

THE BLOOM OF YOUTH

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ABSTRACT: At *NE* 10.4 1174b31–3 Aristotle illustrates his conception of the relationship between pleasure and activity with a puzzling image: pleasure is like ‘the bloom on those in their prime’. Discussion of various passages from Plato and Xenophon shows that the choice of this image arises from Aristotle’s engagement with earlier Socratic discussions of pleasure and virtue, including Plato *Philebus* 53c–d, where Socrates wants to use the example to help to classify pleasures as ‘changes’ or ‘comings-to-be’. In his use of the image of the ‘bloom of youth’, Aristotle reinforces his correction of the Platonic metaphysical classification of pleasure.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.4 Aristotle illustrates what he takes to be the proper relationship between an activity and pleasure. He uses an example taken from the common rhetoric of praise for beautiful male youths to help us to understand the precise relationship he has in mind. He writes at 1174b31–3:

τελειοῖ δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἢ ἡδονὴ οὐχ ὥς ἡ ἔξις ἐνυπάρχουσα, ἀλλ'
ὥς ἐπιγινόμενόν τι τέλος, οἷον τοῖς ἀκμαίοις ἡ ὥρα.

Christopher Rowe translates as follows (in Broadie and Rowe 2002):

Pleasure completes the activity, not in the way the disposition present in the subject completes it, but as a sort of supervenient end, like the bloom of manhood on those in their prime.

This sentence is puzzling for various reasons. It is puzzling because of the difficulty of understanding the claim in the first part of the sentence about the proper way in which pleasure completes or perfects (τελειοῖ) an activity. We are told that pleasure does not complete an activity by being a ‘disposition present in the subject’ (ἡ ἔξις ἐνυπάρχουσα) but rather by being some kind of ‘supervenient end’ (ἐπιγινόμενόν τι τέλος). But it is not particularly clear what either of these is nor, therefore, what the contrast is between them. What is more, given the lexical relationship between the

terms used, there appears to be some relationship between the way pleasure completes or perfects the activity (τελειοῖ) and the kind of end (τέλος) that it is. But if there is some such relationship, Aristotle does not clearly spell it out.¹ The sentence is also puzzling because of the comparison it contains at the end. The contrast between ‘being a disposition present in the subject’ and being a ‘supervenient end’ is illustrated by likening the relationship between pleasure and activity to the relationship between some kind of physical disposition of those in their prime or particular phase of life and a beautiful appearance. If Aristotle’s comparison is supposed to help us to understand the precise relationship in view between activity and pleasure, it is not obvious that it succeeds. It is not obvious what the two relevant relata—the ‘bloom’ and the ‘being in one’s prime’—are and it is not clear how they are to be related to one another. In that case, the comparison tends not to answer some important questions about the relationship between pleasure and activity but rather to provoke additional puzzlement.²

Some of the subsequent discussion in book ten does shed more light on how Aristotle understands the relationship between pleasure and activity. The immediate context for the comparison with the bloom of youth is an account of how an activity is complete or perfect (τελεία) when engaged in under ideal circumstances. For example, seeing is *teleia* when the organ of sight is in the best condition and it is being trained on something that is the best kind of visual object (presumably, for humans, the most beautiful kind of visual object). In those cases, the most pleasure arises from the activity (1174b14–1175a3). And Aristotle goes on to explain how this understanding of pleasure and activity can help in other ways. For example, in 10.5 Aristotle shows how his account will make sense of the view that pleasures differ ‘in kind’ (τῷ εἶδει) from one another, since the activities similarly differ in kind

¹ The adjective *teleios* and its cognate verb are being used throughout *NE* 10.3–4 to cover both the notion of being ‘complete’ and being ‘perfect’; the core notion is of a completed goal or end-point (*telos*). See Waanders (1983) esp. §204, 216.

² For a helpful account (and criticism) of recent interpretations see Strohl (2011) 272–7, who goes on to offer his own view that, for Aristotle, pleasure is ‘an essential aspect of perfect activity of awareness’; it is (278) ‘simply the perfection of a perfect activity of awareness, the very perfection that is brought about by the good condition of the capacity activated and the fine object it is active in relation to’.

(1175a21–28). He goes on to say that this relationship between activity and pleasure will allow him to explain why pleasure increases as the activity increases and, indeed, why increasing pleasure might encourage a more intensive engagement in an activity (1175a29–1175b1). He then proceeds to discuss how some activities may impede others because of the intensity of the pleasures associated with them or by an activity’s ‘own’ pains. At 1175b1–24, the notion that activities have their own proper (οἰκεῖαι) pleasures and pains, contrasted with pleasures and pains that are alien (ἀλλότριά), is a further elaboration of the idea that each activity has a pleasure that differs from other pleasures as the activity differs from other activities; each activity is to be associated with its own proper pleasure: a pleasure which arises out of and completes or perfects the activity, encourages engagement in the activity and may discourage engagement in a competing activity. This picture allows Aristotle to outline a set of distinctions between human pleasures and those of other species and, within human pleasures, between better and worse pleasures, associated with better and worse human activities (1175b24–1176a29). This in turn allows him finally to secure his desired connection between some pleasures and natural and virtuous activity and therefore the conclusion that the life of virtuous activity will also be a very pleasant life.

Nevertheless, the precise understanding of the first part of the sentence in 10.4 remains controversial. And for the most part I shall not say much more about it. Instead, I focus on the puzzling image in the hope that this might contribute to understanding the contrast Aristotle wants it to illustrate. At the very least, consideration of various other related texts by Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle himself to which this image at 1174b31–3 is clearly related will suggest something of the cultural and philosophical background of Aristotle’s account.

