

# interpretation

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# interpretation

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**List of corrections/edits to “About Plato’s *Philebus*” by Jacob Klein,  
based on comparison with the version published in *Lectures and Essays***

157, last line: *Lectures and Essays* (hereafter, *LE*) omits the comma after “is” and does not italicize “one whole”

158, first paragraph after the section break, line 5: the colon after “Philebus” should be a semicolon

158, second paragraph after the break, lines 6, 7: *LE* does not italicize 2,369 (line 6) or 23

158, second paragraph after the break, line 10: *LE* italicizes “Philebus”

159, line 7: *LE* italicizes “loose”

159, second full paragraph, line 12: both versions omit comma after “then” which appears on line 3

161, second paragraph, line 3: period should be inside parentheses

164, line 3: *LE* has a comma after “desirable”

**164, line 7: the sigma and following comma have been omitted from *nous***

165, second full paragraph, lines 5-6: *LE* substitutes “imprecisely” for “unprecisely”

**166, first full paragraph, line 4: two phrases have been transposed. The words beginning with “the” and continuing to the end of the line should *start* the line.**

**169, line 6: an upper-case theta has been substituted for the lower-case letter in *orthe*, and a gamma has been substituted for the first nu in *koinonia***

169, second full paragraph, line 4: the single closing quotation mark should be double

171, first full paragraph, last line: *LE* omits commas after “best” and “obtain”

171, note 60: *LE* has *Ibid.* (This may be a correction by Klein or his editors; a look at the text of the dialogue will confirm it.)

174, last paragraph, line 8: *LE* omits the comma after “pain” (end of line); either the comma is a misprint or a comma has been dropped after “both”

**174, last paragraph, line 18: substitute “he” for “hy”**

174, last line: question mark should be inside quotation marks

178, first full paragraph, line 3: *LE* hyphenates “know how”

178, first full paragraph, line 8: both versions have a comma after “shipbuilding,” but the sense seems to require no comma

180, first full paragraph, line 1: *LE* capitalizes “should”

180, last paragraph, line 5: *LE* capitalizes “is”

181, note 95: *LE* puts Akademische Randglossen in quotation marks without italicization, and italicizes Die Gegenwart der Griechen im Neueren Denken

182, last paragraph before the break, line 1: *LE* substitutes “imprecise” for “unprecise”

ABOUT PLATO'S *PHILEBUS* \*

JACOB KLEIN

To speak about a Platonic dialogue, *about* a Platonic dialogue, means to do violence to it. A sense of guilt will, therefore, be a continuous source of pain within me while I am speaking. But I cannot resist the temptation to shed some light—some moonlight, as it were—on the *Philebus*. I hope you will forgive me—I cannot—for sounding extremely pedantic, for speaking much longer than I should, and for making it sometimes very difficult for you to follow.

Let me state five basic points on which my talking about the *Philebus* will rest.

*First:* a Platonic dialogue is *not* a treatise or the text of a lecture; it is not comparable in this respect to a work of Aristotle or, for that matter, to any of Plotinus's *Enneads* as edited by Porphyry. A Platonic dialogue is usually a drama, a mime, in which what *happens* cannot be separated from what is said and argued about.

*Secondly:* however serious the purpose and the content of a Platonic dialogue, its seriousness is permeated by playfulness; indeed, as we can read in the sixth letter attributed to Plato, seriousness and play are *sisters*. The comical aspect of a Platonic dialogue can never be completely disregarded.

*Thirdly:* no Platonic dialogue can be said to represent what might be called and has been called the "Platonic doctrine." The dialogue may well hint, though never "with perfect clarity,"<sup>1</sup> at genuine and ultimate thoughts of Plato, the thinker. The *Sophist*, for example, does that most certainly. But an unimpeachable source provides us with more direct information about Plato's thinking than he himself ever put down in writing. This source is Aristotle, who spent twenty years at that place of leisure, the Academy, and heard what Plato himself *said*. I assume that we have to pay attention to Aristotle's reports, *never forgetting* that Aristotle has his *own* way of describing other people's thoughts, a peculiar terminology rooted in his *own* thinking and not in the thinking of those other people about whom he reports.

*Fourthly:* in the last two centuries scholars, not all, but most of them, have tried to understand the Platonic dialogues as belonging to different stages of a "development" in Plato's own thinking. Now, it is of course possible that Plato, in his long life, changed his views on many and perhaps even on most important points. But to follow a Platonic dialogue means to take it as it *is*, as *one whole*, in which the interlocutors play a

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\* A lecture given at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland, on May 20, 1971.

<sup>1</sup> *Soph.* 254 C.

definite and unique role and in which what is *said* and what is *happening* does not depend on anything that is said and is happening in any other dialogue. Before we could understand any “development” in Plato’s thinking, it is incumbent on us to understand each dialogue in its *own* terms. This understanding is not helped by assigning a dialogue to a certain period in Plato’s life. Yet, in the case of the *Philebus*, it will not be unimportant to take notice of the time this dialogue was written—not in order to track some “developmental” deviation in Plato’s thinking, but merely to establish whether certain statements in the dialogue may refer to somebody’s conspicuous behavior within the Academy in Plato’s later days. And, happily enough, there is general agreement that the *Philebus* is a *late* dialogue, although some of the reasons for this dating might be questionable.

*Fifthly*: every word in a Platonic dialogue counts, and for somebody in the dialogue to remain silent may count even more. That’s why talking *about* a dialogue must necessarily remain insufficient.

And now let us approach the *Philebus*. The conversation takes place in Athens; we do not learn exactly where; it may be at a gymnastic school or at a wrestling school. What we read is a *part* of a *very long* conversation which begins some time in the afternoon. There are three interlocutors: Socrates, Protarchus, Philebus: many young men, half a dozen or a dozen perhaps, are listening. Socrates is, well, Socrates—a man devoted to inquiries and discussions and a friend and lover of youth. Protarchus is the son of a well-known Athenian, Callias. Philebus is not known at all. He is one of the few personages in the Platonic dialogues, like Callicles, Diotima, Timaeus, invented by Plato; if they do not remain nameless, like the Stranger from Elea and the Stranger from Athens, their names are appropriately coined. The name of Philebus indicates that he is a “lover of youth”—as Socrates is. Philebus seems to be young, but slightly older than Protarchus and all the listening young men around them.<sup>2</sup>

The title of the dialogue as it has been handed down to us is *Philebus*. This title is never mentioned in the writings of Plato’s contemporaries. Aristotle refers to what is *said* in the dialogue at least eight times, mentioning Plato once. There seems to be no reason, however, to doubt that the title “Philebus” is genuine. Moreover, there is one good reason which speaks forcefully for its authenticity. The dialogue contains 2,369 lines (I did not count them, but somebody did). Of these 2,369 lines only 23 are spoken by Philebus (those I counted). He raises his voice altogether only 14 times. Under these circumstances, who else but *Plato* could have chosen the name of Philebus for the title of the dialogue? There will be more to say about this matter later on.

The main question raised in the dialogue is: *What is the best human life?* And this question has to cope primarily with the all-pervasive feeling

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<sup>2</sup> 16 B.

of *pleasure*, common to all living beings—haunting, filling, mocking us. All of us—without exception—want to be pleased in thousands and thousands of different ways: we seek to lie down or to sit comfortably; we like hearing things that flatter us; we enjoy good company, witty words, good drink and food; we delight in traveling, in going to the theatre or to the movies, in looking at beautiful things; we love caresses, precious gifts, wild emotions; we lose ourselves with rapture in exerting power, in sexual satisfaction, in ecstasies, and so on, and so on. A list of pleasures like the one I have just given is not to be found in the dialogue, but an infinite number of possible pleasures is implied in the arguments we are facing. It is Philebus who looks at Pleasure as the highest good, who sees in Pleasure not only the best of human possessions, but the goal after which *all living beings* strive. Pleasure (ἡδονή) is the goddess he worships. And quite a few of us, I think, follow him.

Socrates does not. He contends that there is something better and more desirable than pleasure, to wit, *thoughtfulness in deciding how to act* (τὸ φρονεῖν), *the apprehending of what is intelligible only* (τὸ νοεῖν), *the power of memory* (τὸ μεμνήσθαι) and that which is akin to these, *right opinion* (δόξα ὀρθή) and *true calculations* (ἀληθεῖς λογισμοί); but Socrates carefully adds that these powers are better and more desirable than pleasure for those beings who are able to share in these powers; only to beings who have this ability will these powers be profitable, now and in the future.

