

VIRTUE WITHOUT PLEASURE? ARISTOTLE AND THE JOY OF A NOBLE LIFE

MANUEL MARÍA CRUZ ORTIZ DE LANDÁZURI*

1. INTRODUCTION

ARISTOTLE affirms in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the virtuous person finds pleasure in his own life:

«For most men their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by nature pleasant, but the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant (τὰ φύσει ἡδέα); and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well as in their own nature. Their life, therefore, has no further need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but has its pleasure in itself (ἐν ἑαυτῷ)».¹

What does it mean that the virtuous person enjoys his life, and in which way is pleasure not an additional element? Why does a virtuous life entail the best pleasures? These questions need some explanation and it is necessary to find the metaphysical and psychological foundations of virtue in order to relate it properly with pleasure. Firstly, it would be necessary to examine the Aristotelian concept of virtue and to analyze the relation of the perfect activity with pleasure. Then, it would be possible to show that virtue has an aesthetical aspect that it is necessary to understand it properly.

2. VIRTUE AS EXCELLENCE AND MEAN TERM

Virtue (ἀρετή) is one of the most important concepts in the Aristotelian ethics. Although virtue seems to have a regulative role (because what it is important is not virtue, but its exercise²), it is one of the most developed notions in his thought.³ Aristotle gives several definitions of

* Universidad de Navarra, Campus Universitario, 31009 Pamplona. Navarra (España). E-mail: mcruzo@alumni.unav.es

¹ *Eth. Nic.*, I.8 1099^a11-16. I use W. D. Ross' translation (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1915) with some variations.

² See W. SCHNEIDER, *Οὐσία und εὐδαιμονία. Die Verflechtung von Metaphysik und Ethik bei Aristoteles*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York 2001, pp. 76-88.

³ A. GRANT, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, Illustrated with Essays and Notes, Longmans, London 1874, p. 241: «Aristotle seems to regard moral acts not so much as the development of a latent excellence, but rather as the development or action of our nature in accordance with a law (ἐνέργεια κατ'ἀρετήν). Virtue then comes in as a regulative, rather than as a primary idea; it is introduced as subordinate, though essential, to happiness».

virtue, in which he focuses in the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

«The virtue of man also will be the state of character (ἔξις) which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work (ἔργον) well».⁴

The notion of virtue is linked with that of function or work (ἔργον). There are several natural capacities and faculties in the human being which must be developed, and the repetition of activities creates some dispositions or permanent states (ἔξις) towards the actions. Habit is an intermediate state between the potentiality (the capacity to do something) and the actuality (the performance of the action).⁵ Virtue is the habitual disposition with which the human being develops his own potentialities in the right direction, according to his own function, and in a continuous period of time.

It is necessary to consider, however, how it is possible to create that good dispositions towards the action that help to develop one's own nature in the right way. Virtues are a disposition to act according to nature, but «neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit».⁶ That is why Aristotle says that virtue is some kind of «state of character concerned with choice»:

«Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice (ἔξις προαιρετική), lying in a mean, that is the mean relative to us (μεσότητι οὕσα τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς), this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme».⁷

Virtue is a state of character which lies in a mean that must be regulated by reason. But in which way is that a mean term, and how can the human being discover it?⁸ This can be easier to see in the previous definition of

⁴ *Eth. Nic.*, II.6 1106^a20-22.

⁵ A. VIGO, *Zeit und Praxis bei Aristoteles*, Karl Alber, Freiburg and München 1996, p. 175: «Die Hexeis können weder als Formen des Aktus noch der Potenz ohne weiteres klassifiziert werden. Sie sind weder Aktus noch Potenz im herkömmlichen Sinne, sondern sie befinden sich mitten auf dem Wege zwischen reiner, unbestimmter Potentialität und effektiver Aktualität: die Hexeis sind als Formen, besser noch, als die repräsentativsten Formen dessen anzusehen, was Aristoteles in der Psychologie "erste Aktualität" nennt».

