

## University of Groningen

### Plato on pleasure and illusion

van Zoonen, Derek

DOI:  
[10.33612/diss.250286363](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.250286363)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2022

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
van Zoonen, D. (2022). *Plato on pleasure and illusion*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.250286363>

#### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

#### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*



university of  
 groningen

# Plato on Pleasure and Illusion

**PhD thesis**

to obtain the degree of PhD at the  
University of Groningen  
on the authority of the  
Rector Magnificus Prof. C. Wijmenga  
and in accordance with  
the decision by the College of Deans.

This thesis will be defended in public on

Thursday 27 October 2022 at 16.15 hours

by

**Derk Hilbrand Cornelis van Zoonen**

born on 19 April 1989  
in Hardenberg

**Supervisor**

Prof. L.W. Nauta

**Co-supervisor**

Dr. T.M. Nawar

**Assessment Committee**

Prof. T. K. Johansen (University of Oslo)

Prof. J. Moss (New York University)

Prof. K. M. Vogt (Columbia University)

‘[D]er Schmerz fragt immer nach der Ursache, während die Lust geneigt ist, bei sich selber stehenzubleiben und nicht rückwärts zu schauen.’ — Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*

‘But if you take that portion of them by which [these deceptive pleasures] appear [different] than they really are, and cut it off from each of them as a mere appearance and without real being (τὸ φαινόμενον ἀλλ’ οὐκ ὄν), you will neither admit that this appearance is right (ὀρθῶς φαινόμενον) nor dare to say that anything connected with this portion of pleasure ... is right and true (ὀρθόν τε καὶ ἀληθές).’ — Plato, *Philebus*

‘[M]orality, goodness, is a form of realism. The idea of a really good man living in a private dream world seems unacceptable. Of course, a good man may be infinitely eccentric, but he must know certain things about his surroundings. ... The chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one. Rilke said of Cézanne that he did not paint ‘I like it’, he painted ‘There it is.’ This is not easy, and requires, in art or in morals, a discipline.’ — Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*



## Contents

Preface and acknowledgements.....	1
0. Introduction .....	6
1. Cleansing the Doors of Perception: Plato's <i>Phaedo</i> on the Dangers of Bodily Pleasure .....	30
2. Tricked by Pleasure: Hedonic Fallibilism in Plato's <i>Republic</i> .....	81
3. 'The Greatest Impostor': Hedonic Cognitivism, Hedonic Fallibilism, and Deceptive Pleasure in Plato's <i>Philebus</i> (36c3–41a4) .....	134
4. Problems with the Life of Pleasure: the Γένεσις Argument in Plato's <i>Philebus</i> (53c4–55a12) .....	186
5. Conclusion .....	226
6. Bibliography .....	240
7. Nederlandse samenvatting.....	264

## Preface and acknowledgements

Perennial wisdom has it that mastery of a craft requires mastery of one's self. Writing this dissertation has been a tremendous challenge on every level of my being, possibly the most difficult thing I have ever done in my life. Like the great German classicist von Wilamowitz-Woellendorf—these days mainly known for his scathing review of Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie*—I have come to understand, experientially, that 'to make the ancients speak, we must feed them with our own blood.' Despite this challenge, or perhaps because of it, living the life of the mind for a significant part of my life has also taught me an awful lot about myself—not in the last place what my weaknesses and limitations are. 'To do philosophy,' Iris Murdoch once perceptively wrote, 'is to explore one's temperament and yet at the same time to attempt to discover the truth.'

I owe much gratitude to those who have accompanied me on this journey—in whatever shape or form. First of all, my thanks go to Lodi Nauta and especially Tamer Nawar—the two supervisors of this project. Lodi taught me the importance of being more pragmatic, and less perfectionistic, and he constantly urged me to keep the bigger picture in mind—philosophically, exegetically, and existentially. His sobering and supportive presence has meant a lot to me—especially towards the end of the project when I was on the brink of despair and he more or less single-handedly dragged me across the finish line of this academic marathon. It is a delight that the *pater familias* of Groningen's history of philosophy research community is my *Doktorvater*.

Tamer—my day-to-day supervisor—taught me, for a great part by exemplar, what rigorous, precise, and clear thinking looks like

and that there is such a thing as *quality* in philosophy. Indeed, engaging philosophically with Tamer is nothing less than to be reminded of such a standard. Through the unwavering stream of searching, sometimes devastating comments he provided on the countless drafts I sent his way and multiple hours-long, Oxbridge-tutorial-style sessions in which he always seemed to have a better grip on my ideas than I did myself, I slowly but surely got better at developing, finetuning, and polishing the ideas and arguments that make up this dissertation. As Philippa Foot describes her experience of doing philosophy with Elizabeth Anscombe, ‘it was like in those old children’s comics where a steamroller runs over a character who becomes flattened—an outline on the ground—but the character is there in the next episode, unscathed.’ Working together with Tamer did not just shape me as a thinker, it also convinced me how philosophy is best taught—up close and personal, driven by a deep commitment to unearthing the truth and ‘following the argument wherever it leads,’ and with the gloves off. I am proud to be his first (unofficial) *Doktorkind*.

I also want to thank the members of my reading committee, some of whom I have previously known: Thomas Johansen, Jessica Moss, and Katja Vogt. Thomas kindly hosted me in Oslo for a research visit in the late summer of 2018 and made me feel very welcome in Oslo’s vibrant ancient philosophy community. Ever since I stumbled across her work on Plato on pleasure (and illusion), Moss’s work has been a source of inspiration as well as an example of what good Platonic scholarship looks like. I am humbled—and frankly a bit frightened, given her expertise—that she serves on the reading committee. I am also indebted to Katja, lastly, who has an admirable talent for ‘making the ancients speak.’ Though not a formal supervisor, she has been very generous with her support: she sponsored a visit to Columbia University in the winter of 2019, right



before the pandemic broke loose, gave generous comments on some of the *Republic* 9 and *Philebus* material that can be found in chapters 2 and 4, and convinced me that there is an important difference between non-hedonism and anti-hedonism. Agnes Callard—whose unruly mind has fascinated me ever since I met her during a research stay in Oxford, back in 2017—should also be thanked here. Agnes helped me develop the ideas in chapter 4, when both of us were visiting Oslo in 2018, she has been available for input and discussion ever since our paths crossed, and she introduced me to Fernando Pessoa and Simone Weil—both of whom have become touchstones in my thinking.

I also want to thank Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, Martin Lenz, and Bart Streumer—my other ‘opponents’—and Han Thomas Adriaenssen, Joachim Aufderheide, Milena Bartholain, Amber Carpenter, Luca Castagnoli (who sponsored a visit to Oxford in the winter of 2017), Roger Crisp, Wessel van Dommelen, Job van Eck, Guus Eelink, Brian Embry, Sabine van Enckevort, Mehmet Erginel, Matthew Evans, Emily Fletcher, Dorothea Frede, Sjoerd Griffioen, Zena Hitz, Douglas Hutchinson, Albert Joesse, Matthew Matherne, Corijn van Mazijk, Alexander Mourelatos, Graham Parkes, Sybilla Pereira, Alesia Preite, Jan-Willem Romeijn, Andrea Sangiacomo, Cesar Reigosa Soler, Gerry Wakker, Stephen White, and Steven Willemsen—for inspiration, discussion, and/or support.

Obtaining a PhD, and especially a PhD in philosophy, is such a solitary, self-absorbed pursuit that it is easy to start taking yourself—and especially your identity as a philosopher—too seriously. Whatever context you have arranged for yourself on the surface, though, ‘there is always another context that makes that original idea of yourself absurd’—as the poet David Whyte notes. I am blessed with the many non-academics/non-philosophers around me who constantly invite me to inhabit that bigger context. For one, I want to thank my family—especially mom and dad, for their unconditional

support throughout the years, and my dear sister Anne who made me realize, through ‘tough love,’ that it was high time to bring this project to its end. I generally admire her talent for saying the right things, in the right way, for the right reason, at the right time.

Special thanks go to Maaïke Besseling (who kindly helped me with the graphic design of this thesis), Marieke Blaauw (who quickly transformed from a boss into an emotional anchor during the turbulent past year), Aafke Bouman, Karel Hendriks (for his radical curiosity), Maximilian Lohnert (for his warmth, his groundedness, his genuine interest in other people, and his dark humor), Fareeda van der Marel (for keeping our special connection alive), Jan Mars (who appeared seemingly *ex nihilo* in my life, most likely to confirm that there is only one true path—the path with heart), Sönke Matthewes (for our trilingual adventures), ‘Kalle’ Nonnen (who slowly but surely became ‘another self’ ever since we randomly met in the Indian Himalayas), Marleen Ritzema (for her unconditional loving presence), Josh Sallet (for his valuable support in all (bad) things academic and much more), Hessel Schaaf (for making me see things I tend to miss), Vincent Steinmetz (simply ‘parce que c’était lui; parce que c’était moi’), Wim Jan Trügg (as they say: when the pupil is ready, the guru appears), Roy Veenstra (for his stubbornness, which I simultaneously hate and love, and his passion for conceptual clarification), and many others who hopefully know who they are.

My ‘paranimfen’ Kimon Lèfas and Lia Döring—who have witnessed the many ups and downs of this PhD trajectory from (far too) nearby—deserve special mention. One of the many reasons why Kimon and me are such good friends is that we share the belief—pun intended—that pleasure should be taken very seriously. More than that, Kimon taught me a lot about Greeks on pleasure. What makes Lia such a fabulous creature is that she dedicates a large part of her life to finding out what it means to be a human being. In a way, then,

the attempt to develop a better understanding of the human struggle with pleasure has always felt like a shared quest. I feel so blessed and so grateful that the two of us are ‘just walking each other home.’

While living in Berlin, back in 2014/2015, I started thinking about the philosophical topics and problems scrutinized in this dissertation. Through a process of trial and error, I also began to discover there—quite Platonically—that neither hedonism nor anti-hedonism are satisfactory solutions to the ethical problem posed by pleasure. It is fitting, I think, that Sholem Krishtalka’s Berghain flyer (March), 2015 can be found on the cover of this dissertation. I thank him for granting me permission to use this beautiful image.

## 0. Introduction

Pleasure matters. We do not just simply care about feeling good, there also seems to be an intuitive link between the pleasurable (or painful) experiences our life contains and our level of welfare, well-being, or happiness. Pleasure is not just worth having in and of itself, then, it also enhances the value of a life.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, and perhaps less obviously, pleasure matters because it has a tendency to glue us to the objects or activities we enjoy.<sup>2</sup> This stickiness of pleasure explains, among other things, why our pleasures reflect our commitments, interests, and values, thereby reflecting who we really are and what we are ‘all about.’<sup>3</sup> By identifying someone’s pleasures, we identify what they care about, and by identifying what they care about, we identify the things in the world around which their selves are organised.

Plato’s views concerning pleasure might initially look puzzling. On the one hand, he seems to agree with much of what I just said. In the opening moves of the *Philebus*, Plato’s Socrates argues that if we had the chance to live our life full of ‘intelligence, reason, knowledge, and memory of all things (φρόνησιν μὲν καὶ νοῦν καὶ ἐπιστήμην καὶ μνήμην πᾶσαν πάντων, 21d9–10)’ but without pleasures—‘living in total insensitivity (τὸ παράπαν ἀπαθῆς πάντων

---

<sup>1</sup> This close connection between the two indeed explains why hedonism—the idea that well-being or happiness consists in the greatest balance of pleasant over painful experience or that all and only pleasure has positive value—has often seemed an obvious and intuitive view of the good life. For this connection, see e.g. Crisp (2021: § 4.1) and Haybron (2020: §2.1). For recent defences of hedonism, see e.g. Bramble (2016), Crisp (2006), Feldman (2002) and (2004), and Onfray (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Russell (2005: 2).

<sup>3</sup> Callard (2018: 35). For other so-called hybrid theories of valuing, which stress the importance of affective and emotional engagement in our valuing something, see e.g. Scheffler (2010) and Wallace (2013).

τῶν τοιούτων, 21e–2)’ — we should not choose this life simply because it is not worth living. In the same dialogue, Socrates concedes that many pleasures are good and worth having (e.g. at 13b1) and he also distances himself from a group of extreme pleasure-haters who deny the existence of pleasure and instead offer a privative theory of pleasure on which pleasure is nothing more than the absence or removal of painful desire (44c1).

Likewise, one of the arguments in book 9 of the *Republic* (580c10–588a6) claims that the rationally integrated, just life is better than the unjust life—seemingly in virtue of the fact that such a life is more pleasant. And in the same bit of text, Plato also differentiates three kinds of pleasure—instead of three different *ways* of getting one and the same pleasure—and claims that these hedonic kinds are inexorably connected with three radically different personality types which are characterized, in their turn, by radically different concerns and cares.

On the other hand, Plato often seems to be extremely suspicious of pleasure. In book 6 of the *Republic*, the suggestion that pleasure might be the good our life is aimed at reaching is immediately discarded and ascribed to ‘ordinary people (τοις πολλοις ἡδονὴ δοκεῖ εἶναι τὸ ἀγαθόν, 505b5)’ and when Glaucon so much as dares to mention this possibility again, Socrates brusquely silences him: ‘hush! (εὐφήμει, 509a).’ Large parts of the *Gorgias* and the *Philebus* are devoted to attacks on hedonism and the later dialogue is famous for its defence of the surprising thesis that there are various ways in which pleasures can be *false* (36c3–51a1).

Equally, the *Timaeus* describes pleasure as ‘evil’s most powerful lure (μέγιστον κακοῦ δέλεαρ, 69d1),’ whereas pain ‘makes us run away from what is good (ἀγαθῶν φυγὰς, 69d2),’ the *Phaedo* suggests that the good life involves detachment from pleasures and appetitive desires as much as possible (83b5–7) because bodily pleasure is responsible for ‘the greatest and most extreme evil (ὁ πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν, 83c1–2).’ The *Republic*,

finally, claims, without offering much in the way of explanation, that pleasure is like a bond or leaden weight that keeps people trapped in the messy and shadowy perceptible or material realm around us (519a7–b5).

Even though the Platonic dialogues contain some of the most sustained, most careful thinking about the nature and value of pleasure that has come down to us from antiquity,<sup>4</sup> twentieth-century scholars have often rejected Plato's views on pleasure as confused, flawed, and not worthy of our attention. A typically harsh write-off can be found in Gibbs, for instance, who suggests that 'the rhetorical, fragmented, and ultimately inconsistent character of [*Republic 9's* pleasure arguments] reflects Plato's own intellectual limitations.'<sup>5</sup> Cross and Woozley similarly believe that so much as paying close attention to the pleasure arguments of *Republic 9* means giving Plato a 'doubtful compliment'—the doubtful compliment of undeserved philosophical attention.<sup>6</sup>

Two key Platonic claims have especially come under heavy attack. For one, there is the restorative theory of pleasure presented throughout the corpus: the idea, roughly, that pleasure centrally involves a restorative process of returning towards a previously disrupted natural state of harmony and balance. For another, there is the doctrine of false pleasure defended in the *Republic* and the *Philebus*: the thesis, roughly, that there are such things as false or unreal pleasures which get things wrong or which are not what they pretend to be.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Wolfsdorf (2013-b: 9, 297).

<sup>5</sup> Gibbs (2001: 33).

<sup>6</sup> Cross and Woozley (1964: 265).

<sup>7</sup> These elements of Plato's hedonic theorizing are internally connected. On an infamous Platonic line of thought, which I examine more closely in chapter 2, we experience pleasure just in case our pleasurable mental state—the raw feel of the psychological condition we find ourselves in—is triggered by an underlying

Scholars have criticized the restorative theory of pleasure on the grounds that it is crude and unable to account for the full range of human pleasures.<sup>8</sup> In addition, scholars have argued that this account—and especially Plato’s use of it in *Republic* 9—is hampered by a ‘fatal ambiguity,’ the charge being that Plato suffers from a deficient grasp of the difference between states and processes.<sup>9</sup>

The doctrine of false pleasure has also received significant criticism. Already in antiquity, people complained that the idea makes no sense. According to Theophrastus, the successor of Aristotle in the Peripatetic school, a false pleasure would—*per impossibile*—be a pleasure that is not a pleasure so he concluded that there are no such things as false pleasures: ‘all pleasures are true.’<sup>10</sup> More recently, Plato has been charged with conflating different sense of truth in his talk of false pleasure which arguably makes him guilty of ‘rank equivocation.’<sup>11</sup>

And others have held that pleasures cannot be false for the simple reason that the introspectively based belief that I am experiencing pleasure is immune to error: whenever I believe I am experiencing pleasure, I *am* experiencing pleasure. Simply put, there is no appearance-reality gap in the affective domain—pleasure is just a bit of felt experience—and this renders Plato’s talk of ‘false

---

restorative process; if such an underlying restorative process is lacking, however, our so-called pleasure is not ἀληθής but ψευδής (misleading, deceptive, false, unreal).

<sup>8</sup> For this line of criticism, see e.g. C. Taylor (2003: 244). Plato’s restorative theory of pleasure is often negatively compared with Aristotle’s account—most recently by Price (2017-b).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Gosling and Taylor (1982: 113–114 and 122–126) and Reeve (1988: 306n30). Tellingly, Gosling and Taylor (1982: 142) offer a long list of ‘unsatisfactory points’ and ‘weaknesses’ in the *Republic* account of pleasure in which the restorative model plays a pivotal role. See e.g. Erginel (2011) for a rejoinder.

<sup>10</sup> Theophrastus fragment 85 Wimmer cited by Gallop (1960: 331).

<sup>11</sup> Gosling (1975: 212). See e.g. Fletcher (2018-b) and Strohl (unpublished manuscript) for a rejoinder.

pleasures' incoherent.<sup>12</sup>

In stark contrast to these harsh write-offs, this dissertation offers a more charitable and sympathetic account of Plato's thought concerning pleasure.<sup>13</sup> More concretely, it offers careful and sustained examinations of the inner working of certain Platonic arguments concerning pleasure. One of the central messages I hope to convey is that Plato's thoughts about pleasure are sophisticated, cogent, and deserving of serious attention.

Plato often seems to suggest that pleasure is philosophically and ethically problematic because it is inexorably linked with illusion and deception. Thus, in *Republic* 10, our susceptibility to optical illusions and our desire for pleasure are located in one and the same, lower, cognitively impaired part of the soul—'a weakness in our nature (ἡμῶν τῷ παθήματι τῆς φύσεως, 602d2).' And *Republic* 9 compares the pleasures of ordinary people with '*trompe l'oeil* paintings (ἔσκιαγραφημένας τις, 583b5),' blaming these misleading pleasures on some kind of 'trickery' that brings people under its sway by means of 'untrustworthy appearances' which have nothing to do with the truth of the matter (οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς τούτων τῶν φαντασμάτων πρὸς ἡδονῆς ἀλήθειαν, ἀλλὰ γοητεία τις, 584a9–10).<sup>14</sup>

In a similar vein, the *Philebus* argues that our pleasures can be ψεύδης (deceptive, false, incorrect, unreal) (36c3–51a1) and it dismisses these misleading pleasures as 'quite ridiculous imitations of

---

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Gallop (1960) and Penelhum (1964). The typical response often assumes that we can defend the position Plato is trying to refute by simply repeating it. According to Guthrie, for instance, 'the philosopher may say that he enjoys a higher quality of life than the sensualist, but he cannot say that he enjoys it more, *enjoyment being solely a matter of individual preference.*' (1975: 541, my emphasis)

<sup>13</sup> This thesis may thus be seen as part of a welcome scholarly trend that aims to rehabilitate Plato's hedonic theorizing. See e.g. Aufderheide and Erginel (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Note that, at 602d2–4, Socrates connects the two: 'in its exploitation of this weakness of our nature, σκιαγραφία falls nothing short of γοητεία.'



true pleasures (μεμιμημέναι μέντοι τὰς ἀληθεῖς ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιώτερα, 40c5). And at the end of that same dialogue, Socrates forces his interlocutor Protarchus—who had started the dialogue as a staunch defender of Philebus’s unmitigated hedonism—to admit that pleasure is ‘the greatest impostor (ἡδονὴ ... ἀπάντων ἀλαζονίστατον, 65c5).’ In the *Laos*, finally, the Athenian stranger claims that ‘pleasure achieves whatever her will desires by persuasive deceit that is irresistibly compelling (πειθοῖ μετὰ ἀπάτης βιαίου πράττειν πᾶν ὅτιπερ ἄν αὐτῆς ἢ βούλησις ἐθέληση, 863b8–9).’

To be sure, the relationship between pleasure and illusion in Plato has received attention in recent scholarship. Thus, for instance, in a seminal paper, Jessica Moss argued that Plato is predominantly suspicious of pleasure because pleasure is deceptive. As she summarizes her view:

Pleasure is dangerous because it is a *deceiver*. It leads us astray with false appearances, bewitching and beguiling us, cheating and tricking us. In particular, it deceives us by appearing to be good when it is not.<sup>15</sup>

Moss’s reading draws attention to a crucially important yet often overlooked aspect of Plato’s hedonic theorizing. As she rightly notes, Plato’s mistrust of, and obsession with, pleasure does not stem from mere prudishness or an excessive reaction against contemporary proponents of hedonism such as Aristippus of Cyrene,<sup>16</sup> it is systematic, philosophically motivated, and central to Plato’s

---

<sup>15</sup> Moss (2006: 504). Before her, Mooradian (1992: 2) already claimed that Plato’s hedonic theorizing comes down to the proposal that pleasures can be false and that ‘[the] falsity of a pleasure consists in its existence or desirability being essentially tied to some sort of illusion.’

<sup>16</sup> Such a less philosophical, downright moralistic, more conventional attack on pleasure can be found in Xenophon (e.g. in *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34 where Socrates confronts the hedonist and relentless pleasure-seeker Aristippus with the traditional Greek parable of Heracles on the crossroads).

thought.<sup>17</sup> The problem with pleasure, as I would summarize Moss's take on the Platonic view, is that it is a fundamental source of our misalignment with the world. It blurs our vision, it bars us from seeing clearly what confronts us, and it brings about a mismatch between our experience of the world beyond our heads and how that world really is.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, by focusing on the connection between pleasure and deception—especially the way in which pleasure tricks us about *what matters*—Moss is in a position to offer an elegant story about the genesis of the tripartite moral psychology of the *Republic* and its inner workings.<sup>19</sup> The link Plato discerns between pleasure and illusion, Moss suggests, drives his rejection of the (Socratic) view that all desires are rational desires for the good. Whereas the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* identify a connection between illusion and (our appetitive desire for) pleasure, the *Republic* turns this finding into a psychological theory which claims that one part of our soul is forced to accept evaluative appearances for what they are, whereas the higher, rational part of our soul can use reasoning (λογισμός) to pierce through these deceptive appearances and work out what is really worth having and pursuing.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note, though, that evaluative hedonic illusions—situations where pleasure teams up with appetitive desire to represent something bad or neutral as something good—are just one species of Plato's taxonomy of hedonic illusions. Besides the

---

<sup>17</sup> Moss (2006: 503–504).

<sup>18</sup> For this line of thought, and these ways of formulating it, I am indebted to Murdoch (1972), Bommarito (2017), Bommarito (2020), and Wright (2017).

<sup>19</sup> See Moss (2006) and especially Moss (2008).

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed account see Moss (2008). In this paper, she examines the arguments we find in the *Republic* for dividing the soul into a rational part and two non-rational parts (appetite and spirit), trying to discover 'a substantive concept of rationality that explains [Plato's] carving up psychic phenomena the way he does.'

evaluative illusions on which Moss's treatment focuses, Plato claims that there are various other ways in which pleasure deceives us.<sup>21</sup> What is more, some of the other argumentative strands and the types of hedonic illusion they defend are more radical and require a different explanation. Whereas anyone can be brought to see that pleasure does not always reliably track what is ultimately—all things considered—good for us, Plato also discusses more counter-intuitive, less readily acceptable types of hedonic deception.

In the *Phaedo* (82e–84b), for example, Plato suggests that pleasure deceives us by making the sensible world project its identity more forcefully than warranted. When we experience bodily pleasure, the dialogue suggests, we are necessarily forced to believe that the hedonic object—the material, sensible thing we are enjoying—'is most true and most clear, although it is not (τοῦτο ἐναργέστατον ... εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον, 83c7–8).' In *Republic* 9 (583b1–585a7)—where the attempt to dismantle Thrasymachus's challenge comes to its climax—Plato suggests that not everything that presents itself as a pleasure counts as the real deal. Put differently, we can be mistaken about our own affective experiences or go wrong in our immediate and honest self-ascriptions of pleasure.

And in the *Philebus* (36c3–41a4)—which works its way towards the conclusion that pleasure is 'the greatest impostor (ἡδονὴ ... ἀπάντων ἀλαζονίστατον, 65c5)'—Socrates argues that, like our beliefs, our pleasures can be false—and that such false pleasures are 'ridiculous imitations (μεμιμημέναι ... ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιώτερα, 40c5)' of true pleasure. In the same dialogue, we find an argument (53c4–55a12) to the effect that, as a restorative process or γένεσις (a becoming or going-on), pleasure is deeply problematic and highly misleading. Those who locate pleasure in the centre of their life and agency are not

---

<sup>21</sup> To be sure, Moss (2006: 523–33) herself mentions these other types of deception as well but identifies them as avenues for further research.

just mistaken about what they take themselves to be pursuing, Plato argues, their life is not worth living but fundamentally irrational (ἄλογος) and even ridiculous (γέλοιος)—even though this piece of information about their very own miserable predicament is not introspectively available to the pleasure-seeker.

Many existing discussions of Plato's views of pleasure attempt to avoid ascribing these unorthodox, allegedly untenable claims to Plato by replacing them with more comfortable exegetical alternatives, or they simply dismiss them as embarrassing philosophical blunders to be relegated to the graveyard of intellectual history. In doing so, however, I believe that such treatments strip Plato of some of his deepest and most interesting views and arguments without compensating for this radical interpretative measure by making better sense of the textual evidence.<sup>22</sup>

On the reading I will be defending here, Plato believes that pleasure can trick us in a variety of alarming and often unexpected ways. My focus is on the arguments in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Philebus* I have just briefly described in the preceding paragraph for the simple reason that these are instances where the connection between pleasure and illusion or deception is especially salient and relevant. In all these philosophical discussions, the key suggestion is that pleasure drives appearance and reality radically apart. When not scrutinized rationally and held in check by our higher functions, pleasure casts a falsifying veil between us and the world, thus concealing what directly confronts us.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, or so I will argue, Plato treats pleasure as a prime source of our misalignment with reality: by availing itself of trickery and deception, it sabotages our

---

<sup>22</sup> Nussbaum (1986: 140–141) is surely right that a good part of Plato's importance as a philosopher lies in 'the depth and severity of his challenge against prevailing beliefs, both of his day and our own.'

<sup>23</sup> Murdoch (1972: 82).

attempt to separate truth from fabrication and see reality face to face.

This perspective clashes with what most people—hedonists especially—believe about pleasure. Untutored, naïve intuition claims that pleasure is too obvious to be contested, let alone to warrant sustained theorizing or scrutiny.<sup>24</sup> To those held captive by this ‘simple picture,’ as we might call it following Katz, it is introspectively obvious that pleasure is a simple feeling to which we have unfailing access and that this experience is good and worth having—along with everything else that appears ‘aglow in its light.’<sup>25</sup> To put in a slogan, the simple picture suggests that pleasure is *authoritative*.<sup>26</sup>

The authority of pleasure has two important aspects. Firstly, when it comes to pleasure there is no room for doubt, ignorance, or error. Whenever I *believe* I am experiencing pleasure, I *am* experiencing pleasure (and it is also often thought, in addition, that whenever I *am* experiencing pleasure, I will *believe* (or *know*) I am experiencing pleasure). This aspect of pleasure—its immunity to error—seems to be the result of the fact that there is no more to pleasure than meets the introspective eye: pleasure is just a bit of experience whose ontology is of the first-person, *esse est percipi* variety and whose reality is exhausted by the phenomenology—the mere raw feel—of pleasure.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Wolfsdorf (2013-b: 9).

<sup>25</sup> Katz (2016: §1).

<sup>26</sup> For a recent defence of ‘the authority of affect,’ see Johnston (2001).

<sup>27</sup> This idea goes back to the Cyrenaics: because they argued that ‘the πάθη are the criteria and that they alone are apprehended and are not deceitful (καταλαμβάνεσθαι καὶ ἀδιάψευστα)’—as Sextus Empiricus (*Against the Mathematicians* 7.191) reports—the Cyrenaics believed that pleasure is something we grasp unfailingly and cannot be in error about. When I report that I experience pleasure, in other words, I do so ‘infallibly and truly and firmly and incorrigibly (ἀδιαψεύστως καὶ ἀληθῶς καὶ βεβαίως <καὶ> ἀνεξελέγκτως).’ See Tsouna (1998: 31–61) for this epistemological thesis and Irwin (1991), Lampe (2015: 26–55), and Mesquita (2020) for the important role it plays in Cyrenaic ethical theory.

Secondly, our pleasurable experience is self-evidently good and worth having and we are well off while experiencing pleasure. Put a bit differently, the fact that something is pleasant to me gives me, in and of itself, a reason to pursue or have that thing.<sup>28</sup> In such a vein, Philebus—the protagonist of Plato’s eponymous dialogue—thinks that it is so obvious that pleasure is good and the life of pleasure counts as the best possible life that he treats the very question as beyond argument and leaves the dialogue before it properly starts.

Plato resists this simple picture and its ramifications—mainly because it proceeds ‘as if ‘pleasure’ were a quite unproblematic concept,’ as Elizabeth Anscombe would later put it.<sup>29</sup> In line with one of his more general methodological commitments—the idea that before rushing into evaluating something, we need to give a λόγος of the οὐσία or an αἰτία of that very thing<sup>30</sup>—Plato believes, instead, that before rushing into positing pleasure as (a/the) good, we need to

---

<sup>28</sup> In his discussion of Epicurean hedonism, Cicero (*On Moral Ends* 1.30) captures this idea as follows: ‘Epicurus denies that there is any need for justification or debate (*ratione neque disputatione*) as to why pleasure should be sought, and pain shunned. He holds that we perceive (*sentiri*) these things, as we perceive that fire is hot, snow white, and honey sweet. In none of these examples is there any call for proof by sophisticated reasoning (*exquisitis rationibus confirmare*); it is enough simply to point them out (*admonere*).’ Eudoxus developed a similar argument (recorded in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.2): ‘No one asks anyone ‘for the sake of what are you pleased (τίνος ἕνεκα ἥδεται)?’ This implies that pleasure is choiceworthy in itself (καθ’ αὐτήν αἰρετήν τὴν ἡδονήν).’ For contemporary examples of a highly similar line of reasoning, see e.g. Anscombe (1957: 77) and Nagel (1986: 156).

<sup>29</sup> Anscombe (1957: 77).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Republic* 534b3–4 for the notion of providing a λόγος τῆς οὐσίας and *Gorgias* 465a2–7 and *Phaedrus* 237c2–3 for the idea that any form of expertise is characterized by the ability to give such an explanatory account. In the *Gorgias* (501a5–6), Socrates applies this general methodological insight to hedonic theorizing: it is impossible to gauge the value of pleasure without having first investigated its nature (τὴν φύσιν) and cause (τὴν αἰτίαν).

scrutinize pleasure and provide a thorough account of its underlying nature.

This approach to hedonic theorizing has important consequences. If we investigate pleasure more carefully, Plato claims, we discover that the simple picture is untenable and that pleasure is only authoritative for those who are disinclined or unable to scrutinize how things appear to them. What initially seemed obvious, at least on the simple picture, does in fact not hold up under closer examination: many of the beliefs we have come to adopt as a result of being in the grip of pleasure—beliefs about the world beyond our heads, about the quality of our lives, and even about the psychological state we take ourselves to be in—do not hold up under closer, more careful inspection. Indeed, as Socrates puts it in the *Republic*, people are often ‘involuntarily deprived of true beliefs’ because they are ‘victims of trickery (τοὺς γοητευθέντας, 413c1)’ who are ‘under the spell of pleasure (ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς κληθέντες, 413c2).’<sup>31</sup>

## An Overview of the Chapters

### 0.1. Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The *Phaedo* on the Dangers of Bodily Pleasure

The *Phaedo* contains some of Plato’s harshest remarks on (bodily) pleasure and the threat the pleasures of ‘food, drink, and sex’ and other base indulgences pose to a good life. In what is known as his second defence (63e8–69e5)—a famous passage in which Socrates explains why he does not fear death—Socrates defines philosophy as the practice of death. The good life, to use a Platonic metaphor, is a life

---

<sup>31</sup> Pleasure deceives, Socrates points out, and ‘everything that deceives seems to bewitch (ἔουκε ... γοητεύειν πάντα ὅσα ἀπατᾷ, 413c4).’

in which we strip our soul naked by detaching ourselves from our body and the material realm in which we find ourselves.

This way of life is composed of two sub-practices: cognitive detachment (distancing oneself from the unreliable deliverances of sense-perception) and affective detachment (distancing oneself from appetitive desire and bodily pleasure). Whereas Socrates specifies the need for cognitive detachment—in brief, the intelligible reality of the Forms can only be accessed by the mind’s eye—he merely casually points out that philosophers practice affective detachment too—as if this only serves as a useful illustration of the philosopher’s otherworldly existential orientation without being philosophically connected with the philosopher’s project of seeing reality face to face.

Traditionally, many scholars have described the ethics of the *Phaedo* as some kind of asceticism without offering much in the way of further explanation or commentary. However, ‘asceticism’ is an uninformative label (charged with pejorative connotations) and labelling the *Phaedo* as ‘ascetic’ does little to elucidate Plato’s defence of affective detachment. More recently, some scholars have developed sophisticated alternative readings of the *Phaedo*—so-called evaluative readings—on which affective detachment is not a matter of avoiding bodily pleasures. Instead, it is a matter of having the right attitudes and ascribing little or no value to the bodily pleasures we experience (without necessarily avoiding such bodily pleasures).

While evaluative readings raise important questions concerning Plato’s motivation for defending affective detachment, in this chapter I argue that such interpretive approaches lack textual grounds and run into philosophical problems and I aim to clarify Plato’s defence of affective detachment. In the Deception Argument (83b4–e4), as I call it, Socrates argues that our soul ‘gets tricked by bodily pleasures and appetitive desires to the point at which nothing seems to be real for it but the physical (γοητευομένη ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ὑπό



τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ ἡδονῶν, ὥστε μηδὲν ἄλλο δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀληθὲς ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ σωματοειδές, 81b3–5).’ That is to say, the experience of bodily affect unavoidably lures us into inflating the reality and clarity of the sensible, visible realm. *Contra* other views, I argue that we are dealing here with *ontological* rather than *evaluative* confusion—even though ontological confusion might well have evaluative trickle-down effects. Pleasure makes the perceptible world appear to be real in a manner which it is not. I specify the notion of truth or reality and clarity, vividness, or lucidity Plato is working with in this argument and try to elucidate the mechanics underlying this defective process of belief formation.

If my reading is correct, it suggests that Plato’s defence of affective detachment is philosophically motivated and tied to Plato’s central positions and concerns—especially his belief in a stark distinction between a world of seeming and a world of being. Like sense-perception, bodily pleasure is deceptive and cannot grant us access to the Forms; unlike sense-perception, and more worryingly, bodily pleasure—best construed here as some kind of cognitive, (quasi-)perceptual, or representational state—is highly authoritative: it silences the demand for justification and dislodges our rational ability to deny the content of our appearances.

While looking at a stick submerged in water that looks bent or two lines of seemingly different length in the Müller-Lyer illusion, I can use the power of λογισμός to deny the content of this perceptual experience—but if pleasure tricks me into taking the object of my pleasure for fully real and fully clear, Plato seemingly argues, I am forced into assent. Crucially, then, bodily pleasure directly undermines the philosopher’s attempt to transcend the world of seeming and gain access to the fully real intelligible world and this is why the philosopher practices affective detachment.

## 0.2. Tricked by Pleasure: Hedonic Fallibilism in Plato's *Republic*

From the moment he barges into the discussion, brusquely dismissing conventional morality as 'another's good (ἄλλότριον ἀγαθόν, 343c3),' Thrasymachus haunts the *Republic*. Not only does his challenge pinpoint the central topic of the dialogue, the underlying ideas about what makes for a worthwhile life are diametrically opposed to Plato's. Whereas Plato treats the tyrant as the epitome of psychological breakdown, Thrasymachus believes that a tyrannical life of 'complete injustice (τὴν τελεωτάτην ἀδικίαν, 361a6)' and unrestrained greed for the satisfaction of one's own desire (πλεονεξία) is supremely happy.

Book 9 aims to defuse Thrasymachus's challenge. Between 583b1 and 588b5, Socrates presents his 'strongest and most decisive (μέγιστόν τε καὶ κυριώτατον, 583b6)' argument against these rival ideas about what matters. Despite the fanfare with which this third demonstration (ἀπόδειξις) of the superiority of the rationally integrated life is introduced, much remains unclear. It is not clear, for example, how we are to connect the topic of pleasure with the central questions animating the dialogue and how to understand the central claim of the argument that 'besides the pleasure of the ideal, fully actualized agent, other pleasure is neither entirely true nor pure, but like some sort of *trompe l'oeil* painting (οὐδὲ παναληθῆς ἐστὶν ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ἡδονὴ πλὴν τῆς τοῦ φρονίμου οὐδὲ καθαρὰ, ἀλλ' ἐσκιαγραφήμενη τις, 583b3–5).'

The argument itself—and especially its putative defence of what I call hedonic fallibilism—tends to be brusquely dismissed as a philosophical failure because it clashes with the commonsensical thought that we cannot err in our self-ascriptions of pleasure. This dismissive reaction, in turn, explains why most existing treatments

simply skate over the question of how book 9's critical account of ordinary pleasure should be integrated with the *Republic* as a whole.

In this chapter, I aim to make sense of Plato's hedonic fallibilism—the view that what presents itself as a pleasure may not always be the real thing—in the expectation that a proper understanding of this view might also shed light on the way in which this argument integrates with the *Republic* at large and especially the attempt to respond to Thrasymachus's challenge.

Having discussed a standard objection against hedonic fallibilism—namely, that we cannot go wrong in our self-ascriptions of pleasures because we have practically infallible access to our pleasures—I critically examine two readings of the argument that have arisen in the wake of this standard worry: dismissive readings (which reject the argument out of hand), as I call them, and evasive readings (which deny that the argument defends hedonic fallibilism).

I aim to find a middle way between these interpretive alternatives. The reading I defend takes Plato at his word yet also attempts to bring out what is most cogent and most interesting about the Deceptive Pleasure Argument (understood as a defence of hedonic fallibilism). I want to argue, in other words, that there is sufficient textual evidence to suggest that Plato is, in fact, defending hedonic fallibility and that we should strive to make sense of this unorthodox position.

