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Nicomachean Ethics VII. 14,
(1154^a22 – ^b34): The Pain
of the Living and Divine Pleasure

GWENAËLLE AUBRY

Although book VII of the *NE* passes in review an entire series of deviant behaviours, those which lower man to the level of beasts but which also constitute the weakness of his humanity, it opens and closes with god, by two propositions: god has no virtues (or vices);¹ and god has pleasure.² The correlate of these propositions is: virtue (like vice) is human; and human pleasure is imperfect. There is enough here to shock a Platonist, and particularly a reader of the *Philebus*, in which the divine life is presented as exempt from pleasure and from pain (33b). Eudoxus might have been less startled: indeed, in the first book of the *NE*, Aristotle renders him homage for having affirmed that pleasure, like god and like the good, is superior to praiseworthy things (I. 12, 1101^b27–30).

When Eudoxus is summoned once again, in books VII and X, it is in support of another thesis: that all men and all animals seek pleasure, which must be the sovereign good (1153^b25–6; 1172^b9–11). Yet they do not all pursue the *same* pleasure, and the reason for this is that nature (*phusis*) and the best disposition (*hexis aristē*) are not, or at least do not appear to be, the same for all. It is possible, however, that all are in fact in search of the same pleasure, for in all of them there is, by nature, something divine, *theion ti*. Yet, since the pleasures of the body are both the most accessible and the most frequent, they have usurped this title, so that one ends up believing that they are the only pleasures (VII. 13, 1153^b29–1154^a1).

Aristotle thus gives a singular development to Eudoxus's thesis, which does not fail to remind us of the opening of the *NE*, where the unity of the good

I thank J. Brunshwig, M. Burnyeat, and G. Romeyer Dherbey for their remarks on an initial version of this chapter, as well as the participants at the Symposium Aristotelicum for the discussions to which it gave rise; my thanks go particularly to D. Hutchinson and O. Primavesi for their suggestions on the Greek text, as well as to E. Berti, D. Charles, M. Frede, G. Lear, H. Lorenz, and C. Natali, whose questions gave me the opportunity to specify certain points of interpretation.

¹ VII. 1, 1145^a26. References are to Bywater's edition.

² VII. 14, 1154^b26.

aimed at is opposed to the variety of modes of this aiming. The quest for pleasure may be universal, but it has various objects, whose variety can nevertheless be reduced to that of natures and dispositions, or even led back to the unity of one and the same object. These propositions sketch a research programme, whose successive points would be: to identify this object (and show how it is correlated with a 'divine element'); to understand how it can be concealed (and examine the two reasons given, viz. the diversity of natures and the urgency of bodily pleasure).

Our passage announces that it will fulfil a part of this programme: to uncover the reason for the urgency, and the prevalence, of bodily pleasures (1154^a26). In so doing, it will focus on understanding why, when one seeks pleasure, these are the pleasures that are sought, and why, when one speaks of pleasure, it is they that are spoken of. In other words, it is governed by both a question of fact and a question of law, dealing no longer with the attitude of the common man, but with philosophical debate, and which aims to denounce an error common to hedonists and anti-hedonists. The point is thus to understand why we choose the wrong pleasure, and why we make mistakes about pleasure: why we speak badly about it and enjoy it poorly.

With this goal in view, an attitude will be adopted toward bodily pleasure that is different from both the common one of seeking and the philosophical one of reprobation. We will seek to understand what it is good for, and how it works. Bodily pleasure then reveals itself as a remedy or a compensation for pain—the only compensation, one must add, for the neutral state cannot be substituted for it. To those who condemn it, it can therefore be objected that it is not bad, but 'good by accident'. To those who seek it, in contrast, it will also be shown that it is not really a pleasure, for as a remedy, it is a *genesis*, whereas pleasure, for its part, is *energeia*. Thus, to identify bodily pleasure as a remedy is both to render it off limits to blame and to disqualify it as pleasure. It is, in one fell swoop, to reduce the common illusion and the discourse of the sages.

However, it is also to gain a better understanding of how the relation to pleasure may be deviant—and therefore, this time, subject to condemnation: the deviance consists in the fact that pleasure is sought for itself, and no longer as a compensation. More than on *akrasia* and *akolasia*, however, interest will be focused on pathological cases. More precisely, we shall be working on the border between the normal and the pathological (for instance, that which separates youth from melancholy), and on that between pathology and ethics (which separates melancholy from *akolasia*).

Yet it is to discover that in man, the normal is pathological, and that human nature is constitutionally unbalanced. Man is that living being whose nature is to be made up of two natures, each of which is, for the other, contrary to nature. And since he has two natures, man is also capable of two *energeiai*, and therefore of two pleasures, which fight with or cancel one another. Far from being a divine privilege, the neutral state is thus the result of human imbalance. Pleasure, by contrast, cannot only be said to be divine, but also to be proper to the god: the god is that living being which, because his nature is simple and non-conflictual

can have true enjoyment; that is, both enjoy the same pleasure and enjoy it continuously.

Having started out from the attitude of the common man, we thus arrive, via the melancholy, young people, and the perverse, at the god. Having started out trying to understand the urgency of bodily pleasures, we have come to show, in the first place, that while they are remedies, they are not genuine pleasures, and then that they are an obstacle to genuine pleasure. In man, therefore, what is blameable is not so much the fact that he seeks bodily pleasure in order to enjoy it as the fact that he is unable to enjoy one and the same pleasure.

One might be surprised that the text (and book VII along with it) ends with this observation: that the conflict between the *phuseis* that are constitutive of man, and between the pleasures associated with them, is simply raised and not solved. This will not be the case in book X where, beyond the diversity and potential conflictuality of pleasures, the principle of a hierarchy will be postulated: so that, ultimately, divine pleasure can be assigned to man as a model and an end, precisely by virtue of the *theion ti* that is within him (1177^b28).

Is this a sign that the text functions in another register, descriptive rather than normative? Does it raise questions about its belonging to book VII, or even about its authenticity, which has sometimes been suspected?³ It seems to me that one can, on the contrary, wonder whether the inability to resolve this conflict is not the sign of an uncertainty proper to book VII, triggered by the very definition of pleasure it proposes. Indeed, this definition leaves open the question of whether pleasure—and happiness—are the *energeia* of all the *hexeis* or only of one. It is as if the real pressing need consisted in demonstrating, against Plato, the identity of pleasure with *energeia* rather than with *genesis*, much more than in establishing a hierarchy of pleasures and *energeiai*.

1. Bodily pleasure as pleasure remedy

a. The problem (1154^a22–6)

The text opens with a consideration of a methodological nature, which, at the same time, indicates its object:

And since we must say not only the true, but also the cause of the error—for this contributes to persuasion, for when the cause for which that which is not true seems true appears reasonable, this makes us more persuaded by the true—we must therefore state why bodily pleasures seem to be more choiceworthy. (1154^a22–6)

Two propositions are thus to be confronted, whose value is indicated immediately, but whose content, as well as their status, remains to be specified. The method is not the same as the dialectical one whose rules were formulated at the beginning of book VII: it is not proposed to pass in review the *phainomena* and the principal *endoxa* in order to resolve disagreements and discriminate between acceptable

³ Particularly by Anton, who objects to its lack of coherence. See Festugière (1960), 66, n. 21.

opinions (VII. 1, 1145^b1–7). For here we are at the end of book VII: the truth has already been revealed, and what is sought henceforth is persuasion (*πίστις*, *πιστεύειν*, ^a23, ^a25).⁴

To inspire *pistis*, however, it is not enough to discriminate the true from the false, but the reason why it seems true must also be made to appear *εὐλογος* (^a24). As is well known, *εὐλογος* in Aristotle admits a dialectical usage,⁵ where it qualifies the well-foundedness of an opinion, which can proceed both from its logical coherence and from its psychological value.⁶ Here, the error whose foundation is to be shown—that is, to understand in what sense it is ‘reasonable’—is clearly stated to be of a practical rather than a theoretical nature: the point is to understand why bodily pleasures appear as ‘more choiceworthy’ (*αἰρετώτεροι*, ^a26).⁷ We are in the domain not of a value judgement based on a theory (like those set forth in chapter 11, which determined pleasure as good or bad) but of an immediate judgement of taste, that determines in its turn a vital attitude.

It remains to be seen whether the text really takes only this one error as object. The interpretation of lines 1154^a31–^b2, which some have seen as an erroneous insertion,⁸ depends on this point: in fact, it is no longer asked why bodily pleasures seem preferable, but why it is judged that pleasure is not good (*οὐ σπουδαῖον*, ^a31). Is the point, therefore, to elucidate the basis only of the attitude that leads to choosing bodily pleasure, or also that of the value judgement that issues a condemnation of it?⁹

To answer this question, we must identify the truth on which the persuasion bears. This can only be the thesis enunciated in 1153^b12–14 as a consequence of the definition of pleasure as an unimpeded activity (*ἐνέργεια ἀνεμπόδιτος*): ‘a certain pleasure will be the sovereign good, even if it so happens that most pleasures are bad’.¹⁰ This thesis is opposed to the three propositions against which arguments have been adduced: ‘no pleasure is a good’; ‘some pleasures are good, most are bad’; ‘even if all pleasures are good, none can be the sovereign good’ (1152^b8–13). However, its premiss is also opposed to the error denounced here: on the one hand, it is affirmed that pleasure, as an unimpeded activity, is ‘αἰρετωτάτην’ (1153^b12), and as such is the sovereign good; on the other, that bodily pleasures are ‘αἰρετώτεροι’. When formulated in this way, the Aristotelian thesis—equivalent to the truth of which we are to be persuaded—nevertheless leaves open the question both of what this pleasure is (*τις ἡδονή*) which can be identified with the sovereign good, and of what the bad pleasures are.

⁴ As in the *Rhetoric*, where pleasures and pains are designated, together with *pathē*, as means of achieving persuasion: see I. 1, 1356^a14–15.

⁵ See Le Blond (1938), 13–16.

⁶ At *Metaph.* A. 9, 1074^b28, for instance, the term is applied to the thesis according to which the divine intellect is not *noēsis* but *dunamis*, not thought (in actuality) but power: in this case, writes Aristotle, it is reasonable to judge that the continuity of thought is painful for it. A true thesis, however, can also be designated as *eulogos* (see e.g. *NE* X. 7, 1177^a12).

