The Pleasure Thesis in the *Eudemian Ethics*

RH: Pleasure Thesis

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Abstract: This paper argues that in the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*), Aristotle aims to prove the Pleasure Thesis. According to the Pleasure Thesis, happiness is the most pleasant thing of all. Through a reconstruction of the argument in favour of PT, the paper shows that happiness is most pleasant for three reasons: (1) by definition; (2) because it is constituted by the most pleasant activities (virtuous actions and contemplation); (3) by nature. A reconstruction of the argument in favour of PT is philosophically interesting not only in order to better understand the argument in the *EE*—and in particular the debated status and role of *NE* VII=*EE* VI.11–14—but also insofar as it sheds light on the relation between the pleasant and the good.

Key words: *Eudemian Ethics,* Aristotle, Pleasure, Happiness, Virtue, Common Books

Introduction

The *EE* starts with a remarkable claim: happiness is the best, the most beautiful, and the most pleasant thing of all. I call this the Superlative Thesis (ST).[1] One of the components of ST is that happiness is the most pleasant thing of all.[2] I call this the Pleasure Thesis (PT) (*EE* I.1214a7–8). In this paper, I reconstruct Aristotle's argument in favour of PT and I show that happiness is the most pleasant thing of all for three reasons: (1) by definition; (2) because it is constituted by the most pleasant activities (virtuous actions and contemplation); and (3) by nature. PT is not peripheral to Aristotle's project in the *EE.* Conversely, it is essential insofar as it shows that the life of virtue and of contemplation is also the most pleasant life, and that a certain kind of pleasure is contingently identical with happiness.[3] An investigation of PT elucidates important dimensions of happiness: according to the perspective of the *EE*, the good is not the only value involved. The pleasant, which

is distinct from the good, albeit coextensive with it for the virtuous agent, should be taken into consideration. Pleasure is not just an epiphenomenon of the good and it is not a simple addition to the good. Feeling pleasure in certain things is a sign of virtue to the extent that if we fail to feel pleasure we are not fully virtuous. Pleasure helps us find the good. That is, if the virtuous agent finds something pleasant, this is an indicator that it is also good and beautiful. In addition to its role in relation to virtue and to the best agent, the argument in favour of PT sheds light on important aspects of our human nature, and in particular on human psychology. That is, there are things that are pleasant by nature for human beings. Due to our human nature (as opposed for example to the divine), certain things are pleasant for us and we desire them. As Aristotle puts this, the pleasant by nature elicits the *praxis* of our human nature (*EE* VI.1154b20).

In the reconstruction of PT that I offer, I consider *NE* VII=*EE* VI an integral part of the argument that Aristotle proposes in the *EE*.[4] *NE* VII=*EE* VI is one of the so-called common books that the *EE* shares with the *NE*.[5] In this book, Aristotle offers a discussion of pleasure. With regard to what pleasure is, for present purposes, it is sufficient to invoke a minimal account that involves only two ideas, both of which are widely discussed and fairly consensual: first, that Aristotle takes pleasure to be activity, and second, that pleasure figures importantly in his account of virtue.[6] Activity translates the Greek term ἐνέργεια.[7] This basic claim has been explored by Ryle and Anscombe, whose reconstructions of Aristotelian pleasure were greatly influential.[8] More recently, scholars argued that pleasure is a pre-reflective way, similar to perception, of something seeming to be good.[9] Jessica Moss offers a version of this view that goes beyond the basic claim that pleasure may appear good. Moss argues that pleasure is, in general and in its nature, the apparent good.[10] Though Moss' analysis is not primarily concerned with the *EE*, it takes its departure from a passage in the *EE* and passages from the *EE* are cited in its support. On the view that I defend, if these passages are read in their original context of the *EE*, they have a different upshot. That is, these passages are part of the argument that shows that happiness is the most pleasant thing of all. In this

light, pleasure is not just a pre-reflective phenomenon concerning how things appear to us. Certain pleasures appear and *are* indeed good for us to the point that if the agent fails to take pleasure in them, it is a sign of a rational failure.

In what follows, I argue that in the *EE*, Aristotle proposes the Superlative Thesis and the Pleasure Thesis (section 1). I reconstruct the arguments in favour of PT by showing that happiness is most pleasant by definition (section 2). Happiness is most pleasant insofar as it is constituted by the most pleasant activities (section 3). And it is most pleasant by nature (section 4). Finally, I conclude by showing that the simply (ἁπλῶς) good is simply pleasant for the virtuous agent. Insofar as happiness is simply good it is also simply pleasant (section 5).

1. The Superlative and the Pleasure Thesis in the EE

At the beginning of the *EE*, Aristotle offers a programmatic statement:

> (T1) (Theognis) wrote: "Most beautiful is what is most just, best is being healthy, most pleasant of all is to attain what one desires." We should not agree with him. For happiness, being most beautiful and best, is the most pleasant of all things. (*EE* I.1214a5–8)[11]

Aristotle disagrees with Theognis. He claims that the three superlative properties which Theognis pulls apart—the best, the most beautiful, and the most pleasant—belong to one and the same life. And yet, according to Aristotle, the three properties are distinct. That is, they are not just versions of the same property—the good.

The question of what the best life is was common in antiquity. Philosophers argued that the best life consists in one, two or all of these three things: wisdom, virtue or pleasure (*EE* I.1214a35).[12] Aristotle reports the opinion of Anaxagoras who says that if we had the option to choose whether to be born or not, we would choose to be born for contemplating the sky and the order of the entire universe (*EE* I.1216a11–14). This is clearly an *endoxon*. Anaxagoras' opinion is set in contrast with the opinions of Sardanapallus and Smindyrides who choose the life of pleasure,

and with the opinions of those who choose the life of politics. In the *EE*, Aristotle shows that the philosophical life, the life of pleasure, and the life of politics are not three separate options. The happy life includes philosophy, pleasure, and politics.

