

Imagining Good Future States: Hope and Truth in Plato's *Philebus*

What is the role of hope in motivation and agency?¹ In early Greek thought, hope has a negative reputation. Solon, one of the Seven Sages, famously says that human beings are full of empty hopes. Hopes are false dreams.² Thucydides analyzes loss and victory, and the decision-making that leads up to it. Here hope appears to indicate a lack of deliberation. Those who hope fail to come up with a plan. They have a poor grasp of their situation, and things go badly for them.³ In this paper, I aim to show that Plato challenges this conception of hope. Hopes are not generally empty. They need not reflect a poor grasp of one's situation. And they are not generally associated with failure. The *Philebus* conceives of agential thought as thoroughly future-directed. Hopes and fears are anticipations, and anticipations are essential to agency. They figure in everyone's mental lives, not just in those of poor deliberators. As we think about what to do, we imagine

¹ I am grateful for the invitation to contribute to the Festschrift in Christopher Gill's honor, and for engaging discussions at the conference. Many thanks go also to a reading group at Columbia University, where I presented some of my ideas about agency-imagination, and in particular to Robbie Kubala for insightful notes. Jens Haas commented on several versions of this paper, arguing forcefully for a greater appreciation of the role of imagination in agency.

² Solon, Fr. 13.36.

³ The *locus classicus* in Thucydides is *Histories* V.103, in the so-called Melian Dialogue. The Melians declare their intention to hope that the Spartans will come to their aid and that the gods will look after them because their cause is just. The Athenians respond that hope is comforting but useless, if not dangerous. It encourages people to make decisions against their own best interests. This assessment relates to a larger theme in Thucydides, namely that people make decisions based on wishful thinking, rarely having a good grasp of their situation. I am grateful to Neville Morley for discussion of these matters.

ourselves in possible future states. We relate to what we see, and our affective responses are informative. They help us figure out what we want.⁴

This proposal, I take it, is inherently attractive. Moreover, it helps resolve a controversy. The *Philebus* is well known for the claim that pleasures are true or false.⁵ The dialogue's discussions of false pleasure are famously difficult. Hopes, according to the dialogue's analysis, *are* pleasures. As I argue, false pleasure can only be made sense of if one takes seriously what Plato says about the relation of agents to the future. This paper proceeds in three steps. In section 1, I sketch what I take to be the *Philebus*'s account of thought and pleasure. In section 2, I argue that all pleasure is future-directed. In section 3, I defend the following proposal: hopes are true if and insofar as they are the hopes of good agents, and that means agents who are good at planning their lives and whose lives are going well.

1. Pleasure and Thinking

The *Philebus* is a study of the good in human life. It begins by reformulating two age-old views, 'wisdom is the good' and 'pleasure is the good'. Wisdom and pleasure are not

⁴ Today, hope tends to be seen as a good attitude, perhaps even a virtue, and philosophers engage with it in these terms. Philosophy of motivation tends not to address hope. A notable exception is Adrienne Martin's "Hopes and Dreams," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83 (2011): 148–173.

⁵ I engage specifically with Sylvain Delcomminette, "False Pleasures, Appearance and Imagination in the *Philebus*," *Phronesis*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2003): 215-237; Matthew Evans, "Plato on the Possibility of Hedonic Mistakes," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2008): 89-124; Dorothea Frede, "Rumpelstiltskin's Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato's *Philebus*," *Phronesis*, 30 (1985): 151-80; Verity Harte, "The *Philebus* on Pleasure: The Good, the Bad and the False," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 104 (2004), 111-28; Karel Thein, "Imagination, Self-Awareness, and Modal Thought in the *Philebus*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 42 (2012): 109-149. Cf. Evans for further references to recent discussions, and Delcomminette on early engagement with the issue, reaching back as far as Theophrastus.

discussed as achievements or possessions. Plato shifts focus, toward the goings-on in the mind that reasoning and pleasure involve. 'Wisdom is better than pleasure' thus becomes the following view:

We contend that [...] knowing, understanding, and remembering, and what belongs to them, correct *doxa* and true calculations, are better than pleasure... (11b6-9)⁶

The view that Socrates takes here is really rather different from traditional versions of 'wisdom is the good'. The view is not that, having achieved wisdom, one lives a good life. Rather, the view is that successfully exercising one's cognitive faculties is good. Moreover, the way in which different reasoning activities are lined up with each other should come as a surprise to anyone familiar with Plato's epistemology.⁷ There is no attention here to the idea that *doxa* is a lesser kind of cognitive attitude than knowledge, or indeed to any kind of ranking among reasoning activities. The goal, instead, seems to be to provide a sketch of what goes on in the mind of a human being. The very fact that Plato envisages a range of thinking-activities as together constituting the mental life of an

⁶ My translations are indebted to Dorothea Frede's translation in John Cooper (ed.), *Plato's Complete Works*, Hackett 1997; Frede's German translation in: Ernst Heitsch (ed.): *Platon Werke. Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Band 3,2: *Philebos*, translation and commentary by D. Frede (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1997); and to Friedrich Schleiermacher's translation, reprinted in *Platon Werke 7* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt 1972). Schleiermacher's translation is somewhat of an exception among his Plato translations: it is almost unreadable, staying very close to the Greek and reflecting closely the difficulties of the dialogue. Nevertheless, or perhaps in part because of this, it is worth consulting on matters of dispute.

