

The good in Plato's *Philebus*

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ABSTRACT: In the *Philebus* Socrates conceives of the good as a universally ultimate, sufficient, motivating end for all organisms. He appeals to five informative criteria for selecting the states of soul that constitute a happy human life, i.e. one in which a human being possesses the good: purity, freedom from conflict, truth, due measure, proportion. Each criterion can be explained on the assumption that the good itself is unity, but apparently not on the basis of any other account of the good. Hence it is plausible that, when he wrote the *Philebus*, Plato thought that the good itself is the one.

According to Aristotle, as reported by his student Aristoxenus, Plato in his lecture on the good said that good is one (*hoti agathon estin hen*).¹ Plato's *Philebus* addresses the question of what the good is, but his characters do not answer it: Socrates and Protarchus "cannot hunt down the good in one form" (*mê miâi dunametha ideâi to agathon thêreusai*, 65a1).² Nevertheless, Socrates makes a number of unconstrained assertions³

¹ *Elements of Harmony* (da Rios 40.2). Aristotle in his surviving writings is a little more reticent. He interprets Plato as making the one a cause of the Forms in the sense of being their substance (*ousia*, 987b21) or essence (*ti esti*, 988a11); at 988b4-6, he attributes this position that the one is the essence (*to ti ên einai*) of the Forms more generally to "those who posit the Forms" (*hoi ta eidê tithentes*, 988a35-b1), who presumably include Plato. According to Aristotle, those who posit the Forms in turn make the Forms the essence (*ti esti*, 988a10-11; *to ti ên einai*, 988b4) or substance (*ousia*, 991b2-3) of all other things, so that a Platonic Form is in a certain (Aristotelian) sense substance and the one is therefore a cause of substance. That the one is a cause of substance is, according to Aristotle, something stated by "those who say that the good is the one" (988b12-13). Since Aristotle attributes the position that the one is a cause of substance to nobody other than those who posit the Forms, the authors of the statement that the good is the one are in all probability some or all of those who posit the Forms. Aristotle does not say explicitly whether Plato is one of the Form-positers who say that the good is the one.

² Translations of ancient Greek texts are my own, unless otherwise indicated. For passages from the *Philebus*, I have used the OCT text edited by Burnet, except where otherwise indicated, and I have consulted the translations of Benardete, Diès, Frede, Gosling, Hackforth and Taylor.

³ By "unconstrained assertions", I mean assertions that are not constrained by assertions of Philebus or Protarchus to which Socrates does not explicitly assent, or by the economy of the dialogue (i.e. the demand of the youths present that Socrates and they are to determine [*pros to dielesthai*, 19c5-6] in a single conversation what human possession is best). I assume that such unconstrained assertions reflect Plato's

about the good, and more specifically about the human good. So one might wonder about the logical relationship of those assertions to the proposition that the good is the one. Do they entail it? Are they explicable by it if one makes certain plausible assumptions? Are they completely independent of it? Are they contraindicated or even contradicted by it? The answers to these questions should shed light on whether Plato at the time he wrote the *Philebus* accepted the account of the good that Aristotle apparently attributes to him.

1. What Socrates in the *Philebus* means by ‘the good’

A universally ultimate end: In the *Philebus* Socrates understands the phrase ‘the good’ (*to agathon*) to stand for a universally ultimate end, something for the sake of which every end-directed event occurs but that does not exist for the sake of anything beyond itself. As he puts it at 54c9-11, “That for the sake of which what occurs for the sake of something would always occur, is in the class of the good; but what occurs for the sake of something must be put in another class.” (*To ge mên hou heneka to heneka tou gignomenon aei gignoit’ an, en têi tou agathou moirâi ekeino esti· to de tinos heneka gignomenon eis allên ... moiran theteon.*) This universal ultimacy may be what Socrates means when he asks Protarchus at 20d1-2 whether the class of the good must be *teleon* or not *teleon*, to which Protarchus replies, with Socrates’ apparent agreement, that “it is no doubt the most *teleon* of all things” (*pantôn dêpou teleôtaton*, 20d3).⁴ For, apparently

position at the time he wrote the *Philebus*, unless there is overriding evidence to the contrary, but that constrained assertions may not reflect Plato’s position. An example of a constrained assertion is Socrates’ statement at 66b8-c1 that sciences, arts and correct opinions rank fourth as possessions contributing to human happiness. The presupposition that a happy human life includes all the sciences, arts and correct opinions involves an absurd polymathy that Protarchus proposes at 62c-d as part of a good human life, but on which Socrates himself expresses no opinion. It would be surprising if Plato agreed with it.