⁷ See, in the same sense, *NE* X. 4, 1175^a16.

⁸ Gauthier and Jolif (1970), 795 and 813.

⁹ In favour of simple polemics, see Aspasius, the Anonymous, Gauthier, Grant, Stewart: in favour of twofold polemics, Joachim, Burnet, Festugière, Tricot, and Natali.

¹⁰ Cf. also 1153^b12.

However, the preceding considerations offer some elements of an answer to these two questions. They have established two principal contrasts, which overlap, but proceed in different terms: between pleasures that are accompanied by pain and are curative (*μετὰ λύπης καὶ ἰατρείας*, 1152^b32), which merely restore the natural *hexis* (*αἰ καθιστᾶσαι εἰς τὴν φυσικὴν ἕξιν*, ^b34), on the one hand, and the pleasures with neither pain nor appetite (*ἄνευ λύπης καὶ ἐπιθυμίας*, ^b36), which, for their part, are *energeiai* of the natural *hexis* (1153^a14). The opposition thus proceeds in terms that are both pathological (with versus without pain) and energetic (restoration of the *hexis* versus activity of the *hexis*). Aristotle contented himself with giving, in passing, one example of pleasures without pain: that of the pleasures of contemplation (1153^a1). As far as pleasures accompanied by pain, which are curative, are concerned, he identified them unambiguously with bodily pleasures (1153^a32–3).

From 1153^b29 on, the discussion concentrates on these latter pleasures. It is governed by two main questions. The first is that of their actual urgency. The second is that of their value: should they be judged to be bad? (1154^a8–10). The preceding discussion had begun to answer this second question, by associating bodily pleasures with *akolasia*: bodily pleasures are not bad, but good in so far as they are necessary; the only bad thing is the quest for their excess (1154^a16). The first question, for its part, remains open.

From this point, we can more clearly identify the object of these first lines: the error under examination consists in preferring bodily pleasures, which are known to be identical to pleasures that are accompanied by pain and restorative, to the pleasures that are without pain and ‘energetic’, which have been demonstrated to be more choiceworthy and the sovereign good. However, to state matters in this way is also to manifest their foundation, for this foundation is objective: it resides in the very nature of corporeal pleasure *qua* pleasure remedy. This, then, is what must be elucidated, and it is to this analysis that both the common attitude of questing and the critical discourse of evaluation must be referred.

b. The economy of pleasure (1154^a26–31)

To the problem of the quest for bodily pleasures, an answer is given immediately: if they seem to be preferable, it is ‘first of all, because they repel pain’ (1154^a26–7). It seems that all that is done here is to give an analytical development of the definition that had been given above, which characterized them as pleasures accompanied by pain and with a view to a cure (1152^b32). However, the formulation is not the same: it is no longer said that bodily pleasures are accompanied by pain, but that they repel it. In other words, bodily pleasure is no longer considered, in a Platonic way,¹¹ as being of the order of mixture, but of that of compensation.

One might be surprised that the question of excess is tackled immediately. In fact, a few lines earlier, Aristotle had taken care to distinguish the notion of bodily pleasure from that of excess. The former is good *qua* necessary (1154^a12), while

¹¹ Cf. *Philb.* 46a f.

the latter is characteristic not of bodily pleasure itself, but of a deviant relation to it: it is the *phaulos* who seeks *hyperbolē* (^a15). This analysis thus echoed the definition of those two (unequally) deviant behaviours known as *akrasia* and *akolasia*: the *akratēs* is 'he who, without having so decided, pursues an excess of pleasure and flees that of pain' (1148^a6–7); while the *akolastos* is he who 'pursues an excess of pleasure by virtue of a decision' (1150^a19–20; 1153^a33–4).

We are still in the register of behavioural analysis—of an attitude (*διώκουσι, διώκονται*, 1154^a28, 30), and of the appearance that founds it (*ὡς φαίνεσθαι*, ^a28, ^a31). However, and this is the essential point, this attitude is not presented as deviant. Indeed, the search for the excess of pleasure has excessive pain as its cause: 'and it is because of an excess of pain that they seek exceeding pleasure, that is, in general, bodily pleasure, in the idea that it is a remedy' (1154^a27–9).

Here, Aristotle does not speak of an 'excess of pleasure' when he utilizes the noun *ὑπερβολή*, but of an 'exceeding pleasure', using the participial form *τὴν ἡδονὴν τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν*. It seems important to note this nuance, and to understand that the pleasure sought must be able to exceed a pain that is itself excessive. In other words, we are still in the relative, or compensatory logic of pleasures remedies.¹² Yet this logic is, in a manner of speaking, pathological: it is that of a sick individual, though not of a vicious individual. Indeed, the un-self-controlled or the self-indulgent are not in a logic of compensation; they pursue pleasure in excess through a taste for excess, and not as a remedy for pain; they seek to avoid the latter, even when it is moderate (1148^a7; 1150^a25). Their logic of contraries is also perverted: for the self-indulgent person, excess of pleasure functions as the contrary not of an excess of pain, but only of pain (cf. 1154^a20–1).¹³ Deviant behaviour therefore obeys not a logic of the compensation of pleasure/pain, but a logic of maximal pleasure and minimal pain.

The compensatory approach to pleasure that is at work here may echo Plato. Book V of the *Laws* describes, in very similar terms, four modes of life as a function both of the proportion and the intensity of the pleasure and pain found in them: the temperate life (*σώφρονα βίον*) is characterized by moderate pleasures and pains; here the pleasures are superior to the pains (*ὑπερβαλλούσας τῶν ἀχθῆδόνων*); in the self-indulgent life (*ἀκόλαστος*), by contrast, pains and pleasures are intense (*σφοδρὰς*), and the former exceed the latter; likewise, in the healthy life, pleasures exceed pains, whereas in the unhealthy life, pains exceed pleasures (*Leg. V*, 733e3–734c1). Here we have a veritable economy of affects, whose interest lies

¹² See 1153^a4, as well as *Phlb.* 35a. In [*Pr.*] I, 859^a3, illness is defined as being either a defect (*ἔλλειψις*), or else an excess (*ὑπερβολή*).

¹³ One text, 1148^a20–2, could be interpreted as suggesting that the *akratēs*, unlike the *akolastos*, seeks pleasure in excess not for itself, but as a remedy for excessive pain. What would the *akolastos* do, it is asked, if he were subject to juvenile desire or to the intense pain linked with the lack of necessary pleasures (*περὶ τὰς τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐνδείας λύπη ἰσχυρά*)? It seems, however, that these lines must be read as an argument *a fortiori* (when we see what an *akolastos* can do without even experiencing desire, of what would he be capable if he were subject to a violent desire?), rather than as constituting a new criterion for discriminating between *akrasia* and *akolasia*.

in the fact that it treats pleasure and pain as relative terms. The value (moral, this time) of the life they characterize is deduced not from their nature, but from their relation. And the moderate and healthy life is made up not of the absence of pleasure and pain, nor of their equilibrium, but of an *excess* of pleasure over pain.

Self-indulgent pleasures and pains are distinguished by one essential feature: their intensity (*σφοδρὰς*). But this is the very term Aristotle will use, in his turn: 'And these remedies become intense (*σφοδραὶ*), which is why they are pursued, because they appear (*φαίνεσθαι*) to be in contrast with their contrary' (1154^a29–31).¹⁴ Here, interest focuses not on quantitative excess, but on qualitative excess. In the process, one moves from the order of pleasure as an object (to have *pleasures* [in excess]) to the order of pleasure as a feeling (to have *pleasure* [intensely]).¹⁵

This domain is also that of appearance, and of possible illusion. Earlier (1152^b32), Aristotle had already explained that pleasure remedies are not really pleasures, but only seem to be such, since in reality pleasure is not the restoration of a *hexis*, but *energeia*. He adduced as proof the fact that one may, in the course of these processes of restoration, take pleasure in things that in themselves and in an absolute sense (*phusei, haplōs*) have nothing pleasant about them, like the bitter or the sharp (1153^a5–6). The same process of relativization henceforth applies not just to the feeling of pleasure, but to its intensity:¹⁶ the latter is relative to the pain it makes us forget.

This analysis recalls the *Philebus*, with its attempt to characterize false pleasures. Such an attempt may appear to be doomed to failure, as Socrates emphasizes, since the very feeling of pleasure and the very fact of pleasure cannot be illusory (40d). What can be illusory, in contrast, is its intensity. Thus, pleasures and pains seem greater and more intense by contrast with one another (42b).¹⁷ These intense pleasures are shared by those who are sick in body, but also in mind: the debauched and the dissolute (45d–e). This passage from the *Philebus* may inspire the method adopted here: just as the examination of the most intense pleasures must, according to Plato, enable us to understand pleasure, here it opens up the analysis of the prevalence of bodily pleasure.

Aristotle, however, takes leave of Plato by restricting himself to a physiological analysis, which leaves no room for ethical categories. Whereas this first

¹⁴ The Greek is elliptical, and has given rise to multiple translations. The main divergences turn on the meaning to be given to *γίνονται* (^a29) and to *παρὰ* (^a30). See, e.g., the translations by Barnes: 'Now curative agencies produce intense feeling—which is the reason why they are pursued—because they show up against the contrary pain'; and by Grant: 'Now remedies are naturally violent, and they are adopted because they seem to match their opposites' (my emphasis). Stewart suggests that *αἰετὰς* be understood after *φαίνεσθαι*, which does not seem necessary.

¹⁵ To adopt the distinction formulated by Owen (1971–2).

¹⁶ This is noted by the Anonymous (457, 20–2) more clearly than by Aspasius (155, 15), for whom the question still bears upon the appearance of pleasure.

