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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵ For recent discussions of this dialectical exchange with fuller references, see Rapp 2009; Warren 2009; Fronterotta 2018; Cheng 2020.
grounds, it is intriguing to see how he could undo Speusippus’ solution. What Aristotle provides, however, disappoints many sensitive readers:

The solution (λόσις) Speusippus used to offer (ἐλεγχεῖ) – it is just like the case that the greater is contrary both to the lesser and to the equal – does not follow (οὐ συμβαίνει). For he would not say that pleasure is essentially a bad (ὑπὲρ κακόν τι).\(^6\) (1153b5–7)\(^7\)

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

Puzzles about Speusippus’ attitude to pleasure are not limited to Aristotle’s testimonies but are also found in the later biographical/doxographical tradition. Historians of philosophy are often bemused by the many anecdotes about Speusippus’ being easily subject to passions, in particular to sensory pleasure. Whereas Philodemus characterizes him as akratic (P. 1021. col.7.7–10, Dorandi),\(^10\) Plutarch reports that Plato criticized him as self-indulgent (ἐκ πολλῆς ἀνέσεως καὶ ἀκολοχίας, De frat. amor. 491F2). In Athenaeus, it seems that ‘pleasure-seeker’ (φιλήδονος) is used even as the epithet of

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

\(^7\) The text of \(EV\) follows Susemihl; translations are mainly based on Irwin, though Reeve, Broadie/Rowe, and Außerheide (in the case of \(EV\)) have been consulted and modifications are often made.

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

\(^9\) See e.g. Gosling/Taylor 1982, 230: ‘This (sc. the view that Speusippus holds pleasure and pain as two evils) is, however, in direct opposition to the text of Book VII as it stands. For Aristotle goes on to say that Speusippus would deny that pleasure is of itself an evil’. Likewise, Tarán contends that Aristotle contradicts himself in commenting on Speusippus’ attitude to pleasure (1980, 51).

\(^10\) Also see DL 4.1.4–11.
Speusippus when he is being introduced (XII 546D = 12.66,12–13 Kaibel). All such characterizations are evidently in tension with the Standard Picture that positions him as a representative of the anti-hedonistic camp, even embodying its radical trend within the Academy.

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

The present study will reconsider Speusippus’ role in the Academic debate on pleasure. It aims to offer a new interpretation of his anti-hedonism by re-evaluating all the available sources concerning his attitude towards affective experience, in Aristotle as well as in the doxographical and commentary tradition. This endeavor attempts not only to reconcile the conflicting accounts of Speusippus but also to provide new insights into Aristotle’s interest in this debate. The first half of this study (§§2-4) is devoted to scrutinizing Speusippus’ anti-hedonism. I will begin by arguing that Speusippus’ central motivation for criticizing Eudoxus, apart from exposing the formal flaws of his argument, stems from his revised Platonism, a position that might be called essentialist anti-hedonism, which holds that pleasure has a negative value primarily because of its intrinsic properties and independently of its being the object of any psychological attitude (§2-3). As a reasonable development of Plato’s doctrine, Speusippus’ view is historically well motivated and theoretically defensible, especially in the context of a debate over whether hedonic experiences are intrinsically valuable to human beings (§4). On this basis, the remainder of this paper (§§5-7) revisits the Academic debate on pleasure, with a particular


12 This element, for instance, is not mentioned in the entry ‘Speusippus’ in the three standard reference books: RE (Stenzel 1929), Der Neue Überweg (Krämer 2004, 13–14), and SEP (Dancy 2016). The first may deem it historically unreliable, whereas the last two must regard it as philosophically irrelevant.
focus on Aristotle’s delicate utilization of Speusippus and other anti-hedonists. I propose a fresh perspective on his response to Speusippus, arguing that Aristotle criticizes him for succumbing to a specific form of self-contradiction—an inconsistency between what he says and what he does (§5). This hypothesis is further substantiated and refined by exploring Aristotle’s understanding of truth in practical matter—specifically, how it requires congruence between words and deeds, a central but often overlooked motif in EN X (§6). Finally, the result leads to re-evaluating the puzzling characterization of Speusippus as a hedonist in later traditions (§7). More than a new interpretation of Speusippus’ ethics, the study also sheds light on Aristotle’s methodological concern with ethical argumentation, in particular, how and in what sense an argument in this domain should be practically relevant.

2. Speusippus’ challenge

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

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

13 Owen, for instance, claims that Speusippus ‘holds, first, that pleasure is neither good nor evil in itself’ (2012, 1393). While Dielmeier (1964, 503) believes that philosophical pleasure must be good for Speusippus, Gauthier/Jolif (1958, 800–3) argues that Speusippus identifies true pleasure with the neutral state, which is the good.
believe that pleasure is seriously flawed from an ontological perspective and that this flaw explains the multiple ways in which it can be harmful to experiencing subjects. This standpoint should not be confused with other pleasure-averse positions, either in Aristotle’s works or in other sources, such as the claim that pleasure can never be good in any context or that pleasure is the greatest evil.

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

\[(AC1)\] Pain is a bad.
\[(AC2)\] Pleasure is contrary to pain.
\[(AC3)\] The contrary of a bad is a good.
Therefore
\[(AC4)\] Pleasure is a good.

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

[SP1] Σπεύσιππος ἔλευν [...], ὥσπερ τὸ μεῖζον τῷ ἐλάττονι καὶ τῷ ἴσῳ ἐναντίον·
(EN VII. 13,1153b4-6)
Speusippus used to offer a solution— it is just like the case that the greater is contrary both to the lesser and to the equal.

[SP2] οὖ γὰρ φασιν, εἰ ἡ λύπη κακὸν ἐστι, τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀγαθὴν εἶναι ἀντικείσθαι γὰρ καὶ κακὸν κακῷ καὶ ἄμφω τῷ μηδετέρῳ.15 (ENX. 2, 1173a6–8)
For they deny that pleasure is good given that pain is bad. For, in their view, a bad is contrary to another bad and both [bads]16 to what is neither.

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14 Cheng 2020 argues that there are subtle but important differences between the two versions of AC. But this does not affect the present study insomuch as it is here concerned with the model shared by these two arguments.
15 Reading τῷ μηδετέρῳ, which is accepted by the majority of critics.
16 I take the ἄμφω as referring to two bads, namely pleasure and pain, see Michael in EN 539. 8; Krämer 1971, 207–8; 1981, 440.
In both passages, Speusippus challenged AC by appealing to a trio rather than a pair of oppositions. The analogy in [SP₁] may reflect an Academic theory of contraries, which also finds echoes in Aristotle’s doctrine of the Mean. According to this, two extremes (sc. the greater and the lesser), being opposite to each other, are also opposed to a third thing, which, as the mean between the extremes, is a good (the equal). 17 In *Metaphysics* Iota 5, Aristotle explains why and in what sense the equal in this analogy is both the ‘neither’ and the intermediate:

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

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

(SAC1) Pain is a bad. (=AC1)
(SAC2) Pleasure is contrary to pain. (=AC2)
(SAC3) The contrary of a bad is another bad. (the lesser vs. the greater)

Therefore,
(SAC4) Pleasure is a bad.