To do so, I offer a careful reconstruction of an important dialectical exchange between Socrates and Glaucon. Having made a distinction between pleasure, pain, and a state of affectively indifferent calm in between the two, Socrates argues that there are situations in which the affectively neutral state appears to be pleasant although it is not pleasant but neutral. In such cases, subjects erroneously report that they are experiencing pleasure.

Taking an infallibilist line, Glaucon resists this suggestion and

claims that these subjects do in fact experience pleasure—arguably drawing on some kind of phenomenal subjectivism about pleasure. If the experience of pleasure exhausts the reality of pleasure, his thought seemingly goes, any situation in which it *strikes* me as if I am experiencing pleasure counts as a situation in which I *am* experiencing pleasure. There is no more to pleasure than what is introspectively available to us in experience, so there are no such things as false or deceptive pleasures.

In response, Socrates offers two arguments: the first dialectical, the second philosophically more substantial. Because Glaucon agreed with Socrates that pleasure and affectively neutral calm are different states—each with their independent, separate essence—he cannot also believe, on pain of contradicting himself, that there are situations in which the neutral state proves itself to be a pleasure.

To resist Glaucon's phenomenal subjectivism, Socrates's second line of argumentation appeals to the idea that, fundamentally, pleasure is a restorative process of having one of our (physical or psychological) needs met. Unless the relevant feeling—which we typically call 'pleasure'—is caused in the relevant way by such an underlying restorative process, we are not experiencing a pleasure but a mere εἶδωλον (a deficient fake or simulacrum) of pleasure, that is to say, a false or deceptive pleasure.

Deceptive pleasure is relevantly similar, then, to perceptual types of illusion where, roughly, something appears other than it really is. Because pleasure signals something else—e.g. need-satisfaction, restoration, improvement in our level of welfare—it can misfire, as happens in Socrates's cases of hedonic fallibility. The mere fact that a stick *looks* bent while submerged in water does not mean it really *is* bent, the mere fact that lukewarm water *feels* cold when contrasted with hot water does not mean it really *is* cold, and the mere fact that—as happens in the Checker shadow illusion—two tiles of the

exact same darkness *seem* to be of different colour when they are partly shadowed by another object does not mean they really *are* of a different colour.

Analogously, in the hedonic case, the juxtaposition of an affectively negative state of pain and an affectively indifferent state of calm creates the illusion of there really being an underlying restorative process, even though, in reality, there is just the neutral state of psychological calm temporarily wearing the mask of pleasure and tricking its victims into self-ascribing a pleasure that is not really there.

### 0.3. 'The Greatest Impostor': Hedonic Cognitivism, Hedonic Fallibilism, and Deceptive Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus* (36c3–41a4)

In the middle of the *Philebus* (36c3–51a1), the dialogue in which Plato presents his final and most developed thoughts on the nature and value of pleasure and its place in a good life, Plato's Socrates argues that there are four ways in which pleasures can be ἀληθής (true, real) and ψευδής (false, unreal, deceptive). The first type of falsity, which we will study here, concerns pleasures that are false in the same, literal, sense in which our beliefs can be false because they fail to represent the world correctly.

From antiquity onwards, this stretch of argumentation—which I call the Fallibilism Argument and which runs from 36c3 to 41a4—has puzzled readers. It is especially unclear, firstly, how a private and subjective mental state like a pleasure—arguably nothing more than a bit of feeling—could be false in precisely the same way in which a belief can be false. It is also unclear, secondly, what role Plato's defence of hedonic fallibilism plays in the overall economy of the *Philebus*.

My main aim in this chapter is to untangle—or at least elucidate—these puzzles, especially the first. In brief, I am going to

argue that Plato's defence of hedonic fallibilism is predicated upon a position I call hedonic cognitivism. Pleasure can be false, Plato argues, because our pleasures are more than brute surges of affect. Like beliefs, pleasures are psychologically complex cognitive attitudes with representational content in virtue of which they can be true or false.

More precisely, I argue that Socrates develops and finetunes this position in a dialectical back and forth with Protarchus who believes, in sharp contrast, that pleasure is immune to error. When Socrates broaches the suggestion that (anticipatory) pleasures can be false, Protarchus pushes back and claims that all pleasures are true—arguably because he believes that pleasures belong to the phenomenal realm to which we have privileged and infallible access. In response, Socrates presents his First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (37a1–e7) which argues that, like belief or judgment (δόξα), pleasure has content in virtue of which it can be true or false: true if its content gets things right, false if its content gets things wrong and misrepresents some way the world really is.

When Protarchus resists this idea, again suggesting that pleasure is immune to error, Socrates surprisingly enough weakens his theory and suggests that pleasures are often accompanied by, associated with, or predicated on a false belief. In this case, however, as Protarchus is quick to point out, it is the *belief* that is false, not the pleasure itself—the latter remains immune to error because pleasures are 'just what they are.'

In a next move, Socrates resuscitates his earlier suggestion and develops his Second Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (38b6–41a4) which succeeds at convincing his interlocutor that there are such things as false pleasures ('ridiculous imitations of true pleasures (μεμιμημένοι μέντοι τὰς ἀληθεῖς ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιώτερα, 40c5).') This bit of text, I argue, is best understood as an attempt to flesh out what the First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument had merely stipulated and left

unexplained. Drawing on an elaborate metaphor of the human psyche—and mainly focusing on future-oriented, anticipatory pleasures in whose case it is clear that representational elements play a central role—Socrates convinces Protarchus that pleasures are more than mere bits of experience. They have content because they are constituted by representational or cognitive elements (φαντάσματα based on δόξαι) which represent some state of the world. Since any representation can misfire, it follows that pleasures have semantic value: they can be true (if they represent the world correctly) or false (if they misrepresent the world).

With this discussion in place, I seek to see more about the notion of falsity the argument is operating with. Even if we grant Socrates that a pleasure can be false thanks to its false content, what is it that gets misrepresented by such false pleasure? According to a dichotomy currently dominating the literature, we have to choose between a descriptive or an evaluative reading: on the descriptive or factual interpretation, a pleasure taken in some descriptive state of affairs  $p$  is false if  $p$  is not the case; on the evaluative or ethical reading, by contrast, a pleasure taken in  $p$  is false because one considers  $p$  to be  $F$  (good or otherwise positively evaluatively charged) although  $p$  is *not*  $F$ .

I resist this interpretive dichotomy for a variety of reasons. No matter whether we construe a pleasure's falsity factually or evaluatively, I argue that a false pleasure is always a matter of misrepresentation: a false pleasure is out of touch with some way the world really is. Experiencing a false pleasure is always a matter, then, of being out of contact with reality. The subject of a false or deceptive pleasure lives in what Iris Murdoch aptly calls a 'private dream world.' What the interpretive dichotomy also misses, I argue, is that any pleasure necessarily involves a factual belief that picks out an object or state of affairs in the world and an evaluative belief—an

appraisal or construal, as psychologists call it—that ascribes positive value to it. Without these two beliefs, a pleasure cannot get off the ground. That being the case, I argue, the interpretive dichotomy turns out to be a false dichotomy.

With this examination in place, I zoom out again and point out that Plato’s theorizing in the Fallibilism Argument is not just a perfect manifestation of one of the central findings of the *Philebus*—the idea that cognizance plays a necessary role in any aspect of a life well lived, including pleasure—it also makes trouble for the unmitigated hedonism of Protarchus and Philebus in a variety of ways. Like Nozick’s experience machine and the earlier jelly fish *elenchus*, the possibility of false pleasure is meant to trigger the intuition that we care about other things besides pleasure. More precisely, we do not just want to experience pleasure, we want our pleasures to get things right. If that is the case, though, hedonism fails as a theory of the good and pleasure is not sufficient for the good life.

#### 0.4. Problems with the Life of Pleasure: The Γένεσις Argument in Plato’s *Philebus* (53c4–55a12)

In the *Philebus*—right after Socrates’s examination of the different types of false pleasure—Socrates offers the Γένεσις Argument. This argument moves in three steps: given the fact that pleasure is a γένεσις (a going-on or process of becoming, to give an awkward translation of this tricky phrase) and given the fact that all γενέσεις lack value (in some sense which is to be determined), it follows that pleasure lacks value.

This argument has been variously ignored, criticized vehemently, and found confusing. More recently, scholars have sought to develop more charitable interpretations which tone down



the central claims of the argument—usually because they take a stricter reading to clash with the more conciliatory tone of the *Philebus* at large and its central project of harmonizing extreme, polarized ways of thinking about the value of pleasure. One type of reading suggests that the argument merely ascribes value to a limited class of pleasure (e.g. bodily pleasure) while a different but roughly similar type of reading suggests that the argument ascribes limited or qualified value (e.g. conditional value) to *all* pleasures.

In this chapter, I offer a different interpretation and suggest that the Γένεσις Argument does not concern itself with the goodness of individual, particular episodes of pleasure. Instead, or so I argue, it targets the identification of pleasure as the good around which we ought to organize our lives. Having clarified why Plato treats pleasure as a γένεσις—pleasure counts as a ‘becoming’ because it is a registered process of return to some previously disrupted natural state of homeostasis that enters conscious awareness—I closely examine the Γένεσις Argument itself.

As I understand it, the argument is composed of two sub-arguments: the Argument From Finality and the Argument From A Life Not Worth Living. Against the backdrop of a proto-Aristotelian axiological framework, the Argument From Finality suggests that, as a γένεσις aiming for some further goal (the stable state in need of repair), pleasure cannot be the good—the good being the overall, completely final or end-like (τέλεος), completely sufficient (ίκανός), completely choiceworthy (αίρετός) aim of our actions.

The Argument From A Life Not Worth Living equally suggests that hedonism is a deeply flawed idea. Those who locate pleasure in the centre of their agency are forced to live irrational and even ridiculous lives: their commitments are contradictory, they are forced to pursue and value what they emphatically do not care about (pain), and they can never lay their hands on the thing they aim for. Such a

life does not make any sense, then, and is not worth living and choosing—even though, tragically enough, this predicament cannot be appreciated for what it is from an inside, first-person perspective.

In addition to suffering from a failure in self-knowledge—the pleasure-seeker thinks he is living a worthwhile life although he is not—the hedonistic agent fails to understand what pleasure *is* and what its underlying mechanics are. As a consequence, the pleasure-seeker is mistaken about what he is pursuing (or *thinks* he is pursuing). That is to say, the thing around which he weaves the fabric of his life is ontologically derivative and rests on trouble and imperfection. What is more, it is only once we understand the deeper nature of pleasure as a γένεσις, Plato holds, that we can understand that the pursuit of pleasure is internally inconsistent or self-contradictory, self-sabotaging, and hampered by an insatiability problem.<sup>32</sup>

Instead of being an ‘unsatisfactory little argument,’<sup>33</sup> then, or a shoddy and hasty piece of reasoning that, ‘in desperation, [Plato] inserted badly in the *Philebus*,’<sup>34</sup> I conclude that the Γένεσις Argument is a cogent bit of argumentation worth taking seriously. Indeed, some of the central ideas of Plato’s view on the nature and value of pleasure can be found in concentrated and distilled form in this bit of argumentation. Most notably, we find Plato suggesting that we should get clear on what pleasure is before determining its value and its place in the good life. The argument also suggests that an adequate

---

<sup>32</sup> This reading suggests that the *Philebus* sheds light on the dispute between Eudoxus and Speusippus, two of Plato’s pupils. Against Speusippus, and in favour of Eudoxus and other proponents of pleasure, the *Philebus* argues that pleasures really exist, that some pleasures are in fact worth having, and that a life without pleasure and other affective experiences is not worth living. However, against Eudoxus, and in favour of Speusippus and other critics of pleasure, it also suggests that pleasure cannot be the over-arching good our lives as a whole are aimed at reaching.

<sup>33</sup> Guthrie (1975: 228).

<sup>34</sup> Gosling (1975: 220).

understanding of the nature of pleasure in combination with a solid grasp of the formal features of a good life are going to tell against hedonism. And, finally, the argument shows that most (implicit or explicit) hedonists are less well off, both hedonically and prudentially speaking, than they take themselves to be.

## 1. Cleansing the Doors of Perception: Plato's *Phaedo* on the Dangers of Bodily Pleasure

Even though the *Phaedo* contains one of Plato's most sustained treatments of the philosophical way of life, the theory of the good life it defends is hardly attractive. Plato's Socrates seemingly flirts with the anti-natalist idea that it is better never to have been,<sup>35</sup> the fact that we are embodied and affective beings is repeatedly excoriated as the root of all human evil, and the dialogue takes off with a zealous defence of the cultivation of death as the best possible way of life.

This practice of 'releasing one's soul ... from its communion with the body (ἀπολύων ... τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας, 65a1–2)' boils down to detaching oneself from the unreliable, deceptive deliverances of sense-perception as well as the affective operations of the body. Indeed, later in the dialogue, bodily pleasure is harshly criticized as 'the greatest and most extreme evil (ὁ πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν, 83c1–2).'<sup>36</sup> This is why

---

<sup>35</sup> In the opening gambits of the dialogue, Socrates toys with the idea that suicide might be the best available option, had it not been forbidden by the gods, later in the dialogue he points out that he does not consider his present situation a misfortune — like swans who sing when they die, Socrates actually *looks forward* to his imminent death—and his famous last words ('Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius') have often been taken to telegraph the message that life is a sickness from which death will heal us. Later sources are aware of this anti-natalist tendency in Plato: Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 1.84) records the story of a certain Cleombrotus of Ambracis 'who, having read Plato's book, threw himself from a wall to his death although nothing bad had happened to him.' Augustine (*City of God* 1.22) tells the same story while adding that Cleombrotus had been reading the *Phaedo*. Cf. Warren (2001: 93–94).

<sup>36</sup> Throughout this chapter, references are to the *Phaedo* (unless otherwise noted) and I more or less follow Gallop's (1975) translation of the Greek provided by Burnet (1900), with small modifications here and there.

philosophers are not ‘eagerly concerned (ἐσπουδακέναι)’ with the ‘so-called pleasures (τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας)’ of food, drink, and sex that ‘come through the body (αἰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος εἰσιν)’ but instead ‘despise them—except in so far as they are absolutely compelled to take part in them (ἀτιμάζειν, καθ’ ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν, 64d2–65a7).’

Traditionally, this plea for affective detachment—as I call the Platonic view that one should distance oneself from the body and its affective states—has been heard as a plea for asceticism, ‘the exercise,’ roughly, ‘of extremely rigorous self-discipline’ as the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term. On this received view, the *Phaedo* advocates a rigorous, thorough-going practice of self-denial and avoidance of the body and its pleasure and desires which somehow allows one to gain access to the unseen order of the Forms. The good life, in other words, involves some kind of ‘stripping naked of the self.’<sup>37</sup>

Many readers struggle to see the appeal of this austere type of ethics, and perhaps rightly so. If asceticism is ‘a cultivation of ourselves that involves uprooting and drying up parts of ourselves,’ as Zena Hitz proposes,<sup>38</sup> then the *Phaedo* seemingly ask us to uproot and dry up those parts of ourselves that we typically take to contribute to a life worth living. Much worse, it requires us to uproot and dry up our humanity and mortality *themselves*—the things that make us who we are.

In this vein, Daniel Russell complains that, on the received view, it looks as if the *Phaedo* has ‘very little to tell us about how to live

---

<sup>37</sup> This framing of asceticism goes back to Plato himself who sometimes characterizes the body as a piece of clothing worn by the soul (e.g. *Cratylus* 403b5–6 and *Gorgias* 524d5). For an exploration of this gloss on asceticism, see Finn (2009: 9).

<sup>38</sup> Hitz (2021: 113).

a good human life.<sup>39</sup> Instead, the dialogue suggests that a life worth living is a life in which its owner struggles against his mortality and humanity, 'unable to be whole as he is,' eagerly waiting for the moment death will set him free from the human body in which all of us are trapped.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, John Cooper calls Socrates's disparaging attitude to life 'reprehensible'<sup>41</sup> and going from Plato's urge to repress the body, Martha Nussbaum charges him with narcissism—a pathology characterized by the infantile wish to become omnipotent by closing off all sources of pain, lack of control, inadequacy, and fragility.<sup>42</sup>

More recently, a number of authors—most notably Daniel Russell and Raphael Woolf—have advanced sophisticated alternative readings of these ethical passages in the *Phaedo*. These rival readings have two things in common: they are seemingly designed to soften the austere ethical programme allegedly advertised in the *Phaedo* and they reject the traditional ascetic readings in favour of what is sometimes called an evaluative interpretation.<sup>43</sup>

On this more palatable, less otherworldly view, the *Phaedo* is not arguing that the philosopher should refrain in any far-reaching way from bodily experiences and activities that require association with the body. Plato's weaker claim, instead, is that the philosopher should adopt a negative 'evaluative stance' towards them.<sup>44</sup> This entails, more concretely speaking, that the good life involves adopting a disdainful evaluative stance which attaches little value to the body

---

<sup>39</sup> Russell (2005: 84).

<sup>40</sup> Russell (2005: 85).

<sup>41</sup> Cooper (2012: 315).

<sup>42</sup> Nussbaum (2001: 524). See Nussbaum (1986: 136–164) for a critical examination of such 'goodness without fragility' and Nussbaum (2022) for a more recent defence of the claim that 'the solace of Platonism comes at a large cost.'

<sup>43</sup> Russell (2005) and Woolf (2004).

<sup>44</sup> Woolf (2004: 99).

and its operations but instead views them as trivial or indifferent. On this picture, then, the good life merely involves psychological (rather than behavioural) detachment from the body and its pleasures.

It is against the backdrop of these two rival interpretations that the project of this chapter should be understood. I have two aims—the one exegetical, the other philosophical. To begin with the exegetical aim, I argue that the evaluative reading is problematic—first and foremost because it lacks the requisite textual support. As I will show below, a close reading of the text undeniably suggests that Socrates is advocating behavioural avoidance of bodily pleasure.<sup>45</sup> Still, the evaluative readings make it abundantly clear that Plato owes us an explanation of the philosophical appeal of thoroughgoing detachment from bodily pleasure. As things stands, it looks as if Plato's advocacy of this austere ethical ideal is rooted in resentment or prudishness rather than systematic and careful philosophizing.

This brings me to the second aim of this chapter: I want to develop and sharpen the traditional ascetic readings. Even though the ethics of the *Phaedo* is admittedly quite strange and rather austere, I contend that Plato's attack on bodily pleasure is philosophically motivated, rooted in a cogent, sophisticated, and interesting piece of

---

<sup>45</sup> I find myself in agreement, then, with T. Butler (2012-a) and Ebrey (2017) both of whom have pushed back against the evaluative view. There are two main differences between our readings. Firstly, whereas T. Butler and Ebrey mainly purport to show that the evaluative view breaks down on the later bits of the Affinity Argument, I show in addition that the evaluative view already clashes with Socrates's Second Defence and argue that it is philosophically problematic as well. Secondly, I offer a more careful and more sustained reading of the later bits of argumentation in which Socrates claims that bodily pleasure deceives us, and situate this line of thought in Plato's over-arching hedonic theorizing.

reasoning, and tied to his central views.<sup>46</sup> Although Socrates's initial discussion of the practice of death had explained why philosophers detach themselves from bodily cognition and its sense-perceptual input, this earlier passage merely *stipulated* that the life worth living involves detachment from bodily pleasure without offering much in the way of justification or explanation of this ethical ideal.

In an important yet often missed bit of text towards the end of the Affinity Argument (78b4–84b8), however, Socrates justifies the practice of affective detachment: the problem with bodily pleasure, he argues, is that it poses a 'great and extreme' problem for the life of philosophy (83c1–2). As elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, the key suggestion here turns out to be that pleasure is misleading and closely linked with illusion. This Deception Argument (83b5–e3), as I call it, suggests that whenever we experience bodily pleasure, we are unavoidably tricked into believing that the object or cause of our pleasure is more real and more clear or cognitively accessible than it actually is.

Put differently, bodily pleasure inflates the reality of the messy sensible world around us and makes it project its identity more forcefully than warranted, thus casting a veil between us and the manifestly clear and 'really real reality' of the Forms. That being the case, it directly sabotages the philosophical attempt to transcend the appearances around us and access the unseen order of the Forms. This, then, explains why the philosopher practices affective detachment.

This chapter is organized as follows. In section 1, I examine the Platonic proposal that the good life is structured around the practice of death, breaking it down into two sub-practices: the practice of cognitive detachment (distancing oneself from the deliverances of

---

<sup>46</sup> For a similar but more general point, see Moss (2006: 503–504). In a similar vein, Ebrey (2017: 23–25) argues that one of Plato's aims in the *Phaedo* is to try and provide Pythagorean and Orphic ideas with 'clearer meanings and better justifications.'



sense-perception) and the practice of affective detachment (distancing oneself from the affective states of the body, especially its pleasures).

With this preliminary discussion of the ethics of the *Phaedo* in place, I discuss in considerable detail the different ways in which rival interpretation have unpacked the notion that we should detach ourselves from bodily affect and I side with the traditional view (section 2). Even though the evaluative view is right that Socrates owes us an explanation of the appeal of radical avoidance of bodily pleasure, I claim that its central suggestion that the life of philosophy is merely characterized by metaphorical, psychological detachment from pleasure is both textually unfounded and philosophically problematic.

In section 3, I turn to the philosophical aim of this chapter and offer a careful reading of the Deception Argument in which Socrates spells out the need for the practice of affective detachment. I challenge a widespread view concerning Socrates's defence of affective detachment—the idea that bodily pleasure misleads us about *what matters*—and propose a new understanding of Socrates's thinking according to which bodily pleasure misleads us about *what is true or real*. Bodily pleasure causes ontological rather than evaluative confusion, in other words. Not only do I specify the nature of these false ontological beliefs foisted upon us by bodily pleasure, I also clarify the potential underlying mechanics of this shaky process of belief formation.

In the last section, section 4, I offer some concluding thoughts—the main one of which is that once we have developed a proper handle on Plato's defence of affective detachment, his radical and seemingly unfounded views about bodily pleasure and the dangers it poses to the good life turn out to be more interesting, more cogent, and more successful than usually appreciated.

## 1. Socrates's Second Defence

### 1.1. Philosophy as the Practice of Death

Moments before he is about to drink the hemlock, Socrates and his friends find themselves in a discussion about the permissibility of suicide which quickly segues into a discussion of Socrates's nonchalant attitude towards his very own imminent death. Because Simmias and Cebes jokingly accuse their teacher of not showing any negative emotion even though he is about to leave his friends behind, Socrates proposes to 'defend himself' a second time 'as if [he] were in a court of law (πρὸς ταῦτα ἀπολογήσασθαι ὥσπερ ἐν δικαστηρίῳ, 63b2).' In brief, the aim of this defence is to explain why 'for philosophers least of all men does being dead hold any terror (τεθνάναι ἥκιστα αὐτοῖς ἀνθρώπων φοβερόν, 67e4–6; cf. 63e8–64a1).'<sup>47</sup>

The core argument of Socrates's Second Defence, as this stretch of argumentation is often called, moves in roughly three steps. Firstly, because philosophers practice nothing but 'dying and being dead (ἀποθνήσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι, 64a6),'<sup>48</sup> it would make no sense for a philosopher to fear death.<sup>49</sup> Philosophers practice death, secondly, because they practice the separation of body and soul which is

---

<sup>47</sup> Like Socrates's original defence speech, this second defence is a passionate plea for the examined life and the importance of 'the care of the soul.' Indeed, Hackforth (1972: 3) might be right that the care of the self is the unifying theme that weaves together the many disparate threads of the *Phaedo*.

<sup>48</sup> As we learn later in the dialogue (81a2), philosophy as such counts as a 'training for' or 'cultivation of death (μελέτη θανάτου).'

<sup>49</sup> The hidden premise is that it is 'weird (ἄτοπος),' 'inconsistent,' 'irrational,' or 'illogical (ἄλογος),' or simply 'absurd' or 'ridiculous (γέλοιος)' to fear what you voluntarily practice.

tantamount to practicing death since death is ‘the body’s having come to be separate, alone by itself, apart from the soul, and the soul’s being apart from the body, separated off, alone by itself (χωρίς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαγέν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα γεγονέναι, χωρίς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσαν αὐτὴν καθ’ αὐτὴν εἶναι, 64c5–8).’<sup>50</sup> As Socrates sums it up, ‘the practice of philosophers is just this—a release and parting of soul from body (τὸ μελέτημα αὐτὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν τῶν φιλοσόφων, λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος, 67d4–5).’

Philosophers practice the separation of body and soul, thirdly and finally, because they practice what I call cognitive detachment and affective detachment: they detach themselves from sense-perception (the cognitive component of the body) (65a9–67b6) and they detach themselves from material possessions, bodily desire, and especially bodily pleasure (the affective component of the body) (64c10–65a8).<sup>51</sup>

It is in this third step that Socrates unfolds his ideas about the most worthwhile, rationally driven way of life and its relationship with affective states like appetitive desire and bodily pleasure. As the label ‘lover of wisdom’ or ‘lover of understanding’ suggests, philosophers organize their lives around the project of acquiring

---

<sup>50</sup> Lurking in the background of this definition is Plato’s ‘puritan dualism,’ as Dodds (1951: 212) has called it, which he shared with the Orphics, the Pythagoreans, and the mystery cults. Such puritan dualism treats our soul as an immortal spark of the divine, trapped in a body, and it attributes ‘all the sins and sufferings of the *psyche* to the pollution arising from contact with a mortal body.’ In the *Laws* (959a4–d6), for instance, our body—this ‘lump of flesh’ and εἶδωλον of our true self—is sharply contrasted with our soul: the latter being ‘our real self,’ it has ‘an absolute superiority over our body.’ Likewise, in the *Phaedrus* (250c4–6), Socrates suggests that we—our souls—are tainted ‘by this object we call a body and which we carry around us now, imprisoned like shellfish.’ And in the *Republic* (533d1–2), Socrates claims that, before exposure to philosophy, ‘the eye of the soul is buried in a sort of barbaric bog.’

<sup>51</sup> This summary is deliberately vague: below, I will have to say more about what these practices of detachment from the body precisely involve.

knowledge and wisdom by getting ultimate reality in view. Unfortunately, though, human embodiment forms an obstacle to this enterprise. As Socrates crisply puts it:

[T1.1] It looks as if some sort of track is leading us ... astray in our inquiry: as long as we possess the body and our soul is contaminated by such an evil (ἔως ἂν τὸ σῶμα ἔχωμεν καὶ συμπεφουρμένη ἢ ἡμῶν ἢ ψυχὴ μετὰ τοιούτου κακοῦ), we will surely never adequately attain what we desire— and that is the truth (τὸ ἀληθές). (66b3–7)

Socrates argues, in brief, that human embodiment impairs both the quantity and the quality of our philosophical endeavours.<sup>52</sup> One problem is that the body interrupts our inquiries. It, so to speak, hijacks our psychological energy: the time human beings necessarily have to spend on sleeping, eating, drinking, and personal hygiene, for instance, cannot be spent on contemplative activities and even if we come around to philosophizing, the body ‘sets up a clamour and disturbance (θόρυβον παρέχει καὶ ταραχὴν, 66d6)’ and distracts us from attending to the Forms.<sup>53</sup>

Another, subtler problem with the body is that its cognitive operations are shaky. Sense-perception—‘using the body as a means to study a thing (τῷ σώματι προσχρηῖται εἰς τὸ σκοπεῖν τι, 79c2)’—is inaccurate and unclear and does not afford truth (65b1–8) and this is the case, it seems, because the objects of knowledge and wisdom (the Forms or ‘the things that are’) can only be grasped by ‘using the intellect alone by itself and unsullied (αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ

---

<sup>52</sup> Nussbaum (1986: 152).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Republic* 485d6–8 for the proto-Freudian claim that human beings only have a fixed amount of psychology energy to spend: ‘when someone’s desires incline strongly for one thing, they are thereby weakened for others—just like a stream that has been partly diverted into another channel.’

διανοία χρώμενος)’ without ‘dragging in any other sense (μήτε τινα ἄλλην αἴσθησιν ἐφέλκων, 65e8–9).’ In stark contrast, ‘whenever the soul sets about examining anything in company with the body, it gets completely deceived by it (μετὰ τοῦ σώματος ἐπιχειρή τι σκοπεῖν, δῆλον ὅτι τότε ἐξαπατᾶται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, 65b10–11; cf. 83a3–5).’ Thus, as Burnyeat has put it, one of Plato’s charges against perception in the *Phaedo* seems to be that sense-perception offers itself ‘as a dangerously seductive rival judgement-maker to reason.’<sup>54</sup>

This sheds light on one aspect of the philosopher’s practice of death: in order to cognize the Forms, ‘each alone by itself and unsullied (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ εἰλικρινὲς ἕκαστον ... τῶν ὄντων),’ the philosopher has to use his intellect, ‘alone by itself and unsullied (αὐτῇ καθ’ αὐτὴν εἰλικρινεῖ τῇ διανοίᾳ, 66a1–3),’ and this requires the practice of cognitive detachment. The philosopher ‘utterly disdains the body and flees from it (μάλιστα ἀτιμάζει τὸ σῶμα καὶ φεύγει ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, 65c11–d1),’ separating himself – that is, his soul – ‘as far as possible from his eyes and ears, and virtually from his whole body, on the ground that it confuses the soul and doesn’t allow his soul to gain truth and wisdom when in partnership with it (ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν σύμπαντος τοῦ σώματος, ὡς ταράττοντος καὶ οὐκ ἔωντος τὴν ψυχὴν κτήσασθαι ἀλήθειάν τε καὶ φρόνησιν ὅταν κοινωνῇ, 66a4–7).’

Unexpectedly, though, and without any trace of justification, Socrates describes another sense in which philosophers release their soul from its communion with the body. In the opening gambits of the second defence, he also argues that the philosophical way of life involves the practice of what I called affective detachment: philosophers are not ‘eagerly concerned ἐσπουδακέναι)’ with the ‘so-called pleasures (τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας)’ of food, drink, and sex

---

<sup>54</sup> Burnyeat (1990: 61).

that ‘come through the body (αἰ διὰ τοῦ σώματός εἰσιν)’ but instead ‘despise them—except in so far as they are absolutely compelled to take part in them (ἀτιμάζειν, καθ’ ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν, 64d2–65a7).’

This very idea is echoed in a later passage of the *Phaedo* where Socrates again notes that, throughout their lives, philosophers have ‘rejected the pleasures of the body (τὰς μὲν ἄλλας ἡδονὰς τὰς περὶ τὸ σῶμα) ... as alien, thinking they do more harm than good, and [have] instead seriously concerned [themselves] with the pleasures of understanding (τὰς δὲ περὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἐσπούδασέ, 114e1–4).’<sup>55</sup>

## 1.2. Making Sense of Affective Detachment

On a traditional interpretation of affective detachment, Plato presents us here with an austere and otherworldly ethical theory that advocates thoroughgoing behavioural avoidance of bodily pleasures and activities that give rise to such lowly pleasure. As Gallop summarizes the ethics of the *Phaedo*, ‘nowhere is Plato’s asceticism so uncompromisingly extolled.’<sup>56</sup> In a similar vein, D. Frede has argued that, in the *Phaedo*, we find Plato at his most ascetic, his most anti-hedonist, and his most otherworldly.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Like many other Platonic dialogues, the *Phaedo* is mainly concerned with the dangers posed by bodily pleasures: the hedonic experiences human beings have διὰ (e.g. 65a7), κατὰ (e.g. 82c3, 94b7), or περὶ (e.g. 114e1–2) the body, that is to say, in virtue of the fact that we are embodied creatures. The mental pleasures of reason, in stark contrast, are safe: they are neither harmful nor alienating.

<sup>56</sup> Gallop (1975: 88).

<sup>57</sup> D. Frede (1992: 435) (‘In no dialogue does Socrates show himself as much of an antihedonist as he does in the *Phaedo* (64d–69e)’) and D. Frede (1999-a: 173) (‘Der *Phaidon* is ... der asketischste Dialog Platons. In keinem der späteren Dialoge manifestiert sich die Ausrichtung auf das Jenseits mit einer vergleichbaren Rigorosität’). For other ascetic readings, see e.g. Appolini (1996), Bluck (1955), Bostock

When Socrates claims that the practice of death involves detachment from the affective operations of the body, this type of reading suggests that his claim is that the good life involves rigorous and austere behavioural abstention from ‘what is corporeal, that is to say, what can be touched and seen, drunk and eaten, or used for sexual enjoyment (τὸ σωματοειδές, οὐ τις ἄν ἄψαιτο καὶ ἴδοι καὶ πίοι καὶ φάγοι καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἀφροδίσια χρήσαιο, 81b5–6)’ and especially the bodily pleasures that are bound up with the material, sensible realm.

As already mentioned, a number of authors—most notably Daniel Russell and Raphael Woolf—have, more recently, advanced sophisticated alternative readings of these ethical passages in the *Phaedo*.<sup>58</sup> These rival readings reject the traditional ascetic readings in favour of what is sometimes called an evaluative interpretation. On this rival view, the *Phaedo* is not arguing that the philosopher should refrain in any far-reaching way from bodily experiences and activities that require association with the body; Plato’s weaker claim, instead, is that the philosopher should merely adopt a negative ‘evaluative stance’ towards them.<sup>59</sup>

The evaluative reading suggests, to summarize, that the philosopher distances or detaches himself from his body in a looser, more metaphorical sense. Instead of literally avoiding what is bodily through austere abstemious behaviour, the philosopher merely adopts a disdainful, belittling evaluative stance towards the body and its operations which attaches little value to them but views them as trivial or indifferent. The philosopher’s detachment is merely psychological, then, and located in his attitudes towards the body—it does not spill

---

(1986), Hackforth (1972), the Neoplatonists Damascius and Olympiodorus, Nussbaum (1986), and Rowe (1993).

<sup>58</sup> Russell (2005) and Woolf (2004).

<sup>59</sup> Woolf (2004: 99).

over in abstemious or avoidant behaviour. As Raphael Woolf describes this interpretation:

On the evaluative reading, Socrates's talk of keeping oneself away, or freeing oneself, from one's body would be interpreted as the injunction to place no value on the body and its works, without this entailing, as an embodied human, that one not take part in the usual range of human activities.<sup>60</sup>

If we apply this type of interpretation more specifically to the philosopher's detachment from bodily pleasure, Plato's point is not that the philosopher should actively shun the appetitive pleasures of food, drink, and sex—'that unholy Trinity of Platonic suspects,' as Woolf aptly calls them—his point is merely that the philosopher should adopt an attitude of psychological detachment towards them which regards such lowly material pleasure as indifferent and of little significance in one's life.

Daniel Russell—who is most explicit about the nature of this evaluative attitude—has gone further and suggested that Plato treats pleasure as a *conditional good*. As a conditional good, pleasure is in and of itself neither good nor bad: its value depends instead on how one incorporates it into one's life and one's concerns. The view Plato is trying to develop here, Russell suggests, is that 'the goodness of [pleasure] depends on, and is given by, the role that pleasure takes on in a virtuous character under the leadership of practical intelligence.'<sup>61</sup> Thus,

... instead of asking, say, whether the pleasures of sex are themselves good or bad, Plato would ask whether or not the pleasure a particular person finds

---

<sup>60</sup> Woolf (2004: 100).

<sup>61</sup> Russell (2005: 9).



in sex is underwritten by a skewed or a reasonable sense of what is important.<sup>62</sup>

This rival interpretation has a couple of things going for it. What it gets right, firstly, is that it is undeniable that the philosophical way of life is to a large degree a matter of *having the correct concerns* or *caring about the right things*. In his discussion of affective detachment, for instance, Socrates maintains that the philosopher ‘is not eagerly concerned with’ bodily pleasures but actually ‘disvalues,’ ‘belittles,’ or ‘despises’ them. Indeed, he just ‘does not care about them.’ As Woolf rightly notes, Plato’s description of the best way of life is ‘peppered with evaluative terminology.’<sup>63</sup>

And whatever the precise meaning of the infamous Right Exchange passage (69a6–c3) found towards the end of Socrates’s Second Defence, one of its central messages must be that there is an enormous gap in value between ordinary, pleasure-driven virtue—or what passes itself off as virtue—and the philosopher’s true virtue of φρόνησις (‘the only true currency’). Similarly, at a later stage in the *Phaedo* (83c2–7), Socrates links pleasure with ‘the greatest and most extreme evil’ there is, seemingly arguing—on some interpretations at least—that the trouble with pleasure is that it confuses us about what is worthy of our attention and pursuit.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, both Plato’s language and the way in which Socrates describes the philosophical way of life are characterized by a kind of indeterminacy that creates space for different readings. It is not enough, as Pakaluk has sharply observed, to summarize the philosophical way of life by simply repeating that this life involves the practice of death because such a description leaves it entirely unclear

---

<sup>62</sup> Russell (2005: 78).

<sup>63</sup> Woolf (2004: 99).

<sup>64</sup> See e.g. T. Butler (2012-a: 106).

what it *means* to practice death.<sup>65</sup> This is an important observation which ties in nicely with the fact that much of Plato's talk of 'separating,' 'releasing,' 'freeing,' or 'turning [oneself] towards' the soul and 'disregarding,' 'escaping,' 'withdrawing', 'turning [oneself]' or 'staying away from' the body admits of wildly different, less or more literal interpretations.

Those in the evaluative camp are right, then, that it is not immediately obvious that Socrates's advocacy of affective detachment should be heard *literally* rather than *metaphorically*. What might precisely be at stake, exegetically speaking, is whether one should detach oneself psychologically or metaphorically or behaviourally or literally from the body and its affective operations.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, Russell claims that a close reading of Socrates's Second Defence in fact shows that there is no smoking gun textual evidence to support the idea that the philosophical way of life involves rigorous behavioural abstention from bodily pleasure. 'On closer inspection,' he claims, 'we shall find that ... what the philosopher avoids and disdains is not *pleasure*—not even bodily pleasure—full stop, but only *unhealthy ways* of partaking of pleasure.'<sup>67</sup>

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, considerations of interpretative charity seem to favour these softer evaluative readings. One glaring problem with traditional readings of the *Phaedo*, I believe,

---

<sup>65</sup> Pakaluk (2003: 98–99) (who refers to Burnet, Gallop, and Hackforth among others). The same problem arises for Holmes's (2017: 46) suggestion that Socrates is defending 'aspirational disembodiment' in the *Phaedo* which leaves it entirely unclear what it *means* to be disembodied while alive. This problem depends, in its turn, on what we make of the dualism underlying the *Phaedo* (whether it counts as a weak or strong (Cartesian) type of dualism). For discussion, see Pakaluk (2003), Broadie (2001), and Johansen (2017).

<sup>66</sup> As Woolf (2004: 100) frame this point: 'One should not beg the question in advance. How to interpret this central idea is precisely the point at issue.'