¹⁷ *αἱ μὲν ἡδοναὶ παρὰ τὸ λυπηρὸν μείζους φαίνονται καὶ σφοδρότεραι, λύπαι δ' αὖθις τὰ παρ' ἡμῶν τοῦναντίον ἐκείναις*. In the *Republic*, the appearance due to contrast explains why the neutral state may be confused with pleasure (X, 584a).

development took as its object the possible lack of measure, quantitative and then qualitative, that is introduced into bodily pleasures, or rather into behaviour with regard to them, it did not refer it to a moral deviance, like that of the weak or the self-indulgent, but to a pathological state. Here, the (quantitative) excess is given in the domain of compensation, as (qualitative) intensity is in that of contrast. We are still within a physiological logic of pleasure as a mean and of restoration, and not in a deviant logic of pleasure as an end—although the text does suggest that the slippage from one to the other is easy: it suffices that one end up, in the case of intense remedies, by seeking less the remedy than the intensity (like those patients who are given morphine to ease their pain and who, once they are cured, become morphine addicts).

c. The problem of evaluation (1154^a31–^b2)

The economic analysis of bodily pleasure has achieved its goal: it has uncovered the basis of the common attitude towards this pleasure. If it is sought, it is for what it is, either as a restoration or as a compensation. Yet it also enables us to distinguish between this common behaviour and deviant behaviour, which, for its part, seeks pleasure no longer as a compensation for suffering, but for itself and for its intensity. And because we have provided ourselves with the means for this distinction, we can henceforth reconsider the question of the value of pleasure. No more than as a faulty insertion, therefore, the following lines cannot be considered a simple parenthesis that interrupts the course of the reasoning.¹⁸

If one can judge that pleasure is *οὐ σπουδαῖον*, not good, or ignoble (^a31), it is, says Aristotle, for two reasons: because ‘some (*αἱ μὲν*) are the acts of a vile nature’, while ‘others (*αἱ δὲ*) are the remedies of a defective nature’ (^a32 and 34).¹⁹ Each of these reasons refers the negative value of pleasure to that of its substrate: that is, to a nature designated either as vile or else as defective. Aristotle, however, does not deal with them in the same way. The first one is not discussed, but simply made explicit: a bad nature can be such ‘either by birth, like that of a beast, or else by habit, like that of bad men’ (^a32–4).²⁰ Here we find a summary of the development of VII. 5, 1148^b15, which took its place in a classification of pleasures, distinguishing between natural pleasures and non-natural pleasures. Although less nuanced, the text of chapter 14 preserves the essential points: what makes a nature bad may be

¹⁸ Gauthier and Jolif transpose the passage after 1153^a7, to which, according to them, the *ὡσπερ εἴρηται* of 1154^a32 refers. They see it as a mere note written after the fact by Aristotle, a simple summary of 1152^b26–1153^a7, which an ‘embarrassed editor’ inserted here because of the mention of pleasure remedies at 1154^a28 and 30 (1970, 812). Suspected by Zell, the text is bracketed by Bonazzi, Rackham, Ross, and Barnes.

¹⁹ With Bywater and Burnet, I suppress *ὅτι* at l. 34. I understand *φύσεως* before *ἐθέτας*, as in 11 (cf. also 1153^a1). We thus respect the parallelism between the two propositions introduced by *αἱ μὲν* and *αἱ δὲ*. If we maintain *ὅτι*, we must understand *ἰατρεῖαι εἰσὼ* after it, as is done by Festugière, who translates: ‘those which are remedies because they cure a defective state’.

²⁰ We may wonder to what noun the *αἱ* of l. 34 refers. The plural pleads in favour of *φύσεως*, already understood in ll. 32 and 34, or for *πράξεις* (l. 32), but *φύσεως* is more satisfactory from the viewpoint of meaning.

either an original defect or else a process of denaturation. Yet this typology was said to be external to vice: *ἔξω τῶν ὄρων τῆς κακίας* (1148^b35–1149^a1). Here, we are once again in the register of pathology, not of ethics.

To say this, however, is to say that the first reason for which pleasure is devalued evaporates of its own accord. First, it is not this pleasure that is at issue, but the nature that is its substrate; and if this nature, for its part, can be said to be *φάυλη*,²¹ it is either because of an original defect or because of a process of habituation, *ethos*, which is nevertheless external to vice. In sum, it is more justified to qualify these pleasures as non-natural, as was done in VII. 5, than as ignoble.

The second reason that incites us to pronounce such a judgement on pleasures is that they are due to a ‘defective’ nature. This time, the devaluation of pleasure relies on an ontological foundation. The argument is only very briefly recalled in an allusive form: ‘to have is better than to become’.²² It echoes the characterization of pleasure as *genesis*, already set forth at 1152^b13 in support of the thesis that pleasure is not a good.²³ Yet Aristotle has already answered this argument by claiming that pleasure is not a process, or a *genesis*, but an activity and an end (*energeia kai telos*), and that it is not found in the course of a process, but in actual usage (*οὐδὲ γινόμενων συμβαίνουσι ἀλλὰ χρωμένων*, 1153^a10–11). He has, however, suggested that pleasure remedies should indeed be counted among becomings, and he stated clearly that they are not really pleasures, but are only pleasant by accident (*kata sumbebēkos*, 1152^b34).

Here, however, the point is no longer to say whether or not they are pleasures, but if they are or are not bad. To this question, Aristotle answers that these pleasures ‘are encountered in the course of processes of completion: it is therefore by accident²⁴ that they are good’ (1154^b1–2). The terms of this response echo quite precisely those of the preceding answers: to *οὐδὲ γινόμενων συμβαίνουσι ἀλλὰ χρωμένων* at 1153^a10–11 there replies *αἱ δὲ συμβαίνουσι τελευτούμενων*. We must be attentive to each word. To be sure, the pleasures at issue here, unlike true pleasures, accompany a process, or something that is in the process of occurring, but is not yet accomplished, as is indicated by the verbal form *teleoumenōn*: they are thus indeed on the side of *genesis* and not of *telos* and *energeia*. However, this process is simultaneously one of completion and achievement; it is precisely the progressive realization of a *telos* (both physical completeness and ontological

²¹ This term does not necessarily pertain to the ethical register: it simply indicates an inferior quality or class (one may speak of a *φάυλος ἵππος*, a bad horse).

²² I believe it is better, following Rowe, to maintain the general value of this phrase, which almost sounds like a maxim, rather than to specify, as most translators do (Festugière, Rackham, Tricot), ‘to be in a good state’. This implies giving the verb *ἔχειν* a technical sense, in which it designates actual possession, as is the case in the *Theaetetus* (197b f.), where it is opposed to *κεκτῆσθαι*. In this case, its use would be close to that of the verb *χρῆσθαι*, which, at 1153^a10–11, functions in opposition to *γίγναι*. We should note that in the *Protreptic*, by contrast, *ἔχειν* and *κεκτῆσθαι* together are opposed to *χρῆσθαι* (cf. fr. 14, Ross).

²³ Cf. *Phlb.*, 54c–d. We should stress that what justifies the devaluation of pleasure is not only its designation as *genesis*, but the fact that this *genesis* is ordered to an end that is different from it.

²⁴ There is a play on words in Greek that is hard to render, between *συμβαίνουσι*, which I translate by ‘are encountered’, and *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*.

perfection). Nothing, therefore, justifies its devaluation. In fact, its ethical value is quite precisely deduced from its ontological status, such as it has just been described: it is not bad because it accompanies a *telos*, but it is good only by accident, since it merely accompanies it. Of the two propositions analysed here, the second is, in a way, the ethical translation of the ontological vocabulary of the first: *συμβαίνουσι/κατὰ συμβεβηκός; τελευμένων/σπουδαῖαι*.

Of the two reasons invoked in support of the thesis that pleasure is not good, we thus see that neither is valid: the first one wrongly makes an ethical judgement on phenomena that are of a pathological order, while the second supports its condemnation by an inadequate ontological analysis.

d. *The necessity of pleasure and the question of the neutral state* (1154^b2–15)

There is thus no reason to condemn bodily pleasure as such. The reason why it is pursued is the same one that justifies it: it is sought for what it is, that is, as a remedy or a compensation. Yet this thesis provides room for an objection that the text does not formulate, but to which it replies: is pleasure the only remedy for pain? Can the neutral state—neither pleasant nor painful—not also function as such?

The problem of the neutral state will be approached by an apparent detour: by returning to the notion of intense pleasure and, more precisely, by considering the case of those individuals who pursue bodily pleasures ‘because of their intensity’, and because they are ‘incapable of enjoying other pleasures: these people, for instance, place themselves in a state to enjoy certain thirsts’ (1154^b2–4).²⁵

Here, pleasure is no longer pursued as a remedy for pain, but pain as the occasion for pleasure. The quest for pleasure now obeys not so much a physiological logic of compensation as a pathological quest for intensity. What is sought is not the state of equilibrium that results from compensation once it is obtained, but the intensity of the feeling of pleasure that accompanies the process of compensation as it is realized: a search for intensity, therefore, more than for equilibrium, and of the process more than its end. From this viewpoint, the text does indeed follow upon the preceding development on pleasure-*genesis*, which is a supplementary argument in favour of the coherence of the argumentation.

Here again, however, this argumentation can be better understood if we bear the *Philebus* in mind: for it is just after having characterized pleasure as a *genesis* (and, as such, not good), that Socrates described those individuals who ‘take their joy in that *genesis* in which they wish to see a pleasure, and declare that they could not bear to live without experiencing hunger, thirst, and without feeling all the cravings implied by such appetites’ (54e). Such is also the language of Callicles, who prefers the life of pleasures, ‘where one pours and re-pours as much as one can into one’s cask’—the life, therefore, of the *akolastos*—to the state of

²⁵ This case is distinct from the one evoked at 1151^b23, of individuals capable of enjoying pleasures but ‘less than they should’, and who, together with the weak and the intemperate, constitute the two extremes with regard to which the temperate person can be considered a *meson*.

plenitude of the life of order and temperance: a ‘life of stone’, as he says (Grg. 493e–494b).

Faced with the Platonic text, the approach is the same as above: the observation can be accepted, but the condemnation is refused. For before making a value judgement on the fact, one must give the reason. Yet here, once again, the reason is of a pathological order: the quest for *genesis* for *genesis*’s sake, or intensity for intensity’s sake, proceeds from an inability to enjoy other pleasures. What should determine the value judgement, therefore, is not the mere fact of the search for pleasure, but the nature of the pleasure sought: ‘Indeed, when the pleasures are innocent, there is no reason to censure them, but when they are damaging,²⁶ they are something vile’ (1154^b4–5).

