of affairs. Feldman continues that these pleasures are ‘always directed onto objects just as beliefs and hopes and fears are directed onto objects. This is one respect in which they are different from sensory pleasures.’⁶ I can be pleased by a certain state of affairs that does not necessarily carry with it a feeling of sensory pleasure, as an attitudinal pleasure Feldman states, ‘need not have any “feel”.’⁷ He gives an example of a motorcyclist who has been severely injured in an accident and has been given a powerful anaesthetic that makes feeling any sensory pain or pleasure impossible. This person might still feel *attitudinal* pleasure that he is alive or that his motorcycle was not damaged in the crash.⁸

It is possible to see attitudinal pleasure as being pleasure in the *belief* of a certain state of affairs. If we see attitudinal pleasure this way then we can also consider *false* attitudinal pleasure as being that which is based on a *false belief*. It appears that Feldman’s attitudinal pleasures must be based on a form of belief, they are pleasures taken in a belief that something *actually is* a certain way, a true belief. If the injured motorcyclist takes attitudinal pleasure in his motorcycle being undamaged he must at some level believe that his motorcycle is undamaged.⁹ Feldman mentions another example:

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 56.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 57.

⁹ In this case, the belief is easily verifiable, by having the motorcyclist examine his motorcycle and see that it is undamaged.

Suppose that you are a peace-loving person. Suppose you take note of the fact there are no wars going on. The world is at peace. Suppose you are pleased about this. You are glad that the world is at peace. Then you have taken attitudinal pleasure in a certain fact — the fact that that the world is at peace.¹⁰

In this example, Feldman is careful to emphasise that this attitudinal pleasure is taken in a *fact*, however we still must have a belief that this fact is true. If this state of affairs is indeed a fact then our belief is true. But if, while we are taking pleasure in the fact that the world is at peace, a war breaks out somewhere in the world unbeknownst to us, then the basis for our pleasure can no longer be considered a fact. We might still be taking attitudinal pleasure in our belief, however the change in circumstances has meant that our belief is now untrue. There is in fact a war happening in the world, therefore the world is not at peace. This attitudinal pleasure we are experiencing is based on a false belief. Feldman states, ‘I will not assume that attitudinal pleasure is always directed toward truths. Perhaps the most we can say is that if you take pleasure in some state of affairs, then you must at least think that it is true.’¹¹ In this case, attitudinal pleasure must be based on a belief, a belief that we must think is true. On the other hand, if our attitudinal pleasure is based on a belief that is *not* true, then it might be questionable whether we are experiencing a genuine form of pleasure.¹² As we will see Plato makes a similar argument to this, to make the case for the plausibility of false pleasure.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 56.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 60.

¹² It should be noted this is not a view which Feldman himself endorses.

Irving Thalberg made a similar distinction between pleasures in his 1962 article ‘False Pleasures’.¹³ He classifies examples such as ‘being pleased that...’ and similar states as ‘propositional attitudes’, stating:

An accurate description of a person’s thrills or enjoyments must contain words that the person uses or would use (if asked, “Why are you pleased?”) in depicting his pleasure. When these conditions are fulfilled, and when a false statement follows ‘pleased that’, I would say that the subject is having a false pleasure.¹⁴

In this way, we come to the possibility that pleasure based on a belief (or attitude) might be considered as false if this belief is not based on a truth nor fact. Thalberg gives the example of someone named Smith being ‘pleased that’ Nixon was elected President of the United States in 1960 (which he was not). To update this example, say we see Smith smiling and joyful and ask him the source of his pleasure, he states that he is ‘*pleased that* Hilary Clinton has been elected as President of the United States in 2016’. The proposition on which Smith’s pleasure is based is untrue, and according to Thalberg, we should call the pleasure based on this proposition a false pleasure.

The difficulty of attitudinal pleasures compared to sensory pleasures is the reliance on the belief that states of affairs truly *are* (also *will be* or *were*) a certain way. Sensory pleasures might be more easily recognisable as we experience them through felt sensation, however attitudinal pleasures, as Feldman stated, do not necessarily have this “feel”. When we take attitudinal pleasure in knowledge of a fact, this pleasure is taken in a true state of affairs, however there is a disconnect between the pleasure taken in *knowledge* and pleasure taken in mere *belief*. As Fred Dretske notes, in his essay

¹³ Irving Thalberg, ‘False pleasures’, *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 59, no. 3, 1962, p. 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 74.

‘The Epistemology of Belief’, ‘believing is easy, knowledge is hard’.¹⁵ There are many things we assume knowledge of, I assume that I *know* my friends and family generally think well of me and (at least) tolerate my presence, but how am I sure that this is a *fact*? It could conceivably be the case that no one around me likes or enjoys my company, but only say they do when questioned. It might be that many things in life we cannot know as a discernible fact, in this case we must rely on the lesser *belief*. This is an epistemological problem which must be a consideration if we are to admit the existence of attitudinal or propositional pleasures.

We cannot have knowledge that is false, for knowledge must be of a true state of affairs, but we can have belief that is false. Dretske states,

... it takes something *more* to know because knowledge requires, beside mere belief, some reliable coordination of internal belief with external reality. ... the problem, at least for epistemology ... is not one of understanding how we manage to *have* beliefs, but one of understanding the sources and extent of their reliability.’¹⁶

The problem, as Dretske notes, is the reliability of our beliefs particularly if we are using these beliefs as the basis for pleasure.¹⁷ This epistemological problem will not be entirely dealt with in this work, except to note the fallibility of belief and its distinction from knowledge.

In his 1896 work *The Will to Believe*, American philosopher William James, argued against the British mathematician and philosopher William Clifford. Clifford argued for an epistemology that required sufficient evidence for any and all of our

¹⁵ Fred I. Dretske, ‘The epistemology of belief’, *Synthese*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1983, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ It should be noted that some beliefs on which we base pleasure may never be able to be verified as being true or false, the belief in God or a higher power might be an example. We might base some of our actions and gain pleasure from a belief in God, but this belief can little be confirmed nor denied and we might not be able to say that we are acting on *knowledge* of God.

beliefs, James quotes Clifford as saying, ‘it is, wrong always, everywhere, and for everyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence’.¹⁸ In the case in which our pleasure is based on a belief, if this belief is not verifiable then, according to Clifford, our pleasure should be considered wrong. But in cases in which we cannot *know* for certain our belief is correct, how much evidence is sufficient or insufficient? James argued against Clifford, stating ‘he who says, “Better go without belief forever than believe a lie!” merely shows his own preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe.’¹⁹ James notes,

... it is as if a man should hesitate indefinitely to ask a certain woman to marry him because he was not perfectly sure that she would prove an angel after he brought her home. Would he not cut himself off from that particular angel-possibility as decisively as if he went and married someone else?²⁰

In terms of this belief, and pleasures that accompany beliefs, James argues that we might never be moved to action if we wait for indisputable evidence, evidence that might never occur. James also argues that the strength of a system of beliefs should be in the outcome of the belief, rather than the origin. He continues that we can view our beliefs in two ways, from their source—if their source is false so is the belief and its subsequent pleasure—or we can focus on the outcome of the belief, if what this belief leads to is true then the belief is good—even if from false premises.²¹ It is important to keep this in mind when considering the value that we place on our attitudinal pleasures, or pleasures of belief.

¹⁸ William James, *The Will to Believe*, e-book, New York, 1897, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm> accessed 19 July 2017, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 26.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 17.

While we might consider a belief to be true or false based on something that is occurring in the present moment, in this chapter we will also see that truth and falsity of belief can affect our experience of pleasure in the past and, as James shows, our expectation of pleasure in the future. This is an important point. In his dialogue the *Philebus* Plato specifically discusses false pleasure of belief in anticipation, in which our belief in a future event can turn out to be false; these I will call *false anticipatory pleasures*.

3.2. False Anticipatory Pleasure

In the *Philebus* Plato identifies ways in which we can consider pleasure to be false; the first kind as identified by David Wolfsdorf has to do with our belief in an object pleasure.²² In this case, according to Plato, it is our belief in this pleasure that is mistaken and accordingly is that which makes it a false pleasure. Wolfsdorf specifically focuses on this kind of pleasure in an anticipatory sense, but as we will see later there is an argument to be made that it is also applicable to present and past objects or sources of pleasure. Plato argues that we can feel real pleasure in something that is not based in realities of the past, present or future. The character of Socrates states,

... he who feels pleasure at all in any way or manner always really feels pleasure, but it is sometimes not based upon realities, whether present or past, and often, perhaps most frequently, upon things which will never even be realities in the future.²³

In the future sense, we might have an expectation or hope for a future event or object that will bring us pleasure or fulfil an expected desire. If this event or object fails to materialise then the pleasure we derived from anticipating, according to Plato, can be

²² Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 80.

²³ Plato, *Philebus*, 40d.

seen to be false.

Plato makes the comparison between *pleasure* and *opinion*. A person can have an opinion about something and this opinion can be right or wrong, in either case it is still really an opinion.²⁴ If the object of this opinion is not a reality in the past, present or future, then what is held is a false opinion; there is not an object in actuality for there to be an opinion of.²⁵ As with opinions, Plato argues that this is also the case with pleasure, we can feel *real* pleasure about something that is not based on reality either in the past or present, or that will never be a reality in the future. We can “get our hopes up”, and the thought of future events in our mind can bring us pleasure. However, if this object of pleasure does not come into existence, then the pleasure already derived has also become false, in a way this false pleasure has a real, but illusory character.

Pleasure in the anticipatory sense can be thought to be false if one believes one's thoughts to be capable of becoming truths; but in reality, they do not. In the weaker sense this might be seen as *false pleasure of fantasy*, in the stronger sense this can be considered a type of *delusion*. Taking pleasure in the thought of a fantasy might not be detrimental, if the person recognises that what they are imagining might not become truth. For example, I can take pleasure in the thought of being an astronaut landing on Mars, or scoring a goal for the Barcelona football team; though I must recognise that in all likelihood neither of these things will become truth. Such fantasies do not have to be so grandiose in nature; we can all have small fantasies that we can take pleasure anticipatory in, as an escape in thought or daydream from our everyday lives. Thinking of the pleasure of a job promotion; or of winning some money in the lottery; or of seeing that girl or guy you like and hoping they will finally talk to you. These little moments

²⁴ *Ibid.* 37a.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 40c.

of fantasy or of the thought of future events occurring can be pleasurable, it can be enjoyable to let our imagination wander at its will. However, when we give these fantasies too much attention or credit they can become problematic if they do not become true. The person who is overlooked for the job they thought they would get; the person who never wins the lottery but keeps trying; or the unrequited lover who is snubbed by the one person they desire. In each of these cases the pleasure taken in anticipation does not end up being anything that occurs in reality. In these cases, it is the extent the person who has these anticipatory pleasures believes their plausibility of becoming truths, and the amount of pleasure they pin on these things becoming truth that is important rather than the objects or events of pleasure themselves.

If a belief in something that does or will not come true is pursued to an extent that it becomes detrimental to other aspects of one's life, this might then be considered more than a fantasy as being somewhat of a delusion of pleasure. The problem can occur when actions follow beliefs as if they were knowledge. If I pin all my hopes on winning the lottery to the extent I spent my entire pay-check each week on tickets, against all reasonable advice that I should stop the thought of winning the lottery gives me so much pleasure that I keep buying and buying, this is certainly going to be of detriment to my way of life. Someone could reasonably say of my purchasing lottery tickets in this manner, that I am in a way deluded by the thought that I will win the lottery and by the idea that winning will bring me great pleasure. If I keep buying tickets and end up never winning, then the belief that I would win the lottery was a false one, and correspondingly any pleasure I had in this belief should also be considered false. I was pursuing pleasure in a belief that was wrong.

The difference between fantasies and delusions might have to do with their propositional aspect; if someone asks me why I am pleased at imagining playing

football for Barcelona, I might respond that “I am taking pleasure in *the thought that* I could play for Barcelona”, rather than “I am taking *pleasure that* I will play for Barcelona”. Thalberg gives an example of a war widow who states, ‘I know it’s impossible, but just the *thought* that John is alive in the New Guinea jungle gives me pleasure’.²⁶ Thalberg argues that in this case ‘there is no judgement involved that could be called false *or true*’, and that the object of pleasure here is not *that* her husband is alive but rather the object of pleasure is *the thought of* her husband being alive.²⁷ Thalberg continues that ‘*pleasure in thought of* is not a counter example to Plato’s thesis, since mere *thoughts*, or unasserted propositions, are neither true nor false’.²⁸ The example of the war widow is in a present sense, and it appears that pleasure taken in *thoughts of* are always in the present sense. However, as we have seen anticipated pleasure—*pleasures that* a state of affairs will occur—are based on future events or objects, and their truth-value (truth or falsity) is dependent on this state of affairs coming into being.

It should be noted that it is not clear that Plato entertains that propositions are truth bearers. Wolfsdorf notes that there is no evidence or discussion in the text to suggest that Plato commits to the idea of propositions in this context.²⁹ Similarly Gosling and Taylor in their work *The Greeks on Pleasure* state that there is no evidence in Plato’s language which states that he delineates the propositional “pleased that...”. From Gosling and Taylor, a point can be made regarding anticipatory pleasure, that it is not clear where the falsity lays. If I take pleasure in the thought that I will win money in the lottery in the future, in what exactly I am taking this pleasure? Is it pleasure *that I will* win money; or pleasure *in the thought* I will win the money. Gosling and Taylor

²⁶ Thalberg, ‘False pleasures’, p. 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 83.

state that ‘‘*A* is pleased that he will enjoy *E*’ and ‘*A* enjoys anticipating *E*’ are logically independent descriptions, in that neither implies the other’.³⁰ They continue that Plato takes as his central case one of enjoying anticipating *E*, and that nowhere is it clear he means propositional future pleasures, they state ‘nothing justifies the contention that he is really concerned with being pleased that one will have *E*, rather than enjoying anticipating *E*.’³¹ Gosling and Taylor argue that Plato’s account of false pleasure of belief fails, they state that this is a case of false anticipation, rather than one of false pleasure.

Gosling and Taylor do provide an interesting perspective on the question of what exactly we are taking pleasure in when anticipating something, and where falsity might lie. They give the example of enjoying a drink on my future holidays and they state we can distinguish four aspects of the situation:

- i) My enjoying the drink;
- ii) The picture of myself enjoying the drink;
- iii) My picturing myself enjoying the drink;
- iv) My enjoying picturing myself enjoying the drink.

They state that i) is the anticipated pleasure, and whether or not it does occur in the future, I have to at least believe it will. Aspects (iii) and (iv) they argue are episodes of my ‘mental history’, and cannot be considered true or false, as I am essentially taking pleasure in the picturing of something that I believe will occur in the future. (I consider this to be closer to pleasure in the *thought of* something occurring in the future, rather

³⁰ J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, Oxford, 1982, p. 441.

³¹ *Ibid.*

than pleasure in the *belief that* it will occur. There is no reason to think that the truth or falsity of the belief is important for the pleasure taken in (iii) and (iv)).

They do say however that truth or falsity can apply to (ii) ‘since the picture of myself enjoying the drink is the content of an act of thought ... it can like any content of thought be true or false’.³² They argue the ‘content of the anticipation’ is the only part of anticipatory pleasure that can be construed as false. If the content of my anticipation, here the belief that I will enjoy the drink, does not occur then they say my ‘anticipated enjoyment proved unreal’ or that ‘I believed that I should enjoy something, but that the belief was false.’ In this case, however, they argue that there was no enjoyment which could be called true or false, only a belief that is true or false. This is in line with Protarchus’ rejection of Socrates notion of false pleasure, when Protarchus states it is the belief that is false but not the pleasure.³³ But, they argue that Socrates does want to maintain that ‘in pleasures of anticipation it is literally the pleasure which is true or false, not just the belief’.³⁴

There is much debate whether or not Plato’s account of false anticipatory pleasures succeeds. Philosopher Anthony Kenny, writing on false pleasure in the *Philebus*, argued that,

... even if it is true that a man never thinks he is enjoying himself when he is not, still he may think that he *will* enjoy himself when he will not; and his pleasure in the mental pictures attending this thought will thus be false pleasure – though, as the analogy with belief shows, it will still truly be pleasure.³⁵

That being said, fantasies or thoughts of anticipatory pleasure can be used as starting

³² *Ibid.* p. 437.

³³ *Philebus* 37e-38a.

³⁴ Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, p. 438.

³⁵ Anthony Kenny ‘False pleasures in the *Philebus*: A reply to Mr. Gosling’, *Phronesis*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1960, p. 46.

points for aspirations and goals, they can be used as motivators to achieve or pursue something. William James argues that ‘the desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth’s existence’.³⁶ For example, the belief that I will gain a job promotion might cause me to act in a way that assures me of the position, by working harder than I would otherwise do. In this case, the belief becomes a truth through my actions. As James continues ‘Who gains promotions, boons, appointments, but the man ... [who] sacrifices other things for their sake before they have come, and takes risks for them in advance? His faith acts on the powers above him as a claim, and creates its own verification.’³⁷ However, it should be recognised that these beliefs are not truths until they become real, and we must be able to recognise that there is the possibility they will not ever become truths. This has to do with an individual’s appraisal and attitude towards an anticipated pleasure. The falsity here lies with the individual or subject, rather than with the object of anticipated pleasure. If, on the other hand, that which the subject anticipates comes true, then we can examine the object of this anticipated pleasure. If the object of pleasure does not bring with it the amount of pleasure anticipated, then we might also be able to see the falsity of pleasure in belief because of an aspect of, or something inherent in, the object itself.³⁸

Whether or not Plato’s specific account of false anticipatory pleasure succeeds, there is a stronger account for the plausibility of false pleasure of belief on the *propositional account*. On this propositional account, the falsity of a pleasure is dependent on the truth or falsity of the proposition “pleased that...”. I think it is plausible to say, and in line with Thalberg’s argument, that if a pleasure is dependent on a false proposition, the pleasure can also be deemed false. We also have to keep in

³⁶ James, *The Will to Believe*, p. 24.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See Chapter 3.5.

mind Plato's purpose in discussing different types of pleasure, or the possibility of false pleasure, and that is determine what pleasure should be included in the good life. As Gosling and Taylor note, the 'long discussion of false pleasure is part of a classification of kind of pleasure, whose ultimate aim is to isolate, as sole candidates for inclusion in the good life, a class of unqualified or totally genuine pleasures.'³⁹ The aim of this thesis is similar; however, it focuses specifically on the pleasures which should be *excluded* from, or detrimental to, the good life.

3.3. False Pleasure of Belief: *Present Sense*

While Plato explicitly discusses the falsity of anticipatory pleasures, there is no reason that we cannot also think it to apply to present or past pleasures that depend upon belief. As we have seen, to illustrate his view of pleasure, Plato makes a connection between opinion and pleasure. For any object or event that we are able to perceive, we are also capable of holding an opinion. Opinions can be considered closer to truth, or to falsehood, depending on their relation to the actuality or the truth-value (either truth or falsity) of an object. For example, if we are looking at a tree in the distance and there is a figure underneath it, we might reasonably come to hold the opinion that the figure is that of a man. If this figure turns out to be a man then we can consider our opinion to be true. If, however, this figure turns out to be something else, such as a scarecrow, then it can be said our opinion was false.⁴⁰ Plato claims, if there is someone with us when we are looking at this figure, and we say aloud what we have thought, then our opinion becomes a statement; but if we are alone, then we can carry this opinion around in our mind for a long time.⁴¹ He also states that opinions stem from a combination of

³⁹ Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, p. 452.

⁴⁰ *Philebus*, 38c-38e.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 38e.

memory and perception.⁴² It appears that he is arguing that our ability to form true opinions is contingent on the relative strength of our memory and perception, this is an important point and will be addressed in more detail later.

On Plato's view, there is such thing as right and wrong opinion—or false opinion and true opinion—and often pleasures and pains follow on from these opinions.⁴³ It is important to examine here to what extent pleasure and pain can be contingent on the truth-value (truth or falsity) of an opinion. When we take pleasure in a belief or certain state of affairs, as Feldman states we must believe it to be true.⁴⁴

3.4. False Pleasure of Past Belief: *False Memories*

As with anticipatory beliefs and beliefs in the present sense, beliefs about a past event can also give rise to false pleasures. However, memory is well known to be fallible, our memory of a certain event could give us a great deal of attitudinal pleasure, but this pleasure could be seen to be false if we are remembering events incorrectly.

'False memories' can give rise to false beliefs about a certain object; these false beliefs can be basis for attitudinal pleasure, but this pleasure must also be considered to be false. There have been many studies in psychology that attest to the ability of our mind to 'remember' or create things or events that did not happen, or that happened in a different manner to that which we think.⁴⁵

The question is how can we trust our memories, the beliefs from which they stem and the pleasure (or pain) we take in these beliefs. Say I 'remember' having my

⁴² *Ibid.* 38b-38c.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 38b.

⁴⁴ Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good life*, p. 59.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Henry Roedinger and Kathleen McDermott 'Creating false memories: Remembering words not presented in lists', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1995, pp. 803-814. In which 40-55% of test subjects incorrectly remembered certain words as appearing on lists they had been recently been read. The authors state that their experiment found a 'striking memory illusion', and that people 'remember events that never happened (p. 812)'.

7th birthday party on a sunny day and take attitudinal pleasure in this memory, looking back on it fondly throughout my life. What then can be said of this pleasure if it turns out I had not in fact had a 7th birthday party, or that it was actually raining that day, and that I had merely created this memory? My attitudinal pleasure can be said to be based on a falsehood, or on a false memory. A full survey of the studies and literature surrounding false memories is beyond the scope of this work, nevertheless the problem of false memories is also a problem for the beliefs and pleasures that might be based on them. There can be two ways to look at false pleasure in a past sense:

- 1) we can have pleasure in the present that is based on a false memory, this makes the subsequent present pleasure also false;
- 2) we can remember something was pleasurable in the past, but this pleasure was based on a false belief we had at the time.

With 1) we can either completely invent a memory and base our pleasure on it; or we can remember an event that *did* happen, but that we misremember or remember happening differently, and base our pleasure on this misremembering. In this way, we can say that our memories of the past can cause us false pleasure in the present. As for 2) we can consider this to be an extension of false pleasure in the present sense (see Section 3.3), however we only recognise the falsity of our belief at a later time. This recognition of a past false pleasure cannot affect the pleasure we had at the time of experience, but it might affect the value we now put on this past pleasure.⁴⁶ If emotions stem or are based on faulty memories, the reliability of these emotions as reflective states is called into question.

⁴⁶ See Section 4.1: *The Effect of Belief on the Experience of Pleasure* for more on this.

3.5. False Overestimation of Future Pleasure

We have talked so far of the anticipation of a pleasure which will never become true, as being a kind of false pleasure. However, there is another way this anticipatory pleasure can be false, if the object of pleasure does actually occur, but the pleasure is diminished from what was expected. This falsity of pleasure has to do with the *object itself*, along with a mixture of other affective conditions being experienced. This second kind of false pleasure of belief is discussed by Plato (identified by Wolfsdorf as false pleasure *kind 2*) and is similar, yet distinct from the false pleasure we have thus far examined. In this category we are concerned, primarily, with the object of pleasure and how and our beliefs interact with this object to form an experience.

The examples and cases of false pleasure of belief we have so far examined, focus on the falsity of belief of the person (or subject) who is experiencing this pleasure. In these cases, the individual has mistakenly believed—and based pleasure on—something that will never be a reality. This falsity lies in the belief of the subject, their true or false belief also gives the truth-value (truth or falsity) to their pleasure. In the second kind of false pleasure, Plato states, the reverse is true; that is, truth and falsity applies to the content of pleasure and pain themselves.⁴⁷ Compared with false belief on the part of the subject (Section 3.2) in which a belief is true or false and makes the corresponding pleasure true or false; in the second case, an aspect of an object conditions our belief in that object, making our belief true or true or false. Take for example a belief in an object that we anticipated taking pleasure in does become a truth. Say I *do* win the lottery after I had the belief I would, but instead of experiencing pleasure, my winnings only bring me pain. The pleasure I had taken in anticipation

⁴⁷ Plato, *Philebus*, 41a-42c.

might be false if the actual pleasure I experience is diminished or lesser than what I expected it to be.⁴⁸

The reason Plato think this can happen, is that at times we have a mixture of affective conditions, some painful and some pleasurable. On some occasions these conditions compete and distort one another. For example, someone might experience the pain of hunger, and also the pleasure of anticipating a good meal.⁴⁹ The pain experienced due to hunger, might influence the individual's ability to estimate correctly the pleasure of the upcoming meal. Due to this influence, the anticipatory or imagined pleasure might appear to be greater than the actual pleasure will be when it is experienced. In this case, the mixture of pleasure and pain have created an 'affective illusion', and have caused the individual to have a false belief about the amount of pleasure they will experience.

Plato states that in the first case of false pleasure (Section 3.2), 'opinions, being true or false, imbued the pains and pleasures with their own condition of truth or falsehood.'⁵⁰ But now, with false overestimation of future pleasure, he states,

... because they are seen at various changing distances and are compared with one another, the pleasures themselves appear greater and more intense by comparison with the pains, and the pains in turn, through comparison with the pleasures, vary as inversely as they.⁵¹

⁴⁸ This point relates closely to Albert Hirschman's treatment of "disappointment" in his work *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton, 2002). Hirschman writes, 'the quintessential deception to which humans are subject is that of the hopes they themselves fabricate (p.13).' Interestingly Hirschman argues that disappointment is a necessary result of human's ability to plan and desire for the future, to 'entertain magnificent vistas and aspirations (p.23)' as he puts it. Disappointment, in this light, is not seen as something entirely negative, but rather 'the "cost" of disappointments may well be less than the "benefit" yielded by man's ability to entertain over and over again the idea of bliss and happiness (p.23)'. While this is an important point, the development of its relation to false pleasure perhaps requires its own separate and lengthy treatment. I thank Professor Alan Scott for bringing Hirschman's work to my attention.

⁴⁹ This example is given by Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 85.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Philebus*, 42a.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 42b.

Plato considers that there are be circumstances in which an anticipated pleasure is lesser than its actual pleasure due another simultaneously occurring affective state, such as a pain. If a pleasure and a pain are compared side by side (or a pleasure with a pleasure; pain with a pain) depending on the extent of their variation we might be wrongly led to believe one of them greater than it is in actuality.

It is argued that by Plato that the gap between what I had expected to experience and what I did experience should be considered false as there is no reality to this missing pleasure. Plato continues,

... they both, then, appear greater and less than reality. Now if you abstract from both of them this apparent, but unreal, excess or inferiority, you cannot say that its appearance is true nor again can you have the face to affirm that the part of pleasure or pain which corresponds to this is true or real.⁵²

Any action, activity or object might have the condition of being pleasant, because it admits of being of *more* or *less* desirable than what it is compared to. For example, something might be seen as desirable or pleasurable if it is only compared to something that will bring more pain. But if we take this initial pleasure as a stand-alone entity, removing the object it is being compared to, then we can see that the initial object might not have the qualities of being pleasurable in itself. Therefore, we might not be able to say it is a true pleasure, but only has the appearance of being so. This is the case if we are comparing, pleasures with pleasure, pains with pains, or pleasures with pains.

Wolfsdorf states that, according to Plato, the content of the pleasure is the source of truth-value, and our belief derives its truth-value from this content.⁵³ Pleasures and pains are themselves true or false, and our belief of truth or falsehood comes from this.

⁵² *Ibid.* 42b-42c.

⁵³ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 85.

We can experience more than one affective condition (a feeling such as pleasure, pain, calm) at one time, for example we can have the feeling of hunger (pain) but at the same time can be excited and salivating over our next meal (pleasure). It is possible that either the pleasure or the pain experienced has the effect of distorting the other, in this case, Wolfsdorf notes the 'present pain makes the anticipatory pleasure appear lesser than it will in fact be'.⁵⁴ It is argued here that the pleasure derived from anticipation of a meal is lessened by the immediate pain of hunger a person is feeling. This could also perhaps be said to be the other way, if someone is starving the thought of their next meal can bring immense pleasure, perhaps more than the meal itself will actually bring. If someone is feeling the pain of freezing cold they might imagine the pleasure of being inside by a fireplace, in warmth as greater than the actuality of this scene. In this case two affective states, pain and pleasure, are competing; and the appearance of one—in this case pleasure—is heightened to a level that is perhaps greater than the actuality of the pleasure.

Plato makes a connection between the distortion of pleasures and pains and that of sight; he states that if we see objects from afar, or from too close, it distorts the truth and might cause us to have false beliefs.⁵⁵ Wolfsdorf refers to this as 'affective illusions'.⁵⁶ In the case of visual illusion this is a problem with our spatial perspective, whether an object is near, far, or over a hill. With pleasures and pains the perspective is temporal, how soon or late something might be. We might feel that a pleasure or pain in the distant future can appear to be lesser than it actually will be.⁵⁷ As we have seen the juxtaposition of two affective conditions, rather than the temporal relation between

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Plato, *Philebus*, 41e.

⁵⁶ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 85.

⁵⁷ This will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

them, can also create 'affective distortion'.⁵⁸ In this way the distortion between the conditions is caused by the conditions themselves, rather than by any element of temporal factors, for example a sensory related pleasure or pain could make an imagined pleasure or pain greater or lesser.⁵⁹ Plato joins these two ways in which pleasures and pains might distort each other, in time (something in the present affecting a condition in the future), and through juxtaposition (the effect of distortion on another). Wolfsdorf argues that because of this distorting effect, the distorted part of the pleasure cannot be considered real; and also, that this distorted part of the pleasure falsifies the pleasure as a whole.

Wolfsdorf uses the example of the experience of hunger combined with the anticipatory pleasure of expecting a meal. In this case, the pain might heighten the imagined pleasure, make the imagined pleasure greater than the actual pleasure will be. If, for convenience, we state that we can determine quantities of pleasure and pain, Wolfsdorf states if we can let m stand for imagined pleasure and n stand for actual pleasure, then it is possible to state $m > n$. The quantity of distorted pleasure follows as d then $m - n = d$. This distorted portion of the pleasure (d) then can be said to be false, because it does not correspond to anything in reality, Wolfsdorf equates this to empty names such as "Santa Clause" or "Pegasus". This distorted part of the pleasure might also be said to falsify the imagined pleasure as a whole, Wolfsdorf argues, in the way a portrait of Churchill with blond hair could be said be false as a whole, because of the aspect of the image (blond hair) that is false.⁶⁰

To use the example of sight we might compare two things at various distances this makes the images appear distorted to us, we cannot clearly see an objects true

⁵⁸ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 86.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

proportions and we can be falsely led to an opinion of it. This false opinion comes from the objects characteristics, often compared to something else. As this happens with opinions, Plato argues, it also happens with pleasures and pains.

If we take pleasure and pain we also see that one can distort the other if put side by side. Pleasures can appear greater if they are put beside pains, and vice versa. We can be fooled into thinking pleasures will be greater than they actually are. We can illustrate this distortion with through sight with colour and shape perception. Take the following image:

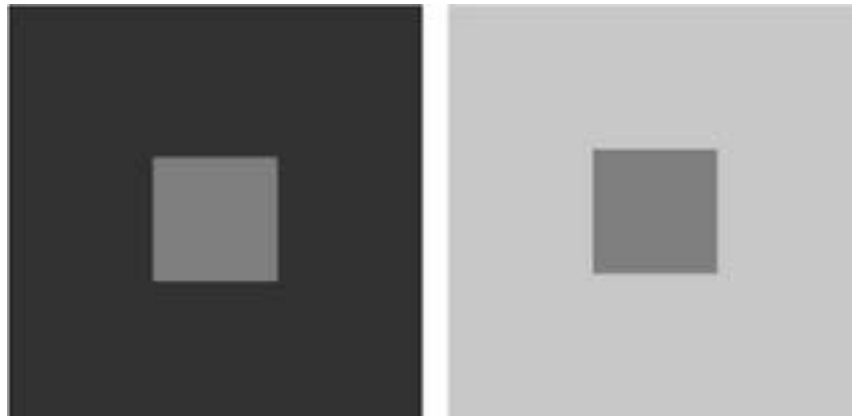


Figure 1: *Simultaneous Contrast Effect.*⁶¹

The middle squares are both the same shade of grey; however, they appear to our eyes as though they are different shades. The appearance of the middle squares is being distorted by the surrounds, leading us to believe they are different. We can also see this in the following *Ehrenstein illusion*, the square in the middle has the appearance of being distorted, and bent due to the circles surrounding and intersecting it.

⁶¹ Steven Lehar, 'The constructive aspect of visual perception', 2008, <http://cns-alumni.bu.edu/~slehar/ConstructiveAspect/ConstructiveAspect.html>, accessed 15 June 2016.

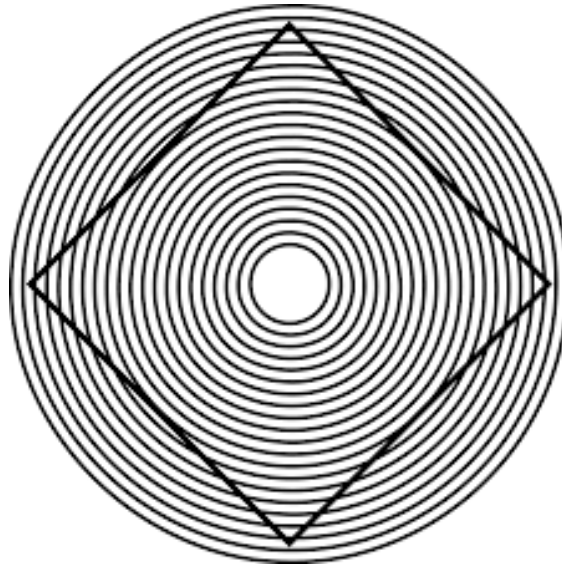


Figure 2: *Ehrenstein Illusion*.⁶²

In a similar way, Plato argues that pleasures and pains can be distorted, when put side by side others. The presence of one, can have an effect on another. Recent psychological literature has attested to the effect mood can have on our beliefs or estimations of what we will feel in the future. In one study on mood and decision making, Norbert Schwartz states that ‘individuals in a happy mood tend to overestimate the likelihood of positive, and to underestimate the likelihood of negative outcomes and events ... the reverse holds for individuals in a sad mood’.⁶³ This is problematic because current emotion can influence decision making about what we think will be beneficial for us in the future. Schwartz continues, ‘unfortunately, our attempts to predict future feelings are fraught with uncertainty and we often get it wrong, resulting in suboptimal decisions’.⁶⁴ This is the problem which Plato also identifies: we can overestimate how much pleasure something will bring us in the future, in doing so we work towards this future goal, not knowing that its pleasure is something unattainable or illusory.

⁶² Source: Gringer, ‘SVG picture demonstrating Ehrenstein illusion’, in *Ehrenstein Illusion*, Wikimedia Commons, [Public domain], 1 October 2007, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AEhrenstein.svg>, accessed 15 June 2016.

⁶³ Norbert Schwartz, ‘Emotion, cognition, and decision making’, *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2000, p. 434.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 436.

The problem concerning this type of false pleasure, is how well we can predict or estimate the pleasure something will bring us in the future. In other psychological literature, our ability to judge future pleasure or pain has been called ‘affective forecasting’ by researchers Timothy Wilson and Daniel Gilbert. They state that ‘sometimes ... people are disappointed by the very things they want ... [they] routinely mispredict how much pleasure or displeasure future events will bring, as a result, sometimes work to bring about events that do not maximise their happiness.’⁶⁵ In this case problems occur in our expectation of future pleasure, and how effective we are at estimating how much pleasure something will bring. ‘Affective forecasting’ can also be influenced by current feelings of pleasure and pain, or mixed pleasures as Plato discusses. A current pain might limit my ability to perceive a future pleasure, or might make the future pleasure appear to be greater than I thought it would be.

Wilson and Gilbert’s point is key to our central topic of how pleasure relates to our conception and pursuit of the good life. I take Wilson and Gilbert’s reference to ‘maximising happiness’ as being similar to the philosophical notion of the good life. If we are considering how we should pursue pleasure if our aim is the good life, then it should be troubling to think that we might be working towards pleasures which take us further away from this aim. This is the general problem of false pleasure: we think that pleasure is good and worth aiming at, however some pleasures, and our desires for them, can detract from our ability to live in such a way that we “maximise our happiness”.

⁶⁵ Timothy D. Wilson and Daniel T. Gilbert, ‘Affective forecasting: Knowing what to know’, *American Psychological Society*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2005, p. 131.

3.6. The Implications of False Pleasures of Belief for Video Games

We turn now to look at the implications this first category of false pleasure, those of belief, have on the pleasure that is gained from the playing of video games. Our aim here is to have a nuanced analysis of the pleasure which different video games bring, to find if this pleasure can be considered false.

If a certain game is to be considered a false pleasure under the category of false pleasure of belief, then we must show that it has an impact on an individual's beliefs causing them to experience false pleasure. As we have seen false beliefs can be about past, present or future pleasures. We must also decide if it is the video game itself that is causing false beliefs, or if the individual (or subject) creates them. There might be a case to be made for the effect of a belief about *future* or *past* pleasure. In terms of future beliefs there might be instances in which there is a false overestimation of how much pleasure a game will bring. As for past pleasure, we can have a present belief—or regret—about an experience of pleasure which determines that pleasure to be in some way wrong or even false.

Regret and Video Games

The nature of many video games is that they lend themselves to long periods of play. After one of these extended periods of play, or by looking back at how many hours have been accumulated playing a game, some players might feel a kind of regret for the time they have spent. In certain areas, this has come to be known as “gamer regret”.⁶⁶ This regret might occur because the individual believes at the time of experience that the pleasure they are pursuing is good or right; or they at least do not believe it to be wrong. Later though, this belief changes, turning to the belief that they should not have

⁶⁶ See Thompson, Clive 'Battle With 'Gamer regret' never ceases', *Wired*, 9 October 2007, http://archive.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/commentary/games/2007/09/gamesfrontiers_0910?currentPage=all accessed 16 May 2017.

spent their time on this pleasure. This regret might be due to the time spent on the game, which the individual now feels could have been better spent; or it could be due to a sense of emptiness that occurs after the pleasure of the game has ceased its immediate influence. The issue of regret is one appropriate for considering that nature of pleasure; is a pleasure we regret a kind of false pleasure?⁶⁷

Regret of a past pleasure is also apparent in other areas of life. For example, ‘consumer regret’ or ‘buyer’s remorse’ can occur when someone makes a purchase they later regret. For some, spending and shopping is itself pleasurable, but this pleasure can be regrettable for some if the spending goes beyond one’s means. Others might realise that their purchases have not brought them the pleasure they had envisioned; and others still might wish they had spent their money elsewhere, or on other items.

Regret can come in many different forms. One that is often discussed in philosophical literature is *moral regret* in which an agent regrets a past action because it was morally wrong or bad.⁶⁸ This form of regret differs from gamer regret or regret of a past pleasure. I argue that, at times, to regret a past pleasure is to judge it self-reflectively as being false or illusory; that is, we thought it had a certain quality at the time but looking back, we judge that it did not. I also wish to argue that, in some cases this feeling of regret is irrational, that sometimes there is no reason to preference our judgement in the present over a judgement in the past.

