

# The General Account of Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

DOES PLATO IN THE *Philebus* present a single general account of pleasure, applicable to all of the kinds of pleasure he discusses in that dialogue? Gosling and Taylor think not;<sup>1</sup> Dorothea Frede has recently reasserted a version of the contrary, traditional view.<sup>2</sup> The traditional view, I shall argue in this essay, is correct: the *Philebus* does contain a general account of pleasure applicable to all pleasures. Nonetheless, Gosling and Taylor have pointed to a real difficulty with the traditional view, a difficulty that has never been adequately addressed. To show how it can be overcome will involve showing that Plato's account of pleasure, and his analyses of other phenomena of moral psychology in the *Philebus*, are more complex and subtle than has often been realized.

Gosling and Taylor offer two considerations in support of their view: (1) Socrates insists against Protarchus that different pleasures can be "most opposite" to each other, which suggests that no single account can apply to them all,<sup>3</sup> and (2) Socrates does not indicate how the most likely candidate for a general account of pleasure, one involving the restoration of a natural har-

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<sup>1</sup> J. C. B. Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford, 1982), 140: "It seems clear that in the *Philebus* Plato has no general formula to encapsulate the nature of pleasure. . . ." So, too, C. Hampton, *Pleasure, Knowledge and Being: An Analysis of Plato's "Philebus"* (Albany, 1990), 73. A similar view is implied by H. Voigtländer, *Die Lust und das Gute bei Platon* (Würzburg, 1960), 163 n. 99.

<sup>2</sup> D. Frede, "Disintegration and Restoration: Pleasure and Pain in the *Philebus*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut (Cambridge, 1992), 444: "Plato's definition of pleasure . . . is designed to cover all kinds of pleasure. . . ." Cf. also D. Frede, tr., *Plato: Philebus* (Indianapolis, 1993), xliii: "The definition of pleasure and pain as restoration and disintegration . . ." Important older representatives of the traditional view are F. Susemihl, *Die genetische Entwicklung der Platonischen Philosophie* (2 vols., 1885–1860; reprint, Osnabrück, 1967), 2: 1–58 and J. Ferber, "Platos Polemik gegen die Lustlehre," *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Philosophische Kritik* 148 (1912): 129–81.

<sup>3</sup> Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 136, 140.

mony, could possibly apply to two important types of pleasure he discusses: pleasures of anticipation and what we may call the “emotional” pleasures, such as those involved in malicious laughter.<sup>4</sup> The first of these cannot be made to carry much weight. Socrates compares the differences among pleasures with those among colors and those among shapes; in each of these cases the differing items are “one in kind [*genei . . . hen*]” while admitting “ten-thousand-fold differentiation,” such that some of them are “most opposite to each other” (12e7–13a2). Even in the *Meno* Socrates recognizes—indeed, insists—that different shapes and colors may be “opposite to each other” (74d7), even as he presses Meno for definitions that apply to all shapes or colors, respectively.<sup>5</sup> His insistence in the *Philebus* on the differences between types of pleasure does not imply,<sup>6</sup> nor even suggest, that looking for a single account of the *genos* of pleasure is a mistake.<sup>7</sup>

Gosling and Taylor’s second reason for denying the existence of a generic account of pleasure in the *Philebus* is more serious, however. Socrates does not explicitly show how either pleasures of anticipation or emotional pleasures can be explained by a restoration-model of pleasure.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, I shall argue

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<sup>4</sup> Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 136. Gosling and Taylor are also skeptical of the applicability of such an account to the pure pleasures of sight and sound (138). In this, and in their skepticism about explaining pleasures of anticipation on the restorative model, Gosling and Taylor take up an Aristotelian criticism: “The pleasures of learning, and, among the sensuous pleasures, those of smell, and also many sounds and sights, and memories and hopes, do not involve pain. Of what will these be the coming into being? There has not been a lack of anything of which they could be the replenishment” (*EN* 1173b16–20, tr. Ross modified).

<sup>5</sup> This point is made by Dybikowski in his review of Gosling’s edition of the *Philebus*, in *Mind* 86 (1977): 446–48.

<sup>6</sup> Dybikowski, in his review, insists that pleasures *qua* pleasure are the same; Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 134 insist that to say so is to side with Protarchus against Socrates (see 13c5), which Plato cannot have wanted us to do. I suspect that an ambiguity in the expression “pleasures *qua* pleasure” underlies this dispute. Generically pleasures do not differ *qua* pleasure, but specifically they do. The same is true of the species of any genus, and of the determinates of any determinable. Cat and mouse are the same *qua* (generic) animal, but different *qua* (specific) animal. Red and blue are both colors, but differ *qua* (determinate) color. (Plato does not seem to have distinguished the genus/species relation from the determinable/determinate relation; see E. Benitez, *Forms in Plato’s “Philebus”* [Assen, 1989], 49–51.)

<sup>7</sup> Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 135–36, suggest that one of the beneficial results of the rejection of a single account of pleasure is that it then becomes difficult to use pleasantness as a criterion of a good life. As they realize, a generic account of pleasure need not in itself provide a criterion for determining the relative pleasantness of pleasures. In the *Meno* Socrates insists both that there is a generic account of color (and shape) and that no color (or shape) is more of a color (or shape) than any other (74c10–e9).

<sup>8</sup> Most defenders of the view that Plato has a single account to cover all the different kinds of pleasure do not consider how a restoration-model of pleasure could apply to anticipatory or emotional pleasure. Frede, “Disintegration and Restoration,” does argue that “Plato’s definition of pleasure as a perceived filling or restoration” (444) applies to such pleasures. To do so she must broaden the notion of lack or disruption and loosen it from any connection with natural harmony.