The notion of innocent pleasure may well be Platonic,²⁷ but this does not make the opposition to Plato any less violent. For what is said here is that one can perfectly well lead the life of a Danaïd (or of a plover) without thereby deserving blame—that one can be Callicles in an innocent way. Thus, just as its character of being a remedy and a *genesis* does not suffice to justify the devaluation of bodily pleasure, so the quest for intensity is not always worthy of condemnation: everything depends on the nature of the pleasure sought, and on that of the lack for which it compensates, according to whether it is or is not natural, and does or does not proceed from a healthy organism. There is nothing wrong with working up an appetite by doing gymnastics;²⁸ there may be, in contrast, in sucking salt in order better to taste tequila.

At the same time, however, what the text emphasizes is the necessity of pleasure. For the individuals in question here seek *genesis* and intensity both *for themselves* and *by default*, through their inability to find their pleasure elsewhere. Aristotle thus refers the artificial character of their behaviour (fabricating desires for oneself) to a kind of necessity. For some people, the fabrication of artificial needs is a means for fulfilling the necessary and natural need for pleasure.

It is this necessary character of pleasure that must now be shown. This implies that we broaden our discussion. We thus move from ‘some people’ (*τινές*) to ‘most’ (*πολλοῖς*, ^b6), and then to the living being in general (*ζῶον*, ^b7). The argumentation seems to be spinning its wheels, but in fact marks a distinct progress: we no longer say merely that the aficionados of bodily pleasures do not know other kinds of pleasure, but that they do not know *any other remedy* to pain than pleasure. At the same time, it will be shown that the neutral state (*τὸ μηδέτερον*, ^b6), which is neither pleasant nor painful, which one might think is such a remedy, is itself ‘painful to most because of their nature’²⁹ (1154^b6). The text thus carries out a reduction of the neutral state to pain: at the end of this

²⁶ I translate *βλάβερα* (found in L^b).

²⁷ Cf. *Resp.* II, 357b7: *ἡδοναὶ ἀβλαβεῖς*; *Leg.* II, 667e5. Cf. also *Pol.* VIII. 5, 1339^b25; 7, 1342^a16.

²⁸ Cf. *Aspasius*, 156, 6–7.

²⁹ *διὰ τὴν φύσιν*. We might wonder if the nature in question is nature in general (Grant speaks of a ‘law of nature’), or of a particular constitution (which, for Stewart, is that of melancholics). It seems simpler to connect these words to the immediately preceding *πολλοῖς*, and to understand, therefore, that the nature in question is that of the greatest number, i.e. of the ordinary man who is the subject of

deduction, pleasure appears not only as the only remedy for pain, but also as a remedy for neutrality.

It is well known that Plato, for his part, distinguishes the neutral state from both pleasure and pain: this is the case in the *Gorgias* (494b) and in the *Republic*, where the neutral state³⁰ is denounced as a spell (*goēteia*) of pleasure, which appears as pleasure only by contrast with pain and through ignorance of true pleasures—as grey can be perceived as the contrary of black by beings who are unaware of white (IX, 583c6–585a5). In the *Philebus*, Socrates wonders what, in living beings (*ζώους*), a state might be like that is without destruction or restoration—and therefore without genesis. He suggests that this third state, *tritē diathesis*, without pain or pleasure, might be that of a man who has chosen the life of intelligence and wisdom. And there would be nothing absurd, he adds, about such a life being the most divine of all (32e–33c). Further on, the neutral state is analysed not as a state of equilibrium, but as a state made up of motions too weak to give rise to pain or pleasure (43b–d).³¹ This new analysis is the occasion for repeating that such a state must be distinguished from pleasure. In particular, this thesis must be affirmed against people who discourse very skilfully about the things of nature (*μάλα δεινούς λεγομένους τὰ περὶ φύσιν*), ill-tempered individuals who see pleasure only as a magical spell (*goēteuma*, 44d).

When he notes that the neutral state may be painful, Aristotle thus opposes both the ill-tempered people who identify pleasure with the absence of pain and Plato, who refuses to see the absence of pleasure as pain. Finally, he also opposes Speusippus,³² who defines happiness as a perfect disposition (*hexis teleia*), characterized by the absence of disturbance (*aokhlēsia*).³³

In order to support his correlative thesis of the necessity of pleasure, Aristotle in turn will summon the discourse of an expert in the natural sciences: 'Indeed, living beings are in constant pain, as is attested by the theorists of nature,³⁴ who say that seeing and hearing are something painful; however, they say, we are used to it by now.'

Scholars generally agree in recognizing a reference to Anaxagoras here: although Aristotle does not cite him by name, the thesis he mentions recalls that according to which 'all sensation is accompanied by pain'.³⁵ We have here a 'tragic conception

the text, and of whom we will learn further on that the neutral state in him is the result of the conflict of the natures that constitute him.

³⁰ τὸ μὲν ἄνευ.

³¹ This analysis goes against that of Aristippus, who, although he too distinguishes the absence of pleasure from pain, and the absence of pain from pleasure, bases this distinction on the fact that pain and pleasure are motions, whose absence therefore results from an absence of motion (cf. *DI* I, 86–93).

³² On the question of the identification of the ill-tempered individuals of the *Philebus*, see the notice by Diēs (1993 (1941)), as well as Dillon (1999).

³³ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* II, 22, 133, 4 = fr. 77 Tarán.

³⁴ Here I adopt the conjecture of Aspasius, *φυσιολόγοι*. The term is already found in 114^b 8–9.

³⁵ ἅπασαν δ' αἴσθησιν μετὰ λύπης (fr. A 92, Theophrastus, *De sens.*, §29); πᾶσαν αἴσθησιν μετὰ πόνου (fr. A 94, Aetius IV, 9, 16). Identified by Theophrastus, the reference is confirmed by Aspasius (156, 17).

of sense',³⁶ which makes pain a structural element of sensation, and, beyond this, a permanent state of the living being. As Theophrastus already emphasized,³⁷ we can hardly judge that Aristotle adheres to the thesis of painful feeling. Whereas Anaxagoras maintains that 'all sensation is accompanied by pain' (*ἅπασαν δ' αἴσθησιν μετὰ λύπης*), Aristotle writes that 'to each sensation there corresponds a pleasure' (*κατὰ πᾶσαν γὰρ αἴσθησίν ἐστιν ἡδονή*, NE X. 4, 1174^b20–1).

However, the thesis concerning the pain of sensing is only summoned in support of another thesis, which, for its part, is presented in a direct way: that of the pain of the living being. We must note that in formulating it, Aristotle does not use the term *lypē*, which we find in the statement of Anaxagoras's thesis, but the verb *ponēi*. However, *ponos* does not designate physical pain properly so called, but pain in the sense of effort or fatigue.³⁸ Thus, Euripides says of the human condition that it is pain without respite, and contains no *ἀνάπαυσις πονῶν* (*Hippolytus* 189). Likewise, in the *Laws*, and in a context that is very close to ours since its subject is pleasure, pain, and the learning of the good *ethos*, we hear of the gods' pity for the pain (*ἐπίπονον*) of men, and of the festivals they have instituted as a truce from this pain (*ἀναπαύλας τῶν πόνων*) (*Leg.* II, 653b–d).

If the reference to the theorists of nature authorizes the broadening of the discussion to include living beings, beyond the limiting cases considered above,³⁹ the term *ponos*, in so far as it exceeds simple physical pain, marks the fact that more than the condition of living beings, it is the human condition that is in question here. What is announced here is the dominant theme of the end of the passage: that of the tension and instability of the incarnate condition and of human nature, of which Aristotle will then say, not that it is in continuous pain, *ἀεὶ πονεῖ*, but that nothing identical is continuously pleasant to it, *οὐκ ἀεὶ δ' οὐθὲν ἡδὺ τὸ αὐτὸ* (1154^b20–1). Book X will describe fatigue, which the word *ponos* can also designate, as one of the symptoms of this imperfection (1175^a4; 1177^b22). At the same time, however, the main thesis of the text is announced,

³⁶ To adopt the title of an article by Romeyer-Dherbey (1999), where the question is raised in particular of whether the theorist of nature at NE VII. 14 is not the same as that of the *Philebus*; in other words, if the ill-tempered person mentioned by Plato is not Anaxagoras. To the various arguments in favour of this hypothesis, one might add that in *EE* I. 5, 1216^a10–15, Anaxagoras is opposed to the partisans of the life of pleasure. However, the thesis combated in the *Philebus* is not the same as that set forth here by Aristotle. Plato's theorists of nature affirm that all pleasure is mixed with pain, and this thesis is articulated with that according to which pleasure is the absence of pain. Aristotle's theorists of nature, for their part, affirm that all sensation is mixed with pain, and this thesis is articulated with that according to which the absence of pleasure is pain.

³⁷ Cf. *De sens.* §§29–33 and in particular §31: ἡ μὲν γὰρ αἴσθησις κατὰ φύσιν, οὐδὲν δὲ τῶν φύσει βίαι καὶ μετὰ λύπης, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον μεθ' ἡδονῆς. Unlike Aspasius (156, 15), the Anonymous (458, 28–31) seems to consider that Aristotle accepts the argument, and suggests that what is painful is to exercise sensory *dunamis*. See, in the same sense, Joachim (p. 240), who refers to *Metaph.* Θ. 8, 1050^b16 f.

³⁸ See *EE* II. 5, 1222^a38, which distinguishes the *philoponoi* from the *apolaustikoi*: our nature does not depart from the mean in the same way in all things; thus, we are less the friends of effort, and more of pleasure.

³⁹ At VII. 3, 1147^b8–9, the viewpoint of the theorists of nature on *akrasia* is very clearly distinguished from that which presides over the analysis, which is nevertheless qualified as *φυσικῶς* (1147^a24).

and also the most polemical, for it works against Speusippus as much as against the *Philebus*: that according to which the remedy for this pain, the state which is both the most desirable and the most divine, and which the god himself enjoys, is not the neutral state but pleasure.

