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# Between Saying and Doing: Aristotle and Speusippus on the Evaluation of Pleasure

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**Abstract:** This study aims to provide a coherent new interpretation of the notorious anti-hedonism of Speusippus, Plato’s nephew and the second scholarch of the Academy, by reconsidering all the relevant sources concerning his attitude to pleasure, sources that seem to be in tension or even incompatible with each other. By reassessing Speusippus’ anti-hedonism and Aristotle’s response, it also sheds new light on the Academic debate over pleasure in which he and Aristotle participated. This debate is not merely concerned with the truth and credibility of the arguments for or against hedonism, there are also notable differences among the participants in their understanding of the practical significance of evaluating hedonic experiences. This new picture allows us to better understand Aristotle’s selective representation of the intra-school debate and some neglected features of his responses to different interlocutors.

**Keywords:** Aristotle; Speusippus; pleasure; pain; hedonism; value

## 1 Introduction

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle devotes himself to defending the value of pleasure against various kinds of anti-hedonists, in particular the Academics (*EN* VII.11–14; X.1–5). Although he does not mention the names of the anti-hedonists in most cases, it has been widely accepted that many of these anti-hedonistic arguments, especially those that radically reject that pleasure *can* be good or even imply that pleasure is *essentially* a bad,<sup>1</sup> should be attributed to Speusippus, the second

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<sup>1</sup> For the former view see *EN* 1152b8–9, where Aristotle reports that some anti-hedonists hold that pleasure cannot even be an accidental good (οὔτε κατὰ συμβεβηκός). The latter seems to be implied in 1153b6–7, where Aristotle complains that Speusippus should not regard pleasure as ‘essentially a bad’ (ὅπερ κακόν τι, cf. fn. 6). I shall return to these views below in §§ 3 and 4.

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scholarch of the Academy.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, as a notorious anti-hedonist or even the representative of its radical trend in the Academy, this portrait of Speusippus is well documented in ancient tradition and widely accepted in modern scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Let me call it the *Standard Picture*.

Worries, however, emerge pertaining to Speusippus' well-known anti-hedonism. While some critics suspect that the declaration of pleasure as *essentially* bad has been a sign of the failure of his position,<sup>4</sup> others have noticed that not all challenges raised by Speusippus are well met by Aristotle's response. It is especially unclear how Aristotle defends Eudoxus' pro-hedonistic view in the face of Speusippus' criticism in the debate on the argument from contraries, which concerns the issue of whether the goodness of pleasure can be legitimately inferred from the badness of pain, its opposite. Whereas Aristotle and Eudoxus (for different reasons) are sympathetic to this argument, Speusippus dismisses it as a *non-sequitur* by appealing to what can be called the principle of triadic opposition (*EN* VII 13, 1153b5–7; X 2, 1173a6–8): since there is the opposition between two bads in addition to the good-bad opposition, Speusippus implies that the goodness of pleasure *does not necessarily follow* from the presupposed badness of pain.<sup>5</sup>

This objection is dubbed by Aristotle 'Speusippus' solution' (*lusis*, *EN* 1153b5). Solution, according to Aristotle, is a critical procedure directed against an argument by revealing what the false deduction depends on in debates or discussions (*SE* 176b29–30; 179b23–4). Speusippus' solution is dialectical insofar as it invokes a principle with which not only Aristotle is familiar (*Cat.* 14b1–2, *Metaph.* I 5) but which also seems to govern his notorious doctrine of the Mean. And when Aristotle states that 'because of pleasure we do *bad* things, and because of pain we abstain from doing fine ones' (*EN* 1104b9–11) or that 'because of pleasures and pains people become *bad*' (1104b21), he even appears to make explicit what is merely implied in

2 For a detailed study on the *legomena* in Aristotle's two accounts of pleasure see Lieberg (1958, 59–85, 96–103); also cf. Joachim (1955, 234–5, 264) and Frede (2009). Speusippus is characterized by Gosling and Taylor (1982) as Aristotle's 'main philosophical rival' (226) and 'the main threat' (227). A similar view can be found in Natali (2004, 113) ('son adversaire principal') and Frede (2020, 927) ('Protagonist der anti-hedonistischen Auffassung'). Festugière (1936, VIII–XX) even regards Speusippus as *the* opponent of Aristotle here. By contrast, Van Riel (2000b) argues that Plato is the prime target there, but this view has been convincingly refuted by Frede (2009, 188–9), also see §4 below.

3 See e.g., Gell.9.5.4; Heliodorus *In EN* 158, 26–8; Anonymous *In EN* 452. 36–7; *Scholion in Par. Gr.* 1854 = Tarán 80e; Michael *In EN* 539.10–16. For the current status of research see §3 below.

4 Some ancient commentators, for instance, claim that *no one* (οὐδεὶς) would reasonably make this claim, see Aspasius *In EN* 150.7; Heliodoros *In EN* 158. 29–30; *Anonymous in EN*, 452.37–453.3. More recently, Rapp has also pointed out that the 'implication that pleasure is essentially bad can easily be proved wrong' (2009, 213).

5 For recent discussions of this dialectical exchange with fuller references, see Rapp (2009), Warren (2009), Fronterotta (2018), and Cheng (2020).

Speusippus' challenge. Given these common grounds, it is intriguing to see how he could undo Speusippus' solution. What Aristotle provides, however, disappoints many sensitive readers:

The solution (λύσις) Speusippus used to offer (ἔλυσεν) – it is just like the case that the greater is contrary both to the lesser and to the equal – does not follow (οὐ συμβαίνει). For he would not say that pleasure is essentially a bad (ὅπερ κακόν τι).<sup>6</sup> (1153b5–7)<sup>7</sup>

If Speusippus does take pleasure as essentially bad, Aristotle, who argues that pleasures can be unconditionally good and even that some pleasures are the highest good (1153b7–8), seems to merely reiterate his disagreement with the Platonist. Then one has to wonder *for what reason* he thinks the Platonist ought not to claim what he believes. If we, alternatively, suppose Aristotle's reply to be an *ad hominem* objection, alluding to some inconsistent ethical commitments endorsed by his opponent, the remaining question is where to find the independent evidence for this commitment, given that Speusippus' works have been almost entirely lost.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, if he explicitly denies the badness of pleasure, not only does the Standard Picture of him need substantial modification, but Aristotle himself does not even seem to provide a coherent account of Speusippus' anti-hedonism.<sup>9</sup>

Puzzles about Speusippus' attitude to pleasure are not limited to Aristotle's testimonies but are also found in the later biographical/doxographical tradition. Historians of philosophy are often bemused by many anecdotes about Speusippus' being easily subject to passions, in particular to sensory pleasure. Whereas Philodemus characterizes him as akratic (P. 1021. col.7.7–10, Dorandi),<sup>10</sup> Plutarch reports

6 A more literal translation is 'pleasure is the very thing that is something bad', which can mean 'pleasure is something which *indeed* is bad'. Yet the context suggests that the ὅπερ is used not merely as an emphatic relative pronoun. For the hedonistic debate concerns how to evaluate pleasure and pain *as such* or, as Lieberg points out (1958, 62), their *Gattungsbegriff*. It is thus intelligible that ὅπερ κακόν τι is most commonly translated as '*essentially* a bad'. This fits well with a technical use of ὅπερ in Aristotle, which, in contrast with *kata symbebēkos*, functions synonymously with *ousia* or *genos* (cf. *DA* 428b1–2; *Metaph.*1003b32–3, 1007a28–31; *Top.* 122b25–6; especially τὸ ἡδὺ ὅπερ ἀγαθόν' in *Top.* 124b8–9). Thanks to Rhodes Pinto for pressing this issue.

7 The text of *EN* follows Susemihl (1887); translations are mainly based on Irwin, though Reeve, Broadie/Rowe, and Aufderheide (in the case of *ENX*) have been consulted and modifications are often made.

8 As Krämer (2004) points out: 'Für eine positive Einschätzung höherer Lustarten bei Speusipp gibt es keinen Beleg' (28).

9 See e.g. Gosling and Taylor (1982, 230): 'This (sc. the view that Speusippus holds pleasure and pain as two evils) is, however, in direct opposition to the text of Book VII as it stands. For Aristotle goes on to say that Speusippus would deny that pleasure is of itself an evil'. Likewise, Tarán contends that Aristotle contradicts himself in commenting on Speusippus' attitude to pleasure (1981, 51).

10 Also see *DL* 4.1.4–11.

that Plato criticized him as self-indulgent (ἐκ πολλῆς ἀνέσεως καὶ ἀκολασίας, *De frat. amor.* 491F2). In Athenaeus, it seems that ‘pleasure-seeker’ (φιλήδονος) is used even as *the* epithet of Speusippus when he is being introduced (XII 546D = 12.66, 12–13 Kaibel). All such characterizations are evidently in tension with the Standard Picture that positions him as a representative of the anti-hedonistic camp, even embodying its radical trend within the Academy.

So far, we have encountered three images of Speusippus: (I) a radical anti-hedonist who denies that pleasure can ever be good or even evaluates pleasure as essentially bad, (II) a dialectician who skilfully overturns Eudoxus’ pro-hedonistic argument to his own advantage, yet does not necessarily endorse a radical anti-hedonistic stance, and (III) a hedonist who is notorious for easily succumbing to the temptation of sensory pleasures. Each image not only presents its own puzzles but, taken together, they are incompatible with each other. While most of Aristotle’s commentators are unfazed by the first portrayal, as they tend to downplay Speusippus as a mere contrasting foil for Aristotle’s more ‘sober’ and ‘realistic’ view, the second portrayal is often preferred by scholars who wish to consider Speusippus’ ethics in a more charitable light.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, since the third portrayal seems to be of little philosophical interest, it is rarely taken seriously by critics who are chiefly concerned with Speusippus as a philosopher.<sup>12</sup>

The present study will reconsider Speusippus’ role in the Academic debate on pleasure. It aims to offer a new interpretation of his anti-hedonism by re-evaluating all the available sources concerning his attitude towards affective experience, in Aristotle as well as in the doxographical and commentary tradition. This endeavor attempts not only to reconcile the conflicting accounts of Speusippus but also to provide new insights into Aristotle’s interest in this debate. The first half of this study (§§2–4) is devoted to scrutinizing Speusippus’ anti-hedonism. I will begin by arguing that Speusippus’ central motivation for criticizing Eudoxus, apart from exposing the formal flaws of his argument, stems from his revised Platonism, a position that might be called *essentialist anti-hedonism*, which holds that pleasure has a negative value primarily because of its *intrinsic* properties and independently of its being the object of any psychological attitude (§2 and §3). As a reasonable development of Plato’s doctrine, Speusippus’ view is historically well motivated and theoretically defensible, especially in the context of a debate over whether hedonic experiences are *intrinsically* valuable to human beings (§4). On this basis, the remainder of this paper

<sup>11</sup> See e.g., Schofield (1971, 16–20), Gauthier and Jolif (1958, 800–3), Gosling and Taylor (1982, 230), and Dillon (2003, 64–77).

<sup>12</sup> This element, for instance, is not mentioned in the entry ‘Speusippus’ in the three standard reference books: *RE* (Stenzel 1929), *Der Neue Ueberweg* (Krämer 2004, 13–14), and *SEP* (Dancy 2016). The first may deem it historically unreliable, whereas the last two must regard it as philosophically irrelevant.