<sup>67</sup> Russell (2005: 88, emphasis in original).

is that the majority of scholars simply content themselves with labelling the Platonic way of life as an ‘ascetic’ way of life without offering much in the way of further elaboration or explanation. Assuming for the moment that we can get clear on what asceticism precisely entails, this approach is problematic because it leaves unclear what the philosophical appeal of such a radical and seemingly off-putting ethical position is supposed to be.<sup>68</sup>

Note that Socrates himself is partially responsible for this. Although his examination of the practice of death provides an explanation of why the philosopher detaches himself from the cognitive dimension of the body—sense-perception is misleading and cannot bring us in contact with ultimate, intelligible reality—he merely *indicates* that the philosopher detaches himself from bodily pleasure without explaining or justifying how affective detachment is connected with the philosopher’s central project of cognizing the Forms.<sup>69</sup> It remains obscure, then, why those who strive to see ultimate reality face to face should avoid bodily pleasure, unless the pursuit of bodily pleasure would somehow impede or sabotage their basic project of cognizing the Forms—as sense-perception does.

Taking all this together, it looks as if Plato’s advocacy of a thoroughgoing detachment from bodily pleasure is rooted in resentment or prudishness rather than systematic and careful

---

<sup>68</sup> A similar point is made by Ebrey (2017: 2).

<sup>69</sup> At first blush, the observation that philosophers practice affective detachment just serves as a powerful indication that they do in fact practice the separation of body and soul: having explained that philosophers distance themselves from bodily pleasures and material paraphernalia, Socrates draws on this bit of information to conclude that ‘it is obvious (δηλός ἐστιν) that the philosopher differs from other men in releasing his soul from its communion with the body (ἀπολύων ... τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας διαφερόντως τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων, 64e8–65a2).’

philosophizing.<sup>70</sup> Up to this point, Socrates has given us no reason to accept that the philosopher should detach himself from the affective dimension of his body as long as he detaches himself from the cognitive dimension of his body. This, I argue, must be one of the main reasons why Woolf concludes that Plato ‘has more important things to do than make an idol or fetish out of withdrawal from bodily activity’<sup>71</sup> and why Russell similarly rejects this stronger reading of the *Phaedo* on the grounds that it creates an unattractive Plato who has ‘very little to tell about how to live a good human life’ but instead asks us to ‘actively fight against [our] humanity and mortality’ and ‘to get by with the rubbish we’re stuck with until we can leave our humanity behind.’<sup>72</sup>

One of the prime merits of the evaluative reading, in stark contrast, is that it provides an elegant account of the philosophical appeal of affective detachment which at the same time allows us to mitigate the otherworldliness of the *Phaedo*. In the hands of Russell,

---

<sup>70</sup> This point is well made by Moss (2006: 503–504) and applies more generally to Plato’s hedonic theorizing.

<sup>71</sup> Woolf (2004: 104).

<sup>72</sup> Woolf (2004: 85). In an important methodological sidenote, he argues that this is such a ‘strange and startling view’ that the burden of proof lies on those who claim that the *Phaedo* advertizes active behavioural avoidance of bodily pleasures. There are at least three additional problems with (Platonic) asceticism. Firstly, asceticism—the attempt to extirpate or excise our affective states—looks like an unnecessarily strong and less than admirable solution to the ethical problem posed by pleasure. As Nietzsche nicely puts it, ‘we no longer admire dentists who ‘pluck out’ teeth so that they will not hurt anymore.’ For Nietzsche’s, and a Nietzschean, criticism of Platonic asceticism, see Nehamas (1998: 139). Secondly, Weiss (1987: 64n15) argues that asceticism is not just ‘inferior than indifference,’ it actually signals—paradoxically enough—‘a preoccupation with pleasure.’ Thirdly, Nussbaum (1986: 154–155) claims that Plato’s argument for asceticism is circular: the Platonic philosopher rejects the body and its needs from the standpoint of someone who no longer sees the body and its needs as genuine parts of himself.

Socrates's take on the good life is no longer 'strange and startling' but gets transformed into a comfortable expression of contemporary axiology: pleasure is a conditional good that requires rational guidance rather than repression to manifest itself as something truly valuable.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, Woolf's Plato can be credited with the invention of a decidedly modern and philosophically appealing notion: what characterizes the good life, on this account, is the exercise of 'maximal psychological detachment' from bodily pleasure by attaching little value to the body and its affective states.<sup>74</sup>

### 1.3. The Ascetic View Redux

The project of the rest of this chapter is to resist these attempts to water down Plato's defence of affective detachment. Even though the *Phaedo* presents a strange and radical picture of the good life and the place it reserves for pleasure—it does, indeed, defend a literal construal of affective detachment—Plato's thinking about this topic is nevertheless cogent, philosophically substantive, and tied to his central views.<sup>75</sup> The main problem Plato identifies with bodily pleasure, I submit, is

---

<sup>73</sup> It is not a coincidence, I take it, that Russell is heavily indebted to Korsgaard (1983).

<sup>74</sup> Woolf (2004: 109): the philosopher's attitude is one of 'maximal *psychological* detachment. This notion, mundane enough for us, is one that Socrates is trying to formulate in the *Phaedo* for perhaps the first time.'

<sup>75</sup> *Pace* Russell, Plato's eerie ideas about the good life as some kind of embodied death arguably deserve to be taken seriously *precisely because* they look so strange and startling to us. As Williams (2000: 478) has argued, the main philosophical point of reading Plato—and other historical figures for that matter—is the point of 'making the familiar look strange, and conversely.' It is not obvious, Williams continues, that we should read something written by Plato "as though it had come out in *Mind* last month'—an idea which, if it means anything at all, means something that destroys the main philosophical point of reading Plato at all.'

that it leads us astray with irresistibly deceptive appearances: the experience of bodily pleasure makes the material world appear to be real and clear, although it is not—thus directly undermining the philosopher’s attempt to move beyond the world of appearances.

Before we get there, though, I want to establish that the philosophical way of life is not just a matter of caring about the right things but that it also involves active abstention from bodily affect. Most basically, it strikes me that the mere fact that Socrates’s description of the philosophical way of life is framed in evaluative terms does not entail that behavioural avoidance of pleasure is excluded from playing a role in the good life. Indeed, I will argue that there are good reasons to resist the all too rigid suggestion that the philosophical way of life is either a matter of properly evaluating bodily pleasure or of actively avoiding it.

It could be the case, for instance, that each of these aspects—correct evaluation and actual behavioural avoidance of pleasure—highlights a different important ingredient of the good life. Depending on individual differences—how far you are on the philosophical path, for instance, or the specific problem a certain pleasure poses—it might be necessary to either actually avoid it or merely keep it at psychological distance by attaching no value to it.<sup>76</sup> Thus, if we try to adopt a new evaluative perspective (adopting a healthy lifestyle), we might need to reject the pleasures of eating chocolate cookies that were characteristic of our old evaluative perspective. Once the transformation is complete, though, we might reintegrate the pleasures we had to reject to get this new evaluative picture in view.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> For such a reading, see e.g. Marechal and Jones (2018). Remarkably enough, Woolf himself opts for such ‘interpretive multivalence’ (as he calls it) as well: unlike Russell—with whom he agrees that the second defence is best read evaluatively—he holds that the later bits of the *Phaedo* make more sense in light of an ascetic reading.

<sup>77</sup> This point is well made by Callard (2018: 169).

In addition, there seems to be an inexorable connection between valuation and action, that is to say, between having certain evaluative attitudes and behaving in a certain way.<sup>78</sup> As even Woolf admits, ‘Plato is too acute a psychologist to countenance that ... there is no linkage at all between behaviour and attitude.’<sup>79</sup> One very obvious reason for abstaining from bodily pleasures would of course be that one does not value—or actively disvalues—them and, conversely, it seems plausible that negative valuation of bodily pleasure is going to spill over into avoidant behaviour of the activities that give rise to such pleasure—especially in light of certain background theories.<sup>80</sup>

I conclude, then, that even though it is undeniable that the philosophical way of life involves *negative evaluation* of the material world, it remains an open question whether it *also* includes *behavioural abstention* from bodily affective states. This is precisely what is at stake, exegetically speaking. To see whether this is the case, we can begin by having a closer look at what Socrates’s Second Defence has to say

---

<sup>78</sup> The distinction between the two is sometimes even straddled within Plato’s terms themselves. When the verb σπουδάζω is used at 64d2–3 (ἐσπουδακέναι), Fowler (1914: *ad loc.*) takes it evaluatively and translates it correctly as ‘to care much about something,’ but when the same verb appears at 114e4 (ἐσπούδασε), he—again correctly—translates it behaviourally as ‘to seek eagerly.’

<sup>79</sup> Woolf (2004: 103).

<sup>80</sup> I am thinking here in particular of Socratic and Platonic intellectualism, so-called hybrid theories of valuing—defended, for instance, by Scheffler (2001) who holds that valuing some  $x$  is not just a matter of having the evaluative belief that  $x$  is valuable but that it also involves (*inter alia*) ‘a disposition to treat certain kinds of considerations pertaining to [ $x$ ] as reasons for action’—and dispositional accounts of belief as put forward by Ryle (1949) and Schwitzgebel (2002) and (2020) (on which someone believes that  $p$  if they tend to act and react in the way we would expect of someone who thinks  $p$  is true).

about affective detachment:

[T1.2] [a] [Socrates] Do you think it is the part of a philosopher to be eager about such so-called pleasures<sup>81</sup> like the pleasures of food and drink (ἐσπουδακέναι περὶ τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας τὰς τοιάσδε, οἷον σιτίων τε καὶ ποτῶν)?

[Simmias] By no means.

[Soc.] What about the pleasures of sex (τὰς τῶν ἀφροδισίων)?

[Sim.] Not at all.

[Soc.] What of the other services of the body (τὰς ἄλλας τὰς περὶ τὸ σῶμα θεραπείας)?<sup>82</sup> Do you think such a man considers them valuable (ἐντίμους ἡγεῖσθαι), the acquisition of distinguished clothes and shoes and the other bodily ornaments? Do you think he values these or despises them (πότερον τιμᾶν δοκεῖ σοι ἢ ἀτιμάζειν), except in so far as he is absolutely compelled to take part in them (καθ' ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν)?

[Sim.] I think the true philosopher despises them (ἀτιμάζειν).

[Soc.] Taking all things together, don't you think that such a man's practice is not concerned with the body (ἢ τοῦ τοιούτου πραγματεία οὐ περὶ τὸ σῶμα εἶναι) but that he aims to be withdrawn from the body, as far as he can, and to be turned towards his soul (καθ' ὅσον δύναται ἀφεστάναι αὐτοῦ, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν τετραφθαι)?<sup>83</sup>

[Sim.] I do.

[Soc.] So ... such things show clearly that the philosopher more than other men releases his soul from association with the body as much as possible (ἀπολύων ὅτι μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας)?

[Sim.] Apparently.

[b] [Soc.] A man for whom none of these things are pleasant (ᾧ μηδὲν ἡδὺ τῶν τοιούτων) and who has no part in them (μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν) is thought by the majority not to deserve to live; instead, they will think that

---

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Jowett's (1930: *ad loc.*) stronger translation: 'the pleasures—if they are to be called pleasures—of the body.'

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Grube's (1977: *ad loc.*) attractive alternative translation (which seemingly takes θεραπείας as a genitive and construes τὸ σῶμα as an accusative of respect): 'what of the other pleasures concerned with the service of the body?'

<sup>83</sup> As Rowe (1993:139) puts it, the philosopher's basic aim is 'to be concerned with the mind.'



someone who does not care for bodily pleasures (ὁ μηδὲν φροντίζων τῶν ἡδονῶν αἰ διὰ τοῦ σώματός εἰσιν) runs pretty close to being dead.

[Sim.] What you say is certainly true. (64d2–65a8)

One thing that immediately stands out from this bit of text is that the philosopher does not *care* about the material realm and its pleasures. Importantly, though, it looks as if lack of care, this negative evaluation, manifests itself in abstemious behaviour — as one would expect given Socrates’s belief that there is an inexorable connection between our evaluative beliefs and our actions.<sup>84</sup> The philosopher ‘regards [bodily pleasures] with little respect’ and indeed ‘disdains’ or ‘despises them’ — ‘*except in so far as he is absolutely compelled to take part in them (μετέχειν).*’ (my emphasis)

This does not just show that evaluation and action go hand in hand in (Socrates’s thinking about) the life of philosophy, it also indicates that behavioural abstention is an essential part of this way of life. Because the philosopher disvalues bodily pleasures and other externals, he generally avoids them as far as possible and only takes part in them when there is no way around it.<sup>85</sup>

In part [b] of this passage, Socrates again speaks of behavioural avoidance and again this goes hand in hand with evaluative

---

<sup>84</sup> When expressing his dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras’ natural philosophy (95e8–102a3), Socrates betrays his intellectualist commitments: human action and choice is best explained by reference to the evaluative scheme we operate from. In a word, he seemingly believes that our evaluative judgment of what is best is the true αἰτία of our behaviour. For good discussion, see T. Butler (2012-b), T. Butler (2019), and Kamtekar (2017: 190–197).

<sup>85</sup> Note how strong this qualification is: the philosopher only engages with externals and physical pleasures when this is absolutely unavoidable. Cf. Rowe’s (1993: 138) gloss on καθ’ ὅσον μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν αὐτῶν: ‘to the extent [whatever it may be] to which there is not great necessity for him to partake in them,’ i.e. ‘except in so far as it is absolutely necessary for him to concern himself with them.’

terminology: the things people usually enjoy ‘do not strike [the wisdom-lover] as pleasant’ and he ‘does not take part in them’ which is to say, in a word, that he just ‘does not care’ about these things. Here is the text again:

[T1.3] According to the majority of people (τοις πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις), a man for whom none of these things are pleasant (ὃ μηδὲν ἡδὺ τῶν τοιούτων) and who has no part in them (μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν) does not deserve to live (οὐκ ἄξιον εἶναι ζῆν); instead, one who does not care for the pleasures of the body (ὁ μηδὲν φροντίζων τῶν ἡδονῶν αἰ διὰ τοῦ σώματός εἰσιν) runs pretty close to being dead (ἐγγύς τι τείνειν τοῦ τεθνάναι).  
What you say is certainly true.

To explain these stronger claims about behavioural abstention away, those in the evaluative camp have suggested that it occurs ‘as part of Socrates’s report of what the *many* think is a life worth living,’<sup>86</sup> even though these non-philosophical people ‘do not share, or much understand, the philosopher’s values.’<sup>87</sup> This would entail that what ordinary people say about the practice of affective detachment—that it involves rigorous abstention from bodily pleasure, say—is likely to get things wrong and that it can be taken with a grain of salt. Because their values and priorities are so shockingly different from those of the philosopher, there is no need to take seriously what Socrates presents as *their* summary of the life of philosophy.<sup>88</sup>

I disagree: I think it makes more sense to assume, instead, that this description of the philosophical way of life get things right because it is Socrates’s own, whereas ‘the many’ merely go wrong in

---

<sup>86</sup> Woolf (2004: 100)

<sup>87</sup> Russell (2005: 88). To back up this point, he refers to 82d3–4: ‘Philosophers do not walk on the same paths as those who, in their view, don’t know where they are going.’

<sup>88</sup> Russell (2005: 88–89) and Woolf (2004: 100).

their understanding of how someone who lives such a life ‘runs pretty close to being dead’ or ‘deserves death.’ Put more precisely, even though Socrates and the majority of people agree that the philosophical way of life involves affective detachment (construed literally or behaviourally)—not caring about bodily pleasure as well as abstaining from it as a far as possible—they have different ideas about the way in which such a life amounts to some kind of death and whether it makes for a life worth living.

Note that [T1.3] (part [b] of [T1.2]) clearly echoes Socrates’s description of the philosophical way of life as presented in part [a] and barely deviates from it.<sup>89</sup> This tells against the suggestion that ordinary people misunderstand what such a life, practically speaking, amounts to. What they misunderstand, instead, is whether such a way of life counts as worthwhile or whether it is a kind of living death (in the colloquial sense of the word of not being a life worth living).

This makes good sense in light of the fact that Socrates had already accused the many of precisely this error. Right before, he claimed that ordinary people ‘aren’t aware in what sense genuine philosophers are verging on death and deserving of it (τῶ ὄντι οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες θανατῶσι, καὶ σφᾶς γε οὐ λελήθασιν ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν τοῦτο πάσχειν, 64b4–6).’ For the majority of people, abstaining from pleasures and passions is extremely unattractive—it is a kind of living death and those who practice such detachment are alive but not *alive*<sup>90</sup>—and *this* is what Socrates and the majority of people disagree

---

<sup>89</sup> ‘For whom none of these things are pleasant’ must echo Socrates reference to the ‘so-called’ bodily pleasures (Plato arguably denies that these experiences strictly speaking count as pleasures), ‘takes no part in these things’ echoes ‘not taking part unless absolutely unavoidable,’ and ‘caring nothing for these pleasures’ echoes the earlier evaluative talk of ‘not deeming [bodily pleasures] valuable’ or ‘disdaining [them].’

<sup>90</sup> As Callicles captures this sentiment in the *Gorgias* (492e5–6 and 494a6–b1), the person who has reached a desireless state by ‘filling himself up’ is no longer able to

about, I suggest, not whether the life of philosophy involves abstention from bodily pleasure.

This gives us some reason to opt for a stronger reading of the second defence passage. But even if we believed that the evaluative view should not be ruled out of court too hastily—up to this point the textual evidence might simply be insufficient to ground our choice of interpretation—I want to argue that the issue gets decided later in the *Phaedo*, towards the end of the Affinity Argument (78b4–84b8), where Socrates offers another ethical reflection, very similar to the one we find in his second defence.<sup>91</sup>

It is undeniable that Plato wants us to connect the earlier and the later ethical material and indeed treat it as a unified strand of argumentation. For one, Socrates explicitly refers back to the earlier defence passage and its discussion of the practice of death: between 80e3 and 81a2, we learn that the type of immortality worth wanting—everlasting bodiless communion with the Forms rather than, say, reincarnation as an animal—is conditional on whether one has been successful at separating one’s soul from the body and gathering one’s soul ‘itself by itself (αὐτὴ εἰς ἑαυτήν)’ by means of ‘the right practice of philosophy(ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦσα),’ that is to say, by actively

---

experience pleasure and ‘that’s like living like a stone or a corpse.’ I agree, then, with Warren’s reading of this argument (2001: 103) who claims that Socrates’s opponents have ‘a conception of true living quite opposed to that of the philosophers. For the majority, truly to live is to indulge in pleasure and passions.’

<sup>91</sup> See Ebrey (2017) and especially T. Butler (2012-a) both of whom have forcefully argued that the evaluative interpretation breaks down on this later treatment of the philosophical way of life. Perhaps surprisingly, the same goes for Woolf (2004: 119), whose plea for interpretive ‘multivalence’ is driven by the conviction that, unlike the evaluative interpretation, the ascetic reading fits the Affinity Argument ‘with no rough edges.’

engaging in ‘the cultivation of death (μελέτη θανάτου, 80e5–81a2).’<sup>92</sup>

More importantly, this later examination of the philosophical way of life is not just ‘renewing’ or ‘repeating’ what has been said before, loosely ‘connected’ with it, or an ‘eigentlich überflüssige Wiederholung der Ermahnung zu einer kathartischen Lebensführung von 64a–69e,’ as many commentators have claimed.<sup>93</sup> Instead, I contend that this bit of text is a pivotal passage in the economy of the *Phaedo* because it provides the key to unlocking the interpretive problem we are trying to untangle here. It does not just establish beyond any doubt that affective detachment involves behavioural abstention from bodily pleasure, it also explains something absolutely crucial Socrates’s earlier treatment had left unexplained—it tells us *why* the philosopher abstains from bodily pleasure. Indeed, without it, Socrates’s Second Defence makes no sense whatsoever and fails to give us a reason to accept the austere ethical theory it espouses.<sup>94</sup>

The main problem with bodily pleasure, or so I will argue, is that it misleads us about the world. More precisely, Socrates claims that it is impossible to experience bodily pleasure without being tricked into taking the sensible realm for more real and more substantive than it actually is while simultaneously losing touch with

---

<sup>92</sup> There are more places where Socrates harks back to this earlier discussion: in his critical treatment of sense-perception, Socrates mention his earlier critique of sense-perception (79c2–8), he reiterates his plea for affective detachment (82c2–c8 and 83b4–7), and he also returns to the difference between the virtue of the philosopher as opposed to the second-rate virtue of ‘lovers of power and prestige.’ (82a11–b3)

<sup>93</sup> Gallop (1975: 137), Rowe (1993: 181), D. Frede (1999-a: 69). With his defence of interpretive multivalence and the suggestion that Socrates’s Second Defence is concerned with the question of *life* while the later bits of the Affinity Argument are concerned with the question of *death*, Woolf (2004: 123) is vulnerable to the same line of criticism.

<sup>94</sup> Apollini (1996: 8) is one of the few who recognizes this crucial point: ‘Without the Affinity Argument, one of Socrates’s most important doctrines throughout the dialogue is given no support precisely where we would expect to find it.’

the ontologically superior intelligible realm. This ontological confusion makes us ‘wallow in utter ignorance (ἐν πάσῃ ἀμαθίᾳ κυλινδουμένην, 82e4–5)’ while alive and, what is even worse, it also bars us from ‘having part in communion with the divine and pure and uniform (τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τε καὶ καθαροῦ καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας, 83e2–3) after death. This makes it obvious, then, why the philosopher must abstain from bodily affective states like material pleasure and appetitive desire.

Before we get there, let us see how this later ethical discussion decides in favour of a stronger reading of affective detachment. In it, Socrates argues that those who organize their life around the ‘cultivation of death (μελέτη θανάτου, 81a2)’ and who ‘care for their soul and do not live for the service of their body (ἐκεῖνοι οἷς τι μέλει τῆς ἑαυτῶν ψυχῆς ἀλλὰ μὴ σώματι πλάττοντες ζῶσι, 82d2–3)’ ‘stay away’ or ‘abstain from (ἀπέχονται; ἀπέχεται, 82c3, 82c8, 83b6)’ bodily desires and pleasures. Although those in the evaluative camp were still able to massage the looser language of the second defence into an expression of metaphorical or psychological detachment, it strikes me that the verb ἀπέχεσθαι used here is most naturally taken behaviourally and thus suggestive of asceticism and abstention from bodily pleasure.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Cf. T. Butler (2012-a: 108). It might be worth noting that verb ἀπέχεσθαι is a cognate (and seemingly the opposite) of the verb μετέχειν, the negation of which (μὴ πολλὴ ἀνάγκη μετέχειν and μὴδὲ μετέχει) is used twice in Socrates’s second defence (at 64e1 and 65a5) to describe the philosopher’s relation with bodily pleasure. If ἀπέχεσθαι carries strong behavioural overtones, as it seems to do, this indicates that we should construe μετέχειν along similar lines which strengthens my behavioural reading of that earlier passage. Even Woolf (2004: 103n9) is willing to concede something like this: although he toys with the suggestion that Plato’s talk of ‘staying away’ simply means that the philosopher ‘keeps [pleasures] at arm’s length by not giving in to them’, he ultimately grants that ‘if there is a whiff of asceticism about such language, it is a sign that an ascetic reading is not to be ruled out of court.’ Slightly

Relatedly, Socrates's later treatment of affective detachment makes trouble for Russell's proposal that Plato treats pleasure as a conditional good. At 81a7–8, fears and sexual passion—two affective experiences—are called 'evils of the human condition (τῶν ἄλλων κακῶν τῶν ἀνθρωπείων)' and a little later Socrates argues that the philosopher should 'secure rest (γαλήνην τούτων παρασκευάζουσα, 84a7–8)' from bodily pleasures, dismissing these—and other elements of the human condition—as 'human evils (τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων κακῶν, 84b3).'<sup>96</sup>

These considerations already put some pressure on the evaluative reading, but the more detailed account of affective detachment Socrates develops in the later part of the *Phaedo* seems decisive against this type of interpretation.<sup>97</sup> Recall that the evaluative view more or less boils down to the proposal that the philosopher can freely experience bodily pleasures as long as he maintains the appropriate psychological distance from these affective experiences (Woolf) or undergoes them under the guidance of virtue and reason (Russell).

In this later stretch of argumentation, however, Socrates claims that the experience of bodily pleasure unavoidably or necessarily undermines the philosophical enterprise of trying to separate the soul

---

earlier, he admits that the expression μηδὲ μετέχει αὐτῶν is 'explicitly suggestive of asceticism.'

<sup>96</sup> At 66b6, the body as such is called an evil and when Cebes refers back to Socrates's critical treatment of sense-perception and bodily pleasure, he talks about 'those evils you were recounting just now.' (70a7–8) The same goes for his third and final reflection on the life of philosophy (114e1–115a3) in which Socrates again makes it explicit that bodily pleasure does 'more harm than good.' *Pace* Russell, there is strong textual evidence, then, that Plato treats bodily pleasure as something bad rather than something (conditionally) good.

<sup>97</sup> For this strike against the evaluative view, see T. Butler (2012-a), Ebrey (2017), and the second half of Woolf (2004).

from the body and the material realm. When we experience bodily pleasure, Socrates argues, a necessary and unavoidable result of this experience is that our soul gets materialized or corporealized: it gets ‘nailed,’ ‘welded,’ ‘bound,’ or ‘glued’ to the body.<sup>98</sup> As a result, such a soul starts sharing the same nature or character and the same upbringing or nurturing as the body—it becomes *ὁμότροπος* and *ὁμότροφος* (83d8–9)—in the sense that it takes the sensible realm for more real and substantive than it actually is. This bars it from ‘having ... a part in the company of the divine, the pure, and uniform (τῆς τοῦ θείου τε καὶ καθαρῶ καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας, 83e2–3).’ Note that this effectively rules out the suggestion driving the evaluative view: Socrates’s more detailed account of affective detachment describes the detrimental effects of bodily pleasure as ‘unavoidable’ or ‘necessary’ (*ἀναγκάζεται*, 83c5 and 83d8) in the soul of ‘every person (*παντὸς ἀνθρώπου*, 83c5)’—including the seasoned, psychologically detached philosopher.

## 2. Tricked by Pleasure: The Deception Argument

Having established that the philosophical way of life involves active avoidance of bodily pleasure, my next aim is to offer a more careful

---

<sup>98</sup> To be sure, there is an outright clash between Socrates’s talk of gluing, binding, nailing, or imprisoning the soul—making it *σωματοειδές*, in brief—and the central tenet of the Affinity Argument. Indeed, the very notion of a materialized soul looks like a *contradictio in terminis*. Most obviously, if the soul is like a body, it is *visible* (81c9), but according to the Affinity Argument, one of the defining features of souls is that they are essentially *invisible* (79a6–7). See Dorter (1976: 303); Russell (2005: 99n46); Gallop (1975: 143); and Hackforth (1972: 46) for this problem. Interpretive charity seemingly requires us to believe, then, as Dorter (1976: 303) also concludes, that Socrates must be talking metaphorically.



examination of the argument Socrates offers in defence of this position. The basic idea driving this argument is straightforward: the most serious problem with bodily pleasure is that it surreptitiously harms us. If we do not abstain from bodily pleasure and other affective experiences, we risk incurring ‘the greatest and most extreme of all evils’—even though people ‘do not take this into account.’ Here is Socrates’s argument:

[T1.4] [Socrates] It is just because it believes it should not oppose this release (τῆ λύσει) [of the soul from the body] that the soul of the true philosopher abstains, so far as it can, from pleasures and desires and pains (ἢ τοῦ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλοσόφου ψυχῆ οὕτως ἀπέχεται τῶν ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ λυπῶν καθ’ ὅσον δύναται), reckoning that when one feels intense pleasure or fear, pain or desire (σφόδρα ἡσθῆ ἢ φοβηθῆ ἢ λυπηθῆ ἢ ἐπιθυμήσῃ), one incurs harm from them not merely to the extent that might be supposed—by being ill, for example, or spending money to satisfy one’s desires—but one incurs the greatest and most extreme of all evils (ὁ πάντων μέγιστόν τε κακῶν καὶ ἔσχατόν) and does not take it into account (οὐ λογίζεται αὐτό).

[Cebe] And what is that, Socrates?

[S.] It is that the soul of every man, when it feels intense pleasure or pain in connection with some object, inevitably believes at the same time that what causes such feelings must be most clear and most real,<sup>99</sup> even though it is not (ἡγεῖσθαι περὶ ὃ ἂν μάλιστα τοῦτο πάσχη, τοῦτο ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον). Such objects are mostly visible (ταῦτα μάλιστα τὰ ὀρατά), are they not?

[C.] Certainly.

[S.] And isn’t it in such an experience that the soul is most completely imprisoned<sup>100</sup> by the body (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ πάθει μάλιστα καταδεῖται ψυχῆ

---

<sup>99</sup> Along with Hackforth (1972: *ad loc.*), we could equally take the superlatives as intensives: ‘transparently clear and utterly real.’ Cf. Gallop (1975:145).

<sup>100</sup> Like Fowler (1914: *ad loc.*), and unlike most translations, I opt for this stronger translation of καταδεῖται: this translation rhymes perfectly with the earlier claim that by gluing or binding the soul to the body, desire (arguably teaming up with pleasure)

ὑπὸ σώματος)?

[C.] How so?

[S.] Because every pleasure or pain rivets the soul, as if with a nail, to the body, welds them together, and makes it corporeal (ἐκάστη ἡδονὴ καὶ λύπη ὥσπερ ἦλον ἔχουσα προσηλοῖ αὐτὴν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα καὶ προσπερονᾷ καὶ ποιεῖ σωματοειδῆ), taking for real whatever the body declares to be real (δοξάζουσιν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῆ).<sup>101</sup> As it shares the beliefs and delights of the body (τοῦ ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς χαίρειν), I think it inevitably becomes of the same character and nurture as the body (ὁμότροπός τε καὶ ὁμότροφος) and is unable ever to reach Hades in a pure state (εἰς Αἴδου καθαρῶς ἀφικέσθαι). Instead, it is always full of body (τοῦ σώματος ἀναπλέα) when it departs, so that it soon falls back into another body (πίπτειν εἰς ἄλλο σῶμα) and grows with it as if it had been sewn into it (ὥσπερ σπειρομένη ἐμφύεσθαι). Because of this, it can have no part in the company of the divine, the pure and uniform (ἄμοιρος εἶναι τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τε καὶ καθαρῆς καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας). (83b4–83e3)

This strand of argumentation picks up on two of Socrates's earlier remarks. When describing the fate of different souls after death—some purified by philosophy, others polluted by their interaction with the body—Socrates had already hinted at the idea that pleasure avails itself of deception to sabotage our grasp of reality:

---

creates a prison—the body, that is—through which the soul is forced to look at the world.

<sup>101</sup> It strikes me that the participle clause *δοξάζουσιν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῆ* is most naturally taken explicatively, that is to say, it serves as an *explanation* of what the fusion of body and soul or the corporealization of the latter comes down to. What it means for a soul to have been corporealized, on this construal, is that such a materialized soul shares the mistaken, far too narrow sense of reality of the body. Cf. 81b1–c2. Others take the expression causally (sharing the body's beliefs *brings about* corporealization) or consecutively (sharing the body's beliefs is a *result of* corporealization).

[T1.5] [A polluted, impure soul] has always been with the body, has served and loved it, and has been so tricked by it and by its desires and pleasures that it thinks nothing else real save what is corporeal (γοητευομένη ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ὑπό τε τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ ἡδονῶν ὥστε μηδὲν ἄλλο δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀληθές ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ σωματοειδές)—what can be touched and seen, drunk and eaten, or used for sexual enjoyment (οὐ τις ἂν ἄψαιτο καὶ ἴδοι καὶ πίοι καὶ φάγοι καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἀφροδίσια χρῆσαιτο)—yet is has been accustomed to hate and shun and tremble before what is obscure to the eyes and invisible, but intelligible and grasped by philosophy (τὸ δὲ τοῖς ὄμμασι σκοτῶδες καὶ αἰδέεσ, νοητὸν καὶ φιλοσοφία αἰρετόν). (81b1–c2)

The argument is also closely connected with the passage that comes right before. In it, Socrates describes the tragic predicament of most people—instead of seeing reality face to face, they are looking at the world ‘through a scanner darkly’ of their own making—but he also maintains that practicing death offers a way out:

[T1.6] When philosophy takes [our] soul in her hand, it has been entirely glued and bound to the body (ἀτεχνῶς διαδεδεμένην ἐν τῷ σώματι καὶ προσκεκολλημένην) and is forced to view the things that are through the body as if through a prison rather than alone by itself (ὥσπερ διὰ εἰργμοῦ διὰ τούτου σκοπεῖσθαι τὰ ὄντα ἀλλὰ μὴ αὐτὴν δι' αὐτῆς) and that is wallowing in utter ignorance. Now philosophy discerns the cunning of the prison, sees how it is effected through desire (δι' ἐπιθυμίας), so that the captive himself may co-operate most of all in his imprisonment. (82d9–e7)

The Deception Argument, as I will call it, has received surprisingly little attention in the recent literature on the *Phaedo*.<sup>102</sup> Its importance

---

<sup>102</sup> Clerk-Shaw (2005: 125n26) spends one brief footnote on it; Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85) briefly discuss the argument and rightly claim that Plato's use of the verb γοητεύειν suggests that bodily desire and pleasures ‘make one take as real what is in some sense or other unreal,’ although I will go on to disagree with how they unpack this proposal; Gallop (1975: 145) spends one sentence on it; Rowe (1993: 197–198)

is hard to overestimate, though. For starters, the argument drives some of Plato's harshest remarks about pleasure in the whole Platonic oeuvre and it promises to grant us some insight into the most alarming problem associated with pleasure. It also plays a crucial role in Socrates's defence of the immorality of the soul. These two aspects are intertwined: the problem with pleasure identified here seems to be that it corporealizes the soul and, as the Affinity Argument suggests, such a materialized soul cannot reach everlasting, bodiless communion with the unseen order of the Forms upon biological death.<sup>103</sup>

Lastly and most importantly—at least for the purposes of this dissertation—it strikes me that Socrates adds a new type of deception to the Platonic taxonomy of hedonic illusions. As we learn in the *Republic* (413b4–c3), pleasure often 'deprives people of a true belief (ἀληθοῦς δόξης στειρίσκεισθαι)' and makes them change their mind by 'putting them under a spell ὑφ' ἡδονῆς κηληθέντες' or 'tricking them (γοητευθέντες).'<sup>104</sup> By connecting pleasure with trickery,

---

virtually ignores it; Moss (2006: 533) merely notes, albeit correctly, that Plato is suggesting here that 'when we devote ourselves to pleasure, we accept a counterfeit reality and fail to seek out the true world that lies beyond appearances'; Moss (2021: 168) adds that the point of this passage is that 'it is part of the embodied human condition to think that what we perceive is what is real; only philosophical investigation can break that trust' and that 'this tendency is exacerbated by our appetites and passions'; and Ebrey (2017) and especially T. Butler (2012-a), finally, discuss this bit of text in more detail—albeit instrumentally and with an eye to arguing that this stretch of text undermines the evaluative view.

<sup>103</sup> See Woolf (2004: 112–115) for a tentative defence of the plausible claim that the Affinity Argument introduces a richer kind of immortality—immortality as a kind of immunity from death rather than continuous life—which it makes conditional on the soul's relationship with the body before death. For a more elaborate defence of a similar claim, see Rowett (2021: 93–117).

<sup>104</sup> They are 'victims of trickery (τοὺς γοητευθέντας)' who are 'under the spell of pleasure (ὑφ' ἡδονῆς κηληθέντες).'

jugglery, or bewitchment (γοητεία)—as he does in [T1.4] and elsewhere in the corpus—Plato means to draw a link between pleasure and deception.<sup>105</sup>

This makes sense: Plato’s suspicion of pleasure stems—to a significant degree at least—from his conviction that pleasure is inexorably connected with illusion.<sup>106</sup> Plato typically complains that pleasure misleads us about what matters or about itself (its size or intensity, for instance, or its reality), but here we find a different type of hedonic illusion: pleasure deceives us about the reality of the visible, sensible, material world in which we find ourselves.<sup>107</sup>

The gist of Socrates’s line of thought in the Deception Argument is easy to grasp. Bodily affect is troublesome because it is cognitively harmful: desires, pains, and pleasures produce false and confused beliefs in our souls.<sup>108</sup> What is also fairly clear is that these false beliefs are the result of illusion: as [T1.4] has it, bodily pleasure is deceptive because it makes us lose contact with reality and tricks us into thinking ‘nothing else is real save what is corporeal.’

This emphasis on deception jibes nicely with Plato’s other complaints about the body and its affective states. In his second defence, Socrates claimed that when we engage in sense-perception,

---

<sup>105</sup> Pleasure deceives, Socrates points out in the *Republic*, and ‘everything that deceives seems to bewitch (ἔοικε ... γοητεύειν πάντα ὅσα ἀπατᾶ, 413c4).’ Although Ebrey (2017: 4) is surely right that the verb γοητεύειν suggests that bodily desires and pleasures ‘make the soul a willing partner, but not for good reasons,’ the crucial point here is that it does so by means of *deception* or *illusion*: it makes things look different than they really are. For some comments, see Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85) and Ebrey (2017: 4).

<sup>106</sup> See Clerk-Shaw (2015), Moss (2006), and, before them, Mooradian (1992).

<sup>107</sup> In her seminal paper, Moss (2006) briefly hints at this type of deception but her focus lies on evaluative illusion (instances where pleasure represents something as (all-things-considered) good, although it is bad or neutral).

<sup>108</sup> Following Fletcher (2018-a: 22).

our soul ‘gets completely deceived by the body (ἐξαπατᾶται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, 65b10–11) and this is so, as we discover later, because ‘inquiry through the eyes and ears and other sense is full of deceit (ἀπάτης ... μεστή ἢ ... σκέψις, 83a3–5).’<sup>109</sup>

Back in the second defence, Socrates also complained that the body fills us up ‘with lusts, desires, fears, all sorts of deceptive images and cheat and illusion (ἐρώτων δὲ καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ φόβων καὶ εἰδώλων παντοδαπῶν καὶ φλυαρίας) so that in truth and in fact we are never able to know anything (66c3–4),’<sup>110</sup> and the Right Exchange passage argued that the so-called virtue of implicitly hedonistic ‘body-lovers’ is ‘untrustworthy (οὐδὲν ὑγιές)’ and ‘like some sort of a *trompe l’oeil* painting (σκιαγραφία, 69b7–8).’ That is to say, it merely *looks* like virtue but does not really count as such.

What is more, according to some scholars at least, the *Phaedo* also seems to contain an inchoate and embryonic expression of the famous Platonic idea that (some) bodily pleasures are *themselves* deceptive.<sup>111</sup> Between 60b3 and 60c7, Socrates claims that there is something absurd about ‘what the majority of people call pleasure (τοῦτο ὃ καλοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἡδύ).’ The mere removal or cessation

---

<sup>109</sup> For a radical interpretation of these claims, according to which perception is always deceptive or illusory, see Baltzley (1996).