This juxtaposition of both contentions, of that of Philebus and of that of Socrates, is made by Socrates very shortly after we begin reading. It is introduced by Socrates with the following words: “See, *then*, Protarchus, what the assertion is which you are *now* to accept from Philebus, and what our assertion is, against which you are to argue, if you do not agree with it. Shall we give a summary of each of them?”<sup>3</sup> These words are the very first words of the dialogue. But what strikes us immediately is that they cannot be understood as indicating the beginning of a conversation; they just continue what was said before; if they were the beginning of a conversation, the vocative Πρώταρχε would be preceded by ὦ (ὦ Πρώταρχε, not simply Πρώταρχε); and the words “then” (δή) and “now” (νυνί) would not be used. Listen again: “See, *then* Protarchus, what the assertion is which you are *now* to accept from Philebus . . .” The dialogue has no true beginning. Nor does it have a true ending. This is the last sentence we read, spoken by Protarchus: “There is still a little left, Socrates; you will certainly not give up before we do, and I shall remind you of what remains.” We do not yet understand why the dialogue has no beginning and no ending. But we see (and this is important), when we begin reading, that Protarchus has to take over the thesis upheld by Philebus. More about that later.

Enjoyment and thoughtfulness are the two banners that Protarchus and

Socrates are respectively waving. The life of pleasure and the life of thoughtfulness face each other. But it becomes clear immediately that Socrates is considering some other life superior to both of them.<sup>4</sup> He will keep reverting to this third life. It will finally be described in the last pages of the dialogue.

What follows the juxtaposition of the two views, that of Philebus and Protarchus on the one hand and that of Socrates on the other, is Socrates' insistence that pleasure has many different aspects: "For, when you just simply hear her named, she is *one thing*, but surely she takes on all sorts of shapes which are, in a way, *unlike* each other."<sup>5</sup> Socrates gives two simple, though significant, examples: the pleasures of a licentious man are very different from those of a self-restrained man, who enjoys his very self-restraint; the pleasures of a fool are very different from those of a thoughtful man, who enjoys his very thoughtfulness. No, says Protarchus, the *sources* of pleasure may be different, may have an opposite character, but "how can pleasure help being of all things most like pleasure, that is, like itself."<sup>6</sup> Yes, says Socrates, color and figure are what they are, but colors and figures can be very, very different and even, in the case of colors, most opposed to each other, like black and white. Protarchus does not see how this could make him change his mind. Socrates tries for the *third* time, this time incisively, anticipating what will be said later in the dialogue. No argument, he says, disputes that pleasant things are pleasant. But Protarchus's contention, which upholds Philebus's conviction, implies that all pleasant things are *good*. That's what is wrong. Pleasant things are for the most part *bad* and only some are good. But you, Protarchus, says Socrates, call *all* of them *good*, although you might be forced by the argument to agree that they are otherwise different. Protarchus tacitly admits that pleasures may be very different from each other, and even *opposed* to each other, but sticks to his main point that pleasures, inasmuch as they are *pleasures*, are always good.

At this point Socrates goes back to his own contention, namely, that *thoughtfulness* (φρόνησις) and *the apprehension of the intelligible* (νοῦς) are good. He adds to these—for the first time—*knowledge* (ἐπιστήμη) and predicts that many kinds of knowledge will come to the fore, some among them unlike each other. Should it turn out that some are even opposed to each other, could he, Socrates, then cling to the point that all knowledge is alike and—not unlike Protarchus—"save himself" in an absurdity?

Protarchus is pleased that both, his assertion and that of Socrates, receive the same treatment and is now willing to grant that there are many *different* pleasures just as there are many *different* knowledges (we have to note that he does not mention *opposite* pleasures and knowledges).

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<sup>4</sup> 11 D.

<sup>5</sup> 12 C.

<sup>6</sup> 12 D/E.

Socrates is satisfied with Protarchus's concession about the manyness within knowledge and within pleasure and speaks as follows: "With no concealment, then, Protarchus, of the differentiation within my good and within yours, but facing it squarely, let us be bold and see if perchance, on examination, it will tell us whether we should say that the good is pleasure or thoughtfulness or some other *third* thing."<sup>7</sup> It is the second time that Socrates reverts to the possibility that something third may be the best of human possessions. He proceeds by strengthening this statement by an assertion which has a wide, wide range.

This is one of the transitions in which the dialogue abounds. (Parenthetical remark: in the 2nd century A.D. Galen wrote a treatise entitled "On the transitions in the *Philebus*," which is unfortunately not extant). Let me say a few words about the transition we are now facing.

Up to this point the talk was about things most familiar to all of us, about pleasure and about thoughtfulness and about knowledge, this last word taken in its colloquial and vague sense. The talk was concerned about our lives in this our world. What Socrates is undertaking now is to lift the conversation to a level of all-embracing universality, disregarding pleasure and knowledge altogether. He will come back to them after a short while and then launch out to an even higher level. Why does he do that? The answer is: to find the *ultimate sources* of what is so close to us and usually unquestioned by us. The dialogue seeks to link the most common to the most uncommon and fundamental. To find the link will require a great deal of vigor on Socrates' part.

The manyness within pleasure and within knowledge leads Socrates to remind Protarchus of the "astounding" assertions that "*many are one*" and that "*one is many*."<sup>8</sup> There is nothing particularly surprising and difficult about these assertions if they refer to visible and tangible things, which come into being and perish. A man, for example, is *one*, but he is also *many*, because he has many members and parts. But when we consider intelligibles, the εἶδη of things, the "invisible looks," which can be encountered only in speech (ἐν λόγῳ), and each one of which is one and unique, the "one and many" problem becomes extremely perplexing (Socrates mentions four of the intelligibles: the *One Man*, the *One Ox*, the *One Beauty*, the *One Good*). That's where the trouble sets in. Any young man, says Socrates, challenging those present, any young man, once he has tasted the flavor of that perplexity and thinks he has found a treasure of wisdom, does not spare anyone, neither himself, nor his parents, nor any human being, who can hear him, and joyfully sets every possible argument in motion, confounding everybody. Protarchus feels hit. "Do you not see, Socrates," he says, "how many we are and that we are all young men? Are you not afraid that we shall join with Philebus and attack you,

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<sup>7</sup> 14 B.

<sup>8</sup> 14 C.

if you revile us?"<sup>9</sup> But Socrates' challenge works. Protarchus wants Socrates to find a better road than was used up to now and to lead them on.

Socrates retorts that there *is* a better road, which he always loved, which is easy to point out, but very difficult to follow. Whatever human art has discovered had been brought to light through it. Socrates' description of this better road marks a new transition in the dialogue.

Socrates calls this road a "gift of gods to men," which we owe to some Prometheus together with some gleaming fire (let me remind you: Prometheus *stole* the fire he gave to men). The ancients, who were better than we and lived nearer the gods, says Socrates with deadpan seriousness, have handed down to us the tradition that all the things which are ever said to exist are sprung from *One* and *Many* and have, inherent in their nature, *Limit* (πέρας) and *Infinitude* (ἄπειρία). We shall come back to this point in a little while. What Socrates emphasizes now is that we must, in every case, look for *one* εἶδος (he uses the word ἰδέα here) and next for *two*, if there be two, and if not, for *three* or some other *number*; and we must treat each of these εἶδη in the same way, that is, subdivide each of them, "until we can see that the original one is not just one and many and infinite, but also *how many* it is."<sup>10</sup> Then we may bid farewell to infinity, bid farewell to the ἰδέα of infinity.

Protarchus wants Socrates to clarify what he has said. No wonder! Socrates provides this clarification by pointing to the letters of the alphabet. The sound which we emit through our mouth can be called one, yet it is infinite in diversity. A god or a godlike man, as an Egyptian story tells, observed, however, that there are distinct vowel sounds, semi-vowel sounds and consonants—in Greek 7 vowels, 3 semi-vowels or sonants (λ, ρ, σ), and 14 consonants, more exactly 10, if we include the rough breathing sound h and exclude the 5 double consonants. This means that between the *oneness* and the *infinitude* of sound there are *definite numbers* of sounds. One has to know *all* of them to possess the *art* of reading and writing. Socrates *emphasizes* the *numbers* of sounds and letters. But this example of the alphabet and the example of the numbers of musical intervals, which Socrates also gives, are meant to let Protarchus and Philebus and us understand that there are *numbers* in the realm of the εἶδη. Later in the dialogue<sup>11</sup> Socrates will clearly distinguish between numbers of unequal units, that is, numbers of sensible things, and pure mathematical numbers of units, that is, of units which do not differ at all from each other. But we learn from Aristotle<sup>12</sup> that Plato also spoke of *eidetic numbers*, of numbers of units which are themselves nothing but εἶδη. To try to find them means to embark upon that better, but difficult road.

<sup>9</sup> 16 A.

<sup>10</sup> 16 D.

<sup>11</sup> 56 D–E.

<sup>12</sup> See esp. *Met.* XIV, 3, 1090 b 32ff.

Protarchus and Philebus do not understand what is going on. Philebus especially does not see what the theme of *numbers*, which Socrates has injected into the discussion, has to do with the alternative of pleasure and thoughtfulness, which was in question. Socrates reminds him that they were wondering how each of them, pleasure as well as thoughtfulness, was one and many, and whether "each of them possessed a number before becoming infinite,"<sup>13</sup> that is to say, whether there were εἶδη of pleasure as well as of thoughtfulness, which then are dispersed among beings that continually come into being and perish and that live their lives in pleasure and thought.

