

## The Nature of Pleasure in *Magna Moralia* 2.7.1-27, 1204a19-1206a36

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### Introduction

Among the ethical writings in the Aristotelian corpus, there are three sustained discussions of pleasure (*hēdonē*): at *Eudemian Ethics* 6.11-14 = *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.11-14, 1152b1-1154b34 (hereafter *E*); at *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.1-5, 1172a19-1176a29 (hereafter *N*); and at *Magna Moralia* 2.7.1-27, 1204a19-1206a36 (hereafter *M*).<sup>1</sup> *E* and *N* have received ample scholarly attention, particularly in relation to one another and due to the fact that their constructive views of the nature and value of pleasure are inconsistent or at least appear so.<sup>2</sup> *M* has largely been neglected, especially in the last half century.<sup>3</sup> The general aim of this chapter is to remedy the neglect of *M*. The discussion focuses on clarifying *M*'s constructive view of the nature of pleasure.<sup>4</sup> Treatment of *M*'s constructive view of the value of pleasure would require a separate chapter. But the discussion will touch on this topic insofar as it bears on the account of *M*'s view of the nature of pleasure.

Regarding *M*'s constructive view of the nature of pleasure, I argue for two main theses: an ambiguity thesis and a bicomponential thesis. The ambiguity thesis states that according to *M* "pleasure" is two-ways ambiguous. I call the two entities that "pleasure" denotes "pleasure<sub>R</sub>" and "pleasure<sub>I</sub>." The bicomponential thesis states that pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub> each have two components: a "core" component and a "contextual" component. The core component, which pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub> share, is a kind of activity (*energeia*). I refer to this as "hedonic activity." By "activity" I mean the exercise of a personal-level psychological capacity. In *M*, hedonic activity is the exercise of a psychological capacity that is dedicated to this activity. A psychological capacity is dedicated to hedonic activity insofar as only that psychological capacity can realize hedonic activity. Contrast the possibility of two kinds of hedonic activity, say, intellectual and visual, being realized by the distinct psychological faculties of intellect and vision.

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<sup>1</sup> See also *Rh.* 1.11, 1369b33-1372a3.

<sup>2</sup> I believe they are inconsistent. Owen (1971-2) influentially argued that they are only seemingly so. Contra Owen, see Gosling (1973-74). See also Kenny (1978) 233-39. Aufderheide (2013) is a recent treatment of *E* that supports Owen.

<sup>3</sup> The principal exceptions are Dirlmeier (1973, 395-419) and Gosling and Taylor (1982, 455-71). See also the somewhat earlier contribution of Festugière (1960, 6-10).

<sup>4</sup> The claim that *M* presents any constructive account of the nature of pleasure itself goes against the grain of scholarship. For example, Gosling and Taylor write of the critical doxography in *M*: "there is no account of the nature of pleasure to establish the thesis [that pleasure is good] and underpin the refutations [of the antihedonist thesis that pleasure is not good]." (1982, 458) It is true that there is no sustained independent account of the nature of pleasure in *M* as there is in *N*. But neither is there such an account in *E*. A constructive account of pleasure is conveyed in *M* through its critical engagement with the various antihedonist arguments.

The contextual component of pleasure<sub>R</sub> and of pleasure<sub>I</sub> is some set of features of the context of the core component, the hedonic activity. The contextual components of pleasure<sub>R</sub> and of pleasure<sub>I</sub> differ. The contextual component of pleasure<sub>R</sub> is a physiological restoration that co-occurs with the hedonic activity and a pain that immediately precedes these. The contextual component of pleasure<sub>I</sub> is simply the absence of those features, that is, the absence of a co-occurring restoration and antecedent pain. If hedonic activity occurs, one of these contextual components occurs, and so one of pleasure<sub>R</sub> or pleasure<sub>I</sub> occurs. I explain why *M* conceives of "pleasure" as ambiguous and of pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub> as bicomponential in this way as due to the influence of Plato's bicomponential conception of pleasure.

Section one focuses on *M*'s views that "pleasure" is two-ways ambiguous and that pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub> are each bicomponential. Section two focuses on *M*'s view that hedonic activity is the activity of a psychological capacity that is dedicated to this activity. I contrast this view with *E*'s view according to which pleasure is the complete activity of any one of several psychological capacities. Section three briefly compares *M*'s and *N*'s views of pleasure. I suggest that *N*'s view may be compatible with *M*'s view of pleasure<sub>I</sub>, depending on how both views are further specified. The discussion concludes by remarking on an apparent incoherence in *M* pertaining to the comparison of *M* and *N*. Precisely, how can pleasure<sub>R</sub>, which *M* also describes as a movement (*kinēsis*), be complete (*teleion*)?<sup>5</sup>

To facilitate the discussion, it will be convenient to have in mind the following overview of the structure of *M*:

- 1204a19-32: Introduction and motivation of the discussion of pleasure
- 1204a32-b3: Introduction of five arguments in support of the antihedonist thesis that pleasure is not a good thing:
  - 1204a32-35: Introduction of the generation argument
  - 1204a35-36: Introduction of the baseness argument
  - 1204a36-b1: Introduction of the commonness argument
  - 1204b1-2: Introduction of the optimality argument
  - 1204b2-3: Introduction of the impediment argument
- 1204b4-1206a35: Criticism of the five plus one antihedonist arguments:
  - 1204b4-1205a6: Criticism of the generation argument
  - 1205a7-25: Disconnected passage
    - 1205a7-15: First section of disconnected passage
    - 1205a16-25: Second section of disconnected passage
  - 1205a26-b28: Criticism of the baseness argument
  - 1205b29-37: Criticism of the commonness argument
  - 1206a1-25: Criticism of the impediment argument
  - 1206a26-30: Criticism of the knowledge argument
  - 1206a31-35: Criticism of the optimality argument.

