

ARISTOTLE'S CRITICISM OF EUDOXAN HEDONISM

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IN THE final book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,¹ Aristotle reveals his view of the nature of the chief good, *eudaimonia*. He presents this view as the only reasonable and acceptable alternative to the untenable opinions of his opponents. Having already dispensed with many of these views—notably Plato's belief in one universal form, the Good, common to all good things, and Speusippus' doctrine that the good is certainly not pleasure, for all pleasure is evil—Aristotle faces a new adversary, Eudoxus, for whom pleasure is not simply good, but is, in fact, *the* good.

It must be noted that the Eudoxan view is the only one that Aristotle does not specifically treat in his discussion of pleasure in Book 7. There Aristotle criticizes negative views about pleasure so harshly (including the mildly negative view that, even if some pleasures are good, pleasure cannot be the supreme good) that he comes dangerously close to committing himself to the position that pleasure is indeed the supreme good. He goes so far as to say that (1153b7–15),

And if certain pleasures are bad, that does not prevent the chief good from being some pleasure, just as the chief good may be some form of knowledge though certain kinds of knowledge are bad. . . . Thus the chief good would be some pleasure, though most pleasures might perhaps be bad without qualification. And for this reason all men think that the happy life is pleasant and weave pleasure into their ideal of happiness—and reasonably too . . .

It is true that in Book 1 Aristotle characterizes those who identify the good with pleasure as vulgar men who prefer a life suitable to beasts. But even this seemingly harsh denunciation is tempered with the phrase “not without some ground,” *οὐκ ἀλόγως* (1095b15). Already in Book 1, then, it is apparent that Aristotle will encounter difficulties in his investigation of pleasure; he can neither praise nor condemn it without qualification.

Even discounting Book 7's favorable remarks about pleasure (on the improbable assumption that Aristotle did not write it),² his ambivalent feelings toward pleasure are still apparent. Very early in the *Ethics* Aristotle admits that pleasure is a necessity for the happy life. In fact, Aristotle says in Book 1 that the man who does not take pleasure in virtuous actions is not even good (1099a17–18) and that the happy life is thus also the most pleasant (1099a24–25). Therefore, when he attempts to refute the Eudoxan view that pleasure is the good, Aristotle faces greater difficulties than he did in

1. I have used the Greek edition of I. Bywater (London, 1920) and the English translation of W. D. Ross (London, 1931) throughout.

2. See, e.g., A. Grant (ed.), *The “Ethics” of Aristotle*, 2 vols. (London, 1855), 1:34, 38, 145, who attributes Book 7 to Eudemus (not accepted by most authorities).

his refutation of Speusippus. His greatest difficulty, no doubt, lies in the striking similarity between arguments he uses elsewhere in the *Ethics* and arguments he presents as constituting Eudoxus' proof for pleasure as the chief good.

The first argument (1172b9–15), which may be a direct quotation of Eudoxus,³ begins with the premise that all things—both rational and irrational—aim at, and choose, pleasure. Since each thing chooses what is good for it, if there is one good which all things choose, it must be good for all. That which is most chosen, that at which all things aim, is thus the greatest good; since pleasure is that thing, pleasure is the greatest good.

At this point Aristotle injects the superfluous comment that Eudoxus' arguments were accepted, not for their own value, but because of the excellence of his character: although Eudoxus argues that pleasure is the good, he is himself remarkably self-controlled. This comment has been variously interpreted. Surprisingly, some critics consider this passage merely a tribute to Eudoxus' character.⁴ It seems evident, however, that this same tribute also serves as a device for belittling Eudoxus' argument. Why did Aristotle prefer an *ad hominem* to a straightforward argument?

Apparently Aristotle simply could not refute the Eudoxan argument. In fact, in Book 7 he uses Eudoxus' first argument to support the same conclusion (except for a qualifying "somehow," *πῶς*). He writes, "And indeed the fact that all things, both brutes and men, pursue pleasure is an indication of its being somehow the chief good" (1153b25–26). This passage has generated much discussion because it is inconsistent with Aristotle's refutation elsewhere of precisely this view.⁵ We need not, however, read as far as Book 7 to find Aristotle using this Eudoxan argument, for the very first paragraph of the *Nicomachean Ethics* defines the good along the same lines: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" (1094a1–3). For Aristotle, then, as for Eudoxus, the fact that all things aim at some one thing is an indication that that thing is, in fact, the good.⁶

3. Aristotle never uses *ἔλλογα* (1172b10) for *λόγον ἔχοντα*; see J. Burnet (ed.), *The "Ethics" of Aristotle* (London, 1900), p. 442; Grant, "*Ethics*," 2:316.

