



What is Pleasure? The Relation Between the Two Definitions of Pleasure Given by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*

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Introduction

Pleasure has been a topic much discussed in Western and Eastern Philosophy. Some have embraced it as the epicureans and utilitarian philosophers with their hedonistic calculation. The stoics took it as beneath or against the virtuous man. Buddhism thinks it and all other worldly desires must be rejected in order to enter Nirvana. Still others try to follow a middle line distinguishing between good and bad pleasures. One could say that if a philosophy doesn't have a position on Ethics, and there resolve the problem of pleasure, it would be incomplete and missing a very important element to understanding human life.

1. The place of pleasure in Aristotle

With so many opinions on pleasure what does Aristotle, one of the greatest philosophers of all times, have to say about it? Aristotle actually

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treats pleasure in more than one book. He discusses it in the *Rhetoric*, the *Magna Moralia* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, among others. However his most acclaimed book on Ethics is the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here Aristotle talks about pleasure in many areas such as in book I on its relation to happiness, in book III on its relation to fortitude and temperance, at the end of book VII in relation to continence and incontinence¹ and at the beginning of book X in relation to the final end, happiness.

With so many places where an author takes up the same question, it is a legitimate question to see if he has a coherent treatment of pleasure throughout. This article will mostly focus on the two accounts of pleasure in the *NE*² and their modern commentators, as to the definition of pleasure and the relationship between the two definitions Aristotle gives. The two accounts are referred to by scholars as the A account (in book VII) and the B account (in book X).³ However, the definition Aristotle puts forward in the *Rhetoric*, and how it is later assumed by Thomas Aquinas, will also come to play in the thomistic solution. There we will try to show how the definition given in the *Rhetoric* and assumed by Thomas offers the key to understanding what pleasure really is and its relation to the other definitions offered by the stagirite in A and B.

2. The problem of contending accounts and definitions

Trying to come to a coherent interpretation of what Aristotle says in both A and B and their relationship can be quite challenging. This is one of the points where many commentators differ. Some ultimately say that one cannot be entirely sure in the end how to reconcile the different accounts. Michael Pakaluk spoke of this problem in chapter ten of his book that introduces the main themes of the *NE*. He holds that with this double treatment of pleasure two difficulties arise:

¹ Incontinence in Aristotle has a wider meaning than that given it in ordinary speech today. It refers to what we would call a weak will which doesn't always follow reason.

² *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³ This nomenclature was first used by Festugière O.P.

The two passages lead to two difficulties, one “editorial” and the other “philosophical.” The editorial difficulty is to explain why two distinct discussions of pleasure turn up in a work which, as we have seen, is otherwise exceedingly well-planned and coherent. [...] The *philosophical* difficulty involves an apparent contradiction in the views adopted by A and B. Both passages, it seems, purport to define what pleasure is, and yet they apparently give incompatible definitions.⁴

The editorial dilemma, though interesting in itself will only be mentioned insofar as it helps to understand or resolve the philosophical dilemma. The philosophical problem is that Aristotle seems to give two different definitions of pleasure, one in each account, that seem to be mutually exclusive. These are rendered by Pakaluk as the following:

A: Pleasure is the unimpeded activity of a living thing in its natural condition (1153a12–15).

B: Pleasure is an end which supervenes upon and completes an activity (1174b31–33).⁵

Now Pakaluk himself admits that these are difficult to translate properly and that it isn't entirely clear that Aristotle puts them forward as formal definitions. It is important to keep in mind that when Aristotle writes these definitions, he began each account of pleasure in contention with the platonic theory that pleasure is not a good since it is a sort of process. Plato's argument against the goodness of pleasure, presented by Aristotle, begins with his definition of pleasure as, “a sensate process to a natural term.”⁶ Aristotle then goes on to note that what is a process

⁴ M. PAKALUK, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: an Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, 288-289.

⁵ M. PAKALUK, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics...*, 289. “ἐνέργειαν (ἀνεμπόδιστον) τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἕξεως,” “τελειοῖ δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἢ ἡδονή, [...] ὡς ἐπιγιγνώμενον τι τέλος,” The Greek is from Bekker. I removed words and changed the order in order to keep just what is in the translation. Even here you see that Aristotle didn't give us a nice concise definition.

⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by C.I. Litzinger, O.P, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1964, 1152b12-15. It must be noted that the parts where he translates Aristotle is a translation of the Latin translation by William of Moerbeke. The original Greek goes as follows: “γένεσις ἐστιν εἰς φύσιν αἰσθητή.”

is not an end. Now the good and the highest good have the notion of ends. Therefore pleasure is not a good. It seems that if pleasure be this way, Plato would be right and pleasure then would not be a good.

However, Aristotle himself, as seen in the other places where he speaks about pleasure, believes it to be a good or at least that some pleasures are good. In A he goes against the platonic position, which says that all pleasures are not good or convenient. In B he writes against the platonic arguments which in turn are against eudoxan hedonism.⁷ He later shows that though he thinks Plato's arguments against Eudoxus are incorrect, he himself doesn't follow Eudoxus' view on pleasure completely either.⁸ Then once he has attacked Plato's view he offers his own position in which he means to save the goodness of pleasure. In A pleasure is seen to be an activity while in B it is something that perfects activity. Which is correct? Can both be reconciled?

This article will first present the varying views of three modern scholars on the possible relationships of Aristotle's two definitions of pleasure presented in opposition to the platonic view and then how Thomas Aquinas assumes a different definition of pleasure, taken from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which I hold as solving the problem of the relationship of the two contending definitions.

I. PART: MODERN EXPLANATIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF A AND B

A. G.E.L. Owen, *objective and subjective pleasures*

Traditionally the question has been whether the two accounts are too divergent to be compatible. I hope to show that they are too divergent to be incompatible. They are neither competing nor

⁷ Eudoxus held that pleasure was an absolute good since all creatures seek it. Cf. 1172b9-15.

⁸ Cf. 1175b-1176a29.

co-operating answers to one question, but answers to two quite different questions.⁹

In this quote from the influential article of G.E.L. Owen, written in the early 70s, we can see Owen's way to come to a resolution of the *vexata questio* on the relation of the two definitions is to show that they are about different aspects of pleasure responding to two different questions.

When Aristotle rejects the thesis that pleasure is a process in *A*, he is offering to tell us what our real pleasures are, what is enjoyed or enjoyable.¹⁰

This results in Aristotle's first definition of pleasure as an "unimpeded activity of the natural state."¹¹ This aspect of pleasure, the *enjoyed* or *enjoyable*, is what he calls *objective pleasure*. Owen is emphatic that in *A*, Aristotle is convinced that pleasure really is an unimpeded activity of a natural faculty and not something that accompanies it. He says this because he believes that Aristotle is already looking forward to the explanation that man's final end and happiness is a pleasure, namely the unimpeded activity of the purely intellectual faculty contemplating the highest things.

Aristotle comes to this conclusion because he totally rejects the platonic position that pleasure is a process to a natural state, like health. For Aristotle pleasure is the *activity* of being healthy, and if there is any pleasure is convalescence or getting better it is on behalf of the healthy parts that remain. Therefore, in the end for *A* pleasure is an activity. Owen says:

When he rejects a thesis in the same form of words in *B*, he is offering to tell us what the nature of enjoying is by reviewing the logical characteristics of pleasure-verbs.¹²

⁹ G.E.L. OWEN, *Aristotelian Pleasures*, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series, Vol. 72, (1971 - 1972), 136.

¹⁰ G.E.L. OWEN, *Aristotelian Pleasures*, 151.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138. Ross' translation 1153a14-15.

¹² *Ibid.*, 151.

This results in Aristotle's second definition of pleasure which, "comes to complete or perfect the activity (1174b14-23)."¹³ This aspect of pleasure as different from the activity itself and perfecting it is what he calls *subjective pleasure*. Hence B is more concerned with what it means to *enjoy* certain things than the objects themselves. It must be pointed out that Owen doesn't really go into detail as to what he believes Aristotle to mean with the phrase, "a supervening end."

