

## **An Introduction to the *Philebus***

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The *Philebus* is one of Plato's most difficult dialogues. I know of no full-length commentary (as opposed to monographs or annotated translations) and even monographs on some particular topic in the dialogue are relatively few. The three topics that have attracted the most attention are those of eidetic analysis, categorial separation and mixture, and pleasure, especially false pleasure. In my opinion, it is a mistake to attempt to study these topics as though they are intelligible apart from the context of the dialogue as a whole. Unfortunately, the dialogue is almost as obscure from a dramatic standpoint as from that of its most famous themes. In this lecture, I will try to indicate two or three general characteristics of the dialogue, and I shall do so by eliciting them from a discussion of the opening pages. Despite the peculiarly spare nature of the dramatic form, the *Philebus* is no exception to the general principle that Plato prefigures the subsequent discussion of a dialogue in his initial scene. My intention is not to add to the technical analyses of the discussions of eidetic and ontological structure, but rather to cast some light on their peculiar status in a discussion of the good life for ordinary mortals rather than philosophers, and in particular, in a discussion with two quite ordinary interlocutors like Philebus and Protarchus. What follows is therefore in no sense intended as a summary of the dialogue as a whole, but rather as the opening of a path into the study of that whole.

I.

«Philebus» is a proper name, attached to an otherwise unknown person who is a principal if unusually taciturn character in the drama we are about

to study. The name means literally «love boy»<sup>1</sup>. Socrates begins the *Philebus* as follows: «Now look, Protarchus, at the *logos* you are about to receive from Philebus, and at ours, which you are about to dispute, unless you say that you agree with it. Do you want me to give the main points of each position?» (11a1-b2). A number of scholars have commented on the oddness of this beginning<sup>2</sup>. In the typical Platonic dialogue, we are provided with an initial orientation by the dramatic details of the time, setting, and personnel of the conversation. Sometimes this orientation is more complex, as in those dialogues that begin with a prologue, within which the details of the main conversation are recollected, whether by a participant in the original event or someone else. The *Gorgias* also begins rather abruptly, but not to the same degree as the *Philebus*. In the former case, the eponymous interlocutor is a famous rhetor, whereas Philebus is initially significant for his name alone.

At first glance, then, it looks as though the dramatic orientation of the *Philebus* is restricted to its abruptness. One might surmise that this is a mark of the old Plato's steady loss of interest in literary form, but even late dialogues like the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Laws* provide us with a dramatic context within which to situate the conversation. If we look to the content of the *Philebus* for some explanation of its peculiar form, we are again left puzzled. The *Philebus* is an unusually difficult dialogue, as we are about to see, but no more so than the *Timaeus* or *Parmenides*, both of which have a rather elaborate dramatic beginning. There is, however, one other peculiarity of the *Philebus* that, although it initially deepens the puzzle of the dramatic form, may assist us in taking our bearings.

It is generally agreed that the *Philebus* was written by Plato after he had composed the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. One might suppose that the shift from Socrates to the Eleatic Stranger as the main protagonist in these two dialogues is a sign of a shift in Plato's doctrines. If this is so, what is the point of the return to Socrates after the complicated discussions carried out under the guidance of the Eleatic Stranger? I have discussed this problem with special attention to the function of the Stranger in my books on the *Sophist* and *Statesman*<sup>3</sup>. Here our focus of attention is Socrates. And the first thing to be said is that the Socrates of the *Philebus* seems to have undergone a modification that brings him closer to (but does not make him identical with) the Eleatic Stranger.

Despite the etymological significance of the name «Philebus» and his physical beauty, which, to anticipate, seems to have a compelling influence upon Protarchus (11c7-8), the usual Socratic emphasis upon Eros, together

1. GOSLING (12a7). BERNARDITE translates «lover of youth».

2. In principle, I agree with BURY (11a1).

3. *Plato's Sophist: The Drama of Original and Appearance*, Yale 1983, and *Plato's Statesman: the Web of Politics*, Yale 1995.

with a vivid interest in the physical and intellectual attributes of the youths with whom he converses, is missing here. In general, Socrates does not exhibit the kind of playful irony that elsewhere is typical of his interrogative style. Even his use of myth is relatively colorless and is largely devoted to the technical analysis of formal structure. Most striking of all is the fact that Socrates introduces topics of unusual difficulty, which are treated in a most obscure manner, and which have struck most readers of the dialogue as irrelevant, and even as obstacles, to the progress of the main theme. In general, Socrates expresses himself with a degree of obscurity that is entirely inappropriate to the nature of his interlocutors, as well as to the theme of the dialogue, which is that of the good life for all human beings. On this point, it is instructive to compare the *Philebus* to the *Republic*, where Socrates converses with much more gifted and articulate youths (Glaucon and Adeimantus) about a related but much more difficult topic (the dependence of justice upon philosophy and the nature of the philosopher), but in a much more lucid and straightforward manner. And this is true even with respect to his treatment of the doctrine of Ideas and the degrees of cognition, as compared with his presentation of formal analysis and the classification of beings in the *Philebus*.