that the dialogue contains clear indications as to how the restoration-model may be extended to apply to these pleasures. First, however, it will be necessary to get clear on just what the account of pleasure as involving restoration consists in. Plato has Socrates develop such an account in three important passages, strategically placed at the beginning (31d1–32b4), middle (43b1–c7), and end (53c4–55a11) of the discussion of pleasure (31b4 to 55c1). The differences between these passages are due, I shall argue, to their different contexts; the essential account they give of the nature of pleasure is the same. As I argue in section 2, according to that account pleasure is a conscious psychic process produced by the restoration of a natural harmony, whether of body or of soul. (Such pleasure is a mere sensation, a psychic epiphenomenon of the restoration that causes it, and has no intentional object.<sup>9</sup>) This account directly applies, however, only to a class of pleasures that I shall call “unreflective,” and not to “reflective” pleasures, of which both anticipatory and emotional pleasures are examples. An examination of Socrates’ and Protarchus’ discussion of these two kinds of pleasure in sections 3 and 4 will lead to an account of reflective pleasures as conscious psychic processes caused by entertaining mental representations or images of oneself in conditions that (one thinks) cause pleasure. (These pleasures, too, are psychic epiphenomena, this time of certain cognitive activities; the pleasurable epiphenomena themselves have no intentional objects.) Putting these two accounts together, we may arrive at a comprehensive account of pleasure as a conscious psychic process caused either by the reality of the restoration of a bodily or psychic harmony, or by entertaining the image of such a restoration.<sup>10</sup> This causal account of pleasure, in spite of the disjunction it contains, is nonetheless a genuinely unified account. For the two different causes it mentions are not unrelated, but are

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Thus she writes: “[Plato’s] definition of pleasure . . . [is] the [perceived] filling of a lack. . . . Plato treats anything that we do not ‘have’ as a lack” (453). Among older writers, Susemihl, *Die genetische Entwicklung*, makes the best effort to extend the restoration model to anticipatory pleasures. He writes: “Wir müssen . . . Lust und Unlust im Allgemeinen also als die Vorstellung des Angenehmen und Unangenehmen in Bezug auf alle drei Zeiten, d.h., als den Gegenlauf von Absorption und Reproduktion selber, so weit er in die Vorstellung tritt, bezeichnen” (2: 33). But there is an ambiguity in Susemihl’s use of *Vorstellung*, which seems to refer, in the case of present pleasures / pains, to mere perception or awareness, and, in the case of anticipations, to mental representations. The latter, I shall argue, are not pleasures, but may cause pleasure.

<sup>9</sup> Frede, *Plato: Philebus*, xlv, suggests that all pleasures have an “intentional object,” but allows that “immediate physical pleasures do not presuppose a propositional content” (xlvi, n. 2). Neither, on my view, do immediate or unreflective psychic pleasures. Furthermore, even reflective pleasures only presuppose propositional content insofar as their cause has such content.

<sup>10</sup> J.-L. Cheronneix, “La ‘vérité’ du plaisir ou le problème de la biologie platonicienne,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 91 (1986): 311–38, suggests a similar account: “Risquons tout de même que le plaisir, pour Platon, c’est la sensation éveillée en l’âme du vivant mortel soit immédiatement par un procès de réintégration, de cette âme elle-même ou du corps qu’elle vivifie, soit par la représentation de ce qui pourrait réintégrer l’âme ou le corps” (317).

rather related as original to image, and it is precisely in virtue of its relation to an original restoration that the image shares the original's power to cause pleasure.

Neither the account of reflective pleasure I shall give, nor the generic account of pleasure to which it contributes, is given *expressis verbis* in the *Philebus*. They may therefore be unconvincing to those who consider the dialogue a straightforward presentation of Plato's thinking on the topics it treats. (Considered from such a point of view, however, the *Philebus* makes a rather poor showing.) I think that a good case can be made, however, for the view that Plato designed even his later dialogues so as to provoke reflection on the problems they treat, and further, that these dialogues contain indications of the solutions to which Plato expected such reflection initially to lead. I shall not argue in general terms for this methodological point;<sup>11</sup> it will be indirectly supported to the extent that the approach taken here proves fruitful in interpreting this notoriously obscure dialogue.

## 2. THE GENERAL ACCOUNT OF (NONREFLECTIVE) PLEASURE

The first of the three passages in which Socrates and Protarchus work out a general account of pleasure begins as follows:

Soc.: Now pay as much attention as you can.

Prot.: Go on.

Soc.: I say, then, that when that harmony<sup>12</sup> of ours is being relaxed, in living beings there occur together at that time a relaxation of their nature and a generation of pains.

Prot.: What you say is quite likely.

Soc.: And when [that nature] is being restored to harmony and is returning to its own nature, we must say that pleasure occurs, if it is necessary that our statement about the greatest matters should be made as quickly as possible in a few words. (31d1–10)

Socrates' introduction to this passage, and especially his words at its end, emphasize the importance of what is here said. Socrates offers in this passage a restoration-model of pleasure, and two points about his presentation of it need to be made. (1) Nothing in the passage indicates that Socrates means to restrict the account contained in it to bodily pleasures;<sup>13</sup> for all that is said here, it may apply to psychic ones as well. (2) Socrates does not here identify

<sup>11</sup> For similar views of the later dialogues, see M. H. Miller, Jr., *The Philosopher in Plato's "Statesman"* (The Hague, 1980), ix–xix, and K. Sayre, "A Maieutic View of Five Late Dialogues," in J. C. Klagge and N. D. Smith, eds., *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, Supplementary Volume (1992), 221–43.

<sup>12</sup> There is no textual warrant for adding "physical" before "harmony," as do the translations of J. C. B. Gosling (*Plato: Philebus* [Oxford, 1975]) and R. Waterfield (*Plato: Philebus* [New York, 1982]).

<sup>13</sup> The notion that Socrates is concerned only with bodily pleasures in this passage is as old as Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus*, ed. Westerink (2nd printing: Amsterdam, 1982), § 141.

pain with relaxation of a natural harmony, nor pleasure with restoration of such a harmony. He indicates that there is some relation between them, but leaves the relation as vague as possible: the processes of relaxation and restoration are referred to by means of genitive absolutes. The one thing that seems clear is that the relation is not identity.<sup>14</sup> Socrates' last words indicate that he realizes that his succinct account leaves out something of importance; this includes, at least, an account of the relation between pleasure / pain and the processes of restoration / relaxation of harmony.

