

AN ANSCOMBIAN APPROACH TO PLEASURE

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Despite her claim that pleasure, as a central concept for the philosophy of psychology, needs its own enquiry before we advance to the even more vexing topic of ethics, Anscombe herself never explicitly took up this challenge¹. Still, Anscombe defends one central claim about pleasure : pleasure is a reason for action, and more specifically, what Anscombe calls a « desirability characterization ». 'It's pleasant' said of some object characterizes the way in which that object seems good to that agent. Further, pleasure is not just one among many equally important ways something can seem good to the agent : pleasure has a central justificatory role within practical reasoning². From this claim regarding pleasure's important role within practical reasoning we can begin to answer Anscombe's call.

While not the whole enquiry pleasure needs or deserves, I will use Anscombe's remarks on pleasure as a starting point for reimagining how pleasure matters for ethical theory. Most contemporary philosophers approach pleasure as a problem in the philosophy of mind, and aim to provide a definition of pleasure, which in practice, means reducing pleasure to some other, simpler mental entity ; many contemporary accounts define pleasure as a feeling or as an attitude. In the first section I argue that Anscombe thinks we need to redirect the philosophic conversation about pleasure, away from the question of what pleasure is and towards the question of how pleasure functions in practical reasoning. In this approach, she follows Aristotle, whose primary interest in his two treatments of pleasure within the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not to answer the question of what pleasure is, but to show how pleasure is rightly of central practical concern for us because pleasure is in some way related to the good. For Aristotle, pleasure is an appearance of goodness. Similarly, in arguing that pleasure functions within practical reasoning as a desirability characterization, Anscombe understands pleasure to

¹ G. E. M. Anscombe, « Modern Moral Philosophy » in *Ethics, Religion, and Politics*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981, p. 38 ; Anscombe, *Intention*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 77.

² As Anscombe explains, « ..."It's pleasant" is an adequate answer to "What's the good of it ?" or "What do you want that for ?" i.e., the chain of "Why's" comes to an end with this answer » (*Intention, op. cit.*, p. 78).

necessarily involve an affirmative evaluation of the pleasant object.

Because the concern of an Anscombian approach is pleasure as a reason for action, pleasure is posited as intentional³. There may be sensory pleasures that are non-intentional, involving a general « feel » of euphoria, but if a pleasure lacks the rational structure provided by the « aboutness » of intentionality, it cannot be a pleasure we practically reason towards, i.e., aim to bring about, sustain, or revisit through our actions⁴. The pleasant object is aimed at under some descriptions and not others, which means pleasure is associated with some descriptions of the desired object and not others. For example, I may be enjoying myself at the movies, where my pleasure is in the arch commentary of my engaging date, and not in watching the movie, which happens to be quite bad. The intentionality of pleasure is why Anscombe distinguishes pleasure in x from pleasure that x ⁵. In the second section, I use the tools Anscombe provides to begin to answer how pleasure functions within practical reasoning : the description under which I am taking pleasure is inferentially related to other descriptions of actions I may do to bring about, prolong, or repeat this experience of pleasure.

In the final section of the paper, I suggest one explanation for the absence of a more thorough accounting of pleasure within Anscombe's writings, given that pleasure is a basic building block for action explanation. Because pleasure necessarily involves affirmative evaluation of the pleasant object x , pleasure cannot be treated as merely a matter of action explanation, but requires ethical theory in a way Anscombe thinks we are not yet capable of doing. This affirmative evaluation aims for practical truth, and so is not just an explanation of what the agent saw in her action, but is expressive of the agent's conception of the good. In answering the question that structures an Anscombian approach to pleasure, « How does pleasure matter for practical reasoning ? », we see that a fundamental ethical question for us as agents is, « How do I get pleasure right ? ».

³ What it means for pleasure to be intentional for Anscombe is that pleasure takes an intentional object ; experiences of pleasure will be « pleasure in... » or « pleasure of... ». For Anscombe, pleasure is intentional even though it may not (and often will not) involve an occurrent propositional attitude. Importantly, pleasure need not be intended ; the agent may experience pleasure without aiming at (this) pleasure, i.e., pleasure may arise incidentally.

⁴ Unlike the standard approach to pleasure that aims to define what pleasure is, an Anscombian approach to pleasure obviates the difficulty of explaining away counterexamples.

⁵ Anscombe, « The Grammar of "Enjoy" » in *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of the Mind*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981, pp. 94-100.

I.

