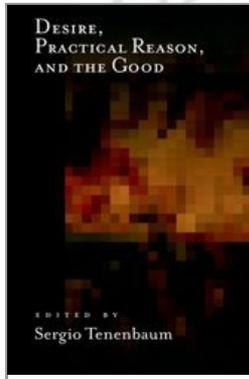


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## Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good

Sergio Tenenbaum

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## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

Moss Jessica

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### [+] Abstract and Keywords

Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View That Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good, Jessica Moss Aristotle appears to hold the most extreme possible version of the view that all desire is for things qua good: He makes this claim not only of the desires characteristic of rational, deliberated human action but also of appetites (epithumiai), paradigmatically nonrational desires for pleasure. This entails that animals, infants, and even akratics pursue their pleasures under the guise of the good. The trouble with this view is that it looks either insane or trivial. Aristotle seems to be making either the absurd claim that every appetite is for something the agent believes good, or the very boring claim that every appetite is for something the agent desires. Some interpreters try to rescue him with a deflationary reading of his frequent claim that appetites are for "the apparent good," but this is textually insupportable: Aristotle is clear that we have appetites for pleasure because it appears good to us. This chapter argues

# Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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that Aristotle not only means what he says on this topic, but says something both reasonable and substantive. Drawing on passages from the psychological works (especially the *de Motu Animalium* and the *De Anima*), I argue that on Aristotle's view all appetite presupposes pleasurable perception of the desired object, where to feel perceptual pleasure in something is to perceive (veridically or otherwise) that thing's value—to perceive it as good. This takes care of the insanity charge: If pleasure counts as finding-good, it follows that all appetites are desires for something the agent finds good (in this perceptual mode; a rational agent may also have a conflicting rational judgment that the thing is bad, and a corresponding rational aversion to it). It also takes care of the triviality charge: I argue that on Aristotle's view, perceptual pleasure is a genuine form of value-awareness, and, in fact, forms the cognitive basis for rational

*Keywords:* Aristotle, pleasure, perception, desire, good, value-perception

## I. Trouble

Aristotle evidently holds the most extreme possible version of the view that we desire things under the guise of the good. Famously, he holds it in the case of the desires he marks as distinctively rational, wish (*boulêsis*) and decision (*prohairesis*):<sup>1</sup>

(1) ... every decision seems to aim at some good ... (*Nicomachean Ethics* [EN] 1094a1–2)

(2) The object of wish without qualification and in truth is the good, but for each person the apparent (*phainomenon*) [good]. (*EN* 1113a23–31)<sup>2</sup>

Less famously—and more problematically—he extends the view to cover *every* desire (*orexis*), including appetite (*epithumia*) for the pleasant, the paradigmatically nonrational kind of desire:

(3) The object of desire (*orekton*) always moves, but this is either the good or the apparent good (*phainomenon agathon*). (*de Anima* [*de An.*] 433a26–29)

(4) The object of desire (*orekton*) and the object of wish (*boulêton*) is either the good or the apparent good. And this is why (*dio*) the pleasant is desired, for (*gar*) it is an apparent good ... (*Eudemian Ethics* [EE] 1235b26–27)

(5) What causes movement in the first place is the object of desire (*orekton*) and the object of thought.... And we must suppose that the apparent good also holds the place of a good, and also the pleasant, for it is an apparent good. (*de Motu Animalium* [MA] 700b23–29)

(6) The apparent fine (*kalon*) is the object of appetite, the really fine the primary object of wish. (*Metaphysics* XII.7 1072a27–28)<sup>3</sup>

(7) Appetite [moves one] on account of the now, for (*gar*) the presently pleasant appears both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good, on account of not looking to the future. (*de An.* 433b8–10)

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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**(p.66)** Appetite is for what appears good; indeed, we have appetites for things just *because* they appear good to us (most explicit in [4] and [7]).<sup>4</sup>

I take these passages to demonstrate that this is indeed Aristotle's view. The trouble is that it looks very strange. So far as rational desires go, it may raise few eyebrows: Many hold that rational desire is simply to be equated with desire for things *qua* good, both as a matter of Aristotle exegesis and as a matter of fact.<sup>5</sup> The claim that nonrational appetites are for things *qua* good, on the other hand, might—especially given Aristotle's other commitments—sound either misleading and trivial, or patently insane.

Let us take the insanity horn of the dilemma first. Desiring under the guise of the good seems to presuppose having thoughts and beliefs about what is good—one consideration that has led people to think that such desire must be distinctively rational. How then can Aristotle maintain that animals—nonrational creatures who lack beliefs of any kind (*de An.* 428a19–24)—desire things *qua* good? What about babies? Things look worse still when we come to akratics (incontinent or weak-willed people). Aristotle himself avows that they choose the pleasant “instead of the things they themselves believe (*dokounta*) good” (*EN* 1166a15)—that the desires they act on are in direct conflict with their judgments about what is good. In fact, he explicitly distinguishes between appetite (*epithumia*), defined as desire for the pleasant, and wish (*boulêsis*), defined as desire for the good (*EN* 1111b17; cf. *de An.* 414b5–6; *Topics* VI.8). Not only does it seem bizarre to insist that babies, animals, and akratics desire their objects as good, then, but Aristotle himself evidently introduces the category of appetite in part to show that this is not so: Some desires are for things *qua* pleasant instead of *qua* good.