(§§5–7) revisits the Academic debate on pleasure, with a particular focus on Aristotle’s delicate utilization of Speusippus and other anti-hedonists. I propose a fresh perspective on his response to Speusippus, arguing that Aristotle criticizes him for succumbing to a specific form of self-contradiction – an inconsistency between what he *says* and what he *does* (§5). This hypothesis is further substantiated and refined by exploring Aristotle’s understanding of *truth in practical matters* – specifically, how it requires congruence between words and deeds, a central but often overlooked motif in *EN X* (§6). Finally, the result leads to re-evaluating the puzzling characterization of Speusippus as a hedonist in later traditions (§7). More than a new interpretation of Speusippus’ ethics, the study also sheds light on Aristotle’s methodological concern with ethical argumentation, in particular, how and in what sense an argument in this domain should be *practically* relevant.

## 2 Speusippus’ Challenge

Let us begin with Speusippus’ anti-hedonism. The Standard Picture, as noted above, seems dubious on both textual and theoretical grounds. For Aristotle’s explicit declaration – Speusippus ‘would not say that pleasure is essentially bad’ (*EN* 1153b6–7) – appears to be strong textual evidence against this picture. Furthermore, the assertion that pleasure is essentially bad is also considered theoretically unpromising, if not outright desperate. In a recent study, Richard Davies even goes so far as to characterize this attitude as ‘fanatical and perverse’ (2023, 33). The result is especially hard to swallow for scholars who tend to take Speusippus’ philosophy seriously. Consequently, some critics (whom we can label as revisionists) endeavor to demonstrate, in one way or another, that for Speusippus, pleasure is not bad in itself or that some pleasures are inherently good.<sup>13</sup>

Since much of the controversy hinges on what is meant by ‘pleasure is essentially bad’, we are not in a position to settle the disagreement until its precise meaning in the context of Speusippus’ ethics is clarified. In what follows (§§2–4), I will defend a version of the Standard Picture against the revisionists by arguing the following: (1) Aristotle neither provides decisive evidence against the portrayal of Speusippus as a radical anti-hedonist nor presents an incoherent account of his position. (2) The dialectical nature of Speusippus’ objections to Eudoxus does not contradict, but rather aligns well with, his anti-hedonist doctrine. (3) To believe that pleasure is

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<sup>13</sup> Owen, for instance, claims that Speusippus ‘holds, first, that pleasure is neither good nor evil in itself’ (2012, 1393). While Dirlmeier (1964, 503) believes that *philosophical* pleasure must be good for Speusippus, Gauthier and Jolif (1958, 800–3) argues that Speusippus identifies *true* pleasure with the neutral state, which is the good.

essentially bad, according to Speusippus, is to believe that pleasure is seriously flawed from an ontological perspective and that this flaw explains the multiple ways in which it can be harmful to experiencing subjects. This standpoint should not be confused with other pleasure-averse positions, either in Aristotle's works or in other sources, such as the claim that pleasure can *never* be good in any context or that pleasure is the greatest evil.

Now, let us return to the heart of the controversy, the argument from contraries (AC), an argument invoked by Eudoxus to establish the goodness of pleasure from an intuition about the badness of pain. Although there are two versions of AC, respectively in *EN* VII.13, 1153b1–4 and X.2, 1172b18–20, their common structure can be sketched as follows:<sup>14</sup>

- (AC1) Pain is a bad.
- (AC2) Pleasure is contrary to pain.
- (AC3) The contrary of a bad is a good.

Therefore

- (AC4) Pleasure is a good.

In both places, as Aristotle goes on to tell us, AC is challenged by Speusippus and those who follow him. Let me quote the key texts again:

[SP<sub>1</sub>] Σπεύσιππος ἔλυεν [...], ὡσπερ τὸ μείζον τῷ ἐλάττονι καὶ τῷ ἴσῳ ἐναντίον· (*EN* VII. 13, 1153b4–6)

Speusippus used to offer a solution – it is just like the case that the greater is contrary both to the lesser and to the equal.

[SP<sub>2</sub>] οὐ γάρ φασιν, εἰ ἡ λύπη κακὸν ἐστὶ, τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀγαθὸν εἶναι· ἀντικείμεθα γὰρ καὶ κακὸν κακῷ καὶ ἄμφω τῷ μηδετέρῳ.<sup>15</sup> (*EN* X. 2, 1173a6–8)

For they deny that pleasure is good given that pain is bad. For, in their view, a bad is contrary to another bad and both [bads]<sup>16</sup> to what is neither.

In both passages, Speusippus challenged AC by appealing to a trio rather than a pair of oppositions. The analogy in [SP<sub>1</sub>] may reflect an Academic theory of contraries, which also finds echoes in Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean. According to this, two extremes (sc. the greater and the lesser), being opposite to each other, are also

<sup>14</sup> In Cheng (2020), I argue that there are subtle but important differences between the two versions of AC. But this does not affect the present study inasmuch as it is here concerned with the *model* shared by these two arguments.

<sup>15</sup> Reading τῷ μηδετέρῳ, which is accepted by the majority of critics.

<sup>16</sup> I take the ἄμφω as referring to two bads, namely pleasure and pain, see Michael in *EN* 539. 8; Krämer (1971, 207–8).

opposed to a third thing, which, as the mean between the extremes, is a good (the equal).<sup>17</sup> In *Metaphysics* Iota 5, Aristotle explains why and in what sense the equal in this analogy is both the ‘neither’ and the intermediate:

The equal is what is neither great nor small, but which is by nature such as to be great or small; and it is opposed to both as a *privative negation* (ἀπόφασις στερητική), and this is why it is also intermediate (1056a22–4, transl. Castelli, emphasis mine).

The ‘neither’ thus refers to a specific negation that requires the three items involved to be in the same domain.<sup>18</sup> Against this background, the core of Speusippus’ dialectical objection is to remind proponents of AC that one cannot infer the goodness of pleasure from the badness of pain, given the existence of opposition between two kinds of bad in the realm of values.<sup>19</sup> We can reconstruct this argument as follows:

(SAC1) Pain is a bad. (=AC1)

(SAC2) Pleasure is contrary to pain. (=AC2)

(SAC3) The contrary of a bad is another bad. (the lesser vs. the greater)

Therefore,

(SAC4) Pleasure is a bad.

Although scholars generally agree that [SP<sub>1</sub>] and [SP<sub>2</sub>] present the same argument, some of them worry whether the above reconstruction chimes with [SP<sub>2</sub>]. It is especially unclear what ἄμω and τῷ μηδετέρω at 1173a8 respectively refer to. The traditional interpretation takes ἄμω as two ‘bads’, corresponding to the greater and the lesser in [SP<sub>1</sub>], and accordingly refers τῷ μηδετέρω to ‘the equal’, which represents the good in the analogy. Other scholars, however, believe that [SP<sub>2</sub>] primarily resorts to analogies of *affection* rather than of *value*. They identify the ἄμω directly with pleasure and pain, and thus take τῷ μηδετέρω to denote the affectively neutral state,<sup>20</sup> which is supposed to be the ultimate good for Speusippus, called either ἀοχλησία or ἀλυπία in ancient testimonies.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the analogy in [SP<sub>1</sub>] also does not primarily concern the value (good and bads) but three states along the

17 For the Academic background of the doctrine of the Mean see Hambruch (1904), Philippson (1925, 447), and Krämer (1959); also cf. Tracy (1969, 77–156).

18 For more details, see Castelli (2018, 150–3).

19 See e.g. Michael *In EN* 539. 3–4: Σπεύσιππος λέγων· ‘οὐκ ἀνάγκη, ἐπειδὴ κακὸν ἐστὶν ἢ λύπη, ἀγαθὸν εἶναι τὴν ἀντικειμένην αὐτῇ ἡδονήν’.

20 See e.g. Tarán (1981, 440): ‘[P]ain as an evil is opposed to pleasure as another evil and both are opposed to the neutral state, or to that which is neither pain nor pleasure’.

21 ἀοχλησία is found in Clem. *Strom.* II, 133.4; for ἀλυπία, see Heliodorus *In EN* 158, 24–8; Anonymous *In EN* 452.31–6. For more see §4 below.

algedonic spectrum (pleasure, pain, and the neutral). Speusippus' challenge, then, turns out to be more than a destructive dialectical argument but points to a genuine alternative: the goodness of the neutral state. In fact, Heliodorus (158, 24–8) and the anonymous commentary on *EN* (452.31–6) seem to have moved forward in this direction. Recently James Warren has delivered the most articulate version of the interpretation along this line, which can be summarized in the following way:

(WAC1) Pain is bad. (=AC1)

(WAC2) The contrary of a bad is a good (=AC3)

(WAC3) The neutral state is contrary to pain.

Therefore,

(WAC4) The neutral state is a good.<sup>22</sup>

According to this reconstruction, Speusippus does not reject the core premise of AC employed by Aristotle and Eudoxus, i.e., *the contrary of a bad is a good*, but adopts it in his counterargument to draw a competing conclusion. Like SAC, according to Warren, Speusippus aims to show that AC4, the hedonistic conclusion, does not necessarily follow because a conflicting claim with equal weight can be established on the same pattern of reasoning. Yet, unlike SAC, he reaches the result *not* by demonstrating that a negative evaluation of *pleasure* (SAC4) can be vindicated by the same *topos* but by indicating that a *third state*, which is different from pleasure and pain, can be equally evaluated as a good (WAC4). In other words, according to WAC, Speusippus maintains the binary opposition of AC, but turns it to his favor, leading to the esteem for the neutral state, a condition in which no pleasure or pain is involved. As Warren emphasizes, WAC is not Speusippus' argument for the goodness of the neutral state but a dialectical manoeuvre designed to undermine AC.<sup>23</sup> It is dialectical in the sense that it uses the premises of AC to show that an alternative conclusion follows no less than the hedonistic conclusion AC4.

WAC appears superior to the traditional SAC insofar as it respects the opposite premise of AC (=AC3) and avoids drawing a *prima facie* shocking conclusion that pleasure is a bad (=SAC4). Despite its ingenuity, however, I doubt that WAC can function as a correct reconstruction of Speusippus' challenge here on both textual and theoretical grounds.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the original vision in Warren (2009, 267): '(i) The opposite of something to be avoided is to be pursued. (ii) Pain is to be avoided. (iii) The intermediate is the opposite of pain. (iv) The intermediate is to be pursued' (Warren 2009, 267). I adjusted its order and words to fit it better into my discussion.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Warren (2009, 250, 251, 267, 274–6) and even 'purely dialectical' (273), 'entirely dialectical' (268), or '[nothing] other than dialectical' (272).



First, WAC seems inconsistent with [SP<sub>2</sub>] even if it can be a possible reading of [SP<sub>1</sub>]. But both texts, as mentioned and Warren (2009, 278) also agrees, are supposed to preserve one and the same argument. [SP<sub>2</sub>], which emphasizes ‘a bad is contrary to another bad’ (1173a6–7), precludes using WAC2 – ‘The contrary of a bad is a good’ (=AC2) – as a legitimate premise for demonstrating that the opposite of a bad must be a good. Since the gist of Speusippus’ refutation is to insist that the opposition in question is triadic rather than binary, it is difficult to conceive that he would be happy to use WAC2, a premise built on the binary opposition, to construct his response.