<sup>110</sup> Following Shorey’s (1935: 132) quite severe translation of φλυαρία as used in the Allegory of the Cave to describe the shadows on the wall; in the same context, Scott (2015: 92) translates φλυαρία as what is ‘superficial’ (in comparison with deeper reality). When the word occurs at *Symposium* 211e3, Nussbaum (2001: 497) opts for ‘(mortal) rubbish’ and explains that the word indicates ‘disdain for the pettiness of mortal pursuits.’

<sup>111</sup> See Clerk-Shaw (2005: 125n26); Gallop (1975: 76); Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85); Hackforth (1972: 33n2); Mouroutsou (2019: 571n19); and Rowe (1993: 118–119), all of whom are sympathetic to this reading although they refrain from developing it in any detail. For a deflationary reading of this passage, see Erginel (2019: 116–118). Gosling and Taylor (1982: 86) might be right, though, that ‘in view of its untheoretical context, it would be unwise to press it into a statement of a theoretical position.’

of pain does arguably not really count as pleasure: such ‘so-called pleasure,’<sup>112</sup> the thought goes, is not genuine but merely apparent. As Socrates’s own example has it, ‘my bonds caused pain in my leg, and now pleasure *seems* to be following (ἦκειν φαίνεται ἐπακολουθοῦν τὸ ἡδύ, 60c7)’ – the implication being that it is not *really* following.<sup>113</sup>

To say that the Deception Argument identifies a link between pleasure and illusion and that its basic proposal is that pleasure foists false and confused beliefs upon us is correct as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. It remains especially unclear what the nature of these false beliefs is and what the underlying mechanics behind this sketchy process of belief-formation looks like. According to a widespread take on this passage, bodily desire and pleasure<sup>114</sup> mislead us by twisting our grasp of what matters. When we are in the grip of appetitive desire and bodily pleasure, the thought goes, we are lured into thinking that unimportant things are valuable and worth pursuing.

Thus, Nussbaum maintains that Socrates’s point here is that ‘the appetites provide us with a constant very strong incentive to make false judgments about value and worth.’ More specifically, ‘they ‘bewitch’ the soul into thinking bodily activities more important than

---

<sup>112</sup> For similar alienating uses of this adjective, which cast doubt on the noun they modify, see e.g. 64d3 (τὰς ἡδονὰς καλουμένας), 68c5 (ἡ ὀνομαζομένη ἀνδρεία), and 68c8–9 (ἡ σωφροσύνη, ἣν καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ ὀνομάζουσι σωφροσύνην). In all these instances, we are not dealing with *real* or *genuine* pleasure or virtue.

<sup>113</sup> This can be confirmed on grammatical grounds: it is often held – as a rule of thumb at least – that φαίνεσθαι with an infinitive, as we are dealing with here, is reserved for a negative use of φαίνεσθαι (mere appearance rather than a manifestation of reality). For excellent discussion and some important qualifications, see Notomi (1999: 91–94).

<sup>114</sup> Plato is usually quite careless in his use of these terms and he often mentions them in one and the same breath: taken together, they seem best understood as some kind of clinging, craving attraction to things in the material realm.

contemplation.<sup>115</sup> In a similar vein, Ebrey argues that ‘pleasures change which things we think are good,’<sup>116</sup> Russell holds that the problem with bodily pleasures is that they lure us into ‘identifying the concerns of such pleasures ... as the things that really matter,’<sup>117</sup> Butler writes that the worst evil caused by pleasure is ‘a specific belief about which objects are most clear and true and, thus, ... most worthy of attention and pursuit,’<sup>118</sup> and Gosling and Taylor—to give a final example—offer the following gloss on this argument: bodily pleasures ‘make one think that a certain experience is *really* good, when in fact it is only good to a limited extent [or] under certain conditions.’<sup>119</sup>

In sum, then, the typical reading of this argument suggests that Socrates is primarily worried about *evaluative mistakes*: bodily pleasure misleads us about what is valuable and what is not. It creates evaluative confusion, in other words. Even though this reading of the Deception Argument hints at the intuitive and plausible idea that there is a close tie between pleasure and the good—as Butler puts it, ‘it is difficult to imagine someone sincerely denying in thought while in the throes of ecstasy that the affecting object is good’<sup>120</sup>—it lacks textual support. Just note what Socrates claims in [T1.4]: when our soul gets tricked by the body, ‘it thinks nothing else is real save what is corporeal (μηδὲν ἄλλο δοκεῖν εἶναι ἀληθὲς ἀλλ’ ἢ τὸ σωματοειδές)—what can be touched and seen, drunk and eaten, or used for sexual enjoyment.’

This earlier statement returns in the later passage ([T1.3]), but Socrates adds some sort of explanation of the underlying mechanism

---

<sup>115</sup> Nussbaum (1986: 152).

<sup>116</sup> Ebrey (2017: 8).

<sup>117</sup> Russell (2005: 85).

<sup>118</sup> T. Butler (2012-a: 106).

<sup>119</sup> Gosling and Taylor (1982: 85).

<sup>120</sup> T. Butler (2019: 173). Cf. Millgram (1993: 404)



which assigns a central role to our affective experiences:

[T1.7] When it feels ... pleasure or pain in connection with some object [especially the things located in the visible, material realm], the soul of every human being is forced to believe at the very same time that the thing, concerning which it is so very much affected, must be transparently clear and utterly real, although it is not (ψυχὴ παντὸς ἀνθρώπου ἀναγκάζεται ἅμα τε ἡσθῆναι σφόδρα ἢ λυπηθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι περὶ ὃ ἂν μάλιστα τοῦτο πάσχη, τοῦτο ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἀληθέστατον, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχον). (83c5–8)

When this happens, Socrates continues, the soul ‘takes for real whatever the body declares to be so (δοξάζουσιν ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἶναι ἅπερ ἂν καὶ τὸ σῶμα φῆ)’ and starts ‘sharing [its] beliefs (τοῦ ὁμοδοξεῖν τῷ σώματι, 83d6–7).’<sup>121</sup>

Whatever we make of this, Socrates is clearly not claiming that pleasure makes invaluable things seem valuable—even though this might be a corollary of the actual line of thought he is developing here. The problem is rather that bodily desire and pleasure make us take

---

<sup>121</sup> This is not the only place in the Platonic corpus where Socrates mentions a connection between experiencing a lower type of pleasure and having a distorted view of ultimate reality. The same imagery of the body as a gravitational field pulling us down from the transcendent realm of the Forms is used a bit earlier in the *Phaedo* (81c4–10): the soul of those who get tricked by bodily desire and pleasure through ‘constant association and much training’ is ‘weighed down, and dragged back into the region of the seen’ thanks to a corporeal, ponderous, heavy, earthy, and visible element that gets interspersed with their soul. Most famously, the Allegory of the Cave (519a7–b5) depicts ‘feasting, greed, and other such pleasures’ as bonds that fasten our souls to the sensible world of ‘becoming’ and as ‘leaden weights’ that pull our vision downwards, away from the higher reality of the Forms. And book 10 of the *Republic* (612a1–3) similarly blames the incrustation of the soul on pleasure: ‘the many stones and shells have grown all over [the soul] in a wild, earthy, and stony profusion because it feasts at those so-called happy feastings on earth.’

visible, corporeal, or bodily things—the objects of our pleasures—for ‘most real and most clear,’ although they are not. One of the cornerstones of Platonism, after all, is that these labels only apply to the ‘really real reality’<sup>122</sup> of the Forms. Socrates is not worried about evaluative mistakes, then, he is worried about *ontological mistakes*: the most pressing problem with bodily pleasure is that it creates ontological confusion.

Still, the argument leaves a lot open and rather vague. Socrates does not specify what notion of truth the argument is operating with nor does he clarify the underlying mechanics responsible for the ontological confusion brought about by bodily pleasure. Let me take these issues in turn. It is obviously beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a full discussion of Plato’s theory of truth.<sup>123</sup> What I want to do here, instead, is canvass two possible ways in which we might understand Socrates’s proposal that bodily pleasures inflate the reality of the underlying objects and make them project their identity more forcefully than is warranted.

When Plato speaks of genuineness or reality—attributive truth, that is—to mark the difference between the intelligible realm of the Forms and the perceptible, material, or sensible world, we find broadly two types of usage.<sup>124</sup> On a first type of usage, the Forms are called true in the sense that they are originals in contrast with mere εἰδωλα—images, sham imitations, simulacra, fakes, facsimiles, or deficient copies—we find around us in the physical, perceptible world. The relevant contrast here is the contrast between a perfect exemplar (the Form) and its imperfect, transitory instantiation in the

---

<sup>122</sup> This idiomatic Platonic expression—literally ‘a being beingly being (οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα)’—is found in *Phaedrus* 247c7.

<sup>123</sup> For good discussion, see e.g. Vlastos (1965-a), Vlastos (1965-b), Moss (2021), Szaif (1996), Szaif (2018).

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Szaif (2018: 20).

sensible domain.

On this construal, Socrates's point would be that bodily pleasure somehow makes us lose touch with the fact that our hedonic object is an ontologically deficient semblance rather than the real deal. While in the cinema, to give an example, we might get so absorbed and pulled into the movie—being swept along by strong emotions such as aesthetic pleasure or downright horror—that we lose touch with the fact that we are actually looking at pixels of light projected on a screen and that the seamless, moving image is in fact just a series of distinct pictures following each other in rapid succession. What we thought was real, is not really real: we are merely looking at what is a fake or (at best) an imitation rather than what is genuine or authentic.

Similarly, to extrapolate this example to the *Phaedo*, bodily pleasure tricks us into mistaking a sham imitation for the truth: it makes us lose touch with the fact that our hedonic object—the thing we are enjoying—is just 'a shadowy sort of thing' (Cornford) or a 'dim adumbration' (Shorey), as Socrates puts it in *Republic* 10, 'by comparison with reality (ἀμυδρόν τι ... πρὸς ἀλήθειαν, 597a10).'

There is a second type of usage.<sup>125</sup> On this construal, the Forms are called true in the sense that they are pure and unmixed in contrast with the impure and mixed sensible instances we find around us and which are subject of mixture or what is often called the compresence of opposites.<sup>126</sup> The view here is that the Forms are vivid, clear, or lucid—cognitively reliable, dependable, or visible, as Vlastos calls this characteristic—whereas the perceptible instantiations are obscure or shadowy, unclear, and messy. In sharp contrast to the Forms, every

---

<sup>125</sup> I am leaning heavily on Szaif's (2018) excellent discussion here (especially section 1.2.2).

<sup>126</sup> Roughly speaking, something suffers from the compresence of opposites when two members of a pair of opposites or contraries are simultaneously (or successively) present in the thing at hand.

sensible particular that is *F* is, in some sense, also *G* (*F*'s contrary) or non-*F*. As a result, they are not cognitively reliable or dependable but *deceiving*: because they are not exclusively *F*—but *F* and non-*F* as well—they can only give us a confused and uncertain idea of what it means to be an unadulterated *F*.<sup>127</sup>

On this construal, which ties in neatly with Socrates's claim that bodily pleasure makes its hedonic object look 'transparently clear (ἐναργέστατον),' Plato's point would be that bodily pleasure lures us into thinking that some hedonic object is genuinely, unqualifiedly, absolutely *F*, although this very object manifests itself in other contexts as *G* (the opposite of *F*) or at least non-*F* as well. Put differently, what we take to be *F* is adulterated by contrary characters and hence cognitively undependable.

An example might help. While in the throes of sexual ecstasy, for instance, we might be lured into thinking that our partner is unqualifiedly beautiful, although he or she is in fact merely qualifiedly beautiful. As Socrates puts it in the *Symposium*, the individual object of our erotic love is in fact just a shadowy adumbration of the 'unalloyed, pure, unmixed, unified' Form of Beauty itself 'trapped in a sea of human flesh and colors and lots of other mortal rubbish (αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν ... εἰλικρινές, καθαρὸν, ἄμεικτον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀνάπλεων σαρκῶν τε ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ χρωμάτων καὶ ἄλλης πολλῆς

---

<sup>127</sup> Vlastos (1965-b: 63). Thus, according to the *Philebus*, the 'truest (ἀληθέστατον)' white is the 'purest' or 'most unmixed (τὸ ἀκρατέστατον, 53a5–b3)' white—the white least adulterated by other colours. Tellingly, the release from the Cave is described as turning from darkness to the light culminating in 'the brightest of realities (τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον, 518c9)'—the Form of the Good. Indeed, in the intelligible world, truth and reality 'shine forth (καταλάμπει)' whereas the sensible world is 'mixed with darkness (τὸ τῷ σκότῳ κεκραμένον, 508d2–6)'. For more Platonic examples, see Vlastos (1965-b: 62–63).

φλυαρίας θνητῆς, 211e1–3).'<sup>128</sup>

To turn to the second issue, the argument also fails to shed light on the bridge between our hedonic experiences and these confused ontological beliefs about the reality of the sensible domain.<sup>129</sup> How exactly do our affective experiences infiltrate our view of reality and distort our perception of the world? Why is bodily pleasure precisely so irresistibly compelling that it, so to speak, grabs us by the hair and forces us into assent—to use a Stoic metaphor? *That* there is a link between our sense of reality and our affective reactions seems plausible. Whether or not pleasures shape our sense of reality, our sense of reality clearly shapes our pleasures. If someone points out to me, for instance, that the painting I am currently enjoying is not a genuine van Gogh but a forgery, this will dampen my pleasure.<sup>130</sup>

Although this gives us *some* clue about a possible correlation between affect and our cognition of the world, note that Socrates is arguing that the correlation runs in the other direction. His view is that our affect confuses our cognition by inflating the reality and clarity of the sensible world around us, not the other way around. Unfortunately, the *Phaedo* does not give us a lot to work with. As regards the underlying causal mechanism, we can only speculate and offer educated guesses. In closing, I want to offer two possible ways in which we might bridge the gap between the experience of bodily

---

<sup>128</sup> For discussion, see e.g. Nussbaum (2001: 495). Note that this creates a backdoor through which the evaluative view can enter the picture again: the problem with pleasure is that it makes what is merely qualifiedly or derivatively good look good in some unqualified or absolute sense.

<sup>129</sup> Beere (2011: 269) is one of the few who notes that Plato owes us an explanation of the strong link between the pleasure and the belief.

<sup>130</sup> Williams (1959). Going from examples like these, the psychologist Paul Bloom (2010) has argued, quite Platonically, that the 'depth' of pleasure (as he calls it) is hidden from us: 'our pleasure is affected by deeper factors, including what the person thinks about *the true essence of what he or she is getting pleasure from.*' (my emphasis)

pleasure and the mistaken ontological beliefs they bring about.

One promising explanation might be that, like other strong *πάθη*, bodily pleasure cognitively impairs us.<sup>131</sup> This idea is more elaborately developed by Aristotle who claims that our rational faculty is sometimes impaired or ‘covered over’ by a *πάθος* which makes us prone, or more prone, to deception. To put it in Aristotle’s own words, ‘we are easily deceived in our perceptions when we are undergoing *πάθη*.’ Indeed, ‘all people become more prone to deception when they are angry or undergoing any appetite, and the more so the more strongly they are undergoing the *πάθος*.’<sup>132</sup>

The thought here seems to be that when a (strong) *πάθος* dislodges our rational faculty, our higher self is no longer able to perform its main function of noticing and contradicting false or misleading appearances.<sup>133</sup> When we are asleep, to use Aristotle’s own example, our rational faculty is no longer able to resist or contradict the deceptive, dreamlike appearances we are faced with. Sleep interferes with our ability to notice the difference between real and clear things and mere dreamlike appearances.

Similarly, while in the grip of anger, Ajax—whose mind and vision have been clouded by Athena—mistakes a flock of sheep for the Achaean leaders (including Agamemnon and Odysseus) and when struck by grief or lovesickness, people often mistake random strangers for their ex-partner or deceased loved one. Lastly, to give another Aristotelian example, ‘lines on the walls sometimes appear to feverish people to be animals from a slight similarity in how the lines are put

---

<sup>131</sup> See Moss (2009) and Moss (2012: 100–133).

<sup>132</sup> *On Dreams* 460b3–16 and *On the Soul* III.3, 429a5–8.

<sup>133</sup> Moss (2009: 135). The cognitive impairment might have to do with lack of attention or distraction, in which case pleasure would somehow bar the salient facts from entering our conscious awareness.

together.’<sup>134</sup> Precisely this mechanism is also at play in the example I provided above: strong emotional engagement—the experience of dread while watching a horror movie—impairs our ability to separate fabrication from truth and notice that we are dealing with a less than fully real imitation or simulacrum.

If we extrapolate this model to the *Phaedo*, the view driving the Deception Argument would turn out to be something like this. When we are in the grip of bodily pleasure and appetitive desire, our critical ability or rational cognition—our λογισμός as Plato calls this ability in the *Republic*<sup>135</sup>—gets temporarily shut down. As a result, we are no longer able to deny the content of our experiences but get cheated into taking the misleading, ontologically defective appearance we are confronted with for what is real and clear.

This gives us one promising way to understand Socrates’s earlier claims that bodily pleasure ‘bothers (παραλυπῆ, 65c6)’ our intellect and ‘sets up a clamour and disturbance (θόρυβον παρέχει καὶ ταραχὴν, 66d6)’ when our higher self tries to cognize the truth. Socrates describes a similar process in *Republic* 9: there, in his discussion of defective and deceptive pleasure, he argues that the Trojans were unable to see the εἶδωλον of Helen for what it was because they were ‘ignorant of the truth’ thanks to being in the grip of ‘mad erotic passions.’ In all these cases, or so I suggest, brute affect clouds our minds, blurs our vision, and casts a veil between ourselves and what is actually going on outside our heads.

Another plausible explanation of the way in which bodily affect makes us lose touch with reality might be that bodily pleasure is more than a brute surge of affect. On this explanation, the belief that the hedonic object is ‘transparently clear and utterly real’ is, as it were,

---

<sup>134</sup> *On Dreams* 460b3–16.

<sup>135</sup> See Moss (2008).

built into the state of being pleased.<sup>136</sup> The thought would be that pleasure *just is* a way of taking the world to be a certain way similar to belief, perception, or other representational states. On this view, then, our bodily pleasures are—at least partially—constituted by the belief that their hedonic object is highly vivid and fully real: enjoying a piece of chocolate cake is neither more nor less than taking that piece of chocolate cake to be real and clear.

Even though this proposal lacks direct textual support,<sup>137</sup> it can provide a neat explanation of the close and bidirectional connection between experiencing bodily pleasure on the one hand and taking the world to be a certain way on the other. If being pleased in some sense *just is* taking the world to be a certain way, this explains quite neatly why our sense of reality shapes our pleasures and why our sense of reality shapes our pleasures.

It is important to note that these two explanations do not have to be mutually exclusive. If we take them together, Plato's claim is that, dangerously enough, pleasure is representational state which at the same time dislodges our ability to deny the false content of that very pleasure itself. This proposal would also be able to account for the fact that Plato seemingly draws a difference between sense-perception and bodily pleasure. Although the philosopher is able to detach himself psychologically from sense-perception by keeping its deliverances at

---

<sup>136</sup> Beere (2011: 269): 'The soul is not forced into such a belief just as a causal consequence of being pleased or pained; rather, such a belief partly constitutes the state of being pleased or pained.' More specifically, Beere claims that pleasure is partly constituted by the evaluative belief that something is good.

<sup>137</sup> Note, though, that Plato is generally sympathetic to the idea that pleasure constitutes some kind of openness to the world: pleasure is often associated with perception (e.g. at *Phaedo* 65c, *Theaetetus* 156b, and *Timaeus* 69c–d)—for discussion see Moss (2006) and (2008)—and, on the readings I will be defending in chapter 2 and 3 of this dissertation, the *Philebus* and the *Republic* claim that pleasure is a special way of taking certain states of affairs in the world to be the case.



arm's length and by denying the content of his perceptual experiences, this proposal is able to elucidate the Platonic conviction that bodily pleasure—the affective dimension of our embodiment—is highly problematic. Bodily affect is precisely so dangerous because a mistaken ontological belief is built into its very essence and because it short-circuits the rationality that might be able to question these mistaken ontological beliefs. Although the Platonic philosopher often questions the perceptual information he receives, bodily affect is irresistibly compelling: it silences the demand for justification and further inquiry.<sup>138</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Pleasure is an important theme in Plato's *Phaedo*. In the framework of the dialogue, Phaedo tells Echecrates that 'remembering Socrates is the greatest pleasure of all (πάντων ἥδιστον, 58d6)' and towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates points out that, despite appearances, philosophers do in fact care about pleasure: they 'seriously concern themselves with the pleasures of understanding (ἡδονὰς τὰς περὶ τὸ μανθάνειν, 114e1–4).' At the same time, though, the *Phaedo* also records some of Plato's harshest remarks about our predicament as bodily beings and the affective experiences that are bound up with this human condition. As Naphta succinctly captures the Phaedonic spirit

---

<sup>138</sup> This undermines Woolf's central claim that Plato treats sense-perception and pleasure parallelly: even though sense-perception is tricky and unreliable, bodily pleasure is even more dangerous because it short-circuits our rationality and is partially constituted by false ontological beliefs. It makes sense, then, that Plato nowhere says that we should actively 'stay away' or 'abstain from' sense-perception: even though perception presents us with false content, it does not force us into assent by knocking out our rational capabilities.

in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, Plato treats our body—'this mortal fabric'—as 'nothing more than a veil between us and eternity.'

This sentiment goes some way towards explaining why Plato's readers have been quick to label the ethics of the *Phaedo* as thoroughly anti-hedonist and indeed ascetic—often without offering much in the way of further commentary or explanation. 'In no dialogue,' D. Frede maintains, 'does Socrates show himself as much of an anti-hedonist as he does in the *Phaedo*.'<sup>139</sup>

In sharp contrast to this received view, a recent group of interpreters have sought to skirt the otherworldly asceticism of the *Phaedo* by developing so-called evaluative views. On this interpretation, there is nothing otherworldly pessimistic or austere about the ethics of the *Phaedo*. When Socrates claims that the good life involves detachment from bodily pleasure, these commentators argue, he should be heard metaphorically: the key ethical proposal driving the *Phaedo* is that the good life merely involves not *caring too much* about bodily pleasure, although there is no need for active behavioural avoidance of hedonic experiences.

In the first half of this chapter, I have argued that, despite its ability to turn Socrates's Second Defence into an expression of more palatable and comfortably recognisable ethical positions, the popular evaluative view is philosophically problematic and textually ungrounded. Not only does it make little sense to pry valuation and behaviour as sharply apart as this reading does, a close reading of Socrates's Second Defence and its reprise in the later strands of the Affinity Argument—two bits of text that are inexorably connected with each other—shows beyond any reasonable doubt that the philosophical way of life involves behavioural abstention from bodily pleasure.

---

<sup>139</sup> Frede (1992: 435).

What Plato seemingly leaves unexplained, though, is why a good life should involve detachment from bodily pleasure. This, I submit, must be one of the main reasons why the rival evaluative views have been able to gain so much traction: the reprehensibility of affective detachment can to a large part be blamed on its unintelligibility. To remedy this situation, the second half of this chapter has sought to clarify Plato's defence of asceticism. To do so, I turned to an argumentative strand towards the end of the Affinity Argument I called the Deception Argument. This bit of argumentation claims that, like its evil twin sense-perception, bodily pleasure is cognitively harmful because it is intimately bound up with deception and illusion. It leads us astray with false appearances, thus foisting false beliefs upon us.

More precisely, the argument suggests that it is impossible to experience bodily pleasure without at the same time being cheated into believing that the ontologically deficient, messy, unstable, obscure, and imprecise world around us is clearer, truer, and realer than it actually is. Having clarified the nature of these mistaken ontological beliefs, I discussed different ways in which bodily pleasures might be taken to sabotage our grasp of what is 'really real' — two important issues Plato leaves virtually unexplained.

On top of its ability to elucidate Socrates's defence of affective detachment, something most scholars have left unexplained, my reading has at least three other benefits. Firstly, I believe it sheds light on the idea that bodily pleasure 'imprisons' and 'materializes' or 'corporealizes' the soul. An imprisoned, materialized soul, I argue, is an ontologically confused soul that has come to believe that things in the visible material realm (including the body) are more real than things in the invisible realm (including the soul). Bodily pleasure does not just sabotage our grasp of the reality 'out there', then, it also sabotages our sense of self 'in here': it makes us think our bodies are

more real than our souls—even though the body belongs to the less than fully real sensible realm and is nothing but a less than fully real ‘semblance (ἰνδαλλόμενον)’ or ‘image (εἶδωλον)’ of the soul—as the *Laws* 959a4–d6 has it.<sup>140</sup>

Secondly, my reading does not just point to an important, usually overlooked connection between the *Phaedo* and Plato’s overarching critique of pleasure, it also unifies the disparate critical remarks about pleasure we find scattered throughout the *Phaedo*. I have suggested that—fully in line with Plato’s general mistrust of pleasure—the *Phaedo* criticizes pleasure on the grounds that it deceives us. In this dialogue, Plato does not just flirt with the idea that bodily pleasure is merely apparent rather than genuine, he also argues that an obsession with pleasure gives rise to second-rate, deceptive virtue comparable to those one-dimensional *trompe l’oeil* shadow-paintings that lack real depth.

More than that, the Deception Argument adds an important new type of hedonic deception to the existing Platonic taxonomy. As we learn elsewhere, affect makes neutral or bad things look good, future affective states often look smaller or larger than they really are, and there are cases where what passes itself off as a pleasure does not really count as the real thing. What we find here, though, is an original idea—the proposal that pleasure deceives us by inflating the reality and clarity of the sensible world around us. This type of hedonic illusion is not just interesting in and of itself, it also sheds light on an otherwise puzzling claim in the Allegory of the Cave (519a9–b3): the bonds and ‘leaden weights’ that keep people stuck in the cave are

---

<sup>140</sup> A similar Platonic argument can be found in Augustine’s *On the Trinity* 10.5.7. There, Augustine argues that the love of pleasure, or ‘the glue of care (*curae glutino*),’ makes the mind drag bodily things along with itself even after it returns to thinking about itself. When this happens, the mind begins to think of itself as a body—as something that is made like a body. See Nawar (2021).

(bodily) pleasures.

This brings me to the third and final advantage of my reading. On the view developed here, Plato's argument for asceticism is not just more complex and more subtle than usually appreciated, it is also philosophically motivated—rather than grabbed from thin air or developed *ad* or *post hoc*—and closely linked with several central themes of Platonic thought. Plato, I argue, thinks that the good life involves affective detachment—active avoidance of appetitive desire and especially bodily pleasure—because affect alienates us from our true nature as souls rather than bodies and because it sabotages our attempt to transcend the world of seeming and grasp the fully real world of being.<sup>141</sup>

Indeed, bodily pleasure clashes head-on with our existential task to struggle out of the depths of the Cave and transform ourselves and our grasp of world by 'turning [our] soul around, away from the world of becoming and towards truth and being (αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς ῥαστώνης μεταστροφῆς ἀπὸ γενέσεως ἐπ' ἀλήθειάν τε καὶ οὐσίαν, 525c5–6)' 'towards the region in which lies the happiest part of reality or the things that are (εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν τόπον μεταστρέφεσθαι ἐν ᾧ ἐστι τὸ εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος, 526e4–5).'<sup>142</sup>

Just as sleep undermines our ability to resist the often absurd, obviously false appearances we encounter in our dreams, the *Phaedo* suggests—or so I have argued—that bodily pleasure keeps us trapped in the shadowy and messy sensible realm. It makes us 'dream and doze through [our] present life (τὸν νῦν βίον ὀνειροπολοῦντα καὶ ὑπνώττοντα, 534c6–7),' as Plato puts it in the *Republic*, 'thinking that

---

<sup>141</sup> For completely different defences of asceticism, which stress the connection between detachment and virtue acquisition, see e.g. Besong (2019), Carey (2018), and Hitz (2021).

<sup>142</sup> For the idea that we are dealing here—quite literally—with a kind of *conversion*, see e.g. Annas (1999: 49), Hadot (1981: 187), and Kahn (1999: 1996).

a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like (τὸ ὅμοιον τῷ μὴ ὅμοιον ἀλλ' αὐτὸ ἡγῆται εἶναι ᾧ ἔοικεν, 476c4–5).'

It is only once we detach ourselves from the body and its affective states—'cutting loose everything else we wear around ourselves (περικόψαντα τὰ λοιπὰ ὅσα περικείμεθα),' to borrow a metaphor from Plotinus (*Enneads* 6.9.9, 50–55)—that we can snap out of this dream-like state, liberate ourselves from the alienation of sensible consciousness, and see reality face to face. For the more there is of our narrow material selves, as Aldous Huxley aptly describes the rationale behind renunciation or asceticism, the less there can be of ultimate reality.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> Huxley (1944: 96). A polished and updated version of this chapter will appear (under a different title) in Aufderheide and Erginel (forthcoming).

## 2. Tricked by Pleasure: Hedonic Fallibilism in Plato's Republic

In *Republic* 9, Socrates presents three 'proofs' or 'demonstrations' (ἀποδείξεις) of the superiority of the just life. Together with book 4's discussion of justice as a kind of psychological health, these arguments are designed to undermine Thrasymachus's radical attack on conventional morality along with his underlying ideas about what makes for a life worth living. Because the second and third of these arguments both invoke pleasure and argue for one and the same conclusion,<sup>144</sup> they seem best understood as a larger, two-pronged strand of argumentation which runs from 580c10 to 588a6 and which I will call the Pleasure Argument.<sup>145</sup>

Whereas book 9's first argument had attacked ordinary lives on psychological grounds—it basically proposes that a person's degree of psychological harmony and integration decides whether their life counts as worth living or not—the Pleasure Argument changes tack and assails ordinary, non-ideal lives on hedonic rather than psychological grounds. In the earlier bits of this argument, Socrates appeals to the idea that the rationally integrated agent—who has tempered the lower parts of his soul and made himself 'one instead of many' (παντάπασιν ἓνα γεγόμενον ἐκ πολλῶν, 443e1–

---

<sup>144</sup> Cf. 583a1–3 ('the one of us in whom [the rational part] rules has the most pleasant life (ὁ τούτου βίος ἡδιστός)') and 587b9–10 ('the tyrant will inevitably live most unpleasantly and the [ideal agent] most pleasantly (ἀηδέστατα ... ὁ τύραννος βιώσεται, ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἡδιστα)').

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Nussbaum (1986: 141).

2)<sup>146</sup>—counts as a ‘fully human’ person ‘on whom nothing is lost,’ as Abraham Maslow and Henry James would later capture this psychological ideal.<sup>147</sup>

Not only does this ideal Platonic agent possess comprehensive first-person experience of the full range of humanly possible pleasures, he combines such experiential input with an exceptional ability to confront it with facts, logic, and rationality. This makes him a ‘competent judge,’ as J. S. Mill would later call a similar figure in his *Utilitarianism*, who ‘speaks the truth (ἀληθέστατα λέγει, 582a1)’ and praises ‘competently’ or ‘with authority (κύριος, 583a4).’ More specifically, he is right when he claims that, of all possible pleasures, the pleasures ‘of the part of the soul with which we understand (τὸ ... ᾧ μανθάνει ἄνθρωπος, 580d9)’ are superior the pleasures that derive from our embodied nature as biological and social, other-directed creatures who care about material and reputational goods.

In the later stage of the argument, this line of thought gets amplified: Socrates suggests that ‘besides the pleasure of the φρόνιμος, other pleasure is neither entirely true nor pure, but like some sort of *trompe l’oeil* painting (οὐδὲ παναληθῆς ἐστὶν ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ἡδονὴ πλὴν τῆς τοῦ φρονίμου οὐδὲ καθαρὰ, ἀλλ’ ἐσκιαγραφημένη τις, 583b3–5).’ Plato’s thesis here, I take it, is that when it comes to non-ideal pleasures, what presents itself to us as a pleasure may not always be the real thing.<sup>148</sup> Put differently, ordinary, non-ideal pleasures—or at least some of them—are not just inferior, they are deceptive and not what they pretend to be: they are mere

---

<sup>146</sup> Throughout this chapter, references are to the *Republic* (unless otherwise noted) and I more or less follow Reeve’s (1992) translation of the Greek (provided by Slings (2003)) with small modifications here and there.

<sup>147</sup> Maslow (1971: 27–29) and H. James (1977: 133).

<sup>148</sup> This gloss on the infamous notion of false pleasure comes from Lovibond (1989: 215).



semblances, counterfeits, or simulacra (εἶδωλα) of true pleasure, to borrow Plato's own terminology. More than that, and rather puzzlingly, the discovery that ordinary pleasure turns out to be deceptive and defective is hailed as the 'strongest and most decisive (μέγιστόν τε καὶ κυριώτατον, 583b6–7)' strike available against Thrasymachus's immoralist challenge.

I believe that neither of these features of the argument have been properly appreciated by the readings currently dominating the literature. The argument itself—and especially its putative defence of what I call hedonic fallibilism—tends to be brusquely dismissed as a philosophical failure which clashes with the commonsensical thought that we cannot err in our self-ascriptions of pleasure. This dismissive reaction, in turn, explains why most existing treatments simply skate over the question of how book 9's critical account of ordinary pleasure is supposed to integrate with the *Republic* as a whole.<sup>149</sup>

It is against the backdrop of these typical reactions that the project of this chapter is to be understood: I want to make sense of Plato's hedonic fallibilism—the view that what presents itself as a pleasure may not always be the real thing—in the expectation that a proper understanding of this view might also elucidate our understanding of book 9's place in the economy of the *Republic*.

Before proceeding, three points of interpretive housekeeping are in order. First, I should admit that it is difficult to get the precise nature of Plato's charge against normal, non-ideal pleasure in view. Indeed, there might be some truth in the oft-heard complaint that Plato's thinking pulls in different directions in book 9 of the *Republic* and that this renders the Pleasure Argument itself fragmentary,

---

<sup>149</sup> Even those who have tried to come to grips with the exact role of the Pleasure Argument in the economy of the dialogue tend to be critical. For such a sustained yet highly dismissive interpretation, see e.g. Kraut (1992).

ambiguous, and perhaps even inconsistent.<sup>150</sup> Throughout the argument, pleasure is most frequently called not ‘pure’ and not ‘true,’ but Socrates also uses a wide variety of other derogatory labels to denounce it and it is not obvious how these labels should be unpacked or how they hang together.<sup>151</sup> And even if we bracket Socrates’s other labels for the moment, the central charge that ordinary pleasure is not true, not pure, and like a *trompe l’oeil* painting seems rather obscure and has thus given rise to a variety of interpretations.

Still, although there is much that defies easy interpretation, it strikes me that there is good reason to believe that the Pleasure Argument is—at the very least partially—in the business of arguing that non-actualized, non-integrated agents can be radically mistaken about the affective state they take themselves to be in. On what seems to be one of the most straightforward, most natural reading of this bit of text, Socrates’s claim that ‘the pleasure of other people’—such as Thrasymachus’s beloved tyrant—‘is neither pure, nor true, but like a *trompe l’oeil* shadow-painting (οὐδὲ παναληθῆς ... οὐδὲ καθαρὰ, ἀλλ’ ἐσκιαγραφημένη τις, 583b3–5)’ should be unpacked as the

---

<sup>150</sup> For such criticisms, see. e.g. Cross and Woosley (1964), Frede (1985), Frede (1992), and Gosling and Taylor (1982). Erginel (2011) is an excellent attempt to defuse these charges.

<sup>151</sup> Such pleasure is explicitly or implicitly called ‘far removed [from true pleasure] (πάνυ πόρρω, 581e1),’ ‘merely necessary (τῷ ὄντι ἀναγκαίως, 581e3)’ (in the sense that it is unavoidable), ‘worthless (οὐδενὸς ἀξίαν, 581d2),’ ‘vulgar (φορτικὴν, 581d6),’ ‘worthless trash (καπνὸν καὶ φλυαρίαν, 581d7),’ ‘untrustworthy’ or ‘unreliable (ἀπιστοτέρως, 585e4),’ not ‘stable’ or ‘secure (βεβαίου, 586a6),’ connected with ‘insatiability (ἀπλησίαν, 586b3),’ ‘[a] mere simulacrum of true pleasure and like a *trompe l’oeil* painting (εἰδῶλοις τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἡδονῆς καὶ ἐσκιαγραφημέναις, 586b8),’ ‘a simulacrum of pleasure in respect of reality three stages removed from that other [pleasure] (ἡδονῆς τρίτῳ εἰδῶλω πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀπ’ ἐκείνου, 587c8–9),’ ‘alien (ἀλλοτρίαν, 587a6)’ rather than ‘authentic’ or ‘one’s own (οἰκείως, 586e1),’ ‘spurious (νόθαιν)’ rather than ‘genuine (γνησίως, 597b15–16),’ and like ‘a [two-dimensional] plane figure (ἐπίπεδον, 587d6)’ (rather than a three-dimensional solid figure).

radical proposal that what presents itself as a pleasure may not always be the real thing. Unlike the ideal Platonic agent, the majority of people are what I call hedonically fallible: they often mistake a merely apparent, fake pleasure for a genuine, authentic one and this means, more plainly speaking, that there are situations where they think they are experiencing pleasure, although they are not.<sup>152</sup>

Even though this mistaken self-ascription interpretation of the argument is one of the most straightforward readings available, most interpretive alternatives have taken issue with it—mainly on grounds of interpretive charity. This brings me to the second caveat. Because commentators are typically driven by the attempt to save Plato from committing the philosophical blunder of defending hedonic fallibilism, my approach in this chapter is more or less indirect. If we can make sense of the text on the most natural, most obvious way of reading it—on which the argument is indeed suggesting that we can go wrong in our sincere belief that we are experiencing pleasure—the interpretive alternatives should lose their appeal. Put differently, I will more or less *assume* that Plato is trying to defend hedonic fallibilism in *Republic* 9 and then try to make sense of this idea, operating under the further assumption that we have not yet run out of exegetical and philosophical resources for developing an alternative interpretation of this admittedly puzzling line of thought.

There is a third and last caveat. Like the larger argument to which it belongs, Plato's defence of hedonic fallibilism itself is fragmentary and varied. Following other commentators,<sup>153</sup> I think the later part of the Pleasure Argument can be divided into two strands of argumentation—the first running from 583b1 to 585a7, the second

---

<sup>152</sup> For similar construals of this argument, see J. Butler (1999), Erginel (2006), Wolfsdorf (2013-a), Wolfsdorf (2013-b).

<sup>153</sup> Cf. e.g. Erginel (2019: 98), Mooradian (1992: 87), White (1979: 229), Wolfsdorf (2013-a: 110), Wolfsdorf (2013-b: 63).

running from 585a8 to 588a10—both of which articulate and defend the thesis that we can go wrong in our self-ascriptions of pleasure.