Against the proponents of the neutral state, it is thus maintained that only pleasure is a remedy for pain. As such, it is necessary for human nature, just as *ponos* seems to be, not for the reason identified by Anaxagoras (the pain of sensing) but for one that may, although we scarcely know anything more at this point, have to do with the incarnate condition. This necessary character of pleasure will be illustrated by two case studies: that of the young and that of the melancholy.⁴⁰

And just as the young, because of growth, are in a disposition similar to that of drunkenness—and youth is a pleasant thing—those who are melancholy by nature always (*ἀεί*) have need of a remedy. Indeed, their body, by its constitution, is constantly bitten, and they are always (*ἀεί*) subject to violent desire. But pleasure chases away pain, whether it is the contrary pleasure or any kind of pleasure, as long as it is powerful: and this is why they become self-indulgent and vile.⁴¹

Here, young people and melancholy are compared as two cases of organic lack of balance, one of which, however, is a source of pleasure, the other of suffering. In the first case, that of youth, the cause of this imbalance is growth (*auxēsis*)—a phenomenon given as an example in the *Philebus* of those imperceptible changes that cause neither pain nor pleasure, and are at the origin of the neutral state (43a–c). In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle speaks of them otherwise, as a state in which bodily heat is intense, as it is in drunkenness, except that here it is a natural phenomenon (*ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως*); this heat brings it about that ‘young people are, by character, inclined to desires’.⁴² Youth is thus a normal pathology, and a necessary moment of the human condition.

The same does not hold true for melancholy: if melancholy people are also ‘constantly subject to a violent desire’, this desire is painful, and is like an incessant ‘biting’ (1154^b12–13). Its cause is a particular nature (*phusis*, ^b11), or

⁴⁰ As it presents itself in Bywater, as in Susemihl, i.e. with a point at 1154^b11 after *νεότητος*, the text raises a problem of coherence: it makes young people the *comparatum* of the proposition introduced by *ομοίως*, whose *comparandum* would be the beings mentioned above who seek bodily pleasure as a compensation for their suffering. Yet Aristotle adds immediately that ‘youth is a pleasant thing’ (1154^b10–11). It is therefore hard to see (as is pointed out by the Anonymous, Thomas Aquinas, and Ramsauer) how youthful behaviour could be cited in support of the thesis of pleasure as a remedy. To avoid this contradiction, Gauthier and Jolif suggest supplying <τὸ ἡδὺ <διδάσκει>. Ross and Festugière adopt another solution, more economical and more satisfactory, which consists in transforming the point after *νεότητος* into a comma: the melancholy thus become the *comparandum*, young people the *comparatum*, and the proposition concerning the pleasure of youth a simple parenthetical clause. This solution also has the advantage of respecting the balance between *πλε/ἠ* (^b9^b11).

⁴¹ For Aspasius, this remark does not apply specifically to melancholics (who are not the subject of commentary, any more than young people are), but to men in general (156, 16–21).

⁴² *Rh.* II, 12, 1389^a3 f. They are also subject to *akrasia*, and are inconstant (*eumetaboloí*). The thirtieth *Problem* also articulates together youth, drunkenness, and melancholy (954^b35–953^b33).

a constitution (*krasis*, ^b13) in which black bile is predominant (*μέλαινα χολή*). This in turn is a complex mixture, in which *pneuma*, the hot, and the cold are found.⁴³ It provokes modifications of the *thumos*, a changeable humour, in which joy follows upon depression ([Pr.] XXX, 1, 953a33). Thus, the melancholic is an unstable, mobile, inconstant (*anōmalos*) being, simultaneously ecstatic and plastic, as quick to project himself outside himself as he is to model himself after others, which can also make him a highly gifted being.⁴⁴

The melancholic has already been the subject of discussion previously, in book VII, as someone particularly inclined to *akrasia*, and, more specifically, to the form of *akrasia* whose cause is rashness: carried away by his imagination, the melancholic does not take the time to deliberate (7, 1150^b25).⁴⁵ For this reason, his *akrasia* is easier to cure than that which follows deliberation (1152^a28). Here, however, melancholy is associated with the more serious form of deviance known as *akolasia*. To be sure, the melancholic, unlike the disturbed person, is subject to genuine suffering. He is therefore in search of a pleasure remedy, or a pleasure capable of ‘chasing away the pain’ (1154^b13–14).

However, the result of the incessant and, in the proper sense, constitutive character of this pain is that the man dominated by black bile is not only in a logic of compensation: he seeks not only the pleasure opposed to this pain, but any kind of pleasure, *καὶ ἡ τυχοῦσα*, as long as it is powerful enough (^b14).

From a physiological logic of compensation—susceptible of a medical description, but not of ethical blame—the melancholic can thus easily fall into a self-indulgent logic of intensity and pleasure for pleasure’s sake (‘pourvu qu’on ait l’ivresse’), indifferent to the very principle of the distinction between good pleasures and bad pleasures.⁴⁶

The study of the melancholic closes the first part of the text, whose main goal was the identification of bodily pleasure with pleasure as a remedy. At the same time, we have considerably reduced the principle of the condemnation to which this kind of pleasure is subject in Plato: its primary field of study is not ethics, but physiology, even if interest has also been focused on tracing the frontier and the points of passage from one to the other. The quest for pleasure corresponds above all to an organic need for compensation, although it may also deviate (for reasons which, moreover, in the case of the melancholics, are also organic) into a quest for pleasure for pleasure’s sake, and intensity for the sake of intensity. As a remedy, bodily pleasure is not bad, but good accidentally. Yet it is also necessary, in so far as it is, to the exclusion of the neutral state, the only remedy for pain.

⁴³ On the *krasis* of black bile, see [Pr.] XXX, 1, 953^b24; 954^a13; ^b34. See also [Pr.] I, 861^b20, and the commentary of the Anonymous, 459, 1–6: black bile is a residue or deposit from that which is not cooked by digestion, and thus remains vehement within the body. It is this excess or superfluity (*perisōma*) that makes the melancholy person an exceptional being (*perittos*): see Pigeaud (1988).

⁴⁴ [Pr.] XXX, 954^a28–^b9.

⁴⁵ On the intensity of the melancholic’s representations, see *Mem.* II, 453^a19.

⁴⁶ Whereas young people are moved above all by the desire for necessary pleasures, and hence by the logic of compensation; cf. 1148^a22.

2. Pleasures without pain (1154^b15–20)

There are, however, pleasures without pain, and they are the genuine pleasures. It will thus be discovered that if it is a mistake to condemn bodily pleasure, since it is a remedy, it is also a mistake to seek a pleasure in it, for in so far as it is a remedy, pleasure is good by accident; but for this same reason, it is pleasant only by accident.

We recall that a fundamental disjunction was formulated between pleasures that are accompanied by pain and are curative, aiming at the re-establishment of the natural *hexis*, and pleasures without pain or desire, which are an *energeia* of the natural *hexis*. The former were identified with bodily pleasures and designated as susceptible of excess (1153^a32–3). Only one example was given of the latter, that of contemplation (1153^a1). This disjunction thus seems to coincide with the one between bodily pleasures and non-bodily pleasures. However, in other passages, Aristotle dissociates bodily pleasures and pain. This is the case in *NE* III, where, echoing the *Philebus* and the *Republic*,⁴⁷ he evokes the pleasures of sight, hearing, and smell. These are external to the sphere of temperance, as they are of self-indulgence, for there can be no excess in their case: a man who relishes painting, music, or the smell of roses will not be qualified as *akolastos*—at least, not as long as the pleasure he derives from the representation of nudes, certain rhythms, or the scent of fruit is not linked to a sensual appetite (10, 1118^a1–16).⁴⁸ The disjunction between pleasures with and without pain can therefore still be operative in the midst of bodily pleasures.

One thing is certain: pleasures without pain, whether bodily or not, do not fill an organic lack. They are neither compensations nor remedies; this is why they allow no excess (1154^b16). They are not preceded by any lack, the satisfaction of which might determine their measure. Finally, and this is the essential point, pleasures without pain, or which are non-compensatory, are not a *genesis* but an *energeia*.⁴⁹

Pleasures that are without pain, for their part, do not admit of excess. They are among things pleasant⁵⁰ by nature and not by accident. I call pleasant by accident the things that act as remedies: for if they happen to cure, it is while that which has remained healthy is active,⁵¹ and this is why they seem pleasant; but I call pleasant by nature the things that provoke the activity of this healthy nature. (1154^b15–20)

⁴⁷ *Resp.* IX, 584b; *Phlb.* 51b f. However, the treatment of ‘pure’ or ‘true’ pleasures differs from one of these dialogues to the other. In the *Republic*, Plato clearly dissociates them from pain, as Aristotle does here; whereas in the *Philebus*, he dissociates them from pain, but not from lack and need. True pleasures occur against a background of a need that is real, but insensible, and they therefore still function as a remedy or a compensation.

⁴⁸ See also *EE* III, 2, 1230^b25 f. (with the citation of Stratoniceus at 1231^a11; some flowers smell beautiful, others pleasant); *Mag. mor.* II, 7, 1204^b10 f. See also Alexander of Aphrodisias, *P. Eth.* 6 and 7.

⁴⁹ Of the whole of chapter 14, the lines quoted have attracted the most attention on the part of modern commentators. See, in particular, Owen (1971–2); Gosling (1973–4); Bostock (1988).

⁵⁰ Like Barnes, I interpret this genitive as partitive.

⁵¹ I suppress the *τι* at l. 19.

We must first note that here the disjunction no longer operates between pleasures (*hēdonai*) but between pleasant things (*hēdeia*). In other words, the perspective is no longer the same as in the first part of the text; it is no longer that of the subject of pleasure, but that of its object, which is at the same time its agent, in the causal sense of the term. Yet this category of the agent here appears as discriminatory: Aristotle opposes remedies, which are pleasant by accident (*kata sumbebēkos*) as that which happens to cure (*sumbainei iatreuesthai*) ‘with the healthy part being in activity’ (and the entire problem turns around the meaning that should be given to this participle, or to the genitive absolute in the Greek text), to the things that are pleasant by nature, which, for their part, *poiei praxin*, provoke activity. *Sumbainei* contrasts with *poiei*: in one case we have an act or an event (curing) concomitant with a *praxis*, in the other an act that causes this *praxis*.