In short, we might have expected a conversation quite different from the one we actually encounter. Is there a connection between the dramatic and stylistic peculiarities of the *Philebus* and its main theme? I suggest that the key to the solution is the role assigned to Eros in the *Philebus*. Let me first state the general point. The *Philebus* is odd because it discusses the question of the good life in a relatively «nonhuman» way. This is partly due to the nature of pleasure, which according to Philebus is the highest good, and which can be enjoyed «by all animals» (11b4). Socrates opposes to this his own view that thoughtfulness is the highest good, but he emphasizes throughout the pure cognition of forms (as well as pure or simple pleasures of sense perception), not the general intelligence that could reasonably be associated with the good life. And in his final account of the mixture of qualities of states of the soul that constitute the good life for all human beings, he omits any reference to Eros. No doubt this has something to do with the need to discipline Philebus (via his spokesman, Protarchus). But it is carrying discipline too far to arrive at a paradigm for the good life that is unacceptable to the human race and indeed, that could be adopted only at the price of extinction.

Let us briefly review the references to Eros in the *Philebus*. Sexual eros is mentioned explicitly four times in the dialogue, either in passing or in order to denounce it (most violently at the end: 67b1-5; cfr. 23a4, 47e1 and 50e1). There are two very brief references to philosophical Eros, near the beginning and the end of the dialogue (at 16b6 and 58d2-5). They certainly reflect the doctrine of Eros enunciated by Socrates elsewhere, but in passing, as it were by moonlight rather than sunlight. The minimal role as-

signed to intellectual Eros is certainly connected to the absence in the *Philebus* of any reference to the hyperuranian or trans-ontic Ideas. Sobriety replaces madness. This is especially evident in the treatment of the sexual Eros. It is never defended explicitly by Philebus, despite his loyalty to Aphrodite, and Protarchus, his official spokesman, is soon drawn into violent criticism of the degrading effects of the most intense bodily pleasures, a violence that may indicate bitter experience but which is nevertheless hardly flattering to the goddess of love. It is also noteworthy that here and elsewhere the criticism of sexual pleasure is presented indirectly if unmistakably in the form of a discussion of the base pleasure of scratching an itch or by denouncing the power of intense physical pleasure to make us grunt, gesticulate, and cavort like the beasts, behavior that is so shameful that we hide it in the dark. Most important, however, is the aforementioned fact that sexual pleasure, or for that matter Eros in any form, is not mentioned as an ingredient in the very full articulation of the components in the mixture constituting the good life.

In one of the best-known passages in the *Philebus*, Socrates speaks of «the tragedy and the comedy of human life» (50b1-2). What one could plausibly call the comic aspects of human life that are due to the bestial Eros, are mitigated in the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic* by the intercession of the philosophical or divine Eros. In the *Philebus*, this mitigation does not take place. Differently stated, Socratic mania is replaced by technical eccentricity. There is no doubt that this eccentricity is muffled in the much more conventional closing section of the dialogue, which emphasizes measure, harmony, and moderation. But the muffling or muting that is apparently appropriate to the life of human beings in general is tragic precisely because we are denied access to the divine madness that raises us beyond ourselves and could thereby be said to constitute our ladder to the good. There is something soporific about the good life of the *Philebus*.

The difficulties associated with Eros are connected to the fact that spiritedness (*thumos*) makes a very restricted appearance in the *Philebus*. If I am not mistaken, this word occurs only twice, both times in the sense of «anger» (40e3, 47e6). If we think of the political role assigned to spiritedness in the *Republic*, the further thought occurs to us that the good life in the *Philebus* is oddly apolitical. It is part of the soporific nature of the good life that it lacks political ambition. But this lack makes it all the more necessary to mute the passions and desires, since in their full form, their cannot be controlled by the intellect alone. A soul produced by a mixture of thoughtfulness and pleasure, however symmetrical the measures, is unbalanced. The central role assigned to arithmetic and formal analysis, which is reflected in the analytical approach to the elements of the good life, together with the ridicule heaped upon Eros and Aphrodite, all conspire to produce a model that is peculiarly unsuited to its addressees, despite the veil of edifying rhetoric in which it is wrapped.

I have been suggesting that the need to punish and suppress Eros accounts for, or more cautiously, is associated with the relative lack of dramatic detail and the abruptness of the beginning of the dialogue. The treatment of the good life is strangely isolated from the context of life itself. It must now be added that this abruptness constitutes a dramatic artifice in its own right. The artifice, however, works retroactively. We come to see that Socrates has fashioned his speeches in such a way as to punish Philebus. In the *Republic*, the extremely erotic Glaucon is not disciplined so much as he is transformed or raised to the level of philosophical Eros. In the *Philebus*, it is almost as if Plato splits Glaucon in half, assigning the erotic component to Philebus and the delight in dialectical conversation to Protarchus. Once he is deprived of Eros, Protarchus becomes very quickly immune to the compulsion of Philebus' beauty, and Socrates has no difficulty in converting him to the principle of thoughtfulness. At the same time, by calling the dialogue *Philebus* rather than *Protarchus*, Plato sends us a clear signal that the silence of Eros continues to be present. We are led to wonder whether Protarchus will continue to celebrate thoughtfulness when Socrates finally departs.