Protarchus is perturbed. He understands what Socrates is after. He cannot find an answer to the question. He wants Philebus to answer it. And he formulates the question as follows: "I think Socrates is asking us whether there are or are not εἶδη of pleasure, how many there are and of what sort they are, and the same of thoughtfulness."<sup>14</sup> Philebus does not utter a word. But Socrates remarks: "What you say is most true, son of Callias."<sup>15</sup> He underscores the importance of this fact by addressing Protarchus ceremonially as son of Callias.

Protarchus is intent on bringing the discussion about pleasure and thoughtfulness to a satisfactory end. We learn from what he says that Socrates *promised* that he would stay on and not go home before this end was reached. This promise must have been given, we have to assume, during the discussion which preceded what we read in the dialogue, and we should not forget that. Protarchus demands that Socrates stop perplexing him and the other young men and decide *either* to divide pleasure and knowledge into their εἶδη himself *or* to let that go, if there be some other way to solve the matters at issue among them. Socrates is willing to do the latter, and this marks a new transition in the dialogue.

Socrates claims playfully that some god has just reminded him of some talk about pleasure and thoughtfulness, which he heard when he was dreaming or perhaps when he was awake. What he heard was that neither pleasure nor thoughtfulness was the good, but some *third* thing, different from both and better than both. We remember, of course, that Socrates himself had intimated this twice. He does it now for the *third* time. If this could be clearly shown now, says Socrates, pleasure would not be the victor and it would no longer be necessary to divide pleasure into its εἶδη. And Socrates adds that, while the discussion proceeds, this will become still clearer.

What follows leads to three insights: (1) it is the lot of the Good and only of the Good to be self-sufficient; (2) if we take the life of pleasure and the thoughtful life separately, so that the life of pleasure is totally divested of any thought, any knowledge, any opinion, any memory, and the

<sup>13</sup> 18 E.

<sup>14</sup> 19 B.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

thoughtful life, on the other hand, totally untouched by any pleasure, both lives—in this bare form—cannot be conceived as self-sufficient, as desirable and as good; (3) only a life made up of a *mixture* of pleasure and thoughtfulness and sharing in both will be the kind of life everybody would choose. Let me remark that Socrates and also Protarchus list under the powers associated with thoughtfulness the power of apprehending the intelligibles,  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}$  which in common parlance may simply mean *good sense*. This term will now play a central role for quite a while. Socrates concludes: it has been sufficiently shown that Philebus's goddess, Pleasure, cannot be considered identical with the good. Thereupon Philebus raises his voice: "Nor is your  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  the good, Socrates; it will be open to the same objections."<sup>16</sup> Let us hear Socrates' reaction: "My  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  perhaps, Philebus; but not so the *true*  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$ , which is also *divine*; that one, I guess, is different. I do not as yet claim for the  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  the prize of victory over the combined life, but we must look and see what is to be done about the *second prize*."<sup>17</sup> Socrates goes on, still speaking to Philebus: "Each of us might perhaps put forward a claim, one that  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  is *responsible* for this combined life, is its *cause*, the other that pleasure is: and thus neither of these two would be the good, but one or the other of them might be regarded as the *cause* [of the combined life]."<sup>18</sup> Then, turning to Protarchus, Socrates claims he might keep up his fight against Philebus in an even stronger way and might contend "that in this mixed life it is  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  that is more akin and more similar than pleasure to that, whatever it may be, which makes that life both desirable and good." As to pleasure, he adds, "it is farther behind than the third place, if *my*  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  is at all to be trusted at present."<sup>19</sup>

The emphasis in this passage is clearly on the terms  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  and "cause" ( $\alpha\lambda\tau\iota\omicron\nu$ ). What remains unclear is the sense in which the term "cause" is to be taken and the rank to be attributed *ultimately* to the  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$ . And let us not for a moment forget Socrates' own  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$ .

Socrates suggests that it might be better to leave pleasure and not to *pain* her by testing her in the most precise way and thus proving her in the wrong. Protarchus disagrees. Socrates asks whether Protarchus disagrees because he, Socrates, spoke of *paining* pleasure. It is the *second* time that pain is mentioned in the dialogue. It is done jokingly. Pain was mentioned for the *first* time when Socrates dealt with the thoughtful life, totally untouched by pleasure. The way he put it then was this: "Would anyone be willing to live possessing thoughtfulness and  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\zeta$  and knowledge and perfect memory of all things, but having no share, great or small, in pleasure, or in *pain*, for that matter, but being utterly unaffected by everything of that sort?"<sup>20</sup> The question, which is supposed

<sup>16</sup> 22 C.

<sup>17</sup> 22 C–D.

<sup>18</sup> 22 D.

<sup>19</sup> 22 E.

<sup>20</sup> 21 D/E.

to be negated, when put in this form actually involves a difficulty: one would perhaps be willing to accept a thoughtful pleasureless life, which does not involve us in any pain. The *third* time pain will be mentioned is going to show pain as a close companion of pleasure and as a real evil. Protarchus says he is not shocked by Socrates' phrase "paining pleasure," but rather by Socrates' apparent attempt to stop talking about pleasure altogether and because Socrates does not seem to understand "that not one of us will let you go yet until you have brought the argument about these matters to an end."<sup>21</sup> This is the second time Socrates is warned about leaving too early.

Whew, Socrates exclaims, and predicts that a long and difficult discussion lies ahead of them. To fight the battle of the νοῦς for the second prize requires new weapons in *addition* to those already used. A new beginning has to be made, and this will mean a new transition in the dialogue.

Let us be on our guard in making this beginning, says Socrates, and we should indeed pay attention to these words. Socrates suggests that everything that now exists in the world be distributed in a twofold, or rather in a threefold way. The results of this distribution are very different from each other. They are called by Socrates, indiscriminately and unprecisely, εἶδη or γένη, which I shall translate by the word "tribes." The first two have been mentioned before as a kind of Promethean gift: the "limitless" (τὸ ἄπειρον) and the "limit" (τὸ πέρας). The third is the *mixture* of these two into one. This is not to be taken literally, as we shall see in a moment: let us be on our guard. And now Socrates adds: "But I cut a considerably ridiculous figure, I think, when I attempt a separation into tribes and an enumeration."<sup>22</sup> Protarchus wonders why. Socrates: "It seems to me, a fourth tribe is needed besides."<sup>23</sup> It turns out that Socrates means the *cause* of the commixture of those first two. And Protarchus, who is eager to supply even a fifth, namely the power of separation, is told in affable words that this fifth is not needed now, but that if it be needed later, he should excuse Socrates for going after it. The mentioning of Protarchus's proposal and the way of handling it cast a doubt on the necessity of the fourth tribe, the *cause*. There might be something strange and even ridiculous indeed about that. We should be on our guard.

Let us consider one of the first two tribes, namely τὸ ἄπειρον. The following English translations are all adequate: the limitless, the endless, the boundless, the unlimited, the infinite, the innumerable, the indefinite, the indeterminate. And we must not forget the homonym ἄπειρος, meaning the inexperienced one, upon which word Plato does not fail to pun.<sup>24</sup>

As to the second tribe, τὸ πέρας, the "limit," it becomes almost im-

<sup>21</sup> 23 B.

<sup>22</sup> 23 D.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> 17 E.

mediately apparent that, although Socrates keeps using this term, he also substitutes for it the phrase “that which has limit,” τὸ πέρας ἔχον, that is to say, the “limited.” Protarchus and the other young men as well as we are somewhat confused. Socrates proposes to investigate how each of them, the “limitless” and the “limited,” are both “one and many”; for he contends that each one of them is split up and scattered into many. He starts with the “*limitless*,” warning Protarchus again: “What I ask you to consider is difficult and debatable.”<sup>25</sup>

Here are special cases of this tribe, parts of its manyness: “hotter and colder,” “quicker and slower,” “greater and smaller,” “exceedingly and slightly,” “excessive and lacking.”<sup>26</sup> In each there is “the more *as well as* the less” (τὸ μᾶλλον τε καὶ ἧττον). Each of them is constantly *advancing* the less” (τὸ μᾶλλον τε καὶ ἧττον). and *never stationary*—in sharp contrast to what is determined by a fixed number, by just “that much”: if such a number advances, it ceases to exist. What captures our attention is the expression τὸ μᾶλλον τε καὶ ἧττον. This expression is meant to gather together the tribe of the “limitless” and to put upon it the seal of a single nature.<sup>27</sup> It is used six times in the passage we are now considering and once more much later on. *Once* the particle τε is omitted. This omission focuses our attention on the use of this particle in all the other cases. The verbs related to this expression are all in the dual. And Socrates summarizes pointedly: “By this argument the hotter and its *opposite* become together limitless.”<sup>28</sup> The “limitless” is a pair. The expression “the more as well as the less,” as the seal of a single nature, seals a *duality*. And this duality remains completely *indeterminate*. The “limitless” is an *indeterminate pair*.