In order to give meaning to this opposition, we must understand the problem it is intended to solve. At 1152^b31 f., Aristotle has established a strict (definitional) identity between pleasure and *energeia*, and at the same time has demolished that between pleasure and *genesis*. This has already led him to denounce the pleasure remedies as simple appearances of pleasure (οὐδ’ ἡδοναί, ἀλλὰ φαίνονται, 1152^b32). However, this analysis, the stakes of which are just as polemical against the theory of pleasure as a *genesis* as they are foundational for the Aristotelian theory of pleasure, encounters a difficulty: that of pleasure itself, taken in the curative process. Our text, for its part, functions on the level of facts, and it must confront all the more urgently the question of the pleasure taken in the curative process, in that its entire first part has the goal of showing that bodily pleasures are pleasure remedies. The terms of the problem are therefore: the pleasure remedies, in so far as they are *geneseis* and not *energeiai*, are not genuine pleasures; however, the fact is that one derives pleasure from the curative process. The solution can only consist in affirming that if there is pleasure, there must be an *energeia*: as Aspasius notes, *prattontos ti* and *praxis* of lines 19 and 20 must indeed be understood in this sense.⁵² However, this *energeia* is not to be confused with the curative process; nor can it have the same subject: that which is in activity, as was already indicated in 1152^b35–6,⁵³ is the healthy part which, in so far as it is healthy, is capable of an *energeia*, precisely because since it does not have a cure as its goal, it does not aim at any end other than itself.⁵⁴

However, the question arises of how the relationship between the activity of this healthy part and the process of cure is to be conceived (i.e. how the verb *sumbainei* and the Greek genitive absolute must be understood). Should we understand that the cure is an accidental effect of the activity of the healthy part, and that we

⁵² 156, 31: *πράξιν μὲν οὖν εἴρηκεν ἀντὶ τοῦ ἐνεργεῖαν.*

⁵³ ὅτι δ’ ἡ ἐνέργεια ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς ὑπολοίπου ἕξεως καὶ φύσεως. Although the idea is the same, the terms are slightly different, since they oppose not the healthy part to the damaged part, but the disposition and the nature of the motion aiming to re-establish them.

⁵⁴ It seems difficult to identify this part of the soul, as Bostock does (1988), with the entire soul: it is hard to see in what sense the qualification ‘healthy’ could apply to it, and the parallel text 52^b35–6 does not mention it.

would therefore have one and the same action, which would admit a twofold description, as *genesis* and as *energeia*⁵⁵ (in this case, one would have to give a causal value to the genitive absolute, and translate: 'they happen to be cures because the healthy part is in activity...')? Or do we indeed have two distinct, but concomitant actions, one of which, the curative process, has an end that is external to itself, while the other, the activity of the healthy part, has no end other than in itself?

The opposition at work in the text favours the second option: unlike things that are pleasant by nature, remedies do not provoke the activity of the healthy part; they are effective *at the same time* as this part is in activity (and also, no doubt, because it is so: try administering a tonic to a corpse), but they trigger a process that is irreducible to this *praxis* precisely in so far as it has the cure as its end.

Thus, water appeases thirst only on condition that it is assimilated by the vegetative *dunamis*,⁵⁶ which indeed presupposes that the latter is in good working order, carries out its proper activity, and nothing but such activity, but also on the condition that the just equilibrium between the dry and the moist be re-established in the entire organism, which presupposes a *genesis*. The verb *sumbainein* thus indicates not the accidental effect (external to a given finality) of one and the same action susceptible of a twofold description, according to whether it is considered as the cause of this effect or as self-finalized, but rather the coincidence of two distinct actions, one of which is a *genesis* and the other an *energeia*.

To say that remedies are pleasant only by accident (*kata sumbebēkos*) is thus, in fact, to say that they only seem pleasant; or else, as was said at 1152^b31, that they are not pleasures. It is not a question of saying that the quality of being pleasant is attached to them not *qua genesis* but *qua energeiai*, but quite simply to deny them this quality.⁵⁷ If they are pleasant by accident, it is because the effect of pleasure is misleadingly attached to them as its cause, whereas it occurs at the same time as them, but not *through* them. Indeed, the pleasure felt is not due to their action, which is a mere *genesis*, but to that of the healthy part which, for its part, is an *energeia*. The illusion, therefore, or the appearance, concerns not so much the feeling of pleasure (which, as long as it is felt, cannot be placed in doubt⁵⁸), as the identification of its cause.

⁵⁵ This is the thesis of Owen (1971–2), who therefore interprets *kata sumbebēkos* in the sense that it is not *qua genesis* that the phenomenon would be the source of pleasure, but *qua energeia*. However, Aristotle, as is quite clear at 1152^b31–2, not only says that it is not *qua A* but *qua B* that remedies are sources of pleasure, but also that they are not (in any way, in any aspect) pleasures, since pleasure, by definition, is not *genesis* but *energeia*.

Owen's interpretation has given rise to a debate over the question of the degree to which an *energeia* can be described as a *genesis*, and on the criteria of distinction set forth in book X. See particularly Ackrill (1965) and Rorty (1974).

⁵⁶ See the Anonymous (459, 27–38): if drinking and eating seem pleasant, it is because the *dunamis threptikē* is active.

⁵⁷ In so doing, as is noted by Rorty (1974), Aristotle conserves the heart of the anti-hedonist thesis: one does not desire a process for its own sake.

⁵⁸ Whence, as Owen notes, the need to modify the definition of pleasure, and to avoid making its being felt a definitional feature (*ἀντί δὲ τοῦ αἰσθητῆν ἀνεμπόδιον*, 1153^a15).

Things that are pleasant by accident must be opposed by those that are such by nature: their action is not only concomitant to that of the healthy part, but provokes it. In order to be pleasant by nature, the agent must therefore be the cause of an *energeia* and not of a *genesis*: things that are pleasant by nature have as their effect an activity that is its end in itself, and that, as such, is the source of an authentic pleasure. Since this distinction overlaps with that between pleasures *meta lupōn* and *aneu lupōn*, with and without pain, one might think of the effects on the senses of sensibles which are the occasion for their full actualization.⁵⁹ Yet the description would also be valid for the action of the intelligibles on the passive intellect.⁶⁰ If the distinction between pleasures with and without pain can still be operative in the midst of bodily pleasures, it also opens the way to the consideration of other pleasures in which, this time, the body no longer has a share.

This analysis marks the conclusion of the preceding one: it makes clear that bodily pleasures, since they are reducible to pleasure remedies, are the simple appearances of pleasures. This does not mean, however, that they are bad: pleasant by accident, bodily pleasures are also good only by accident (1154^b1).

3. The conflict of pleasures (1154^b20–31)

Line 1154^b21 inaugurates a new moment: in the first place, there is no longer any question of the nature of pleasure, or of its value, but of its continuity (there are three occurrences of *ἀὲ* in lines 21–6). Secondly, there is no longer any question of particular cases, on the border of the pathological, or of the living being in general, as in 1154^b7, but of man: more particularly, of man's specificity with regard to that other living being known as the god. Yet the last lines of chapter 14 will also contribute a final answer to the question of the urgency of bodily pleasure, as to that of the value of pleasure in general. This answer is unexpected: we will discover that the proper feature of man is not to seek bodily pleasure in order to enjoy it but, far rather, to be unable always to enjoy the same pleasure. Man is that living being who, because he is made up of two natures, is also capable of two pleasures, each of which is contrary to nature for the other, and which fight or cancel each other out. The neutral state is therefore not the divine state, as the *Philebus* claimed, but the effect of this conflict of pleasures in man. In contrast,

⁵⁹ Cf. *De an.* II, 5, 417^b20, where a similar formulation is found: sensible things are said to be *τὰ ποιητικὰ τῆς ἐνεργείας*.

⁶⁰ Thus, Aspasius judges that pleasures that are good by nature are those of the better nature (157, 1). Following him, Gosling and Taylor (1984, 339–40) emphasize the normative character of this distinction. However, it seems to me that their analysis holds for the nearby text at 1153^a5 f., but not for this one: in the first case, things are considered that are neither pleasant by nature nor even absolutely (*haplōs*, ^a6), as for instance the bitter and the spicy, to explain how they can appear to be pleasant to a sick person, in so far as they are accompanied by a curative process. Here, the question is no longer the same: the point is to show how that which accompanies such a process, and in so far as it accompanies it, cannot be genuinely pleasant.

the proper feature of the god, because he is simple, is to enjoy a genuine pleasure, or an *energeia* that is unimpeded and without rivals.

a. *The two natures* (1154^b20–4)

It has been shown that bodily pleasure is both necessary as a remedy and illusory as a pleasure. It has thus been opposed to these pleasures, which may or may not be bodily, and which, in so far as they are not the process of curing suffering, but the occasion of an activity, are pleasant by nature. The initial distinction, between bodily and non-bodily pleasures, has thus been displaced: the opposition is henceforth between pleasures by accident and pleasures by nature. The initial question may therefore also be reformulated: if bodily pleasures are merely appearances of pleasure, why should one seek them in preference to authentic pleasures?

The answer to this question is as follows:

Yet there is nothing identical that is continuously pleasant to us, since our nature is not simple, but there is something else in it, by which we are perishable things,⁶¹ so that if one of the two does something, it is contrary to nature for the other nature ... (1154^b20–3)

Man is thus characterized as a living being destined not only for the alternation of pleasure and pain, but for the alternation of pleasures, in so far as his nature is not simple, but composed of a second element, immediately designated as being a 'second nature' (^b24). This answer raises new problems. The preceding passage already mentioned a duality of natures; but the distinction then took place between the healthy nature, capable as such of a *praxis* or of an *energeia*, and the sick nature, the subject of curative *genesis*. Here, the 'other nature' is designated as the cause, for human nature, of its corruptibility. The paradoxical character of this formulation must be conserved: the proper feature of human nature is to be composed of two natures. Yet the descriptive approach that is adopted here consists in observing a conflict between these two natures, at the same time as a kind of equality: a relationship of forces. Each one is capable of a *praxis* (whence it must be deduced, by virtue of the identity of *praxis*, *energeia*, and *hēdonē*, that each one has its own pleasure attached to it), and this *praxis* is, for the other, contrary to nature. Man is therefore that living being whose nature is to be constituted of two natures, each of which is contrary to nature for the other.

This point is eminently problematic: until now, in fact, the notion of *phusis*, like that of *praxis*, has had a normative value. Pleasures by nature have been opposed to pleasures by accident, and pleasures leading to the re-establishment of the *hexis phusikē* (remedies) to pleasures with the value of the *energeia* of the *hexis kata phusin* (1152^b34/1153^a14). We now discover that there are conflictual natures and activities.

⁶¹ Bywater, like Aspasius, the Anonymus, and the Periphrast, read *φθαρτοί*. I maintain *φθαρτά* with Susemihl.