If Aristotle nonetheless insists that appetites are for the apparent good, we seem to be driven to the second horn of the dilemma: triviality. Anyone who maintains the extreme guise of the good thesis must be defining ‘appears good’ in such a way as to make the thesis analytic: ‘X appears good to S’ can mean nothing more than ‘S desires x,’ or at very best ‘x attracts S in some way.’ Such a view is not only boring, in that it makes no substantive philosophical claim about desire or action, but also misleading. Take (2)–(6) above. Each seems to make an interesting claim about the objects of desire: They all either are good or appear so. That is, there is some one property, goodness, such that all objects of desire either have this property or appear to have it. This property is the proper or natural (formal) object of desire, and an agent will desire an object just in case she takes the object to have it. (Compare: There is some one property, being red, that all the handkerchiefs in this field either have or appear to have. This property is the proper object of bull anger, and a bull will charge at a hankie just in case he takes the hankie to have it.) If ‘appears good’ turns out to mean ‘is desired,’ this interesting claim dissolves. Apparent goodness bears no closer relation to genuine goodness than it bears to, say, genuine leather. Or at least there is no straightforward connection between the two of the kind indicated by the ‘apparent.’

**(p.67)** Of course we can escape the dilemma entirely if we abandon the face value reading of Aristotle's claims, and simply deny that he thinks animals and babies and akratics desire things under the guise of the good. Aristotle sounds much saner on the

deflationary reading we find, for example, in Irwin:

... 'apparent good' need not refer to something's appearing *as* good, but may instead refer to the good that appears, even if it appears as something other than good—as pleasant, for instance.... When the animal acts to get what appears to it, the appearance must be in general an appearance of its good—an appearance of something that is in fact good for the animal, though not necessarily an appearance of it *as* good. (T. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, 331–32)<sup>6</sup>

Thus a hungry slug pursues a leaf not because the leaf appears good to it, but because the leaf appears to be a leaf, or appears pleasant.

As reasonable as this sounds on its own terms, as an interpretation of Aristotle it is problematic. First, when Aristotle says the pleasant is desired *because* it appears good (see [4] and especially [7]), he evidently means to be saying something more explanatory than that the pleasant is desired because it appears pleasant. Second, the strategy cannot help us with the akratic: To say that the akratic goes for “an appearance of something that is in fact good” for him—a mirage of vegetables, perhaps—would be to deny the distinctive and problematic feature of *akrasia*, namely that the akratic goes for something he himself thinks *not* good, and rightly so.<sup>7</sup> Third (as Irwin acknowledges), the strategy forces an awkwardly hybrid account of “apparent good.” Passage (2) shows that when Aristotle says that rational desires are for the apparent good he means that they are for what the agent herself considers good; it would be very misleading of him to use the same words to apply to the object of nonrational desires without meaning to suggest that in this case too the agent in some way finds the desired object good.

The aim of this chapter is to save the appearance that Aristotle does indeed embrace the guise of the good view even for appetites, while showing that, on his version of it, the view is substantive, tolerably sane, and philosophically compelling. I base my solution on a fairly widespread interpretation of Aristotle's view of pleasure: that to feel pleasure in something is to perceive it as good. What I want to show is that we can take this much more literally than one might suppose. Pleasurable perception, even in nonrational animals who lack value-concepts or beliefs, is a genuine cognitive state: a full-blooded awareness of value. (This is not to say, of course, that it is always veridical; the point is that it is a genuine mode of cognition, even if a highly fallible one.)

By 'cognition,' I mean to capture a notion that Aristotle introduces in the *de Anima* and *de Motu Animalium* with the claim that there is an important similarity between the faculties of perception, *phantasia* ('imagination'), and thought. What these faculties have in common—and what allows them each to combine with desire to produce action—is that **(p.68)** they are all *kritika*, faculties by which we *krinein*: discern, distinguish, or judge.<sup>8</sup> They are all ways of registering information about objects, and of doing so in a way that can, in principle, make those objects the focus of desire. I will use 'cognitive' to stand in for Aristotle's *kritikon*. Thus on my use the word carries no implications of anything conceptual, rational, propositional, or doxastic: Even the simplest animals who have only the sense of touch and no higher faculties at all count as cognizers.

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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If we can show that Aristotle treats pleasure as genuine cognition of value, we can attribute to him a theory of apparent goodness on which:

- (i) things can appear good to creatures entirely independently of any beliefs about goodness, and yet
- (ii) experiencing an appearance of something as good is a genuinely cognitive state

where (i) frees Aristotle from the insanity charge, while (ii) frees him from the triviality charge.

I will not, by the way, have much to say about whether or not Aristotle's guise of the good view is *true*. I suspect, alas, that it is not, on the grounds that we sometimes voluntarily do things we in no way find pleasurable.<sup>9</sup> What I want to show is that the view is worth taking seriously. It is my own opinion that by freeing the guise of the good from its bonds to rationality, Aristotle gives it its very best chance.

### II. Pleasure as Value-Perception

When people attribute to Aristotle the idea of pleasure as value-perception they generally have in mind his discussion of pleasure in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I will have something brief to say about that discussion below, but the main evidence for my interpretation comes from a single passage on perceptual pleasure from the *de Anima*:

(8) (a) Perception, then, is analogous to simply stating or thinking. But whenever the perceptible thing is pleasant or painful, the soul, as if affirming or negating, pursues or avoids it. (b) In fact, to feel pleasure or pain (*to hêdesthai kai lupeisthai*) is precisely to be active (*energein*) with the perceptual mean toward the good or bad as such. (c) And actual avoidance and actual desire are this/are the same,<sup>10</sup> (d) and the faculty of desire and the faculty of avoidance are not different either from each other nor from the perceptive faculty; but they are different in being. (*de An.* III.7 431a8–12, based on Hicks's translation)

The central claim for our purposes is (b). 'The perceptual mean' (*têi aisthêtikêi mesotêti*) must refer either to the faculty of perception itself or to an organ of perception;<sup>11</sup> and I take the 'as such' to pick up the nearest and most obvious antecedent, the good or bad.<sup>12</sup> Thus (b) says that to feel pleasure in something is to be perceptually active toward it *as good*. But what does that mean?

