IS PLEASURE GOOD?
Aristotle claims that pleasure is good, and that eudaimonia involves pleasure. So he needs to answer objections that claim it is not good, and clarify just how and when pleasure is good. He does this in Bk 7.12-13 and Bk 10.2. We will not discuss all the objections he considers, as some are difficult and technical.

1. **Objection**: The temperate person avoids pleasure.
   *Reply*: Not true. What the temperate person avoids is an excess of certain bodily pleasures.

2. **Objection**: The practically wise person doesn’t seek pleasure, but only avoids pain.
   *Reply*: Not true. The practically wise person does seek pleasure, but in accordance with reason. Furthermore, the fact that they avoid pain (in accordance with reason) shows that pleasure is good. As pain is bad and to be avoided, the contrary of pain, pleasure, is good and to be pursued.

3. **Objection**: Pleasure interferes with thought.
   *Reply*: Not true. The pleasures of thinking don’t interfere with thinking, but assist it. It is pleasures that arise from other sources that interfere with thinking. It is generally true of pleasurable activities that each interferes with the others.

4. **Objection**: Not all pleasures are good, for example bodily pleasures or taking pleasure in something bad or disgraceful. (Aristotle doesn’t provide an example, but voyeurism - an invasion of someone’s privacy, especially sexual privacy - provides a fairly clear example.)
   *Reply*: If we say bodily pleasures are not good, then how can we explain that their opposite, bodily pains, are bad? It is only excess of pleasure here that is bad. Disgraceful pleasures are not good, agreed. To explain this, we could say any of three things:
   a. Disgraceful pleasures are not really pleasures, but only pleasant to bad people. All real pleasures are good, though.
   b. The kind of pleasure involved in something disgraceful is a pleasure (e.g. looking at an attractive naked body), and so it is good in general. But such pleasure is not good when it is caused by or involves something disgraceful (such as an intrusion on privacy).
   c. Pleasures are of different kinds, and only some pleasures are good. We will look further at this below.

Do we have any positive reasons for thinking that pleasure is good? Aristotle considers four arguments from another philosopher, Eudoxus, for the claim that pleasure is the only good ($\S 10.2$). He argues that Eudoxus is right that pleasure is a good, but not that it is the only good.
1. Every creature aims at pleasure. This is a good indication that it is, for each thing, the good. And what is good for all things is the good.

Aristotle agrees that this is the strongest reason for thinking that pleasure is good. However, he argues that pleasure is not the only thing that we aim at, it is not our only end (§10.3). There are other things which we seek out, such as seeing, knowing, being virtuous, that we would seek out even if they brought us no pleasure. The pleasure they bring is not why we seek them. They are final ends, not a means to pleasure.

With the next three arguments, Aristotle agrees that they show that pleasure is good, but not that it is the only good.

2. Everything avoids pain, so its contrary, pleasure, is good.
3. We choose pleasure for its own sake, not for some further purpose.
4. Adding pleasure on to any good makes it more desirable.

So, we should conclude that pleasure is good, but not the only good.

PLEASURE, VIRTUE AND FUNCTION

What is pleasure? We naturally think of it as a kind of subjective feeling, which we can only define by how it feels. But Aristotle argues that it is the unimpeded activity of our faculties (§7.12).

This is a very difficult claim to understand, but we can start by thinking about being ‘in the zone’, as we say now. Start with the activities of the senses, such as seeing (§10.4). Pleasure in the activity of a sense is caused most when that sense is at its best (e.g. when you can see well) and active in relation to its ‘finest’ object. Aristotle doesn’t define this, but we can think of it as something on which we can really exercise that sense. So with vision, this is something that is (at least) interesting to look at, that we can explore and engage with through sight. Works of art and beautiful landscapes might provide examples. The same can be said of activities of thought – there is pleasure here in grappling with something that exercises our thought, but which doesn’t impede it, e.g. through being too difficult to understand. We can extend this analysis to all our activities.

But pleasure is not something simply caused by, and separate from, such unimpeded activity. It ‘completes’ the activity. It is part of it, not a separate end, nor a state produced by the activity, as deliberating might produce a decision or looking might produce finding. The pleasure is in the activity itself and intensifies and supports it. Thus, when we enjoy an activity, we throw ourselves into it, and we can enjoy it less if other pleasures from outside the activity distract our attention.

If this is the correct analysis of what pleasure is, we can explain how pleasures can be good and bad, and how they relate to virtue and eudaimonia. Each kind of activity - eating, thinking, running, listening to music - has a corresponding kind of
pleasure. So there are different kinds of pleasure. A pleasure is good when the activity that produces it is good and bad when the activity is bad.

Aristotle claims that different animals have different characteristic activities, and so they enjoy different pleasures. The pleasures that are most suited to human beings are, therefore, those that relate to our characteristic activity, namely living in accordance with reason. Now, it is the virtuous person who has the traits and the practical wisdom that enable them to perform this characteristic activity and this constitutes the good life for human beings. So what is ‘truly’ pleasant is what is pleasant to the virtuous person. It is these pleasures that form part of eudaimonia. People who are not virtuous may get pleasure from other activities, but such pleasure is not good or ‘truly’ pleasant.