4. E.g., Grant, "*Ethics*," 2:316. Since in Book 1 Aristotle characterizes as most vulgar (*φορτικώτατοι*) those who identify the good with pleasure, this tribute to Eudoxus' character is unexpected. There is, however, another respectable sort of man introduced in connection with pleasure, *ὁ σπουδαῖος*, mentioned at 1176a16 and again at 1176b25. I do not think, however, that Eudoxus and *ὁ σπουδαῖος* have much in common for a number of reasons: (a) the specific virtue of Eudoxus, namely, his *σωφροσύνη*, is not attributed to *ὁ σπουδαῖος*; (b) the distinguishing mark of *ὁ σπουδαῖος*, his reliability as a gauge of the authenticity of particular pleasures, is not applied to Eudoxus; (c) popular opinion is apparently unswayed by *ὁ σπουδαῖος*—it is far more impressed with the lifestyle of those *ἐν δυναστείαις* (1176b16–17)—but, if we are to believe Aristotle, it readily accepts the philosophical position of the temperate Eudoxus; and (d) in the case of Eudoxus, though certainly not in the case of *ὁ σπουδαῖος*, Aristotle links excellence of character to mediocrity of argument.

5. See, e.g., W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London, 1953), p. 227; G. E. R. Lloyd, *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of His Thought* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 235–36; cf. W. F. R. Hardie, *Aristotle's Ethical Theory* (Oxford, 1968), p. 294.

6. Ross (on the first page of his translation), Burnet ("*Ethics*," p. 442), and M. Ostwald (*Aristotle: "Nicomachean Ethics"* [New York, 1962], p. 3) think Aristotle may be referring specifically to Eudoxus here.

Eudoxus' second argument (1172b18–20) reasons that, since pain is an object of aversion to all things, and since pleasure is its opposite, pleasure must be the object of choice for all things. Once again Aristotle offers a similar argument in Book 7. He establishes pain as that which is to be avoided, and continues, “the contrary of that which is to be avoided, *qua* something to be avoided and bad, is good” (1153b3–4).

The argument in Book 10 does not quite establish that pleasure is the good, for that conclusion requires the further claim that being most desirable⁷ is a sufficient condition for being the good. This, of course, is the claim of the first argument, but, according to Aristotle, Eudoxus believes that it is *οὐχ ἥττον . . . φανερόν* (1172b18)—“no less clear”—from the second argument than from the first that pleasure is the good. Surely, however, this is not so; the second argument establishes only that pleasure is most desirable. (The argument in Book 7, on the other hand, does make the connection between being an object of choice and being a good, but does not make the strong claim that pleasure is most desirable and therefore that it is the chief good.) Aristotle does not comment upon this second argument until later (1176a6–13), when he actually defends it.

Nor does Aristotle fault the third argument (1172b20–23).⁸ This argument, which maintains that pleasure is most worthy of choice since it is desirable in itself and not for the sake of some further good, approximates Aristotle's own view of pleasure. Aristotle actually concedes to Eudoxus here, and declares most emphatically elsewhere,⁹ that pleasure is good and desirable in itself.

Nevertheless, Aristotle and Eudoxus (at least as he is represented here) do differ. For it seems that Eudoxus accepts the quality of being an object of choice “in itself” as somehow a sufficient condition for being most desirable. For Aristotle, however, since many things are good in themselves (for example, health, honor¹⁰), this criterion alone could not possibly determine the unique supreme good.¹¹

Indeed, there is little justification for identifying the phenomenon of being an object of choice in itself with that of being most desirable. And one begins to wonder if Eudoxus really intended such an identification. We certainly have no reason to suppose that Eudoxus believed pleasure to be the only thing good in itself; and, if Eudoxus accepted the plurality of things

7. This is a standard translation of the *τὸ μάλιστα* which appears at 1172b11 as the superlative of *τὸ αἰπερόν*. Ross's rendering, “most the object of choice,” is perhaps more accurate, but it is too cumbersome to be used more than once.

8. Some commentators regard this argument as part of the previous one; cf. H. H. Joachim, *Aristotle: The “Nicomachean Ethics”* (Oxford, 1951), p. 263. Others regard it as distinct; cf. Grant, “*Ethics*,” 2:316.

9. Aristotle claims that pleasure is good in itself in Book 1 (1096b16–20), objecting to Plato's view that the form of the Good is the only thing truly good in itself.