But what about the “limit,” on the one hand, and the “limited,” that “which has limit,” on the other? Let us take the “limited” first. It is, as Socrates quite clearly states,<sup>29</sup> contrary to “the more as well as the less”; it is the *equal*, and *equality*, the *double*, and any number in firm *relation* to another number or a measure in firm *relation* to another measure, that is, everything which “puts an end to the variability between the opposites and makes them proportionable and harmonious by the introduction of number.”<sup>30</sup>

We understand that what Socrates means by this tribe of the “limited” is what we read in the Fifth Book of Euclid’s *Elements*. This book is in all probability either a perhaps somewhat condensed copy of an original work of Eudoxus or imitates this work. Who is *Eudoxus*? He was born in Cnidus, on the shores of Asia Minor, came to Athens and stayed at Plato’s Academy for a while. He was an astronomer, a mathematician, and a

<sup>25</sup> 24 A.

<sup>26</sup> “Lacking” is not mentioned. It is lacking in deed.

<sup>27</sup> 25 A.

<sup>28</sup> 24 D.

<sup>29</sup> 25 A/B.

<sup>30</sup> 25 D/E.

geographer; he firmly established the doctrine of ratios and proportions, including those of numerically incommensurable magnitudes; he tried to "mix" the εἶδη, as understood by Plato, with all the sensible things; and—what is most important to us—he declared *pleasure* to be the *supreme good*. But pleasure was not his goddess, as she is for Philebus. Eudoxus, as Aristotle reports, "seemed to be a man of exceptional temperance, and hence he was thought to uphold this view not because he was a lover of pleasure, but because it seemed to him that it was so in truth."<sup>31</sup> Socrates, as we see in the dialogue, disagrees.

The tribe of the "limited" then consists of *ratios*. The tribe of the scattered "limitless," of the ἄπειρον, in its infinite manyness found its unity in the seal of "the more and its opposite,"<sup>32</sup> that is, in "the more as well as the less." The tribe of the "limited," the manyness of determinate ratios, has not yet found its unity. This unity was only postulated, was only, as Socrates says, "referred to." There was indeed a direct "reference" to the "limit" itself (εἰς τὸ πέρας).<sup>33</sup> And Socrates concludes: "The limit did not contain a multitude nor did we feel a difficulty that it might not be *one* by nature."<sup>34</sup>

It is at this point that we might turn to Aristotle's reports about Plato's unwritten words to confirm what we found in the dialogue and to win greater clarity.

In the Sixth Chapter of the First Book of the *Metaphysics*<sup>35</sup> Aristotle says of Plato: "It is *peculiar* to him [i.e., Plato] to posit a duality instead of the single Limitless, and to make the Limitless consist of 'the Great and the Small.'" In the Third Book of the *Physics*, where Aristotle discusses the ἄπειρον at great length, we read in the Fourth Chapter<sup>36</sup> again: "For Plato there are two Infinities, 'the Great and the Small.'" We see thus confirmed what we read in the *Philebus*, except that Aristotle, in his own way, uses the words "great" and "small" without their comparative forms.<sup>37</sup> He keeps using these words, in speaking about Plato, at many other places. But, what is more important, in Books XIII and XIV of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle mentions several times two "elements," as he puts it, out of which, according to Plato, "numbers" are derived. We have to understand that Aristotle has in mind "eidetic numbers," assemblages of εἶδη. These two sources are the "indeterminate dyad" (ἡ ἀόριστος δυάς) and the "one" (τὸ ἕν). We recognize the indeterminate pair of the *Philebus* in the "indeterminate dyad," the duality of the Limitless, "the more as well as the less." But we see now that what was named the

<sup>31</sup> Arist. *Met.* XII, 8, 1073 b 17ff.; Proclus, *In Eucl. Comm.* (Teubner) pp. 67, 2ff.; Arist. *Met.* I, 9, 991 a 14ff.; *Nic. Eth.* X, 2, 1172 b 9ff.

<sup>32</sup> 26 D.

<sup>33</sup> 25 B.

<sup>34</sup> 26 D.

<sup>35</sup> 987 b 26–28.

<sup>36</sup> 203 a 15.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. 37 C end.

“Limit” in the *Philebus* can also be named the “One.” What Aristotle calls the “elements” can be called the *ultimate sources* of everything, that which has the *first* rank both as *beginnings* and as *ruling powers*. That is what is meant by ἀρχή, in common parlance as well as in most thoughtful speech. We should not assume, I think, that Plato had a definitely fixed name for each of these ἀρχαί. The terms *the Good, the One, the Precise itself, the Same, the Limit*, and perhaps *the Whole* are all suited to one of the ἀρχαί, depending on the context in which they are used. As to the names of the second ἀρχή, the “indeterminate dyad,” “the more as well as the less,” and the *Other* (which also implies a duality<sup>38</sup>) seem all of them no less suitable. In the *Philebus* Socrates, in putting a seal on the tribe of the ἄπειρον, makes its intrinsic character perfectly clear. But the character of the πέρας, the “limit,” remains obscured.

Now let us take up the third tribe, the “mixture” of the “Limitless” and of the “Limit.” What does “mixing” here mean? It means that the two ἀρχαί, the “Limitless,” the “indeterminate dyad,” and the “Limit,” the “One,” exert their power on each other. What happens then may be described as follows. The “indeterminate dyad” duplicates the “One,” that is to say, produces two entities, two εἶδη, duplicates each of these εἶδη—we may also say “divides” each of these εἶδη—and keeps on duplicating—we have to assume up to a certain point. In Aristotle’s reports the “indeterminate dyad” is explicitly characterized as a “doubling power” (δυσποτιός).<sup>39</sup> It is the ultimate source of definite manyness, of “numbers,” in the realm of the εἶδη as well as in our world. In the earlier passage, when Socrates first introduced the Promethean gift of “infinite” and of “limit” and urged that in every case a definite number of εἶδη had to be found (the alphabet helping him to clarify this point), there was hardly a discernible hint that the “Limitless” with its doubling power is responsible for the *multiplicity of the εἶδη*. You will remember that in this context the “limitless,” the infinite, was ultimately dismissed. Not so in the world in which we live. What happens here is this: the “Limit,” the “One,” transforms the “indeterminate dyad” into a *determinate* one, that is to say, transforms the two constantly and indeterminately changing terms of the dyad into two stationary and determinate ones and keeps doing this, produces, in other words, a multitude of *ratios*. That’s why Socrates can call the manyness of ratios “the offspring of the limit.”<sup>40</sup>

We understand now what confused Protarchus and us when Socrates substituted “that which has limit,” the “limited,” for the “limit” itself. The “limited,” the assemblage of ratios, is already a part of the mixture, of the third tribe. But it represents a mixture, or rather mixtures, of a special kind, mathematical partnerships that can give to parts of the world we live in a certain rightness, remove the excess and indefiniteness,

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Soph.* 255 D and 256 E–257 A.

<sup>39</sup> *Met.* XIII, 7, 1082 a 15 and 8, 1083 b 36.

<sup>40</sup> 25 D.

and produce balance and right measure.<sup>41</sup> Such mathematical partnerships engender, for example, *health*, establish the entire *genuine* art of *music*, bring about the *temperate seasons* and all the bounties of our world, beauty and strength of the body, and all the beauties of the soul. And Socrates, addressing Philebus directly and speaking about that proper partnership (ὁρθὴ κοιτώνια)<sup>42</sup> of mathematical ratios, has this to say: “For this goddess, my beautiful Philebus, beholding the wanton violence and universal wickedness which prevailed, since there was no limit of pleasures or of excess in them, established law and order [νόμος καὶ τάξις] in which there is *limit*. You say she exhausted us; I say, on the contrary, she kept us safe.”<sup>43</sup> Socrates addresses Philebus, but we cannot help thinking of Eudoxus. Philebus remains completely silent. Socrates turns to Protarchus: “How does this appear to you, Protarchus?” And Protarchus answers: “It is very much how I feel, Socrates.”<sup>44</sup>

Let us conclude: the common power of the two ἀρχαί determines the mixture. Sometimes the community of this power is lacking.

Socrates turns now to the fourth tribe, the *cause*. You will remember that Socrates seemed somewhat reluctant to add this fourth to the first three. And indeed, is there any need for it? The common power of the “Limitless” and the “Limit” appeared as the *cause* of the mixture and of what is engendered in this mixture. Listen now to Socrates’ words: “Should I sound a *false note* if I called the fourth the *cause* of the mixture and generation?”<sup>45</sup> And listen to what Socrates one moment earlier says with regard to *all* the first *three* tribes: “That which fabricates *all these*, the cause, we call the fourth, as it has been sufficiently shown to be distinct from the others.”<sup>46</sup> That has not been shown at all! How can ultimate sources, ἀρχαί, be caused by something else? If that were so, the first two tribes, the “Limitless” and the “Limit,” would not be what they are.