⁷ In different dialogues, Plato explores at least two different notions of *doxa*: (i) *doxa* as 'mere' belief and inherently deficient, to be contrasted with knowledge; and (ii) *doxa* as belief or judgment. Cf. Katja Maria Vogt, *Belief and Truth: A Skeptic Reading of Plato* (OUP 2012). The *Philebus* may offer a third notion. *Doxa* is not analyzed as deficient, and/or concerned with lesser kinds of entities as compared to knowledge, and it is not clear that the term is used to refer to something like judgment. I explore this latter point below.

agent should serve as a premise for interpreting the dialogue. It is re-iterated when

Socrates argues that no one would choose pleasure without reason:

Since you would not be in possession of either reason, 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 intelligence? (21b6-9)

Without cognitive activity one would not be aware that one is in pleasure. Pleasure is part of an agent's mental life in a way that is dependent upon activities that are not themselves affective or desiderative, but cognitive. This is not the claim that pleasure or pain are kinds of thinking, or involve judgments, or anything of this sort. Instead, it is a claim about the interrelation between goings-on in the mind. For a living being to be aware of pleasure, the mind must be active in ways that belong, roughly speaking, to reasoning or cognitive activity.

Three kinds of cognitive activity are discussed in more detail: memory, *doxa*, and planning.

Moreover, due to lack of memory, it would be impossible for you to remember that you ever enjoyed yourself, and for any pleasure to survive from one moment to the next, since it would leave no memory. But, not possessing right *doxa*, you would not realize that you are enjoying yourself even while you do, and, being unable to calculate, you could not figure out any future pleasures for yourself. You would thus not live a human life but the life of a mollusk or of one of those creatures in shells that live in the sea. (21c1-8)

Again, the focus is on the intersection between cognitive and affective activities. Memory enables the agent to recall that she enjoyed herself. It generates continuity between now and a moment ago, several moments ago, and so on. Memory is needed for awareness of pleasure because, otherwise, moments of experience would be purely momentary 'nows'. There may be creatures whose mental life is like this: consisting of nothing but minimal 'nows'. Perhaps sea-urchins are like this. But this is not a human life.⁸ A few pages later Plato extends his analysis of memory. One of its functions is the preservation of perception (34a). Call this access-memory. A related activity is recollection. If one can no longer immediately access a perception, one can make an effort to recall it (34a-c). Thus Plato envisages in total three cognitive activities involved in memory, and relevant to experience of pleasure: continuity-preserving memory, access-memory, and recollection.

The second class of cognitive activity that Socrates mentions is *doxa*. *Doxa* is introduced as having the task of assessing whether one is in pleasure. And yet, only a few pages later this task is assigned to perception (*aisthêsis*) (33d-34a). Now Socrates says that, when cognizers recognize that they are in pleasure or pain, this recognition is a perception (*aisthêsis*). A process of restoration (pleasure) or disintegration (pain) is perceived. If these processes are below a certain threshold—say, the early beginnings of dehydration—they do not register with the agent. One only comes to perceive dehydration after a certain level of disintegration has been reached; then one is thirsty (33d-34a; cf. 38b).

⁸ Of course, it is not unthinkable that someone, say, acquainted with extreme drugs, pursues a condition that is radically about 'living in the moment'. It is possible that, in antiquity, Aristippus advocates this kind of hedonic presentism, a term I borrow from David Sedley in his contribution to this volume.

These passages should give interpreters pause. They suggest that *doxa*, in the *Philebus*, is used in a sense wide enough to incorporate the perceptual ‘registering’ by which an agent comes to be aware of pleasure. Similarly, in the *Philebus*’s main account of the soul, Plato talks of *doxai*, *doxazomena*, and *doxasthenta* (39b-c), blurring the line between any differences one might take to exist between these attitudes.⁹ *Doxazomena* and *doxasthenta* are plausibly rendered as ‘what is being represented’, and *doxa* is not flagged as any different. A bit later, Socrates says that from memory and perception *doxa* arises in us. Alongside with *doxa*, Socrates says, memory and perception generate in us a “striving for *diadoxazein*.”¹⁰ That is, *doxa* does not conclude a thought process, as a judgment would.¹¹ *Doxa* is already in the mind, and still the mind wants to figure things out, aiming to discriminate and settle how things are.

Schleiermacher’s translations reflect this understanding of *doxa*, in a way that may be philosophically more attuned to the text than today’s translations. For him, *doxa* in the *Philebus* covers a wide range of representational thinking activities, referring to a broader

⁹ I cite and discuss the relevant passage below.

