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7 Anecdotes and Ethics

Theophrastus, Parrhasius, and the Forms of Life[1]

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7.1 Introduction

Parrhasius of Ephesus (c. 440–380 BC), a contemporary of Zeuxis (c. 435/25–390 BC), was renowned for his masterful contour painting, particularly his subtle control of lines, elegant forms, and well-proportioned compositions.[2] The earliest textual evidence about him, as described by Xenophon in a dialogue with Socrates on the differences between imitating the body and the soul (*Mem.* 3.10.1), reveals that Parrhasius was more than just a skilled artisan but already attracted the attention of philosophers, and thus somehow became involved in the philosophical discourses of his contemporaries. The post-classical period saw an ever-growing interest in Parrhasius, celebrating his artistic prowess and legendary victory over Zeuxis in a contest, while highlighting his extravagant lifestyle and arrogant demeanor. One infamous story involves his torturing of a slave to capture the agony of Prometheus authentically (Sen. *Controv.* 10.5). While this anecdote demonstrates Parrhasius' unwavering dedication to his craft, it simultaneously casts an ethical shadow over his career. Unsurprisingly, the painter also caught the eye of Theophrastus, Aristotle's most distinguished student, who recorded several anecdotes about Parrhasius in the lost work *On Happiness* (Περὶ εὐδαιμονίας), preserved in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* and Aelian's *Varia Historia* respectively.[3]

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2 For a collection of sources on Parrhasius, see DNO no.1636–1702; for art historical evaluations of his works, see Brunn (1889) 66–82; Pfuhl (1923) 689–696; Rumpf (1951).

3 The translations follow *Theophrastus of Eresus. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence* (FHS&G). On Aelian's sources in general, cf. Scholfield (1958) xv–xxiv; Wilson (1997) 10–11; Kindstrand (1998) 2975–2977; Stamm (2003) 46–58. While Aelian may have had access to Athenaeus, the question remains whether the similarities between their works are always due to the latter's reliance on the former, or whether they may instead derive from a common source; for different

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T1a (Parrhasius) competed once against an inferior painter in Samos (on the subject of) Ajax and was defeated. When his friends sympathized with him, he said that he himself cared little, but he sympathized with Ajax who was defeated for a second time. Given to luxury he used to wear a purple cloak and to have a white band on his head and to support himself with a staff embossed with gold spirals and to fasten the straps of his slippers with gold clasps. But he did not produce artistic work without pleasure, but with ease, so that he even sang while painting, as Theophrastus records in the (work) *On Happiness.*

(Ath. 12.62 543E–F = fr. 552B FHS&G)

T1b That Parrhasius the painter used to wear a purple cloak and to have round (his head) a gold wreath is attested by other (witnesses) and by the inscriptions on many of his portraits. He competed once in Samos, happened to have an opponent not much inferior and was defeated. His theme was Ajax competing for the arms of Achilles against Odysseus. When Parrhasius was defeated, he responded with exceptional charm to one of his comrades who sympathized with him. For he said that he himself cared little about the defeat, but sympathized with the son of Telamon who was now defeated a second time for the same (arms). He used to hold a staff with gold spirals encircling it and to fasten the straps of his slippers with gold clasps. Men say that he engaged in artistic work neither reluctantly nor laboriously, but with good spirits and with ease. For indeed he used to sing and by humming try to lighten the toil which resulted from his skill. Theophrastus says these things.

(*VH* 9.11 = fr. 552A FHS&G)

Both texts portray Parrhasius' comfortable, joyful life from distinct perspectives. Their content divides into three parts: the **Luxury Story**, detailing his extravagant appearance and demeanor; the ***Agōn* Story**, depicting his indifference to an unexpected defeat in a painting competition; and the **Master Story**, showcasing his effortless *technē*.

Why, then, does Theophrastus' *On Happiness* invoke these anecdotes? This question is challenging due to the absence of its original context. Athenaeus and Aelian are drawn to Parrhasius presumably because they see him as emblematic of

positions, see Johnson (1997) 28–29; Stamm (2003) 48–50. With regard to Theophrastus' account of Parrhasius, Wilson (1997) 291 and Kansteiner et al. (2022) 822 prefer the first option, whereas, in contrast, Fortenbaugh (2011) 60 suggests that "Aelian and Athenaeus are almost certainly following the same intermediate source," see also Wellmann (1894) 488. In fact, given that Aelian's version is longer and richer in detail, we need to consider whether he has expanded upon Athenaeus, or whether, as Fortenbaugh (2011) 646–647 claims, this feature reflects Athenaeus' abbreviation of the source. Since Aelian possessed knowledge of Theophrastus' ethics independent of Athenaeus (*VH* 4.20 = fr. 513 FHS&G), and, as I will show, not all the differences between the two versions can be easily explained by Aelian's attempts to embellish the narrative for vividness and entertainment, it seems more probable that either Athenaeus abridged the shared source, or that Aelian consulted more than just Athenaeus.

the ancients' hedonistic lifestyle. While Athenaeus introduces Parrhasius by noting: "the ancients were so devoted to a luxurious, expensive lifestyle" (543C, trans. Olson), it is well-known that τρυφή is a central concern for Aelian throughout his *Varia Historia*.[4] The portrayal of Parrhasius thus serves as part of their critique of hedonism and, more specifically, the life of extravagance (τρυφή). Although this observation is supported by the context of Athenaeus' and Aelian's works (see Section 7.3), the light and witty tone of **T1a** and **T1b** seems ill-suited for such a critical purpose. Comparisons with surviving sources suggest that Imperial-era compilers like Athenaeus and Aelian often reshaped texts to display erudition and entertain, disregarding their original context or intent.[5] This also reinforces the likelihood that Theophrastus had a *different* concern with Parrhasius. Perhaps, like the personality sketches found in his *Characters*, Theophrastus uses these stories to illustrate a famous painter's unconventional lifestyle without *serious* philosophical implications. As Hoesch summarizes, such exaggerated accounts provide "evidence of the status which a painter was already capable of attaining at that time."[6] While this possibility cannot be excluded, it scarcely explains *why* Parrhasius' story is so detailed in Theophrastus' *On Happiness*, an ethical work addressing a central Peripatetic question: what is the highest human good?[7]

Fortenbaugh is among the few scholars who treat the Parrhasius narrative as a serious *philosophical* text. He highlights Theophrastus' ability to blend vivid narrative with philosophical theorization, suggesting that Theophrastus might use Parrhasius to illustrate an Aristotelian ideal of the good life, specifically emphasizing happiness as unimpeded, joyful activity.[8] I agree that the whole narrative deserves closer scrutiny within the context of Aristotelian ethics, but Fortenbaugh seems to rely on a simplistic dichotomy between positive and negative reception of the painter, too hastily placing Theophrastus in the favorable camp. While this approach may help dispel the hostile bias of Athenaeus and Aelian toward pleasure-centered lives, the binary framework oversimplifies the potential complexity of assessing an individual's life from a philosophical perspective. Moreover, the notion that Parrhasius symbolizes a joyful, good life ignores the subtle irony in Theophrastus' narrative, nor does it do sufficient justice to the interconnections among the three stories.

While the extant testimonies, reworked by erudite compilers, hinder a full recovery of Theophrastus' intent, I believe that a careful comparison of the two transmitted versions, along with a reconstruction of their dialogical contexts, allows for a fresh *philosophical* interpretation of Theophrastus' portrayal of Parrhasius. Going beyond the simple opposition between Athenaeus' and Aelian's

4 Kindstrand (1998) 2971; Smith (2014) 251–254.

5 For Athenaeus' working method, see e.g., Skydsgaard (1968) 101–116; Pelling (2000); Walbank (2000); for Aelian, see e.g., Johnson (1997) 31–32; Kindstrand (1998) 2969–2971; Stamm (2003); Digiulio (2023).

6 Hoesch (2000) 357.

7 See below in Section 7.2.

8 Fortenbaugh (2011) 159, 647–648.

anti-*tryphē* narrative and Fortenbaugh's favorable image of the painter, I argue that Theophrastus uses Parrhasius' life to represent *a refined form of technē-centered hedonism*, rearticulating and expanding the Aristotelian conception of pleasure and its connection to happiness. Against his contemporaries, Theophrastus would not deny that such hedonists could lead decent and even enviable lives, but in sketching the limitations of such a life, he rejects the idea that pleasure can function as a guiding principle of life, even if some pleasure, according to Aristotle, can be the highest good. From this perspective, a simplified pro- and anti-hedonistic framework does not help much, since Theophrastus is interested in these stories not only for their ethical intricacies, but also because he engaged in philosophical debates that go beyond this simplistic dichotomy for and against pleasure.

I begin by exploring the nature of Theophrastus' *On Happiness*, arguing that, exoteric or not, it must engage seriously with the relationship between happiness and pleasure, contributing to broader debates on different modes of life beyond Aristotle's classical model (Section 7.2). In Section 7.3, I analyze the Luxury Story, showing how it plays a pivotal role in Theophrastus' portrayal of Parrhasius by hinting at a more refined form of hedonism. In Section 7.4, I scrutinize the *Agōn* Story, cautioning against reading it as evidence of Parrhasius' composure or sympathy in the face of adversity. Finally, in Section 7.5, I examine the Master Story, contrasting Parrhasius' performance with Aristotle's ideal of *energeia* and its intrinsic pleasure. I argue that this story does not celebrate Parrhasius' *technē* but instead highlights his limitations as a painter or the inherent constraints of *technai* when compared to truly ideal activities.

7.2 Context

Understanding Parrhasius' stories partly hinges on the nature of Theophrastus' *On Happiness*, yet, as Fortenbaugh notes, the lack of textual evidence makes it difficult to classify the work as esoteric or exoteric.[9] Despite this disadvantage, we should note that the presence of anecdotes does not, in itself, diminish the work's philosophical seriousness. For anecdotes are also present in Aristotle's ethical works, such as the much-told story of Philoxenus praying for a crane's gullet in order to enjoy more food when discussing pleasure and virtue (*EN* 3.10.1118a32–33; *EE* 3.2.1231a12–17).[10] This aligns with Aristotle's view that ethics should prioritize actions and practical truths, best illustrated through specific examples rather than universal rules (*EN* 10.1.1172a34–b1, 10.8.1179a18–19). Anecdotes, when properly used, can vividly demonstrate what constitutes good or bad actions, making them valuable for guiding behavior and enhancing a theory's credibility.[11] This

9 Fortenbaugh (2011) 156–161.

10 This story is also found in Theophilus (Ath. 1.6B = fr. 6, FHG iv.516 Müller) and Macho (Ath. 8.341B–D = 64–86 Gow). In his *On Lives*, Clearchus also depicts Philoxenus as a φιλόδειπνος with a different story, but he attributes the desire to lengthen the gullet to a tragic poet called Melanthius (fr. 60A, 60B Dorandi).