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<sup>5</sup> I insulate my discussion from the questions of *Magna Moralia*'s authorship and date. It would be rash to draw conclusions about these topics principally on the basis of *M* alone. For recent discussion of the *status quaestionis* on the authorship and date of *Magna Moralia*, see Wolt (2021, 2-8). See also Irwin's chapter in this volume.

The structure of *M* is then rather straightforward. After initially motivating the discussion, *M* introduces five antihedonist arguments. The remainder and largest portion of *M* is then devoted to criticizing each argument. In this critical portion, a sixth antihedonist argument – the knowledge argument – is also criticized. Presumably, the original composition of *M* introduced the knowledge argument along with the other five; but somehow that passage was lost in the process of textual transmission. The critical portion of *M* is further complicated by the intervention of a "disconnected" passage between the criticisms of the generation and baseness arguments that is not clearly related to the preceding or subsequent content.

### Section One: The Ambiguity of "Pleasure" and the Bicomponency of Pleasure<sub>R</sub> and Pleasure<sub>I</sub>

According to the baseness argument, some pleasures are base (*phaulai*); but what is good does not contain any baseness; so, pleasure is not good. Given this, since the antihedonist takes bodily pleasures to be base and to consist of a generation (*genesis*), *M*'s criticism of the baseness argument also involves criticism of the view that pleasure is a generation:

T1 "Since pleasure occurs both when one's [bodily]<sup>6</sup> nature (*physeōs*) is being restored (*kathistamenēs*) and when it has been restored (*kathestēkuias*) – for example, when it is being restored (*kathistamenēs*), there are replenishments that come from need; and when it has been restored (*kathestēkuias*), the [pleasures] are from sight and hearing (*apo tēs opseōs kai tēs akoēs*) and such things – the activities (*energeiai*) of a nature that has been restored (*kathestēkuias tēs physeōs*) are better [than the activities of a nature that is being restored]; for the pleasures spoken of in both ways (*hai ... hēdonai kat' amphoterās legomenai tous tropous*) are activities (*energeiai*). So, it is clear that the pleasures from sight and hearing and intellection (*apo tēs opseōs ... kai tēs akoēs kai tou dianoieisthai*) would be the best pleasures, since the bodily pleasures derive from replenishment (*ex anaplērōreōs*)." (*MM* 2.7.18, 1205b20-27)

(T1) states that pleasure is spoken of in two ways. I take this to imply that "pleasure" is two-ways semantically ambiguous.<sup>7</sup> Assuming so, I want to consider why the author of *M* maintains this view.

First, note that (T1) maintains that the two denotations of "pleasure" are activities. I will refer to these activities as "hedonic activities." Note also that earlier in *M*, precisely in the criticism of the generation argument, the author twice claims that pleasure is an activity, precisely an activity "of the soul" (*tēs psychēs*). (2.7.8, 1204b25-28; 2.7.9, 1204b34-35) According to *Magna Moralia*, activities of the soul are limited to what we would now call

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<sup>6</sup> Since what I am calling "restorative" pleasures are, at the end of this passage, explicitly identified as "bodily" (*sōmatikai*) pleasures, the nature (*physis*) that is described as either being restored or as already restored must be the body or some part of it.

<sup>7</sup> This is a common construal of Aristotelian claims of the form "x is said in many/several ways" and the like, i.e., claims of multivocity. I endorse this construal here. But it is not the only construal of such expressions. See Tolkieln (2019, 43-67).

"personal-level psychological" events.<sup>8</sup> So, hedonic activity is a kind of personal-level psychological event.<sup>9</sup>

Given the two-way ambiguity of "pleasure," (T1) characterizes the denotation of one sense of "pleasure" as "bodily" (*sōmatikē*) pleasure. This is because the hedonic activity denoted by "pleasure" in this sense co-occurs with the replenishment (*anaplērōsis*) or restoration (*katastasis*) of a physiological deficit.<sup>10</sup> I will refer to so-called bodily pleasure as "pleasure<sub>R</sub>," short for "restorative pleasure." To be clear, the hedonic activity of pleasure<sub>R</sub> is not a process of restoration. Rather, it co-occurs with a process of restoration. The other entity called "pleasure" is hedonic activity that occurs independently of any process of restoration. I will refer to it as "pleasure<sub>I</sub>."

Granted the existence of two kinds of entity, pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub>, why does *M* maintain that "pleasure" is ambiguous. For example, elsewhere *M* acknowledges various "kinds" (*eidē*) of what I am calling "pleasure<sub>I</sub>" (2.7.12, 1205a25), broadly, pleasure<sub>I</sub> derived from sense-perceiving and pleasure<sub>I</sub> derived from intellecting, but also numerous sub-kinds of these, for example, pleasure<sub>I</sub> derived from seeing and pleasure<sub>I</sub> derived from hearing. *M* also recognizes pleasure<sub>I</sub> derived from the exercise of virtue. Yet *M* never commits to the view that what I am calling "pleasure<sub>I</sub>" is itself said in more than one way.

Evidently, the fact that the hedonic activity of pleasure<sub>R</sub> co-occurs with restoration distinguishes it from pleasure<sub>I</sub>. Yet why should this support the ambiguity thesis? *M* does not directly address this question. However, it does contain content that can be used as indirect evidence to support an answer. Use of that content as evidence is itself supported by a passage in *Topics* where Aristotle claims that "pleasure" is spoken of two ways and where these two ways closely resemble those of (T1).