⁶ *Eth. Nic.*, II.1 1103^a24-26.

⁷ *Eth. Nic.*, II.6 1106^b35-1107^a8.

⁸ Hardie has done a good analysis of the problems of the doctrine of virtue as a mean: W.F.R. HARDIE, *Aristotle's Doctrine that Virtue is a Mean*, in J. BARNES, M. SCHOFIELD, R. SORABJI (a cura di), *Articles on Aristotle*, vol. II, Duckworth, London 1977, pp. 33-46.

virtue,⁹ because the mean is precisely the point in which the human being develops better his life according to his own function (ἔργον). Virtue is related, then, with the perfection of the own capacities, and it has some similarity with the perfect activity of the natural faculties.¹⁰ Just like the excellence of the eye lies in the activity of seeing, the human excellence (virtue) depends on the well development of the human activities. This perfection or excellence is established by one's own capacities, that have a mean term, and the action will be perfect if it is done according to it. Hence in some sense virtue is a mean term between two extremes, but in other sense it is an extreme, because the mean is excellence, perfect harmony between the capacity (that is δύναμις) and the activity (ἐνέργεια).

The mean is the point of perfection of one's own nature, just as it is established by every natural function.¹¹ This is precisely what Kant didn't understand when he criticized that virtue could be a mean between extremes because, in his opinion, that would be an arbitrary point.¹² Virtue is, according to Kant, the perfect adequacy with duty, not only from an external point of view, but from the inner intention. The doctrine of the just mean between extremes is for him the adequacy of conduct to an external term that doesn't reach the inner perfection.¹³ Kant denies the doctrine of virtue as a mean because for him virtue can only be the adequacy to the norm, a universal principle, and the excellence of virtue is measured attending to the inner dispositions of the subject, that is, if he acts for the sake of duty.¹⁴ The Kantian critic reveals an interesting point: the excellence of the human life doesn't consist in the performance of some external actions, but it is necessary to do them with

⁹ *Eth. Nic.*, II.6 1106^a20-21.

¹⁰ Although the word ἀρετή is translated as "virtue", the Greek term has some connotations that should be taken into account: «Ἀρετή did not mean quite the same as "virtue" with us; he meant the excellence, or perfection of man, just as he spoke elsewhere of the ἀρετή of a horse» (A. GRANT, *The Ethics of Aristotle, Illustrated with Essays and Notes*, Longmans, London 1874, p. 262).

¹¹ See U. WOLF, *Sinn der Aristotelischen Mesoteslehre*, in O. HÖFFE (ed.), *Aristoteles. Die Nikomachische Ethik*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1995, p. 90.

¹² «Dieses Mittlere zwischen zwei äußeren Enden, wer will mir es angeben? Der Geiz (als Laster) ist von der Sparsamkeit (als Tugend) nicht darin unterschieden, dass diese zu weit getrieben wird, sondern hat ein ganz anderes Prinzip (Maxime), nämlich den Zweck der Haushaltung nicht in den Genuß seines Vermögens, sondern mit Entsagung auf denselben bloß in dem Besitz desselben zu setzen» (I. KANT, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Ak. VI, 404, footnote).

¹³ «Der Unterschied der Tugend von Laster kann nie in Graden der Befolgung gewisser Maximen, sondern muss allein in der spezifischen Qualität derselben (dem Verhältnis zum Gesetz) gesucht werden: mit anderen Worten, der belobte Grundsatz (des Aristoteles), die Tugend in dem Mittleren zwischen zwei Lastern zu setzen, ist falsch» (I. KANT, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Ak. VI, 404, 3-12).