The question « What is pleasure ? » dominates contemporary philosophical discussions of pleasure, where the various argumentative positions reveal that the problem motivating these discussions is how to understand the mind⁶. We can divide the scholarship on pleasure into two periods. The first period was initiated by Gilbert Ryle's attack on the popular conception of pleasure as a feeling episode or sensation, instead arguing that we should understand pleasure as a disposition (roughly, this period lasted from 1949-1975)⁷. Strangely, pleasure then dropped away as a topic of philosophical dispute, only to come in vogue again at the turn of the millennium. In these debates we see something like the same argumentative landscape ; however, instead of conceiving of pleasure as either a sensation or a disposition, the argumentative positions now view pleasure as either a feeling or an attitude⁸.

Perhaps Anscombe's most well-known claim about pleasure is her cutting criticism of Hume, Locke, and those philosophers who, following the British empiricist tradition, theorize pleasure as a « particular internal impression » :

« But it shews surprising superficiality both to accept that notion and to treat pleasure as quite generally the point of doing anything. We might adapt a remark of Wittgenstein's about meaning and say "Pleasure cannot be an impression ; for no impression could have the consequences of pleasure". They were saying that something which they thought of as a particular tickle or itch was quite obviously the point of doing anything whatsoever⁹. »

⁶ An excellent overview of attempts to answer this question is L. Katz, « Pleasure » in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2009 edn. URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pleasure/>. By contrast, pleasure is a central topic in ancient philosophy, but the problem structuring consideration of pleasure is the value of pleasure, and so the ethical import of various pleasures. See D. Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 272ff.

⁷ See G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1949, pp. 107-109 ; G. Ryle, « Pleasure » in *Dilemmas*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. 54-67 ; G. Ryle, « Symposium : "Pleasure" » *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 28, 1954. Some critics of Ryle argue that pleasure is sensation (R. Puccetti, « The Sensations of Pleasure » *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 20, 1969) or that one use of « pleasure » is to refer to a local sensation (W. B. Gallie, « Symposium : 'Pleasure' » *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 28, 1954). Other critics dispute Ryle's reliance of dispositions and provide accounts of pleasure as episodic, positive evaluation (T. Penelhum, « The Logic of Pleasure » *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 17, 1957 ; D. Perry, *The Concept of Pleasure*, Berlin, Mouton, 1967). An interesting defense of pleasure as a disposition is found in W. Quinn, « Pleasure – Disposition of Episode ? » *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 28, 1968. For a more thorough overview of this period of pleasure scholarship, see Wolfsdorf, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-232.

⁸ The problems associated with sense-datum theories and behaviorism, respectively, explain this shift in terminology. « Attitude » is an umbrella term for a range of views that hold that pleasure is a generically cognitive stance towards the pleasant object ; these different views usually provide some account of how this cognitive stance involves feeling.

⁹ *Intention, op.cit.*, p. 77. A slightly different version of this quote is found in « Modern Moral Philosophy », *op. cit.*, p. 27.

Anscombe's derision for this conception of pleasure as an internal impression, her Aristotelian proclivities, and her concern for pleasure's role in practical reasoning all suggest she should be read as a staunch soldier for the attitudinal camp. But this one-sided enlistment would be too hasty. On the one hand, the reasons to reject a picture of pleasure as an internal impression do not clearly extend to every account of pleasure as feeling, so long as the feeling of pleasure is not construed as prior to the cognitive judgment¹⁰. On the other hand, Anscombe gives reason for thinking attitudinal accounts of pleasure misidentify pleasure as its likely accompaniments.

Anscombe denies that pleasure could be an internal impression because this conception of pleasure cannot accommodate the way pleasure is meaningful for us, and so the way that pleasure is often « the point » of our actions. Pleasure cannot be a primitively-given, raw « feel » inherent within our experience, because no feeling could function as the end, or point, of our actions in the way that pleasure does. When we do something for pleasure, i.e. because « it's pleasant », the action is not a means for bringing about some independently specifiable feeling. Rather, to say that an agent does *x* for pleasure is to specify the light in which the action appears good to the agent. Nor is pleasure a primitively-given feeling that could force itself into our awareness regardless of context. The meaningfulness of pleasure is displayed through the way that pleasure can and often does attach itself to highly specific aspects of the thing we are doing or aiming at, e.g., I am enjoying the way my humming causes you annoyance.

Anscombe's point, that acting for pleasure is not acting so as to obtain some particular feeling, may seem a different way of posing the heterogeneity objection. The heterogeneity objection arises from the difficulty of identifying some one « feel » that unites all of our different experiences of pleasure¹¹. If we group together our pleasures not because of their phenomenological similarity but despite how different these pleasures feel, this suggests we should look elsewhere for the unifying feature of pleasure. In fact, Anscombe is arguing for a more fundamental claim that explains the bite of the heterogeneity objection : Anscombe's point is that « pleasure » is not a description of one kind of content of my experience, but is more like a second-order judgment about how my

¹⁰ Millgram's argument that pleasure is a judgment that *X* is desirable apprehended as feeling, for instance, falls within an Anscombian approach to pleasure (E. Millgram, « Pleasure in Practical Reasoning » in *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, ed. E. Millgram, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2001).