**(p.69)** We can begin by considering what it means to be to "be active toward something as good" in general, bracketing for the moment the role of perception. Here we are helped by the fact that throughout the corpus Aristotle links the notion of the good with another notion, that of the end (*telos*), so much so that he often equates the two. (See, e.g., *Physics* 194a32–33, 195a23–25; *Politics* 1252b34–35; *EE* I.8 1218b9–11; *Metaphysics* 1.3 9833102; *de Partibus Animalium* 639b19–20; and the opening lines of the *EN*.) The function argument of *EN* I.7 is a good example: For everything that has a good, "its good seems to be in its function" (1097b26–7), where a thing's function (*ergon*) is identical with or closely linked to its *telos* (*EE* 1219a8). Thus the good in general for a thing is the

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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attaining of its *telos*, and whatever contributes to that is instrumentally good. In the biological works, as Gotthelf shows, “the good” for an animal always refers to what contributes to and promotes its life: what is *oikeion*, familiar or proper to it, what benefits it in the sense of contributing to the actualization of its innate potentials, the realization of its form.<sup>13</sup> There is a debate among scholars as to which is metaphysically basic: Gotthelf argues that good is defined in terms of *telos*, while Cooper and others argue that *telos* is defined in terms of good.<sup>14</sup> Whichever way the metaphysical reduction works, however (if either), the near equation between goods and ends suggests that we can understand what sounds like a mysterious psychological state, being active toward something as good, in terms of one more readily understandable: being active toward something as an end. This, surely, means aiming at the thing, striving for it, pursuing it or being disposed to do so.

Thus we can say that when a sapling draws water up through its roots, it is “being active toward the water as good.” The water is good for it—contributes to its actualization and flourishing—and in drawing up the water the sapling is acting in the appropriate way toward the water, acting toward it *as good*. It is doing so with its only psychic faculty, its *threptikon*, faculty of nutrition and growth.

Living things endowed with perception have a more complex way to be active toward something as good. They can become aware of something as good, not only having it as an end in the way that a plant can have an end (on Aristotle's view), but being aware of it as an end, discerning it as an end through perception. That is, there is a special state a perceptive agent can be in, a special kind of awareness such an agent can have of an object, in which the object impacts her not simply as, e.g., blue or sweet or in motion, but as to-be-pursued. I take (b) to be telling us that this state is precisely the one we call feeling pleasure.

Of course sometimes what seems to be value-awareness is delusive: A creature can be perceptually active toward something as good even if it is, in fact, bad.<sup>15</sup> In fact, it is a crucial claim of Aristotle's ethical theory that many human beings systematically take pleasure in things not genuinely good: people with bad ethical characters take pleasure in base, harmful (**p.70**) things (like overeating and adultery) that would not please the virtuous (*EN* 1119a12, 1176a13–22).

It is notable, however, that Aristotle views taking pleasure in the bad not merely as a regrettable tendency, but as a kind of malfunctioning of the pleasure-taking apparatus, akin to ordinary perceptual error:

(9) The pleasures that bring reproach ... are not pleasant: that they are pleasant for those in a bad condition does not mean that we should think them to *be* pleasant, except for this sort of person, any more than we should think things healthy or sweet or bitter that are so to people who are ill, or again think things to be white that appear so to those suffering from eye disease. (*EN* 1173b20–25)<sup>16</sup>

Why does Aristotle say that base people are making some kind of factual error in feeling

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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pleasure in base things?<sup>17</sup> The explanation, I suggest, lies in his view that a thing's nature is defined by its *telos* (see especially *Physics* II.7: "What a thing is and what it is for are one and the same"). The essence of perceptual pleasure, like the essence of anything else, is revealed not by defective cases but by the cases in which things go well—in which it achieves its *telos* and serves its function. And the function of perceptual pleasure, as a look at the psychological works will show, is precisely to direct the perceiver toward its good.

To see this we must begin by noting that Aristotle's theory of perception is thoroughly teleological. He asks himself why certain creatures should be endowed with perception, where this means asking in what way perception serves their good.<sup>18</sup> He is perfectly explicit that a main purpose of perception is to further the survival of the perceiver (*de Sensu* 436b15–437a1; *de An.* III.12 434b22–27). Nature, who does nothing in vain, equips animals and people with a special faculty that increases their opportunities for survival, by allowing them to discriminate (*krinein*) objects that would benefit them and ones that would harm them.