Boys and men

The reference to ‘those in their prime’ is to males of an age young enough to be attractive *erōmenoi*, the ‘beloveds’ of older mature adult *erastai* in the standard

conceptualization of male homosexual couples found in textual and visual representations from classical Athens.³

Some commentators have denied that this is the correct interpretation. Their case rests principally on references elsewhere in Aristotle's works to a person's *akmē* being rather later than would be the age of a beautiful *erōmenos*. A passage at *Rhetoric* 1390b9–11, for example, claims that the body reaches its peak (ἀκμάζει) between the ages of thirty and thirty-five and the soul at the age of forty-nine.⁴ However, it is clear that other classical Athenian texts use terms such as ὥραϊος—the adjective from the term used by Aristotle—to refer to younger men, who are no longer boys (*paides*) but not yet mature men (*andres*); someone who is ὥραϊος—‘in season’ or ‘in bloom’—is certainly younger than thirty-five (see e.g. Aeschines *In Timarchum* 40–42, 126, cf. 155–7). Although it is difficult to be sure of the likely age of someone for whom this would be the appropriate description, in part because we should probably not assume that the usual age for male puberty in Athens at the time was the same as in modern Western societies, this stage of life is regularly associated with the

³ Clear erotic overtones in the analogy in *NE* 10.4 were detected by Michael of Ephesus, working in the twelfth century A.D. When he comes to comment on *NE* 1174b31–3, he writes: ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡ ὥραιότης ἐπιτερέστερα τὰ ἀκμάζοντα τῶν σωμάτων καὶ ἡδύτερα ποιεῖ καὶ ποθεινότερα καὶ ἐρασμιώτερα ὁρᾶσθαι, οὕτω καὶ ἡ ἡδονὴ τὴν ἐνέργειαν μᾶλλον ἐφετὴν ἐργάζεται καὶ μᾶλλον αὐτῆς ἔχεσθαι ἡμᾶς διατίθησιν (*In Nic. Eth. comm.* 559.7–10 Heylbut). Note also the continuation of Michael's account at 559.14–17. For Michael, the connection between, on the one hand, pleasure and activity and, on the other hand, bloom and being in one's prime, is stronger than a simple analogy since the bloom of youth is itself something that causes an intensification of desire for the beloved and pleasure in perceiving the beloved.

⁴ Hadreas (1997) surveys evidence from Aristotle's biological works and concludes that the reference is not to youths at all. Rather, he argues that in *NE* 10.4 Aristotle refers to men reaching their adult maturity and that this is in fact no simile at all, since Aristotle thinks it simply true that at that point an individual reaches the peak of their perfection. Hadreas does not, however, mention *NE* 1157a1–12 (on which, see below). Cf. Gauthier and Jolif (1970) *ad loc.* who insist that the phrase τοῖς ἀκμαίοις ἡ ὥρα should be rendered as: ‘... comme un homme *en pleine force* (l'*akmè* est la force de l'âge, non la jeunesse)’. Bostock (2000) 156, agrees; so do Van Riel (2000) 57 and Wolfsdorf (2013) 130 n. 32. Strohl (2011) 281 and n. 32 is not convinced.

brief period at which a young man was showing the first signs of a beard.⁵ At the very beginning of Plato's *Protagoras* (309a1–5), for example, a friend teases Socrates for still desiring Alcibiades although Alcibiades' beard is already filling out by describing Socrates as 'hunting after his [Alcibiades'] ὄρα'; Alcibiades is already a man (ἄνθρωπος).⁶ And at *Alcibiades I* 131d–e Socrates contrasts himself with the other lovers of Alcibiades. They will leave Alcibiades now that his possessions—including his youthful beauty—are fading; Socrates will become more enamored of Alcibiades as Alcibiades—or, more precisely, his soul—blossoms.⁷ This is marked as a rather idiosyncratic Socratic preference based on the idea that psychic maturity and beauty are the proper objects of erotic pursuit. The more usual situation is confirmed by *Republic* 474d–e, where Socrates insists that a 'lover of boys', a *philopais*, will love all of those who are 'in bloom' (ἐν ὄρῃ: 474d2, e4) regardless of their various individual differences of appearance. Whatever the precise age of the objects of attraction here, they are being described both as being 'in bloom' and also being boys, *paides*.⁸

In other texts, ὄρα features as a marker of evident physical beauty and is sometimes noted as a potential distraction from proper virtuous pursuits. Three passages from Xenophon illustrate this well. First, when describing Eudaimonia, the goddess who competes with Aretē in Prodicus' story of the choice of Heracles, Xenophon writes that she wore 'a dress from which her ὄρα might particularly shine forth' (ἐσθῆτα ἐξ ἧς ἂν μάλιστα ὄρα διαλάμποι, *Memorabilia* 2.1.22). This is likely to mean that she is wearing something revealing or provocative; that would be perfectly fitting for the goddess who is trying to tempt Heracles to choose a life of pleasure and ease. At the very least, it is likely that ὄρα here is meant to stand for her visual appeal and it is probable that this appeal is linked to pleasure, perhaps even sexual pleasure specifically. What Eudaimonia (her opponent later calls her 'Kakia')

⁵ For example, consider Pausanias's comments at Plato *Symposium* 181d, discussed further below. See also Davidson (2007) 68–98.

⁶ Denyer (2008) *ad loc.* compares Xen. *An.* 2.6.28 as an unusual case in which a beardless youth makes a bearded adult his *paidika*.

⁷ Note esp. 131e11: τὰ δὲ σὰ λήγει ὄρας, σὺ δ' ἄρχῃ ἀνθεῖν.