¹¹ This objection is perhaps best voiced by J. C. B. Gosling, *Pleasure and Desire : The Case for Hedonism Reviewed*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969, pp. 37ff. An updated version of the heterogeneity problem is presented by W. Robinson, « What Is it Like to Like ? » *Philosophical Psychology*, 19 :6, 2006.

experience is going.

Given the profound problems Anscombe suggests must plague any view of pleasure as an internal impression, the dominance and resilience of this view of pleasure as good feeling pressed upon the subject's consciousness calls out for explanation ; materials for just such a diagnosis are provided through Anscombe's examination of the intentionality of sensation. Like sense-perception, pleasure is intentional. One important feature of intentionality – that the intentional object of my pleasure may be non-existent and so merely intentional, not reaching through to what it represents – makes the idea the pleasure is first and foremost good feeling (in Anscombe's terminology, an impression), that we then positively evaluate, so tempting. The pleasure as feeling theorist starts from the fact that if one is enjoying, one is enjoying something, and that in order to describe what one is enjoying, we give the intentional object of the pleasure. But sometimes, what I take myself to be enjoying may not be the case ; there may be no material object that corresponds to the intentional object. This possibility suggests that to get at what pleasure is, we should look to what is common to these deviant cases as well as more straightforward examples of pleasure, since after all, the person is getting pleasure either way. This argument from illusion pushes one towards granting priority to the feeling, as the thing that is always there. But it is a mistake to think that feeling, stripped of any content or about-ness, which is necessary for it to be the thing all pleasures share, could provide an adequate account how pleasure functions in our lives. I do not want good feeling or warm glow, nor do I want the feeling of holding your hand – I want the pleasure of holding your hand.

We have learned to be suspicious of this argument from illusion in theories of perception. In « The Intentionality of Sensation : A Grammatical Feature », Anscombe explains the recurrence of this mistake despite our hard-won suspicions ; this further diagnosis helps explain the dominance of the view of pleasure as good feeling. Anscombe argues philosophical confusion results from taking a « grammatical » description of an object's function in a sentence to be equivalent to a « material » description of that physical object. Her example is the sentence « John sent Mary a book ». A true grammatical claim about this sentence is that « the book is the direct object ». However, it would be a mistake to press the analysis further by asking, « which book is the direct object ? ». While both claims may be true, shifting between different kinds of descriptions produces nonsense.

This example of confusedly taking the grammatical and the material descriptions to be equivalent, so that the one can be substituted for the other, explains why it is confused to take the feeling that accompanies the intentional object to be the pleasure. Just as the object's function in the sentence cannot be translated onto some material object in the world, the pleasure is not simply the felt impression made by the idea of the intentional object. One might adapt something Anscombe says about « seeing » and say of the pleasure as feeling theorist : « such a philosopher makes an incorrect inference from the truth of the grammatical statement that the intentional object, the impression, the pleasurable object, is what you enjoy¹². He takes the expression “what you enjoy” materially. “The pleasurable impression is what you enjoy”, which is a proposition like “The direct object is what he sent”, is misconstrued so as to lead to “You enjoy an impression”, as the other never would be misconstrued so as to lead to “He sent her a direct object”¹³ ». No one is tempted to say that John sent Mary a direct object, but we are tempted to say that one enjoys the feeling, instead of holding fast to our sense that pleasure is in the material object indicated by the intentional object.

In response to Anscombe's criticism of pleasure as internal impression, philosophers who defend a conception of pleasure as feeling¹⁴ have discarded the implausible features attributed to pleasure as sensation on the model of sense-data – that pleasure is intrinsically private and subjective, apprehended in consciousness immediately and not inferentially, just as it appears and so something we incorrigibly know – while still defending the idea that pleasure is some sort of good feeling¹⁵. This leaner, more adaptable account of pleasure as feeling thus shows itself to arise from the core intuition that pleasure is more than *finding* something good, but always involves *feeling* good : pleasure is taken to be a feeling we like or enjoy that is primitively given in

¹² Here Anscombe means to draw attention to how we shift between different kinds of descriptions without realizing it ; she is not (falsely) implying pleasure as feeling theorists identify pleasure with the intentional object. The view that pleasure is feeling arises from moving between true claims, like « going to the opera is a pleasure of mine », and « going to the opera makes me feel good » to produce the conclusion that pleasure simply is (good) feeling. More specific answers as to what this pleasurable feeling consists in are often provided, e.g. stimulation of CT fibers, warm glow, a dopamine surge, etc. All of these answers involve a kind of category confusion because resting on the assumption that pleasure just is (good) feeling.

