

# Rethinking the Contest Between Pleasure and Wisdom: Plato's *Philebus* 11a-14b

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**Abstract:** The *Philebus* starts by setting up a contest. Two positions, Revised Hedonism and Reason as I call them, offer competing views on the good. The two positions are modified versions of the long-standing ideas that either pleasure or wisdom are the good. They are formulated, however, in distinctive ways. In response the interlocutors investigate, broadly and extensively, what goes on in our minds. The emerging project includes not only psychology and epistemology, but also the metaphysics of plurality. Moreover, both positions construe good as good-for: the good for human beings. This will prompt the interlocutors to pursue nothing less than the metaphysics of the kind of mix — a limit-unlimited combination — that a good human life is. The chapter reads the beginning of the *Philebus* as launching this *tour de force* across philosophical disciplines.

**Keywords:** pleasure, reason, hedonism, good, human good, *Republic*, *Philebus*, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The *Philebus* is a philosophical inquiry into the good.<sup>1</sup> The dialogue's interlocutors interpret this investigation as a project in ethics: they aim to find out which life is best for human beings.<sup>2</sup> And yet they embrace, without restraint, inquiries in the philosophy of mind, epistemology, physics, and metaphysics. As I will argue, 11a-14b lays the groundwork for this broad conception of ethics.<sup>3</sup> Two views about the good, familiar from earlier dialogues, compete: that the good is pleasure or wisdom.<sup>4</sup> These views are formulated, however, in terms that are unfamiliar. First, good is explicitly understood as the good for human beings. Second, a wide range of cognitive and affective goings-on in the human mind is mentioned and thereby flagged as relevant to the current investigation. Third, and picking up on this range, plurality is introduced as a topic that leads directly into metaphysics.

This, then, is the view I defend: the *Philebus* contains a distinctive approach to ethics, one that is—given the difficulties of reconstructing a dialogue that is unabashedly complex and that refuses to take shortcuts—still understudied and underrated. To avoid any unclarity, let me state right away that versions of the ideas that interest me in the *Philebus* also figure in other Platonic dialogues, and in particular in the *Republic*, which too covers psychology, epistemology, metaphysics, and more, in the service of a line of questioning that is primarily ethical. What I mean by claiming that the *Philebus*'s approach to ethics is distinctive is that it is rich, sophisticated, and self-contained in such a fashion that the dialogue can serve as the starting-point of ancient-inspired approaches in ethics just as much as the *Republic* or Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*). And though the *Philebus* shares much with both of these better known works, it invites lines of investigation in ethics that are not simply the same.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Panos Dimas, Gabriel Richardson-Lear and the editorial board for inviting me to the conference leading up to this volume, to all participants for discussion, to Christiana Olfert for written comments, and to Jens Haas for input on several drafts of the paper. Verity Harte, Russell Jones, Gabriel Richardson-Lear and Susan Sauvé-Meyer provided much appreciated feedback.

<sup>2</sup> This concern is phrased both in terms of goodness/the best, and in terms of what makes human lives happy. For the purposes of this chapter, I set aside discussion of the difference and relationship between these questions, treating them instead as broadly speaking one.

<sup>3</sup> I argue for this, with a view to the dialogue as a whole, in "A Blueprint for Ethics," Chapter 1 of my book project entitled *Desiring the Good: Ancient Proposals and Contemporary Theory*; and briefly in (2010).

<sup>4</sup> In speaking of earlier dialogues, I stipulate a conventional relative chronology, according to which the *Philebus* is among the latest dialogues.

My focus is on how the *Philebus*'s approach to ethics is framed at the beginning. The structure of this chapter is supplied by the three ways in which, on my reading, the *Philebus* re-conceives of a familiar conversation. I start with discussion of good as good-for human beings (section 1). Next I turn to the scope of what ethics must study if it takes two competing claims about the good for human beings—which I call Revised Hedonism and Reason—as requiring analysis of the very nature of pleasure and thinking (section 2). I end with remarks on the way in which affective and cognitive activities are, each in their own way, pluralities (section 3).<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Good as Good-For Human Beings

### *1.1. The good for all human beings*

At the beginning of the *Philebus*, Socrates finds himself in conversation with two interlocutors: Philebus, a proponent of hedonism, and Protarchus, who takes it upon himself to defend Philebus's position. Their conversation addresses the question “what is the good?” (Q, as I call it) and two candidate replies, versions of which are familiar to readers of Plato and other ancient texts: either pleasure or wisdom is the good.<sup>6</sup> In the *Republic*, discussion of these two views is flagged as well-worn. Both are taken to be evidently flawed (*Rp.* VI, 505b-d). Why then do we encounter them in the *Philebus* as if they were live competitors?

One reason, and the reason I shall defend, is that we are not simply encountering age-old replies to an age-old question. Instead the *Philebus* re-thinks both: the question and the competitor

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<sup>5</sup> This third part of my analysis is brief. It introduces topics that are discussed *in extenso* in later sections of the dialogue, and that are properly the subject of later chapters in this book. Paolo Crivelli's contribution discusses an idea formulated in 14c8, that the way in which pleasure and knowledge are many implies the paradox that “the many are one and the one many”; the one-many theme is pursued further in section 23b-27c, analyzed in Mary Louis Gill's contribution. On the dialogue's ranking of kinds of knowledge in 55c-59c, cf. Jessica Moss's chapter.