Second, the problem of WAC is exacerbated by Warren’s translation of the ἄμωφ in [SP<sub>2</sub>] as the ‘good and bad’ (1173a8).<sup>24</sup> This rendering is implausible, not only because it grammatically violates the principle of proximity<sup>25</sup> but also because it results in endowing the two occurrences of ἄμωφ in the same context with different meanings.<sup>26</sup> More importantly, it aggravates the inconsistency between [SP<sub>1</sub>] and [SP<sub>2</sub>]. For the parallel between τὸ μείζον τῷ ἐλάττωι καὶ τῷ ἴσῳ in [SP<sub>1</sub>] and κακὸν κακῷ καὶ ἄμωφ τῷ μηδετέρῳ [SP<sub>2</sub>] suggests that the μηδετέρῳ, which literally means ‘neither’, should refer to the ἴσῳ, which represents something good in the analogy.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, if one reads the ἄμωφ as the good and bad, the μηδετέρῳ cannot be the neutral affective state (=the good) but turns out to be what is neither good nor bad, the neutral *in value*. But if the neutral *value* is involved in [SP<sub>2</sub>], WAC, which only refers to the two values (the good and bad), can hardly be a correct reconstruction of this text.<sup>28</sup>

24 Warren (2009, 278); for the same view see Ramsauer (1878, 652), Hambruch (1904, 16), and Schofield (1971, 17).

25 This clause is immediately preceded by ‘κακὸν κακῷ’.

26 In Aristotle’s response to this argument he said that ἀμωφῶν μὲν γὰρ κακῶν καὶ φευκτὰ ἔδει ἄμωφ εἶναι (1173a10). The ἄμωφ in 1173a10 refers evidently to two bads.

27 Some scholars excise ἄμωφ at 1173a8 in order to make [SP<sub>2</sub>] exactly parallel to [SP<sub>1</sub>], see e.g., Hackforth (1958), Rackham (1934, 583), Gauthier and Jolif (1958, 823), and Krämer (1971, 207–8, n92). This emendation seems to me unnecessary.

28 Some scholars emend the phrase ἄμωφ τῷ μηδετέρῳ either to μηδέτερον τῷ μηδέτερα <εἶναι> or, in a more conservative way, to ἄμωφ τῷ μηδέτερα <εἶναι> (see Burnet 1900, 444; Gosling and Taylor 1982, 229; Schofield 1971, 17; Stewart 1892, 408). Both proposals, I think, face the same difficulties. For the introduction of the neutral value – either in the form of the opposition between two neutral things or in the form of the opposition between something neutral and something good/bad – seems to erase the parallel between [SP<sub>1</sub>] and [SP<sub>2</sub>]. Theoretically considered, the onus would be on Speusippus to cash out what could instantiate value-neutrality along the pleasure-pain axis. This move is not promising for him given that his chief aim is to pick apart AC, in which only two values are in operation. I think Aristotle’s mention of the value-neutral in his response at 1173a11 (τῶν μηδετέρων δὲ μηδέτερον ἢ ὁμοίως) intends to make his defense exhaustive, which does not mean that Speusippus, as a challenger of AC, must already be talking of the value-neutral (*pace* Gosling and Taylor 1982, 229).

Finally, leaving aside the coherence problem between [SP<sub>1</sub>] and [SP<sub>2</sub>], if WAC is indeed Speusippus' objection to AC, what he seems to be doing is nothing but providing an *alternative* inference based on the same argumentative *topos*. Although from independent sources, we know that the conclusion WAC4 is what Speusippus somehow endorses (see §4 below), it remains unclear in what sense this argument is *dialectically relevant* as a solution of AC. For to establish a dilemma of opposing arguments with equal weight, the conclusions in question must be two *conflicting* claims. Yet whether AC and WAC are in genuine conflict is far from evident. For the claim that the neutral state is something good does not entail that something else cannot be good too. An Epicurean, for instance, must recognize both the neutral state and pleasure as good, even if the former is held in higher esteem. By contrast, Aristotle, who appreciates the value of pleasure more than that of the neutral state, also sometimes admits the goodness of the latter (*Top.* 117a26; *Cael.* 284a29; *HA* 633b25–6; *EN* 1120a26–7). It cannot be ruled out that Eudoxus might hold a similar view.<sup>29</sup> In brief, if the thesis that the neutral state is a good (WAC4) is compatible with the thesis that pleasure is a good (AC4), the proponents of AC can accommodate WAC well while leaving their position unaffected. WAC thus seems too weak to be dialectically relevant. After all, Aristotle does not deny that Speusippus makes a dialectically strong challenge to AC (*EN* 1173a8–9), even if he believes that this counterattack eventually fails for other independent reasons (see §5 below).

In contrast with WAC, I do not take the thesis – that the neutral state is to be pursued – as a competing conclusion of Speusippus' solution but as a *doctrinal background* that motivates him to challenge AC. Although he must be ready to provide different arguments for this commitment where necessary, it is highly doubtful, even for a dialectical purpose, that he is willing to reach this conclusion through the binary opposition (AC2=WAC2) he strongly resists. As the analogy in [SP<sub>1</sub>] implies, it is true that what Speusippus aims at in his challenge to Eudoxus and his advocates must be more than a dialectical victory. But in the first round of the debate, he need not cash out what 'the equal' stands for apart from claiming that it differs from pleasure and pain. The possibility that pain (as a bad) is contrary to pleasure (as a bad) is sufficient to undermine AC and is thus dialectically more relevant at this stage of the argument. Whatever status is behind 'the equal' and how to characterize it could be left to the subsequent debate (see below).<sup>30</sup>

It is remarkable that in response, Aristotle neither attacks Speusippus' analogy as such nor questions the status of 'the equal' but criticizes one of the consequences if

<sup>29</sup> It can be clearly seen from *EN* 1172b9–15 and b24–6 that the goodness comes in degrees in Eudoxus and he recognizes that many things other than pleasure can also be good.

<sup>30</sup> One can ask, for instance, whether it is a well-balanced state of pleasure and pain, a state completely outside the hedonic spectrum, or a state with other distinctive features.

the analogy is cashed out, namely the badness of pleasure. This surely strengthens our interpretation of SAC since its implicit conclusion concerns the evaluation of *pleasure* rather than that of a third state.

### 3 Can Pleasure Be Bad?

But why does Aristotle in *EN VII* think that the mere response ‘[Speusippus] would not say that pleasure is intrinsically bad’ (1153b6–7) is sufficient to defend Eudoxus’ AC? His strategy is often interpreted either as a *reductio ad hominem* or an argument *de consensu omnium*. According to the former, if Speusippus’ counterargument were valid, then he would have to concede the essential badness of pleasure, which contradicts his own teaching. In favor of this interpretation, some scholars appeal to speculative reconstructions of Speusippus’ ethics,<sup>31</sup> while others take *EN 1153b6–7* itself as evidence for Speusippus’ doctrinal commitment.<sup>32</sup> The optative plus ἄν in the expression, however, makes the latter strategy very suspect. For such a construction usually refers to a speaker’s *supposition* of a certain matter of fact, at best pointing to a reasonable conclusion drawn from some (in her eyes) reliable evidence.<sup>33</sup> This is not what one expects from a doctrinal report.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, even if Speusippus’ belief in the non-essential badness of pleasure can be confirmed, this does not make Aristotle’s response more convincing. For one may still wonder how Aristotle can save the AC by appealing to this doctrinal commitment if the challenge Speusippus poses is *dialectical* in nature. For in order to block this argument, one does not need

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31 According to Dirlmeier (1964, 503), for instance, all the participants of the hedonistic debate in the Academy have agreed that *philosophical* pleasure is essentially true and good, which is supposed to be a baseline that no Academic is permitted to violate. This proposal can neither be supported by textual evidence, nor does it fit what we know about the freedom the members of the Academy enjoyed (Frede 2018; Watts 2007, 10). Eudoxus was even not a member of the Academy (Lasserre 1966, 138; Waschki 1977, 34–58). Gosling and Taylor (1982) and Dillon (2003) also try to soften Speusippus’ alleged radicalism in different manners, yet they seem to read too much of Plato’s *Philebus* – especially the position of the naturalists (44b–46c) and the so-called subtlers (53c–55a) – into the doctrine of Speusippus. For arguments against this approach, see e.g. Hackforth (1958, 87), Lieberg (1958, 72–3, 1959, 28–34), Isnardi Parente (1980, 357–8), Tarán (1981, 79–85), Frede (1997, 265–74), and Cheng (2018).  
32 Michael *In EN* 539.29; Schofield (1971, 79); also cf. Gauthier and Jolif (1958, 801) and Gosling and Taylor (1982, 230).

33 See Kühner and Gerth (1955, 231, 233) and Smyth (1920, §1826). However, it is not, as Frede suggests, a ‘Konstruktion im Irrealis’ (2020, 789).

34 In fact, Aristotle does use the indicative to report the views of others here and in other places, e.g., Εὐδοξος ... φησὶ, *EN* 1101b27–9; Εὐδοξος μὲν οὖν τὴν ἡδονὴν τάγαθὸν ᾗ ἐρ’ εἶναι, *EN* 1172b9; also see *Metaph.* 991a16–18, 1072b30–2.

to endorse the essential badness of pleasure as a premise of the objection; it seems *formally* sufficient to recall the existence of the bad-bad opposition.

If the *reductio ad hominem* is out of place, does the appeal to argument *de consensu omnium* provide a better option?<sup>35</sup> Aristotle rejects Speusippus' solution, according to the latter, because his denial of pleasure is too counterintuitive or absurd to be accepted by anybody with normal sanity. As Richard Davies has recently stressed, 'no one in their right mind thinks that pleasure is an evil [...] only fanatics like Speusippus propose that pleasure is an evil' (2023, 31). This interpretation is tempting because it seems intuitively based on a kind of common sense that Aristotle should respect. However, it is reasonable for a sensitive reader to doubt that there was such a consensus among the ancients. Aristotle, after all, regards the question of how to evaluate pleasure as 'a subject of much dispute' (πολλήν ἐχόντων ἀμφισβήτησιν) at *EN* 1172a26–7, the preface of *EN* X. Indeed, a more serious question is whether it is already theoretically absurd to endorse the essential badness of pleasure. This question cannot be easily answered before clarifying what is meant by taking pleasure as essentially bad, according to Speusippus.

Historically considered, pleasure-aversion in classical antiquity was fairly popular. In addition to the essential badness of pleasure, Aristotle himself already witnesses various kinds of *radical* anti-hedonistic claims, such as: no pleasure is good, either in itself or in relation to something else (*EN* 1152b8–9; 12–13); most pleasures are base (1152b10–11) and even unconditionally (ἀπλῶς) bad (1153b13–14); pleasure is entirely bad (κομιδῆ φαῦλον, 1172a28). Similarly, while Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* regards the experience of intense pleasure as 'the greatest and most extreme evil' (πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατον, 82c2–3), certain anti-hedonistic naturalists in the *Philebus* deny that there is anything healthy about pleasure (*Phlb.* 44c7–8). Such a radical hostility is also attested in their contemporary Antisthenes, who notoriously declares himself to 'prefer being insane to experiencing pleasure',<sup>36</sup> 'the greatest evil'.<sup>37</sup>

Return to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although Aristotle reports wide varieties of anti-hedonism in books VII 11–14 and X 1–5, ranging from the radical to moderate ones, what he takes most seriously and devotes most space to are its radical versions. He rarely dismisses such positions directly as ludicrous but struggles to respond to their challenges with varying degrees of sophistication. Especially in *EN* X, he deliberately uses the two *extreme* positions of Eudoxus and Speusippus to create a

35 Philippson (1925, 448), Wolf (2002, 196), and Rapp (2009, 214). Some scholars (Burnet 1900, 336; Joachim 1955, 237–8; Stenzel 1929, 1666), following ancient commentaries (see fn. 4), further suggest inserting an indefinite pronoun τις to replace the default subject 'Speusippus' at *EN* 1153b6. The emendation, however, cannot gain support from the manuscript tradition of *EN*.

36 μαίνειν μάλλον ἢ ἡσθεῖν, *DL* 6.3.2.

37 Gell.9.5.3 = *SSR* V A 122; *Aspasius In EN* 142, 8–10 = *SSR* V A 120.

well-defined space that facilitates the clarification and justification of his own position through a series of argumentative exchanges.