¹³ The unmodified passage is in Anscombe, « The Intentionality of Sensation » in *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, *op.cit.*, 13.

¹⁴ Contemporary defenders of pleasure as feeling are M. Aydede, « An Analysis of Pleasure Vis-à-vis Pain », *International Phenomenological Society* 19 :3, 2000 ; S. Rachels, « Is Unpleasantness Intrinsic to Unpleasant Experiences ? », *Philosophical Studies* 99, 2000 ; A. Smuts, « The Feels Good Theory of Pleasure », *Philosophical Studies* 155, 2010 ; Katz, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Aydede, *op. cit.*, p. 538 makes this aim explicit. Aydede describes the good feeling as a feeling of euphoria.

experience¹⁶. In laying bare the core intuition moving the pleasure as feeling theorist, it becomes clear Anscombe objects to this claim about how pleasure has value, and not simply the Lockean epistemology that has historically clothed this core intuition. What it means to say pleasure is the point of our actions is that many of our actions are done for the sake of pleasure. Even if some of these actions done for pleasure are done to obtain some obviously-good feeling, it cannot be the case that every time we act for pleasure, we act to produce the effect of some obviously-good feeling.

The problem for the definition of pleasure as feeling arises from the nature of pleasure as an object of pursuit¹⁷. Pleasure is unlike tickles, itches, and other psychosomatic sensations in that these sensations do not involve reference to good and evil, but instead are description of how something feels, and so a feeling that could be good or bad in different contexts. By contrast, pleasure is good (though not the good); to identify something as « pleasant » is to assert that this pleasant object is good and worthy of pursuit. Pleasure is ethically valenced in a way that no specific type of sensation could be. We differentiate pleasure from psycho-somatic sensations through this connection of pleasure and goodness, something the pleasure as feeling theorist acknowledges in positing pleasurable feeling as good. However, we do not reach our conception of pleasure by aggregating those feelings that share some qualitative « feel » given in experience as obviously good-in-itself; rather, what unifies our application of the description « pleasant » to various experiences and objects is our judgment that these things are pleasant and so good¹⁸. As Anscombe explains, « no concept is simply given; every one involves a complicated technique of application of the word for it, which could not just be presented by an experience-content¹⁹ ». This leaves open the possibility that most and maybe even all pleasures involve some sort of good feeling. What Anscombe is denying is that good feeling is basic for and so prior to our judgment that this object is worth pursuing or having. Because the goodness of the feeling of pleasure cannot be

¹⁶ Another way of putting this core intuition is that pleasure is different from belief or evaluation, because those tend to guide our experience, whereas pleasure arises, bottom-up, from the experience itself. I can't claim that something is pleasant unless I have actually experienced it, whereas I can think something is good without having experienced it.

¹⁷ The argument that follows is based upon Anscombe's comments about emotion in « Will and Emotion » in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981, p. 104.

¹⁸ « Pleasure » is one light under which things seem good. Not all things we think are good are thereby thought of as pleasant, and to think that something is pleasant is not thereby to think of that thing as good in the sense of being fitting, fair, right, useful, etc.

¹⁹ Anscombe, « The Intentionality of Sensation », *op. cit.*, 16.

independent of the context in which the feeling occurs and so the agent's reasons for finding this feeling to be good, it is a mistake to claim pleasure just is (good) feeling, even if pleasure (maybe even necessarily) involves good feeling.

The pleasure as feeling theorist runs into trouble by claiming that the goodness of pleasure as an object of pursuit can be reduced to a feeling that is independent of the agent's reasoning about what is of value²⁰. But the opposing philosophical definition of pleasure as an attitude also seems unsuitable. Philosophers who define pleasure as an attitude²¹ take inspiration from Aristotle's descriptions of activities : within an activity, the agent is actively *doing* something, the agent's attention is absorbed in the activity, there may be some kind of expertise or habit at stake, the agent desires and seeks out this activity, and does the activity for its own sake. A closely related thought is that the pro-attitude of pleasure is inseparable from a favorable evaluation of what we are taking pleasure in²². These positions all argue that pleasure is *in* something (whether desire-satisfaction or kinds of activities or experiences), that we (often) act to bring about those experiences we find pleasure in, and that when we are taking pleasure in something, we (usually) seek to maintain that experience.

While the various accounts of pleasure as attitude are situated much closer to our Anscombian starting point of pleasure as a reason for action, here too, Anscombe would object to defining pleasure as some specified attitude²³. To accept that pleasure is a reason for action and so good means that we will have characteristic attitudes, feelings, etc., towards our pleasures. Yet we can use an example from Anscombe to show how pleasure

²⁰ See C. Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 88-89 and D. Richter, *Anscombe's Moral Philosophy*, Plymouth, Lexington Books, 2001, p. 131 for examples of what becomes hard to describe from within this picture of pleasure.