Although scholars generally agree that [SP₁] and [SP₂] present the same argument, some of them worry whether the above reconstruction chimes with [SP₂]. It is especially unclear what ἀμφῶ and τὸ μηδετέρῳ at 1173a8 respectively refer to. The traditional interpretation takes ἀμφῶ as two ‘bads’, corresponding to the greater and the lesser in [SP₁], and accordingly refers τὸ μηδετέρῳ to ‘the equal’, which represents the good in the analogy. Other scholars, however, believe that [SP₂] primarily resorts to analogies of affection rather than of value. They identify the ἀμφῶ directly with pleasure and pain, and

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17 For the Academic background of the doctrine of the Mean see Hambruch 1904; Philippson 1925, 447; Krämer 1959; also cf. Tracy 1969, 77–156.
18 For more details, see Castelli 2018, 150–3.
19 See e.g. Michael In *EN* 539. 3–4: Σπεύσιππος λέγων: ‘οὐκ ἀνάγκη, ἐπειδὴ κακόν ἐστὶν ἡ λύπη, ἀγαθόν εἶναι τὴν ἀντικειμένην αἴτη ἡδονήν’. 
thus take τῷ μηδετέρῳ to denote the affectively neutral state,\(^{20}\) which is supposed to be the ultimate good for Speusippus, called either ἀοχλησία or ἀλυπία in ancient testimonies.\(^{21}\) Consequently, the analogy in [SP] also does not primarily concern the value (good and bads) but three states along the algedonic spectrum (pleasure, pain, and the neutral). Speusippus’ challenge, then, turns out to be more than a destructive dialectical argument but points to a genuine alternative: the goodness of the neutral state. In fact, Heliodorus (158, 24–8) and the anonymous commentary on *EN* (452.31–6) seem to have moved forward in this direction. Recently James Warren has delivered the most articulate version of the interpretation along this line, which can be summarized in the following way:

(WAC1) Pain is bad. (=AC1)
(WAC2) The contrary of a bad is a good (=AC3)
(WAC3) The neutral state is contrary to pain.

Therefore,

(WAC4) The neutral state is a good.\(^{22}\)

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

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

\(^{21}\) ἀοχλησία is found in Clem. * Strom.* II,133.4; for ἀλυπία, see Heliodorus *In EV* 158, 24–8; Anonymous *In EV* 452.31–6. For more see §4 below.

\(^{22}\) Cf. the original vision in Warren 2009, 267: ‘(i) The opposite of something to be avoided is to be pursued. (ii) Pain is to be avoided. (iii) The intermediate is the opposite of pain. (iv) The intermediate is to be pursued’ (Warren 2009, 267). I adjusted its order and words to fit it better into my discussion.
undermine AC.\textsuperscript{23} It is dialectical in the sense that it uses the premises of AC to show that an alternative conclusion follows no less than the hedonistic conclusion AC\textsuperscript{4}.

WAC appears superior to the traditional SAC insofar as it respects the opposite premise of AC (=AC\textsuperscript{3}) and avoids drawing a \textit{prima facie} shocking conclusion that pleasure is a bad (=SAC\textsuperscript{4}). Despite its ingenuity, however, I doubt that WAC can function as a correct reconstruction of Speusippus’ challenge here on both textual and theoretical grounds.

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

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

\textsuperscript{23} See e.g. Warren 2009, 250, 251, 267, 274–6 and even ‘purely dialectical’ (273), ‘entirely dialectical’ (268), or ‘[nothing] other than dialectical’ (272).

\textsuperscript{24} Warren 2009, 278; for the same view see Ramsauer 1878, 652; Hambruch 1904, 16; Schofield 1971, 17.

\textsuperscript{25} This clause is immediately preceded by ‘κακὸν κακῷ’.

\textsuperscript{26} In Aristotle’s response to this argument he said that ἐμφων μὲν γὰρ κακὸν καὶ φθειρᾶ ἐδή ἐμφω ἵσφω (1173a10). The ἐμφω in 1173a10 refers evidently to two bads.

\textsuperscript{27} Some scholars excise ἐμφω at 1173a8 in order to make [SP\textsubscript{2}] exactly parallel to [SP\textsubscript{1}], see e.g., Hackforth 1958; Rackham 1934, 583; Gauthier/ Jolif 1958, 823; Krämer 1971, 207–8, n92. This emendation seems to me unnecessary.

\textsuperscript{28} Some scholars emend the phrase ἐμφω τῷ μηδετέρῳ either to μηδετέρῳ τῷ μηδετέρῳ <ἐλιαν> or, in a more conservative way, to ἐμφω τῷ μηδετέρῳ <ἐλιαν> (see Stewart 1892, 408; Burnet 1900, 444; Gosling/Taylor 1982, 229; Schofield 1971, 17). Both proposals, I think, face the same difficulties. For the
Finally, leaving aside the coherence problem between [SP₁] and [SP₂], if WAC is indeed Speusippus’ objection to AC, what he seems to be doing is nothing but providing an alternative inference based on the same argumentative topos. Although from independent sources, we know that the conclusion WAC₄ is what Speusippus somehow endorses (see §4 below), it remains unclear in what sense this argument is dialectically relevant as a solution of AC. For to establish a dilemma of opposing arguments with equal weight, the conclusions in question must be two conflicting claims. Yet whether AC and WAC are in genuine conflict is far from evident. For the claim that the neutral state is something good does not entail that something else cannot be good too. An Epicurean, for instance, must recognize both the neutral state and pleasure as good, even if the former is held in higher esteem. By contrast, Aristotle, who appreciates the value of pleasure more than that of the neutral state, also sometimes admits the goodness of the latter (Top. 117a26; Cael. 284a29; HA 633b25–6; EN 1120a26–7). It cannot be ruled out that Eudoxus might hold a similar view.²⁹ In brief, if the thesis that the neutral state is a good (WAC₄) is compatible with the thesis that pleasure is a good (AC), the proponents of AC can accommodate WAC well while leaving their position unaffected. WAC thus seems too weak to be dialectically relevant. After all, Aristotle does not deny that Speusippus makes a dialectically strong challenge to AC (EN 1173a8–9), even if he believes that this counterattack eventually fails for other independent reasons (see §5 below).