What has led interpreters generally to overlook these two points is Socrates' evident neglect of them in the ensuing passage. For the examples he uses to illustrate this account of pain and pleasure are all bodily experiences (hunger-eating, thirst-drinking, shivering-warming up, being stiflingly hot-cooling down), and in his recapitulation of the account of pleasure after his discussion of these examples he does not scruple to identify pain with the relaxation or destruction of a natural harmony and pleasure with the process of its restoration:

And in a single statement—see if that statement seems well-measured to you which says that the form composed of the indefinite and of limit, which is natural, ensouled, and generated, which I talked about earlier—whenever that form is perishing, the perishing is pain [*tên . . . phithoran lupên einai*], but the path into their own being, this return, on the other hand, is, again, in the case of all things, pleasure. (32a8-b4)

This identification, after the careful avoidance of the identification in the initial statement of the theory, is not a case of Plato nodding. It is explicable in terms of the interaction between the interlocutors, which is important even in this late dialogue. Socrates' interlocutor is Protarchus, whose name indicates that he is a beginner twice-over.<sup>15</sup> After Socrates' initial exposition of the nature of pleasure, Protarchus responds: "While I think you are speaking correctly, Socrates, let us try to say the same things even more clearly" (31e1–2). Socrates takes the opportunity to explain more clearly what he means by the restoration of natural harmony, using "run-of-the-mill and extremely obvious" examples, which are "easiest to understand" (e3–4). In order to simplify

<sup>14</sup> So too Ferber, "Platos Polemik," 163, n.3: "Plato drückt sich meist ungenau aus . . . ; doch lassen die Worte *hama . . . en tōi tote chronōi* . . . den Unterschied zwischen beiden Vorgängen deutlich erkennen."

<sup>15</sup> A. Diès, *Philèbe* (Paris, 1966), liv, calls Protarchus "un jeune dialecticien," and Sussemihl, *Die genetische Entwicklung*, 5, compares him to Theaetetus. Perhaps surprisingly, no one has, to my knowledge, hitherto made the simple point about the meaning of Protarchus' name. (This point does not depend on the fictionality or historicity of Protarchus, son of Callias.) R. Hackforth, *Plato's Philebus* (Cambridge, 1945, repr. 1972), 7, expresses the more common view that Protarchus is "just the 'ordinary listener', the average educated interlocutor needed to keep up some semblance of real discussion."

matters, Socrates for the time being treats this restoration as identical to pleasure; but this is a simplification he soon corrects.

The "extremely obvious" examples adduced by Socrates of harmony disrupted and restored are all bodily ones. After concluding his discussion of them with the "single statement" concerning the nature of pleasure quoted above, Socrates introduces a "second type of pleasure and pain," belonging to "the soul alone" (32b6-c5). We shall discuss these pleasures in greater detail later; what is important for our present purposes is that after having introduced this type of pleasure, Socrates once more recapitulates the general account of pleasure as involving restoration, this time, as at first, leaving vague the precise relation between pleasure and restoration.<sup>16</sup> That he does so indicates that he holds that some version of the general account applies to psychic pleasure, too. He does not, however, explicitly explain how it does so.

The psychic pleasures Socrates introduces at 32b6-9 are the pleasures of anticipation. In investigating these pleasures, Socrates finds it necessary first to give an analysis of perception, in the course of which it becomes obvious that the initial account of pleasure needs to be supplemented if it is going to apply even to the simplest case of the pleasure of bodily restoration. In analyzing perception Socrates distinguishes between bodily processes that are "extinguished in the body before they reach the soul, leaving the latter unaffected" and those that "proceed through both and produce in them something like a shock, both peculiar and common to each of them" (33d3-6). This distinction once made, it would be easy to make the change in the preliminary account of pleasure that would render it adequate to the pleasures of bodily restoration. Socrates could easily have proceeded: restoration of a bodily harmony is a bodily process; when it is "extinguished in the body before it reaches the soul," there is no pleasure, whereas when it produces "a peculiar shock, common to body and soul," that shock constitutes a pleasure. But Socrates does not immediately revise his account of pleasure; rather, Plato has him first finish his analysis of pleasures of anticipation, thus positioning the revised account of pleasure strategically at the center of the discussion of pleasure. What is more, when Socrates does revise the account of pleasure, he does not do so in the way that the treatment of perception leads us to expect. Doing so would have made the revised account apply only to bodily pleasures; the revision Socrates in fact produces is applicable to psychic pleasures as well.

The revision of the preliminary account of pleasure takes place after the

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<sup>16</sup>"If what we have said really is the case: when these things are being destroyed, there is pain, and when they are being restored, pleasure . . ." (32d9-e2). Again, Socrates uses that vaguest of constructions, the genitive absolute.

discussion of anticipatory pleasures is concluded. Socrates introduces his revision with a recapitulation of the preliminary account of pleasure:

Soc.: I suppose it has often been said that, when the nature of each of these things is severally being corrupted [*tês phuseôs hekastôn diaphtheiromenês*] by joinings and separations and fillings and emptyings and certain growings and shrinkings, pains and aches and agonies and everything with a name like that happen to occur.

Prot.: Yes, that has often been said.

Soc.: And when there is taking place an establishment [*kathistêtai*]<sup>17</sup> into their own nature, this establishment, on the other hand, we have accepted from ourselves to be pleasure.

Prot.: And rightly so. (42c9-d8)

This recapitulation also recapitulates the ambiguity we noticed above about the relation of pleasure and pain to the processes of destruction and restoration. Socrates at first leaves the relation between pain and the process of "corruption" vague, using, once again, a genitive absolute construction. He then proceeds straightforwardly to identify pleasure with the process of (re)establishing the relevant natural condition. This oscillation from vagueness to outright identification highlights the ambiguity left hanging by the earlier discussion. Furthermore, Socrates' statement that "we have accepted from ourselves" the identification of pleasure with the relevant process may suggest that the identification was made in the first place because of Socrates' need to proceed slowly with this particular interlocutor. Socrates is now in a position to revoke that identification and specify the relation between process and pleasure as a causal one.<sup>18</sup>

To call into question the identification that Protarchus still thinks was "rightly" made, Socrates once again makes reference, first of all, to the "obvious" pleasures and pains, those of the body.<sup>19</sup> But the criticism leveled at the identification is couched in terms that make it equally applicable to purely psychic pleasures and pains:

Soc.: Answer me this: concerning all the things that any animate thing undergoes [*paschei*]<sup>20</sup>—does the thing undergoing them always perceive all of them, and do we neither grow, nor undergo any other such thing unawares; or is it quite the reverse?