⁸ Cf. *Dissoi Logoi* 2.2: αὐτίκα γὰρ παιδὶ ὡραῖον ἐραστᾷ μὲν [χρησιτῶι] χαρίζεσθαι καλόν, μὴ ἐραστᾷ δὲ [καλῶ] αἰσχρόν.

has to offer is immediately evident and, we are invited to imagine, would require very little effort to secure and enjoy.⁹

Second, at *Memorabilia* 1.6.11–12, Antiphon has noticed that Socrates does not charge for people to engage him in conversation. He constructs a dilemma: either Socrates is honest or he is deceitful. If Socrates is honest then he is not charging a fee for his conversations because he considers what he offers to be of no genuine worth. And so, if Socrates is honest then he cannot be wise. But if he is wise and his conversation is worth something then he is not honest because he does not charge for it. Socrates is therefore either wise or honest but cannot be both. In response, Socrates draws an analogy between wisdom and physical beauty (ῥᾶ 1.6.13) since it is thought that both can be either fine or shameful. Physical beauty is shameful if the beautiful person simply sells it, as a male prostitute (πόρνος) might, to anyone who wishes to pay for it. But the same beauty is noble if someone should recognize it and become a fine and good *erastēs* as a result. Indeed, we might even consider such a person to be virtuously self-controlled (σώφρων). Similarly, wisdom is shameful if it is simply sold to any willing buyer—and therefore sophists are intellectual prostitutes—but it is a fine thing to teach wisdom without being paid; indeed it is a reason to think someone a fine and upstanding kind of person. Again, there is a strong connection here between a particular form of physical beauty (ῥᾶ) and a youthful object of desire. In addition, we find here a distinction between two possible reactions to this beauty on the part of the young man concerned and his lover. The baser version sees the beauty as an opportunity for monetary gain on the part of the boy and sexual pleasure on the part of the lover. The more elevated version sees the beauty as instigating a longer-term bond which is related to and may even cement certain virtuous traits in both the lover and his beloved.

Much the same point is made in a third passage. Towards the end of Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates is contrasting two distinct kinds of relationship: one in which the attachment between lover and beloved is based on an appreciation of goodness and virtuous character and another in which the lover is simply bent on gratifying his physical desires. In this latter case, Socrates claims, the boy neither

⁹ However, her appearance is the result of careful artifice. Her skin, for example, has been made to look paler and healthier than it truly is (2.22). Her allure, therefore, is both superficial and illusory and it contrasts sharply with the pure, chaste, and genuine elegance of her rival.

shares in a bond of *erōs* with his lover nor does he share sexual pleasure with the older lover, but instead he is merely selling his physical beauty (ῥα) in the market place (*Symposium* 8.21).

These passages come from Socratic texts in which discussions of the nature and use of this youthful beauty are used as means to consider more general ethical questions and, in particular, the relationship between pleasure and virtue: a relationship, of course, that Aristotle too is trying to explain at *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.4. In both the choice of Heracles and the discussion with Antiphon, Socrates distinguishes sharply between a reaction to physical youthful beauty that is concerned primarily with physical pleasure and sexual gain and an alternative preference for the cultivation of moral virtue. In the choice of Heracles these initially appear to be stark alternatives, although later in the discussion Virtue makes the case for her being able also to provide for better or more satisfying pleasures than her rival (2.1.33, cf. 2.1.30). In his discussion with Antiphon and also in Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates similarly makes a case for a life which integrates properly an appreciation of physical beauty with moral virtue, while noting that there is an alternative and altogether less edifying reaction that is all too possible.

Before we move on, there is one further text to consider. It is tempting to think that the outward glow of beauty is a necessary concomitant of a young man's being in his prime such that all such young men in their prime will necessarily display this further aspect of a kind of blooming appearance. However, there is a Platonic text that Aristotle knew very well which suggests that the connection might often be much less strict. Although the bloom of youth comes only to those that are in their prime, it is apparently possible for someone to be in their prime but not display this bloom of youth. At Plato *Republic* 601b, Socrates is considering poetry. A poet, he argues, adorns his account of cobbling or generalship or some other activity with metre, rhythm, and harmony. But when his poetry is stripped of these elements, the words that remain are 'like the faces of men who are youthful (ῥαῖοι) but not really beautiful, when the bloom of youth (τὸ ἄνθος) abandons them'.¹⁰ Of course, the terminology is different from that chosen by Aristotle and, in particular, Socrates seems to use the term ῥαῖοι as a synonym for Aristotle's ἀκμαῖοι and finds another

¹⁰ Plato *Rep.* 601b6–7: ἔοικεν τοῖς τῶν ῥαίων προσώποις, καλῶν δὲ μή, οἷα γίγνεται ἰδεῖν ὅταν αὐτὰ τὸ ἄνθος προλίπη.

term, ἄνθος, for the perceptible beauty.¹¹ But what does seem clear from Socrates' account is that this bloom is something relatively fleeting, being visible only for a short period when the young man is at a particular stage of his growing maturity and perhaps only for a brief period of one's already brief youth. This part of the *Republic* and this specific account of the allure of poetic form is certainly a text that Aristotle knows well because he refers to it in his discussion of similes at *Rhet.* 3.3.¹² In terms of the relationship between pleasure and activity, the claim that there are young men who nevertheless display this bloom only for a brief period would imply that the simple presence of the underlying disposition is not sufficient for this completion but that the completion comes about only under certain ideal circumstances. Aristotle himself, of course, has some clear views on what, for example, constitute the ideal objects of the activity of seeing and the ideal circumstances of engaging in the activities from which pleasures arise and makes those clear immediately prior to using the image of the bloom of youth.¹³

Hōra, pleasure, and virtue

We can also find similar connotations of the notion of the bloom of youth elsewhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. At *NE* 8.4 1156b35–1157a12, Aristotle contrasts the virtuous kind of friendship (*philia*) with other kinds. The virtuous form of friendship, he insists, is much more stable and lasting than the others because each member of the relationship receives the same things from the other partner. He then explains how this is not always the case for friendships founded on pleasure.