Finally, and most importantly, to understand in what sense Speusippus can be considered a radical anti-hedonist, we should clarify what is meant by evaluating pleasure as essentially bad. To say that pleasure is essentially bad, I think, is not to say that badness falls under the definition of pleasure as a normative component. Rather, it amounts to a negative evaluation of pleasure in terms of what pleasure is and what kind of intrinsic qualities it necessarily has. This is a Socratic legacy according to which the evaluation of X should be primarily based on the essence of X or its intrinsic features. The idea is also reflected in the distinction between what is good/bad *per se* and what is good/bad *per accidens*, well attested in Aristotle (see *EN* 1152b8–9, 1152b27–9; 1153b2; 1152b8–9; 1153a29–30; 1154b16–18). That X is good/bad *per se* means that X has intrinsic value/disvalue in and of itself, independent of any relational or external factors. By contrast, evaluating X as good/bad *per accidens* is evaluating X in virtue of its extrinsic, relational properties. These two evaluations are independent positions, with no necessary implication of one from the other. Thus, evaluating pleasure as essentially bad does not necessarily commit Speusippus to the view that pleasure cannot be good *per accidens*. As a result, Speusippus' position should be distinguished from other (radical) versions of anti-hedonism, wherein pleasure, for instance, is considered the *ultimate* bad, the *sole* bad, or *entirely* bad. Specifically, to say that pleasure is essentially bad is not to say that pleasure can *never* be good since it allows the possibility of pleasure being good in other ways.<sup>38</sup> This aspect can be well illustrated by pain.<sup>39</sup> Although pain, due to its unpleasant and disturbing quality, is generally seen as bad on its own, it is also considered desirable in many scenarios when it functions as a reminder of danger, an inevitable by-product of certain healing processes, or even the so-called 'the fifth vital sign' (Barnes 2023, 122–4). Likewise, according to my interpretation, Speusippus' view does not exclude that there are circumstances in which some pleasures, which are intrinsically bad, can be desirable insofar as they somehow contribute to the wider whole which is good. It is thus ineffective to criticize Speusippus' stance as violating ordinary experience according to which pleasure is often pursued and enjoyed by many (if not all) people.

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<sup>38</sup> Pace Joachim (1955, 234), who, based on *EN* 1152b8–9, believes that Speusippus takes no pleasure as good in any sense, either in itself or accidentally.

<sup>39</sup> I would like to express my thanks to a reviewer for drawing attention to this example.

## 4 Speusippus' Essentialist Anti-Hedonism

If Speusippus, as argued above, is an essentialist anti-hedonist, how does he justify his anti-hedonism? Of course, this goal cannot be reached by overturning AC. To this question, in fact, Aristotle provides important clues. *EN* VII and X record various anti-hedonistic arguments; many are metaphysically loaded, closely connected with or directly derived from the restorative model of pleasure, according to which pleasure is essentially a motion or a process of coming-to-be. Such arguments are evidently influenced by Plato. However, it is uncertain to what extent Plato himself endorsed the restorative model. It is especially controversial whether he thinks this model can account for *all* kinds of pleasure.<sup>40</sup> Even if he does, note that the restorative model itself does not necessarily entail a pleasure-hostile consequence. For pleasure can be considered good or at least not bad, given that in this model, pleasure functions as a natural process towards the natural harmony of a living creature. In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle seems to embrace a restorative understanding of pleasure while evaluating it in a fairly friendly light.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, he also reports that there have been friends of *genesis* who adopt the restorative model yet believe that pleasure is good not *in spite of* but precisely *because of* its being a *genesis* (*EN* 1153a15–17).

No matter what role this model plays, Plato explicitly assigns some positive value to pleasures or a part of them at the end of the *Philebus*,<sup>42</sup> which ensures that he cannot be the main target of Aristotle's criticism in *EN* VII 11–14 and X 1–5. By contrast, Aristotle is primarily concerned with the anti-hedonists who hate pleasure because they see it as *essentially* an unstable process, *always* accompanied by the double evils: physical lack and unpleasant appetite.<sup>43</sup> In their eyes, the inherent instability and shiftness of pleasure is not only defective in itself but also what makes it especially alluring and dangerous for human beings, given their natural inclination to seek variation.<sup>44</sup> The negative effects of pleasure, according to these anti-hedonists, are especially manifest in its inherent tendency to impede thought,

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<sup>40</sup> For inclusive readings of the restorative model see Frede (1992, 1997), van Riel (2000a, 7–43), Carpenter (2011), and Obdrzalek (2012); for those who take this model rather as a starting point or at most a core aspect of Plato's understanding of pleasure, see Gosling and Taylor (1982, 136–40, 175–92), Carone (2000, 264–70), Fletcher (2017), and Price (2017). For most recent discussions thereof see Ogihara (2019), Rangos (2019), and Warren (2019).

<sup>41</sup> In addition to *Rhet.* I 11, also see 1362b6–9, b16–17, 1364b23–6, 1365b11–13, 1369b22–3, b28, 1372b14–15.

<sup>42</sup> For the ranking of pleasure at the end of the *Philebus*, see Barney (2016) and Harte (2019).

<sup>43</sup> *EN* 1153a4–5, 1154a34–b2, 1173a16, a29–30, 1173b12–15.

<sup>44</sup> It is not surprising to draw this inference. In the discussion of pleasure, Aristotle even himself associates change with something bad: 'Of all things change (*μεταβολή*) is sweet, as the poet says, because of a kind of *badness* (*πονηρίαν*); for just as a *bad* human being is prone to change

thereby compromising reason (*EN* 1152b16–18; *Pl. Phd.* 66c). This is because the proper functioning of rational faculties demands moderation and proportion, a requirement that, in their eyes, directly contradicts the intrinsic nature of pleasure.

Regardless of the assessment of the above arguments, I can discern no better proponents for this position than Speusippus and his followers, considering the unorthodox Platonist undertones (cf. fn. 2). This picture also fits well with the analogy – the greater, the lesser, and the equal (*EN* 1153b5–6) – employed by Speusippus to dismantle Eudoxus’ argument from contraries (see §2 above). For in the Academic tradition, the greater-lesser, as opposed to the equal as the good, is simply another way of expressing the concept of unlimited (ἀόριστον/ἄπειρον).<sup>45</sup> Notably, as Aristotle reports, it is also by appealing to the classification of pleasure as *unlimited* that some anti-hedonists – who must be Academics – try to strengthen their position (*EN* 1173a16). Arguments along this line should be understood through Aristotle’s repeated references to the Pythagorean table of opposites (*Metaph.* A5, 986a22–6; Γ2, 1004b27–31; Λ7, 1072a30–5). In particular, he points out:

*The bad belongs to the unlimited (τοῦ ἀπείρου) – as the Pythagoreans used to say by analogy – the good belongs to the limited (EN II.6, 1106b29–30, italics mine).*

From Aristotle, we also learn that this table was quite influential in the Academy and was utilized for various purposes by the Academics (K9, 1066a13–16; *Metaph.* N6 1093b7–13), especially by Speusippus, the most Pythagoreanized Platonist.<sup>46</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Speusippus deems pleasure essentially bad *because of its intrinsic unlimitedness*. His revision of Plato’s teachings probably gained prominence during his tenure as the scholarch, which explains why, from a historical perspective, he seems to overshadow Plato in Aristotle’s accounts of interactions with the Academics in *EN* VII and X. Gellius’ testimony well reflects this intellectual atmosphere:

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(εὐμετάβολος ὁ πονηρός), so a nature that needs change is *wicked* (δεομένη)’ (*EN* VII 14, 1154b28–31, transl. Rowe and Broadie, modified, emphasis mine).

<sup>45</sup> The unlimited is also referred to as ‘the more and the less’ (*Pl. Phlb.* 24c–d) or ‘the great and small’ (*Metaph.* 987b26, 988a26, 1089a35–6, cf. 1087b10, 1091a24–5). For further discussion of this background, see Krämer (1959, esp. 416–23).

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle not only often associates Speusippus with the Pythagoreans, calling them those who posited mathematics (e.g., *Metaph.* 1072b31, 1069a36, 1075b37, 1080 b11–17 and 23–30, 1090a20–31), he explicitly records that Speusippus adopted the Pythagorean tables of opposites at *EN* 1096b5–7. Scholars such as Burkert (1972, 51–2) and Zhmud (2012, 450–1) even trace this table back to the Academics like Speusippus rather than to orthodox Pythagoreans.

Speusippus and the whole of the Old Academy say that pleasure and pain are two mutually opposing bads, but that the good is what stands in the middle of the two (Gell.9.5.4 = Tarán F84 = Isnardi Parente F119, transl. Warren 2009, 274, modified).<sup>47</sup>

As this passage suggests, although Speusippus appears to highlight Eudoxus' flaw in the debate over AC on purely formal grounds, his engagement in the controversy must have originated from a doctrinal disagreement, not merely from dissatisfaction with the weakness of Eudoxus' argument. The analogy he invoked indicates that behind his critique lies not only a distinctive valuation of pleasure but also an alternative conception of the highest good. No one illuminates the latter aspect better than Clement:

Σπεύσιππος τε ὁ Πλάτωνος ἀδελφιδοῦς τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν φησὶν ἔξιν εἶναι τελείαν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν ἔχουσιν ἢ ἔξιν ἀγαθῶν, ἧς δὴ καταστάσεως ἅπαντας μὲν ἀνθρώπους ὀρεξίν ἔχειν, στοχάζεσθαι δὲ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς τῆς ἀοχλησίας.<sup>48</sup>

Speusippus, Plato's nephew, says that eudaimonia is a complete state in things in accordance with nature or a state of [possessing] goods,<sup>49</sup> which therefore is a state for which all humans desire, while good people aim at being free from disturbance (my translation).

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<sup>47</sup> The source of Gellius is disputed. Whereas it was traditionally taken to be his teacher Calvenus Taurus (see Lakmann 1995, 98–113), Tarrant (1996) has proposed Favorinus as the candidate, followed by Annas (1999, 138–9) and Warren (2009, 274). If the testimony goes back ultimately to Aristotle, it would not serve as independent evidence. But this does not mean that Gellius or his source misunderstood Aristotle's account (*pace* Warren 2009, 274). No doubt Gellius' attribution of Speusippus' anti-hedonism to the *whole* Academy cannot be correct. But it is understandable if this only, in an exaggerated manner, aims to highlight Speusippus' influence on the Academy or even the dominance he enjoyed in leading the Academy as Plato's successor. If this testimony is simply a reading of Aristotle's *EN*, it is at least in tune with the mainstream of the scholarship that Speusippus, who is representative for the anti-hedonistic wing in the Academy, is the main opponent Aristotle targets in his defense of the value of pleasure. This explains why Aristotle often uses the third person plural in *EN X* even when he almost certainly has Speusippus in mind. Similarly, Theophrastus, in his *Metaphysics*, criticizes Speusippus' view of the first principles by using expressions such as 'those surrounding Speusippus' (οἱ περὶ Σπεύσιππον, *Met.* 6b6).

<sup>48</sup> Clem. *Strom.* II, 133.4<Tarán F77<Isnardi Parente F101. To avoid unnecessary controversy, I do not include the last sentence of Clement's report here: εἶεν δ' ἂν αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας ἀπεργαστικαί ('virtues, then, would be fit for creating eudaimonia'). Different from the cited passage in which the indirect speech is represented by an infinitive with the guiding φησὶν, the optative-plus-ἂν construction suggests that this sentence looks more like stemming from Clement or his source than being Speusippus' own conclusion, even if Speusippus would not disagree with the important role of virtues attributed to the acquisition of eudaimonia here (cf. Tarán 1981, 436).