Owen does remind us however that in B Aristotle calls identifying pleasure with thinking or perceiving absurd or unreasonable, hence deepening the difference between A and B.¹⁴ He says that the difference between activity or process and pleasure is seen in pleasure-verbs. The argument that one can walk quickly doesn't imply that one is enjoying the walk quickly. Hence the object of enjoyment can be a process or something in time while the enjoying is always complete in each moment as in sight. This makes it clear in B, according to Owen, that the enjoying can't be a process, and is different from its proper activity.

In synthesis Owen's view of the relationship of A and B is that each is speaking about different things. In A Aristotle is speaking about objective pleasures, namely an activity that gives us pleasure. In B Aristotle is speaking about subjective pleasure, namely how our enjoying perfects the pleasurable activities. With this said ultimately he believes there is divergence in what Aristotle wants to call pleasure since he gives two definitions which are exactly that: two different definitions and of two different things.¹⁵

B. David Bostock, pleasures are only *perceptions* and *thoughts*

In Book VII Aristotle claims that a pleasure simply *is* an activity of a special kind, whereas in book X we find no such identification. Instead, book X, which speaks of 'complete' activities, says that

¹³ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁴ Cf. 1175b32-35.

¹⁵ Cf. G.E.L. OWEN, *Aristotelian Pleasures*, 152.

pleasures is what completes them, and there is some dispute over how this is to be taken.¹⁶

Here David Bostock in his article, "Pleasure and Activity in Aristotle's Ethics," begins by saying, as seen above, that he is of the opinion that there is a difference of doctrine between the two accounts of pleasure. He takes the side of the definition that is provided by Aristotle in the B account, namely that an activity is pleasurable in so far as it is complete. Interestingly, what makes this article original is Bostock's proposition that first, all pleasures are thoughts and perceptions, and second, that these can be processes.

The first thing that must be noted is that he will make his observation mostly based on the B account since he believes it to be, "fuller, more clearly organized, and (on the whole) better argued."¹⁷ He then goes to point out that for Aristotle, invoking the sight paradigm argument, the fact that pleasure can't be a process is because it is complete in form at any time while processes are not. Perception, taken as sensation, thinking or contemplation, can be pleasant since it is a complete activity. To show the connection between pleasure and activity, he cites Aristotle, saying, "pleasure does not occur without activity, and pleasure completes every activity (1175a20-1)."¹⁸ The problem now lies in seeing which kinds of activities.

We already saw that perception is one and a very prominent one, but are there any other types of activities that fit the description? Bostock goes through a list of Aristotle's examples and shows that they are either a perception or reducible to perception. Still, he finds four exceptions, which are pleasures mostly connected to virtuous actions or works of art.¹⁹ The first exception is life. He then, following Aristotle, also reduces this to perceptive activity since for man, "life seems to be essentially [...] perceiving or thinking (1170a16-19, tr. Ross)."²⁰

¹⁶ D. BOSTOCK, *Pleasure and Activity in Aristotle's Ethics, Phronesis*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1988), 251.

¹⁷ D. BOSTOCK, *Pleasure and Activity...*, 251. He then immediately states that this view doesn't affect his discussion.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁹ Art in the sense of something made by man. This can go from building to writing symphonies.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 255.

The next three activities are in accordance with 1) the virtues, 2) music or building (arts), and 3) Writing or calculating (intellectual activities). The problem with these (except music if it is just listening) is that they seem to be processes with a series of movements, something Aristotle emphatically rejected as pleasures. Here we are coming to Bostock's other claim that some pleasures are processes. Here he expands the concept of activity (*ἐνέργειά*). "In fact, process (i.e. change, *κίνησις*) is *defined* as an activity (i.e. actualization) of a special kind in *Physics* III, chapter 1."²¹ The problem is, even if these are activities, how can they be enjoyed? The example of building is especially problematic, since it is used as an example of a process which has parts that aren't the same as the final product, and hence not complete.