I take there to be a process of gamer regret: first, the player has an experience of pleasure, accompanying this pleasure is a belief that its related action or object is

⁶⁷ The treatment of “regret” here closely relates to the similar experience of “disappointment” addressed by Albert Hirschman (Princeton, 2002). Hirschman argues that disappointment is a somewhat necessary corollary of the hopes and ambitions people have for the future—hopes and ambitions that are rarely fulfilled. When our expectations of the future are not realised this results in disappointment. Hirschman directly relates disappointment to the consumer experience (p.25). I argue that a similar system at work regarding regret. Regret being a stronger, yet perhaps less common experience than disappointment.

⁶⁸ See: Rüdiger Bittner, ‘Is it reasonable to regret things one did?’ *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 89 no. 5, 1992, pp. 262–273.

worthy of pursuit. I assume that this experience happens at a certain place in time, let us call it T_1 . I then assume that a different judgement or belief—the regret—occurs at later time (T_2), this later belief judges that the pleasure at T_1 was *not* worthy of pursuit. We have then, a difference of belief occurring at two different points in time but within the same individual.

Regret can either be that: i) we did something that we should not have, or; ii) we did *not* do something we should or could have. It is either regret of action or regret of inaction. When we regret a past pleasure we are regretting that we acted in a way which we judge now, in the present, to be misguided or wrong. It is a regret of action. The judgement of the value of a past pleasure relies on a past propositional content:

At T_1 I experienced pleasure in object X.

This proposition has a truth value, either it is true I experienced pleasure in X at T_1 or it is false. To take the case of video games we might say that, “At T_1 I was pleased that I was doing well in the game”. When judging pleasure at the time—that is at T_1 —I have little reason to doubt that I am truly experiencing pleasure in object X . This judgement changes however, when I judge the value of the pleasure at the later time, T_2 . At T_2 , I look back and judge that, either:

- a) I experienced pleasure in X ; but it was in an object I should not have;
- b) I experienced pleasure in X ; but it took away from something else I should have been doing; or,
- c) I experienced pleasure in X ; but it is not something that I would *now* find pleasurable.

To regret a past pleasure is a kind of self-reflective judgement about the quality of that pleasure, and I argue can be a recognition of the falsity of certain pleasures.

Firstly, we will look at the argument for (a). In this case, the regret for the pleasure can come from a later judgement that the object of pleasure was wrong to pursue, most commonly this might be moral regrets. We might consider a regretful adulterer, for example: a cheating spouse might either at the time of their infidelity know their action—even if it was pleasurable—to be immoral, or later judge it to have been when they feel regret. This form of regret might come from recognising the past pleasure as being a false immoral pleasure.⁶⁹ We can either at the time be cognisant of the wrongness of the pleasure we are pursuing or it might be that only later and with reflection that we can clearly judge the quality of the pleasure experienced. The role of regret here is to make us recognise the wrongness of the action and in doing so we might be less drawn to such action in the future.

The argument for (b) is that we regret a past pleasure because it took away from other activities, or that we spent too much time focused on it. This seems a common regret regarding video game playing and it is often due to the extended time some people spend playing some games. This regret might be justified in certain ways, for example, if the pleasure of the game is becoming detrimental to relationships, to work, or to study time. This detrimental effect is the same we will see with *false pleasure of negative consequence*, in Chapter 5, regret here might be a recognition of this false pleasure.

However, it is not just video games which are able to be pursued to the point where they take away from other parts of our lives. It is common for us to reflect on objects or actions we have chosen and feel we should have done otherwise. To regret a pleasure in this manner, we must think that there was another course of action we could have taken which would have brought about a greater good. Thomas Hurka, in an article

⁶⁹ This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

on rational regret, points to two different ways we can think about this regret.⁷⁰ He asks us to suppose we have a choice between two courses of action, the first bringing about a greater good and the second a lesser good. If we choose the option of the greater good, should we have any reason to regret not choosing the lesser good? Hurka posits two points of view, firstly what he calls ‘concentration’ in which one should only feel pleasure and no regret in choosing the option of greater good. The second view, ‘proportionality’, states that you should divide your feelings between the relative value of the choices: ‘more for the greater good, but still some for the lesser good’.⁷¹ Hurka concludes that it is rational to hold this proportionality viewpoint, if we are faced with a choice between two goods it stands that we should regret only being able to choose one over the other. It might be the conflict between these two choices and their values which cause us to question our actions, or for us to have regret for one course of action over the other. It might be rational to think, “what if I had done *b* instead of *a*”, even if *a* brought about a greater good.

The problem in regretting the choice of a past pleasure over another course of action with a different good, is accurately determining the value of each. We often give preference or greater value to the experience of pleasure because it *feels good at the time*; however, later we do not feel this same sensation and so, we might give preference to something else we feel we *should have done*. When making a judgement about the best course of action at the time T_1 , we might not know whether *a* or *b* will bring about a greater good yet we must choose. We make a value judgement about the best course of action and, as Aristotle states, actions which are more agreeable often win out when we are forced to choose.⁷²

⁷⁰ Thomas Hurka, ‘Monism, pluralism, and rational regret’, *Ethics*, vol.106, no.3, 1996, p. 556.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1175b.1; This will be explored further in the discussion of *false alien pleasures*, in Section 4.3.

One other reason people might regret the time they spend playing certain games, is that they have internalised arguments against the playing of video games. This point is raised by video game designer and theorist Jane McGonigal, it occurs because so many reports over the years have put a negative slant on video games, that they are a ‘waste of time’.⁷³ McGonigal argues that it might be that people who do enjoy games do so in a kind of guilty way, or in a way in which many people think they will regret. Because of this, their regret of playing comes from their guilt of playing; they have internalised the judgement that they should not be taking pleasure in spending so much time on certain games.

Regret here might come from acting against what one *ought* to do; that is, regretting doing *a* because I think I ought not to have done *a*. Moral philosopher R. M. Hare argues that, in certain cases, when someone acts against evaluative terms such as “good” or “ought” they are using these terms in what he calls an *inverted-commas* sense.⁷⁴ In this case, the judgement that “I ought to do *a*” (or “I ought *not* do *a*”) only reflects a view that many or most other people—or at least those whose opinion should be respected—would say that the best thing to do is *a*.⁷⁵ This judgement then is not a personal reflective one, but rather it is making use of value judgements of other people.⁷⁶ Hare states that if we make a judgement such as ‘it is good to do *a*’, we put the word “good” here in inverted commas; our judgement is better characterised as being ‘*many people think it is good to do a*’, or ‘those who know about this kind of thing would do *a*’. Hare uses this argument as a possible explanation of why some

⁷³ Jane McGonigal, ‘The game that can give you 10 extra years of life’, TED Talk, Video Recording, June 2012, https://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life accessed on 9 May 2017.

⁷⁴ R. M. Hare, *Language of Morals*, Oxford, 1952, p. 124.

⁷⁵ Sarah Stroud, ‘Weakness of will’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Spring 2014, para. 12, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/weakness-will/> accessed 9 June 2017.

⁷⁶ Hare, *Language of Morals*, p. 124.

might act against what they consider to be their ‘better’ judgement. Because of this, and as Sarah Stroud notes in her article on weakness of will, ‘an agent does not himself assess the course of action he fails to follow as better than the one he selects, even if other people would’.⁷⁷

The feeling that an individual could have been doing ‘something more valuable with their time’, might also relate to the value the individual gives to the playing of video games. This relates to the previous point about internalising the arguments against the playing of video games, and therefore feeling guilty for playing and feeling like there could have been objects of more worth to focus on. This feeling of guilt at time spend on something pleasurable appears to be more focused in discussions of video games than other media. It is rare we hear reports of people ‘wasting their time’ reading too many novels, yet this seems to be a common narrative in discussion of video game play.⁷⁸ It is questionable whether everyone who experiences gamer regret does internalise the arguments against video games, and so feels regret for playing them, but it is one possible link to gamer regret.

The third reason (c) we might regret a past pleasure—though regret might be too strong of a term here—is that we do not *now* feel pleasure in something which we previously did. We have changed our taste from one point in time to another. I argue that in this case it might be irrational to regret the past pleasure only on the basis that I do not *now* find it to be pleasurable. This might be as irrational as feeling regret about another person’s pleasure in, for example, eating liquorice. The question is whether we should preference our judgement in the present, just because it is in the present?

⁷⁷ Stroud, ‘Weakness of will’, para.12.

⁷⁸ See: Condry, ‘Video Games Can Waste Children’s Time’, para. 13.

When we propose something such as, “I thought I was enjoying myself at the time, but I now think it was not a pleasure at all”, we are making a judgement about a certain affective condition occurring at a certain place in time. The value judgement passed on this pleasure, however, takes place at a later time. We can, I think, say that at the time the pleasure is felt T_1 the judgement made is that this is a genuinely enjoyable moment (so long as we do not have any immediate feelings of regret, or should in some other way feel this pleasure to be wrong). When we then reminisce at a later date, T_2 , and judge this pleasure to not really have been pleasurable at all we are passing a judgement on our past mind set. The reason for this change in judgement might be greater awareness or education, which has come with experience of what is truly pleasurable and what is not. This is one possibility, another might be that, because we experienced these pleasures in the past, we now have grown tired of them, that is they do not now hold the same attraction they once did. What we once found pleasurable we can no longer find pleasure in. In this case, we either find these pleasures no longer appealing because we have in some way ‘refined’ our taste; or, we have exhausted all the pleasure we can from this source. If we take the latter, there is little reason to think our past pleasure was anything but a pleasurable experience, just because it does not at T_2 appeal to us is not a logical reason to discount the pleasure entirely.

Regret can be linked in another way to false belief; being that our action in the past was based on a false belief about the best course of action. I might regret a past decision that was based on a belief that, at the time, I thought was true. This belief might be something like: “ X is the best course of action for me...”. If I have reason to recognise that X was in fact *not* the best course of action for me, then I acted on a false belief—and I have reason to regret this decision. Regret of this pleasure might occur if

X does not live up to our expectation of pleasure, as we will see in false pleasure of overestimation in the following section.

False Overestimation of a Future Pleasure and Video Games

While regret can be a possible indicator for false pleasure of belief, there is another way in which belief can influence the pleasure taken in certain games. This relates to the category explored in section 3.5, that of false overestimation of future pleasure. As indicated in the previous section, some video games have the capability to draw the player in for long periods of time. One of the reasons this happens is because certain games offer great amounts of anticipatory pleasure. Whether it is anticipating getting to the next level, to gain a new item, or to get a high-score. Many games consistently offer new goals for their players to aim for, the completion of these goals is accompanied by satisfaction and pleasure. As we saw in Section 3.5, falsity can arise when an anticipated pleasure does not live up to what we had imagined. In the case of certain video games, the pleasure the player expected to gain at a certain point, might be less than what they had imagined.

Plato considers this to be a form of false pleasure, the falsity having to do in part with the object of the pleasure. If we relate this to video games, we can ask whether certain games cause the player to pursue this form of false pleasure; that is, whether there are mechanics inherent in the game which cause the player to want to keep playing towards this pleasure. There might also be a problem that relates to Wilson and Gilbert's notion of affective forecasting as it relates to video games.⁷⁹ A player might have a certain drive, desire and want for something in the game, but when they reach this point they have mispredicted how much pleasure they would experience from it.

⁷⁹ Wilson and Gilbert, 'Affective forecasting: Knowing what to know', p. 131.

I argue that there is a case to be made for certain video games giving rise to this type of false anticipatory pleasure. This occurs when a player expects a certain degree of pleasure from an upcoming event in the game, but when this event occurs, the pleasure it is not as they had imagined. Certain games set goals for the player to achieve, these goals are worked towards with the feeling that once they are reached the player will feel a certain sense of excitement or satisfaction—that they will feel pleasure. This sense of satisfaction is one of the ways certain video games keep their players playing, and it is one of the ways in which video games are pleasurable. However, these aims and goals can also contribute to false pleasure, when the actual reward felt by the player is not as great as they had envisioned it would be. The nature of certain video games is such that there are many goals to work towards, once one is completed another takes its place. Subsequently, the player finds newer events to place their anticipated pleasure on.

Games which are effective at keeping players playing often do so by playing on the pleasure of anticipation. For example, role-playing games (RPG's) often feature systems of achievements. A player who controls a single character in the game, can gain *experience points* which tally up and, after reaching a certain threshold, increase the *level* of the character.⁸⁰ This is known as *levelling-up*. A player whose character is level 3, might need 500 experience points to reach level 4; from there they might need 700 more points to reach level 5 and so on. In many RPG's as the character's level increases their ability and effectiveness in the game also increases, this essentially allows the player to play the game *better* the higher their level. This also brings with it greater enjoyment from the game, as the player is able to do more than they were

⁸⁰ The most prominent game of this type is *World of Warcraft*, which at its height had an estimated 12 million active users. *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/276601/number-of-world-of-warcraft-subscribers-by-quarter/> accessed 27 September 2017.

previously able. As the player's level increases the requirements for the next level also incrementally increase, for example, it might only take a player half an hour of playing time to go from level 1 to level 2, however to go from level 61 to level 62 might take many hours, days or even weeks.

Certain games also offer reward structures throughout the game. Game reward systems can come in many forms, and each of these can play on our anticipatory pleasure. Wang and Sun outline eight forms of reward which can occur in video games. 1) Score systems; 2) Experience reward points; 3) Item granting rewards; 4) Resource collecting; 5) Achievement systems; 6) Feedback messages; 7) Plot animations and pictures; and 8) Unlocking game content.⁸¹

A 2006 survey of *World of Warcraft* players, found that play time is greatly influenced by the game's reward structure.⁸² Players in this game control one character who becomes better as they progress in the game. These reward structures include, 'alternating levels with and without new skills, "milestone" levels opening up new content ... and a slow but steady time increase in required play time with each level.'⁸³ The authors state that these rewards are reminiscent of behavioural conditioning principles, 'where rewards are distributed to maximize player commitment.'⁸⁴ As the player continues in the game, their aims or goals can also shift to a 'different endgame where focus is less of levelling up and more on accumulating powerful items and accruing reputation' among other players.⁸⁵ At each point in the game there are rewards to work toward each of these rewards, such as new items or new game content, bring

⁸¹ Hao Wang and Chen-Tsai Sun, 'Game reward systems: Gaming experiences and social meanings', *Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 conference: Think design play*. 2011, p. 3–5.

⁸² Nicolas Ducheneaut, Nick Yee, Eric Nickell and Robert J. Moore, 'Building an MMO with mass appeal: A look at gameplay in World of Warcraft', *Games and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2006, p. 293.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

with them the anticipation of pleasure. It is possible that the promise of future pleasure acts to keep some players playing.

This levelling up system effectively provides the player with milestone achievements or goals to aim toward. With these incremental goals a player is more likely to keep playing the game until they reach the next level; once this level is reached though, a new goal is established. In many of these games there is a nearly endless shifting of the goal posts. One of the reasons that this system of play is so effective is that it plays on the anticipatory pleasure of the player. The player knows (or thinks) that when they reach the next level they will be able to play the game more effectively, and so the anticipation of reaching the next level brings with it a certain excitement. There is an anticipation of the pleasure they will be able to experience once this goal is reached. Reaching the next level might bring with it the pleasure which the player expected, however because of the way the system operates, this pleasure might be short lived as there is always a new level to aim toward. As we have seen, people are often not very good at knowing how much pleasure something will bring them in the future. As a result, there is the danger that certain players will overestimate how much pleasure a future in-game reward will bring. For some players, this might mean pursuing a kind of false pleasure.

It has been found in modern psychology and neuroscience that anticipatory pleasure is linked to motivation. According to psychological research from David Gard *et. al.*, ‘anticipatory pleasure is linked to motivational processes that promote goal-directed behaviours aimed at achieving desired rewards’.⁸⁶ This is an important point, and might go some way to answer why certain player might play video games to an

⁸⁶ David Gard, Ann Kring, Marja Gard, William Horan, Michael Green, ‘Anhedonia in schizophrenia: Distinctions between anticipatory and consummatory pleasure’, *Schizophrenia Research*, vol. 93, no. 1-3, 2007, p. 254.

excessive degree. Anticipatory pleasures can drive us and give us goals to aim toward, in the hope or expectation that we will experience a certain degree of pleasure when we reach them. Often, however, this anticipatory pleasure is in some way mitigated or short lived. It is perhaps the case that those who are less able to predict with accuracy their level of anticipatory pleasure in certain games, are more susceptible to playing for long periods of time. This however is an empirical claim and not one that will be dealt with here.

Ostensibly most video games are goal driven; the player must complete certain tasks to achieve an end point or goal. While many games have an overarching goal, they will also employ smaller tasks within this. Some games start off with simple tasks so the player can become accustomed to the rules, mechanics and aims of the game. These tasks will increase in difficulty as the game progresses, or will become more complex. As we have seen certain games offer rewards which give players pleasure when accomplished.

While reward systems are often seen as genuinely pleasurable parts of modern game play, they can also keep players engaged with the game for long periods. It must be recognised there can be certain ways in which these systems lead to a kind of illusory pleasure. This might occur when an individual spends time working toward a certain goal, be it to reach a certain score, obtain a certain achievement, or other such reward. When they reach this point, however, they discover the pleasure not have reached the level they expected. This might not occur all the time; many times, the anticipation of completing a game, comes with great pleasure, satisfaction and relief. There might be times, though, where the player believes they will experience x pleasure, but the pleasure they actually experience is less than x (i.e. $x-1$). This might not be the case for

all players, nor for all games; however, we should keep in mind the possible danger false anticipatory pleasure can have in relation to the playing of certain video games.

Conclusion

In summary, we can conclude from this chapter that there is a plausible case to be made in which pleasures that rely on belief can be considered false. The fallibility of belief is an important consideration when thinking of the role of pleasure in the good life. False pleasure can occur if based on an erroneous belief, or if we overestimate how much pleasure we will experience in the future. Because anticipatory pleasure plays such a guiding role in motivation, it is important that we aim to correctly estimate the value of a future pleasure. As we have seen, however, this is not always possible nor are our predictions always accurate. This is an important consideration in any decision-making process and, as we have found can be an important consideration for the playing of video games. Players might spend long periods of time working toward a goal they believe will bring a certain amount of pleasure. The belief of how much pleasure they will experience might, or might not, be accurate. The danger is that the pleasure expected might not resemble the actual pleasure and the player works toward something they falsely think will ‘maximise their happiness’. This is something which is important for players to recognise. While this danger remains, and might keep some players playing longer than they intended, it is not necessarily the case for all video games nor for all players. False pleasure of belief, while an important consideration, is not reason enough to discount video games entirely as being *false pleasures*.

In the next chapter, we will turn to false pleasures of sensory experience, to find if this offers a more effective critique of the pleasure of video games. As we will see, belief and experience in relation to pleasure are at times interrelated and so an analysis of one must consider the other.

Chapter 4 – Experientially False Pleasures

In this chapter I will explore the ways in which pleasure could be considered false even when an experience feels to the person like pleasure. This will be called *experientially false pleasure* and is concerned, at least in part, with sensory experience. This category of false pleasure differs from false pleasures of belief, as the truth or falsity an experiential pleasure is not predicated on the truth or falsity of a belief that is held. Experientially false pleasure must include the felt sensory experience rather than being based purely on a belief of pleasure, or what we have called ‘attitudinal pleasure’. With this being said, a belief can influence—positively or negatively—our felt sensory experience and as such there will be some crossover between the two categories. When considering this category of false experiences of pleasure, four subcategories emerge and will be explored, these are:

- 1) *false pleasures of excess*;
- 2) *false pleasures of distraction*;
- 3) *false pleasures of the neutral state*; and;
- 4) *false mixed pleasures*.¹

This chapter will draw on works of both Plato and Aristotle, with illustrative examples, to show how we can be misguided by the pleasures we experience. The distinction will be made between different experiences. Firstly, there are those in which we genuinely feel the sensation of pleasure but this sensation should not be considered desirable or could even be detrimental. Secondly, there are states in which we might think we

¹ Please refer to Appendix A for a diagram of the taxonomy of false pleasure

experience pleasure, but we mistake what we are interpreting as pleasure—such as thinking a state that is absent of pain is one of pleasure—in the latter case, it will be argued, there is no genuine pleasure being experienced. Thirdly, there are states in which we experience pleasure, however the experience is distorted by another affective condition, causing us to overestimate or mistake the real nature of the pleasure we experience.

4.1. The Effect of Belief on the Experience of Pleasure

In the *Philebus*, Plato argued that, ‘while someone may really feel pleasure, this pleasure is sometimes not based on a reality, whether in the present, past or future’.² As we have seen in the previous chapter there are times in which a belief of something genuinely impacts the level of pleasure experienced. This might be in an attitudinal sense, such as the pleasure afforded someone who believes their life to be going well, or the pleasure taken in the belief of a certain set of circumstances. However, our belief in something can also affect our felt sensation of pleasure.

More recent studies provide an example of this notion. A neurological study by Hilke Plassmann *et. al.* showed that people can genuinely feel greater pleasure when they believe something to be of a better quality than it is.³ Through a functional MRI, Plassmann *et. al.* showed that when people believed a certain wine to be of greater monetary value, its taste and consumption gave greater reward to pleasure centres in the brain. The experiment gave five samples of wine to participants; they were told one of the wines was of \$90 value while the others were of a cheaper variety. The wine that the participants were told was of a greater value was actually no different to one of the

² Plato, *Philebus*, 40d.

³ Hilke Plassmann, John O’Doherty, Baba Shiv and Antonio Rangel, ‘Marketing actions can modulate neural representations of experienced pleasantness’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 105, no. 3, 2008 pp. 1050–1054.

samples already tasted. The pleasure centres of each participant were measured in response to the tasting of each wine, along with their subjective opinion of which tasted better. Despite the reality, the participants reported greater feeling of pleasure from the wine they believed to be of higher quality or value; and tests showed greater activity in the pleasure centres of the brain being measured in response to wine believed to be of higher value.

While this may only be one example of the effect of belief on pleasure, it contains interesting implications when considering the experience of pleasure. One conclusion we can draw from this experiment is that—at least in some cases—it is possible for people to feel greater pleasure in the belief that something, such as wine, is of a greater quality (quality being interpreted as being of greater monetary value). In this case, it was through one of the senses (taste) that test subjects experienced pleasure, their senses, however, were also being acted upon or influenced by their belief or perception of what they were experiencing. Despite this belief being false the actual experience of pleasure was greater when accompanied by the belief that the wine being consumed is of a greater quality. This tentatively shows that it is possible that sensory pleasure can be taken in, or at least enhanced by, a false belief.

While belief might have an impact on some felt pleasures, there are other types of pleasurable experiences in which belief may not be so influential, yet we might still be able to categorise them as false pleasures. The following categories of false pleasure can be deemed to be false because of their negative or less than desirable impact on an individual's life. These are forms of pleasure that cannot be said to reside specifically in belief, but rather predominantly in experience.

4.2. False Pleasure of Excess

The first form of false pleasure of experience we will consider is that of excess. As we will see Aristotle thought that pleasure could be pursued in *excess* of its good. The pursuit of excessive pleasure has long been seen a negative form of experience, either as a characteristic of flawed character or as immoral and sinful behaviour. In Dante's *Inferno*, the third circle of hell is reserved for gluttony or self-indulgence. Dante describes that the gluttonous one's lie submerged in mud, alone and exposed to rain and hail. Dorothy L. Sayers, who translated and commented on the work, wrote that this symbolises the cold, selfish and solitary pursuit of self-indulgence.⁴ Gluttony, which I take to be a kind of excessive pursuit of pleasure, has also been held in Christian tradition to be one of the seven deadly sins. Thomas Aquinas wrote that gluttony was a sin, in part, because it is an 'inordinate desire' which leaves the 'order of reason, wherein the good of moral virtue consists.'⁵ The pursuit of gluttony according to Aquinas is contrary to virtue and this being so it is also a sin. He states that, if someone pursues excess of food mistakenly thinking it is beneficial to them it might not be a sin; rather, it is a sin when an individual knowingly pursues excess from a 'desire for the pleasure of the palate'.⁶ This desire for excessive pleasure for Aquinas is not only sinful in itself, but might also lead further acts of immoderation as it dulls the senses in matters of choice.⁷ He is concerned that gluttony is the pursuit of excessive pleasure as an end in itself, and that this turns an individual away man's 'due end', which is for Aquinas, devotion to God, and God's law.⁸ Gluttony, or the pursuit of excessive pleasure, can on Aquinas' view be regarded as an immoral pleasure as the desire for it can override

⁴ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Cantica I: Hell*, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 107.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II:148:1.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* II-II: 148:6.

⁸ *Ibid.* II-II: 148:2.

reason, leading to a habit of pursuing further immoderation. This immoderation then mistakenly becomes an end in itself.

Aristotle views the excessive pursuit of pleasure in a similarly disdainful fashion to Aquinas, however he comes at the matter in a different way. Aristotle points out that there are states and activities of which it is possible to exceed the good and so the good of the pleasure corresponding can also be exceeded. It should be noted that, for Aristotle, not all bodily pleasures are to be considered bad, many bodily pleasures are necessary such as eating, drinking or sexual pleasure. However, these pleasures must be must only be considered good within limits, as not everyone enjoys these pleasures to the right degree.⁹ Similar to Aquinas' view, was an opinion held by the ancient Greeks. For Aristotle, the 'bad' person or character is made by virtue of pursuing bodily pleasures to excess. It is not the pleasures themselves that are necessarily bad, rather the degree to which they are pursued. Aristotle states that it is the good or temperate person who can pursue such pleasures within limits. There is no pain from this pleasure for the good person, as they do not pursue any pleasures to excess. There is only pain for the person who pursues excessive pleasure.¹⁰

The view Aristotle presents is that bodily pleasure is good in its degree, but bad in excess. Excessive pleasure is not a pain for the good character, because she does not pursue pleasure to excess. However, Aristotle argues, that for the bad character pursuing excessive pleasure is not a pleasure at all, rather it is a *pain*.¹¹ Excess only appears to be good and pleasurable, but in fact it is the opposite. Because of this illusory element, excessive pleasure can be considered a form of false pleasure for those who pursue it. It might have the appearance of pleasure but, for Aristotle, it is actually

⁹ *Ibid.* 1154a.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1154a.20.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 1154a.1–1154a.20.

painful.

As we have seen, Aristotle stated that pleasures of the body are the most common types of pleasures and as such these pleasures appear to be more desirable than other pleasures.¹² He noted two reasons that they appear this way: i) because pleasure drives out pain, and the more pain one is suffering the greater or excessive the pleasure desired; and, ii) because of their intensity, bodily pleasures have an attraction to those who cannot find pleasure any other way.¹³ A person suffering from great pain, be it mental or physical, might believe that the remedy for their pain is to be found in pleasure; generally bodily pleasures, because they offer instant and intense gratification. The more extreme the pain felt by the individual, the greater the excess of pleasure pursued.¹⁴

These two points relate to Plato's notion of *false pleasures of the neutral state* and *false mixed pleasures*, which will be discussed further in this chapter (Sections 4.4 and 4.5). In these cases, another affective condition experienced by an individual, clouds or distorts judgement of what is truly pleasurable. This being so, it can cause an individual to pursue mistakenly something they think is pleasurable and beneficial, when in fact it is not. Plato argues that the object has the appearance of being pleasurable, but this is a false appearance.

The pursuit of excessive pleasure, according to Aristotle, results from some defective state of being, or bad character. Excessive pleasure is not something the temperate or virtuous one would pursue, or would find pleasurable at all. As we will see in the Chapter 6 on *false immoral pleasures*, Aristotle argues that certain pleasures are only pleasurable to the 'bad' character—as opposed to the virtuous one. He thinks

¹² Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1153b.20.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

that this is only the case because of how they are influenced by their character, and that they are acting under something resembling a delusion. This also seems to be the case with excessive pleasures. It can be argued that these pleasures are false, because they only appeal to characters in such a state. They appear as pleasures to the bad character but they are really delusions or symptoms of this character.

The question which can be raised in regard to excessive pleasure, is how much is too much? The issue with pursuing a pleasure to excess, to the extent that it becomes a false pleasure, is knowing what should be considered excessive. This problem can be seen as version of the *Sorites* paradox (or paradox of the heap). If we know that a certain pleasure is a good, but also that excessive pursuit of this pleasure turns it bad, or false, where are we to draw the line between the two? In the *Sorites* paradox Eubulides continually adds grains of sand together and asks when the grains of sand become a heap. This question does not admit of a simple, nor clear-cut answer. For some, knowing the point at which a pleasure becomes bad due to excess is a difficult task. Often excess is linked to negative consequences of an action: excessive eating leads to a painful stomach ache or to health problems, excessive gambling can result in bankruptcy. Excess in these cases is bad because it leads to something which takes away our ability to live a good life. Though there might be initial pleasure, the negative consequence of this pleasure might outweigh its good. This consequentialist argument against excess appears to be one basis for Aquinas' argues against gluttony.

According to Aquinas, the pursuit of excessive pleasure is both sinful and a condition of a flawed or bad character. For Aquinas, it might be considered to be a false pleasure because pursuit of this excess forms the habit of desiring other 'sinful' pleasures so much so that excessive pleasures come to be desired as ends in themselves. In this case, excessive pursuit of pleasure negatively impacts one's character. Excessive

pleasure creates a desire that changes what an individual considers to be the most important aim or end in life, which for Aquinas is virtue and adherence to God. The pursuit of excessive pleasure or desire for it creates a kind of delusion in the individual, clouding their judgement. The pleasure that this delusion considers to be the highest aim, is only a symptom and as such cannot be said to be real in character and must be considered in this way to be false. Excessive pursuit of pleasure, for Aquinas, is wrong because of the negative consequences which it brings. This relates to arguments we will find in Chapter 5, on false pleasure of negative consequence.

For Aristotle, the pursuit of excessive pleasure can also lead to the forming of the bad character and so have negative consequences.¹⁵ However, Aristotle appears to make the stronger claim, in saying that excessive pleasure is not pleasure at all, rather it is a pain. An individual might be experiencing an excessively negative state, and turn to pleasure to drive out this pain—the greater the pain, the greater the amount of pleasure pursued—or one might be intemperate or of bad character. In either case, the appeal of, and desire for, the excess of pleasure is a symptom of the condition the individual experiencing, which clouds their judgement. Excess only has the appearance of being a pleasure, or of being desirable. For those who are in a natural state or are temperate, excess does not have such an appeal and is not considered pleasurable at all. For some, then, excess holds only a false appearance of being pleasurable and so can be considered a false form of pleasure.

It is questionable whether we should endorse the consequentialist view that excessive pleasure should be avoided because its negative outcomes outweigh its good; or, the stronger view that excess is not pleasure at all. Both, however, begin to give an idea of how we can judge and question the felt experience of pleasure. More will be

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 1154a.1.

said on these points when we apply them to the experience of video games, in Section 6 of this chapter. We will next examine how different and competing pleasures can act upon our experience.

4.3. False Alien Pleasures or Distractions

The type of false pleasures under consideration in this section are those that Aristotle terms 'alien pleasures'.¹⁶ He states we must consider the intellect or mind and our senses as separate, just as we have done with pleasures of belief and those of experience. Both the faculty of the mind and the faculty of our senses are going to have pleasures of different kinds that perfect them. Because there are pleasures of many different kinds, they often vie for our complete attention and focus. Pleasures that infringe on the progress of other activities are deemed by Aristotle to be 'alien pleasures'.¹⁷ These alien pleasures, for Aristotle, have a similar effect on another activity as a pain of that same activity. He mentions that if someone finds writing or mathematics boring they are unlikely to pursue this activity, because the pain of boredom is unpleasant.¹⁸ In this way, the pain of the activity itself means that the person will not pursue it, alien pleasures are similar as they come near to 'destroying' an activity for the pleasantness of the alien pleasure will be preferred to a less pleasant activity.

Activities we feel we should be focused on are hindered by the pleasures attending another activity, these alien pleasures are false not in themselves but rather because they are preventing us from achieving something else. In this category I mean to discuss objects of pleasure which act in a way manner which can detract from other worthwhile pursuits. These objects can be considered as *tokens* of false pleasure, they are not to be avoided in all cases but rather, as we will see, only at certain times or in

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 1175b.1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

certain situations.¹⁹

For Aristotle, it is sometimes not possible to do two things at once. If we are conflicted about two activities, the more pleasant activity will win out over the other—the more pleasant it is the more effective it will be at distracting us.²⁰ Alien pleasures could be considered to be false because they take away from other areas of life, or prevent another pleasure from becoming. For example, if I desire to learn the piano, but instead of practising I watch television all day because it is more pleasurable to me now, I will never learn the piano and so will never have the opportunity to experience the pleasure that playing the piano could bring. Alien pleasures should only be considered false if they are taking away from another activity, the pleasure itself might be quite rightly pursued at another moment in time. We can add to this discussion of alien pleasures by considering Aristotle's comments of amusements and pastimes, it seems we can sometimes consider amusements and pastimes as alien pleasures on Aristotle's view. Amusements are false if they are pursued seriously, or to an extent where they can cause us 'more harm than good by leading us to neglect our health and our finances'.²¹

Aristotle states that while amusements are pleasurable, they are desirable for their own good, and we do not pursue them as a means for something else. It might be that at times they can distract us from other pursuits of worth, the highest of which Aristotle considers to be 'virtue and intelligence'.²² If certain pleasures act as constant distractions, they might be considered false pleasures, one reason being that they take

¹⁹ *Tokens* of false pleasure are distinct from *types* of false pleasure. *Types* of false pleasure I consider to be, are those which are false absolutely and should always be avoided. These will predominantly be shown in chapter 6 on *false immoral pleasures*. While *tokens* of pleasure may be desirable in some situations and not others, *types* of false pleasure should not have this desirable quality.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.* 1176b.1.

²² *Ibid.*

away from the potential to live the good life. Aristotle's ideas on amusements will be addressed further in section 4.6, when we apply his ideas to video games.

As stated, an alien pleasure itself might not be false but the time we dedicate to it can make it so. Having a paper to write, but instead choosing another pleasurable pursuit, can limit our future potential. Often, we have competing pleasures, and it can be argued that something that gives immediate (or sensory) pleasure competes over something that might bring longer-term pleasure such as the attitudinal pleasure of 'being pleased that I finished my paper, and graduated'.

Alien pleasure, I suggest is the kind of false pleasure that is referred to when the argument is made that something is a 'waste of time'. In this case, it is argued that if the pursuit of one pleasure were to impact on one's life in such a way that its pursuit infringed on other areas then this pleasure should be considered false, or a waste of time. The 'waste of time' argument is one that often features when discussing the pursuit of something such as video games. This appears to be a normative judgement that implies there is a 'right' or 'correct' way to spend one's time. It is also one that puts little value or worth in what is being pursued. It will be argued in section 4.6, that while video games, and many other pleasures, can act as alien pleasures; there are certain games which can be beneficial and, when used correctly, should not be considered 'wastes of time'.

4.4. False Pleasure of the Neutral State

Following the discussion of alien pleasures and those of excess taken from Aristotle, we return now to Plato's discussion of false pleasure in the *Philebus*. Firstly, we will focus on false pleasure of the 'neutral' or natural state. Plato states that there are pleasures and pains that might be 'more false' than false pleasures of belief (as

discussed in Chapter 3).²³ To examine what these false pleasure or pains could be Plato distinguishes between three states: pain, pleasure and the natural or neutral state. His view is that pain is caused by a disruption to our natural state; when we are restored to our natural state, this restoration can be called pleasure.²⁴ For example if we feel the pain of hunger this is a ‘breaking up’ of the harmony that is the natural states; when we eat, this is a ‘filling up’ or a restoration, which is a pleasure.²⁵

According to Plato, when people are in the natural state of calm, they can misinterpret this state as being one of pleasure, when in fact it is merely the absence of pain. This mistaken recognition of the state we are in is a form of false pleasure and it is experiential. We can imagine a state where there is no change occurring, we are neither being emptied nor restored, where no pain nor pleasure is being experienced. Plato argues there are three lives, one pleasant, one painful, and one neither of the two, and that some mistake the life that is neither painful nor pleasant as a life of pleasure, because it is free from pain.²⁶ The character of Socrates states that, ‘they have a false opinion about pleasure, if there is an essential difference between feeling pleasure and not feeling pain.’²⁷ In this way, he claims, they are mistaken about the nature of pleasure. If we have an opinion of something we can have an opinion in the affirmative or in the negative, and we can have a third that is undecided. We cannot say that this third opinion is closer to the affirmative nor to the negative side of the argument. Plato believes this is the same of the life of calm or the natural state. If we believe this state of calm to be a life of pleasure, then we have a false belief. We may just as easily say the life of calm is painful, as it does not contain any pleasure. With false pleasures

²³ Plato, *Philebus*, 42c.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 42c–42d.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 31e.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 42c–42d.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 44a.

explored in Chapter 3, it is the object or a belief that is false, however this is accompanied by the feeling of pleasure. Wolfsdorf states, however, that the false pleasure of the neutral state (what he calls 'kind 3') 'is not really and truly pleasure; and thus, as Plato claims, it is even more false than the preceding two kinds.'²⁸

In this form of false pleasure, I am mistaken that the life I am leading or state of mind I am experiencing is pleasurable, when it is actually the absence of pain. I do not have moments of pleasure; rather I have absences of pain. Plato's view of the neutral state is at odds with some other ancient philosopher's view. Feldman mentions that Epicurus and Stoicus have a different view to this form pleasure. Epicurus in his *Letter to Menoeceus* states,

...when we say pleasure is the goal, we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasures of consumption, as some believe, either from ignorance and disagreement or from deliberate misinterpretation, but rather the lack of pain in the body and disturbances in the soul.²⁹

Similarly, Stoicus is portrayed as wanting to live a life of peace and quiet and to live 'an unruffled life',

It is not that he wants peace and quiet because he thinks that these will give him sensory pleasure. He wants peace and quiet as ends in themselves. In fact, he prefers not to experience any episodes of pleasure ... he feels the same way about sensory pain: he does not want it.³⁰

²⁸ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 90.

²⁹ In Feldman *Pleasure and the Good Life* p. 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 50.