In T1, the pleasant is placed next to the most important properties in Greek ethics: καλόν (the beautiful) and ἀγαθόν (the good).[13] Aristotle aims to connect pleasure and the highest good—happiness. Of course, ST could stand at the beginning of a treatise which shows two of these properties to be derivative—say, the pleasant and the beautiful might be ways in which we perceive the good. If this is true, then PT is not different from the claim that happiness is the best thing of all. Yet, throughout the *EE*, pleasure is treated as something in its own right, different from the good albeit connected to it if we consider the perspective of the virtuous agent.

PT has a special place if compared to the two other claims that are part of ST (i.e. happiness is the best and happiness is the most beautiful). Literally, Aristotle says "happiness, being the most beautiful and the best, is the most pleasant thing of all."[14] In order to say that happiness is the most pleasant thing of all, Aristotle uses a finite verb—ἐστιν—instead of the participle—οὖσα—that he uses for saying that happiness is the most beautiful and the best. This stylistic variation together with the position of PT at the end of the sentence suggest that Aristotle emphasises PT. We can only speculate on the reasons why Aristotle assigns a special place to PT. One of the reasons may be that it is not intuitive that happiness, which is virtuous activity and contemplation according to Aristotle, is also the most pleasant thing of all.[15] The virtuous agent pursues virtue for its own sake. However, PT may have a protreptic function for the person who is en route to become virtuous. It is conceivable that most of the people who constitute the audience of the *EE* are trying to become virtuous.

2. Happiness Is the Most Pleasant by Definition

In *EE* VI=*NE* VII, Aristotle argues that happiness happens to be pleasure. This "happens to be" identification of pleasure and happiness has been described as contingent (*EE* V.1153b13–17).[16] If

pleasure and happiness were identical in a stronger sense, we should expect that they literally *are* the same. But they are not; each has its own account and definition. This is as it should be, for of course, not any kind of pleasure is contingently identical with happiness. In order for the contingent identity to come about, we need to consider the best kinds of pleasure: pleasures of reason and of virtuous activity.

The contingent identity works because two criteria are satisfied: (1) happiness and pleasure are both natural activities; (2) happiness and pleasure are both unimpeded. Aristotle defines εὐδαιμονία (happiness) as activity according to complete virtue in a complete life (*EE* II.1219a39). He defines pleasure as follows:

> (T2) One should say that (pleasure) is an activity of the natural state and should put unimpeded in the place of perceptible. (GB: In this passage, Aristotle is responding to those who argue that pleasure is a perceptible process.) (*EE* V.1153a14–15)

Happiness is pleasure insofar as it is unimpeded activity according to our natural state.[17] In the passage, Aristotle refutes the idea that pleasure is a γένεσις.[18] Pleasure is an activity: it is complete at any moment in time, as other activities such as seeing are complete in this way; and it does not have an external end. That is, the activity itself is its own end. Rapp considers the idea that happiness is unimpeded a pre-condition for its completeness. That is, insofar as happiness is unimpeded, it should involve a kind of pleasure. Pleasure is what brings about the completeness of happiness.[19]

The so-called Function Argument—which occurs in *EE* II.1218b38–1219a38—leads to the definition of happiness.[20] According to the Function Argument, the function of the soul is living (*EE* II.1219a24). Happiness is the best activity for human beings as it is the best fulfilment of our function. In this sense, it is most pleasant insofar as pleasure is unimpeded activity according to our natural state. Aristotle does not specify what our natural state is: we may hypothesise that it is the state of our soul when it is alive, as described by the Function Argument. The Function Argument

and its conclusion, which constitutes the definition of happiness, have been considered evidence in support of the Inclusive reading of happiness in the *EE*.[21] The issue of whether happiness includes virtuous activity or only contemplation is still widely debated. With regard to the *NE*, scholars defend two readings: according to the dominant reading, happiness consists in contemplation; according to the inclusive reading, happiness consists in contemplation and in activity according to the character virtues and practical wisdom.[22] The inclusive reading has gained consensus with regard to how happiness is conceived in the *EE*.[23] In this paper, I assume that the inclusive reading is the most plausible for understanding happiness in the *EE*. With this assumption, the Function Argument provides some evidence in favour of the idea that the activities of the virtues of thinking and of the virtues of character are most pleasant. That is, all these activities constitute the best fulfilment of our function and for this reason, they are most pleasant.

In *EE* VI, Aristotle ties pleasure not only to happiness, but also to excellent agency. He argues that when our faculties perform their activities without any impediment, pleasure arises naturally. Pleasure accompanies perfect (τέλειον) activity (*EE* VI.1153b10–18).[24] Insofar as the activities of the virtues of character and of the virtues of thinking are all perfect—and a perfect activity cannot lack pleasure—they are most pleasant. According to Coope, feeling pleasure in virtuous activity is a sign of the excellent agent. The person who is merely self-controlled (rather than virtuous) suffers from a rational failure, namely she fails to take rational pleasure in virtuous actions.[25] Coope's analysis fits well Aristotle's proposal in the *EE* insofar as according to the perspective of the *EE*, it is not possible for the excellent agent to fail to enjoy perfect activity.[26]

3. Happiness Is Constituted by the Most Pleasant Activities

In order to prove that happiness is most pleasant, Aristotle shows that these two sets of activities—activity of the character virtues and practical wisdom, and activity of the virtues of theoretical thinking—are most pleasant. He starts with a basic claim. At the beginning of the *EE*, Aristotle says that knowledge and sight are more pleasurable than food and sex. In *EE* I.1215b30–35, he specifies

that no one would prefer a life of pleasure of nourishment and of sex without the pleasures of knowledge, sight, and the distinctively human senses:

> (T3) Nor indeed would anyone who was not completely slavish prefer life merely for the pleasure of nourishment or of sex, if deprived of the other pleasures that knowledge or sight or any of the other senses provide human beings with. (*EE* I.1215b30–35)

In the text leading up to T3, Aristotle asks which things we choose in life and what fully satisfies our desire. He sets aside two classes of things that we do not choose for their own sake: what brings neither pleasure nor pain (in other words, what is indifferent with respect to pleasure and pain) and what brings only pain (*EE* I.1215b24–26). No one would choose life over non existence if life was deprived of the pleasures of knowledge, sight, and the other senses that provide pleasure to human beings. Sight, of course, is a type of perception. But Aristotle agrees with other Greek thinkers in assigning a special status to vision: it is connected to knowledge.[27] Indeed, in a way the pleasures of knowledge, sight, and other senses are properly human. Notably, T3 does not refer to the pleasures of the senses insofar as these might be shared with animals. Rather, Aristotle specifies that he is referring to pleasures of the senses that are distinctively human. This means that Aristotle refers to sense perception with respect to the distinctive role it plays in the human cognitive architecture, just as in *Metaphysics* A he conceives of vision as a kind of γνῶσις and as it relates to further cognitive capacities.

Even though knowledge and sight are more pleasurable than food and sex, pleasures of the body are also part of the happy life. In *EE* I.1216a30–37, Aristotle addresses the question of whether bodily pleasure and the pleasure of enjoyment—ἀπόλαυσις—are the pleasures of the good life.

> (T4) The pleasure that is associated with the body and with enjoyment is far from obscure as regards what it is, its quality and the ways it is acquired. Hence there is no need to investigate what these pleasures are, but instead whether or not they contribute

> anything to happiness, how they do so, and whether these are the pleasures that should be connected with living finely, if in fact any pleasure should be connected with such a life; or is it rather that one must share in pleasures in some other way, and that the pleasures reasonably supposed to give the happy person a life of pleasure, and not merely an absence of pain, are different ones. (*EE* I.1216a30–37)

As the passage shows, bodily pleasures and pleasures of enjoyment are part of the same class. These pleasures of enjoyment are similarly ranked as bodily pleasures. As some kind of "lower" pleasures, we might think of them along the lines of "having fun" or "amusement." The questions that Aristotle poses are whether (1) they lead to happiness and how; and whether (2) these pleasures are part of the happy life. Aristotle does not answer these questions: he postpones the discussion to *EE* VI. However, he says that there is vast agreement on the idea that there are other pleasures—other than the bodily pleasures and the pleasures of enjoyment—that characterise the life of the happy person. For now, all that Aristotle says about the pleasures that characterise the happy life is that they are not mere absence of pain.[28]

In *EE* V and VI, Aristotle provides some evidence in favour of the idea that the activity of the virtues of thinking is most pleasant. First, in *EE* V.1144a1, he says that theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom are desirable in themselves. Being desirable in themselves is not yet being pleasurable. However, every desire is desire for something that appears good. Pleasure is often characterised as what appears good (*EE* II.1227b3–5). Theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom are desirable in themselves insofar as they appear good and pleasant. This appearance is not misleading as they are truly good and pleasant for human beings.[29] Second, in *EE* V.1144a7, Aristotle says that practical wisdom and the character virtues (together with contemplation) bring to fulfilment the function of human beings. Insofar as pleasure is defined as unimpeded activity of our natural state, pleasure must accompany the fulfilment of our function. In *EE* VI.1153a1 and in 1153a23, Aristotle mentions explicitly the pleasure of contemplation.

In *EE* VII.1237a24–25, Aristotle says that we take pleasure from scientific theories and from learning. This pleasure is more intense when learning is fresh in our minds. This remark is part of a longer discussion on why we take pleasure in spending time with other people. Aristotle chooses two examples to compare the pleasure that we take from companionship: first, the pleasure of scientific theories and of studying; second, the pleasure of recognising familiar faces. To fulfil these tasks—understanding scientific theories, studying, and recognising familiar faces—we need the virtues of thinking. In this sense, the passage brings further evidence in favour of the idea that the activities of the virtues of thinking are most pleasant.[30]

With regard to the virtues of character, Aristotle says that they are about pleasure and pain. In *EE* II.1227b8–11, he offers the following definition of virtue of character:

> (T5) Virtue of character is a state that makes decisions with regard to the mean point relative to us, in respect of those pleasant and painful things by which someone is said to have, in what they enjoy or are pained by, a certain sort of character. (*EE* II.1227b8–11)

The virtuous person avoids excess and deficiency of pleasure and of pain; she is able to find a mean point in pleasures and in pains. Among these pleasures and pains, there are bodily pleasures, pleasures connected to emotions, and so forth. Not all pleasures fit the definition given in *EE* V.1153a14–15. For example, there are unnatural pleasures. For present purposes, what matters is that the pleasure that the agent derives from virtuous activity fits the definition given in *EE* V.1153a14–15. This pleasure is unimpeded activity and it is natural. This is so for a number of reasons. First of all, virtuous activity is the best fulfilment of our function as this function is outlined in the *EE*-Function Argument. As I explained above, if we accept the Inclusive reading, happiness is constituted by activities of the virtues of character and of the virtues of thinking. Hence, the activity according to the virtues of character is natural and it is unimpeded insofar as it is a way of fulfilling our function at the best. Second, in *EE* II.1222a8, virtue is defined as the best

condition toward what is best. Qua best condition toward what is best it cannot lack pleasure. Third, engaging in the activities according to the virtues of character is most pleasant for the virtuous agent insofar as this agent has been habituated to enjoy virtuous activity through time (*EE* II.1220b1). This habituation to engage in virtuous activity has become second nature for the virtuous agent.[31] Fourth, Aristotle is explicit in saying that the continent person has to force herself to do virtuous actions. That is, she does not feel pleasure at all in virtuous actions. Hence, insofar as the virtuous agent is not continent, she must feel pleasure in virtuous actions. For all these reasons, virtuous actions are most pleasant for the virtuous agent.[32]