This is, however, a very unsophisticated faculty: It cannot reason that something is beneficial; on some interpretations, it cannot even recognize things as, e.g., leaves or lions, having access only to "proper" perceptible qualities (color, sound, etc.) and "common" perceptibles (size, shape, motion, number).<sup>19</sup> Aristotle scholars have wondered how such a limited faculty can possibly serve its teleological function in animals that lack the power of reasoning: How can it enable them to recognize things as food, or as threats? Some argue that Aristotle simply has no answer to this worry.<sup>20</sup> Others try to solve the problem by bringing in *phantasia*, ascribing to it powers or roles nowhere explicit in Aristotle's texts, on the grounds that some such filling-in is needed to make sense of his account.<sup>21</sup>

Our passage (8), however, suggests a simple explanation: The perceptual faculty is designed so that when it comes in contact with beneficial and harmful objects, it responds with special feelings—pleasure and pain—and it is these feelings that guide the animal toward the beneficial and away from the harmful.<sup>22</sup> We get strong confirmation of this view from the *de Sensu*: **(p. 71)**

(10) Taste [must belong to all animals] on account of nutrition, for by it one distinguishes the pleasant and the painful in food, in order to flee the one and pursue the other ... When we are hungry the smells of [foods] are pleasant, but not pleasant to those who have been filled and need no more. (*de Sensu* 436b16–18, 443b24–26).<sup>23</sup>

Creatures are so designed that, when all goes well, when and only when food will benefit them does its taste or smell please them; given the essential connection between pleasure and appetite (which we will consider below), this is enough to ensure that they pursue foods that benefit them and avoid those that would harm them. An animal pursues her food not because she judges "This is food," or "This is a banana," and then reasons or intuits that she needs to eat such things in order to survive, but because when she

smells or eats it, she gets a special feeling: pleasure.<sup>24</sup>

For the teleological account to work pleasure must be closely linked to desire. Earlier in the *de Anima* Aristotle has asserted that it is:

(11) Wherever there is perception there is also pain and pleasure, and wherever these are there is of necessity appetite too ...; Whatever has the perceptive faculty also has the desiderative, for ... whatever has perception also has pleasure and pain and the pleasant and painful, and whatever has these also has appetite. For appetite is desire for the pleasant. (*de An.* II.3 413b23–24; 414b1–6)

(8c–d) may simply reiterate the claim that pleasurable perception necessarily entails desire; it is often taken to imply the much stronger claim that pleasurable perception *is* desire.<sup>25</sup> The lines are difficult and contentious, however, and for our purposes there is no need to take sides. We set out to show that Aristotle holds that appetite is for the apparent good in the robust sense of being for something the agent is in some way aware of as good. Aristotle defines appetite as desire for the pleasant (see [11]). Thus—whether or not the desiring is distinct from the pleasure taken or anticipated in its object—if feeling perceptual pleasure in something is literally cognizing it as good, we have shown what we needed to show.

Before we turn to consider that ‘if,’ I should note that while the arguments I have given in this section go beyond what others have said, this general interpretation of the *de Anima* passage is supported by commentators ancient and modern:

To experience pleasure or distress ... is nothing else but to perceive something as commensurate or incommensurate with the perceiver. (*Philoponus*, commentary on Aristotle's *de Anima*, ad loc.)

In being pleased perception cleaves to its proper (*oikeia*) activity as good, while in being pained it rejects it as bad. (*Simplicius*, commentary on Aristotle's *de Anima*, ad loc.)

[Aristotle] defines pleasure and pain to consist in ‘the consciousness, by means of the discriminating faculty (*tê aisthêtikê mesotêti*) of the senses, of coming into contact with good or evil. (A. Grant, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, vol. 1, 256)

**(p.72)** Finally, a very brief comment on Aristotle's more famous discussion of pleasure in the ethical works. Here the focus is not mainly on the pleasure involved in appetitive desire, but it is notable that Aristotle's more general theory of pleasure is, according to an established interpretation, very close to the account of perceptual pleasure we derived above. Pleasure is “a way in which the goodness of the activity is experienced through its effects on our subjectivity in general, or our sensibility in particular”;<sup>26</sup> “something's being pleasant is a prereflective way of its seeming to be good.”<sup>27</sup>

### III. Non-Trivial, Non-Insane

I wanted to show that Aristotle construes perceptual pleasure as literal cognition of value,

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## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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and thus that his view that appetites are for the apparent good is both substantive and sane. So far as the insanity charge goes, we are doing well. If feeling perceptual pleasure in something counts as a way of finding it good then one requires almost no cognitive sophistication whatever to desire something as good; hence the claim that animals and babies desire things *qua* good loses its absurdity. Akratics might seem still to pose a worry, but here we must distinguish between different modes of value-cognition. On Aristotle's account there can be cognitive dissonance between the perceiving part of the soul (the source of appetites) and the reasoning part (the source of the rational *prohairesis*, deliberated desires, which conflict with appetites in cases of *akrasia*):

(4) [expanded] The desired and the wished for is either the good or the apparent good (*phainomenon agathon*). And this is why the pleasant is desired, for it is an apparent good; for some believe it is, and to some it appears [good] although they do not believe it so. For *phantasia* [quasi-perceptual appearance] and *doxa* [rational belief] do not reside in the same part of the soul. (*EE* 1235b26–29)<sup>28</sup>

The akratic agent rationally judges some tempting object bad, and thus forms a deliberated desire to avoid it, but the object appears good to her perceptive soul, and so she appetitively desires it.<sup>29</sup> Her appetite, just as much as her rational desire, is for something she finds good.

On the triviality front, however, things might look bad. What I have said so far, instead of diminishing the worry set out in section I, may only strengthen it. For it might seem that we can cash out the notion of value-perception I have attributed to Aristotle entirely without reference to cognition.