In contrast with WAC, I do not take the thesis – that the neutral state is to be pursued – as a competing conclusion of Speusippus’ solution but as a doctrinal background that motivates him to challenge AC. Although he must be ready to provide different arguments for this commitment where necessary, it is highly doubtful, even for a dialectical purpose, that he is willing to reach this conclusion through the binary opposition (AC₂=WAC₂) he strongly resists. As the analogy in [SP₁] implies, it is true that what Speusippus aims at in his challenge to Eudoxus and his advocates must be more than a dialectical victory. But in the first round of the debate, he need not cash out what ‘the equal’ stands for apart from claiming that it differs from pleasure and pain. The possibility that pain (as a bad) is

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²⁹ It can be clearly seen from EN 1172b9–15 and b24–6 that the goodness comes in degrees in Eudoxus and he recognizes that many things other than pleasure can also be good.
contrary to pleasure (as a bad) is sufficient to undermine AC and is thus dialectically more relevant at this stage of the argument. Whatever status is behind ‘the equal’ and how to characterize it could be left to the subsequent debate (see below).  

It is remarkable that in response, Aristotle neither attacks Speusippus’ analogy as such nor questions the status of ‘the equal’ but criticizes one of the consequences if the analogy is cashed out, namely the badness of pleasure. This surely strengthens our interpretation of SAC since its implicit conclusion concerns the evaluation of pleasure rather than that of a third state.

3. Can pleasure be bad?

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

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

31 According to Dirlmeier (1964, 503), for instance, all the participants of the hedonistic debate in the Academy have agreed that philosophical pleasure is essentially true and good, which is supposed to be a baseline that no Academic is permitted to violate. This proposal can neither be supported by textual evidence, nor does it fit what we know about the freedom the members of the Academy enjoyed (Watts 2007, 10; Frede 2018). Eudoxus was even not a member of the Academy (Lasserre 1966, 138; Waschkes 1977, 34–58). Gosling/Taylor and the so-called scholars (53c–55a) – into the doctrine of Speusippus. For arguments against this approach, see e.g. Hackforth 1958, 87; Lieberg 1958, 72–3; 1959, 28–34; Isnardi Parente 1980, 357–8; Tarán 1981, 79–85; Frede 1997, 265–74; Cheng 2018.


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

34 In fact, Aristotle does use the indicative to report the views of others here and in other places, e.g., Εὔδοξος ...ὁμοίως, EV 1101b27–9; Ἐὐδοξὸς μὲν ὄν τήν ἱδρώσαν τύγχανον ὧν ῥατ’ ἔργα, EV 1172b9; also see Metaph. 991a16–18, 1072b30–2.
Aristotle can save the AC by appealing to this doctrinal commitment if the challenge Speusippus poses is dialectical in nature. For in order to block this argument, one does not need to endorse the essential badness of pleasure as a premise of the objection; it seems formally sufficient to recall the existence of the bad-bad opposition.

If the reductio ad hominem is out of place, does the appeal to argument de consensu omnium provide a better option?33 Aristotle rejects Speusippus’ solution, according to the latter, because his denial of pleasure is too counterintuitive or absurd to be accepted by anybody with normal sanity. As Richard Davies has recently stressed, ‘no one in their right mind thinks that pleasure is an evil […] only fanatics like Speusippus propose that pleasure is an evil’ (2023, 31). This interpretation is tempting because it seems intuitively based on a kind of common sense that Aristotle should respect. However, it is reasonable for a sensitive reader to doubt that there was such a consensus among the ancients. Aristotle, after all, regards the question of how to evaluate pleasure as ‘a subject of much dispute’ (πολλὴν ἔχοντων ἀμφιβήτησιν) at EN 1172a26–7, the preface of ENX. Indeed, a more serious question is whether it is already theoretically absurd to endorse the essential badness of pleasure. This question cannot be easily answered before clarifying what is meant by taking pleasure as essentially bad, according to Speusippus.

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

33 Philippson 1925, 448; Wolf 2002, 196; Rapp 2009, 214. Some scholars (Burnet 1900, 336; Joachim 1955, 237–8; Stenzel 1929, 1666), following ancient commentaries (see fn.4), further suggest inserting an indefinite pronoun τις to replace the default subject ‘Speusippus’ at EN 1153b6. The emendation, however, cannot gain support from the manuscript tradition of EN.
their contemporary Antisthenes, who notoriously declares himself to ‘prefer being insane to experiencing pleasure’,\(^{36}\) ‘the greatest evil’.\(^{37}\)

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

Finally, and most importantly, to understand in what sense Speusippus can be considered a radical anti-hedonist, we should clarify what is meant by evaluating pleasure as essentially bad. To say that pleasure is essentially bad, I think, is not to say that badness falls under the definition of pleasure as a normative component. Rather, it amounts to a negative evaluation of pleasure in terms of what pleasure is and what kind of intrinsic qualities it necessarily has. This is a Socratic legacy according to which the evaluation of X should be primarily based on the essence of X or its intrinsic features. The idea is also reflected in the distinction between what is good/bad *per se* and what is good/bad *per accidens*, well attested in Aristotle (see *EN* 1152b8-9, 1152b27-9; 1153b2; 1152b8-9; 1153a29-30; 1154b16-18). That X is good/bad *per se* means that X has intrinsic value/disvalue in and of itself, independent of any relational or external factors. By contrast, evaluating X as good/bad *per accidens* is evaluating X in virtue of its extrinsic, relational properties. These two evaluations are independent positions, with no necessary implication of one from the other. Thus, evaluating pleasure as essentially bad does not necessarily commit Speusippus to the view that pleasure cannot be good *per accidens*. As a result, Speusippus’ position should be distinguished from other (radical) versions of anti-hedonism, wherein pleasure, for instance, is considered the *ultimate* bad, the *sole* bad, or *entirely* bad. Specifically, to say that pleasure is essentially bad is not to say that pleasure

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\(^{36}\) μανείην μᾶλλον ἢ ἡσθείην, DL 6.3.2.

\(^{37}\) Gell.9.5.3 = SSR V A 122; Aspasius *In EN* 142, 8–10 = SSR V A 120.
can never be good since it allows the possibility of pleasure being good in other ways. Although pain, due to its unpleasant and disturbing quality, is generally seen as bad on its own, it is also considered desirable in many scenarios when it functions as a reminder of danger, an inevitable by-product of certain healing processes, or even the so-called ‘the fifth vital sign’ (Barnes 2023, 122-4). Likewise, according to my interpretation, Speusippus’ view does not exclude that there are circumstances in which some pleasures, which are intrinsically bad, can be desirable insofar as they somehow contribute to the wider whole which is good. It is thus ineffective to criticize Speusippus’ stance as violating ordinary experience according to which pleasure is often pursued and enjoyed by many (if not all) people.