¹¹ Bostock (2000) 156–8 argues that, if *hōraios* is understood more or less as a synonym for *akmaios*, it is likely that we should read the relationship between pleasure and activity in Aristotle's simile as an analogue for the relationship between, for example, health and a healthy body. He further argues that this interpretation minimizes the temptation to think of pleasure in Aristotle's view as something extra and in addition to the activity and therefore also minimizes the possibility of an inconsistency between the account of pleasure in book 10 and book 7 (esp. 1153a12–15).

¹² Arist. *Rhet.* 1406b36–a2: καὶ ἡ εἰς τὰ μέτρα τῶν ποιητῶν, ὅτι ἔοικε τοῖς ἄνευ κάλλους ὥραίοις· οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀπανθήσαντες, τὰ δὲ διαλυθέντα οὐχ ὅμοια φαίνεται.

¹³ See *NE* 10.4 1174b14–20 and 1174b28–31.

ἡ δὲ διὰ τὸ ἡδὺν ὁμοίωμα ταύτης ἔχει· καὶ γὰρ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ἡδεῖς ἀλλήλοις. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ διὰ τὸ χρήσιμον· καὶ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι ἀλλήλοις οἱ ἀγαθοί. μάλιστα δὲ καὶ ἐν τούτοις αἱ φιλίαι μένουσιν, ὅταν τὸ αὐτὸ γίνηται παρ' ἀλλήλων, οἷον ἡδονή, καὶ μὴ μόνον οὕτως ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ, οἷον τοῖς εὐτραπέλοις, καὶ μὴ ὡς ἐραστῇ καὶ ἐρωμένῳ. οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἡδονται οὗτοι, ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ὀρῶν ἐκεῖνον, ὁ δὲ θεραπευόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐραστοῦ· ληγούσης δὲ τῆς ὥρας ἐνίοτε καὶ ἡ φιλία λήγει (τῷ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδεῖα ἡ ὄψις, τῷ δ' οὐ γίνεται ἡ θεραπεία)· πολλοὶ δ' αὖ διαμένουσιν, ἐὰν ἐκ τῆς συνηθείας τὰ ἥθη στέρξωσιν, ὁμοήθεις ὄντες.

Friendship based on pleasure is similar to this one [sc. friendship based on virtue] for good men also are pleasing to one another. (It is similarly the case for friendship based on what is useful, because good men are also useful to one another.) Friendships last especially in those cases when the same thing is shared between them, such as pleasure, but not just that: also pleasure from the same thing, for example as in the case of witty people and not in the case of a lover and beloved. For these last two do not take pleasure in the same things, but the former in seeing the latter, the latter in being cultivated by the lover. And sometimes when the bloom of youth fades (ληγούσης δὲ τῆς ὥρας) so too does the friendship for the appearance is no longer pleasant to the lover and the beloved is no longer cultivated. But many do remain friends, provided as a result of familiarity they enjoy each other's character, now that they have become alike.

Some examples of pleasure friendships are like those based on good character. For example, friendships based on pleasure can be as stable as friendships based on virtue, provided that the two members continue to take pleasure in the same things. When two witty people are friends with one another, this might be a stable form of friendship even though it is based on pleasure, because both members of the pair enjoy the same thing: the other's wit. (Virtuous people will take pleasure in the same things and so a virtuous friendship will also involve many experiences of pleasure,

even though pleasure is not the grounds of the friendship.) Significantly, Aristotle contrasts such a stable friendship based on pleasure with the case of a relationship between an older lover and a younger beloved since, in the latter case, Aristotle says that although both members of the pair may take pleasure from the relationship, their pleasures come from different sources.¹⁴ The older lover takes pleasure in seeing his beloved, whereas the beloved takes pleasure in being cared for and being cultivated by his lover. Furthermore, Aristotle insists that such erotic relationships are temporary since they depend on a particular and transitory youthful beauty.

At 1157a8, when describing the youthful beauty of the beloved, Aristotle uses the same word—*ὄρα*—as he does to illustrate the relationship between pleasure and activity at *NE* 10.4 1174b33. In the passage from book eight he is clearly describing a relationship between an *erastēs* and an *erōmenos* and the reference to the beauty of the latter fading suggests very strongly that it is to be associated with a temporary phase during adolescence at which the young man is at some kind of peak of attractiveness.

Yet in book eight Aristotle is not drawing an analogy between beauty and pleasure; rather, he is interested in showing how in this situation the beauty of the young man can also be a cause of a certain kind of pleasure. In his analysis of the *philia* between lover and beloved, Aristotle points out that when the beauty disappears so does the lover's pleasure in viewing the beloved and when the lover no longer offers the same kind of attention to the beloved then the beloved's pleasure from the relationship also ceases. He notes elsewhere that sight is a source of great pleasure between lovers and wonders if it is often the primary reason why an erotic relationship first arises and is then sustained (1171b29–32, cf. 1167a3–7).¹⁵ This role of the pleasant vision of the beloved as the provocation to a relationship is then taken up once more in Aristotle's explanation of why such relationships end. Often, when youthful beauty fades, since the relationship is grounded on the respective pleasures each takes, so too does the relationship itself fade unless it has been replaced by a

¹⁴ Contrast cases in which only one partner takes pleasure in the relationship while the other is interested in its utility: 1164a2–13. Cf. Price (1989) 243–49.

¹⁵ Cf. Price (1989) 241–3; Sihvola (2002) 211.

more lasting tie based on familiarity (1157a10–12).¹⁶ In particular, since the lover's pleasure is generated by the perception of the beloved's youthful beauty, when this beauty fades then so does the pleasure and, in turn, the friendship which takes that pleasure as its basis. This type of friendship then contrasts with another kind of erotic relationship in which the two partners exchange favors of utility rather than pleasure (a12–14).¹⁷ This final form of relationship is most unstable because, as Aristotle curtly notes, the two are not *philoî* of one another but only of the gain each might take from the relationship. Once that opportunity has disappeared, so too has the relationship. The grounds of the friendship are unstable and, like the friendship based on pleasure, so too is the friendship itself.