<sup>49</sup> Following Isnardi Parente (1980, 173), Tarán (1981, 436), Dillon (2003, 65), and Warren (2009, 268–9), I understand τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν ἔχουσιν and ἀγαθῶν as neuter plurals rather than masculine plurals (see Ferguson 1991, 246).



Here Clement engages in a critical discussion of the various ends that different philosophers have posited as the (ultimate) good. In accordance with his testimony on Plato, who is said to distinguish two kinds of end (cf. Πλάτων ὁ φιλόσοφος διττὸν εἶναι τὸ τέλος φησίν, *Strom.* II, 131.2), Speusippus seems also to suggest that two kinds of end can be the candidates for the ultimate good. One is the eudaimonia, pursued by all people, while the other is called *aokhlēsia*, which, as a goal, is reserved only for a select few, the so-called good ones (τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς). The common goal, eudaimonia, is said to be either a complete (τελείαν) state in tune with nature or a state of possessing various goods. The former seems to be in the vein of an internalist account of the eudaimonic state, highlighting the core features that such a good state should satisfy, whereas the latter looks like it follows the contemporary ‘objective list approach’, which characterizes the ideal state by enumerating the various goods it possesses.<sup>50</sup> Although Speusippus offers more than a formal claim, the question of what eudaimonia essentially is, except being a stable state, remains indeterminate.<sup>51</sup> Whether the eudaimonia is realized in the internalist or the objectivist way, both accounts cannot automatically lead to the notion of *aokhlēsia* as the aspirational ideal. They, jointly or severally, function at best as a necessary but insufficient condition for what Speusippus regards as the true, ultimate good.

Genealogically considered, Speusippus’ introduction of *aokhlēsia* seems to be a further development (if not a radical remolding) of Plato’s unsystematic notion of the neutral state, a condition which the latter values but for which he does not have a fixed term.<sup>52</sup> Given that in the *Philebus* Plato highlights the ideal human life as a proper mixture of reason with (pure) pleasure, it is especially unclear whether and how the neutral state – ranging from the most divine state to the state of things that are not equipped with perceptual capacity – could be integrated into the goodness of the *human* well-being. Speusippus cannot be unaware of this problem, but he offers a radical yet more consistent solution: in addition to insisting that pleasure is essentially bad, he feels the need to circumscribe more precisely the nature of this specific non-algedonic state if it is taken to be the aspirational ideal reserved for the few. Invoking or even inventing an idiosyncratic term for this privileged state is thus a

<sup>50</sup> I prefer a more inclusive interpretation of the ἀγαθὰ to Tarán’s identification of them with the virtues (1981, 436).

<sup>51</sup> *Cat.* 8b25–35; 9a8–10; *Metaph.* 1022b10–12. Whether or not Speusippus would follow Aristotle’s understanding of *hexis*, his conception of eudaimonia as a state, as Lieberg (1958, 99) stresses, is diametrically contrasted with Aristotle’s conception of eudaimonia as an activity (*energeia*); also cf. Isnardi Parente (1980, 349) and Tarán (1981, 436).

<sup>52</sup> Plato refers to this state in varying ways, e.g. ὁ μεταξύ (*Rep.* 583e4; 584e9), τὸ μέσον (*Rep.* 584d4), τὸ μηδέτερον (*Rep.* 583e7) or τὸ μηδέτερον (*Leg.* 733b1). For the neutral state as a mongrel concept in Plato, see Cheng (2019).

reasonable part of his revisionist project.<sup>53</sup> It is conceivable that while *alupia* is too narrow a term for Speusippus to encompass his concern with the danger of pleasure, *apatheia* is too broad to exclude even lifeless objects, which, being inanimate, are not affected by any experience. Moreover, terms such as ‘the intermediate’ (ὁ μετὰξύ, τὸ μέσον) and ‘the neither’ (τὸ μηδέτερον) seem ill-suited too, for they can easily be confused with a mixture of pleasures and pains or even with the Aristotelian mean. On the other hand, *aokhlēsia*, as its literal meaning implies, extends beyond a mere absence of pleasure and pain or a moderate mixture of the two. Instead, it signifies a state of *abstaining from* algedonic experiences, which are characterized as disturbances and annoyances.<sup>54</sup> It is a state that applies only to sentient beings. Although rocks, for instance, neither enjoy pleasure nor suffer pain, they cannot aspire to or maintain *aokhlēsia*. Gods can undoubtedly be characterized as existing in a state of *aokhlēsia*, as their undisturbed essence shields them from the fluctuations of worldly experience. However, for humans, given their limited nature, attaining or maintaining *aokhlēsia* requires more demanding efforts, especially the training and control of reason. This must include a sense of trying and doing, in contemporary parlance, the phenomenology of agency (Bayne 2008), in which the subject has a sense of itself as the source of its carefree state, accompanied by feelings of focus, concentration, and mastery. As a state or feeling of being the owner of an action, *aokhlēsia* avoids or at least mitigates the problem of content indeterminacy for the Platonic neutral state. It thus allows Speusippus to better specify what ‘the equal’ is in his response to Aristotle if the debate over AC continues. According to my interpretation, it can also help Speusippus differentiate his *aokhlēsia* phenomenologically from what is commonly referred to as ‘true pleasure’. By doing so, he not only

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53 ἀοχλησία could be Speusippus’ term, because he is notorious for inventing or using extraordinary words (Merlan 1968, 122; Schofield 1971, 14). Moreover, we should note that Clement is a very careful witness (Isnardi Parente [unpublished], Introduzione, p. 12), who is well aware that different authors of the Hellenistic period are inclined to characterize their idealization of the neutral state with different terms: in addition to Speusippus’ ἀοχλησία, Nausiphanes’ ἀκαταπληξία and Epicurus’ ἀταραξία are also attested in the *Stromata* (II, 130.5.2; VI, 24.10.1). If so, Speusippus seems to foreshadow or even initiate the Hellenistic trend of identifying the ultimate good with a *specific* undisturbed state. Of course, Clement’s report might be thought to indicate later standardization, given the occurrences of ἀοχλησία elsewhere, including evidence concerning Epicurus (see the entry in LSJ). But in the Epicurean tradition, as the sources suggest, it is either used in a limited sense (see τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἀοχλησίαν in DL 10.127) or invoked to illustrate the central concept of ἀταραξία, the true pleasure (*Strom.* II, 138.5.1; cf. *Sext. Emp. Pyr.* 1.10.6–7). This is different from the case where ἀοχλησία, as a *terminus technicus*, is used in the absolute sense, referring to a specific non-algedonic state as the ultimate goal.

54 The term *aokhlēsia* comes from alpha-privative + ὄχλος (annoyance, trouble)/ὄχλέω (disturb, make trouble).

maintains the coherence of his resolute rejection of pleasure but also avoids the criticism that the *aokhlēsia* is merely another kind of pleasure in disguise.<sup>55</sup>

In the absence of evidence, we do not know who, according to Speusippus, can be qualified as the *agathoi* who correctly pursue the *aokhlēsia* as the ultimate end. But his refusal to equate the ultimate good with the object sought by all human beings is sufficient to explain why he feels obliged to reject Eudoxus, who bases his pro-hedonistic argument just on the *universal* pursuit and avoidance of *all animals* (*EN X 2, 1172b9–15*).<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Speusippus is also in stark opposition to another group of people (call them Pragmatists) in the same context, who do not endorse the badness of pleasure *per se* but consider it *practically useful* to persuade ‘the many’ to evaluate it as bad.<sup>57</sup> As Aristotle points out:

[The Pragmatists] think it is better for our lives (πρὸς τὸν βίον) to proclaim pleasure as a bad (τῶν φαύλων) even if it is not. For, they say, the mass (τοὺς πολλοὺς) lean toward pleasure and are slaves to pleasures, and that is why we must lead them in the contrary direction, because that is the way to reach the mean (τὸ μέσον, *EN 1172a29–33*, modified).

It is precisely because the Pragmatists want to correct the bad inclination of ordinary people that they declare pleasure as bad. But the goal they set for the mass is called by Aristotle *to meson*, the intermediate state (1172a33), which can hardly be identical to Speusippus’ *aokhlēsia*. For it has been well-known that for Aristotle *to meson* is characterized by appropriate emotions, mostly accompanied by proper pleasure and pain, whereas in Plato, *to meson*, which is more loosely used, refers to various states ranging from a hedonically neutral condition to those with proper pleasure and pain

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55 Warren (2009, 272): ‘Perhaps Speusippus was himself muddled or else otherwise stymied by attempting to say that this state [sc. *aokhlēsia*] is pleasant while objecting to the pursuit of pleasurable experiences. As later criticisms of the Epicureans well demonstrate, it is not hard to see how this might be a difficult position to maintain.’ For criticisms along this line, also see Gauthier and Jolif (1958, 801–2), Dillon (2003, 67), and Fronterotta (2018, 63).

56 My reading of Speusippus’ attempt as meliorating the ordinary concept of eudaimonia as well as recasting the Platonic concept of the neutral state is more ambitious than Dillon’s interpretation of his attempt as a criticism of mass hedonism. In other words, I think that Speusippus aims to draw a subtle distinction between eudaimonia and *aokhlēsia* rather than a radical contrast between pleasure and the neutral state. After all, the text neither mentions pleasure nor seems to aim at refuting a *specific* misunderstanding of eudaimonia. Dillon, therefore, has to assume the existence of ‘some ellipse [...] arising from Clement’s compression of his sources’, which indicates that most men, foolishly, identify pleasure as the eudaimonia (2003, 65). The suggestion, however, reveals that his reading, at least, cannot be supported by *the current text*. Moreover, it seems vague but fairly reasonable to capture eudaimonia as a complete, natural *state* or a *state* of possessing goods. But if so, it has been ruled out pleasure, which is determined by Speusippus as *genesis*, as a candidate for the eudaimonia introduced here. This testimony, therefore, can hardly be read as a criticism of mass hedonism.

57 Pace Taylor (1928, 459), who identifies Speusippus with the Pragmatists.

(see Cheng 2019, 539–41). Even if the Pragmatists' *meson* includes Speusippus' *aokhlēsia*, he must resist setting it as the very goal *for ordinary people*.<sup>58</sup> And even if Speusippus allows the *aokhlēsia* as a common goal accessible to the mass, as an essentialist, he would not grant that this can be achieved by a cheap lie, without considering the essence of pleasure.<sup>59</sup>

## 5 Aristotle's Response to Speusippus

After clarifying Speusippus' objection to AC and its doctrinal background, we are in a better position to explore Aristotle's reply to Speusippus in *EN X*, which, compared to the version in *EN VII*, seems more informative:

The point they make [against Eudoxus] is not bad (λέγοντες ταῦτα οὐ κακῶς), but at least in the present case they miss the truth (οὐ ... ἀληθεύοντες). For if both (sc. pleasure and pain) were bads, both would have had to be avoided, and if both were neutral, neither should be avoided or both equally. Evidently, however, they avoid pain as bad and choose pleasure as good (νῦν δὲ φαίνονται τὴν μὲν φεύγοντες ὡς κακόν, τὴν δ' αἰρούμενοι ὡς ἀγαθόν). Hence they (sc. pleasure and pain) are opposed in this way (*EN X 2*, 1173a8–13).