Plato states that we can mistake a state of calm as pleasurable, when it is just the absence of pain. For Plato, this state of calm does not hold any pleasure, and if we think it does then we are mistaken and this is form of false pleasure.³¹

As we have seen Plato makes three divisions: pleasure, pain and the neutral state; Epicurus on the other hand only recognises two states. This distinction helps explain the different views of pleasure between the two. Epicurus' view is that pleasures can be divided into *katastematic* (passive) pleasures, and *kinetic* (active) pleasures.³² Diogenes Laertius quotes Epicurus as saying, in *On Choices* that, 'freedom from anxiety and the absence of pain are *katastematic* pleasures, while joy and delight are regarded as pleasures in motion and action.'³³ The third of Epicurus' Principal Doctrines seems to relate to *katastematic* or passive pleasures,

Pleasure reaches its maximum limit at the removal of all sources of pain. When such pleasure is present, for as long as it lasts, there is no cause of physical nor mental pain present – nor of both together.³⁴

For Epicurus, there is a type of pleasure that results from the absence of pain or anxiety from the mind and body; this could be thought of something resembling *peace of mind*. It is interesting to note here, that Epicurus states this state is when pleasure has reached its *maximum*. If we take this to be true then it seems for Epicurus that maximum pleasure can only come from *katastematic* pleasures. This means maximum pleasure is not based on *kinetic* pleasures that bring us joy and delight 'pleasures in motion and action', but rather on freedom from pain and anxiety.³⁵ For Epicurus, maximum

³¹ Wolfsdorf terms this as an 'ontologically false pleasure' because actual states of pleasure do not exist, (*Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 100).

³² Diogenes Laertius points out (at sect. 136) that this distinction also differentiates Epicurus' view of pleasure from that of Aristippus and the Cyrenaic school. The Cyrenaics do not recognise *katastematic* pleasures, but only *kinetic* pleasures.

³³ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Book X*, sect.136.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 139.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 136.

pleasure should not be based on external pleasures that could bring us joy and delight, but rather on those that free us from pain and anxiety, those that still the ‘storms in the soul’.³⁶

The disagreement between Plato and Epicurus comes in part from how they think of pleasure. Plato thinks that pain is a disruption to the harmony of the natural state, and that pleasure is the restoration to this state. Epicurus however, does not appear to view pain and pleasure as disruptions and restorations. His view is that the natural state is in fact a state of pleasure, that the absence of pain is in itself pleasurable.

The cases where Plato’s account of false pleasure of the neutral state is useful, and where I consider it to be plausible, is when we consider the use of pleasure to alleviate a deeper or underlying pain. It can be argued that some types of pleasure that occurs in an immediate way (such as a sensory pleasure) could be pleasurable because of their sensation; but also, because they mask a deeper or longer-term pain. In this case, Plato argues, while appearing to be pleasurable, the object of pleasure only works only to restore us to a form of the natural state. Instead of being genuinely pleasurable, this form of pleasure is merely the absence of pain, and usually only occurs for a short time.

Aristotle states that bodily pleasures are often the most intense type of pleasures, which is why it is often the case that if someone is feeling a form of mental pain or anguish, they pursue a type of intense bodily pleasure to mask this pain. Alcohol and other drugs, which offer a near immediate altering of one’s state, are sometimes used to satiate types of mental pain. But even though we might have the sensation of pleasure while under their influence, we should be able to recognise that some forms of drugs used in this way may not be genuinely pleasurable; rather they act to temporarily take

³⁶ *Ibid.* 128.

away another pain. We are restored to a form of the natural state for a short period, and we might mistake this for a genuinely pleasurable state. The problem is if we mistake this mixed neutral state for being pleasurable (instead of merely one with an absence of pain) we might choose to pursue this state instead of aiming for a state that is genuinely pleasurable. A person who is feeling mental pain and who uses a drug such as alcohol to mask it, might find themselves needing more and more of the drug to reach the same state in which pain has been eliminated from their feelings. In this case, the pursuit of this form of false pleasure could also develop into the pursuit of the *false pleasure of excess*.³⁷ If we mistake the neutral state for being one that is genuinely pleasurable, we run the risk of not knowing or experiencing what is truly or genuinely pleasurable in life.

If we are faced with a pain in our lives, such as the death of a loved one, it seems understandable that we use a type of pleasure as a means to ‘take our mind off’ our feeling of pain. Things that can normally be seen as ‘genuine’ types of pleasure can be used as a way to alleviate the pain we are experiencing. In our ‘natural state’ these pleasures take us into a state of genuine pleasure, from the middle ground to a positive emotional state. However, if we are in a state of pain, according to Plato, they only take us back to the middle or neutral state.

If we use a mathematical method of measuring pleasure, such as a pleasure unit of *hedons*, we can say that the natural state is 0 in our scale, a pleasure carries with it a positive unit of hedon (+1*h*) while pain is a negative hedon (-1*h*). If we start in a neutral state (0) and add a pleasure to it we get an overall positive hedonic state (+1*h*); but if we start from a negative hedonic state of pain (-1*h*) and add a pleasure to this state (+1*h*) we return to a neutral state of (0) rather than a positive pleasurable state. Even though

³⁷ See: Section 4.2.

we are experience a pleasure (+1*h*) the sum-total of our pleasure/pain balance is zero (0); therefore, we are not experiencing a genuinely pleasurable state. For Plato (though he does not use this numbering system) what we are experiencing in the neutral state is not pleasure but rather a type of false pleasure, as our pleasure/pain balance is neutral rather than positively pleasurable. This is an over simplistic account of the balance of pleasure and pain, and it is naïve to assume that we can attribute a numerical value to the pain of losing a loved one and compare it to the value of the pleasure of watching a *Marx Brothers* film. However, it can give us a starting point by which we can think about the balance of pleasures and pains we experience.

Some types of pleasures might be used as a means to balance out pains that we are experiencing, and it is true that this is a common use of pleasure. However, for Plato, pleasure here only acts to remove pain and take us back to the neutral state. If we confuse this state for one of pleasure, then this is a form of false pleasure. The use of pleasure when in a negative state, adds to our hedonic balance of pleasure/pain (if only a little and for a short time) and restores us closer to a natural state of emotion. Pleasure can be used as a type of coping mechanism, so that we are not completely overwhelmed by our state of pain. For Plato, however, we must be careful not to mistake the absence of pain for a genuinely pleasurable state.

Plato also discusses false pleasure of the neutral state in the *Republic* Book 9. He argues that if we start in a negative hedonic state, if we are sick or in pain, the prospect of pleasure which alleviates this pain may appear to be the most pleasant state.³⁸ However, this is mistaking the middle state for one of pleasure. It is argued that this is also the case when someone goes from a state of pleasure to the middle state and mistakes the absence of pleasure for a state of pain. Kenneth Dorter, in his commentary

³⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 583d, (trans. Paul Shorey), Cambridge, 1969.

on the *Republic*, argues that this might be the ‘psychological basis of addiction’. He claims, ‘...when someone ceases to feel pleasure the state of calm feels painful ... as they move from the top to the middle they mistake the middle for the bottom.’³⁹ Dorter states that there are three kinds of pleasure that Plato discusses in this section of the *Republic*: true but fleeting pleasures, which leave a painful feeling when they depart (pleasure to middle state); false pleasures, which are only a relief from pain (pain to middle state); and pure pleasures which are neither preceded nor followed by pain.⁴⁰ Pure pleasures, for Plato, are those which are unmixed with pain.⁴¹

It is difficult to say that one experiencing a form of pain should avoid any type of pleasure because it will not be ‘pure pleasure’. The avoidance of pleasure might well bring with it more pain, as our mind might dwell something distressing and increase the level of pain experienced. If one who had just lost a loved one, and was experiencing the pain of this, was to choose between sitting in an empty room, or to have a film playing that brought them some pleasure, it seems likely that they would choose the latter. Even if this pleasure does not bring a positive hedonic balance (+1*h*), its alleviation of pain might be enough for it to be seen as desirable. If pleasure is used in this way can we say that it might be desirable and pursuable (even for a short time) even if we also (at the same time) consider it to be a false pleasure? Or should this use of pleasure, or this type of pleasure, be seen as something different as it does not lead to an overall positive hedonic state? If this false pleasure just a mask on the real state of things, some might say it is better to be have false pleasure than real misery.

In this category, it is not necessarily the object of pleasure that is false, but rather the use of this object of pleasure by an individual. Many objects of pleasure can be used

³⁹ Kenneth Dorter, *The Transformation of Plato's Republic*, Lanham, 2006, p. 294.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ According to Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 97, there are three types of ‘pure pleasures’ recognised in the *Philebus*: ‘olfactory, visual and auditory, and intellectual’.

in this way: from the binge watching of television shows or films to the use of books or video games to escape or mask a pain that one might be feeling. Anything that takes us away from an immediate feeling of pain, or distracts us might be seen to be a type of this false pleasure. However, it need not always be detrimental; objects of pleasure or amusement can be used as distractions from a certain negative mental state, but we can recognise the reason that we are using these forms of pleasure.⁴² If we have had a bad day at work and we choose to escape from this feeling by doing something such as watching television, to ‘take our mind of it’ this is not necessarily wrong as long as we recognise why, and in what form we are using these objects of pleasure. The use of pleasure in this way does not resolve any underlying problems we might be having, but it could be that it allows us to be able to take some time away from our problems in order to better be able to deal with them at a later time.

It seems then, for something to be considered genuinely pleasurable, or for us to experience genuine pleasure, we should have eliminated as much as possible that which acts on us as a form of pain. For instead of starting in a negative mental state (one of pain) and using pleasure to replenish us to a neutral state, we start in the neutral state and pleasure is then used in a beneficial way on the side of the genuinely pleasurable.

4.5. False Mixed Pleasures

The final sub-category of experientially false pleasures, is that of *false mixed pleasures*. Carrying on from the discussion of the neutral state, this category has to do with the purity of the pleasure we are experiencing. Plato claims that we often experience mixed

⁴² False pleasure of the neutral state equates to something like a ‘miscategorisation’ of experience. The falsity occurs when we think we are experiencing a pleasurable state but what we are actually feeling is the absence of pain. In this sense, the state may be more desirable than that of a painful state, but it is not the highest possible form of the experience of pleasure.

states, where pleasures intermingle with pains. This can be of a combination of pleasures and pains of the body and pleasures and pains of the soul. We can feel pains of the body while also experiencing pleasures of the soul, just as we can feel pleasures of the body and pains of the soul. Plato's point concerns the extent that feelings of pleasure might be tainted by feelings of pain. It also has to do with the good or bad that is attributed to pleasure, as we might take joy or feel pleasure in something that we should not. This might be something such as similar to *Schadenfreude* or taking pleasure in other people's pain.⁴³ According to Plato, pleasures and pains can be somatic (body), psychic (mind) and psychosomatic (mind and body). Wolfsdorf identifies three sub-types of false mixed pleasures: 1) false bodily pleasures mixed with bodily pains; 2) false anticipatory pleasures mixed with bodily pains; and 3) false psychic pleasures simultaneously mixed with psychic pain (bittersweet emotions, *Schadenfreude*).⁴⁴

Firstly, Plato recognises the mixed state in which we feel a bodily pain internally, but can only alleviate this superficially. For example, if we have an itch we can only scratch and bring relief on the surface, not to the internal inflammation.⁴⁵ For Plato, we cannot consider the scratching of an itch to be a genuinely pleasurable state, it is only pleasurable as it is relieving a source of pain.

The second sub-type refers to the discussion in Chapter 3 regarding anticipatory pleasures, in this case the soul and body can have opposite elements. Plato argued,

when a man is empty he desires to be filled, and rejoices in his expectation, but is pained by emptiness, and I now add, what I did not

⁴³ This will be explored in Chapter 6 when we discuss immoral pleasures.

⁴⁴ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 100.

⁴⁵ Plato, *Philebus*, 46d-46e.

say at the time, that in all these cases, which are numerable, of opposition between soul and body, there is a single mixture of pain and pleasure.⁴⁶

In this case, a present pain can distort how much pleasure we think something will bring us in the future. Such as someone who is starving estimating how much pleasure their next meal will bring. In this case, the pain of starvation distorts how much pleasure is expected in the future. Socrates states now that the feeling of hunger and the expectation of future pleasure form a single mixture or emotional state; because this state combines both pleasure and pain, what we think of anticipatory pleasure is not pleasure at all. Rather it is a form of false pleasure.

The third sub-type pertains to differing psychic states, in which we feel opposing feeling. States such as anger, fear or jealousy, to name a few, are pains of the soul. Pains of the soul can also be mixed with pleasures; Plato claims that mourning and longing are these types of mixed states.⁴⁷ It is possible that states in this way can be mixed in ways such as someone rejoicing in the misfortune of his enemies, or laughing sometimes at the ridiculousness of friends. Plato argued that laughter at the misfortunes of one's friends is caused by envy, envy being a pain of the soul is mixed with the pleasure of laughter, in this way the two states exist together.⁴⁸ Pleasures of this kind are seen as false because they are mixed with pain, as Wolfsdorf states 'since pain is bad ... pleasure mixed with pain will thus be tainted in value ... here the simultaneous juxtaposition of pleasure and pain is responsible for distorting the hedonic appearance'.⁴⁹ Something might appear as pleasurable, however the mixture of pain makes this appearance false. Laughter at one's friends is caused by envy; envy is a pain

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 47c-47d.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 48a.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 50a.

⁴⁹ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 100.

of the soul, but laughter is a pleasure. Here two states exist; but because the pain of envy taints the pleasure in laughter, this is a form of *impure* or *false* pleasure.

False pleasure of the mixed state occurs when pleasure and pain intermingle. The effect of pain can counteract the effect of pleasure, making the experience one that only appears to be pleasurable. False mixed pleasures occur when one state or feeling distorts another, this can happen across time, as we have seen in Section 3.5. In this section, false overestimation of a future pleasure was shown to be sometimes caused by the influence of a current affective state. Those in a good mood might mistake how much pleasure something will bring them in the future, because they are influenced by their current positive mood.

Plato's aim in the *Philebus* is to distinguish kinds and uses of pleasure; to separate those which should be considered as part of the good life, from those which should not. The arguments for false pleasure serve to counter the hedonistic position that all pleasures are good, or that pleasure should be considered *the good*. Because pleasures can be deceptive in so many ways, we can easily err and pursue pleasures we think are beneficial. False pleasures are distinguished from 'pure pleasures'. In the *Philebus*, these pure pleasures are: olfactory, visual and auditory, and intellectual. Pure pleasures are those which are not mixed with any form of pain. Plato gives these pure pleasures different values, and in both *Republic 9* and the *Philebus* gives the greatest value to intellectual pleasures or the pleasures of knowledge.⁵⁰ Wolfsdorf notes that because 'pleasure requires restoration, intellectual pleasure is pleasure of learning' and that contemplation must 'entail the acquisition of information and knowledge.'⁵¹

⁵⁰ Dorter, *The Transformation of Plato's Republic*, p. 294; See also: Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 97.

⁵¹ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 97.

To understand why Plato gives the greatest value to intellectual pleasures, we must understand Plato's division of the soul. In the *Republic* Book 4 Plato divides the soul into three parts: the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational.⁵² Wolfsdorf states,

the appetitive part is motivated to satisfy our basic bodily needs; for example, it desires food and drink. The spirited part is concerned with our social status; for example, it desires esteem or honour. The rational part is concerned with knowledge and understanding; for example, it desires wisdom.⁵³

In Book 9, of the *Republic* the argument is made that the pleasures of the rational part of the soul are 'truer' or 'purer' than those of the appetitive part. One reason this is the case is that rational pleasures are more 'stable' than appetitive ones.⁵⁴ Pleasures of the mind also change our condition, they add something extra to our lives, rather than pleasures of appetite which are only short term or ephemeral.⁵⁵

Pleasures of appetite fill up the body with nutrition, but this is relatively unstable and only short lived. With pleasures of rationality, on the other hand, the soul is the container, and knowledge is the content.⁵⁶ According to Plato these later pleasures are more stable and so are more true. Wolfsdorf states, 'Plato implicitly reasons as follows: the more stable a thing is, the more it perdures, the more it exists, the more it is real, the more it is (ontologically) true.'⁵⁷ For Plato, the persons who only pursue appetitive pleasures, and have not ever experienced pleasures of wisdom or virtue, continually flow between the middle state (neutral) and the lower state (pain) and do not ever look up to the higher state. They have never been 'really filled with real things, nor ever

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 47.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 586a.

⁵⁵ Dorter, *The Transformation of Plato's Republic*, p. 297.

⁵⁶ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 71.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 72.

tasted stable and pure pleasure ... because they are vainly striving to satisfy with things that are not real the unreal and incontinent part of their souls'.⁵⁸ On Plato's account, only pleasures of wisdom, intelligence and knowledge—those pleasures of the rational part of the soul—are worthy of being part of the good life. I will later argue that a broader range of pleasures should be considered for the aim of the good life.

Because of Plato's view of the pleasures that should be part of the good life, that is pure pleasures, he does not consider those pleasures that are mixed with pain as genuinely pleasurable. These mixed pleasures might have the appearance of being pleasurable, and beneficial to the good life, but this is a false appearance. These false mixed pleasures can manifest in three ways.⁵⁹ False bodily pleasure mixed with and bodily pains, such as the scratching of an itch being pleasurable but only because it removes a pain. False anticipatory pleasure mixed with bodily pain, such as the pain of hunger mixed with the pleasure of anticipating a meal. Or, false psychic pleasure mixed with psychic pain, such as with bittersweet emotions.⁶⁰ In each of these cases the mixture of pleasure and pain cause us to experience *false pleasure*. this is the type of pleasure Plato argues we should not consider if our aim is the good life.

The issue at the core of this chapter has been to determine whether it is possible to question our felt experience of pleasure. It seems on the face of it that we have an inherent understanding of what pleasure is, and how it manifests. Each of us know, through experience, what we find pleasurable and what we do not. The issue is whether we can determine that some felt experiences of pleasure are right and worth pursuing, while others are not. Aristotle states that there is a large variation between what different people find pleasurable, what is painful to some arouses pleasure in others;

⁵⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 586a-586b.

⁵⁹ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 100.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

we might even fight with ourselves thinking something is pleasurable one day but not the next. Plato thinks that pleasures of the appetite are such transitory pleasures, whereas pleasures of the intellect are more stable, and so more reliable.

Determining the truth or falsity of a felt experience might more difficult than recognising the truth or falsity of an opinion or belief that a pleasure is based on. A pleasure that is based on a belief can be considered false if the belief is also false, however to say that a felt experience is false be it pleasure or otherwise, is often problematic. As Protarchus states in the *Philebus* regarding false pleasures of belief or opinion ‘we call the opinion false; but nobody would ever call the actual pleasure false’.⁶¹

This chapter has aimed to build a framework by which we might be able to think about ways in which pleasures of experience can be questioned. False pleasures of *excess* and *alien pleasures* discussed in this chapter show examples of pleasures that might not be considered wrong or false in themselves, but rather their use and degree to which they are pursued turn them into undesirable objects or ones which might hinder individual flourishing or a good life. While some examples are given in this chapter in relation to false pleasures of excess and distraction, these types are meant to be as a guide to the forms and use of pleasure, rather than individual examples of objects of false pleasure. Plato’s account of false pleasures of the *neutral state*, and of false *mixed pleasures*, gives further reasons for why something that feels pleasurable might still be considered false. The purpose of this chapter has been to outline how these ancient writers questioned felt experience. The following section will apply these arguments to video games, to find whether they can be usefully applied to modern objects and experiences of pleasure.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 37e-38a.

4.6. The Implications of False Experiential Pleasures for Video Games

In this section, we will examine the arguments for false experiential pleasure and apply them to the topic of video games. The aim is to show whether or not certain video games can be categorised as false pleasures of experience. To do this we will focus on the categories most applicable, they are the categories of *excess*, *alien pleasures* and false pleasure of the *neutral state*.

False Pleasure of Excess and Video Games

The discussion of overestimation of future pleasure (Sections 3.5 and 3.6), raised the problem that certain players have of playing a video game in excess of what is good. False overestimation of future pleasure gave us one reason why this might happen. The player might feel that she should continue play because of the anticipation of a forthcoming pleasure. If this pleasure does not meet expectations, then the anticipatory pleasure can be put onto a new goal or objective, which again might or might not be satisfied. If this perpetual cycle continues the player might end up losing track of time and playing longer than she thought she would, this can lead to excessive play. As this chapter has shown there are many argument against the pursuit of excessive pleasure and arguments that deem excess as a false pleasure. Here, we must decide whether the excessive playing of video games should be considered a form of false pleasure.

While certain games lend themselves to excessive periods of play, by inflating the anticipatory felt by players this is not be the case for all games. Nor, as we have briefly seen, is excess a problem solely restricted to the playing video games. If we are to judge video games to be a false pleasure because of their capacity to be played to excess, we must also consider other objects which also have this quality and effect. One

other form of media we can compare video games to is that of television, particularly modern television with internet provided content.

One way in which excess features as a part of modern television watching is the term “binge-watching”, which has come into common language in the recent years. This refers to the practice of watching multiple episodes of certain shows over a single extended period of time.⁶² This state of watching has come to prominence as a result of streamable internet television, in which multiple series of programmes can be watched any time and for as long as the viewer wishes. Services such as *Netflix* and *Hulu*, while available to be watched on television in the home, can also be accessed through computers, laptops and phones. The viewing of programming is now a ubiquitous activity, no longer locked to the television in the living room. Because of this ubiquity and ease of access, modern television viewing might also have the risk of being pursued to excessive degrees.

There are many forms of pleasure that have the capability of being used to excess, one can play video games, watch television, read novels, consume lavish amounts of food or drink. However, it must be decided what the limits of excess are and why pursuing excess should be considered so wrong. Aristotle saw that the bad character (as opposite of the virtuous one) was unable to recognise the limits of pleasure, or the limits we should place on the pursuit of certain pleasures. But difficulty lies in drawing a line beyond which consumption becomes excessive. We can say that eating or drinking to the point of making oneself sick is in excess of what is good; however, in terms of pursuing objects of media such as video games or television it is less clear where barriers should be drawn. Psychologists of childhood and young

⁶² See: Mareike Jenner, ‘Is this TVIV? On Netflix, TViII and binge-watching’, *New Media & Society*, vol. 8, no.2, 2016, pp. 257-273; Sidneyeve Matrix, ‘The Netflix effect: Teens, binge watching, and on-demand digital media trends’, *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2014, pp. 119–138.

adolescence often recommend a limit on ‘screen-time’ for these age groups.⁶³ However, should we place similar limits on grown rational actors? And is it excessive to pursue such pleasure if it does not impact negatively in another way?

The negative influence of excessive pleasure is often related to its outcome. To distinguish what constitutes excess, we often resort to the categories of *alien* pleasures or pleasures of *negative consequence*. We can posit something such as:

*X is excessive if the excess takes away from other pursuits; or,
X is excessive if the excess leads to further negative consequences.*

Aristotle is not clear on what defines excess, he merely states that the pursuit of what is in excess of good is the trait of the bad character. According to Aristotle, we must try to balance our lives between a lack of pleasure and its excess. On this view, pleasure turns to pain when pursued to excess for example, the pleasure of chocolate cake turns into the pain of a stomach ache if too much is consumed.

Aristotle mentions that the foods the temperate person pursues are those that *contribute* to health and fitness but there are also foods that are merely *consistent* with health and fitness.⁶⁴ Charles Young, in his article ‘Aristotle on Temperance’, states that foods under the first condition are *healthful* and those of the second are *treats*. The temperate person while taking pleasure in the healthful, might also on occasion indulge in foods or drink only for ‘the sake of the pleasure it brings’.⁶⁵ However the temperate person pursues these pleasures ‘so long as they are neither ignoble nor beyond his means’.⁶⁶

⁶³ See, Janet A. Gingold, Alan E. Simon and Kenneth C. Schoendorf, ‘Excess screen time in US children: association with family rules and alternative activities’, *Clinical Pediatrics*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2014, p. 41.

⁶⁴ Charles M. Young, ‘Aristotle on temperance’, *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 97, no. 4, 1988, p. 534.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 535.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 534.

In terms of pleasure in amusements or entertainment we might be able to see a similar parallel to that of the temperance of food and drink. At one point Aristotle mentions that amusements are a good thing as they help us revive so we can go back to work; this is their beneficial effect.⁶⁷ Perhaps, we are to say then that excess of amusement is that which goes beyond its restorative function. Elsewhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle also claims that relaxation and amusement seem to be necessary elements in life.⁶⁸ But though they might be necessary, the pursuit of *excess* amusement is problematic. Aristotle considered that many people think that those too fond of amusement are ‘profligate’, that is, reckless or immoderate; however, for Aristotle the opposite is true. He states, ‘amusement is rest, and therefore a slackening of effort, and addiction to amusement is a form of excessive slackness, this is not an excessive proneness to pursue pleasure, and so cannot be profligacy’.⁶⁹ He goes on later to say that, it would be strange if we considered amusement to be our End, that we should work just to amuse ourselves.⁷⁰

Aristotle claims that everything is pursued as a means to something else, except happiness which is an end in itself. Amusements should be recognised as good for relaxing but, according to Aristotle, not the object of our serious pursuit. He here quotes Anacharsis’ motto “Play in order that you may work” (sometimes translated as “Play so that you may be serious”) to be a guiding principle.⁷¹ For Aristotle, amusement is a form of rest; rest is needed so that we may work again, therefore it is a means for further activity.⁷²

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1176b.20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 1128b.1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 1150b.1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 1176b.20.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² The idea that amusement is necessary that we may work again, is one we will come back to in Chapter 7, when we discuss the Frankfurt School’s view on mass media in the 20th Century.

Amusement, then, can be interpreted as being pursued to *excess* if it is consistently pursued *and* is made an *End*—rather than as a *means* of relaxation to further other activities in our lives. We can say:

Any amusement X is excessive if it pursued as an End in itself, rather than as a means.

Interestingly the pursuit of amusement to excess is not for an excess of pleasure for Aristotle, rather it is due to an excess of ‘slackness’. In effect, it signifies an addiction to laziness. It is not clear, however, to what amusement Aristotle is referring. We can ask what is it that justifies something as being considered an amusement. It might be considered that tic-tac-toe, pinball, or checkers are amusements; but should we also consider the game of chess as an amusement? Or theatre or sport? Each of these has the quality of being amusing to some, but they are also pursued by others as more than a means of relaxing.

Aristotle argued that ‘to make amusement the object of our serious pursuits and our work seems foolish and childish to excess’.⁷³ However, certainly many people do make certain amusements their serious pursuit; the chess player, the theatre critic, the sports star. Perhaps then we can say that there are certain pursuits which go beyond being mere amusements, transcend into something which should be taken seriously. For example, some theatre can be considered only as amusement, yet other theatre transforms into being an art form. We might have pause to consider the merit of a being a tic-tac-toe grandmaster, yet we do not consider the chess grandmaster to be pursuing a mere amusement. We are left questioning what merits worth when considering what an amusement is, what is it that sets chess apart from tic-tac-toe. Or should we see all

⁷³ *Ibid.* 1176b.20.

pursuits of amusements or pleasure as equal, as Bentham saw there was no difference in “push-pin from poetry”.

If we judge that pursuing certain pleasures in excess of their good constitutes false pleasure, then it is entirely plausible that video games in certain cases can be considered false pleasures. However, if we apply this to video games, then it should also be applied to any form of entertainment that can be pursued to excess. Television, internet use for example can also be considered possibly problematic on this account. What is important here is that it might not necessarily be the pleasures themselves, but rather an individual’s use or pursuit of this pleasure which makes it wrong or false. We must also consider what makes something capable of being pursued to excess and what makes this excess wrong. It is difficult to say that we should think of video games as false pleasures because they have the potential to be player to an excessive degree. In certain cases, though, if they are being pursued excessively at the expense of other important areas in our lives, then we might have cause to resort to the following category, of *false alien pleasures*.

False Alien Pleasures and Video Games

Aristotle states that, when two pleasures are competing the more agreeable will win out. At times, because of the amount of pleasure they generate, some video games can be act as distractions from other areas of life. This is similar to the false pleasure of negative consequence argument we will see in the following chapter. However, as we have seen video games are not the only type of entertainment that is used to distract us from other pursuits. Matt McCormick claims that, ‘at best, this sort of objection is arguing for moderation, balance, and an equal distribution of human talents. If we take

it as a blanket condemnation of the so-called lesser pleasures, video games are just one of a long list of activities that we will be forced to avoid'.⁷⁴

The argument from alien pleasures, that some pleasures are false because they take away from other pursuits, does not necessarily condemn this type of pleasure outright. Rather, it takes into consideration the situation in which the pleasure is enjoyed, and the other activities it is being compared to. In a certain way, it is similar to the argument for higher and lower pleasures. This argument does not say that lower pleasures are false, but rather that they are of lesser value than higher pleasures.

John Stuart Mill divided pleasures into higher and lower categories, as a way to defend his view of utilitarianism against being considered a form of simple hedonism.⁷⁵ He refers to early criticisms of the Epicureans who were 'compared with pigs' for placing pleasure at the heart of the good life.⁷⁶ Contrary to this criticism Mill states that the Epicureans gave higher value to intellectual pleasures—feelings, imagination and moral sentiments—over pleasures of mere sensation. However, Mill argues that the reason for this preference was that pleasures of the intellect tend to last longer, or be more stable than those of sensation; not because of anything intrinsic to these pleasures in general.^{77,78} Mill took this argument further and argued that there was an intrinsic difference in value between pleasures of the intellect (higher pleasures) and those based solely in sensation (lower pleasures). The lower pleasures were ones which all animals enjoy; humans, being animals, also have the capacity to enjoy these types of pleasures. However, humans also have the capacity to enjoy pleasures which animals cannot, pleasures of thought, imagination, or philosophising for example. Mill argued that

⁷⁴ Matt McCormick, 'Is it wrong to play violent video games?', 2001, p. 281.

⁷⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, e-book, Jonathan Bennet (ed.), 2008, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/mill1863.pdf>, accessed 5 September 2017, p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 6.

⁷⁸ This is similar to Plato's account of 'stable and pure' pleasures in *Republic* 9.

rather than judging pleasures of intellect as being more valuable because they are ‘more permanent, safer, or less costly’—what he calls ‘circumstantial advantages’—higher pleasures should be judged as having greater intrinsic value.⁷⁹

The problem with applying the concept higher and lower pleasures to the topic of video games, is that it is unclear whether certain video games should be considered sensory or intellectual pleasures. Many video games offer sensory pleasures of incredible visual graphics and accompanying music. Yet some games, are excursions in problem solving in which reason and intellect are tested—often alongside dexterity and reaction times. The pleasure of rationality and application of problem-solving skills required for many games are not, as Mill thinks lower pleasures are, those that animals could enjoy. If this is the case then some video games can more easily fit in the higher order category of pleasure. If we only see the pleasure of video games coming from sensory experience, then we might only see them as lower pleasures. However, if we recognise there are some that make use of the intellect, then there might be room for them in the order of higher pleasures. Alien pleasures, like lower pleasures, might be appealing but be of lesser value than other pleasures. However, alien pleasure can become false in certain circumstances, if they act to take away from other important parts of an individual’s life.

As with false pleasure of excess, it might be plausible that the use of certain video games can be a false alien pleasure only in certain circumstances, but not others. There are many stories of individuals who have pursued certain games instead of focusing on their study, relationships or other important aspects of their lives.⁸⁰ If video games in these cases are used as a distraction point from other pursuits of value, then

⁷⁹ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, e-book, Jonathan Bennet (ed.), p. 6.

⁸⁰ This will be discussed further in Section 5.4.

they can be considered to be false alien pleasures. As with false pleasure of excess though, many forms of pleasure can be used as distractions or alien pleasures. False alien pleasures also depend on the individual who is pursuing the pleasure. While certain games have mechanics (such as points scoring, reward structures or achievement systems) that lend themselves to addicting play, it is not the case that all players will use these games in such an alien way. It might be the case that certain people are more susceptible than others to playing these games to excessive degrees and at the expense of other valuable areas of their lives.

One recent study into the use of ‘free-to-play’ games posits that different players are more, or less, susceptible to becoming addicted to these games. Free-to-play games are primarily mobile based games, on phone or tablet, and are free of charge to download and play. These games make their money either through advertising, or through charging small amounts of money (usually ~99 cents) for certain things during the game. These small charges (known as *micro-transactions*) increase the player’s ability to play the game; they might be considered as giving a helping hand to the player. Money can be spent to unlock certain objects, or to play certain levels or parts of the game. Dreier *et. al.* however, in a recent study on addictive behaviour, posit that some of these games use monetary transactions as a way to avoid difficult problem-solving tasks.⁸¹ They state, ‘the capability of solving problematic in-game situation by spending money might be linked to the coping mechanisms of vulnerable free-to-play gamers. A problematic situation can be answered by financial investments’.⁸² In some cases players can avoid difficult or tedious parts of game-play, by spending money to have these problems solved or the game sped up. This can be problematic as the player might,

⁸¹ Michael Dreier, Klaus Wölfling, Eva Duven, Sebastian Giralte, Manfred Beutal and Kai W. Müller, ‘Free-to-play: About addicted Whales, at risk Dolphins and healthy Minnows. Monetization design and Internet Gaming Disorder’, *Addictive Behaviours*, vol. 64, 2017, p. 328.

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 331.

instead of learning problem solving skills, simply learn to spend money instead. The authors state that by monetising aspects of the game, they can also increase certain player's attachment to it. They state, 'this is especially relevant in terms of conditioning processes, which lead to a cognitive bias and severe attachment on the game. The longer this kind of behaviour is maintained the more likely it is that specific dynamics develop, which eventually might lead to a problematic or even addictive use'.⁸³ This can be linked to Aristotle's point that amusements can be damaging by sometimes leading us to neglect our finances.⁸⁴

The more money certain players spend in a game, the more likely they are to want to continue playing that game; which in turn, leads to further spending. This is not the case with all players; the study posits that some players are at risk at suffering from what they call 'internet gaming disorder'. They state, 'risky and addicted gamers show higher perceived stress and dysfunctional coping strategies than non-problematic free-to-play gamers' and 'significantly spend more time and money on free-to-play games'.⁸⁵ The authors divided free-to-play players into three types, 'healthy Minnows, at risk Dolphins, and addicted Whales'.⁸⁶ Minnows (50% of players) are estimated to spend around 1€, Dolphins (40% of players) around 5€, and Whales (10% of players) over 20€, per month.⁸⁷ It is the latter category who are likely to spend higher amounts of money and time on certain games. They also state that those at risk of 'internet gaming disorders' were more likely to not only spend more money on games, but be 'less prosocial in terms of behaviour, are affected by problems of conduction as well as hyperactivity, and are having problems with peers or within relationships'.⁸⁸ The study

⁸³ *Ibid.* pp. 331–332.

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1176b.1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 328.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 332.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 328.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 332.

recommends ‘strategies preventing (vulnerable) individuals from negative repercussions potentially arising from free-to-play use’ and that for these vulnerable players monetisation designs in certain games represent a real problem.⁸⁹

This study, however, indicates that not all players are at risk from addiction or overspending on these specific games, the clear majority (around 90%) do not fit into the high-risk category. It is the players who are susceptible to addictive behaviour in relation to these games, who are at most risk of pursuing these games as false alien pleasures if they take away from other parts of their lives. They are also at risk of pursuing these pleasures in excess of what is good, as discussed in the previous section. As McCormick alluded to at the beginning of this section, if we are to view all pleasure that have the potential to act as distractions—taking this trait alone—then video games join a long list of activities we are forced to avoid.⁹⁰ It might rather, be enough to recognise the potential for problems to occur and act in a way that minimises the impact of one pleasure on other important areas of our lives.

False Pleasure of the Neutral State and Video Games

If video games, or other forms of entertainment are used as ‘escapes’ from an underlying feeling of pain, then according to Plato’s analysis they might not be truly pleasurable. According to Plato pleasures used in this way only act as temporary restorations to the middle or neutral state. This might appear as pleasant, but often are only temporary alleviations of pain. He likens this to filling a leaking cup with water; while it might be full for a time, it will soon be emptied. If something such as video games are used as pleasures to alleviate pain, they must be recognised as so. There might not be anything necessarily wrong with wishing to avoid pain through some form

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Matt McCormick, ‘Is it wrong to play violent video games?’, 2001, p. 281.

of escape, as long as we recognise our reasons for pursuing this pleasure. It should be recognised that this pleasure in this case may not be a long-term solution, and according to Plato we should not mistake the absence of pain for a genuinely pleasurable state. With this said, however, there are other ways in which video games might be able to help beyond immediate experiences of pleasure. There are currently games being developed with the direct intention of treating underlying medical conditions, such as depression. Rather than being, what Plato considers to be short-term fixes, these games are designed to assist with overall mental health improvement.

In a recent study into depression intervention, Anguera *et. al.* state that existing treatments for depression have modest effects. One reason for this, they state, is that ‘existing treatments only manage symptoms rather than treat the underlying causes of depression.’⁹¹ On the face of it, it might appear that using something such as a video game to help someone with depression might work in a similar limited manner, lifting the individual’s mood for only as long as they are experiencing the pleasure of the game. However, Anguera *et. al.* state there are other ways in which target and intentionally designed games can help with depression. They state, ‘to reduce the burden of depression, we need to develop interventions that are both targeted to underlying causes of depression symptoms, and that are easily deployed into the community’.⁹² Anguera *et. al.* specifically studied late life depression (LLD), major depression which occurs over the age of 65. One of the problems with LLD is ‘poor functioning of cognitive control’, and ‘difficulty ignoring irrelevant, especially negative biased information’.⁹³

⁹¹ Joaquin A. Anguera, Faith M. Gunning and Patricia A. Areán, ‘Improving late life depression and cognitive control through the use of therapeutic video game technology: A proof-of-concept randomized trial’, *Depression and Anxiety*, vol. 34, no. 6, 2017, pp. 508-517.

⁹² *Ibid.* p. 509.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

According to Anguera *et. al.* at least 40% of older adults with depression suffer from ‘cognitive control dysfunction’, which impacts on an individual’s ability to ‘attend to information central to goal-directed behaviour’ and is ‘characterized by increased susceptibility to interference from task irrelevant stimulus properties, poor response inhibition, and reduced sustained attention’.⁹⁴ Anguera *et. al.* proposed treating individual’s with LLD with computerised control interventions based on video game technologies, with the aim of improving cognitive control functions. They used an iPad based intervention project entitled Project: EVO. They state that ‘this game involves guiding a character through an immersive environment while responding to select targets’. Participants were required to play the game 5 times a week for 20 minutes, for 4 weeks. The study found ‘preliminary evidence that a video game intervention targeting the cognitive control network is a potentially effective intervention for both mood and cognitive symptoms of LLD’.⁹⁵

Though this study was only a ‘proof of concept’ and featured a group of 12 participants who played the EVO game, all of them managed to use the game for the required time, suggesting that games of this sort might have the appeal needed to be effective treatments. They also found that those who used this game did ‘experience cognitive control enhancements beyond any basic motoric improvements in response time’, meaning there is the possibility for games such as this to be used to treat some underlying causes of depression. Anguera *et. al.* state ‘these transfer effects are indicative that a properly designed intervention that challenges specific neural circuitry can have beneficial effects in an older population suffering from depression’.⁹⁶ Studies on the beneficial possibilities of targeted video games have been increasing in recent

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 514.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 515.

years, and studies such as the one presented here indicate these types of treatments might be effectively implemented in the future.

The use of video games as a source of pleasure might be one of the reasons they can be effective for treating a condition such as depression. The pleasure they provide might also possibly increase their attraction to those in a painful state. If this pleasure is accompanied by content that can help the player's underlying depression, then this is not a use of pleasure that merely restores to Plato's neutral state as a short-term fix. But rather can alleviate the source of pain, to allow the individual to experience 'true' or genuine pleasure.