¹⁰ Οὐκοῦν ἐκ μνήμης τε καὶ αἰσθήσεως δόξα ἡμῖν καὶ τὸ διαδοξάζειν ἐγγχειρεῖν γίγνεθ’ ἐκάστοτε; (38b12-13). In Schleiermacher’s translation: “... entsteht uns jedesmal die Vorstellung und das Bestreben, durch Vorstellung zu unterscheiden.” Frede translates *diadoxazein* as ‘the attempt to come to a definite judgment’; Thein as ‘decide among beliefs’. Both renderings seem modeled after the *Theaetetus*.

¹¹ Dorothea Frede’s English and German translations understand *doxa* along the lines of judgment.

phenomenon than today's translations of belief or judgment.¹² In interpreting *doxa* as judgment or actively formed belief, as is customary today, one presumes a continuity between the *Philebus* and a famous passage in the *Theaetetus* (189e-190a).¹³ There Plato describes thinking as an inner conversation that is concluded by *doxazein*. Having looked at things this way and that way, the cognizer says "yes" to one way of seeing them, thereby forming a judgment. In the *Philebus*, the verb *doxazein* figures prominently when Socrates turns to the comparison between *doxazein* and 'taking pleasure', *hêdesthai* (37a). Even here, it is by no means obvious that the relevant activity consists in judging that such-and-such is so-and-so. The comparison works also, and perhaps better, if *doxazein* is taken to mean 'to represent something as so-and-so'.¹⁴ For current purposes, this question need not be resolved. It suffices to note that Plato's notion of *doxa* in the *Philebus* seems wider than judgment.¹⁵ This point has significant implications for the well-known issue of false pleasure in the *Philebus*. Plato compares truth and falsity in pleasure to truth and falsity in *doxa*. In interpreting this, we need to get both *comparanda* right. That is, we need to get clear about the question of whether false *doxa*, as it matters

¹² Schleiermacher translates "Vorstellung," not just in the *Philebus*, but also in the *Theaetetus*. It is hard to imagine how much current interpretations of these dialogues would have to be modified if his translation was, on the whole, preferable to translations along the lines of belief/judgment.

¹³ Cf. Delcomminette (2003), who makes much of the comparison with the *Theaetetus*, without calling into question whether *doxa* is well understood in the *Philebus* if it is taken to refer to judgment.

¹⁴ Schleiermacher's verb is "vorstellen."

¹⁵ Though I disagree with the way in which Thein sees agreement and continuity between the *Philebus* and the *Theaetetus*, I think he rightly observes the following: "In the *Philebus*, whose subject-matter offers a broader view of human concerns than the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, it [the *Theaetetus*'s picture of thinking] is adapted to suit the richness of the everyday thought-processes in their modal and counterfactual dimensions." (2012, 109)

to the discussion of false pleasure, is rightly thought of as false judgment. The way in which *doxa* is employed in the dialogue calls this premise in question. *Doxa* in the *Philebus* seems to include judgment, but it also seems to include other kinds of representational thinking.

Third in Socrates' list is reasoning, *logismos*, a mode of thought that is specifically concerned with the future. Its task is to figure out future pleasures for oneself. Reasoning, here, is planning, a future-directed form of thought. It is agency-related thought, about what to pursue or how to attain things in the future. At this point, Plato says little about planning. And yet it is clear that planning, or figuring out what to pursue in one's life, is crucial to the dialogue. The *Philebus* asks what kind of life is good for human beings. For long sections of the text, it approaches this question through metaphysics, as well as through analyses of cognitive activities and pleasure/pain. Again and again, these fairly technical discussions break off, and Socrates and Protarchus ask simpler questions, such as: what would people choose? They imagine what it would be like, say, to live a life without pleasure (21d-e), or, at the other end of a spectrum, the life of a sea-urchin, whose mental life is presumably such that nothing beyond the present is at all perceived (21c). No one would choose either, a verdict that appears to derive from nothing but a moment of imagining what such lives would be like. It is this component of making up one's mind that interests me here. In addition to thinking through the pros and cons of this and that form of life, agents also do something else. They imagine a given state of affairs, and respond to their sense of what it would be like.

Socrates' talk about 'planning' relates to earlier Platonic discussions, in particular in the *Protagoras*. There Socrates analyzes how a pleasure/pain-calculus would work, aimed at the greatest pleasure in total (351b-358d). The *Philebus*, however, departs from this picture. The good life has to be a mix. Pleasure is one ingredient, in the same way in which thinking is.¹⁶ Both blend with everything a human being does: there is no conscious experience without cognitive activities, and there is no conscious experience without pleasure/pain. Accordingly, whatever calculation the agent makes, it is not about choosing pleasure versus something else. It is about choosing a life in which pleasure/pain have the right kind of presence: in which the mix is a good mix. Pleasure and pain nevertheless play a role in figuring out what kind of life to pursue: in imagining, for example, what it would be like to live a life of reason without pleasure, the agent immediately sees that she would not like it. She would not enjoy it, and she would not choose it.¹⁷ This exchange between Socrates and Protarchus suggests that certain kinds of decisions are made, in part, by asking ourselves whether we could imagine a given path for ourselves. When we ask ourselves whether we can see ourselves in a scenario—can you see yourself married to him?, can you envisage yourself living in New York City?—we find out some of what we want. This does not mean that 'planning' as a whole

¹⁶ Cf. K. M. Vogt, "Why Pleasure Gains Fifth Rank: Against the Anti-Hedonist Interpretation of the *Philebus*," (2010).