Prot.: Quite the reverse indeed; nearly all such things escape our notice. (43b1–6)

Although growth is most likely here a bodily process, the distinction between processes and our (affective) awareness of them is not explicitly limited to bodily processes. And when Socrates produces a causal account of the relation

<sup>17</sup> With Diès (see note 15) I translate this word impersonally.

<sup>18</sup> Note *apergazontai*, 43b9; *poiouein*, 43c5.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. 42d9–10: "What about when, in the case of the body, none of these [processes] is taking place?"

between processes and pleasures and pains, to replace the discredited identification-account, he does so in terms that seem deliberately chosen to apply to psychic processes as well as to bodily ones: "While great changes produce [*poiouein*] pains and pleasures in us, measured and small ones produce neither of them at all" (43c4-6). Instead of identifying those changes that produce pleasure or pain with those that are not "extinguished in the body before they reach the soul" (33d3-4), Socrates identifies them in purely quantitative terms. Such an account, though vague, has the virtue of being general enough to apply to cases of both bodily and psychic restoration. Later on in the dialogue (52a), Socrates explicitly discusses psychic changes (emptyings) that go unnoticed and therefore produce no pain, and contrasts them with other psychic changes (replenishments) that are large enough to produce pleasure (51e-52b). We may therefore safely summarize the account of pleasure that emerges from the above passage thus: the destruction or restoration of the natural harmony of body or soul, when it is of sufficient magnitude, produces pain or pleasure. Furthermore, taking the analysis of perception as our guide, we may assume that the pleasure or pain is itself a psychic process (a "shock"); unlike perception, however, it can be caused either by a bodily process or by another psychic process.

This revision of the general account of (nonreflective) pleasure is the most complete of the three statements of that account in the *Philebus*. The two other statements, the preliminary one at the beginning of the discussion of pleasure and a passage that remains to be considered, both involve certain simplifications. We have already seen how the preliminary account masks a certain vagueness by falsely identifying pleasure with the process of restoration, a simplification rendered necessary by the early stage of the discussion and Protarchus' relative lack of sophistication. As we shall now see, the final account of the general nature of (nonreflective) pleasure employs a similar simplification, although for different reasons, and without committing itself to any false assertions.

After completing his analysis of the various kinds of pure and impure pleasures, and before turning to an analysis of the kinds of knowledge, Socrates treats once more of pleasure in general. His purpose is to make the point that the nature of pleasure as such disqualifies it from admission to the "class of the good" (*têi tou agathou moirai*; 54c10).<sup>20</sup> Instead of referring to the account of pleasure he and Protarchus have developed in the course of their discussion, Socrates invokes the views of others:

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<sup>20</sup> It is clear that Socrates is not arguing that there is no sense in which any pleasure can be good; rather, his claim is only that neither pleasure in general, nor any particular pleasure, can, on metaphysical grounds, be the highest good.



Haven't we heard about pleasure that it is always a coming-into-being [*genesis*], but has no being [*ousia*] at all? For certain subtle persons, you know, are trying to make this position clear to us, and we must be grateful to them. (53c4-7)

Socrates goes on to argue that all coming-into-being comes to be for the sake of being, and that while that for the sake of which something comes to be belongs to the class of the good, things that come to be for the sake of other things do not. If pleasure is a coming-into-being, then, it does not belong to the class of the good (54c1-d2).

The notion that pleasure is a coming-into-being that is for the sake of some being has an obvious resemblance to the view that pleasure is a restoration of a natural harmony. This resemblance is especially strong if we model our understanding of the way one thing is for the sake of another on Protarchus' example, that of shipbuilding's being for the sake of ships. On this model, the natural harmony would correspond to the ship, the restoration of it to the shipbuilding. If we understand Socrates' argument this way, the claim that pleasure is a coming-into-being amounts to a claim that pleasure is identical with a restoration to a natural harmony, a claim that we have seen Socrates make in his first discussion of the general nature of pleasure only to retract in the second in favor of the more nuanced view that such restoration *causes* pleasure. Why does Socrates ignore that more nuanced view here?

It should be noted that Socrates never explicitly endorses the view that pleasure is a "coming-into-being" in the way that shipbuilding is. It is open to him to say that he has only proved that those who accept such an identification are committed to the view that pleasure is not good as an end. If Protarchus or an inattentive reader has failed to remember the modification such a theory of pleasure requires, this argument should persuade him of an important truth. But Plato is not simply having Socrates present a valid argument with a true conclusion and a false premise. For he has Socrates intimate that there is a way of understanding the relation between a coming-into-being and that for the sake of which it comes to be that is quite different from that of Protarchus.<sup>21</sup> To illustrate how one thing can be for the sake of another, Socrates uses the

<sup>21</sup> Most scholars understand the distinction between *genesis* and *ousia* in the way suggested by Protarchus' example. (E.g., E. Friedrichs, *Platons Lehre von der Lust in Gorgias und Philebos* [Halle, 1890], 48; Hackforth, *Plato's Philebus*, 106; Gosling, *Plato: Philebus*, 125; R. Shiner, *Knowledge and Reality in Plato's "Philebus"* [Assen, 1974], 49-52; Diès, *Philèbe*, lxxvii-lxxviii.) Benitez, *Forms in Plato's "Philebus"*, 103-105, sees that "Protarchus is the one who brings up ships and shipbuilding, not Socrates," and comments: "This change of speaker may be significant, and ought to make us wonder whether the case of ships and shipbuilding is accepted by Socrates as an example or analogy" (104). But Benitez does not see how Socrates' own example points the way to a proper understanding of this distinction as an ontological one. Scholars maintaining the ontological interpretation include Ferber, "Platos Polemik," 153 and Hampton, *Pleasure, Knowledge, and Being*, 74.

relation of lovers to their beloveds (53d9–10). Now a lover does not produce his beloved, at least not in the way that shipbuilding produces ships. The beloved is an already existing thing, for the sake of which the lover does that which characterizes him as a lover. If the restoration (coming-into-being) of a natural harmony is analogous to the activity of a lover, then that for the sake of which the restoration comes to be will not be its product, the natural harmony, but rather something else, already existing, that stands over and above both the process of restoration and its product. On this account, neither the restoration, nor the natural harmony to which it leads, nor the pleasure that it incidentally produces if it is of sufficient magnitude, would be in the class of the good. The theory that results from taking Socrates' example seriously has obvious connections with the doctrine of *eros* in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.<sup>22</sup> What is important for our purposes is that the argument Socrates uses to show that pleasure conceived as coming-into-being cannot be in the class of the good does not depend on the identification of pleasure and the restoration of a natural harmony. Socrates's argument works even if pleasure is conceived as a coming-into-being or process produced in the soul by such a restoration.