4. Speusippus’ essentialist anti-hedonism

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

38 Pace Joachim (1955, 234), who, based on EN.II.152b8–9, believes that Speusippus takes no pleasure as good in any sense, either in itself or accidentally.
39 I would like to express my thanks to a reviewer for drawing attention to this example.
40 For inclusive readings of the restorative model see Frede 1992, 1997; van Riel 2000a, 7–43; Carpenter 2011; Obdrzalek 2012; for those who take this model rather as a starting point or at most a core aspect of Plato’s understanding of pleasure, see Gosling/Taylor 1982, 136–40; 175–92; Carone 2000, 264–70; Fletcher 2017; Price 2017. For most recent discussions thereof see Ogihara 2019; Rangos 2019; Warren 2019.
41 In addition to Rhet. I 11, also see 1362b6–9, b16–17, 1364b23–6, 1365b11–13, 1369b22–3, b28, 1372b14–15.
also reports that there have been friends of genesis who adopt the restorative model yet believe that pleasure is good not in spite of but precisely because of its being a genesis (EN 1153a15–17).

No matter what role this model plays, Plato explicitly assigns some positive value to pleasures or a part of them at the end of the Philebus,\footnote{For the ranking of pleasure at the end of the Philebus, see Barney 2016; Harte 2019.} which ensures that he cannot be the main target of Aristotle’s criticism in EN VII 11-14 and X 1-5. By contrast, Aristotle is primarily concerned with the anti-hedonists who hate pleasure because they see it as essentially an unstable process, always accompanied by the double evils: physical lack and unpleasant appetite.\footnote{\textit{EN} 1153a15.} In their eyes, the inherent instability and shiftiness of pleasure is not only defective in itself but also what makes it especially alluring and dangerous for human beings, given their natural inclination to seek variation.\footnote{\textit{EN} 1154a34.} The negative effects of pleasure, according to these anti-hedonists, are especially manifest in its inherent tendency to impede thought, thereby compromising reason (EN 1152b16–18; Pl. Phld. 66c). This is because the proper functioning of rational faculties demands moderation and proportion, a requirement that, in their eyes, directly contradicts the intrinsic nature of pleasure.

Regardless of the assessment of the above arguments, I can discern no better proponents for this position than Speusippus and his followers, considering the unorthodox Platonist undertones (cf. fn.2). This picture also fits well with the analogy – the greater, the lesser, and the equal (\textit{EN} 1153b5-6) – employed by Speusippus to dismantle Eudoxus’ argument from contraries (see §2 above). For in the Academic tradition, the greater-lesser, as opposed to the equal as the good, is simply another way of expressing the concept of unlimited (\textit{ἀόριστον}/\textit{ἀπειρον}).\footnote{\textit{EN} 1154a29.} Notably, as Aristotle reports, it is also by appealing to the classification of pleasure as unlimited that some anti-hedonists – who must be Academics – try to strengthen their position (EN 1173a16). Arguments along this line should be understood through Aristotle’s repeated references to the Pythagorean table of opposites (\textit{Metaph.} A5, 986a22-6; Π2, 1004b27-31; Λ7, 1072a30-5). In particular, he points out:

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\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\footnote{1}42] For the ranking of pleasure at the end of the \textit{Philebus}, see Barney 2016; Harte 2019.
\item[\footnote{1}43] \textit{EN} 1153a4–5, 1154a34–b2, 1173a16, a29–30, 1173b12–15.
\item[\footnote{1}44] It is not surprising to draw this inference. In the discussion of pleasure, Aristotle even himself associates change with something bad: ‘Of all things change (\textit{μεταβολή}) is sweet, as the poet says, because of a kind of \textit{badness (πονηρία)}; for just as a \textit{bad} human being is prone to change (\textit{εἰμιμεταβολος ὁ πονηρός}), so a nature that needs change is \textit{wicked (διόμην)}’ (\textit{EN} VII 14, 1154b28-31, transl. Rowe and Broadie, modified, emphasis mine).
\item[\footnote{1}45] The unlimited is also referred to as ‘the more and the less’ (Pl. \textit{Phlkh.} 24c-d) or ‘the great and small’ (\textit{Metaph.} 987b26, 988a26, 1089a35-6, cf. 1087b10, 1091a24-5). For further discussion of this background, see Krämer 1959, esp. 416-23.
\end{footnotes}
The bad belongs to the unlimited (τοῦ ἄπειρου) – as the Pythagoreans used to say by analogy – the good belongs to the limited (EN II.6, 1106b29-30, italics mine).

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

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

As this passage suggests, although Speusippus appears to highlight Eudoxus’ flaw in the debate over AC on purely formal grounds, his engagement in the controversy must have originated from a doctrinal disagreement, not merely from dissatisfaction with the weakness of Eudoxus’ argument. The analogy he invoked indicates that behind his

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

47 The source of Gellius is disputed. Whereas it was traditionally taken to be his teacher Calvenus Taurus (see Lakmann, 98–115), Tarrant (1996) has proposed Favorinus as the candidate, followed by Annas 1999, 138–9 and Warren 2009, 274. If the testimony goes back ultimately to Aristotle, it would not serve as independent evidence. But this does not mean that Gellius or his source misunderstood Aristotle’s account (pace Warren 2009, 274). No doubt Gellius’ attribution of Speusippus’ anti-hedonism to the whole Academy cannot be correct. But it is understandable if this only, in an exaggerated manner, aims to highlight Speusippus’ influence on the Academy or even the dominance he enjoyed in leading the Academy as Plato’s successor. If this testimony is simply a reading of Aristotle’s EV, it is at least in tune with the mainstream of the scholarship that Speusippus, who is representative for the anti-hedonistic wing in the Academy, is the main opponent Aristotle targets in his defense of the value of pleasure. This explains why Aristotle often uses the third person plural in EV X even when he almost certainly has Speusippus in mind. Similarly, Theophrastus, in his Metaphysics, criticizes Speusippus’ view of the first principles by using expressions such as ‘those surrounding Speusippus’ (ὁ περὶ Σπεύσιππον, Met. 6b6).
critique lies not only a distinctive valuation of pleasure but also an alternative conception of the highest good. No one illuminates the latter aspect better than Clement:

Σπεύσιππος τε ὁ Πλάτωνος ἅδελφιδος τῆς εὐδαιμονίας φησίν ἐξίν εἶναι τελείαν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν ἔχουσιν ἢ ἔξιν ἀγαθῶν, ἢς δὴ καταστάσεως ἂπαντας μὲν ἀνθρώπους ὀρεξὶν ἔχειν, στοχαζεσθαι δὲ τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς τῆς ἀσχημοσίας.\(^{48}\)

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

Here Clement engages in a critical discussion of the various ends that different philosophers have posited as the (ultimate) good. In accordance with his testimony on Plato, who is said to distinguish two kinds of end (cf. Πλάτων ὁ φιλόσοφος διττὸν εἶναι τὸ τέλος φησίν, Strom. II, 131.2), Speusippus seems also to suggest that two kinds of end can be the candidates for the ultimate good. One is the eudaimonia, pursued by all people, while the other is called aokhlesía, which, as a goal, is reserved only for a select few, the so-called good ones (τῶν ἀγαθῶν). The common goal, eudaimonia, is said to be either a complete (τελείαι) state in tune with nature or a state of possessing various goods. The former seems to be in the vein of an internalist account of the eudaimonic state, highlighting the core features that such a good state should satisfy, whereas the latter looks like it follows the contemporary ‘objective list approach’, which characterizes the ideal state by enumerating the various goods it possesses.\(^{50}\) Although Speusippus offers more than a formal claim, the question of what eudaimonia essentially is, except being a stable state, remains indeterminate.\(^{51}\) Whether the eudaimonia is realized in the internalist or

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


\(^{50}\) I prefer a more inclusive interpretation of the ἀγαθά to Tarán’s ‘identification of them with the virtues (1981, 436); cf. fn. 46 above.