Conclusion

The categories identified in the false pleasures of experience relate to the use and felt sensations of pleasure. The issues raised in the taxonomy can be useful as directly applied to pleasurable objects such as video games. Video games, along with many other pleasures of the modern world, have the capacity to appear pleasant and to be adding to the good life, when this may not be the case. However, false pleasures of experience must also take into account the role the individual plays in their pursuit of pleasure. Often the falsity lays in the degree or use of certain pleasures, rather than the pleasures themselves. As we have seen in the false pleasure of excess, the pursuit of pleasure to such a degree can impact negatively on the individual. This might be the case with the use of some video games. Aristotle noted that excessive pleasures can appeal to those who can find pleasure in no other place, as pleasure has the effect of driving out pain. However, for us to live the good life in Aristotle's eyes, we must temper our desires for such excessive pleasures. Similarly, Plato stated that if someone is in a painful condition, they might see certain objects as pleasurable because they

remove this pain. However, we should be careful not to see this as a genuinely pleasurable state, as the cessation of pleasure will result in a return to a painful state.

The use of video games and other immediate pleasures might lead some to think their pursuit is pleasurable when it is just an ‘escape’ from an underlying painful condition. However, there is promising research being currently conducted into the effectiveness of targeted video game treatment for conditions such as depression and anxiety. Some video games might also be used as alien pleasures by some people, while not necessarily masking some other pain, they instead take away from other valuable areas of an individual’s life. This might also be said to be true of other pleasurable pursuits—Aristotle noted that the more pleasurable an activity the more its appeal over other pursuits. However, it is the case that not all video game players use games this way, and there are some that are more susceptible to this form of false pleasure than others. Again, while the source of pleasure does have to be taken into consideration, it is also important to examine individual’s responses to certain games if we are to judge them as false pleasures. It is evident that certain uses of pleasure from video games can be problematic in some circumstances; however, it is unsatisfactory to say that the experience of pleasure in all video games is a form of false pleasure of experience.

The categories of false pleasure of experience, and the reasons for why we should question felt experiences of pleasure, relate closely to false pleasures of *negative consequence* this will be the topic for the following chapter.

Chapter 5 – False Pleasures of Negative Consequence

The following category of false pleasure to be considered is that of *negative* or *harmful consequences* in which a pleasure in the present directly causes harmful or negative consequences in the future. It is argued in this chapter that the immediate pleasure of an action should be considered false if the longer-term consequences of that pleasure are detrimental to an individual or to others. This form of false pleasure can be self-regarding in that damage is done to one's self, for example drug abuse or some masochistic acts. It can also be *other-regarding* if an action, which brings an individual pleasure, brings pain to others around them.

Looking at pleasures that could be considered false due to their longer-term consequences, we can see that there are parallels with *false mixed pleasures* discussed in Section 4.5. A pleasure taken in the present but with harmful consequences can be seen as a temporal mixture of pleasure and pain; for example, the cigarette smoker who knows the long-term health risks (pain) of their habit, but continues because these risks are outweighed by the immediate sensation of smoking that he finds pleasurable. Here we have a mixture of pleasure and pain, however, because the possible pain is in the distant future and the pleasure so close, the proximity can cloud our judgement allowing us to only be able to see the benefit of that which is nearest.

The consequential view of pleasures and pains and their relation to our attitudes to time will be examined. This will consider how we relate to emotions that are near in time versus those that are more remote. It will explore how our identity can change over time and how this might change our personal relation to some pleasures and pains.

This chapter will also consider how video games might be considered *false pleasures of negative consequence*. It will draw on psychological literature related to, what the *American Psychiatric Association* refers to the ‘new phenomenon’ of ‘Internet Gaming Disorder’. Similarities between this disorder and false pleasure of negative consequence will be considered. This chapter will also consider the ancient Greek notion of *akrasia* as a possible reason for some choosing to pursue false pleasures.

5.1. False Artificial or Harmful Pleasures

The first kind of *false pleasure of negative consequence* we will consider comes from Aristotle. He considers that, at times, some create in themselves artificial desires for certain pleasures; these are often bodily pleasures, and differ from natural desires for, say, food and drink. As we have seen, Aristotle argues that bodily pleasures hold an attraction for those who can find pleasure in no other kind; because of this some people seek the intensity of pleasure in many places, but in doing so they create a thirst for these pleasures.¹ This creation of desire is true of many pleasures and there is no objection to the pursuit of some pleasures, however, Aristotle argues we must call these pleasures 'bad' when they cause harm to the individual.² For example, a person dependent on drugs, on Aristotle's view, can be seen as someone whose body is in constant longing for a satisfaction of her want, a want that, through whatever means, has been created artificially in her. This is not what we can call a natural thirst, such as the need for food; rather this is a thirst that was at some point created by an individual.

Aristotle states that some people are in a state of constant inner turmoil or irritation and because of this they seek out an excess of pleasure as a cure.³ This pleasure, provided it is strong enough, has the effect of driving out pain for a time,

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1154b.1.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

however according to Aristotle these people are in a constant longing for a cure for their pain and find it in any source of pleasure available. This desire for pleasure leads people to create for themselves ‘artificial thirsts’ for certain pleasures, to mask pain or to cover a lack of pleasure in any other part of their lives. This can be seen to be in close relation to what we have discussed in the previous chapter: both *false pleasures of the neutral state* and *false mixed pleasures*.

Aristotle argues that the artificial desire created in us for certain pleasures can cause harm, these pleasures can be deceptive as they can appear to have the beneficial trait of driving out pain. Aristotle argues that because pleasures—particularly bodily ones—can be so intense that the desire for them becomes almost irresistible. This desire, however, is one that has been created artificially, before the desire for these pleasures was created in an individual, they might have had little reason to pursue them. Because these pleasures act to drive out pain they create a desire or want in individuals, and consequently it can be painful when this pleasure is not experienced. As we have seen Plato put forward a similar argument, that if a pleasure acts only to drive out pain it is not truly a pleasure at all, rather it only restores us to what he called the neutral state. Plato considered these to be false pleasures and we might have reason to similarly call Aristotle’s pleasures artificial thirst false. Similarly to Plato, Aristotle notes that ‘many are so constituted that a neutral state of feeling is to them positively painful’, because of this they require constant restorative pleasures to avoid this painful feeling.⁴ Depending on how we interpret this, Aristotle might be saying that these people are either: a) mistaking the neutral state for one of pain, as Plato thinks some mistake the neutral state for one of pleasure or; b) that without the pleasures they pursue they are in a constant state of pain.

⁴ *Ibid.*

If (b) is the case, then pleasure only acts to restore the individual to the neutral state; if we follow Plato's argument, then this is a form of false pleasure of the neutral state as pleasure only acts to remove pain. If, on the other hand, (a) is the case, then we can say these people are experiencing *false pains* as this is not genuinely a painful state, rather they mistake a lack of pleasure for a state of pain. Because they mistakenly think they are in a state of pain, they might also be mistaken in believing that they must necessarily rid themselves of this pain by pursuing certain pleasures. This creates a false need for certain pleasures and, as Aristotle states, bodily pleasures are often the most intense and these appear to be most needed. However, if these pleasures are also harmful then their effect is not to cure pain, but rather to relieve it for a short time and cause greater pain in the long term; pleasure is then, again, needed to drive out this further pain. By pursuing certain pleasures, we can create a state in which lack of that pleasure is painful. In this case, the harmful pleasure can be seen as false, as it only creates deeper and deeper pain.

Aristotle's discussion of this kind of bodily pleasures differs from Plato's in that the pleasure being pursued is wrong when it causes an individual harm. He states, 'bodily pleasures are sought for, just because of their intensity by people who are incapable of enjoying others . . . not that there is any objection to this when the pleasures are innocuous, but it is bad if they are productive of harmful results'.⁵ For these pleasures to be 'bad' on Aristotle view, the desire for them must be created artificially and their pursuit must cause future harm for the individual which outweighs any present benefit.

It appears that, for some, the more immediate and intense a pleasure the more it outweighs the pain of its consequences in the future. Aristotle notes that not all

⁵ *Ibid.*

pleasures which create a desire in us are wrong or bad, but they are bad when these pleasures cause harmful results. However, the term ‘harmful results’ is one which is vague and leads to the question of what harms we should consider when judging the results of certain pleasures.

The rest of this chapter will explore whether we can determine that pleasures which directly lead to negative consequences should be considered wrong or false.

5.2. Present Pleasure, Future Pain

As we discussed in Section 3.5, it is common for people to over or under estimate how much pleasure something will bring them in the future. If it holds true that we cannot effectively forecast what will bring us pleasure in the future, it should also hold that we cannot effectively forecast what will cause us pain future. Because there are reasons to care about the well-being of our future selves, then we should also care if something in the future will bring us harm. Something that brings pain is *prima facie* to be avoided—be it in the present or in the future— however, our judgement of something that will bring pain in the future can be clouded if it is a consequence of something that brings pleasure in the present. If an object in the present has the appearance of being pleasurable but will bring with it a future pain, then it is difficult to judge this object’s true value based only on our present experience. As we also have seen, Plato puts forward the argument that time can distort our views on the value of pleasure and pain; that which is further away in time might seem to us to be less worthy of concern than that which is closer in time. This point will be explored later in this chapter.⁶

⁶ It should be noted that the discussion in this chapter relates to past sociological work on *deferred gratification*, which cannot be treated in full here. Research, such as Schneider and Lysgaard’s ‘The deferred gratification pattern: A preliminary study’, 1953, held the now antiquated view that deferred gratification was a class specific trait. Members of the “lower class” were more prone to prioritising pleasure in the present over longer-term gratifications; while those of the “middle class” were more likely delay achievement be it through lengthy education, deferment of sexual gratification or the saving of money for future purposes. Interestingly the authors questioned if there were not advantages of the “lower class”, stating ‘It seems worthwhile to investigate the view that the lower class does

There are two initial ways in which we can think about pleasure and its relation to time and consequences. Firstly, that pleasure in the present is all that we should have reason to care about or, that at least we should give greater value to pleasures which are nearer in time than any distant consequence. Secondly, that pleasures and their consequences are tied to one another in such a way that we cannot judge the value of one without the other. As we will see this second argument informs the view of pleasures with negative consequences being false. To find arguments for both views we can look to two of the ancient hedonistic schools: the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans. Both schools differed in their views of pleasure in relation to time and consequences: the Cyrenaics believing pleasure in the present to be the most valuable and the Epicureans valuing more long-term pleasures.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Cyrenaics view of what pleasures should be pursued included some which the Epicureans view would not. These include indulging in pleasures of the present; one pertinent feature of the Cyrenaics, according to philosopher Tim O’Keefe, is their ‘lack of future concern’.⁷ He states, ‘the Cyrenaics advocate pursuing whatever brings pleasure *now*, enjoying that pleasure, and not worrying about the future’.⁸ For the Cyrenaics only pleasure in the present has intrinsic value, whereas worries about future, or past, pleasures and pains do not. Opposed to this is the Epicurean view that, while pleasure is good, we should practise temperance in relation to choosing which pleasures to pursue considering all possible consequences. The Epicureans considered that we should avoid those pleasures which will bring with

have such advantages and reaps the “pleasures” of following impulse and not “deferring.” Discounting the future, taking the cash and letting the credit go, disavowing major and worrisome self-disciplines, lower class persons may conceivably have a certain contentment that keeps them attached to an existing social order even when, from the point of view of the other classes, the “live like animals” (Schneider and Lysgaard, 1953, p.148).’ I thank Professor Alan Scott for bringing this point to my attention.

⁷ Tim O’Keefe, ‘The Cyrenaics on pleasure, happiness and future concern’, *Phronesis*, vol.47, no.4, 2002, pp. 395.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 395–396.

them pain in the future, and that we might need to postpone pleasure in the present for more long-term pleasures.⁹ Any future consequence is just as important to consider as the pleasure itself. Compared to the Epicureans, we might see the Cyrenaic view of disregarding future consequence as short-sighted or imprudent, one which can lead to misery further down the line. However, as we will see, interpretations for the justification of the Cyrenaic stance raise interesting counter points to the Epicurean view. Firstly, we will consider Epicurus' view and how it relates to modern consequentialist views of future pleasures.

Epicurus' main aim for the happiest life was freedom from pain and anxiety, this freedom is what has been called *katastematic* (or passive) pleasure. Other types of pleasures are *kinetic* (or active) pleasures, these are of joy and delight and are usually sensory pleasures.¹⁰ While Epicurus does say that no pleasures are bad in themselves, the problem with many *kinetic* or bodily pleasures is that they can have painful consequences. If our aim is to remove all pain from our lives, then it follows that we should avoid pleasures that will bring us future pain. In this case, we should not only care about a pleasure itself but also any consequence tied to it.

To take this argument further we can say that any value judgement regarding an object of pleasure must also extend to any future consequences; only with its consequences taken into consideration can the object be accurately judged as *good* or *bad*. With the consequences of an action considered we have the whole object of pleasure and pain (or the object's *valence*) made up of the *action* and its *consequences*. Once we consider these as intrinsically linked we can more accurately judge the merits of an action or object. Using the consequences of an action to form value judgements

⁹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Book X*, sect. 129.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 136.

about that action is common practice; for example, the judgements “Drug abuse is bad...” or “You should not smoke...” are both reliant on the negative consequences of both actions to form an overall value judgement.

If an action has positive valence (pleasure) then it might be considered desirable, however this is only a part of the object to consider. If the *consequence* of the action has negative valence (pain) and this pain is such to the extent that it outweighs the initial pleasure, then the object as a whole (action and consequence) has a negative valence. We can therefore say that the object as a whole should be considered undesirable, as it affects us in a way that is overtly negative. It can be argued that any pleasure derived from the initial action should be considered false, as the overall valence of the action or object (with consequence included) is negative and not truly pleasurable at all.

This argument is essentially a utilitarian or consequentialist argument regarding the nature of pleasure. Utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick, in his book *The Methods of Ethics*, set out what he called ‘egoistic hedonism’ in which the ultimate end of each individual’s actions is her own greatest happiness.¹¹ Sidgwick contends that it is reasonable for someone to act in a way that benefits her own happiness; qualifying *happiness* as being ‘the greatest attainable surplus of pleasure over pain’.¹² On this view it is reasonable to be drawn to actions that provide us with a balance of pleasure over pain. This chapter however, is concerned with the moments in which pain in the future outweighs any present pleasure.

The calculation for empirical hedonism outlined by Sidgwick rests on the assumption that pleasures and pains can have quantitative relations to one another.¹³ To

¹¹ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, London, 1907, p. 119.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 120.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 123.

argue for this position, we can perform a kind of hedonic calculus; say, for example, the value of pleasure is h , with $+1h$ being a pleasurable experience and $-1h$ being a negative experience. We can say that if the overall balance of a pleasure in the present is outweighed by a pain in the future, then the initial pleasure should not be considered pleasurable as our overall experience has negative value. For example, if I eat an extra piece of cake, I experience $+1h$ but I later experience a painful stomach ache that keeps me up at night causing $-2h$. The combined experience of the initial pleasure and consequential pain is $-1h$.¹⁴ Because the combined experience results in an overall negative state the initial pleasure, despite its appearances, should not be considered truly pleasurable at all. The initial experience of pleasure is a kind of gloss on an object which conceals its true nature. The taking of drugs such as heroin, for example, has the sensation of being pleasurable and is desirable for this reason. However, the real personal and societal consequences of abuse of such drugs can be overwhelmingly negative. While the user might initially feel and experience pleasure using this drug, the real nature of the object is destructive; it has only an illusory appearance of being pleasurable. While we might have an initial outlay of positive valence (pleasure) the consequent descent into negative valence (pain) outweighs this pleasure. Our overall experience is a negative one and the pleasure of the initial action has led us to this negative experience. Therefore, considering the whole object of our experience (action and consequence), if the totality of this experience is negative, the initial pleasure should be considered only an illusory or false.¹⁵

¹⁴ This is of course an over simplistic account of present pleasure and future pain, but it demonstrates how we could begin to think about how a pleasure we experience in the present could cause a negative overall state, and therefore be detrimental to our well-being.

¹⁵ It should be noted this is not Sidgwick's view, rather he held that pursuit of a present pleasure that leads to a greater future pain to be irrational, but that this does not make the initial pleasure any less a pleasure.

There are, however, some problems associated with this consequentialist approach to pleasure and pain. We can return now to the arguments put forward by the Cyrenaics. O'Keefe puts forward interpretations of why the Cyrenaics might think that we should not care about future consequences of a pleasure. Aristippus thinks that the future is inherently 'unclear', O'Keefe interprets this as possibly meaning that 'planning for the future is not worth the trouble because of uncertainties of the effects of one's actions'.¹⁶ The future value of pleasure or pain is inherently an unknown quantity until it comes to pass and we might not know the consequence of an action will outweigh the initial pleasure experienced, or if this is even possible to measure. We can have indicators and probabilities of what will occur as a consequence of something, but we might not necessarily *know* what will befall us in the future. It might be that, even if an action has negative consequences the initial pleasure was worth the future pain. However, Sidgwick states that we can judge what is right to pursue, by representing in advance the 'different series of feelings that our knowledge of physical and mental causes leads us to expect from the different lines of conduct that are open to us'.¹⁷ This means that we should represent the emotional or physical outcomes that can arise out of certain actions. Successful judgement of what is right to pursue depends on how accurately we can represent different outcomes to different actions.

Part of the difficulty of balancing valences is determining the quality of a pleasure measured against its consequent pain and whether we can effectively measure either. In comparing pleasure and pain we can either use time (i.e. the length of a pleasure against the length of a consequent pain) or; intensity (i.e. the strength of the pleasure against the strength of consequent pain). Philosopher Jeremy Bentham, in what

¹⁶ O'Keefe, 'The Cyrenaics on Pleasure, Happiness', p. 405.

¹⁷ Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 131.

has become known the *felicific calculus*, did use categories such as *intensity* and *duration* to determine the value of pleasure and pain.¹⁸ He argued that ‘the value of a pleasure or pain will be greater or less according to: 1) its intensity, 2) its duration, 3) its certainty or uncertainty, 4) its nearness and remoteness.’¹⁹

To consider *duration*, if something brings us pleasure for a minute, say, but results in a week of consequent pain. We might be able to say that the initial pleasure should be considered a *false pleasure of negative consequence*, as the total length of the pleasure is outweighed by the length of the pain.²⁰ We can also similarly consider *intensity*, if something brings us mild pleasure but results in intense pain, this pleasure might be *false*. A problem comes when we mix these two measurements, intensity against duration. We might say that something brings us immense but short term pleasure is worth consequent mild but long lasting pain. It might be the case that intensity of pleasure could outweigh duration of pain, or it could be the reverse. Measuring affective conditions in this way is inherently difficult, and it might be the case that there are times when we do not know whether a pleasure was worth a consequent pain.

The Cyrenaics argued that worrying about future consequences, and foregoing present pleasures, can be self-defeating. O’Keefe notes that for the Cyrenaics ‘one does not gain happiness by anxiously planning for one’s future, and toiling for it, but by enjoying whatever pleasure is at hand, without worrying about long-term consequences.’²¹ There might be so many consequences tied to an action that worrying about everyone can only lead to misery in the present. Seemingly inconsequential

¹⁸ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, e-book, Jonathan Bennet (ed.), 2017, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/bentham1780.pdf>, accessed 10 September 2017, p. 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Note that Bentham did not consider pleasures to be *false*, rather some pleasures can be of lesser value than others.

²¹ O’Keefe, ‘The Cyrenaics on pleasure, happiness’, p. 405.

actions or pursuits of pleasure can lead to negative outcomes, or they can have no bearing on us whatsoever. It might not necessarily be practical to calculate the possible outcomes of every decision we make to assess how we should act. Sidgwick recognised there are ‘vastly many contingencies with varying probabilities’; his solution was to reduce the calculation by ‘discarding all obviously imprudent conduct and neglecting the less probable and less important contingencies’.²² For Sidgwick, we should have reason to care about the obvious consequences that affect us or others in a significant way.

A further argument against the Cyrenaic view comes from Derek Parfit, in his book *Reasons and Persons*. Parfit makes the point that we often have a ‘bias to the near’; meaning that we give more value to what will happen in the near future compared to what will happen further in the future.²³ He quotes Jeremy Bentham who stated—in a similar manner to the Cyrenaic view—that, ‘in deciding the value of any future pleasure, we should consider how *soon* we will enjoy it...’, and this can also be said for pain.²⁴ Parfit continues that this argument means we should prefer nearer pleasures just because they are nearer, and that when we think of the future we should be less concerned about something just because it is further away. Parfit argues that there is no rational reason for thinking this way. John Rawls makes a similar argument, stating that,

mere temporal position, or distance from present, is not a reason for favouring one moment over another. Future aims may not be discounted solely in virtue of being future, although we may, of course, ascribe less weight to them if there are reasons for thinking that, given their relations to other things, their fulfilment is less probable.²⁵

²² Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 131.

²³ Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 1984, p. 158.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p. 420.

We cannot disregard the consequence of an action just because it is in the future, but we might consider its likelihood or probability. If we take the Cyrenaic view, we must show why we should preference the present.

Parfit claims it is irrational to care less about a pain just because it will occur more than a year from now; he likens this to not caring about experiencing a pain on a Tuesday, for no other reason than it being Tuesday. The reason he thinks not caring about a pain that will occur a year from now is irrational is that it draws an arbitrary line between pains we should care more about and those we should care less about, only because they occur at different times. He gives an example of someone choosing a worse pain, which will occur in a few weeks, over a lesser pain that will occur this afternoon as being irrational.²⁶ Parfit states that if we decide between equally bad pains in an arbitrary way, such as because one will occur this afternoon and one in a year from now, that we are not judging by anything intrinsic to the object of pain, rather only on the arbitrariness of it happening to occur at a certain time.

Parfit considers this when the two pains we are considering are equal except for their location in time. We can consider this when thinking about whether a pain might come as the consequences of a certain action, if we are unsure about pursuing an action because it will have a painful consequence this afternoon, but we then reconsider when we are informed the painful consequence will in fact happen in five years, then our motive for reconsidering could be called irrational. Nothing has changed about the pain that we will experience, except that it now will occur further in the future. This might also be true if the situation is reversed, if the consequence of an action changes from

²⁶ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 124.

being in the distant future, to instead being in the near future, and this reason alone causes us to reconsider the action, then we might also say that this is irrational.

However, we might say that there are cases in which it is not irrational to care less about a pain in the future than one in the near. For example, I have to get two teeth removed, one today and one in six months, both I know will hurt just as much, but it seems to make sense for me to care more *now* about the pain I will experience this afternoon rather than the pain I will experience in six months' time. Even if I dread both my visits to the dentist, both in the near and the future, to the same level it seems unlikely that I will experience the same apprehension and anxiety *now* about both. It appears that it cannot always be considered irrational to prioritise what will occur in the near future; however, to act in a way in which no regard is given to the future, or to change our attitude towards an action based only on its consequence being nearer or further in the future can be considered irrational. It may also be said that that while some might choose to delay a pain for a later date, some others might have a counteracting bias to wish the pain to be closer in time so that it can be over and done with, Parfit calls this a *bias toward the future*. These two biases can act differently for different people, or for different situations.²⁷

If we are biased toward the near, then it might be that we are open to the criticism of false pleasure of negative consequence. If we only think about what is pleasurable to us in the present, or if we give preference to that which is pleasant and always wish it to be nearer to us in time there is the risk that we will have to deal with painful negative consequences in the future. If the negative consequence outweighs the initial pleasure, the argument follows that the pleasure should be considered false.

²⁷ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 160.

Always wishing the pleasant to be close to us in time ignores those pleasures that require or are predicated on actions or events that we could consider to be painful in the present. On this view, we disregard distant future pains and disregard distant future pleasures in favour of present or nearer ones. If we focus only on present, or near present pleasures, it also follows that we disregard the consequence of these pleasures. It might be that some purely present pleasures have negative or painful consequences, on our view, however, we do not think about these consequences. As we have seen it can be argued that if the negative consequences of an action outweigh its initial pleasure then it should be considered false. Therefore, the advice to preference only pleasure in the near future, leads us to disregard any future consequence that might mean, due to our *bias toward the near* we are more likely to experience a type of false pleasure.

This is a problem; the supposed solution might be to instead have a bias toward the future to preference pain in the near, in order to experience greater pleasure in the future. This might seem to fix the problem of false pleasure of consequence, seeing as this view is based not on the merit of an action, but on its future implications, however, it is not without its complications.

If someone is bias toward the future then they run the risk that their ‘future-self’ might not desire the pleasure they had sacrificed for, that they were merely under a belief that they would find it pleasurable. Another possibility is that if I am constantly putting off reward or pleasure to the future, it might be questionable whether I am actually going to experience this pleasure I have prepared for myself. Suppose I live my life with a constant eye toward future pleasure or gratification, I work studiously at the expense of all present pleasures and even set a date in the future for when I am going to enjoy the fruits of my labour. But then suppose that before this date arrives some misfortune befalls me inhibiting me from enjoying this pleasure; or that the day

arrives but I have changed my mind, what I thought would bring me pleasure, and what I had worked toward no longer appeals to me. In this case, the time I had spent postponing pleasure had been for nothing. While I had not allowed myself to experience false pleasure like the person with a bias toward the near, in this case I had not allowed myself to experience any pleasure at all.

Another interpretation of the Cyrenaic view put forward by O'Keefe, is that our desires change over time and so what is good for us also changes over time; the only good that can be truly known is what I desire in the present. This provides an argument against putting aside pleasures in the present for some desired future state of pleasure, and one we will examine in the next section concerning our future-selves.

5.3. Consequences for Future Selves

What does it matter if someone takes pleasure in the present, with scant regard for their future state? Do we have the right, or a duty, to say that “You shouldn't be spending your time in this manner, because of the possible harmful consequences”? Are we free to choose to pursue pleasure in the present, or are we some way morally tied to our future-selves? These are difficult questions to answer. If we wish to respect an individual's autonomy and freedom, then on the one side they should be left to do as they please; however, we might also say that if a current state or activity is going to limit a person's autonomy or freedom in the future (i.e. through pain or disease), then we should do all we can to respect and enable this person's *future-self*. The question becomes, what rights do, or should, our future-selves have over our present actions?

It can be argued that when considering our future selves, we must give weight to their preferences. Even though we do not know what our exact preference will be in the future regarding some subjective desires, we can consider there to be some fundamental desires that we will have in the future. For example, my desire for oysters

can change from the present into the future. If I, one day in the future, have a bad experience eating oysters I might develop an aversion to them, or a desire *not* to eat them; a desire that I do not hold in the present. The desire to be in a healthy state, on the other hand, is one that, if I am thinking clearly and have all my mental faculties intact, I can expect to hold both now and in the future. Therefore, while I might not know all my future preferences and desires, there are some of which it is possible to know in the present. It is also possible to make decisions in the present that will facilitate bringing these desires about, or at least bringing about circumstance that will not restrict their possibility.

These considerations are important for our view of pleasure over time, because what we find pleasurable can be dependent on what combination of preferences and desires we have at a certain stage of our lives. That which I found pleasurable in my teenage years might not be the same as which I find pleasurable at 80. Nothing about the object of pleasure might change, but merely my relation to it is one that changes from being pleasurable to not being so. We could just say that our pleasures are constantly evolving, just as our identities are, which is a fine argument for pursuing that which we find pleasurable in the present. However, the trouble arises when we pursue pleasure in the present which leads us to harm in the future. On the other hand, putting off pleasure in the present for a perceived future pleasure, runs the risk of finding that in the future our preferences have changed, and the object we had been pursuing is no longer pleasurable.

While the Cyrenaics do not necessarily discuss identity over time, they state that the only preferences which should have value are those of the present, because these are the only ones I *know*. This argument is problematic, however, while preferences of taste might change over time it seems unlikely that our preference for certain things

such as health and well-being will change from the present to the future. Our future selves are just as likely to wish to be in good health as we are in the present. It should therefore go against reason to pursue a pleasure in the present which will limit our preference for well-being in the future. In instances such as this we should regard our preferences, as Socrates did and as Parfit urges, in a temporally neutral manner.²⁸ There is sufficient evidence that we should not preference pleasure in the present over future pain, just because they occur at different times.

If we take this consequentialist approach then pleasures in the present, which bring harm in the future should be considered false due to their negative overall valence. There might be reason to give more concern to that which will occur closer in time, rather than something distant, but it is irrational to give *no* concern to our future selves. This is often difficult though, as the intensity of pleasure in the present can override our judgement. As we will see in the following section, the amount of immediate pleasure derived by some video games can be enough that, for some, they act as false pleasures of negative consequence.

5.4. The Implications of False Pleasures of Negative Consequence for Video Games

As we have seen, if there is reason to judge the consequence of a pleasure as sufficiently detrimental—in that it outweighs any good or value that the initial pleasure contained—then there are grounds to say that this initial pleasure should be considered to be *false*. In recent years, there have been many stories of individuals playing video games to such a degree that they lead to detrimental health outcomes and harmful social effects. There have also been numerous deaths attributed to excessive video game play, caused by a combination of an unhealthy sedentary lifestyle mixed with prolonged periods of

²⁸ O'Keefe, 'The Cyrenaics on pleasure, happiness', p. 410.

play, lack of food, and sleep. Young men and women in China, South Korea and elsewhere have died due to heart attacks, blood clots and exhaustion from playing anywhere from 40 hours to three days without breaks.²⁹ More worrying, perhaps, are two accounts of parents neglecting their children in favour of playing certain games. In South Korea, a couple were found negligent after their young child died of malnutrition while the couple played 12-hour sessions of the game *Prius Online*.³⁰ In America in 2011, a woman was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment after her daughter died of malnutrition and dehydration. The mother reportedly spent 15 hours playing the game *World of Warcraft* online the day her daughter died.³¹ These stories, and ones like them, are used allegorically as warnings of the consuming power of new technology. Like other stories of addiction, they have at their heart a sense of loss; where time, responsibility and rationality seem to evaporate into an overwhelming desire for pleasure and satisfaction. They speak of an uncontrollable want to keep playing.

Warnings of the dangers of excessive video game play follow closely behind fears of violent content for reasons why certain games are argued to have a detrimental effect on their players. Perceived negative effects of video game play have been under question since the 1980's; most recently there has been a debate over whether video game addiction—specifically ‘Internet Gaming Disorder’ (IGD)—should be qualified as a formal mental disorder. In 2013, the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), produced by the *American Psychiatric*

²⁹ See: ‘S Korean dies after game session’, *BBC*, 10 August 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4137782.stm> accessed 6 July 2017; ‘Man in China dies after three-day internet session’, *Reuters*, 17 September 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-internet-death-idUST16999720070917> accessed 6 July 2017; Katie Hunt and Naomi Ng, ‘Man dies in Taiwan after 3-day online gaming binge’, *CNN*, 19 January 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/19/world/taiwan-gamer-death/> accessed 6 July 2017.

³⁰ Salmon, Andrew ‘Jail for couple whose baby died while they raised online child’, *CNN*, 28 May 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/05/28/south.korea.virtual.baby/> accessed 6 July 2017.

³¹ *Associated Press* ‘New Mexico mom gets 25 years for starving daughter’, 4 June 2011, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/mexico-mom-gets-25-years-starving-daughter-145411042.html> accessed 6 July 2017.

Association, tentatively classified Internet Gaming Disorder as a ‘condition warranting more clinical research and experience before it might be considered for inclusion in the main book as a formal disorder.’³² Along with gambling addiction, this is the first time that non-substance addictions have been considered for inclusion in the manual.³³ However, the problem with discerning a disorder like this is coming to a consensus regarding what exactly Internet Gaming Disorder is, how it manifests, and what criteria are set for it to be a formal condition.

From a review of 250 publications on the topic, for the DSM-5, a group of clinical specialists ‘readily determined that existing studies applied no standard diagnostic criteria to assess the condition.’³⁴ Based on these publications, the number of people studied who showed signs of Internet Gaming Disorder ranged from less than 1% to approximately 10%, depending on diagnostic criteria used.³⁵ In order to overcome this disparity in criteria, Petry *et. al.* in a paper that gathered many international researchers, proposed a ‘consensus’ method for assessing internet gaming disorder. Among the proposals were nine criteria by which this disorder could be assessed, these are:

1. *Pre-occupation*
2. *Withdrawal*
3. *Tolerance*
4. *Unsuccessful attempts to stop or reduce*
5. *Loss of interest in other hobbies or activities*
6. *Excessive gaming despite problems*

³² American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5 Fact Sheet: Internet Gaming Disorder*, <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/educational-resources/dsm-5-fact-sheets> accessed 20 July 2017, p. 1.

³³ Nancy M. Petry, Florian Rehbein, Douglas A. Gentile, Jeroen S. Lemmens, Hans-Jürgen Rumpf, Thomas Mößle, Gallus Bischof, Ran Tao, Daniel S. S. Fung, Guilherme Borges, Marc Auriacombe, Angels González Ibáñez, Philip Tam, Charles P. O'Brien, ‘An international consensus for assessing internet gaming disorder using the new DSM-5 approach’, *Addiction*; vol. 109, no. 9, 2014, p. 1399.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 1400.

7. *Deception*
8. *Escape or relief from a negative mood*
9. *Jeopardized or lost a relationship, job or educational or career opportunity.*³⁶

Of interest for our current chapter are the points made regarding (6) *Excessive gaming despite problems* and (9) *Risk or lost relationships or opportunities*. Both are considered possible negative consequences of video game play. It is also interesting to note that the other criteria align with the categories of false pleasure so far presented. (1) *Pre-occupation* and (2) *Unsuccessful attempts to stop or reduce*, fall under the category of *Excess*; (5) *Loss of interest in other hobbies or activities*, falls under the category *Alien pleasures*; and (8) *Escape or relief from negative mood* can fall under the category *False pleasure of the neutral state*.

Petry *et. al.* state of criteria (6), that ‘in the case of gaming the, the individual continues to play even though he is aware of significant negative consequences of this behaviour, which are more likely to be psychosocial than physical in nature.’³⁷ For this to be a clinical problem, the authors state that issues must be ‘persistent and significant’ and must involve ‘central areas of functioning’ such as ‘spending too much money, having arguments or neglecting important duties due to gaming.’³⁸ This is distinguished from the criteria (9), in that the consequences do not have to be as serious relative to the latter criteria. Criteria (9)—which is also a serious symptom of gambling addiction—happens when there is real loss of livelihood or relationships due to addiction. Petry *et. al.* state that if a relationship is jeopardised due to gaming, or there is a neglect of studies leading to an individual failing or dropping out of school, for example, then this criterion would be met.

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 1402–1404.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 1403.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

In response to these criteria other authors have offered alternative suggestions. Griffiths *et. al.* ask whether criteria (9) should highlight ‘whether gaming is a barrier to seeking opportunities (i.e. the difference between losing something versus impaired capacity to seek out something).’³⁹ One problem might be losing a job or relationship, and another might be limiting one’s self in regard to what one can achieve. Griffiths *et. al.* state that for someone who has already lost opportunities and relationships, continued gaming can also be a barrier to gaining or seeking out new opportunities. On this latter point, problem gaming could be seen as a kind of *self-limiting* pleasure, as the time gaming consumes prevents an individual from ‘flourishing’ in the Aristotelian sense.

Griffiths *et. al.* did agree that ‘problems caused by gaming should be a requirement criterion’ if there is to be a clinical definition of internet gaming addiction.⁴⁰ However, their paper also criticises some of the other criteria set out by Petry *et. al.*; for example, they argue (1) *pre-occupation*—thinking about games when not playing them—occurs with many other activities, such as music or sport, and occurs with gamers who are not problem risks.⁴¹ Griffiths *et. al.* also argue that criteria (5), *loss of interest in other hobbies or activities*, might represent ‘a normal development process’. They state, ‘true damage occurs when gaming impacts negatively overall physical and psychological wellbeing or impacts very negatively in an important area in one’s life (e.g. relationships, school performance, professional life, etc.), not if it diverts gamers from other recreational activities.’⁴² Due to their reservations regarding

³⁹ Mark D Griffiths, Antonius J. Van Rooij, Daniel Kardefelt-Winther, Vladan Starcevic, Orsolya Király, Ståle Pallesen, Kai Müller *et. al.*, ‘Working towards an international consensus on criteria for assessing Internet Gaming Disorder: A critical commentary on Petry *et. al.* (2014).’ *Addiction*, vol. 111, no. 1, 2016, p. 172.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 173.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 168.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 170.

certain criteria, Griffiths *et. al.* conclude that there is currently ‘no consensus in the IDG field at present on how best to assess IDG’.⁴³

While there are certainly signifiers for problem gaming, which include negative consequences, there is still not enough conclusive research on, what the American Psychiatric Association call, the ‘new phenomenon’ of gaming addiction. This is still a burgeoning area of empirical research. While there might not be conclusive data how many gamers are at risk, there is enough tentative evidence to suggest that for some individuals problematic gaming can lead to negative consequence for themselves and those close to them.⁴⁴ For those who do risk losing career or relationship opportunities due to gaming, there is reason enough to call the pleasure of gaming in these instances *false*.

In these cases, the pleasure from gaming cannot be said to outweigh the negative effects this pleasure causes. Gaming might have the appearance of being pleasurable in the moment, but it is actually causing greater misery in the longer term. Playing games to this extent shows Parfit’s *bias to the near*, in which future consequences are disregarded in favour of present pleasure.⁴⁵ While the Cyrenaics might say that all that matters are pleasures in the present, the pursuit of any pleasure at the expense of other important areas of life cannot be said to be an effective recipe for a good or fulfilling life. While we might have some reason to give more value to something occurring nearer in time (for example, caring more about a tooth that will get pulled out today over one that will be pulled out next year), there is not enough reason to discount

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Griffiths *et. al.*, ‘Working towards an international consensus’, p. 172, cite three studies: the first stated that 31 out of 32 clinical patients endorsed risking or losing opportunities due to gaming; the second that ‘most disordered players presented to the clinical setting with high risk of jeopardizing relationships and opportunities’; and the third that ‘fewer than 50% of their sample of individuals with problem video game use had problems in their significant relationships’. Variations in methodologies and criteria have led to inconclusive data regarding the prevalence of such problems for certain gamers.

⁴⁵ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 158.

entirely what will happen to us in the future. If it is the case that gaming, for some, leads to negative ‘overall physical and psychological wellbeing’, as Griffiths *et. al.* state, then *for these individuals* the pleasure from gaming should be considered a false kind of pleasure. This is not to say, though, that video games *in themselves* are false pleasures, but rather they are for those who experience negative consequences. In these cases, they can be considered as *subjectively* false pleasures.