Our investigation has shown, then, that the three statements of a general account of pleasure, found at the beginning, middle, and end of the long discussion of pleasure in the *Philebus*, are mutually consistent. Pleasure, on this account, is a psychic process of a special sort, caused by the restoration, when that restoration is a change of sufficient magnitude, of a natural harmony in either body or soul. As I remarked earlier, however, since this account is applicable only to pleasures caused by an actual restoration of body or soul, it does not cover anticipatory or emotional pleasures. But of these latter kinds of pleasure Plato does not give accounts that are unrelated to the restorative model. As we shall see, Socrates' treatment of these pleasures suggests a modification of the account of pleasure at which we have arrived, a modification that produces an account applicable to all kinds of pleasure.

### 3. PLEASURES OF ANTICIPATION

Pleasure, according to the account we have presented so far, is a psychic process caused by a process, whether bodily or psychic, that is a restoration to harmony. The fact that pleasure is not identical to such restoration, but caused by it, leaves open the possibility that pleasure may be caused by something that, though not itself a restoration, shares some of its causal properties. Pleasures of anticipation and emotional pleasures are caused, I suggest, not by actual restorations, but by certain complex images which involve the mental

<sup>22</sup> So too Frede, "Disintegration and Restoration," 64 n 1.

representation of such restorations. More precisely, they are caused by images representing both the conditions of such a restoration and the pleasure ensuing on such a restoration.

To see how this complex image might itself produce pleasure, we need to consider more closely the nature of the psychic process that pleasure is. The pleasure that is caused by a restoration is clearly a certain kind of awareness; yet it is not an awareness of that restoration, as such. To take one of Socrates' examples: the pain of being cold is caused by the solidification of one's internal moisture, while the pleasure of being warmed in such circumstances is caused by the dissolution of these congelations (322a6–8). Yet the pleasure caused by such a restoration can scarcely involve an awareness that one's frozen internal moisture is melting; the doctor or natural philosopher is the one who has such knowledge, not the person feeling the pleasure. Indeed, it seems that this pleasure has no cognitive or propositional content at all. It may appropriately be called a mere feeling, so long as it is understood that not every restoration causes the same feeling: just as the causes are different, so are the feelings they produce.<sup>23</sup>

Now restorative pleasures can be caused by psychic as well as by bodily processes; an example of the former sort is the pleasure of learning, which Socrates describes in terms of repletion (cf. 52a5–6), the same mode of restoring natural harmony involved in such bodily pleasures as those of eating and drinking. But a different sort of psychic process may also produce pleasure: namely, the psychic process of representing oneself as in conditions one thinks would be pleasant and as enjoying them. In the past, one's being pleased under such conditions was a product of the restoration of some bodily or psychic harmony; as the discussion above has shown, however, one is not explicitly aware of the nature of that restoration. Similarly, the cognition that produces a reflective pleasure does not have as part of its content the actual bodily or psychic restoration; its content is that of oneself in pleasant conditions and feeling pleasure.

This suggestion will grow clearer as we consider the dialogue's treatment

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<sup>23</sup> Frede, "Disintegration and Restoration," maintains that "Plato's definition of pleasure as a perceived feeling of restoration . . . precludes the identification of pleasure with a simple indistinct feeling that merely accompanies these processes or results from them." She argues that on such a view, "it does not matter where the pleasure comes from (push-pin or poetry); all that matters is that we are pleased" (444). But surely Plato can maintain qualitative, even moral, distinctions among pleasures conceived as noncognitive feelings. Furthermore, even "reflective" pleasures, caused by cognitions of certain sorts, are not, on my interpretation of the *Philebus*, cognitive. (In denying that any pleasures in the *Philebus* are cognitive in the sense of having propositional content, I differ from most writers who have focussed on the discussion of false pleasures in the dialogue. In my view, nothing in the discussion of false pleasures requires that such pleasures, as opposed to their causes, have propositional content.)

of the pleasures of anticipation. These pleasures are important in the larger scheme of the dialogue because they provide the element of pleasure in the mixture of pleasure and pain that is desire.<sup>24</sup> To understand the cause of pleasures of anticipation, then, we may look to Socrates' discussion of desire, and specifically thirst, concerning which Socrates and Protarchus have the following exchange:

Soc.: I suppose we say, from time to time, that a person thirsts for something.

Prot.: Of course.

Soc.: Which means he is being emptied?

Prot.: Yes.

Soc.: Now is thirst a desire?

Prot.: Yes, a desire for drink.

Soc.: For drink, or for the replenishment of drink?

Prot.: I guess for the replenishment. (34e9–35a2)

In what follows Socrates and Protarchus concern themselves with the thirsting person's cognitive relation to replenishment, ignoring any relation such a person may have to drink. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to suppose that drink is mentioned here only to be discarded as a wrong answer to the question of the object of thirst. Rather, it reminds us that to understand thirst, we shall have to understand not only the cognitive relation of the thirsting person to replenishment, but also how that relation is related to that person's obvious cognitive relation to drink.