11 Cheng (2024).

perspective explains why personality and behavior sketches are especially integral to *ethical* discourses and why anecdotes, serving as *exampla*, gain prominence among the Peripatetics after Aristotle.[12]

Given Aristotle's close association of happiness with pleasure,[13] the presence of Parrhasius, who led a *specific* life of pleasure, in a Peripatetic text called *On Happiness* is not at all surprising. The significance of this theme, in fact, makes it more improbable that the text is merely a popular work devoid of any substantial philosophical content.[14] No less than Aristotle, Theophrastus regards happiness as the goal or even the *raison d'être* of philosophy. As Cicero reports:

> **T2** *omnis auctoritas philosophiae, ut ait Theophrastus, consistit in beata vita comparanda; beate enim vivendi cupiditate incense omnes sumus*.
> The entire importance of philosophy consists, **as Theophrastus says**, in bringing about a happy life, for we are all burning with a desire to live happily.
>
> (*Fin.* 5.86 = fr. 475 FHS&G)

The appearance of works with the same title by philosophers across different schools underscores the widespread relevance of the topic in the intellectual landscape of that time.[15] Theophrastus' *On Happiness* should be an integral part of that landscape, engaging not only in the defense or elucidation of Aristotle's legacy but also in the contemporary debates surrounding the subject. This hypothesis is further supported by the growing popularity of *pleasure* as a subject among early Academics and Peripatetics.[16] Heraclides Ponticus,[17] for instance, makes extensive

12 This feature can be clearly seen even from the limited fragments available, see e.g., Walzer (1929) 80–81; Wehrli and Wöhrle (2004) 529; Fortenbaugh (2011) 239 (more cautiously). From Stobaeus (2.7.20 = fr. 449A FHS&G), for instance, we know that Theophrastus explores the doctrine of the mean first by "out several sets of coordinates in conformity with his teacher, next **adducing individual cases**." This indicates that the use of numerous examples to illustrate relevant theory is an important part of Theophrastus' teaching practice. Moreover, according to Ath.15.15 673E–F (= fr. 437 FHS&G), Adrastus is said to have published five books *On Questions of History and Style in the (Work)* On Dispositions (Περὶ ἠθῶν) *of Theophrastus* and a sixth (book) *On the (Same Matters) in Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics. This implies that Theophrastus, like Aristotle, employed historical material and anecdotes in his ethical writings, but probably more extensively.

13 See e.g., *EN* 7.13.1153b14–17, 10.7.1177a22–27; cf. also *Metaph.* Λ.7.1072b24–30.

14 Theophrastus' *On the Divine Happiness in Response to the Academics* should also be devoted to this issue (Diog. Laert. 5.49 = Theophrastus fr. 436 no.13 FHS&G).

15 *On Happiness* by Heraclides Ponticus (Diog. Laert. 5.87 = fr. 17 no.6 Schütrumpf), Strato of Lampsacus (Diog. Laert. 5.59 = fr. 81 no.5 Sharples), and Xenocrates (Diog. Laert. 4.12).

16 Since Plato's *Philebus*, *On Pleasure* or similar titles seem to have become a standard constituent of the writings among early Academics and Peripatetics: *Aristippus* and *On Pleasure* by Speusippus (Diog. Laert. 4.4); *On Pleasure* (two books) by Xenocrates (Diog. Laert. 4.12); *On Pleasure* by Heraclides Ponticus (Diog. Laert. 5.88); *On Pleasure* by Philippus of Opus (*Suda* φ 418, s.v. Φιλόσοφος), *On Pleasure like that in Aristotle*, *On Pleasure*, *On False Pleasures* by Theophrastus (Diog. Laert. 5.44, 46); *On Pleasure* by Strato of Lampsacus (Diog. Laert. 5. 59); *On Pleasure* by Chamaeleon (fr. 2 no.1 Martano).

17 Heraclides was likely not an official member of the Lyceum, but rather a follower of Aristotle during the Academy period, see Gottschalk (1980) 3–4; Dillon (2003) 203–206; Mejer (2009) 27–29. His

use of anecdotes about individuals and groups to examine the value of pleasure, an approach that finds echoes in Theophrastus and Clearchus as well.[18] While *Quellenforschung* is not our focus here, what stands out is the shared reliance on anecdotes in philosophical discussions of happiness and pleasure, suggesting that these stories may reflect common interests, with different authors offering varying interpretations in ongoing debates.

The debates notably extend beyond evaluating pleasure as a singular experience to considering whether it can serve as the guiding principle for a happy life. This expanded inquiry into goodness involves comparing and ranking different lifestyles.[19] Aristotle exemplifies this approach with his classical distinction among the life of pleasure, political engagement (βίος πρακτικός or πολιτικός), and contemplation/philosophy (*EN* 1.5.1095b14–96a10, 10.7.1177a12–78a9; *EE* 1.4.1215a25–b14). Theophrastus not only authored an *On Lives* (Diog. Laert 5.42 = 436 no. 16 FHS&G) but also displayed a keen interest in diverse modes of life in his ethical writings.[20] He laments that while people focus on all other aspects of life, they often fail to reflect on the best way to live (Stob. *Flor.* 2.31.124 = fr. 465 FHS&G). He also emphasizes that choosing the best life is hard, but adhering to it is even more challenging (fr. 476 FHS&G). Similarly, in *On Lives*, Clearchus explains that his interest in the dietary habits of the hedonist Anaxarchus stems from Anaxarchus' portrayal as a figure embodying *happiness* (τῷ **εὐδαιμονικῷ** καλουμένῳ Ἀναξάρχῳ, 55 Dorandi). As Verhasselt characterizes *On Lives* literature as "a platform for debate about the right way of life,"[21] it cannot be an accident that it quickly became a popular title in the Academy and Lyceum, as seen in the writings of Xenocrates (fr. 2, 12 Isnardi Parente), Heraclides Ponticus (Diog. Laert. 5.87 = fr. 17 no. 23 Schütrumpf), Clearchus (at least eight books, fr. 37–66 Dorandi),[22] Strato (Diog. Laert. 5.59 = fr. 82 no. 4 Sharples), and Dicaearchus (Diog. Laert. 3.4 = fr. 47 Mirhady = fr. 22 Verhasselt).[23]

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philosophy seems to reflect the influence of both Plato and Aristotle.

18 Common *topoi* include **oriental luxury**, see Heraclides fr. 39 Schütrumpf (the Persians and Medes); Clearchus fr. 42A, fr. 65 Dorandi (the Lydians), fr. 50 (the Medes) and fr. 52B (the Persians); for **Ionian luxury**: Heraclides fr. 23 Schütrumpf (the Milesians); Clearchus fr. 43 (the Milesians, the Colophonians); Thphr. fr. 549 FHS&G (the Ionians); for **the luxury in southern Italy**: Heraclides fr. 22, fr. 41 (Sybaris); Clearchus fr. 46 (Tarentum), fr. 47 (Carbina), fr. 54 (the Sicilians); for **the luxury of dictators**: Clearchus fr. 45 (Dionysius II of Syracuse), fr. 51D (Sardanapallus), fr. 58 (Darius), fr. 63 (Phalaris), fr. 65 (Polycrates); Thphr. fr. 550 FHS&G (on Smindyrides), fr. 551 FHS&G (Smindyrides, Sardanapalos, Agesilaos), fr. 603 FHS&G (the Persian kings).

19 In Heraclides, see e.g., πολύ τοι φέριστον ἀνδρὶ τερπνὸς αἰών (a quotation of Pindar, fr. 39 Schütrumpf); κατὰ τὸν βίον ἡσθῆναι, fr. 40; ὁ περὶ ἡδονὴν βίος of Callias, fr. 42; τὸν μεθ' ἡδονῆς βίον fr. 43; τρυφερόν τινα τῷ βίῳ, fr. 45.

20 This feature of Theophrastus' ethics is well captured by Cicero's Latin translation of *Peri Eudaimonias* as *De Beata Vita* (*Fin.* 5.86 = fr. 475 FHS&G; 5.12 = fr. 498 FHS&G).

21 Verhasselt (2018).

22 This title is also cited by Athenaeus in the *Deipnosophistae* as *Lives* (Βίοι). For why *On (Typles of) Lives* (Περὶ βίων) should be preferred, see Fortenbaugh (2022) 436.

23 Most scholars view these as treatises on modes of life rather than simple biographies, see e.g., Wehrli and Wöhrle (2004) 503–504; Verhasselt (2016), (2018); Ranocchia (2021); Fortenbaugh (2022).

Although the loss of these texts leaves their exact content and the authors' positions undetermined,[24] it would be incorrect to assume that all Peripatetics strictly adhered to Aristotle's view or framework.[25] They not only differ in their understanding and evaluation of the three classical lifestyles, but these modes of life can also be combined, expanded, and subdivided, allowing for more complex and nuanced analysis. Beyond the famous debate between Dicaearchus and Theophrastus on the primacy of political versus contemplative life,[26] there were Peripatetics who tried to reconcile the two lives in different ways.[27] Beyond the classical framework, Clearchus, for instance, differentiates between the "enduring life" (*bios karterikos*) and the 'dog-like life' (*bios kynikos*), critiquing the Cynics for adopting the weaknesses of dogs instead of their strengths (fr. 64 Dorandi).[28] Even concentrating on the theme of pleasure, Clearchus invokes Gorgias to define temperate living (τὸ σωφρόνως ζῆν) as "*never* acting for pleasure's sake," a stance far more extreme than that of Aristotle or Theophrastus, who, while rejecting hedonism, still regarded pleasure as integral to a virtuous life. If in Clearchus, we encounter an extreme anti-hedonist, we recognize a moderate hedonist in Heraclides, who seems to consider a more delicate form of hedonism, allowing pleasure to promote both fashions and virtues (fr. 39).[29] Likewise, Aristoxenus, in his *Life of Archytas*, recounts a Pythagorean hedonist, Polyarchus, who seems to integrate bodily pleasures and the pleasures of argument (τῷ λόγῳ) into a choiceworthy life in accordance with nature (Ath. 12.545A–546C = Archytas A9 Huffman).

In this intellectual context, historical figures were often invoked and interpreted differently across texts, with participants using varied sources and offering distinct perspectives. Whereas Aristoxenus, for instance, attributes Pythagoras' achievement primarily to his *philosophical* thinking (fr. 11–41 Wehrli; cf. fr. 1–11 Huffman),

24 The possibility that some of these works are dialogues further complicates the task of determining the author's intent.