The *Topics* passage occurs in a discussion that describes diagnostics for detecting whether a single word or word form occurring in different contexts is semantically ambiguous (106a9-10). One set of diagnostics relates to tests for antonymy, that is, semantic opposition (*enantiotēs*). For example, when said of a sound, the antonym of "sharp" (*oxus*) is "flat" (*baru*); but when said of a concrete object, for example, a knife, the antonym is "dull" (*amblu*) (106a12-14). A distinct antonym test is whether the word or word form as it occurs in one context has an antonym, whereas in another context it lacks an antonym (106a36). Aristotle illustrates this test with "pleasure":

T2 "The pain from thirst has as an opposite the pleasure from drinking. But there is no opposite to the pleasure from contemplating that the diameter is not commensurable with the side. Consequently, pleasure is spoken of in more ways [than one] (*pleonaxōs hē hēdonē legetai*)." (*Top.* 1.15, 106a36-b1)

"Pleasure from drinking when thirsty" apparently denotes a kind of pleasure<sub>R</sub>, whereas "pleasure from contemplating a geometrical proposition" apparently denotes a kind of pleasure<sub>I</sub>. So, the

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<sup>8</sup> For "*energeia*" in *Magna Moralia*, see Wolt (2021). For the personal/subpersonal distinction in psychology, see Dennett (1969, 93) and more recently Drayson (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Contrast subpersonal, unconscious, or merely neural or physical events. For example, *Magna Moralia* maintains that the soul is responsible for certain metabolic processes, but denies that these processes are *energeiai*. (1.4.7-9, 1185a14-35)

<sup>10</sup> Strictly, replenishment is a salient form of restoration.

claim that "pleasure" is two-ways ambiguous in (T1) apparently conforms to the claim that "pleasure" is two-ways ambiguous in (T2). But whereas the ambiguity of "pleasure" in (T1) ostensibly turns on the fact that pleasure<sub>R</sub> co-occurs with physiological restoration and pleasure<sub>I</sub> does not, the application of the antonym test in (T2) encourages the idea that it is in fact the precedence by pain of the hedonic activity that constitutes pleasure<sub>R</sub> that distinguishes pleasure<sub>R</sub> from pleasure<sub>I</sub>.<sup>11</sup>

Support for this explanation of the ambiguity of "pleasure" in (T1) derives from passages in *M*'s criticism of the generation argument:

T3 "In the case of seeing and hearing and smelling, one has not had prior pain (*prolupēthēnai*). For no one who takes pleasure in seeing or smelling has had prior pain (*proelupēthē*). Similarly, in the case of intellection, it is possible for one who is contemplating (*theōrounta*) something to take pleasure without having had prior pain (*aneu tou prolupēthēnai*)" (*MM* 2.7.5, 1204b14-17)

In the context in which (T3) occurs, *M* is distinguishing pleasures<sup>12</sup> that are preceded by pain from pleasures that are not preceded by pain. Contemplation is cited as an example of pleasure that is not preceded by pain. Immediately prior to (T3), *M* cites pleasures from eating or drinking as examples of pleasures preceded by pain. (2.7.4,5, 1204b9-10,13) So, the examples *M* here uses to draw the distinction closely resemble those in the *Topics* passage, and *M* draws the distinction on the basis of precedence by pain or lack thereof.

This distinction – pleasure<sub>R</sub>, which is preceded by pain, and pleasure<sub>I</sub>, which is not – itself derives from Plato, who, in *Philebus*, characterizes it in terms of "mixed" or "impure" and "pure" pleasure.<sup>13</sup> Mixed or impure pleasure is pleasure mixed with pain and thereby impure. Plato distinguishes various kinds of mixed or impure pleasure. The kind at issue in (T2) and, as I maintain, in (T1) consists of a diachronic rather than synchronic mixture. Again, pain owing to physiological disintegration or depletion precedes the psychological activity constituting pleasure<sub>R</sub> that co-occurs with restoration.<sup>14</sup>

A crucial difference between Plato's view of pleasure, on the one hand, and (T1)'s views of pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub>, on the other, is that Plato maintains that all pleasure does not merely co-occur with, but in fact partly consists in restoration. However, in some cases – namely those of so-called pure pleasure – the antecedent condition of physiological disintegration or depletion is too subtle to register psychologically, precisely experientially. Such psychological registering is a necessary condition of pain. Consequently, in these cases, pain does not precede pleasure. In contrast, (T1) maintains that pleasure<sub>I</sub> does not co-occur with, let alone consist in, restoration.

This Platonic background and (T2) shed some light on (T1)'s commitment to the two-way ambiguity of "pleasure." Yet it remains obscure why (T2) and (T1) conclude that "pleasure" is

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<sup>11</sup> By "precedence" in this context, here and throughout I understand immediate precedence due to depletion or disintegration.

<sup>12</sup> I say "distinguishing pleasures" rather than "distinguishing what are called 'pleasures'" because in this context that author does not treat "pleasure" as ambiguous.

<sup>13</sup> For example, *Phlb.* 46c3, 48a2, 52c2.

<sup>14</sup> Given *Magna Moralia*'s understanding of *energeia*, the phrase "psychological activity" is strictly redundant. But I employ it here as an expository convenience.

two-ways ambiguous rather than that there are two basic kinds of pleasure: restorative and non-restorative.

For example, the positions of (T2) and (T1) would be clarified and vindicated if it were a semantic fact of ordinary Greek that the noun "pleasure" was two-ways ambiguous and that the two senses corresponded to pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub>. However, I see no evidence for this. Instead, the positions of (T2) and (T1) appear to be rooted in psychological and physiological theory whose result is subsequently applied to the term "pleasure."

Now, if (T2) and (T1) do base their claims of semantic ambiguity on psychological or psychophysiological theories, this justification may still be questioned. Common to pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub> is a kind of psychological event, namely hedonic activity. *M* maintains that this psychological event may co-occur with physiological restoration and be preceded by pain or that it may occur independently of any physiological restoration and not be preceded by pain. In the former case, pleasure<sub>R</sub> occurs; in the latter, pleasure<sub>I</sub>. But granting this, what prevents "pleasure" from being univocal and simply denoting hedonic activity, that is, the kind of psychological event common to both pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub>? In other words, why does the physiological context in which hedonic activity occurs matter to the meaning of "pleasure"?