⁴ Delcomminette (2006, p. 167) rightly rejects the attempt of Marsilio Ficino (2000, pp. 290-297) to deduce the three characteristics of the good agreed to without proof at 20d from a substantive conception of the good. The agreement that the good is *teleion*, *hikanon* and *haireton* is an agreement as to what the phrase ‘the good’ (*to agathon*) means, to be used as a basis for rejecting *Philebus*’ identification of the good with

reporting ordinary usage, Aristotle⁵ tells us that “we call what is pursued for itself more *teleion* than what is pursued for something else, and what is never chosen for something else more *teleion* than those things that are chosen for themselves and for something else,⁶ and unqualifiedly *teleion* what is always chosen for itself and never on account of something else” (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.7.1097a30-34). ‘Final’ or ‘ultimate’ would fit the context as translations of ‘*teleion*’ in the just-quoted sentence.⁷

A sufficient end: In addition, Socrates means by ‘the good’ a sufficient end. He says in his own name that the nature of the good differs from all other things (60b10) in that “any animal that always possesses it, to the end of its life, in every manner and in every respect, never needs anything else in addition, and has the most perfect self-sufficiency.” (*hôi pareiê tout’ aei tôn zôôn dia telous pantôs kai pantêi, mêdenos heterou*

pleasure, and also for rejecting the identification of the good with reason. It is not an agreement about the characteristics of whatever emerges as substantively constituting the good.

⁵ It might seem more reasonable to look at uses of *teleon* by Plato. And indeed, as Bury (1897, pp. 211-212) points out, there is a clear use of *teleon* at *Timaeus* 30c to mean ‘whole’ or ‘complete’, as contrasted to ‘having the character of a part’, a meaning carried through at 33a and 34b. But, since there is no suggestion in the *Philebus* that the good is a whole composed of parts, this meaning cannot be the meaning of *teleon* at *Philebus* 20d1-2, as Cooper (2003, p. 118, n. 2) points out. The response of Delcomminette (2006, p. 165, n. 9) that completeness can simply mean not being in need of anything does not apply to the meaning in the *Timaeus*, where being *teleon* is clearly contrasted to having the status of a part, and means including all the parts that there are—e.g. all the species of living organisms, all the bits of earth and air and fire and water.

⁶ Reading *di’ allo* in accordance with the ms. Γ of an ancient Latin translation, in place of the OCT reading *di’ auto* found in Aspasius’ commentary.

⁷ Cooper (2003, p. 118, n. 2) also interprets ‘*teleon*’ as ‘final’ on the basis of Aristotle’s explanation of the meaning of the term, assuming that Aristotle’s criteria of finality and self-sufficiency for the highest good achievable by action are derived from the discussion at *Philebus* 20b-23b. See also Kenny (2003, p. 148.) Delcomminette (2006, p. 165) interprets ‘*teleon*’ as ‘complete’, in the sense of lacking nothing. He argues (2006, p. 168) that each of the three criteria implies the other two, since Socrates uses only the third criterion in rejecting reason as the good (and the second and the third criteria more or less equivalently in rejecting pleasure). But this argument has little force, since Socrates does not claim that reason (or pleasure) fails on all three criteria. On the contrary, the fact that Socrates asks separately whether the good is *teleon* and whether it is *hikanon* suggests strongly that these are two distinct, independent criteria. Delcomminette, following Bury (1897, pp. 211-214), offers the following analysis of the relationship between the three criteria: “*teleon* characterizes the good with reference to itself, while *hikanon* is related rather to its consequences for those who possess it, and *haireton* to the manner in which it appears to those who do not yet possess it.” (2006, p. 168, my translation) But Socrates’ later explanation of ‘*hikanon*’ at 60c as meaning ‘such that any living organism possessing it in all respects and in every way to the end of its life would need nothing else’ implies that it would mean exactly the same as ‘complete’. It is implausible that at 20d1-6 Socrates asks the same question twice, in immediate succession.

pote eti prosdeisthai, to de hikanon teleôtaton echein, 60c2-4) It should be noted, however, that the claim that sufficiency in this sense is a distinguishing feature of the good does not imply, nor does Socrates assert, either that being sufficient is a complete definition of ‘the good’ or that the other components of the meaning of ‘the good’ can be derived from sufficiency.

A motivating end: Thirdly, Socrates means by ‘the good’ an end that is motivating for anything that has cognitive capacities. “Everything that knows⁸ hunts for it and aims at it with a view to getting and possessing it.” (*pan to gignôskon auto thêreuei kai ephietai boulomenon helein kai peri auto⁹ ktêsasthai, 20d8-9*) The word ‘*gignôskon*’ appears to be used here as a general umbrella term for any sort of conscious awareness, and for a capacity rather than a state; no form of this word occurs in any of Socrates’ lists of cognitive states that he asserts to be better than pleasure for those that can acquire them. The characteristic of being an object of acquisitive desire, which Socrates labels ‘*haireton*’ (‘choosable’ or ‘choiceworthy’), does not imply that what an individual organism concretely pursues as its ultimate goal is in fact the good for that individual. For Socrates recognizes that Philebus pursues the most intense pleasures as his ultimate end, but actively challenges Philebus’ claim that pleasure is the good for all animals, and in particular for Philebus. Philebus, as a conscious individual, wants to get and possess the good, but hunts for and aims at pleasure, under the mistaken impression that it is the good. On the other hand, if beasts do universally pursue pleasure as their ultimate

⁸ Not “knows it”, as some translators (Benardete, Frede, Hackforth and Taylor) would have it. The word “*auto*” in the Greek must be the object of “*thêreuei kai ephietai*”, and cannot do double duty as also being the object of “*gignôskon*”. Further, it makes sense to attribute to any organism with some cognitive capacity a desire to get for itself that ultimate end whose possession will leave it in need of nothing. No particular awareness of what the good substantively is seems required. My translation here agrees with those of Diès and Gosling.