When Aristotle wrote this he can hardly have been unaware of an obvious Platonic antecedent of his discussion of the differences between, on the one hand, the exchange of pleasures between lover and beloved and, on the other hand, a relationship more focused on character and perhaps even virtue. The most obvious antecedent for Aristotle's account of this form of *philia* is Pausanias' speech in Plato's *Symposium*, particularly 183d8–e6. Here, as at *Republic* 601b, the preferred term appears to be *ἄνθος* rather than *ῥα*—the term found in Xenophon and Aristotle—but the sense is evidently the same:

πονηρὸς δ' ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνος ὁ ἐραστῆς ὁ πάνδημος, ὁ τοῦ σώματος
μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐρῶν· καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲ μόνιμός ἐστιν, ἅτε οὐ
μονίμου ἐρῶν πράγματος. ἅμα γὰρ τῷ τοῦ σώματος ἄνθει λήγοντι,
οὔτε ἥρα, οἵχεται ἀποπτάμενος, πολλοὺς λόγους καὶ ὑποσχέσεις

¹⁶ Pakaluk (1998) 79 insists that this is the right interpretation of Aristotle's point and rejects an alternative view (supported by Price (1989) 247–8 and Pangle (2003) 41) that the friendship becomes one based on virtuous character. That alternative, as Price points out, would seem to make Aristotle's view on this occasion rather closer to some Platonic texts.

¹⁷ Pakaluk (1998) 78–80, interprets the case at a12–14 (his case (4)) as one in which *one* partner offers what is useful in return for pleasure from the other partner. While this is clearly a plausible form of erotic *philia* and perhaps a common way for Aristotle's contemporaries to imagine the relationship, it appears that here Aristotle is denying that pleasure is the basis for either of the ties between the pair. *ἀντικαταλλαπτόμενοι* at a12 suggests that whatever is being exchanged is reciprocated in kind.

καταισχύνας· ὁ δὲ τοῦ ἡθους χρηστοῦ ὄντος ἐραστῆς διὰ βίου μένει,
ἃ τε μονίμῳ συντακεῖς.

It is the common, vulgar, lover who loves the body rather than the soul, the man whose love is bound to be inconstant since what he loves is itself mutable and unstable. The moment the body is no longer in bloom (ἅμα γὰρ τῷ τοῦ σώματος ἄνθει λήγοντι), ‘he flies off and away’, his promises and vows in tatters behind him. How different from this is a man who loves the right sort of character, and who remains its lover for life, attached as he is to something permanent. (trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

The love of the worse kind of *erastēs*, therefore, is indeed a fleeting and unstable thing because it is focused upon something which is itself not lasting. It should be compared unfavorably with the lover who is focused on the stable and good character of the beloved. Indeed, the worse kind of love is necessarily temporary since the particular bloom of youth whose beauty on which it is based is present only for a fleeting period in the development of the young man. This is evidently something of a common trope in discussions of this kind of relationship. In the encomium of the non-lover at *Phaedrus* 232e3–6, Lysias’ speech explains how a lover tends to desire the beloved physically in advance of any knowledge of the beloved’s character. In that case there is good reason for even the lover himself to be unsure whether the relationship will last once the desire has passed, which presumably is to be understood as a suspicion that a decline in the lover’s ardor might be caused by a gradual decline in the particular youthful physical beauty of the beloved as he ages.

Plato Philebus 53d–e

The evidence offered so far should provide sufficient reason to think that the choice of the image in *NE* 10.4 is guided at least in part by a relatively extensive theme in Socratic texts.¹⁸ These texts discuss the relationship between pleasure and virtue by

¹⁸ While I concentrate on the background to Aristotle’s remarks, it is evident that this general theme was also prominent in philosophy after Aristotle. The Stoics’ account of *erōs* defines it

considering homosexual relationships between a young and beautiful beloved and an older lover. The visual appearance of the beloved is agreed to be a cause of and incitement to pleasure but thinking about the initial grounds and possible development of such a relationship between two men allows Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle himself to explore further the differences between relationships based merely on pleasure and those based on an appreciation and cultivation of good character. Aristotle's choice of an image taken from discussions of erotic youthful beauty is justified in part because, as the passages from Xenophon and Aristotle's own discussion of *philia* show, there are already strong connotations of this youthful perceptual beauty being an object of or temptation to pleasure and, moreover, there is a long-running awareness that there is a potentially fraught relationship between pleasing beauty of this kind and virtuous behavior.

But we noted at the outset that Aristotle is trying to illustrate a metaphysical claim about the nature of pleasure and its relationship to activity. And here too there is an important Platonic text which Aristotle and his audience should have in mind which also deals with pleasure by reference to relationships between *erastai* and *erōmenoi*. The general disagreement between Aristotle and Plato on the correct analysis of the nature of pleasure is clear enough and is introduced succinctly at 10.3 1173a29–31 by Aristotle himself.¹⁹ A strong common thread between the two discussions of pleasure in *NE* 7 (see e.g. 7.12 1152b12–15 and 1153a7–15) and *NE* 10 is that Aristotle takes issue with any analysis of pleasure which categorizes it as always some kind of change (*kinēsis*) or coming-to-be (*genesis*). Since someone might conclude that if pleasure is a *kinēsis* then it cannot itself be a good, Aristotle seeks to remove this obstacle to the acceptance of at least some pleasures as good by correcting the analysis of the nature of pleasure on which it is based. That correction involves insisting that pleasure is to be associated with activities and goals rather than

as the pursuit of the apparent beauty of a young man in bloom (τὸν δ' ἔρωτά φασιν ἐπιβολὴν εἶναι φιλοποιῖας διὰ κάλλος ἐμφαινόμενον νέων ῥαίων: Arius Didymus ap. Stob. 2.115.1–2W = *SVF* 3.650); cf. Schofield (1991) 28–42 and Price (2002) 183–91.