The exploration of this fourth tribe, the “cause,” is left *pending*, and Socrates makes a new transition, which helps him to turn backwards.

What was the purpose, he asks, of coming to the point they have reached? They were trying to find out whether the second prize belonged to pleasure or to thoughtfulness (φρόνησις). They had posited, Socrates reminds Protarchus and us, that the *mixed life* was the victor. We can see now, he continues, to which tribe it belongs, namely, to the third tribe, formed by the mixture of all that is “limitless” and all that is “bound by the limit.”<sup>47</sup> And now Socrates asks Philebus to which of the

<sup>41</sup> 26 A.

<sup>42</sup> 25 E.

<sup>43</sup> 26 B–C.

<sup>44</sup> 26 C.

<sup>45</sup> 27 B/C.

<sup>46</sup> 27 B.

<sup>47</sup> 27 D.

three tribes his life of *unmixed pleasure* belongs. The *full* question is this: have pleasure *and pain* a limit or are they among the things which admit “the more as well as the less?” Philebus’s answer is: “Yes, among those which admit the more; for pleasure would not be all the good, if it were not limitless in multitude and in the ‘more.’”<sup>48</sup> Socrates dryly replies: “Nor would *pain*, Philebus, be all the evil.”<sup>49</sup> This is how pain is introduced in the discussion for the *third* time, and this time *decisively*. For Socrates adds he would grant Philebus that both, pleasure *and* pain, are in the tribe of the Limitless. We note Philebus meant only pleasure, *not* pain. Socrates’ addition is decisive.

Pleasure and pain are a limitless pair. One of the consequences of this finding is that there are no εἶδη of pleasure, in the strict sense of this word. We remember that Socrates had intimated that the discussion would show in a clearer way why it would not be necessary to divide pleasure into its εἶδη. Socrates will use this term later on in discussing pleasure, but it will not have to be taken in its strict sense.

The next question Socrates asks Protarchus and Philebus is: to what tribe thoughtfulness, knowledge and νοῦς shall be assigned without impiety. Socrates explains: “For I think that our risk is not a small one in finding or not finding the right answer to what is being asked now.”<sup>50</sup> Philebus: “You exalt your own god, Socrates, you do.”<sup>51</sup> Socrates: “And you your goddess, my friend. But the question calls for an answer, all the same.”<sup>52</sup> Protarchus intervenes and urges Philebus to answer. Whereupon Philebus says: “*Did you not, Protarchus, choose to reply in my place?*”<sup>53</sup> This is the *last* time Philebus raises his voice. Let us look back for a moment.

At the beginning of our reading we learn that Protarchus will defend Philebus’s thesis of pleasure, because Philebus himself, as Protarchus says, “has grown tired” (the Greek word is ἀπέιρηκε, a pun on the word ἄπειρον). A little later Philebus has an opportunity to *regret* that he spoke up again and calls upon his own goddess to witness that he *does* regret. When the “one and many” question comes up, Protarchus remarks: “It is perhaps best for the inquirer not to disturb Philebus in his sweet repose.”<sup>54</sup> And now he will be silent all the time, even when pleasure, his goddess, is thoroughly discussed. What is he doing all this time? Just listening?

Protarchus has some difficulty in answering Socrates’ last question, namely, to what tribe knowledge and νοῦς should be assigned, and asks Socrates to answer this question himself. Socrates is willing. He declares:

<sup>48</sup> 27 E.

<sup>49</sup> 28 A.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> 28 B.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

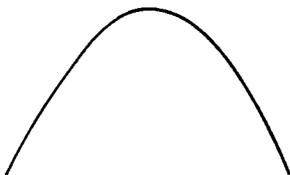
<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> 15 C [tacit reference to the proverb: μή κινεῖν κακὸν εἶ κείμενον].

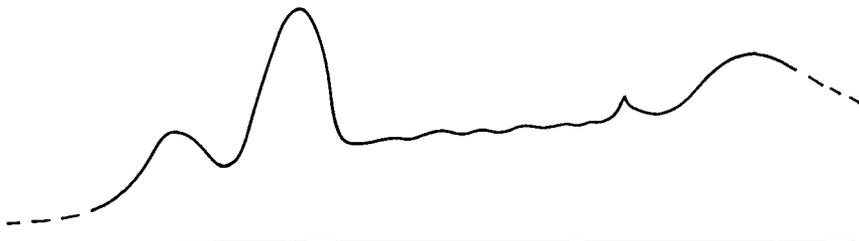
"What you enjoin me to do *is not difficult*,"<sup>55</sup> and he repeats: "It is easy." Let us be on our guard. All wise men agree, and thereby really exalt *themselves*, says Socrates, that  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$  is king of heaven and earth. Socrates adds: "Perhaps they are right."<sup>56</sup>

What follows is indeed an easy, but not too convincing "cosmological" account, which ends with the statement that  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$  belongs to that of the four tribes which was called "*the cause of all*."<sup>57</sup> Notice, please, again, "*of all*." And Socrates adds: "Now, you have at last your answer." Protarchus: "Yes, and a very sufficient one; and yet you answered without my noticing it."<sup>58</sup> Socrates: "Yes, Protarchus, for sometimes *playing* provides rest from *serious* pursuit."<sup>59</sup> We understand: the "cosmological" account, which makes the  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$  the *cause* of all the other tribes, was a *playful* account. We are not sure whether this  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$  is the "divine  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$ " mentioned before. And let us not forget that, within the confines of human life, the best,  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$  could obtain, was the *second prize*.

Socrates concludes this entire discussion of the four tribes by pointing to  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$  and to pleasure. He does not mention anything pertaining to "limit" and to the "mixture." Let us remember, he says, "that  $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$  was akin to cause and belonged roughly speaking [ $\sigma\chi\epsilon\delta\acute{o}\nu$ ] to this tribe and that pleasure was itself limitless and belonged to the tribe which, in and by itself, *has* not and *never will have* either beginning or middle or end."<sup>60</sup> We must add that this holds also for pain. As we have seen, the dialogue, too, has neither a beginning nor an end, and for that matter, no middle. The graph of a Platonic dialogue usually—not always—looks like this:



But the graph of the *Philebus* looks like this:



<sup>55</sup> 28 C.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> 30 E.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> 31 A.

The dialogue itself, taken as a drama, in which we, the readers or listeners, are involved, seems to resemble pleasure and pain. If it does that, it must be pleasurable and painful. We will have to wait and see . . . . But we need not wait to register the most important result of the preceding discussion. All the pleasures and pains, small or great, which pervade our lives, reflect in their duality an ultimate source, one of the ἀρχαί, namely the "indeterminate dyad." It is thus that some of our most familiar and common experiences are tied to one of the highest points human reflection can reach.

Socrates now abandons this high level and turns to a much lower one. A new transition is made. Only about a third of the dialogue has been considered so far. I shall be able to proceed much faster from now on.

The next task is to see, says Socrates, *where* each of them, that is, *voῦς* and pleasure, can be found and by means of what affection both come into being, *whenever they come into being*.<sup>61</sup> Note, please, that the *voῦς* mentioned here is said to come into being and cannot, therefore, be understood as the eternal divine *voῦς*. Socrates takes pleasure first, and immediately adds that it is impossible to examine pleasure sufficiently apart from pain.

Socrates' contention is that pain and pleasure emerge in the combined tribe, the one, we remember, where the "limitless" and the "limit" join together and form a mathematical partnership conducive to balance and right measure. When this balance is broken in us, living beings, "a disruption of nature and a generation of pain also take place at the same time."<sup>62</sup> "If, on the other hand, balance is being restored and is returning to its own nature, pleasure is generated."<sup>63</sup> The *process* of destruction is *pain*, and the *process* of restoration is *pleasure*. When we are being *emptied*, we are becoming *hungry* and pained; when we are filling up again through eating, we are pleased. And the same can be said of *thirst*. It is shown later that it is *not* the body that hungers or thirsts or has any such affection, that the body cannot, therefore, be pained or pleased. Pleasure and pain belong to the *soul*, and to the soul only. But sometimes, or rather often enough, as in the case of hunger and thirst, the *body* is involved. Whenever this is the case, we face one kind of pleasure and pain.

Another kind of pleasure and pain does not involve the body at all. It arises within the soul itself as the sweet and cheering *hope* of pleasant things to come and as the fearful and woeful *expectation* of painful things to come. Both the pleasant and the painful expectations originate within the soul in memory. Socrates proceeds to give a circumstantial description of this origin by passing from perception to memory, to forgetfulness, to recollection, and finally to desire. But he ends this passage by reverting to pleasure and pain that involve the body. He points to a man who is

<sup>61</sup> 31 B.