4. Happiness Is Most Pleasant by Nature

The argument in favour of PT reaches an important step in *EE* VI. Aristotle proposes a classification of pleasures. This classification has at least two functions. The standard view is that it is introduced as part of the answer to the question of whether someone is akratic without qualification or akratic in relation to a particular object.[33] However, this is not the only function of the classification. As I argue, it has also a role in the argument in favour of PT. More precisely, in *EE* VI, Aristotle specifies what the pleasures of the happy life are and he concludes that happiness is most pleasant by nature. In 1152b5, Aristotle reports that people think that pleasure comes with happiness; and in 1154a2, he concludes that if what he has said so far was not true, then the life of the happy man would not be pleasant. Both remarks suggest that the classification of pleasure, and his arguments against the views that pleasure is not good and that it is not the Supreme Good are responses to views of other philosophers, but they are also part of his argument in favour of PT. That is, in this section of the text, Aristotle focuses on the relation between pleasure and happiness.

In *EE* VI, Aristotle divides pleasures in: intermediate pleasures,[34] pleasures desirable in themselves/naturally desirable, and pleasures bad in themselves.

(T6) In accordance with our earlier classification, some appetites and pleasures are beautiful and excellent in kind (some pleasures being naturally [*φύσει*] choiceworthy,

> some are opposite to these, and some are in between, as we distinguished before) for example, money and profit and victory and honour; and with respect to all pleasures, these and the intermediate pleasures, people are not blamed just because they experience them or have an appetite for them or like them but rather because they do so in a particular way, i.e. to excess. That is why we blame all those who are dominated by or pursue something that is naturally beautiful and good, contrary to reasoning, like those who are more devoted to honour than they should be, or to their children and parents. (*EE* VI.1148a23–31)[35]

Intermediate pleasures are bodily pleasures such as pleasures of food and sex (*EE* VI.1147b27). These pleasures are part of a good human life provided that they are pursued with moderation. They are also called necessary pleasures: they are necessary insofar as qua human beings we need food and sex. However, not only the objects of these pleasures are necessary, the pleasures themselves have a certain normative dimension. That is, as human beings we should take pleasure in necessary pleasures. The inability to feel pleasure from necessary pleasures is a vice (*EE* VI.1151b23–33).

Pleasures desirable in themselves are for example the pleasures of victory, honour and wealth (*EE* VI.1147b29–30). They are called naturally pleasant: by nature we desire them and we find them pleasant. Natural goods are naturally pleasant. As Aristotle specifies in *EE* VIII.1248b27–31, natural goods can be bad for some agents insofar as we need to choose and acquire them in the right measure and in the right way (*EE* VIII.1249b17–23).[36] For this reason, in T7, Aristotle says that people can be blamed if they pursue them in excess and contrary to reason. Yet, pleasures that are desirable in themselves are called beautiful and excellent in kind insofar as for the virtuous agent, natural goods are not only good, but also beautiful (*EE* VIII.1249a7–8). Aristotle explains that among the things that are pleasant by nature, some are simply pleasant and some are pleasant for certain species.[37]

(T7) Some things are pleasant by nature [*φύσει*], and of these some are simply [*ἁπλῶς*] pleasant and others are pleasant according to the species being it that of animals or that of human beings. Some things are not pleasant by nature, but of these some become pleasant as a result of deformities, some as a result of habituation, others because of wicked natures; so it is possible to observe, in connection with each of these kinds of pleasure, correspondingly similar states. (*EE* VI.1148b15–19)

The pleasant by nature includes both what is pleasant across species—and this is simply pleasant—and what is pleasant for a particular species. In order to understand the relation between the pleasant by nature and the simply pleasant, we may relate T7 to a famous passage in *EE* V, where Aristotle says that things healthy or good for human beings differ from things healthy or good for fish (*EE* V.1141a23). What is healthy for human beings is different from what is healthy for fish. Similarly, things pleasant for human beings differ from things pleasant for fish. And yet, there are things that are pleasant by nature for fish and for human beings. This is the simply pleasant.

Correspondingly to natural pleasures, there are unnatural pleasures. Aristotle says that they are pleasant because our development is impeded, because of bad habit or because of depravity (*EE* VI.1148b17–20). Some of these unnatural pleasures are pleasant because of some kind of distorted nature: this is the case for monstrous creatures who feel pleasure in depravity.

Aristotle argues that what is pleasant by nature is not pleasant incidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκός). Things that restore us to our natural state are pleasant incidentally, i.e. they happen to be pleasant because they relieve us from pain or they fill a lack. But the pleasant by nature is not a restorative pleasure:

(T8) The good is either an activity or a state, those processes [*καθιστᾶσαι*] that restore a person to his natural state are only incidentally pleasant. In the case of appetites [*ἐπιθυμίαις*], the activity is the activity of the remaining part that is a state and that is natural, since there are also pleasures that do not involve pain and appetite, such as

those of contemplation, in which case one's nature is not lacking in anything. An indication of this is the fact that people do not enjoy the same pleasure when their natural state is being replenished as they do when it has been restored. Once it is restored [*καθεστηκυίας*], they enjoy things simply pleasant; but while it is being replenished they enjoy even quite the contrary. They even enjoy sharp and bitter things, none of which are pleasant either by nature [*φύσει*] or simply [*ἁπλῶς*]. (*EE* VI.1152b35–1153a7)