Here he distinguishes two types of completeness. One is complete in form, like sight, and hence not having or lacking parts. The second is complete, or perfect, in the sense that the faculty is in good condition and directed to a good object. Therefore, activities that are processes might be complete in the second sense, and hence pleasurable, while deficient in the first. Bostock isn't content, however, with this alone since he thinks that the first form of completeness is necessary for the second kind. In the end he comes to the conclusion that building and things of that kind (he uses the example of just distributions) can't be anything but processes.

He further says that Aristotle is content in giving some measure of pleasure to such activities. They might not be perfect pleasures but are at least *incidentally* so. They are this way at least by reference to some connected activity. But what kind of activity? Aristotle isn't very clear. Bostock rejects Owen's understanding of this passage as referring to a remaining healthy bodily part, because it places the pleasure in the body alone, furthermore because it doesn't explain other replenishment processes like drinking when thirsty that, according to Bostock, Aristotle surely had in mind. Then, if the pleasure isn't in the body it must be in the mind, and so it is not the replenishment itself that is pleasurable, this being rejected by Aristotle, but the perception of it as such. Hence pleasure is more in the senses than in the dinking, to take the example used

²¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

by Bostock. He puts forward this theory as a conjecture, but one that seems to be the only one that makes sense of Aristotle's words.

Bostock holds so firmly to this view that even when Aristotle changes the platonic definition of pleasure, as a perceived replenishment to his "unimpeded activity," he believes the new definition must necessarily imply that the activity be perceived. To further support this view he cites the *Physics*, where Aristotle says that pleasure and pain are, "either in acting or in remembering or in anticipating,"²² and then refers to other places in the *NE*. He, then ultimately says:

In view of this, it is fair to conclude that it was not an accident or an oversight that, when Aristotle is telling us what pleasure is in book X, chapter 4, he mentions only activities of perceiving and thinking, and it is only for these that he indicates the conditions under which they are pleasant.²³

If this is so the three exceptions can be pleasures, at least incidentally, insofar as they include perceptions that are pleasant activities. Nevertheless, even with this said, he still believes that in the end it seems, "a mistake on Aristotle's part to suppose that perceivings and thinkings are not processes,"²⁴ since some of Aristotle's examples are clear forms of this, such as arguing and making calculations. But for Bostock the most important thing to realize is that all pleasures are ultimately perceivings and thinkings.

D. Michael Pakaluk, the *what* and *how* of pleasures

As we saw in the introduction, Pakaluk sees the apparent contradiction between the two definitions given by Aristotle in A and B. In A, Aristotle clearly advocates that pleasure is identical with certain unimpeded activities. However in B, there is a clear separation of the pleasure and its proper activity which it perfects. Pakaluk even points out

²² D. BOSTOCK, *Pleasure and Activity...*, 270. In Bekker it is 247a10-14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 271.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 272.

that in one passage in B Aristotle states that identifying pleasure with activity is absurd. How can we come to a reconciliation? Well, he starts by rejecting what he calls three common responses: the first is that A is in one of the common books to the *EE*²⁵, which is supposed to have been written earlier and didn't originally belong to the *NE*. As such, A represents positions that are less mature and ultimately surpassed in B which belongs to the *NE* proper. Did the editor not notice the difference? Pakaluk thinks this view is unfounded. I would say it is a bit of an excuse to throw the weight of the problem from a philosophical to an editorial problem.

The other two possibilities are minimizing the difference by saying the two definitions are consistent, or maximizing the distance between the two accounts saying they are about different phenomena. The first proposes that in the end the unimpededness of the activity is the perfection of the activity and hence both definitions coincide. Pakaluk rejects this since the unimpededness isn't distinct from the activity itself, but in B it is very clear that for Aristotle pleasure, which perfects activity, *is* distinct from its activity.

The second possibility is of the definitions being compatible since they are of different phenomena. In a way this view we saw in Owen's interpretation as the two definitions (objective and subjective pleasures) are responses to two different questions. Moreover, Pakaluk himself goes on to reject the second hypothesis, though he calls it appealing, saying that this implies that pleasure has two meanings. Now Aristotle is very attentive to when there are many meanings to a word and here he shows no recognition of two distinct meanings. So, what should be done?