The question then arises of what they are to be identified with. The commentators differ widely on this point, and their interpretations often seem dependent on book X. No doubt one can derive assistance, *a contrario*, from the continuation of the text, which opposes to the duality of human nature the simplicity of the divine nature. However, this opposition still leaves various possibilities open, since the second element—present in man, but absent from the god—can be assimilated either to the body⁶² or to matter,⁶³ or again to *dunamis*. It therefore seems safer to refer to the general anthropology that is at work in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as in the *Eudemian Ethics*. This anthropology relies, of course, on a fundamental duality, which nevertheless operates not between the soul and the body (much less between form and matter, or between *energeia* and *dunamis*), but between the rational and the irrational parts of the soul.⁶⁴ In book I of the *NE*, this opposition is presented in terms that are very close to the ones found here: the irrational part is also designed by the term *phusis*, and as the site of a possible conflict with the rational part.⁶⁵ The explanation of the various types of relationships between these two *phuseis* is, moreover, immediately articulated with the figures of the *enkrateis* and of the *akrateis* (1102^b14). If we interpret the passage as referring to this basic duality, then light is shed on the problem raised above. We understand how two *phuseis* and two *praxeis* can be spoken of: for, as the preceding passage reminded us, bodily pleasures themselves, although they are *geneseis*, do indeed imply the *praxis* or the *energeia* of a part of the soul (the *phutikon* or else (1152^b35) the *epithumētikon*). Thus, the opposition is displaced from that between bodily pleasures and non-bodily pleasures to that between the *energeia* of the irrational soul and the *energeia* of the rational soul.⁶⁶ It is therefore not the same one we find in the text, apparently parallel and often cited in this context, in book X (1175^a4), which explains the discontinuity of pleasure by fatigue (the cause of which is ultimately *dunamis*, although the text of the *NE* does not say so).⁶⁷ However, this is also because the initial problem is different: the question with which our text is concerned is not only that of the discontinuity of pleasure, but also that of the alternation of pleasures; the point is not to know why we do not enjoy a given

⁶² See the Anonymus (460, 4) and Gauthier (p. 814), with the criticism of Dirlmeier (p. 507), who, following Aspasius (157, 7), understands that the reference is to the primary elements. In the same sense, see also Joachim (p. 240).

⁶³ Stewart (ii. 259); van Riel (2000, p. 63).
⁶⁴ We have here a fundamental duality, but the irrational part may in turn be divided into the *phutikon*, on the one hand, and the *epithumētikon kai orektikon*, on the other hand (1102^b29–30). Since this latter part, unlike the former, has a share in reason, we may also consider that the division takes place in the midst of the rational part, between the rational principle itself and that which is liable to submit to it (1103^a2). In the same sense, see *EE* II. 1, 1219^b28 f.

⁶⁵ ἄλλη τις φύσις, 1102^b13; ἄλλο τι παρὰ τὸν λόγον πεφυκόσ, δ μάχεται καὶ ἀντιτείνει τῷ λόγῳ, 117–18.

⁶⁶ It could be objected to this interpretation that it does not take account of the *phtharta*, since it seems difficult to associate a part or a faculty of the soul with corruptibility. However, the irrational faculty, in so far as it is nothing other than the life of the body, is indeed linked to mortality.

⁶⁷ One must refer to *Metaph.* H. 8, 1050^b25 f., which articulates fatigue and *dunamis*, and associates *dunamis* and *hylē* in order to oppose them to *energeia* (which itself is linked to *kinēsis* in the case of stars).

pleasure continuously (be it of the mind or the senses: cf. the example of sight in X. 4, 1175^a9), but why we do not continuously enjoy the *same* pleasure.

The problem is therefore that (which will, moreover, also be addressed in book X, 1175^b f.) of the conflict between pleasures and activities. We may be surprised, however, that Aristotle remains at the level of the observation and description of this conflict, and that he does not propose a principle of hierarchy and of choice among the conflicting *praxeis*. This point is all the more surprising in that such a hierarchization of *energeiai* is at the basis of the ethical project of the *NE*,⁶⁸ and that its necessity is indicated right at the outset by the definition of happiness not only as the *energeia* of the soul, but as *energeia kat' aretēn teleian*, or according to perfect virtue (I. 13, 1102^a5–6). Book I thus proposed to hierarchize the *dunamis*, or constitutive faculties of man, so as to determine the faculty, properly human, whose *energeia* should constitute the good and the end for man, as well as virtue, which, as *hexis*, must make this *energeia* possible.⁶⁹

What manifests itself here, it seems to me, is one of the limits of book VII, and of the definition of pleasure proposed in it. The object of book VII was above all to establish, against the partisans of pleasure as *genesis*, the identity between pleasure and *energeia*, but not to determine *in which energeia* the most desirable pleasure consists. The question is indeed raised in the course of the extremely dense definitional statement of 1153^b10, and in relation to the definition of happiness (is it the *energeia* of all dispositions, or rather of just one of them, εἶθ' ἢ πασῶν ἐνέργειά ἐστιν εὐδαιμονία εἴτε ἢ τινὸς αὐτῶν?), but it remains in suspense. In contrast, book X will propose an explicit hierarchization of pleasures, in relation to that of the *energeiai* to which they are appropriate, and linked, as in book I, to the notion of *ergon* (1175^b24–31).

However, the text will manifest the weakness of the definition of pleasure as an *energeia* in still another way. Here, in fact, we also hear of a state not of conflict, but of equality, between man's two constitutive natures, and their activities: 'and when they are in an equal state, what is done seems neither pleasant nor painful' (1154^b23–4).

Here again, we hear of the neutral state, neither painful nor pleasant. This time the vocabulary is the same as in the exposition of the thesis of Speusippus (ἰσάλη (1154^b24)/ἴσῳ (1153^b6)),⁷⁰ yet the neutral state is referred not as it is in the latter to a *hexis*, but to an equilibrium of *energeiai*. If our hypothesis is correct, we must understand that the activity of the soul's rational part is painful for the irrational part, and reciprocally: thus, the pleasure taken in music prevents one from enjoying a philosophical discussion. If the pleasure proper to each *energeia* increases it, then, conversely, an alien pleasure acts as an impediment. This is why book X, which analyses this case, can claim that its effect is comparable

⁶⁸ It is also present in the *EE* (II. 1, 1219^a31–4, 38–9), as well as in the *Protreptic*, where it is associated with a hierarchy of pleasures: see fr. 6 and 7 Ross, as well as fr. 14 (= Iamblichus, *Protr.* 38, 15 P.): 'ἀλλὰ μὴν ἢ γε τελεία ἐνέργεια καὶ ἀκόλυτος ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἔχει τὸ χαίρειν, ὥστε ἂν εἴη ἡ θεωρητικὴ and justify ἐνέργεια πασῶν ἡδίστη' and fr. 15 (= Iamblichus, *Protr.* 60, 4 P.).

⁶⁹ On the question of the choice of definitional *dunamis*, see Aubry (2002).

⁷⁰ See also *Leg.* V, 733b.

to that of pain (1175^b16 f.). The neutral state must therefore be attributed to a reciprocal neutralization of *energeiai*. The pleasures attached to each one cancel one another instead of accumulating. By definition, such a state is 'neither painful, nor pleasant'; one may wonder, however, since the result is a double impediment, if it does not tend more towards pain than towards pleasure.⁷¹ This is what book X suggests, but in our text, similarly, it was said above that the neutral state is painful to most because of their nature (1154^b6). Much more than a state of equilibrium, therefore, which would be desirable as such, we must see in it the effect of an imbalance which, however, is not, as in the young or the melancholic, a physiological anomaly, but is truly constitutive of human nature, in so far as it is essentially dual.

b. Divine pleasure (1154^b24–8)

Another living being suddenly appears on the scene, which had previously been evoked only at the beginning of book VII: god. 'For if we suppose a being whose nature is simple,⁷² the same action will always (ἀεὶ) be maximally pleasant. That is why the god always enjoys a pleasure that is unique and simple.'

Here, the divine nature is summoned in contrast to human nature: while the latter is dual, the former is simple. From its simplicity are deduced the identity of its *praxis*, as well as the continuity, the unity, and the simplicity of its pleasure. Far from being doomed, as man is, to the alternation of activities and pleasures, the simple being always enjoys the same activity and the pleasure attached to it.

We hear nothing more of this activity, or this divine *praxis*. What counts is the attribution of pleasure to god, and, in the process, its articulation with simplicity. As it had been from the category of *genesis*, pleasure here finds itself removed from the category of the mixed, to which the *Philebus* had consigned it. Once again, the text seems governed much more by the ontological problem of the nature of pleasure than by the ethical one of the hierarchy and choice between the various kinds of pleasures and *energeiai*. In this, moreover, Aristotle remains largely tributary to the Platonic tradition. On this precise point, however, it is the better to oppose it: for in the *Philebus* it is the neutral life, exempt from pain and pleasure, which was presented as the divine life,⁷³ rather than a life confused with an immutable and continuous pleasure. At the moment of concluding his first reflection on pleasure, then, Aristotle sides with Eudoxus and against Plato. He had already rendered homage to Eudoxus as early as book I, for having affirmed that pleasure is superior to praiseworthy things, as are god and the good (1101^b27–30). But henceforth he goes further, for he intimately associates god, pleasure, and the good.

The question arises, however, of the precise articulation between these different terms: book VII contents itself with noting that a certain pleasure—and therefore

⁷¹ Just as virtue, although it is a mean, may incline more towards the side of excess or of lack (see *Ph.*, at *NE* IV. 5, 1125^b28, the case of sweetness).

⁷² Cf. *Resp.* 380d5, 382e8 (Dirlmeier).

⁷³ *Phlb.* 33b. See also *Epist.* III, 315c; *Epin.* 985a7.

a certain *energeia*—is the sovereign good, without identifying it precisely (there is only an allusion to the activity of contemplation at 1153^a1), or solving the question of the ‘inclusive’ or ‘dominant’ character of happiness (does the latter consist in several *energeiai*, or in only one?). Book X, for its part, will identify the divine and supreme activity—and therefore the pleasure attached to it—as being that of the intellect (1177^b19). By so doing, he will also assign it as a model and goal for man: his accomplishment resides in it, not, however, as a man, but in so far as a divine element, *theion ti*, also exists within him.