¹⁹ There is a good discussion in Taylor (2003).

changes or comings-to-be.²⁰ Although the notion that pleasure is a *kinēsis* or *genesis* of some kind is in all likelihood neither an innovation on Plato's part nor is it a thesis which Aristotle would have associated with Plato alone, the distinction between a *kinēsis* or *genesis* and something else, namely the goal or end-point of the change, plays a significant role in Plato's most elaborate discussion of the nature of pleasure in the *Philebus*. And in the *Philebus* too there is a discussion of pleasure that illustrates what Socrates thinks is the correct metaphysical account of the nature of pleasure by means of an analogy with the relationship between an *erastēs* and a beautiful *erōmenos*.

In his discussion of the nature of pleasure at *Philebus* at 53d–e, Socrates tries to make clear the correct general metaphysical classification of pleasure. Socrates outlines a general two-fold distinction between things that are ‘themselves by themselves’ (*auta kath’ hauta*) and those that are always ‘aiming at’ something else. In presenting this distinction, Socrates is trying to explain to Protarchus the argument which he has just—at 53c4–7—ascribed to a group of clever people (*kompsoi*). These people argue that pleasure is not to be counted among goods because it belongs not in the class of ‘beings’ (*ousiai*) but of ‘becomings’ (*geneseis*). In order to make his account clearer, Socrates makes various attempts at elucidating this general division of things including a distinction between things that are ‘themselves by themselves’ and those that ‘aim at something else’. For example, Socrates considers the example of ship-building and ships. A ship is an example of an *ousia*, something that is ‘itself by itself’; presumably, the notion is that it is complete and in so far as it is a ship it requires nothing additional beyond itself. Ship-building, on the other hand, is what it is precisely because it aims at something else: the being of a ship. Were there not this goal at the end of the process of ship-building, the process would not be a process of ship-building at all. We might object that without processes of ship-building there would be no ships either, but Socrates is not interested in this kind of causal

²⁰ On the relationship of this passage to the discussion of the *energeia–kinēsis* distinction found in *Met.* Θ.6, see Burnyeat (2008) 265–79.

dependence but rather in the claim that the nature of the process is dependent on the nature of the end or goal.²¹

More interesting, however, is Socrates' first example.²² The very first example of the *ousia-genesis* contrast, at 53d9–10, is the relationship between a younger, beautiful, male beloved and his older male lover. Here is the example in its immediate context (53d3–e1):

Soc.: Let there be this pair: what is itself, by itself, and what is always aiming at something else (τὸ μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό, τὸ δ' αἰεὶ ἐφιεμένον ἄλλου).

Prot.: What are these two you are talking about and what are they like?

Soc.: The one is always by nature most holy (σεμνότατον) and the other is deficient.

Prot.: Be clearer still, please.

Soc.: I suppose we have seen beautiful and good young boys together with their brave lovers (παιδικά που καλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ τεθεωρήκαμεν ἅμα καὶ ἐραστὰς ἀνδρείους αὐτῶν).

Prot.: Certainly.

Soc.: Then now look for another pair of things that are like these two in all the ways we are mentioning.

Protarchus clearly finds Socrates' point hard to grasp. But if the shipbuilding–ship example is an alternative way of making the same point, then here too Socrates is attempting to use the example of such a relationship to outline a very general classification of things into those which are for the sake of something else and those for whose sake other things are. Protarchus, like most modern readers, finds the shipbuilding–ship example far more helpful (σαφέστατα 54c5) than Socrates' initial analogy of the beloved and his lover, but it is worth remarking that Socrates turned

²¹ Socrates also seems not to consider, or at least not to think it worth mentioning, the possibility that something might be both for the sake of something and something for the sake of which something else is. The general point of the passage is nevertheless clear enough for our purposes.

²² There is a good discussion of this passage in Evans (2007).

first of all to an analogy from male homosexual relations and only when pressed for further clarification moved to something more easily grasped. We have, in other words, no reason to think that there cannot be a similar exposition of Socrates' first choice of analogy and some reason to think that this might in fact be Socrates' preferred example.

Socrates seems prepared to argue that the pairs of items he wants to outline as analogous are analogous 'in all the ways mentioned'. By this he must mean that the pairs are analogous to one another in so far as one member of each pair is (1) 'what it is itself, by itself' and (2) 'most holy', while the other has characteristics which contrast with each of these since it is (1*) 'always aiming at something else' and (2*) 'deficient'. Just after this section, at 54c, Socrates adds a further contrast: one member of the pair is (3) 'that for the sake of which each of the things that comes-to-be comes-to-be' and the other member is (3*) 'always for the sake of something' (53e5–7). So, although Protarchus finds it difficult to understand Socrates' point, at least initially, the analogy seems to demand that it is the young beloved who is (1) 'what it is itself, by itself', (2) 'most holy', and (3) 'that for the sake of which what comes-to-be comes-to-be', while the older lover is (1*) 'always aiming at something else', (2*) 'deficient', and (3*) 'for the sake of something else'.²³

Before we consider just how such an erotic relationship might us help to understand the metaphysics of pleasure, let us note at the outset that there is at the very least a *prima facie* case for thinking that Aristotle's comment in *NE* 10.4 is in some way related to Socrates' comment here in the *Philebus*. Not only do both texts reach for a comparison rooted in the language of homosexual courtship for their explanation of the nature of pleasure, but also those two explanations of the nature of pleasure are themselves engaging in a clear dialogue with one another. The