It seems that, from a rational perspective, few would see the playing of a game (or the pursuit of any pleasure for that matter) solely, and at the expense of all other vital needs, as being the correct or best course of action. Yet, it happens that on occasion reason and rationality appear to be overridden for the pursuit and satisfaction of other desires. Acting against reason, or against one’s best interests, was termed by the ancient Greeks as *akrasia*, meaning literally ‘lack of mastery’.⁴⁶ Aristotle noted two kinds of *akrasia*, that of impetuosity and that of weakness. The weak person deliberates and makes a choice, but rather than acting in line with reason he acts ‘under the influence of passion’.⁴⁷ The impetuous, on the other hand, does not deliberate or try to think of choices rationally, rather he just acts in line with his passions. The impetuous one does not feel conflict when deciding how to act, but rather after they have acted, may feel regret for their actions.⁴⁸

If we take the example of someone pursuing a pleasure, knowing that there might be a detrimental outcome to this pleasure can be reason not to pursue it, however the appeal of the immediate pleasure (what Aristotle would consider passion) can cause them to act against their better judgement. This kind of *akrasia*, caused by a desire for

⁴⁶ Richard Kraut, ‘Aristotle’s ethics’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2017 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/aristotle-ethics/>, accessed 14 July 2017.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

pleasure which undermines reason, Aristotle considers to be ‘unqualified *akrasia*’.⁴⁹ The desire for pleasure is the primary passion that undermines reason.

Aristotle’s discussion of *akrasia* is an important one in relation to false pleasure, but for Aristotle impetuosity and weakness are ‘chronic conditions’.⁵⁰ The commentator Richard Kraut states, ‘the impetuous person is someone who acts emotionally and fails to deliberate not just once or twice but with some frequency; he makes this error more than most people do’.⁵¹ In this case it is an inherent condition that causes the impetuous one to be guided by their passions, and to make decisions they would not make, had they full control to reason, deliberate and choose. It seems then that the desire for certain pleasures, and their pursuit—even when one knows that they should do otherwise—can be caused by this chronic condition. It might be that for some addiction to certain video games, or something such as slot-machine addiction are modern examples of this chronic condition.

It could be asked, how much culpability can the *akratic* person have if their choice to act is made seemingly against any rational will. Kraut states that for Aristotle, when reason and feeling come into conflict, the psychological mechanisms that accompany feeling also have limited reasoning power. He notes, ‘when feeling conflicts with reason, what occurs is better described as a fight between feeling-allied-with-limited-reasoning and full-fledged reason’.⁵² While ‘full-fledged’ reason can stand apart from emotional influences, and judge objectively; the ‘feeling-reason’ has only limited power, and is restricted in the decisions it can make. While it might seem like we are using reason proper, in the case of *akrasia*, we are actually only using this limited field. We can decide something such as “it is good to pursue pleasure *x*, for

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

reason y and z ”, and this might appear to be rational; however, this may only be the result of limited feeling-reason. If we were to act with our full-reasoning capacity, then we might consider other reasons a , b and c , for why we should *not* pursue pleasure x . This is perhaps one way in which we can think about why people act against their better judgement, it is also one way to think about why we sometimes pursue false pleasures of negative consequence. The negative consequence is unable to be seen, because the desire or appetite for pleasure causes us to reason only in a limited capacity.

It appears, on this reading of *akrasia*, that Aristotle is not necessarily judging the object of pleasure itself as causing bad decisions; but rather fault lies with individual’s desire for certain pleasures and their ability to control these desires. Many different objects and actions of pleasure are appealing, but it is the one who is not impetuous or weak, viz. the virtuous person, who reasons which pleasures to choose, and avoids those which might have negative consequences. If we relate this back to video games and the capacity for certain games to be pursued to the detriment of the player, the *akratic* view might lay blame on the player—or at least that the player had limited ability to act differently—rather than on any quality of the game itself. However, it seems that there are elements to modern game design which, similar to the design of casino slot machines, cause the player to want to continue to play even when they rationally know they should not. This does not apply to all people who play all games, just as not everyone who plays a slot machines becomes addicted, rather there are some who are more susceptible to loss of control than others. These people might be similar to Aristotle’s *akratic* person.

Many games are designed to keep the player playing and, as we have seen, this can have negative consequences. There is an issue here of whether game designers have a moral responsibility toward their players in terms of how much time the players spend

playing. Nintendo's *Wii Sports* game, for example, encouraged players to take a break after extended periods of play. There might be reason to consider the use of certain video games as false pleasures, if they have a negative long term impact on the player. However, this might be merely a subjective judgement, we might say it is a false pleasure *for that player* where it might not be for others. Blaming certain games entirely for player's playing excessively, might be taking all agency away from these players. However, game designers might have to recognise the susceptibility of certain people to excessively play.

It is common for games to be advertised for their 'addictive' quality; in many cases the word *addictive* connotes *fun*. Games which have addictive qualities can be fun, it can be a measure of a game that it keeps the player interested, for longer periods of time. On the Cyrenaic's view, we might have very good reason to pursue pleasures such as video games in the present. As stated, the Cyrenaics viewed happiness as attainable in the present by enjoying whatever pleasure is at hand, rather than worrying over future consequences.⁵³ On their view, what is valuable is what one desires at a certain time, if this is to pursue the pleasure of video games then this is a good. However, considering the examples of extreme negative consequences that have resulted for some by playing certain games, the Cyrenaic position becomes less defensible. It is hard to imagine a person experiencing the pleasure of playing a certain game is also happy that their child is dying because of neglect. The pleasure of the game in this case is certainly unworthy of merit due to such dramatic outcomes; when balanced against its consequences we might say that the game is not a pleasure at all but rather it only causes great pain. While the feeling of pleasure in the present is

⁵³ O'Keefe, 'The Cyrenaics on pleasure, happiness', p. 405.

important, the real value of a pleasure must emerge from judging the pleasure and including its consequences.

Conclusion

While some negative consequences from video game play mentioned in this chapter are rare and at times extreme, that there is the potential for this form of false pleasure is something which should be considered. While not all players will experience negative consequences from video game play, the fact that some people are susceptible to a kind of addiction should be recognised. As we have seen, the pursuit of pleasure in the present must be balanced against potential negative consequences in the future, to determine the value of this pleasure. Negative consequences, with regard to video game play, do not necessarily only mean impact on school, work or relationships—though these are important—but might also mean the potential to limit future opportunities. If they are used in a certain way, as with other forms of entertainment and pleasure, video games do have the potential to limit an individual's experience of the good life. The fact that psychologists have labelled *internet gaming disorder* as something that needs further research shows that, for some at least, this can be an area of concern. However, it cannot necessarily be concluded that *all* video games in *all* situations are false pleasures due to negative consequences, for this is not the case for the majority of players. We can say that for *some* people the influence of video games can be a false pleasure if this pursuit impacts their life negatively. This might resemble similarly held view on other objects of pleasure such as gambling or alcohol.

While this chapter has focused on certain types of negative consequences, some see other perceived negative outcomes from video game play. The debate that some video games cause violent behaviour, for example, is one of negative consequences. However, even if certain games do not cause violent behaviour, their portrayal of

immorality might, for some, be enough that they are considered a kind of false pleasure. As we will see in the next chapter on *false immoral pleasures*, the moral concerns regarding video game play also question the nature of pleasure taken in the content of certain games.

Chapter 6 – False Immoral Pleasures

This chapter aims to explore the relation of pleasure to morality, examining what role pleasure (and pain) might play in determining what we view as moral or immoral. This will explore whether experiences of pleasure and pain—be they ours, or others—can shape moral or ethical decisions and attitudes. This will be done by examining moral frameworks, and the role pleasure plays in them, to determine whether that which could be considered immoral but pleasurable, could be seen also as a form of ‘wrong’ or ‘false’ pleasure.

If a pleasure is deemed to be false by reason of immorality, then it could have the quality of being *implicitly false*. The reason for this is that the nature of these pleasures must have something inherent to them that makes them false. In the previous chapters the pleasures detailed are not necessarily false in themselves, rather it is often an individual’s interaction with the pleasure that makes them false. In this chapter, the pleasures detailed are considered either, to be false *in and of themselves*; or because they in some way negatively transform one’s moral being.

This chapter will address certain forms of pleasure that might come as the result of immorality itself. I will examine arguments from Aristotle that pleasures can be wrong *in themselves* or *from their source*. This includes pleasures from enacting or viewing cruelty and other base pleasures. If we see pleasure as that which guides us towards certain actions, and pain as something which leads us to avoid other activities, it is important to examine pleasures that draw some towards immoral acts. Certain immoral acts hold pleasure for some and it is this pleasure that might cause immorality; here we are judging the action itself, rather than focusing on any consequence of it as

in the previous chapter. This chapter will also address whether immoral pleasure could be considered pleasurable because it is immoral or goes against the law; or whether immorality is incidental to the pleasure itself. It will also consider instances of *Schadenfreude* as forms of pleasure that the subject might know as being in some way wrong.

When people talk about pleasure and immorality, there appears to be the implied sense that it is wrong to take pleasure in something deemed to be immoral; or, that something immoral should not be pleasurable at all. This is one way in which some judge pleasure to be false. It is generally considered that it is wrong to take pleasure in that which is immoral, that this pleasure is wrong because the action it accompanies is also wrong. However, it is also the case that often pleasures are inextricably linked to immorality, some pleasures associated with sex or sadistic acts often tread the line of moral acceptability. These pleasures are considered false by some because they are immoral, but what does it mean for a pleasure to be immoral?

This chapter will also cover malicious pleasures, taken in the enacting and viewing of cruelty; pleasures which have been attained by immoral means; and base pleasures which might be seen to lower one's character. It will also briefly discuss pleasure taken in immorality itself, in which the subject experiences pleasure in something *because* it is immoral. Throughout this chapter, we will consider why immoral pleasure should be considered false and whether the acts *in and of themselves* are wrong, or whether they are false because they create or transform a person's moral being. The categories of false pleasure this chapter will cover are:

- 1) *False pleasure in enacting cruelty;*
- 2) *False pleasure in viewing cruelty;*
- 3) *False pleasure of Schadenfreude;*
- 4) *False immoral pleasure due to its source;* and,

5) *False self-conscious immoral pleasure*.¹

6.1. Pleasure in Cruelty

The topic of this chapter is to determine whether, on some normative or moral modes of thought, objects can be divided as being worthy or unworthy of having pleasure taken in them. If there are to be determined objects that give pleasure, but, that this pleasure should be unworthy of pursuit, then it must be decided how we are to think of these unworthy objects, and how they should sit in relation to the *good life*.

To begin this section, we can consider two examples of pleasure taken in what could be considered immoral. Both involve *cruelty*, one in enacting cruelty and the other in viewing it. Philosopher G.E. Moore stated that the enjoyment of pain in others is an essential characteristic of cruelty. He states that cruelty is a love of evil, and a love of what is ugly. He continues, that ‘the evil of the state is heightened not only by an increase in the evil or ugliness of the object, but also by an increase in the enjoyment’.²

We can firstly consider, someone who takes pleasure in *enacting* cruelty, torture or harm on others. For example, a kidnapper who takes pleasure in tying up and torturing his victim. In this case, the pleasure is being taken in committing an immoral act. Secondly, we might consider someone who takes pleasure in *viewing* cruelty or misfortune that happens to others, a cruelty that they themselves do not enact. Richard Brandt describes ‘some women who attended beheadings in evening dress in Germany’, he suggests, ‘if they enjoyed the occasion, their enjoyment was not intrinsically desirable’.³ This is called in Feldman a *worthless pleasure*.

¹ Please refer to Appendix A for a diagram of the taxonomy of false pleasure.

² Moore G. E. *Principia Ethica*, Chapter VI, Section 125, Cambridge, 1948, p. 210.

³ Richard Brandt, *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics*, Englewood Cliffs, 1959, p. 316, quoted in Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, p. 38.

On Aristotle's conception of virtue ethics, immoral pleasures are not genuinely pleasures at all.⁴ If we have the view that pleasure is good because it can help guide us to a eudaimonic or good life, it seems that immoral pleasures do the opposite. They are only pleasurable to the 'bad' character (as opposed to the 'good'), and though these pleasures might seem as if they are genuinely pleasurable, this is only an appearance.⁵ The 'bad' person is deceived by the nature of the pleasure they are pursuing, they have in mind that pleasure is needed for them to live a good life for them, however they are mistaken by which pleasures they should pursue. On the view, immoral pleasures are mere illusions of the good and, as they are only pleasurable to the 'bad' character, they are not really pleasures at all.⁶

Fred Feldman, proposes a form of hedonism which incorporates the morality of a pleasure as a determining factor in its relative value. He argues,

... the value of a pleasure is enhanced when it is pleasure taken in a pleasure-worthy object, such as something good or beautiful. The value of a pleasure is mitigated when it is pleasure taken in a pleasure-unworthy object, such as something evil, or ugly.⁷

Feldman makes the distinction that the value of a pleasure should be adjusted for how much something deserves to be an object of pleasure. This, he states, makes use of the normative concept of *desert*, some objects are deserving of having pleasure taken in them, others are not deserving of pleasure.⁸

On Aristotle's thinking, however, it appears we cannot call immoral pleasures good in any way. It is not that their value is mitigated, rather there is the stronger claim

⁴ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1176a.20.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, p. 120.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 121.

that denies these are pleasures at all. We might call these pleasures false, in that they are only pleasurable to what Aristotle considers ill-conditioned or vicious people. They are false in the way that a medicine might be good for a sick man, but the same medicine would be harmful to a healthy man in a normal state. Or in the way that something might look white to someone with a disease of the eyes, are not really white.⁹ Aristotle argues that people who find pleasure in depraved or immoral acts are deficient in a way that what they find pleasant are not pleasures in themselves, or to anyone except these people.¹⁰ He argues that true pleasures are those that seem pleasant to the good and virtuous man and the really pleasant things are those that he finds pleasant.¹¹

Wolfsdorf suggests that Aristotle's distinction between *genuine* and *apparent* pleasures, is 'equivalent to a commitment to the concepts of ontologically true and false pleasures'.¹² It follows that what is not pleasant, or what is distasteful to the good man, but is pleasurable to the vicious, must be bad or false. It should not surprise us, Aristotle continues, that the things the good man deems as bad are agreeable to others. He states, 'humanity is subject to corruption and abnormality in many forms, and what seems pleasant to persons in such a condition is not really pleasant at all'.¹³ True pleasures are drawn from good and virtuous acts, and as such no immoral or vicious activity can be a true pleasure.

How can we call these pleasures 'false' instead of merely 'bad'? In terms of pleasure taken in cruelty, we can say that it is false because the pleasure taken by the individual does not outweigh the pain inflicted on the victim. On a consequentialist view the sum-total of pleasure and pain balances toward pain; therefore, the pleasure

⁹ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1173b.20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1176a.20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 138.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1176a.20.

could be considered false as it is outweighed by the overall experience of pain. If the torturer thinks ‘this is a pleasant or pleasing experience’, then this statement is false, as the pain being experienced by his captive outweighs any pleasure being experienced. On the other hand, if the torturer states that ‘this is pleasurable for *me*’, then this statement can be true. Aristotle however argues that, because this form of pleasure is only pleasurable to this ‘bad’ or ‘wicked’ person, it cannot be considered genuinely as a pleasure. A healthy or moral person would not find pleasure in the same activity. As stated Aristotle argues that while medicine might be healthy for a sick person, the same medicine might be harmful for a healthy person. The torturer is in a way deluded into thinking their actions are pleasurable.

We may say that a dose of radiation to combat cancer in a sick patient is healthy in the sense that it might rid this patient of cancer and lead them to a better overall existence. But we would also say that the same treatment would be detrimental to a person without such a cancer. Aristotle similarly wishes to equate this with the feeling of pleasure taken in the immoral, that because it is not pleasurable to everybody, only the ‘bad’ person, it is not genuinely a pleasure at all. However, if we follow this reasoning, then pleasure can only really be what the virtuous person finds to be pleasurable; how are we to know what the virtuous person should see as pleasurable? Plato expresses a similar sentiment, in that only the wise truly know what should be considered pleasurable, as their judgement has been refined over time. This is can be considered similar to the argument for higher and lower pleasures, in that it is only those with refined tastes that know what is genuinely pleasurable. Wolfsdorf notes that on Aristotle’s account of pleasure, ‘the concept of apparent pleasure per se indicate that there is a normative condition on genuine pleasure’.¹⁴

¹⁴ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, p. 138.

While Aristotle argues that genuine pleasures are those the virtuous finds pleasurable; he is also arguing that immoral or wicked pleasure are only pleasurable due to a form of delusion. This delusion not only makes the pleasure ‘bad’ or ‘wicked’, but also *false*. Aristotle seems to be saying that the people who find pleasure in the immoral are, in some way, afflicted by a form of sickness. This sickness clouds their judgement regarding what they consider to be pleasurable. These people are suffering from a type of delusion when they consider something immoral to be pleasurable. While they might indeed feel the sensation of pleasure, this pleasure is merely an illusion caused by their disposition. If this argument succeeds then we can have grounds to consider this type of pleasure, not merely as ‘bad’ or ‘evil’, but as *false*. A fevered person might see visual hallucinations they genuinely believe to exist, they might believe their visions to be an experience of reality – while an outside observer would know this to be false. Similarly, Aristotle thinks that immoral pleasures are illusory, even if the person experiencing them feels the sensation of pleasure, this experience is not enough for it to be considered genuine, rather, their condition is causing them to experience a form of deluded or false pleasure.

6.2. Viewing Immorality and Cruelty

While we have discussed the implications of performing immoral acts for pleasure, such as torture, we turn now to instances of taking pleasure in *viewing* immorality. We must decide whether taking pleasure in viewing immorality is similar or different to performing an act of immorality. This differs from taking pleasure in enacting cruelty, as the agent does not, themselves, inflict any pain on another; rather they revel from afar in pain that happens to another. This is an important consideration as modern technology allows the viewing of immorality in many forms. Sometimes, as with *Schadenfreude*, the person experiencing the pleasure might also experience regret for

having done so. In this case, someone seems to hold two simultaneous, but contradictory, states at one time—the pleasure of something happening and also regret or shame in feeling this pleasure. We feel pleasure and then nearly instantly regret it; as we feel an emotional reaction but on another level, know we should not be feeling this way.

The possibility of viewing immoral images has increased in recent times. Depictions of, not just pornography, but child pornography, animal cruelty, public humiliations, violence and other forms of immorality are accessible instantaneously. We are able to spectate from our homes on anything we can imagine and indeed beyond. One of the issues this seemingly infinite access raises is the degree of moral responsibility on behalf of the viewer. While it might seem that remoteness from the actual situation diminishes any moral burden, it is questionable whether the viewer is completely absolved from moral responsibility. Of importance to this question is whether pleasure taken in the viewing of cruelty or immorality is in itself immoral, and whether we can judge such pleasure to be a form of *false* pleasure.

There are strong arguments to be made as to why taking pleasure in the viewing of cruelty perpetrated on others should be considered an immoral form of pleasure. Even though the spectator is not enacting cruelty, there might be reasons to point to as to why this pleasure should be seen as immoral. Four such arguments spring immediately to mind.

- 1) Firstly, if the acts being viewed are themselves are immoral, then taking pleasure in viewing them should be considered as equally immoral; [*comparative argument*].

- 2) Secondly, taking pleasure in the viewing of cruelty or immorality might influence or encourage the viewer to emulate similar actions, and cause them to act immorally in the future; [*emulation argument*].
- 3) Thirdly, this pleasure might lessen one's moral character, to the extent that it changes one's moral outlook, this might mean a shift in what one finds to be morally acceptable, or as a cause to frame or view the world differently; [*moral character argument*].
- 4) Fourthly, taking pleasure in viewing immorality might also be considered as a show of approval for the action being committed, meaning that actions of this sort should continue in the future; [*perpetuity argument*].

The first argument, as stated here, does not appear to lead us to greater understanding of *why* taking pleasure in viewing immorality should also be immoral. As mentioned, Brandt gives the example of women in Germany attending beheadings in evening dress, seeing the event itself as a source of pleasure. We find here that the addition of pleasure in the spectacle adds to the sense of immorality. Brandt argues that if these people enjoyed the occasion, then this enjoyment and pleasure is not intrinsically desirable.¹⁵ One could argue against this claim, by stating that their actions have not caused any harm to another, so they have limited moral responsibility. All the spectator in question has done is take pleasure in viewing a form of immorality; but should this implicate them in the immoral action itself? A claim for why taking pleasure in viewing cruelty should also be seen as immoral, it seems, must further than this argument.

The second and third arguments here state that taking pleasure in viewing immorality is wrong if it leads the viewer to further acts of immorality. The main

¹⁵ Richard Brandt, *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics*, Englewood Cliffs, 1959, p. 316, quoted in Fred Feldman, 'The good life: A defense of attitudinal hedonism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2002, p. 617.

argument against the viewing something such as pornography, appears to be that it will have a detrimental effect on the viewer, causing them to change or act in certain negative ways. Trying to pin down exactly what these negative or detrimental effects might be, however, is a different matter. It can be argued, that if viewing and taking pleasure in immorality, leads to committing immorality, then there is reason to discount this initial viewing as being wrong in itself.

In an article on the pornographic viewing of fraternity men, Foubert *et. al.* argue that there is a relation between viewing pornography, especially violent or sadomasochistic pornography, and the likelihood of committing rape or sexual assault.¹⁶ Other studies, however, have found little link between viewing pornography and an increase in willingness to violent sexual behaviour.¹⁷ It is difficult to find a clear answer to whether there is a causal link between the two. However, if even in a small percentage of people, there is the possibility that viewing violent pornography can lead to acts of violent sexual behaviour, then it can be argued that the initial viewing should be considered a false pleasure of *immorality* and *negative consequence* (as discussed in the previous chapter). The initial pleasure directly leads to something which causes a greater amount of pain, we might also consider this to be an immoral pleasure if it leads to the enactment of cruelty.

The third argument to consider is that taking pleasure in viewing immorality, might not necessarily lead to further acts of immorality, but rather it has an effect on the moral character of the person. Trying to find exactly how this effect occurs, or how

¹⁶ John Foubert, Mathew Brosi and R. Sean Bannon 'Pornography viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance and Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault', *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* vol. 18, no. 4, 2011, p. 225.

¹⁷ Christopher Ferguson and Richard Hartley 'The pleasure is momentary...the expense damnable', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2009, p. 323.

it would manifest is difficult. For example, Hill and Windfrey in a report to the American commission on obscenity and pornography stated,

pornography has an eroding effect on society, on public morality, on respect for human worth, on attitudes toward family love, on culture ... Pornography is loveless; it degrades the human being, reducing him to the level of animal ... we believe government must legislate to regulate pornography, in order to protect the 'social interest in order and morality'.¹⁸

While it appears clear that this argument against pornography, considers it an eroding influence on the moral fabric of society, exactly how this occurs is another question. If, for example, someone takes pleasure in degrading pornography, but does not wish to commit any such acts, they might have still been negatively influenced. Their viewing might have changed or shaped the way they frame the world. A mental change might mean that their view of the world and of other people changes such that it leads them to lessen their value of others. Proving this change purely in a state of mind, and any possible direct causes of it is, however, a difficult task.

Augustine in his *Confessions* mentions the idea of taking pleasure in someone else's suffering, stating that violence might be done 'for the mere pleasure in another man's pain, as the spectators of gladiatorial shows or the people who deride and mock at others'.¹⁹ The drive for this iniquity according to Augustine, is 'out of the lust of the flesh, and of the eye, and of power'.²⁰ Augustine's argument against pleasure in another's pain appears to stem from the concern for the detrimental effect this might have on the moral character. For Augustine, these kinds of pleasures are acts against

¹⁸ In, Raymond Rodgers 'The jurisprudence of censorship: Philosophic bases of anti-pornography arguments', *The Free Speech Yearbook*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1978, p. 82.

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 3, Chapter VIII, in *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion*, (trans. Albert C. Outler), London, 1955, p. 71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

morality and God; but he also argues they are against human society and the souls of those find this kind of enjoyment. He states that this kind of iniquity corrupts or perverts what our true nature should be, which for Augustine is the nature that God created. This corruption leads to ‘lustful desire for things forbidden, as “against nature” ... when they cast aside respect for human society and take audacious delight in the conspiracies and feuds according to their likes and dislikes’.²¹

Augustine considered the pursuit of immorality for pleasure as being akin to “kicking against the pricks”—the more one rebels and pursues immorality, the more that person suffers. This suffering might take the form of God’s retribution, or it might be that their character or soul is changed in such a negative way that their lives become one’s of suffering. For Augustine, the opportunity to take pleasure in such immorality comes from what he calls a “false freedom”; on his view God will save all ‘provided we do not raise up against the arrogance of a false freedom—for thus we lose all through craving more’.²² While we might be free to pursue these kinds of immoralities and the pleasures they offer, we do so at an expense; be it God’s grace, or a fundamental change or corruption in our being. For Augustine, this loss far outweighs the pleasure found in these kind of forbidden pleasures, and they only offer a kind of falsity, as any momentary benefit is overshadowed by the metaphysical consequences.

The fourth argument against taking pleasure in viewing cruelty or immorality is that this support can further the immoral activity taking place. What this means is that as long as there is support for such activity, the more likely this activity is to continue. Even though the viewers might not be directly partaking in an immoral action, their pleasure in it means more immorality will take place in the future. We can take the

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.* p. 72.

example of something, such as dog fighting, if one sees this as immoral due to the cruelty inflicted on the animals. It appears the reason something such as this takes place, and continues, is due to the pleasure of the spectators, betting money on the result of each fight. This pleasure supports the activity and leads to further fights; if there were no one taking pleasure and betting on these fights it would appear that there would be little reason for them to continue. In this way, it can be argued that this is an immoral form of pleasure.

The viewing of cruelty or other forms of humiliation or degradation can take many forms, and some of these forms are created for the direct purpose of bringing pleasure to their audience. A long-debated example of this is the pornography industry where it can be argued that the content of some of these films focus on the degradation of participants, particularly of the women involved. Does the dim view taken by some in society toward pornography come from the act itself, or rather that its viewing in some way leads to a lowering of moral or virtuous character? There could also be an argument against the viewing or reading of immoral fiction, such as films or novels, on the ground that they lower the audience's character. At times films and novels have been banned for showing explicit sexuality or other forms of immorality, and it seems the rationale of banning these films is in some way to 'protect' the audience. In some way, the viewing or reading of this immoral content might have a negative effect on the audience, either traumatically or through such exposure influencing and, in a way, changing an audience's moral being.

Arguments against extreme forms of pornography note that this is an immoral form of pleasure, that should not be produced, nor consumed. There might be many reasons for seeing this pleasure as immoral, we may be able to apply the arguments already discussed, as follows:

- 1) Firstly, sex and sexual activities are private endeavours and should not be shown as a public spectacle. (This argument might also include that sex outside of marriage is itself immoral, so any depiction of it is similarly immoral. This might include that the acts shown degrade the people, particularly the women, shown, and that their humiliation should not be a source of pleasure for others); [*comparative argument*].
- 2) Secondly, taking pleasure in forms of pornography, particularly extreme forms, might increase the likelihood of the viewer committing sexual violence against women; [*emulation argument*].
- 3) Thirdly, the viewing of such content might have a negative mental effect on the viewer, changing their moral character and the way they see others. This may mean seeing (particularly) women, less as being's in their own right, and more as objects purely for sexual gratification; [*moral character argument*].
- 4) Fourthly, taking pleasure in such an industry leads to the continued degradation of women in society; and in extreme cases the trafficking of women for use in this industry; [*perpetuity argument*].

Writer David Foster Wallace in his essay *Big Red Son*, which concerns the pornography industry in the late 90s, pointed to the genre's increasing bent toward 'unacceptability', in order for it to continue to appeal to some of its audience. He points out that 'adult entertainment' over the course of the years preceding and including the 90's had become more "mainstream", more widely available and in some ways acceptable. Because of this a strand of the industry had to try to push taboos, become more extreme in order to still entice viewers to their product. There became, according to Wallace, a 'new emphasis on anal sex, painful penetration, degrading tableaux, and the (at least)

psychological abuse of women'.²³ He argues that the further adult entertainment reaches in the mainstream, the more extreme it must become to 'preserve its sense of unacceptability that's so essential to its appeal'.²⁴

Robert Jensen makes a similar point with what he calls the 'paradox of pornography', he states 'at the same time it is more accepted, pornography's content is becoming steadily more extreme'.²⁵ Foster Wallace continues, 'the industry's already gone pretty far; and with reenacted child abuse and barely disguised gang rapes selling briskly', it would appear that these types of films cater for an audience which is already there, one in which titillation can only come through knowingly breaking social thought of decency.²⁶ Misogynistic degradation of women in these films (the genre explored in Wallace's article being *Bizarro-sleaze*) appeals to a market of men who take pleasure in these scenes men who, as Wallace argues, 'have a problem with women and want to see them humiliated'.²⁷ This humiliation takes the form of, what can only be describe as sexualised violence and abuse, 'men taking turns spitting [metaphorically and literally] in women's faces'.²⁸ Wallace continues: 'Whether Bizzaro-sleaze might conceivably help armchair misogynists "work out" some of their anger at females is irrelevant. Catharsis is not these films' intent. Their intent is to capitalize on a market demand that quite clearly exists...'.²⁹ In terms of morality and pleasure, the question arises, whether we should view something such as this as a form of *false* pleasure. If there is reason enough to think that something such as taking pleasure in the

²³ David Foster Wallace 'Big Red Son', in *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*, New York, 2005, p. 27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Robert Jensen, 'The paradox of pornography', in *Pornography: Driving the demand in international sex trafficking*, David E. Guinn and Julie DeCaro (eds.), 2007, p. 76.

²⁶ Wallace 'Big Red Son', p. 28.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

degradation, or pain of another should be reason enough to discount this experience or form of pleasure as being not just undesirable, but not pleasurable at all.

The term ‘adult *entertainment*’ denotes that, apart from the extreme nature of the content, these products are designed for the pleasure of the viewer. Pleasure is taken in the viewing of degradation and humiliation of the performers. Whether this can be defensible by stating that the performers are willing participants seems to be beside the point. Taking pleasure in the humiliation of another, be they ‘acting’ or not speaks to a deeper sense of the relation between pleasure and morality. Is the pleasure in this viewing taken just in the breaking of social taboos; or does this breach of common acceptability *enhance* whatever pleasure might have already been there?

6.3. False Pleasure of *Schadenfreude*

While taking pleasure in extreme kinds of cruelty or violence perpetrated on another being is considered immoral, there are lesser degrees in which we take pleasure in the misfortunes of others—*Schadenfreude*.³⁰ We have already briefly discussed this point regarding *false mixed pleasures* in Section 4.5. Here it was found that pleasure can be tainted by the mixture of a simultaneous pain. Plato considered envy as such a pain. John Portmann, who has written extensively on *Schadenfreude*, mentions the view of Schopenhauer, that any pleasure taken in the suffering of another should be seen as immoral, asking how ‘if we take morality seriously, can we both love our neighbour and laugh when he falls?’³¹ Though Portmann continues, Schopenhauer was careful to

³⁰ It should be noted that *Schadenfreude* here is recognised as a *type* of pleasure as opposed to a *token* of pleasure such as those referred to in Section 4.3, *false alien pleasures*. *Tokens* of pleasure are specific examples of pleasures which might be false at certain times but not others, whereas *types* of false pleasure are those that should be avoided.

³¹ John Portmann, *When Bad Things Happen to Other People*, New York, 2000, p. xvii.

insist that ‘the only pleasure we may take in bad things happening to other people is in the triumph of justice’.³²

Portmann claims that taking pleasure in the suffering of another, is justifiable if we are seeing a type of justice done to another.³³ He argues that we often approve of punishment of another if they have committed crimes or have caused the suffering of others. Portmann thinks we feel, if not *outright* pleasure, a type of satisfaction at seeing justice carried out. In this way pleasure can seemingly act as an instrument of social normality. If someone has acted outside of what we consider to be acceptable behaviour, some may wish for him experience a form of pain that is hoped to bring him back in line with what we think *is* acceptable behaviour. There might be a pleasure that occurs when someone is “brought down to earth”, this pleasure comes from an individual or group being brought back into the symmetry of what we consider to be ‘normal’ society. It could be that the only way this can happen is through the experience, be it trivial or otherwise, of some kind of suffering or pain. Portmann states ‘by discerning and clarifying beliefs about what people deserve, we gain better access to a culture’s general idea of what kinds of suffering deserve sympathy and, accordingly, of what a good person’s character should include or exclude’.³⁴ For Portmann, a glimpse into what people think about the suffering of others offers insight into ‘important cultural forces’ that cannot be otherwise discerned.

Some might wish to see the suffering of someone if they have acted outside of society’s norms; to seek punishment and retribution for criminals and taking a certain satisfaction in this. When a criminal goes unpunished there is a cry of injustice, which is only satisfied when this criminal is brought for punishment for their crimes. It might

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.* p. xvi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

be that we take satisfaction in this kind of suffering of another, because it is the way we see society as functioning, if those who act against society go unpunished then we could have no social order. On one level then, we seek the suffering of another to maintain a status quo, and to deter others from acting this way (at least in theory). On another level, we might feel a personal pleasure at the suffering of another.

The feeling of *Schadenfreude* has been defended by some, by pointing out that this pleasure is taken when we see another get their ‘just deserts’; that we feel someone deserves the pain they are suffering. Sometimes this emotion comes when we feel that someone, in some way, has acted such that they deserve to suffer a pain of humiliation. For example, spectators of sporting matches often gain pleasure from seeing someone who they consider to be arrogant lose a game, to fall over, or otherwise embarrass themselves. In this case, the spectator feels the player has gotten their *just deserts*. It is often in the spectating of sport that we feel pleasure when a team or player we dislike loses. However, as philosopher Mike McNamee notes when we are teaching children how to play sport, this is a feeling we discourage, if we do see this we say that it is an example of being “bad sport’s”. We want sportsmen and women to play within ‘the spirit of the game’, not too feel too bad about losing and not to gloat when they win, because they could make the other team or players feel bad. McNamee argues that ‘*Schadenfreude* is itself evidence of poor sporting character and sporting culture’.³⁵

Earl Spurgin argues that *Schadenfreude* differs from cruelty or sadism because the person experiencing it often has had no active impact on the suffering of another, rather they have been passively watching or reading about another’s misfortune.³⁶ If someone actively influences the misfortune of another, and then takes pleasure in this,

³⁵ Mike McNamee ‘Schadenfreude in sport: Envy, justice, and self-esteem’, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2003, p. 1.

³⁶ Earl Spurgin, ‘An emotional-freedom defense of *Schadenfreude*’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2015, p. 767.

then their action could be considered as cruel or sadistic. Spurgin argues that *Schadenfreude* often comes from seeing justice done to others, 'we are driven by considerations of justice, not by cruelty or sadism. Our pleasure stems from our recognition that justice is being served'.³⁷

Spurgin criticises Portmann's argument that something such as *Schadenfreude* comes from seeing someone who deserves their misfortune (this is a *just deserts* argument), as being too narrow a focus for such an emotion.³⁸ Spurgin claims that this view links the pleasure of *Schadenfreude* too narrowly to the concept of justice. Spurgin mentions an argument by Mike McNamee that the feeling of justice being served is one akin to *satisfaction*, which McNamee states denotes emotional neutrality, a passivity absent in *Schadenfreude*.³⁹ There is a question here of whether there is there a difference between satisfaction and pleasure; or whether satisfaction is a form of pleasure. Feldman argues that *attitudinal* pleasures are those in which we are pleased by a situation in which there may not be a sensory pleasure present.⁴⁰ Being pleased that my life is going a certain way, encompasses a certain form of satisfaction. I am pleased because I have a certain vision of my life, at the present moment this vision is being satisfied; this would appear to be a form of pleasure.

The question is whether we take personal pleasure in the punishment of another, or we take pleasure in social order being maintained. It would appear to most that the latter would be true, or at least it is what we hope to be true. If the former is the case, and we take personal satisfaction in the suffering of another, does this leave us open to a criticism of being immoral? If I take personal pleasure in the execution of a sadistic murderer, am I any better than this murderer who also took pleasure in death of another?

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 769.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 771.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, p. 56.

We should decide whether, when we take pleasure in the suffering of another we are reflecting the view of society, or reflecting our personal beliefs.

6.4. False Immoral Pleasure Due to its Source

For Aristotle, the source of a pleasure is as important as the pleasure itself. If we can say that the source of a certain pleasure is false, then the pleasure resulting must be false also. While we can consider that wealth is a pleasure and is desirable, it should be called a false pleasure if it is gained at a betrayal or another immoral act. Aristotle argues that pleasures differ in kind, if pleasures are sought from noble and virtuous sources they are different to those derived from base sources.⁴¹ An object of pleasure is desirable, only so through virtuous or dutiful means. Aristotle claims that it is 'impossible to taste the pleasures of a just man, unless you are just.'⁴² It is only the pleasures of the just person which can be called true, the source of all other pleasures (those without noble or virtuous sources) must be considered false. Just as someone cannot have the pleasure of playing music if they have never learned an instrument, if one has not learned to be just, they cannot have the true pleasures of a just person.

With this said, pleasures that would normally be considered genuine, can be corrupted if they are dependent on another act of immorality. For example, taking pleasure in something such as spending money might not necessarily be bad in itself. Having money can be a pleasure and beneficial, as with money one can help more people or do more good than if she is broke. However, if to indulge in the pleasure of having money I rob someone at gunpoint the source of this pleasure taints or falsifies it as being genuine. Aristotle states that, 'wealth is desirable, but not if won by

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, 1173b.20.

⁴² *Ibid.*

treachery.’⁴³ On this view, actions and pleasures can be judged as immoral not just in and of themselves, but rather also on their *source*.

6.5. Self-conscious Pleasure in Immorality

There could very well be different reasons for someone taking pleasure in something which is immoral. Firstly, it could be that pleasure is taken *because* something is considered immoral or unacceptable. Pleasure might be taken, not necessarily just in the object, but in its immoral quality. This might be considered pleasurable because it is risky or taboo; we could say in this case that the ‘wrongness’ of the activity impacts and increases the pleasure from it. In some cases, immorality is closely linked with pleasure. Sometimes that which is ‘taboo’ or bordering on immoral can increase the pleasure derived from the object. It could be argued that pleasure is increased by the “I know I shouldn’t be doing this...” drive.

Augustine in his *Confessions* gives an account of stealing pears when he was young. He states, ‘my pleasure was not in the pears; it was in the crime itself, done in association with a sinful group.’⁴⁴ In his account Augustine notes that he could have stolen pears by himself at any time, but this would not have been pleasurable. Rather, he links his pleasure to being part of a group ‘sharing the guilt with others’. The pleasure is not in the object, necessarily, but rather in the circumstances of the action. As philosopher Antonio Calcagno notes, for Augustine it was ‘the desire to do evil itself, especially in company, that [was] pleasurable.’⁴⁵ The desire to do wrong, for some, can bring pleasure in itself. Where this desire comes from and why immorality for immorality’s sake is pleasurable for some, are questions beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 2, Chapter VIII, in *Augustine: Confessions*, p. 59.

⁴⁵ Antonio Calcagno, ‘The desire for and pleasure of evil: the Augustinian limitations of Arendtian mind’, *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2013, p. 97.