<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the *Philebus*, the interlocutors are as if were in mid-conversation. Presumably, they have already left behind a simpler conversation, where one may just say what one thinks is good. On the question of whether the beginning of the *Philebus* is concerned with what is good or with the good, see Delcomminette (2006).

responses. This departure is not so dramatic as to make the conversation unrecognizable. Now as before, the motivation behind Q—the question “what is the good?”—is to find out what is good for human beings. In a first stab at characterizing the *Philebus*’s approach, one may say that Plato forefronts this motivation behind Q. He does not conceive of Q as asking, immediately, what goodness is. Instead he pursues, for long stretches of the dialogue and in its own right, the question of what makes a human life a good human life.

In a sense, the philosophical concerns relevant to this line of inquiry are familiar. It is a commonplace about early Socratic dialogues that Plato, or Plato’s Socrates, urges readers to care about their souls and to make an effort to find out how they should live. Plato’s *Republic* is concerned with *our* virtue: why it is to our advantage to be just, what justice in a human being amounts to, how human souls (and cities) should be shaped so that we become virtuous and happy. In this way, the *Republic* is naturally read as asking what it means for us to lead good lives. And yet, in the *Republic* this line of inquiry begins with questions about the just rather than the good; and once it turns to the good, it is immediately concerned with asking what the good itself—the Form of the Good—is. The *Philebus*, on the other hand, sticks to a remarkable degree to the project that is framed at the outset: a study of the human good.<sup>7</sup>

The kind of ethics that is explicitly and emphatically concerned with the human good is often associated with the *NE*. Aristotle, according to standard readings, conceives of ethics as an inquiry into the human good and the good human life. He rejects, in *NE* I.6, what is taken to be a Platonic account of the good, according to which the good is the good itself, one, and separate.<sup>8</sup> Here good is universal and univocal: there is one property and predicate ‘good,’ which figures in every true ascription of goodness. Against this, Aristotle introduces multivocity: the good is “said in many

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<sup>7</sup> Delcomminette (2006) calls the project of the *Philebus* “agathologie.” He thinks that the *Philebus* goes beyond the *Republic* in revealing the “essence (*logos*)” of the good (p. 13). I defend a different approach, one that does not view the *Philebus* as completing the project of the *Republic* by enabling the reader to find out what, in Delcomminette’s terms, the Good “essentially” is. On my view, the *Philebus* shares many concerns with the *Republic*; nevertheless, it frames its own questions.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Shields (2015).

ways.” Famously and among other things, this means that the good for fish and the good for human beings are not the same (*NE* VI.7, 1141a22-28).

This sketch, incomplete though it is, brings to light a question about the beginning of the *Philebus*. Is Plato doing here what we take Aristotle to do?<sup>9</sup> In other words, why does Plato begin his inquiry by emphasizing that, in ethics, we are concerned with what is good for human beings? Here are the formulations that Socrates employs in his initial sketch of the contest. Philebus’s position addresses what is good for all living beings (ἀγαθὸν εἶναί [...] πᾶσι ζώοις, 11b4); the hedonism he defends considers human beings explicitly as a subset of living beings. Sketching his own position, Socrates speaks of all those, living now as well as future generations (πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσί τε καὶ ἔσομένοις, 11c3), who can benefit from what he considers the good, thus presumably restricting his claim to human beings. In collectively referring to both positions, Socrates says their dispute is concerned with all human beings (ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι, 11d5).<sup>10</sup>

These formulations flag that what is being studied is good-for—in other words relative goodness.<sup>11</sup> They provide *relata* of good-for and each of the three *relata* contains an all-quantifier. The interlocutors will not address, say, the difference between what is good for me versus what is good for you, or good for 5th century Athenians versus some group of people in some other place and time. Though the topic is relative goodness, the *relatum* does not have the scope that it tends to have in relativism—an individual person or a culture. Instead inquiry aims to determine what, in general, is good for human beings.

Socrates’ formulations signal that inquiry will be concerned with good-for also in a second way: via the very vocabulary that is used for ‘good.’ Socrates initially employs the standard term, ἀγαθὸν (11b4). A few lines down he speaks of what is better and more agreeable (ἀμείνω καὶ

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<sup>9</sup> The relative chronology of the *Philebus* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a difficult matter. I am assuming that *NE* I.6 captures one position that can plausibly be characterized as Platonic, and that Aristotle’s interest is primarily philosophical: he aims to think through a schematized position, not to offer exegesis or historical reconstruction of Plato’s views in all their detail and complexities.

<sup>10</sup> It is a further question how the good of the universe relates to the good for living beings and human beings (“what is the good in (*en*) the universe?”, 64a); cf. Hendrik Lorenz’s contribution to this volume.

<sup>11</sup> The formulation “what is the good?” (Q) is later used as shorthand for the topic of conversation, for example, 13b6 and 13e5.

λόῳ, 11c1) to all who can attain it, thereby implying that the good is an object of desire and acquisition—something that humans, if they attain it, are affected by in positive ways. Again just two lines further, he treats ‘useful’ as equivalent with ‘good.’ We are looking, he says, for what is the most useful thing of all (ὠφελιμώτατον πάντων, 11c2). Accordingly, good as good-for is what *does good to its relatum*. A moment later Socrates reveals what the good-for human beings does: it makes for a happy life (τὸν βίον εὐδαίμονα παρέχειν, 11d6).

Good-for, as this notion is understood in the *Philebus*, thus is relative goodness without being relativistic, and it is not an epistemic notion. Good-for is not, say, what appears good from a human point of view. The claim is that there is such a thing as what is good for human beings, and that is what affects human beings in good ways. The notion of use or benefit makes this even more explicit. The relevant conceptual tie is most easily seen in Latin: what is good (*bonum/bene*) does good (*beneficere*). Plato’s vocabulary does not lend itself to this kind of linguistic illustration. But conceptually, this is precisely the idea: what is good is good-doing or good-making.