The focus of this chapter will be on the first of these different argumentative strands, though, the one running from 583b1 to 585a7, which I call the Deceptive Pleasure Argument. This bit of argumentation has not received the attention it deserves, even though it contains a cogent and interesting line of thought worth taking seriously.<sup>154</sup> What is more, unlike the later stretch of argumentation, it does not lean on the contested heavy-duty metaphysics of the middle books, it does not force us to take a stand on what it entails to cognize the Forms, and it is not embodied in a convoluted and problematic bit of text.

What should emerge is a textually and exegetically sound, philosophically attractive, yet unexplored interpretive option concerning Plato's Deceptive Pleasure Argument and its defence of hedonic fallibilism. Here is the plan for the chapter. In section 1, I discuss a standard objection against hedonic fallibilism and show how this objection has given rise to two ways of reading the argument. In sections 2 and 3, I offer a close reading of the Deceptive Pleasure Argument. Finally, by way of conclusion, section 4 places the argument in a wider context and discuss some of its ramifications.

## 1. Hedonic Fallibilism, a Standard Objection, and Interpretive Alternatives

---

<sup>154</sup> Plato himself seemed to have thought so at any rate: the *Philebus*—whose treatment of pleasure is sometimes taken to be a polished version of the rougher discussion found in *Republic* 9—takes up the first strand of argumentation but leaves the second line of argumentation behind.

The Platonic proposal that agents are hedonically fallible is typically met with resistance. According to a standard objection, Plato's defence of hedonic fallibilism rests on a philosophical mistake. Because our pleasures and other *πάθη* are transparent to us, the thought goes, there is no room whatsoever for doubt, ignorance, or error in the affective domain: human beings are hedonically omniscient and thus hedonically infallible. Put differently, I am always in a position to know whether I am experiencing pleasure or something else; whenever I am experiencing pleasure, I will also *believe* (or *know*) I am experiencing pleasure; and—conversely and most importantly—whenever I *believe* I am experiencing pleasure, I *am* in fact experiencing pleasure. On this view, pleasure is essentially subjective and there is no appearance reality gap when it comes to hedonic experiences: something *is* pleasant just in case the subject of the pleasure candidly reports that it *seems* pleasant to them.<sup>155</sup>

This standard objection has generated two typical reactions to Plato's alleged defence of hedonic fallibilism in the Pleasure Argument. A first family of interpretations—Dismissive Readings, as I call them—holds that because hedonic fallibilism is an untenable position Plato *should* not hold, we can dismiss this argument as a failure. As Rosen puts it, to give just one example more or less taken at random from a larger sample:

[P]lato does not, and in my view cannot, explain the difference between a fantasm or illusion of pleasure and pain and the real thing. If I believe that I am in pain, then I am, even if the *source* of the pain is imaginary.<sup>156</sup>

Summarizing the scholarly *communis opinio*, Crombie similarly claims

---

<sup>155</sup> For good discussion of this objection, see Erginel (2006) and Annas (1980: 296) and Annas (1981: 307).

<sup>156</sup> Rosen (1966: 336–37).

that, in the affective domain, the distinction between appearance and reality is ‘quite out of place,’<sup>157</sup> Grote resists the proposal because a pleasure ‘is what it seems, neither more nor less; its essence consists in being felt,’<sup>158</sup> both Gosling and Taylor and Urmson blame Plato’s mistake on a naïve and unsophisticated theory of pleasure,<sup>159</sup> Cross and Woosley think that so much as taking the pleasure arguments of book 9 seriously would be tantamount to paying Plato the ‘doubtful compliment’ of undeserved philosophical attention,<sup>160</sup> and Gibbs is even willing to entertain the possibility that ‘the rhetorical, fragmented, and ultimately inconsistent character of [*Republic* 9’s pleasure arguments] reflects Plato’s own intellectual limitations.’<sup>161</sup>

Exercising interpretive charity, a second family of interpretations—Evasive Readings, as I call them—tries to develop alternative ways of understanding book 9’s project which manage to find a way around Plato’s alleged defence of hedonic fallibilism. This type of interpretation suggests that, upon closer scrutiny, it will turn out that hedonic fallibilism is a position Plato in fact *does* not hold. Whatever grounds it might have for stigmatizing ordinary pleasure, the Deceptive Pleasure Argument is not defending the palpably false thesis that ordinary people can go wrong in their honest reports that they are experiencing pleasure.

Thus, when Socrates at some point in the argument concludes that ordinary, non-ideal pleasure involves ‘some kind of trickery (γοητεία τις, 584a10)’ as well as ‘untrustworthy or deceptive appearances (οὐδὲν ὑγιές τούτων τῶν φαντασμάτων, 584a9)’ detached from the ‘reality’ or ‘truth of pleasure (ἡδονῆς ἀλήθειαν,

---

<sup>157</sup> Crombie (1962: 139).

<sup>158</sup> Grote (1875: 602).

<sup>159</sup> Gosling and Taylor (1982: 451) and Urmson (1984: 213).

<sup>160</sup> Cross and Woosley (1964: 265).

<sup>161</sup> Gibbs (2001: 33).

584a9),’ the evasive reading maintains that the argument is actually merely suggesting that ordinary pleasure fails to get at genuine value, say, or that it goes wrong in some other way.<sup>162</sup> In what follows, I aim to find a middle way between these interpretive alternatives. The reading I defend here takes Plato at his word yet also attempts to bring out what is most cogent and most interesting about the Deceptive Pleasure Argument (understood as a defence of hedonic fallibilism).

## 2. The Deceptive Pleasure Argument

### 2.1. Misleading Pleasure

The Deceptive Pleasure Argument opens with the sweeping claim that all pleasure besides the pleasures of the ideal agent is ‘neither true nor pure but like a *trompe l’oeil* shadow-painting (οὐδὲ παναληθῆς ἐστὶν ἢ ... ἡδονὴ ... οὐδὲ καθαρὰ, ἀλλ’ ἐσκιαγραφημένη τις, 583b3–5).’ Because these charges of falsity and impurity constitute the core of Socrates’s attack on non-ideal pleasure, let me briefly gloss these notions. Plato typically calls pleasures pure when they ‘are not derived from pains (οὐκ ἐκ λυπῶν, 584a12),’ that is to say, when they do not just consist in ‘an escape from pain (τὴν λύπης ἀπαλλαγὴν, 5854b9–c1)’ or ‘[a] cessation of pain (παῦλαν λύπης, 584b2).’<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Below, in section 2.3, I will discuss (different sub-types of) this interpretive option more carefully.

<sup>163</sup> The notion of impurity also has important religious and spiritual connotations: in eschatological contexts, it is often associated with the polluting influences of the body. Cf. e.g. *Phaedo* 67a5–6, discussed extensively in chapter 1, where Socrates argues that we should ‘keep ourselves pure from [the body] (καθαρεύωμεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ)’—especially its lowly pleasures and desires. For good discussion of this puritanism, see Dodds (1951) and Morgan (1992).

The notion of truth operative in *Republic* 9 is harder to capture, if only because the word has a variety of meanings. Crudely speaking, something can be called true or false in terms of what it *represents* or in terms of what it *is*.<sup>164</sup> A belief or utterance is called false, for instance, if it fails to represent the world correctly, but we can also speak of a true van Gogh painting rather than a forgery, if it really has all the properties of a van Gogh painting.<sup>165</sup> To capture some sort of intuitive unity between these different senses, I want to adopt a fruitful suggestion developed by other scholars who claim that, for Plato, a pleasure is false just in case it deceives us about some way the world really is—where this includes deception about the hedonic experience *itself*—and that a pleasure is true just in case it does not.<sup>166</sup>

This understanding of the falsity of pleasure harmonizes nicely

---

<sup>164</sup> For this characterization, see Wolfsdorf (2013-b: 63).

<sup>165</sup> When understood representationally, the property of being true or false is attributed to beliefs, belief-like states, or utterances whose propositional content represents—or fails to represent—the world correctly; when understood ontologically, the property of being true or false is attributed to some *F* that has—or fails to have—all the properties of really being an *F*. In these cases, ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ and ‘fake’ or ‘unreal’ can be substituted for ‘true’ and ‘false’ without loss of meaning (e.g. one might speak of the true Beatles as opposed to a cover band). It is worth noting, especially in the current context, that characterizing some *F* as ‘true’ or ‘untrue’ or ‘false’ often amounts to claiming that the untrue or false *F* *merely appears to be F*, without really being *F*, whereas the true *F* *really is F*. For more guidance, see especially Wolfsdorf (2013-a: 122–129) and Szaif (1998) and (2018).

<sup>166</sup> For this take on what Plato means by calling pleasures false, see especially Whiting (2014: 24) but also Fletcher (2018-b: 395–396). As LSJ (s.v. 2) attests, the adjective ψευδής is often used for lying or deceitful persons; in the *Sophist*, Plato connects ‘falsity (τὸ ψευδός)’ with ‘deception (ἀπάτη, 260c6)’ as well as ‘simulacra, imitations, and appearance (εἰδώλων τε καὶ εἰκόνων ἤδη καὶ φαντασίας, 260c8–9)’; likewise, in *Republic* 10 (598e5–599a3), imitations and appearances are juxtaposed with manifestations of reality or truth and linked with deception and trickery; and when speaking of perceptual illusions, Aristotle uses the verb διαψεύδω (e.g. at *On Dreams* 460b22).



with the fact that Plato's suspicion of pleasure stems—to a significant degree at least—from his conviction that pleasure is inexorably connected with many types of illusion and deception.<sup>167</sup> In an important paper, Jessica Moss has convincingly argued that the intimate association between pleasure and illusion plays a pivotal role in Plato's moral psychology—especially in the *Republic*, where 'the association between pleasure and illusion that functioned almost as a background assumption of [other dialogues] is developed into a full-fledged theory.'<sup>168</sup>

Earlier, at 413b4–c3, Socrates had claimed that people often abandon 'true belief' because they are 'victims of trickery (τοὺς γοητευθέντας)' who are 'under the spell of pleasure (ὕφ' ἡδονῆς κηληθέντες).'<sup>169</sup> And later, in book 10, Socrates will locate our susceptibility to perceptual illusions and our desire for ordinary pleasure in the same part of the soul. As Moss summarizes the moral psychology underlying the *Republic* and its emphasis on pleasure's tendency to mislead: '[t]he *Republic* characterizes appetite, the pleasure-desiring part of the soul, as *illusion-bound*.'<sup>170</sup> (my emphasis)

Although this is very often overlooked, the close link between pleasure and illusion also plays a pivotal role in the Deceptive Pleasure Argument. Indeed, as I hope to show, appreciating this connection will provide the key to unlocking the most promising interpretation of the argument. Socrates maintains that those who err hedonically are 'getting deceived (ἀπατῶνται, 585a5),' he calls their defective pleasure 'fakes,' 'semblances,' 'simulacra,' or 'counterfeits

---

<sup>167</sup> See Moss (2006) and, before her, Mooradian (1992).

<sup>168</sup> Moss (2006: 523). For a more detailed discussion of the *Republic*, with which I will engage below, see Moss (2008).

<sup>169</sup> Pleasure deceives, Socrates points out, and 'everything that deceives seems to bewitch (ἔουκε ... γοητεύειν πάντα ὅσα ἀπατᾶ, 413c4).'

<sup>170</sup> Moss (2006: 517).

(of true pleasure) (εἰδῶλοις τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἡδονῆς, 586b8 and 586c4),’ compares them to optical illusions or ‘*trompe l’oeil* shadow-paintings (ἐσκιαγραφημέναις, 583b5 and 586b8),’ claims that they are caused by ‘some kind of trickery’ or ‘magic (γοητεία τις, 584a10),’ and argues that defective pleasure is the product of ‘untrustworthy, illusory appearances (οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς τούτων τῶν φαντασμάτων, 584a9)’ rather than a manifestation of the ‘truth’ or the ‘reality of pleasure (ἡδονῆς ἀλήθειαν, 584a9).’

## 2.2. Platonic Affective Psychology – Five Key Ideas

Appreciating the connection between pleasure and illusion does not just get us to the heart of Plato’s thinking about pleasure in *Republic* 9, I also want to argue that the Deceptive Pleasure Argument identifies and examines a new type of hedonic deception or illusion. To see how Plato develops this new type of hedonic trickery, let us have a closer look at the text. In collaboration with his interlocutor Glaucon—who is supposed to ‘answer questions (σοῦ ἀποκρινομένου)’ while Socrates ‘seeks (ζητῶν, 583c1)’—Socrates develops some basic ideas about our affective psychology. Here is the text:

[T2.1] [Socrates] Tell me, then, don’t we say that pain is the opposite of pleasure (ἐναντίον λύπην ἡδονῆ)?

[Glaucon] Yes.

[S.] Isn’t there also a state of feeling neither pleasure nor pain (τὸ μήτε χαίρειν μήτε λυπεῖσθαι)?

[G.] There is.

[S.] Isn’t it intermediate between these two, in the middle (μεταξὺ τούτων ἀμφοῖν ἐν μέσῳ ὄν), a sort of calm of the soul (ἡσυχίαν τινὰ ... τῆς ψυχῆς) where these are concerned (περὶ ταῦτα)? Or wouldn’t you describe it that way?

[G.] I would. (583c3–9)

We can extract the following claims about human affectivity from this bit of text:

- (1) Pleasure and pain are opposites or contraries.
- (2) There is a third, intermediate affective experience, which is located 'in between' or 'in the middle of' pleasure and pain.
- (3) Unlike pleasure and pain, which are affectively positive and affectively negative respectively, this intermediate affective experience is affectively neutral—it consists in 'neither experiencing pleasure nor pain (τὸ μήτε χαίρειν μήτε λυπεῖσθαι).'
- (4) This affectively neutral intermediate experience is 'a sort of calm of the soul (ἡσυχίαν τινὰ ... τῆς ψυχῆς),' that is, it is a state.

Slightly later, at 583d9–10, Socrates adds a crucially important fifth idea:

- (5) Pleasure and pain themselves are 'a sort of motion or change of the soul (τό ἥδὲ ἐν ψυχῇ γιγνόμενον καὶ τὸ λυπηρὸν κίνησις τις ἀμφοτέρω),' that is, they are a process.

On the picture we are given here, pleasure and pain are two opposite ends of a scale of affective experience with positive valence (pleasure) on the one extreme of the spectrum, negative valence (pain) on the other, and neutral or indifferent valence (calm) in the middle, situated in between pleasure and pain. Apart from their differences in hedonic tone—whether they feel good, bad, or neutral—these affective experiences also differ, more essentially, in respect of the fact that pleasure and pain are *processes* while calm is a *state*, characterized more specifically—and privatively, to boot—as the *absence* of pleasure

and pain and other affective upheaval.<sup>171</sup>

### 2.3. Socrates's Fallibility Cases

Between 583c10 and 583d9, the argument turns to a set of problematic cases. Although these deviant cases or fallibility cases, as I will call them, appear to undermine the argument's underlying affective psychology and the clean distinctions between three different affective experiences that have just been drawn, Socrates instead treats them as evidence for our hedonic fallibility.

There are people, he points out, who mistake the affectively indifferent state of calm for an affectively positive state of pleasure when it gets juxtaposed with an affectively negative state of pain. Sick people, for instance, hold that 'nothing gives more pleasure than being healthy (οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἥδιον τοῦ ὑγιαίνειν, 583c13)' – they even go so far as to claim that health is 'the most pleasurable thing there is (ἥδιστον ὄν, 583d1)' – and those who are 'in great pain (τῶν περιωδυνία ἐχομένων)' report that 'nothing is more pleasant than putting an end to their suffering (οὐδὲν ἥδιον τοῦ παύσασθαι ὀδυνώμενον, 583cd3–4).'

In the next step, Socrates claims, more sweepingly, that this

---

<sup>171</sup> Surprisingly enough, the hedonist Aristippus of Cyrene is reported to have developed a strikingly similar theory of human affect which nicely illustrates the model Plato is working with here: 'There are three states in our constitution. In one, which is like a storm at sea (έοικυϊαν τῷ κατὰ θάλασσαν χειμῶνι), we feel pain (ἀλγοῦμεν); in another, which is similar to a smooth undulation stirred by a favorable breeze (τῷ λείῳ κύματι ἀφομοιουμένην ... οὐρίῳ παραβαλλομένην ἀνέμῳ), we feel pleasure (ἠδόμεθα) (for pleasure is a smooth motion (λείαν κίνησιν τὴν ἠδονήν). The third state, in which we feel neither pain nor pleasure (οὔτε ἀλγοῦμεν οὔτε ἠδόμεθα), is in the middle (μέσην εἶναι κατάστασιν) and is like a calm sea (γαλήνην παραπλησίαν οὔσαν).' SSR 4b.5 = Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 14.18.32.

mistake of mixing up calm with pleasure is actually widespread and generalizes to many other cases—including the defective, non-ideal pleasures of most people besides the φρόνιμος:

[T2.2] [T]here are many other similar circumstances in which you find people who, when they are in pain (ὅταν λυπῶνται), praise not experiencing pain or freedom from that sort of thing as most pleasant rather than experiencing pleasure (τὸ μὴ λυπεῖσθαι καὶ τὴν ἡσυχίαν τοῦ τοιοῦτου ἐγκωμιάζουσιν ὡς ἥδιστον, οὐ τὸ χαίρειν). (583d6–9)

After a back and forth with his interlocutor, in which Glaucon's deflationary and infallibilist take on these deviant cases is scrutinized, Socrates reaffirms his conclusion that these people are getting tricked: 'there is nothing trustworthy in these [hedonic] appearances as far as the truth about pleasure is concerned, only some kind of trickery (οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς τούτων τῶν φαντασμάτων πρὸς ἡδονῆς ἀλήθειαν, ἀλλὰ γοητεία τις, 584a9–10).'

At the same time, though, he also warns Glaucon not to stray in the other direction and overgeneralize the force of these examples by offering an all too sweeping reductive theory of all and every pleasure as nothing but 'a cessation of' or 'relief from pain (παῦλαν λύπης, 584b2)'. Socrates's point is just that there are some cases where people fall prey to deceptive pleasure, *not* that all pleasures are just a trick of the mind.<sup>172</sup>

Influential evasive readings, most of which have entered the literature as a response to Plato's problematic defence of hedonic fallibilism, interpret these remarks as follows. Going from Socrates's

---

<sup>172</sup> Such a far-reaching reductive take on the nature of any and all pleasure can be found in Speusippus and 'the grumpies' in the *Philebus* who boldly deny the existence of pleasure—all so-called pleasures are in fact nothing but an escape from pain—and dismiss pleasure's power as 'a trick (γοήτευμα, 44c8).'

warning to Glaucon and his observations about the deeper ‘nature (πεφυκέναι, 584b1)’ of pleasure, a first type of evasive reading claims that Socrates is merely taking issue with rival explanatory accounts of the *nature* of pleasure. Thus, Dorothea Frede has suggested that Socrates is basically ‘ruling out the paradox (he calls it ‘trickery’) that pleasure is merely the end of pain, and pain the end of pleasure.’<sup>173</sup>

In a similar vein, Reeve claims that ‘[Plato] is not arguing that [the subjects in Socrates’s deviant cases] wrongly find this state to be pleasant. His argument is about the nature of pleasure, about what pleasure is, about what account of it is true’<sup>174</sup> and Warren reads the passage as ‘a neat dialectical argument against a potentially troubling set of opponents’ who deny the existence of an intermediate affective state and offer an alternative to Socrates’s own account of pleasure and pain.<sup>175</sup>

A second type of evasive reading suggests that Socrates is merely repudiating ordinary pleasure on evaluative or ethical grounds, the basic charge being that such pleasure fails to get at genuine value or misinforms us about what matters. According to Nussbaum, to give a prominent example of such a reading, Platonic talk of ‘true pleasures’ should be construed as talk of ‘truly valuable activities’ and these, in turn, refer to:

those activities that are chosen in harmony with *true* beliefs about value or worth, as opposed to those in which agents take pleasure because they falsely believe them to have worth.<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Frede (1985: 158).

<sup>174</sup> Reeve (1988: 305).

<sup>175</sup> Warren (2011: 113).

<sup>176</sup> Nussbaum (1986: 141).

In stark contrast, ordinary activities or ‘false pleasures’ – including all appetitive activities – should be rejected ‘as lacking in true or intrinsic value,’<sup>177</sup> which is to say that the judgment that they are worth something is mistaken because it is ‘thoroughly based on illusion.’<sup>178</sup>

Likewise, on Clerk-Shaw’s account, the basic problem *Republic* 9 identifies with most pleasure is that it is the root cause of pernicious ethical errors:

Felt pleasures do not merely offer an incomplete picture of what is noble and good; they also offer a distorted picture of what is noble and good, [so] the fact that we are subject to pervasive hedonic error rules out using felt pleasures as a reliable guide to what is good for us.<sup>179</sup>

Daniel Russell, finally, suggests that Socrates calls certain pleasures less ‘true’ than other pleasures just in case they mistakenly suggest to those who experience these pleasures that their life is going better than it really is and this suggests that *Republic* 9’s critique of pleasure is in fact just a covert critique of inferior ways of life.<sup>180</sup>

Going from Socrates’s initial set-up of the argument, a third and last type of evasive reading treats Socrates as some kind of behavioural economist *avant la lettre* who merely points out that people are bad at affective forecasting due to flaws in their rationality. From the skewered perspective of being ill, for instance, sick people might come to the false conclusion that being healthy is pleasant. Likewise, I might misestimate the unpleasantness of filing my tax

---

<sup>177</sup> Tellingly, she understands Socrates’s concluding remark – that there is οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς τούτων τῶν φαντασμάτων πρὸς ἡδονῆς ἀλήθειαν – as if he is talking about the distorted *views* ordinary people take of *the good*. (1986: 146).

<sup>178</sup> Nussbaum (1986: 146).

<sup>179</sup> Clerk-Shaw (2015: 151).

<sup>180</sup> Russell (2005: 127–35).

return when I fail to compare it, more rationally, with a long-term vision of its hedonic consequences in my life as a whole.<sup>181</sup> In this vein, Murphy claims that Plato's argument is merely 'attacking statements about [the] prevalence [of pleasure and pain] made at a [temporal] distance and the generalizations of those who compare one condition of life with another'<sup>182</sup> and Annas grants Plato the 'acceptable point' that 'we do sometimes use the language of appearance and reality about pleasures when we are contrasting long and short term views of some pleasures and pains.'<sup>183</sup>

What binds these various evasive interpretive strategies is the conviction that the hedonic mistake Socrates is examining here does not concern one's current affective experience and whether one is in a given affective state or not. On evasive readings, the agents targeted by Socrates's argument do not go wrong in their honest, immediate, present-tense self-ascriptions of pleasure, they merely have false beliefs about other things which, somehow, bear on pleasure—albeit in a more derivative way.

Importantly, the falsity of these more derivative hedonic beliefs—about what explanatory account of pleasure is correct, about the pleasantness of future states of affairs, or about the evaluative status of the things one enjoys—does not impinge on the hedonic experiences *themselves*. This is crucial: if Socrates is not espousing hedonic fallibilism in this stretch of text but merely trying to expose relatively benign pleasure-related mistakes, located more downstream from one's hedonic experiences, it follows that the pleasures themselves remain unscathed and this means, even more importantly, that 'the usual charge against [the defective pleasure argument]—of violating the obvious rule that pleasures and pains ...

---

<sup>181</sup> Annas (1981: 311).

<sup>182</sup> Murphy (1953: 212–213).

<sup>183</sup> Annas (1981: 311).



cannot be unreal since their *esse* is *percipi*—need [not] be allowed weight,’ as Murphy concludes.<sup>184</sup>

Evasive readings—especially the one put forward by Murphy—have been fairly influential, not in the last place because they are seen as a welcome solution to the putative problem posed by the Platonic proposal that we are hedonically fallible. Although there is much to say against these evasive readings, I will confine myself to a few observations and my focus will be on Murphy whose interpretation is arguably the most widely followed line in the scholarly literature.<sup>185</sup>

To be sure, Murphy’s evasive reading finds some support in the text—especially Socrates’s initial remarks lend credence to the idea that he is merely arguing that people tend to go wrong in their predictions or generalizations about pleasure instead of repudiating their immediate self-ascriptions of pleasure.<sup>186</sup> I nevertheless believe that this type of reading faces serious difficulties, so let me give three strong reasons to think that we are instead dealing with mistaken self-ascriptions and deceptive pleasures which are not what they pretend to be.

First of all, note that, throughout the argument, Socrates takes issue with the pleasures themselves rather than with the higher-order, derivative beliefs one might *entertain* about such affective states. He calls the defective pleasures *themselves* untrue, compares them to

---

<sup>184</sup> Murphy (1953: 212–213).

<sup>185</sup> Cf. J. Butler (1999: 286n5): ‘Contemporary interpreters, such as Irwin, Frede, Gosling and Taylor, and Cross and Woosley, all follow Murphy’s lead to some degree.’

<sup>186</sup> It is perhaps worth stressing that although I defend a mistaken self-ascription reading of the argument here, I am open to the possibility that there are other hedonic mistakes at play which are captured and emphasized by alternative interpretations. My basic point is the following: *even if* Socrates is interested in other hedonic errors as well, he is *also* defending hedonic fallibilism—and this will be the focus of this chapter.

deceptive *trompe l'oeil* paintings, and denounces them as mere εἰδῶλα—flimsy, insubstantial, pale semblances of the real deal, ‘in respect of reality three stages removed from [true pleasure] (ἡδονῆς τρίτῳ εἰδῶλῳ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀπ’ ἐκείνου, 587c8–9).’ The most natural, most straightforward way of understanding these charges of falsity, deception, and ontological defectiveness, I take it, is to unpack them as the proposal that it is possible to conflate a merely apparent pleasure for a genuine pleasure, thereby mistakenly self-ascribing a pleasure that is not really there.

Secondly, the exchange between Glaucon and Socrates that takes place in the course of the argument strongly suggests that the error of the relevant agents concerns immediate self-ascriptions of affective experiences rather than other, more derivative types of hedonic error. Having been confronted with Socrates’s fallibility cases, Glaucon pushes back in the following way:

[T2.3] [a] [Glaucon] That may be the case because at that moment the state of calm turns out to be<sup>187</sup> pleasant (τοῦτο γὰρ τότε ἡδὺ ἴσως καὶ ἀγαπητὸν γίγνεται, ἡσυχία).

[b] [Socrates] So [, if you are right,] after someone has stopped experiencing pleasure, the absence of pleasure will be painful (καὶ ὅταν παύσῃται ἄρα, εἶπον, χαίρων τις, ἢ τῆς ἡδονῆς ἡσυχία λυπηρὸν ἔσται).<sup>188</sup>

[G.] Probably (ἴσως). (583d10–e3)

Part [a] might be taken to suggest that Glaucon is describing a future state of affairs in which—then and there, at that very moment—the calm will prove itself to be pleasant as soon as the preceding pain has

---

<sup>187</sup> I will explain and defend my choice for this translation of γίγνεται below.

<sup>188</sup> Note that ἡσυχία (with a genitive) does double duty here: it refers to the absence of or freedom from pain as well as the middle state of calm.

subsided.<sup>189</sup>

This is confirmed by part [b], which is less ambiguous and more perspicuous. In it, Socrates complements Glaucon's remark and tries to sum up what his interlocutors think is going on in the deviant cases: '[on your account], then, after someone has stopped experiencing pleasure, the absence of pleasure will be painful (ὅταν παύσῃται ἄρα χαίρων τις, ἢ τῆς ἡδονῆς ἡσυχία λυπηρὸν ἔσται).' Although this is often missed,<sup>190</sup> the Greek suggests that we are dealing with two future states of affairs located at different times in the future: an anterior event expressed in the dependent clause and a posterior event expressed in the main clause.

That is to say, Socrates's gloss on Glaucon's claim expresses a situation in the future where the pleasure has come to an end, after which the calm will feel painful.<sup>191</sup> Conversely, Glaucon's proposal—which Socrates is after all merely complementing—is best understood in a parallel way: he must be talking about a similar future situation

---

<sup>189</sup> A defender of a Murphy-style affective forecasting interpretation might object that Glaucon's 'at that moment' (τότε) instead refers to the moment at which the irrational people formulate their false predictions about the future, the idea being that from a skewered, painful perspective, the future state of calm might look pleasant, although it is not. The way in which Socrates takes up Glaucon's suggestion rules this reading out, though, and decides in favour of my interpretation.

<sup>190</sup> E.g. in the translations by Reeve (1992) and Shorey (1935). In their defence, it is worth noting, though, that the English language often uses what is known as a concealed future—a present-stem form—in temporal clauses referring to future states of affairs.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Rijksbaron (2002: 80): 'ἐπίν, ὅταν etc. + aorist subjunctive [rather than present subjunctive]: the state of affairs of the dependent clause is anterior to that of the main clause.' For a parallel construal, cf. Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 625: 'τάφος δὲ ποῖος δέξεταί μ', ὅταν θάνω;' ('what tomb shall receive me, after I have died?'). I want to thank Stephen White and especially Gerry Wakker for useful discussion of these grammatical issues and the importance of this bit of text for my mistaken self-ascription reading.

where the pain has come to an end, after which the calm will manifest itself as something pleasant.

What this suggests, then, is that when the irrational people engage in sloppy affective forecasting and claim that putting an end to pain is pleasant, they are doing so for the simple reason that this is how they are in fact going to experience their convalescence against the backdrop of their current state of uncomfortable sickness. They, so to speak, practice what they preach: when the moment is there, their recovery will really manifest itself as a pleasure—albeit a false and deceptive one—and it will really *feel* good.<sup>192</sup>

That we are dealing with mistaken immediate self-ascriptions rather than mistaken predictions or generalizations seems to be confirmed by what follows.<sup>193</sup> When Socrates summarises his results, he echoes his earlier exchange with Glaucon<sup>194</sup> and offers a more general observation about these cases, using present-tense forms: when juxtaposed with pain, the affectively neutral state of calm ‘merely seems—but is not really—pleasant (οὐκ ἔστιν ..., ἀλλὰ φαίνεται, 584a7).’

Of course, this could again involve the juxtaposition of a present state of pain with a future state of calm—as if we are dealing with generalizations and predictions about the future made from a blurry current perspective—but the way in which Socrates explicates these mistakes by means of an analogy rules out such an evasive

---

<sup>192</sup> Thus, the affective forecasting reading goes hand in hand with a mistaken self-ascription reading: in Socrates’s example, the hedonically mistaken individual predicts that their convalescence is going to be pleasant (although it is neutral) and when the time is there, they will experience their convalescence as a pleasure (although it is neither a pleasure nor a pain, but an affectively indifferent state).

<sup>193</sup> Cf. J. Butler (1999: 292).

<sup>194</sup> Adam (1902: 350) rightly notes that ‘οὐκ ἔστιν κτλ. contradicts Glaucon’s suggestion τοῦτο γὰρ—ἡσυχία 583d,’ the point being that ‘there is no *reality* about this (as *you* [Glaucon] suggest): it is only a φάντασμα.’

construal (584d1–585a7). When it comes to pleasure, Socrates suggests, ordinary people are like people who live in a house with three floors, although they are only aware of the basement and the ground floor. This tricks them into thinking they have reached the highest floor when they have in fact moved from the basement to the ground floor.<sup>195</sup>

Likewise, non-ideal agents are ‘deceived (*ἀπατῶνται*, 585a5)’ into believing that they are experiencing pleasure, even though an affectively negative state of pain merely gets juxtaposed with an intermediate state of affective neutrality or painlessness: ‘whenever [non-ideal agents] are moved from pain to the intermediate state, they strongly’—but wrongly—‘believe they are in a state of filling and pleasure (*σφόδρα μὲν οἴονται πρὸς πληρώσει τε καὶ ἡδονῇ γίγνεσθαι*, 585a2-3).’<sup>196</sup> Even though the intermediate state of calm is—by definition (as per 583c5)—not a pleasure, one might mistake this state of painlessness for a state of pleasure thanks to a contrast effect and the juxtaposition with pain.<sup>197</sup>

It seems fairly obvious, then, that irrational people go wrong

---

<sup>195</sup> This example comes from Warren (2011: 133).

<sup>196</sup> Following the translation of Wolfsdorf (2013-a: 117). For this translation of *γίγνεσθαι* + *πρὸς*, see LSJ s.v. II.3.c: ‘to be near something,’ ‘to be at something.’ For the analogy between the topological and the hedonic domain to make sense, this translation seems required: in the topological example, someone ‘standing in the middle’ (the intermediate affective state) believes himself to be in the upper region (pleasure); likewise, someone in an intermediate state thinks they are in a pleasant state.

<sup>197</sup> Socrates develops a second analogy (585a3–5): the victims of this hedonic mistake are like people who take themselves to be seeing something white, even though they are merely looking at a patch of grey which gets confused for something white because it appears against the backdrop of patch of black.

in their first-person, present-tense self-ascriptions of pleasure.<sup>198</sup> Even though they sincerely believe and report otherwise, they are not experiencing pleasure: in reality (τῶ ὄντι, 585a1), they find themselves in an affectively neutral psychological condition of pain- and pleasureless calm which they *mistake* for a pleasure.

Finally, there is a third difficulty for the evasive readings put forward by Murphy and others. Such readings are arguably in a weaker position to deliver a cogent story about how Plato's demonstration of the superiority of the rationally integrated life is meant constitute the 'strongest and most decisive' strike against Thrasymachus's sceptical project and make trouble for the underlying rival theory of the good life. It is hard to see, in other words, how sloppy generalisations, poor affective forecasting skills, adherence to faulty accounts of the nature of pleasure, or defective evaluative beliefs would constitute the promised knock-down argument against the life of the tyrant preferred by Thrasymachus and other implicit and explicit hedonists,<sup>199</sup> unless such derivative hedonic errors would ultimately bleed into the hedonic experiences themselves and make them less pleasant than they seem to be and hence not worth having.

It is telling that when Socrates targets Thrasymachus's beloved tyrant towards the end of the Pleasure Argument (587a4–588b5), he is not concerned with the derivative mistakes identified by the evasive readings. Instead, he goes to great lengths to point out how impoverished, flimsy, and one-dimensional the tyrant's pleasures really are, basically arguing that the tyrant is seriously mistaken about his pleasures. The tyrant *thinks* he is well off, hedonically speaking,

---

<sup>198</sup> As Wolfsdorf (2013-a: 117) puts it: 'The mover is not predicting where he will stand as he moves from the bottom. Rather, he believes he is at the top when is standing at the midpoint.' Cf. J. Butler (1999) and Erginel (2006) for the same point.

<sup>199</sup> For the claim that Plato's tyrant should be understood as a pleasure-seeker, see Johnstone (2015) and Moss (2005).

although he is not. The crucial point here—and the point that should bother Thrasymachus who seems to flirt with such a way of life on hedonistic grounds—is that the tyrant’s pleasures are not what they pretend to be: they are insubstantial, defective simulacra of the real deal, although this bit of information about the contents of his very own mind is not introspectively available to the psychologically fragmented tyrant whose blurred vision makes him a stranger to himself.<sup>200</sup>

#### 2.4. Glaucon’s Infallibilism

In the next stretch of the argument, Glaucon pushes back against Socrates’s proposal and offers his own infallibilist explanation of the deviant cases. Glaucon objects that the people in these cases merely say these things for the simple reason that ‘at that moment, this is perhaps what turns out to be pleasant and desirable—[the] calm (τοῦτο τότε ἤδὺ ἴσως καὶ ἀγαπητὸν γίγνεται, ἡσυχία, 583d10–11).’ Put differently, Glaucon holds that Socrates’s examples do not count as instance of serious hedonic error: the people in his deviant cases do in fact experience pleasure, just as they claim. If that is the case, though, Socrates adds, it would also follow—conversely and from the same premises—that ‘after someone has stopped feeling pleasure, this calm or freedom from pleasure will be painful (ὅταν παύσηται ἄρα χαίρων τις, ἢ τῆς ἡδονῆς ἡσυχία λυπηρὸν ἔσται, 583e1–2).’

Like many contemporary students of Plato, Glaucon assumes

---

<sup>200</sup> Both in the *Gorgias* and in *Republic*, the tyrant is used as a prime illustration of the Platonic view that we are not transparent to ourselves and that we can only discover what we really believe, desire, and feel by leading an examined life. See Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 73–102), Lear (1998: 59–60), and Parry (1992) for discussion of the tyrant’s deeply impoverished self-knowledge.

that there is a more parsimonious and more down-to-earth explanation of Socrates's fallibility cases available which does not commit us to the counter-intuitive notion that people are hedonically fallible. This alternative take on Socrates's fallibility cases seems best understood as driven by some kind of phenomenal subjectivism about our affective psychological states. Such affective phenomenal subjectivism, in its turn, boils down to the thesis that there is no appearance reality gap in the affective domain. When it comes to pleasure, pain, and certain other *πάθη*, things are to any person just as they appear to that person.<sup>201</sup> A pleasure's immediate phenomenological quality—how it *seems* to the subject of the experience or how it *feels*—exhausts its reality or how it *is*. Pleasure is just a bit of felt experience—neither more nor less. Crucially, this picture obviously guarantees our hedonic infallibility: if the ontology of pleasure is a first-person, *esse est percipi* ontology, any situation in which it strikes me *as if* I am experiencing pleasure counts as a situation in which I *am* experiencing pleasure.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> Following Chappell (2005: 62 and 241).

<sup>202</sup> Plato was not unaware of this difficulty. In the *Theaetetus* (179c2–4), Socrates claims that '[s]o long as we keep within the limits of that immediate present experience of the individual (τὸ παρὸν ἐκάστῳ πάθος) which gives rise to sensory experiences and to sensory judgments (αἰ αἰσθήσεις καὶ αἰ κατὰ ταύτας δόξαι), it is more difficult (χαλεπώτερον) [but not impossible] to convict these latter of being untrue (οὐκ ἀληθεῖς).' In the *Philebus*, Socrates wrestles with Protarchus' infallibilism (there construed as the claim that pleasures cannot be false): not only does he mention people who are dreaming, mad, or suffering from other delusion as possible candidates for hedonic fallibility (36e5–8), he also develops an argument—briefly touched upon below—which suggests that people can go wrong in their immediate self-ascriptions of pleasure (42c5–44a11).



## 2.5 Two Arguments Against Glaucon's Infallibilism

In what follows, Socrates aims to show that Glaucon's alternative explanation of these putative cases of hedonic fallibility falls apart under sharper scrutiny. Here is the text in full, broken down in four parts:

[T2.4] [a] [Socrates] [If what you, Glaucon, are saying is right,] then the thing we described as being intermediate between the two, the calm, this thing will be both—both pain and pleasure (ὁ μεταξὺ ... ἀμφοτέρων ... , τὴν ἡσυχίαν, τοῦτό ... ἀμφοτέρω ἔσται, λύπη τε καὶ ἡδονή).

[Glaucon] That's what it looks like.

[S.] Now, is it possible for that which is neither to be both (δυνατὸν τὸ μηδέτερον ὄν ἀμφοτέρω γίνεσθαι)?