I suggest that the answer to this question may lie in Plato's theory of pleasure, which, as noted, constitutes the historical background to the claim of the ambiguity of "pleasure" in (T2) and (T1). It may be natural for us today to conceive of pleasure simply as a distinctive quality of consciousness, that is, a distinctive *quale*; but this is not the way Plato viewed pleasure. He conceived of it as a restorative process, saliently a process of physiological restoration, one that registered psychologically. He conceived of the psychological registering of this process as a kind of perception (*aisthēsis*), precisely proprioception. According to this conception, Plato could characterize pleasure as a kind of generation (*genesis*), namely a perceived generation. Consider *M*'s expression of this view in the context of its criticism of the generation argument: "Some say [that pleasure is] a perceived restoration to the natural state (*apokatastasis ... eis phusin aisthētē*)." (1204b37-8)

So, according to Plato's view of pleasure as a generation, pleasure is not merely a psychological event. Granted this, as noted, one of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's generation theory of pleasure is that we correctly apply the term "pleasure" to events that do not consist of restoration and that are not preceded by pain. Such events, as described in (T2) and (T1), are cases of pleasure<sub>I</sub>. But, assuming that anything correctly called "pleasure" has a psychological component, we then have the view that "pleasure" – at least in one of its senses – denotes a psychological event that does not consist of restoration and is not preceded by pain. Insofar as this physiological and psychological context continues to inform the conceptualization of what is called "pleasure," anything so-called will not merely be identified with a kind of psychological event.

So much then for a possible answer to the question why the physiological context in which the kind of psychological event occurs matters to the meaning of "pleasure." Assume, as (T2) and (T1) claim, that "pleasure" is two-ways ambiguous. What is the significance of this for *M*'s constructive view of pleasure? The answer is that "pleasure" does not merely denote a kind of psychological event, namely, hedonic activity. Rather, "pleasure" qua two-ways ambiguous term denotes two things, of each of which hedonic activity is a proper part. In addition, each of

the two senses of "pleasure" denotes some aspect of the context of that activity, precisely whether or not the hedonic activity co-occurs with restoration and is preceded by pain.<sup>15,16</sup>

## Section Two: Hedonic Activity and the Dedication Thesis

In remarking on (T1)'s claim that pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub> are activities, I noted that *M* makes two similar claims elsewhere. Both occur in the context of criticism of the generation argument. According to the generation argument, pleasure is a generation; what is good is complete; a generation is incomplete; so, pleasure is not good. *M* criticizes the generation

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<sup>15</sup> If a term is said or spoken of in more than one way, then that term is multivocal. So, according to *M*, "pleasure" is multivocal. (In *MM*, five other terms are claimed to be multivocal: "good" (1.2.1, 1183b19-20); "witty" (1.30.2, 1193a16-17); "just" (1.33.15, 1194b15); "fortunate" (2.8.6, 1207a27); and "friendship" (2.11.16, 1209a28).) Multivocal terms are semantically ambiguous. Many multivocal terms are homonymous, but multivocality does not entail homonymy. (On this point, see Tolkiehn, 2019, 54-55, 59-63.) In fact, there are two passages in *MM* where the author explicitly speaks of homonymy. In both cases, he claims that the term under discussion – "justice" (1.33.15, 1194b6-7), "friendship" (2.11.16, 1209a29-30) – is multivocal. However, he suggests that "justice" is homonymous, but that "friendship" is not. The author of *M* is silent on whether "pleasure" is homonymous. It is questionable, then, whether evidence from *M* and from elsewhere in *MM* tells in favor of the author thinking that "pleasure" is homonymous. In other words, is the case of "pleasure" like that of "justice" or like that of "friendship"? Space constraints prohibit further consideration of this question here, save to suggest the following general idea. An Aristotelian theory of homonymy may be motivated by at least the following two things: facts of ordinary language polysemy (whether or not these are interpreted in terms of a focal sense, i.e., *pros hen*, of the word or word form in question); the Platonic metaphysically inspired semantic idea that some apparent *F*s are not truly or completely *F*; hence, they are only called "*F*" derivatively and degradedly.

<sup>16</sup> Distinct from, but related to the question whether the author of *M* views the two senses of "pleasure" as homonymous is whether he views pleasure<sub>I</sub> and pleasure<sub>R</sub> as species of a common genus. The term *genos* does not occur in *MM*. However, in considering this question, in light of the multivocality, but non-homonymy of "friendship" in *MM*, notice should also be taken of *EE* 7.2, 1236a16-32. There, Aristotle discusses the multivocality of "friendship." He claims that three kinds (*eidē*) of friendship do not have a common *genus*. Ergo, the terms for each kind are not synonymous. But Aristotle also claims that the terms for each kind are not wholly (*pampan*) homonymous either. (On this, see Tolkiehn, 2019, 150, n.324; and relatedly, regarding the possibility, mentioned in the preceding footnote, of explaining homonymy in terms of Platonic metaphysically inspired semantics – consider Tolkiehn's suggestion, at 154, that the secondary senses of "friendship" are explicable as axiologically degraded in comparison to the primary sense.) Now, it is unclear whether the author of *M* views pleasure<sub>I</sub> and pleasure<sub>R</sub> as having a common genus. More fundamentally, I doubt that he has a clear view of the *genus* of either. In considering this point, note *EN* 10.4, 1174a13. This is the only passage in the corpus where Aristotle explicitly articulates an interest in the questions: What (*ti*) is pleasure? And what sort (*poion ti*) of thing is it? This content suggests that Aristotle is here seeking a definition of pleasure *per genus et differentiam*. Remarkably, however, he does not provide an answer to the first question; and it is questionable whether he provides an answer to the second.

argument on two grounds. One is that some pleasure – that is, pleasure<sub>E</sub> – involves no generation. Another is that in cases where pleasure co-occurs with restoration – that is, pleasure<sub>R</sub> – it is not to be identified with restoration:

T4 "For since there is some part of the soul (*tēs psychēs ti meros*) by which (*hōi*) we take pleasure (*hēdometha*) at the same time that the provision of the things that we need [occurs],<sup>17</sup> this portion of the soul (*touto to morion tēs psychēs*) is active (*energei*) ... and its activity (*autou ... energeia*) is pleasure." (*MM* 2.7.8, 1204b25-28)<sup>18</sup>

Shortly after this, in the same context, the author writes:

T5 "For there is some portion of the soul by which we take pleasure (*morion ti tēs psychēs hōi hēdometha*), which is active (*energei*) at the same time that the provision [of what we need occurs]." (*MM* 2.7.9, 1204b34-35)

Here, I want to focus on (T4)'s and (T5)'s claims that "there is some part" or "some portion" of the soul responsible for hedonic activity.<sup>19</sup> On one reading, these claims support the view that hedonic activity is the activity of a psychological capacity that is dedicated to pleasure, that is, a single hedonic capacity.<sup>20</sup> However, this is not the only interpretation that (T4) and (T5) admit. Alternatively, these passages might be read as claiming that restoration is a bodily event and that this event co-occurs with an event for which some part of the soul is responsible. Moreover, granting that in the case of pleasure<sub>R</sub> – which (T4) and (T5) are here describing – hedonic activity is the activity of a psychological capacity, this does not entail that that capacity is dedicated to pleasure, let alone that every instance of hedonic activity, including that of pleasure<sub>E</sub>, is the activity of a dedicated hedonic capacity.

I will argue that all hedonic activity is activity of a single psychological capacity and so of a psychological capacity dedicated to hedonic activity. The reservations I expressed in the preceding paragraph with respect to the interpretation of (T4) and (T5) arise from reflection on *M*'s view of pleasure in comparison with *E*'s view. To convey this point, I will briefly clarify *E*'s

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<sup>17</sup> Such "provision" refers to physiological restoration. For example, the body is being provided with needed nutrition or hydration.

<sup>18</sup> I have omitted some of the text here to simplify the discussion. But I will return to the omitted portion in section three.

<sup>19</sup> Strictly speaking, (T4) and (T5)'s claims that pleasure is an activity of the soul and (T1)'s claim that "pleasure" is two-ways ambiguous are inconsistent; for my interpretation of the latter yields the view that hedonic activity is a proper part of each of the two denotations of "pleasure." Granted this, a charitable response to this strict inconsistency would maintain that *M*'s claims in (T4) and (T5) that pleasure is an activity of the soul are simplified expressions of *M*'s more nuanced views. In that case, it would also be charitable to maintain that in the remainder of *M* following the ambiguity claim, the fact that *M* does not carefully speak of one or the other sense of "pleasure" is merely an expository convenience. In any case, for the most part the remainder of *M* focuses on pleasure<sub>E</sub>.

<sup>20</sup> Compare *MM* 1.34.2-5, 1196b12-27, where the author distinguishes various parts (*morai*) of the soul on their basis of their proprietary activities and the objects or subject matters with which these activities are involved.

view, and then return to the relevance of *E*'s view to the question whether in *M* hedonic activity is activity of a dedicated hedonic capacity.

According to *E*, "pleasure" is univocal. In particular, *E* would reject *M*'s view that pleasure<sub>R</sub> is a denotation of "pleasure." Put positively, *E* only recognizes something akin to pleasure<sub>I</sub> as the denotation of "pleasure." More precisely, according to *E*, pleasure is the activity of any member of a plurality of psychological capacities, when the activity of that capacity is complete.

There is some unclarity over precisely which psychological capacities are included within the relevant plurality. Certainly, sense-perceptual and intellectual capacities are included. Characterological capacities, including emotional and motivational capacities, seem to be included too. In any case, determination of the exact plurality of psychological capacities is not required for the present purpose.<sup>21</sup> Granted this, for example, vision is a member of the relevant plurality; but vision is the psychological capacity dedicated to seeing, not pleasure. Likewise, contemplation is a member of the plurality; but contemplation is dedicated to contemplating, not pleasure. Nonetheless, seeing, when it is complete, is pleasure; and contemplating, when complete, is pleasure.

I will refer to the psychological capacities that, according to *E*, are not dedicated to pleasure, but whose activities realize pleasure when they are complete, as "potentially hedonic capacities." What makes the activity of a potentially hedonic capacity complete is that the capacity is in good condition and that it is exercised under good conditions. The following line from *E* expresses these points:

"[In contrast to the view currently being criticized,] we should rather say that pleasure is an activity (*energeian*) of the natural state (*tēs kata phusin hexeōs*) ... an unimpeded (*anempodiston*) one." (*EE* 6.12, 1153a14-15)

By "natural state" Aristotle intends some psychological capacity in good condition.<sup>22</sup> And by "unimpeded" Aristotle intends the exercise of that capacity under good conditions. Notably, insofar as the capacity is exercised on an object, good conditions entail that the object is optimal. For example, visual pleasure requires that the visual capacity be in good condition and that the object of vision be not merely any clearly visible entity, but an optimal visible object, in other words, a beautiful one. Conceived as such, on a clear day 20/20 vision of some ugly object would not constitute a complete visual activity.

Given *E*'s view of pleasure, what prevents it from being the case that, according to *M*, hedonic activity is the exercise of any one of several potentially hedonic capacities rather than a single and so dedicated capacity? I suggest that various pieces of evidence from *M* collectively make a strong case for the view that, according to *M*, all hedonic activity is due to a dedicated hedonic capacity. Space constraints prevent me from discussing all of the available evidence. But I will discuss four considerations. For convenience, I will hereafter call the thesis that hedonic activity is due to a dedicated hedonic capacity the "dedication" thesis; and I will call the thesis that hedonic activity is due to any one of several potentially hedonic capacities the "potentiality"

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<sup>21</sup> But there is no reason to believe that a dedicated hedonic capacity is a member of this plurality.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle often conflates goodness and optimality. So, unless otherwise specified, "good" should be understood as "at least good."

thesis. In the following passages, *M* speaks simply of "pleasure" and does not distinguish "pleasure<sub>R</sub>" and "pleasure<sub>E</sub>." For convenience, I will simply speak of "pleasure" unless disambiguation is required.

