

The good in Plato's *Philebus*

In (Hitchcock, 1985), I argued that Socrates' comparison of the good with the sun at *Republic* 507d-509c is a series of hints that the good, which is neither knowledge nor pleasure (505b-d, 509a), is the one. In this paper, I investigate Socrates' conception of the good in the *Philebus*.

Socrates means by the good an ultimate (*teleon*, 20d1-3, 60c3-4; cf. 54c), comprehensive (*hikanon*, 20d4-6, 60c1-5), motivating (*hairaton*, 22b; cf. 20d7-11) end for all souls (22b4-5). Concretely, it differs from organism to organism, in accordance with the organism's capacities and limitations: cognitive states are better than pleasure—for souls that can acquire them (11b7-c1); beasts pursue enjoyment as their ultimate goal (67b1-2); reason without pleasure is insufficient for humans, but enough for gods (22c5-6).

As in the *Republic*, but on rather different grounds, Socrates denies that the good is either pleasure or cognition (22d3, 61a1-2), at least for a human being. He looks for it in the human life that contains a beautifully mixed and faction-free blending of cognitive states and pleasures (61b8-9, 63e8-64a1), but cannot find it in one form (65e1). We are however given three sorts of clues to the identity of the good itself: the criteria explicitly appealed to in creating the humanly beautiful mixture of pleasures and cognitions, Socrates' retrospective claims about what makes this mixture good, and his statements about the creation of mixed entities by the imposition of a limit on an unlimited.

Socrates explicitly appeals during the mixing process at 61a-64b to the criteria of beauty, safety, purity or truth, necessity, benefit, harmlessness, possibility, freedom from factional dispute, coherence, truth, and order. While some of these criteria are merely schematic, the substantive ones imply that a beautiful human mixture will consist of a variety of mutually enhancing and supporting states and conditions.

Retrospectively, Socrates claims that measure and proportion, beauty, and truth make this mixture good. The crucial features, measure (*metriotês*) and proportion (*summetria*), are respectively an absolute limit manifested by a single ingredient (the "due measure" of *Statesman* 283e-284e) and the correct ratio between different ingredients.

In general, Socrates says, a mixture is formed when a limit "stops contraries from having differences with one another, and by putting in number makes them proportionate (*summetra*) and consonant (*sumphônâ*)" (25d11-e2). That is, a fluctuation of a variable on whose values there is an ordering relation gives way to a stable value which is good.

Thus the crucial immanent good-making factor in the soul of a human being who lives a happy life turns out to be measure (in the sense of due measure, that which is neither too much nor too little), along with its implication, proportion. The measure and proportion result from the imposition of limit on the unlimited. They produce a unification of the person's cognitive states and pleasant experiences. In Socrates' metaphors, these ingredients form a uniform blend and live together peaceably in the same house. They are as unified as the states and conditions of a human soul can be. Thus the theory of the good human life in the *Philebus* is coherent with a conception of the good itself as the one.

Reference

Hitchcock, D. (1985). "The good in Plato's *Republic*." *Apeiron* 19: 65-92.