¹⁴ See G. BIEN, *Aristotelische Ethik und Kantische Moraltheorie*, «Freiburger Universitätsblätter», 72 (1981), p. 63.

a right will, wanting the goodness in itself. However, although this aspect of the human virtue is of the most importance, it is not a critic that goes against Aristotle, because for him virtue is not to do a certain kind of actions, but to them in a certain way, with the right dispositions, «by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom (*φρονιμός*) would determine it». ¹⁵ Just like Gauthier points out, the natural perfection is not only that what is done, but also how it is done, and there is an objective aspect, the external action, and a subjective aspect, which are the inner dispositions. ¹⁶

This double perspective seems important in the relation of pleasure and virtue. The Aristotelian doctrine of virtue points out that it is not only necessary to do the right things, but to do them with the right dispositions and joy. The virtuous person has achieved some inner dispositions or states of character (affective and deliberative) that allow him to do the good actions in a continuous period of time. These states of character imply a capacity of enjoying and suffering in a right way, according to the best development of one's own nature. ¹⁷ On the other hand, a virtuous state of character is not consolidated until one's desires are good regulated and one is motivated to do the right actions with pleasure: one seeks the noble life in a natural way. For example, in order to be temperate it is necessary to avoid the excess of drinking, but the temperate person is the one who avoids it because he prefers and finds more joy in living a temperate life, according to virtue:

«The man who does not rejoice in noble actions is not even good; since no one would call a man just who did not enjoy liberal actions; and similarly in all other cases. If this is so, virtuous actions must be in themselves pleasant (*ἡδέϊαι*). But they are also good and noble (*ἀγαθαί γε καὶ καλαί*).» ¹⁸

There is virtue when a person does good actions in a natural and pleasurable way. Hence it is necessary to consider virtue from an emotional-desiderative

¹⁵ *Eth. Nic.*, II.6 1106^b35-1107^a2.

¹⁶ R.A. GAUTHIER, *La morale d'Aristote*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1963, p. 63: «La vertu comporte pour Aristote deux aspects, un aspect *objectif* et un aspect *subjectif* qui est le principal: il faut assurément pour être vertueux faire certaines *choses*, mais il faut surtout les faire dans certaines *dispositions*. Quelles choses et quelles dispositions? C'est à ces deux questions que répondent les deux réalités que nous avons vu Aristote appeler «différence spécifique» et «genre»: les choses que la vertu doit faire sont des choses «mesurées»: le juste milieu est la qualité distinctive de l'*objet* de la vertu; les dispositions dans lesquelles elle doit les faire sont au contraire les qualités du *sujet* vertueux; c'est l'état habituel qui lui fait accomplir les choses de la vertu de façon stable et infaillible et surtout dans une intention droite».

¹⁷ J. MÜLLER, *Physis und Ethos. Der Naturbegriff bei Aristoteles und seine Relevanz für die Ethik*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2006, p. 109: «Der *spoudaios* wird als der gesunde, erwachsene Mann gekennzeichnet, der die artspezifischen Potentialitäten des Menschen in höchster Vollendung personifiziert.»

¹⁸ *Eth. Nic.*, I.8 1099^a17-22.

point of view. Virtues are dispositions towards the good actions, because they establish an emotional and desiderative balance in the human being that allows him to perform the best actions in a natural way.¹⁹ Thanks to virtue the human beings seek their natural goal without being dominated by the immediate appetites.²⁰ This emotional disposition doesn't consist in a quantitative equilibrium (a life without pleasures and pains), but it is based on the fulfilment of human nature.²¹

3. VIRTUE AS A MEAN TERM RELATIVE TO US

The major problem of the Aristotelian doctrine of virtue is how to determine the just mean in which it consists. Virtues are dispositions, states of character, that allow the perfect life according to the natural functions, but how do we know the mean towards the actions? Is there an objective criteria with which we can judge actions as good or bad? How can we know the function of man? These are important questions to consider specially the relation of this mean towards pleasures and pains.