The first consideration in favor of *M*'s commitment to the dedication thesis concerns *M*'s view, found in the criticism of the optimality argument, of the value of pleasure. Note that according to both *Magna Moralia* and *Eudemian Ethics*, eudaimonia is the best thing, that is, the greatest good. Moreover, *E* argues that some pleasure is the greatest good. This follows from *E*'s further views that pleasure is complete activity and that eudaimonia is a kind of complete activity. (6.13, 1153b7-32) So, according to *E*, eudaimonia is a kind of pleasure.

According to the optimality argument in *M*, pleasure is not good because it is not the best thing. In criticizing this argument, *M* argues that denial that pleasure is the best thing does not entail that pleasure is not good. The optimality argument is clearly fallacious, and *M*'s rejection of it is sound.<sup>23</sup> *M*'s argument against the optimality argument is, precisely, by reductio and analogy with the goodness of the virtues:

"But in this way and from such an argument you will also undermine the things that are each called virtues. For courage is not best. Is it then on account of this not good? Is this not absurd? And likewise also in the other cases [that is, in the cases of the other virtues]. And because of this, it is not the case that pleasure is not good because it is not best."  
(*MM* 2.7.27, 1206a31-35)

The *Magna Moralia*'s admission that eudaimonia is the best thing and *M*'s denial that pleasure is the best thing entail *M*'s rejection of the potentiality thesis. This is because, according to *M*, eudaimonia is the complete exercise of the virtues. (2.7.2, 1204a27-28; cp. *MM* 1.4.3, 1184b27-30) But the virtues are psychological capacities that are not dedicated to hedonic activity.<sup>24</sup> This alone does not compel the conclusion that *M* is committed to the dedication thesis. But we've seen that *M* explicitly states that hedonic activity is an activity of the soul. So, *M*'s criticism of the optimality argument supports the claim that *M* is committed to the dedication thesis.

The second consideration I appeal to in support of *M*'s commitment to the dedication thesis is the absence of any statement in *M* that pleasure is realized by an activity such as sense-perceiving or intellecting as well as the absence of any statement in *M* that pleasure is the unimpeded activity of a natural state. In this respect, I am making an argument *ex silentio*. However, the argument is further supported by a certain structural parallelism between *M* and *E* and, more precisely, by the limits of this parallelism.

Like *M*, *E* focuses on criticism of antihedonist theses and arguments. In *E*, these criticisms target three antihedonist theses: that no pleasure is good, neither in itself nor coincidentally; that while some pleasures are good, most are bad; and that even if all pleasures are good, the best thing is not pleasure. Regarding the first of these three theses, *E* critically discusses six antihedonist arguments. There are parallels, but limits to these parallels, between these arguments and the six antihedonist arguments that *M* criticizes. Compare the order in which *E* introduces its six antihedonist arguments with the order in which *M* criticizes its six antihedonist arguments:

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<sup>23</sup> Pace Gosling and Taylor (1982, 469) B3.4-6.

<sup>24</sup> A satisfactory defense of this claim would require, among other things, discussion of *M*'s criticism of the impediment argument at 2.7.21-25, 1206a1-25.

<i>E</i>	<i>M</i>
generation argument	criticism of the generation argument
moderate person argument	criticism of the baseness argument
wise person argument	criticism of the commonness argument
impediment argument	criticism of the impediment argument
knowledge argument	criticism of the knowledge argument
children and animals argument	criticism of the optimality argument.

On the one hand, the parallelism is strengthened by the fact that in its subsequent criticism of the six antihedonist arguments, *E* maintains that the moderate person, wise person, and children and animals arguments can all be met in the same way, namely by distinguishing between pleasures that are absolutely good and pleasures that are merely good for a specific sort of subject. So, the moderate person and wise person avoid pleasures that are not absolutely good, and children and animals pursue pleasures that are good for them, but that are not absolutely good. (6.12, 1153a27-35) As such, the moderate person, wise person, and children and animals arguments in *E* evidently relate to the baseness argument in *M*, which distinguishes good and base pleasures and relates this distinction to the distinction between living things with good and base natures.

Granted this, at this level of description, the main difference between the structure of *M* and *E* is that *E* does not discuss the commonness argument or the optimality argument. But regarding the optimality argument, I have already explained that *M* and *E* differ in this respect precisely because *M* denies, while *E* maintains, that the best thing is a kind of pleasure. And regarding the commonness argument, *E* does engage a claim related to the central premise of the commonness argument, namely that pleasure is common to all living things. This occurs in the context of *E*'s defense of the view that the best thing is a kind of pleasure. Precisely, *E* maintains that the fact that all animals, including humans, pursue pleasure is a sign that pleasure is the best thing. (6.13, 1153b25-26)

In sum, the parallelism between *E* and *M* and, more precisely, the limits of this parallelism corroborate the view that *M* diverges from *E* precisely insofar as *M* is committed to the dedication thesis, whereas *E* is committed to the potentiality thesis.

The third consideration I appeal to in support of *M*'s commitment to the dedication thesis concerns certain of *M*'s uses of phrases of the form "pleasure from (*apo*) *x*." In several of these, the value of *x* is an activity of some kind. For convenience, I call this activity the "source activity." So, in some expressions of the form "pleasure from *x*," some activity is the source activity of pleasure. In these cases, pleasure and the source activity are clearly not identical. Furthermore, in some such instances, the value of *x* is precisely the activity of sense-perceiving or intellecting or a kind thereof. These instances encourage the view that *M* is not committed to the potentiality thesis. And that in turn supports *M*'s commitment to the dedication thesis.