25 For the diversity of positions within the Aristotelian school, especially on pleasure, see Cheng (2018).

26 In *Letter to Atticus* 2.16, Cicero mentions a "great controversy" (*tanta controversia*) between Theophrastus, who favored the contemplative life, and Dicaearchus, who advocated for political engagement (fr. 33 Mirhady = fr. 481 FHS&G = fr. 50a Verhasselt). This supposed debate has long intrigued scholars, who envisioned a fierce clash between the two Peripatetics: see Fortenbaugh (2011) 393–396. However, recent scholarship has questioned this traditional narrative. Huby (2001) and Fortenbaugh (2013) express doubts about Cicero's account, with Fortenbaugh suggesting that the dispute may reflect Cicero's own context and relationship with Atticus more than an actual historical event. Though Cicero likely dramatized the conflict, it remains plausible that Theophrastus and Dicaearchus held differing views on evaluating various forms of life and their components (cf. fr. 461 FHS&G), which Cicero simplified for his purposes, cf. McConnell (2012); Verhasselt (2016) 68–69.

27 See e.g., [Plut.] *Plac. phil*. 874F–875A and Müller (1968).

28 This fragment is attributed to Clearchus' *On Lives* by most editors, see Wehrli (1969a) 51; Dorandi (2022); Tsitsiridis (2008) 66–67, (2013) 157–158; also see Verhasselt (2016) 65–66; Fortenbaugh (2022) 456–460.

29 Schütrumpf (2009) utilizes fr. 39 to challenge the view of Heraclides as a staunch anti-hedonist. For us, however, it does not matter whether fr. 39 represents Heraclides' considered view, cf. also Lieberg (1959) 38–42; Wehrli (1969b) 77–81; Gottschalk (1980) 89–93.

Dicaearchus, perhaps to substantiate the preference for *practical* life, seems more inclined to portray Pythagoras as a charismatic orator and politician (fr. 40, 41A Mirhady = fr. 56, 57a Verhasselt). Likewise, Thales and Socrates received different evaluations and even symbolized completely different lifestyles among earlier Peripatetics.[30] Parrhasius likely played a similar role, as he appears not only in Theophrastus' *On Happiness* but also in Clearchus' *On Lives*, with overlapping and differing material.[31] When Clearchus records Parrhasius' self-description as both *habrodiaitos* and respectful of virtue (ἁβροδίαιτος ἀνήρ, Ath. 15.687A; 12.543D, more see below), he has undoubtedly intervened in the debate concerning the relationship between good and *habrodiaitos*—a term that semantically shifts between the negative "dainty" and the positive "graceful." Since *habrodiaitos* refers to a refined, aristocratic lifestyle distinct from mere indulgence in bodily pleasures, the debate in question is not simply about whether one should pursue a life of pleasure or luxury, but rather whether *a specific form of hedonism* can encompass virtue—or even happiness.[32] We know that some Epicureans, although equating pleasure with the highest good, reject the notion that a *habrodiaitos bios* can count as a life of pleasure (Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 29, col. 2,8–10 Smith; cf. fr. 31, fr. 32).

The expansion and enrichment of Aristotle's schema is a natural result of the developments of the debates on forms of life, which took place not only among the Peripatetics but also expanded to other schools in the post-classical period. In an epitome attributed to Arius Didymus, for instance, more than three lives are available to the virtuous as worthy choices, constrained by varying external conditions (143.24–145.10).[33] Although the author emphasizes the primacy of contemplative life (προκρίνεσθαι δὲ τῶν ἄλλων τὸν θεωρητικόν, 144.18), he seems more interested in manifesting different ways in which political life can be realized and combined with other forms of life (143.24–144.15). One might even choose a contemplative life while retaining a desire for political involvement (as opposed to direct political engagement), or devote himself to an educational life (<τὸ> παιδευτικόν), which is considered a middle ground (μέσον) between the life of an ordinary citizen and the life of contemplation. The title *On Lives* is also attested in Epicureans and Stoics,

30 While Heraclides portrays Thales as a solitary, hermit philosopher (μονήρη […] καὶ ἰδιαστήν), Dicaearchus asserts that none of the Seven Wise Men were philosophers but were instead intelligent lawmakers (συνετοὺς δέ τινας καὶ νομοθετικούς, fr. 37 Mirhady = fr. 53 Verhasselt). Likewise, Socrates seems to represent a life of pleasure in Aristoxenus, but for Dicaearchus, Socrates' approach to philosophy is similar to engaging in politics: neither involves mere theoretical contemplation but requires action in every aspect of daily life.

31 In addition to fr. 12, the lives of Greek celebrities also often appear in discussions of pleasure and happiness, including not only Pericles (Heraclides fr. 43), Callias, Nicias (Heraclides fr. 42), and Gorgias (Clearchus fr. 56), but also artists like Aeschylus (fr. 553 FHS& G) and Melanthius (a tragedian active in the 420s, Clearchus fr. 60AB).

32 *Pace* Tsitsiridis (2013) 172, who downplays the polemical nature of Clearchus' *On Lives*, characterizing it as merely protreptic rather than polemical. For a more reasonable hypothesis, see Bollansée (2008).

33 Cf. Fortenbaugh (2018).

who continued debates on the same subject.[34] While Epicurus discouraged political involvement and suicide (fr. 1, 119 Arrighetti), Chrysippus encouraged the wise to engage in politics (fr. 3.697 SVF) and permitted suicide in extreme circumstances (fr. 3.691 SVF). Like Aristotle, Chrysippus upheld the classical tripartite division of life forms but replaced the sensual life (βίος ἀπολαυστικός) with the rational life (λογικός). More strikingly, he dismisses the "leisured life" (βίος σχολαστικός) as nothing but a life of pleasure (βίος ἡδονικός), opposing Aristotle and Theophrastus, who equated leisure with contemplation and distanced it from a life of pleasure (fr. 3.702 SVF).[35]

In summary, the contextual and intertextual factors suggest that Theophrastus' *On Happiness* should not only be regarded as a philosophical text addressing the relationship between pleasure and happiness but also as a conscious contribution to ongoing debates about the value of different lifestyles. Parrhasius' presence in that work naturally integrates into the discussion, thereby warranting serious philosophical attention. But the key question remains *how* his stories might illuminate Theophrastus' views on pleasure and the nature of a happy life.

7.3 The Luxury Story

I begin with Parrhasius' attire:

T3a Ath. 12.62 543F (<fr. 552B FHS&G)	T3b *VH* 9.11 (<fr. 552A FHS&G)
ἐφόρει δὲ ὑπὸ τρυφῆς **πορφυρίδα** καὶ στρόφιον λευκὸν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς εἶχεν **σκίπωνί** τε ἐστηρίζετο **χρυσᾶς ἕλικας** ἐμπεπαισμένῳ **χρυσοῖς τε ἀνασπαστοῖς ἐπέσφιγγε τῶν βλαυτῶν τοὺς ἀναγωγέας**. Given to luxury he used to wear a purple cloak and to have a white band on his head and to support himself with a staff embossed with gold spirals and to fasten the straps of his slippers with gold clasps.	Παρράσιος ὁ ζωγράφος ὅτι μὲν **πορφυρίδα ἐφόρει** καὶ χρυσοῦν στέφανον περιέκειτο μαρτυροῦσι καὶ ἄλλοι καὶ τὰ ἐπιγράμματα δὲ ἐπὶ πολλῶν εἰκόνων αὐτοῦ· […][a] κατεῖχε δὲ καὶ **σκίπωνα χρυσᾶς ἕλικας** ἔχοντα περιερπούσας, **χρυσοῖς τε ἀνασπάστοις ἐπέσφιγγε τοὺς ἀναγωγέας τῶν βλαυτῶν**. That Parrhasius the painter used to wear a purple cloak and to have round (his head) a gold wreath is attested by other (witnesses) and by the inscriptions on many of his portraits. […] He used to hold a staff with gold spirals encircling it and to fasten the straps of his slippers with gold clasps.

[a] Aelian's version marks the beginning of his account of Parrhasius, but it is split into two parts by what I call the *Agon* Story, represented here by […]. By contrast, Athenaus' version appears after the *Agon* Story, presented as an uninterrupted whole.

34 For Epicurus, see fr. 1.30; 119; 136; 10.1–3 Arrighetti; for the Stoics, see fr. 2.42; fr. 2.270; fr. 3.579; fr. 3.685; fr. 3.691; fr. 3.693; fr. 3.697; fr. 3.702–3; fr. 3.716 SVF. *P.Herc.* 1020 and *P.Herc.* 1384 are also identified by some scholars as parts of Chrysippus' Περὶ βίων, see Ranocchia (2022); cf. Plutarch's Περὶ βίων πρὸς Ἐπίκουρον and Philodemus' Περὶ ἠθῶν καὶ βίων.

35 Theophrastus' alleged self-characterization as σχολαστικόν in Diog. Laert. 5.37 should be connected to this doctrinal commitment, cf. "σχολὴν ἄγωσιν" in fr. 461 FHS&G. For research on this term, see Zaccaria (forthcoming).

Both texts show Theophrastus offering a meticulous head-to-toe description of Parrhasius, covering items from headgear and cloak to cane and shoes. While Aelian's exposition appears purely descriptive, Athenaeus explicitly attributes this feature to luxury (ὑπὸ τρυφῆς), effectively integrating this motive into his broader critique of hedonism in Book 12.[36] Since clothing, as is well-known, often served in ancient literature as a symbol not only of the wearer's social status but also of their moral and political stance,[37] it is not surprising that this element got Theophrastus' attention in an ethical treatise, presumably as he introduces Parrhasius.

Unlike Athenaeus, Aelian's exposition is divided into two blocks: the former is the main attire, while the latter is supplementary. Items such as a purple cloak and gold wreath are introduced as Parrhasius' most distinguishing marks, symbolizing his personality and way of life.[38] Aelian also emphasizes that these elements are confirmed by multiple sources. The descriptions of the staff and the slippers, however, are interspersed between the *Agōn* Story and the Master Story, and do not seem to be particularly directly related to either of them. This division, however, seems to reinforce the subtle tension between the golden wreath and Parrhasius' defeat in the immediately succeeding *Agōn* Story, a relationship I will return to in Section 7.4.