\(^{51}\) Cat. 8b25–35; 9a8–10; Metaph. 1022b10–12. Whether Speusippus would follow Aristotle’s understanding of ἥξις, his conception of eudaimonia as a state, as Lieber (1958, 99) stresses, is diametrically contrasted with Aristotle’s conception of eudaimonia as an activity (energeia); also cf. Isnardi Parente 1980, 349; Tarán 1981, 436.
the objectivist way, both accounts cannot automatically lead to the notion of *aokhλησία* as
the aspirational ideal. They, jointly or severally, function at best as a necessary but
insufficient condition for what Speusippus regards as the true, ultimate good.

Genealogically considered, Speusippus’ introduction of *aokhλησία* seems to be a further
development (if not a radical remodeling) of Plato’s unsystematic notion of the neutral state,
a condition which the latter values but for which he does not have a fixed term.\(^{52}\) Given
that in the *Philebus* Plato highlights the ideal human life as a proper mixture of reason with
(pure) pleasure, it is especially unclear whether and how the neutral state – ranging from
the most divine state to the state of things that are not equipped with perceptual capacity –
could be integrated into the goodness of the *human* well-being. Speusippus cannot be
unaware of this problem, but he offers a radical yet more consistent solution: in addition
to insisting that pleasure is essentially bad, he feels the need to circumscribe more precisely
the nature of this specific non-algedonic state if it is taken to be the aspirational ideal
reserved for the few. Invoking or even inventing an idiosyncratic term for this privileged
state is thus a reasonable part of his revisionist project.\(^{53}\) It is conceivable that while *alupισία*
is too narrow a term for Speusippus to encompass his concern with the danger of pleasure,
*apathεία* is too broad to exclude even lifeless objects, which, being inanimate, are not
affected by any experience. Moreover, terms such as ‘the intermediate’ (ὁ μεταξύ, τὸ
μεσόν) and ‘the neither’ (τὸ μηδέτερον) seem ill-suited too, for they can easily be confused
with a mixture of pleasures and pains or even with the Aristotelian mean. On the other
hand, *aokhλησία*, as its literal meaning implies, extends beyond a *mere absence* of pleasure
and pain or a moderate mixture of the two. Instead, it signifies a state of *abstaining from*
algedonic experiences, which are characterized as disturbances and annoyances.\(^{54}\) It is a

\(^{52}\) Plato refers to this state in varying ways, e.g. ὁ μεταξύ (Rep. 583c4; 584e9), τὸ μέσον (Rep. 584d4), τὸ
μηδέτερον (Rep. 583c7) or τὸ μηδέτερον (Leg. 733b1). For the neutral state as a mongrel concept in Plato, see
Cheng 2019.

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

\(^{54}\) The term *aokhλησία* comes from alpha-privative + ὄχλος (*trouble*)/ ὄχλέω (*disturb, make
trouble*).
state that applies only to sentient beings. Although rocks, for instance, neither enjoy pleasure nor suffer pain, they cannot aspire to or maintain \textit{aokhlēsia}. Gods can undoubtedly be characterized as existing in a state of \textit{aokhlēsia}, as their undisturbed essence shields them from the fluctuations of worldly experience. However, for humans, given their limited nature, attaining or maintaining \textit{aokhlēsia} requires more demanding efforts, especially the training and control of reason. This must include a sense of trying and doing, in contemporary parlance, the phenomenology of agency (Bayne 2008), in which the subject has a sense of itself as the source of its carefree state, accompanied by feelings of focus, concentration, and mastery. As a state or feeling of being the owner of an action, \textit{aokhlēsia} avoids or at least mitigates the problem of content indeterminacy for the Platonic neutral state. It thus allows Speusippus to better specify what ‘the equal’ is in his response to Aristotle if the debate over AC continues. According to my interpretation, it can also help Speusippus differentiate his \textit{aokhlēsia} phenomenologically from what is commonly referred to as ‘true pleasure’. By doing so, he not only maintains the coherence of his resolute rejection of pleasure but also avoids the criticism that the \textit{aokhlēsia} is merely another kind of pleasure in disguise.\footnote{Warren (2009, 272): ‘Perhaps Speusippus was himself muddled or else otherwise stymied by attempting to say that this state [sc. \textit{aokhlēsia}] is pleasant while objecting to the pursuit of pleasurable experiences. As later criticisms of the Epicureans well demonstrate, it is not hard to see how this might be a difficult position to maintain.’ For criticisms along this line, also see Gauthier/Jolif 1958, 801–2; Dillon 2003, 67; Fronterotta 2018, 63.}

In the absence of evidence, we do not know who, according to Speusippus, can be qualified as the \textit{agathoi} who correctly pursue the \textit{aokhlēsia} as the ultimate end. But his refusal to equate the ultimate good with the object sought by all human beings is sufficient to explain why he feels obliged to reject Eudoxus, who bases his pro-hedonistic argument just on the \textit{universal} pursuit and avoidance of all animals (\textit{EN} X 2, 1172b9–15).\footnote{My reading of Speusippus’ attempt as meliorating the ordinary concept of eudaimonia as well as recasting the Platonic concept of the neutral state is more ambitious than Dillon’s interpretation of his attempt as a criticism of mass hedonism. In other words, I think that Speusippus aims to draw a subtle distinction between eudaimonia and \textit{aokhlēsia} rather than a radical contrast between pleasure and the neutral state. After all, the text neither mentions pleasure nor seems to aim at refuting a \textit{specific} misunderstanding of eudaimonia. Dillon, therefore, has to assume the existence of ‘some ellipse […] arising from Clement’s compression of his sources’, which indicates that most men, foolishly, identify pleasure as the eudaimonia (2003, 65). The suggestion, however, reveals that his reading, at least, cannot be supported by the \textit{current} text. Moreover, it seems vague but fairly reasonable to capture eudaimonia as a complete, natural \textit{state} or a \textit{state} of possessing goods. But if so, it has been ruled out pleasure, which is determined by Speusippus as \textit{genesis}, as a candidate for the eudaimonia introduced here. This testimony, therefore, can hardly be read as a criticism of mass hedonism.} Likewise, Speusippus is also in stark opposition to another group of people (call them Pragmatists)
in the same context, who do not endorse the badness of pleasure per se but consider it practically useful to persuade ‘the many’ to evaluate it as bad. As Aristotle points out:

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

It is precisely because the Pragmatists want to correct the bad inclination of ordinary people that they declare pleasure as bad. But the goal they set for the mass is called by Aristotle to meson, the intermediate state (1172a33), which can hardly be identical to Speusippus’ aokhlēsia. For it has been well-known that for Aristotle to meson is characterized by appropriate emotions, mostly accompanied by proper pleasure and pain, whereas in Plato, to meson, which is more loosely used, refers to various states ranging from a hedonically neutral condition to those with proper pleasure and pain (see Cheng 2019, 539–41). Even if the Pragmatists’ meson includes Speusippus’ aokhlēsia, he must resist setting it as the very goal for ordinary people. And even if Speusippus allows the aokhlēsia as a common goal accessible to the mass, as an essentialist, he would not grant that this can be achieved by a cheap lie, without considering the essence of pleasure.

5. Aristotle’s response to Speusippus

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

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

59 Aristotle also thinks that it is difficult to convince ordinary people by arguments (EN 1179b8–10).
After clarifying Speusippus’ objection to AC and its doctrinal background, we are in a better position to explore Aristotle’s reply to Speusippus in ENX, which, compared to the version in EVII, seems more informative:

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

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

How to answer this question considerably relies on how to pick out the grammatical subject of EN 1173a11–12, a key statement in Aristotle’s reply: νῦν δὲ φαίνονται τὴν μὲν φεύγοντες ὡς κακόν, τὴν δ’ αἱρούμενοι ὡς ἀγαθόν. Either, in a traditional way, a force

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60 The third-person plural may reflect the existence of different factions within the Academy since its foundation (see Watts 2007, 109) or the situation of the Academy under Speusippus’ leadership (see §4 above). The third person plural is widely attested in Aristotle’s references to Speusippus and his doctrines (see e.g. οἱ δὲ τὰ μαθηματικὰ μόνον τοῖς, Metaph. 1069a36 in F31 Tarán; οἱ δὲ λέγοντες τὸν ἀριθμὸν πρῶτον τῶν μαθηματικῶν καὶ ὁμός ἄξιον ἐγομένην οὕσιν καὶ ἄρχας ἐκτάσεως ἄλλης, ἐπεισοδιώδη τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ὦσιν ποιεῖσθαι, Metaph. 1075b37–1076a1 in F30 Tarán; τοῖς τὰ μαθηματικὰ μόνον εἶναι θρήνος, Metaph. 1090b16 in F37 Tarán; for the same way of referring, see Metaph. 1076a21–22 in F32 Tarán; 1080b14–15 in F33 Tarán; Metaph. 1083a20–24 in F34 Tarán; Metaph. 1086a2–4 in F35 Tarán; Metaph. 1087b6 in F39 Tarán; Metaph. 1091b23–25 in F45 Tarán; APo. 97a8–9 in F63 Tarán; Top. 108b30 in F65 Tarán; Pl 642b5–6 in F67 Tarán).

61 The importance of this sentence is marked by the opening words ‘νῦν δὲ’, which is in Aristotle often used in a non-temporal sense to emphasize what is actually the case (Bonitz 492a60–b3).
of generalization comes into play here so that the third person plural refers to what people commonly do, or it is possible to track the third person plural and its corresponding participles throughout the whole passage so that the implied subject of ‘φαίνονται’ at EV1173a11 is identical with the subject of the antecedent clauses. The two options are not necessarily incompatible if in the former, Speusippus and his advocates are taken to be included in the people who are said apparently to avoid pain as bad and pursue pleasure as good. It means that in Aristotle’s eyes, they are guilty of what scholars call pragmatic inconsistency, a mismatch between actions and words. As Natali perceptively points out, if Speusippus’ thesis cannot be confirmed by his life, it is only a ‘sophisme moral’.

But why are the anti-hedonists like Speusippus unable to live by what they say (1991, 326)? Broadie and Natali do not provide an elaborate answer, but both Michael of Ephesus and James Warren resort to a natural preference for pleasure shared by humans and animals. If this is correct, then Eudoxus’ universal thesis about animal pursuit is re-invoked by Aristotle to ‘ward off’ Speusippus’ counterargument. It is, however, doubtful that returning to Eudoxus’ first argument can save his second one. After all, Speusippus has just dismissed the former as unreliable (EV1172b35–73a5). Moreover, the premise of the latter – animals universally avoid pain – seems less controversial than that of the former – animals universally seek pleasure.