My suggestion about Eros has a second component that is much more speculative than the first. I suspect that the behavior of Socrates in the *Philebus* is intended by Plato as a kind of satirical comment on the limitations of the philosophical approach of the Eleatic Stranger. Very far from employing the Eleatic Stranger as a symbol of a new stage in his own philosophy, Plato presents us with several different paradigms of the philosophical nature. In the *Philebus*, Plato shows us what would happen if Socrates were to have fallen under the influence of the Stranger's methods. The satire would not work if Socrates became a simple copy of the Stranger. It owes its bite to the comic results of attempting to pursue Socratic ends in a manner influenced by the Stranger, or what the Stranger represents for philosophical method. I cannot prove the soundness of this suggestion, but it fits the facts both of the *Philebus* and the nature of dramatic writing. Plato presents us with the many sides of the philosophical nature. These sides are not totally disparate, but they are less unified than is believed by those who speak regularly of «Platonism» and more unified than is implied by schemata of the early, middle, and late Plato.

## 2.

The words do not appear explicitly, but the first line of the *Philebus* could be understood to resonate with a famous Socratic expression: *palin eks arches* («once more from the beginning»). Our beginning is not that of the dramatic encounter between Socrates and his subsequent interlocutors, or the still more artificial device of the prologue in which someone recollects

a past conversation. It is not even the abrupt beginning of a discussion of some problem but rather the indication that we have reached an impasse in an ongoing dispute and the suggestion that a restatement of principles would be helpful. The dialogue thus begins *in medias res*, but not simply by inserting us into the flow of ongoing action. We begin with an invocation of memory. In the last exchange of the dialogue (67b10-13), Protarchus denies Socrates' request to allow him to depart. «There is still a little bit left [to discuss]... and I will remind you (*hupomneso*) of the remainder». The conversation as we witness it is thus contained between two exercises of the memory, the second of which is the basis for an anticipation of future discussion. In the middle of the dialogue (33c8), Socrates introduces the problem of memory (*mneme*), which, together with anticipation, plays the crucial role in providing the continuity of conscious life.

The initial peculiarity of the abrupt beginning of the *Philebus* is mitigated by our perception of the structural role assigned to memory and its corollary, anticipation. These two mental powers are directed to the past and the future, respectively. What remains to be explained is how their combined activity produces the present. The dramatic structure of the dialogue thus exhibits what will become one of the most difficult problems in the dialogue, a problem that is discussed only indirectly, and indeed, that is presented rather than analyzed. This is the problem of human temporality, and in particular of the «lived present», as I shall call it. The «intermediate-nature of the dramatic presentation in the *Philebus* corresponds to the intermediateness of the lived present between the past and the future. Plato does not present us with a theory or phenomenological description of human temporality; he exhibits dramatically our fragile purchase on the present.

The curtain rises and we are presented with an adult, whom we have reason to assume will be the hero of the play, talking to two youths. One of them, Philebus, has just finished defending a position that, for some reason, is about to be taken up by the other, Protarchus, or «first principle», «Socrates», incidentally, could be translated as «strong savior». With whom is Protarchus disputing? Socrates says «with us» but this could be a figure of speech that means «with me». We shall see later that the number of those in attendance is more than two. The dyad of Philebus and Protarchus is in fact only the surface of an indeterminate collection of youths. But the Socratic monad is also indeterminate; by saying «we», Socrates at least implies that he is not the only person present who advocates thoughtfulness as the best life. The point of this joke is that from the outset, the *Philebus* is an imprecise treatment of precision. This will become evident as the conversation unfolds. We do not know exactly how many are involved in the discussion, or who beside Philebus has already contributed to it, perhaps in support of Socrates, or where it is taking place. We are also dependent upon Socrates for an account of what was previously said, although we

can be partly reassured by the fact that neither Protarchus nor Philebus objects to his report. And a detailed analysis of the technical passages will exhibit the same systematic imprecision, camouflaged as the invocation to precision.

This imprecision is also exhibited by the terminology applied by Socrates to express the two competing accounts of the good life. There is a rather precise difference between the two principles invoked, yet there is also a fluctuation bordering upon ambiguity in the terms used to formulate these principles. Socrates first states the *logos* of Philebus, according to whom, he says, «good is what is enjoyable (*to chairein*) to all living beings; [it is] both pleasure and delight (*ten hedonen kai terpsin*), and whatever is harmonious (*sumphona*) with this genus» (11b4-6). He then repeats «our *logos* ... that thoughtfulness, intelligence, and memory (*to phronein kai to noein kai memnesthai*) and things of the same genus, both correct opinion and true calculations (*doksan te orthen kai aletheis logismous*), are better and superior to pleasure for all things able to partake of them» (11b6).