⁹ Reading *auto* with mss. B and T in preference to the OCT reading *hautō*.

sufficient goal, as the hedonist argument reported at 67b asserts, Socrates would be hard pressed to say that pleasure is not the good for beasts; it should be noted however that Socrates does not there express agreement with the hedonist premiss.

An end for all living organisms: Fourthly, by ‘the good’ Socrates means a universally ultimate, sufficient, motivating goal for all living organisms. Summing up at 22b the results of the thought-experiment of considering lives with pleasure but no cognition and with cognition but no pleasure, Socrates says that, if either life contained the good, “it would be sufficient and ultimate and choiceworthy for all plants and animals that were able to live in this way always, throughout their life; any of us who chose other things would get them contrary to the nature of the truly choiceworthy, unwillingly, out of ignorance or some unhappy necessity.” (*ên gar an hikanos kai teleos kai pasi phutois kai zôiois hairetos, hoisper dunaton ên houtôs aei dia biou zên· ei de tis alla hêireith’ hêmôn, para phusin an tên tou alêthôs hairitou elambanen akôn ex agnoias ê tinos anankês ouk eudaimonos*, 22b3-5) Presumably Socrates is aware that plants cannot experience pleasure or grasp truths, so the mention of plants in this context reflects the breadth of application of the concept of the good rather than an expectation that a plant might lead a life of, say, intense pleasures without cognition.¹⁰ The good is a universally ultimate, sufficient, motivating goal not only for plants, beasts and human beings, but also for gods (22c5-6), whom Socrates in the *Philebus* thus implicitly construes as

¹⁰ Delcomminette (2006, pp. 36 ff.) assumes that Socrates is defining the good at 11d4-6 when he speaks of “a state and condition of soul that can provide to all human beings the happy life” (*hexin psuchês kai diathesin ... tina ... tên dunamenên anthrôpôis pasi ton bion eudaimona parechein*). But at 11d4-6 it is an open question whether there is such a single state, and the upshot of the thought-experiment at 20b-22b is that there is not; a mixed life containing both pleasure and cognition turns out to be better than a life containing either without the other. Further, the good for plants obviously does not include any cognitive states, since plants cannot acquire them. It is not even clear whether the good for human beings is a single state and condition of their soul; indeed, the end result of the dialogue is that it has five components, ranked in importance.

animals, that is, as living organisms with cognitive capacities that can initiate their own local motion.

2. Comparison to what Socrates in the *Republic* means by ‘the good’

Basic similarity, with differences: The conception of the good in the *Philebus* as a universally ultimate, sufficient, motivating goal for all living organisms is similar to its conception in Plato’s *Republic* as “what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything” (*ho dê diôkei men hapasa pscuhê kai toutou heneka panta prattei*, 505e1-2). But there are differences.

An end for living organisms rather than souls: Whereas in the *Republic* Socrates takes ‘the good’ to refer to a universally ultimate end for souls, in the *Philebus* he takes it to refer to a universally ultimate end for living organisms. This difference fits with the absence from the *Philebus* both of any suggestion that a soul can exist apart from the body that it animates and of even a hint that a soul can migrate after death to a body of a different species; the discussion of what human possession is best, in the sense of being able to provide a happy life to all human beings (11d5-6), proceeds without any consideration of what might happen to a human being after death. Despite the shift of pursuer from soul to organism, however, it appears that Socrates in the *Philebus* still construes the good to be some sort of state (*hexis*) or condition (*diathesis*) of a soul (11d4). For all the candidates for the good of a human being that are considered in the dialogue—pleasures, cognitive states, truth, measure, proportion, beauty—are, or are construed as, characteristics of the soul rather than of either the human being as a whole or the human body or human external possessions.