10. Despite Aristotle's trenchant refutation of honor as *τάγαθόν* at 1095b22–30, he later states unequivocally (1096b16–19 and esp. 1097b2–4) that honor is among those goods that are good in themselves.

11. For Aristotle, the sufficient condition for being the good is being the ultimate end of all human action. Although pleasure, honor, and health, for example, are desired for themselves, they are also desired for the sake of *εὐδαιμονία*. *Εὐδαιμονία* alone is desired for itself and not for any further good (1097a28–1097b6).

good in themselves, then for him, as for Aristotle, the criterion of being good in itself is insufficient to identify the chief good.¹²

In the fourth and final argument (1172b23–25) confusion regarding the goal of Eudoxus' argumentation appears once again. The argument states that a good can only be improved by the addition of something good and that the addition of pleasure to goods such as justice and temperance renders them more desirable. Aristotle notes that this argument proves, not that pleasure is the chief good, but merely that it is good or a good;¹³ he neglects to tell us whether Eudoxus insisted that it is meant to prove more. Perhaps Aristotle himself did not know. Is it not therefore possible that Eudoxus himself did not specify what this last argument, or indeed any of the previous ones, sought to prove? Is it unreasonable to suppose that Aristotle was responsible for supplying the specific conclusions of all or some of the Eudoxan arguments?

Of course, Aristotle is our main authority on Eudoxus. But, if all he really knew is that Eudoxus believed that pleasure is the good and that he offered the four arguments just discussed to support his view, it is conceivable that Aristotle's presentation of these arguments constitutes only an imperfect interpretation of them. Even if Aristotle is quoting the arguments themselves,¹⁴ the order in which he chooses to present them and his opinion as to what they are intended to prove may be mistaken.¹⁵

It is interesting that the order of the points in a non-Aristotelian account of the argument for the supremacy of pleasure found in Alexander of Aphrodisias' *Commentaria* on Aristotle's *Topics* is not the same as it is in the *Ethics*. Alexander discusses the view that pleasure is the highest good, but in presenting the argument he says *first* that pleasure is good in itself (*δι' αὐτό*) and hence is an *ἀγαθὸν τέλος*, and *second* that pleasure is desired by all things, both rational and irrational, and hence is *μάλιστα κατὰ φύσιν τελικώτατον*.¹⁶

12. A parallel case occurs in Book 1, where Aristotle says: "Eudoxus also seems to have been right in his method of advocating the supremacy of pleasure; he thought that the fact that, though a good, it is not praised indicated it to be better than the things that are praised, and that this is what God and the good are; for by reference to these all other things are judged" (1101b27–31). Here Aristotle appears to accept the claim that pleasure is not praised and that it is therefore better than things that are praised, but he nevertheless rejects the absolute supremacy of pleasure. Eudoxus, like Aristotle, may have believed that the quality of not being praised is a criterion for the relative superiority of pleasure but not for its absolute superiority.

13. The weakness of this argument (if indeed it is meant to prove the stronger claim that pleasure is the good) caused L. von Spengel (*Aristotelische Studien*, vol. 1 [Berlin, 1863], p. 50) to interpret the Eudoxan argument quite differently. He thought that Eudoxus argued that the addition of pleasure to any good thing, however small, makes that good thing better than any other good thing, however great.

14. In the third argument there is reason to believe that the direct quotation from Eudoxus begins *after* the identification between being an object of choice in itself and being most desirable is made—probably at *οὐδὲνα γὰρ ἐπερωτᾷν* (1172b22); see Burnet, "*Ethics*," p. 442. Unless this is a direct quotation, it is difficult to account for the redundancy of the argument. On the other hand, if it is a direct quotation, there is a basis and justification for Aristotle's previous interpretation of Eudoxus' position.

15. Aristotle here excludes one of Eudoxus' arguments, which he cites in Book 1 (1101b27–31), apparently because it suits his purpose to do so.

16. M. Wallies (ed.), *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis in Aristotelis "Topicorum" libros octo commentaria*

Surely this order is more acceptable than Aristotle's because, unless it is first established that a given thing is good in itself, there is no point in claiming that it is the chief good. In fact, if we rearrange the individual Eudoxan arguments cited by Aristotle, it becomes easy to form a coherent and complete proof for pleasure as the good. The last argument (Aristotle is correct in saying that it proves that pleasure is a good but not the good) should be first, not last. Before pleasure can be established as the chief good, it must first be shown to be good. The next step is to show pleasure to be good, not solely for the sake of some further good, but rather in itself. Now that it is a strong candidate for chief good, pleasure can be shown to be most choiceworthy (as the argument from the opposition of pleasure to pain is designed to show). Finally, it must be proved that the most choiceworthy thing is the chief good. This order is precisely the reverse of that provided by Aristotle.