We find a first approach to the problem in the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he distinguishes between the arithmetical mean and the mean relative to us:

«By the intermediate in the object I mean that which is equidistant from each of the extremes, which is one and the same for all men; by the intermediate relatively to us that which is neither too much nor too little, and this is not one, nor the same for all. For instance, if ten is many and two is few, six is the intermediate, taken in terms of the object; for it exceeds and is exceeded by an equal amount; this is intermediate according to arithmetical proportion. But the intermediate relatively to us is not to be taken so; if ten pounds are too much for a particular person to eat and two too little, it does not follow that the trainer will order six pounds; for this also is perhaps too much for the person who is to take it, or too little. [...] A master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this, the intermediate not in the object but relatively to us».²²

¹⁹ See M. RIEDENAUER, *Orexis und Eupraxia*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2000, p. 240.

²⁰ F. RICKEN, *Der Lustbegriff in der nikomachischen Ethik des Aristoteles*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1976, p. 104: «Die Möglichkeit einer Täuschung durch das Angenehme und die Möglichkeit, daß das von der Vorstellung des Gutes geleitete Handeln nicht angenehm sei, werden durch die ethische Areté ausgeschaltet. Sie ist die Verfassung des nicht vernünftigen Strebevermögens, die gewährleistet, daß die nicht vernünftigen Strebungen nur in Übereinstimmung mit der von der wahren Annahme über das Gut des Menschen geleiteten, d. h. der vernünftigen, Strebung aufkommen».

²¹ The mean does not consist in an emotional equilibrium, because it is based in the recognition of something as valuable. See D. ACHTENBERG, *Cognition of Value in Aristotle's Ethics*, State University of New York Press, New York 2002, pp. 117-118.

²² *Eth. Nic.*, II.6 1106^a28-1106^b7.

The mean relative to us must be understood as the point in which one develops his own nature in the right way, considering the particular circumstances at the time of the election.²³ It is the way in which the exigencies of the perfection of one's nature are harmonized with the present situation and the peculiar affective constitution. It is necessary to make concrete the capacities of the soul with the use of *φρόνησις*. For example, it is necessary to do justice, but the way to do it here and now must be determined according to the circumstances: if I have to give food to ten people and two of them are ill, it will be more just to give more food to those who need them more. This doesn't mean that justice is arbitrary, but that it is necessary to apply the general principle of the action according to the present situation, because, as Aristotle says with the verses of a poet: «For men are good in but one way, but bad in many».²⁴ The mean relative to us is the proportional relation between the perfect development of some natural activity and the particular situation: if one is in front of some danger, the virtuous behaviour is not to frighten in an irrational way, nor to tackle it rashly without considering the problem, but to have an attitude of respect to confront it, according to the real magnitude of the problem. It is not the mean relative to us the passive accordance to a norm, but the actualization of virtue according to the present situations, just because the circumstances are always new, different.²⁵

²³ Some authors have emphasized the individual perspective of the mean relative to us, understanding that it consists in an adequacy of the individual behaviour to the present circumstances of life and the personal affective dispositions: See R. KRAUT, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1989, p. 328; and S. LEIGHTON, *Relativising Moral Excellence in Aristotle*, «Apeiron», 25 (1992), pp. 49-66. Leighton thinks that Aristotle makes of excellence something relative to each person, with his own circumstances, so that the moral life would be relative to each individual. The problem of this kind of interpretations is that virtue could be seen as a subjective disposition, without an objective criterion of behaviour. In some cases, virtue would depend on the psychological dispositions of the individual: for example, for a very passionate person, temperance would consist in enjoying corporal pleasures more than someone who is more rational, because for him it is more difficult to avoid these pleasures. However, the good actions according to virtue don't depend only in our psychical dispositions, because they must be ordered towards some goods and goals. If some food is pleasurable, but not healthy, the act of eating it would be vicious, although I may have a character inclined to enjoy food.

²⁴ *Eth. Nic.* II.6 1106^b34.

²⁵ H. SCHILLING, *Das Ethos der Mesotes*, Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1930, p. 42: «Die Arete ist nicht Hexis in dem Sinn, dass sie die gesinnungsmäßige Grundhaltung ist, welche dem Handeln und Fühlen die allgemeine Richtung gibt. Sie ist, obwohl Aristoteles gelegentlich die Hexis der *ἐνέργεια* entgegensetzt, im zentralen nicht *δύναμις*, sondern *ἐνέργεια*: aktive Gestaltung und Formung der Anforderungen, welche in der Einzel-Situation an das Verhalten gestellt sind. Die Einzel-Situation ist immer neu, immer anders, nie dagewesen, nie wiederkehrend».