## 1.2. A novel focus on relata

How radical a departure is this line of inquiry for Plato? I suggested that the relevant notion of good-for is developed in two ways: via its relata, and via the vocabulary employed for the good. The innovation of the *Philebus*, I submit, lies in the first of these dimensions rather than in the second. The conceptual resources for discussion of the good as good-making are not new. For example, paradigmatic defenses of the Socratic paradox that everyone desires the good invoke the premise that the bad harms and, by implication, that the good benefits (*Meno* 77b-78b).<sup>12</sup> The premise that the good benefits also figures, for example, in the function argument in *Republic* I, 335b-d, the beginning of *Republic* II, and the *Republic*’s discussion of how poets should portray the gods (ὠφέλιμον τὸ ἀγαθόν, *Rp.* II, 379b11). Similarly, the tie between the good and happiness is part

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Barney (2010).

of pre-Phileban discussions; witness, say, the *Symposium*'s claim that happiness is possession of goods (205a).<sup>13</sup> Further passages could be added. But one thing seems clear: there is a sense in which Plato has been conceiving of good as good-for already in earlier dialogues, including the very dialogue that scholars have in mind as Aristotle's foil in *NE* I.6.

One could hold that it is the nature of the good itself that it benefits. The good is good-making.<sup>14</sup> This is conceptually close to thinking of good as good-for. And yet it can be put forward as an analysis of the nature of the good itself—as part of a universal theory of goodness, according to which goodness is one property that permits of one account, such that every instance of something being good is explicable via this same account. I am not aiming to defend a reading of the *Republic* here; but roughly, this is an approach that may be ascribed to the *Republic*.

What, then, is novel about the beginning of the *Philebus*? In brief, the *Philebus* undertakes a distinctive ethical-metaphysical project. It does not focus on the nature of the good itself. Rather, the dialogue focuses on good-making ingredients of a good human life and offers an account of the metaphysics of human lives. Q as construed at the beginning of the *Philebus* shifts focus on the *relatum* of good-for, on given creatures who can do better or worse. This leads toward a kind of ethics that asks what kind of creatures people are: how to metaphysically understand human lives. A human life, it will turn out, is a limit-unlimited combination and there are better and worse combinations of this sort. This, I propose, is how the beginning of the *Philebus* sets ethics on a distinctive path, a path that includes a distinctive metaphysical project, different from the metaphysics of asking what the good itself is.

### 1.3. Three questions about the good

Suppose my arguments so far are compelling. Should we conclude that Plato abandoned the project that Aristotle ascribes to him and rejects in *NE* I.6? That would be too quick. Right before the

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<sup>13</sup> Those who are happy (*eudaimones*) are happy through possession of goods (*agatha*); we do not ask why someone wants to be happy. That one wants to be happy is a final (*telos*) answer (205a).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sedley (1998); Stephen Makin (1990-91).

dialogue's conclusion, Socrates distinguishes between three lines of inquiry into the good: "what is the good for human beings?" (Q-human beings), "what is the good of/in the universe?" (Q-universe), and "what is the nature of the good itself?" (Q-itself) (64a).<sup>15</sup> This threefold distinction confirms that the dialogue's starting point is well-considered. Plato does not proceed as if Q-human beings and Q-itself just came to the same. Q-human beings and Q-itself are different construals of Q. And Plato has by no means given up on Q-itself. He does not seem to think that Q-human beings replaces Q-itself, nor that Q-human beings and Q-itself are competing as lines of inquiry. Instead he seems to think that Q-itself is especially hard. As Socrates puts it at the end of the *Philebus*, the nature of the good may, in spite of all that was achieved, still be in hiding (64e). Via the current study, the interlocutors can only see it in conjunction with other properties—they as it were fail to isolate it sufficiently and thus we do not attain a full view (65a). Ultimately, the text suggests, we want answers to both: Q-human beings and Q-itself. But this outcome is not presented as defeat. Though one may still want to know what the good itself is, the fact that we do not have an answer to Q-itself is not presented as an impediment for the study of Q-human beings.

Why, in the light of these considerations, does the dialogue start from Q-human beings, turning to the good of the universe when the question of causes for goodness comes up (22d, 28c-31b), and to the nature of the good only briefly at the end (64d-65a)? On the proposed reading, this is a matter of the order of inquiry: ethics, as construed in the *Philebus*, starts by asking what kind of life we would choose (20b-22b) and what we should, on reflection, consider best. The remarkable upshot of the way the conversation proceeds is that this entirely ordinary concern unravels into a series of inquiries: What goes on in our minds when we want things? What kinds of thinking do we engage in? What is, metaphysically, a human life? How should we understand the mix that

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<sup>15</sup> Q-universe studies, like Q-human beings, relative goodness. The summary formulation of three questions about the good, two of which are Q-universe and Q-human beings, uses "in" (ἐν) (64a). In the earlier discussions of the good for human beings, the relevant constructions are naturally (and standardly) translated in terms of good-for. The universe, it seems, is in one way or another a special case. How precisely this should be thought of is not my topic. In order to remain agnostic on this matter, I render Q-human beings in terms of good-for and Q-universe in terms of good-of/in.

makes for a good human life? Via these questions, philosophy of mind, epistemology, physics and metaphysics turn out to be immediately relevant to ethics.