Let us return now to the text. Regardless of whether Eudoxus intended his last argument (that pleasure, when added to any good, makes that good better) to prove that pleasure is the chief good or simply that pleasure is a good, Aristotle uses a similar, Platonic argument to show that pleasure is not the good. According to Aristotle (1172b28–34), Plato argues that, since the pleasant life is more desirable with wisdom than without, pleasure cannot be the good. Aristotle, convinced that this is true of pleasure and that anything whose value can be increased by the addition of some good is not the chief good, insists that pleasure is not the good, which must accordingly be sought elsewhere.

This is Aristotle's first attempt to refute a Eudoxan argument, but it seems rather strained. A perfectly natural observation—that pleasure makes good things more desirable and thus must itself be good—is countered by the awkward suggestion that pleasure is improved by wisdom. Pleasure may certainly be said to “accompany” something, but it is odd to speak of wisdom “accompanying” pleasure.

Aristotle tries to impute this suggestion to Plato, but it is really his own. In the *Philebus* Plato does try to prove that pleasure is not the good, and it is perhaps also true that he does so, as Aristotle says, *τοιούτω δὴ λόγῳ* (1172b28), that is, by an argument similar to Eudoxus'; but it is certainly false that he does so by precisely the argument that Aristotle presents here. For, although Aristotle initially represents Plato faithfully, by the end of his statement of Plato's argument and its ramifications he has in effect substituted his own argument.

Plato's view is roughly as follows: if pleasure is the good, then the pleasant life is the best life. If, however, the pleasant life can be improved by something else, then the pleasant life is not the best and hence pleasure is not the good. Since the pleasant life can be improved by knowledge, reason, memory, true judgment, and the power of calculation (these enable one to be aware of, to remember, and to anticipate the pleasant experiences of one's

(Berlin, 1891), p. 6 (lines 2–11). Burnet, “*Ethics*,” p. 442, quotes Alexander's second point as a parallel to Aristotle's opening argument of Book 10, chapter 2, but does not mention the first point.

life), the purely pleasant life is not the best life and pleasure is not the good (*Phlb.* 19E–21D).

Aristotle moves so smoothly from Plato's argument into his own that he blurs the real, and significant, distinction between them. Whereas Plato says that the life of pleasure, but not pleasure itself, can be rendered more desirable by the addition of some other good,¹⁷ Aristotle does not mention the pleasant *life* in his discussion at 1172b31–34. Moreover, unlike Plato, Aristotle cannot allow his argument to work at the level of the pleasant life and to move from there to a refutation of pleasure as the good. Plato is attacking the general hedonist position; Aristotle, an explicitly formulated argument in favor of that position. And, since the particular argument under attack makes no mention of the effect of pleasure on good *lives*, but rather states simply and directly that the addition of pleasure *δωροῦν τῶν ἀγαθῶν* (1172b24) makes that *ἀγαθόν* more desirable, Aristotle's attack must be similarly direct. He, too, must say simply, with no mention of lives, that pleasure is not the good *οὐδενὸς γὰρ προστεθέντος αὐτῷ τὰγαθὸν αἰρετώτερον γίνεσθαι* (1172b31–32), the understood premise being that pleasure is made more desirable by the addition of something else (presumably wisdom).

Aristotle's use of this Platonic argument is particularly objectionable because, within just a few pages of its use, Aristotle himself defines pleasure in terms of its "accompanying" function. There is, he maintains, a pleasure corresponding to (*κατά*) each sense as well as to thought and speculation, and each of these pleasures perfects (*τελειοῖ*) the activity to which it corresponds (1174b20–23).

It is interesting to observe some of the words Aristotle employs to describe the relationship between pleasure and activity. Aristotle says that pleasure perfects activity *ὡς ἐπιγινόμενον* (1174b33), that it accompanies or attends it (1175a5–6 *ἐπεται γὰρ τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ*, 1176a26 *ταύταις γὰρ ἔπονται αἱ ἡδοναί*), but, most important, *συναύξει γὰρ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἢ οἰκεία ἡδονή* (1175a30–31). *Συναύξει* is reminiscent of *αὔξεσθαι*, which Aristotle used in the statement of the final Eudoxan argument to describe the effect of pleasure on other good things (1172b25). Aristotle, then, also sees pleasure as the perfecter, the accompanier, the bloom (1174b33 *ῥα*), the augments of activities, and not as that which is perfected, accompanied, or augmented.