Here, in contrast, the divine *praxis* is not assigned to man as a model and a goal, but is opposed to the necessary alternation (and the possible neutralization) of the *praxeis* and pleasures to which his duality condemns him.

In book Λ of the *Metaphysics*, human pleasure and divine pleasure are also compared: the text emphasizes once again that what is given to us only ‘for a brief period of time’ (*μικρὸν χρόνον*, 7, 1072^b15), or only sometimes (*ποτέ*, 1072^b25), is given to the god continuously, *ἀεί*.⁷⁴ In so doing, however, he insists above all on the similarity between divine *energeia* and ours, in so far as we too are capable of *noēsis*. Far from opposing divine *energeia* to the other activities that characterize man as a composite being, Aristotle postulates a relationship of causality from one to the others: it is because (*διὰ τοῦτο*) the divine act is pleasant that thought, but also walking and sensation, are also pleasant for us (1072^b17–18). Yet the perpetuity of divine pleasure is deduced from the fact that the prime mover is *ousia energeia* (1071^b20), or a substance that is purely actual and simple as such (1072^a32). For this reason, its thought is always in act, which is why it is the most pleasant, *ἡδιστον*, and because it is also the thought of the act which it is, and of the best in itself, it is, in addition, the best (*ἄριστον*, 1072^b19, 24; 74^b33–5). The notion of *energeia* thus appears here as the unifying term of the three excellences distinguished by Eudoxus: god, pleasure, and the good.

Yet the concept of *energeia* at work in Λ is not (yet) the one articulated by our text: it is an ontological concept, which presupposes all the work carried out in Θ. This work aims both to correlate *energeia* with *dunamis* and to extend these concepts from the field of motion to that of being. It is governed by the affirmation of Θ. 1, according to which ‘*dunamis* and *energeia* exceed that which is said only with regard to motion’ (1046^a1–2). By so doing, it also sheds light on E 2, which counts potentiality and actuality among the meanings of being (1026^b1). At the end of this twofold movement of transfer and extension, *dunamis* and *energeia* will appear as the adequate principles of compound and mobile substances, and *energeia* as the adequate concept of simple and immobile substance (for, as must be emphasized, Aristotle never says that the Prime Mover is form, but always that it is actuality). This work of extending the concept of *energeia* is at the basis of the demonstration of Λ. 6: to account for the eternity of circular motion, it is necessary to postulate a principle that is not only a power, or *dunamis*, or even only a power in activity, but one whose very *ousia* is *energeia* (1072^a12–20). Exempt from *dunamis*, which is the principle both of motion and of corruptibility (the

⁷⁴ For a detailed commentary, see Laks (2000).

power of contraries and the power of contradictories), this substance will also be immobile and eternal (1071^b5, 21). The extension of the concept of *energeia* from the field of motion to that of being is thus solved, via the articulation of *energeia* to *dunamis*, in an opposition between *energeia* and *kinēsis*: it is because it is *ousia energeia* that the first motor is immobile.⁷⁵

But this opposition cannot be read into our text.⁷⁶ The fundamental opposition operates between *energeia* and *genesis* (1153^a16–17), and is determined by the notion of *telos* (1153^a10). Likewise, *energeia* is correlated not with *dunamis*, but with *hexis* (1152^b33). Finally, the notion seems to be used as equivalent to that of *praxis*—a term which also includes motion.⁷⁷

Lines 26–7 of our passage allow us clearly to see both this correlation of *energeia* with *kinēsis*, and the beginning of their separation: ‘Indeed, there is not only an activity of motion (*κινήσεως ἐνέργεια*), but also of immobility, and there is more pleasure in stability than in motion.’

The phrase clearly associates, in chiasmic form, *energeia* with motion as with immobility. The formulation is too paradoxical to be a mere ‘slippage’ or an instance of poetic prettiness.⁷⁸ However, it can be deduced from what precedes: if god has pleasure, he must have an *energeia* or a *praxis*. If the latter is contemplation, as was already suggested at 1153^a1, which presented the pleasures of *theōria* as those of a nature exempt from lack, it implies immobility.⁷⁹ Thus, the notion of immobility is deduced not from the unique and unitary character of divine *praxis*, but from the latter’s very nature. Similarly, the notion of motion does not refer to the duality and alternation of human *praxeis*, but once again to their nature. Thus, motion and immobility indeed designate two types of *energeia*.

Indirectly, however, a gradation is established between the two, for, as Aristotle writes, there is more pleasure in stability than in motion. By virtue of the identity postulated in book VII between pleasure and *energeia*, we must deduce that there is also more *energeia* in stability.

These lines therefore mark the beginning, not yet of an opposition, but of a dissociation between *energeia* and *kinēsis*. It will be further accentuated in book X, which, without explicitly marking the *energeia/kinēsis* opposition, will nevertheless correlate *kinēsis* and *genesis* (1173^a30) and oppose *kinēsis* and pleasure (1174^b6–7). It might be thought that this conceptual rearrangement is not alien to the reformulation of the definition of pleasure, which, by no longer characterizing it merely as *energeia* but as that which completes *energeia* (1175^a15), and therefore

⁷⁵ I am here summarizing some developments from Aubry (2006).

⁷⁶ See Burnyeat (2008), who emphasizes the extreme rarity of this distinction, which is confined to *Metaph.* Θ. 6, 1048^b18–35, and does not fit well with its context: *energeia* is opposed to *dunamis*, not to *kinēsis*, which, on the contrary, is classified beneath it (*energeia atelēs*). Still according to Burnyeat, and against Owen (1971–2) in particular, Aristotle misses the opportunity for this contrast in the *NE*, even if he does associate *kinēsis* and *genesis*, and opposes *genesis* and *energeia*.

⁷⁷ On this point, see Natali (1991), (1993), (2002), taken up once again in (2004).

⁷⁸ As is maintained respectively by Bostock (1988), who considers that the implication here should be that pleasure is ‘a change of activity’, rather than ‘an activity of change’, and Stewart (ii. 261), with regard to Λ. 7, 1072^b16.

⁷⁹ See *Metaph.* Λ. 9, 1074^b25–7; *De an.* I. 3, 407^a32.

causing the intervention of the discriminating notion of *telos*, excludes the kinetic meaning of *energeia*.⁸⁰

c. Conclusion (1154^b28–31)

The last lines of the text no longer speak of *kinēsis* but of *metabolē*. The term is introduced via a quotation from Euripides' *Orestes*: 'If change is the sweetest thing,⁸¹ according to the poet,⁸² it is because of a certain depravity.⁸³ For just as changing man is deprived, so <is deprived> the nature that needs change:⁸⁴ for it is neither simple, nor balanced.'

The same citation appears in the *Rhetoric* (1371^a23) with a very different meaning: there the pleasure derived from change is not condemned. On the contrary, it is presented as natural, since 'the repetition of the same creates an excess of the normal condition'.⁸⁵ Here, by contrast, the taste for change is given as characteristic of a bad nature. In this nature, we recognize human nature, which has just been under discussion: for its versatility is associated with the fact that it is neither simple, nor balanced.⁸⁶ The term *metabolē* must therefore not be understood as a synonym for that kind of *kinēsis* which we have just seen could also be an *energeia*, but it names the very alternation of *energeia* to which human nature is constrained by its duality.

The excessive tone is nevertheless surprising, still more so if one has the text from the *Rhetoric* in mind. Here, human nature is the object of a kind of ontological condemnation. It is designated as a whole as pathological and unbalanced. What qualifies it as such is not its quest for pleasure, but its inability always to enjoy the same pleasure: its quest for change, in so far as it is the sign of its constitutive duality.

Thus, bodily pleasure has been removed from condemnation only to bring the latter to bear upon human nature. And yet this twofold operation proceeds from the same viewpoint, more descriptive than normative, more ontological than ethical. It is this viewpoint that has led us to recognize a remedy in bodily pleasure, and to study it from the angle of compensation, to carry out case studies, more pathological than deviant, and finally to observe the conflict within man of natures, *energeiai*, and pleasures. In turn, this approach may proceed from the project of persuasion that guides chapter 14: the latter is addressed to the greatest

⁸⁰ From the opposition *genesis/ousia* (*Philebus*), we thus move to: *genesis/energeia* (*kinēsis* or *akinēsis*) (*NE VII*), *genesis, kinēsis/energeia* (*NE X*). Still missing is the identity *ousia/energeia* postulated in *Metaph.* Θ and Λ.

⁸¹ I maintain the superlative, as in the MSS. Bywater, following Aspasius, restores the form γαυεῖ, which is found in Euripides, as well as at *EE VII. 1, 1235^a16*.

⁸² Euripides, *Or. 334*.

⁸³ *πovηρία*, which also means a state of sickness, and echoes *πovεῖ* at 1154^b7.

⁸⁴ We must no doubt understand *πovηρία* here, which would therefore be an attribute, rather than a subject, as in the preceding proposition (we would then have a chiasmatic construction).

⁸⁵ τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ ἀεὶ ὑπερβολὴν ποιεῖ τῆς καθεστῶσης ἕξεως, ⁸²¹.

⁸⁶ *ἐπιεικῆς* also means moderate, measured. As Natali points out, this duality distinguishes man both from god and from the animals, who enjoy a simple set of pleasures, and are therefore in this sense 'closer than men to God'. See Natali (1999), (2004).

number, and therefore to those who seek bodily pleasure in preference to all others. They have been shown that pleasure is not bad, since it is a remedy, but also that if it is a remedy, it cannot be a pleasure. Conversely, it has been shown that pleasures without pain are the true pleasures, and finally that the pleasure of contemplation was not only preferable, but divine. Thus, the *theion ti* we were wondering about has indeed been extracted from pleasure: pleasure is so divine that it is the very state of the god, whereas the neutral state, conversely, results in man from his duality. The text goes no further than this observation: persuasion is not transcended in the direction of exhortation, and no rule is given that would allow man to have access to this *theion ti*, or this divine element that is also within him, by choosing his best *energeia*. This time, we can see here a limit of book VII: its inability, by hierarchizing *energeiai*, to confront the ethical subject with the possibility of and the demand for the divine within him—and hence for a pleasure which, although it is rare, nevertheless removes him, in dazzling intermittencies, from his duality.