²³ Cf. Delcomminette (2006) 494–5: 'Il convient de garder constamment cette série de couples à l'esprit, car elle suffit par elle-même à réfuter l'une des interprétations dominantes de ce passage, qui y voit la simple distinction entre moyen et fin. En effet, une telle interprétation ne permet pas de rendre compte du couple de l'amant et de l'aimé, par exemple. Ce qui se joue ici est bien plutôt la distinction entre le *désir* et son *objet*, ou plus généralement et plus exactement, entre ce qui, étant en état de manque, *tend* toujours vers autre chose, à savoir l'état dans lequel ce manque serait comblé, et ce qui n'a plus de manque, mais se suffit à lui-même.'

metaphysical classification of pleasures expounded by the *kompsoi* and elucidated by this analogy in the *Philebus* is precisely what Aristotle is arguing against in *NE* 10.3–4. As he says at 1174b9–10: ‘From these considerations it is clear also that they do not correctly describe pleasure as a change (*kinēsis*) or a coming-to-be (*genesis*)’. The people he refers to here as holding this mistaken view are not exclusively the *kompsoi* of the *Philebus*, but the *kompsoi* are surely included in the group he wants to oppose and this section of the *Philebus* will in all likelihood have been the most prominent and explicit statement of this thesis.²⁴

The erastēs, beauty, and pleasure

Now let us try to explain the lover–beloved relationship in the same way that Socrates himself explains the relationship between ship-building and a ship in the following section of the text (54b2ff.) There, it is clear that the practice of ship-building aims at some goal or end—the ship—and moreover is guided throughout by that goal or end in terms of the selection of materials, tools, and the order in which the process unfolds. And it is also clear that a given process of ship-building will be evaluated in the light of the eventual ship that results; whatever value it has is dependent on the value of the product at which it aims. When Socrates finally explains the *ousia–genesis* distinction in terms of the value of the members of the two classes, he insists that ‘that for the sake of which something comes to be’ should be put in the class (*moira*) of goods while pleasure, if it is a kind of coming-to-be, ought to be placed in a different class and is therefore not a good (54c9–d3).

The relationship of beloved to lover or *erōmenos* to *erastēs* is meant to be an analogue of that of *ousia* to *genesis*. Most importantly, it is the lover who is aligned with pleasure and ‘becoming’ while the beloved is aligned with a completion or goal and with ‘being’. Our confidence that this is the correct way to understand the analogy can be supported by a variety of notions which build on a common, albeit perhaps idealised, picture of the lover–beloved relationship and also various

²⁴ True, the *Philebus* puts the contrast in terms of *genesis* and not *kinēsis*; but Aristotle uses the latter legitimately to allow him to make the point clearer in terms of his favoured contrast. He seems to understand the two (*genesis* and *kinēsis*) to be more or less interchangeable in the sense relevant for the present discussion (see e.g. 1174b9–10).

conceptions of the lover–beloved relationship which can be found either in the surrounding context of the *Philebus* or elsewhere in Platonic texts.²⁵ Generally speaking, it is the beloved and not the lover who is described in terms which refer to his beauty and goodness. And it is the beloved who is the goal at which the lover aims. It is ‘for the sake of’ the beloved that the lover undertakes various tasks, performs various acts and so on. Furthermore, it is the lover, and not the beloved, who feels desire. In addition, desire is often explained as involving a lack or absence. So in this sense, *qua* lover he is lacking. Lack or deficiency is a characteristic of the class of things that are *geneseis* (54e4–8) and is made a defining feature of the lover by Plato most obviously in the *Symposium* (see e.g. Socrates’ exchange with Agathon at 200e–201c and then Socrates’ exchange with Diotima at 201e–206c).

There is a further association between Socrates’ analogy and the notion of the metaphysics of pleasure he is trying to explain. Whatever the reality of the matter, some Platonic accounts promote the idea that it is the lover and not the beloved who takes pleasure in the relationship.²⁶ Consider, for example, *Phaedrus* 240c6–d4: ‘The older man stays with the younger day and night and will not leave him willingly, but he is driven by necessity and a goad that urges him on even as it gives pleasure to him to see, hear, touch, and take in the beloved with every sense so that he accompanies him like a servant, with pleasure’. To be sure, the context here is a speech in which the aim is to persuade the young man that he is better off taking up with someone who is not his lover, but the rhetorical tropes must be to some extent plausible to a general Athenian audience for the speech to be effective. And one of those tropes is undoubtedly the notion that the lover, despite—or perhaps because of—the oddly subservient position in which he is placed by the perceptible beauty of the young beloved, will take pleasure in the sight, sound and feel of the object of his desire. That this is a central motif in depictions of such relationships might even be confirmed by the fact that Socrates continues to deploy it in the palinode which praises love and the beneficial effects it has on the soul of a good lover. Here, when the lover glimpses the beauty of the beloved, he might—if he has not been properly initiated—surrender to physical pleasure and incorrectly emphasize the bestial part of

²⁵ Cf. Frede (1997) 311–12.

²⁶ There are exceptions to this general picture in the sources, but they tend to be marked as grotesque departures from the norm. See the lengthy discussion in Davidson (2007) 38–67.

his nature (250e). But the more enlightened lover will react to the same beauty differently because he will see in the physical beauty a reflection of pure intelligible beauty. Nevertheless, this lover too will take great pleasure in an association with the beloved. As the lover takes in the flow of beauty, the pain caused by the initial growth of the lover's wings subsides and is replaced by pleasure (251c5–d1) and Socrates insists throughout that the vision of the beloved's beauty will be a source of the sweetest pleasure to the lover (251e3–252a1).

All in all, at *Philebus* 53d–e, Socrates is expecting Protarchus to agree that, having considered the *erastēs*—*erōmenos* relationship as an illustrative analogue, pleasure should be assigned to the category in which also belong those other things, brave lovers included, that are deficient or for the sake of some further goal. The beautiful beloved, on the other hand, belongs in the category of items for whose sake other things are. The direct association in other contexts of the lover rather than the beloved with erotic pleasure further cements Socrates' intended message.