## 2. Revised Hedonism and Reason

### 2.1. Setting up the contest

Here, then, are the two competing views as stated at the outset of the dialogue:

*[...] what is good for all creatures is to enjoy themselves, pleasure and delight, and whatever else goes together with that kind of thing. (11b3-6)*

*We contend that [...] gaining insights, understanding, and remembering, and what is akin to them, correct doxa and true planning, are better than pleasure and more agreeable to all who can attain them. (11b6-c1)<sup>16</sup>*

Let's call the two contenders Revised Hedonism and Reason. Revised Hedonism and Reason are responses to a question phrased in the singular, "what is *the* good for human beings?" They identify one good—though via a range of activities—as the good. Each claims that a certain state or condition of the soul (ἔξιν ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσιν) is the good (11d4). These are not 'static' conditions, but two ways in which the soul can be engaged in activity. The two positions are, accordingly, that enjoying oneself (χαίρειν) and being wise (or thinking in wise and insightful ways, φρονεῖν) are the good (11d8-9).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> All translations from the *Philebus* are adaptations, with changes, of Frede (1993). Cf. Hackforth (1945) and Frede (1997).

<sup>17</sup> Later on, Plato refers to Revised Hedonism and Reason as the lives of ἡδονή and φρόνησις (e.g., 20e). I take it that these are placeholders, referencing the more complex descriptions at the beginning.

Revised Hedonism and Reason are versions of traditional positions, which we can call Traditional Hedonism (“pleasure is the good”) and Wisdom (“wisdom is the good”). Revised Hedonism and Reason, I submit, differ sufficiently from Traditional Hedonism and Wisdom to deserve their own designations. Socrates signals departure from Traditional Hedonism with the very first verb: τὸ χαίρειν. The term for pleasure that is standardly used in Traditional Hedonism is ἡδονή. By itself, ἡδονή may evoke the presumed lowliness of hedonism. The verb χαίρειν, however, does not elicit the same visceral reaction. In Socrates’s formulation, it supplies ἡδονή with contextual connotations that pull away from a conception of pleasure as lowly. In full, Revised Hedonism is the view that enjoying oneself, pleasure, delight (τέρψις), and what ‘goes together with these’ are the good. The third term, τέρψις, is traditionally used for taking pleasure in food and drink, or similar bodily pleasures.<sup>18</sup> Set next to ἡδονή, τέρψις signals that these bodily pleasures are merely a subset of all pleasures. Flanked by χαίρειν and τέρψις, ἡδονή is thus used as a general term for pleasure. Like χαίρειν, ἡδονή can refer to any kind of enjoyment or pleasure, including, say, the pleasure of thinking through an argument. Revised Hedonism is the claim that pleasures of whatever kind are good.

Socrates’s list of pleasure-terms starts with a verb and this signals a shift. Traditional Hedonism and Wisdom conceive of the good as a possession: as something an agent has successfully attained. To enjoy oneself, as Revised Hedonism has it, is on the contrary an activity. The focus on activity is even more pronounced in Reason. Instead of envisaging a life in which wisdom has been attained, Socrates speaks of wise thinking, as we may gloss the first two items on the list, τὸ φρονεῖν and τὸ νοεῖν.<sup>19</sup> Together they are plausibly taken to refer to thinking that (i) is factive

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<sup>18</sup> In *Topics*, 112 b 21-25, Aristotle says that Prodicus (a sophist) divides pleasures (*hedonai*, pl.) into joy (*charis*) and delight (*terpsis*) and good cheer (*euphrosune*); but that really these are just names for the same thing, pleasure. Along similar lines, I take it that Plato aims to cover a wide range of pleasures, rather than introduce a distinction between *chairein*, *hedonê* and *terpsis*. Cf. Kurath (1921); Chantraine (1933); Lefebvre and Villard (2006); Gosling and Taylor (1984); Cosenza and Laurenti (1967).

<sup>19</sup> Frede misleadingly translates *hexis* in 11d4 as if Socrates referred to ‘possessions’, which is a traditional way to refer to goods that are pursued in the pursuit of happiness (cf. *Symposium* 199-207). But in this traditional account, ‘possession’ translates *ktêsis*, not *hexis*. The Socrates of the *Philebus* says that each of them will argue that some state or disposition of the soul (ἔξιν ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσιν) is the good (11d4). And yet, this is

(grasping or understanding something), (ii) covers both the practical and the theoretical domain, (iii) and is held in high esteem, perhaps because it is concerned with worthy matters.<sup>20</sup>

The next item on the list—remembering (μεμνήσθαι)—departs from Wisdom not only by referring to an activity rather than acquired state. Both φρονεῖν and νοεῖν are, broadly speaking, ‘wisdom words’: they are often used for elevated and wise ways of thinking. Remembering can be seen in this light. For example, the Homeric tradition may view having seen and remembering the past as a primary form of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> And Plato himself may develop similar lines of thought when, in his discussions of recollection in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, he thinks of the soul as learning by remembering what it saw in a disembodied state. Nevertheless, for the purposes of referencing Wisdom, remembering is a surprising addition. At the very least, it spells out an aspect of wise thinking that is not mentioned or implicitly referred to, say, in the *Republic*’s reference to Wisdom (505b-d). And in spite of the Homeric tradition as well as Plato’s theory of recollection, remembering is not inherently concerned with important and weighty matters. Later in the *Philebus*, memory figures in remembering that one enjoyed oneself (21c1-2), discriminating an object from nearby or from a distance (38b12-13), taking pain and pleasure in remembered past scenarios (33c), and in discussion of whether desire for X involves prior acquaintance with and memory of X (33c-35d).