It is sufficient to say, for now, that immorality itself holds a certain pleasure for some. If this is the case, and using the arguments for false immoral pleasure, there might be sufficient argument to call these self-reflexively immoral pleasure as false.

6.6. Implications of False Immoral Pleasures for Video Games

This section will focus on the question of whether taking pleasure in immoral acts in a video game constitutes false pleasure. One of the most pervasive arguments against video games is that violent or sexualised content offered by some games has a perceived negative influence on those playing. The fact that some games have been either censored or banned for their portrayal of immoral acts, such as sexualised violence and rape, shows that they are a genuine area of moral concern. It should be asked whether it is the act of *simulated immorality itself* that is the issue, or if it is the potential for the *emulation* of this act in the real world.

It should be acknowledged at the outset that not all video game feature such content, but the question remains whether those that do should be avoided and deemed as immoral forms of pleasure. The taxonomy of false pleasure so far developed holds that taking pleasure in immoral acts—however we define immorality—should be considered as wrong or a false pleasure. Aristotle held that because these objects or actions were only pleasurable to the vicious character—as opposed to the virtuous one—they did not represent genuine pleasure at all. In this section, I will address the implications of immoral actions in video games and go on to propose that some games can in fact be effective tools for moral education and development.

In this chapter, there have been proposed several ways in which pleasure can be influenced by immorality, they are: *enacting cruelty*; *viewing cruelty*; *Schadenfreude*; and, *self-reflexive*. We now look at which of these can be applied to certain video games. Of these subcategories, the most relevant to arguments regarding video games

are those of *enacting* and *viewing cruelty* for pleasure. It appears *prima facie* that violent or sexualised video games combine both the *enacting* and the *viewing of cruelty* into one, as such these categories will be the focus for this section.

Viewing and Enacting Immorality in Video Games

This section will not aim to cover all arguments regarding violence and video games, as this is a topic that has been much discussed in many fields. Rather, the focus will specifically be on whether the pleasure from simulated immorality should be considered false.

In the discussion of false immoral pleasures, we noted four possible arguments as to why pleasure in viewing cruelty should be immoral. These arguments are again relevant when addressing immorality and video games. They are:

- 1) Firstly, if the acts being viewed are themselves are immoral, then taking pleasure in viewing them should be considered as equally immoral; [*comparative argument*].
- 2) Secondly, taking pleasure in the viewing of cruelty or immorality might influence or encourage the viewer to emulate similar actions and cause them to act immorally in the future; [*emulation argument*].
- 3) Thirdly, this pleasure could diminish one's moral character, to the extent that it changes one's moral outlook. This might mean a shift in what one finds to be morally acceptable or as a cause to frame or view the world differently; [*moral character argument*].
- 4) Fourthly, taking pleasure in viewing immorality might also be considered as a show of approval for the action being committed meaning that actions of this sort should continue in the future; [*perpetuity argument*].

Of most relevance to video games are the first three of these arguments. There are two broad ways these arguments are expressed: firstly, that acts of cruelty or violence (even in simulation) are wrong in and of themselves; and secondly that they are wrong

because of the negative impact on the one viewing (or playing). The first of these, which the *comparative argument* falls under, wishes to say that even if there is no negative impact on the viewer/player, taking pleasure in immorality is wrong in and of itself. The second, which the *emulation* and *moral character* arguments fall under, locates the wrongness of pleasure in immorality in the potential negative influence on the viewer/player. We will firstly look at (1) the *comparative argument*.

While the *comparative* argument as stated concerned pleasure in the viewing of cruelty, it can be adapted to the pleasure found in immoral actions in certain video games. This argument can be restated as:

If the actions portrayed, either by the player or the game are immoral, any pleasure taken in them should also be considered as immoral.

This argument posits that any pleasure taken in an immoral act, simulated or otherwise, is itself immoral. For this to be the case in our present context it must be shown that the actions depicted in video games are in fact immoral. Seeing as these games feature simulated acts of immorality, it must be shown that this constitutes a definite breach of morality in order for the comparative argument to work. Immorality in video games, and subsequently the pleasure derived, must be closer to real world action than, for example, immoral thoughts or dreams. For this argument to succeed two things must be shown: firstly, that simulated immorality is *ipso facto* immoral; and, secondly, that there is a definite correlation between simulated immorality and the moral culpability of the player.

There is, however, a difficulty in trying to show that simulated immorality is in fact immoral; this can come from the approaches we take to making moral judgements. Traditionally actions are judged as immoral if they have an overall negative outcome (consequentialist); if they abuse the another's individual rights (deontological); or if

there is an impact to one's moral character (virtue). If we judge an action in a simulated environment in and of itself, it is difficult to see by what measure it is immoral. It can be argued that there are no *real* humans being effected by which we can measure the balance of pain over pleasure; similarly, there are no *real* humans whose individual rights we can be said to be violating. The virtue ethics argument might here be more plausible, however the morality concerned here is a reflection on the player's moral character rather than a judgment of the morality of actions performed in the game (this argument will be returned to later in this section when addressing the *moral character* argument).

Difficulties in judging the morality of simulated actions are not limited to those critical of video games. Those who wish to defend violent or sexualised simulated content might also run into ethical grey areas. Morgan Luck argues that there is an inherent intuition that while simulated murder might be morally permissible, simulated rape or virtual paedophilia is not.⁴⁶ However, Luck argues, defending this intuition is difficult as often the defences against virtual murder, i.e. that no one is actually physically being harmed, might just as easily be offered as uncomfortable defences of virtual paedophilia. Luck argues that a dilemma arises when one wants to argue for virtual murder being morally acceptable, but virtual paedophilia not. This dilemma comes when trying to make moral distinctions between the two cases and arguments which could be utilised to defend one but not the other. We may wish to intuitively judge any pleasure taken in something such as virtual paedophilia as being a false pleasure in and of itself for reason of immorality, but must show how it is different to other forms of simulated immorality.

⁴⁶ Morgan Luck, 'The gamer's dilemma: An analysis of the arguments for the moral distinction between virtual murder and virtual paedophilia', *Ethics Information and Technology*, vol.11, no.1, 2009, p. 31.

Because of the difficulty in proving that simulated immorality is *ipso facto* immoral or not; many criticisms of video games instead focus on the effect of these games on the player, this brings us to the (2) *emulation* and (3) *moral character* arguments. As we will see these arguments make appeals to consequentialist, Kantian and virtue ethics.

Matt McCormick argues that on both a consequentialist and Kantian view of morality, actions within violent video games fall outside the scope of what is immoral. Both of these moral frameworks focus on the morality of an action performed, and as such it is difficult for an effective case to be made against actions in these games. Firstly, on the consequentialist view an action should be considered immoral if it leads to a greater balance of pain over pleasure. To say that a violent video game is immoral is to say that it leads to a further negative outcome, and so for these games to be immoral on this view would mean that they directly lead to further pain, violence, or misery. A consequentialist view of immoral games must mean they lead to the *emulation argument*. Whether they are immoral or not must depend on the truth or falsity of this argument. McCormick argues that the utilitarian must show that the playing of violent video games increases the risk of harm to oneself or others.⁴⁷ He also states that this view must demonstrate that the harm or risk associated outweighs the benefits of these games.

The first of these arguments is an empirical claim, McCormick states that it must be shown that violent video games are risk increasing activities.⁴⁸ Empirical studies must show that there is a causal link between playing violent video games and an increased risk or propensity for violent or other harmful behaviour outside of these

⁴⁷ McCormick, 'Is it wrong to play violent video games?', p. 280.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 281.

games. If this is found to be the case then there could be an argument made for these games being false immoral pleasures.

Again, consequentialist defenders of simulated immorality might be forced to defend that which they find unsettling. If they argue that simulation of immoral acts does not lead to any real-world action, i.e. violent video games do not cause real world violence, they might also have to similarly defend something such as virtual rape or paedophilia. The consequentialist view point might even have reason to say that *not* committing acts of virtual paedophilia is immoral, if it causes desires to be relieved in this virtual state rather than with real-world actors.⁴⁹ Philosopher and ethicist Neil Levy states there may be an argument to be made that ‘allowing virtual porn will reduce the amount of harm to actual children, by providing an acceptable outlet for dangerous desires, and by encouraging pornographers to seek alternatives to real children’.⁵⁰

However, McCormick argues, that empirical links to real world action might not be enough to judge violent video games as being morally objectionable. Many activities increase the risk of other undesired outcomes. The playing of or spectating sport, for example, often has the increased risk for violence or other aggressive behaviour, yet there are few arguments for sport to be considered morally objectionable. The degree of risk involved must also be assessed and weighed against any potential benefit these games provide. He notes that games often provide high recreational and entertainment value for their players.⁵¹ From the analysis of false pleasure, however, I argue that pleasure of certain kinds is not enough to justify value. McCormick also argues that there are many other social and financial benefits to these games which should be included in a consequentialist cost/benefit analysis. He concedes these

⁴⁹ Luck, ‘The Gamers Dilemma’, p. 33; See also Neil Levy, ‘Virtual child pornography: The eroticization of inequality’, *Ethics and Information Technology*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2002, pp. 319–323.

⁵⁰ Levy, ‘Virtual child pornography’, p. 321.

⁵¹ McCormick, ‘Is it wrong to play violent video games?’, p. 280.

analyses are notoriously difficult, though makes the point that increased risk of emulation from these games should not be the only consideration to make when assessing moral objections to violent video games.

McCormick concludes that the utilitarian does not have ‘any substantial grounds on which to morally criticise playing violent video games’.⁵² The reason for this being that it is difficult to show that: a) violent video games do in fact cause further violence or increase risk for their players, and b) that the possible increase for harm outweighs any potential benefit (pleasure) derived from them.

After addressing the consequentialist moral view of violent video games, McCormick asks whether Kantian theories of ethics should find these games morally objectionable. The Kantian view of morality is duty based, and posits that we should not treat others as means. Kant’s imperative dictates we must, ‘so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means’.⁵³ This duty is also universal, that we ‘act only according to the maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law’. From this duty, we are aware that we should act as to treat others only as ends, and not as means for further ends. For example, in relation to the false pleasure of immorality, to take pleasure in the misfortune of another—or in enacting certain cruelties on them—would be to treat this other human as a mere means for our personal satisfaction. Were we to take pleasure in such a manner we would be violating Kant’s imperative, and by disregarding another’s wellbeing for our own end would be acting immorally. McCormick states that, ‘if a person commits unjustified violence against another person, she is failing to treat that person as an end in herself. If we disregard

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 281.

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. Mary Gregor), Cambridge, 1998, p. 31.

their value as rational and autonomous agents, then we treat them as mere means to an end'.⁵⁴ While this holds for other human agents, McCormick questions whether this holds for simulated agents. He argues that in many cases playing violent video games do not involve other people, the player is pitted merely against computer generated opponents. McCormick argues that in these cases we cannot be violating the Categorical Imperative, because there are no other *humans* which we are treating as means.⁵⁵

There is a question of whether the treatment of *representations* of humanity should be considered under the categorical imperative. If these simulated representations do not constitute humanity, then we have no reason to think actions against them to be immoral. If, on the other hand, simulated actors do constitute some form of representational humanity then they are deserving of respect. This later argument is one which is difficult to find an answer to, as it depends on how we should frame “humanity”. As Kant’s formulation—which is known as the Formula of Humanity (FH)—states, ‘so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means’.⁵⁶ Notice that it is *humanity* which we need to treat with respect, rather than individual humans. Johnson and Cureton note that, ‘it is not human beings *per se* but the “humanity” in human beings that we must treat as an end in itself’.⁵⁷ Does this mean there could be a humanity imbued in simulated video game characters, which is beyond just a collection of electronic pixels?

⁵⁴ McCormick, ‘Is it wrong to play violent video games?’, p. 282.

⁵⁵ McCormick goes on to address the ethical concerns of playing a game against human controlled opponents.

⁵⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics*, (trans. Mary Gregor), p. 38.

⁵⁷ Robert Johnson and Adam Cureton, ‘Kant’s moral philosophy’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2017 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/kant-moral/> accessed 4 July 2017.

Defining what makes us all human, or what traits represent “humanity” again is difficult. Johnson and Cureton state that, ‘our “humanity” is that collection of features that makes us distinctively human, and these include capacities to engage in self-directed rational behaviour and to adopt and pursue our own ends, and any other rational capacities necessarily connected with these’.⁵⁸ Judging by these criteria, computer simulated representations of humans fail to have this test of *humanity*. Humanity requires rationality, a sense of self-direction and autonomy; it is this autonomy we must respect as an end in others. Simulated humans on the other hand have no autonomous direction, they are programmed to react in a certain way to a certain stimulus. It appears then, by killing these simulations, no matter how life-like their representation, we cannot be breaching the formula of humanity, or the categorical imperative. Pleasure taken in these acts of simulated killing can also not be considered necessarily false, on the formulation of false pleasure of immorality, as the action is not in itself immoral.

A conclusion, such as the one reached here, appears to place video games or any simulated reality into a kind of moral vacuum, where seemingly, because no *real* people are hurt, anything is morally permissible. This might be an uncomfortable conclusion for those who wish to say that there are certain moral lines which should not be crossed even in simulation and as we have discussed, virtual rape or paedophilia might fall into this category. Some might still wish to argue that acts such as these are wrong in and of themselves. They might wish to argue that taking pleasure in simulated rape or paedophilia is still somehow, in the Kantian sense, not treating humanity as an end, but merely as a means to personal satisfaction or gratification. However, for this

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

argument to succeed, one must convincingly show that the treatment of simulated actors can be immoral in and of itself.

There is another option available to those who wish to argue for the immorality of violent video games, that is to argue that the immorality shown on screen has a negative or detrimental impact on the player. As stated there are two arguments which depend on the effect on the player, the *emulation* and the *moral character* arguments. In these cases, then, taking pleasure in immoral actions in games is wrong because there is a negative consequence for the player. We have examined the first of these arguments when discussing the consequentialist moral view. This argument claimed that immoral games are wrong because they influence the player to emulate what they have seen and played, and so lead to further pain in the real world. The second argument, also focuses on the effect on the player, but differs slightly; it claims that taking pleasure in these games is wrong because of the effect on the *moral character* of the one playing. On an Aristotelean view, this detrimental effect on one's character might even stand in the way of living a eudaimonic, or happy life. If we find reason to think that this is the case, then there might also be reason to say that taking pleasure in immoral games is a false pleasure, as it prevents us from living the good life. McCormick argues that this might be one of the most effective moral arguments against violent video games. Rather than focussing on whether these games cause the player to go out and commit further harm in the world, this argument focusses on the moral condition of the player. Committing immoral acts, even in simulation, impacts our virtuous character. McCormick states, 'by engaging in such activities, you do harm to yourself in that you erode your virtue, and you distance yourself from your goal of eudaimonia'.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ McCormick, 'Is it wrong to play violent video games?', p. 285.

On Aristotle's view, virtue is something which we cultivate over time, it is not something which necessarily comes naturally or easily. To live the virtuous life is to live as a rational animal, to act in a way that we overcome our base desires. Aristotle held that (as with any other type of craft) the virtues were something which needed to be honed and trained over time. We are not born with a fully formed understanding of virtuous or moral behaviour, rather, through experience, we shape our character. If morality is not just *a priori*, then it must hold that our experience influences or shapes our moral understanding. The virtuous one is shaped by making virtuous decisions and choices, while the un-virtuous is shaped by their immoral behaviour. The virtuous life is the highest life for which to aim, only the pursuit of virtue can allow us to live a eudaimonic life; only virtue can bring us happiness.

On this view, anything which impedes our pursuit of virtue also impedes us living a properly happy life. If the playing and enjoyment of immoral actions within a game negatively impacts our pursuit of virtue, then it also impedes our ability to live a happy life. On this reading, certain forms of immorality or immoral acts—even if only simulated—can be argued to take away from the good life. If this is the case, then the pleasure taken in certain simulated immorality can be argued to be a false pleasure. On this view, the pleasure might appear to be adding something to our lives, i.e. the value of enjoyment, but it is also eroding our virtuous nature and in doing so is preventing us from becoming or being something greater.

There are a couple of concerns here, firstly, if this applies to the enjoyment of immorality in video games should it not also apply to other media forms? Is taking pleasure in the scene of a film in which the bad guy is thrown off a roof to his death, or blown up in a large explosion, any different to what is featured in a video game? It seems that if pleasure in immorality in a video game can impact on the virtuous

character, then it must also hold that similar pleasure in immorality from a film, television show, radio broadcast or novel can have just as negative an impact. To form a truly virtuous character, perhaps we have to forgo any and all media forms that have the potential to undermine or erode this character.

Another argument from Aristotle we have already discussed, is that some immoral pleasures are only pleasurable to the vicious person, as opposed to the virtuous person. They appear to be pleasures to these people, but only because they are, in a way, deluded to think that these are truly pleasurable. It might be the case, that the pleasure found in simulated rape or paedophilia, for example, is not a pleasure at all, rather it only appears to be for the vicious person. In this case, any pleasure taken in these simulated acts should be considered false. They should be seen more as a symptom of delusion than being actually pleasurable.

Here, we should also ask whether the pleasure of simulated rape or paedophilia is actually cultivated, or whether it is more of an outlet for those already disposed to this kind of action. It seems unlikely that for someone who does not find the idea of rape or paedophilia pleasurable—simulated or otherwise—that playing a game of simulated rape or paedophilia would make them enjoy these actions any more. That is, it seems unlikely that just by playing a game they would come to enjoy these acts even if they were only simulated. Those who do find pleasure in these acts, it seems, must already be disposed to finding this kind of immorality pleasurable. I argue that it is only *by finding pleasure* in these acts that one's virtuous character can be negatively impacted, not just by playing the game itself.

Conclusion

To judge the pleasure taken in certain video games as being false, one must show that that they are sufficiently immoral. If we take the utilitarian and Kantian view of

morality, there appears to be little way to argue that simulated violence or immorality can be in itself immoral. They both need to show that playing these games directly leads to further pain or breaching of one's duty in the real world or to real world agents. An Aristotelean attack on the pleasure found in immorality in certain video games does appear to be more successful. However, it must be shown whether this attack can be limited to only immorality in video games, or whether it effects all forms of media. As this section has discussed there is a moral dilemma between allowing simulated violence, but not allowing simulated rape or paedophilia. If we wish to allow the former but not the latter there should be valid moral reasons for this decision.

This chapter has argued that taking pleasure in immorality—however one defines immorality—is cause for this pleasure to be considered false. There is, I believe, sufficient support to show that media objects such as video games do not exist in a moral vacuum. There are certain scenarios and actions which—morally speaking—should not have pleasure taken in them and should not be the basis for video games. As mentioned, rape and paedophilia fall into this category. If this is the case then there is a case to be made that some video games act as *false immoral pleasures*. However, drawing a line between what is morally acceptable in a video game and what is not becomes difficult.

The arguments regarding violence and immorality in media are not new. Concerns have long been raised regarding the negative effects film, television, and radio might have on the moral character of their audience. Whether or not these arguments succeed is the topic for the following chapter. This chapter will give a brief history of moral panics surrounding new communication technologies, to understand how these arguments have developed. It will also focus on twentieth century mass

media and communication, analysing arguments for why certain media forms might be considered *false pleasures*.

Chapter 7 – The Frankfurt School on the Culture Industry: Mass Media as False Pleasure

In this chapter, we shall change direction. This work so far has been concerned with the relationship of the individual to false pleasure as a problem of moral psychology. This chapter turns away from moral psychology and toward the political implications of false pleasure in the modern age. To accomplish this, we will focus on the pleasures that are the products of modern mass communication, culture and media. Critical questions have been asked by cultural theorists regarding the pleasures of entertainment and leisure—the same issues being explored here with respect to video games—and whether they might be corrupting, mistaken or exploitative. This chapter will analyse critiques of mass media as a cultural phenomenon, taken from Frankfurt School authors such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse; whom I take to be some of the major figures of twentieth century cultural criticism.

In this chapter, we shall draw out the connections between the Frankfurt School and philosophical debates about false pleasure. In doing so we will consider the following questions:

- What is the Frankfurt School critique of modern culture?
- Are the Frankfurt School talking about false pleasure in the sense discussed in this thesis?
- If they are talking about false pleasure in the relevant sense, does their approach provide further insight into the concept of false pleasure? Does it provide a distinct and different analysis?

The purpose of this chapter then is to determine the extent to which the Frankfurt School analysis is necessary for a study of false pleasure in the modern world.

The Frankfurt School's concern regarding mass media is *political* in nature: the thought is that mass media systematically *misleads* individuals into making mistakes regarding pleasure, and that these mistakes serve a political and social function. These authors are important as they are often drawn upon in cultural critiques concerning the political function of pleasure in capitalist society. Their views are also important as some see video games and other products of mass culture, as manipulating pleasure for capitalist gains.

In exploring the relationship between the idea of false pleasure and the Frankfurt School we need first to acknowledge methodological difficulties that the Frankfurt School as an intellectual movement presents for our present purposes. Firstly, an analysis of the thoughts of these authors requires a change in language and emphasis from what has so far preceded in this thesis. This will be done to facilitate the arguments regarding the possible undue influence of pleasure from modern culture and mass media objects. Secondly, it must be acknowledged that the Frankfurt School is a broad group with similar interests rather than presenting one unified theory. Thirdly, much of these theorists focus is political rather than with moral psychology. They claim (a) that false pleasures of the modern capitalist world are deliberately and systematically produced and, (b) that their production serves a function for the maintenance of the capitalist system itself.

In response to these difficulties I will argue that the Frankfurt School critique of modern culture can be accommodated within the proposed taxonomy of false pleasure. However, it should be noted they do not use the language of false pleasure used so far in this work. By filtering the Frankfurt School theorists through the lens

false pleasure the proceeding analysis does not do a disservice to their ideas. Though the language these theorists use to address the problems of pleasure might be different, I argue they have similar concerns to those of Plato and Aristotle so far covered in this thesis. The major difference which will be recognised is the Frankfurt School's focus on the *political* or *social* function of false pleasure in capitalist society.

Secondly in response to the general disparate nature of their work, I shall focus on three key thinkers namely Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer and pick out three theses in their work relevant to the idea of false pleasure, these are:

- 1) Marcuse's notion of *false needs*: in which false anticipatory beliefs of pleasure are created by mass media;
- 2) Adorno's notion creation of *belief in pseudo-realities*: where mass media is seen to propagate false beliefs about social reality; and,
- 3) Adorno and Horkheimer's idea of *manipulation* and *anti-enlightenment*; where pleasure from mass media is seen to both control and limit the potential for enlightened thought and pursuit of the good life.

These three points will be linked to the categories of false pleasure: *false needs* and *belief in pseudo-realities* will be connected to the category of *false pleasure of belief*; while *manipulation* and *anti-enlightenment* will be linked with *false alien pleasures* and *false pleasure of negative consequence*.

Thirdly, we shall accept that the focus of the Frankfurt School is different from that of this thesis and therefore the critical questions about video games that the tradition asks are distinct from those we have thus far explored. The two key questions to be addressed are firstly whether or not the Frankfurt School theorists provide new or

distinct reasons to question the nature of pleasure; and secondly whether or not the political context they provide gives new reason to reject video games as false pleasures.

In the following sections, it will be argued firstly that conceptions of false pleasure can be teased out of the Frankfurt School theorists and accommodated within the taxonomy of false pleasure proposed. Secondly, it will be argued that their fundamental political focus raises different issues about false pleasure and video games, namely concerning whether the systematic production of video games which sometimes involve false pleasure, provides a different reason for rejecting video games. This is not necessarily a question of moral psychology—of whether we are making a mistake pursuing certain pleasure—but rather if these games are systematically produced with the aim of using false pleasures to exploit players and if this must mean that they should be rejected.

Before coming to the Frankfurt School critique, we will first examine a brief overview of the kinds of criticisms that have stemmed from advances in communication technologies over time. As we will see, new technologies have often been cause for concern— and even moral panic—regarding the corrupting influence they might have on an unsuspecting public. Similarities between these critiques and modern day criticisms of objects such as video games will be drawn. This does not provide in itself a refutation of these modern criticisms, but merely aims to show how such criticisms have developed and changed over time.

7.1 Brief History of Media Criticisms

From the end of the nineteenth-century the advancement of technologies for communication lead to a rapid rise and spread of new media and cultural forms. Along with these advances has come a genuine change in the way in which societies and individual's act and interact with one another, and how they interact with technology,

media and culture. With each new advance invariably come concerned arguments or fears about the effect it will have on an individual's way of life, in particular on the development of youth in society.

Fear over the effects of media, culture and communication are not unique to the modern age. In his work the *Phaedrus* Plato writes that Socrates was wary of writing itself, for fear that students who used writing would cease to use their memory. According to Socrates, this meant students would only have the appearance of wisdom rather than obtaining true wisdom.¹ The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw concern over the number of books being published; indeed historian Ann Blair quotes two such reservations.² In 1545 Swiss bibliographer Conrad Gesner complained there was a 'confusing and harmful abundance of books', while in 1685 French critic Adrien Baillet warned:

We have reason to fear that the multitude of books which grows everyday in a prodigious fashion will make the following centuries fall into a state as barbarous as that of the centuries that followed the fall of the Roman empire.'³

The sheer number of books enabled by the printing press meant that, for some, quantity overtook quality. Blair suggests these writers worried about 'information overload'. The French critic Baileet continued that this danger needed to be prevented by 'separating those books which we must throw out or leave in oblivion from those one should save and within the latter between what is useful and what is not'.⁴ He argued

¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275a.

² Blair Ann, 'Reading strategies for coping with information overload, ca. 1550-1700', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no.1, 2003, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

there needed to be judgement regarding what was worthy of being read and what was not.

The spread of books over the coming centuries continued, in some circles, to be a cause for trepidation. The rise in popularity of the novel in the eighteenth century was blamed by some for the increasing ills of society. English essayist Vicesimus Knox in 1779 wrote,

... if it is true, that the present age is more corrupt than the preceding, the great multiplication of Novels probably contributes to its degeneracy. Fifty years ago, there was scarcely a Novel in the kingdom.⁵

Knox took issue with works of fiction and he was not alone in his time with respect to this concern. Patrick Brantlinger, in his book on the threat of literacy in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, quotes poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge as saying, 'Where the reading of novels prevails as a habit ... it occasions in time the entire destruction of the powers of the mind'.⁶ Coleridge continues that the novel,

is such an utter loss to the reader, that it is not so much to be called pass-time as kill-time ... [it] produces no improvement of the intellect, but fills the mind with mawkish and morbid sensibility, which is directly hostile to the cultivation, invigoration, and enlargement of nobler powers.⁷

These criticisms come from Coleridge's lectures, given in the early part of the nineteenth century. It was not until later in the mid-nineteenth century, Brantlinger argues, that the novel gained some legitimacy through the rise in popularity of authors such as Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott. While certain kinds of novels began to gain

⁵ In Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, Bloomington, 1998, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 1–2.

cultural acceptance, other sub-genres such as Gothic romances and ‘penny dreadfuls’ ‘came under attack for rotting the minds of their readers, promoting vice, and subverting cultural standards.’⁸ Novels at the end of the eighteenth century were so maligned that Jane Austen herself felt forced to defend the genre. Brantlinger quotes from her novel *Northanger Abbey* written around 1798-99, ‘... we [novelists] are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried.’⁹

Into the twentieth century new forms of media began to cause great consternation among members of the public. This, again, was due to the perceived undue influence they had on their audience. The advent of cinema, radio, and television each caused debate regarding the impact that they might be having on the public. Ellen Wartella and Nancy Jennings, in an article on the history of moral panic in the twentieth century, outline a range of arguments given during the 1920s and 1930s against new media forms.¹⁰ The advent of film in the early 1900s brought forth a critical reaction from some sections of society, Wartella and Jennings noted that ‘opponents soon labelled movies as immoral for exposing children to scenes of violence and debauchery. They argued that movies were the cause of crime, delinquency and sexual misconduct among teens’.¹¹ Critics called for the censorship and restriction of distribution of films to protect the morality of their children. It was claimed that the young people viewing these films did not have the experience or fortitude to ‘weigh the real from the unreal, the usual from the occasional’.¹²

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

¹⁰ Ellen Wartella and Nancy Jennings, ‘Children and computers: New technology—old concerns’, *Children and Computer Technology*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2000, p. 31–43.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 32.

¹² *Ibid.*

When radio became a popular form of home entertainment in the 1920s and 1930s fresh concerns were raised. A study from 1936 entitled 'Children and radio programs' summed up these anxieties,

this new invader of the privacy of the home has brought many a disturbing influence in its wake. Parents have become aware of a puzzling change in the behaviour patterns of their children. They are bewildered by a host of new problems, and find themselves unprepared, frightened, resentful, helpless. They cannot lock out this intruder because it has gained an invincible hold of their children.¹³

Radio also came under criticism in the 1930s and 1940s for its broadcast of criminal and violent themes. These broadcasts, it was claimed, were leading to juvenile delinquency and 'providing youngsters with both method and inspiration for criminal acts'.¹⁴

The advent of television in the late 1940s brought the world of moving images and sound from the theatre into many living rooms and with it again came expressions of disconsternation. Not only was there concern regarding content but, Wartella and Jennings point out that, 'opponents voiced concerns about how television might hurt radio, conversation, reading and the patterns of family living and result in the further vulgarisation of American culture'.¹⁵ This time television was to blame for causing juvenile delinquency and misbehaviour. Its content was also criticised as being culturally non-existent providing no service to education and having a damaging influence on politics.¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of arcade machines and video games, and again concerns were expressed for the individuals using them. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, in 1981 a UK member of parliament accused arcade machines of causing children to steal from their parents, to ‘miss school and to give up other normal activity’ stating they ‘become crazed, with eyes glazed, oblivious to everything around them as they play the machines’.¹⁷

As we can see, common to many apprehensions over new cultural or media forms are, firstly, that which is pleasurable can also be harmful and, secondly, that pursuing that which is purely pleasurable is a waste of one’s time. As we have so far considered in this thesis these concerns are essentially arguments of *false pleasure*. It would be too general to say that each of the objections regarding new technologies have the same argumentative content. It is also not useful to say that, because some previous concerns might appear to lack foundation, we should stop critiquing new technologies and media altogether. What is required is a comprehensive analysis of emerging media and culture to understand their production and their attraction.

While it is doubtlessly true that popular culture offers pleasures of many kinds—from novels to film and television to comic books and video games—we have shown there to be many criticisms concerning the nature of pleasure these objects offer. A common theme is that the pleasure experienced is only of a *trivial* nature, gained at the overall detriment of those who enjoy them. While, as we have seen, criticisms abound regarding new forms of media, few give clear or reasoned arguments for why we should take this critical viewpoint. To examine whether the pleasure from such media should be considered false, we turn now to the arguments presented by the

¹⁷ United Kingdom, House of Commons, ‘Control of space invaders and other electronic games’, *Debates*, 20 May 1981, vol. 5, col. 287–291.

critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. We do this because they present one of the most comprehensive philosophical attacks on modern culture and have influenced many of the ideas in this area since their time of writing.

7.2. Background to the Frankfurt School

One reason it is important to consider the ideas presented by Frankfurt School theorists, is that their critique questions the pleasures that mass media and mass culture provide. Not only this, and perhaps even more importantly, their ideas have been influential in subsequent critical analysis of mass culture by philosophers, cultural analysts, and media theorists. What must be kept in consideration when examining the ideas from this school are both the time and age they are writing and their essentially Marxist background. These factors colour the ideas and opinions of these writers. It will be our job here to try, as much as it is possible, to disentangle the moral and philosophical arguments and to apply them to modern mass popular culture. Our job is also to examine the extent which the Frankfurt School's critiques link to the notion of *false pleasure* provided so far in this thesis.

While not the first, nor for that matter the last, writers to critique the culture of their day, the Frankfurt School's positioning in time and the breadth of their critiques is unique. They were writing at a time of major change in global politics, living through the rise of Nazism and Fascism, a time when totalitarian regimes came to power and commanded complete control over their citizens. Alongside these political upheavals were major changes to the nature and spread of culture in many parts of the world. Television and radio lead to new forms of culture and offered new ways of connecting nations, societies and cultures together. These new forms of communication—for all their advantages and the enjoyment they provided— did not come without concerns according to theorists such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse. What they discerned

was not only the capability to spread of information on a mass scale, but also the possibility of *manipulation* on a mass scale.

Their fear was essentially two-fold: firstly, there was the concern over what information was being disseminated through these media and who controlled this spread; secondly, there was the concern over the enjoyment mass media provided. The latter concern was focused on whether this type of enjoyment could have the effect of creating a passive mass audience, uncritically accepting what was put before them as a by-product of their enjoyment. The fear here essentially concerned the power of these media for manipulation. Intellectual manipulation of the information people were receiving, and; manipulation of action—what to consume and when. Both of these had a perceived effect individuals power for critical and free thinking.

The idea that pleasure can be a socially controlling force is not one that has been confined to the products of the modern age. The Roman author Juvenal famously said of the Roman people in 100 A.D. that their most important desires had been curtailed, replaced by hope for two things, ‘bread and circuses’. Juvenal’s lament was that his people no longer cared for their given right to partake in something of pivotal importance such as politics, as long as they had the distraction of simple pleasures. The pleasures gained from bread and circuses were enough to keep the people happy and, more importantly, to keep them in a passive state in which they would be less likely to revolt or care about negative practices carried out by the state.

The Frankfurt School theorists believe a similar strategy is in place in modern society, with mass culture replacing both bread and circus. If people are satisfactorily entertained in their leisure time, these theorists believe, they are less likely to think for themselves or protest against the ruling powers. While there is little doubt that things

such as bread and circuses bring pleasure, the worry is that this comes at the expense of greater societal liberties.

One result of mass media, as the Frankfurt School saw it, was that cultural forms could be consumed in more places and by more people than ever before. With an increase in media outlets came an increased demand for content. For these theorists, culture soon became something to be *manufactured*, just as a physical commodity is produced, on a production line. Adorno and Horkheimer called this mass production the ‘culture industry’ and further discussed its effects in terms of ‘mass deception’.¹⁸ Similarly, Marcuse saw a ‘one dimensionality’ to the character of popular culture, since it left little room for differences of interpretation, nor any room for free thought.¹⁹ On these theorists’ view, individual’s leisure time was being consumed entirely by mass culture; they were being saved the strain of thinking for themselves and were entertained enough to be kept passive. The culture industry is regarded here as an agent of manipulation. By manipulating what and how people think, it begins to cause illusions about the reality of the way the world is, how it should be and the way we should act and operate within it.

The question remains how does the culture industry exert such manipulation? And, how accurate is this Frankfurt School critique? To attempt to answer these questions, the role of pleasure as it relates to manipulation will be assessed. In doing so we will analyse three arguments. Firstly, Marcuse’s argument concerning *false needs*; secondly, Adorno’s notion of a created *pseudo-reality* and; thirdly Adorno and Horkheimer’s *anti-enlightenment* argument. We will first turn to Marcuse.

¹⁸ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford, 2002, p. 94.

¹⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, London, 1972.

7.3. False Needs

The first argument to examine is that of Marcuse's idea of *false needs*. Marcuse argues that false needs lead in individual to mistakenly believe in the importance of certain cultural objects. He distinguishes the *vital* or *essential* needs of an individual from those needs that are imposed on an individual by their society. Marcuse claims, 'the only needs that have an unqualified claim for satisfaction are the vital ones – nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture'.²⁰ However, he argues that societies create other needs that can sometimes conflict with these essential needs. When this occurs, these other needs are thought by Marcuse to be 'false needs'. False needs are those which are unnecessary in that they do not contribute to, or might even take away from, our essential needs. In his analysis of critical theory, Douglas Kellner argues that for Marcuse false needs are,

... artificial and heteronomous: imposed upon the individual from outside by manipulative vested interests ... although these needs and their satisfaction provide momentary pleasure, they perpetuate a system whose continuation impedes the fulfilment of individual and social needs and potentials.²¹

Marcuse regards false needs as a consequence of consumerism; they are needs which are created for certain objects or products. He argues that we, the consumer, even begin to see our identity in the objects we buy; that is, we regard the satisfaction of these false needs as being *essential to who we are*. Marcuse claims that 'the people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, kitchen equipment'.²² It seems obvious to Marcuse that consumerism and

²⁰ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 19.

²¹ Douglas Kellner, 'Critical theory, commodities and the consumer society', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1983, p. 68.

²² Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 22.

the desire for false needs, is guided by mass media, by advertisements on television, radio and in magazines that stir our longing for certain consumer objects.²³ Marcuse claims that ‘the most prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs’.²⁴ Many of these objects are not essential to our lives, but from what we see, hear and read we desire them as if they are.

Political philosopher Frank Cunningham says of these so-called false needs that ‘some of a society’s members are conditioned to have aspirations which can be satisfied within the system, even though the result is what someone with alternative aspirations will regard as a drone-like or unnecessarily arduous existence’.²⁵ The difficulty with the system as it is—that is, the pervasive and controlling state of mass media and the culture industry—is that once individuals are embedded in the system it is very hard to see it as manipulating, because their thought becomes the thought of the system. Because it provides so many opportunities for pleasure, and so many objects for consumption, the system becomes very comfortable for those within it. There is no reason to think ill of it, this is the way the world is and should be—this is what Marcuse considers to be the *false consciousness* of modern society.

The notion of false consciousness is one which is developed from Marxist theory. Marcuse states ‘the products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood.’²⁶ This indoctrination becomes a way of life. Marcuse continues ‘it is a good way of life – much better than before – and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change’.²⁷ In this system we feel

²³ We can now include advertisements on the internet to this list.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 19.

²⁵ Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 238.

²⁶ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p. 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

as if we are free. We feel we have free choice and free will, however on Marcuse's view, we only have the freedom to choose what the system provides. This impacts on our experience of pleasure, as our idea of pleasure is determined by the system and is, in this way, somewhat coerced. We feel pleasure by satisfying the desires for consumption that have been created in us.

It is not only that these false needs are unnecessary for an individual to pursue, but moreover their pursuit, in general, perpetuates a larger societal problem. Even though there are pleasures to be had in these objects, Marcuse thinks that this pleasure should not be protected if it means that individuals cannot see the problems of society; or if they cannot work toward fixing them. If there is a choice that must be made between the comfortable pleasures of the many, and the overhaul of society so that it no longer exploits and so that it can provide freedom for all, then the choice for Marcuse must be the latter.

On the Marcuse's view marketers and advertisers both create and target our desire for false needs and the beliefs we have regarding how we fit into our world and surroundings. Our beliefs, hopes and fantasies are played upon and we are sold not only the product but the idea of what this product will bring. We can accommodate Marcuse's view of false needs as a *political* expression of the taxonomy of false pleasure. It is an example of both *false anticipatory pleasure* and *false overestimation of future pleasure*. The category of *false anticipatory pleasure* involves the idea that if pleasure is based on something which will not be a reality in the future, then this is a form of false pleasure. *False overestimation of future pleasure* is the notion that even if a future pleasure is realised it can be false if expectation does not align with reality.