¹⁷ The question of whether one would choose a life without pain calls for more reflection. Perhaps one would intuitively say "yes," and only after imagining what it really would be like—to not have available, say, the warning mechanisms that pain affords, as when one pulls back one's hand because otherwise it would burn—one would realize that one wouldn't choose a life wholly without pain.

consists of imagining scenarios, observing one's pleasure/pain reactions. It does mean, however, that the *Philebus* advances a proposal: imagination-tests help us figure out some components of what appears to be a good life for us.

2. Pleasure's Future-Directedness

What is good for all creatures, according to Protarchus, is to be pleased and pleasure and delight (11b4-5). As in the case of reason, the very formulation by which 'pleasure is the good' is introduced departs from traditional phrasings. What is good, or so Protarchus holds, is *to be* pleased. The nouns 'pleasure' and 'delight' are mentioned afterwards, subordinate to the idea of experience. Pleasure is an experienced state. This sets up a constraint for understanding true and false pleasure. No one in the dialogue disputes that a person who experiences pleasure actually experiences pleasure.¹⁸

Pleasure can be bodily in the sense that one takes pleasure in a present physiological process, say, the 'filling' of drink when thirsty. Still, the mind is involved, for otherwise the agent would not experience anything. Accordingly, I shall not speak of bodily pleasures, and instead of pleasures taken in present states, or, for short, present pleasures. Present pleasures can be distinguished from pleasures of anticipation (32b-c). Pleasures of anticipation are expectations of pleasurable scenarios, and they are called hopes. Their

¹⁸ Harte captures this point (if a person reports that she is in pleasure, she is in pleasure) by saying that pleasure is 'factive'. I shall refrain from using this term, which tends to be used for knowledge and perception, referring to the idea that, say, if S knows that p, p is the case. This isn't precisely the point here. Rather, the idea is that the fact that someone experiences pleasure is not in dispute when one asks whether a given pleasure is true or false. Cf. Delcomminette (2003, 218), who is clear about this point.

negative counterpart are fears (32b-c). An anticipation is, in the terms of the dialogue, a *prosdokêma* or a *prosdokia* (32c). These terms fit the account of the mind that emerges throughout the dialogue, an account that focuses on the interrelations between thinking and pleasure/pain. The verb *prosdokaô* means expecting in an affectively colored way, as in hope or fear. It is a representing of expected future states that is immediately tied to motivation. Later Plato introduces pleasure/pain terms that pick out the affective condition of the agent: she is pre-pleased or pre-pained (*prochairein*, *prolupeisthai* 39d). And yet, here too the distinction between cognitive and affective/desiderative attitudes is blurred. These are attitudes about the future (39d4-5), and thus presumably about the very states of affairs that *prosdokia* expects to come about.

Now one may wonder whether Plato's proposal about false pleasure is meant to apply specifically to anticipatory pleasure. However, this cannot be the case. Right after introducing the distinction between present pleasure/pain and anticipatory pleasure/pain, Plato softens it. First, it is evident that anticipatory pleasure/pain is not just about the future. To be pre-pleased is to be pleased right now, as well as to anticipate future pleasure. Second, Socrates re-classifies conditions that formerly counted as pains, namely hunger and thirst, as desire (*epithumia*, 34d).¹⁹ As desires, pleasure and pain propel the

¹⁹ Desire has a pain-aspect to it, namely the perception of a disintegration such as getting hungry or thirsty; and it relates to the opposite of this condition, namely future filling. Thus desire is a pain-pleasure conglomerate. Its pain-pleasure composition depends on one's presumed prospects for attaining that which is perceived as lacking. One can lack something, but anticipate that one gets it, such that the desire has a pain- and a pleasure-aspect. Or one can be in twofold pain, lacking something and anticipating that one won't attain it (36a-b).

agent into the future. Pain is such that one wants it to go away or not come about; pleasure is such that one wants to attain it or wants it to continue. That is, the distinction between present pleasure/pain and anticipatory pleasure/pain is less straightforward than it may initially appear. Both present and anticipatory pleasures are, at least in part, about future states of the agent.²⁰ A constraint on reconstructing false pleasure emerges from this set-up. The way in which pleasure is false/true should have something to do with the fact that pleasure/pain are motivational and thereby directed towards the agent's future. This constraint puts hope and fear at the center of the discussion. If all pleasure and pain is future-directed, all pleasure and pain has hope/fear components. Agents relate to future states of theirs that they either see as pleasurable or as painful, even if only by wanting present pleasure to last or present pain to go away.