<sup>62</sup> 31 D.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

empty and suffers pain, but who, because of his memory, hopes to be filled again and enjoys this hope. "At such a time, then, a man, or any other living being, has both pain and joy at once."<sup>64</sup> If, however, an empty man is without hope of being filled, a twofold feeling of pain arises in him. The stress is on the duality of pleasure and pain. The possibility of a twofold pain and—although this is not mentioned—of a twofold pleasure emphasizes the duality even more. Let us not forget its ultimate source.

Looked at in this passage is also a life in which there is no feeling of pleasure or pain at all, but only thoughtfulness and *voũç*. Such a life had been considered much earlier in the dialogue and had been rejected as totally undesirable, lacking self-sufficiency and, therefore, goodness. Now Socrates calls it "the *most divine* life." Protarchus chimes in: "Certainly it is not likely that gods feel either joy or its opposite."<sup>65</sup> And Socrates agrees: "No, it is very unlikely; for either is unseemly for them." Socrates adds that they may consider this point later on, if it would help the argument; they might give *voũç* credit for it in contending for the second prize. We shall be watching.

A new transition takes place. What follows can be subdivided into three parts, and the title that can be given to all of them is "On *false* pleasures." This is what happens in *part one*: Protarchus is unwilling to agree that pleasures and pains could be false; he accepts the possibility of false opinions, but rejects the possibility of false fears, false expectations, and false pleasures; a lengthy discussion follows which culminates in the assertion that a "just, pious and good man," a "friend of the gods," has "true pleasures," while an "unjust and thoroughly bad man" can only have "false pleasures," which imitate the "true pleasures" to the point of ridicule; and the same can be said of pains.<sup>66</sup>

This, now, is what happens in *part two*: we are reminded that pleasure and pain are a limitless pair tied to "the more as well as the less"; any one who feels pleasure in any way always really feels pleasure; but these pleasures may be felt as present pleasures and also as pleasures *to be felt* in the future; the latter ones may be *false* because they may not come into being as expected, not as great and intense as expected; and when, in our feelings, we are trying to compare pleasures with pleasures, or pains with pains, or pleasures with pains, we may reach entirely *false* results, because of the limitless and indeterminate character of both, pleasure and pain.

The *third part* of this passage does not concern false pleasures directly, but rather pleasures falsely understood or falsely judged. The theme of pleasure and pain is a common topic in Plato's own time, widely discussed by outstanding men. One of the opinions about pleasure, rejected by Socrates, is that freedom from pain is identified with pleasure. For some men this opinion amounts to the firm denial of the existence of pleasures

<sup>64</sup> 36 B.

<sup>65</sup> 33 B.

<sup>66</sup> 39 E-40 C.

altogether. For them that which Philebus and his friends call pleasures are merely escapes from pain. These men are men "of harsh judgments."<sup>67</sup> Socrates does not mention any names, but it is highly probable that *Antisthenes* is one of these men. Antisthenes is reputed to have said: "Should I ever meet Aphrodite, I would strangle her with my own hands."

I have condensed this passage of the dialogue to the utmost. But you understand that it challenges the conviction of Philebus radically. Let us look at him again. He has not said a word. Is he really listening? We know, he had grown tired. Has not his sweet repose mentioned by Protarchus a long time ago transformed itself into sound sleep? And *sleep*, sound, dreamless sleep, we should observe, excludes any feeling of pleasure and pain, brings about, in other words, a condition of the "most divine life," yet a condition not compatible with Philebus's own aspirations. Yes, there he lies, the beautiful Philebus, with closed eyes and closed ears, while Socrates continues the inquiry, imposed upon him by Philebus, Protarchus, and the other young men. In sharp contrast to Philebus's fatigue and somnolence are Socrates' vigor and straightforwardness.<sup>68</sup>

A subtle transition is brought to pass inasmuch as Socrates takes those men "of harsh judgments" with whom he disagrees as allies. He is going to describe more accurately what pleasure means to these men, who oppose it or deny its existence. We have already seen that pain and joy can be felt at the same time. The point is now emphasized: pain and pleasure do not only constitute an indeterminate pair, but they also *mix* with each other. This is again shown by Socrates in a tripartite way. *Some* mixtures of pleasure and pain are those in which both pleasure and pain, involve the body, as, for example, *itching* and *scratching*, which Protarchus tends to consider a "mixed evil."<sup>69</sup> *Some* mixtures are those in which the body and the soul contribute the opposite elements, "each adding pain or pleasure to the other's pleasure and pain,"<sup>70</sup> as, for example—we have heard that before—a man suffers from thirst, is pained by his bodily emptiness, but rejoices in his hope to be filled, a hope entertained only by his soul. The *third* kind of mixture is the most important; it is the one in which the soul and only the soul is involved. Socrates gives as examples of pains belonging to this third kind: anger, fear, longing, mourning, love, jealousy, envy—and he asks: "Shall we not find them full of ineffable pleasures?"<sup>71</sup> He then refers—in *one sentence only*—to anger and to mournings and longings in order to show the mixture of pain and of pleasure in them. Protarchus fully agrees. Socrates' next question is: "And you remember, too, how people, at *tragedies*, enjoy the spectacle and at the same time *weep*?"<sup>72</sup> "Yes, certainly," says Protarchus. Whereupon

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<sup>67</sup> 44 C-D.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, 34 D 4-8 and 38 B 3-4.

<sup>69</sup> 46 A.

<sup>70</sup> 47 C.

<sup>71</sup> 47 E.

<sup>72</sup> 48 A.

Socrates asks: "And the condition of our souls at *comedies*—do you know that there, too, there is a mixture of pain and pleasure?"<sup>73</sup> Protarchus's answer is: "I do not quite understand." Socrates confirms that it is *not easy* to understand such a condition under such circumstances, and Protarchus, on his part, confirms that it is not easy for him. It is not easy for us either.

This is the short beginning of the discussion about the third kind of mixture of pleasure and pain, which involves only the soul. And now, surprisingly, Socrates launches into a *lengthy* explanation of what happens to spectators at comedies. It takes no less than four pages, and ends with Socrates' contention that pain is mixed with pleasure—not only for spectators in the theatre, where tragedies and comedies are performed—but also "in all the tragedy and comedy of life."<sup>74</sup> Today, we are prone to call any horrible or simply sad event a "tragedy" and a funny one a "comedy." But that was not done in ancient times. The expression "tragedy and comedy of life" in the dialogue is highly unusual and even paradoxical. It is almost unique; a somewhat similar phrase referring to tragedy, *not* to comedy, can be found only in Plato's *Laws*.<sup>75</sup> Why is this expression used in the *Philebus*? Let us hear what Socrates says.

He takes up *envy* first. Envy is a pain of the soul, but we also see an envious man rejoicing in the evils that befall those close to him. Thus envy is both pain and pleasure. Socrates then takes up the *ridiculous*. The ridiculous is in the main the consequence of a disposition in the human soul which contradicts the famous inscription at Delphi. A ridiculous man is a man who does not know himself. This folly of not knowing oneself can have three aspects: (1) the conceit of being *richer* than one is; (2) the conceit of being more *beautiful* than one is; (3) the conceit of being more *virtuous* than one is, especially *wiser* than one is (δοξοσοφία). This third kind of conceit is the most numerous. Now, we tend to laugh at men thus conceited. But two cases must be distinguished here. Those who are laughed at may be strong and able to revenge themselves, and are then powerful, terrible, and hateful; for folly in the powerful is hateful and base. Or they are weak and unable to revenge themselves, and then they are truly ridiculous. When we laugh at the follies of such men, who may be our friends, we feel pleasure. But to feel pleasure at the follies of our friends is what envy brings about, since it is *envy* that makes us rejoice in the evils that befall these our friends, and envy is painful. Therefore, when we laugh at what is ridiculous in our friends, we mix pleasure and pain.

It is not quite clear how all this explains what happens at comedies, although Protarchus appears to be satisfied. Socrates adds that all that was said by him so far concerned only envy, mourning, and anger (he

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> 50 B.

<sup>75</sup> 817 B.

omits *longing*, which was also mentioned by him in that one sentence he uttered before passing on to tragedies and comedies). And now, Socrates declares, he need not go further and Protarchus ought to accept the assertion that there are plenty of mixtures of pain and of pleasure. But now something extraordinary happens that sheds more light on the theme of comedy.