Pursued by all knowing organisms rather than by all souls: A second difference from the definition in the *Republic* is the qualification of the organism that pursues the good as “knowing” (*gignôskon*). This qualification appears to be a consequence of the first difference. If the soul of a plant has latently all the cognitive powers that it would exhibit if it were reincarnated as a human being, then it makes sense to construe that soul as pursuing something and doing everything for its sake. But it makes no sense to construe a plant, in the absence of any doctrine of its soul’s *post mortem* survival and possible reincarnation in an animal with desires, as hunting for and aiming at something with a view to getting and possessing it.¹¹

Distinguished from everything else by its sufficiency: A third difference from the definition in the *Republic* is the addition of sufficiency and its identification as a distinguishing mark of the good. The fact that something is pursued as a universally ultimate end does not imply that its permanent acquisition leaves the pursuer in need of nothing. For, in the first place, getting what one wants does not necessarily mean being satisfied with what one gets. And, in the second place, even if what is pursued as a universally ultimate end is in fact satisfactory, there might be subsidiary goals worth pursuing in themselves as well as for the sake of this end, in which case someone could be in need of something (achieving the subsidiary goal) despite permanently possessing the universally ultimate end. For example, if the universally ultimate end is pleasure and knowledge of some sort is valuable not only as a means to getting pleasure but also in itself, a soul that gets permanent pleasure without obtaining that knowledge might still be

¹¹ Admittedly, at *Theaetetus* 167b7-c2, Socrates imagines Protagoras attributes perceptions to plants. But there is no indication there that plants have desires.

in need of the knowledge. The characterization in the *Philebus* of the good as sufficient eliminates any such possibility.

Different concretely from one type of organism to another: A fourth, and highly significant, difference from the *Republic* account is the recognition of a difference from one type of organism to another in what the good concretely is. In summarizing his position at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates does not say that cognitive states are better than pleasure for all organisms, but only “for all that can get a share of them” (*sumpasin hosaper autôn dunata metalabein*, 11b9-c1). At the end of the dialogue, he does not rule out the possibility that pleasure is the good for beasts, even though it is not the good for human beings. And, while recognizing that reason is not the good for human beings, who need pleasure as well, he expresses the opinion that things are different with “the true and divine reason” (*ton ... aiêthinon hama kai theion ... noun*, 22c5-6), apparently because he regards it as “unseemly” (*aschêmon*, 33b10) for gods to experience joy or its contrary. The inappropriateness of divine enjoyment or suffering is in fact a logical consequence of Socrates’ beliefs about pleasure, pain and the gods: all pleasures imply a lack in the organism experiencing the pleasure and all pains are a felt lack, but Socrates, at least in other dialogues, regards gods as lacking nothing (cf. *Euthyphro* 13c, *Republic* 2.381b-c).¹²

3. Does Socrates in the *Philebus* allow for a single substantive goal as the good itself?

¹² Delcomminette (2006, pp. 187-193) makes a strong case, however, that “the true and divine reason” is a life accessible in principle to human beings, whose characteristics are gradually developed in three passages, at 32d-33c, 42d-43d and 55a. He argues that this life includes some pleasure, both in humans and in gods, and construes the denial at 33b that the gods experience joy as confined to the pleasures of repletion that have just been discussed. If his position is accepted, Socrates will nevertheless be committed in the *Philebus* to concrete differences in what constitutes the good for plants, for beasts and for rational animals (including both gods and humans).

One might even doubt whether the Socrates of the *Philebus* retains the commitment of the *Republic* to a single substantive universally ultimate end for all living organisms. Perhaps all that is in common to the good for plants of various species, for beasts, for humans and for gods is the purely formal feature of being a universally ultimate, sufficient, in-principle motivating end for an organism of the species in question. Nevertheless, the differences between the substantive concrete goods of different kinds of living organisms are compatible with a single common substantive abstract good like unity, whose concrete manifestation in a given kind of organism would be a function of the capacities of that kind of organism. A unified human soul, for example, would be free of internal conflicts, whether cognitive or conative—no inconsistencies in the belief system, no inner tensions and struggles about what to pursue as a goal.

One might also think¹³ that Socrates in the *Philebus* gives his final answer as to what the good substantively is for a human being, when he says to Protarchus, “So, if we cannot hunt down the good in one form, let us capture it with three—beauty, proportion and truth—and say that we would most correctly identify this triad, as a unity, as cause of the things in the mixture and that because of this, as being good, it has become good.” (*Oukoun ei mê miâi dunametha ideâi to agathon thêreusai, sun trisi labontes, kallei kai summetriai kai alêtheiai, legômen hôs touto hoion hen orthotat’ an aitiásaimeth’ an tôn en têi summeixei, kai dia touto hôs agathon on toiautên autên gegonenai, 65a2-5*) In this passage, as is indicated even by his echoing of the vocabulary, Socrates completes the project undertaken at 22d of identifying the cause (*aitiôimetha, 22d1*) of the mixed life of reason and pleasure, i.e. the ingredient because of which this life has become

¹³ Among the proponents of this position are Delcomminette (2006, pp. 13, 539-542).

choiceworthy and good (*gegonen hairetos hama kai agathos*, 22d7). But there he distinguished this immanent cause of the mixture from the good (22d4). So it is at least possible that he here distinguishes the immanent good-making triad beauty-proportion-truth, which is good, from *the* good. On this interpretation, beauty-proportion-truth would be the immanent state of a human soul that most closely reflects the good itself, and would thus be responsible by its presence for the mixture of cognitive states and pleasures being a good mixture. The triad would thus either resemble the good itself or cause the soul by its presence to resemble the good itself.