What is incidentally pleasant appears to be pleasant to us when our natural state is altered. It restores us to the natural state. However, when our state is restored we enjoy the simply pleasant.[38] As Aristotle puts this, what is pleasant by nature is what elicits the *praxis* of a given nature (*EE* VI.1154b15–20). This leads to the definition of pleasure at *EE* VI.1153a14, where pleasure is defined as unimpeded activity of our natural state. If we read the definition of pleasure as the conclusion of the discussion of different pleasures, and in particular of what is pleasant by nature/ simply pleasant, it is clear that happiness is the most pleasant thing of all insofar as it is what most of all elicits the *praxis* of human nature. This is so insofar as it is the best activity of the human soul. What is more, it is the *telos* of our human nature and the best fulfilment of our human function as defined in the Function Argument.

In *EE* VI, Aristotle directly replies to an objection to PT: if some pleasures are bad, how can the best thing—happiness—be the most pleasant thing? Aristotle specifies that the idea that there are bad pleasures does not prevent what is best from being a kind of pleasure:

(T9) The fact that some pleasures are bad in no way prevents what is best from being a kind of pleasure; the same also applies to knowledge, though some kinds of knowledge are bad. And if it really is the case that there are unimpeded activities of every state, then whether happiness is the activity (provided that it is unimpeded) of all states or of some one state, maybe it is even a necessary conclusion that it is this which is most

choiceworthy; and this is pleasure. The result would be that what is best would be a kind of pleasure, even though most pleasures might turn out to be simply [*ἁπλῶς*] bad. (*EE* VI.1153b7–13)

Aristotle compares pleasure to knowledge: there are good and bad pleasures and good and bad knowledge. However, this does not prevent some pleasures or some kind of knowledge from being good. The idea is that even if there are bad pleasures, nothing prevents happiness—which is the very best thing—from being the most pleasant thing of all.

5. The Relation between the Pleasant and the Good

In *EE* VII–VIII, the argument in favour of PT reaches its final steps. Aristotle shows that the pleasant and the good are different although they both belong to happiness. What is more, he argues that the simply good is simply pleasant for the virtuous agent. Aristotle starts out with a distinction between the object of ἐπιθυμία, which is the pleasant, and the object of βούλησις, which is the good.

(T10) There is also a puzzle about whether what is loved is the pleasant or the good. If we love what we have an appetite for (and passion is most like this, for every "passionate lover always feels love") and appetite is for the pleasant, than in this respect the object of love is the pleasant; but if what we love is what we wish for then it is the good. And the pleasant and the good are distinct. On these points and others related to them we must attempt to make distinctions, taking this as our starting point: the object of desire and wish is either the good or the apparent good. That is why the pleasant is an object of desire (for it is an apparent good); some people believe that pleasure is good, while to others it appears good even if they believe that it is not, since appearance [*φαντασία*] and belief [*δόξα*] are not in the same part of the soul. It is, however, clear that both the good and the pleasant are dear. With this distinction made, we must make another assumption. Some good things are simply good and others are good for a

particular person but not simply. And the same things are simply good and simply pleasant. (*EE* VII.1235b18–33)

Both the pleasant and the good are φίλοι—loved or desired. That is, the pleasant and the good elicit similar reactions. However, Aristotle explicitly says that the pleasant and the good are different. He adds a sentence that is much-debated by scholars: "the object of desire and of wish is the good or the apparent good."[39] Aristotle argues that some people believe that pleasure is good; other people believe that pleasure is not good and yet, the pleasant appears good to them. That is, pleasure appears good (φαίνεται) because φαντασία produces an image of pleasure as good, namely as something that needs to be pursued. As Aristotle says, appearance and belief are not in the same part of the soul. These two parts of the soul may convey contrasting information. It exceeds present purposes to investigate what these parts are and how this description of the parts of the soul fits with the account that Aristotle provides in *EE* II.1219b27–37. It is sufficient to say that since beliefs and imagination belong to two different parts of the soul, something may appear to us in a way even if we believe that it is not. Appearance may be misleading: what appears good may not in fact be good or pleasant.

According to Aristotle's distinction between what is ἁπλῶς and what is not ἁπλῶς, some things are good ἁπλῶς and others are good for someone. Similarly, there are things pleasant ἁπλῶς and pleasant for someone. There are things that are good—for example surgery—but that are not pleasant. Similarly, there are things that are pleasant—for example eating a cake—but that are not good. Aristotle specifies that the good ἁπλῶς is such for healthy and sound bodies. We may say that surgery is not good nor pleasant for the healthy and sound body, but it may be good for the sick body. The simply (ἁπλῶς) good and the simply pleasant can be coextensive: for example, drinking water is simply good and simply pleasant for the healthy and sound body. As Aristotle says in *EE* VII.1236a6, for the virtuous agent, what is simply good is also simply pleasant and beautiful. Virtue is what causes these three properties—the good, the pleasant, and the beautiful—to occur together

(*EE* VII.1237a2–3). This is an essential step to prove PT insofar as it explains why the highest good —happiness—is at the same time the best, the most pleasant and the most beautiful thing of all.

As conclusion of PT, in *EE* VIII.1249a20, Aristotle says that the happy person lives most pleasantly.

> (T11) We have, as well, discussed pleasure, stating what it is like and how it is good and that things which are simply pleasant are also beautiful and that things which are simply good are pleasant. And pleasure occurs only in acting, which is why the truly happy person will also live most pleasantly and why it is not pointless for people to value living pleasantly. (*EE* VIII.1249a17–21)

The beginning of the passage refers to the discussion of pleasure in *EE* VI, where the refutation of the idea that pleasure is bad occurs in a more developed and extensive form than anywhere else in the two ethics. Aristotle says that the good and the pleasant are coextensive—they are both properties of happiness—but they are not versions of the same property (i.e. pleasure is not just a way in which the good appears to us). In order for the good and the pleasant to be coextensive they need to be simply pleasant and simply good. And we need to consider what is good and pleasant for the virtuous agent. In this light, T11 is the last step to prove PT.