Aristotle starts his response by acknowledging the strength of Speusippus' challenge, presumably because it is built on a reasonable principle and indeed exposes

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58 Warren (2009, 269–70) favors a 'democratic' reading of Speusippus' view on the good, according to which the ἀοχλησία is pursued not only by a few elites but also by all people. The difference between both groups, on this reading, consists merely in that while the former *consciously* take the ἀοχλησία as 'a recognized and explicit goal' (270), the latter aim at the same thing but in an *unconscious* way. On this basis, Warren draws a close parallel between Eudoxus' belief in pleasure as a universal goal and Speusippus' alternative thesis about ἀοχλησία as a universal goal. Despite being an interesting proposal, this reading can hardly hold for the following reasons. First, the distinction between conscious and unconscious pursuit is not attested in the text. Rather, what Speusippus is trying to show is that although all people pursue eudaimonia as an ultimate goal, few of them know that it can be realized only in what he calls ἀοχλησία. Second, Speusippus has no argumentative need or motivation to imitate Eudoxus by supporting a parallel, yet more demanding thesis about ἀοχλησία as the universal goal. Theoretically considered, X as a universal goal is not required for its evaluation as the chief good. Third, if we believe that a considerable part of anti-hedonistic arguments in *EN VII* and *X* can be attributed to Speusippus, Warren's suggestion does not fit well with Aristotle's accounts where we are told that only the wise person – instead of all people – pursue what is painless (ὁ φρόνιμος τὸ ἄλυπον διώκει, *EN* 1152b15–16), which is obviously an essential property of ἀοχλησία. Finally, whereas eudaimonia as a common goal somehow pursued by *all* people seems to be a popular notion widely attested in classical antiquity (*EN* 1095a17–19), there is no evidence to my knowledge that any of Aristotle's contemporaries or predecessors sets ἀοχλησία or the like as a *universal* goal that all people *in fact* seek.

59 Aristotle also thinks that it is difficult to convince ordinary people by arguments (*EN* 1179b8–10).

Eudoxus' argumentative weakness.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, he disputes its applicability to the current issue because, as he emphasizes, this strategy 'fails to grasp the truth'. A crucial reason for this is that no matter how one claims to treat pleasure and pain, her genuine belief, implied in her choice and action, cannot be independent of what she actually does (cf. *Metaph.* Γ4, 1008b14–19). Remarkably, Aristotle invokes no *endoxon* or common sense but, in Broadie's expression, rejects Speusippus by 'read [ing] the action as his judgments' (1991, 329). In other words, what Aristotle undertakes is to track the evaluation of pleasure and pain *via actions*, namely by virtue of the phenomenon whereby either of them is pursued or avoided. But if so, one may wonder in what sense such actions can help him fulfill his defensive purpose.

How to answer this question considerably relies on how to pick out the grammatical subject of *EN* 1173a11–12, a key statement in Aristotle's reply: *νῦν δὲ φαίνονται τὴν μὲν φεύγοντες ὡς κακόν, τὴν δ' αἰρούμενοι ὡς ἀγαθόν.*<sup>61</sup> Either, in a traditional way, a force of generalization comes into play here so that the third person plural refers to what people commonly do,<sup>62</sup> or it is possible to track the third person plural and its corresponding participles throughout the whole passage<sup>63</sup> so that the implied subject of 'φαίνονται' at *EN* 1173a11 is identical with the subject of the antecedent clauses.<sup>64</sup> The two options are not necessarily incompatible if in the former, Speusippus and his advocates are taken to be included in the people who are

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60 The third-person plural may reflect the existence of different factions within the Academy since its foundation (see Watts 2007, 109) or the situation of the Academy under Speusippus' leadership (see §4 above). The third person plural is widely attested in Aristotle's references to Speusippus and his doctrines (see e.g. οἱ δὲ τὰ μαθηματικά μόνον τούτων, *Metaph.* 1069a36 in F31 Tarán; οἱ δὲ λέγοντες τὸν ἀριθμὸν πρῶτον τὸν μαθηματικὸν καὶ οὕτως αἰεὶ ἄλλην ἐχομένην οὐσίαν καὶ ἀρχὰς ἐκάστης ἄλλας, ἐπεισοδιώδη τὴν τοῦ παντός οὐσίαν ποιούσιν, *Metaph.* 1075b37–1076a1 in F30 Tarán; τοῖς τὰ μαθηματικά μόνον εἶναι φαμένοις, *Metaph.* 1090b16 in F37 Tarán; for the same way of referring, see *Metaph.* 1076a21–22 in F32 Tarán; *Metaph.* 1080b14–15 in F33 Tarán; *Metaph.* 1083a20–24 in F34 Tarán; *Metaph.* 1086a2–4 in F35 Tarán; *Metaph.* 1087b6 in F39 Tarán; *Metaph.* 1091b23–25 in F45 Tarán; *APo.* 97a8–9 in F63 Tarán; *Top.* 108b30 in F65 Tarán; *PA* 642b5–6 in F67 Tarán).

61 The importance of this sentence is marked by the opening words 'νῦν δέ', which is in Aristotle often used in a non-temporal sense to emphasize what is actually the case (Bonitz 1955, 492a60–b3).

62 This reading is accepted by most translators and commentators, who take the implicit subject to be all humans or people (e.g. Broadie and Rowe 2002; Crisp 2000; Davies 2023, 34: 'people'; Rapp 2009, 213; Reeve 2014; e.g. Dillon 2003, 66: 'men'; Dirlmeier 1964; Frede 2020: 'Man'; Gigon 1995; Irwin 2019: 'we'; Joachim 1955, 264; Rolfes 1972; Wolf 2006: 'die Menschen').

63 οὐ γάρ φασι, 1173a6, λέγοντες, a9, οὐ [...] ἀληθεύοντες, a10; φαίνονται τὴν μὲν φεύγοντες ὡς κακόν, τὴν δ' αἰρούμενοι, a11–12.

64 See Warren (2009, 278–9) and Aufderheide (2020, 74). The paraphrase of this argument by Gosling and Taylor – 'but in fact *the objectors* clearly object to the one (pain) as evil and choose the other (pleasure) as good' (1982, 229, emphasis mine) – suggests that they construe the text roughly in the same direction.

said apparently to avoid pain as bad and pursue pleasure as good.<sup>65</sup> It means that in Aristotle's eyes, they are guilty of what scholars call pragmatic inconsistency, a mismatch between actions and words.<sup>66</sup> As Natali perceptively points out, if Speusippus' thesis cannot be confirmed by his life, it is only a 'sophisme moral'.<sup>67</sup>

But why are the anti-hedonists like Speusippus unable to live by what they say (1991, 326)? Broadie and Natali do not provide an elaborate answer, but both Michael of Ephesus and James Warren resort to a natural preference for pleasure shared by humans and animals.<sup>68</sup> If this is correct, then Eudoxus' universal thesis about animal pursuit is re-invoked by Aristotle to 'ward off' Speusippus' counterargument. It is, however, doubtful that returning to Eudoxus' first argument can save his second one. After all, Speusippus has just dismissed the former as unreliable (*EN* 1172b35–73a5). Moreover, the premise of the latter – animals universally *avoid pain* – seems less controversial than that of the former – animals universally *seek pleasure*.<sup>69</sup>

To reinforce Aristotle, one may suggest limiting the scope from animals to human beings. His defense turns out to be an argument based on *human* nature: We, as members of the human species, are constitutionally predisposed to pursue pleasure, which compels the anti-hedonists to live a life that is at variance with their beliefs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Of course, in the formal case one may reject the inclusive reading of the tacit subject, but prefer one of the traditional readings according to which the view of Speusippus and his followers runs contrary to the actions of common people. Hence there would be no *ad hominem* inconsistency involved, but a mismatch between the words of the anti-hedonists and the actions of *the others*. This interpretation, however, needs the subject of *EN* 1173a11–12 to be *ordinary* people rather than *all* people, a more natural option for the implicit subject. More importantly, as I shall show, this interpretation is vulnerable to the same difficulties as the *ad hominem* argument based on human nature.

<sup>66</sup> I use the term pragmatic inconsistency in a broad sense (see various examples listed in Harrison 1995, 596–8), classified under the argument *ad hominem* (Walton 1998; for this type of argument in Aristotle see e.g. Brinton 1986; Fortenbaugh 1992; Horn 2019), which is different from the more rigorous understanding of it as an assertional inconsistency or pragmatic self-refutation (see Woods and Walton 1989, 62).

<sup>67</sup> Natali (2004, 116).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. πάντα and πάντες ἢ πάντα in Michael *In EN* 539. 17–20, cf. 539.20; 'animals and people' in Warren (2009, 278).

<sup>69</sup> This asymmetry can be seen from the Stoics' well-known criticism of Epicurus, according to which the newborn's natural impulse is self-preservation, which must include avoidance of pain, rather than the pursuit of pleasure as the Epicurean cradle argument claims. But according to Aristotle's report, Eudoxus 'believed that the same conclusion (sc. pleasure is the chief good) followed *no less* evidently from the contrary' (*EN* 1172b18–19, italics mine). This suggests that Eudoxus might not prioritize the premise concerning pain over that concerning pleasure.

<sup>70</sup> See Taylor (1928, 458–9). Rapp's reading (2009, 213–4) seems to combine the argument from human nature (sc. people do not avoid pleasure but pursue it) with the argument *de consensu omnium* (sc. people take pleasure as good, see §3 above).

This proposal appears attractive insofar as numerous facts indicate that most (if not all) of us are naturally prone to pleasure, which reflects an empirical truth Aristotle recognizes (e.g., *EE* 1222a36–42, 1230b16–18; *EN* 1119a5–10). As noted, however, Speusippus believes that eudaimonia is universally pursued by all people but denies that *aokhlēsia*, the highest good, is identical to a universal goal. Likewise, the Pragmatists mentioned above believe that pleasure is what ordinary people are naturally disposed to pursue, but this is why they consider it practically better to purport pleasure *as bad* (1172a29–33). To be sure, Aristotle starts his account of pleasure in *EN* X by characterizing it as ‘most intimately attached to us as humans’ (μάλιστα ... συνωκειώσθαι τῷ γένει ἡμῶν, 1172a19–20)<sup>71</sup> and alluding to it as a natural goal pursued by human beings, exerting a powerful influence upon their life (1172a25).<sup>72</sup> However, this is a statement on relevance rather than evaluation. In fact, it is precisely because of this fact that Aristotle admits that as human beings, ‘we are not impartial judges (οὐ γὰρ ἀδέκαστοι κρίνομεν) in the case of pleasure’ (*EN* 1109b8–9). Not unlike the Pragmatists, he further stresses that many people by nature (διὰ τὴν φύσιν) are prone to enjoying accidental, *bad* pleasure, which functions as an apparent good *for* them (*EN* 1154b4–6).<sup>73</sup> Such a natural inclination accounts for why they tend to make *false* value judgments about hedonic experiences.

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71 Aufderheide (2020, 55) mentions two readings of this characterization. According to the pessimistic reading, pleasure is what we cannot help but have; according to the optimistic reading, pleasure, as something that is most congenial to the human nature, plays an important role for developing a fully human life. Aristotle’s considered view, as *EN* X 3–5 indicates, is obviously closer to the latter, yet he does not need to take a strong position in the stage-setting part.

72 The implicit subject in τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἡδέα προαίρουσιν should be ‘humans’, referring back to τῷ γένει ἡμῶν in 1172a20. Reasonably Aristotle does not stress pleasure as the *unique* goal *universally* pursued by all, either animals or humans.

73 Broadie (1991) sensitively connects Aristotle’s criticism of the radical anti-hedonists like Speusippus with his criticism of the Pragmatists at *EN* 1172b3–7 (328–30). The inconsistency of the former, according to her diagnosis, lies in the gulf between their pleasure-hostile attitude and their *occasional* pursuit of pleasure. For ‘[e]njoying something, which is enjoying it for what *it* is, is a kind of affirmation that it is good in itself, much as pursuing something is an affirmation that it is good in one way or another’ (329). She further explains this assertion-action link by appealing to what she calls Aristotle’s ‘hedonic mode of seeming good’, according to which ‘my finding Z pleasant, and my pursuing it as pleasant, is my affirming it to be good’ (320). This appears to be a refined version of the argument based on the naturalness of pleasure. This can show that Speusippus, like other people, cannot be completely unmoved by pleasure so that experiences of this kind must appear to him good under that condition. But the *seeming* goodness of *x* is not necessarily incompatible with *essential* badness of *x*. Pragmatists also seem to recognize the apparent goodness of pleasure, which explains why they think that pleasures are so powerful and attractive to all people that it is in practice more beneficial to think of them *as bad*.