Two such passages occur in the context of *M*'s criticism of the generation argument:

T6 "The pleasure that comes from contemplation (*hē ... apo tou theōrein hēdonē ginomenē*) is not a generation, nor the pleasure from hearing and seeing and smelling (*hē apo tou akousai kai <idein kai><sup>25</sup> osphranēthēnai*)." (MM 2.7.4, 1204b6-8)

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<sup>25</sup> "*idein kai*" is Susemihl's emendation (1883, 72). See Dirlmeier (1973, 400-1), remark on 65,6.

(T6) supports the dedication thesis insofar as the conjoined infinitival phrases "*tou theōrein ... tou akousai kai idein kai osphranēthēnai*" refer to psychological activities; and pleasures, as stated, come from these activities.

Consider also follow passage, which also occurs in the criticism of the generation argument a few lines below (T6):

T7 "In the case of seeing and hearing and smelling (*epi tou idein kai akousai kai osphranthēnai*), one has not had prior pain (*prolupēthēnai*). For no one who takes pleasure in seeing or smelling has had prior pain (*hēdomenos tōi horan ē osphrainesthai proelupēthē*)." (*MM* 2.7.5, 1204b14-16)

All of the infinitives in (T7) – "*tou idein kai akousai kai osphranthēnai*" and "*tōi horan ē osphrainesthai*" – clearly refer to the psychological activities of seeing and hearing and smelling, and this corroborates the claim that in (T6) the source activities are psychological activities. Observe also the expression "take pleasure in seeing or smelling" (*hēdomenos tōi horan ē osphrainesthai*) in (T7). Ostensibly, this expression suggests a distinction between pleasure and some psychological activity that is the intentional object of pleasure. So, this expression further supports the dedication thesis.

The fourth and final consideration I appeal to in support of *M*'s commitment to the dedication thesis relates to *M*'s criticism of the knowledge argument. According to the knowledge argument, pleasure is not good because there is no kind of knowledge (*epistēmē*) that produces (*poiei*) it.<sup>26</sup> Evidently, the argument assumes that producible goods of different kinds are products of different kinds of knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

The author criticizes the knowledge argument on two grounds. First, there are in fact some kinds of knowledge that produce pleasure. *M* offers cooks, wreath-makers, and perfumers as examples. Evidently, by this *M* intends the knowledge of cooking, wreath-making, and perfume-making. Granted this, observe that if one assumes that the products of these kinds of knowledge are concrete objects, namely edibles, wreaths, and perfumes, then the examples fail to support the author's claim. These objects are not themselves forms of pleasure. Rather, pleasure is derivable from the objects. Granted this, how one views pleasure as derivable from these objects depends precisely on what one's conception of pleasure is. For example, according to the potentiality thesis, pleasure consists in complete activities in which these objects are employed, for example, eating the edible,<sup>28</sup> beholding the wreath, and smelling the perfume. If, instead, a dedicated hedonic capacity produces pleasure, then the complete activities instead produce pleasure; in other words, pleasure derives from these activities.

Granted this, the second ground *M* adduces in criticizing the knowledge argument is expressed in the following statement:

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<sup>26</sup> The author seems to conflate *epistēmē* with *technē*.

<sup>27</sup> See *MM*'s claim at 1.1.9, 1182a32-35 that the *telos* of every *epistēmē* is something good. Compare also *MM* 1.1.15, 1182b29-30; 1.18.4, 1183a7-9.

<sup>28</sup> In this case, for the activity to be complete, the edible must be something sweet, for example a dessert, and eaten not to sate hunger.

"And though among the other kinds of knowledge the pleasure does not exist as the end (*hōs telos*), still it [that is, the end] is with pleasure (*meth' hēdonēs*) and not without pleasure (*ouk aneu hēdonēs*)." (*MM* 2.7.26, 1206a28-30)

Observe here that for pleasure to be compresent with the end of a kind of knowledge, that end must consist in some activity or employment. Moreover, *M* here explicitly distinguishes the end from pleasure that is compresent with it. So, the author's statement both supports the view that the products of the sorts of knowledge he has in mind in discussing the knowledge argument are not objects such as edibles, wreaths, and perfumes, but rather activities involving them, and that pleasure is not identical to any such activities, understood to be the ends of these sorts of knowledge, but may be compresent with them.<sup>29</sup> The dedication thesis requires this position. In contrast, according to the potentiality thesis, pleasure would be such activities, rather than merely accompany them.

I conclude that *M* is committed to the dedication thesis. In other words, the hedonic activity that is a core component of both pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub> is the activity of a psychological capacity dedicated to pleasure.

### Section Three: Pleasure, Completion, and Ends

Like *E*, *N* takes "pleasure" to be univocal. But in contrast to *E*, *N* rejects the identification of pleasure with the complete activity of a potentially hedonic capacity. Instead, *N* maintains that pleasure is "added on" (*epigignomenon*) to such activity:

"Corresponding to each kind of sense perception (*aisthēsin*) there is a pleasure, and likewise in the cases of thought (*dianoian*) and contemplation (*theōrian*). And the most complete (*teleiotatē*) [activity (*energeia*) of any such kind] is the most pleasant; and the most complete [activity] is the one that derives from the [capacity] being in a good condition in relation to the best of its objects. And the pleasure completes (*teleioi*) the activity (*energeian*). But the pleasure completes [the activity] not in the same way that the perceived object or the sense perceptual capacity does ... The pleasure completes (*teleioi*) the activity ... as some end (*ti telos*) added on (*epigignomenon*) to it, as maturity comes to those at the pinnacle of their lives." (*EN* 10.4, 1174b20-33)

Among points of obscurity in this passage, note the following two. The expression "some end" is very general. It is unclear what pleasure qua end is, including what sort of end pleasure is. Second, the added-on relation is obscure. It is unclear what the relation between pleasure and