You will remember that the young men, who surround Socrates, extracted from him the promise not to go home before bringing the discussion about pleasure and thoughtfulness to a satisfactory end. And you will also remember that Protarchus, later on, reminded Socrates of this promise and assured him that not one of the young men would let him go before the end of the discussion was reached. Listen to what Socrates says now: "Tell me then: will you let me off, *or will you let midnight come?* I think only a few words are needed to induce you to let me off."<sup>76</sup> How strange! Why on earth does Socrates utter these words? Is this the Socrates who is known for his never abating eagerness to discuss things? Has he grown tired like Philebus? Or is it that *envy* has entered not only the λόγος but also the stage, the "comedy of life" presented in the dialogue? Incredible as it might seem, Socrates appears to be *envious* seeing Philebus asleep, "divinely" asleep, without pleasure and pain.<sup>77</sup> Does that not mean that Socrates is *pained* by this envy and yet also *pleased* by the ridiculous aspect of Philebus's sleep, which manifests the latter's "conceit of wisdom," the δοξοσοφία of friend Philebus? But what about *us*, who read or hear the words of the dialogue and are the spectators of this "comedy of life"? Well, we are puzzled and *pleased* by realizing that *Socrates* of all people is envious at this moment, and we are also *pained* by witnessing what happens to him. We might refuse to accept that this is what is going on at this moment, but this refusal would only mean that we *expect* to be pained and pleased, *if* we accepted it.

Yes, the dialogue is pleasurable and painful in deed (ἔργῳ), in addition to dealing with pleasure and pain in speech (λόγῳ). And is there any need to mention the pain and the pleasure one feels in reading, or listening to, the dialogue in all its deliberately complex and inordinate convolution? We understand now, I think, why the title of the dialogue is *Philebus*.

Socrates proceeds, of course. He takes up now—and this is a new transition—the *pure* pleasures, that is, pleasures *unmixed* with pain. Socrates lists five kinds of such pleasures, *four* of them conveyed to us by our senses, *one* involving that which cannot be sensed. The first four kinds of pure pleasure have their source in beautiful figures, in beautiful colors, in clear sounds and in many odors. The beautiful *figures* are *not* beautiful living beings or paintings, but—"says the argument"<sup>78</sup>—a

<sup>76</sup> 50 D.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Apology* 40 C–E.

<sup>78</sup> 51 C.

straight line drawn with the help of a ruler, a circular line drawn with the help of a compass, plane figures drawn with the help of these same tools, and solid figures constructed with the help of suitable instruments.<sup>79</sup> The beautiful *colors* are pure colors, in which there is no trace of any other color. Clear *sounds* are those that send forth a single pure tone. The pleasures these figures, colors, and sounds generate are pure pleasures, unmixed with pain. As to the pleasures of smell, they are, as Socrates playfully says, "less divine." The last kind of pure pleasure—and this is deeply serious—is that which has its source in the known or the knowable, accessible to human beings without hunger for learning and without pangs of such hunger.<sup>80</sup> What Socrates means is *contemplation* (θεωρία), which is *not* preceded by ἔρως, the *desire* to know, as we feel it in the pursuit of knowledge. This pleasure of contemplation is felt by exceedingly few.

The transition now made leads to a passage that again has three parts, of which again the third is the most important. The first part extends in some way the realm of pure pleasures by the statement that what characterizes such pleasures is *due measure*. The second part makes us understand that the pure pleasures are, because of their purity, also *true pleasures*. In the third—the longest—part Socrates refutes "certain ingenious people"<sup>81</sup> while accepting one of their premises. These "ingenious people" are reduced a little later to *one* man, and there is hardly any doubt that this man is *Aristippus*. His premise, which Socrates accepts, is that pleasure consists in a process of generation and has *no stable being*. What is rejected by Socrates is that such a process in itself is a good. To refute this assertion, Socrates proposes to consider the relation that the process of *coming* into being (γένεσις) has to *being* (οὐσία). The question is: which one of the two is for the sake of the other? Protarchus rephrases the question as follows: do ships exist for the sake of shipbuilding or is shipbuilding for the sake of ships? Protarchus knows the answer to this question, of course, but Socrates gives the answer in an all-comprising form: "Every instance of *generation* is for the sake of some *being* or other, and *all* generation is *always* for the sake of being."<sup>82</sup> Now, the being for the sake of which the process of generation takes place is "of the order of the good," while the process of generation itself is *not* of that order. Therefore, says Socrates, we must be grateful to him who pointed out that there is only a *generation*, but no *being* of pleasure. He makes a laughingstock of all those who find their highest end in pleasure and know that pleasure is nothing but a process of generation. For their highest end is not of the order of the good. Protarchus concludes: "It is a great absurdity, as it appears, Socrates, to tell us that pleasure is a good."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> 53 A–B.

<sup>80</sup> 52 A.

<sup>81</sup> 53 C.

<sup>82</sup> 54 C.

<sup>83</sup> 55 A.

There is a new transition, in which courage, self-restraint and  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\zeta$  are mentioned and which begins to move the dialogue upward. The task is now to consider  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\zeta$  and *knowledge* carefully and to find out what is by nature *purest* in them. We expect that *their* truest parts will be joined with the truest parts of *pleasure* in the desired mixed life.

Two kinds of knowledge are distinguished. One is necessary to *produce* things, the other serves *education and nurture*. The productive knowledge, the “know how” of the producing arts, is taken up first, and here again a division is to be made. Some of those parts are acquired by practice and toil, aided by guessing, and lack precision. They do not use sufficiently the arts of counting, measuring, and weighing. This holds, Socrates says, for music, as it is commonly practiced, for medicine, agriculture, piloting, and generalship. But in the arts of building, shipbuilding, and housebuilding, for example, there is much more precision, because measuring and the use of ingenious instruments play a much greater role in them. It is at this point that Socrates divides the arts of counting and of measuring (not, however, that of weighing) into two kinds. Some counting refers to visible and tangible units, which are all unequal; but there is also counting of units that do not differ at all from each other. This kind of counting is the basis of the true art of numbering, of true “arithmetic.” The art of measuring may also refer either to visible and tangible things or to entities that cannot be sensed. To measure, and to deal with, the latter entities means to be engaged in “geometry,” not for the purpose of production and trade, but for the purpose of knowing. And this holds also for the careful study of ratios and proportions. These true arts of numbering and measuring serve education and nurture. We see that there is a kind of knowledge *purier* than another, as one pleasure is *purier* than another. This purity of knowledge brings about much greater clarity and precision and much more truth.

But there is, beyond that pure mathematical knowledge, the power of *dialectic*. It deals with Being, True Being, with that which always *immutably* is. Protarchus remembers at this point the claim of Gorgias that the art of persuasion, the rhetorical art, surpasses all other arts. Socrates replies that he was not thinking of the art that surpasses all others by being the “greatest,” the “best,” and the “most useful” to men; he was thinking of the art or the knowledge which is most concerned about *clearness, precision, and the most true*, however little and of little use it might be. Socrates asks Protarchus to look neither at the usefulness nor at the reputation of the various sciences, but to consider whether there is a power in our souls which is *in love with Truth* and does everything for the sake of Truth. Would this power possess thoughtfulness ( $\varphi\rho\theta\acute{\nu}\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ) and  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\zeta$  in the greatest purity? Protarchus concedes that this must be so.

To be in love with Truth does not mean to possess it or to contemplate it. It means to pursue it, to try to find it, indefatigably, unremittingly; to pursue it means to submit to the power of discourse, a power that is able to discover in the spoken or silent *words* that which make speaking and

thinking ultimately possible, namely the unchangeable and, thereby, *true* beings. But, as Socrates points out, the many existing arts and the men engaged in them do not submit to the power of discourse, but are satisfied with their opinions. If a man sees fit to investigate nature, he spends his life in studying this world of ours—that is to say, tries to find out how it came into being, how it is acted upon and how it acts itself. By doing that, that man toils to discover transient productions of the present, the future and the past, *not* what unchangeably *always* is. And Socrates asks: “How can we gain anything *stable* about things which have *no stability* whatsoever?”<sup>84</sup> The argument compels us thus to see that the stable, pure, and true, can only be found in what is eternally the same without change or mixture or, Socrates surprisingly adds, “in what is most akin to it.”<sup>85</sup> He may mean the moving, but never changing celestial bodies.

This passage which deals with the *purest* knowledge ends with the repeated reference to νοῦς and φρόνησις, which have to be honored most. This reference is the *last* transition in the dialogue to the *last* passage of the dialogue.

This last passage is about *the most desirable life*, in which thoughtfulness and pleasure are mixed. Socrates undertakes now to make this mixture with the help of Protarchus. We expected and still expect that the *pure* pleasures and the *purest* knowledge will be joined in this mixture.

Before the mixing begins, Socrates reminds Protarchus and us of what had been said before. Philebus had claimed that pleasure was the true goal of every living being and that these two words, “good” and “pleasant,” mean the same thing. Socrates, on the other hand, claimed that “good” and “pleasant” mean different things and that the share of thoughtfulness in the good is greater than pleasure’s. They had agreed, Socrates continues, that any living being, in whom the good is present always, altogether, and in all ways, has no further need of anything, but is perfectly self-sufficient; but that neither a life of pleasure unmixed with thoughtfulness nor a thoughtful life unmixed with pleasure was a desirable life.