Before considering what Socrates means by each member of the triad beauty-proportion-truth, and whether this triad can be regarded as being in a human soul either a reflection or a cause of unity, let us attend to the mixing process that preceded Socrates' identification of this triad as the good-making ingredient in the mixture. For Socrates provides some indications during the mixing process of the criteria that he is using to determine what makes such a mixture good. And those criteria ought to reflect the nature of the good itself.

4. Substantive criteria of goodness recognized by Socrates in the mixing process

Choose the truest pleasures and cognitions first: In the first place, Socrates cautions Protarchus that it is not safe (*ouk asphales*, 61d4) to mix every pleasure with every cognitive state, and proposes as a less dangerous (*akindunoteron*, 61d4) process to mix together first “the truest sections” (*talêthestata tmêmata*, 61e6) of pleasure and cognition, meaning in the case of pleasure those pleasures itemized at 51b-52b that are “true” (*alêtheis*, 51b1) in the sense of being free from any admixture of pain, and in the case of cognition the precise and clear knowledge of unchanging eternal realities, which

is free from any admixture of falsehood. If we take the superiority of the mixed life to a life of pleasure or cognition alone to imply that pleasure and grasp of the truth are both intrinsically good for a human being, then the danger that Socrates wishes to avoid is that of including intrinsically bad possessions, i.e. pain and commitment to falsehoods, in the mixture. Such an inclusion might be a danger if one were seeking to minimize intrinsic evils in one's life, or if one were seeking to optimize the net balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil. But it would also be a danger if one were seeking to avoid internally conflicted mental states and conditions, in which one was simultaneously experiencing both something intrinsically good and its contrary. Such a goal seems not far from the surface in Socrates' painstaking differentiation of pure or true pleasures from pleasures mixed with pain and distress (51a-53c). And its value is clearly explicable on the assumption that the good is unity: a unified soul will not simultaneously possess contrary states or contrary conditions.

Combine only mutually reinforcing or non-conflicting kinds: In the second place, Socrates sets up an imaginary interrogation of pleasures on the one hand and of wisdom (*phronêsis*)¹⁴ and reason (*nous*) on the other about which species of the other genus they would welcome, and he endorses their answers (63c5, 64a3-5). The point of this approach is to ensure that cognition enhances pleasure and that pleasure does not impede cognition—in other words, that the ingredients of a beautifully mixed human life work together and not against one another. Thus the pleasures express the opinion that the best

¹⁴ Frede, Gosling, Hackforth and Taylor translate "*phronêsis*" here as "intelligence", Benardete as "mind". Delcomminette (2006, p. 24, n. 6) chooses to translate it throughout his study as "pensée" ("thought" or "thinking"), on the ground that "*phronêsis*" has both a broad sense, covering all the processes belonging to Descartes's *res cogitans*, and a strict sense, designating the most pure thinking. I assume that Socrates uses both "*phronêsis*" and "*nous*" at 63c5ff. in the strict sense that he defined at 59d4-5, as "situated among thoughts about what is really real" (*en tais peri to on ontôs ennoias ... keimena*); it is only the purest and truest cognitive states that would be qualified to pronounce on which pleasures to admit as cohabitants. My translation agrees with that of Diès, who renders "*phronêsis*" as "sagesse".

of all kinds to dwell with them is “the kind that knows everything else and in particular each of us as perfectly as possible” (*to tou gignôskein talla te panta kai autên*¹⁵ *hêmôn teleôs eis dunamin hekastên*, 63c2-3). This kind is the truest knowledge, that of eternal monads; presumably the reason why the pleasures privilege the knowledge of themselves is that it contributes more than the knowledge of other things to their own flourishing. Wisdom and reason, on the other hand, reject the greatest and most intense pleasures as co-habitants, on the ground that “they bring myriads of impediments to us by disturbing the souls in which we dwell with crazy pangs, don’t allow us to come into being from the beginning, and for the most part completely destroy the offspring arising from us by producing forgetting through neglect.” (*empodismata te muria hêmîn echousi, tas psuchas en hais oikoumen tarattousai dia manikas ôdinas*¹⁶, *kai gignesthai te hêmas tèn archên ouk eôsi, ta te gignomena hêmôn tekna hôs to polu, di’ ameleian lêthên empoiousai, pantapasi diaphtheirousin*, 63d5-e3) Helpfully, they provide a rationale for avoiding impediments to the functioning, birth and preservation of cognitive states: that of producing “a most beautiful and conflict-free mixture and blend” (*hoti kallistên ... kai astasiastotatên meixin kai krasin*, 63e9-64a1). As to the beauty of the mixture, Socrates mentions beauty more than once during the mixing process as a desideratum (61b8, 63e9, 64b7), but does not provide the account of it that his hearers, and the reader of the dialogue, would need to understand how it functions as a criterion—‘beautiful’ seems to be almost a synonym of ‘good’. But freedom from *stasis*, civil strife or factionalism, is a clear criterion. To learn what is by nature good in a human being and in the universe by

¹⁵ I follow Burnet’s OCT edition and Diès’s Budé edition in excising an immediately preceding “*au tèn*” in mss. T and W (*tèn* in B) as an erroneous scribal duplication.