Despite the many overlapping elements, Athenaeus' and Aelian's descriptions of the headdress are different, the former as a white band, the latter as a gold wreath. In contrast to Aelian, Athenaeus explicitly states that he has also borrowed from Clearchus' account about Parrhasius, as indicated by the beginning:

> **T4** οὕτω δὲ παρὰ τοῖς ἀρχαίοις τὸ τῆς τρυφῆς καὶ τῆς πολυτελείας ἠσκεῖτο ὡς καὶ Παρράσιον τὸν ζωγράφον πορφύραν ἀμπέχεσθαι, χρυσοῦν στέφανον ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἔχοντα, ὡς ἱστορεῖ Κλέαρχος ἐν τοῖς βίοις.
> The ancients were so devoted to a luxurious, expensive lifestyle that the painter Parrhasius wore purple clothes and put **a gold wreath** on his head, according to Clearchus in his *Lives.*
>
> (Ath. 12.543C, trans. Olson = fr. 41 Dorandi)

It seems that both Theophrastus and Clearchus mention Parrhasius' purple clothing, but they differ regarding the headdress. Aelian opts for the *gold* wreath, perhaps

36 The unusual attire of the luxurious life as a motive occurs repeatedly in Athenaeus, who collects a great deal of the material from early sources. See Ath. 12.512 BC (cf. Thuc. 1.6; Aelian, *VH*. 4.22); 514C (cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 8.8.19–20); 518E; 521B; 522A, D; 523CD; 525C–E; 526AB; 528E; 528F; 534A; 535EF; 537F; 542D; 545A; 545E. See also Aelian *VH* 9.3; 9.8.

37 Bernhardt (2003) 207–209.

38 The use of purple fabrics was a hallmark of luxury in ancient discourse, see e.g., Reinhold (1970); Bradley (2009) 189–211. Plutarch, for example, highlights this in his portrayal of Alcibiades, whose extravagant lifestyle and hubristic behavior are marked by his purple robes (*Alcibiades* 16.1). Similarly, Athenaeus uses purple to signify Alexander's opulence (Ath. 12.539C–540A). Aristotle also employed purple as a symbol of excess (*EN* 4.2.1123a23), a theme echoed by early Academics and Peripatetics, such as in Clearchus' depiction of Midas (fr. 42A Dorandi = Ath. 12.516B) and Heraclides' presentation of luxurious Athenians (fr. 39 Schütrumpf = Ath. 12.512C).

because more sources support it,[39] or because he sees it as a more vivid symbol of luxury. After all, in ancient tradition, purple and gold are two closely connected "shining" colors, lending the wearer a more magnificent appearance when combined.[40] Moreover, unlike Athenaeus, who openly dismisses Parrhasius as tasteless and unworthy of his profession (Ath. 12.543C), Aelian does not directly comment on Parrhasius' appearance. Yet, his stories about the painter (9.11) appear within an anti-hedonistic framework too, where figures like Alexander the Great (9.3, cf. Ath. 514B), Demetrius of Phalerum (9.9, cf. Ath. 543CD), and Epicureans Alcaeus and Philiscus (9.12, cf. Ath. 12.547AB) are criticized for their indulgence, while elites like Plato are praised for rejecting pleasure. This suggests that Aelian's view of Parrhasius, like Athenaeus,' aligns with their general hostility to the life of pleasure.

While the Luxury Story fits well with the compilers' critical purposes, scholars are more puzzled by its role in Theophrastus' *On Happiness*, both in terms of its intrinsic significance and its connection to the rest of the Parrhasius narrative. Wehrli argues for a positive interpretation, invoking "eine bedingte Anerkennung der äußeren Lebensgüter" within the Aristotelian tradition.[41] However, purple cloak, gold wreath, and embroidery are typically luxuries, not necessities. The need for external goods is one thing, while the excessive pursuit of luxuries is another.[42] More recently, Fortenbaugh offers a simpler view. He draws on Hermippus' portrayal of Theophrastus, suggesting that Theophrastus wittily referenced his own fine wardrobe through his depiction of Parrhasius:

> [R]eference to Parrhasius' luxurious style of dress may appear gratuitous and foreign to an esoteric writing, but Theophrastus was clearly interested in such stylistic matters and even exhibited this interest in the way he dressed—'splendid and all decked out'—when lecturing within the Peripatos (Athenaeus 1.38 21A = 12.2). He may even have called attention to his own dress in order to evoke a smile when making reference to Parrhasius.[43]

This interpretation attempts to incorporate the Luxury Story into a lighthearted account of the ideal, pleasure-filled life. However, it risks trivializing the symbolic weight of extravagant clothing, a well-known motif in ancient *anti-hedonist* discourse.[44] Aristotle already saw dress as both a symbol and symptom of character, noting that those who adorn themselves excessively are conceited (χαῦνος), flaunting their fortune (τὰ εὐτυχήματα) to seek honor and prestige (*EN* 4.3.1125a30–32). Clearchus, who asserts that character is "clearly reflected in *attire* and habits"

39 See T3a: they are "attested by other witnesses and by the inscriptions on many of his portraits."
40 Goldman (2013) 29.
41 Wehrli (1969a) 61.
42 In *On Marriage*, Theophrastus critiques the pursuit of luxury, condemning items such as "expensive dresses, gold, jewels, money" for their negative impacts (fr. 486 FHS&G).
43 Fortenbaugh (2011) 159.
44 For dress as a typical symbol of luxurious living, see Berry (1994) 27–30.

(fr. 44 Dorandi; trans. White), provides more examples of the close link between ostentatious dress, luxury and hubris.[45] Theophrastus is not a friend of extravagance (σαλακωνία) either (fr. 449A, 449B FHS&G). He even ridiculed a person who constantly worries about how he looks as *mikrophilotimos* (*Ch.* 21). In this light, it's hard to imagine that the detailed depiction of Parrhasius' ostentatious attire is mere innocent, self-referential humor, especially given its critical role in Clearchus' similar portrayal. In fact, a closer look at Hermippus' evidence, cited by Athenaeus in *Deipnosophistae* Book I, further reveals that the alleged parallel between Parrhasius and Theophrastus is tenuous:

> **T5** Θεόφραστον παραγίνεσθαι εἰς τὸν περίπατον καθ᾽ ὥραν λαμπρὸν καὶ ἐξησκημένον, εἶτα καθίσαντα διατίθεσθαι τὸν λόγον οὐδεμιᾶς ἀπεχόμενον κινήσεως οὐδὲ σχήματος ἑνός. καί ποτε ὀψοφάγον μιμούμενον ἐξείραντα τὴν γλῶσσαν περιλείχειν τὰ χείλη.
> Theophrastus used to arrive punctually at the Peripatos, looking splendid and all decked out. Then sitting down, he (used to) present his lecture, refraining from no movement nor any gesture. And once while imitating a gourmet, having stuck out his tongue, he repeatedly licked his lips.
> (Ath.1.38 21A–B, = fr. 12 FHS&G = Hermippus fr. 51 Wehrli = fr. 35 Bollansée)

What Hermippus focuses on is Theophrastus' lecturing style, including the excellence of his outward appearance and mimetic way of delivery.[46] The substantial distinction between T5 and the *Agōn* Story lies in their focus: the former presents a depiction of an *action*, with appearance being just one aspect,[47] whereas the latter concentrates solely on appearance, or more precisely, on *dress and adornment* alone. Even when focusing on appearance, the phrase "looking splendid and all decked out" (λαμπρὸν καὶ ἐξησκημένον) is too vague to conclusively determine that Theophrastus' dress code is extravagant as well, let alone indicative of the style specific to Parrhasius.[48]

45 See fr. 46 ("They all wore transparent clothing with ornate border"); fr. 47 ("paint their faces, wear hairpieces, and dress in floral robes"); fr. 48 ("dressed in elaborately decorated robes fit for tragic performance and wearing long tunics down to their feet"); fr. 49 ("the Massalians, who wore the same fancy clothing as the Iberians, turned effeminate," trans. White). The same pattern is attested in Heraclides Ponticus; see fr. 39 Schütrumpf = Ath.12.5 512C.

46 For Theophrastus' distinguished reputation in the art of delivery, see fr. 1.30–31; fr. 5–7 FHS&G.

47 Alongside posture and voice, appropriate dress was considered an important way for an orator to present himself to an audience in the ancient rhetorical tradition, see Bollansée (1999) 333.

48 The context of Ath. 1.38 is not luxury, but rather the appropriateness of dress and behavior, which should conform to the cultivated behavior expected of a gentleman, such as a philosopher or rhetorician. Hermippus' favorable portrayal of Theophrastus in this regard is contrasted with his report of Theocritus' criticism of Anaximenes, who is described as dressing in a manner unbecoming of a gentleman. In fact, T5 seems to reflect the way in which Theophrastus puts his theory of delivery into practice, cf. Fortenbaugh (1985). Even his meticulous attire may represent a general Peripatetic style, similar to Diogenes Laertius' characterization of Aristotle, who is said to have been accustomed to wearing fine clothes and rings (ἐσθῆτί τ᾽ ἐπισήμῳ χρώμενος καὶ δακτυλίοις, Diog. Laert.

In any case, I think we should not underestimate the symbolic significance of Theophrastus in illustrating Parrhasius' attire, which embodies not merely the painter's lavish lifestyle in general but also *a specific form of refined hedonism that aligns with both his character and his profession*.[49] If this assumption is plausible, the rest of Parrhasius' episode should be consistent with its critical implication. Against this background, it is unlikely that Theophrastus would view the painter as a representation of ideal life. Likewise, his interest in Parrhasius, as I will argue, should also go beyond a *popular* critique of *various kinds of* hedonism like that found in Aelian and Athenaeus.

7.4 The *Agōn* Story

While the Luxury Story merely sets a certain tone for the episode of Parrhasius from an external perspective, the *Agōn* Story offers us a glimpse into his inner world, which may be of greater significance for Theophrastus' purposes in *On Happiness*. This episode is often interpreted as illustrating Parrhasius' serene attitude in the face of unjust or unforeseen failure since he lost the match to an opponent who is said to be less skilled. Following Fortenbaugh's interpretation, if the Master Story shows how Parrhasius realizes unimpeded joy through his expertise, the *Agōn* Story reveals his adeptness at avoiding pain under adverse conditions.[50] Theophrastus thus represents a favorable tradition in the reception of Parrhasius, in contrast to the hostile tradition seen in Clearchus and Pliny (see below).[51]

Just as I'm skeptical that the Master Story implies that perfect activity is necessarily accompanied by pleasure (see Section 7.5 below), I doubt that the *Agōn* Story presents an unambiguously ideal portrayal of Parrhasius. If we assume the contest was unfair, and Parrhasius achieved tranquility in the face of an "unjust defeat,"[52]

5.1). Such a portrayal might also allude to the Peripatetic ethical commitment, according to which external goods, including wealth, are viewed as necessary or even integral to happiness and certain virtues, see Wehrli (1974) 77; Bollansée (1999) 335. This emphasis on the importance of wealth, however, should not be confused with a justification of luxury. It is perhaps no coincidence that neither Athenaeus nor Hermippus places the appearance of Theophrastus in the context of a critique of luxury.