Conclusion

On the view that I defended, Aristotle's answer to Theognis in *EE* II.1214a7–8 should be understood as a programmatic statement of what Aristotle argues in the treatise.[40] I reconstructed the argument that shows that happiness is the most pleasant thing of all. In this reconstruction, I situated *EE* VI=*NE* VII, which has often been read as part of the *NE*, in the context of the larger argument in favour of the Pleasure Thesis in the *EE*. I argued that Aristotle proposes three steps. First, he shows that happiness is most pleasant by definition. Second, he argues that the activities of which happiness is constituted—contemplation and activities of practical wisdom and the character virtues—are most pleasant. Third, he explains that happiness is most pleasant by nature insofar as it

is the best fulfilment of our function. With regard to the relation between the good and the pleasant, Aristotle shows that what is simply good is simply pleasant for the virtuous agent.

PT is philosophically interesting insofar as it allows Aristotle to connect happiness and pleasure and to argue that the best life is the most virtuous *and* the most pleasant. In this light, the life of virtue and contemplation does not compete with the life of pleasure. The virtuous and contemplative life is also the most pleasant. What is more, a reconstruction of the argument in favour of PT helps us situate the classification of pleasures in *EE* VI.4–5, and the discussion of what is pleasant by nature and simply pleasant, in a different light. What emerges is a rehabilitation of the role of pleasure in the virtuous life: certain pleasures are indeed good and natural, and we should take pleasure in them if we are fully virtuous.[41]

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[1] The Superlative Thesis appears also in *NE* I.1099a21–29. However, the Superlative Thesis does not play a programmatic role in the *NE*. First of all, ST is not presented at the beginning of the treatise. Second, the passage appears in a discussion of beliefs that people have in relation to happiness.

[2] For a discussion of the translation of *EE* I.1214a8 see footnote 11.

[3] I endorse the inclusive interpretation of happiness in the *EE* according to which happiness consists in contemplation and virtuous activity. For a discussion of the debate on inclusive vs dominant readings see p. 6. For a discussion of the contingent identity see section 2.

[4] I do not aim to show that the common books are not part of the *NE*, or to contribute to controversies regarding the chronology of the two ethics. My aim in this paper is more modest: I show that *EE* VI is part of the argument in favour of PT. This may be compatible with the idea that *EE* VI is also part of the *NE.* With regard to the debate on the role of *NE* VII in the *NE*, already Festugière discusses the discontinuity between what Aristotle says in *NE* VII.11–14 and the rest of the *NE* (Festugière, *Le Plaisir*). Scholars focus in particular on the relation between *NE* VII=*EE* VI.11–14 (A) and the discussion of pleasure in *NE* X.1–5 (B). One of the first to discuss these two accounts is Owen in "Aristotelian Pleasure," 135–52. D. Frede calls *NE* VII=*EE* VI.11–14 a "little treatise on pleasure" (see Frede, "*Nicomachean Ethics* VII.11–12: Pleasure," 183–207). Among scholars who think that A is not compatible with B, some argue that A is a late addition, others argue that *NE* X, including B, was meant to be a separate treatise from the rest of the *NE*. Other scholars argue that A reflects a debate in the Academy on pleasure and the good (see for example, Natali, *Aristotele, Etica Nicomachea*). I follow Gauthier and Jolif in reading A as part of the *EE* (Gauthier, Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque*, 781–83). My paper goes beyond their views insofar as I argue that A is part of an argument that Aristotle develops throughout the *EE* in its entirety (and that includes *EE* VI, and not just A).

[5] For a detailed account of the situation of the common books in the manuscripts see Harlfinger, *Die Uberlieferungsgeschichte der Eudemischen Ethik*. Lieberg, *Die Lehre von der Lust in den Ethiken des Aristoteles,* argues that the common books were originally part of the *EE*. Webb ("Relative Dating of the Accounts of Pleasure in Aristotle's Ethics," 235–62) argues that the common books were added later to the *EE* and they were originally part of the *NE.* For two more recent attempts to consider the common books as not part of the *EE*, see Frede, "On the So-Called Common Books of the Eudemian and Nicomachean Ethics," 84–116; and Primavesi, "Ein Blick in den Stellen von Skepsis," 51–77.

[6] There is a vast debate on pleasure in Aristotle's ethics. Festugière provides the first study of pleasure in *EE*, *NE* and *Magna Moralia* (Festugière, *Le Plaisir*). Two comprehensive studies of the role of pleasure in ethics can be found in: Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*; Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*. On pleasure and desire, see Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire: The Case for Hedonism Reviewed*; Corcilius, "Aristotle's Definition of Non-rational Pleasure and Pain and Desire," 117–43; Lorenz, *Brute Within*. On pleasure as a supervenient end that feels good to us see Crips, *Reasons and the Good*.

[7] An analysis of the discussion of pleasure as an activity and of the distinction between activity and *genesis* exceeds the scope of this article. For a detailed account of this, see Bostock, "Pleasure and activity in Aristotle's Ethics," 251–71; Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*; Ackrill, "Aristotle's Distinction Between *Energeia* and *Kinesis*;" Beere, *Doing and Being: an Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta*. *Genesis* is a particular type of *kinesis.* On the distinction between *energeia* and *kinesis,* see also: Burnyeat, "*Kinesis* vs *Energeia*: a Much Read Passage in (but not of) Aristotle's Metaphysics," 219–91.