²¹ The view of pleasure as attitudinal is a hodgepodge of philosophical accounts. What unites these positions is the idea that pleasure, as an attitude towards some object, is propositional or representational, and so involves cognitive content. Ryle argues for a dispositional account of pleasure as a kind of attention like absorption (Ryle, *op. cit.*). Feldman argues that pleasure is a pro-attitude (F. Feldman, « Two Questions about Pleasure » in *Utilitarianism, Hedonism and Desert*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988 ; *Pleasure and the Good Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004). Schroeder and Heathwood offer desire-satisfaction accounts of pleasure ; Schroeder emphasizes a net positive change in desire satisfaction (T. Schroeder, « Pleasure and Displeasure » in *Three Faces of Desire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004 ; « Pleasure, Displeasure, and Representation » *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 31, 2001), while Heathwood suggests the desire satisfied occurs with the pleasant sensation and is for that sensation at that time (C. Heathwood, « The Reduction of Sensory Pleasures to Desire » *Philosophical Studies*, 133, 2007).

²² All sensible versions of the attitudinal view acknowledge that the positive evaluation is a *pro tanto* one, and is compatible with lots of conflict, guilt, shame, etc., including regret that one is taking pleasure in this.

²³ Just as Anscombe rejects the behaviorist project of specifying what external behavior makes an action intentional, she would reject the attempt to make some characteristic attitude assumed by the agent equivalent to pleasure. To understand pleasure, we must examine the rational structure of the agent's action, which is cannot be identified with some discrete mental item or act, nor some physical act.

as a reason for action must have explanatory priority. In *Intention*, Anscombe asserts that the primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*²⁴. She goes on to describe a man who sees objects, fetches them, and keeps them near him ; these actions make « his “wanting” recognizable as such²⁵ ». Trying to get is how we understand what it means to want something, and not simply to wish for something. But it would be a mistake to think that wanting just is trying to get, for there may be things a person wants that do not reach expression in some trying to get ; the sign is not constitutive of the thing itself. Analogously, even though some specified attitude may be a sign of pleasure, so that we recognize pleasure by this characteristic attitude, it is mistaken to think pleasure just is the attitude ; in identifying pleasure as a characteristic attitude, attitudinal accounts unwittingly subvert the correct explanatory order²⁶.

As a reason for action, pleasure should be understood through its contribution to the rational order that structures the agent’s actions and reasoning process²⁷ : pleasure requires that the material object, under the intentional description of it, seems good to the agent because pleasant. Pleasure has a necessary evaluative dimension that may assume the form of an explicit mental act or attitude on the agent’s part, but need not. Rather than try to answer what pleasure is, an Anscombian approach to pleasure must be wholly different, instead starting from the question of how pleasure works within practical reason.

II.

Our Anscombian touchstone for understanding pleasure is Anscombe’s assertion that pleasure is a desirability characterization : « it’s pleasant » specifies the light under which the wanted object seems good to the agent. This means pleasure is a reason for action ; this view of pleasure is grounded in the idea that pleasure is, first and foremost, a

²⁴ *Intention*, op. cit., 68.

²⁵ *Intention*, op. cit., 71.

²⁶ Anscombe faults ordinary language philosophy for refusing to allow for the seeing of a *merely* intentional object and so the decoupling of seeing from the material object ; while the success of seeing, for example, is structurally built upon the seeing reaching through the intentional object to the material object, there are cases where what is at issue is the intentional object seen, e.g., « ‘I see the print very blurred : is it blurred, or is it my eyes ? ’ » (« Intentionality of Sensation », *op. cit.*, p. 12). Similarly, while pleasure is structurally built around taking characteristic attitudes towards the material object as described by the intentional object of the pleasure, it is mistaken to think pleasure is simply the way pleasure functions when the intentional object truly describes the material object.

²⁷ See §42 of *Intention*, where Anscombe makes clear the practical syllogism does not describe actual mental processes.

source of action. « Pleasant » characterizes some object or experience the agent wants, so that the agent then calculates how to sustain or attain the desired connection with this pleasant object. Of course, many pleasures arise spontaneously and are not first aimed at through practical calculation ; however, this auspicious start is usually taken up by practical reason, in that the fortunate subject calculates how to act so as to best sustain this pleasure, and perhaps afterwards how best to revisit this pleasure on future occasions.

Pleasure specifies why some wanted object is wanted, which is a different way of functioning as a reason for action than the way the wanted object functions as a reason for action. The answer to the question « What are you doing ? » gives the object of the agent in so acting (« I'm A-ing in order to D »), how A-ing is a means to do D or is D-ing (the A-D order at stake in the action), and so the intention with which the agent acts ; whereas pleasure as a desirability characterization answers the question « What do you want that for ?²⁸ ». As Anscombe explains, there is a difference between « what a man is up to and what he is after²⁹ ». But because the wanted object is wanted under some description³⁰, it is easy to run these descriptions of what is wanted and why together.