49 Pliny notes that refinement (*subtilitas*) was a defining feature of Parrhasius' painting. Through his delicate rendering of facial expressions, the graceful depiction of hair, and the beauty he imparted to the lips, Parrhasius was believed to achieve an unparalleled level of refinement (*HN* 35.67).

50 Fortenbaugh (2011) 647 does not explicitly contrast these two anecdotes in this way. In his commentary, he thinks that through the two anecdotes, Theophrastus "recognizes [Parrhasius'] capacity for work and acknowledges his ability to accept defeat in a graceful, witty manner." (He further comments: "Perhaps we are meant to understand that Parrhasius does not and will not harbor ill feelings regarding his defeat in the way that Ajax did even in Hades (Homer, *Odyssey* 11.543–547). Or is Parrhasius simply masking ill feelings, which will be slow to depart. I prefer the first way of understanding the text." This interpretation seems similar in spirit to the pain-avoidance interpretation mentioned above. But in a recent paper, Fortenbaugh (2022) 469 takes the two stories to illustrate the painter's "joyful work and a capacity for sympathy."

51 Wehrli (1969a) 60–61; Fortenbaugh (2011) 646–648.

52 Fortenbaugh (2011) 647.

it seems unlikely that Theophrastus, adhering to Aristotle, would approve of the painter's response. For Aristotle holds that the proper reaction to injustice is measured anger—an appropriate pain in response to perceived injustice (ἐπὶ φαινομένῃ ἀδικίᾳ, *EN* 5.8.1135b28–29).[53] From this perspective, while Ajax exemplifies excessive rage in response to unjust failure, Parrhasius, had he truly attained the spiritual tranquility, might risk slipping into a form of insensitivity. Yet whatever moral the *Agōn* Story might convey, a deeper issue lies in the fact that scholars seem to hastily presume the *injustice* of Parrhasius' defeat, possibly swayed by his implicit comparisons to Ajax's fate. Under closer scrutiny, however, there is no conclusive evidence to support this assumption. Let us consider the *Agōn* Story in greater detail:

T6a Ath. 12. 543EF (<fr. 552B FHS&G)	T6b Ael.*VH*.9.11 (<fr. 552A FHS&G)
ἀγωνιζόμενος δέ ποτε πρὸς καταδεέστερον ἐν Σάμῳ τὸν Αἴαντα καὶ ἡττηθείς, συναχθομένων αὐτῷ τῶν φίλων, ἔφη ὡς αὐτὸς μὲν ὀλίγον φροντίζοι, Αἴαντι δὲ συνάχθοιτο δεύτερον ἡττηθέντι.	ἠγωνίσατο δέ ποτε ἐν Σάμῳ, συνέτυχε δὲ ἀντιπάλῳ οὐ κατὰ πολὺ ἐνδεεστέρῳ[a] αὐτοῦ εἶτα ἡττήθη. τὸ δὲ ἐπίγραμμα ἦν αὐτῷ ὁ Αἴας ὑπὲρ τῶν ὅπλων τῶν Ἀχιλλέως ἀγωνισάμενος πρὸς τὸν Ὀδυσσέα. ἡττηθεὶς δὲ εὖ μάλα ἀστείως ἀπεκρίνατο πρὸς τὸν συναχθόμενον αὐτῷ τῶν ἑταίρων ὁ Παρράσιος· ἔφη γὰρ αὐτὸς μὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἥττης ὀλίγον φροντίζειν, συν άχθεσθαι δὲ τῷ παιδὶ τοῦ Τελαμῶνος δεύτερον τοῦτο ὑπὲρ τῶν αὐτῶν ἡττηθέντι.
(Parrhasius) competed once against an inferior painter in Samos (on the subject of) Ajax and was defeated. When his friends sympathized with him, he said that he himself cared little, but he sympathized with Ajax who was defeated for a second time.	He competed once in Samos, happened to have an opponent not much inferior and was defeated. His theme was Ajax competing for the arms of Achilles against Odysseus. When Parrhasius was defeated, he responded with exceptional charm to one of his comrades who sympathized with him. For he said that he himself cared little about the defeat, but sympathized with the son of Telamon who was now defeated a second time for the same (arms).

[a] According to Scheffer's conjecture (athetesing οὐ), the painter is "much inferior" to Parrhasius. In his Loeb Classical Library edition, Nigel Wilson also brackets οὐ. By contrast, both Dilts (1974) 104 and Fortenbaugh (2011) 646 adopt the manuscripts' reading and do not mention this alternative. I think the emendation is not only unnecessary but also misleading, see below.

By invoking Ajax's alleged second defeat, Parrhasius is not simply referring to the subject of his painting. Instead, he uses the image for a dual purpose: explicitly, to express his detachment from losing, contrasting it with Ajax's notorious overreaction; implicitly, to suggest that, like Ajax losing to Odysseus for Achilles' armor, he too, as a superior artist, was bested by an inferior rival, perhaps unjustly. Scholars recognize this layered message but often overlook that it *is* Parrhasius' *interpretation* of the contest rather than a fact directly presented by Theophrastus

53 *EN* 2.6.1105b26–28, 2.7.1108a4–9, 4.5.1126b4–9; also cf. *EN* 4.5.1125b31–35, 1126a3–7.

(or Athenaeus/Aelian). We must exercise caution in hastily equating the former's understanding of the event with the latter's assessment.

Divergent views on Ajax's failure further complicate the interpretation of the episode. In the epic tradition, Ajax forfeits his claim to the armor due to his hubris toward Athena. By the classical period, however, his status becomes more ambiguous, as his defeat is portrayed as the result of failing to secure a majority vote—variously attributed to his lack of eloquence, Odysseus' cunning, or the blindness of the voters.[54] Notably, there was no consensus that Ajax surpassed Odysseus in *aretē*, nor that his defeat was essentially unjust. Even Aristotle dismisses the argument that Ajax's resemblance to Achilles proves his superiority over Odysseus (*Top.* 3.2.117b12–17). Likewise, he also characterizes Ajax as embodying *megalopsychia*, yet not as a virtue; rather, it reflects his pride and arrogance, manifesting in his intolerance and extreme reactions to perceived slights (*APo*. 2.13.97b18–25). It is such differences of opinion that probably made the "judgment of arms" (ὅπλων κρίσις) a compelling subject for writers and artists, including Parrhasius.

Regarding the *Agōn* Story, both Athenaeus and Aelian present versions that suggest no impropriety in the contest. While Athenaeus indicates that Parrhasius' rival is not equal to him, Aelian describes the rival as "not much inferior," subtly narrowing the gap between them. In either case, these evaluations do not dictate a contest's outcome, which, as Aristotle also acknowledges, depends on more than just the contestants' abilities (*EN* 1.9.1099a3–7). Especially in craftsmanship, it is the final product that ultimately matters. Thus, in a drawing contest, judges should focus on the impact of the completed work rather than an artist's past achievement. If Parrhasius lost to a less skilled rival, assuming a fair match, it could be due to his own underperformance or the opponent's exceptional performance. In this scenario, Parrhasius may sincerely acknowledge his failure in the contest but be less bothered, as his comparison to Ajax suggests that the defeat did not compromise his superiority *in ability* relative to his competitor. If so, Parrhasius' response to his friend was motivated by pride and self-confidence, in keeping with his well-known personality. The alleged gap in skill could even lead him to *underestimate* his rival and *thereby* lose the contest. And if he lost to someone only slightly inferior, it is even less surprising. It is, however, also possible that Parrhasius' appeal to Ajax's fate hints at *the injustice* of the judgment, such that he believes his superiority in *both ability and performance* remains unaffected despite the adverse outcome. In either scenario, it seems to be Parrhasius' arrogance, rather than any virtue, that motivates him to distance himself from the frustration, whether or not he actually achieved some kind of emotional tranquility.

In Aelian's version, Parrhasius' golden wreath contrasts subtly with his defeat, symbolizing both luxury and, ironically, the reward of victory in Greek culture. The *Agōn* Story thus reinforces the ironic undertones regarding Parrhasius' attire. This implication becomes more transparent when we consider Athenaeus' composition:

54 Bocksberger (2022) 56–71, 167–210.

the story immediately follows two epigrams Parrhasius reportedly attached to his works, creating a cohesive narrative:

> **T7a** ἁβροδίαιτος ἀνὴρ ἀρετήν τε σέβων τάδ᾽ ἔγραψεν
> Παρράσιος κλεινῆς πατρίδος ἐξ Ἐφέσου.
> οὐδὲ πατρὸς λαθόμην Εὐήνορος, ὅς <μ᾽> ἀνέφυσε
> γνήσιον, **Ἑλλήνων πρῶτα φέροντα τέχνης**.
>
> (FGE 279–282, Page)

> This was painted by a man who led a dainty life and respected virtue / Parrhasius, whose famous fatherland is Ephesus. / Nor do I omit my father Euenor, whose legitimate son / I am; the best of the Greeks at his craft.
>
> (trans. Olson, modified)

> **T7b** εἰ καὶ ἄπιστα κλύουσι, λέγω τάδε· φημὶ γὰρ ἴδη
> τέχνης εὑρῆσθαι τέρματα τῆσδε σαφῆ
> χειρὸς ὑφ᾽ ἡμετέρης· ἀνυπέρβλητος δὲ πέπηγεν
> οὖρος· ἀμώμητον δ᾽ οὐδὲν ἔγεντο βροτοῖς.
>
> (FGE 283–286, Page)

> Even if those who hear this disbelieve me, I say the following: I claim that / the certain boundaries of this craft have been discovered / by my hand. The limit has been fixed and no one can / Go beyond it; but nothing mortals do is perfect.
>
> (trans. Olson, modified)