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62 This reading is accepted by most translators and commentators, who take the implicit subject to be all humans or people (e.g. Crisp 2000; Broadie/Rowe 2002; Rapp 2009, 213; Reeve 2014, Davies 2023, 34: ‘people’; e.g. Dirrmeier 1964; Rolles 1972; Gigon 1995; Wolf 2006: ‘die Menschen’; Joachim 1955, 264; Dillon 2003, 66: ‘men’; Frede 2020: ‘Man’; Irwin 2019: ‘we’).
63 ὡς γὰρ φαίνεται, 1173α6, λέγοντες, α9, ὡς […] ἀληθέοντες, α10: φαίνονται τὴν μὲν φεύγοντες ὡς κακὸν, τὴν δ’ οὐροῦμεν, α11–12.
64 See Warren 2009, 278–9; Außerheide 2020, 74. The paraphrase of this argument by Gosling and Taylor – ‘but in fact the objectors clearly object to the one (pain) as evil and choose the other (pleasure) as good’ (1982, 229, emphasis mine) – suggests that they construe the text roughly in the same direction.
65 Of course, in the formal case one may reject the inclusive reading of the tacit subject, but prefer one of the traditional readings according to which the view of Speusippus and his followers runs contrary to the actions of common people. Hence there would be no ad hominem inconsistency involved, but a mismatch between the words of the anti-hedonists and the actions of the others. This interpretation, however, needs the subject of EV1173a11–12 to be ordinary people rather than all people, a more natural option for the implicit subject. More importantly, as I shall show, this interpretation is vulnerable to the same difficulties as the ad hominem argument based on human nature.
66 I use the term pragmatic inconsistency in a broad sense (see various examples listed in Harrison 1995, 596–8), classified under the argument ad hominem (Walton 1998; for this type of argument in Aristotle see e.g. Brinton 1986; Fortenbaugh 1992; Horn 2019), which is different from the more rigorous understanding of it as an assertional inconsistency or pragmatic self-refutation (see Woods and Walton 1989, 62).
68 Cf. πάντα and πάντες ἦ πάντα in Michael In EV539. 17–20, cf. 539.20; ‘animals and people’ in Warren 2009, 278.
69 This asymmetry can be seen from the Stoics’ well-known criticism of Epicurus, according to which the newborn’s natural impulse is self-preservation, which must include avoidance of pain, rather than the pursuit of pleasure as the Epicurean cradle argument claims. But according to Aristotle’s report, Eudoxus
To reinforce Aristotle, one may suggest limiting the scope from animals to human beings. His defense turns out to be an argument based on human nature: We, as members of the human species, are constitutionally predisposed to pursue pleasure, which compels the anti-hedonists to live a life that is at variance with their beliefs. This proposal appears attractive insofar as numerous facts indicate that most (if not all) of us are naturally prone to pleasure, which reflects an empirical truth Aristotle recognizes (e.g., EE 1222a36–42, 1230b16–18; EN 1119a5–10). As noted, however, Speusippus believes that eudaimonia is universally pursued by all people but denies that aokhlēsia, the highest good, is identical to a universal goal. Likewise, the Pragmatists mentioned above believe that pleasure is what ordinary people are naturally disposed to pursue, but this is why they consider it practically better to purport pleasure as bad (1172a29–33). To be sure, Aristotle starts his account of pleasure in EN X by characterizing it as ‘most intimately attached to us as humans’ (μάλιστα... συνωκειόμεθα τῷ γένει ἢμῶν, 1172a19–20) and alluding to it as a natural goal pursued by human beings, exerting a powerful influence upon their life (1172a25). However, this is a statement on relevance rather than evaluation. In fact, it is precisely because of this fact that Aristotle admits that as human beings, ‘we are not impartial judges (οὐ γὰρ ὁδέκαστοι κρίνομεν) in the case of pleasure’ (EN 1109b8-9). Not unlike the Pragmatists, he further stresses that many people by nature (διὰ τὴν φύσιν) are prone to enjoying accidental, bad pleasure, which functions as an apparent good for them (EN 1154b4–6). Such a natural inclination accounts for why they tend to make false value judgments about hedonic experiences.

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6believed that the same conclusion (sc. pleasure is the chief good) followed no less evidently from the contrary’ (EN 1172b18–19, italics mine). This suggests that Eudoxus might not prioritize the premise concerning pain over that concerning pleasure.

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

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

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

73 Broadie 1991 sensitively connects Aristotle’s criticism of the radical anti-hedonists like Speusippus with his criticism of the Pragmatists at EN 1172b3–7 (328–30). The inconsistency of the former, according to her diagnosis, lies in the gulf between their pleasure-hostile attitude and their occasional pursuit of pleasure. For ‘[e]njoying something, which is enjoying it for what it is, is a kind of affirmation that it is good in itself, much as pursuing something is an affirmation that it is good in one way or another.’ (329). She further explains this assertion-action link by appealing to what she calls Aristotle’s ‘hedonic mode of seeming good’, according to which ‘my finding Z pleasant, and my pursuing it as pleasant, is my affirming it to be good’ (320). This appears to be a refined version of the argument based on the naturalness of pleasure. This can show that Speusippus, like other people, cannot be completely unmoved by pleasure so that experiences of
For most people, deception comes about because of pleasure, since it appears good when it is not. So they choose what is pleasant as something good, and avoid pain as something bad. (\textit{EN}1113a33–b2, italics mine; cf. 1109b7–9)

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

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

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

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

6. The truth between words and deeds

If Aristotle’s criticism of Speusippus is not an appeal to human nature, one may wonder how he can charge the anti-hedonists with failing to practice what they preach. To answer

\textsuperscript{74} Cf. \textit{EE} 1230b16–18; \textit{Rhet.} 1382b4–9.

\textsuperscript{75} Cf. \textit{EN}1109a12–13.
this question, his claim that they miss the truth (1173a8–9) offers a revealing clue. Far from an impromptu comment, Aristotle’s emphasis on the truth is also found in EN X 1 and re-emerges in EN X 8, a consistent concern he holds in dealing with debates on the ultimate good. But what kind of truth does he have in mind? Is it a universal proposition about value or a truth about what to do in concrete circumstances?

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

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

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

In addition to the criticism about the effectiveness of persuasion, it is telling that Aristotle also charges the Pragmatists with undermining the truth (τάλθεσις προσαναφόσιν). Just as truth in theoretical matters requires internal coherence or correspondence between words and facts, truth in practical matters, according to Aristotle, requires coherence between logoi and erga, between what one says and what one does. It is this coherence that makes a practical truth more effective than mere words, not only for practical persuasion or reasoning in specific situations but also for the overarching decision of how to live one’s life. 76 From this perspective, a more serious problem with the Pragmatists’ approach lies in their isolating ‘what is practical’ from ‘what is true’, a misconception of the priority of practice in ethics Aristotle feels obliged to resist.

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

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76 I leave open how Aristotle’s concept of practical truth is to be understood. Despite various interpretations, the prevailing focus has been on the relevance and function of practical truth with respect to a particular action – specifically, how a rational agent, guided by such truth, can effectively achieve a correct goal through practical reasoning in a concrete situation (see, for example, Anscombe 1981; Pakaluk 2010; Kenny 2012; Broadie 2016; Offert 2017). Remarkably, few studies consider the passages addressed in the current study. Consequently, few of them realize that a macroscopic concept of praxis, the ways in which people organize and shape their lives through a series of characteristic activities, also affects how we should interpret the concept of practical truth. Given the constraints of the subject matter, however, this paper will refrain from an in-depth exploration of this complex issue, reserving it for a future independent study.
What is true in practical matters (τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς ἐν τοῖς πρακτικοῖς) is judged from what one does and how one lives (ἐκ τῶν ἔργων καὶ τοῦ βίου), since these are what have authority. Hence we ought to examine what has been said by applying it to what one does and how one lives (ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὸν βίον); and if it harmonizes with what one does (τοῖς ἔργοις), we should accept it, but if it conflicts we should count it [mere] words (λόγοις). (EN 1179a18–22)

The close parallels between the two passages confirm that Aristotle’s remark on the Pragmatists is much more than a critical doxography. It rather points to one of his fundamental requirements for theoretical debate on practical matters, namely the consistency between words and life,77 which, as Natali emphasizes, is also an important part of Aristotle’s dialectical strategy.78 The juxtaposition of erga and bios indicates that a practical justification is not simply based on a narrow concept of action as what one does in a concrete situation but, more crucially, on how to live one’s life, a large-scale concept of practice. In other words, the erga covers a range of practical facts insofar as they can manifest how one usually organizes and shapes one’s life. This echoes the cited passage at the opening of EN X, where Aristotle criticizes the Pragmatists by emphasizing that true arguments are most useful ‘for life’ (πρὸς τὸν βίον, 1172b5) and ‘encourage people who understand them to live by them’ (ζην κατ’ αὐτοῖς, 1172b6–7).