It has been regularly noted that Socrates, in speaking of Philebus' thesis, uses *agathon* («good») without an article<sup>4</sup>. Most commentators take the bare word to be equivalent in sense to «the good». I see no reason why Plato could not have added the article, had he wished to convey its meaning. We see here the first instance of the corollary to the imprecise presentation of precision, namely, a precise, that is, intentional, use of imprecision. The context does not make clear whether Socrates is speaking of «good», «a good», or «the good». This vagueness is appropriate to the initial formulation of the question as attributed to Philebus: What is good for all animals (*pasi zois*)? As we shall see, Socrates varies his terms considerably in discussing the instances of goodness, both here and in the last section of the dialogue. Nevertheless, as the conversation unfolds, there can be no doubt that the issue in dispute is the identity of «the» good for all human beings, or in other words, for human beings in general. The ambiguity leads us to ask what the argument would look like if we accepted multiple goods corresponding to different types of human being. These would still have to be rank-ordered, but on what principle? And whatever the principle, would it not itself be «good» in some sense higher than that attributed to the elements in the rank-ordering? In the *Republic*, the Idea of the good serves as such a first principle. There is no such first principle in the *Philebus*. Or stated more cautiously, in the final blending of the good life, thoughtful-

<sup>4</sup> BURY (11b6) initially takes the omission of the article as intentional: «In this dialogue Plato is nothing if not exact». In a subsequent additional note (p. 215), he retracts this view and agrees that *agathon* is here equivalent to *tagathon* (with which Hackforth and Gosling concur). BERNARDETE is more cautious and notes that the absence of the article may indicate «that the argument is tightened and restructured with the replacement of Philebus by Protarchus». I agree that the article is omitted intentionally for reasons explained in the text.

ness drops to third place whereas measure wins first prize. It is also true that thoughtfulness is much closer to measure than is pleasure, but the upshot of the long analysis is to promote attributes that remind us of practical intelligence, not goodness in any ontological sense.

Socrates uses three names to characterize Philebus' claim about the good: enjoyment, pleasure, and delight, which he says represent a genus or set of terms. «What is enjoyable to all animals» is replaced a few lines later by «pleasure». In both places it is evident that the expression is not restricted to human beings but connects them together with all animals. It is obvious that what is enjoyable to one species need not be pleasant for another, but the *logos* of Philebus is apparently indifferent to differentia; whatever any animal enjoys is good because it is pleasant. We can see at the outset that Philebus abolishes the most important distinction between humans and brutes. Otherwise stated, the brutes can live as good a life as human beings.

In order to summarize «our» principle, Socrates requires five terms. Thoughtfulness, intelligence, and memory are a kind of response to enjoyment, pleasure, and delight. The latter triad is harmonious with other attributes of the same genus. But the genus containing the cognitive attributes also contains attributes that are the result of the activity of thoughtfulness, intelligence, and memory, namely, correct opinion and true calculation. Whereas these last two are «harmonious» with the first three, they are also not homogeneous with them but of a higher order of complexity. Enjoyment issues in versions of itself, namely, in a sensation of feeling. But cognition issues in *logos*, that is, in assertions that are true or false, or more broadly expressed, in opinions and judgments that might be true or false. Socrates qualifies opinion as «correct» and calculation as «true». Incorrect opinions and false calculations are not part of the good. In sum: if the pleasant is the good, then this includes all pleasures. But if thinking or cognition is the good, this does not include all thoughts. We therefore see that cognition (as I am labelling the genus for convenience) is not unqualifiedly the good but is itself subordinate to truth and correctness. One small point: «correct» (*orthen*) is normally associated with «calculation» and «true» with opinion or belief. Here the linkages are reversed.

We should also note that in the third line of the dialogue, Socrates asks Protarchus whether he agrees with the *logos* of Philebus. The Greek phrase translated by «agrees» is *kata noun*, literally, «in accord with your intellect» (11b1)<sup>5</sup>. Strictly speaking, the game is up for Philebus after the recapitulation of positions, which itself depends upon *logos* and *nous*, or in other words, cognition. One might wish to argue that human beings would be better off if they lacked cognition but were in a state of continuous sensory pleasure. Socrates will later claim that if we are not aware that we are

5. BENARDIETE (192 *et passim*) is especially acute on this phrase.



pleased, then we cannot know that we are living the good life. This seems uncontroversial, but it does not entirely refute the thesis that one can live the good life without knowing it. A somewhat different but not unrelated question is whether one can be mistaken about what one regards as the good life. The political dimension of the so-called quarrel between the ancients and the moderns depends upon the answer to this question.