Socrates suggests that the thirsting person "grasps hold of replenishment through memory" of past experiences of replenishment (cf. 35b11–c1). Such past experiences were experiences of drinking, in which the drinking person was aware, however, not of bodily replenishment as such (i.e., of the rise in water-content in various bodily organs), but rather of the pleasure that such replenishment causes. Now the passage with which we are concerned occurs before Socrates explicitly makes the distinction between replenishment and the pleasure that it causes (at 43b1–c6); Socrates and Protarchus still conceive of pleasure in such a way that the first can say, and the second agree, that "the force of moisture replenishing again what has been dried out is pleasure" (31e10–32a1). Looking at the discussion of thirst from the point of view of the

<sup>24</sup> See 47c6–7: "Whenever a person is being emptied, he desires replenishment, and insofar as he anticipates this, he rejoices [*elpizôn men chairei*], but insofar as he is being emptied, he is in pain [*kenoumenos de algei*]." Most commentators suppose that 35e9–36c1 shows that there is no anticipatory pleasure in cases where one despairs of attaining the object of one's desire. But such a view is mistaken, as the use of *pothos* at 36a6 in connection with such a situation suggests. *Pothos* (yearning) is itself a mixture of psychic pleasure and psychic pain (see 47e1, 50b7). The very intensity of the pain of a despairing desire derives from the moment of pleasure contained in it. H.-G. Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, tr. R. Wallace (New Haven, 1991), 160–61, is the only scholar I know who interprets along similar lines.

account of pleasure as later revised, we can see that what the thirsting person "has hold of by memory" is not the bodily replenishment as such, but the pleasure that that replenishment caused.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the thirsting person typically has got cognitive hold of something more: namely, the conditions in the past that gave rise to this pleasure,<sup>26</sup> i.e., drinking. It would seem, then, that thirst typically involves a cognition that one's drinking would produce pleasure. The pleasure of anticipation is the pleasure that entertaining this cognition itself produces.

The cognition that one's drinking would be pleasant, on this account, itself produces pleasure. The causal relation here is similar to that in play when the act of drinking itself produces pleasure. In the latter case, the actual restoration of a bodily harmony produces a psychic motion that is pleasure; in the former, entertaining an image of (the conditions of) such a restoration (and the pleasure it produces) produces a similar psychic motion. In order for the actual restoration to take place and produce pleasure, the natural harmony in question must have been disrupted; so too, it seems plausible to suggest, for the imagined restoration to produce pleasure, the natural harmony must have been disrupted (as is the case in the thirsting person), or the disruption of that harmony must itself be cognitively entertained.<sup>27</sup> In the former case, the imagined restoration produces a psychic effect similar to that of an actual restoration. It might be thought that it does so merely through association; yet I suspect that Plato looks on the situation somewhat differently. The imagined restoration produces pleasure not simply because it has been associated with such pleasure, but rather specifically because it is an image of the restoration that would produce such pleasure. The image itself has the ability to fulfill the relevant lack, or restore the relevant harmony. Or rather, as an appearance of such restoration, the image can appear to fulfill the relevant lack, without, in fact, doing so. Hence the persistence of the pain of the disrupted harmony alongside the pleasure caused by the apparent restoration. Although Plato's emphasis on

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<sup>25</sup> In discussing anticipatory pleasure commentators often switch, without comment, from talking about replenishment to talking about pleasure. Thus Voigtländer, *Die Lust und das Gute*, first says that during thirst we remember "den früheren Zustand der Anfüllung" (132), and later says that we remember "des Angenehmen" (134). See also the quotation from Susemihl in note 8 above.

<sup>26</sup> Presumably thirst does not essentially involve cognition of something that would relieve it; one might simply have the memory of pleasure without remembering what gave that pleasure to one. But any desire that is going to guide action requires cognition both of the pleasure that attends restoration and of conditions that would produce it.

<sup>27</sup> That is to say: the imagined disruption of a natural harmony may provide the context that enables the imagining of restoration to produce pleasure. When we enjoy in prospect a good meal, we are either actually hungry, or imagine ourselves as being hungry when we eat it.

the role of images in causing this sort of pleasure may strike us as strange, a theory of this sort has been attractive to a variety of thinkers. Freud's theory of dreams as wish-fulfillment, for example, is founded on the notion that psychic representations of oneself obtaining what one needs can produce a pleasure like that produced by actually obtaining it.<sup>28</sup>

Our discussion of the anticipatory pleasure involved in thirst, then, leads us to modify in the following way our formulation of the account of pleasure Plato offers in the *Philebus*. Pleasure is a conscious psychic process, a feeling, caused either by a bodily or psychic restoration to natural harmony, or by the cognition of the conditions (and pleasant consequences) of some such restoration in the past. This account is corroborated by its clear application to the complex example of a pleasure of anticipation that Socrates adduces in his discussion of false pleasures:

Soc.: A person often sees an unstinted amount of gold accruing to himself, along with many pleasures taken in that gold; and most of all he gazes on himself painted into the picture and intensely pleased with himself. (40a10–12)

Socrates is referring to mental pictures (called variously *eikones* [39c4], *zôgraphêmata* [39d7], *phantasmata ezôgraphêmata* [40a9]), the entertaining of which is one way of experiencing hope or expectation.<sup>29</sup> There are two components to the picture he here describes: the individual's coming into great wealth, and that individual's feeling great pleasure. The individual is able to connect these two components because in the past the possession of money has led (through restorations the precise nature of which the individual need not have in mind) to pleasant feeling. The individual's hope consists in his entertaining this composite picture of himself enjoying a financial windfall in the future; the pleasure that this hope produces in him is the present pleasure of anticipation.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Freud considers dreams prompted by the body's need for water to be the clearest illustration of his theory. Cf. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, tr. J. Strachey (New York, 1965), 157: "If I can succeed in appeasing my thirst by *dreaming* that I am drinking, then I need not wake up in order to quench it" (emphasis in original). Freud also refers (158 n.) to Isaiah 29:8: "It shall be . . . as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh."

<sup>29</sup> Socrates holds that the cognition involved in hoping need not be "illustrated," but can have as its intentional object a bare proposition; see 40a6–7.

<sup>30</sup> It is sometimes thought that Socrates, and Plato, confuse the image of the future pleasure and the present pleasure that entertaining that image causes (see Gosling and Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, 438). However, Socrates very plainly distinguishes between the two at 42b8–c3. Socrates' use of various forms of *hêdonê pseudês* to refer to the picture of a future pleasure in his discussion of the gold-example (40b6–7, c1, c4–5), while elsewhere using that expression for the present pleasure caused by entertaining such a picture (cf. 40e3, 9–10), is to be explained in terms of the dialectical strategy Plato has Socrates employ to get Protarchus to acknowledge the existence of actual pleasures that it is meaningful to call false.