Some aspects of pleasure/pain's truth or falsity can be addressed, in a preliminary fashion, without reference to the future. Pleasure/pain are true/false insofar as they 'register' and 'reflect' something (37e).²¹ Insofar as pleasure/pain are concerned with the present, they reflect physiological processes. Against this idea, Protarchus raises an objection that philosophers today also raise. If pleasure and pain are thought of as perceptions of physiological goings-on, how come we do not (as we might say today)

²⁰ Harte (2004) says it does not matter whether one takes an example of anticipatory pleasure or present pleasure; that Plato just takes the former because it is the easier case for what he aims to say; and that we can follow him and assume that whatever is said about anticipatory pleasure can be extended to all pleasure. But she does not point out why: because *all* pleasure is future-directed.

²¹ I choose this expression in order to avoid the controversial formulation that pleasure/pain is 'about' something.

perceive sugar- or lipid-levels in our blood, and so on? Plato's response is that pleasure and pain are not about our physiology in that sense. They are about more general conditions, such as dehydration. Arguably, a case can be made that one perceives dehydration, and that one can make mistakes in diagnosing such conditions as dehydration. Say, one feels listless and wrought out, and misperceives this as a state of tiredness, when really one is dehydrated.²²

To see more clearly how such mistakes may occur, consider briefly the metaphysics of pleasure/pain. Pleasure and pain, according to the *Philebus*, fall into the class of the unlimited (14a-20b).²³ This classification involves several claims. (i) Pleasure is varied in such a way that there is no such thing as 'what pleasure is'. (ii) Since pleasure is not one kind of thing, different pleasures are not sub-kinds. (iii) There are not 'many' pleasures in the sense of so-and-so many kinds of pleasures. Instead, there is an unlimited array of variety. (iv) Pleasure/pain do not come in 'units'. That is, the intensity of pleasure is not measurable by reference to units. (v) Given pleasure/pain's unlimited nature, there are no

²² Socrates compares the case of diagnosing whether one is in pleasure or pain to a case of judging whether a figure under a tree is a person or a statue (38d-c). The object can be misperceived; and the observer may carry in himself the possibly mistaken thought that 'a man is under the tree' for a while, when he no longer actually sees the figure (38e). The point of the comparison may be that we find ourselves in a certain kind of distance from physiological processes: we are only aware of them in psychologically-translated versions. Thus we may make mistakes in identifying something perceptible as something else, say, tiredness as dehydration, or the other way around. And we may carry this thought in us for a while, and be motivated accordingly; say, seeking to get some rest rather than seeking to get something to drink.

²³ Cf. also later in the text: Pleasure and pain arise in the same domain, namely the domain of limit-unlimited combinations (31c). They belong to the class of the unlimited (41d).

extreme ends of maximum and minimum, by reference to which the intensity of a given pleasure/pain could be determined.²⁴

These premises aim to capture familiar phenomena about pleasure/pain, such as the difficulty of measuring pain. In some cases, we are quite confident in our assessment, say, describing pain as minute when a kid hits you in a playful way, or as acute when we have a splitting headache. But the elusiveness of pain assessments is nevertheless familiar, and reflected in methods of medical diagnosis. Think of a tool doctors sometimes employ, a row of sketches of happier/unhappier faces, which is used to help patients describe whether they are in much or little pain.²⁵ Socrates suggests that one needs comparisons: some pleasure/pain is more or less intense than some other pleasure/pain. That is all one can say (42a-c).²⁶ Thus one can make mistakes in assessing pleasure/pain. One could claim that some pain is absolutely much, thereby misrepresenting the nature of pain; one might have such slight pain that one is unsure about whether one is in pain or not, and mistakenly say one is not in pain when really one is (think of your dentist asking you

²⁴ Discussion of these matters starts right at the beginning of the dialogue, at 12c-14b. Socrates argues that pleasures are not just 'many', but manifold in the sense of ποικίλον. They are unlike each other, sometimes to the extent that they are opposites. This means, or so it is argued at this early stage, that all one may be able to say about all pleasures is that they are pleasures. But one cannot further characterize them (along the lines of "all pleasures are..."), given how deeply they differ. For present purposes controversial questions of interpretation can be set aside. What matters is the general picture of pleasure/pain as difficult to measure and to categorize, due to its metaphysics.

²⁵ Cf. the Wong Baker Faces Pain Rating Scale or the Pain Smiley Face Chart.

²⁶ I assume here that pain and pleasure are symmetrical, such that whatever phenomena are found in pain are also present in pleasure; and such that an explanation that applies to one applies to the other. This assumption is controversial, but I shall not address it here.

whether biting on the repaired tooth still hurts); one can mistake one pain-condition for another pain-condition (say, tiredness for dehydration); and so on.