When a creature comes into perceptual contact with something in fact good for it, and all is functioning smoothly, it registers the presence of the object with a feeling of pleasure; I want to say that on Aristotle's view this feeling is its cognizing (*krinein*) the goodness of the object. The (p.73) deflationist will object that perceptual pleasure is not itself a way of perceiving the qualities of external objects, but rather a purely affective state, a feeling that arises from perception as a separable result. The slug discerns, through its sense of taste, some perceptible properties of the leaf, and as a consequence gets a special tingle, just as it might as another consequence get a nasty rash. The slug is designed to get this special tingle when and only when it tastes something good for it (although the system fails in the case of poisoned leaves and the like), but what it is actually perceiving is only the taste of the leaf, not the leaf's goodness. Thus talk of value-perception turns out to be mere metaphor: When Aristotle says that the pleasant appears good he means no more than that it is pleasurable, and when he says that appetites are for the apparent good, he means no more than that they are for the pleasant. Appetite directs us, when all goes well, toward what is, in fact, good for us, without depending on any awareness of that good *as* good.

There are, however, three important reasons for rejecting this deflationist view—three reasons for maintaining that pleasurable perception is genuine cognition of value. Two of them emerge from our account of the *de Anima* passage, as follows.

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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The main reason to count perceptual pleasure as a literally cognitive state concerns its function. Recall that I am using 'cognitive' to stand in for Aristotle's *kritikon*, i.e., to denote the property that thought, perception and *phantasia* have in common. A state is cognitive, on this use, just in case it is a creature's way of discerning or discriminating some property. That something is beneficial or harmful to a creature—that it contributes to or detracts from her flourishing—is on Aristotle's view an objective, although of course agent-relative, fact about that thing: Being beneficial is a property of external objects out there to be discovered. More specifically, it is what the *Categories* would classify as a relation (*pros ti*): for some food to be good for an animal (e.g.) is for that food to stand in a certain relation to the animal—the relation, as we saw above, of contributing to her *telos*.

If feeling pleasure is, as I have argued, an agent's way of becoming aware that a perceived object is beneficial, then pleasure registers a fact about an external object: that the object stands in this particular relation to the agent.<sup>30</sup> It is thus fully cognitive in the relevant sense. That it does not require possession of the concept of goodness, nor the ability literally to predicate 'good' (or even 'pleasant') of an object, in no way impugns its status as genuine awareness: In feeling pleasure a creature's perceptual system need not perceive *that* the object is good, but it does discriminate (is aware of, *kritikon* of) the object's goodness. Just as in tasting a leaf the slug's perceptual system discriminates the leaf's dryness, so in pleurably tasting the leaf it discriminates the leaf's goodness.

None of this is meant to downplay the aspects of Aristotle's account of value-perception that make it sound at times noncognitivist. Perceiving something as good is inseparable from having "pro-attitudes" toward it, affective and conative: being in favor of it, being disposed to pursue it, being (p.74) pleased by it. My claim is just that finding something good does not reduce to these noncognitive states. Even though it is an affective state (and on some interpretations of [8c–d] a conative one as well), it is at the same time a genuinely cognitive state: perceptual discrimination of a perceptible feature of an external object.<sup>31</sup> Thus we have in *de An.* III.7's description of perceptual pleasure an account of a kind of finding-good that one can attribute to nonrational agents without triviality as well as without insanity.

Our *de Anima* passage also suggests a second important reason for construing pleasure as genuine cognition: In calling pleasure an activity of the "perceptive mean," Aristotle implies that it is literally an exercise of the perceptual faculty, the *aisthêtikon*.

The simplest way to understand this is saying that pleasure is itself a form of perception, and there is some evidence for this being precisely Aristotle's view:

(12) The movements (*kinêseis*) of pleasures and pains and in general (*holôs*) of every perception appear to begin from [the heart] and terminate there.<sup>32</sup> (PA 666a11–13, emphasis mine)

Aristotle nowhere else says that pleasures and pains are perceptions; at one point—*EN* 1175b34–35, discussed below—he outright denies it. But throughout the corpus he treats pleasures and pain as affections or states of the perceptual system, physiologically

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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very similar to ordinary perception. In the *de Anima* he defines perception in general as a “kind of alteration” of the *aisthêtikon* (415b24); in the *Physics*, he defines pleasures and pains in just the same way, as “alterations of the *aisthêtikon*” (*Phys.* 247a16–17). Some argue that this line from the *Physics* must represent an Academic view that Aristotle later rejected, because it seems incompatible with the *Ethics*' argument that pleasure is an activity (*energeia*) rather than process (*kinêsis*). If Aristotle changed his mind about whether pleasure is an activity or process, however, he remained constant about the system to which it belongs: As we have just recalled, (8b) from the *de Anima* calls being pleased an activity (a way of *energein*) of the “perceptive mean.” Moreover, just after *EN* X denies that pleasures are identical with perceptions it argues that the two are so intimately related as to be “inseparable” (1175b34–35); this makes its view in principle compatible with the *Physics*' and *de Anima*'s claims that the pleasures of perception are themselves activities or affections of the perceptual system. (*EN* VII, meanwhile, arguably confirms the identity thesis: Pleasures are unimpeded activities, so when perception is unimpeded, it is pleasure.) Let us consider how one might reconcile these views of pleasure with Aristotle's general account of perception.