4. PLEASURE MAKES PERFECT THE ACTIVITY THAT IT IS DONE WITH FULFILMENT

Pleasure is in a close relation with virtue, with the mean relative to us, precisely because virtue allows the perfect actualization of the natural capacities according to a rational plan and the present circumstances. Virtue is not just disposition, but some kind of perfection in continuous process of actualization.²⁶

Thus, it is an interesting point the analogy that appears between the sensitive pleasures and the pleasure who finds the virtuous person. When Aristotle analyzes sensation in the *De Anima* he says:

«To feel pleasure or pain is to act with the sensitive mean towards what is good or bad as such (ἔστι τὸ ἡδέσθαι καὶ λυπεῖσθαι τὸ ἐνεργεῖν τῆ ἀισθητικῆ μεσότητι πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακόν, ἣ τοιαῦτα).²⁷

Pleasure, in the case of sensation, appears when there is a perfect adequacy between the sensible faculty and the sensible object that stimulates the sensibility, pleasure depends on this adequacy between sensible stimulus and mean term (μεσοτήτης) in which the sensibility consists. The faculty of sensibility is some kind of mean term, and the exterior objects or stimulus can be adequate or not with it. When something is not adequate is perceived as painful and bad, whereas it is perceived as good and pleasurable when there is harmony. In the same way, pleasure in the intellectual knowledge depends on the adequacy between the intellectual faculty and the object of knowledge:

«So long, then, as both the intelligible or sensible object (νοητὸν ἢ αἰσθητὸν) and the discriminating or contemplative faculty (τὸ κρῖνον ἢ θεωροῦν) are as they should be, the pleasure will be involved in the activity; for when both the passive and the active factor are unchanged and are related to each other in the same way, the same result naturally follows». ²⁸

The faculties of knowledge have a mean term towards their respective objects, which in the case of the sensibility are the material organs, whereas in the case of the intelligence is the intelligibility of the object. In the same way, the different vital functions depend on a mean term, and the human being must adequate his behaviour towards them, in order to develop his nature with fulfilment. This perfection of functions in the case of the human being is due to rational dispositions, which are the virtues, because they allow a proj-

²⁶ Virtue is some kind of disposition towards the actions, but it is also some kind of perfection, as when Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics* that virtue is some τελείωσις (*Met.* Δ.16 1021 b 20). Virtue is not a passive capacity or disposition, but requires actualization.

²⁷ *De Anima*, III.7 431^a10-12.

²⁸ *Eth. Nic.*, x.4 1174^b35-1175^a4.

ect of rational life and contemplation. Virtues consist in a mean relative to us, and in the way the human being acts according to it and he contemplates the excellence of his life, he would find some kind of pleasure, the joy of the noble conduct.²⁹ Actions can be pleasant in the way they are adequate with the mean term of the natural capacities, which is the point of perfection of our vital powers.³⁰ Virtue in the exercise of sensibility consists in the perfect harmony between the faculty and the object perceived, whereas virtue in the case of the human actions consists in the harmony between what one is and what one does, because one's nature is some kind of mean term.

Human beings find the true pleasure when they develop their life according to the exigencies of their own nature: when he does a job adequate with his capacities,³¹ when his relation with the others is convenient,³² when he takes the appropriate time for leisure,³³ when he tackles the risks without being a coward nor being rash,³⁴ when he gives to everyone what is just,³⁵ when he is generous when it is needed,³⁶ etc. This doesn't mean that he will find pleasure in all these actions, or that this pleasure must be immediate. The repetition of actions according with virtue allows that the human being lives according to his own function, and that requires time, so that pleasure in this case is not immediate. This kind of joy is some satisfaction with one's life, an inner pleasure due to the contemplation (θεωρία) of one's noble life.