Conclusions

In all the passages we have surveyed, the pleasure that the lover experiences as a result of the erotic partnership is associated with a desire for the beloved and, more specifically, is related to the visible and youthful beauty of the beloved. The pleasure is usually imagined as being caused by a desire that is generated by perceiving the beloved's beauty. Since that physical beauty is not long-lasting, neither is the pleasure the lover receives because of it and the relationship itself will either cease once the beauty fades away or else it will have developed into a relationship based on a desire for or appreciation of some other facet of the partner, perhaps a more lasting and stable facet that will ground a more lasting tie of friendship or—in those Platonic texts which tie the power of erotic attraction to beauty to a specific ontological view—the appreciation of a stable and general, perhaps solely intelligible, kind of beauty. It is clear, in that case, why Socrates in the *Philebus* likens pleasure to the lover and not the beloved, since he wants to categorize pleasure as a coming-to-be and as something temporary and incomplete on the grounds that it looks for its fulfilment in some object for whose sake it comes-to-be and which is its goal.

Aristotle too may have been thinking of how this is the most beautiful appearance a young man will have since he has also been discussing how the pleasure

of seeing increases when the activity of seeing is engaged to the highest degree and that this requires a beautiful object (10.4 1174b14–19).²⁷ But the image he chooses in *NE* 10.4 also makes a point about the metaphysical nature of pleasure by casting pleasure as the analogue of this very bloom of beauty rather than a product of the desire the beauty inspires in the lover. Indeed, in Aristotle’s preferred account pleasure stands to an activity as the bloom of beauty stands to the young beloved himself at this particular stage of his life. Clearly, this is meant to point to a sense in which pleasure and activity are intimately related: they are ‘yoked together and cannot be separated’ (10.4 1175a19–20). Activity is not the cause of a pleasure in the way that the beauty of the beloved functioned as a cause of the lover’s pleasure in Socrates’ analogy in the *Philebus*. Instead, we ought to conceive of the relationship between pleasure and activity differently. Nevertheless, despite wanting to correct the prevalent understanding of the nature of pleasure and its relationship to change and activity, Aristotle wants to capture and illustrate his own account of this relationship by reaching again for the familiar source of explanatory material in this kind of discussion. Most importantly, by shifting our focus of attention away from the lover and towards the beloved, Aristotle will encourage us to think of pleasure not in connection with a deficient or incomplete change, coming-to-be, or desire but rather towards a something that is complete, an object of desire, and a goal. Aristotle invites us to think that pleasure should be associated not with the incomplete or unsatisfied desire of the lover but rather with the completion and perfection of the young man: the manifest beautiful bloom of youth.

There remains, of course, the tricky business of trying to understand the precise nature of the relationship between pleasure and activity that Aristotle has in mind, in particular the precise relationship between the ‘underlying disposition’ and the ‘supervening end’.²⁸ It is not my aim here to settle those difficult questions but this consideration of the philosophical and literary background to Aristotle’s choice of analogy ought to cast some light on the precise nature of that relationship. We can certainly outline some of the ways in which it might do so. For example, it is clear that the connection between the bloom of youth and the underlying physical

²⁷ See Warren (2014) 60–64.

²⁸ On which, see for example Bostock (1988), Gonzalez (1991), Heinaman (2011), Shields (2011), and Strohl (2011).

disposition of the young man in his prime is extremely close, so close that it might be difficult sometimes to distinguish one from the other. Nevertheless, there is an important distinction to be drawn between the visible beauty of a young man— itself the cause of much pleasure and desire—and the underlying state of the young man. So too, Aristotle notes that the connection between an activity (*energeia*) and the supervenient pleasure is also very close; it is so close, in fact, that some people have mistakenly identified the activity of perception, for example, with the pleasure of perceiving (1175b34–6). That underlying state of the young man, furthermore, is explanatorily prior to the perceptible ‘bloom’ just as the underlying activity is explanatorily prior to the pleasure that supervenes on it. A similar relation of priority holds between the activity and pleasure.

Finally, the implication of the analogy is that the bloom of youth is the perceptible manifestation of the young man’s being at the very peak of physical desirability, a state that may last only for a short while, and that this bloom somehow completes or perfects that underlying state. How does it do that? Consideration of other texts that use the term shows that this ‘bloom’ is the outward sign and perceptible manifestation of the young male’s being at the peak of his physical development. Although dependent on the underlying excellent physical state, the bloom of youth is not identical to it. Rather, the bloom of youth is what declares the value of that state to the *erastēs*. Similarly, perhaps, although pleasure is dependent on and caused by the underlying activity, it too declares the positive value of that activity.

Regardless of the various interpretative problems that remain, it should be clear, nevertheless, that Aristotle certainly uses this otherwise puzzling comparison to reach back to a set of illustrative connections between pleasure, beauty, virtue, and desire that would have been very familiar to his audience because, in particular, it had been used regularly in related philosophical discussions in Socratic texts including Plato’s *Philebus*. The subtle reuse of a familiar Socratic motif that had previously been deployed in a text that set out to defend the idea that pleasure is a *genesis* presents in a very compact form the essentials of Aristotle’s attempt to correct the Platonic account: pleasure belongs first and foremost with the perfect and complete

activity and not, as Socrates maintained in the *Philebus*, with the change or process that leads up to it.²⁹

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²⁹ I presented a version of this paper to an audience at the Institute of Classical Studies in London. My thanks to Joachim Aufderheide, Alastair Blanshard, Jenny Bryan, Fiona Leigh, MM McCabe, Helen Morales, Frisbee Sheffield, Shaul Tor, Raphael Woolf, and various anonymous readers for helpful comments.

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