## 4. EMOTIONAL PLEASURES: MALICIOUS LAUGHTER

As we have seen, the pleasure of anticipation is caused, not by a bodily process, but by a psychic one. Furthermore, it differs from such psychic pleasures as those of learning in being caused not by the restoration of a natural harmony, but by the cognition of oneself as enjoying conditions that would cause such a restoration. Such cognition is reflective; hence I call the pleasures they cause reflective, too. I shall argue in this section that the pleasures and pains involved in emotional experience are also reflective in the sense of being caused by a cognition of oneself. The reflective cognitions in these cases are, however, more complex than those involved in anticipatory pleasure. Therefore before turning to the pleasures and pains of malicious laughter, the example of emotional pleasure and pain Socrates analyzes most carefully in the *Philebus*, I shall turn to a case of reflective pain that is of intermediate complexity, and which Socrates and Protarchus treat in passing. I refer to the pain caused by the realization that one has forgotten something one once knew.

The exchange which Socrates and Protarchus have on this subject is as follows:

Soc.: If, to people who are filled up with learning, there later occur losses through forgetfulness, do you observe any pains in these losses?

Prot.: Not, at any rate, as a natural occurrence, but I do in certain calculations [*logismois*] about the experience, when the deprived person feels pain because of need.<sup>31</sup>

Soc.: Well, dear man [*ô makarie*], for now, at least, we are going through precisely the experiences of nature alone, without calculation. (52a5-b3)

Although Socrates is concerned in this passage to show that the pleasures of learning need not be accompanied by pain, his addressing Protarchus with the expression *ô makarie* hints that Plato means us to take due notice of what Protarchus says.<sup>32</sup> Protarchus concurs with Socrates that the loss of knowledge—which we must understand as the disruption of a psychic harmony which is in some sense natural—does not itself cause pain. However, some sort of reflection on that loss does.<sup>33</sup> The scenario Protarchus evidently has

<sup>31</sup> *dia tèn chreian*. Diès, Waterfield, and Frede translate similarly. Hackforth and Gosling prefer a different translation of *chreia*. Hackforth: "he feels pain because of the usefulness of what he has lost"; Gosling: "because of its value." These latter translations (especially Gosling's) do not indicate what provokes the reflection of the person who has forgotten, which however the syntax of the clause (cf. the aorist *lupêthêi*) leads us to expect.

<sup>32</sup> J. V. Luce remarks that the vocative *makarie* is "a form of address often used by Socrates in passages of 'pith and moment'" ("A Discussion of *Phaedo* 69a6-c2," *Classical Quarterly* 38 [1944]: 60–64, 60), adducing, besides the *Phaedo* passage he discusses, *Protagoras* 313e5, *Charmides* 157a3, and the discovery of the definition of justice at *Republic* 432d7.

<sup>33</sup> Protarchus' assertion that the pain in question is dependent on calculation and Socrates' apparent agreement show the similarity between this sort of pain and the pleasures of antici-

in mind is one in which one finds oneself in circumstances where the knowledge one once had would be useful. It is only then that one realizes that one has lost that knowledge. Such a realization involves, I suggest, at least two self-representations: on the one hand, one pictures oneself as one was in the past, in full possession of the knowledge one currently needs; on the other, one pictures oneself as currently lacking that knowledge. Entertaining the former self-representation, that is, the representation of oneself with the resources needed to restore some natural harmony, causes (reflective) pleasure; entertaining the latter, a representation of oneself without those resources, causes (reflective) pain.<sup>34</sup> What is important for our purposes is that this reflective pain is caused by a self-representation which gets its content in part from the contrast with the self-representation of oneself as one once was. It is the contrast between one's present lot and one's former possession of knowledge that gives rise to the peculiar pain to which Protarchus and Socrates here refer.

This account of the pain caused by reflection on one's having forgotten something can help explain both the pain of malice and the pleasure of malicious laughter. Just as the pain concerning forgotten knowledge is caused by entertaining an image or representation of oneself that gets its content in part from a comparison with an image of oneself as one used to be, so in the case of malice the pain and pleasure are caused by entertaining images of oneself that get their content in part from a comparison with others (or with images of others). The person who suffers from *phthonos* feels pain because he has an image of himself as, in comparison to other people, lacking certain good things (that is, things the possession of which, he thinks, would enable him, via the restoration of various natural harmonies, to feel pleasure). The spectacle of other people possessing such goods as knowledge, virtue, good looks, and wealth makes the envious person represent himself to himself as lacking in those goods, which representation causes him pain.<sup>35</sup>

The pleasure that the malicious person feels at the misfortunes of his friends, and the laughter that issues from this mixture of pleasure and pain, are caused by a similar, though still more complicated, comparison between

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tion, which Socrates had earlier asserted to be impossible without calculation: "One who is deprived of calculation [*logismou*] must be unable to calculate that at a later time he will rejoice" (21c5-6).

<sup>34</sup> The experience as a whole, therefore, is a mixture of pleasure and pain, in which the pain predominates.

<sup>35</sup> Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, suggests that it is not the lack of these specific goods that the malicious person feels, but rather his being at a competitive disadvantage in a more abstract sense: "[I]t is essential to ill will that one is not concerned with the thing that one begrudges the other person, as such . . . ; instead, one is concerned that the other person should not get ahead of one or catch up with one by such a success" (185).



the malicious person himself and the object of his laughter. Socrates describes the laughable (*to geloion*) as the vice of self-ignorance, when found in weak or harmless persons. Such self-ignorance involves supposing one possesses good things that one does not. To perceive someone as laughable, Socrates says, is to perceive, among other things, that that person is not in a position to harm one (49b6-c5); such perception therefore involves at least a minimal comparison, in respect of power or social status, between that person and oneself. But it also involves, I suggest, a more extensive comparison. In entertaining the spectacle of someone who thinks he has some good that he in fact does not, the malicious person forms, in contrast, a favorable image of himself, which causes him pleasure.<sup>36</sup> This image cannot simply be the image of himself as possessing the good that the other does not have; such an image, though doubtless (on the account I ascribe to Plato) a source of pleasure, would depend on a contrast merely with the other as not having the good in question, not as imagining himself to possess it. The pleasure distinctive of malicious laughter is a pleasure that results from seeing that the other is self-deluded about the goods he has; the self-image that viewing another in this light evokes by contrast in the malicious person is the image of oneself as *not* self-deluded about one's own good attributes. Seeing oneself as possessing self-knowledge (a self-perception produced through contrast with a ridiculously self-deluded person) is the cause of malicious pleasure. Because the malicious person also suffers pain from viewing himself, in general, as lacking goods other persons possess, his malicious pleasure is sharpened by contrast with pain, and issues in laughter.