Moreover, it is interesting to examine this question from the other point of view, that of the wicked person. There is an important text in the ninth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Taking about the wicked men, he says:

²⁹ This analogy between the sensitive pleasure and the joy in the virtuous actions seems plausible because Aristotle uses the word ἀίσθησις when he speaks of the perception of the mean term of the right actions: «Up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate before he becomes blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception (ἐν τῇ αἰσθήσει ἢ κρίσει)» (*Eth. Nic.*, II.9 1109^b18-23). And also: «How far and how a man must stray before he becomes blameworthy, it is not easy to state in words; for the decision (κρίσει) depends on the particular facts and on perception (αἰσθήσει)» (*Eth. Nic.* IV.5 1126^b2-5). Olmstead suggests that there can be some kind of intuitive-perceptive capacity to find the just mean «it is significant that at the crucial moment of the definition μεσοτήτης is the active principle of virtue just as it is of perception in the *De Anima*, a capacity of achieving a quantity between extremes» (E.H. OLMSTED, *The «Moral Sense» Aspect of Aristotle's Ethical Theory*, in C. MUELLER-GOLDINGEN (ed.), *Schriften zur aristotelischen Ethik*, Olms Studien, Hildesheim 1988, p. 67).

³⁰ A. GRANT, *The Ethics of Aristotle, Illustrated with Essays and Notes*, Longmans, London 1874, p. 256: «Each of the senses then is, or contains, a sort of standard of its proper object. And it is clear that Aristotle attributes to us a similar critical faculty in regard of morals».

³¹ See *Eth. Nic.* x.5 1175^a32-36.

³² See *Eth. Nic.* IV.6 1126^b25-28.

³³ See *Eth. Nic.* x.6 1176^b32-34.

³⁴ See *Eth. Nic.* III.7 1115^b16-18.

³⁵ See *Eth. Nic.* v.5 1134^a1-6.

³⁶ See *Eth. Nic.* IV.1 1120^a23-25.

«[Wicked men] having nothing lovable in them they have no feeling of love to themselves. Therefore also such men do not rejoice or grieve with themselves; for their soul is rent by faction, and one element in it by reason of its wickedness grieves when it abstains from certain acts, while the other part is pleased, and one draws them this way and the other that, as if they were pulling them in pieces».³⁷

The wicked person cannot contemplate his own life with satisfaction, because he doesn't have anything noble in himself, and because of this he seeks pleasure in the exterior things. On the other hand, the virtuous person develops his life according to a rational project of life of the most valuable things, according to the goods of his natural tendencies, and in this way he contemplates his own life and finds pleasure in this contemplation.

It is also necessary to consider, however, the way in which virtue is a mean term towards pleasures and pains because, as Aristotle says:

«Virtues are concerned with actions and passions (πράξεις καὶ πάθη), and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, for this reason also virtue will be concerned with pleasures and pains».³⁸

Aristotle rejects the doctrine of Speusippus, who thought that virtue could be a neutral state between pleasures and pains, a state of freedom towards the passions.³⁹ Pleasure is, fundamentally, some kind of good, and the mean term towards it is ordered by the perfection of the own nature, so that moderation in respect with some pleasures is the way to achieve life's fulfilment, which brings in itself a greatest pleasure.⁴⁰ The mean term towards pleasures and pains allows the most excellent and perfect activity (contemplation), and with it, the greatest kind of pleasure.

5. VIRTUE AND PLEASURE: ETHICAL AND AESTHETICAL WAY OF LIFE

In this relation between virtue and pleasure it seems of great importance to consider the concept of virtue for a Greek in the time of Aristotle. Jaeger says that «there is not complete equivalent for the word ἀρετή in modern English: its oldest meaning is a combination of proud and courtly morality with warlike valour».⁴¹ Although Aristotle develops the philosophical concept of vir-

³⁷ *Eth. Nic.*, IX.4 1166^b17-21.