Parrhasius' self-proclaimed *habrodiaitos* (dainty life), as noted above, evokes an exquisite, luxurious lifestyle dating to the sixth century BC, yet often criticized by the fifth century. As a new strain of hedonism, *habrodiaitos* transcends mere physical indulgence, embracing a cultivated life of style and fashion intimately linked to aristocratic values. It cannot be an accident that our sources contain four of the seven core characteristics of such a life as summarized by Kurke: "garments of expensive material," "gold ornaments," "song," "a certain sensuality."[55] Read in context, Parrhasius' message is provocative, suggesting that, unlike coarse indulgence and luxury, his refined hedonism not only aligns with virtue but actually *defines* his very identity. For the *habrodiaitos bios* embodies his excellence in craft, which is not characterized as the *best* in Greece but connected to the *divine*. Yet the *Agōn* Story, which directly follows this self-portrayal, seems to challenge Parrhasius' professed superiority. Especially when compared to the equally arrogant Zeuxis, who, after competing with Parrhasius, is said to have readily accepted his defeat with noble humility (*ingenuo pudore*, Pliny, *HN* 35.65), Parrhasius' response to his own failure, though not lacking in wit, seems more evasive—almost as if he were attempting to conceal rather than confront or reflect on the outcome. These

55 Kurke (1992) 96.

elements position Athenaeus' version not far from the so-called hostile tradition of the same story, particularly as seen in Pliny:

> **T8** *fecundus Artifex, quo nemo insolentius usus sit gloria artis, namque et cognomina usurpavit habrodiaetum se appellando aliisque versibus principem artis et eam ab se consummatam, super omnia Apollinis se radice ortum et Herculem, qui est Lindi, talem a se pictum, qualem saepe in quiete vidisset; et cum magnis suffragiis superatus a Timanthe esset Sami in Aiace armorumque iudicio, herois nomine se moleste ferre dicebat, quod iterum ab indigno victus esset.*
>
> Parrhasius was a prolific artist, but one who enjoyed the glory of his art with unparalleled arrogance, for he actually adopted certain surnames, calling himself the '*Habrodiaetus*,' and in some other verses 'Prince of Painters,' who had brought the art to perfection, and above all saying he was sprung from the lineage of Apollo and that his picture of Heracles at Lindos presented the hero as he had often appeared to him in his dreams. **Consequently when defeated by Timanthes at Samos by a large majority of votes, the subject of the pictures being Ajax and the Award of the Arms, he used to declare in the name of his hero that he was indignant at having been defeated a second time by an unworthy opponent**.
>
> (*HN* 35.71–72, trans. Rackham, modified)

Structurally, Pliny's version closely mirrors Athenaeus': both begin with Parrhasius' self-portrait, highlighting his arrogance and *habrodiaitos*, followed by the *Agōn* Story that undermines this self-characterization.[56] Unlike Athenaeus and Aelian, however, Pliny adds two details: first, Parrhasius' loss is attributed to his failure to gain a majority vote; second, his opponent is named—Timanthus—described as possessing exceptional talent (*vel plurimum adfuit ingenii*, *HN* 73).[57] With no hint of unfairness in the voting, it seems unsurprising that Parrhasius lost to such a gifted rival; given his arrogance, this outcome might even be expected. As in Athenaeus and Aelian, Parrhasius also evokes Ajax's defeat to mirror his own, but there are notable differences. In the former, Parrhasius *explicitly* contrasts

56 *HN* 34–35, Pliny's chapters on the history of art, is thought to have drawn directly or indirectly on a number of sources, see e.g., Münzer (1897); Kalkmann (1898); Gallett de Santerre and Le Bonniec (1953) 48–60; Sellers (1976) xii–xci; Croisille (1985) 13–26; König and Winkler (2007) 378–381; Carey (2003) 8–11. It is likely that through Roman writers such as Varro and Cornelius Nepos, he gained access to the works of Hellenistic authors such as Xenocrates of Athens and Antigonus (of Carystus?). In particular, Xenocrates' views on art are believed to have influenced Pliny's classification and organization of materials. Moreover, Duris of Samos (c. 340–270 BC) is regarded as his primary source for the anecdotes about artists, cf. e.g., Sellers (1976) xlvi–lxvii; Kris and Kurz (1934) 26–31; Koch (2013) 143–145. Since Duris was a pupil of Theophrastus (Ath. 4.128A), Pliny's account of the *Agon* Story is likely to have originated in the Peripatetic tradition. In this light, Athenaeus and Aelian may have relied on an intermediary source that simplified the details of this anecdote.

57 If Timanthes is indeed the other protagonist behind this story, "not much inferior" is more likely used by Theophrastus. It is also difficult to imagine that Aelian would have felt the need to add a "not" if Athenaeus were the only source for him in this case.

his indifference to his own defeat with sympathy for Ajax, subtly *implying* both failures were unjust.[58] In Pliny, however, this subtlety vanishes, with Parrhasius directly comparing himself to Ajax to express frustration at losing. While in Athenaeus and Aelian, his opponent is portrayed as inferior, here the judgment of being 'unworthy' comes from Parrhasius alone, contradicting *the narrator*'s depiction of Timanthus' brilliance.

To sum up, in both Athenaeus and Aelian, Parrhasius claims indifference to his defeat and expresses pity for Ajax. But it is one thing to respond to a friend in an unfavorable scenario with appropriate *words*; it is another to respond to the unfavorable scenario with appropriate *emotions*, which requires appropriate factual and self-knowledge. Given that Parrhasius' indifference and pity are all embedded in his *response* to a friend's sympathy,[59] it remains uncertain whether they represent a sincere, detached attitude toward failure or a euphemistic way of expressing his conceit and dissatisfaction. After all, as noted, Parrhasius' expression of pity for Ajax is not merely an ironic commentary on the subject of his painting, but reinforces his superiority in skill, even by alluding to an *unworthy* opponent or an *unfair* contest. From this perspective, rather than expressing sympathy for a fallen hero, it is more accurate to say that Parrhasius was conveying a self-oriented pity—a certain kind of pain (cf. συνάχθεσθαι in T6a–b)—which cannot arise without arrogance, pride, and discontent. For this reason, Parrhasius can hardly be seen as having achieved the ideal of tranquility that many philosophers, especially in the Hellenistic period, pursued. Instead, as a refined hedonist, he appeared more focused on rationalizing his failure to avoid pain or discomfort, striving to maintain a hedonically positive state.

7.5 The Master Story

If the *Agōn* Story, as argued, indirectly concerns Parrhasius' *product*, the Master Story directly reveals a core aspect of his *production process*.

T9a Ath. 12.543B, transl. FHS&G

τὰ κατὰ τὴν τέχνην ἀηδῶς ἐποιεῖτο ἀλλὰ ῥᾳδίως, ὡς καὶ ᾄδειν γράφοντα, ὡς ἱστορεῖ Θεόφραστος ἐν τῷ περὶ Ε ὐδαιμονίας.

But he did not produce artistic work without pleasure, but with ease, so that he even sang while painting, as Theophrastus records in the work *On Happiness.*

T9b Ael.*VH* 9.11, transl. FHS&G

φασὶ δὲ αὐτὸν μήτε ἄκοντα μήτε ἐπιπόνως τὰ ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ χειρουργεῖν, πάνυ δὲ εὐθύμως καὶ ῥᾳδίως· καὶ γὰρ καὶ ᾖδε καὶ ὑποκινυρόμενος **τὸν κάματον** τὸν ἐκ τῆς ἐπιστήμης ἐπειρᾶτο ἐπελαφρύνειν. λέγει δὲ ταῦτα Θεόφραστος.

Men say that he engaged in artistic work neither reluctantly nor laboriously, but with good spirits and with ease. For indeed he used to sing and by humming try to lighten the toil which resulted from his skill. Theophrastus says these things.

58 It is not clear, as the phrase "*in Aiace armorumque iudicio"* whether the subject of *the contest* is Ajax in the ὅπλων κρίσις or, as in Athenaeus and Aelian, only the content of Parrhasius' work. While Croisille (1985) 191 prefers the former, Pfuhl (1923) 698 and Sellers (1976) 115 opt for the latter.

59 In Aelian, the phrase εὖ μάλα ἀστείως refers not to Parrhasius' feelings about his failure but to the wit with which he deflects sympathy by comparing himself to Ajax.

Both versions provide a close-up view of Parrhasius exercising his skill. Singing may signify the joy accompanying his productive activity (εὐθύμως in Aelian; οὐδέ […] ἀηδῶς in Athenaeus) or the ease with which he performs his craft (ῥᾳδίως in both). This interpretation holds if we consider Athenaeus' account alone. Aelian's version, however, cautions against this reading, given that it explicitly states that Parrhasius sang to "lighten the toil" of painting.[60] The *hapax* ὑποκινυρόμενος hints at a low moan, an expression of feeling pain,[61] implying that the singing was not a sign of joy but an analgesic, extrinsic to his work.[62] But what does this distinction mean for an Aristotelian?

Fortenbaugh identifies two Aristotelian elements that are integral to Theophrastus' account. First, Parrhasius uses singing to ease the pain of painting, since, as Aristotle notes, pleasure can dispel pain (*EN* 7.14.1154a27, b13–14). Second, Aristotle emphasizes that perfect activity should be accompanied by ease and pleasure (*Protrep.* B31; *Pol.* 8.3.1338a1–9; *EN* 7.13.1153b9–15, 10.4.1175a12–17). Thus, Parrhasius' multitasking aligns with the Aristotelian ideal of 'unimpeded, joyful activity.'[63] If this interpretation is correct, Parrhasius helps Theophrastus illustrate how pleasure, as a good, integrates into an ideal activity, contributing to its excellence.

I agree that Theophrastus' interest in Parrhasius likely arises from the ethical significance he finds in the anecdotes. Fortenbaugh is, therefore, correct in identifying an allusion to Aristotle's views on happiness and pleasure. However, he seems to ignore a tension between the role of pleasure in alleviating pain and the concept of certain pleasures as unimpeded activity. When Fortenbaugh suggests that "singing can mask the labors of intense work while also expressing unimpeded, joyful activity,"[64] he conflates two types of pleasure that, in Aristotelian ethics, are incompatible. To see why, we need to first consider Aristotle's distinction between two types of pleasure:

60 Compared to Athenaeus, who tends to mention his sources explicitly (though not necessarily his *direct* sources), Aelian is more inclined to remain silent on such matters. Specifically, in the case of *HV*, the author's voice is more concealed behind the text, since the available text is either an epitome or an unfinished draft; see Johnson (1997) 31–32; Kindstrand (1998) 2969–2971. In the case of Theophrastus on Parrhasius, however, Aelian's version is not only richer in detail but also explicitly emphasizes at the end that "Theophrastus *says* these things (ταῦτα)" (emphasis mine). As Fortenbaugh (2011) correctly observes, "the pronoun ταῦτα almost certainly includes everything that precedes" (158), suggesting that the Theophrastean testimony is not, as Athenaeus' version might lead one to assume, limited to the Master Story. More importantly, given the considerable differences in vocabulary and syntax between T9a and T9b, it is hard to imagine Aelian relying entirely on Athenaeus here, rather than the latter abbreviating an intermediate source.