Regardless of whether it is proper to speak of pleasure as augmented by other goods, there is no reason to suppose that Eudoxus would have been forced to concede to Plato and Aristotle that pleasure can be made more desirable by the addition of other good things. For Eudoxus, the making-more-desirable relation was probably asymmetrical, working from pleasure to other goods but not vice versa.

Aristotle's refutation of the final Eudoxan argument is the only refutation he directs specifically at any Eudoxan argument. As mentioned earlier,

17. *Phlb.* 11D4–6, 11D11–12A1, 20E1–2, 21A8–9, 21B3–4, 21C6–7, 22A9–22B2, 60C6–9. Plato does say (60D) that no one would choose pleasure without memory, intelligence, knowledge, and true opinion, but this statement is in the context of his evaluation of the corresponding life of pleasure (60C).

Aristotle actually defends Eudoxus' second argument, and, as we are about to see, his first and primary one as well. According to Aristotle, anyone who would seriously object to Eudoxus' first argument on the ground that it posits an unwarranted connection between a thing's universal desirability and the notion that this thing is good is talking nonsense (1172b36–1173a1). If only irrational creatures aimed at this thing, it might not necessarily be good, but, as it is, rational creatures do so as well. It might even be possible, he adds, that irrational creatures have within themselves a natural good which aims at the goods appropriate to them. Aristotle, then, believes that Eudoxus is correct in establishing a connection between being desired by all and being good. Furthermore, Aristotle himself makes the connection between being desired by all and being *the* good both in Book 7 and in the first sentence of Book 1 (1094a1–3).

With regard to the second argument (that from the opposition of pleasure to pain), Aristotle insists that it is not the case that both pleasure and pain are evil simply because they are opposed to each other and to the neutral state as well. For, if pleasure were evil, it would be an object of aversion just as pain is; in fact, pleasure is not an object of aversion (1173a5–13). Once again Aristotle reinforces the criterion of desirability for determining goodness.

Aristotle is clearly less than successful in his criticism of the view that pleasure is the supreme good. Having conceded the commonsense notion that there is an intimate connection between goodness and desirability, and between being desired by all and being the chief good, Aristotle is committed to the acceptance and appreciation of the important role of pleasure in the good life for man. Indeed, pleasure is quite significant in Aristotle's presentation of his own view of *εὐδαιμονία*. Since Aristotelian *εὐδαιμονία* consists of contemplation (*θεωρητική*), which is an activity, it necessarily contains an element of pleasure as well—the pleasure that accompanies contemplation. Aristotle even maintains that the life of contemplation is the most pleasant (1177a23 *ἡδίστη*).

This is not to say that Aristotle's philosophy is hedonistic. Pleasure is never assimilated to activity,¹⁸ and this justifies Aristotle in offering as his chief good an alternative to *ἡδονή* which nevertheless includes it.¹⁹ Nonetheless, since he allows—indeed emphasizes—the criterion of desirability by all in determining the good, and since he supports three of Eudoxus' argu-

18. It is true that Aristotle seems to equate *ἐνέργεια ἀνεμπόδιτος* with *ἡδονή* when he says that the activity which constitutes happiness, when unimpeded, is probably the most desirable thing there is (1153b12 *τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἡδονή*). If Aristotle is here really attributing to pleasure the status of activity, this passage will constitute his most serious commitment to hedonism. But the real purpose of this passage (1153b7–25) is to reject the view that pleasure is *ἐνέργεια* and to assert that it is the unimpeded nature of activity. For, whereas it is an error to equate *τὸ ἀριστον* with a particular pleasure, it is correct (*εὐλόγως*) to include pleasure in the happy life: no one, no matter how good, can be happy in misfortune. Furthermore, if *εὐτυχία* (which substitutes for *ἡδονή* in the latter part of this passage), when excessive, impedes activity, it is a fortiori not itself activity; *πρὸς γὰρ τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν ὁ ὅρος αὐτῆς* (1153b24–25).

19. Aristotle has no trouble disqualifying *παιδιά* (and *σωματικά ἡδοναί* and *διαγωγαί*) as the good (1176b9–1177a11), but *ἡδονή* is another matter.

ments and is unsuccessful in the attempted refutation of the fourth, he has not satisfactorily eliminated *ἡδονή* as a candidate for the good. Unfortunately, Aristotle's futile efforts in this direction lead him to undermine Eudoxus and prematurely to declare: τὰ μὲν οὖν λεγόμενα περὶ τῆς ἡδονῆς καὶ λύπης ἱκανῶς εἰρήσθω (1174a11–12).

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