How, then, does remembering fare with respect to (i), (ii), and (iii), the features ascribed to φρονεῖν and νοεῖν? Remembering is factive, or rather, it is here understood as factive.<sup>22</sup> Thus criterion (i) is met. Insofar as memory figures in desire, (ii) may seem to apply; by itself, however, remembering is not a form of practical thinking. (iii) does not apply: remembering is unrestricted in scope. Thus the inclusion of remembering in Socrates’ initial sketch of Reason signals a shift

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immediately rephrased in terms of activities. The two positions are, accordingly, that to take pleasure (χαίρειν) and comprehending (φρονεῖν) are the good (11d8-9).

<sup>20</sup> Frede translates “knowing” and “understanding”; I translate “comprehending” and “understanding,” because I prefer to use “knowledge” for ἐπιστήμη.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hussey (1990).

<sup>22</sup> Arguably, there is also another use of μεμνήσθαι, a usage that permits the distinction between successful remembering and misremembering.

away from Wisdom. The *Philebus* will not be concerned exclusively and immediately with the value of possessing wisdom. Instead it will analyze a wider range of successful thinking.

The next items on the list, presumably akin to comprehending, understanding, and remembering, are correct δόξα and true λογισμός. Neither δόξα nor λογισμός is factive. Since both can go wrong, criterion (i)—or a version thereof, securing that only successful thinking is on the list—is only met via a restriction to correct and true instances. Still, with Plato’s discussions of δόξα in the *Republic* in the back of their minds, readers may wonder why δόξα counts at all as ‘akin’ to wisdom.<sup>23</sup> Is not δόξα, whether or not it is correct by its own standards, inherently different from elevated kinds of thinking?<sup>24</sup> The *Republic*’s philosopher, say, loves all wisdom (475b9-10), which involves a turn away from the domain of δόξα. Interpreters tend to presuppose that the relevant notion of δόξα in the *Philebus* does not invoke the different metaphysical domains of the *Republic*. Instead, it is assumed, another well-known conception of δόξα is employed, which has its locus classicus in *Theaetetus* 189e-190a. Here δόξα is belief or judgment in any domain. But it is by no means clear that this rendering of δόξα is adequate for interpreting the *Philebus*, inter alia because later on Socrates associates δόξα, *Republic*-style, with the domain of becoming (59a1-9).<sup>25</sup> Schleiermacher’s construal of δόξα in the *Philebus* takes a third route, neither presupposing the *Republic*’s domain-specific notion of δόξα, nor the judgment-conception of *doxa* from *Theaetetus* 189e-190a. Instead, his translation as representation (“Vorstellung”) is broad and able to accommodate uses of both kinds. It understands δόξα as doxastic thinking that permits a range. The common denominator of doxastic thinking under describes it: it merely says that the cognizer represents

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<sup>23</sup> Plato is serious about this kinship. At 21b, which offers a comparison passage for the list we are considering, Socrates even subsumes true *doxa* under a broad notion of ‘phronetic’ thinking. “Since you would not be in possession of either understanding, memory, knowledge, or true *doxa*, must you not be in ignorance, first of all, about this very question, whether you were enjoying yourself or not, given that you were devoid of any kind of thought?” (21b6-9)

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Vogt (2012).

<sup>25</sup> This question bears on one of the most widely debated proposals in the *Philebus*, namely the claim that pleasures are true and false in ways that compare to how δόξα is true and false (36c-37a). Interpreters tend to presuppose that the comparandum, δόξα, is straightforward. But it is conceivable that, in presupposing that δόξα is well-translated as belief or judgment, one moves too quickly. What if *doxa* in the *Philebus* should be construed differently? Then reconstructions of true and false pleasure that take the comparandum to be true and false belief are flawed.

some content.<sup>26</sup> Belief/judgment is one version of this, namely the version where the represented content is affirmed as being the case.

Now it may seem that only judgments/beliefs are properly assessed as true or false, and that Reason's reference to "correct δόξα" signals that δόξα, as used in *Philebus* 11b, means judgment/belief. But this inference is too fast, and not only because it is conceivable that "correct" and "true" are not equivalent. The *Philebus* is famous for attaching the truth-predicates to attitudes that, today, we would not consider truth-apt, or in other words, attitudes that according to widely accepted premises are not plausibly assessed as true or false. Hence I suggest that, when considering the beginning of the dialogue, we should keep an open mind.

Similar considerations apply to "true λογισμός." It is customary to translate λογισμός as 'calculation'. This translation is well-established via Plato's *Protagoras*, which explores a so-called pleasure/pain calculus.<sup>27</sup> Calculating intuitively seems truth-apt—surely, one can get it right or wrong in quantitative reasoning. But 'calculus' is a metaphorical translation: the relevant reasoning is not purely mathematical. Rather, it is deliberative. The agent decides what to do, and much of the difficulty resides in the fact that her decisions involve future-directed attitudes. That is, λογισμός-thinking is practical thinking. My preferred translation is 'figuring out what to do', where 'figuring out' captures the quasi-mathematical connotations of the term, while 'what to do' captures that we consider a mode of decision making. This is why true λογισμός is by no means a simple term. It involves what we may call a notion of practical truth—of deliberative thinking as truth-apt.