Two more points remain to be made about this account of malicious pleasure and pain. First of all, it implies that the malicious person himself lacks self-knowledge; for if that person in fact knew what goods he possessed, he would not allow his self-image to be influenced by a comparison with others.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, this account makes clear why Socrates thinks that it makes no difference whether the persons who help cause the malicious person's pleasure and pain are actual persons with whom he has dealings, or merely artistic representations on stage.<sup>38</sup> The pleasure and pain of malice are immediately caused by entertaining a certain image of oneself; other persons contribute to the experience only in that one's cognition of their situation serves to modify one's self-

<sup>36</sup> Compare the similar account of Hobbes, *Essay on Human Nature* (in *English Works*, ed. W. Molesworth [London, 1839-1845], IV 46): "The passion of laughter is nothing else but *sudden glory* arising from some sudden *conception* of some *eminency* in ourselves, by *comparison* with the *infirmity* of others, or with our own infirmity" (emphases in original).

<sup>37</sup> The malicious person is, therefore, so long as he is harmless, himself ridiculous.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 49c3-4: self-ignorance in strong people is harmful, "both itself, and as many things as are images of it" (*autê te kai hosai eikones autês eisin*); also 50b1-4.

image by contrast. An artistic image of persons in the relevant conditions may serve as the distorting backdrop to our own self-image just as well as actual persons in such conditions.

The above account of malicious pleasures and pains goes far beyond what is explicitly given in the *Philebus*, though it does, I hope, build plausibly on suggestions in that dialogue. (As in some other late dialogues,<sup>39</sup> in the *Philebus* simpler cases are treated first and with great fullness, while more complex cases are treated towards the end of the dialogue with a concision that challenges the reader to work out the details.) Socrates' and Protarchus' remarks on the pain consequent on realizing one has forgotten something suggest how one's self-image can be modified by contrast with another; and while in the discussion of *phthonos* no mention is made of the malicious person's comparing himself with others, that account implies, as we have seen, at least a minimal comparison of this sort. The nature of the phenomenon itself suggests that a more extensive comparison is involved. Moreover, the interpretation of Plato's analysis of malicious pleasure we have proposed above may derive corroboration of a sort from a passage in Plutarch which presents an analysis of another of the emotional conditions Socrates mentions in the dialogue, *zêlos* or zealous emulation. Although Plutarch's Platonic sympathies are well known,<sup>40</sup> we are scarcely in a position confidently to assert that he drew his analysis of *zêlos* from a Platonic source. Nonetheless, his analysis shows striking parallels with the account of *phthonos* given above, and to that extent at least suggests that that account is Platonic in spirit. The parallels consist in Plutarch's view that zealous emulation is a mixture of pleasure and pain, each of which is caused by a comparison the person in this condition makes between himself and the object of his emulation. Such a person, Plutarch writes, "compares himself with the acts and deeds of a good and perfect man, at the same time gnawed by the awareness of his deficiency [*tôî suneidoti tou endeous daknomenos*] and rejoicing because of his expectation and yearning [*di' elpida kai pothon chairôn*] . . ." (*De Profectibus in Virtute* 84c-d).<sup>41</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this essay I have argued that a single generic account of pleasure underlies Plato's discussion of pleasure in the *Philebus*. Plato's discussion includes three explicit treatments of pleasure as such, which are found at the beginning,

<sup>39</sup> The *Theaetetus* is a good example of such a dialogue.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. R. Flacelière and J. Irigoin, *Plutarque. Oeuvres morales*, I, Première partie (Paris, 1987), cxxiv: "Plutarque . . . a toujours maintenu fermement sa pensée dans l'axe de Platon, sans jamais perdre le cap."

<sup>41</sup> This passage is quoted by E. Milobenski, *Das Neid in der griechischen Philosophie* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 50 n. 98.

middle and end of the section on pleasure. These three treatments, though differing superficially for reasons I have suggested, essentially agree on an analysis of pleasure as a conscious psychic process caused by a restoration of a natural harmony in either body or soul. This analysis does not directly apply to two important kinds of pleasure treated in the dialogue, namely, anticipatory and emotional pleasure. But Plato's discussion of these kinds of pleasure, far from showing that there can be no single overarching account of pleasure, suggests how the theory present in the three explicit treatments of generic pleasure may be modified so as to cover these apparently anomalous cases. Anticipatory and emotional pleasures, Socrates suggests, are brought about by one's entertaining a certain image of oneself; for this reason such pleasures can be termed "reflective." The general account of pleasure that would apply to both reflective and nonreflective pleasures, then, reads as follows: Pleasure is a conscious psychic process caused either by a restoration of a natural harmony in body or soul, or by entertaining a representation of oneself as in the conditions that cause such restorative pleasure. To put it more briefly and only slightly misleadingly: pleasure may be caused by the image as well as by the reality of bodily or psychic restoration.

Plato nowhere in the *Philebus* has any of his characters enunciate the general account of pleasure which I have argued emerges from the dialogue. This omission is due to the nature of Plato's manner of presenting his philosophical views: namely, in such a way that the reader is provoked to pursue certain lines of inquiry herself, following up indications in the dialogue as to how that inquiry might profitably proceed. This style of philosophical writing is recognized by many to be that of the earlier dialogues of Plato; I am convinced that it is the style of at least some of the later dialogues as well. Looking at the *Philebus* in this way will allow us to understand the philosophical content of this most underappreciated of Platonic dialogues, and the artfulness with which it is communicated. I hope the present essay has made a first contribution towards this goal.<sup>4\*</sup>

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