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<sup>29</sup> *M*'s treatment of the knowledge argument should be contrasted with *E*'s treatment at 6.12, 1153a23-27. *E*'s critical response is likewise twofold. *E* notes that there are some *technai* (this is the term *E* uses, not *epistēmē*) that are thought to be productive of pleasure. But – and this is the crucial point – *E* also argues that the *ergon* (this is the term *E* uses, not *telos*) of a *technē* is never an *energeia*, but rather a capacity (*dunamis*). And so, setting aside the possible hedonic *technai* that *E* mentions, given that pleasure is an *energeia*, this explains the fact that there isn't a *technē* of pleasure.

complete activity is. The simile concluding the passage seems to speak to both points. But the simile's figurative language is also obscure.<sup>30</sup>

Granted these obscurities, could pleasure be a kind of psychological end and not be a sort of activity? Certain psychological powers or dispositions may be ends. (*MM* 1.3.3-4, 1184b9-17) Yet there is no reason to believe that *N* is committed to pleasure being a power or disposition. *N* is clearly committed to pleasure being occurrent. For example, *N* explicitly discusses why human beings cannot experience pleasure without interruption. (10.4, 1175a3-10) Moreover, if pleasure were dispositional rather than occurrent, the very idea of pleasure being an end added on to complete activity would be incoherent. I suggest then that although *N* never states that pleasure is an activity, given *N*'s commitments, there appears to be little, if any, alternative.<sup>31</sup>

If *N* is bound to view pleasure as an activity, yet *N* rejects *E*'s view of pleasure as a complete activity that is the exercise of any one of several psychological capacities, then in this respect *N*'s view of pleasure appears akin to *M*'s view of hedonic activity. Granted this, since *N* maintains that pleasure is an end, what is the relation between *N*'s view in this respect and *M*'s view?

According to the generation argument in *M*, pleasure is not good because it is a generation, a generation is incomplete (*ateles*), and what is good "has no place in what is incomplete (*oudepote tēn tou atelous chōran echein*)." (2.7.3, 1204a34-35) So, *M* implies that what is good is complete. So, *M* is committed to the view that insofar as pleasure is good, pleasure is complete. If something's being complete entails that it is an end, it follows that pleasure is a kind of end. But *M*'s commitment to pleasure being complete is difficult to square with its distinction between pleasure<sub>R</sub> and pleasure<sub>I</sub>. In particular, how can pleasure<sub>R</sub> be complete? To be sure, pleasure<sub>R</sub> is not a generation. Nonetheless, *M* does not explain how pleasure<sub>R</sub> can be complete.

One hypothesis is that hedonic activity would pass the sort of completion test that Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* Θ.6, namely that at any point during which pleasure is occurring, pleasure has occurred. (9.6, 1048b18-27) As such, "pleasure" denotes – in the terminology of contemporary linguistics – an atelic event.<sup>32</sup> Contrast the phrase "run a marathon"

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<sup>30</sup> For a recent discussion of this passage and *N* generally, see Aufderheide (2020, 113-20). For a helpful summary, see also Cheng (2018, 175-76).

<sup>31</sup> One of the editors asks why pleasure couldn't be an aspect of an activity rather than an activity itself. In response, I question what ontological category an "aspect" of an activity would belong to. I presume, the answer is: a quality (*poiotes*). But at *EN* 10.3.1, 1172b13-15 Aristotle criticizes the objection that if pleasure were not a quality, it couldn't be one of the things that are good. Aristotle's response to this objection is that *eudaimonia* and activities (*energeiai*) of virtue, which are not qualities, are nonetheless among things that are good. If Aristotle thought that pleasure was a quality, it is strange that he would respond to the objection in this way. So, I infer that Aristotle does not think that pleasure is a quality. Moreover, if, despite this consideration, Aristotle still did think that pleasure is a quality, it is puzzling that he would not say so at *EN* 10.4. In short, between the possibilities that pleasure qua *ti telos* added on to complete activity in *EN* 10.4 is itself an activity or a quality, I take the evidence to favor the former option.

<sup>32</sup> For example, see Rothstein (2008). Unfortunately, the relation between the contemporary linguistic terminology and the ancient Greek is confusing. An atelic verb denotes an event that would typically be conceived as a *telos*; a telic verb denotes an event that would typically not be conceived as a *telos*.

which denotes a telic event, that is, an event that has an endpoint. When one is running a marathon, at mile thirteen one has not run the marathon. Only when one crosses the finish line has one run a marathon. So, this might explain *M*'s commitment to the completeness of pleasure<sub>R</sub> as well as of pleasure<sub>I</sub>. Yet no such test for atelicity is mentioned in *M*. So, the ground of *M*'s commitment to the completeness of pleasure<sub>R</sub> is obscure.

Related to this problem is another puzzling claim that *M* makes in its criticism of the generation argument. The claim in fact occurs within (T4). But to facilitate the exposition above, I elided the puzzling content. Here is the passage without the ellipsis:

"For since there is some part of the soul by which we take pleasure at the same time that the provision of the things that we need [occurs], this portion of the soul is active (*energei*) and is moved (*kineitai*), and its movement (*kinēsis autou*) and activity (*energeia*) is pleasure." (*MM* 2.7.8, 1204b25-28)

Here *M* claims that pleasure – that is, pleasure<sub>R</sub> – consists of a movement as well as an activity. Note that in *N*, what is called a "*kinēsis*" is precisely the category of entity that fails *Metaphysics* Θ's test for atelicity. (10.4, 1074b6-14) This makes it difficult to believe that *M*'s commitment to the completeness of pleasure<sub>R</sub> owes to the view that hedonic activity necessarily passes the atelicity test. More generally, *M*'s claim that pleasure<sub>R</sub> consists of a movement makes it difficult to understand *M*'s commitment to the view that pleasure<sub>R</sub> is complete.<sup>33</sup>

Whether *M* is in fact incoherent in these respects requires more scrutiny. Space constraints prohibit further inquiry here.

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<sup>33</sup> But consider the claim at *MM* 2.12.3, 1211b30-31 that the "*energeia*" of housebuilding has "another end" (*heteron telos*) beyond it. Compare also *EE* 6.14, 1154b26-28.

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