³⁸ *Eth. Nic.*, II.3 1104^b13-16.

³⁹ See *Eth. Nic.*, VII.13 1153^b1-7.

⁴⁰ In the doctrine of virtue as a mean term that must be applied towards pleasures and pains saw H.J. Krämer the influence of Plato's *Philebus* and *Republic*, because he affirms there that when pleasure is ordered by reason, in its just measure, it is more beautiful and truthful (*Rep.* 586 D, *Fil.* 52 C-53 B). See H.J. KRÄMER, *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles*, Heidelberg 1959, p. 189, footnote n. 88.

⁴¹ W. JAEGER, *Paidea. The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York 1965, p. 5.

tue, he is in fact working on a notion of his own civilization and, in this way, he is asking for the excellent man, the one who develops the Greek spirit into fulfilment.⁴² In this way, a very important characteristic of the virtuous man is that he has a noble behaviour, *καλόν*, beautiful.⁴³ The purity and harmony of the virtuous person makes of his conduct not only something good, but also beautiful:

«Virtuous actions are noble and done for the sake of the noble (*καλαί καὶ τοῦ καλοῦ ἕνεκα*)».⁴⁴

Good behaviour involves an adequate equilibrium between passions and reason. Serenity and inner harmony are two characteristics of the good life, as some kind of measure that allows the human excellence.⁴⁵ With the practice of virtue the human being seeks what is the best for him, as human being, and that is also called by Aristotle beautiful, *καλόν*, as when he says:

«Courage is a mean with respect to things that inspire confidence or fear, in the circumstances that have been stated, and it chooses or endures things because it is noble to do so, or because it is base not to do so (*ὅτι καλόν αἰρεῖται καὶ ὑπομένει, ἢ ὅτι αἰσχρόν τὸ μὴ*)».⁴⁶

The term *καλόν* is not only an aesthetically concept, but also moral,⁴⁷ because it is concerned with moral obligations and it is valuable in itself.⁴⁸ *Τὸ καλόν* designs the ideal of human excellence, what is beautiful and noble to seek in

⁴² L. OLLÉ-LAPRUNE, *Essai sur la morale d'Aristote*, Eugène Belin et fils, Paris 1881, p. 53: «L'homme vertueux d'Aristote, c'est donc l'homme tel qu'Aristote le connaît, c'est le Grec de ce temps-là; je dirai que c'est Aristote lui-même, tel qu'il souhaite d'être, tel qu'il est dans les bons moments; ce sont ses contemporains les meilleurs, dans leurs meilleurs jours; c'est lui et ce sont eux, avec leurs plus nobles aspirations, avec leurs plus belles ambitions. L'esprit grec, le caractère grec est là, et je ne crois pas que nulle part dans la philosophie morale antique il y en ait une plus vive et plus complète image».

⁴³ W. JAEGER, *Paidea. The Ideals of Greek Culture*, cit., p. 13: «But what did Aristotle mean by the beautiful? Our thoughts turn at once to the sophisticated views of later ages – the cult of the individual, the humanism of the eighteenth century, with its aspiration towards aesthetic and spiritual self-development. But Aristotle's own words are quite clear. They show that he was thinking chiefly of acts of moral heroism. A man who loves himself will be ready to sacrifice himself for his friends or his country, to abandon possessions and honours in order to «take possession of the beautiful».

⁴⁴ *Eth. Nic.* IV.1 1120^a23-24.

⁴⁵ H.H. JOACHIM, *Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics*, Greenwood Press, Westport 1985, p. 86: «The good action is that in which the right amount of *πᾶθος* is embodied, in which the agent's feeling and response to feeling are determined by the right proportion or system of proportions».

⁴⁶ *Eth. Nic.*, III.7 1116^a10-12.

⁴⁷ See T.H. IRWIN, *Beauty and Morality in Aristotle*, in J. MILLER (ed.), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. A Critical Guide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, 239-253.