Something has to be said about the terms employed by Socrates in speaking of «our good». To *phronein* means thoughtfulness, but in the Socratic school the intrinsic conception of wisdom is associated with prudence or sound judgment and culminates in Aristotle's sense of practical intelligence (*phronesis*)<sup>6</sup>. The second term, *to noein*, refers in general to intellectual perception; it is used more particularly to connote considering, understanding, and devising a complex plan. In Plato, the characteristic meaning is that of pure thinking, as in *noesis*, the apprehension of pure forms or formal structure. To *phronein* and *to noein* may thus be taken as an informal representation of practical and theoretical intelligence. As is usually the case in Plato, there is no third term corresponding to the Aristotelian *poiein* or *poiesis*, «making» or «productive intelligence». This is connected to the absence of any reference to *techne*, which is normally associated by Socrates with *episteme* or knowledge, and hence with thoughtfulness. We should however note that at 62d1-e1, Socrates and Protarchus agree to include «all the sciences» (*pasas las epistemas*) into the blend constituting the good life. This agreement is amplified at 66b8-c2 to include the *technai*. Finally, *memnesibai*, «to remember», has the essential power of detaching perceptions and cognitions from erasure by the flow of time, and holding them before the mind's eye as it opines or calculates. In a very real sense, human life transpires within, and is unified by, the memory. One could say that memory is accordingly both theoretical and practico-productive. It constructs experience and thereby renders it cognitively accessible.

In sum: we remember the formal structures that make cognition possible, including the cognition of the superiority of a life of thinking to that of a life of pleasure. We cannot «forget» these structures because we must verify them independently each time that we think them. This superiority of the theoretical life will hold good for all of our ostensibly multiple personalities. The entire thrust of the philosophy of the Socratic school is precisely to move away from what is today called self-consciousness, and precisely because it is internally incoherent.

If I may interpolate a historical remark on this point, critics of Plato like Nietzsche have correctly discerned an ambiguity, if not indeed an inner in-

6. BERNARDINI (11B) warns us not to take *phronesis* as «thoughtfulness» in the Aristotelian sense. The warning is sound, but it is not alleviated by using the English word «thought». This implies, or could imply, that *phronesis* is synonymous with *nous* or *to noein*.

Aristotle from the Socratic school to define evil as a privation is entirely unsatisfactory. I cannot develop this point here because it is dependent upon a discussion of negation and non-being. For the moment it will suffice to say that privation is too empty a concept to do justice to the positive harm of evil.

The second comment is with respect to the verb *metaschein*, 'to participate'. This verb may remind us of the famous doctrine of Ideas, which does not seem to be present in the *Philebus* in its traditional version. Some would say that in the later dialogues, Plato abandons the thesis of the Ideas. But this way of formulating the issue assumes that the dialogues are historical documents or a chronology of Plato's philosophical career. Suffice it to say that in the *Philebus*, by accepting Socrates' account of the good, we participate, not in an Idea, but in what looks very much like a definition or concept.

To continue, Protarchus unreservedly accepts Socrates' summary of the dispute to this point. He is then asked by his interlocutor whether he will receive the *logos* that Philebus has turned over to him. Protarchus replies: 'I must receive it, for it has been renounced by the beautiful Philebus' (11c2-8). What precisely does this mean? If Philebus were not beautiful, would Protarchus feel the same compulsion? Or is he simply taking up the defense of a common principle that his ally has deserted? We should look ahead to 19c4-5, where Protarchus will say that it was Socrates who 'gave freely, that is to say, bestowed upon those present', the *sunousia* or community of discussion. *Sunousia* is one of those polyvalent terms that can mean sexual union, a gathering of friends, or ontological unity. However we take it, Socrates is evidently the founder of the 'being together' that underlies the conversation. He is the principle of unity, which Philebus, through his silence, threatens to disrupt. Note that the disrupting factor is not the disagreement about principles; this is instead the underlying cause of the conversation. In addition, there is at least a hint of another unifying factor: the beauty of Philebus.

The dialogue begins with a hint that Protarchus has chosen his principle under the compulsion of Eros. As a result of the main part of the conversation, he is won over by Socrates to the attractiveness of intelligence, and so to the mixture of cognition and pleasure. At the end of the dialogue (67b10), Socrates will ask to be released from the discussion, but is denied permission by Protarchus, who says that there are still one or two points to clear up. We move from a free gift, and so a voluntary association, through the various stages of discursive compulsion. The beauty of Philebus, and so Eros, plays an imprecise role in the early stages of this compulsion. Socrates was free to begin the investigation of the good life, but he is not free to terminate it. By coming before the public, philosophy acquires public obligations. A private conversation about the good life is not the same as a

discussion about the public good, but it carries an analogous commitment of responsibility.