Pleasure specifies the light under which the wanted object seems good to the agent because pleasure is, in some way, in itself, good. However, as Anscombe is quick to point out, saying that pleasure is one important way that we characterize the good (or point) of doing an action, does not entail that all pleasures are good. It's not hard to think of examples of pleasures that are not good, that the agent herself does not think are good, even while finding them incredibly pleasant. But the presence or absence of pleasure is one very important way we navigate through our world : the absence of pleasure in one's work is often how people move towards a change of career, the absence of pleasure more generally is often how people recognize depression and seek counseling, the pull of pleasure is often how we recognize the value of an activity we may initially have been indifferent towards³¹. Pleasure guides us through the world because the rational

²⁸ See *Intention*, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-63 and 74 for the contrast between these two questions for the agent. Also relevant is Anscombe, « Intention » in *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, *op. cit.*, 78-79, although here Anscombe talks of motive instead of desirability characterization. For the A-D order of practical reason, see *Intention*, *op.cit.*, §22.

²⁹ Anscombe, « Practical Inference » in *Human Life, Action and Ethics*, Exeter, Imprint Academic, 2005, p. 137.

³⁰ *Intention*, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

³¹ Millgram makes this same point, and presents an especially effective example of how pleasure can pull us toward a certain career path (Millgram, *op. cit.*, p. 331).

structure of pleasure can be likened to the judgment that *this* (the wanted object) *is desirable*. As Anscombe explains, the object of « wanting » is what is « good », just as the object of « judgment » is « truth »³². In aiming at some wanted object or experience as pleasant, the agent aims at obtaining some real good. And in characterizing some object or experience as « pleasant », the agent expresses her judgment that this object is good because pleasant. This conceptual connection of « pleasure » and « good » means we can think of pleasure as an appearance of goodness, where this appearance expresses the agent's judgment that this experience is desirable in itself³³.

Similar to making a judgment, in experiencing pleasure we are active, in that we are doing something, usually towards some object, and so making this experience of pleasure possible. But, just as judgment is constrained by the aim of producing truth, the world has its say in whether some wanted object is in fact pleasant. No matter how desirable or undesirable we think an experience will be, in an important sense, the world acts on us, generating this appearance of desirability. Expectations, previous experiences, background conditions, etc., all contribute to an experience's pleasurable, but importantly, one can't force pleasure. Conversely, because the agent has a role to play in generating experiences of pleasure, appearances of pleasure may be misleading ; pleasure is not an infallible indicator that the enjoyed object is in fact desirable in itself, even though it seems to the agent she is getting something good in getting this object.

To understand the specific role pleasure plays within practical reasoning, we must clarify how pleasure is (typically) connected to the rational order described by the practical syllogism. The first premise of the practical syllogism is a description of something wanted. From this description under which the object is pursued, the agent calculates how best to achieve this object, at last settling upon something that is done here and now in order to obtain the object : for example, I am buying eggs on my way home from work because I want to bake a cake this weekend (I am D-ing in order to A). But pleasure is not something done in order to get something else, nor is pleasure (usually) the first premise and so the thing aimed at³⁴. We arrive at pleasure in its role of

³² *Intention*, op.cit., §40.

³³ As a desirability characterization, pleasure designates a kind of good we aim at, like health or honor. But pleasure has a much more central role in practical reasoning than these other kinds of good because pleasure is also an appearance of the good, i.e., one way the good is made manifest to us. Pleasure has a thick evaluative role in practical reasoning because what an agent takes pleasure in is revelatory of the agent's conception of the good as such.

³⁴ In particular contexts, such as throwing a party or deciding what to play on Game Night, « pleasure » could serve as the target to be pursued, so that the agent calculates how best to bring pleasure about. But most of

desirability characterization by repeatedly answering the question « What for ? » until we reach what Anscombe calls a terminal desirability characterization. These terminal desirability characterizations give the grounds on which the wanted object is wanted. But even though « pleasure » is too generic an end to function prominently in practical reasoning, the experience of pleasure is generative of actions and ends, insofar as the agent will (usually) work to sustain the experience so characterized as « pleasant ».

Pleasure is practical in at least two ways : pleasure is something that we reason towards and act for the sake of, and pleasure is often taken in something we are doing. In « On the Grammar of “Enjoy” », Anscombe draws attention to the distinction between enjoying and « enjoyment that... » and contends that enjoying x-ing (enjoying an activity) is the primary form of pleasure :

« Thus I may have enjoyed, taken pleasure in, the fact that I was riding with *N*. But that is not the same thing as actually to have enjoyed riding with *N*. The fact may have given me pleasure, but if I am candid I may have to confess that I did not enjoy the activity itself³⁵. »

Anscombe suggests we can think of enjoying doing something as « enjoyment of substance » and « enjoyment that... » as « enjoyment of fact » ; while enjoyment of substance seems much more important, she muses that perhaps neither of these ways of enjoying occur pure amongst creatures with language³⁶.