The metaphysics of the *Philebus* contributes a further premise for the interpretation of truth and falsity in pleasure/pain. Scholars tend to buy into Protarchus' assumption that true pleasure is unproblematic; only false pleasure is in need of explanation.²⁷ But the opposite instinct is equally crucial for the dialogue. Socrates refers to people who deny that there is any pleasure; they think all pleasure is chimerical, in fact just being the relief of pain (44b-d). These people, in effect, say that there is no true pleasure, and Socrates makes it his task to refute them, just as he aims to refute Protarchus. If the metaphysics of pleasure is taken seriously, the *Philebus* calls into question how any pleasure can be true as much as it asks how pleasure can be false.

Suppose someone makes a mistake of the sort described above. She misdiagnoses her present condition as dehydration rather than tiredness. Her diagnosis of what the pain reflects is false, and in this sense her pain is false. An agent who is in pain, taking it to be the pain of dehydration, will seek to end this state, say, by trying to find something to drink. The pain of thirst is a desire for drink. However, the drink will not alleviate her pain, given that it is the pain of tiredness. Really, what the agent needs is rest, otherwise the pain experience is not going to go away. The false diagnosis of present pain, thus,

²⁷ They thereby consider the *Philebus* as continuing a project that is crucial to the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*: the explanation of falsity. But this may be too quick. Given the metaphysics of pleasure, true pleasure must be at least as difficult to understand as false pleasure.

goes along with a desire that is false in the sense of directing the agent to an action that is not going to keep its promise: the action is undertaken as pain-alleviation, but it does not do the job. This example provides further help for interpreting the role of truth and falsity in pleasure/pain. It suggests that truth and falsity have something to do with success. A course of action is envisaged as pleasurable, and this anticipation is pleasant. But as the course of action is undertaken, it does not keep its promise. The condition that the agent attains is not pleasurable, contrary to her expectations.

Socrates elaborates on the desiderative side of pleasure/pain by pointing out that one registers a process in relation to what, in a given situation, seems preferable. Present pain/pleasures are desires, and they are concerned with what agents want. Plato's primary example is heat and cold, being warm and freezing (32a-d). In some situations, cold is welcome, in others warmth is welcome (32d). Consider a person who uses air conditioning in the summer and heating in the winter. In effect, it is colder in her office in summer than in winter. Should she not be displeased with this? Not necessarily. A person may think of the summer as a time when a cool breeze is desirable, enjoying her icy office. A similarly cold room in the winter would strike her as a painful place to work in.²⁸ The earlier proposal that pleasure/pain reflects a present physiological condition

²⁸ Warmth and cold are also Plato's examples in the *Theaetetus*. Plato asks whether present tense reports such as "I am cold now" are always true. On the premises of the *Philebus*, that kind of proposal must fail. Pleasure/pain involve temporal extension, memory, and future-related thought. For discussion of the relation between the *Philebus* and Protagorean relativism in the *Theaetetus*, cf. Norman Mooradian, "Converting Protarchus: Relativism and False Pleasures of Anticipation in Plato's *Philebus*," *Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1996): 93-112.

must be amended. Pleasure/pain reflect relational states of affairs. They are about present conditions as related to what the cognizer envisages as pleasurable or painful future states for her to be in, where this in turn may depend on what the agent prefers in a given situation.

3. Imagination and Agency

Agents, or so Plato argues, are constantly concerned with their future. Socrates' famous metaphor of a scribe and a painter in the human soul elaborates on this point.

S: If memory and perceptions concur with other affections at a particular occasion, then they seem to me to inscribe words in our soul, as it were. And if what is written is true, then we form a true *doxa* and true sentences (*logoi*) of the matter. But if what our scribe writes is false, then the result will be the opposite of the truth. (39a1-7)

Memory and perception are the scribe's work: they make inscriptions into the soul. The scribe has a companion, a painter.

S: A painter who follows the scribe and draws images of these words in the soul.
[...]

S: When a person takes his *doxazomena* and what is being said directly from sight or any other sense-perception and then envisages inside himself the images of these *doxasthenta* and 'sayings'. Or is it not something of that sort that is going on in us? [...]

S: And are not the images of the true *doxai* and sentences true, and the images of the false ones false? (39b6-c5)

Alongside the inscriptions, images are painted in the mind. These images are also true or false, in the same way in which their linguistic counterparts are. Interpreters have suggested that the scribe-painter model introduces imagination as a kind of cognitive

activity.²⁹ This suggestion seems too quick. What is being said, however metaphorically, seems to be that representations come with linguistic counterparts, and that the mind produces corresponding images. Still, interpreters seem to be on the right track. Imagination, I submit, is introduced, though not because thought involves images. Imagination is introduced because cognizers are said to be specifically concerned with their future. Future states cannot be perceived or otherwise recognized as being the case; they have to be imagined. The inscriptions and images in the soul are said to involve past, present, and future (39c). When Socrates asks Protarchus whether these representations are also concerned with the future, Protarchus says “decidedly with the future,” and Socrates comments on this qualification:³⁰

“If you say ‘decidedly’, is it because all of them are really hopes for future times, and we are forever brimful of hopes, throughout our lifetime?” (39e4-6)

This is a remarkable proposal. The goings-on in our minds, it is suggested, are about the future more than about anything else. In emphasizing a cognizer’s relation to the future, Plato departs further from the account of thinking in the *Theaetetus*. There, thinking is concerned with figuring out what is true or false about a given matter, leading toward a judgment that affirms one view over others. The future does not seem to figure in thinking, or not in any distinctive way. Why would the Socrates of the *Philebus* say that the mind is constantly concerned with the future? The framing question of the dialogue—

²⁹ Delcomminette (2003, 225) explains imagination simply as the production of images.