For most people, deception comes about because of pleasure, since it *appears good when it is not*. So they choose what is pleasant as something good, and avoid pain as something bad. (EN 1113a33–b2, italics mine; cf. 1109b7–9)

Given that many people can fundamentally get it wrong when they aim at what they take to be good,<sup>74</sup> the regularity revealed in their natural attitude to pleasure and pain cannot be used to justify how these affections should be evaluated respectively. This is a crucial reason why Aristotle thinks that only a virtuous agent can exemplify ethical norms in practice through his decisions and actions:

What is really so is what appears so to the excellent person (τῷ σπουδαίῳ). [...] The good person (ἀγαθός) insofar as he is good, is the measure (μέτρον) of each thing, then what appear pleasures to him will also really be pleasures, and what is pleasant will be what he enjoys. (EN 1176a16–19)<sup>75</sup>

This idea leads Aristotle to emphasize that only a virtuous individual possesses the ability to discern *truth* in practical matters. Consequently, such virtuous individuals, rather than a universal human nature, establish criteria for making value judgments about relevant states of affairs:

The excellent person (ὁ σπουδαῖος) judges each sort of thing correctly, and in each case *what is true* (ἀληθές) appears to him. For each disposition has its own corresponding range of what is fine and pleasant. Presumably, then, the excellent person is far superior because he sees *what is true* (ἀληθές) in each case, being himself a sort of standard and measure. (EN III.4, 1113a29–33, emphasis mine).

## 6 The Truth Between Words and Deeds

If Aristotle's criticism of Speusippus is not an appeal to human nature, one may wonder how he can charge the anti-hedonists with failing to practice what they preach. To answer this question, his claim that they miss *the truth* (1173a8–9) offers a revealing clue. Far from an impromptu comment, Aristotle's emphasis on the truth is also found in EN X 1 and re-emerges in EN X 8, a consistent concern he holds in dealing with debates on the ultimate good. But what kind of truth does he have in mind? Is it a universal proposition about value or an imperative about what to do in concrete circumstances?

These questions bring us back to the opening of EN X, Aristotle's confrontation with the Pragmatists, whose position looks strikingly similar to his own. For both are

74 Cf. EE 1230b16–18; Rhet. 1382b4–9.

75 Cf. EN 1109a12–13.



strongly motivated by educational purposes to deal with the problem of evaluating pleasure and pain; both are worried about the natural inclination of humans to pleasure; both think that with respect to hedonic experiences, people should be guided to a mean state; in speaking of the significance of such experiences, both focus more on their impact upon the entire life than merely upon individual actions; more importantly, both embrace a certain priority of practice in sustaining their ethical stances, according to which ethical judgment should be guided by and made for the sake of action. These similarities explain well why Aristotle feels the urge to distance himself from Pragmatists at the beginning of *EN X* and why his critical remarks, which deserve quoting in full, are strongly methodologically oriented:

Surely, this (sc. the view of the Pragmatists) is not well argued (οὐ καλῶς τοῦτο λέγεται). For words about affections and activities are less credible than deeds (οἱ γὰρ περὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ ταῖς πράξεσι λόγοι ἤττον εἰσι πιστοὶ τῶν ἔργων); hence when words conflict with perceptible [deeds], they arouse contempt and the truth is also undermined (τάληθές προσαναίρουσιν). For if someone blames pleasure, but then has been seen to seek it on some occasions, the reason for his lapse seems to be that he regards every type of pleasure as something to seek; for the many are not the sort to make distinctions. True words (οἱ ἀληθεῖς τῶν λόγων), then, would seem to be the most useful, not only for knowledge but also for life (πρὸς τὸν βίον). For since they harmonize with the deeds (τοῖς ἔργοις), they are credible (πιστεύονται), and so encourage those who comprehend them to live by them (τοὺς συνιέντας ζῆν κατ' αὐτούς). (1172a33–b7)

Aristotle does not directly criticize the conclusion of the Pragmatists. His criticism is methodological-oriented, directed at their misunderstanding of what is meant by the priority of practice in forming value judgment in ethical areas. This misunderstanding, according to Aristotle, makes the Pragmatists unable to carry out their strategy effectively, and thus they are paradoxically powerless to achieve their initial, practice-oriented goal. For although they correctly take people's natural affinity to pleasure seriously, they are mistaken about the whole dynamic due to their naivety about the relation between persuasion and action. For in practical fields, Aristotle points out, people are usually inclined to be persuaded more by deeds than words and more so by what they directly see than what they infer from other indirect sources, especially when confronted with a conflict between the two factors. In the case of pleasure, as he goes on to emphasize, someone's *occasional* pursuit of pleasure could even be generalized by 'the many' into a belief that this person regards *every* type of pleasure as desirable (1172b2–3). For ordinary people are not good at conceptual distinctions. Thus, the Pragmatists can hardly succeed, even from within the perspective of the many, who are the main target of their anti-hedonistic thesis.

In addition to the criticism about the effectiveness of persuasion, it is telling that Aristotle also charges the Pragmatists with undermining the truth (τάληθές προσαναίρουσιν). Just as truth in theoretical matters requires internal coherence or correspondence between words and facts, truth in practical matters, according to

Aristotle, requires coherence between *logoi* and *erga*, between what one says and what one does. It is this coherence that makes a practical truth more effective than mere words, not only for practical persuasion or reasoning in specific situations but also for the overarching decision of how to live one's life.<sup>76</sup> From this perspective, a more serious problem with the Pragmatists' approach lies in their isolating 'what is practical' from 'what is true', a misconception of the priority of practice in ethics Aristotle feels obliged to resist.

With this concern in mind, it cannot be an accident that at *EN* X.8, after establishing what the highest good is and its relation to other goods, Aristotle returns to the talk of the truth in practical matters concerning the tension between *logoi* and *erga*:

What is true in practical matters (τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς ἐν τοῖς πρακτικοῖς) is judged from what one does and how one lives (ἐκ τῶν ἔργων καὶ τοῦ βίου), since these are what have authority. Hence we ought to examine what has been said by applying it to what one does and how one lives (ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὸν βίον); and if it harmonizes with what one does (τοῖς ἔργοις), we should accept it, but if it conflicts we should count it [mere] words (λόγους). (*EN* 1179a18–22)

The close parallels between the two passages confirm that Aristotle's remark on the Pragmatists is much more than a critical doxography. It rather points to one of his fundamental requirements for theoretical debate on practical matters, namely the consistency between words and life,<sup>77</sup> which, as Natali emphasizes, is also an

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<sup>76</sup> I leave open how Aristotle's concept of practical truth is to be understood. Despite various interpretations, the prevailing focus has been on the relevance and function of practical truth with respect to a *particular action* – specifically, how a rational agent, guided by such truth, can effectively achieve a correct goal through practical reasoning in a concrete situation (see, for example, Anscombe 1981; Broadie 2016; Kenny 2012; Olfert 2017; Pakaluk 2010). Remarkably, few studies consider the passages addressed in the current study. Consequently, few of them realize that a macroscopic concept of praxis, the ways in which people organize and shape their *lives* through a series of characteristic activities, also affects how we should interpret the concept of practical truth. Given the constraints of the subject matter, however, this paper will refrain from an in-depth exploration of this complex issue, reserving it for a future independent study.

<sup>77</sup> Broadie (2018) offers a self-referential reading of *EN* 1179a18–22, arguing that Aristotle here aims to defend the primacy of the theoretical ideal by alluding himself, his devotion to the theoretical life, as exemplifying what he theoretically advances (104–6). This self-referential reading is different from the audience-focused reading she provided in Broadie and Rowe (2002, 446–7), where this passage is taken to be Aristotle's invitation to the audience to check his arguments against their own lives. I do not want to dispute these two proposals (for critical remarks see Aufderheide 2020, 222–3); the self-referential one especially seems to fit better the content of *EN* X 8, the intermediate context of this passage, where the competition between the practical and theoretical life is at stake. However, I doubt whether Aristotle only has such a *personal* and relatively *narrow* interest here, either for himself or for the present audience. Theoretically speaking, *EN* 1179a18–23 unambiguously concerns a fundamental question of his practical philosophy, namely that in which its practical relevance and truth consist. The requirement for pragmatic consistency, I think, covers *EN* as a whole, or even must

important part of Aristotle's dialectical strategy.<sup>78</sup> The juxtaposition of *erga* and *bios* indicates that a practical justification is not simply based on a narrow concept of action as what one does in a concrete situation but, more crucially, on how to live one's life, a large-scale concept of practice. In other words, the *erga* covers a range of practical facts insofar as they can manifest how one usually organizes and shapes one's life. This echoes the cited passage at the opening of *EN X*, where Aristotle criticizes the Pragmatists by emphasizing that true arguments are most useful 'for life' (πρὸς τὸν βίον, 1172b5) and 'encourage people who understand them to live by them' (ζῆν κατ' αὐτούς, 1172b6–7).

Given the varieties of manners of life a human can live, we should give preference to them over the abstract concept of human nature. If the *ergon* of us qua human is a typical or characteristic activity of a human being, namely the use of our rational faculties as Aristotle's famous *Ergon Argument* aims to establish, the *ergon* of us as individuals is the particular way of life we choose and live. This approach avoids the reckless inferences ordinary people tend to draw and accounts for the nature of the pragmatic inconsistency I claimed Speusippus faced, inasmuch as characteristic activities or what can be called behavior patterns provide a much firmer ground than occasional activities for indicating the principle by which one guides her life. Hence, one commits a pragmatic inconsistency not only because what she *sometimes* did or does violates what she says but because she fails to live up to what she asserts by how she *typically* behaves. For in a practical context, claiming that X is essentially good implies a willingness to live a life enriched by X. Similarly, claiming that Y is essentially bad means that, *ceteris paribus*, one should strive to minimize and eliminate Y from one's life.

To return to our original question: In what sense can Aristotle claim that Speusippus and his followers 'miss the truth' (οὐ μὴν [...] ἀληθεύοντες, 1173a9)? According to my interpretation, they miss the truth precisely because of a substantial discrepancy between their *logoi* and *erga* with respect to pleasure and pain. In this respect, Speusippus and the Pragmatists make similar mistakes, though in different ways. While the former contradicts himself by living a life that does not correspond to what he advocates in theoretical or dialectical discussions, the latter seem to value the coherence between words and deeds but misplace it. Even if Speusippus could defend himself, as noted above, by claiming that his position leaves enough room for pleasure to be desirable in many scenarios given its remedial, instrumental, or

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be respected in any good practical theory for Aristotle. This principle recurs here, at the end of *EN X* 8, not primarily because this is useful for Aristotle's defense of the superiority of the theoretical life that he is supporting, but because this requirement is fundamental for the question of 'what is the highest good', the subject of this chapter and Aristotle's practical philosophy as a whole.

78 Natali (2004, 116).

extrinsic value, Aristotle must contend that all of this remains incompatible with the evaluation of pleasure as essentially bad in the sense of being detrimental to *life as a whole*.