According to the *de Motu Animalium*, when an agent perceives (or otherwise cognizes) an object of pursuit or avoidance, the bodily parts around her heart are altered in a special way (see *MA* 702b15–25): They are heated or chilled. (This, in turn, leads to other bodily changes, including expansions and contractions of these and adjacent parts, and thereby (p.75) to large-scale locomotion.) This phenomenon particularly—perhaps uniquely—occurs with pleasant and painful objects:

(13) ... for the painful is to-be-avoided, the pleasant to-be-pursued.... And nearly all painful and pleasant things are accompanied by some chilling or heating. (*MA* 701b36–702a1)

Although the *MA* does not spell out the connection between physical states and psychological states as clearly as we would like, it suggests that when an animal perceives some pleasant or painful taste or other quality, that quality further affects it by heating or chilling the area around its heart, this being the physical aspect of its experiencing pleasure or pain.

This means that the process is similar to that whereby, on a plausible interpretation of Aristotle's theory, we perceive “common” perceptibles like being square or in motion.<sup>33</sup> In perception of commons, some proper perceptible (e.g., taste or color) strikes a peripheral sensory organ, and from there impacts the central organ of perception, the heart, thereby effecting perception of the common perceptible.<sup>34</sup> Just as with pleasurable or painful perception as described in the *MA*'s account, in the course of perceiving some proper perceptible quality of an object the perceiver undergoes alterations in the region around her heart.

If pleasure is literally a species of perception (as arguably implied by [12] from the *PA* and *EN* VII), then it is just like perception of commons in that these alterations around the heart constitute perception of some further property of the external object. The main

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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difference is that when what we are perceiving is (e.g.) the squareness of a blue object, the changes around the heart involve no temperature changes, while when what we are perceiving is (e.g.) the goodness of a sweet object or the badness of a bitter one, they include heating or chilling—and thus the experience is pleasurable or painful rather than affectively neutral.

This view allows us to take the idea that pleasure and pain are *kritika* of value very straightforwardly. What about the *EN X* view of pleasure as an “inseparable” effect of perception? Here the analogy with perception of commons is looser, but still holds. If pleasure is an inseparable effect of activities, “a supervening perfection like the bloom of youth on those in their prime” (1174b33), then the pleasure proper to each activity is so closely bound up with the activity that the activity could not occur without it, would not be that very activity. (To put it another way, if pleasure is what “completes” activities, then there can be no complete activity without pleasure.<sup>35</sup>) And thus there is an intrinsic difference between the perceptual system and its activities on occasions when there is no pleasure and on occasions when there is; pleasurable perceptions are different, *qua* perceptions, from nonpleasurable ones. If we are to reconcile this view with the *MA*, the idea would be that heatings and chillings, although effects of perception rather than actual perceptions, are effects on the perceptual system itself—consistent with both *Phys.* 247a16–17 and (8b) from the *de Anima*.

**(p.76)** Thus on either view of pleasure, when one feels pleasure in, e.g., a sweet taste, one's perceptual system is functioning differently from how it functions when one feels no pleasure in the taste. And since, as we have already seen, this psychophysical difference makes for a cognitive difference as well—in the former case the perceptual system is discriminating not merely the leaf's taste, but also its value—it is a difference in the perceptual system *qua* perceptual (rather than a difference that is merely incidental to that system's nature and function). Here then is a second reason to count perceptual pleasure as genuine value-cognition: It is an exercise of the perceptual system *qua* perceptive.

Parallels between Aristotle's theoretical epistemology and his view of moral education suggest a third reason. To develop and defend this claim is too big a project to undertake here; I will leave it as a suggestion that, if accepted, strongly bolsters the conclusions of this chapter.<sup>36</sup>

The claim is that on Aristotle's view, perceptual pleasure forms the basis for our thoughts about goodness. Just as ordinary perception is at the basis of all theoretical cognition, so practical perception, i.e., pleasurable or painful perception, is at the basis of all practical cognition, i.e., finding-good. We can call this Aristotle's practical empiricism: Just as one gets to grasp the universal squareness by having perceived particular squares (see e.g., *Posterior Analytics* I.18), one gets to grasp the universal goodness by having perceived particular things as good—i.e., by having felt perceptual pleasure in them.<sup>37</sup>

Given an epistemology like Aristotle's, the perceptual state one is in when all is going well and one looks at something square deserves to be called “perceiving as square” both

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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because it is caused by squareness in an external object and because it is on the basis of such perceptions that one comes to have a concept of squareness. If pleasurable perception provides the inductive basis for the concept of goodness, then it deserves to be called "perceiving as good" for the same kinds of reasons.<sup>38</sup>

### Notes

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### Notes:

(1) . *Prohairesis* is rational in the straightforward sense of being the product of rational deliberation (see *EN* III.2–3); it is more difficult to say in what sense *boulêsis* is rational (Aristotle declares that it is at *de An.* 433a22–25, *Topics* 126a13, and *Rhetoric* 1369a3),

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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but at the least it occurs only in rational animals (*EN* 1111b12–13).

(2) . Compare “All men strive for the apparent good (*phainomenon agathon*), but no one is in control of the appearance (*phantasia*): the way the end appears to someone depends on what sort of a man he is” (*EN* 1114a32–b1). Translations throughout are mine unless otherwise noted.

(3) . Aristotle uses ‘fine’ in this context as interchangeable with ‘good’: cf. *MA* 700b25–26.

(4) . The discussion surrounding (2) reveals that ‘apparent’ is ambiguous: Some desires are for things that are in fact good, and others for things *merely* apparently good, but every desired object appears good to the one who desires it. Thus, although Aristotle never draws attention to the ambiguity, “Desire is for the good or the apparent good” should be read as “Desire is for what appears good to the desirer, where this is either genuinely good—in the case of correct rational desire—or merely apparently so.”