¹⁶ I follow Diès in reading “*manikas ôdinas*”, in place of the mss. reading “*manikas hêdonas*”, on the basis of *Timaeus* 86c6.

looking at a mixture of pleasures and cognitions, reason and wisdom reasonably and wisely say, one must have a mixture that is as free from internal conflict as possible. Clearly this dictum is explicable on the hypothesis that the good is unity: if the good is unity, one will learn this fact by looking at a life only if it is as free from internal psychological conflict as possible.

One part of the response of the pleasures is however difficult to explain if the good is the one. They say: “For any kind to exist alone and in solitary purity is neither something very possible nor beneficial.” (*To monon kai herêmon eilikrines einai ti genos oute panu ti dunaton out’ ôphelimon*, 63b7-c1) Socrates represents this statement as a compulsory (*anankaiotaton*, 63b5) repetition of what has been said earlier, an apparent reference to the results of the thought-experiment at 20c-22c, that neither a life of pleasure without cognition nor a life of cognition without pleasure contains the good (22b3-4). But here the point is put more generically and extended from undesirability to impossibility. The impossibility of the soul’s containing just one kind poses no problem for the hypothesis that the good is unity, since a soul can only be as unified as possible. And indeed, on reflection, a life of unconscious pleasures is in fact impossible, as is a life of joyless learning. But the principle that it is not beneficial for any kind to exist alone and in solitary purity causes more difficulty, especially if one construes it as applying even if a kind *can* exist alone. Are the gods deprived of a benefit by having in their soul pure reason with no accompanying pleasure? At 22c5-6, Socrates thought not. If he is to be consistent, he must be construed as limiting the principle enunciated at 63b7-c1 to human beings, or more generally to those living organisms whose complexity makes a single concrete goal inferior to a harmoniously organized plurality of concrete goals.

Thus the benefit of having more than one kind in a soul would not be an ultimate intrinsic value, but would reflect the complexity of the organism that the soul is animating.

Include truth: In the third place, Socrates rather unexpectedly adds truth to the mixture that Protarchus has chosen (64a7-b9). Further, he recalls this addition in the subsequent discussion of the ingredients that make the mixture good (64e9-11), includes truth as part of the good-making triad beauty-proportion-truth (65a1-5), and invites Protarchus to say whether pleasure or reason is more akin to truth (65b10-c3). Curiously, however, he does not mention truth in his ranking of human possessions in a good life (66a4-d3). To understand what Socrates is adding, why he finds it possible to omit any mention of truth from his ranking of the best human possessions, and whether the recognition of truth as a good-making feature of a human life can be explained on the hypothesis that the good is unity, we need to look at Socrates' rationale for adding truth to the mixture. This rationale is that otherwise this mixture "could never come to be or be one" (*ouk allôs an pote genoito oud' an hen*, 64a7-8)—without truth it "could never truly come to be or, if it did come to be, exist" (*ouk an pote alêthôs gignoitō oud' an genomenon eiê*, 64b2-3). How should the term 'truth' be understood, if we are to make plausible the claim that without truth a mixture of psychological states and conditions could neither come to be nor have a stable, unitary existence? Clearly Socrates is not talking about truth as a property of correct opinions; the cognitive states added to the mixture already have this property, and Socrates is adding an ingredient to the whole mixture, not shoring up one component of it. Nor is he talking about truth as purity, freedom from alien admixtures. For Protarchus has let in all the impure cognitive states, and some impure pleasures as well. Nor is he talking about truth as knowability, the sense

that ‘truth’ has in the comparison of the good to the sun at *Republic* 507a-509a, since knowability is not a necessary component of a generated, unified and existing mixture of psychic states. It appears that Socrates is using ‘truth’ as a synonym for ‘reality’, and that he might well have used ‘being’ (*on*) just as easily as the label for this ingredient and justified its inclusion as necessary for the mixture to ‘really’ (*ontôs*) come into being. Thus the requirement is that the mixture of cognitions and pleasures be something really possible. This requirement in fact duplicates the conditions of mutual reinforcement and absence of internal conflict that Socrates has already endorsed, since these conditions produce a stable mixture. In the final ranking, it is implicitly met by the mention of measure and proportion, which together likewise guarantee stability, so it does not need to be mentioned. The main function of adding it explicitly at 64a7-b9 is to provide another basis for holding that reason is more akin than pleasure to the immanent good-making ingredients of a good human life. At any rate, the reason that Socrates gives for recognizing truth as an ingredient of a good mixture—namely, that it is required to make something be one—follows directly from the hypothesis that the good is the one: if the good is unity, then anything required to make a mixture of states and conditions in a soul be one is a good-making ingredient of that soul.