In this light, the next exchange between Socrates and Protarchus is quite interesting. The philosopher asks: «must we not acquire in every way the truth about these things?». Protarchus agrees: «we must» (11c9-d1). The compulsion of *sunousia* is dual. Let us say that Protarchus has been implicated in the present community by two kinds of pleasure, one emanating from the beauty of Philebus and the other from his own desire to know, or at least to engage in philosophical discussion. Human beings are brought together by *Eros* and *logos*. Perhaps Protarchus wished originally to shine in the eyes of Philebus; no matter, he is now learning from his own situation the force of *logos*. But there is no reason to see here a radical shift from one principle to another. The main theme of the dialogue is the impossibility of a radical separation between pleasure and cognition. Otherwise put, there can be no doubt that the boys are enjoying the conversation; even Philebus' silence is not the same as leaving the company. He intends to make a point by his silence, not to dissolve the *sunousia*. This is why he will eventually be reintegrated into the discourse. Philebus is not genuinely silent; he is posturing, advertising the strength of his conviction. And this is a quasi-speech. Only something in particular can be deprived of a property. So too only someone who speaks through his silence can take a stand with respect to the discourse of another. Only someone whose silence means something can be taken into account in a dispute. Philebus' silence, while it lasts, is the reiteration of his principle and the attempted demonstration of the superiority of silent pleasure to the speech of *logos*. The thematic suppression of *Eros* is thus accompanied by a silent demonstration of its force.

Appropriately enough, Socrates says that we have each agreed to make visible (*apopbainein*) «a habit and condition of the soul» (*beksis* and *diathesis* are central notions in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*) that is capable of furnishing a blessed life to all human beings (11d2-6)<sup>8</sup>. The implication is that what is hidden or invisible in itself must be made visible by discourse. Strictly speaking, this is not true of pleasure, which, as we have established, can be enjoyed silently. But cognition depends upon *logos*; if there is a cognitive habit of the soul, it cannot be silently felt. We become aware of it only through its own activity, and this of course includes speaking to oneself. As should have been obvious from the first moment of the dialogue, it will be impossible for pleasure to defeat *logos* in argument. But neither can pleasure secure a complete victory by total silence, since this is tantamount to the complete absence of the soul from itself.

8. BURY has a valuable note to 11d5; the key point is that *-beksis* differs from *diathesis* as "enduring state" from "transient condition".

We were initially said to have been looking for what is good for all living beings, or at least for those who are capable of participating in cognition and pleasure. Socrates now associates the preferred habit or disposition of the soul with «the blessed life». *Eudaimonia* means prosperity, good fortune, extreme happiness, and cumulatively, the fullest share of these blessings. The literal sense of the word is «good daimon». The blessed life raises us above the merely human, but not to the level of the fully divine. Protarchus does not require a technical definition of a term in common use. Blessedness is a habit or condition of the soul, not an action or even a propensity to act toward others in such and such a manner, but a self-perfection. As is well-known, Kant criticizes the ancients for their Eudaimonist ethics, which he regards as immoral or conducive to selfishness. It seems that Kant's standards are even higher than those of Holy Scripture, which speaks of salvation and blessedness in addition to the performance of good deeds. Surely it is not impossible to know that one is saved without feeling intense pleasure or joy. Whatever Kant would say to this, he is correct on one point. Blessedness is not other-directed, and it is inseparable from the enjoyment of extreme happiness (if one can even distinguish, except perhaps in degrees of intensity, between enjoyment and happiness). This is of course not to suggest that blessed persons do not perform virtuous deeds. But they may not, unless they are convinced that the performance of such deeds is useful to the strengthening or maintaining of their blessedness. This reinforces my previous observation that the utility of the highest principle is ontological rather than ethical. It defines how we must be, that is, what is the state or condition of the soul that leads to our personal blessedness.

Socrates now identifies the two competing habits of the soul as enjoyment (*tou chairein*) and thoughtfulness (*tou phronein*). These were the first terms in the previous fuller statement of the rival theses. In his next speech, Socrates refers to pleasure (*hedone*) rather than to enjoyment, but retains thoughtfulness (11e1-12a1). The contraction and the substitution are first steps in what will become a rather confusing variation of key terms. One thing is plain: Socrates does not find it necessary to proceed from careful definitions of the main concepts of the conversation. He proceeds instead by the method of substitution of equivalents. We will have to be alert to these ostensible equivalences, in order to make sure that Socrates arrives at a coherent conception of blessedness. The justification for his method is that all discussions of the good life proceed on the basis of already known terms, and so by reference to states or habits of the soul that are better known than any technical analysis of them. One might very well be able to achieve precise definitions of enjoyment and thoughtfulness, but these would then become part of an artificial language detached from human life. When the discussion shifts, as it will very shortly, to quite abstract topics like dividing and collecting formal elements or categorizing every

being in the sum of things (*panta ta nun onta en toi panti*: 23c4), Socrates will be a bit more careful in his terminology, but not much more. So even Socrates' ontology (as I somewhat apologetically persist in calling it) is rooted in the everyday and already known.