³⁰ Cf. *Laws* 644c4–d3.

what people choose with a view to having their lives go well—suggests an answer. The cognizers of the *Philebus* are agents, aiming to have their lives go well. And agential thought is inherently concerned with the future.

This is what it means to say that people are always full of hopes: people always see themselves in future scenarios, worrying about bad things that they hope to avoid or get rid of, or anticipating good things that they hope to attain or preserve. Socrates repeats this claim. All human beings have manifold hopes (40a3-4). Here is his example:

“And someone often envisages himself in the possession of an enormous amount of gold and of a lot of pleasures as a consequence. And in addition, he also sees, in this inner picture of himself, that he is beside himself with delight.” (40a9-12)

This is Plato's primary example for the claim that pleasures are true or false. Interpreters tend to take for granted that Rich, as I will call him, entertains a *false* hope.³¹ Notably, Socrates and Protarchus do not say so. Instead, right after the example Socrates offers a general account of what makes anticipatory pleasures true or false. They are true or false depending on whether the person is good and loved by the gods. The gods, or so it is assumed, make those prosper whom they love.³² Assuming that the gods love the good, this means that the hopes of good people are true. Truth is tied to success, falsity to

³¹ Well-known passages, say, in the *Republic*, suggest that Plato considers love of money lowly. Similarly, the *Philebus*'s later discussions of good lives make it clear that values other than money inspire worthier pursuits. Still, Rich is not identified as a misguided person with a false hope.

³² The opposite idea, namely that the gods are envious and take away goods from those who they see prosper, figures in early Greek thought too. Clearly, this is not something Plato endorses or invokes.

failure. Pleasure is false if that which is imagined neither is nor ever was the case, nor—most importantly—ever will be the case (40d7-10).

This proposal has not been developed by scholars, perhaps because its reference to the gods makes it sound all too metaphorical, and because it is not obvious how it relates to Socrates' insistence that truth/falsity in pleasure be compared to truth/falsity in *doxa* (36c-42c). This comparison is reformulated multiple times, in the attempt to get clear about it. For present purposes, the core of Plato's idea shall suffice: pleasure goes along with, or involves, a *doxa*-component (38a).³³ Thus a plausible account of truth/falsity in hope must accommodate six premises, three of which, (i) to (iii), were already discussed in Sections 1 and 2:

- (i) True pleasure is as difficult to make sense of as false pleasure.
- (ii) Anticipatory pleasure/pain involves a *doxa*-component.
- (iii) This *doxa*-component must be understood along the lines of the dialogue's wide notion of *doxa*.
- (iv) Human mental life is, insofar as it is concerned with motivation and action, essentially future-directed.
- (v) Truth is tied to success, falsity to failure.
- (vi) Truth is tied to the agent's goodness, falsity to the agent's badness.

³³ Evans thinks that another component is crucial, namely the pleasure/*doxa* comparison in (40c). But he reformulates it misleadingly, as if the text said that false pleasure is false on account of the same feature(s) on account of which false *doxa* is false. Socrates makes a different point. If pleasure is bad, its badness must be its falsity, just as in *doxa*, when it is bad, its badness is its falsity.

A traditional line of interpretation argues that Rich's pleasure is false insofar as the content of his dream—being rich and taking pleasure in it—is lowly. But Socrates does not talk about the contents of anticipations as good or bad. He talks about good or bad people (40b). Moreover, a wide range of interpretations proceeds by conceiving of *doxa* as judgment/belief, without asking how this accommodates (iii) and (iv). Doing so, these interpretations understand *doxa* more narrowly than the dialogue may require. They also miss out on asking a crucial question: whether and in which sense thoughts about the future are true. A compelling proposal on the truth/falsity of anticipatory pleasure must ask what kind of *doxa* is involved specifically in future-directed attitudes. Prediction might be such an attitude. A future state of affairs is envisaged. But the kinds of agency-imaginings Plato discusses are not predictions.³⁴ Rich does not think “I will be rich,” making a true or false prediction. Rich does what psychologists today describe with a range of terms: imagining, anticipating, day-dreaming, forecasting.³⁵ That is, the doxastic side of pleasure resides in imagination.