This distinction between enjoying *X* and enjoyment that *X* rests upon the intentionality of pleasure. Anscombe describes three characteristics of intention that characterize intentionality, and so the intentionality of pleasure. « First, not any true description of what you do describes it as the action you intended : only under certain of its descriptions will it be intentional³⁷ ». Pleasure’s intentionality similarly constrains which descriptions are true descriptions of a person’s pleasure. For instance, the following may all be true – Liz was talking with her sister on the phone, Liz sipped coffee as she talked, Liz spoke about her difficulties with a coworker – but perhaps none of these will be true descriptions of what made the conversation so pleasurable for Liz. « Second, the descriptions under which you intend what you do can be vague, indeterminate³⁸ ».

the time, the starting point of the description of the thing wanted will be much more specific, with « pleasure » serving as a more general description of why this thing is wanted.

³⁵ « The Grammar of “Enjoy” », *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁷ « The Intentionality of Sensation », *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Similarly, the object of one's enjoyment can be indeterminate : it may not be clear, for instance, if one is enjoying making tamales, spending time with one's tamale-making partner, or the thrill of trying something new in the kitchen. « Third, descriptions under which you intend to do what you do may not come true... You act, but your intended act does not happen³⁹ ». There are many ways pleasures can be « false », but one very important way is when I am pleased that... but I am wrong about what is the case (for instance, I am pleased that you think my baby is cute, when you were just being polite). Pleasure as judgment is ascribed to *this object*, and so necessarily concerns a happy friction between agent and world. While the thing enjoyed is the intentional object of pleasure, it does not follow that when I enjoy *X*, what I enjoy is my idea of *X*. Pleasure aims to reach through to the world, to be a true report of how well things are actually going ; this aim is not always achieved.

III.

But perhaps our Anscombian starting point is marred by ambiguity concerning what it means to be a reason for action. Philosophers of action distinguish between the motivating, or explanatory, reasons for action, which explain why the agent acts as he does, and the justifying, or normative, reasons for action, which justify the agent's action⁴⁰. We can use this distinction to clarify the Anscombian criticism of feeling and attitude accounts of pleasure. Pleasure as feeling accounts go wrong when the feeling of pleasure is posited as prior to any cognitive content, for this undoes the power of pleasure to function as a reason for action. Pleasure as attitude accounts go wrong when the evaluative nature of this cognitive content of pleasure is given short shrift, for this vitiates the aspiration of pleasure to manifest some truth about what is good and worth pursuing. By contrast, an Anscombian approach to pleasure is well-positioned to explain why pleasure has motivating and justificatory purport.

Pleasure must function as a motivating reason for action ; what this means within Anscombe's practical terminology is that pleasure serves as the desirability

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Lawrence distinguishes what he calls the *Low Road of Reason*, which gives the reason why the agent is doing any particular action, including those actions he may be conflicted about, e.g. akratic actions, from the *High Road of Reason*, which demands of the agent a more substantive commitment to what he is doing, and so invokes the agent's circumstances and values, in order to ascribe a reason for action to the agent (G. Lawrence, « Reason, Intention, and Choice » in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. O'Hear, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004). This distinction can be mapped onto motivating vs. justificatory reasons for action, although it better tracks Anscombe's interests.

characterization for many of our intentional actions. For Anscombe, all intentional actions are done for a reason, in that all intentional actions are aimed at something the agent wants. The kind of « wanting » at issue in intentional action is « that a man should see what he wants under the aspect of some good⁴¹ ». Anscombe accepts the Aristotelian claim that « every action done by a rational agent [is] capable of having its grounds set forth up to a premise containing a desirability characterisation⁴² ». « Pleasure » is an important and common desirability characterization ; thus pleasure, as the good thing wanted by the agent in so acting, motivates many of our (intentional) actions⁴³. The explanatory power of pleasure does not mean that whenever an agent acts for pleasure, the agent thinks this action is a (morally) good action, or even the best thing to do in her situation. It's more than possible to act for pleasure, and to take pleasure is so acting, all the while thinking of one's action as bad and/or not what one should be doing. Pleasure explains why the agent did what she did, what good the agent saw in her action, but the goodness of pleasure is not moral goodness. While it is possible to take pleasure in morally abhorrent actions, it is not possible to take pleasure in anything ; as Anscombe puts it, pleasure « does have to have a point », i.e. something that makes the pleasure intelligible, such as domination, sexual excitement, etc.⁴⁴