## 7 Speusippus' Inconsistency

The interpretation I have been developing sheds new light on the stories about Speusippus as a hedonist in the later tradition. The central passages are the following:

Diogenes: [Speusippus] adhered to the same doctrines as Plato but was unlike him in character. For he was irascible and liable to be defeated by pleasures (ἡδονῶν ἤττων). It is reported, at any rate, that in a fit of anger he threw a puppy into a well, and that merely for pleasure he traveled to Macedonia to attend Cassander's wedding (*DL* 4.1.4–11, transl. Mensch and Miller 2018)  
 Philodemus: [In fact, those who were present in] the Academy are said to have preferred Xenocrates [at that time], because they admired his temperance (σωφροσύνη). For Speusippus had in him a more akratic spirit (ἀκρατέστερ[ον] θυμ[όν]) than [loose-living people, and indeed, having been defeated] by pleasure (τῶν ἡδονῶ[ν] ἢ] ττ[ων γενόμενος) (*Index Academicorum*, P. 1021. col.7.7–10, Dorandi 1991).<sup>79</sup>

Plutarch: Plato reclaimed his nephew Speusippus from great laxity and self-indulgence (πολλῆς ἀνέσεως καὶ ἀκολασίας), not by either saying or doing to him anything that would cause him pain, but when the young man was avoiding his parents, who were always showing him to be in the wrong and upbraiding him, Plato, by showing himself to be well-disposed and not angry, filled Speusippus with shame and created in him an admiration for both himself (Plato) and philosophy. (*De frat. amor.* 491F, transl. Helmbold 1962, modified),

Athenaeus: Speusippus, who was Plato's relative as well as his successor as head of the school, was also a pleasure-seeker (φιλήδονος). Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, at any rate, in his letter to him, denounces his hedonism (φιληδονία), criticizing him for being too interested in money, as well as for being in love with Lasthenia of Arcadia, who was one of Plato's students (XII 546D, transl. Olson 2010, modified).

Speusippus, as we can see, was characterized as an akratic or indulgent hedonist by different authors in various contexts. Not without reasons, scholars rarely take such accounts seriously, either dismissing them as malicious anecdotes<sup>80</sup> or interpreting them as embodying a widely attested hostility to the whole Academy, having little to do with the historical Speusippus.<sup>81</sup> Tarán (1981) belongs to the few critics who recognize the philosophical relevance of these stories, tracing them back to the

<sup>79</sup> Transl. by Kalligas/Tsouana, in Kalligas/Balla 2020, modified.

<sup>80</sup> Zeller (1920, 987), Gauthier and Jolif (1958, 819), and Merlan (1959, 214).

<sup>81</sup> Natoli (2004, 44) and Frede and Burnyeat (2015, 37–8).

debate over pleasure within the Academy. However, he does not see the connection in Speusippus' criticism of Eudoxus but thinks it is a confusion of the Pragmatists in *EN* 1172a28–b3 with Speusippus in reading Aristotle that encourages the doxographers to invent such anecdotes to disclose Speusippus' *doctrinal* inconsistency.<sup>82</sup>

Despite being sensitive to the connection and difference between Speusippus and the Pragmatists, this hypothesis leaves unexplained how a *misinterpretation* of Aristotle's Pragmatists could yield the very characterization of Speusippus we have encountered. In principle, it is not impossible that the doxographers intend to ridicule Speusippus' ethical doctrine through these contradicting portraits. Nevertheless, none of their accounts exhibits any knowledge of Aristotle's Pragmatists, nor do they even mention or hint at Speusippus' anti-hedonistic *theory*. By contrast, we should note that the other traditions in which Speusippus' anti-hedonism is addressed keep silent about his alleged hedonistic life (see fn. 3). As a matter of fact, it is reasonable to doubt whether the polemical stories, if read carefully, actually concern the problem of evaluating pleasure at all, given that Speusippus' hedonistic lifestyle is often paired with his irritability and his avarice, which unambiguously goes beyond a debate over hedonism. More importantly, those anecdotes are embedded in diverse contexts, thereby serving quite diverse purposes. It is even questionable whether all of them really concern Speusippus in the first place. While the main motivation of Plutarch seems to be to extol Plato's pedagogical skill,<sup>83</sup> the source used by Philodemus intends to highlight Xenocrates' virtue by taking advantage of Speusippus as a contrasting backdrop.<sup>84</sup> The accounts of Diogenes Laertius and Athenaeus may reflect a subtle relationship between the Macedonian regime and the Academy, especially in the period of Speusippus' leadership.<sup>85</sup> So if the initial goal of these accounts, as Tarán suggests, is to ridicule Speusippus' anti-hedonistic *doctrine*, their selection and presentation of the materials seem impotent for this specific purpose. If it is unlikely that the doxographers *invent* Speusippus' hedonistic way of life to caricature his anti-hedonism, the converging image of him as a hedonist in the later tradition may contain a certain historical truth. At least this image represents a popular impression of him, which can be traced back to the early Peripatetic school or even to the Academy under the headship of Xenocrates.

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<sup>82</sup> Tarán (1981, 178). Dillon is more cautious, merely suggesting that Speusippus' alleged hedonism 'at least probably has something to do with Speusippus' known doctrine on pleasure' (2003, 31).

<sup>83</sup> Stenzel (1929, 1636): 'ein gutes Beispiel für die Erziehungspraxis Platons'.

<sup>84</sup> See Gaiser (1988, 469) and Watts (2007, 115–8). The contrast between Speusippus and Xenocrates is clearly related to the popular narrative in which it is Xenocrates, rather than Speusippus, who is deemed the genuine heir of Plato and takes his heritage forward (see Sedley 2021b, 59–61; cf. Sedley 2021a).

<sup>85</sup> Natoli (2004, 42–7).

Combining this aspect with the analysis of *EN X* above, we are better equipped to revisit one of the initial puzzles: Why does Aristotle, in *EN VII*, seem satisfied with the provocative claim that ‘Speusippus would not say that pleasure is essentially bad’ (1153b6–7), even though the essential badness of pleasure is precisely what the latter endorses? In my interpretation, Speusippus’ notorious personality and behavior should be the evidence with which Aristotle presses him on this issue. In effect, he is asking whether Speusippus could *honestly assert* what is implied in his analogy if the debate were to continue. As Aristotle points out:

What affirmation and denial (κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις) are in the case of thought, pursuit and avoidance are with desire. [...] Reason must assert (φάναι) and desire pursue the same things. This, then, is practical thought and truth. (*EN* 1139a21–27, transl. Rowe and Broadie, modified) Whenever there is something pleasant or painful, [the soul], just as *affirming or denying* (καταφᾶσα ἢ ἀποφᾶσα), pursues or avoids. (*DA* III. 7. 431a9–10, translation and emphasis mine)

Aristotle is confident that if Speusippus were further asked to articulate the trio in his analogy and to map each element onto affective space, he would have difficulty publicly representing himself as believing what his solution implies. The question is *not* whether he can align his actions in a given situation with the belief implied by his objection, namely, the intrinsic badness of pleasure. Rather, as suggested earlier, the question is whether Speusippus, given his well-known self-indulgence in pleasure, can truly adopt this judgment as the central focus of his *agency* and the fundamental principle guiding *his way of life*. After all, Aristotle demanded that a good person should be ‘truthful in what he says and in how he lives (ἀληθευτικός καὶ τῷ βίῳ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ, *EN* 1127a24, cf. καὶ ἐν λόγῳ καὶ ἐν βίῳ ἀληθεύει, 1127b2). Thus, Speusippus can hardly evade the dilemma of choosing between the irrationality of his position or his actions, an unhappy consequence that would even further pose a significant threat to his overall credibility as a competent participant in a philosophical debate. Aristotle’s laconism, in this reading, has a certain rhetorical appeal, particularly in the context of dialectical debates in the Academy and Lyceum. For Speusippus cannot be a ‘nobody’ in these circles. Even if how he lived could no longer be directly observed by Aristotle’s audience (given that he was no longer alive when Aristotle was giving his lecture),<sup>86</sup> rumors about his words and actions must have been widespread among the Peripatetics, conceivably in different forms. Since the coherence between words and deeds is especially required for a rational agent, Speusippus, as a rational, competent interlocutor, would not want to manifest himself as intellectually dishonest or inept in the intra-school debate.

<sup>86</sup> See the imperfect tenses in Aristotle’s report of this debate (Εὐδοξος μὲν οὖν τὴν ἡδονὴν τάγαθὸν ᾗτ’ εἶναι, *EN* 1172b9; οὐχ ἦττον δ’ ᾗτ’ εἶναι φανερόν ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου 1172b18, cf. *EN* 1101b29; ὡς γὰρ Σπεύσιππος ἔλυσεν, *EN* 1153b4–5).

## 8 Conclusion

We started with three seemingly inconsistent images of Speusippus. The result we have achieved is, besides reconciling them into a coherent picture, to offer a fresh way of considering Speusippus' ethics, particularly his essentialist anti-hedonism as a version of radical Platonism. The re-assessment of Speusippus also brings us to a reconsideration of the debate over pleasure in the Academy and the way in which Aristotle presents various rival views as a dialectical springboard to develop his own position. Aristotle's concern here, as argued, is not limited to the question of how to properly evaluate pleasure but also includes the question *in what sense* such value judgments are *practically relevant*. Different attitudes to the latter question, or even a typology, can be discerned from his account:

As naive 'empiricists', ordinary people exhibit a reasonable sensitivity to the actions of others. However, they often tend to overgeneralize from their direct observations, letting casual evidence disproportionately influence their value judgments. The Pragmatists, like Aristotle, regard how to evaluate hedonic experiences as crucial for human life, yet they capture the practicality merely in terms of pragmatic efficacy, which condones and even encourages 'useful' lies if they can help achieve their goal of social reform. They overestimate the practical effects of words but ignore the need for truth as a normative constraint on practical persuasion, especially when viewed from a long-term perspective. Like the Pragmatists, Eudoxus refrains from exploring the essence of pleasure. However, given his claim that pleasure is choiceworthy *intrinsically* (καθ' αὐτὴν), namely good by its own nature (EN 1172b20–3), it is not enough to establish pleasure as the ultimate good or to justify its relevance for rational action merely by appealing to the reactive attitude of animals, even if it is pursued indiscriminately by all of them.

Both Speusippus and Aristotle, by contrast, try to base their evaluation of pleasure primarily on what pleasure is, including its essence and intrinsic properties. Despite their diametrically opposed conclusions, both worry about Eudoxus' overuse of the evidence from animals' behaviors, especially his identification of the ultimate good with the universal good. For in inquiring about the normative status of something in practical fields, both think that behaviors from humans are more revealing than those from other animals, and behaviors from a few wise people – either Aristotle's so-called *phronimoi* and *epieikeis* or Speusippus' *agathoi* – provide more authoritative evidence than what ordinary people are inclined to do. But, as argued, it is also because of this agreement that Aristotle can attack Speusippus by putting him, a rational disputer, in a dilemma of either undermining his rational agency or conceding a certain inconsistency between his words and deeds.

It should be noted that I do not think the appeal to pragmatic inconsistency is a decisive objection to Speusippus. What Aristotle provides, after all, is merely his version of a segment of a larger intra-school controversy. There are, no doubt, many more details to fill in Aristotle's fairly optimistic assumption about the relationship between action and truth in practical fields. There is also much more to say generally about what actually constitutes or dictates a practical judgment on value. More importantly, while Aristotle, as an essentialist, is concerned with the nature and classification of pleasure, he also demonstrates a keen interest in the practical dimensions of the debate on its value, especially with regard to the practical presuppositions, efficacy, and consequences of relevant value judgments. He believes that each participant in this debate should respect practical truths, truths that have a holistic aspect, concerning not only concrete actions in specific situations but also the overarching principles that guide one's behavior and life over time. This aspect of *EN X* reflects well Aristotle's understanding of ethics as a genuine, practical science, which should not be eclipsed by his preoccupation with the metaphysics of *energeia* and *genesis* in the same context.

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