If Marcuse's view of false needs is correct, then the pleasure dependent on these needs must be considered *as false as* the needs themselves. As we saw in our discussion

of the category of *false pleasures of belief*, there are a number of ways in which our belief in something can cause it to become a false pleasure. In the anticipatory sense, we can have an expectation that a future event or object will bring us pleasure and fulfil our desire. If this event or object *does not* occur, then falsity of pleasure occurs on the side of the *subject*. If this event or object *does* occur, but does not bring with it the pleasure expected, then falsity occurs on the side of the *object* and can be considered a *false overestimation of future pleasure*. Although he does not use the term *false pleasure*, from Marcuse's account of false needs and desires, it is possible to conclude that in certain cases objects of the culture industry should be considered as what we have referred to as *false pleasures*. Marcuse's idea of false needs can be accommodated in the taxonomy of false pleasure, the idea of false belief is one we have encountered before. However, Marcuse's view does add something new to the debate of false pleasure. It points towards the political implications of false pleasure, namely that false desires can be created for the purpose of generating profit. Mass media, for Marcuse, systematically misleads people into making mistakes regarding the pleasures they pursue and these mistakes serve a political function.

7.4. Use Value and Exchange Value

Before addressing the next argument of Adorno's, regarding *pseudo-realities*, I feel it is important to give some context to the arguments we are considering. One of the problems with mass society for the Frankfurt School, as we have seen, is its focus on the production of unnecessary or *false* needs. One of the reasons widespread falsity of belief happens, according to the Adorno, is that there is confusion between the Marxist notions of an objects 'exchange-value' and 'use-value'.²⁸

²⁸ Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 73.

We might view certain cultural objects as being valuable, not because of something inherent to them or how useful they are to us, but rather because of their value to others around us. The social theorist Simon Jarvis states ‘the fetishism of commodities causes a relation between people to appear in the form of a property of a thing, expressed as its exchange value’.²⁹ Exchange-value is an aspect of a commodity that dictates its value between people, this is contrasted with ‘use-value’ which is how good the commodity is at satisfying necessary human wants or, what Marcuse sees as, vital needs. The problem can occur when people mistake the exchange-value for the use-value—the value of these objects increases through society—and because they are valuable people see them as being essential or at least as being worthy of pursuit.

Adorno and Horkheimer suggest the exchange-value of the culture industry becomes the only standard by which people measure a thing’s value. They claim that,

everything has value only in so far as it can be exchanged, not in so far as it is something in itself. For consumers, the use value of art, its essence, is a fetish, and the fetish – the social valuation which they mistake for the merit of works of art – becomes its only use value, the only quality they enjoy.³⁰

According to Adorno something such as art is not characterised by its essence, something in and of itself, but rather its value only comes from how much it is worth to someone else (that is, its exchange value). The exchange-value increases for its own sake, rather than for any qualities of the object itself. Jarvis notes that ‘the actual qualities of the cultural product – the structural form of a musical work, for example – are of less and less relevance to its consumption the more consumption comes to be

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Fetishism here refers to the obsession or worship of certain objects.

³⁰ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 128.

focused on exchange-value'.³¹ The problem for Adorno and Horkheimer is that objects of the culture industry are given their value, not through characteristics of the objects themselves, but by their relation between consumers. With this in mind, we will return to Adorno's argument regarding *pseudo-reality*.

7.5. The Creation of Belief and Pseudo-Realities

If Marcuse's notion of *false needs* is correct, then it demonstrates the power of mass society and the culture industry to create beliefs regarding the nature of the world around us. We have seen that false needs primarily concern *anticipatory pleasure*, they create a desire for an object we think will bring us pleasure. However, this desire can cause us to falsely *overestimate a future pleasure* leading us to mistakenly desire and pursue objects of pleasure. Marcuse's idea of false needs can be problematic as they can create false beliefs about the future. Adorno argues further that while the culture industry can also create false beliefs about the present and create a kind of manufactured *pseudo-reality*.

According to Adorno one of the troubling powers of mass communication, is its power to create views of the world which people—in lieu of experience and in contradiction with their own lived experience—take for reality. Adorno, in his essay 'How to Look at Television', claims that 'the repetitiveness, the selfsameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tends to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance.'³² On Adorno's view, the culture industry takes away individual's abilities to think for themselves. Mass media, in particular television, he feared had tremendous power to shape the way we view reality, moreover it can create false versions of the good life and the ideals towards which we should aim.

³¹ Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, p. 73.

³² Theodor Adorno, 'How to look at television', *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1954, p. 216.

One of the ways in which the culture industry shapes people's views is through the use of stereotypes. Adorno believes stereotypes are often necessary in media such as television due to the constraints of time given to present a story and the short time in which to write them. The problem, however, is their *functional* effects in mass culture. The use of stereotypes can become *reified*, meaning they begin to take on real traits in the minds of the people.³³ Adorno claims,

... the more stereotypes become reified and rigid in the present setup of the culture industry, the less people are likely to change their preconceived ideas with the progress of their experience.³⁴

This is one of the main concerns with the culture industry and with mass media, according to Adorno—the more it presents certain stereotypes, the more the audience believe these stereotypes to be reflections of reality and the harder it becomes to change these views. For Adorno, people's preconceived ideas are informed by these stereotypes and this informs their experience, rather than their experience informing or acting as a basis for their ideas.

For Adorno, some stereotyped messages sent through mass media might be legitimate, such as those targeted at 'the weak spots in the mentality of large sectors of the population' through moral messages.³⁵ The only specific message he mentions here is that 'one should not chase after rainbows'; general moral messages of this kind might have a legitimate role. However, he argues that these messages are overshadowed by

³³ The term *Reification* is attributed to Marxist theory, but came to prominence through Georg Lukács *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*. Reification refers to the idea that through human activity, labour or thought comes something which is given objective and independent existence. In particular, social relations are given objective existence as if they were facts of nature, rather than mere human invention. The term is related to use-value and exchange-value, as we have seen an object's exchange value is often taken as being a trait inherent to the object itself, rather than as something created by the society the object is found.

³⁴ Adorno, 'How to look at television', p. 229.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 230.

the phenomenon of ‘inducing people to mechanical simplification by ways of distorting the world in such a way that it seems to fit into pre-established pigeonholes’.³⁶

Moreover, for Adorno, this pseudo-reality that the culture industry presents can be mistaken for being what we should consider as the good life. He writes,

Culture cannot represent either that which merely exists or the conventional and no longer binding categories of order which the culture industry drapes over the ideas of the good life as if existing reality were the good life.³⁷

Adorno considers that what the culture industry presents as the norm, is what this industry wants us as consumers to see as the good life. Adorno argues that ‘the power of the culture industry’s ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness’.³⁸ What the culture industry presents as the good life, for Adorno, is a type of false reality. On Adorno’s view the culture industry equates good life with consumption and one is led to believe that to live and be happy necessarily requires products produced by this very industry.

Adorno, considers that what is presented by mass media is not a genuine view of the good life. He claims,

...the concoctions of the culture industry are neither guides for a blissful life, nor a new art of moral responsibility, but rather exhortations to toe the line, behind which stand the most powerful interests.³⁹

For both Adorno and Marcuse, the culture industry, by creating *false needs* and *pseudo-realities*, ensures that individuals can be satisfied but only by desiring and living in

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 104.

³⁸ Adorno, ‘The schema of mass culture’, in *The Culture Industry*, p. 104.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

accordance with the system this industry provides. Of interest for this thesis is the consideration that pleasure can be based on these false beliefs that Adorno and Marcuse accuse the culture industry of creating.

The idea of the creation of a *pseudo-reality* can be located in our taxonomy, under the category of *false pleasure of belief*. This idea of pseudo-reality can only be considered if we take pleasure in or expect to take pleasure in these beliefs. If it is the case that the culture industry creates a false vision of the good life and we aim towards it, it must be because we expect to take pleasure in this vision. If we discover that this is not the good life as we expected it to be, then we can say that this is a type of *false anticipatory pleasure*. This is a false pleasure in the future sense, however, we have seen that on Adorno's view false beliefs can be created by the culture industry regarding the present sense or the way the world is around us. If this is the case, and we depend on this false belief as a source of pleasure, then this can be considered a *false pleasure of present belief*. Again, we can see that this false pleasure can be accommodated within our pre-existing taxonomy. The further point we must take into consideration is that, similar to Marcuse, Adorno thinks that the culture industry purposely creates *false beliefs* about the way the world is and the good life, to serve a political purpose. If this is the case then it shows a further implication for the nature of *false pleasure* that this thesis has not covered before. While, I argue that Adorno does not provide a distinct notion of *false pleasure*, and his ideas can be accommodated by the taxonomy provide by this thesis. The political considerations do provide a different form of analysis of *false pleasure*.

7.6. Manipulation, Control and Anti-Enlightenment

The third argument we will address, comes from the writing of Adorno and his collaboration with Max Horkheimer. This argument continues on from the previous

two arguments, that the culture industry can manipulate and control its audience; but adds that the culture industry can also act as an impediment to the good life or *enlightenment*.

Adorno claims that the reason we should be concerned with the culture industry is so that we are able to ‘face psychological mechanisms operating on various levels in order not to become blind and passive victims’.⁴⁰ Adorno’s worry is that some forms of the culture industry create a state of unthinking in individuals, where freedom and critical thinking are subsumed by stereotyped views and ideas. As Adorno and Horkheimer claim ‘the whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry’.⁴¹ These are ideas we have already considered. Further to these ideas though, Adorno considers the culture industry to be ‘anti-enlightenment’. He claims,

... the total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment ...
It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves.⁴²

On Adorno’s argument, individuals can become unable to think for themselves regarding what the good life is or what it should look like. Instead as Adorno and Horkheimer claim they are fed the world through the filter of the culture industry, which purports to show that the world as it is (or as the culture industry itself presents it) is the good life.⁴³

As we have seen, Adorno thinks that the repetitiveness and self-sameness of mass culture makes for ‘automatized reactions’ and serves to weaken individual reactions’.⁴⁴ He also thinks that by the culture industry ‘dumbing’ down some of its

⁴⁰ Adorno, ‘How to look at television’, p. 235.

⁴¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 99.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 106.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 99.

⁴⁴ Adorno, ‘How to look at television’, p. 216.

content in order to appeal ‘to the level of eleven-year-olds’ that this negatively affects its audience. Adorno claims that the culture industry would like to turn all adults into ‘eleven-year-olds’.⁴⁵ This is the notion of “regression”, or the “regressive effect” of the culture industry.

He states that the repetitive nature of the products of the culture industry ‘incessantly drills the same formulas on behaviour’ and that this has a gradual wearing effect on the audience like ‘steady drops [that] hollow the stone’.⁴⁶ Repetition serves to hammer home certain messages about the way the world is and this repetition serves to convince the audience of a certain view of the world. Through this process of repetition Adorno claims that the culture industry, at its core, is ‘anti-enlightenment’; that the audience *en masse* is been kept in a constant state of repression.

The culture industry for Adorno, creates needs and desires in people; ones it constantly repeats. However, these desires are not based on genuinely improving social situations, or improving autonomous thinking. Because of the watered-down content of mass media, true self-realisation and emancipation is not possible. According to Adorno, the culture industry, while seemingly showing avenues to the good life, can in actuality, do no such thing. He claims,

... in so far as the culture industry arouses a feeling of well-being that the world is precisely in that order suggested by the culture industry, the substitute gratification which it prepares for human beings cheats them out of the same happiness which it deceitfully projects’.⁴⁷

The culture industry projects a vision of the good life and presents it as attainable for all; however, in as far as this life is at all possible, it might only be realised by a certain

⁴⁵ Theodor Adorno, ‘Culture industry reconsidered’, in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, J. M. Bernstein (ed.) London, 2001, p. 104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 105.

fortunate few. On Adorno's view the culture industry manipulates us as consumers into thinking it can provide us with pleasure and happiness, however this promise might just be an illusion.

If it is indeed the case that the culture industry represents a manipulative force, and that it serves to stand in the way of human flourishing, then it can be considered to fall into the taxonomy of false pleasure. This analysis can fall under the categories of *false alien pleasures*, and *false pleasures of negative consequence*. Regarding false alien pleasures, we have seen that this occurs when a present pleasure stands in the way of a greater further pleasure. If the culture industry does, as Adorno asserts, stand in the way of flourishing (being *anti-enlightenment*), then there is reason to consider this to be a false pleasure. The pleasure attained through mass culture, the pleasure of film or television for instance, cannot be compared to the idealised vision of genuine human autonomy and freedom. If the former stands in the way of the latter, then it might be considered a false form of pleasure.

If it is the case that the culture industry creates regression in its audience then parts of Adorno's critique can also be located within the category of *false pleasure of negative consequence*. If it is the case that the culture industry causes a 'dumbing-down' of its audience, then the initial pleasure taken should be considered a false pleasure. The category of *false pleasure of negative consequence* involves the idea that a pleasure in the present should be considered false if it has a negative impact in the future that outweighs the initial pleasure. If it is the case that the culture industry creates pleasure, but does so in a way that causes a regression in its audience, then certainly the negative consequence should be seen to outweigh the initial pleasure. Consequently, the objects of the culture industry should thus be considered to provide false pleasure.

However, for this to be considered a form of false pleasure it must be shown that this negative consequence does in fact occur.

As we can see the nature of pleasure being considered by Adorno and Horkheimer, that of *manipulation* and *anti-enlightenment*, can again be accommodated into the taxonomy of false pleasure presented in this thesis. The unique position Adorno and Horkheimer take, however, is to consider the political motive for creating false pleasure.

7.7. Does the Frankfurt Critique Succeed?

To begin to address the question of whether this critique succeeds we must look at what the aim of the critical theorists might have been. Kolakowski states that ‘critical theory looks forward to another society [not capitalism] in which men and women will decide their own fate and not be subject to external necessity’.⁴⁸ This is an aim which points toward the future emancipation and happiness of all people, beyond what they perceive as being possible under capitalism. As philosopher Nicholas Smith notes, the critical theorists ‘have at least one thing in common: the hope for a better world’.⁴⁹

Unsurprisingly this critique of the culture industry, while being influential, has itself been heavily criticised. Kolakowski argues that the Frankfurt School’s,

‘critique of culture ... is imbued with nostalgia for the days when the enjoyment of culture was reserved for the élite: it is an attack on the ‘age of the common man’ in a spirit of feudal contempt for the masses’.⁵⁰

Adorno, in particular, has been seen as a defender of a notion of high culture, over the ‘lower’ culture enjoyed by many. While Adorno is criticised for being elitist in his view

⁴⁸ Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, p. 354.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Smith, ‘Hope and critical theory’, *Critical Horizons*, vol.6, no. 1, 2005, p. 45.

⁵⁰ Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, p. 376.

of modern culture, there are still plausible ideas we can take from his discussion of culture that go well beyond the higher and lower pleasure divide.

Adorno and Horkheimer's worry about the culture industry was that it created a commercialisation of cultural products. There might well be some truth to this idea regarding the commercialisation of art in industrial society and of the inferiority of cultural products that depend on the market. It seems an undeniable fact that the coming of mass culture meant an increase in market driven content. The sheer number of cultural outlets in the modern world, and their requirement for content, means that it is impossible for all cultural products to be of genuine value. It is questionable however whether this means that *all* cultural goods which are produced with revenue in mind, and only because of this, necessarily lack any meaning, value or merit. The idea here is that anything which is constructed within the system, and by this trait alone (as if it were a scarlet letter of in-authenticity), must necessarily be reason enough to dismiss it outright.

The critique must also show that the consumption of 'lower' commercial pleasures is indeed an impediment to enlightenment, or that commercial pleasures stand in the way of what can be considered the good life. Enlightenment for Adorno and Horkheimer mean, 'the most general sense of progressive thought ... aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty'.⁵¹ In this way, their criticisms have similarities with the arguments for false pleasure. False pleasure acts as an impediment to flourishing; this is exactly the same concern the Frankfurt School has regarding the culture industry.

The Frankfurt School argue that the enjoyment taken in these objects acts as an impediment to flourishing and enlightenment. If this is the case then, I argue objects of

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 372–373.

the culture industry can be accommodated into the taxonomy of false pleasures. However, it is debatable whether this criticism holds for all to be true. Should we regard all mass entertainment as false pleasure? I am somewhat sceptical about this. It is certain that some of the Frankfurt School criticisms hold up for some content, however it is far too broad to be plausible on a description of all art in the modern world. The Frankfurt School makes some plausible points which correspond to the taxonomy of false pleasure proposed, and these points can be said to hold some of the time. However, objects of modern mass culture should not all be considered all the same, indeed art lives in many forms.

We have seen firstly that Marcuse's notion of false needs created by mass media does correspond with *false pleasures of anticipated belief*; we can say where mass media does create these false needs it should be seen as propagating false pleasure. Secondly, Adorno's notion that mass media creates *false belief* and *pseudo-realities* corresponds to the category of *false pleasure of belief*; if this is the case, and if pleasure is dependent on these beliefs, then again mass media can be seen as a source of false pleasure. Thirdly, Adorno and Horkheimer's idea that mass media can be manipulating or *anti-enlightenment* corresponds to false pleasure of *negative consequence* or of *false alien pleasures*. If mass media creates pleasure which acts in a way to limit, or negatively impact an individual's life, then it should be considered, as per our taxonomy, a false pleasure.

However, it is not clear that these negative effects are in practice in mass media all the time, or can relate to every cultural product created in the modern world. Many types of novels, films, television programs, instead of being impediments to enlightenment or the good life, can add to an audience's knowledge and aid in

developing an understanding of the world around them. These types of entertainment can also add pleasure that cannot be judged to be necessarily false.

As we have seen, there are strong similarities between the ideas of these theorists and the taxonomy of false pleasures proposed. The arguments from these theorists give suggestions to the ways in which false pleasure can be used for the political gain of certain parties over others. By using the arguments presented by these theorists, we can see why we might view certain media forms as providing types of false pleasure and in doing so we can find their critique useful. However, I argue that that it should not be the case that all objects of the culture industry should be *false pleasures*. We can defend certain forms of mass culture against the criticisms of being false pleasure and from the criticisms of the Frankfurt School. We will now return our focus to video games, to find if the Frankfurt School critique gives us new reason to reject them as objects of pleasure.

7.8. Implications of the Frankfurt School Critique for Video Games

As we have seen, Adorno criticised mass media and culture as commodifying art. In the case of video games, they were originally developed purely as commodities, electronic toys and entertainments to be sold off for profit at Christmas time or for birthdays. The industry began this way for the reason that it was very difficult for anyone without large banks of computing equipment to make video games. It was not until personal computers became more common, and people became more curious to experiment with the new technology, that games began to be created independently. It is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint when video games became more than mere toys or amusements. However, it is certain that some games now offer great intellectual depth to their players. With this said, and echoing some of Adorno's sentiments, there are other forms of video game which are purely 'commodity gaming', designed with

the express intent of deriving profits for the producer. Games which follow the ‘free-to-play’ model (these were mentioned in Section 4.6) are indeed such ‘commodity games’. It is understandable that games producers wish to make money, as we discussed in the previous chapter, for this income is necessary for media organisations to continue to produce content for their audiences. However, there are certain forms of games which are morally questionable in the way they extract money from their players.

It is important to judge the argument of whether these game designers, like casino and slot machine designers, have any moral responsibility for what they do. The most obvious defence is that these designers are not *forcing* anyone to play or to spend money, since they are offering an entertainment service for which some people are willing to pay for. The case of these commodity games is slightly different from gambling however, since in the case of gambling there is at least the hope that one will win money; that is, win something tangible. In the case of these games, there is no tangible prize, for playing the game well; all there is, is personal pleasure, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment when one completes the relevant task. To some this might sound irrational, but another way to look at it is that these people pay to experience pleasure, as we would do on a roller-coaster or other fair-ground ride. Of course, it is questionable whether the experience of pleasure provided in these commodity games is proportional to the pleasure provided.

As discussed in Section 4.6, only a small fraction of the players who use ‘free-to-play’ these games spend any money to play; it is these few people who, as with gambling, prop up the entire industry. The argument that what is being provided is a pleasurable experience and that people do not *have* to pay for it, might on some level work, but if it were the case why do these games not cap how much a player can pay? Everyone would still be getting the same experience of pleasure. Indeed, it seems

certain that the person who pays \$600 in a game, over the person who pays \$1, is not getting 600 times the pleasure nor an experience which is 600 times greater in worth. Even if the person can afford it one would expect that the pleasurable experience needs to be proportional to the value they have paid. This takes us back to the Frankfurt School critique of exchange value production. People often confuse the ultimate value or worth of something with its exchange value because they see it in terms of what someone is willing to pay, rather than the object itself. In terms of commodity games, simply because someone is willing to spend \$600 on an experience, does not mean that that is what that experience is worth, nor does it mean that we should be letting or encouraging people pay that much. It also speaks to the concept of ‘commodity fetishism’, people begin to in a way worship these experiences so that they are willing to pay as much as they see necessary.

One serious problem is that the use-value of these games—which concerns how good it they are satisfying our human wants—is conflated with its exchange value (that is how much we are willing to pay). The use-value these games are satisfying is our desire for pleasure and satisfaction, however, we must question how well these games are satisfying these desires, proportional to how much money is being paid to have them satisfied. The reason these games do not cap purchases and allow people to spend as much as they wish, is because some people are willing to pay what others would consider to be unreasonable prices. The added effect of this is that the companies who produce the biggest of these games, themselves increase in value. This valuation has little to do with the quality of the product—that is the intrinsic experience of the game—but rather how much people are willing to pay and keep paying for the experience. Therefore, how much money these games make is not a reflection on the quality of the

game, but rather only a reflection of how much people are willing to pay for its experience.

When we examined the Frankfurt School critique of commodity culture and the culture industry, the argument was outlined that the culture industry had a role to play in creating false needs and false versions of reality. These false beliefs and ideas were created in order to further certain interests, that is, to sell more goods and, ultimately, to create profit. The Frankfurt School argued that the culture industry really only served the purpose of furthering capitalist interests. While they applied their critique to film, television and radio as they were the dominant media of their time, we might ask what they would have thought of the role video games play in this vision of the world. It is not unreasonable to extrapolate their views to video games.

There are certain elements of game design which have the specific purpose of creating profit at the expense of the player's better judgement. These game mechanics, such as points and rewards systems, are not anymore limited to the domain of video games, rather, they have been adapted by the marketing and advertising industry in order to convince customers to buy and to remain "loyal" to a product. It is not just traditional "gamers" who need to be wary of these strategies, rather it is now every consumer. The techniques used in some of the most sophisticated games to keep people playing, are now also being used by marketing companies in all markets to keep people consuming with their brand. Those who criticise certain video game players for spending too much time on their pursuit, might in fact be caught by the same techniques these games use, into shopping only in certain places, or to buying only certain goods. The susceptibility of the gamer to play and to keep playing, is the same susceptibility that the regular consumer has; just as the gamer is kept playing, the consumer is kept consuming.

Some of the main sources of pleasure from playing a video game as we have noted are achievement, satisfaction, and accomplishment. These are derived from the game itself as players improve their skills. They might reach a certain level in the game or overcome some difficult obstacle which tests their skill and ability, pleasure results from this experience. These sources of pleasure achievement, satisfaction, and accomplishment, which are found in video games, are also the sources of pleasure I suggest that are being targeted by marketers using game based mechanics, such as point and reward systems. When using a *point* based system in order to reward frequent purchases, there can come a sense of accomplishment when consumers reach x number of points. They might anticipate reaching this number, and enjoying the ‘reward’ that they can use these points to buy. Video games use a similar (if not identical) mechanic.

The concern should not just be that people are playing these games; it should be *why* they are playing these games and playing them for such extended periods. It should be of paramount concern when we see the tools used in these games which keep people playing, employed in different areas of society. When we recognise the ubiquity of these tools, we cannot just say that they are only an issue for video game players. We must instead recognise that we are all exposed to, and possibly all susceptible to, these mechanics of control. This is why a study of video games and the pleasure they provide is important. The new method of social control is no longer fear, but rather it is acquiesced pleasure.

Certain game-mechanics, such as point and rewards systems, are not just tied to video games; they are used in different parts of our lives in ways which we might not even be aware of. These techniques can have subtle and not so influence on our lives. They can be used by marketers to encourage us to shop only at a certain place, at a certain time, or to buy certain products; they are used in social media to encourage us

to use more, to interact more. The same psychological techniques used in some games to keep players playing are used to keep people shopping, to keep people posting on social media, to keep people watching certain programs. No longer should we only be worried about the isolated player succumbing to the addictive nature of some games; rather we should recognise the pervasive nature of these techniques and their strong influence in different areas of society. Business authors Gabe Zichermann and Joselin Linder point out that there are four components to games which are be sources of motivation, they are:

- *Status and Levels*: Status is an outward display of achievement. Levels are a convenient way to divide play into achievable subgames while also creating status shorthand.
- *Points*: To keep track of how we're doing in the game, a scorekeeping and comparison table.
- *Rules*: Essential structures established to avoid chaos.
- *Demonstrability*: Making sure that others know who is winning, making these components *demonstrable* is what gives marketers the power of status persuasion.⁵²

Deterding *et. al.* define 'gamification' as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.⁵³

There have been many criticisms of this type of marketing. Heather Chaplin, in a critique of 'gamification' states that, 'In a gamified world, corporations don't have to reward us for our business by offering better service or lower prices. Rather, they can

⁵² Gabe Zichermann and Joselin Linder, *Game-Based Marketing: Inspire Customer Loyalty Through Rewards, Challenges, and Contests*, Hoboken, 2010, pp. 43–44.

⁵³ Sebastian Deterding, Dan Dixon, Rilla Khaled, and Lennart Nacke, 'From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining "Gamification"', *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*, 2011, p. 9.

just set up a game structure that makes us feel as if we're being rewarded'.⁵⁴ Video game theorist, Ian Bogost writes of gamification,

In particular, gamification proposes to replace real incentives with fictional ones. Real incentives come at a cost but provide value for both parties based on a relationship of trust. By contrast, pretend incentives reduce or eliminate costs, but in doing so they strip away both value and trust.⁵⁵

He continues that airlines and frequent flyer programs offer real rewards, as the rewards are reciprocal and go two ways; there is 'Something is real for both parties'.⁵⁶ Bogost distinguishes these relationships from those found in gamification, which he argues,

... replaces these real, functional, two-way relationships with dysfunctional perversions of relationships. Organizations ask for loyalty, but they reciprocate that loyalty with shams, counterfeit incentives that neither provide value nor require investment'.⁵⁷

Bogost replaces the term *gamification* with the term *exploitationware*. He argues that this idea of gamification takes the least essential part of the game (i.e. points, leader boards) and represents that as the most important. While points and status might encourage players to play more in some cases, they will not necessarily play a game which is solely based on these features. A game must be entertaining and challenging for people to care about the points system and leader boards of the game.

⁵⁴ Heather Chaplin, 'I don't want to be a superhero: Ditching reality for a game isn't as fun as it sounds', *Slate*, 29 March 2011, http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/gaming/2011/03/i_dont_want_to_be_a_superhero.html, accessed 22 June 2017.

⁵⁵ Ian Bogost, 'Persuasive games: Exploitationware', *Gamasutra*, 3 May 2011, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/134735/persuasive_games_exploitationware.php?page=4, accessed 22 June 2017.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

People are often worried about game play because it can change an individual's behaviour, i.e. they cease other activities to focus on the game. But, we can also see that game techniques in marketing are also designed to change individual's behaviour, to spend a little more when they did not need or expect to. The techniques used show that certain techniques are not just of concern for those playing video games.

With this said it is questionable whether we should see something as being a false pleasure just because someone else may want us to enjoy it. Pleasure of consumerism may not necessarily be false; however, we should be aware of the forces acting upon us so that do not become, what Adorno called, 'blind and passive victims.'⁵⁸ Rather, recognition of these forces can help us to become Adorno's ideal of 'autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously' for ourselves.⁵⁹

Conclusion

This chapter set out to analyse the ways in which modern mass entertainment has been considered by some theorists to provide pleasure that can be corrupting, mistaken or exploitative. This closely relates to the issues previously explored in this thesis with respect to video games. Cultural theorists interested in evaluating the worth of modern entertainment often draw on the work of the Frankfurt School, in particular the ideas of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. For this reason, among others, their ideas are important to consider. It was argued above that these theorists explore similar territory to that covered by the taxonomy of false pleasure proposed in this thesis.

This chapter argued that with regard to the moral psychology these theorists did not offer new ideas of false pleasure that were not already accommodated in the

⁵⁸ Adorno, 'How to look at television', p. 235.

⁵⁹ Adorno, 'The schema of mass culture', in *The Culture Industry*, p. 106.

taxonomy of false pleasure. Marcuse's notion of *false needs* and Adorno's idea of *belief in pseudo-realities* were found to be accommodated in the category of *false pleasure of belief*. While Adorno and Horkheimer's concerns regarding *control* and *anti-enlightenment* can be accommodated within the categories of *false alien pleasure* and *false pleasures of negative consequence*.

While I argue that many of the ideas raised by the Frankfurt School in relation to pleasure can be accommodated by a taxonomy of false pleasure, it was also found that their critique offered insight into possible political uses of false pleasure. As stated much of these theorist's focus is political rather than on the moral psychology this thesis has so far presented. The theorists analysed in this chapter focused on the claims that: (a) false pleasures of the modern capitalist world are deliberately and systematically produced and, (b) that their production serves a function for the maintenance of the capitalist system itself. While some of their ideas can be accommodated into the taxonomy of false pleasure, this political focus cannot, it instead gives greater context to the way types of false pleasure can be used in modern society.

The Frankfurt School critique also has implications for the question of false pleasure and video games. We have explored the idea that rather than false pleasures of video games being a mistake of moral psychology, certain games can exploit players for monetary gain. In these cases, it is not the player who is entirely to blame, rather there might be forces acting on her aiming to create false pleasure for monetary gain. The question was asked whether or not this should be a concern that causes us to reject video games as false pleasures. It was concluded that for some players the lack of control and possibility of exploitation of pleasure is a concern. Certain games do appear to use false pleasures as means for creating profit and if they do this at the expense of

the player's autonomy or well-being, then these games might be considered false pleasures at least for this player.

This chapter has also shown the critique of the Frankfurt School authors to be useful when considering the role of pleasure in relation to the modern entertainment industry. While not all their conclusions regarding modern media were endorsed, I argue that they provide a different focus on the possible uses of false pleasure, not previously considered in this thesis.

While this analysis has provided a different reason certain video games might be rejected as part of the good life, the following chapter will turn to the positive benefits other video games can have in the pursuit of the good life.

Chapter 8 – How to Do Things with Video Games

The central question of this thesis and the one to which we will return now is: *are video games a form of false pleasure?* To answer this question, we have considered the nature of pleasure, and importantly the ways in which certain pleasures have been viewed—by philosophers and in public discourse—as detrimental to one’s well-being. We have examined some important arguments against video games and analysed what it means for something to be considered a *false* pleasure. We have found that, rather than being one broad univocal concept, false pleasure can be divided into distinct categories. These categories have informed our analysis of video games and the quality of the pleasure they provide. This chapter will briefly review the points made relating to video games as false pleasures; while also adding how certain video games can be beneficial to the good life. This section will consider both positive and negative features of video games as they relate to pleasure. Some of what is drawn upon in this chapter is psychological and empirical material, to underscore the use of the taxonomy of false pleasure.

8.1. Reflections on Video Games and the Taxonomy of False Pleasure

As we have seen false pleasure can be divided into distinct sub groups they are, of: *belief, experience, negative consequence, and immorality*. While we have distinguished these categories, it is important to show how they are useful for analysing objects of pleasure. To do this they have been used to address the question of whether video games are a form of false pleasure. This has meant pointing to the categories and sub-categories that are relevant to this topic, and the ones which are of most concern.

Belief, Regret and Video Games

In Chapter 3, false pleasure of belief was divided into two initial categories, the first is when pleasure is based on a belief that is false; and the second, when a belief misjudges how much pleasure will be experienced in a certain future situation. As we have seen belief can impact on our feeling of pleasure, and it must be taken into consideration when thinking about false pleasures and video games.

Section 3.6, examined what it meant to regret a past pleasure and whether this might mean that the pleasure experienced was false. It was argued that often regret of a past pleasure can be an indicator that something has gone wrong in our interaction with pleasure. We can regret previous immorality, taking pleasure in objects or actions we should not have. We can regret being distracted by objects of pleasure that take away from other important areas of our lives. Or we can change our preferences over time, and regret pleasure we would not now take pleasure in.

A problem which can occur with the playing of video games is regret of time spent playing them, this is known in gaming circles as ‘gamer regret’. If there is good reason to regret pursuing a pleasure, such as the playing of video games, because they negatively take away from other areas of one’s life, then this regret might well be justified. Regret might be a key factor in recognising false immoral pleasures and false pleasures of negative consequence. There is reason to regret pleasure gained from adultery or pursuing a pleasure that jeopardises our school, career, or other relationships. However, other times we might feel a regret without necessarily having it point to a mistake. We might regret choosing to do *a* over *b*, even if both were good, and *a* was the best course of action for us to take. We might only regret not knowing what *b* might have been. We might also regret doing something because we ‘ought’ to

have done otherwise. ‘Ought’ here is used in, what Hare called, the *inverted-comma* sense; that is, the sense that people other than ourselves think it to be the best course of action.¹ To say one ‘ought’ to do something, or that it is ‘good’ to do something, is at times only taking value judgements of other people, not making value-judgements ourselves. If we regret a past pleasure, such as playing a video game, because it was not what we ‘ought’ to be doing, we might only be upholding other’s value judgements. If this is the case then we might have less reason to regret these pleasures than we thought. Regarding the playing of video games, regret can occur after extended periods of play. At times this regret might be warranted if it points to false pleasure or negative consequences, for example, but at other times it might not be.

Regret can, though, come in a different form—if it comes from an action that was based on a past false belief. If I had the belief that, “*X* is the best course of action for me, because it will bring *Y* amount of pleasure”, but it does not, then my action was based on a false belief—and I might have reason to regret it. This is based on *false overestimation of future pleasure* as discussed in Section 3.5. Certain games, for certain players, can instil beliefs about the amount of pleasure that will be experienced. At times, there may be a belief that the player will experience more pleasure than she actually will and this might keep her playing for longer than she might wish. I consider this to be a problem for video games as objects of pleasure and entertainment.

The problem of estimating future pleasure is discussed in psychological literature as ‘affective forecasting’, that is the ability to accurately predict emotional reactions to future events.² Researchers Wilson and Gilbert state that affective forecasts can be broken down into four components: ‘predictions about the *valence* of one’s

¹ R. M Hare., *Language of Morals*, p. 124.

² Timothy D. Wilson and Daniel T. Gilbert, ‘Affective forecasting: Knowing what to know’, p. 131.

future feelings, the *specific emotions* that will be experienced, the *intensity* of the emotions, and their *duration*.³ While their research has found that people are generally good at predicting *valence* what will be pleasant from what will be unpleasant—an ice cream will be more pleasant than a trip to the dentist, for example—they were less able to accurately predict ‘intensity or duration’ of future emotional reactions.⁴

This point is an important one, as one’s ability to predict how much pleasure something will bring in the future can be a catalyst for motivation toward certain actions. If our predictions are not accurate, however, then there is the risk that we will mistakenly choose a course of action thinking it will bring us more pleasure than it will. Overestimation of future pleasure regarding a player of a video game can be problematic as it might lead him to play the game for longer than what he would like or at the expense of other important pursuits. If a player falsely thinks that an event in the game being played will bring them more pleasure than something else in their life—for example, school, relationships or career—then there is the risk that she might disregard these latter objects for the pleasure of the game. While the game in this case might lead the player to have false thoughts about how much pleasure she will experience, the player must also recognise the fallibility of her *affective forecast*.

Having players, or an audience, is an obvious necessity for any game or form of entertainment. The sheer amount of video games being released each month on various platforms means that it is increasingly difficult for developers to find players, keep them interested, and to make money from them. There are many methods different games use to keep people playing, but often motivation for a player comes how much pleasure they anticipate experiencing. As discussed in Section 3.6, anticipatory pleasure

³ Timothy D. Wilson and Daniel T. Gilbert, ‘Affective forecasting’, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 35, Mark Zanna (ed.), New York, 2003, p. 346.

⁴ *Ibid.*

is linked to motivation toward certain actions, it drives what goals we aim toward and our behaviour in achieving these goals. Many video games use anticipatory pleasure, they use how much pleasure the player believes they will experience once they have completed a certain objective. This can be positive, since the accomplishment of certain tasks or goals can bring with it a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure. However, anticipatory pleasure can be problematic for those who mispredict how much pleasure something will bring them in the future. Overestimation of how much pleasure something will bring in the future can be a kind of false motivator toward certain actions. A player might expect a certain amount of pleasure once she has reached a certain point in a game, and might act toward that aim; however, she might find that, when reached, there was not the feeling of pleasure that she expected. Different games offer different forms of anticipatory pleasure—high-score systems, levelling-up, or new content—all encourage players to keep playing. Because of this, once one goal is reached, there is often a new goal or aim to be accomplished. Certain games are also ‘open-ended’ in that they have no real finishing or ending point for the player. In this way, certain games can play on the expected pleasure that some players may have, and for these players and at certain times, they can be considered to offer a form of false pleasure.

As we have also seen in Section 4.6, estimating future pleasure can also be problematic in terms of the money spent in certain games. Many mobile video games have adopted a ‘free-to-play’ model of revenue, in which a player can download and play the game for free, but has the option to pay small amounts of money for certain perks or benefits. As was discussed in this section certain players are more susceptible to paying more in these games, these players are known as ‘whales’ and it is estimated

they make up around 10% of players.⁵ For players who are unable to control their spending, monetisation in these games poses a real problem. The study from Dreier *et. al.* recommended ‘strategies preventing (vulnerable) individuals from negative repercussions potentially arising from free-to-play use.’⁶ These are examples where certain beliefs in video games mean the game can plausibly be considered a false pleasure.

Positive Beliefs, Emotional States, and Video Games

While we have concluded that in certain cases video games can offer false pleasures of belief, there are other positive points we should consider when addressing the value of the pleasure video games offer. For example, feelings of satisfaction, accomplishment, and mastery found in some games appear to be psychologically beneficial pleasures of video games. While this is an underdeveloped area of research, there are some indications of the benefits of video games on mood and motivation. A study from Fleming and Rickwood, indicated a positive increase in general mood in adolescents—both boys and girls—after playing video games, compared to a pencil-and-paper game.⁷ Another study showed that playing of casual games—defined as those played for fun that are quick to access—led to increased mood and a decrease in physical stress.⁸ The three casual games tested in this study also showed indicators of reduced anger in players, and reduced feelings of depression. Interestingly, the three games tested each had different effects on different areas of the brain. Russoniello *et. al.* state, ‘significant subscale changes in anger, tension, vigor, depression, fatigue and confusion by different

⁵ Michael Dreier *et. al.*, ‘Free-to-play: About addicted Whales’, p. 328.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 332.