## 3.

We recall that at 11d4, Socrates introduced the terms «habit» (*heksis*) and «disposition» (*diathesis*). These terms are almost synonymous; perhaps we may distinguish them as follows. A disposition is a consequence of a habit. And habits are produced by repetition or training. In the *Republic*, for example, intelligence must have trained, and so persuaded spiritedness to enforce its rule over the passions. This is the habit of virtue, which induces in us dispositions to act in this or that virtuous manner. More important for us is the relation between *phronesis* or thoughtfulness and *sophrosune*: temperance or moderation. The temperate soul is in proper balance or has been habituated to possess the disposition of the right measure, to employ a term that will figure prominently at a later stage of the discussion. A soul that is correctly measured has all of its parts in harmony. *Phronesis* thus leads by way of moderation to measure and harmony, or to what one might call ethical arithmetic. This is the counterpart to the eidetic arithmetic that is introduced with respect to formal structure. Eidetic arithmetic divides and collects, whereas ethical arithmetic rearranges or reorders. The relation between ethical and eidetic arithmetic constitutes the basis for the connection between the good life and cognition. It remains to be seen whether *Philebus* and Protarchus need to know this, or indeed, whether Socrates actually explains it to them.

The topic under immediate discussion is not simply one of analytical structure but of what Nietzsche calls «rank-ordering». Our goal is to establish the generally best life, namely, the life that is best for all those living creatures that can participate in it. But this life need not be best in itself. There may be an intrinsically superior life that is accessible only to a few living beings. Socrates does not proceed by examining sample lives but rather by the analysis of competing principles. It would take too long to pursue the former path, nor could we in fact succeed without first having agreed upon the order of principles. It has been the upshot of the opening conversation (as we know it) that there are two principles, pleasure and thoughtfulness. But now the question arises: how do we know this? Why could there not be three, four, or five principles? There is no deduction of our two principles from a higher or transcendental principle, in the Kantian style that has been so influential in modern philosophy. The situation is exactly the same here as in the case of the Platonic Ideas or the Aristotelian categories. The relevant items are introduced into the discussion with little

or no justification. The implication is that they are obvious, directly furnished by our pre-philosophical experience. Only then does the technical analysis or theory-construction get under way. And how could it be otherwise? We cannot begin with a theoretical construction of the foundation of experience, because theory is always based upon pre-theoretical experience. We cannot completely replace pre-theoretical experience with a formal construction, because then philosophy would not be about life, or for that matter about anything except itself. It would be a formal calculus or technical game.

Socrates acknowledges that there may be another habit of the soul that is stronger than pleasure or thoughtfulness and so defeats both in the struggle for dominance in the rank-ordering of principles. Furthermore, if that third state should be related either to thoughtfulness or pleasure, then the compound will be superior to the remaining candidate (11d11-12a5). I note in passing that the task of rank-ordering lives is agonistic; here as elsewhere, Plato uses images of hunting, wrestling, boxing, and war to illustrate philosophical investigation. This has something to do with the erotic nature of the soul.

Let us make a preliminary reflection on the Socratic proposal to examine separately states like thoughtfulness and pleasure. If this proposal is feasible, it should be possible to be continuously pleased without remembering that we were previously pleased or anticipating that we will continue in this state. This is required by the fact that memory falls under thoughtfulness, as does anticipation of the future. The autonomy of pleasure thus rests upon a peculiar type of consciousness that is not cognitive and therefore cannot even be reflexive in the proper sense. We cannot formulate the statement «I am being pleased». In sum, we do not know that we are now being pleased, which is to say that past, present, and future all drop away. The remainder, if it is thinkable at all, is a curious sort of sentience that mimics eternity. This thought-experiment is enough, I believe, to establish the absurdity of the notion of a life of pure pleasure, which would not be a life at all. We would subsist, like a rock, with the single difference that we would be enjoying our rocklike homogeneity.

Now let us consider a life of pure thoughtfulness, to which no pleasure at all is attached. Here it is initially more difficult to know how to proceed. Why could we not spend our time in perpetual cognition, preserving the past in memory and projecting the future via anticipation? I see no conceptual incoherence in this hypothesis; it is not logically impossible. But it suffers from an obvious deficiency. It is not a human life, and so it is on a par with the life of pure pleasure.

It is unnecessary to pursue these examples further. They show us that there is something artificial about the attempt to consider principles like thoughtfulness and pleasure in complete independence of any others. By this I do not mean merely that Socrates will eventually arrive at a mixed

life or some combination of thoughtfulness and pleasure. I mean instead that Socrates, like us, begins from such a mixture. It is only a being of such a mixed nature that would be capable of entering into an investigation like that conducted in the *Philebus*. This places a restriction on the use of counterfactual conditionals, so popular in contemporary philosophy of mind, for our own reflection on the best life. We are not engaged in the study of the logical independence of possible states, like mentation or pleasure, but rather in the pursuit of the best life. To make this point in another way, the philosophy of mind is a denatured or attenuated version of the Socratic investigation into states of the soul. The philosophy of mind begins from the tacit rejection of the soul, and with its replacement by the modern concepts of mind and body. In other words, it is no longer concerned with the question of the best way of life, which has been excluded from philosophy as reconceived in the image of modern science. Late modern philosophy separates the conceptual analysis of properties and relations from a reflection on the continuity or wholeness of life, and so of course from the question of the best life. We are thus mutilated or divided against ourselves from the outset of our attempts to investigate ourselves.