[8] Ryle, "Pleasure," 135–46; Anscombe, "Will and Emotion," 100–107. Shields in "Perfecting Pleasures: the Metaphysics of Pleasure in Nicomachean Ethics X," disagrees with Anscombe's view according to which Aristotle's account of pleasure is incoherent. Cf. also Dow, "Aristotle's Theory of the Emotions, Emotions as Pleasure and Pain," 47–74.

[9] Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*; Urmson, *Aristotle's Ethics*; Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*; Tuozzo, "Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desire in Aristotle," 525–49; Achtenberg, *Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics*; Segvic, *From Protagoras to Aristotle: Essays in Ancient Moral Philosophy*.

[10] Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception,* Phantasia*, Thought and Desire*. Moss argues that pleasure refers to something that is good for us in that particular condition. Cf. also Moss, "Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that we Always Desire Things under the Guise of the Good."

[11] All translations of the *EE* reported in the paper are by Brad Inwood and Raphael Woolf modified by the author. Alternatively, *EE* I.1214a8 can be translated as follows: "Happiness, being most beautiful and best of all things, is most pleasant." *Hêdiston* can be understood as a relative superlative as I suggest in T1 ("the most pleasant of all things") or as absolute superlative as the alternative translation shows ("most pleasant"). As I argue in the paper, in the *EE*, Aristotle proves that happiness is the most pleasant thing of all. Insofar as Aristotle focuses on human happiness, happiness is the most pleasant of all things that are pleasant for human beings. The claim may be compatible with the idea that divine happiness is even more pleasant, but insofar as it is not possible for human beings to enjoy it, it is not among the things that are pleasant for human beings.

[12] See also *EE* I.1215a35. These three options are not exhaustive. The best life can include also a combination of goods: cf. Broadie, *Aristotle and Beyond*, ch. 9; Irwin, "Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon," 89–124. Irwin argues that Aristotle rejects the Socratic view that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness. In order to be happy, the virtuous person needs to make a good use of the goods. See also Irwin, "Stoic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Happiness," 205–45; Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness," 167–97.

[13] The translation of *kalon* is controversial. Irwin and Rowe translate "the fine" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by T. Irwin; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by C. Rowe). Ross and Crisp translate "noble" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by D. Ross; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by R. Crisp). For the relevant semantic range in Aristotle, see *Eudemian Ethics* III.1230b20–39, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1123b3–11, *Physics* 246b, *Politics* 1254b38–1255a6, *Sophistical Refutations* 164b20-26, *Rhetoric* 1372a12–18. For a discussion of *kalon* in Aristotle, see Rogers, "Aristotle's Conception of *to Kalon*;" Kraut, "Aesthetic Reading of Aristotle's Ethics;" Lear, "Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine;" Crisp, "Nobility in the *Nicomachean Ethics*," 231–45; Tutuska, "Aristotle on the Noble and the Good: Philosophical Imprecision in the *Nicomachean Ethics*;" Irwin, "Sense and Reference of *Kalon* in Aristotle," 381–96; Irwin, "Beauty and Morality in Aristotle," 239–53; Cooper, "Reason, Moral Virtue and Moral Value;" Monan, *Moral Knowledge and Its Methodology in Aristotle*.

[14] See note 11 for an alternative translation.

[15] Already Plato in *Republic* IX defends the idea that the philosophical life is the most pleasant of all. For a discussion of the inclusive reading of happiness in the *EE*, see p. 6.

[16] The expression "contingent identity" has been proposed by Rapp ("NE VII.13–14: Pleasure and Eudaimonia," 209–37). Rapp argues that "εὐδαιμονία is an activity of certain states and this activity, in virtue of its being unhindered happens to be pleasure."

[17] T2 and the context in which this passage occurs are widely discussed and debated: here I should be somehow brief.

[18] For Aristotle, *genesis* is a type of *kinesis* (change). In *Metaphysics* 1048b18–35, Aristotle divides actions in activities and changes. Plato argues that pleasure is a *genesis* in *Philebus* 46a–c. See also footnote 7.

[19] Rapp, "NE VII.13–14: Pleasure and Eudaimonia," 222.

[20] "Function" is not the best translation of ἔργον (job, task,…), but I adopt this translation for clarity insofar as it is ingrained in the debate.

[21] Whether this is truly a definition of happiness or not it is a debated issue that does not affect my argument.

[22] The distinction between a dominant and an inclusive reading is first proposed by Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory*.

[23] Cooper, Kenny and al. think that in the *EE*, happiness includes activity according to the character virtues and contemplation. Cf. Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life*; Cooper, *Reason and the Human Good*. According to Rowe (*The Eudemian and the Nicomachean Ethics*), in *NE*, happiness is "the actuality of the virtue of the superior part of the soul" and in the *EE*, it is the whole of virtue. Rowe says that in the *NE*, happiness seems to be mostly theoretical while in the *EE*, it is practical and theoretical.

[24] For a different interpretation, see Van Riel, "Does a Perfect Activity Necessarily Yield Pleasure? An Evaluation of the Relation Between Pleasure and Activity in Aristotle's NE VII and X," 211–24. Van Riel argues that perfect activity does not necessarily yield pleasure. His argument focuses on the account of pleasure in *NE* X. For this reason, I do not think that this view applies to the *EE*.

[25] Coope, "Why Does Aristotle Think that Ethical Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?" 142–63.

[26] Of course this is compatible with the case of the less than excellent agent who fails to enjoy perfect activity.

[27] Cf. the famous beginning of *Metaphysics* A.1, where Aristotle defends the view that all human beings desire knowledge by invoking our love of sight. Notice also that the word θεῶρειν has the same root of the verb "to see."