Apart from the three aforementioned features—Socrates’ addition of truth, his proposal to mix in first the pure pleasures and cognitions, and his endorsement of the imagined choices of the pleasures and of wisdom and reason as to which species of the other genus to cohabit with—no other aspect of the mixing process reveals anything about Socrates’ implicit conception of the good itself. He does not endorse the impure ingredients that Protarchus adds to the mixture, and the other criteria appealed to in the

mixing process—beauty, necessity, benefit, harmlessness, possibility—either are merely schematic or are not endorsed by Socrates.

5. The good-making triad beauty-proportion-truth

Truth and beauty: We can therefore return to the question whether the immanent good-making triad beauty-proportion-truth can be regarded as a reflection or cause of unity. We have already seen that Socrates added truth to the mixture on the ground that it is a necessary condition for the mixture's being one. Further, Socrates introduces beauty as a good-making feature of the mixture, at 64e6-7, as a consequence of its *metriotês* and *summetria*. So our question reduces to the question whether *metriotês* and *summetria*, which at 66a-b Socrates ranks best and second best among good human possessions, can be regarded as a reflection or cause of unity.

The meaning of metriotês and summetria: To answer this question, we need to get clear on what Socrates understands by these two characteristics. The common root *metr-* of their names indicates that the characteristics are quantitative, having to do with measurement. The mixing process provides no guidance in identifying them more precisely, for neither *metriotês* nor *summetria* was appealed to as a criterion during that process, nor is it easy to see how the resulting mixture exhibits any sort of measurability, since at no point did Socrates or Protarchus raise a question about the absolute quantity or relative proportion of the ingredients. The focus of their discussion was not quantitative but qualitative: What kinds of cognition and what kinds of pleasure belong to a good human life?

In fact, Socrates identifies *metriotês* and *summetria* as good-making ingredients on the basis of a general argument that they are the cause of the value of any mixture.

The argument runs as follows:

1. Such <a blending together> [i.e. one that does not obtain *metron* and the *summetros* nature] is not a blend but a truly unblended kneading together, and each time becomes really a misfortune for its possessors. (*oude ... krasis alla tis akratos sumpephurmenê*¹⁷ *alêthôs hê toiautê* [i.e. *metrou kai tês summetrou phuseôs mê tuchousa ... sunkrasis*, 64d9-10] *gignetai hekastote ontôs tois kektêmenois sumphora*, 64d11-e3)

2. Therefore, every blending together of whatever kind and in whatever manner that does not obtain *metron* and the *summetros* nature, of necessity ruins the things being blended and itself first. (from 1; *metrou kai tês summetrou phuseôs mê tuchousa hêtisoun kai hopôsoun sunkrasis pasa ex anankês apollusi ta te kerannumena kai prôtên autên*, 64d9-11)

3. Therefore, for any and every mixture it is not difficult to see <that *metron* and the *summetros* nature are> the cause through which it becomes worth everything or nothing at all. (from 2; *kai mên kai sumpasês ge meixeôs ou chalepon idein* [sc. *metron kai tên summetrou phusin einai*] *tên aitian, di' hên ê pantos axia gignetai hêtisoun ê to parapan oudenos*, 64d2-5)

The inferential sequence in this chain of reasoning seems to go as follows: blending without *metron* and *summetria* → no blend but unblended kneading together → blend

¹⁷ I read *sumpephurmenê* as in W, by analogy to 51a7. The pun with *sumphora* in the next line need not imply the cognate verb *sumpephorêmenê*, which is likely to have been introduced in the transmission of the text as a 'correction' bringing about the commonality of root. The translation above makes no attempt to reflect Plato's punning.

and the things blended ruined → mixture worth nothing. Whereas Socrates earlier compared their mixing of pleasures and cognitions to the mixing of honey and water in a cup whose contents are to be poured out as a libation to a god (61c4-8; see Benardete 1993, p. 77, n. 141), now he uses an inadequate kneading together of flour and water as a metaphor for attempts at blending that fail because of an absence of *metron* and *summetria*. It would presumably be common knowledge in Plato's day that failure to knead the dough for a long enough time will result in a heavy and dense loaf, thus ruining both the mixture and its ingredients.¹⁸ This knowledge gives somewhat¹⁹ the same sense for “*metriotês*” as the visitor from Elea gives at *Statesman* 283e-284e for “*to metrion*”: he classes *to metrion* with the fitting (*to prepon*, 284e6), the appropriate [sc. in time or place] (*to kairon*, 284e6-7), the obligatory (*to deon*, 284e7) and “all things that have been banished from the extremes to the middle” (*panth' hoposa eis to meson apôikisthê tôn eschatôn*, 284e7-8). The central idea at *Statesman* 283e-284e is of an absolute quantitative standard in relation to which a quantity can be judged as excessive or deficient, as opposed to judging it merely as greater or less than another quantity of the same type. Thus, in the kneading of dough, there is a “due measure” of time taken. In other mixtures, the due measure may be of some other quantity, e.g. the volume of honey put in a cup by someone preparing an offering to a god, or the amount of time spent acquiring some body of knowledge. The construal of *metriotês* as an absolute standard is implicit in

¹⁸ Quantitative limits are important in many other aspects of bread-making. For example, the ratio by weight of flour to water determines how fine or coarse is the texture of the bread, the location where the bread is left to rise must be neither too cool nor too warm, the bread must be left to rise for a length of time that is neither too short nor too long, and the bread must be baked at a temperature that is neither too hot nor too cool for a period of time that is neither too long nor too short. But, since the text refers only to kneading, we cannot use these requirements for a good loaf of bread to infer what the text means by *metron* and *summetria*.