⁴⁸ See *Eth. Nic.*, III.8 1117^a17; IV.1 1120^a24-25.

the particular actions.⁴⁹ Moreover, a *καλὸν* behaviour is not only good and noble, but also pleasurable:

«Since virtue consists in rejoicing and loving and hating aright, there is clearly nothing which we are so much concerned to acquire and to cultivate as the power of forming right judgements, and of taking delight in good dispositions and noble actions (τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς ἐπιεικέσιν ἡθροσι καὶ ταῖς καλαῖς πράξεσιν)».⁵⁰

It seems that for Aristotle goodness and the true pleasure are linked so close together that it is possible to say that virtue is beautiful, because beauty is also truly pleasant. The other way around happens in the case of vicious people:

«Living by passion they pursue their own pleasures and the means to them, and avoid the opposite pains, and have not even a conception of what is noble and truly pleasant (τοῦ δὲ καλοῦ καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἡδέος), since they have never tasted».⁵¹

In the Aristotelian ethics there is some connexion between the virtuous life and the noble (and beautiful), and it seems that this connexion has something to do with the aesthetical pleasure of contemplation of one's life. It is possible to say that a virtuous action is beautiful because there is some pleasure or delight that accompanies the contemplation of these actions. The contemplation of the virtuous actions, however, is not always pleasant or, at least, not to everybody. The vicious person finds displeasure towards the virtuous person, because there is no harmony between his inner principle and what he is seeing, whereas the virtuous person contemplates joyfully the other virtuous person, precisely because there is an adequacy of excellent characters:

«The truest friendship, then, is that of the good, as we have frequently said; for that which is without qualification good or pleasant seems to be lovable and desirable, and for each person that which is good or pleasant for him; and the good man is lovable and desirable to the good man for these reasons».⁵²

6. CONCLUSION

The Aristotelian concept of virtue as the excellent development of human capacities, according to a rational project of life, allows us to understand pleasure as something inherent to the virtuous life, and not as something extrinsic to it. In this sense the Kantian opposition between acting well and acting with pleasure seems to vanish,⁵³ because the virtuous pleasure is grounded on the contemplation of one's noble life:

⁴⁹ See J. OWENS, *The καλόν in the Aristotelian Ethics*, in D.J. O'MEARA (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1981, pp. 261-278.

⁵⁰ *Pol.*, VIII.5 1340^a15-19.

⁵¹ *Eth. Nic.*, X.9 1179^b13-16.

⁵² *Eth. Nic.* VIII.5 1157^b24-27.

⁵³ See G. BIEN, *Aristotelische Ethik und Kantische Moraltheorie*, «Freiburger Universitätsblätter», 72 (1981), p. 71.

«Such a man wishes to live with himself; for he does so with pleasure, since the memories of his past acts are delightful and his hopes for the future are good, and therefore pleasant. His mind is well stored too with subjects of contemplation (θεωρημάτων). And he grieves and rejoices, more than any other, with himself; for the same thing is always painful, and the same thing always pleasant, and not one thing at one time and another at another; he has, so to speak, nothing to repent of».⁵⁴

This kind of contemplation is a perfect activity, ἐνέργεια τελεία, and for this reason it brings the greatest joy. Pleasure, then, is something inherent to the activity of contemplation of one's life. The vicious person, on the other side, doesn't experience that joy, because he does not contemplate his life as excellent, and he tries to find pleasure in the external things, trying to do more bearable from the outside the life that he doesn't bring into fulfilment from the inside.

ABSTRACT: How it is possible for Aristotle to say that the virtuous man finds the greatest pleasures? In this article I try to show a reasonable link between virtue and pleasure, grounded on the notion of perfect activity (ἐνέργεια τελεία), which in the case of human beings is an activity according to virtue. The virtuous person can contemplate his own noble life and find joy in his good actions, and pleasure appears in this contemplation, which is a perfect activity (ἐνέργεια τελεία).

KEYWORDS: activity, Aristotle, mean, pleasure, virtue.

⁵⁴ *Eth. Nic.*, IX.4 1166^a22-28.