But in specifying the aspect under which the action appears good to the agent, pleasure must also function as a justifying reason for action. This does not mean that any action that provides some pleasure for the agent is thereby justified, i.e. we should judge that action to be a good action or the right thing to do. Rather, pleasure should be thought of as an affirmative evaluative judgment about the material object of the pleasure, as described by the intentional object of the pleasure. To take pleasure in *X* or to pursue *X* as pleasant expresses a judgment that the goodness of pleasure is here in *X* ; this judgment contained with pleasure taken or pursued is open to rational criticism because the agent's aim, within her actions but also within her pleasures, is practical truth. Because pleasure is one light under which the good appears to me, my object is not simply to obtain the pleasure that I desire, but to be right in desiring this pleasure. « It's pleasant » does more than characterize the kind of good the agent was acting for : it reveals the agent's

⁴¹ *Intention*, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴³ Because « pleasure » names a general end that we pursue, Aristotle assumes that pleasure's role in the practical syllogism is as one part of the universal premise.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

judgment about what is good because pleasant, and so makes an ethical claim.

« ... “It’s pleasant” is an adequate answer to “What’s the good of it ?” or “What do you want that for ?” I.e., the chain of “Why’s” comes to an end with this answer. The fact that a claim *that* “it’s pleasant” can be challenged, or an explanation asked for (“But what is the pleasure of it ?”) is a different point, as also would be any consideration, belonging properly to ethics, of its decency as an answer⁴⁵. »

For Anscombe, practical truth « *includes* the truth of the description “doing well” », but because what we find pleasant is revelatory of what we think is good, at issue in our pleasures is the truth of the description « enjoying well⁴⁶ ». Simple, casual pleasures can be just as revelatory of our values and character as those pleasures that require a great deal of planning and effort to enjoy.

Anscombe asserts that practical truth is « brought about – i.e. made true – by action⁴⁷ ». But because pleasure is what we want the things we want for (what we are after in acting this way), « this wanting is in the decision [that informs the action] too, even though it may be that you have never chosen, never decided, to *make* it your objective⁴⁸ ». Because the function of pleasure is to explain what moved the agent to act in this way by specifying the light under which the object seemed good to him, pleasure makes impossible any clean distinction between the philosophy of action and ethics. « Pleasure » is needed to explain why many of our everyday intentional actions are done and not only those actions motivated by the agent’s deeply held values and commitments ; this explanation is frequently used when the agent is conflicted or unclear about his motivations, or when the agent’s actions are not immediately intelligible to others. On the other hand, an agent’s pleasures are crucial for understanding what the agent’s conception of « doing well » consists in.

The centrality of pleasure for both philosophy of action and for ethics means it is unclear how to do either without the other. Anscombe explicitly rejects those accounts of pleasure as feeling (an internal impression) that fail to capture the intentionality of pleasure ; it may seem the natural next step is to identify pleasure with some cognitive attitude. I argued in the first section that Anscombe raises a worry about identifying pleasure with what accompanies it. But we can now see that there is a further deeper

⁴⁵ *Intention, op. cit.*, p. 78. Anscombe states that ethics concerns the question of « whether there are orders of human goods » (*Ibid.*, p. 75).

⁴⁶ « Practical Truth » in *Human Life, Action, and Ethics, op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁴⁷ « Thought and Action in Aristotle » in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981, p. 77.

⁴⁸ « Practical Truth », *op. cit.*, p. 154.

worry about what attitudinal accounts of pleasure aim to do ; insofar as they remain focused on answering what pleasure is, they have not yet begun to address the ethically fraught question of how such cognitive attitudes can be true and responsive to the world. Our Anscombian touchstone, that pleasure is a central desirability characterization within practical reasoning, means that pleasure is beholden to a standard of what is genuinely good because genuinely pleasant.

In changing the question to how pleasure functions in practical reasoning, an Anscombian approach to pleasure demands a rethinking of what the philosophical problems surrounding pleasure are. Instead of providing another answer to the question of what pleasure is, the Anscombian view of pleasure as implying a judgment that is potentially correct or incorrect poses a wholly different set of questions : What is this evaluative component of pleasure actually about ? What is the epistemic standard of correctness at issue here ? What would it be to get pleasure right ? To claim that pleasure is a reason for action may seem like a familiar thought, but the Anscombian explanation of how pleasure can be the justificatory ground for so many of our actions is that pleasure is an appearance of the good. The heterodoxy of an Anscombian approach to pleasure stems from this thought that pleasure aspires to capture some truth about the world⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ I would like to thank Jay Elliott, Candace Vogler, and Daniel Wack for their help, as well as the philosophy department of the University of Utah for the opportunity to present an early version of this paper.