⁷ Michele Fleming and Debra Rickwood, ‘Effects of Violent Versus Nonviolent Video Games on Children’s Arousal, Aggressive Mood, and Positive Mood’, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol.31, No.10, 2001, pp. 2047–2071.

⁸ Carmen Russoniello, Kevin O’Brien, and Jennifer Parks, ‘The effectiveness of casual video games in improving mood and decreasing stress’, *Journal of CyberTherapy and Rehabilitation*, Vol.2, No.1, 2009, pp. 53–66.

games and not by others again seems to infer that there are specific changes associated, to a degree, with particular games and not so much with others'.⁹ This might be an indicator of a need for nuance when researching video games.

Issues of false pleasure might also depend on what type of game is being played. For example, some games might lead players to have poor self-control as we have seen in false overestimation of future pleasure; however, others have been linked to longer-term planning and self-control.¹⁰ Gabbiadini & Greitemeyer studied the effects of *strategy video games* and their relation to self-regulation.¹¹ The study hypothesis stated, 'because strategy video games require long gaming sessions and planning and management of resources for reaching long-term goals, we assumed that they would function as a virtual training center for self-regulation abilities in every-day life'.¹² The study found a correlation between strategy game exposure and self-regulation. Self-regulation was characterised as 'willpower, perseverance, or self-control', and 'the ability to regulate impulses and desires'.¹³ Strategy games require planning and long-term management, which this study believes correlates with real world behaviour. However, an earlier study from Gabbiadini *et. al.* showed that the playing of violent video games was linked to a lack of short term self-control.¹⁴ This study tested self-control by placing a bowl of chocolates next to a computer with players playing either a non-violent or violent video game. Those playing the violent video game were found to have less self-control, and were also to cheat on a subsequent test, and showed increases in aggression. The different findings between strategy games and violent

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 63.

¹⁰ Alessandro Gabbiadini and Tobias Greitemeyer, 'Uncovering the association between strategy video games and self-regulation: A correlational study, *Personality and Individual Difference*, vol. 104, January 2017, p. 129.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* p. 129.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 130.

¹⁴ Alessandro Gabbiadini, Paolo Riva, Luca Andrighetto, Chiara Volpato, Brad J. Bushman, 'Interactive Effect of Moral Disengagement and Violent Video Games on Self-Control, Cheating, and Aggression', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2013, pp. 451–458.

games are further indicators for the different effects different games can have on players.

Another meta-analysis of the effects of video games on aggression found that, while there are indicators that violent video games have at least a slight increase on aggression and decrease prosocial behaviour, other games have the opposite effect.¹⁵ The playing of *prosocial* games (classified as games in which the predominant goal is to help another game character) were found to ‘decrease aggressive behaviour, cognition and affect, and increase prosocial behaviour cognition and affect’.¹⁶ The variation between types of games, the platforms they are played on, and their content all add to the difficulty of researching video games. They also offer further reason not to treat video games as a monolithic whole. Greitemeyer and Mügge state that, ‘in terms of the player’s social behaviour not all video games have negative effects. In fact, depending on the content, video game play may also benefit social behaviour, cognitive development or health’.¹⁷

Another way in which video games have been proposed to be of benefit, which relates to belief, is their influence on individual’s *persistence*. Persistence is essentially based on a belief that one can accomplish something, even in the face of adversity or setbacks. A study by Ventura *et. al.* indicated that video game players may have a higher level of persistence when faced with problems.¹⁸ They state that persistence is a ‘facet of conscientiousness that reflects the dispositional need to complete difficult tasks, and the desire to exhibit high standards of performance in the face of

¹⁵ Tobias Greitemeyer and Dirk O. Mügge, ‘Video games do affect social outcomes: a meta-analytic review of the effects of violent and prosocial video game play’, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2014, pp. 578–589.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 581.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 586.

¹⁸ Mathew Ventura, Valerie Shute, Weinan Zhao, ‘The relationship between video game use and a performance-based measure of persistence’, *Computers and Education*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2013, pp. 52–58.

frustration'.¹⁹ The study set anagram and riddle tasks with varying degrees of difficulty, subjects were able to try again if they were wrong, or could choose to skip each question. It was found that students who played video games regularly spent longer on unsolved puzzles than those who do not regularly play video games, indicating a greater level of persistence in the player group.²⁰ While this area needs further research, it might be that certain video games can teach persistence in the face of failure.

In another review of empirical research on video games Granic, Lobel and Engels found that persistence offers another role in relation to self-belief.²¹ They state that there are two ways which children develop their beliefs about intelligence and abilities.²² The first is an *entity* theory in which children are 'praised for their traits rather than their efforts (e.g. "Wow, you're such a smart boy")' this maintains that intelligence is an innate trait. The second is an *incremental* theory, in which children are praised for their efforts '(e.g. "You worked so hard on that puzzle!")', these children believe intelligence is 'malleable, something to be cultivated through effort and time'.²³ Granic *et. al.* state that the degree to which individuals endorse the incremental or entity theory, has been found to influence whether they persist or give up when faced with challenges, respectively.²⁴ Further, if one believes intelligence to be fixed, she might be more likely to feel failure or worthlessness when faced with failure. Those who see intelligence or ability as 'a mark of effortful engagement, failure signals the need to remain engaged and bolster one's efforts'; this positive attitude to failure also 'predicts

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 52.

²⁰ This study does note that its findings were correlational, and could not conclude whether the video game players were more persistent because they play video games or whether their persistent nature drew them to play more video games.

²¹ Isabela Granic, Adam Lobel and Rutger Engels, 'The benefits of playing video games', *American Psychologist* vol. 69, no. 1, 2014, pp. 66-78.

²² This is based on the work: Carol S. Dweck, and Daniel C. Molden, 'Self-theories: Their impact on competence motivation and acquisition'. In *Handbook of competence and motivation*, Andrew. J. Elliot and Carol. S. Dweck (eds.), New York, 2005, p. 122.

²³ Granic, Lobel and Engels, 'The benefits of playing video games', p. 71.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

better academic performance'.²⁵ If one has the belief that intelligence is something which must be worked on, then one must also be willing to show persistence when faced with problems or challenges. If video games can be used to train this persistence, through their use of failure and positive feedback, to train the belief that one must be persistent, then they might have a positive impact on their players. Each of these are examples, of the ways in which video games can enhance one's self-belief. They may teach long-term planning, or resilience in the face of failure, these positive effects of certain games might enhance the ability to lead the good life.

Excess, Addiction and Video Games

Following on from the discussion of belief and video games, we now turn to discussion of experiential false pleasure. It was argued in Chapter 4 that *excessive* pursuit of something might not, in itself, be reason enough to judge something a false pleasure. Excess appears only to be necessarily problematic when coupled with *negative consequences*. Someone who spends excessive amounts of time on something he or she enjoys—say writing or painting—is not necessarily said to be pursuing a false kind of pleasure. If the time they spend is not impinging on other areas of their life, then their past time is considered as being beneficial, they are enjoying their pursuit. However, when the excessive amount of time spent does endanger other parts of one's life, such as threatening relationships, careers or school, then this excess can be considered as false pleasure.

Psychologist, and addiction specialist, Mark D. Griffiths writes that, in the case of video games, one must examine the context in which individuals are playing excessively.²⁶ He states that at times excessive play does not necessarily lead to

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Mark D. Griffiths, 'The role of context in online gaming excess and addiction: some case study evidence', *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, vol.8, no. 1, 2010, p. 119.

addiction, nor does it necessarily have negative impacts on the player. Excessive play can in fact be beneficial to some in certain circumstances. Griffiths uses two case studies to illustrate his point: the first person, “Dave”, is a young gamer who has just graduated from university, is looking for work, and claims he plays around 12-14 hours of *World of Warcraft* a day. He does this because most of his friends have moved or have full-time jobs and, being unemployed, he has little else to fill his day with. He uses the game as both a way to fill the day and a means of social interaction with other players. Overall, he considers his use of the game as beneficial and as having a positive function in his life. The other case concerns “Jeremy”, a 38-year-old with a wife and two kids. He also plays 12-14 hours a day on a different game, however, in this case his excessive play causes negative outcomes. Over time he begins to skip work to play and spends less time with his wife and children, eventually causing him to lose his job and his marriage to breakdown. Jeremy tries to give up playing the game but finds he is unable to, becoming anxious and aggravated when he tries, he always ends up returning to the game.

In looking at these two cases, though, the amount of time spent in each instance is the same and it is to the degree that many would call excessive, there are very different outcomes for both players. In the first case, excessive play appears to have a beneficial influence on the player; in the second, a dramatically negative influence.

Griffiths notes that Dave eventually found a job and through *World of Warcraft* also found a girlfriend. Now, due to his work and relationship commitments he plays the game less and less. Though, for a period of his life he was excessively playing this game, by and large, it had a positive effect. Excess, in and of itself, was not necessarily reason enough to call his pursuit of video games a false pleasure.

For Jeremy on the other hand, his excessive video game play was a catalyst for the failure of his marriage and the loss of his job. Griffiths argues that, for Jeremy video game play turned into a form of addiction. The more things were falling down in his life, the more he turned to the pleasure of the game to alleviate his stress and anxiety. In my framework, for Jeremy, excessive play coupled with negative consequences meant that the game he was playing was a source of false pleasure. Although the time spent playing in these two cases was the same, the effect of the pleasure was drastically different. Griffiths argues that excessive play is not in itself enough to diagnose something such as addiction, rather we must look at the context in which this excess is being pursued. He states, ‘the real issue is to what extent excessive gaming impacts negatively on other areas of gamer’s lives’.²⁷ The nature of addiction is of concern as it takes away from the autonomy of the player. Pursuits of pleasure and uses of free time should be freely made, otherwise it becomes a kind of forced pleasure—or compulsion.

Some games, used in certain ways, can have negative consequences for the player; so much so that the American Psychiatric Association has raised the issue of internet gaming disorder as an area for future concern. If used in this way—just as with other forms of addiction— games can be false pleasures. This is problematic for video games, as it is for some other pleasures, however negative consequences for some should also be balanced against positive consequences. Matt McCormick argues that for video games to be wrong on a utilitarian view, it must be shown that they cause ‘more harm or risk of harm than is warranted by the benefits’.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 123.

²⁸ McCormick, ‘Is it wrong to play violent video games?’, p. 279.

Video Games as Moral Educators

As we have seen certain games can lead to other beneficial consequences beyond pleasure. Examples of these are: learning, literacy, social interaction, problem solving skills. Another area video games have the capacity to influence positively, is that of *moral education*. While this might seem paradoxical at first—given the reputation of certain immoral or violent video games—video games are in a unique position to challenge player’s moral reasoning. Much has been written about the effect of immorality in video games—and the media in general—on young individuals. It is still questionable whether there is a direct connection, between simulated and real-life violence. If there is then a connection, then there might be reason to consider the pleasure from simulated immorality as false on the *emulation argument* outlined in Chapter 6. As we have seen in earlier in this current chapter, a meta-analysis of studies into aggression and video games from Greitemeyer and Mügge did find a link between violent video games and increased aggression.²⁹ However, in their paper the authors state that is debatable whether the slight increased risk found, is enough to warrant societal concern.³⁰ In fact, other studies have found that violent video game exposure was linked with *lowered* likelihood of committing violent crimes.³¹ The debate over violent video games and criminal or aggressive behaviour is likely one that will not be concluded in the near future and certainly not by this thesis. What I offer here, instead, is an outline of the ways in which video games might be able to help *teach* morality, rather than immorality—and in doing so add to the good life. Video games are in a unique position regarding morality, in that they can force their players to make

²⁹ Greitemeyer and Mügge ‘Video Games Do Affect Social Outcomes’, p. 578.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 585.

³¹ Christopher J. Ferguson, John Colwell, Boris Mlacic, Goran Milas, & Igor Miklousic, ‘Personality and media influences on violence and depression in a cross-national sample of young adults: data from Mexican-Americans, English and Croatians’, *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2011, pp. 1195–1200.

decisions with moral consequences and in doing so there enable players to develop moral thinking and understanding.

Many theorists, including Aristotle, have stated that the most effective method moral education cannot come from merely lecturing on right from wrong; rather morality must be developed through experience.³² John Dewey following in the same line of thought, argued that lessons “about morals”—teaching what is right and what is wrong—are generally lessons in what *other* people think about virtue and duties’.³³ Unless a pupil is already in some way morally inclined, Dewey states, these lessons amount to little more than teaching information about the ‘mountains in Asia’. Dewey views morality as being something which needs to be practised, rather than recited verbatim from a definitive list.

Dewey points out that Aristotle saw moral virtue ‘like an art, such as medicine; the experienced practitioner is better than a man who has theoretical knowledge but no practical experience of disease and remedies’.³⁴ For Aristotle morality, as with virtue could only develop over time, and could only be shaped by experience. In his book *Moral Education in Aristotle*, Gérard Verbeke notes that Aristotle did not allow the young to be morally educated; because of their age, they lack the ‘experience of moral conduct in the various circumstances of life’.³⁵ He quotes Aristotle as saying that ‘arguments in moral philosophy not only deal with practical matters but proceed from experience of ethical behavior’. It can plausibly be argued that interactive media such as a videogame could provide—if not a pure experience of ethical behaviour—at least a very good simulation of circumstances from which it might be possible to build moral experience.

³² See: Gérard Verbeke, *Moral Education in Aristotle*, Washington, 1990, p. viii.

³³ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, New York, 1997, p. 255.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 256.

³⁵ Verbeke, *Moral Education in Aristotle*, p. viii.

In a similar fashion to Aristotle, Raymond Gaita argues that we cannot ‘acquire moral knowledge in any sense that would make us morally *knowledgeable*’.³⁶ He continues that it makes more sense to talk about a ‘depth of moral understanding or of wisdom, and *it is not accidental to these that their achievement takes time*’.³⁷ There is a reason, he thinks, that there are no moral ‘whiz-kids’ or Nobel Prizes for breakthroughs in morality. According to Gaita moral education can be better interpreted as *moral understanding*.

It has been argued that other media forms can act to inform moral understanding. Martha Nussbaum, for example, argues that certain novels are ‘irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy ... [and] the novel can be a paradigm of moral activity’.³⁸ In a similar vein Mikhail Bakhtin claims, that ‘it is through becoming increasingly responsive to the particularities of individual cases that we become more moral, not through our adoption of a set of pre-ordained moral maxims; and hence the real potential of the novel as a source of moral education’.³⁹ According to Bakhtin the novel holds the ability to develop moral experience and understanding, rather than listing that which is ‘right’ from that which is ‘wrong’. While not every novel is a source of enlightenment on living well, and nor should be seen as such, what they do offer is the *capacity* for development of moral understanding.

The late novelist David Foster Wallace, in his essay about fiction and U.S. television, argues that ‘If we want to know what American normality is – what Americans want to regard as normal – we can trust television. For television’s whole *raison* is reflecting what people want to see’.⁴⁰ Mainstream television presents, or

³⁶ Raymond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd edn., London, 2004, p. 265.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 265–266.

³⁸ Martha Nussbaum, *Loves Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, New York, 1992, p. 148.

³⁹ In, Joe Winston, *Drama, Narrative and Moral Education*, London, England, The Falmer Press, 1998, p. 27.

⁴⁰ David Foster Wallace, ‘E unibus pluram: television and U.S. fiction’, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1993, p. 152.

reflects, a normative view of what society finds acceptable. On Wallace's view, we can trust television to present what is 'normal'; the viewer can find a guideline of what is morally acceptable.

If it is to be held that novels or television have the ability to provide moral education, then it seems to follow that we should also see narrative through other media, such as video games, as being similarly effective. Moreover, the opportunity for the player to exercise choice in certain video games, gives these games greater *capacity* for the development of moral understanding.⁴¹ Most ethical decisions made need to be in some way *other regarding*; the advantage of play in video games is the opportunity it provides to inhabit the shoes of another person, in different circumstances, and making decisions for them. Certain games require from the player the use of *moral reasoning*. There are two different styles of games which I will focus on here, to illustrate briefly how moral knowledge, understanding and reasoning can be used in game design. These are what I call *overtly moral* games, and *ambiguously moral* games.

Firstly, overtly moral games (also known as *persuasive* or *serious* games) are designed purely to convey a certain specific moral message to their player. These games address a certain specific issue, and enforce a certain perspective on this issue. Examples of these types of games can be seen on the organisation 'Games for Change' website, which create and distribute 'social impact games that serve as critical tools in humanitarian and educational efforts'.⁴² These types of games have political or social messages that are conveyed to the audience through the medium of a game. For example, the games *Against All Odds* and *Syrian Journey* put the player in the shoes of

⁴¹ It should be noted that this argument is not meant to state that the games in question definitively *will* have a morally beneficial effect for every user, but rather (as Nussbaum states of literature) they have the *capacity* for such an effect.

⁴² Games for Change, 'About: What we do', para. 2, gamesforchange.org/about, accessed 27 September 2017.

a refugee, struggling to flee their country to escape violence.⁴³ In the case of *Against All Odds*, a game developed by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, the player must (in the face of racism and hostility) attempt to integrate into a new society. Games like this uses the medium to place the player into another's experience, in an attempt to balance their moral point of view or provide a new outlook on an experience. These games attempt to promote an empathetic moral standpoint in their audience; the player is faced with the decisions a refugee might be faced with, and must decide for themselves the best course of action.

The mobile game *Liyla and the Shadows of War* positions the player as a husband, and father of a young child, trying to save his family from air raids on Gaza.⁴⁴ The player is forced to portray a victim—situated amid animated backdrops based on real-life photographs from the war in Gaza—who has no choice but to hide and attempt to flee to safety. The short game finishes with statistics of the number of Palestinians killed in recent time. A game such as this attempts to inform about a situation from an historical point of view; it also brings into question the morality of such a war. It is important to consider whether the player is able to gain a different or unique moral insight into this situation then he or she would have from, say, a newspaper or television report.

The second type of game to discuss is that of *ambiguously moral games*. These types of games offer the player greater moral choices; however, these choices are less black and white and do not give the player only 'good' or 'evil' options. Such games, in a way, are moral thought experiments presented with greater context than normal

⁴³ United Nations High Commission of Refugees, *Against All Odds*, web-based game, UNHCR, available online <http://www.playagainstallodds.ca>, 2006; BBC Arabic, *Syrian Journey*, web-based game, BBC, available online <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32057601>, 2015.

⁴⁴ Rasheed Abueideh, *Liyla and the Shadows of War*, mobile application, version 6.1, 2017, <http://www.liyla.org/>, accessed 20 September 2017.

thought experiments. They offer the play a chance for insight into what it is to be moral, and in turn allow for deeper moral understanding; morality is presented as being more ‘messy’ than it is clear-cut. An example of this is Lucas Pope’s game *Paper’s Please*.⁴⁵

In this game, a player inhabits the character of a passport control officer in a fictionalised dystopian Balkan state. The player must decide on who to let in to the country, based on who has appropriate documentation. The player must also consider the character’s family, who can begin to starve, fall ill, or die if the player does not earn enough money. The player is forced to make tough ethical decisions: some are refugees fleeing war but without proper documentation who state they will be killed if they are not let into the country. Another is a young girl being trafficked and who asks for the player’s help, not to let her captor into the country. In another instance a husband and wife are to be processed, but only one has proper documentation; the player can choose to split up the couple, or let them through illegally. The player is rewarded for the more people she correctly processes, but is fined for mistakes. Often making an ‘ethical’ decision will result in being fined, which takes money away from being able to help the player’s in-game family. The player can either have an ethical responsibility to help those trying to get into the country, but in doing so endanger their job and in turn, their family who is dependent on their income. Or the player might decide their primary ethical duty is toward their job and family and show no empathy to characters trying to get through passport control.

These are only a couple of the ways in which certain video games can be seen as increasing moral understanding. This goes against one common narrative that all video games only teach players to be immoral. Games such as these allow players to

⁴⁵ Lucas Pope, *Paper’s Please*, mobile application, version 1.0.12, 2016, <http://www.papersplea.se/>, accessed 21 September 2017.

experience difficult moral decisions and they have the capacity of being effective moral educators. Rather than being false pleasures, or taking away from the good life; they offer the capacity to *enhance* one's ability to lead the good life. Just as literature and other forms of media can have a positive effect on morality, so can certain video games. While games can teach 'right' from 'wrong' they also have the ability to enhance critical moral thought, and positively influence moral behaviour.

Conclusion

The outline of some of the positive and negative aspects of video games shows that there are many facets to this topic. This section has focused on the positive role certain video games can have in the good life. While the merits of certain video games will continue to be debated, it can be argued that there are ways in which video games can add to the good life, but also in some cases take away from this life. As we have seen, the pleasure sought from certain games can lead to concerns such as feelings of regret, excessive spending of money, the possibility of addiction, or possibility of emulating immoral behaviour seen in games. But we have also seen their potential benefits, including: improved mood and relaxation, improved persistence and self-belief, potential decrease in aggressive feelings and behaviour, and the potential for moral education.

From this it appears it is not easy to cast all video games, or their use, as either 'good' nor 'bad'. The aim of this thesis, and the application of the taxonomy of false pleasure, has been to point to the potential pitfalls that the pursuit of pleasure generally and in video games can bring. We have seen in certain situations that the potential for addiction to video games, particularly online games, is quite real for some players. In these situations, games can have the effect of being false pleasures, if they have negative consequences for the player. We have also seen the potential for some players

to spend excessive amounts of money on certain games; this is another potentially negative effect. The point has also been made that while certain games themselves can be problematic, we must also be concerned with the nature of the person or player who can influence whether a pleasure can have a positive or negative effect.

This thesis has aimed to show certain problems that can arise with pursuing pleasure, this includes potential problems with video games. However, from our investigation into the use of video games, it has been found that, rather than taking away from the good life, certain games can enhance the good life. This is an important consideration when considering the use of these games, and it calls for a more nuanced approach to the study of video games in general.

As video games continue to develop and evolve, in terms of graphics, game play and the degree of immersion involved, it is important to consider the nature of the pleasure these games offer. The rapid rise in popularity of video games as a popular social form shows that their use is not something that can be easily ignored, nor pushed aside as ‘fad’ that only children engage in. The popularity and income generated from video games is enough to rival Hollywood.⁴⁶ The advent of e-sports—in which team’s battle each other in certain video games in front of stadiums of thousands of people—shows the rise in sophistication of strategy and technique in certain gameplay. With so many facets to modern video games it appears both anachronistic and unhelpful to consider them all as a monolithic whole. When considering the question “Are video games a false pleasure?”, this thesis has shown that we need a nuanced approach to both the subjects: *video games* and *false pleasure*. I have argued that, rather than all video games being false pleasures, some in fact have a positive role to play in the good

⁴⁶ Trevor Nath, ‘Investing in video games: this industry pulls in more revenue than movies, music’, *Nasdaq*, para 1, <http://www.nasdaq.com/article/investing-in-video-games-this-industry-pulls-in-more-revenue-than-movies-music-cm634585>, accessed 20 September 2017.

life. The advances in technologies designed for pleasure and enjoyment has now more than ever called into question the nature of pleasure itself. As technology continues to improve, and the number of objects designed ostensibly for pure pleasure increases, we must question which pleasures or objects of pleasure are of worth; that is, which add to the good or fulfilled life. From this section, we can determine that certain video games do have a role to play in the good life.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a problem, namely whether or not video games are the *right* kind of pleasure to pursue. This called into question many notions regarding the nature of pleasure, how we interact with it and how it is experienced in the modern world. It also raised the issue of whether we are able to question our felt experience of pleasure and, in so doing, distinguish between different kinds of pleasure. This at first seems counter intuitive, as many have the view that pleasure is pleasure and no more. However, in this thesis I have argued that it is only by questioning our experience of pleasure that we come to a deeper understanding of the nature of pleasure itself. Further, there is a more radical claim to be made that there is a definite distinction between *genuine* and *false* pleasures. By using this distinction, one which I endorse, we are in a better position to judge the value of pleasure in the modern world.

It is apparent that modern technologies have brought with them immense social changes; shifting how we interact with one another, do business and how we spend our leisure time. It is the last of these changes and how technology has influenced it that has been the main focus of this thesis. There is a social concern that the pleasure taken in objects such as video games is in fact detrimental to the aim of a happy or fulfilled life. With the increase in the number of people playing and the amount of time spent in these games, it is understandable that there is concern of the nature of the pleasure being provided and pursued. This concern has led some to judge video games as being, in colloquial terms, a 'waste of time'. We can say that by seeing video games in this way, we mean that they should not be considered *worthy of pursuit*, beyond mere amusement. It must also mean that those who do play video games are being in some

way distracted, or derailed from living the *good life*. The underlying questions that are much debated are whether certain games should be considered a good use of one's time; and—while it is undeniable that video games provide pleasure—is this *right* kind of pleasure to pursue?

As we have seen many writers have given accounts of the type of pleasures which should be part of the good life and, importantly for this thesis, those which should not. These latter pleasures have been distinguished in this thesis into a *taxonomy of false pleasure*.

As we have seen, the idea of false pleasure dates back to at least Plato. His aim, in part, was to give an account of the best possible life to live, that which makes life 'happy for all human beings'.⁴⁷ The difficulty that Plato saw in considering the role of pleasure in the good life, however, was that not all pleasures are created equal and not all pleasures help in the aim of the happy or good life. Accordingly, he stated that certain pleasure can have qualities or characteristics that make them *false*. While these pleasures appear to be genuine and might feel so, the falsifying characteristics mean that what is actually occurring is a kind of felt or affective 'illusion'. These false pleasures do not add anything toward the good life and, in fact, might be detrimental as they can be pursued under the mistaken belief that they are beneficial. Plato stated that pleasures of belief can be false, but I have argued that his analysis did not go far enough. There are other ways in which pleasures can be deceptive and even detrimental beyond those outlined by Plato.

If we agree with Plato that not all pleasures help to make the best life possible, then we must continue his task of determining which ones to pursue and which not. This thesis has argued for four distinct categories of false pleasure. Those of:

⁴⁷ Plato, *Philebus*, 11d.

- i) belief;
- ii) experience;
- iii) negative consequence; and
- iv) immorality.

Along with distinguishing these categories, this thesis has shown how they are useful when judging the relative value or worth of certain pleasures. It has used these categories to help address the question of whether certain video games should be considered false pleasures, by illustrating how each of the categories, and sub-categories, relate to this topic. Let us briefly summarise these categories.

The first category distinguished, as discussed in Chapter 3, was *false pleasure of belief*; this category was drawn in part from Plato's dialogue the *Philebus*. This category posited that if a pleasure is taken in or dependent upon a belief and, if this belief is in fact false, the corresponding pleasure should also be considered false. It was argued that this category is most plausible when pleasure is taken in a false propositional belief, such as, "I am *pleased that* such and such is occurring". It was argued that false pleasures of belief can depend on beliefs of events in the past, present or future.

One assumption within the taxonomy is that false pleasure of belief can come from either a mistaken belief that something will occur in the future, when it will not, or from overestimating how much pleasure something will bring in the future.⁴⁸ Of most relevance for the discussion of video games was the amount of anticipatory pleasure expected by the player and the degree to which this expectation is met. It might be the case that certain video games, to a varying degree, offer this kind of false

⁴⁸ The former point can also be applied to pleasure based on something that *has occurred when it did not, or is occurring when it is not*.

pleasure. They can keep the player's attention because the player anticipates an upcoming event which will they think will bring them pleasure. The nature of many video games, however, is that there is a seemingly unending series of events to look forward to; the thrill of achieving one goal will quickly be replaced by the desire for another. In some cases, this can distort how much pleasure a player thinks they will experience, compared to how much they actually do experience.

The second category proposed in this thesis as discussed in Chapter 4, was *false pleasure of experience*; which concerned the felt experience of pleasure when it is directed in the wrong manner. This category was divided into four sub sections:

- i) false pleasure of excess,
- ii) false alien pleasure,
- iii) false mixed pleasures and
- iv) false pleasures of the neutral state.

Of most relevance to the topic of the pleasure of video games are false pleasures of *excess* and false *alien* pleasure. It was argued that certain pleasures can be pursued in excess of what is good; this pursuit of excess can often happen with video game play. The difficulty comes in knowing where to draw the line between pleasure and excess. It was argued that the pursuit of gluttony and excess might cloud the judgment of an individual jeopardising what they see as truly pleasurable is not actually so. Similarly, it was argued that excessive pleasures might only have the appearance of being pleasurable to those who are in a certain condition. The more pain someone is in, for example be it physical or psychological, the more appealing excessive pleasure will be. Excessive pleasure has the false appearance of being truly pleasurable to those who are in states such as these. It was argued that we cannot judge the merit of a pleasure unless we also consider the purpose or reason for use of this pleasure.

Because many video games create a great amount of pleasure for their players, there is the possibility that they can be used as a kind of ‘escape’ from another negative affective condition which is being experienced; something such as depression. If the pleasure from certain games is used in this way, the reason for its use—namely, alleviation of pain—should be recognised. If this is not recognised and pleasure is being pursued to an excessive degree to drive out pain, there might be reason to call this a pursuit of false pleasure. This pleasure might not be relieving the underlying cause of their pain, and while appearing beneficial is only a short-term fix.

With this said, and as explored in Chapter 4, there are promising signs that the use of certain targeted video game play might be of genuine benefit to treat those with conditions such as depression. As we have seen, recent studies have shown using mobile or tablet based games which are designed to improve cognitive abilities and treat negative thought patterns in those suffering with depression can help improve overall reported mood.⁴⁹ The key to the success of treatments for diseases such as this is continued active behavioural change. The appeal of mobile or tablet based intervention—besides portability and ease of use—is that the pleasure inherent to certain games might increase the likelihood that individuals will continue treatment. In this way, it is hoped that the pleasure of video games might help to not only alleviate negative mood in the short-term, but also help treat the underlying causes of conditions such as depression.

Aristotle also suggested that other ‘alien’ pleasures can impinge on or take away from other areas of our lives, or from activities of more worth. This can be said to be true of certain video game use. As with false pleasure of excess, it can be argued that

⁴⁹ See: Joaquin A. Anguera, Faith M. Gunning and Patricia A. Areán, ‘Improving late life depression and cognitive control through the use of therapeutic video game technology: A proof-of-concept randomized trial’, *Depression and Anxiety*, vol. 34, no. 6, 2017, pp. 508–517.

what is problematic here is not just the object of pleasure, but an individual's use and response to this pleasure. Video games have certainly been used by some in ways that have taken away from other areas of their lives—as is discussed in the following category of *negative consequence*. However, video games are not the only type of pleasure that is used in this way. Many other forms of pleasurable entertainment, such as television or internet use, can also take away from other valuable pursuits. This can also be said for objects of addiction, such as drugs, alcohol or gambling. As was discussed in Chapter 4, it is not necessarily beneficial to regard all these pleasurable pursuits as inherently false, but rather to focus on their use. It might be more appropriate to say something such as, “If pleasure *X* is used in a way that takes away from other beneficial pursuits, then its use can be considered false”. If we employ this formula to judge the pleasure of video games, then it might be that in *certain cases* their use is a false pleasure, but not in other cases. But it is certainly also true that video games are not the only pleasurable pursuits that can be judged in such a negative manner.

As with false pleasure of excess we must also look at the individual who is using pleasure in this way as a co-determinate of the falsity of the pleasure. With this said, game designers are not necessarily without culpability for the design of certain games which might encourage excessive or distractive play. As we have seen some game designers and manufacturers build in reminders for players to take breaks, such as notifications on the *Nintendo Wii* console. Other games, however, specifically many mobile games, have been designed and advertised specifically as “addicting”; addicting play being considered a positive trait of a game. It is certainly not the case that all video game players become addicted to the point of disregarding other valuable pursuits. But for those who might be more susceptible, for whatever reason, the pleasure of video

game play (along with pleasure of other addicting pursuits) can be considered a type of false pleasure.

The third category, as discussed in Chapter 5, was *false pleasure of negative consequence*. This category held that if a pleasure leads to an overall negative balance of pleasure and pain, now and in the future, then the initial pleasure should be considered false. This chapter considered competing arguments from the Cyrenaic and Epicurean schools on pleasure and consequence. The Cyrenaics identified pleasure in the present as most valuable, while the Epicureans considered longer-term consequences as equally, if not, more important. The Cyrenaic school offered, what Derek Parfit considers to be, a *bias to the near* in which negative consequences were discarded for present pleasure. According to Parfit, it is irrational only to care about present pleasure just because their temporal location is closer to where we are now. It was concluded that, while we might have some reason to value pleasure in the present, it should not be done with a complete lack of future regard.

This third category, it was shown, relates to the way that some engage with video games. The desire to play, for some, can override rational considerations and cloud perspective on future negative consequences. As we have seen there is still considerable debate in psychology regarding whether gaming addiction—specifically called *internet gaming disorder*—should be considered a clinical condition. While this debate focuses on the formulation of criteria for a disorder, there is evidence that for some individuals problem gaming can lead to negative consequences. These negative consequences can include: spending too much money; having arguments with loved ones; neglecting important duties; risk or actual loss of relationships; failing or dropping out of school; or, loss of a job or career opportunities. For these individuals, it was argued that if gaming is directly causing these negative outcomes, then the

pleasure gained should be considered false. It is false for these individuals as gaming might have the appearance of something pleasurable, but it is in fact causing greater overall problems and misery. In these cases, however, it is incorrect to classify the games *in themselves* as false pleasures, rather they are false *for these individuals*; they are what can be called *subjectively false pleasures*.

Pursuing any pleasure to the extent that it has detrimental effects on other areas of one's life was also considered related to a form of *akrasia*, when one acts against reason or one's best interest. The notion of *akrasia* might go some way in explaining why some might pursue pleasures which will bring them pain or misery. We might believe we are acting in a rational manner, however, Aristotle argues that at times feeling and reason come into conflict—and that feeling limits our rational ability. While it is not clear what proportion of video game players experience negative consequences from their game play it does seem that some at least are liable to experience video games as false pleasures of negative consequence.

The fourth, and final category (which was discussed in Chapter 6) was *false immoral pleasures*. It was argued that pleasure taken in immoral acts—however one wishes to define immorality—should be considered to be a kind of false pleasure. This section distinguished between different kinds of pleasure taken in immorality. Sadistic and cruel pleasures—taking pleasure in others pain—were dismissed as being false. Chapter 6 considered that determining pleasure in the *viewing* of immorality as also being false was less clear cut. Four arguments were outlined for why this pleasure might also be considered false. The *comparative*; *emulation*; *moral character*; and *perpetuity* arguments were each assessed. These arguments are important as they directly relate to perceived immorality simulated in certain video games. Immorality is perhaps one of the most frequently offered reasons for dismissing video game content as some games

allow players to ‘act out’ violent, sexual or otherwise immoral behaviour. As we have seen the critic of this content must be able to show where the immorality lays in these games to argue successfully that they represent a false immoral pleasure.

Pleasures taken in immorality in video games were found to be *conditionally* false. *If* it is the case that the *emulation* argument holds for some individuals—that they act out the immorality seen in some games—then there is reason to call these games consequentially false pleasures for these individuals. However, it must be conclusively shown that these games do directly cause further immoral behaviour. Similarly, if immorality in games for some people cause a lessening of their *moral character*, they can also be said to be false as this is leading them away from a fulfilled and *eudaimonic* life. This is expressed in a conditional form as it must be shown that one’s moral character is in fact being sufficiently damaged as a direct result of a certain game. For this to be a conclusive argument for immoral games being false pleasures, it must also be shown that they differ significantly from portrayal of immorality in other media forms, such as film, television or novels. This chapter concludes that it is not clear cut that enjoying immorality in video games is a condition of these games being false pleasures.

Considering debates regarding video games, it was also important that this thesis considered the wider political effects of mass media and arguments regarding new technology as it relates to pleasure. This was discussed in Chapter 7 and was based on concerns raised by the Frankfurt School who in the mid twentieth-century explored the political concerns raised by the influence of new media technologies. The Frankfurt School argued that the goods offered by mass media and the ‘culture industry’ are pale imitations of true art and, moreover, that they are a malignant manipulative force on our lives. On this view, products of the culture industry merely act as distractions, diverting

our attention from important concerns about the way the world *really* is. The Frankfurt School accuse these inferior products and the pleasure associated with them of being deliberately produced with a certain political purpose in mind. Just as the ancient Romans were placated with ‘bread and circuses’; the Frankfurt School argued that the modern western world was being unwittingly controlled, not by fear, but by pleasure. While some of the theories proposed by the Frankfurt School are useful, I concluded that many of their ideas regarding pleasure can be accommodated by the proposed taxonomy of false pleasure.

The extreme claim put forward by the Frankfurt School calls into question our interaction with all media forms. With this thought in mind it becomes apparent that if critics wish to say that *all* video games are a waste of time, then they might have to endorse the further argument that *all* products of the culture industry are similarly wastes of time, as the Frankfurt School appeared to. This includes television, films, popular novels, popular music. However, analysis of modern culture shows that not all media objects are mere distractions, rather some have a great deal of intrinsic value. It is the job of the cultural critic to distinguish what is important from what is not. For those who do not wish to go so far as to condemn all popular culture, but still condemn video games, then it must be shown what makes video games distinct and unworthy of pursuit, compared to other forms of modern entertainment. The work lies in distinguishing what is unique and valuable about certain video games, in relation to other media forms; but with an eye on the nature of the pleasure these games produce for different individuals.

Chapter 8 offered arguments for why certain video games, rather than being *false pleasures*, can assist in the pursuit of the good life. This chapter showed that the playing of certain video games has been linked to positive emotional benefits in players.

Certain games led to an increase in mood and decrease in physical stress, while others were found to be positively linked with self-regulation characterised by willpower, perseverance and self-control. It was argued that video games with moral themes can also be used as tools for moral education. By giving players moral problems with which to contend, it was argued that video games are in a unique position to challenge player's moral reasoning. In doing so video games can have the capacity to develop moral understanding and moral knowledge. Throughout this thesis, the positive and negative effects of video games have been considered. Certain video games used in certain ways, it has been argued, can be considered as *false pleasures*; yet other video games, it has been shown, do have a beneficial role to play in the pursuit of the good life. It has been concluded that an effective study of video games, as a philosophical area of enquiry, requires a nuanced approach to draw out the beneficial characteristics of this evolving media form.

The taxonomy proposed in this thesis has been shown to be effective when applied to judging the value of pleasures from video games. This is only one area which a taxonomy such as this can be useful. This thesis ends, not by suggesting the philosophy of false pleasure is complete, but rather that a modest step forward has been taken in advancing this field of research. The use—and at times the abuse—of pleasure in the modern world is an area which we must keep a close eye. As technology progresses so does the danger of being consumed by objects of pleasure. A taxonomy of false pleasure is a useful tool to sort pleasures that are valuable and add to the good life; from those which may only have the appearance of being truly pleasurable. With this taxonomy in mind the analysis of pleasure in the modern world can begin.

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Appendix A:
Taxonomy of
False Pleasure