[G.] Not in my view (οὐ μοι δοκεῖ)

[b] [S.] More importantly, when pleasure and pain take place in the soul, they are both some kind of process (τὸ ἡδὺ ἐν ψυχῇ γιγνόμενον καὶ τὸ λυπηρὸν κινήσις τις ἀμφοτέρω ἔσπτον).

[G.] Yes.

[S.] But didn't what is neither painful nor pleasant come to light just now as a state of calm and something in the middle between them (τὸ δὲ μήτε λυπηρὸν μήτε ἡδὺ οὐχὶ ἡσυχία μέντοι καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τούτοις ἐφάνη ἄρτι)?

[G.] Yes, it did.

[c] [S.] How can it be correct, then, to think that not feeling pain is pleasant or that not feeling pleasure is painful (τὸ μὴ ἀλγεῖν ἡδὺ ἡγεῖσθαι ἢ τὸ μὴ χαίρειν ἀνιαρόν)?

[G.] There's no way it can be.

[S.] Then it isn't correct. [d] But when the calm is juxtaposed with the painful it merely appears pleasant without really being pleasant (οὐκ ἔστιν ... τοῦτο, ἀλλὰ φαίνεται) and when the calm is juxtaposed with the pleasant it merely appears painful without really being painful (παρὰ τὸ ἀλγεῖν ἡδὺ καὶ παρὰ τὸ ἡδὺ ἀλγεῖν τότε ἢ ἡσυχία), but there is nothing trustworthy in these deceptive appearances as far as the truth about pleasure is concerned, only some kind of trickery (οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς τούτων τῶν φαντασμάτων πρὸς

ἡδονῆς ἀλήθειαν, ἀλλὰ γοητεία τις).

[G.] That's what our account (λόγος) suggests at any rate. (583e4–584a11)

Parts [a] and [b] contain what I take to be two separate yet closely interconnected arguments against Glaucon's infallibilist response, designed to safeguard and reaffirm the earlier conclusion—forced upon us by the fallibility cases—that we can go wrong in our self-ascriptions of pleasure.<sup>203</sup> As Socrates puts it in part [c], his arguments are meant to (re-) establish the conclusion that it is not correct 'to think that the absence of pain is pleasant (τὸ μὴ ἀλγεῖν ἢδὲ ἡγεῖσθαι, 584a4).' Part [d], finally, develops an explanation as to why people fail to recognize what affective state they are in, which pivots on a distinction between appearance and reality or seeming and being and introduces the notion of hedonic illusions or deceptive pleasures. These parts are best discussed in turn.

### 2.5.1. Sub-Argument 1: the Dialectical Argument

In part [a], Socrates offers his first-sub-argument against Glaucon's infallibilism. At first blush, this argument seems undeveloped and

---

<sup>203</sup> Although Socrates also describes cases where the calm merely seems to be painful without really being painful, the overall focus of the argument lies on cases of misleading and merely apparent pleasure. The argument is not just explicitly concerned with the falsity, impurity, and deceptiveness of pleasure rather than pain, Socrates also claims that self-ascriptions of pain almost never go wrong: when non-ideal agents 'think they are in pain when they ascend to the painful, ... they really are in pain (ὅταν ... ἐπὶ τὸ λυπηρὸν φέρωνται, ἀληθῆ τε οἴονται καὶ τῷ ὄντι λυποῦνται, 585a1).' This is an important qualification, because Plato's critics—and other optimists about introspection—often use the example of pain to reduce their opponents' pessimism about self-knowledge to absurdity. This point is well made by Schwitzgebel (2008: 259).

commentators have struggled to make sense of it.<sup>204</sup> This interpretive struggle seems to stem from our inability to get a decent handle on the puzzling principle that ‘what is neither [*F* nor *G*] cannot γίγνεσθαι both [*F* and *G*]’ (583e7) which, somehow, allows Socrates to reduce Glaucon’s initial position to absurdity and forces him to give up his hedonic infallibilism (at 584a6).

This principle is often taken to invoke book 4’s Principle of Opposites, the thought being that the principle claims that it is impossible for what is neither (an) *F* nor (a) *G* (where *F* and *G* are opposites or contraries) to *become* both *F* and *G* (at least not in the same respect, at the same time, and relative to the same thing). Understood that way, Socrates’s thought here would be that nothing whatsoever—including the calm—can become both pleasant and painful, at least not in the same respect, at the same time, or relative to the same thing.<sup>205</sup>

Socrates must be driving at something else, though. As we learn in the *Parmenides*, there is usually nothing ‘puzzling (ἄξιον θαυμάζειν, 129c3)’ about the compresence of contrary properties. To unravel the superficial clash between opposites, we often just have to dig a bit deeper and add the relevant qualifiers. In this sub-argument, Socrates even supplies these qualifiers himself: he explicitly states that the calm is painful when it gets juxtaposed with pleasure and pleasant when it gets juxtaposed with pain which goes to show that the calm is not pleasant and painful in the same respect, at the same time, and towards the same thing.

Fortunately, there is a more parsimonious and more elegant reading of this passage available which does not run into these

---

<sup>204</sup> Wolfsdorf (2013-a: 113) calls it ‘the puzzling argument.’

<sup>205</sup> For readings along these lines, see e.g. J. Butler (1999: 291–92), Warren (2011: 121), White (1979: 229).

problems.<sup>206</sup> Note that at three points in the argument Plato shifts nonchalantly and without explanation between instances of εἶναι and γίγνεσθαι. This happens at 583e3, where Socrates’s ἔσται takes up Glaucon’s γίγνεται almost in the same breath. It happens slightly later as well: when Socrates posits his principle at 583e7, γίγνεσθαι refers back to and is meant to block the inference that the state of affective calm ἔσται both pleasure and pain (583e5). Finally, this equation occurs again in the last part of our passage, where Socrates echoes Glaucon’s initial suggestion and again picks up the latter’s γίγνεται (as well as his own ἔσται) by an ἔστιν: ‘the calm *is* not pleasant, it merely *seems* pleasant (οὐκ ἔστιν ... ἀλλὰ φαίνεται, 584a7).’<sup>207</sup>

It is obvious, then, that Socrates equates εἶναι and γίγνεσθαι in his first sub-argument against Glaucon’s infallibilism. What is not so obvious, is what we should make of this equation. Let me offer a promising way to understand this otherwise puzzling and problematic move: because the *Aktionsart* of the verb εἶναι is stative or durative rather than kinetic, mutative, or dynamic, forms of the verb γίγνεσθαι are sometimes used in a dynamic sense of εἶναι.<sup>208</sup> When this happens, instances of γίγνεσθαι are used not in the meaning of ‘coming into being,’ ‘becoming *F*,’ or ‘coming into a certain state *F*,’ but in the meaning of ‘being *F* as result,’ ‘showing or proving itself to be *F*,’ ‘turning out to be *F*,’ or simply ‘being *F*’ (with the dynamic connotation suppressed).<sup>209</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> I want to thank Tamer Nawar, Katja Vogt, and especially Job van Eck who have significantly improved my understanding of this tricky passage.

<sup>207</sup> Adam (1902: 350).

<sup>208</sup> See e.g. Kahn (1981: 111) and van Eck (2000).

<sup>209</sup> Cf. e.g. *Sophist* 256b3: ‘τρία δὴ γίγνεται ταῦτα (these *prove to be* three [classes]),’ *Philebus* 64d4–5: ‘δι’ ἣν ἢ παντὸς ἀξία γίγνεται ἠτισοῦν ἢ τὸ παράπαν οὐδενός (thanks to which it *turns out to be* either most valuable or worth nothing at all),’ and Euripides, *Medea* 14–15: ‘ἥπερ μέγιστη γίγνεται σωτηρία, ὅταν γυνὴ πρὸς ἄνδρα μὴ διχοστατῆ (it *proves to be* the greatest source of safety, when a woman is not at odds

If we construe the principle along these lines, Socrates's line of thought is more or less tautological: because what is not-*F* cannot turn out to be *F* or, more precisely, because what is neither *F* nor *G* cannot turn out to be both *F* and *G*, the non-pleasant and non-painful state of calm cannot turn out to be pleasant and painful—*pace* Glaucon, who had suggested that the neutral, painless, and pleasureless state of psychological calm will sometimes be both pleasant and painful, thanks to the juxtaposition with a contrastive affective state.

More plainly speaking, the guiding idea here must be something like the following. If we agree that an apple, say, is neither a pear nor an orange, it is trivially true that an apple cannot prove itself to be an orange—even in strange circumstances or when juxtaposed with a pear—although it might be mistaken for an orange (because it looks that way, for instance). Likewise, if we agree that the affectively neutral state of calm is neither a pleasure nor a pain, it is trivially true that the calm cannot turn out to be either of them (or both for that matter)—even though it might be mistaken for a pleasure (because it looks that way in funny circumstances, for instance).<sup>210</sup>

A passage from the *Philebus* sheds light on Socrates's line of reasoning. In it, Socrates explains to his interlocutor Protarchus that according to the 'correct explanatory account of the matter (τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον, 43e10),' those who claim to be experiencing pleasure when they find themselves in a state of painless psychological calm are mistaken. Although they *think* they are experiencing pleasure, they are

---

with her man).' As Mastronarde (2002: 165) comments: "'proves to be' or 'shows itself to be' or the like is frequently the best English equivalent for γίγνομαι followed by a predicate noun or adjective.'

<sup>210</sup> This is confirmed by part [d], where Socrates introduces a distinction between mere appearance and reality. Although an apple cannot (prove or show itself to) *really be* an orange, it might nevertheless *strike me* as an apple—if I look at it in unfavourable perceptual circumstances, for instance, or if my (phenomenal) concept of apples is defective.

not. Put differently, *not* experiencing pain is not, and cannot be, the same as experiencing pleasure—even if there are people who suggest otherwise because they report that they experience pleasure when they are merely in a state of pain- and pleasureless calm.<sup>211</sup> Here is why:

[T2.5] [Socrates] Imagine three sorts of things, whichever you may like, and because these are high-sounding names, let us call them gold, silver, and what is neither of the two (τριῶν ὄντων οὐκ ἡμῖν, ὄντων βούλει, τίθει, καλλίσουσιν ἵνα ὀνόμασι χρῶμεθα, τὸ μὲν χρυσόν, τὸ δ' ἄργυρον, τρίτον δὲ τὸ μηδέτερον τούτων.)

[Protarchus] Consider it done.

[S.] Is there any way conceivable in which this third kind, which is neither of both, could turn out to be the same as either of the other two sorts, gold or silver (τὸ δὴ μηδέτερον τούτων ἔσθ' ἡμῖν ὅπως θάτερον γένοιτο ἄν, χρυσοῦς ἢ ἄργυρος)?

[P.] How could it?

[S.] That the middle kind of life be described as either pleasant or painful would be the wrong thing to think, if anyone happened to think so, and it would be the wrong thing to say, if anyone would say so, at least according to the right explanatory account of the matter (κατὰ γε τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον). (*Philebus* 43e1–10, my translation, loosely based on Frede)

Unlike most other translators,<sup>212</sup> D. Frede construes the expression γένοιτο ἄν exactly right—as a dynamic, kinetic, or mutative version of εἶναι. Plato's suggestion is *not* that what is neither gold nor silver

---

<sup>211</sup> Cf. *Philebus* 43d4–5 for this identity claim: 'S.: Not experiencing pain would not be identical with experiencing pleasure (οὐκ ἄν εἴη τὸ μὴ λυπεῖσθαι ταῦτόν τῳ χαίρειν), right? P.: Certainly not!'

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Fowler (1962: *ad loc.*): 'Now can that which is neither *become* either gold or silver?' and Gosling (1975 *ad loc.*): 'Could it possibly *become* gold or silver?' (my emphasis) Hackforth (1974: *ad loc.*) is slightly closer to the mark: 'Could we possibly *identify* the third *with* either of the others, gold or silver?' (my emphasis)

(bronze, say) cannot *become* gold; his more reasonable suggestion is that, while remaining itself, bronze, which is neither gold nor silver, cannot *turn out to be* gold or silver, even in special circumstances or when juxtaposed with a different mineral.

Likewise, or so Socrates argues, affectively indifferent psychological calm, which is neither pleasure nor pain but something in between the two, cannot somehow turn out to be a pleasure—even when it gets juxtaposed with a contrastive affective state and even if there are people who report that they are experiencing pleasure when they are not in pain because they find themselves in this state of calm affective indifference. This is so, Socrates adds in a crucially important rider, because ‘not experiencing pain and experiencing pleasure each have a different or independent nature (χωρίς τοῦ μὴ λυπεῖσθαι καὶ τοῦ χαίρειν ἢ φύσις ἐκατέρου, 44a10).’<sup>213</sup>

The guiding thought here seems to be, then, that there is an intrinsic, essential, underlying feature—or cluster of such features—that is common and peculiar to all pleasures and that sets it apart from other mental states, such as affectively neutral psychological calm. Given this underlying, essential feature of the different affective states—their ‘hidden structure’ or φύσις—it is simply impossible for affectively neutral calm to prove itself to be a pleasure or a pain.

This suggests the following interpretation of Socrates’s first, dialectical strike against Glaucon’s infallibilist gloss on the deviant cases. When laying down his affective psychology, Socrates basically *stipulates* that the intermediate state of affective calm is neither a pleasure nor a pain. (This is thesis 3 of Socrates’s affective psychology, touched upon above). In the remainder of the argument, he then reminds Glaucon that this necessarily entails that the calm cannot prove itself to be a pleasure or a pain—on the hardly disputable

---

<sup>213</sup> Cf. *Republic* 584b1–2, where Socrates argues that, as regards its φύσις (πεφικέναι), pleasure is emphatically *not* merely ‘relief from pain (παῦλαν λύπης εἶναι).’

assumption that it is not possible for what is not-*F* and not-*G* to be both an *F* and a *G*. Taking all this together, then, Socrates's *reductio* of Glaucon's position goes something like this:

1. The affectively neutral state of calm is neither a pleasure nor a pain.
2. Juxtaposed with pleasure, the calm is a pain. [Assumption]
3. Juxtaposed with pain, the calm is a pleasure. [Assumption]
4. The calm is both a pleasure and a pain. [From 2, 3]
5. It is not possible for what is not-*F* and not-*G* to be both an *F* and a *G*. [Assumption]
6. Contradiction. [From 1, 4, 5]

Admittedly, this interpretation of Socrates's first argument against Glaucon might seem a bit deflationary. From a dialectical perspective, however, Socrates's argumentative move makes perfect sense: he is just pointing out an inconsistency in Glaucon's belief set and reminds his interlocutor of his earlier dialectical commitments. When Socrates posited his affective psychology—including the claim that the calm is a different affective state, lying in between pleasure and pain, and characterized as neither of the two—Glaucon did not push back and immediately expressed agreement with the proposed model of human affect.<sup>214</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> Importantly, Plato makes it explicit that Socrates needs Glaucon's help in developing his thesis and that they are in this together: 'With you answering my questions and me seeking, I'll find out [what is wrong with ordinary pleasure].' (583c1) More broadly speaking, when arguing for a contentious position, Socrates tends to begin from premises that are available to his opponent. As he puts it in book 6, if you are arguing with an interlocutor who disputes the truth of what you are saying, your safest best bet is 'to soothe and persuade [your interlocutor] gently,



That is to say, the argument just records Socrates's attempt to trip up Glaucon in light of his earlier commitments: if he believes that calm and pleasure are different, separate affective states and that calm is not a pleasure, he cannot also believe—on pain of contradicting himself—that in some contexts the calm can turn out to be a pleasure. In still other words, and to put it as succinctly and plainly as possible, Socrates points out that the neutral state of calm cannot be a pleasure for the simple reason that it is the neutral state, and not a pleasure.<sup>215</sup> Even though the calm might deceptively *appear* to be a pleasure, it cannot really *be* a pleasure: the underlying essence of our mental states or psychological conditions decides whether we are experiencing a pleasure or something else—even if introspection suggests otherwise. To put it boldly, Plato's view is that reality—the underlying φύσις or hidden structure—does not care about our feelings.

### 2.5.2. Sub-Argument [2]: The Substantive Argument

Let us turn to Socrates's second sub-argument located in part [b]. On the face of it, Socrates more or less repeats his previous dialectical strategy: his argument seemingly takes a stipulated theory of our affective psychology for granted—on which pleasure is a κίνησις and the intermediate state of affectively indifferent calm is not—from which it deduces the conclusion that the intermediate state of

---

hiding from him that he isn't in his right mind (ἐπικρυπτόμενοι ὅτι οὐχ ὑγιαίνει, 476e1–2).' Fine (1990: 87) and Irwin (1977: 136) interpret this methodological statement as 'the dialectical requirement': in his exchange with the lovers of sights and sounds—and perhaps more generally (as suggested by e.g. *Meno* 75d2–7)—Socrates must argue from premises that are acceptable to his interlocutors.

<sup>215</sup> For a similar point, see Mooradian (1992: 79n1).

experiencing neither pleasure nor pain cannot be a pleasure.<sup>216</sup> If we understand the argument along these lines, Socrates again merely points out a clash in his interlocutor's belief set: Glaucon's take on the fallibility cases suggests that the calm can be a pleasure, but he *also* believes that something can only be a pleasure if it is a κίνησις, and that the calm is not a κίνησις.

But if this is all there is to Socrates's response to Glaucon's infallibilism, it would render the Deceptive Pleasure Argument rather underwhelming: the existence of false pleasures is derived from merely stipulated theses about human affective psychology which lack further argumentative support. More worryingly, perhaps, such a reading would make the argument vulnerable to argumentative pressure. For what Socrates sees as consequences of his affective psychology, Glaucon might see—or perhaps should have seen—as counter-examples. Rather than accepting that Socrates's affective psychology entails that we are hedonically fallible, Glaucon could push back and argue that Socrates's affective psychology simply fails to carve our affective nature at its joints *precisely because* it entails that we are hedonically fallible.<sup>217</sup>

In sharp contrast to this critical approach, I believe we can read part [b]—and what follows—in a more promising, more substantive, and philosophically more interesting way. The proposal that pleasure is a κίνησις is not just a dogmatic assumption, I will suggest, it is derived from a sophisticated and powerful theory of pleasure—albeit a theory that is still in an embryonic state. The κίνησις passage gives us more to work with than it seems, then, although it requires some effort to extract the relevant information from the text. Additionally, I want to argue that this more detailed account of pleasure sheds

---

<sup>216</sup> For such a reading of the argument, see Fletcher (2018-a: 27–28).

<sup>217</sup> For this concern, see e.g. Gosling and Taylor (1982: 450). Thanks to Roger Crisp for pushing me to address this worry.

important light on various aspects of the Deceptive Pleasure Argument. More specifically, it does not just complement the previous line of thinking, it also lays the groundwork for a more substantive, more cogent argument against Glaucon's infallibilism.<sup>218</sup>

At the heart of part [b] lies Socrates's claim that pleasure is a κίνησις: a process (of movement or change) rather than a state (of calm). This is not just what makes a pleasure a pleasure, it also sets pleasure and affective neutrality sharply apart: the latter is not a process but a state of affectively neutral mental calm and freedom from affective disturbances such as pleasure and pain. The claim that pleasures are—at least partially—picked out by their identity as processes rather than states must find its origin in Plato's restorative theory of pleasure.<sup>219</sup>

Throughout the corpus, Plato puts forward more or less developed formulations of such as restorative model of pleasure, according to which pleasure, somehow, involves a process of restoration or replenishment.<sup>220</sup> In the topological analogy, for instance, Socrates seemingly equates 'filling' or 'fulfilment (πλήρωσις)' and 'pleasure (ἡδονή, 585a3),' at another point in the argument he speaks of pleasure as a 'filling (πλήρωσις, 585b1)' of an

---

<sup>218</sup> Note that the passage is introduced by the particle καὶ μήν: this particle signals that the speaker adds information (καί) and that they vouch for the correctness or relevance of this added information, even if their interlocutor may not expect it (μήν). Generally, its use is progressive—as Denniston (1954: 351–52) writes, 'καὶ μήν often introduces a new argument, a new item in a series, or a new point of any kind'—but Plato also uses καὶ μήν to add missing premises to an argument. (353) I thank Gerry Wakker for significant help with these issues.

<sup>219</sup> Indeed, Socrates's affective psychology as a whole—including the denial that calm can be a pleasure—seems to issue from an underlying restorative theory of pleasure. This point is well made by Mooradian (1992: 79 n1).

<sup>220</sup> 'Somehow involves' is deliberately vague. For more thorough discussion, see Frede (1992), Wolfsdorf (2013-b), and Evans (2007-a).

‘emptiness (κένωσις, 585b9),’ and slightly later, Socrates maintains that ‘being filled with what is appropriate to nature is pleasant (τὸ πληροῦσθαι τῶν φύσει προσηκόντων ἡδύ ἐστι, 585d11).’

Although these formulations fall short of being careful definitions of pleasure—strictly speaking, it looks as if they just pick out one thing among others (getting (ful)filled) that happens to be pleasant—the context, along with the corpus as a whole, indicates that Socrates is trying to give conditions, or at least a necessary condition, on something’s counting as a pleasure. For something to count as a pleasure, it takes—at least—a restorative process. In addition, there are some indications in the text that Plato also thinks that, for something to count as a pleasure, this restorative process must be (quasi-)perceptually registered and enter awareness.<sup>221</sup>

In Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, we find a similar definition of pleasure which combines these two elements and usefully illustrates the Platonic idea that is doing most of the heavy lifting here:

[T2.6] We may lay it down that pleasure is a κίνησις, a settling-down by which the soul as a whole is perceptibly brought into its natural state of being; and that pain is the opposite (τὴν ἡδονὴν κίνησιν τινα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ κατάστασιν ἀθρόαν καὶ αἰσθητὴν εἰς τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν φύσιν, λύπην δὲ τοῦναντίον).<sup>222</sup> (*Rhetoric* 1.11, 1369b33–35)

---

<sup>221</sup> See Erginel (2019: 99) for this ‘perception condition’ in *Republic* 9. Although this requirement receives a more sustained treatment in the *Philebus*, we find textual support in *Republic* 9 as well: for one, pleasure is described as a κίνησις *in* or *of* the soul, for another, while speaking of bodily pleasures, Socrates points out that these pleasures ‘stretch out to the soul through the body (ἄι διὰ τοῦ σώματος ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τείνουσαι, 584c3–4).’

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s summary of Plato’s take on pleasure in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1152b13): ‘[on the Platonic account,] every pleasure is a registered/conscious/perceived γένεσις toward [the subject’s] nature (πᾶσα ἡδονὴ γένεσις ἐστιν εἰς φύσιν αἰσθητή).’

In sum, Plato treats pleasure as a perceptually registered process of restoring a previously disrupted healthy, natural, and harmonious state.

Critics have been quick to write off Plato's restorative theory of pleasure. This is not the place to give a full-fledged defense of this model,<sup>223</sup> but two closely related observations are in order: one about the nature of this model, another about its scope. Plato's detractors often complain that his restorative model of pleasure is merely in a position to account for crude physical pleasures—the pleasure of eating when hungry, for instance, which is quite literally a filling of an emptiness—although it cannot make sense of more elevated pleasures such as the pleasure of listening to Beethoven's brilliant late string quartets, petting your cat, or learning a new language.

This problem seems to subside, though, if we ascribe a more subtle version of this model of pleasure to Plato. The sharp insight he is trying to capture here, I argue, is that pleasure is awareness of processes of *fulfilling diverse needs*.<sup>224</sup> That is to say, pleasure indicates, signals, tracks, or represents something else—namely some kind of relative *improvement* such as the restoration of a disrupted balance or harmony, a return to our homeostatic state, the satisfaction of our desires, an increase in our net level of welfare, or the fulfilment of our physical or psychological needs.<sup>225</sup>

The affective calm, by contrast, can be understood as a stable,

---

<sup>223</sup> For some recent attempts to rehabilitate Plato's restorative theory of pleasure, see e.g. Aufderheide (forthcoming), Carpenter (2011), Vogt (forthcoming), van Zoonen (2021)/chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>224</sup> Katz (2005).

<sup>225</sup> I am following Katz (2005) here who calls the Platonic view an 'improvement indicator view.' For similar contemporary representational theories of pleasure, see e.g. Millgram (2000), Schroeder (2001), and Schroeder (2004: 71–106).

homeostatic state and a neutral midpoint on the continuum in between pleasure and pain where pain should be understood as a deviation from this neutral middle state and pleasure as a return to it.<sup>226</sup> As such, it makes sense that the state of calm was defined, more or less privatively, as the *absence* of psychological turbulence—such as pleasures, pains, and other πάθη reaching the mind—or ‘freedom from that sort of thing (τὴν ἡσυχίαν τοῦ τοιούτου, 583d8).’

Getting this restorative model of pleasure in view is important for a proper understanding of at least three aspects of the Deceptive Pleasure Argument. First of all, the restorative model of pleasure sheds new light on the idea that pleasure and calm are two different things—the basic insight that was driving the first sub-argument against Glaucon. As Plato’s model of pleasure suggests, the former precisely consists in a reparative process during which the latter is restored.

This is not just what sets the two apart, it also explains why the homeostatic state of calm cannot turn out to be a pleasure. Given the fact that κινήσεις and ἡσυχίαι are essentially different entities with separate and independent natures—an identity claim that is rooted in an elegant bit of theory and not just plucked out of thin air—it follows that an affectively neutral state of calm (a ἡσυχία rather than a κίνησις) can never turn out to be a pleasure, even if looks that way—thanks to juxtaposition with a contrastive condition—and even if gets mistaken for one.

Secondly, it is in this way that we can see why Socrates claims

---

<sup>226</sup> In the *Philebus*, pleasure and pain are called ‘changes’ (μεταβολαί) and pleasure is described as a settling down, a calming, or quieting (α κατὰστασις) of the natural state (φύσις), that is to say, it is a restorative process in which a previously disrupted (natural and healthy) state (of calm or quietude) is being repaired.

that something only counts as a pleasure if it is a κίνησις—a claim which, in its turn, helps us understand the second sub-argument. Having laid down the claim that pleasure is a κίνησις, Socrates again trips up Glaucon on the basis of his dialectical commitments, but this time he supplies evidence for his claims. If you believe that pleasure is a restorative process and hence a κίνησις and if you also believe that the intermediate state is a ἡσυχία rather than a restorative process and hence *not* a κίνησις, you cannot *also* believe—on pain of contradicting yourself—that, in some contexts, the calm can turn out to be a pleasure. As before, Socrates reduces Glaucon’s thinking to absurdity by pointing out an inconsistency in his belief set:

1. The affectively neutral state of calm is not a κίνησις but a ἡσυχία.
2. If something is not a κίνησις, it is not a pleasure.
3. The affectively neutral state of calm is not a pleasure. [From 1, 2]
4. Against the backdrop of pain, the affectively neutral state of calm is pleasure. [Assumption]
5. The affectively neutral state of calm is a pleasure. [From 4]
6. Contradiction. [From 3, 5]

With his two sub-arguments in place, both of which lean on the claim that pleasure is a restorative process and thus a κίνησις, Socrates concludes that ‘it cannot be right to think that the absence of pain is pleasant (τὸ μὴ ἀλγεῖν ἢ δὴ ἡγεῖσθαι, 584a4–6).’

Thirdly and lastly, appreciating that pleasures are—at least partially—picked out by their identity as a restorative process can also help us come to grips with Plato’s deeply counter-intuitive proposal

that there are such things as deceptive pleasures or hedonic illusions. Spelling this out in more detail is the project of the next section.

### 3. Deceptive Pleasures or Hedonic Illusions

In part [d] of [T2.5], Socrates offers a substantive account—some kind of error theory—of why agents mistakenly report that they are experiencing pleasure when they actually find themselves in a state of affective neutrality, even though the two are importantly different from each other—as part [a] and [b] had suggested. Whereas Glaucon had cautiously advanced the proposal that these people do in fact experience genuine pleasure—‘at that moment, this, the calm, perhaps turns out to be pleasant (τοῦτο ... τότε ἡδὺ ἴσως καὶ ἀγαπητὸν γίγνεται, ἡσυχία, 583d10–11)’—Socrates rejects his interlocutor’s attempt to defuse these fallibility cases and responds that ‘at that moment, this, the calm, merely *appears* to be pleasant’ without ‘really *being* so (οὐκ ἔστιν τοῦτο ἀλλὰ φαίνεται παρὰ τὸ ἀλγεινὸν ἡδὺ ... τότε ἢ ἡσυχία, 584a7–10).’

Socrates suggests, in other words, that the victims of this hedonic mistake go wrong in their self-ascriptions of pleasure for the simple reason that the calm *seems* to be pleasant without really *being* pleasant.<sup>227</sup> Their pleasure is merely apparent—what presents itself as

---

<sup>227</sup> Although the verb φαίνεσθαι is notoriously ambiguous between a positive and a negative use, the juxtaposition with εἶναι makes it clear that we are dealing here with unreliable, deceptive appearances rather than a manifestation of reality. For a similar antithesis, cf. *Gorgias* 464a3–4 (‘δοκοῦσαν μὲν εὐεξίαν, οὖσαν δ’ οὐ’), *Republic* 596e4 (‘φαινόμενα, οὐ μέντοι ὄντα γέ που τῆ ἀληθεία’), and 599a3 (‘φαντάσματα ἀλλ’ οὐκ ὄντα’). That the distinction between seeming and being is operative here is corroborated by the fact that Socrates dismisses ordinary pleasure as ‘trickery (γοητεία)’ and sets its ‘unreliable, illusory appearances (οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς τούτων τῶν



a pleasure is not the real thing—and this means that we are dealing here with deceptive pleasures or hedonic illusions, situations where a pleasure’s appearance and its reality come radically apart.

From a Platonic perspective, drawing a connection between pleasure and illusion comes naturally—as I intimated before. In the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and especially book 10 of the *Republic*, Socrates links our susceptibility to illusions and our appetitive desire for pleasure and locates them in a cognitively impaired part of the soul.<sup>228</sup> As Moss and others have shown, this lowest part of the soul is stuck at the level of εἰκασία which basically means that it is out of touch with reality. Because it only exercises the lowest level of cognition and is unable to avail itself of the rational power of λογισμός, this psychological part is confined to the use of unreliable images which is to say that it is unable to distinguish mere appearances, imitations, or faint adumbrations from what counts as a manifestation of reality.<sup>229</sup>

As Socrates explains in *Republic* 10, ‘*trompe l’oeil* shadow-painting, conjuring, and other forms of trickery have powers that are little short of magical (ἡ σκιαγραφία ἐπιθεμένη γοητείας οὐδὲν ἀπολείπει, καὶ ἡ θαυματοποιία καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι πολλὰ τοιαῦται μηχαναί, 602d2–4).’ Exploiting the fact that most human beings have the tendency to naively accept appearances without scrutinizing them by means of their rational powers—‘a weakness in our nature (ἡμῶν τῶ παθήματι τῆς φύσεως, 602d2)’—these forms of deception lure us into mistaking misleading appearances for what is real, thus causing ‘error[s] (πλάνην)’ and ‘all kinds of confusions in our souls (παῖσά τις ταραχὴ δῆλη, 602d1–2).’

---

φαντασμάτων, 584a9)’ sharply apart from ‘the truth about’ or ‘the reality of pleasure (ἡδονῆς ἀλήθειαν, 584a9).’

<sup>228</sup> Moss (2006: 517).

<sup>229</sup> For discussion of εἰκασία, see e.g. Lorenz (2006), Moss (2008), and especially Storey (2020).

Although a handful of commentators have appreciated the fact that deception plays a pivotal role in the Defective Pleasure Argument, these scholars typically point to pleasure's tendency to distort our view of the good and mislead us about what matters.<sup>230</sup> On this approach, the 'confusion in our soul' caused by pleasure is an evaluative or ethical error: pleasure tricks us by making things *seem* good which are not *really* good. Moss, for instance, offers the following reading of Plato's take on the connection between pleasure and illusion in the *Republic* which is mainly informed by material coming from book 4 and 10:

Plato concludes in the *Republic* [that] desires for pleasure are very deficient as desires for good. Illusion-bound desires, like those of the appetitive soul, are desires for what *appears* good, but these desires ignore the agent's more reliable thought about what really is good.<sup>231</sup>

On Moss's account, then, the hedonic trickery is located in one's *desires* for pleasure—rather than one's pleasures themselves—and these deceptive desires mislead us about some object beyond ourselves by depicting it as pleasant and thus good (at least for those who are unable to distinguish appearances from reality), although it is in fact not really good. While in the grip of an appetitive desire for pleasure, for instance, a second helping of cake might *seem* good—merely because it *seems* pleasant—although an all-things-considered rational judgment would be able to pierce through this evaluative illusion and tell me that it would be better to abstain (in light of the fact, say, that I am trying to lose weight).

This evaluative reading fits book 4 and book 10 of the *Republic* with no rough edges, but it is clear that book 9's Deceptive Pleasure

---

<sup>230</sup> See e.g. Moss (2006), Clerk-Shaw (2015: 143–170), and Russell (2005: 120–135).

<sup>231</sup> Moss (2006: 532).

Argument is describing another, distinct type of illusion. As I have already argued, Socrates is examining situations where the experiences *themselves* are not what they seem: the point here is not that some pleasures mislead us about what matters, the point is that what passes itself off as a pleasure might, in fact, not be a pleasure at all but merely a deficient imitation or insubstantial simulacrum of what really counts as a pleasure.

Indeed, these cases must constitute the limiting case of hedonic illusions. When people falsely believe they are experiencing pleasure, appearance and reality come apart completely and the victims of this error find themselves behind ‘a falsifying veil’ of illusion which conceals a significant part of their world.<sup>232</sup> It is not just the case that they are deceived about the evaluative status, the size, the intensity, or the intentional object of their pleasure—types of hedonic illusion that receive extensive discussion elsewhere in the Platonic corpus—they are deeply mistaken about their very own affective make-up and the very affective state they take themselves to be in. Although they think they are in a state of pleasure, they actually find themselves in a state of calm which gets mistaken for a state of pleasure thanks to a contrast effect with a state of pain. That is to say, a non-pleasure successfully wears the mask of pleasure and manages to get itself mistaken for one.<sup>233</sup>

To see how the restorative model of pleasure I identified above can elucidate Plato’s proposal that a pleasure’s reality and its appearance can come apart in this radical way, we might start by recalling that Glaucon and most modern infallibilist critics reject

---

<sup>232</sup> Murdoch (1972: 84).

<sup>233</sup> This of course suggests that there is a trivial sense in which my reading also counts as evaluative: if we grant that it is good to experience pleasure and that it is indifferent to experience neither pleasure nor pain, cases where affective neutrality deceptively appears to be pleasant also trick us about what matters.

hedonic fallibilism on the grounds that pleasure is nothing more than a chunk of seeming picked out by its immediate phenomenological quality to which we have privileged, infallible epistemic access.<sup>234</sup>

On the view lurking in the background of the Deceptive Pleasure Argument, in sharp contrast, there is more to pleasure than meets the introspective eye: Plato suggests that pleasure is more than a feeling and not just a blind surge affect whose reality is exhausted by its immediate felt quality. More precisely, the argument seems to treat pleasure as a complex consisting of two aspects or ‘faces’: there is an internal, subjective, or phenomenal face—the introspectively available features of a pleasure—and there is an external, objective face—the underlying restorative process of having one’s needs fulfilled. Both of these conditions—both faces of pleasure—state different, individually necessary, and perhaps jointly sufficient conditions of pleasure.<sup>235</sup>

Crucially, though, the internal aspect—the felt quality or what Socrates calls the ‘appearance’ or φάντασμα—is not sufficient for something to count as a genuine pleasure. In the absence of an underlying restorative process—what I called the external face—we are merely dealing with a deceptive, illusory simulacrum of pleasure which is nothing more than a trick of the mind and a deficient

---

<sup>234</sup> As D. Lewis (1980: 222) puts it, ‘a theory of what it is for a state to be a pain is inescapably a theory of what it is like to be in that state, of the phenomenal character of that state.’ And according to Kripke (1980: 153), ‘pain ... is not picked out by one of its accidental properties; rather it is picked out by its immediate phenomenological quality.’

<sup>235</sup> In a passage in the *Philebus* (37a1–10), which I will discuss in more depth in chapter 3, Socrates makes a similar yet slightly different point about the nature of pleasure when he suggests that pleasure is a unitary complex consisting of (i) the *act* of taking pleasure (ἡδεσθαι) (the internal face) and (ii) the *content* of that act or that in which one takes pleasure (τό γε ὃ τὸ ἡδόμενον ἡδεται) (e.g. the fact that I won the lottery) (the external face).

imitation of the real thing. For an affective experience to count as a real pleasure instead, something over and beyond an experience's subjective, raw feel needs to obtain.

More precisely speaking, the appearance itself has to be properly brought about by some kind of underlying restorative process. In order for us to experience genuine pleasure rather than a flimsy, insubstantial semblance of pleasure, it must not just *feel* as if our needs are being met—this is the internal face of pleasure which explains the intuitions of the infallibilist—our needs must also really *be* met—this is the external face of pleasure and Plato's important addition to the infallibilist's phenomenal model of pleasure.

So on the Platonic assumption that pleasure is a veridical perception of a restorative process of return to some healthy, natural, harmonious state, it follows that something only counts as a pleasure if it is a veridical appearance of having one's needs met. In the absence of the underlying process of having one's needs met and being restored to a homeostatic state, the pleasure we think we are experiencing is actually a defective and deceptive simulacrum of the real thing.

This suggests that cases of hedonic illusion are very similar to cases of perceptual illusion where, roughly speaking, some *x* appears other than it really is.<sup>236</sup> Just like a straight stick might look bent while

---

<sup>236</sup> That this is the right way of understanding this bit of text is corroborated by the fact that Plato compares these defective and deceptive pleasures with σκιαγραφία paintings. Σκιαγραφία—literally 'shadow-painting'—was an ancient painting technique, developed by Apollodorus in the last quarter of the fifth century BC, which was able to create a realistic effect of depth and three-dimensionality by juxtaposing contrasting colors comparable to contemporary *trompe l'oeil* or *chiaroscuro*. Cf. Brill's *Der Neue Pauly* (s.v.), Keuls (1975), and Keuls (1978: chapter 4). This illusionist painting technique—as Plato points out in book 10—exploits the inferior part of our nature and our cognitive and sensory blind spots by juxtaposing different shades of color to create an illusion of depth and three-dimensionality. Similarly, in the hedonic case, the

submerged in water and just like something concave might look convex—to use Plato’s own examples (602c10–d1)—the affectively indifferent calm might appear other than it really is: if it gets juxtaposed with pain, it seems to be pleasant or looks like a pleasure, although it is not.