Given the varieties of manners of life a human can live, we should give preference to them over the abstract concept of human nature. If the ergon of us qua human is a typical or characteristic activity of a human being, namely the use of our rational faculties as Aristotle’s famous Ergon Argument aims to establish, the ergon of us as individuals is the particular way of life we choose and live. This approach avoids the reckless inferences

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

ordinary people tend to draw and accounts for the nature of the pragmatic inconsistency
I claimed Speusippus faced, inasmuch as characteristic activities or what can be called
behavior patterns provide a much firmer ground than occasional activities for indicating
the principle by which one guides her life. Hence, one commits a pragmatic inconsistency
not only because what she sometimes did or does violates what she says but because she fails
to live up to what she asserts by how she typically behaves. For in a practical context,
claiming that X is essentially good implies a willingness to live a life enriched by X.
Similarly, claiming that Y is essentially bad means that, ceteris paribus, one should strive to
minimize and eliminate Y from one’s life.

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

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

Diogenes: [Speusippus] adhered to the same doctrines as Plato but was unlike him in
character. For he was irascible and liable to be defeated by pleasures (ἵδονῶν ἵπτον). It
is reported, at any rate, that in a fit of anger he threw a puppy into a well, and that
merely for pleasure he traveled to Macedonia to attend Cassander’s wedding (DL
4.1.4–11, transl. Mensch 2018)

Philodemus: [In fact, those who were present in] the Academy are said to have
preferred Xenocrates [at that time], because they admired his temperance
(σωφροσύνη). For Speusippus had in him a more akratic spirit (ἀκρατέστερον ὑπάρχον) than [loose-living people, and indeed, having been defeated] by pleasure (τῶν ἡδονῶν) ἢ τῶν γενόμενον (Index Academicorum, P. 1021. col.7–10, Dorandi 1991).79

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

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

Speusippus, as we can see, was characterized as an akratic or indulgent hedonist by different authors in various contexts. Not without reasons, scholars rarely take such accounts seriously, either dismissing them as malicious anecdotes80 or interpreting them as embodying a widely attested hostility to the whole Academy, having little to do with the historical Speusippus.81 Tarán (1981) belongs to the few critics who recognize the philosophical relevance of these stories, tracing them back to the debate over pleasure within the Academy. However, he does not see the connection in Speusippus’ criticism of Eudoxus but thinks it is a confusion of the Pragmatists in EN1172a28–b3 with Speusippus in reading Aristotle that encourages the doxographers to invent such anecdotes to disclose Speusippus’ doctrinal inconsistency.82

Despite being sensitive to the connection and difference between Speusippus and the Pragmatists, this hypothesis leaves unexplained how a misinterpretation of Aristotle’s

79 Transl. by Kalligas/ Tsouna, in Kalligas/Balla 2020, modified.
80 Zeller 1920, 987; Gauthier/Jolif 1958, 819; Merlan 1959, 214.
81 Natoli 2004, 44; Frede/Burnyeat 2015, 37–8.
82 Tarán 1981, 178. Dillon is more cautious, merely suggesting that Speusippus’ alleged hedonism ‘at least probably has something to do with Speusippus’ known doctrine on pleasure’ (2003, 31).
Pragmatists could yield the very characterization of Speusippus we have encountered. In principle, it is not impossible that the doxographers intend to ridicule Speusippus’ ethical doctrine through these contradicting portraits. Nevertheless, none of their accounts exhibits any knowledge of Aristotle’s Pragmatists, nor do they even mention or hint at Speusippus’ anti-hedonistic theory. By contrast, we should note that the other traditions in which Speusippus’ anti-hedonism is addressed keep silent about his alleged hedonistic life (see fn.3). As a matter of fact, it is reasonable to doubt whether the polemical stories, if read carefully, actually concern the problem of evaluating pleasure at all, given that Speusippus’ hedonistic lifestyle is often paired with his irritability and his avarice, which unambiguously goes beyond a debate over hedonism. More importantly, those anecdotes are embedded in diverse contexts, thereby serving quite diverse purposes. It is even questionable whether all of them really concern Speusippus in the first place. While the main motivation of Plutarch seems to be to extol Plato’s pedagogical skill,83 the source used by Philodemus intends to highlight Xenocrates’ virtue by taking advantage of Speusippus as a contrasting backdrop.84 The accounts of Diogenes Laertius and Athenaeus may reflect a subtle relationship between the Macedonian regime and the Academy, especially in the period of Speusippus’ leadership.85 So if the initial goal of these accounts, as Tarán suggests, is to ridicule Speusippus’ anti-hedonistic doctrine, their selection and presentation of the materials seem impotent for this specific purpose. If it is unlikely that the doxographers invent Speusippus’ hedonistic way of life to caricature his anti-hedonism, the converging image of him as a hedonist in the later tradition may contain a certain historical truth. At least this image represents a popular impression of him, which can be traced back to the early Peripatetic school or even to the Academy under the headship of Xenocrates.

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

83 Stenzel 1929, 1636: ‘ein gutes Beispiel für die Erziehungspraxis Platons’.
84 See Gaiser 1988, 469; Watts 2007, 115–8. The contrast between Speusippus and Xenocrates is clearly related to the popular narrative in which it is Xenocrates, rather than Speusippus, who is deemed the genuine heir of Plato and takes his heritage forward (see Sedley 2021b, 59–61; cf. Sedley 2021a).
could honestly assert what is implied in his analogy if the debate were to continue. As Aristotle points out:

What affirmation and denial (κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις) are in the case of thought, pursuit and avoidance are with desire. [...] Reason must assert (φάναι) and desire pursue the same things. This, then, is practical thought and truth. (*EN* 1139a21-27, transl. Rowe and Broadie, modified)

Whenever there is something pleasant or painful, [the soul], just as affirming or denying (καταφάσα ἢ ἀποφάσα), pursues or avoids. (*DA* III. 7. 431a9–10, translation and emphasis mine)

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

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86 See the imperfect tenses in Aristotle’s report of this debate (Εὐδοξος μὲν οὖν τήν ἡδονήν τάγαθόν ὅτι 'εῖναι, *EN* 1172b9; οὗτος ήττον δὲ ὅτι 'εῖναι φανερόν ἐκ τοῦ ἑναντίου 1172b18, cf. *EN* 1101b29; ὡς γὰρ Ὁσίσπιτος ἔλεεν, *EN* 1153b4–5).
as a rational, competent interlocutor, would not want to manifest himself as intellectually dishonest or inept in the intra-school debate.

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

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

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

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

Bibliography


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