Suppose Revised Hedonism and Reason are sketched along the lines I suggest. To complete the set-up of the contest, Socrates asks: what if there is yet something better—call it X—than χαίρειν or φρονεῖν, as Socrates refers to both positions in abbreviated fashion (11d11-12a5)? Depending on whether X would be more akin (μᾶλλον ... συγγενής) to one or the other, a ranking

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<sup>26</sup> Other kinds of thinking also involve representing some content. I defend a version of this construal in Vogt (forthcoming/a).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Moss (forthcoming).

would emerge. Socrates and Protarchus accept the terms of the competition. Notably, if X is ranked highest, *χαίρειν* or *φρονεῖν* did not win in the sense of identifying ‘the’ good for human beings. They win only relative to each other, by being closer to that which is best.<sup>28</sup>

In setting out these terms of the debate, Socrates moves back and forth between claims of the form “X is good” and claims of the form “the life of X is good.” As discussion proceeds in the *Philebus*, it turns out that no view of the form “X is the good” is compelling. Any reply to Q which identifies one substantive good (or as today we might put it, one value) as ‘the’ good is misguided.<sup>29</sup> In studying the good of human beings, the interlocutors will identify a range of ingredients of a well-mixed life. Similarly, talk about “the life of X” is insufficient. Though this expression may provide room for ingredients other than X in a good life, it stipulates that a good life has only one good-making feature; or, on a weaker reading of the “life of X”-formulation, that this life is structured by the goodness of one core ingredient. But a well-mixed life, as the *Philebus* conceives of it, has several good-making ingredients.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, though 11e-12a completes the set-up of the contest, the type of ranking envisaged here—a ranking of kinds of lives—is *not* the type of ranking the dialogue eventually puts forward. At the end of the *Philebus*, the interlocutors rank causes and ingredients of a well-mixed life, not kinds of lives.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.2. Human Beings as Living Beings

The sequence of *relata*—all living beings (1), all future and presently living beings (2), all human beings (3)—deserves a closer look in yet another respect. The *relatum* of good-for that is widest in scope, all living beings, comes up when Socrates introduces Revised Hedonism (11b3-9). This is no coincidence. Hedonism traditionally refers to non-human animals in the exposition and defense of its claim that pleasure is the good.

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<sup>28</sup> Susan Sauvé Meyer’s chapter in this volume discusses precisely this upshot: that neither of the initial competitors ‘wins’ in the sense of being identified as the good.

<sup>29</sup> Vogt (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Russell Jones’ chapter in this volume discusses the mixture that the Plato of the *Philebus* thinks a good life is.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Harte’s contribution to this volume on the final ranking.

Consider the following argument by Eudoxus, a hedonist from Plato's Academy whose ideas Aristotle discusses in the *NE*:

*Now Eudoxus used to think that pleasure was the good because he saw every sort of creature seeking it, whether rational or non-rational; and since he thought that what was desirable in all cases was what was good [...] and that what was good for every creature, and what every creature sought, was the good. (tr. Rowe, NE X.2, 1172b9-15)*

Epicurus, in his later version of hedonism, makes a similar argument, invoking the behavior of animals and infants as testimony. According to Epicurus, their (presumed) striving for pleasure makes apparent what is naturally—prior to any corruption by education—desirable: pleasure.<sup>32</sup> The end of the *Philebus* provides further evidence that such arguments are stock elements of hedonism. Socrates dismisses traditional hedonism as a view that takes “cattle, horses, and the rest of the animals” to be witnesses for what is, in substance, the human good (67b). As one reaches these final lines of the dialogue, Socrates' negative tone comes as a surprise. Throughout a long and complex investigation, the view that Protarchus defended was taken seriously. Indeed, it was considered sufficiently interesting to keep the interlocutors busy with complex theorizing for an extended period. Why, all of a sudden, is it appropriate to just sneer at hedonism as a philosophy which mistakes people for cattle? Socrates' remark can appear as ill a fit as if, say, a professor taught a seminar on hedonism for a full semester, every week presenting on far-reaching theoretical issues, and yet making a throw-away remark at the end of the term to the effect that hedonism is evidently idiotic. The students would rightly be confused. Why, then, is it that Socrates makes this kind of remark?

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<sup>32</sup> “We are investigating what is the final and ultimate good [...] Epicurus situates this in pleasure, which he wants to be the greatest good with pain as the greatest bad. His doctrine begins in this way: as soon as every animal is born, it seeks pleasure and rejoices in it as the greatest good, while it rejects pain as the greatest bad and, as far as possible, avoids it; and it does this when it is not yet corrupted, on the innocent and sound judgment of nature itself.” (Cicero, *De finibus* 1.29-30, tr. Long and Sedley with changes by KMV). For further analysis of these arguments, cf. Vogt (forthcoming/b).

My answer to this question should already be apparent. What Socrates sneers at in the final lines of the dialogue is Traditional Hedonism, not Revised Hedonism, the view that was under discussion. Revised Hedonism is more interesting than its traditional ancestor. It calls for serious philosophical work. Pleasure and pain come in all sorts of guises, and it is a respectable task for the ethicist to study their role in our mental lives. What is more, hedonism may get something right in referring to other living beings. The largest scope *relatum*, “all living beings,” signals to the reader that a methodological premise of hedonism is under consideration, the premise that inquiry into the good should study commonalities that may obtain between humans and animals. What are, according to the *Philebus*, these commonalities? They do not lie in what is, in substance, good for us. Instead they emerge when human beings are studied as creatures with a given physiology, a psychology that ties in with this physiology, with a range of cognitive capacities relevant to desire, and so on.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.3. Stock refutations

In effect—and this is my final reason for proposing that Revised Hedonism and Reason differ from Traditional Hedonism and Wisdom—Revised Hedonism and Reason are formulated in ways that are reflective of stock refutations of their traditional precursors. By that I do not mean that the stock refutations become obsolete or inapplicable. On the contrary, the refutational arguments are recognized as poignant invitations to say more. As one engages with them, one engages precisely with the questions that ethics, as the *Philebus* conceives of it, must address.