In the hedonic case, the juxtaposition of an affectively negative state of pain and an affectively indifferent state of calm creates the illusion of there really being an underlying restorative process and thus an affectively positive state of pleasure, although, in reality, there is just the neutral state of psychological calm temporarily masquerading as pleasure and tricking its victims into self-ascribing a pleasure that is not really there. The analogy with perceptual illusion elucidates Plato’s thinking. The mere fact that a stick *looks* bent while submerged in water does not mean it really *is* bent, the mere fact that lukewarm water *feels* cold when contrasted with hot water does not mean it really *is* cold, and the mere fact that—in the Checker shadow illusion—two tiles of the exact same darkness *seem* to be of different color when they are partly shadowed by another object does not mean they really *are* of a different color. In the same way, or so Plato argues, the mere fact that the state of calm *seems* pleasant when juxtaposed with pain does not mean it really *is* pleasant.

Note that Plato can only claim this, as I have argued, because he believes that a pleasure is more than a feeling. In addition to the feeling aspect, an underlying restorative process which guarantees that our needs are really met is required: in the absence of such an objective correlate out there in the world, one can go wrong in self-

---

juxtaposition of mental states—pain and painlessness, to be precise—exploits the same inferior part of our mind and exploits our affective blind spots to create an illusion of pleasure. In both cases, the deceptive simulacrum seems to be superficial and lacks depth. As Socrates’s own metaphor has it (587d6), deceptive pleasures are like a two-dimensional projection of a solid, three-dimensional object.

ascribing a pleasure—merely in virtue of the fact that there is a felt appearance as of there being such an underlying restorative process.

However, as Socrates concludes in part [d], these hedonic appearances are misleading: they are unreliable and untrustworthy, they do not track the truth about pleasure, and they involve some kind of trickery.<sup>237</sup> In cases of hedonic fallibility, the appearance is there—it strikes the subject as if they are being restored, there is something it is like to experience a misleading pleasure, it really feels good—although the actual restorative process is lacking and that is why we are dealing with a deceptive rather than a truthful pleasure.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Deceptive Pleasure Argument in book 9 of Plato's *Republic* is often dismissed scornfully. One of the argument's most problematic features is its defence of hedonic fallibilism—the counter-intuitive thesis that we can go wrong in our immediate self-ascriptions of pleasure. Because pleasures are neither more nor less than a bit of felt experience, Plato's detractors argue, it is hard to see how the introspectively based belief that I am currently experiencing pleasure could be mistaken.

Driven by considerations of this sort, a large group of interpretations rejects this Platonic argument out of hand—even though it is meant to constitute the 'greatest and most decisive' strike against Thrasymachus's project—whereas another group of interpretations tries to save Plato from himself by developing textually ungrounded readings on which the argument is defending an entirely

---

<sup>237</sup> Dickie (2001: 44) notes that Plato often uses the analogy of γοητεία (magic, trickery, witchcraft) to describe 'the creation of illusion by making objects appear to be present that are not really there.'

different yet more palatable thesis.

In this chapter, I have tried to find an alternative interpretation. The reading I have put forward here is based on the most natural and most straightforward reading of the text but it also strives to *make sense* of Plato's hedonic fallibilism. The key to unlocking this puzzling position, I have suggested, lies in appreciating the fact that Plato holds that pleasures are not exhausted by their phenomenology. For something to count as a pleasure, it takes something over and above and external to the feeling of the relevant experience to turn that experience into a genuine pleasure. More precisely speaking, in addition to the phenomenal aspect—the pleasurable feel of the experience—it takes an underlying restorative process of having one of our needs fulfilled. By tricking us into adopting the false belief that our needs are met when this not really the case, these deceptive pleasures or hedonic illusions misinform us about some way the world really is and this is what makes them defective, deceptive, merely apparent, or what Plato calls false or untrue.

This theory of pleasure sheds light on the idea that there are such things as deceptive pleasures. Because any representation can misrepresent and any appearance can fail to latch onto reality, Plato seems to believe that there is nothing crazy or counter-intuitive about the idea that there can be errors in our hedonic tone. When not brought about in the usual way—that is, by a genuine underlying restorative process in which one of our needs is satisfied—our so-called pleasures are not what they pretend to be.

If there is the felt appearance of having one's needs fulfilled without the underlying restorative process, we are dealing with a case of deceptive pleasure or hedonic illusion akin to perceptual illusion. It *seems* as if we are experiencing pleasure—as if we undergo some relative improvement—although we are not. In such a situation, as Plato has it, our putative pleasure is a mere trick, εἴδωλον, or *trompe*



*l'oeil* painting: an insubstantial, deficient, specious, false simulacrum of the real deal which misinform us about some way the world really is.<sup>238</sup> Importantly, the impoverished status of these pseudo-pleasures is not introspectively accessible: like any other illusion, a deceptive pleasure cannot be directly seen for what it is—and this adds to the tragic foolishness of those who are taken in by these false and deceptive pleasures.<sup>239</sup>

This interpretive option is attractive and deserves more scholarly attention than it has received. If my reading gets things right, Plato's hedonic fallibilism is not just more intelligible and more cogent than usually thought, it also fits seamlessly into the over-arching strategy of the dialogue as a whole. For unlike the first demonstration of *Republic* 9, and like the arguments of book 1,<sup>240</sup> the Deceptive Pleasure Argument constitutes an immanent critique of the Thrasymachus's project.<sup>241</sup> Like 'the majority' of people—who treat their pleasures as 'important things (μεγάλων τινῶν)' because they believe that without pleasure one is 'hardly living at all (οὐδὲ ζῶντες),' let alone 'living well (εὖ ζῶντες, 329a7–8)'—Thrasymachus seems at least implicitly driven by a tacit commitment to hedonism.<sup>242</sup>

With its defence of hedonic fallibility, the argument meets Thrasymachus on his own ground: it shows that the good-making features of his favourite, pleonectic, tyrannical way of life—its

---

<sup>238</sup> My thinking here is indebted to Schroeder (2001) and Schroeder (2007).

<sup>239</sup> This point is well made by Whiting (2014: 36).

<sup>240</sup> Nawar (2018).

<sup>241</sup> For the plausible suggestion that the third demonstration of book 9 is supposed to bite with an (implicit) hedonist like Thrasymachus, see e.g. Frede (1985: 157–58), Gosling and Taylor (1982: 101), and White (1979: 233–34).

<sup>242</sup> For an excellent defence of the idea that Socrates's interlocutors are attracted to the tyrannical way of life because of their (implicit) hedonism, see Moss (2005). Johnstone (2015) defends the related claim that Plato's tyrant is primarily concerned with the pursuit of bodily pleasure.

pleasures—are not what they seem. Crudely speaking, because Thrasymachus mainly seems to care about pleasure, he should be bothered by the possibility that his pleasures are merely apparent rather than genuine.<sup>243</sup>

Note that even if Thrasymachus and other implicit or explicit hedonists remain unmoved by this argument—for instance, because they refuse to accept the idea that pleasures are picked out by an underlying restorative process rather than the phenomenal quality of the experience—the later parts of *Republic 9* will tighten the screw. There, in a dense and vexed passage, Plato seemingly suggests that the φρόνιμος's ecstatic pleasures of 'the soul itself by itself (τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡδονὴν αὐτῆς καθ' αὐτήν, 485d11)' are more pleasant—and thus phenomenally different—from non-ideal pleasures. When the soul transcends the gravitational field of the material plane to cognize the Forms, 'getting near what really is and having intercourse with it (πλησιάσας καὶ μιγείς τῷ ὄντι ὄντως 490b4–5),' this somehow involves a supreme restoration and hence a supreme pleasure—no less than 729 times more pleasant than the sketchy pleasures of ordinary people and tyrants.

That the interpretation I defend here is in a position to explain why Socrates calls the argument the 'strongest and most decisive' of book 9's attempts to defuse Thrasymachus's challenge is an important second benefit of my reading, besides the fact that it can respect the text as it stands. There is a third and final advantage. On the reading defended here, *Republic 9* develops a historically influential idea that

---

<sup>243</sup> Interestingly, this suggests that the Deceptive Pleasure Argument is a mirror image of the jellyfish *elenchus* from the *Philebus*: in that argument, Socrates makes trouble for hedonism by forcing his interlocutor to admit that it would be bad to have a pleasure without the higher-order, self-ascribing belief *that* one is experiencing pleasure; here, Socrates pursues a reverse strategy by arguing that it would be bad to have the belief *that* one is experiencing pleasure without the underlying pleasure.

is not just interesting but also worth taking seriously. Plato is basically suggesting that our pleasures are a form of openness to the world: when things go well—when our pleasures are true rather than false, as Plato would have it—they do not cast a veil between us and reality but supply us with a fragment of the world.<sup>244</sup> Indeed, I believe we are dealing here with the first attempt in Western philosophy to formulate the powerful idea that, like our beliefs, our pleasures are charged with ‘the critical task of getting things right.’<sup>245</sup>

---

<sup>244</sup> See McDowell (1994: 111), de Sousa (1987), and Tappolet (2016: 29) for contemporary iterations of a similar idea.

<sup>245</sup> Following Evans (2008-a: 123), who detects this proposal in Plato’s *Philebus*. Portions of this chapter, in different stages of development, have been presented in Oxford (*Oxford Graduate Conference*) (special thanks to Roger Crisp for his astute comments and further discussion), Austin, Texas (online) (*Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop*), Erlangen-Nuremburg (online) (*Lust und Unlust in der antiken Philosophie*) (special thanks to Dorothea Frede who kindly offered to read a whole draft of this chapter), and at two occasions in Groningen. I thank the audiences at these different occasions for their valuable input.

### 3. 'The Greatest Impostor': Hedonic Cognitivism, Hedonic Fallibilism, and Deceptive Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus* (36c3–41a4)

In the middle of the *Philebus* (36c3–51a1), the dialogue in which Plato presents his final and most developed thoughts on the subject of the nature and value of pleasure and its place in a good life, Plato's Socrates 'stirs up a weighty controversy (λόγον οὐ πάνυ μικρόν, 36d3–4)'<sup>246</sup> by suggesting that pleasures can be ἀληθής (true, real) and ψευδής (false, unreal, deceptive). Such falsity, he continues, comes in four types of which the first type will concern us here—the pleasures that are false in the same, literal, sense in which our beliefs can be false because they fail to represent the world correctly.<sup>247</sup>

Already in antiquity, Plato's readers were perplexed, if not annoyed by this talk of false pleasure. Aristotle's successor in the Peripatetic school, Theophrastus, argued that 'if there is such a thing as false pleasure, there will be pleasure that is not pleasure' and concluded that all pleasures are true,<sup>248</sup> Gallop complained that Plato's doctrine of false pleasure is so muddled that it 'annually defeats my

---

<sup>246</sup> Throughout this chapter, references are to the *Philebus* (unless otherwise noted) and I more or less follow Frede's (1993) translation of the Greek provided by Burnet (1903) with small modifications here and there.

<sup>247</sup> From here on, I will simply refer to this first type of false pleasures as false pleasure. The other false pleasures under discussion are, in order of appearance, pleasures that are false because they seem larger or more intense than they really are (41b4–42c4); pleasures that are false because they are in fact neutral states pretending to be pleasures (42c5–44d6); and—finally—pleasures that are false because they are not pure but intimately mixed up with pain (44d7–50e4). For a neat and accessible overview, see e.g. Frede (1992); for an attempt to bring some order in these different types of falsity, see Fletcher (2018-b) and Strohl (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>248</sup> Theophrastus fragment 85 (Wimmer) cited by Gallop (1960: 331).

powers of exposition,<sup>249</sup> and Gosling sparked an enormous debate when he accused Plato of the confusing different senses of truth and falsity or ‘rank equivocation.’<sup>250</sup>

To be sure, Plato’s defence of the possibility of false pleasures or hedonic mistakes is highly puzzling. It is especially unclear, firstly, how a private and subjective mental state like pleasure—arguably nothing more than a bit of feeling—could be false in precisely the same way in which a belief can be false. Untutored intuition, here represented by Protarchus who takes up Philebus’s unadulterated hedonism, resists this proposal for the simple reason that, unlike representational states (such as beliefs or perceptions), an affective state does not constitute an experience ‘in which the world reveals itself to us’ as McDowell puts it.<sup>251</sup> Instead, the thought goes, pleasure belongs to the phenomenal realm to which we have infallible or at least privileged access.

It is also unclear, secondly, what role Plato’s defence of hedonic fallibilism plays in the overall economy of the *Philebus*. What is the connection, one might ask, between the possibility of hedonic mistakes or false pleasures and Socrates’s and Protarchus’s attempt to discover some ‘state and condition of the soul . . . that can give all human beings a happy life (ἔξιν ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσιν ... τὴν δυναμένην ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι τὸν βίον εὐδαίμονα παρέχειν, 11d4–6)?’

My main aim in this chapter is to untangle—or at least elucidate—these puzzles, especially the first. In brief, I am going to argue that Plato’s defence of hedonic fallibilism is predicated upon a

---

<sup>249</sup> Gallop (1960: 338).

<sup>250</sup> See Gosling (1959) and Gosling (1975). For a rejoinder, see Fletcher (2018-b) and Szaif (2021: 136).

<sup>251</sup> McDowell (1998: 330).

position I call hedonic cognitivism.<sup>252</sup> On this theory of pleasure, hedonic states are more than blind surges of affect, raw sensations, or mere feelings. Put bluntly, Plato argues that pleasure is a way of taking the world to be a certain way. If pleasure is in the business of representing reality, though, it straightforwardly follows that a pleasure can be true or false: like other representational attitudes, a pleasure is true if its content represents some way the world really is and it is false if its content *mis*represents some way the world really is.

With this discussion of the first puzzle in place, I turn to the second puzzle and explain how the possibility of false pleasure bears on the dialogue's structuring question—specifically focusing on Socrates's mysterious claim that false pleasures are 'ridiculous imitations (μεμμημέναι τὰς ἀληθεῖς ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιότερα, 40c5)' of true pleasure. False pleasure, I argue, is deceptive pleasure: the subject of the false pleasure is in the grip of a misrepresentation of the world and thus out of contact with reality even though this cannot be appreciated from an inside perspective because, like a false belief, a misleading pleasure necessarily represents its content as true.

This chapter is organized in the following way. Having briefly introduced the *Philebus* (section 1), I offer a close examination of Plato's argument for false pleasure which I dub the Fallibilism Argument and which runs from 36c3–41a4 (section 2). This argument, I suggest, is best read as a dialectical back and forth between Socrates and Protarchus in which they defend their diametrically opposed takes on pleasure. I contend that, throughout the argument, Socrates finetunes his hedonic fallibilism, as well as the underlying theory of pleasure, in response to Protarchus' infallibilist objections.

---

<sup>252</sup> Hedonic cognitivism should be distinguished from a weaker thesis concerning the connection between pleasure and cognition: the claim—readily accepted by Protarchus—that pleasure is often accompanied by, or associated with, a (potentially false) belief.

In the first move—the First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (37a1–e7)—Socrates more or less stipulates that, like beliefs (δόξαι), pleasures have representational content in virtue of which they can be evaluated in terms of truth, accuracy, or correctness. When Protarchus resists this argument by claiming that pleasure is immune to error, Socrates surprisingly enough starts to defend a weaker theory than his original hedonic cognitivism. On this weaker theory, our pleasures have (derivative) semantic value because they are *accompanied by* or *associated with* true or false beliefs.

When Protarchus resists this proposal by pointing out that, in this case, it is merely the *belief* that is false and not the pleasure, Socrates returns to his stronger line of argumentation and claims that there is a tighter connection between the cognitive element and the pleasure. This line of argumentation—the Second Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (38b6–41a4)—is best understood, I argue, as a more careful attempt to explicate what the earlier defence of hedonic cognitivism had left implicit.

More specifically, the argument explains where pleasures derive their content from. Its basic suggestion is that pleasures can be false because they are *constituted by* representational or cognitive elements. Drawing on an elaborate metaphor of the human psyche—and mainly focusing on future-oriented, anticipatory pleasures in whose case it is clear that representational elements play a crucial role—Socrates convinces Protarchus that pleasures are more than mere bits of experience: they centrally involve representations or cognitions (φαντάσματα based on δόξαι) of some state of the world. Since any representation can misfire, it follows that pleasures can be true (if they represent the world correctly) or false (if they misrepresent the world).

In section 3, I turn to a thorny issue and seek to say more about the precise nature of this falsity—situations, that is, where pleasure

misrepresents—building on extant scholarship. Even if we grant Socrates that a pleasure can be false thanks to its false content, what is it that gets misrepresented by such false pleasure? Much of the existing literature on this thorny issue can be divided into descriptive and evaluative readings. According to the descriptive or factual interpretation, a pleasure taken in some descriptive state of affairs *p* is false if *p* is not the case; according to the evaluative or ethical reading, by contrast, a pleasure taken in *p* is false because one considers *p* to be good (or otherwise positively evaluatively charged), although *p* is *not* good (or otherwise negatively evaluatively charged).

I resist this stark dichotomy for a couple of reasons. For one, it strikes me that descriptive and the evaluative readings share an important common ground that is often overlooked or obscured in the literature.<sup>253</sup> In both cases, I maintain, false pleasure is simply a matter of *misrepresentation*: whenever I experience false pleasure, no matter whether we construe this falsity descriptively or evaluatively, there is mismatch between my representation of the world and how that world actually is. Being in the grip of false pleasure is always a matter, then, of being out of contact with reality.

For another, I believe there is good reason to believe that, like other emotions or passions (πάθη), pleasure involves both a factual or descriptive and an evaluative or ethical cognitive element. What the interpretive dichotomy misses is that any pleasure necessarily involves a factual belief that picks out an object or state of affairs in the world and an evaluative belief—an appraisal or construal, as psychologists call it—that ascribes positive value to it. Without these two beliefs, a pleasure cannot get off the ground.

With this account in place, I move to section 4 where I draw some conclusions and argue that this more complex, more

---

<sup>253</sup> E.g. by Evans (2008-a) and by most evaluative readings which have been designed in conscious opposition to the traditional factual reading.



sophisticated picture of pleasure fits neatly into the overall aim of the *Philebus* and is intimately connected with the attempt to discover what a good life looks like—a connection that has received surprising little attention in the literature. Plato’s hedonic cognitivism is not just a perfect manifestation of one of the central findings of the *Philebus*—the idea that cognizance plays a necessary role in any aspect of a life well lived, including pleasure—it also makes trouble for the unmitigated hedonism of Protarchus and Philebus in a variety of ways.

### 1. The Philebus, Pleasure, and the Authority of the Soul

In the *Philebus*, Socrates and the hedonist Protarchus set themselves the task of ‘trying to prove some possession or state of the soul to be the one that renders life happy for human beings (ἔξιν ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσιν ... τὴν δυναμένην ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι τὸν βίον εὐδαίμονα παρέχειν, 11d4–6).’ While Protarchus takes pleasure (ἡδονή), delight (τέρψις), or enjoyment (τὸ χαίρειν) to be the state of the soul they are looking for, Socrates opts for knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), reason (νοῦς), or intelligence (φρόνησις).

Upon closer scrutiny, however, Socrates and Protarchus discover that they are both wrong: neither the life of pleasure nor the life of knowledge but rather the mixed life in which the two are combined turns out to be the good life (20b1–23b4). With this reoriented understanding of what makes for a good life, the guiding question of the dialogue as a whole shifts significantly too: no longer are Socrates and Protarchus interested in either pleasure or knowledge, what drives them from here on is the attempt to find out which of the two is responsible for the fact that the mixed life counts as the good life.

It is obvious, though, that before one can compare the influence

of two ingredients on the overall quality of a mixture, one should first know what these ingredients precisely are and what conditions or circumstances bring them about. To find this out, Socrates thinks they need ‘a satisfactory examination’ (ικανῶς βασανίσαι) of especially pleasure, and to develop such a satisfactory examination, in turn, they need to ‘find out in what kind of thing each of them resides and what kind of condition makes them come to be when they do (ἐν ᾧ τέ ἐστιν ἐκάτερον αὐτοῖν καὶ διὰ τί πάθος γίγνεσθον ὅποταν γίγνησθον, 31b2–5).’

A promising way to understand Socrates’s strategy here is to assume that he aims to establish ‘the authority of the soul’ (to borrow Harte’s felicitous phrase) in all affective matters.<sup>254</sup> The basic point, in other words, is that our affective experiences cannot be understood in way independent from cognizance and other mental activities or operations.<sup>255</sup> Even raw physical pleasures—the pleasure of getting a massage, for instance, or the pleasure of drinking cold water on a hot summer day—only count as pleasures because they enter conscious awareness and get picked up on by our psyche. In an important way, then, there are strictly speaking no such things as purely bodily pleasures: all pleasures heavily depend on the mind.

What is more, a second type of pleasure is solely psychological or mental. These anticipatory pleasures, as they are often called, turn out to be ‘a different kind of pleasure (ἕτερον εἶδος)’ and they are intimately connected with ‘the anticipation that the soul experiences by itself without the body (τὸ χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς διὰ προσδοκίας γιγνόμενον, 32c3–5).’ Think for instance of the pleasure I feel *right now* because I am fantasizing about next week when, if all goes well, I will be enjoying a glass of slightly cooled pinot noir while sitting in the warm French sun.

---

<sup>254</sup> Harte (2014).

<sup>255</sup> See e.g. Harte (2014) and J. E. Butler (2007).

To finetune his analysis of this type of pleasure, which plays an essential role in his subsequent defence of the possibility of false pleasure, Socrates offers a more careful examination of the psychology undergirding our affective experiences in which he claims that especially memory and desire play a pivotal role in the genesis of such anticipatory pleasures. When we are in a state of lack, such as being hungry, our mind is aware of this lack and draws on memories of past events to have us realise that there is a state opposed to being hungry. This realization, in turn, leads to a desire for this opposite state. As Socrates has it, ‘every living creature always strives towards the opposite of its own experience (τοις ἐκείνου παθήμασιν ἐναντίαν ἀεὶ παντὸς ζῶου μηνύει τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν, 35c9–10).’

After this excursus into the psychology underlying our affective experiences, the pleasures of anticipation enter the scene again. An ‘empty’ person (κενούμενος), as Socrates formulates it at 36b4–6, sometimes ‘hopes or expects’ that he will be ‘filled (ἐν ἐλπίδι τοῦ πληρωθήσεσθαι)’ in the near future. When this happens, this person takes pleasure in the anticipation of being filled again: he or she enjoys the idea of future enjoyment or takes pleasure in the idea of prospective pleasure.

## 2. The Hedonic Fallibilism Argument

At this point, Socrates suddenly and rather unexpectedly introduces the notion of *falsity*: he explicitly says that he wants to make use of their ‘examination of those affections for a particular purpose (ταύτη δὴ τῇ σκέψει τούτων τῶν παθημάτων τόδε χρῆσώμεθα, 36c)’—namely to see whether the concept of falsity can be applied to

pleasures.<sup>256</sup> As the passage continues:

[T3.1] [Socrates] Shall we say that those pleasures and pains (ταύτας τὰς λύπας τε καὶ ἡδονὰς) are true (ἀληθεῖς) or false (ψευδεῖς), or that some are true and others not so (τὰς μὲν τινὰς ἀληθεῖς, τὰς δ' οὐ)?

[Protarchus] But, Socrates, how can there be false pleasures or pains (πῶς ... ἂν εἶεν ψευδεῖς ἡδοναὶ ἢ λύπαι)?

[S.] But, Protarchus, how can there be true and false fears (φόβοι), or true and false expectations (προσδοκίαι), or true and false beliefs (δόξαι)?

[P.] Beliefs (δόξας) I would grant you, but not the rest.

[S.] What? I am afraid we are starting a very considerable discussion (λόγον οὐ πάνυ μικρόν).

[P.] You are right. (36c6–d5)

There are, I think, a few important things in this passage that are worth emphasizing. As Gosling and Taylor have put it, 'a major source of obscurity about this topic is, precisely, what the topic is.'<sup>257</sup> It is not clear, for instance, what the scope of Socrates's claim is, how we should unpack the notion of falsity Socrates is working with here, or what Protarchus is suggesting when he pushes back against the bold proposal that pleasures and pains can be false.

To answer these and other questions, I think it pays off to focus on Protarchus's ultimate conversion to the thesis that pleasures can be false. What happens in the handful of Stephanus pages which make up the Fallibilism Argument that brings Protarchus to concede at 40b5 and 40c7 that false pleasures do indeed exist, although at 36c8–9, 36e9–10, and 37e12–38a2 he had vehemently disagreed with Socrates's

---

<sup>256</sup> Following Whiting (2014: 24), we can say—as a rough first pass—that a pleasure is false just in case it misleads us about some way the world really is.

<sup>257</sup> Gosling and Taylor (1982: 429).

contention that there are false pleasures?<sup>258</sup>

If we look at the exchange between Socrates and Protarchus from 36c3 up to 41a4, I think we can discern three different stages in all three of which there is a dialectical back and forth between Protarchus's infallibilism and Socrates's fallibilism. [1a] When Socrates broaches the notion of true and false pleasures, Protarchus presents and defends a first iteration of his hedonic infallibilism or what I will call his Immunity To Error Thesis. [1b] In response to Protarchus's infallibilism, Socrates offers an argument from analogy which I will call his First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument. This argument more or less stipulates that, like δόξα, pleasure has content. Seeing as a δόξα can be true or false in virtue of its content, it follows that a pleasure can be true or false too in virtue of its content. It is not the case, in other words, that 'pleasures are simply what they are (ἡδονὴ δὲ καὶ λύπη μόνον ἄπερ ἐστὶ, 37c5)': they can be evaluated in terms of truth, correctness, rightness, properness, or accurateness.

[2a] Protarchus pushes back again and offers a slightly different formulation of his infallibilism which claims that 'pleasure cannot be mistaken (οὐχ οἷόν τε, εἴπερ ἀμαρτήσεται γέ ἡδονή, 37e8–9).' [2b] Mysteriously enough, Socrates suddenly weakens his proposal to get Protarchus on his side: instead of arguing that pleasures have truth-evaluable content, as he did before, he now claims that our pleasures are often accompanied by beliefs with truth-evaluable (or false) content.

[3a] When confronted with yet another iteration of Protarchus's Immunity To Error Thesis ('in [Socrates's alleged false pleasure case] the belief is false, no one would dream of calling the pleasure false (τὴν μὲν δόξαν γέ ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ καὶ τότε λέγομεν

---

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Guthrie (1978: 219): '[A]t 36d and 38a Protarchus denies the existence of false pleasures. At 40b–c he admits it. So Socrates must have said something in between to make him change his mind.'

ψευδῆ, τὴν δ' ἡδονὴν αὐτὴν οὐδεὶς ἄν ποτε προσείποι ψευδῆ, 37e12–38a2), [3b] Socrates's Second Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (38b6–41a4) returns to the stronger proposal driving the First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (37a1–e7) and strengthens it. To do so, Socrates fleshes out his earlier suggestion that pleasures have content (instead of merely stipulating it) and focuses on future-oriented pleasure (which makes it easier to see that we enjoy our representations of the world rather than the world itself). [3c] Protarchus finally gives up his immunity to error thesis and agrees with Socrates that 'there are false pleasures in human souls (εἰσὶν ... ψευδεῖς ἐν ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχαῖς ἡδοναί, 40c4–6).' These stages and their central questions are best discussed in turn.

## 2.1 Protarchus's Immunity To Error Thesis

Let us start with Protarchus' first formulation of his Immunity To Error Thesis, to be found in [T3.1]. Although Protarchus initially denies that 'those pleasures and pains' (ταύτας τὰς λύπας τε καὶ ἡδονὰς)—namely the anticipatory pleasures and pains they have just been talking about—can be false, a little later his denial seems to become a more sweeping denial of false pleasures and pains *as such* or *in general*.<sup>259</sup>

There are two ways of unpacking his denial of false pleasures. On a first construal, Protarchus's claim is that there are no true or false pleasures. Put in another way, he is denying, on this reading, that affective states are *truth-apt*. On an alternative construal, he is claiming that all pleasures are true or that there are no false pleasures. At least

---

<sup>259</sup> Cf. the exchange between him and Socrates at 36e2–4 ('What is your view? Are there not false pleasures as well as true ones? But how could there be?') and 40d7–10.

since Kenny,<sup>260</sup> it has been recognized that Protarchus's rejection of false pleasure does not imply the rejection that pleasure can be truth-apt: from the start it is clear that Protarchus has no qualms about pleasures being called *true*, he only resists their being called *false*.

Initial, albeit non-conclusive evidence can be found in [T3.1] where Protarchus only wonders how there could be false pleasures and pains.<sup>261</sup> Additional evidence can be distilled from the following exchange:

[T3.2] [Socrates] [W]hat we have to question is how it is that belief (δόξα) is usually either true or false (ψευδής τε καὶ ἀληθής), while pleasure admits only truth (τὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς μόνον ἀληθές), even though in both cases one is equally really believing and taking pleasure (δοξάζειν ὄντως καὶ χαίρειν ἀμφοτέρω ὁμοίως εἴληχεν).

[Protarchus] We have to question that. (37b5–9)

Kenny seems right, then, to conclude that '[n]owhere is [Protarchus] made to deny that pleasures can be true; nowhere does he suggest that pleasure has no true-false poles at all.'<sup>262</sup>

Even after some pressure from Socrates—who introduces extreme circumstances like dreams, madness, and delusions to convince Protarchus' of the possibility of false pleasures—Protarchus holds his ground, asks the rhetorical question 'how could pleasures be false (πῶς γὰρ ἄν)?', and retorts that 'we all hold the view that all these things are so (πάνθ' οὕτω ταῦτα ἔχειν πάντες ὑπειλήφαμεν), Socrates (36e9–10).' Here, then, is an attempt to capture the first

---

<sup>260</sup> Kenny (1960: 47); cf. Wolfsdorf (unpublished manuscript: 3).

<sup>261</sup> Cf. 38a2 where Protarchus merely denies that pleasures can be false.

<sup>262</sup> Kenny (1960: 47). He continues: 'To us it may seem clear that if it does not make sense to call something false, it does not make sense to call it true either [...], but perhaps such things were not always so clear.'

## iteration of Protarchus's Immunity To Error Thesis:

All pleasures are true; there are no false pleasures.

Although the literature contains more than one way of understanding this thesis and Protarchus's reasons for holding it,<sup>263</sup> one promising way to make sense of it that I will broadly follow here is to say that Protarchus is committed to something like a Cartesian transparency thesis or the idea that our passions or emotions 'are so close and internal to our soul that it is impossible that it should feel them without their truly being as it feels them.'<sup>264</sup> All pleasures are true—in the sense that we cannot be in doubt, ignorance, or error about them—simply because we have the privilege of first-person, immediate access to mental states like pleasure and pain.<sup>265</sup>

---

<sup>263</sup> For good discussion, see Wolfsdorf (unpublished manuscript). Some other options include: Protarchus believes that a pleasure is true insofar as that in which it is taken is truly pleasant and a thing being truly pleasant is a function of one's finding it so (Harte); Protarchus's commitment to the Immunity To Error Thesis is more or less obscure (Gosling and Taylor); Protarchus thinks (just like Theophrastus) that there are no non-genuine pleasures (Kenny); Protarchus resists the view that pleasure can be false because if he accepts this view, he must concede to Socrates that some pleasures are not good (Frede); Protarchus is a 'Protagorean hedonist' who believes—as Mooradian (1996: 94) puts it—that 'pleasure cannot be false because it is a kind of αἴσθησις and αἴσθησις is always correct in relation to its objects' (Mooradian and Warren).

<sup>264</sup> Descartes, *Les passions de l'âme*, article 26. In his commentary on the *Philebus*, Delcomminette treats self-ascription of pleasure as a kind of Cartesian *cogito*: 'Ne touchons-nous pas ici à l'évidence ultime, celle du *cogito* lui-même?'

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Frede (1997: 245): 'Auch mit seinem nächsten Vorschlag, man könne doch im Traum oder im Wahnsinn fälschlich meinen, Lust oder Unlust zu empfinden, ist Sokrates nicht erfolgreicher. Protarchos bestreitet, daß es sich dabei um 'falsche' Lust oder Unlust handelt. Er scheint davon auszugehen, daß man sich über seine Gefühle gar nicht im Irrtum befinden kann.'



When talking about subjective experiences, the thought goes, we have as it were reached rock bottom with regard to justification — there is no point in denying honest, immediate self-reports about the nature of our affective (and other subjective) experiences.<sup>266</sup> This, in its turn, might have to do with the fact that there is no appearance reality when it comes to pleasure: the essence of pleasure consists in being felt. As Socrates reformulates Protarchus’s claim, pleasures (and pains) are ‘simply what they are (ἡδονὴ δὲ καὶ λύπη μόνον ἄπερ ἔστί, 37c5).’

This construal of Protarchus’s commitment to the Immunity To Error Thesis ties in neatly with the (admittedly speculative) assumption that Plato might have used Philebus and Protarchus—the first of whom is almost certainly a literary fiction—to give voice to hedonistic ideas that were fashionable in Plato’s lifetime in the Cyrenaic school.<sup>267</sup> The Cyrenaics were famous for defending a radically subjectivist epistemology, according to which sensible qualities and sensible objects are nothing but motions or modifications of our consciousness (πάθη). They also believed that these modifications of consciousness are either painful, pleasurable, or indifferent, that they do not allow for any further classification, and

---

<sup>266</sup> Much (recent) empirical and philosophical work, which claims that we can be in serious error even about our subjective experiences, obviously makes trouble for far-reaching Cartesian infallibilism. See e.g. Armstrong (1963), Bayne and Spener (2010), Churchland (1988), Haybron (2007), Haybron (2008), Jäger (2009), W. James (1884), Schwitzgebel (2008), and Wilson (2002).

<sup>267</sup> As, most recently, Zilioli (2014: 83–5) has argued. Some remarkable similarities are, for instance, the following ideas: that we are infallible and incorrigible about our mental states, that pleasure is the *summum bonum* for all living beings, that is, that the pleasant is good and that the good is pleasant, that pleasure does not differ in kind but only in degree so that we cannot apply any other predicate to it except that it is pleasurable, and the conviction that pleasure is good even if it proceeds from bad or immoral conduct. For a discussion of Cyrenaic philosophy, see e.g. Tsouna (2005), Lampe (2014), and Zilioli (2014).

that we are infallible and incorrigible when it comes to (our reports about) these πάθη. (They are always true, as Protarchus would put it.) Whenever I candidly report that I am undergoing some affection, the Cyrenaics held, I do so ‘infallibly and truly and firmly and incorrigibly (ἀδιαψεύστως καὶ ἀληθῶς καὶ βεβαίως <καὶ> ἀνεξελέγκτως)’ (as Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.191 reports).<sup>268</sup>

## 2.2. The First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (37a1–e7)

The First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (37a1–e7), which pivots on an analogy between pleasure and belief (δόξα), moves in three simple steps and goes something like this:

1. A belief is false if its content misrepresents a state of the world.
2. Like a belief, a pleasure has content.
3. So a pleasure is false if its content misrepresents a state of the world.

To make his case, Socrates starts by breaking down pleasure (ἡδονή) and belief (δόξα) in two parts or aspects to show that both are structurally similar. Belief, on the one hand, can be divided into the act of believing (δοξάζειν, 37a2) and what is believed (τὸ δοξαζόμενον, 37a7). Pleasure, on the other hand, can similarly be divided into the act of taking pleasure (ἡδεσθαι, 37a5) and—to

---

<sup>268</sup> Cf. *Theaetetus* 152b2–5 for Socrates’s ascription of a similar idea to Protagoras *cum suis*.

formulate it somewhat awkwardly—‘what that which takes pleasure in takes pleasure in’, ‘that in virtue of which what takes pleasure takes pleasure’, or ‘that in or by which what takes pleasure takes pleasure’ (τό ᾧ τὸ ἡδόμενον ἦδεται, 37a9).

What do these relatively vague expressions τὸ δοξαζόμενον and τό ᾧ τὸ ἡδόμενον ἦδεται refer to? It is often simply assumed—for instance in Frede’s translation—that these expressions refer to the *object* of our beliefs and pleasure, but this interpretation is unsatisfactory for a couple of reasons. Most importantly, as Delcominette has pointed out, this construal makes it very difficult, if not impossible to understand how hedonic error is possible. ‘[F]or if τὸ δοξαζόμενον corresponds to the object of belief, what could it mean that this object is *mistaken*? One should rather say that the subject is mistaken *about* the object.’<sup>269</sup> The expression τὸ δοξαζόμενον does not refer to the *object* of the belief, then, but to its *content*. This content can be said to be mistaken, or false, if it does not correspond adequately to what the δόξα is about—and the same would hold for pleasure.

Like belief,<sup>270</sup> Socrates’s thought seems to go, pleasure is a unitive yet double-edged complex which consists of two inseparable

---

<sup>269</sup> Delcominette (2003: 217). Here are two more worries for this interpretation. Firstly, note that when Socrates wants to draw a distinction between subject and object rather than a distinction between the act of believing or enjoying and its content, he uses the expressions ‘what is believing’ and ‘what is enjoying’ (37a–b) to refer to the *subject* of these acts. These expressions are not used here which seemingly suggests that we must be dealing with an act-content rather than a subject-object opposition. Secondly, Socrates goes on to use these distinctions to analyze future-oriented or anticipatory pleasures in which case there might be no objects to be referred to—even though there *is* content.

<sup>270</sup> Both in English and in Ancient Greek, the word belief or δόξα is ambiguous: it refers both to the *attitude* we have when taking something to be true as well as to *what* we take to be true (the content of the attitude).

aspects or faces: for any pleasure, there is the brute fact *that* we are taking pleasure in something (the act) and there is the *content* of this attitude (*what* we are taking pleasure in) which specifies it as this or that pleasure. Importantly, it is the content that is responsible for the truth or falsity of the belief or pleasure as a whole.<sup>271</sup>

This reading is indeed borne out by the text. We see that Socrates agrees with Protarchus that that which believes (τὸ δοξάζον) cannot be deprived of (ἀπόλλυσιν) the fact that it really believes (τό δοξάζειν ὄντως), whether it believes correctly (ὀρθῶς) or not. Even though the content of my belief can be mistaken, in other words, it makes no sense to say that the act of believing—the attitude I have while taking something to be true—gets things wrong (37a11–b1). Similarly, Socrates continues, that which takes pleasure (τὸ ἡδόμενον), whether it takes pleasure rightly (ὀρθῶς) or not, can never be deprived of (ἀπόλλυσιν) the fact that it really takes pleasure (τό ὄντως ἡδεσθαι) (37b2–4).

This suggests that the possibility of error or mistake must be sought in the *content* of pleasure and belief rather than in the acts of believing or being pleased themselves. Our mental acts cannot be false—we are, so to speak, still believing and taking pleasure even if the content of our doxastic or hedonic attitude is false—so if we want to ascribe falsity to our pleasures and beliefs as a whole, we must ascribe falsity to their content in virtue of the fact that it does not adequately represent reality. In this respect the content of our beliefs and pleasures can either display rightness (ὀρθότης) or some opposite of rightness (τοῦναντίου ὀρθότητι), reach their aim or miss it (ἀμαρτάνειν).<sup>272</sup> More precisely, if the content of the belief gets things

---

<sup>271</sup> Delcomminette (2003: 218).