In order to get to the bottom of the question Pakaluk divides his discussion of pleasure, now in more detail, into first addressing the A account and then the B. The most important part of his discussion of A is where he gives his view as to how to understand the first definition of pleasure, "unimpeded activity of something in its natural condition."²⁶ He begins by telling us that it is unclear whether Aristotle intended to define pleasure here at all. Furthermore, he wonders if this definition is

²⁵ Eudemian Ethics.

²⁶ M. PAKALUK, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics...*, 303.

only of pleasure in the objective sense or whether it can possibly hold some subjective traits.

For Aristotle, there are pleasures without qualification or by nature, like those of the just man, and pleasure with qualification, those of the fiend. For Pakaluk this seems to be an indication that there are objective and subjective sides to pleasure. Hence the formula:

“unimpeded activity of a natural condition” should be interpreted as including *both* the subjective and objective elements of pleasure: “activity of a natural condition” is what it is for something to be pleasant by nature; “unimpeded” signals that, furthermore, the activity is pleasant to the agent.²⁷

Presumably then, one can take the unimpeded aspect to represent the subjective side since it takes the place of the platonic definition's “perceptible,” which indicates our experience of pleasant activity, whether it be by nature or not. In this view of the A definition it seems we have a way of taking account of both the objective and subjective aspects.

Does this improved understanding help us to integrate A with B? It seems that it can, now that both accounts take into consideration the two aspects of pleasure. In B Pakaluk sees many distinctions between the objective and subjective side: 1) The activity of being pleased and pleasure itself, which varies in “purity.” 2) What pleasure is according to the process theory and the real subject that experiences the pleasure. 3) The pleasant things and being pleased. 4) The pleasant things which the good man takes pleasure in.

This must be so since pleasure involves appearance, and as Pakaluk points out, “there can be no appearance without the possibility of a distinction between objective and subjective.”²⁸ Then where is the originality of B? Pakaluk thinks that in B Aristotle is not concerned with *what* pleasure is but *how* it works or what it does. Thus Aristotle tells us that the pleasure of an activity, in Pakaluk's words, “functions as a distinct goal, the attainment of which is correlated with the full execution of an

²⁷ M. PAKALUK, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*..., 305.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 306.

activity.”²⁹ This is important for the ethical evaluation of pleasure. In A, Aristotle was defending pleasure against various philosophers. Now, in B, he is putting it in its proper place with respect to morality. Hence, the intimate relation between pleasures and their activity having been seen, they are also distinguished among themselves by their differing activity. In the same way since some activities are good or evil, this having been explored elsewhere in the *NE*, so their pleasures can be good or evil. This being said, B differs from A more in that it wants to divide pleasure into good and bad and in the end discover the highest activity, contemplation, which will necessarily imply the highest pleasure.

Even with all these explanations Pakaluk ends his article showing doubt as to Aristotle’s final ontology of pleasure.

What exactly is taking pleasure in something, if it is something that a living thing does, yet it is not an activity of thinking or sense perception, and it is not quite the pleasant activity, but rather a goal distinct from the activity? Aristotle might reply that he has told us already: it is the unimpededness of the activity. He seems content to leave it at that, because the B account is concerned with motivation and teleology, not metaphysics. His view is perhaps ultimately unclear, and he does not always speak in such a way as to put off possible confusions, but that is not a difficulty arising from his two different treatments of the matter, so much as a difficulty in the subject matter – and in the subjectivity of pleasure.³⁰

II. PART: THE THOMISTIC RESOLUTION

A. The thomistic definition of pleasure and its explanation

Up until now we have seen the modern ways of interpreting Aristotle and how each tries to put the two definitions together. Thomas

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 309.

³⁰ M. PAKALUK, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics...*, 314.

Aquinas doesn't show any of the anxiety about finding two different definitions of pleasure in Aristotle. Actually he quotes both accounts of pleasure in his *Summa Theologiae* without a problem.