Suppose that this proposal takes care of premises (i), (ii), (iii), and (iv). A future-directed kind of doxastic attitude has been identified: agency-imagination. Agency-imagination fits the wide notion of *doxa* introduced earlier, by reference to Schleiermacher. It is not

³⁴ The point that attitudes involved in motivation are different from prediction was famously made by Elizabeth Anscombe. Anscombe points out that we provide evidence for predictions, but not for intentions (*Intention*, 6).

³⁵ Psychologists tend to distinguish these activities from mere mind-wandering, where the latter is unintended or occasioned by external triggers.

a judgment, and not true or false in the sense in which judgments are. It is a mental representation of a future state, tied to affective attitudes. With respect to this kind of imagination, truth and falsity are on a par. It is quite unclear how the truth-predicates apply to imaginations. This is an advantage of my proposal. If the metaphysics of pleasure/pain is taken seriously, truth should not be any easier to understand than falsity.

The success criterion, (v), is meant to answer the question in which sense agency-
imagination is true/false. It is true if that which is envisaged comes about. But whether it does depends on (vi), whether the agent is a good person. What notion of a good person is invoked in this context? The framing questions of the dialogue provide guidance. They suggest that we are talking about agents who aim to lead a good life, and who aim to understand what a good human life looks like.

With this in mind, let me fill in some detail about Rich. As Socrates remarks, a person may imagine herself as rich quite often. Perhaps it is Rich's tried and trusted means for falling asleep soundly: he lies down, closes his eyes, and imagines the wonderful vacations he would take with all that money, the soft breeze in palm trees at far-away beaches, and so on. And yet, as he imagines some of the details of that life, Rich may realize that, if he really became rich, say, winning the lottery, he might lose his current context in life, which on reflection he admits he likes a lot. Luxurious vacations would take him away from work he cares about, from friends who do not live wealthy lives, and

so on. Thus he may conclude that, in fact, becoming rich is not his 'dream'. He has other goals in life.

Imaginations help agents figure out what they want. In imagining future scenarios, agents do not 'deliberate', or not in the sense in which this term tends to be used, inspired by the Aristotelian tradition. They do not weigh reasons for and against possible courses of action. They may imagine something that, for all they know, is not in their power to bring about. These imaginings have an affective side. As one entertains them, one registers pleasure or pain, thus noting whether one likes what one sees. Moreover, it seems one can be better or worse in employing imagination as a means of discovery. One may lack the imagination to come up with a rudimentary picture of the sea-urchin's mental life, or to ask in the first place what it is like to be a sea-urchin (21c-d). Or one fails to fill in the details. Imagining that such creatures are in continuous 'pleasure-now' states, perhaps one thinks this is just fine, just as Rich, before he fills in the picture, may think that continuous cocktail-sipping is his dream. Agency-imagination may be something that good agents are good at, similar to the way in which Aristotelians think that good agents are good at deliberation.³⁶

³⁶ Aristotle scholars tend to translate *phantasia* as used in the *De anima* with "imagination." It is customary, however, to flag that this is by no means ideal. And yet a better translation is hard to come by. According to the *De anima*, *phantasia* plays a role in human action and in the things other animals do (for some famously difficult passages cf. 428b30-434a). The notion of imagination I employ in this paper is not equivalent with imagination/*phantasia* in the *De anima*, and it would go far beyond my purposes to compare them here. My proposal is that, when Aristotle discusses the kinds of agential reasoning that figure in a good life in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and in particular in Book VI, he does not include anything like excellence at imagination. If one were to develop further the ideas I discuss in this paper, this is where one would end up: with an account of what it means to be good at agency-imagination.

Socrates and Protarchus employ imagination as they develop an account of the good human life. Contrary to Aristotelian views on how one comes up with a conception of the good life, the *Philebus* suggests that, among other things, one must have imagination. One must be able to imagine what it would be like to be a sea-urchin, what a life without pleasure would look like, or what it would be like to win the lottery; and one must take guidance from one's pleasure/pain reactions to these imagined scenarios. If a good agent is someone who is good at the kinds of activities involved in figuring out how to live, and in pursuing that kind of life, the good agent of the *Philebus* needs agency-imagination. Thus some light is shed on (vi), what it means to be a good agent. And this helps with (v), the success criterion. Imaginative agents will be those who dream of things that they can take some steps to bring about, and that not only seem pleasant from afar, but indeed bring pleasure if realized.

Conclusion

I began by saying that hopes, according to earlier ancient thinkers, have three negative features. Hopes are empty or false. They are typical of those who do not have a good grasp of their situation. And they do not make a positive contribution to planning. All three assumptions, according to the *Philebus*, are misguided. Hopes can be false. However, they can also be true, namely if imagination enables the agent to identify a pursuit that does not just look as if it will be enjoyable, but that she can take some steps to bring about, and that in fact she will enjoy. Agents who are good at hope have a

realistic grasp of their situation. Otherwise they don't know what to hope for. Moreover, hopes are thought experiments: reactive attitudes to future scenarios help agents understand what a good human life looks like.