What, then, are these stock refutations? The most famous arguments, and the arguments that are most immediately relevant to the *Philebus*, are summed up in *Republic* VI. The opponent of Traditional Hedonism says “there are good and bad pleasures.” If the proponent of Traditional Hedonism cannot deny this, she is committed to the view that the good and the bad are the same,

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<sup>33</sup> Arguably, versions of the ideas figure in Aristotle’s *De anima*, *De motu animalium*, and other biological treatises.

or so it is assumed.<sup>34</sup> The critic of Wisdom asks: “*phronêsis* of what is the good?” which tends to be rendered as “knowledge of what is the good?” Now the proponent of Wisdom must identify what it is that the person who has attained *phronêsis* is ‘wise about’ or in other words what she knows. She finds herself committed to a circular claim: “The good is knowledge of the good.” According to Socrates, those who hold Traditional Hedonism go no less astray than those who hold Wisdom (505c7). Wisdom is called ridiculous (505b13), and Traditional Hedonism is flagged as the subject of much fighting (505d1-2). Both views are on par insofar as both count as refuted.

Nevertheless, a range of ideas that are in the neighborhood of Traditional Hedonism and Wisdom are developed and defended in the *Republic*, which is highly attuned to the variety of pleasures agents can pursue and the difficulties of ranking them; and equally, to the challenges and importance of knowing the good. Consider that, according to *Republic* V-VII, the best agent attains knowledge of the highest object of knowledge, namely the good. This is not quite the claim that the good is knowledge of the good. But it is a recognizable way of capturing what may be taken to be Wisdom’s core intuition. Moreover, on her way to coming to know the good the best agent engages in extensive lines of study that count, in one way or another, as preparatory of coming to know the good.

For present purposes, this idea is worth thinking through. In the stock refutations of Wisdom and Traditional Hedonism, it is taken for granted that the proponent of Wisdom will say “knowledge of the good is the good.” But another reply is available to her in response to “knowledge of what is the good?” She could say “knowledge of everything.” What would be her opponent’s next move? Sure enough, the opponent would demand specification of the notion of ‘everything’. What is its scope? As far the *Republic* is concerned, ‘everything’ is restricted: it is knowledge of everything intelligible.<sup>35</sup> Suppose, however, that we set aside the metaphysical framework of the *Republic*. In this case, the opponent of Wisdom can argue that knowledge of everything

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<sup>34</sup> Both refutations are flagged as well-worn; the interlocutors remind themselves of these arguments in just a few lines (*Republic* VI 505b5-d2).

<sup>35</sup> On the difficulties of this claim and scholarly controversies about it, cf. Vogt (2012), chapter 3.

is an implausibly wide and paradoxical notion. Whatever else we take knowledge to be, we take it to be valuable. Without a restriction on the scope of ‘everything,’ this premise is in danger. What about knowledge of the bad, the critic may ask. Is not knowledge of the bad bad? Or, to include a wider range of cognitive activities, is contemplation of the bad bad? Is dwelling on the bad bad? Are there, perhaps, things one should forget rather than remember? Are there bad perceptions, say, graphic scenes where a good person averts her eyes? And so on. Similar considerations apply to the modes of thinking that are involved in *Republic*-style knowledge. They adhere to specific methods and are shaped by years of study in a range of well-considered fields, from music to mathematics.<sup>36</sup> Not all cognitive activity, it seems, is part of the best and happy life. Instead, it matters how one thinks, in ways that are closely related to what one thinks about.

If this is how the conversation goes, the proponent of Traditional Hedonism can make a novel move. She can say that Wisdom runs into the same problem that Traditional Hedonism presumably runs into. Wisdom faces a version of, as I put this, the Bad Pleasure Problem, call it the Bad Knowledge Problem: proponents of both views must recognize that there is variety—variety in pleasure and variety in knowledge. They must sort out this variety if they want to hold on to their positions. And they must admit that their positions are on par. Either we take the Bad Pleasure/Knowledge Problems to refute Traditional Hedonism and Wisdom in a way that makes them so plainly false that they become uninteresting. Or we take up the task of sorting through variety on both sides.

This is precisely the situation we encounter in the *Philebus*. Once the set-up of the contest is concluded, Socrates moves on to this topic. He speaks of the pleasures of the debauched versus those of the sober-minded person, *and* of the foolish opinions and false hopes the former entertains, while the latter is wise (12c-d). The formulations of Revised Hedonism and Reason lay the groundwork for this: both on the affective and on the cognitive side of things, we must consider variety and range. There are many kinds of thinking, just as there are many kinds of taking pleasure. And

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Burnyeat (2000).

though the notion of bad pleasures is more familiar than the notion of bad thinking, it is far from obvious that all kinds of cognitive activity are good.

### 3. Plurality

Socrates's first characterization of pleasure is that it is ποικίλον, manifold in a way that tends to have negative connotations.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, this is the one thing Socrates claims to know prior to any more detailed investigation: that pleasure is *poikilon* (12c4-5). *Poikilon* is a much-debated term in Plato scholarship. Traditionally, it has positive connotations. What is *poikilon* is intricate and ornate, as a piece of clothing constructed from several materials, displaying a range of colors and shapes, and including ornaments with symbolic meanings may be. Plato takes this term and rethinks it: this kind of intricacy and many-ness is, in his philosophical use, a negative kind of plurality.<sup>38</sup> Alas, Protarchus does not 'hear' the term as negative, though perhaps Plato expects readers familiar with the *Republic* to recognize *poikilos* as a watchword. For all we know, for him as for others who are not antecedently persuaded by Plato's larger commitments, *poikilon* signals a dazzling and amazing kind of multitude, a property that he may happily assign to pleasure.