The most shocking thing to notice is that, when Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* does intend to show what the nature of pleasure is, or delight as some translate it, he doesn't use either of the definitions put forth in the *NE*. Actually he takes the definition from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Its latin translation found in the *Summa* goes as follows: "*delectio est quidam motus animae, et constitutio simul tota et sensibilis in naturam existentem*"³¹ (delight is a certain movement of the soul and a sensible establishing thereof all at once, in keeping with the nature of the thing).³²

Here in his interpretation he puts forward that pleasure is a passion or a certain movement of the soul, "*quidam motus animae*".³³ However it isn't any kind of passion but one caused by a "*praesentia connaturalis boni*,"³⁴ the presence of a connatural good, which is his understanding of "*constitutio in naturam existentem*." It must be said that for Thomas pleasure is not only a passion of the soul, but also the repose of the will in its desired object.³⁵ Hence *animae* (of the soul) may be seen as referring to the concupiscible appetite or the will which is the rational appetite. This explains spiritual pleasures caused by spiritual activities. He also interprets the "*simul tota*" (all at once) as going against the process theory of Plato, since pleasure is "complete all at one" and not fragmented like a process. Finally, it is "*sensibilis*" (sensible) to show that it doesn't apply to plants who cannot perceive present goods, like the fresh

³¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae, Textum Leoninum Romae 1888 editum ac automato translatum a Roberto Busa SJ in taenias magneticas denuo recognovit Enrique Alarcón atque instruxit*, I-II, q.31, a. 1. The original Greek goes as the following: "εἶναι τὴν ἡδονὴν κίνησιν τινα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ κατάστασιν ἀθρώπου καὶ αἰσθητὴν εἰς τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν φύσιν" Rh.1369b33.

³² THOMAS AQUINAS, *The Summa Theologica*, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros. edition, 1947.

³³ Here we must remember that movement is an analogous term and hence, in this case, doesn't refer to local-motion or motion that involves a process but a change of a quality in the soul.

³⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 31, a. 1.

³⁵ Cf., *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 31, a. 4.

water or nourishing earth they need. So for Thomas pleasure is the passion consequent on an apprehended and present or possessed good.³⁶

So where do Aristotle's definitions of pleasure as an activity or a perfection of an activity come in? First, we need to realize that with the definition above we need two things to have pleasure, "The attainment of the suitable good, and knowledge of this attainment."³⁷ This will help us resolve the relation of pleasure to operation, since each of the before mentioned requirements consists:

In a kind of operation: because actual knowledge is an operation; and the attainment of the suitable good is by means of an operation. Moreover, the proper operation itself is a suitable good. Wherefore every pleasure must needs be the result of some operation.³⁸

That works for operation or activity, seeing that it is the cause of pleasure, but how does Thomas relate pleasure to perfection? He puts this aspect of pleasure among its effects.

Pleasure perfects operation in two ways. First, as an end: [...] according as every good which is added to a thing and completes it, can be called its end. [...] Inasmuch as to this good, which is operation, there is added another good, which is pleasure, denoting the repose of the appetite in a good that is presupposed. Secondly, as agent; [...] it does so indirectly; inasmuch as the agent, through taking pleasure in his action, is more eagerly intent on it, and carries it out with greater care.

So pleasure perfects operation, from a static point of view, by adding another end to it, and from a dynamic point of view, makes the operation more desirable. It can be said, therefore, that the relation of the

³⁶ This "possessed good" must also be taken analogically and this way it can explain the many causes for pleasure, like Aristotle's unimpeded activity and Plato's replenishment process, which result in the many types and levels of pleasure.

³⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*..., I-II, q.32, a. 1.

³⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*..., I-II, q.32, a. 1.

two definitions of the *NE* is in that, "operation is the efficient cause of pleasure, while pleasure perfects operation by way of final cause."³⁹

One might object, "that sounds great but that is Thomas's view not Aristotle's." First it must be conceded that Aristotle doesn't refer to the definition of the *Rhetoric* in the *NE*, but he doesn't deny it either. Second, as Pakaluk pointed out, the definitions in the *NE* might not be formal definitions, or at least not intended to be so by Aristotle. I would call them definitions through causes. The first is through the agent cause while the second is through the final cause, as quoted above. Thomas's definition is one of genus, passion, and specific difference, the rest of the definition. This kind of definition refers to the formal cause of pleasure and really states the essence of it. Third, it must be noted that this definition does seem to be Thomas's view of Aristotle. He quotes Aristotle multiple times and never takes distance from something Aristotle said, except by a distinction here and there. Thomas thinks this is the way to put together the doctrine found in the *NE*. How this view relates to the rest of Aristotle's explanation of pleasure and is able to respond to the examples there offered, can be further seen in his commentary on the *NE* and the questions on delight in the *Summa* but go beyond the scope of this article.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Finally, after having discussed the views of three modern scholars and of the *doctor angelicus* what have we found? It seems that pleasure isn't easy to define. Most admit that pleasure has an objective and subjective side. For Owen, this division is due to asking different questions, and hence the different definitions are about different phenomena. Bostock recognizes these two aspects of pleasure, but favors the view of pleasures being just perceivings and thinkings. Pakaluk does something similar to Owen but reconciles the two by the motivation behind each definition. In A, it is presented more as an activity, in opposition to the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I-II, q.33, a. 4.

⁴⁰ Specifically these would be in *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, book VII *lectiones* 11-14, and book X *lectiones* 1-8; in the *Summa Theologiae* it is I-II, *questiones* 31-39, from which I took the thomistic resolution.

process theory, while in B, it is discussed in order to see its perfecting relationship to contemplation and man's happiness.

Thomas doesn't speak of subjective and objective pleasures. If he were in dialogue with the three preceding scholars, he might make the objective side one of the causes of the subjective side which is what pleasure for him really is, namely a passion in the concupiscible faculty which in turn perfects the objective activity. Thomas's account even understands how processes can be a cause of pleasure and hence resolves one of Bostock's problems. However, I believe that part of the difficulty of the question is that Aristotle didn't have his doctrine developed enough on the following points: first, the passions in general and second, the will as a faculty really distinct from the intellect. This causes him to have a difficult time trying to get at what pleasure really is, as opposed to what causes it or what effects it has, and where to put it in his anthropology.

In the end I conclude, that Thomas's treatment of pleasure in the *Summa* is the correct way to understand pleasure. It is also capable of responding to many of the doubts and problems raised by the difficulties of Aristotle's A and B accounts, while at the same time giving them a deeper point of union in the formal definition of pleasure as a passion in the concupiscible appetite.

Summary: This article discusses the nature of "pleasure" in Aristotle. It is an attempt to reconcile and integrate the two different definitions that Aristotle gives in 1153a12–15 (unimpeded activity) and 1174b31–33 (end that completes an activity) of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. It exams the analysis and proposals of three contemporary philosophers: G.E.L. Owen, David Bostock, and Michael Pakaluk. It then passes to the exegesis of the medieval Thomas Aquinas. Thomas's reading of the texts is presented as a way to answer the difficulties brought up earlier and provide a solid interpretation that is capable of uniting both of the definitions of the Stagirite.

Key Words: Pleasure, unimpeded activity, end, complete, Aristotle, G.E.L. Owen, David Bostock, Michael Pakaluk, Thomas Aquinas.

Sommario: Questo articolo discute la natura del “piacere” in Aristotele. È un tentativo di riconciliare e integrare le due diverse definizioni che Aristotele dà in 1153a12-15 (attività non-impedita) e 1174b31-33 (fine che completa un'attività) della sua Etica Nicomachea. Esamina l'analisi e le proposte di tre filosofi contemporanei: G.E.L. Owen, David Bostock e Michael Pakaluk. Si passa poi all'esegesi del medioevale Tommaso d'Aquino. La lettura dei testi da parte di Tommaso è presentata come un modo per rispondere alle difficoltà sollevate in precedenza e fornire una solida interpretazione che è in grado di unire entrambe le definizioni dello Stagirita.

Parole chiave: Piacere, attività non-impedita, fine, completa, Aristotele, G.E.L. Owen, David Bostock, Michael Pakaluk, Tommaso d'Aquino.