[28] Aristotle may refer to absence of pain in response to a discussion regarding whether the pleasures of contemplation provide something more than living in absence of pain (see *EE* I.1215b6–14). I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out to me.

[29] There is a long-standing and rich discussion about the so-called Guise of the Good, according to which desire, as it were by definition, aims at the good. Cf. Moss, "Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that we Always Desire Things under the Guise of the Good."

[30] In the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle says explicitly that the activity of thinking is the most pleasant. See B87, B90, B91.

[31] Second nature refers to the acquisition of ethical virtues through habituation. When the subject becomes habituated to virtue, acting virtuously becomes second nature to her. First nature refers to capacities that we have from birth and second nature to virtuous character developed through habituation. For a discussion of second nature see McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*; Cooper, "Some Remarks on Aristotle's Moral Psychology," 25–42. Admittedly, in the *EE*, the evidence regarding habituation is scarce, but there is no other indication that the agent develops the virtues of character in a way that is not habituation.

[32] In the *EE*, Aristotle does not say explicitly that the activities of the virtues of character are pleasant. However, there is indirect evidence in favour of this idea—as I discussed above—and an argument that shows that what is beautiful and good is also pleasant. In *EE* VII.1236a6–7, Aristotle says that for the virtuous person, things beautiful and good are pleasant. He argues that the same thing is good ἁπλῶς and pleasant ἁπλῶς (1236b27). And he specifies that things beautiful should be also pleasant for the virtuous agent (1237a7). In *EE* VIII.1248b17–36, Aristotle says that the activities of the virtues of character are beautiful and good. Hence, the activities of the virtues of character are pleasant for the virtuous agent insofar as they are beautiful and good. The idea that the good, the beautiful, and the pleasant go together is repeated at *EE* VIII.1249a17–21.

[33] Cf. Lorenz, "Nicomachean Ethics VII.4: Plain and Qualified Akrasia," 72–103.

[34] They are called intermediate at *EE* VI.1148a25 and necessary at *EE* VI.1147b25. Lorenz argues that there are two classifications of pleasures: A (1147b23–8a22) and B (1148a22–b14). He argues that B is meant to replace A and that it is in line with the discussion of pleasure in *NE* X. Cf. Lorenz, "Nicomachean Ethics VII.4: Plain and Qualified Akrasia," 72–103. Differently from Lorenz, insofar as I conceive of *EE* VI as a continuous discussion instead of a collection of discussions that belong to different works, I take the two classifications as compatible and as part of the same discussion in the context of the *EE*. Aristotle calls the same pleasures in two ways (intermediate and necessary): this is not rare in Aristotle's works.

[35] For a different punctuation see Lorenz, "Nicomachean Ethics VII.4: Plain and Qualified Akrasia," 84. I agree with Lorenz that money, profit, victory and honour are naturally choiceworthy.

[36] For a different interpretation see Lorenz, "Nicomachean Ethics VII.4: Plain and Qualified Akrasia," 72–103. Lorenz explains T6 in the context of the *NE* and he distinguishes between μοχθηρία (*EE* VI.1148b2) and vice. I do not think that this distinction is relevant for present purposes.

[37] A widespread translation of ἁπλῶς is "without qualification." However, I translate ἁπλῶς "simply" for the sake of clarity. That is, whereas the simply pleasant is pleasant across species, the simply good is good for human beings. Hence, the simply good has indeed a qualification insofar as we are considering what is ἁπλῶς for human beings and not for other beings in the cosmos.

[38] Contemplation is simply pleasant even though it is not simply pleasant across species (in T7, the simply pleasant is what is pleasant across species).

[39] Cf. Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception,* Phantasia*, Thought and Desire*, xii. Moss defines appearance of goodness as "a motivating representation through *phantasia,* which derives from previous perception of its object as pleasant, and forms in turn the basis for thoughts about goodness." Moss offers a number of formulations for her main proposal: "pleasure is awareness of goodness," "a way of tracking the good," "pleasurably cognising something is finding it good" (Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception,* Phantasia*, Thought and Desire*, 29–40). On Moss' account, the pleasant is the object of desire *qua* apparent good. *Phantasia* is the faculty that detects it, in a manner that resembles sense perception. According to Moss, *phantasia*'s job in picking up on the pleasant is similar to how perception works. She argues that Aristotle understands the apparent good in a quite literal sense, which she elucidates by comparison with optical illusion: in the same way in which we perceive something as X while it is in reality Y, by perceiving something as pleasant we believe that it is good. In effect, she argues, we desire the pleasant because *phantasia* produces appearances of goodness. Previous experiences in which we perceive the same object as pleasant function as the material from which *phantasia* forms appearances of that object as good. Insofar as in the *EE,* pleasure is discussed as something in its own right that has important roles in human motivation, I disagree with Moss' view that pleasure is just an epiphenomenon of the good. Regarding *phantasia,* Lorenz proposes a different interpretation of the role of *phantasia* in relation to motivation. He connects imagination with intellect and not only with perception: see Lorenz, *Brute Within*. On the role of the apparent good in motivation see also: Richardson, "Desire and the Good in De Anima," 381–99; Hamlyn, *Aristotle* De Anima *Books II and III*; Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*.

[40] The third component of this programmatic statement for which Aristotle provides less evidence throughout the *EE*—namely, that happiness is the most beautiful thing of all (the Beautiful Thesis)—should be the topic of future work.

[41] I am grateful to Katja Vogt for comments on previous drafts of this paper, to anonymous referees and the editorial committee of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. I benefitted from discussions and questions on earlier versions of this paper presented at the AIA-SCS Meeting in Toronto, at the Work in Progress Workshop in Ancient and Contemporary Ethics at Columbia University, and at the Munich School of Ancient Philosophy.