(5) . This is not to say that the view that rational desires are for the good needs no defense. On my view—which I will not have room to present here—Aristotle thinks rational desires are good-dependent because he thinks they are ultimately based on pleasurable perception. [For a brief indication of how this will work, see the final section of this chapter; for much fuller defense, see my *Aristotle on the Apparent Good* (work in progress)]. In saying that all desire is for the apparent good, then, Aristotle is not bizarrely extending a feature distinctive of rational desire to appetitive desire; instead, he is extending a feature of appetitive desire—that it is for what one finds pleasant, and thus, as I shall argue here, for what one finds good—to rational desire.

(6) . Irwin offers this as a response to what I have called the insanity charge.

(7) . Irwin does not mean to apply his analysis to akratic appetites, but only to those of lower animals; in the texts that characterize the object of appetite as the apparent good, however—see especially *MA* 6 and *de An.* III.10—Aristotle seems unconcerned to draw any distinctions between human and animal appetites.

(8) . “We see that the things which move the animal are thinking (*dianoia*) and *phantasia* and decision (*prohairesis*) and wish (*boulêsis*) and appetite (*epithumia*). And all these can be reduced to thought (*nous*) and desire (*orexis*). For both *phantasia* and perception hold the same place as thought, for they are all *kritika*” (*MA* 700b17–20); cf. *de An.* 432a16.

(9) . Aristotle outright denies this possibility at *EN* 1110b10–15: Voluntary action is always pleasurable.

(10) . The manuscripts are divided between *touto* and *tauton* or *tauto* at 431a12. See discussion below.

(11) . See Hamlyn’s note *ad loc* (D. W. Hamlyn, *Aristotle, De Anima Books II and III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968)).

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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(12) . This is a common interpretation, but some take the “as such” to mean “as perceptible,” or even “as pleasant or painful.” I take my reading to be supported by the arguments I give in what follows.

(13) . A. Gotthelf, “The Place of the Good in Aristotle’s Natural Teleology,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1989): 113–39.

(14) . See Gotthelf, *op. cit.*, and J.M. Cooper, “Aristotle on Natural Teleology,” in M. Schofield and M. C. Nussbaum, eds., *Language and Logos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 197–222

(15) . For that matter, there can be mistakes in the nutritive case too: just as a slug might take pleasure in the taste of a poisonous leaf, a tree’s roots might soak up acid rain.

(16) . Translation by C. Rowe, in S. Broadie and C. Rowe, *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford, 2002). Compare Aristotle’s claims that the things that please the base are not pleasant “without qualification” (*haplôs*), or not pleasant “by nature” (see, e.g., *EN* 1153a5–6; compare 1176a13–22).

(17) . This is a version of the question that arises in Plato’s *Philebus*: Why does Socrates say that bad pleasures are false, rather than merely bad? For accounts of the *Philebus*’s answer that accord with what I say here about value-perception, see V. Harte, “The *Philebus* on Pleasure: The Good, the Bad and the False,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104, no. 2 (2004): 113–30; and M. Evans, “Plato on the Possibility of Hedonic Mistakes,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2008): 89–124.

(18) . This is ground well covered in the literature; see, e.g., Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, 303–5.

(19) . That is, “incidental” perceptibles can only be recognized by perception in combination with the higher cognitive faculties that nonhuman animals lack: see, e.g., J. I. Beare, *Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), 286ff.; and C. Kahn, “Aristotle on Thinking,” in M. Nussbaum and A. Rorty, eds., *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 359–79.

(20) . “[There is] a major problem for the interpretation of animal perception. Clearly animals need to ‘make sense’ of their perceptions. Do they have something corresponding to sortal classifications like *man*, *dog* [which in humans are the work of *nous*]? Aristotle has apparently nothing to say on this question except that, lacking *logos*, animals cannot have *our* way of understanding what they perceive” [“Aristotle on Thinking,” in M. Nussbaum and A. Rorty, eds., *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 359–79., 369 note].

(21) . M. Nussbaum, *Aristotle’s De Motu Animalium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), Essay V; H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chapter 9. On Nussbaum’s influential account, *phantasia* must be present along with perception to interpret sounds, colors,

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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and shapes *as* bananas and lions and the like. Lorenz argues that through *phantasia* animals envisage complex scenarios, and associate them with present perceptions, so that they are motivated to pursue goals.

(22) . Many have recognized that pleasure plays some crucial role here: see, e.g., C. Freeland, "Aristotle on Perception, Appetition, and Self-Motion," in M. L. Gill and J. G. Lennox, eds. *Self-Motion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 49; D. Modrak, "Phantasia Reconsidered," *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie* 68 (1986): 47–69, at 60; and J. Whiting, "Locomotive Soul: The Parts of Soul in Aristotle's Scientific Works," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002): 141–200, at 173. My interpretation differs from Modrak's and Freeland's by making the link between pleasure and perception more direct (not requiring the mediation of *phantasia*); it is in many ways close to Whiting's.

(23) . Compare *de Partibus Animalium* (= PA) 661a6–8: "All animals have appetite for food because they have (*hōs echonta*) perception of the pleasure that arises from food."

(24) . There will still be important questions as to how the animal associates the pleasant taste of her food with the mere sight of it, or what motivates her to set off in search of food when none is in view. Here *phantasia* must indeed play a crucial role, conjuring up a memory or anticipation of the pleasant taste. I would argue, however, that *phantasia*'s efficacy depends on its reproducing the pleasurable quality of perceptions, so that perceptual pleasure remains the basic mechanism of motivation.