Plato's *Philebus* cannot be understood on the basis of the two modern paradigms of conceptual analysis or the philosophy of life. These paradigms arise from the modern conception of reason as fundamentally mathematical or analytical, a paradigm that the philosophers of life accept in their very rebellion against rationalism and recourse to intuition, feeling, sympathy, and so on. The Platonic starting-point is the indispensability of the sense of wholeness of the diverse dimensions of human existence, a sense of wholeness that is furnished by everyday life. I say *starting-point*, because of course, as thoughtful animals, we cannot avoid reflecting upon the diversity of the elements that constitute human nature, as well as the conflicts and even incoherencies that mark their relations. It is our initial wholeness that initiates or is the ground for our feeling that we are «falling apart» or that we suffer from conflicts and inner diremptions that threaten to destroy us.

For a Platonist, then, it is not a serious problem that we cannot establish conceptually the continuity of self-identity. If we begin by separating concepts or thoughts from the existential unity of human life, the remainder is temporality or the flow of genesis, held together by nothing other than spatial sequence. Dissolution is thus effected by the very formulation of the problem of self-identity. This is not very interesting, even when it is expressed with the full regalia of logic and set-theory. What is interesting is the unified creature who is engaged in the analytical enterprise of self-dissolution. The focus is on the best life, not on the logical or conceptual coherence of the counterfactual conditional of the thoughtless life of pleasure or the life of pure thought that lacks all pleasure. More precisely, the focus is on the rank-ordering of pleasure and thoughtfulness in human

life, and not on two separate lives, one of pure pleasure and the other of pure thought. This is precisely the conclusion at which Socrates arrives. What I wish to emphasize is that he arrives there only because this was also his starting-point.

I have anticipated the sequence of events in the dialogue in order to give a coherent picture of the general context. We have reached 12a6, where Philebus asserts that he believes and will continue to believe that pleasure triumphs entirely over thoughtfulness. It should now be clear that the only possibility for retaining this belief is by refusing to engage in its investigation, or in other words, by lapsing into silence. And in fact Philebus turns over the defense of their common principle to Protarchus. The new spokesman notes that Philebus is no longer master of the decision whether or not to agree with the *logos* of Socrates. Philebus replies: «You speak the truth. I swear it and invoke the goddess a witness» (12b1-2). He does not intend by these words to sacrifice his belief (*dokei kai doksei*: «it seems to me and will seem to me»), which, as reinforced by the oath, is for him stronger than *logos*. I note that Philebus does not say «it has seemed to me». In other words, he does not refer to memory or recollection. The past is of less importance than the present and the future of partisans of pleasure.

I take this passage to mean also that the speech of belief is stronger than the speech of rational argumentation, and that belief is represented by the testimony of silence. A refusal to debate is not the same as an acknowledgment of inferiority. Is this enough? One could say that Philebus is permitted to enjoy the conversation without understanding it, in the sense that he does not see the validity of the Socratic refutation of his principle. But some cognition must ensue, since the enjoyment of failing to see that one has been refuted rests upon a misunderstanding of the Socratic argument, and misunderstanding is a form of understanding. Philebus does not lose consciousness or disappear into a sea of pleasure, as is obvious from his subsequent re-entry into the discussion. The symbolic or silent speech of Philebus is thus a testimony to the impossibility of sundering the two principles of thoughtfulness and pleasure while retaining a human life. It is not a sign that pleasure can triumph over thoughtfulness by remaining silent. Genuine silence is not triumph but death, and death is not the best life for human beings. That Philebus does not choose death is clear from his oath to the goddess, identified by Socrates at 12b7 as Aphrodite.

One more supplementary remark: in the *Republic*, Book IX (580d1ff, 581c3ff), Socrates says explicitly that each part of the soul (intellect, spiritedness, desire) has its particular pleasure, for the sake of which it does its work. This is fundamental to the present investigation, not because the argument in the *Philebus* depends upon the argument in the *Republic*, but because both dialogues depend upon human nature. All men desire by nature to know because it is pleasant to know. Socrates makes the further claim (as would Aristotle) that those who are capable of the best form of



thinking experience the purest and best pleasure. As I mentioned above, this is not the same argument as the claim in the *Philebus* that thoughtfulness or cognition is superior to pleasure altogether. But it has to be kept in mind by the reader of the *Philebus*.

So much for our inspection of the opening exchanges in the *Philebus*, or rather of the bridge from Philebus to Protarchus, the new master of the *logos* of pleasure.