61 κινύρομαι means "utter a plaintive sound," "lament" in the *Liddell, Scott, Jones*.

62 Aristotle was very familiar with the role music can play as an analgesic, cf. τῆς γὰρ διὰ τῶν πόνων λύπης ἰατρεία τίς ἐστιν, *Pol.* 8.5.1339b16–17, 8.7.1341b41, 1342a10.

63 Fortenbaugh (2011) 158, 648. Fortenbaugh (1984) 309 also believes that Theophrastus holds an overall positive view of Parrhasius, but interprets the Master Story as "mehr ein Zeichen von fleißigem Character als von τρυφή."

64 Fortenbaugh (2011) 648.

T10 αἱ δ᾽ ἄνευ λυπῶν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὑπερβολήν· αὗται δὲ τῶν φύσει ἡδέων καὶ μὴ κατὰ συμβεβηκός. λέγω δὲ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ἡδέα τὰ ἰατρεύοντα· ὅτι γὰρ συμβαίνει ἰατρεύεσθαι τοῦ ὑπομένοντος ὑγιοῦς πράττοντός τι, διὰ τοῦτο ἡδὺ δοκεῖ εἶναι·

Pleasures that do not involve pain have no excess. These are among the things naturally and not coincidentally pleasant. By 'coincidentally pleasant things,' I mean the curative ones, since being cured happens to coincide with a certain activity of the part of us that remains healthy, and because of this it seems to be pleasant.

(*EN* 7.14.1154b15–19)[65]

T10 distinguishes between pleasure *simpliciter* and pleasure *per accidens*. The former is an unhindered activity itself (*energeia*) or accompanies the optimal performance of an activity without requiring pain as a counterpart. In contrast, pleasure *per accidens* arises from a remedial or restorative process and inherently involves pain (μετὰ λύπης καὶ ἰατρείας ἕνεκεν, *EN* 7.12.1152b32).[66] This suggests that the presence or absence of pain is a key criterion for this distinction. Pleasures *simpliciter* are free from pain, exemplified by the pleasures of contemplation and vision, which serve as paradigmatic activities of thought and perception. In contrast, pleasures *per accidens* not only arise from pain as their starting point and contrasting background but are also particularly prone to being used by individuals in a naturally flawed or morally deficient state to alleviate various forms of pain or discomfort (*EN* 7.14).[67]

On the basis of this distinction, Aristotle shifted the center of the discussion of pleasure from the traditional accounts on *genesis* or *kinēsis* to *energeia*. In particular, he emphasizes that pleasures intrinsic or appropriate (οἰκεῖαι) to each activity (*energeia*) inherit the essential characteristics of the activities that produce them:

T11 βελτίστη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνέργεια τοῦ ἄριστα διακειμένου πρὸς τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ὑπ᾽ αὐτήν. αὕτη δ᾽ ἂν τελειοτάτη εἴη καὶ ἡδίστη. κατὰ πᾶσαν γὰρ αἴσθησίν ἐστιν ἡδονή, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ διάνοιαν καὶ θεωρίαν, ἡδίστη δ᾽ ἡ τελειοτάτη, τελειοτάτη δ᾽ ἡ τοῦ εὖ ἔχοντος πρὸς τὸ σπουδαιότατον τῶν ὑπ᾽ αὐτήν· τελειοῖ δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἡ ἡδονή.

The best activity will be, then, the activity of the subject that is in the best condition in relation to the most excellent of its objects. And this activity will be the most complete and most pleasant. For with every perceptual capacity there is a pleasure connected, and the same holds for both thought and contemplation; the most pleasant is the most complete, and the most complete

65 The text of Aristotle's *EN* follows Bywater (1894), and the translations are from Reeve (2021), with slight modifications.

66 *EN* 7.12.1152b27–33, 1152b36–a6, 7.14.1154b17–20.

67 For more details, see Cheng (2023b).

> is the activity of a subject that is in good condition in relation to the most excellent of the relevant objects. And pleasure is what completes the activity.
> (*EN* 10.4.1174b18–23)

This passage breaks down the conditions for ideal pleasure into the respective state of the subject and the object as well as their appropriate connection. Ideal pleasure arises from the best activity, performed by a subject in optimal condition in relation to an excellent object. Such activities are free of pain, and their associated pleasures are similarly untainted. This is why Aristotle asserts that there are in fact pleasures without pain or appetite, such as the activities of contemplation, where there is no lack in the natural state (*EN* 7.12.1152b36–53a1). Another defining feature of ideal pleasure is its unimpeded nature. Unimpededness is a *negative* condition for a perfect activity, relying not only on the excellence of the subject and object but also on favorable external conditions. Any defect or mismatch, or lack of external support, can hinder the activity and thus diminish its pleasure, even potentially introducing accompanying pains. This, in turn, leads to an experience that is either bittersweet (when pleasure is mixed with pain) or predominantly painful (when pain overshadows pleasure). Therefore, unimpededness is often seen as a hallmark of ideal activities and, consequently, of *eudaimonia*, which is defined by Aristotle in terms of doing well:

> **T12a** εἴπερ ἑκάστης ἕξεώς εἰσιν ἐνέργειαι ἀνεμπόδιστοι, εἴθ᾽ ἡ πασῶν ἐνέργειά ἐστιν εὐδαιμονία εἴτε ἡ τινὸς αὐτῶν, ἂν ᾖ ἀνεμπόδιστος, αἱρετωτά την εἶναι.
>
> If there are indeed unimpeded activities of each state, no matter whether happiness is the activity of all of them or of one of them in particular, then this activity, insofar as it is unimpeded, is the most choiceworthy.
> (*EN* 7.13.1153b9–12)

> **T12b** οὐδεμία γὰρ ἐνέργεια τέλειος ἐμποδιζομένη, ἡ δ᾽ εὐδαιμονία τῶν τελείων.
> For no activity is perfect when it is impeded, and happiness is something perfect.
> (*EN* 7.13.1153b16–17)

While many factors can hinder or even disrupt an activity, Aristotle sees pain and displeasure as especially effective in playing this role. Freedom from pain thus represents a sort of unimpededness, whereas pain usually disrupts the activity it accompanies, rather than merely signaling a defect. Aristotle explicitly notes that if painting involves pain or discomfort, it impedes the painter from continuing the activity:

> **T13** φθείρουσι γὰρ τὰς ἐνεργείας αἱ οἰκεῖαι λῦπαι, οἷον εἴ τῳ τὸ γράφειν ἀηδὲς καὶ ἐπίλυπον ἢ τὸ λογίζεσθαι· ὃ μὲν γὰρ οὐ γράφει, ὃ δ᾽ οὐ λογίζεται, λυπηρᾶς οὔσης τῆς ἐνεργείας. συμβαίνει δὴ περὶ τῆς ἐνεργείας τοὐναντίον

> ἀπὸ τῶν οἰκείων ἡδονῶν τε καὶ λυπῶν· οἰκεῖαι δ᾽ εἰσὶν αἱ ἐπὶ τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ καθ᾽ αὑτὴν γινόμεναι.
> The pains that properly belong to activities ruin them—for example, if painting or rationally calculating is unpleasant and painful for someone, he does not draw or rationally calculate, because the activity is painful. An activity is affected in contrary ways, then, by the pleasures and pains that properly belong to it—the ones that properly belong being the ones that supervene on the activity by itself.
>
> (*EN* 10.5.1175b17–22)

The terms ἀηδὲς καὶ ἐπίλυπον here resonate with ἀηδῶς in Athenaeus and ἐπιπόνως in Aelian, both referring to the intrinsic pains from imperfect craftsmanship. In contrast, an ideal Aristotelian activity is not only painless but also accompanied by pleasure intrinsic to the activity, contributing to its perfection. Just as pain impedes the activity it accompanies, intrinsic pleasure enhances the performance of the activity to which it belongs:

> **T14** φανείη δ᾽ ἂν τοῦτο καὶ ἐκ τοῦ συνῳκειῶσθαι τῶν ἡδονῶν ἑκάστην τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ ἣν τελειοῖ. συναύξει γὰρ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἡ οἰκεία ἡδονή. μᾶλλον γὰρ ἕκαστα κρίνουσι καὶ ἐξακριβοῦσιν οἱ μεθ᾽ ἡδονῆς ἐνεργοῦντες, οἷον γεωμετρικοὶ γίνονται οἱ χαίροντες τῷ γεωμετρεῖν, καὶ κατανοοῦσιν ἕκαστα μᾶλλον, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ οἱ φιλόμουσοι καὶ φιλοικοδόμοι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστοι ἐπιδιδόασιν εἰς τὸ οἰκεῖον ἔργον χαίροντες αὐτῷ· συναύξουσι δὲ αἱ ἡδοναί, τὰ δὲ συναύξοντα οἰκεῖα.
> This is also evident from the fact that each of the pleasures is intimately attached to the activity it completes, since *the pleasure that properly belongs to it increases the activity by its own increase*. For we discern each thing better and treat it with greater exactness when the activity involves pleasure; for example, those who enjoy geometry become true geometers and understand each aspect of it better and, similarly, those who are lovers of music or building or whatever it is—each makes advances in their own work by finding enjoyment in it. And so the pleasures increase the activities *by their own increase*. But what increases something *by its own increase properly belongs to that thing.*
>
> (*EN* 10.5.1175a29–36)

The reciprocal relationship between activities and their intrinsic pleasure applies both to the application of knowledge and the performance of skills. Pleasure enhances the perfection of an activity in both quality and duration. As Aristotle states, "the pleasure that properly belongs to an activity makes it more precise, enduring, and better" (*EN* 10.5.1175b13–15). Thus, the Aristotelian ideal is an unimpeded exercise of someone's ability, perfected by the intrinsic, painless pleasure inherent in the activity itself.