12d-14a addresses how to understand the variety of pleasure on the one hand, and of successful thinking on the other. The argument offers a first taste of the metaphysically difficult sections of the *Philebus*. Here are the core moves of the exchange, in terms that are at once reflective of the quasi-technical distinctions that are employed, and comprehensible for us today:

*Socrates I*: Pleasure goes by one name, but comes in forms that are in some way quite unlike each other.

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<sup>37</sup> Frede translates "complex," which seems too positive to me. LSJ offers "complex" with the example of a labyrinth. In the *Republic*, *poikilos* is associated with notions of beauty and excellence that Plato argues against. Cf. for example 399d-e on *poikilous* rhythms and harmonies that should be removed from musical education, or the multifarious democratic character in 561e as well as *poikile* pleasure at 561d.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Hughes Fowler (1984); Micaella (2009); LeVen (2013).

*Protarchus 1:* Pleasures come from opposite things; but they (i.e., the pleasures) are not themselves opposites (έναντία) to each other (12d8). Pleasure must be most like pleasure. How could a thing not be most like itself?

*Socrates 2:* Compare pleasure with color and shape. Colors and shapes are one in genus (γένει μέν έστι πάν έν, 12e7); but some colors/shapes are to the greatest degree opposites to each other (τά μέν έναντιώτατα άλλήλοις, 13a1).

*Protarchus 2:* Maybe. What does it matter?

*Socrates 3:* It matters because you say that all pleasant things are good. No one disputes that pleasant things are pleasant. But what is the common element in good and bad pleasures that allows you to call them all good (τί οὖν δὴ ταύτων έν ταίς κακαίς όμοίως και έν άγαθαίς ένόν πάσας ήδονάς άγαθόν είναι προσαγορεύεις; 13b3-5)?

*Protarchus 3:* Hold off! I'm not on board here. I'm starting out with the premise that pleasure is the good.

Stale mate.—How to proceed?

*Socrates 4:* Let's suppose that Reason faces the same question, namely whether all knowledges (έπιστήμαι) seem to be many (πολλαι), with some of them quite unlike the others (άνόμοιοί τινες αύτων άλλήλαις) (13e9-10).

*Protarchus 4:* Let's assume that, yes, the same applies to both Revised Hedonism and Reason. There can be many and unlike pleasures; and many and unlike knowledges (πολλαι μέν ήδοναι και άνόμοιοι γινέσθων, πολλαι δέ έπιστήμαι και διάφοροι, 14a8-9).

Consider two sets of observations about this dispute. First, I use the word 'knowledges' to translate έπιστήμαι. 'Knowledges' could be a catch-all for the kinds of successful cognitive activities mentioned at the beginning of the dialogue. On that notion, correct memory, for example, falls under this broad notion of knowledge. The advantage of this reading is that it fits with the beginning of the dialogue and it provides us with a wide-ranging plurality. Alternatively, 'knowledges' refers

to knowledge in a narrower sense, the plurality being introduced via different objects of knowledge. The advantage of this reading is that it picks up the idea mentioned with respect to pleasure, namely that one takes pleasure in different things and that pleasures may differ depending on how their objects differ. At this early point in the dialogue, I recommend against deciding between both readings. The text is underspecified, and Plato may want both lines of thought to be in play.

Second, Protarchus seems unaware that the multitude of knowledges is not characterized in the same, presumably negative, terms in which the multitude of pleasures is described. When Socrates references his position in 13e4-6, he refers back to his initial list of forms of thinking. In retrospect, it may seem as if he set things up in such a way as to establish an unfair advantage for himself: by restricting the list of modes of thought to successful instances, bad thinking—thinking about bad objects such as scheming how to commit a crime and bad thinking such as excessive day-dreaming—was excluded from the get-go. Nevertheless, a multitude of knowledges remains. With respect to these knowledges, Socrates speaks of ‘many’ by employing the value-neutral term *pollai*, not in terms of what is *poikilon*. But given that these cognitive activities are already a select group, they do not differ from each other as radically as pleasures differ from each other. Along these lines, Socrates presupposes that ‘unlike’ is less than ‘opposite’. ‘Unlike’ is employed in a sense that allows for degrees, and knowledges will be many in the sense of being unlike. But Socrates will not permit that they are unlike in the strong sense of opposites (14a). ‘Opposite’ is employed in a sense that allows for degrees, such that things can be more or less, and maximally, opposites. For Socrates, good pleasure and bad pleasure are opposites in this maximal sense.

As I suggested at the outset, these initial discussions about the nature and plurality of pleasures and knowledges make one thing clear: adequate investigation into Q will include not only questions in (what today we might call) the philosophy of mind, psychology, and epistemology. It will also include topics in metaphysics, and among them, the study of plurality. A closer look at plurality prompts metaphysical inquiries that address division into kinds, and how such a division may apply to pleasure and knowledge respectively. Finally, the metaphysics of plurality and of

genus/species will lead, given that we are concerned with human lives in which different pleasures and modes of thinking figure, to the metaphysics of mixtures and their causes.

## 4. Conclusion

Scholars have long been interested in Socrates' re-appearance as a main interlocutor, in what is—according to widely accepted views—a very late dialogue.<sup>39</sup> A fairly obvious reason, however, remains under-explored: a concern with human matters is one of the hallmarks of the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues. Does Socrates re-appear in the *Philebus* because we approach the good as what is good for human beings? If my reading is compelling, then Plato aims to demonstrate in the *Philebus* what a Socratic concern with human matters truly amounts to. It is far from a modest project, *sine* physics and metaphysics, as the *Apology* has it. Rather, it turns out to require a tour de force across philosophical disciplines.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Frede (1996). Frede thinks that Socrates returns, as it were, for the sake of the hedonist's conversion.