(25) . "That which is appetitive, then, is not different as a subject from the power to perceive but differs only in account, since sense is simple cognition of the sensible as such, whereas appetite is cognition of the sensible as destructive or preservative of the animal" (Philoponus, commentary on Aristotle's *de Anima*). For extensive defense and discussion of the view, see D. Charles, "Aristotle's Desire," in V. Hirnoven, T. Holpainen, and M. Tuominen, eds., *Mind and Modality: Studies in the History of Philosophy in Honour of Simo Knuuttila* (Leiden: Brill, 2006)

(26) . J. M. Cooper, "Reason, Moral Virtue and Moral Value," 270, on EN X.4 in M. Frede and G. Striker, eds., *Rationality in Greek Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 81–114; reprinted in Cooper, *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 107–29.

(27) . S. Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 329. There is one passage in EN X.5 that may seem to contradict this interpretation directly: here Aristotle says that while pleasure is closely related to, indeed inseparable from, perception (and thought), it would be "absurd" (*atopon*) to hold that pleasure is itself perception (or thought) (1175b34–35). I discuss this passage below.

(28) . Compare the parallel explanation of perceptual illusions: "The cause of these is that the faculty in virtue of which the ruling part judges is not identical with that in virtue of which *phantasmata* [quasi-perceptual appearances] come before the mind. A proof of this

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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is that the sun appears only a foot in diameter, though often something else contradicts the *phantasia*" (*de Insomniis* 460b16–20).

(29) . For this interpretation, see my "Aristotle on *Akrasia* and Perceptual Illusion," *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie*, 91 (2009): 119–56

(30) . For a detailed account along these lines, see D. Achtenberg, *Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics: Promise of Enrichment, Threat of Destruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). She argues that "perception of value is ... perception of a certain kind of relatedness, namely, the internal relation [Aristotle] calls '*entelecheia*' or '*energeia*' and that we might call 'development,' 'completion,' 'or 'fulfillment'"; "Since good means *telos* or its variants, when we see something as good, then, we are seeing it as a *telos* or as *teleion* [complete/perfect] or a *teleiôsis* [completion/perfection], and so forth" (*Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics*, 44 and 65).

(31) . For a similar view of perceptual pleasure, see D. Charles, "Aristotle's Desire"; for a parallel view about *prohairesis* (that it is at once a cognitive, affective, and conative state), see R. Demos, "Some Remarks on Aristotle's Doctrine of Practical Reason," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22 (1961–62): 153–62.

(32) . Aristotle often uses 'x, y and in general (*holôs*) z' when x and y are species of z: Compare, e.g., *de Sensu* 436a9: "spirit and appetite and in general desire," and *EN* 1105b21–23: "I mean by passions appetite, anger, fear ... pity, in general those things which pleasure and pain attend."

(33) . Indeed this is what we should expect: Pleasures and pains are more similar to perception of common perceptibles than to perception of "proper" perceptibles—color, sound, smell, and the like—for we can experience them through any of the five senses. Another way to state the point is that being beneficial or harmful, like being in motion but unlike being blue, can be perceived (granting that it can be perceived at all) through more than one sense. For different arguments for a similar view of pleasure—that it is an analogue of perception of common perceptibles, with the object perceived being goodness—see T. Tuozzo, "Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desire in Aristotle," *Journal for the History of Philosophy* 32 (1994): 525–49, at 535–36.

(34) . Suggested by Aristotle's claim that the heart is the organ of the common sense, as at, e.g., *de Somno* 2 and *de Juventate* 469a5–18, in conjunction with his claim that it is the common sense that directly grasps the common perceptibles (e.g., *de Memoria* 450a9–14). For one version of the view that common perceptibles are grasped by the common sense, see Hicks, *Aristotle, De Anima*, 427. Gregoric refers to it as "the standard view" (and rejects it: Gregoric, *Aristotle on the Common Sense*, 71 ff.).

(35) . *Contra* G. E. L. Owen, "Aristotelian Pleasures," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1971/2): 135–52. For an interpretation on which pleasure is even more closely linked with perception than I have proposed, see J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 209–13. As I understand their argument, pleasure is what actualizes

## Aristotle's Non-Trivial, Non-Insane View that Everyone Always Desires Things under the Guise of the Good

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the faculty of perception in certain circumstances, and thus there are not two separate things, the activity of perceiving and the pleasure arising from it, but only one thing, the perfect, i.e., pleasurable, activity; on this view, Book X is compatible with Book VII (Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 207–8).

(36) . I develop the view in my manuscript *Aristotle on the Apparent Good*. For a compelling defense of the main claim, on different grounds, see T. Tuozzo, “Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desire in Aristotle”; a view similar to mine is strongly implied by J. Burnet (*The Ethics of Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1900), 76).

(37) . I find my evidence for the view in the *EN*. The idea, very briefly, is this: Habituation leads us to take pleasure in (to perceive as good) a certain kind of activity, virtuous or vicious (*EN* II); this forms our moral characters, where part of this formation is giving us a certain general *phantasia* of the good (*EN* III.4–5); on the basis of this *phantasia* we reach our rational judgments about what is good. For a related view, see D. Achtenberg, *Aristotle on the Cognition of Value*.

(38) . I am extremely grateful to Sergio Tenenbaum, and to the other participants in the conference he organized on desire and practical reason. Many thanks also to an extremely helpful audience at USC, and for comments and discussion from Klaus Corcilius, Cian Dorr, Simon Keller, and Wolfgang Mann.



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