Returning to Theophrastus' Master Story, Parrhasius' painting is accompanied by pleasure in both versions. However, especially in Aelian's account, this does not fit well with Aristotle's ideal of an excellent activity. The testimony explicitly

mentions "pain resulting from the performance of his skill" (τὸν κάματον τὸν ἐκ τῆς ἐπιστήμης), while it is silent on any pleasure derived from painting itself. Instead, Parrhasius relies on singing to alleviate the pain of his craft.[68] This suggests that Parrhasius does not derive intrinsic pleasure from painting; rather, he endures its inherent discomfort and attempts to counterbalance it with an external pleasure—namely, the enjoyment he finds in singing. Just as Aristotle stresses that pleasure *per accidens* is especially suitable to drive out pain (*EN* 7.14.1154b13–14), the pleasure in Parrhasius is curative, and the pain involved thus signals a deficiency in the subject or the activity.[69]

One might think that being able to do two things at once is still a sign of the excellence of Parrhasius' skill. But Aristotle never gets excited about this kind of multitasking:

> **T15** ὅταν ἅμα περὶ δύο ἐνεργῇ· ἡ γὰρ ἡδίων τὴν ἑτέραν ἐκκρούει, κἂν πολὺ διαφέρῃ κατὰ τὴν ἡδονήν, μᾶλλον, ὥστε μηδ᾽ ἐνεργεῖν κατὰ τὴν ἑτέραν. διὸ χαίροντες ὀτῳοῦν σφόδρα οὐ πάνυ δρῶμεν ἕτερον, καὶ ἄλλα ποιοῦμεν ἄλλοις ἡρέμα ἀρεσκόμενοι, οἷον καὶ ἐν τοῖς θεάτροις οἱ τραγηματίζοντες, ὅταν φαῦλοι οἱ ἀγωνιζόμενοι ὦσι, τότε μάλιστ᾽ αὐτὸ δρῶσιν.
> When we are involved in two activities at the same time, […] the more pleasant activity knocks out the other one, and all the more so if the difference in pleasure is large, to the point where we no longer engage in the other activity. That is why when we enjoy something intensely we scarcely do anything else, but do indeed other things when only mildly pleased—for example, people who eat sweets in theaters do so most when the actors are bad.
> (*EN* 10.5.1175b6–13)

The best pleasure, according to Aristotle, is the simple pleasure experienced by the god in the constant contemplation of itself (*Metaph.* Λ.7.1072b24–30; *EN* 7.14.1154b25–26). For humans, when immersed in intense pleasure, they cannot or will not engage in other activities. However, one might engage in multiple activities if a single activity provides insufficient pleasure or causes discomfort. In the former case, the agent seeks additional pleasure, often leading to one pleasure overshadowing the other. In the latter, a suffering individual seeks additional pleasure to counterbalance pain and make the ongoing activity tolerable. Evidently, Aelian's version of the Master Story fits the latter, showing that Parrhasius does not

68 One might question the legitimacy of discussing pain here since Aelian uses κάματον rather than more common terms like λύπη or ὀδύνη. Admittedly κάματον and its cognates are rarely found in Aristotle or Theophrastus (an exception being καματωδέστερος in Thphr. *Lass.* 13), and *semantic* differences exist among terms translated loosely as pain (Cheng 2019). Nevertheless, *conceptually*, Aristotle uses "pain" broadly to refer to all negative, unpleasant affects—not just the sensation of bodily harm. Theophrastus follows this view (Cheng 2023a). Notably, in T9a and b, ἐπιπόνως and ἀηδῶς suggest that κάματον here is part of a broader experience of pain, a point on which I agree with Fortenbaugh.

69 See Cheng (2017).

embody an ideal life—not only due to the presence of pain but also his reliance on external pleasures for relief. To summarize my argument so far:

(P1) Happiness consists of unimpeded, ideal activities that are inherently pleasant and free from pain [The Hedonic State of Happiness].
(P2) Such pleasure comes from perfect, unimpeded activity and differs from accidental, curative pleasure [Two Types of Pleasure].
(P3) Pain arising from activity x is intrinsic to x, indicating that x is imperfect or impeded to a certain degree [Intrinsic Pain].
(P4) Pleasure arising from activity x is intrinsic to x but alien to activity y, if x and y differ in kind [Alien Pleasure].
(P5) Pain can be alleviated by simultaneous pleasure, especially alien ones, which cannot be pleasure *simpliciter* [Alien Pleasure as Pain Reliever].

Therefore

(C1) Parrhasius was suffering intrinsic pain of painting, yet alleviated by an alien pleasure, namely pleasure from his singing.
(C2) What he achieved is not an unimpeded, joyful activity, i.e., happiness.

If my argument holds, Theophrastus cannot use the Master Story to depict an ideal activity in his ethical treatise while remaining faithful to Aristotle.[70] Theophrastus likely does more than illustrate Aristotle's thought with a new example; he may interpret Parrhasius' story in two ways. First, Parrhasius doesn't embody an ideal life but rather a refined hedonistic life, which surpasses most hedonists indulging in a sensual life, yet still limited in value. For Parrhasius' life is not only marked by extravagance and hubris stemming from overconfidence in his abilities, but his artistic skill also lacks intrinsic pleasure, relying on external sources of enjoyment to mitigate the discomfort of its execution. Alternatively, the story helps Theophrastus distinguish between the pleasure of craft (*technē*) and the pleasure of activity (*energeia*), a nuance implicit in Aristotle's theory but not detailed in his treatises on pleasure, which are more concerned to distinguish between pleasure as activity and as *kinēsis*, with examples like seeing and contemplating versus eating and drinking. There, Aristotle does mention the pleasure of *technē* such as painting or sculpture, yet his perspective is on the connoisseur rather than the producer. Ideally, a producer could also derive pleasure from the act of production

70 As shown in *De sensibus*, Theophrastus' understanding of pleasure and pain generally follows Aristotle (Cheng 2023a). According to Cicero (*Fin.* 5.12 = fr. 498 FHS&G), they agree on the notion of a happy life but differ only on the role of fortune, with Theophrastus emphasizing ill-fortune's greater impact on virtuous individuals (fr. 479 FHS&G). More importantly, both believe that contemplation and study enable wise individuals to achieve a happy life—a life of pure pleasure akin to the gods, free from desire and pain (*Fin.* 5.11 = fr. 482 FHS&G, cf. *Tusc.* 1.44–45 = fr. 484 FHS&G).

itself, independent of the final product or outcomes like winning a competition; if a producer employs her skills unhindered, her activity might be accompanied by painless pleasure, enhancing its perfection.

There are two worries with this idea, however. First, it does not strictly align with the definition of *technē*, whose essence involves creating a product *external to* the act of production (*EN* 6.5.1140b2–11). Second, it does not adequately reflect reality. The openings of the Master Story in Athenaeus and Aelian—"he did not produce artistic work without pleasure" and "men say he worked neither reluctantly nor laboriously"—suggest that *technē* was typically seen as unpleasant or painful in the eyes of ordinary people. Parrhasius stands out because he challenges this popular impression with his exceptional talent. Yet, even Parrhasius, as a great painter, does not achieve the pure pleasure inherent in contemplation or simple vision. Admittedly, when Aristotle distinguishes between pleasure as *energeia* and pleasure as *kinēsis*, the distinction between *energeia* and *technē* is not his main concern. A broader notion of *energeia* may include the exercise of craft. However, the reason Aristotle consistently uses seeing and thinking as examples of *energeia* must be that other activities do not effectively illustrate his argument for the intrinsic value of pleasure or the idea that some pleasures are the highest good. Although a craft may be deemed perfect for producing a perfect product, the production process itself cannot be perfect since the product, by definition, is external to it. Thus, the craftsman's *energeia*, realized through the production process, has to be imperfect, strictly speaking. If he derives pleasure from the process of production, that pleasure is intrinsically imperfect because of the inherent imperfections of the process itself; but if, during the process, he takes pleasure in anticipating the completion of the product, that pleasure is not intrinsic, since its object is the final product, which is not yet completed and external to his ongoing activity. From this point of view, it cannot be an accident that when Aristotle discusses the intrinsic pleasure of music, he focuses on the pleasure from hearing the melody rather than from playing the instrument (*EN* 10.4.1175a13–14). Likewise, the intrinsic pleasure of painting should come from viewing, not from drawing. Thus, even an ideal producer experiences less pleasure than a viewer or thinker if the production process, as *energeia*, has pleasure independent of its outcome. Parrhasius can even hardly be considered an ideal producer since, as Aelian's account makes clear, his pleasure during work does not come from the production process itself but from an external activity, namely his singing. The wordplay in Athenaeus (οὐδέ […] ἀηδῶς […] ᾄδειν) points in the same direction.[71] If Parrhasius needs an external pleasure to make his work less onerous, he cannot even be regarded as a second-best producer—one who reinforces and prolongs the productive process by the pleasure inherent in that process.

71 This observation is indebted to Ruobing Xian.

7.6 Conclusion

Let's revisit the key points and their implications. I examined three anecdotes about Parrhasius—the Luxury Story, the *Agōn* Story, and the Master Story. Traditionally, Theophrastus' interest in these tales has been seen as either rhetorical or loosely tied to Aristotle's views on good pleasure. These perspectives, however, leave the stories disjointed, especially given the tension between the negative portrayal in the Luxury Story and the more positive tone in the *Agōn* and Master Stories.

I argued that Theophrastus' engagement with Parrhasius in *On Happiness* is more serious and coherent, addressing the classical question of pleasure's role in happiness. This goes beyond identifying components of happiness to explore which lifestyle most authentically realizes it. Thus, the question of the relationship between pleasure and happiness is closely interconnected with the question of the nature and value of different modes of life. Parrhasius, a controversial figure, becomes a focal point in this debate, potentially representing a refined hedonistic life, which some might claim is achievable, harmless, and even desirable. While the Luxury Story symbolizes how he *enjoys* a refined hedonistic life in line with the style of his craft, the *Agōn* and Master Stories reveal how he, in his profession, seeks to achieve a positive hedonic state by *suppressing* and *counterbalancing pain*. The emphasis on pain avoidance points to a hedonism that seems more passive and restrained.

To be sure, Theophrastus might concede a certain superiority to Parrhasius, particularly when compared to other hedonists, as the painter exemplifies a life of πεπαιδευμένη ὕβρις (*Rhet.*2.12.1389b11–12), in Aristotelian terms—rather than coarse indulgence. Yet, we must not overlook the ironies and limitations embedded in these three stories, suggesting that such a life, however delicate and cultivated, cannot attain true happiness as the ultimate good, owing to its inherent flaws. If this is the case, Theophrastus clarifies and develops Aristotle's thesis in three key aspects. First, while pleasure can be the highest good (τἄριστον, cf. *EN* 7.13.1153b7–15), this does not mean that a hedonistic life is the best mode of life, even in its advanced form. Second, the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain should not be the guiding principles for living a happy life, although, as such, pleasure is intrinsically good and pain intrinsically bad. Finally, pleasure can be realized in a variety of ways in a variety of activities. Yet, most pleasures, including those derived from the performance of excellent skills, cannot compare to the truly perfect *energeia* embodied by seeing and contemplating, due to their intrinsic differences.

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