

Pleasure Essay Questions

General Themes

- Coherence and Plausibility of Aristotle's Account (220603 Q10 Or, 180602 Q12, 130604 Q10)
- Goodness of Pleasure and Aristotle's Response to Hedonism (200528 Q11, 190613 Q10, 170608 Q11, 160603 Q11)

220603 Q10 Either

'People who eat nuts in theatres do this most when the actors are bad.' Explain the significance of Aristotle's remark for his account of pleasure. Is his distinction between 'proper' and 'alien' pleasures persuasive?

220603 Q10 Or

'That our Nicomachean Ethics is not a unity is beyond controversy – the existence of two treatments of pleasure is enough to prove the fact.' (JONATHAN BARNES) Does Aristotle offer two incompatible accounts of pleasure in the Nicomachean Ethics?

- Interpret Aristotle's account of pleasure at VII.11-14, as an unimpeded activity belonging to a capacity in a natural state.
- Aristotle's account of pleasure at X.1-5 is not clear, and two competing interpretations are possible. These interpretations agree that Aristotle in X.1-5 thinks that pleasure is something that "completes" an activity belonging to a capacity in good condition and with an excellent object. These interpretations differ in the sense in which pleasure "completes" this activity.
- Reject the interpretation under which pleasure is something "extra".
- On the supervenience reading, Aristotle's two accounts of pleasure are seen different and incompatible.
- Irwin brings Aristotle's account of pleasure in VII.11-14 "closer" to the apparent account in X.1-5. On Irwin's reading, pleasure is some other unimpeded activity that accompanies an activity belonging to a natural state.
- Irwin's interpretation is not plausible because on this account, Aristotle could not argue, as he evidently does in VII.11-14, that eudaimonia is a pleasure, and so pleasure is in some sense the supreme good.
- Owen argues that the two accounts of pleasure are answers to different questions rather than incompatible answers to the same question.

200528 Q11

What role does Aristotle give to pleasure in the happy life? Is it plausible?

- Aristotle, quite misleadingly, writes that pleasure is, in some sense, the supreme good. But Aristotle is quite evidently not a hedonist, and it is clear that what Aristotle means is simply that the supreme good, eudaimonia, is a pleasure. Aristotle writes that the supreme good is, in some sense, a pleasure, presumably because Aristotle wants to remain at least linguistically close to "the common beliefs".
- Aristotle apparently offers two accounts of pleasure, one at VII.11-14 and another at X.1-5, and it is not clear that both afford precisely the same role to pleasure in the happy life.
- At VII.11-14, Aristotle clearly rejects the strong antihedonist view that no pleasure is good, and argues that eudaimonia is pleasant, but it is not clear whether Aristotle here maintains that all pleasures are good. Aristotle does respond to objections to the goodness of all pleasure, but it is not clear whether Aristotle aims to show merely that these objections are unsuccessful, or that their conclusion is false.
- At X.1-5 Aristotle more clearly rejects the hedonist view that pleasure is the supreme good in the ordinary sense. Aristotle also rejects antihedonist arguments. Here, it is more clear that Aristotle does not think all pleasures are good. Aristotle here argues that the goodness or badness of a pleasure derives from the goodness or badness of the activity it is associated with.
- Evaluate Aristotle's arguments against the hedonist, against the antihedonist, and for the contingent goodness of pleasure individually.

190613 Q10

If pleasure completes every activity, why is Aristotle not a hedonist?

180602 Q12

What is the role of pleasure in Aristotle's account of the human good?

170608 Q11

Explain what exactly is wrong with hedonism, according to Aristotle, and evaluate his view.

- Aristotle's argument against hedonism appears in X.2 and is repeated at the end of X.3, that pleasure alone is not "self-sufficient" whereas we think that the supreme good, eudaimonia is.
- In contrast, Aristotle thinks that eudaimonia is pleasant, but does not consist in pleasure, and that the goodness or badness of a pleasure derives from the goodness or badness of the activity that it is associated with.
- That the goodness or badness of a pleasure derives from its associated activity is supported by Aristotle's argument that the nature of a pleasure more generally derives from the nature of the associated activity. This is plausible.
- But this does not entail that the goodness or badness of a pleasure derives from that of the associated activity, and merely leaves room for it.

160603 Q11

'Shameful pleasures may not be fine or good, but they are still pleasures'. How would Aristotle respond to this claim?

- Aristotle would respond that shameful pleasures are only qualifiedly pleasures. Unqualified pleasures that are truly pleasant for humans are the pleasures of the excellent person. Shameful pleasures are only pleasant to vicious persons.
- Consider Bostock's objection to this response.
- Aristotle appears to offer the further response that such pleasures are bad because they are associated with bad activities.
- These responses allow Aristotle to maintain that, in some sense, all pleasures are good, because all unqualified pleasures are good, and also that shameful pleasures are bad but are still (in some sense) pleasures.
- Even if Bostock's objection is successful, Aristotle can accommodate the claim that all pleasures are good by conceding that this is true in a qualified sense. Aristotle maintains that the bodily pleasures (the pleasures of sense perception) are good to some extent. The pleasures of thought, Aristotle will maintain, are always good.
 - The argument for this is that bodily pains are bad.
- This is implausible because there is no "excess" or "satiation point" for the sadistic pleasure from torturing innocent children. So Aristotle's insight that the nature of a pleasure derives from the nature of its associated activity is correct.

130604 Q10

How should we understand Aristotle's claim that pleasure 'completes' an activity? Does it?