Directly related to the task of making the mixture is the task of winning a clear understanding of the *good* in the well-mixed life, *or at least an outline of it*,<sup>86</sup> so as to be better able to find out *to what* in the well-mixed life the second prize should be assigned. We remember that Socrates had raised the question before. At that time the possible recipients of the second prize were νοῦς and pleasure. Note that in this last passage of the dialogue νοῦς has not been mentioned so far.

This is now what Socrates says jovially and playfully just before he begins to make the mixture: “Let us make the mixture, Protarchus, with a proper prayer to the gods, Dionysus or Hephaestus, or whoever he be

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<sup>84</sup> 59 B.

<sup>85</sup> 59 C.

<sup>86</sup> 61 A.

who presides over the mixing.”<sup>87</sup> Dionysus leads on revellers and presides over orgies; he stands here for pleasure. Hephaestus is known for his thoughtful and sober craftsmanship. Socrates continues: “We are like wine pourers, and beside us are fountains—that of pleasure may be likened to a fount of *honey*, and the sober, wineless fount of thoughtfulness to one of pure, health-giving *water* of which we must do our best to mix as well as possible.”<sup>88</sup>

The first question is: should Socrates and Protarchus mix *all* pleasure with *all* thoughtfulness? Socrates observes that this would not be safe. It would be better to mix first that pleasure which was *more truly* pleasure with that knowledge which was *most true* and *most precise*. Protarchus agrees. But Socrates is not satisfied. Let us assume, he says, a man who is thoughtful about justice itself, that is, about the εἶδος of justice, and is guided in his reasoning about everything that *truly* is by his apprehension of the intelligible, by his νοεῖν (it is the first time that νοῦς is mentioned in this last passage of the dialogue). If this man is fully cognizant of the mathematical circle and the all-embracing celestial sphere, but is ignorant of our *human* sphere and *human* circles, will this man have *sufficient* knowledge? No, says Protarchus, it would be ridiculous for a man to be concerned only with divine knowledge. “Do you mean,” Socrates asks, “that the unstable and impure art of the untrue rule and circle is to be put with the other arts into the mixture?”<sup>89</sup> Yes, says Protarchus, that is necessary, if any man is ever to find his way home. Socrates and Protarchus go further. They put *music*, which they said a while ago was full of guesswork and lacked purity, and *all* the deficient kinds of knowledge mingling with the pure into the mixture.

Then Socrates turns to the pleasures. Here again the pure and true pleasures are not the only ones to be put into the mixture. For the first and only time in the dialogue Socrates mentions “necessary pleasures,”<sup>90</sup> by which he means pleasures connected with the satisfaction of vital needs, and adds them to the pure ones. And the further question arises: is it not advantageous and harmless to let *all* pleasures be a part of the mixture, just as it was harmless and advantageous to let *all* the arts and *all* knowledge be such a part? Whereupon Socrates says: “There is no use in asking us, Protarchus; we must ask the pleasures themselves and the different kinds of thoughtfulness about one another.”<sup>91</sup> That’s what Socrates does. He asks first the pleasures: “Would you choose to dwell with the whole of thoughtfulness or with none at all?”<sup>92</sup> And Socrates lets them answer that for any tribe to be solitary and unalloyed is neither possible nor

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<sup>87</sup> 61 B/C.

<sup>88</sup> 61 C.

<sup>89</sup> 62 B.

<sup>90</sup> 62 E.

<sup>91</sup> 63 A/B.

<sup>92</sup> 63 B.

profitable: "We think the best to live with is the knowledge of all other things and, so far as is possible, the perfect knowledge of ourselves."<sup>93</sup> Let us not forget, it is Socrates whom we hear speaking. It is highly doubtful whether the pleasures can speak—and can have any knowledge of themselves. And now Socrates turns to thoughtfulness and νοῦς. (It is the second time that νοῦς is mentioned in this last passage of the dialogue.) Socrates asks them whether they want the greatest and most intense pleasures to dwell with them in addition to the true and pure pleasures. And Socrates replies *for them*—that is, for thoughtfulness and νοῦς—that the true and pure pleasures are almost their own, and also those which are united to *health* and *self-restraint* and all those which are handmaids of *virtue*; they should be added to the mixture; as to the pleasures which madden the souls of men, which are the companions of folly and of all the other vices, it would be senseless to mix them with the νοῦς.

This is the third time that νοῦς is mentioned in the passage, while thoughtfulness (φρόνησις), which was also addressed by Socrates, is left out. When Socrates has finished replying in the name of both νοῦς and φρόνησις, he says to Protarchus: "Shall we not say that this reply which the νοῦς has now made for itself and memory and right opinion is thoughtful and sensible?"<sup>94</sup> And Protarchus says: "Very much so." Which νοῦς is this νοῦς? Is it the "divine νοῦς" that Socrates contrasted with his own in his reply to *Philebus* a long time ago? No, it is *Socrates* who was speaking guided by *his own* νοῦς. It is *not* the νοῦς that the "easy" cosmological account found to be "the cause of all" and that the sages, in exalting themselves, declare to be "king of heaven and earth." It is *not* the fourth tribe of the Promethean gift, which Socrates introduced, fearing to appear ridiculous by doing that. Socrates' *own* νοῦς is responsible for the kind of mixture he makes to produce the life which combines thoughtfulness and pleasure, is the cause of *this life*. It is neither the cause of the commixture of the "limitless" and of the "limit," nor the cause of these first two tribes of the Promethean gift.

What does the original introduction of the νοῦς as the "cause of all" and the subsequent somewhat veiled rejection of this νοῦς mean? I think it means a subtle mocking of Plato's great pupil Aristotle. Aristotle's thoughts must certainly have been familiar to Plato in his late years. A passage in an ancient manuscript,<sup>95</sup> that informs us about Aristotle's life, hints at lively controversies between Plato and Aristotle. Plato appears to have nicknamed Aristotle ὁ νοῦς, and to have once said, when Aristotle was not present at a meeting: "The νοῦς is absent; dullness reigns in the lecture room." We do know that the investigation of the different meanings

<sup>93</sup> 63 B/C.

<sup>94</sup> 64 A.

<sup>95</sup> Codex Marcianus. See Paul Friedländer's *Akademische Randglossen in Die Gegenwart der Griechen im Neueren Denken*, Festschrift für Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1960, p. 317.

of *cause* (αἰτία) and of the *divine* νοῦς plays a decisive role in Aristotle's works. What the dialogue intimates is that νοῦς is above all a *human* possession, and that Socrates is the embodiment of this νοῦς.

Socrates completes the mixture by pointing to the necessity that *truth* must be a part of it, and then asks what is the most precious in it and the *chief cause* for this mixed life to be most lovable. The answer is: *due measure* and *proportion* which bring about beauty and excellence. Nobody is ignorant of this. We should more properly, however, consider these three, *beauty, truth, due measure*, as the components of the goodness of the mixture. We see, first: νοῦς is more akin to truth than pleasure; secondly: nothing could be found more immoderate than pleasure and nothing is more in harmony with due measure than νοῦς and knowledge; and thirdly: νοῦς has a greater share in beauty than pleasure.

And now, finally, Socrates gives a list of the best human possessions in their proper order. *First* something like Measure, Due Measure, Propriety, and like everything which must be considered of the same order. *Secondly* comes what is well proportioned, beautiful, has been completed and is sufficient, and all that belongs to that very family. Socrates continues: "As to the *third*—this is my prophecy—if you insist on νοῦς and φρόνησις, you will not wander far from the truth."<sup>96</sup> Is νοῦς relegated to the third place? No, it is elevated to the proper rank, if you consider the role the *triad* played in the entire dialogue. *Fourthly* come the different kinds of knowledge, the arts, the true opinions; and *fifthly* the painless pure pleasures of the soul, some of which accompany *knowledge* and some of which—as we have seen—accompany *perceptions* (observe that knowledge was not mentioned before among the pure pleasures, presumably because the *pursuit* of knowledge involves the *desire* to know, involves ἔρωσ, in which pain and pleasure are mixed). There is no sixth place, says Socrates, quoting Orpheus. He reminds us that neither νοῦς nor pleasure is the good itself, since both are devoid of self-sufficiency. But within the mixed life, which is the victor, νοῦς has now been given the second prize, while pleasure—as Socrates' own νοῦς had predicted a long time ago—is further behind than the third place. Note that this holds even for pure pleasure and that the satisfaction of vital needs is not mentioned at all. Pleasure is fifth. We should be aware that, according to the tradition, the people called "Pythagoreans" associated the goddess Aphrodite with the number *five*.

The list given by Socrates is strangely unprecise and inordinate. It is indeed only an *outline* of the good in the most desirable life. The ἄπειρον, the "limitless," the "indeterminate," reigns, though not supremely, in the dialogue.

I shall not keep you until midnight. Good night! But there will be a discussion.

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<sup>96</sup> 66 B.