¹⁹ I say “somewhat” because it is apparently quite difficult to knead dough for too long a time. The key thing is to knead it for long enough.

Protarchus' statement that nothing is more unmeasured (*ametrôteron*, 65d9) than pleasure or more enmeasured (*emmetrôteron*, 65d10) than reason and knowledge.

What about *summetria*? In kneading dough, one must be careful not only to knead the dough long enough but also not to add too much flour during the kneading process. Adding too much flour leaves one with a dry, flavourless and tough loaf.²⁰ This fact could well have been common knowledge in Plato's day. Here what is in question is the proportion of the ingredients. The interpretation of *metriotês* as measuredness²¹ and *summetria* as proportion fits well with Socrates' assertion that "*metriotês* and *summetria* without doubt turn out everywhere to be beauty and virtue" (*metriotês ... kai summetria kallos dêpou kai arête pantachou sumbainei gignesthai*, 64e6-7). Construal of "*summetria*" as "symmetry" fits neither the remark about beauty, since Socrates recognizes the beauty of simple shapes and colours and notes (51c-d) where no symmetry is involved, nor that about virtue, where the issue of symmetry does not arise. Construal of "*summetria*" as "commensurateness" would not fit the remark at all.

The text however discourages too precise a specification of the meaning of *metron* and *hê summetros phusis*. As Hackforth points out (1960, p. 133, n. 1), Socrates varies his terminology, speaking at 64d9 of *metrou kai tês summetrou phuseôs*, at 64e5 of *metriotês kai summetria*, at 65a2 of *summetria*, and at 65b8 and 65d4 of *metriotês*, in contexts that indicate that in each case the term or terms refer to the same factor in a good mixture. At 66a-b, however, Socrates puts *metron kai to metrion* ("measure and the measured", 66a6-7) in one category along with *to kairion* ("the appropriate [sc. time or

²⁰ See <http://www.baking911.com/bread/101_knead.htm#HOW%20TO%20KNEAD%20DOUGH>; visited 2007 August 24.

²¹ In the sense of exhibiting a "due measure".

place]”, 66a) and all such things (*panta hoposa toiauta*, 66a7);²² but *to summetron kai kalon* (“the proportionate and beautiful”, 66b1) in a different category along with *to teleon kai hikanon* (“the ultimate and sufficient”, 66b2) and all things that belong to this family (*panta hoposa tês geneas au tautês estin*, 66b2-3).

Explanation of the value of measure and proportion: Can the hypothesis that the good is the one account for the combination of due measure and proportion being a necessary and sufficient condition for the value of any mixture? Socrates claims that, without these “ingredients”, a mixture does not become a blend, i.e. does not become unified. His assumption is that the aim of any blending process is to produce a uniform product in which the ingredients are thoroughly integrated with one another. In particular, in mixing the concrete ingredients of a good life, a person is trying to get them to fit together harmoniously. Given a variety of concrete ingredients, such a blending is the closest a person can get to a perfectly unified soul.

6. Conclusion

Thus all the informative criteria to which Socrates appeals as good-making criteria—purity, freedom from conflict, truth, beauty, due measure, proportion—can be explained on the hypothesis that the good itself is the one. Each of them is, directly or indirectly, either a necessary condition for, or a helpful contributor to, the soul of a human being becoming as unified as possible. Further, it is difficult to imagine any other account of the good itself that could explain why each of these is a desideratum for the

²² At 66a8, I follow Diès in accepting the marginal reading in W (cod. Vindobonensis 54, suppl. phil. Gr. 7) *tina hêdion* for the manuscripts’ reading *tên aidion*, so that 66a6-8 reads: *prôton men pêi peri metron kai to metron kai kairion kai panta hosa toiauta chrê nomizein tina hêdion hêirêsthai* (“it is necessary to believe that something more pleasant has been chosen to be first, somewhere around measure, i.e. what is measured and appropriate and all such things”).

psychological state of a happy human being. If one thinks of competing accounts of the good in ancient Greek philosophy—Democritus’ *euthumia*, Socrates’ *phronêsis*, Stoic *sophia*, Epicurus’s *aponia* and *ataraxia*, Pyrrhonian *ataraxia*, Arcesilaus’ *epochê*—one sees quickly that none of them can explain the criteria used by Socrates in the *Philebus*. But these criteria can be explained by the view attributed to Plato that the good is *to hen*. So it is plausible that when he wrote the *Philebus* Plato thought that the good itself is the one.

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