<sup>272</sup> In the *Cratylus* (420b–c), Socrates offers an etymology of δόξα that traces it back to the word τόξον: this suggests that belief is like a bow aimed at an object which means, in turn, that, like archers, our beliefs can hit their target or miss the mark. The same

wrong, we say that the belief—as a whole—is incorrect or false. Analogously, if pleasure is mistaken (ἀμαρτάνουσαν) in what it is pleased about, we should not call it right (ὀρθήν) or proper (χρηστήν) or apply other names of praise (τι τῶν καλῶν ὀνομάτων) (37d6–e7). Instead, such a pleasure is *false*.<sup>273</sup>

### 2.3 Socrates Defends a Weaker Position

Protarchus demurs, however, and repeats his Immunity To Error Thesis in a somewhat different formulation: ‘That would be impossible, if indeed (γέ) pleasure (ἡδονή) should be mistaken (ἀμαρτήσεταιί, 37e8–9).’ Again, Socrates tries to undermine Protarchus’s position, but still without success:

[T3.3] [Socrates] As to pleasure, it certainly often seems to arise (γίγνεσθαι) in us not with a right (οὐ μετὰ δόξης ὀρθῆς) but with a false belief (μετὰ ψεύδους).

[Protarchus] Of course. But what we call false (ψευδῆ) in this case (ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ) at that point (τότε) is the belief (τὴν δόξαν), Socrates; nobody would dream of calling the pleasure itself false (τὴν δ’ ἡδονὴν αὐτὴν οὐδεὶς ἄν ποτε προσείποι ψευδῆ). (37e10–38a2)

This is a crucial passage—mainly because Socrates, seemingly deliberately, commits a fatal mistake by weakening his position and giving up his defence of hedonic cognitivism. Whereas he was arguing

---

metaphor is used in the *Theaetetus* (194a2–4) to explain how false belief is possible: ‘Like a bad archer [the person who has a false belief] shoots beside the mark and misses it (παράλλάξει τοῦ σκοποῦ καὶ ἀμαρτεῖν) and it is just this which is called error or deception (ὁ δὲ καὶ ψεῦδος ἄρα ὠνόμασται).’

<sup>273</sup> Cf. 37e10–38a2 where Socrates equates truth and correctness and falsity and incorrectness.

that pleasures are roughly similar to beliefs in the sense that both attitudes have content in virtue of which they can be either true or false, he suddenly starts defending the wholly different idea that pleasures often ‘arise in us (ἡμῖν γίγνεσθαι, 37e11)’ or ‘come to us (ἐκάστοις ἡμῶν ἐγγίγνεσθαι, 38a8)’ ‘accompanied by’ or ‘going with’ (false) beliefs (37e10–38a8). On this weaker picture, the representational attitudes or elements do not constitute the pleasures, they merely serve as some kind of cognitive base or foundation of the pleasures at hand—and this means that the pleasures that are accompanied by false beliefs can, *at best*, be derivatively false.<sup>274</sup>

Protarchus readily snatches the clue and immediately turns the tables on Socrates whose observation was indeed spot on. Even if those cases in which a pleasure is accompanied by a belief, the pleasure we are dealing with remains immune to error—it is the associated belief that may be false. This, then, is the second iteration of Protarchus’ Immunity to Error Thesis:

In so-called cases of ‘false pleasure,’ we are in fact dealing with a pleasure that is merely accompanied by a false belief. Put differently, it is the associated belief that is false, not the pleasure itself.

An example can illustrate the point Protarchus is trying to make. Imagine that the immense gustatory pleasure I am experiencing while drinking a glass of red wine is accompanied by, or parasitic on, the false belief that the wine is a fancy *grand cru classé* although,

---

<sup>274</sup> We should wonder why Socrates ruins his own analogy and does not argue that, at least in a *derivative* sense, we can maintain a distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ pleasures. I find myself in agreement with Frede (1985: 167) who astutely observes that ‘if Socrates undermines his own analogy, this must indicate that he himself is not satisfied with it but wants to establish the truth or falsity of pleasure in the primary [non-derivative] sense.’

unbeknownst to me, I am actually drinking a plain *vin de table*.<sup>275</sup> On Protarchus's theory, this does not detract from the truth of my pleasurable experience: it is the connected δόξα—the mistaken assumption about the wine I am drinking—that is false, the pleasure itself is immune to error. This is so, as I have suggested above, because Protarchus denies that there is an appearance-reality gap in the hedonic domain: pleasure is a bit of felt experience and, along with pain, 'just what it is.'

#### 2.4. The Second Hedonic Cognitivism Argument (38b6–41a4)

To counter Protarchus 'spirited defense of pleasure (προθύμως ἀμύνεις τῷ τῆς ἡδονῆς λόγῳ τὰ νῦν, 38a3–4),' Socrates resuscitates his stronger position—hedonic cognitivism—by finetuning and fleshing out his earlier line of argumentation. One of the primary goals of this second stretch of argumentation, I submit, is to convince Protarchus of the fact that pleasure cannot be identified or understood in a way independent of cognitive or representational attitudes. Put differently, Socrates aims to explode the weaker, more deflationary position, previously toyed with by himself, which suggests that in alleged cases of false pleasure we are in fact dealing with false accompanying beliefs. It is not just the case that pleasure is often associated with (false) belief, the idea at play is way stronger: this argument proposes that the two are *merged* and that our pleasures are—at least partially—*constituted by* cognitive or representational states.<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>275</sup> Bloom (2010: 45).

<sup>276</sup> Cf. Frede (1985: 166 n32): '[A] merger seems to be what Plato has in mind' and Frede (1997: 247): 'Statt sich mit möglicherweise anfechtbaren Parallelen zwischen Meinung

There are a couple of ways in which this second line of argumentation improves upon Socrates's earlier argument for fallibilism. Whereas the rather abstract and hasty First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument more or less stipulated that pleasures have content, leaving it unexplained where this content comes from and which mental operations are involved in the process, the Second Hedonic Cognitivism Argument is more elaborate and more detailed. Having examined the psychological operations driving our affective experiences, Socrates suggests that our experiences of pleasure have representational or cognitive content because they centrally involve representations of (obtaining or non-obtaining) states of affairs, based on (true or false) beliefs.<sup>277</sup> This more fine-grained, more sophisticated picture should make it obvious that, and how, a pleasure can be false, or true, in the literal, representational, semantic sense of the word: false if its constitutive representational states misrepresent the world, true if they represent things correctly.

There is a second way in which this argument improves upon Socrates's earlier attempt to draw on cognitivism to establish hedonic fallibilism. In contrast to that earlier argument, the focus of the current argument lies on *anticipatory pleasure* where it is obvious, or at least *more* obvious, that representational elements and interpretations play a crucial role.

The argument starts with the question of how the human soul or mind comes by its δόξαι which are sometimes false and sometimes true. To account for the truth and falsity of our beliefs, Socrates's basic move is to compare the human mind to a book in which a writer (γραμματεύς) is at work. When engaging in a dialogue with another

---

und Lust zu begnügen, will er vielmehr zeigen, daß gewisse Arten von Lust und Unlust deshalb im eigentlichen Sinne wahr oder falsch sein können, weil sie selbst in Meinungen oder Annahmen über Sachverhalte *bestehen*.' (emphasis in original)

<sup>277</sup> Cf. Szaif (2021: 136).



person or with ourselves—that is, when *thinking*—our beliefs turn into λόγοι (assertions, statements, or propositions).<sup>278</sup> These public or private articulations of our beliefs can either be true or false, depending on whether they describe reality correctly: ‘If what is written is true (ἀληθῆ), then we form a true belief (δόξα ἀληθῆς) and a true account (λόγοι ἀληθεῖς) of the matter, but if what our scribe writes is false (ψευδῆ), then the result will be the opposite of truth (τάναντία τοῖς ἀληθέσιν, 39a4–7).’

It turns out, in addition, that besides the writer there’s another craftsman at work in our mind—a painter or illustrator (ζώγραφος). This painter follows the writer and turns the writer’s words into images or illustrations (εἰκόνας or φαντάσματα)—representations, that is—which are also capable of being true or false, depending on whether they are in line with the beliefs they aim to depict: ‘Are not the pictures of true judgments and assertions true, and the pictures of the false ones false (αἱ μὲν τῶν ἀληθῶν δοξῶν καὶ λόγων εἰκόνες ἀληθεῖς, αἱ δὲ τῶν ψευδῶν ψευδεῖς, 39c4–5)?’

A pivotal question is, of course, how we should unpack this elaborate metaphor of the book and the craftsmen. Frustratingly, Socrates is not very clear on this score. It seems textually plausible and philosophically attractive, though, to assume that the writer at work in the human mind stands for our memory, whereas the painter stands for φαντασία—here to be understood as the psychological faculty that is responsible for the creation of φαντάσματα (representations or mental images).<sup>279</sup>

---

<sup>278</sup> As Lorenz (2006: 105n21) notes, ‘the word λόγος does double duty here ... : it denotes, first, the mind’s articulation of its experience; second, the person’s utterance of a belief in speech.’

<sup>279</sup> Cf. e.g. Delcomminette (2003), Frede (1985), (1993), (1997), and Lorenz (2006); for an overview of imagination in Plato, see Silverman (1991). In a recent paper, Fletcher (2021) argues instead that these φαντάσματα stand for our pleasures.

Let me illustrate this with an example. Suppose I am wandering through a forest when suddenly my mind is bombarded by a bundle of visual and auditory sense data of a feathery, large, and screeching entity that is sitting on a branch, flapping its wings. Suppose, further, that as a consequence of this sensory input I come to have the following δόξα: ‘That thing over there is an owl.’ In line with Socrates’s metaphor, my memory goes to work as soon as I start talking or thinking—that is, talking with myself—about the belief at hand. It does so by storing the belief in the form of an assertion, statement, or word (λόγος) somewhere in my memory.<sup>280</sup>

If it were not for the writer’s memorizing activities, all of our beliefs would be fleeting states, disappearing as soon as the perceptions responsible for them disappeared, and we would have no network of short- and long-term beliefs about ourselves and the world.<sup>281</sup> Stronger still, further down the line Socrates seems to let go of the idea that our memory stores already existing beliefs. Instead, he seems to believe that our beliefs are formed or come to be (ἐν ἡμῖν γιγνόμενοι) when our memory is writing in our minds: ‘When [it] writes what is true (ἀληθῆ), then we form a true belief (δόξα ἀληθῆς) and true account (λόγοι ἀληθεῖς) of the matter, but if what our scribe writes is false (ψευδῆ), then the result will be the opposite of truth

---

<sup>280</sup> As the earlier discussion at 34a10b–9 suggests, memory (μνήμη) must be distinguished from recollection (ἀνάμνησις): while memory preserves our perception and thus stores things, recollection as it were *restores* our memories and takes place ‘when the soul recalls as much as possible by itself what she had once experienced together with the body.’

<sup>281</sup> Cf. the earlier definition at 34a10 of memory as ‘[the] preservation of perception’ (σωτηρίαν ἀσθησεως); cf. Frede (1993: 42, n1): ‘The truth and falsity are initially those of simple sense-perceptions. But the scribe in our soul does more than that; he inscribes long-term views about the world [and] these are true or false in the same sense as the simple statement, however. They depict the way the world is, or they fail to do so.’

(τὰναντία τοῖς ἀληθείσιν, 39a3–7).’

At the same time (ἐν τῷ τότε χρόνῳ, 39b4), the painter or φαντασία jumps in and begins to draw mental images (εἰκόνας or φαντάσματα) of the beliefs I have and the λόγοι that have just been stored in my memory. Whereas my memory arguably stores my beliefs in the form of abstract linguistic units, my imagination is able to make these lifeless linguistic units visible by turning them into vivid mental images. For as Socrates himself explains, the painter is at work ‘when a person takes his beliefs and statements (τὰ δοξαζόμενα καὶ λεγόμενα) from sight or any other sense-perception (τινος ἄλλης αἰσθήσεως) and then somehow views (ὁρᾷ πως) the images of those beliefs and assertions (τὰς τῶν δοξασθέντων καὶ λεχθέντων εἰκόνας) inside himself (ἐν αὐτῷ, 39b9–c2).’

Put succinctly, then, the writer in my head records a belief by turning it into a λόγος and then hands it over to the painter whose job it is to depict its content as an εἰκὼν or φάντασμα.<sup>282</sup> Together, the craftsmen account for the fact that our inner worlds consist of large networks of both linguistic and pictorial units that are intimately connected with our beliefs about the world. That is to say, we have beliefs about the world which are accompanied by vivid mental images putting certain states of affairs lively before our mental, introspective eyes. Socrates adds, furthermore, that this psychology process of belief formation and representation creation is not confined to the past and the present: we also form δόξαι and related λόγοι and εἰκόνες or φαντάσματα about future states of affairs.

Before we turn to Socrates’s final move in the Second Hedonic Cognitivism Argument, there are two important things that bear

---

<sup>282</sup> Note that these images should not be considered exclusively visual: Socrates makes it clear, after all, that we can form images of all kinds of perceptions (39a1–7). Since we have no reason to think that the εἰκὼν or φάντασμα of a sound is visually stored, we should interpret the illustrator metaphorically.

mentioning. To begin with, note that our beliefs and their articulations (λόγοι) are true or false if they depict the world the way it is or if they fail to do. Something similar holds for our representations: they are true if they depict (articulations of) true beliefs, they are false if they depict false beliefs and λόγοι. So if my belief and the connected λόγος about the owl turn out to fail to correspond to reality, they will become false themselves and the same holds for the mental images I have created on the basis of this false belief and the false λόγος attached to it. Truth, then, is at all levels a matter of correspondence—correspondence, that is, between the beliefs, their articulation in λόγοι, and the illustrations in our minds and the world out there. In other words, truth is a matter of correct representation whereas falsity boils down to *misrepresentation*.

With this psychological groundwork in place, the argument renews the earlier defence of the possibility of hedonic mistake and false pleasure. As a first step, Socrates reminds Protarchus of the existence of ‘anticipatory pleasures and anticipatory pains about future states of affairs (τὸ προχαίρειν τε καὶ προλυπεῖσθαι περὶ τὸν μέλλοντα χρόνον, 39d3–4),’ something on which they had already agreed in an earlier stage of the dialogue. Sometimes we feel pleasure when picturing or thinking of something pleasurable that lies ahead of us (e.g. daydreaming about a journey around the world that I plan to undertake next year) and sometimes we feel pain when picturing or thinking of something painful that lies ahead of us (e.g. worrying about a root canal treatment that will be carried out tomorrow).

It is important to notice *why* Socrates uses precisely these anticipatory, future-oriented pleasures to establish the possible (literal) falsity of pleasures. He states, after all, that his theory is omnitemporal: both past, present, and future pleasures can be false.<sup>283</sup>

---

<sup>283</sup> E.g. at 40d7–10.

Note, though, that in the case of pleasures about the past or present, it would have been much more difficult for Socrates, if not impossible, to convince Protarchus of the fact that pleasures have content in virtue of which they can be false. In the case of future-oriented pleasure, as Frede sharply notes, there is often ‘a wide discrepancy between what is enjoyed “as a fact” and what is in fact going to happen’ and this gap creates a lot of room for misrepresentation and falsity. Indeed, in the case of future-oriented pleasure we *only* have our representation of what the future is going to look like. As Frede sums it up, ‘what we enjoy is the anticipated event as it is described or pictured in our minds itself.’<sup>284</sup>

What this suggests, then, is that if Socrates had focused on pleasures in the present, he might have obscured the fact that what we tend to enjoy is not the *thing* itself but the thing as *conceived of* by us. The thought here, to borrow a phrase from Anscombe, is that we always enjoy something *under a description*—especially when it comes to our anticipatory pleasures which necessarily involve some kind of interpretation of, or hypothesis about, the way in which the future is going to unfold.<sup>285</sup>

The second step of the argument (39d7–39e7) is to stress, again, that people’s minds contain writings and pictures about the future. These are called hopes or expectations (ἐλπίδας) and we human beings are said to be ‘forever brimful of expectations, throughout our lifetime (ἡμεῖς διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου ἀεὶ γέμομεν ἐλπίδων, 39e5–6).’<sup>286</sup>

---

<sup>284</sup> Frede (1985: 174–5); cf. Frede (1993: xlvi).

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Carone (2000: 275).

<sup>286</sup> Frede and Gosling’s rendering of ἐλπίδας as ‘hopes’ cannot be correct for the simple reason that Socrates explicitly talks about future *pains* as well (e.g. at 39d4 and 40c6.) Since we can and do indeed *expect* pains but do not *hope* for them, I render ἐλπίδας as the more neutral ‘expectations’ (which does not strain the Greek, cf. LSJ s.v.). Szaif (2021: 53n7) raises a different but similarly important point: ‘One can

It is, so to say, a fundamental characteristic of the human condition that we create and entertain beliefs and other mental representations about what lies ahead of us, although we cannot access the future in an epistemically reliable way.<sup>287</sup>

In a third and rather surprising step (39e8–40a2), the argument introduces an ethical distinction between a good man and a bad man.<sup>288</sup> The good man is ‘just, pious, and good in all respects (δίκαιος ἀνὴρ καὶ εὐσεβὴς καὶ ἀγαθὸς πάντως)’ and, as such, ‘also loved by the gods (θεοφιλῆς, 39e10–11).’ The bad man, by contrast, is ‘unjust and in all respects evil (ἄδικός τε καὶ παντάπασι κακός, 39e13)’ and, as such, ‘[the good] man’s opposite (τὸναντίον ἐκείνῳ, 40a1),’ that is, hated by the gods.

The fourth step (40a3–40b1), lastly, ties together the preceding threads and aims to establish the possibility of false pleasures by showing how the representational states that are involved in them are false. Having argued that there are λόγοι—articulated beliefs, that is—and especially (καὶ δὴ καὶ) representations or ‘painted images (τὰ φαντάσματα ἐζωγραφημένα, 40a9)’ in us that we call expectations, Socrates offers an example of a person who ‘sees himself getting an enormous amount of gold and a lot of pleasures as a consequence (ἐαυτῷ χρυσὸν γιγνόμενον ἄφθονον καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ πολλὰς ἡδονάς, 40a10–12)’ adding that it is ‘indeed central to this inner picture that he is beside himself with delight (καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐνεζωγραφημένον αὐτὸν

---

knowingly hope against the odds, while expectation entails that one view the outcome as probable.’

<sup>287</sup> As the chorus in Sophocles’ *Oedipus King* (489) sings, it is characteristic of the tragic human predicament that ‘we fear, but cannot see, what is before us.’

<sup>288</sup> Kenny (1960) was the first to heavily stress this step. See Warren (2003: 129–156) for a thorough examination of the connection between (ethical) character and false pleasure in this argument; Carpenter (2006) also tries to make philosophical sense of this part of the argument without seeing it as ‘the straightforward nod to conventional piety.’

ἐφ' αὐτῷ χαίροντα σφόδρα καθορᾶ, 40a9–12).'

Without unpacking or explaining his own example of the man enjoying the prospect of obtaining a huge amount of gold, Socrates immediately rushes to the conclusion of his argument in the fifth and final step (40b2–e5). It runs as follows:

[T3.4] [Socrates] Now, do we want to say that in the case of good people these pictures are usually true because they are loved by the gods (τοῖς μὲν ἀγαθοῖς ὡς τὸ πολὺ τὰ γεγραμμένα παρατίθεσθαι ἀληθῆ διὰ τὸ θεοφιλεῖς εἶναι) while quite the opposite usually holds in the case of bad people, or is this not what we ought to say?

[Protarchus] That is just what we ought to say.

[S.] And bad people nevertheless have pleasures painted in their minds (τοῖς κακοῖς ἡδοναί οὐδὲν ἦττον πάρεσιν ἐζωγραφημέναι), even though they are somehow false (ψευδεῖς δὲ αὐταί που)?

[P.] Right.

[S.] So bad people as a rule enjoy false pleasures (ψευδέσιν ἡδοναῖς τὰ πολλὰ οἱ πονηροὶ χαίρουσιν), but the good among mankind true ones (οἱ ἀγαθοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀληθέσιν)?

[P.] Quite necessarily so.

[S.] From what has now been said, it follows that there are false pleasures in human souls that are quite ridiculous imitations of true ones (ψευδεῖς ἐν ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχαῖς ἡδοναί, μεμιμημέναι μέντοι τὰς ἀληθεῖς ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιότερα), and also such pains. (40b2–c6)

It seems relatively easy to capture the general gist of the argument and to see what explanatory work the example is supposed to do. Recall that pleasure, as the First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument had aimed to establish, is a unitary complex consisting of two inexorably connected parts or aspects: the attitude of taking pleasure and the content of this act of taking pleasure. This second part of one's pleasure is very often a δόξα (articulated, in speech or in thought, in a λόγος recording or articulating the belief) or an εἰκὼν or φάντασμα in its turn depicting the belief at hand. This happens when we enjoy

our anticipations or advance instalments of future enjoyment (προχαίρειν): when right now, for example, I thoroughly enjoy future pleasures painted in my mind, that is, mental representations of me travelling the world, say, swimming in South American waterfalls, riding camels in African deserts, and crossing the Indian Himalayas on a Royal Enfield motor bike—all along ‘being beyond myself with delight.’

When these painted pictures of future pleasures that I am currently enjoying turn out to be *false*, that is, when the content of my current anticipatory pleasure turns out to be false, my anticipatory pleasure as a whole becomes false too. The same goes for my past or concurrent pleasures whose representational content misses the mark and gets things wrong. In that respect pleasure and belief are indeed remarkably similar: both derive their truth and falsity from the semantic or representational value of their content. The hedonic content, to use Socrates’s own neat metaphor, *fills* or *infects* the pleasure as a whole so to speak with its own shaky predicament of falsehood.<sup>289</sup> As Socrates drives home the conclusion of the Fallibilism Argument:

[T3.5] [Socrates] Whoever believes anything at all is always *really* believing (δοξάζειν μὲν ὄντως ἀεὶ τῷ τὸ παράπαν δοξάζοντι), even if is not about anything that is the case—be it in the present, past or future (μὴ ἐπ’ οὐσι δὲ μὴδ’ ἐπὶ γεγονόσι μὴδὲ ἐπ’ ἐσομένοις).<sup>290</sup>

---

<sup>289</sup> As Socrates himself puts it at 42a7–9, when he introduces the second type of hedonic falsity: ‘Earlier it was true and false beliefs which ἀνεπίπλασαν (filled or infected) the respective pleasures and pains with their own condition (τοῦ παρ’ αὐταῖς παθήματος).’ For these different senses of ἀναπίμπλημι, see LSJ (s.v. II and II.2).

<sup>290</sup> Pace Frede (1993: *ad loc.*) and Fowler (1962: *ad loc.*), it makes best sense to take these instances of εἶναι (and those below) veridically rather than existentially: false pleasure



[Protarchus] Right.

[S.] And these were, I think, the conditions that produce a false belief and believing false (τὰ ἀπεργαζόμενα δόξαν ψευδῆ καὶ τὸ ψευδῶς δοξάζειν), weren't they?

[P.] Yes.

[S.] But should we not also grant to pleasures and pains a condition that is analogous in these ways (τὴν τούτων ἀντίστοροφον ἕξιν ἐν ἐκείνοις)?

[P.] In what ways?

[S.] In the sense that whoever has any pleasure at all, however ill-founded it may be (τῷ τὸ παράπαν ὅπως οὖν καὶ εἰκῆ χαίροντι), really does have pleasure (χαίρειν ὄντως ἀεὶ)—even if sometimes it is not about anything that either is the case or ever was the case or often (or perhaps most of the time) refers to anything that will ever be the case (μὴ μέντοι ἐπὶ τοῖς οὔσι μῆδ' ἐπὶ τοῖς γεγονόσιν ... ἐπὶ τοῖς μῆδὲ μέλλουσί ποτε γενήσεσθαι).

[P.] That also must be necessarily so.

[S.] And the same account holds in the case of fear, anger, and everything of that sort (ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος ἂν εἴη περὶ φόβων τε καὶ θυμῶν καὶ πάντων τῶν τοιούτων)—namely that all of them can at times be false (ψευδῆ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐνίοτε)?

[P.] Certainly. (40d7–e5)

This bit of text confirms my claim that Socrates's Second Hedonic Cognitivism Argument is an attempt to resuscitate his First Hedonic Cognitivism Argument—and especially its central proposal that, like a belief, a pleasure can be false because it has content. In addition, Socrates makes it clear that hedonic cognitivism is omnitemporal—it applies to *all* pleasures—even though his argument had mainly focused on future-directed, anticipatory pleasure. Stronger yet, it applies to *all* passions or emotions. In addition, Socrates at the same time concedes to Protarchus that he was in a way right to think that there is something incorrigible about our subjective hedonic

---

misrepresents what is the case, what is true, what is a fact, it does not misrepresent 'realities' (Fowler) or 'what exists' (Frede) .

experiences: even if a pleasure's content is false, we are still 'really having' such a false or 'ill-founded or fortuitous' pleasure.<sup>291</sup>

### 3. The Falsity of False Pleasure

One vexing and crucial question remains, however.<sup>292</sup> As Socrates puts it, some pleasures are 'somehow ( $\pi\omicron\upsilon$ , 40b7)' false. What exactly renders a pleasure false, though, 'if [the pleasure] is not about anything that either is the case or ever was the case or often (or perhaps most of the time) refers to anything that will ever be the case'? Where, in other words, should we locate the truth or falsity of a pleasure?

#### 3.1 An Interpretive Dichotomy

It is often believed that the most natural reading of Socrates's argument and its central example is a factual or descriptive reading.<sup>293</sup> On such a reading, a person enjoying a pleasure with the content that  $p$  enjoys a false pleasure if  $p$  is not the case.<sup>294</sup> This is the case, to stay

---

<sup>291</sup> Note, though, that Socrates's third type of hedonic falsity goes on to differentiate between merely apparent and genuine pleasure, thus suggesting that those who experience merely apparent pleasure actually go wrong in their self-ascriptions of pleasure: they are hedonically fallible in the strongest sense of the word. For discussion of this argument, see chapter 2 of this dissertation, Pearson (2019), and Whiting (2014).

<sup>292</sup> As Warren (2003: 131) expresses this worry, 'Socrates himself does not make clear precisely where any falsehood enters into the imagined example.'

<sup>293</sup> Delcomminette (2003), Evans (2008-a), Frede (1985), (1992), (1993), and (1997), Hackforth (1945: 72–73), Penner (1970), Williams (1959).

<sup>294</sup> This is even conceded by those who read the argument evaluatively (such as Harte, Moss, Russell).

close to Socrates's example, when a person experiences pleasure while picturing himself obtaining a lot of money next week, although the representational content of his current anticipatory pleasure does not depict the relevant future state of affairs correctly: when next week arrives, say, his lottery ticket turns out not to be the winning ticket.<sup>295</sup>

In these cases, Plato's point is that the content of one's pleasure does not stand in a correct representational relation with reality: it misrepresents some way the world really is. There is a mismatch, in other words, between our representation or depiction of some state of affairs in our life and how that state of affairs actually is, was, or will turn out to be. As a result, all these pleasures have content that is false which renders the pleasures themselves false too—in the same way in which the false content of a belief 'infects' the belief as a whole with its falsity.

Despite the *prima facie* plausibility and naturalness of this reading, recent scholarship has witnessed the increasing popularity of a different, evaluative or ethical reading of the argument. Space does not allow me to go too deeply into the reasons for the introduction of this line of interpretation. Most importantly, Socrates's moralistic digression—in which he ascribes false pleasures to *bad* people—suggests that there must be something evaluatively or ethically sketchy about the false pleasures under discussion.<sup>296</sup> As Frede puts it,

---

<sup>295</sup> Even though his argument focuses on anticipatory, future-directed pleasure, Socrates makes it clear that his analysis is omnitemporal: whether a pleasure is concerned with the past, the present, or the future, it always involves a representation of some way the world was, is, or will be and this creates space for falsity. I might enjoy a painting, say, merely because I think it is an original Van Gogh—even though I am actually looking at a fake, crafted by a master imitator. In a similar vein, the pleasure I enjoy while remembering some childhood event I am particularly fond of might in fact centrally involve a confabulated memory.

<sup>296</sup> It might also be argued that it takes an evaluative reading to make sense of Socrates's claims that we can analyse other passions, such as anger and fear, in broadly

Socrates's emphasis on a putative connection between the truth of one's pleasures and one's moral standing seems to be implying that Plato also holds that '*the moral content* of foolish pleasures is mistaken, so that they represent a skewed view of life.'<sup>297</sup> (my emphasis)

If a person experiences a pleasure with the content that *p*, the evaluative reading suggests that their pleasure is false if it is (or would not be) good (or otherwise positively evaluatively charged) that *p*.<sup>298</sup> The view that pleasure is true or false depending on whether the object or state of affairs in which it is taken is actually valuable is defended, for instance, by Hampton who claims that 'false pleasures result from the inability to grasp what is truly valuable in life.' Thus, according to Hampton, the person in Plato's example—who envisions himself 'getting an enormous amount of gold'—'enjoys a pleasure that is false because it is based on the false belief that money is intrinsically valuable.'<sup>299</sup>

In her defence of the possibility of false pleasure, Lovibond—who is clearly indebted to this stretch of argumentation in the *Philebus*—likewise starts from the claim that there is an 'internal relation between pleasure and value-perception.' Departing from this connection between the two, she goes on to suggest that something counts as a false pleasure just in case we 'refuse to accept the construction of our experience of the bad object as a pleasurable experience.'<sup>300</sup>

---

similar ways (40e2–5) and the puzzling claim that it is impossible 'to account for the badness of pleasures (πονηραὶ) unless they are false (πλὴν τῷ ψευδεῖς εἶναι, 40e6–8).')

<sup>297</sup> Frede (1993: 44); cf. Marechal (2021: 285). For broadly similar views, see Carpenter (2006: 18–19), Hackforth (1945:73), Harte (2004: 125), Russell (2005: 181–2), Warren (2014: 136–146).

<sup>298</sup> Russell (2005: 176, 182).

<sup>299</sup> Hampton (1987: 255).

<sup>300</sup> Lovibond (1989: 222).

According to Dimas, the *Philebus* aims to offer an account of ‘good and bad pleasures’ whose key claim is that ‘a pleasure is true if it is taken in what is good—and false if it is taken in what is not good—for the agent’<sup>301</sup> and Marechal’s recent interpretation concurs: a pleasure is true ‘when it correctly represents the actual value of things.’<sup>302</sup> According to Moss, finally, the *Philebus* defends the following thesis: ‘to feel a passionate pleasure in  $x$  is to hold that  $x$  is good (or in some more determinate way valuable), and thus such a pleasure will be false just in case  $x$  is not good, true just in case  $x$  is good.’<sup>303</sup> (emphasis in original)

The most careful, most sustained articulation of this type of interpretation, however, can be found in Russell’s *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life*. According to Russell, it is not enough to appreciate that Plato thinks pleasures are *about* something—that they have intentional content, that is—what is even more important is to see that, for Plato, our pleasures ‘represent their objects to the agent under such descriptions as ‘satisfying’, ‘worth-while’, ‘just what I need’, and so on, and that, as such, they can also misrepresent their objects.’<sup>304</sup>

Crucial to Russell’s evaluative reading is a specific understanding of the nature of φαντασία and the role it plays in how we apprehend the world. Rather than merely representing the world as it is, or matter-of-factly, φαντασία represents the world in a concern-laden way—that is, the faculty of φαντασία brings the *significance* of certain states of affairs for a person into vivid relief. In Russell’s words:

---

<sup>301</sup> Dimas (2019).

<sup>302</sup> Marechal (2021: 283).

<sup>303</sup> Moss (2012: 15).

<sup>304</sup> Russell (2005: 176–177).

The paintings do not merely tell us more than the writings do. It is by 'painting' them within ourselves that we overlay our experience, so to speak, with the vivid shape and color that our concerns lend. Pleasure goes beyond taking things to be such and such, to ascribing them a value and power that our deeper concerns invest in them.<sup>305</sup>

Although Russell does not flesh out or defend this understanding of φαντασία in much detail, let us try to make better sense of it.<sup>306</sup> In Plato's *Sophist*, the Eleatic stranger defines φαντασία as 'the δόξα which arises not on its own'—as part of an internal, soundless dialogue the mind has with itself—'but through perception (μη καθ' αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ δι' αἰσθήσεως, 264a4–6)' or, alternatively, as 'a mix or commingling of perception and δόξα (σύμμειξις αἰσθήσεως καὶ δόξης, 264b2).' To see what is meant by this, let us take the example Socrates gives at the start of his argument (at 38c2–d11). The example concerns a person who is looking at figure from a distance, wonders what it is he is seeing, and then represents it to himself (φανταζόμενον; cf. φαντασθέντα) as a man, although it is actually a statue.<sup>307</sup>

In this situation, the man's perception is as it were structured by a δόξα or, to put the same point slightly differently, his perception is subsumed under a concept ('man'). That is to say, the raw perceptual input is mistakenly interpreted or represented to him as a man rather than as a statue—as it should have been.<sup>308</sup> It might very

---

<sup>305</sup> Russell (2005: 179).

<sup>306</sup> In my attempt to clarify why Russell understands φαντασία the way he understands it, I am leaning heavily on the analyses we find in Lorenz (2006: 105–110) and Delcominette (2003: 222–225).

<sup>307</sup> The notion of error and deception already figures here: if this person represents the figure as a man, he gets things right (ἐπιτυχῶς), but if he represents the figure as a statue he is mistaken or gets misled (παρενεχθείς).

<sup>308</sup> Cf. Lorenz (2006: 105): 'In the case that Socrates is mainly interested in, someone forms a false perceptual belief, misidentifying a man in the distance as a statue (38c5–

well be possible, therefore, that one's perception is strictly speaking identical in two cases, although the way in which things are represented to someone differs from case to case—depending on the δόξα that shapes or structures the perceptual input at hand.<sup>309</sup>

On the assumption that φαντασία is defined by Plato as a commingling of perception and belief or a belief which arises through perception, it follows that our appearance, or the product of φαντασία, can be false for two reasons. It can be false because something goes wrong with the perceptual part of the appearance and it can be false because something goes wrong with the cognitive part of the appearance or the belief we impose upon the perceptual input.

On the first construal, my perception might be blurred or vague—I am not seeing clearly because I am looking at things from a distance, as Socrates suggests—so that I accidentally apply the δόξα 'that is a man' to my perception. In this case, I am struck by the appearance *as of* seeing a man, although I am actually looking at a statue. Alternatively, the concept that I apply to the perceptual input might *itself* be defective. I might, for instance, conflate real men and fake statues because my grasp of the notions 'man' and 'statue' is shaky.

From this latter case of falsehood, it is clearly a small step to an evaluative understanding of Socrates's argument. Although it might

---

e7). ... In this case, the painter's work depicts, not what the person in fact saw (a man), but what he falsely believes he saw (a statue). As Socrates says, the painter follows the scribe, and what the painter paints is true or false depending on what the scribe writes (39c4–5, with 39a). The painter's works thus involves interpretation of what one saw or perceived otherwise. They depend on the rational states or dispositions that are one's perceptual beliefs.'

<sup>309</sup> Interestingly, the *Timaeus* (28a2–3, 52a7) holds that it is only by means of this combination of perception and δόξα that we gain access to the world, not by means of bare, unstructured perception in and of itself. See McDowell (1994) for a famous defence of the claim that perceptual experiences have conceptual content.

be hard to see how we can be mistaken in our very concepts of ‘man’ and ‘statue,’ it is easier to see how this works in the case of the evaluative δόξαι giving rise to evaluative appearances which figure centrally in our pleasures (such as ‘winning the lottery will be extremely rewarding’ or ‘a new MacBook is just what I need.’) When it comes to these evaluative representations, there is clearly room for conflating concepts of value, goodness, or badness and wrongly taking to be good or valuable what is actually bad or invaluable and *vice versa*.

With this evaluative understanding of φαντασία in place, a fairly sophisticated evaluative reading of the Fallibilism Argument presents itself. Russell offers the instructive example of a rich man who has decided to buy a Jaguar in the near future. Not only does this person have the factual belief ‘I will own a Jaguar soon’, which just dryly picks out a future state of affairs, his φαντασία faculty overlays this future state of affairs with significance and meaning. Like a belief, φαντασία represents the world—but it does so in a more concern-laden way. For instance, the painter inside him depicts his belief about soon possessing a Jaguar with all kinds of positive evaluative images and colors such as ‘the thrill of speeding along, being the envy of my neighbors and friends, [and] increasing my sex appeal’<sup>310</sup> and this highly evaluatively charged painting functions itself, importantly enough, as the content of anticipatory, future-directed pleasure.

The crux, of course, is that such a highly charged evaluative representation of some future state of affairs can get things right or wrong and be false or true. It is true when the future state of affairs does indeed have the significance someone attributes to it, it is false when it does not. Perhaps the Jaguar does not get the man any female attention; perhaps the ever-growing pile of speeding penalties starts

---

<sup>310</sup> Russell (2005: 179).



to bother him; and perhaps his friends are not impressed but hate his bragging about his fancy car. In these cases, his anticipatory pleasures were clearly false. As Russell concludes:

[O]n Plato's analysis there *is* something for pleasure to be right or wrong about. ... For it is all too possible that a person may represent something to herself as satisfying, rewarding, and worthwhile, when, in fact, it is none of those things.<sup>311</sup>

### 3.2. Resisting the Dichotomy: In Defence of a Wider Reading

In sum, then, the descriptive reading of Plato's Fallibilism Argument suggests that I experience a false pleasure if I take pleasure in a descriptive state of affairs  $p$ , although  $p$  does not obtain, whereas the evaluative reading suggests that my pleasure is false if I take pleasure in  $p$  being  $F$ — $F$  being some further determinable positively charged evaluative term—although  $p$  is not  $F$ .

I resist this stark dichotomy for three reasons. Firstly, it strikes me that descriptive and the evaluative readings share an important common ground that is often overlooked or obscured in the literature. In both cases, I argue, false pleasure is a matter of *misrepresentation*. Whenever I experience false pleasure, no matter whether we construe this falsity descriptively or evaluatively, there is mismatch between my representation of some way the world is and how the world actually is: in one case my pleasure misrepresents a purely 'factual' matter, while in the other case it misrepresents an 'evaluative' matter.

This, however, is something that is often missed in discussions about this exegetical dispute. Evans, for instance, ascribes to the descriptive camp the idea that 'what makes a pleasure false is either

---

<sup>311</sup> Russell (2005: 182) (emphasis in original).

its having false content or its sharing its content with some false belief.<sup>312</sup> The evaluative reading suggests, in sharp contrast, that Plato's argument claims that 'what makes a pleasure false is its having content that is *bad*, or at least *not good*.'<sup>313</sup> Evans goes on to give two examples:

[On the descriptive or factual interpretation,] if you are pleased (and believe) that the war is ending, then your pleasure is false if it is not the case that the war is ending. [On the evaluative interpretation,] if you are pleased that the war is ending, then on this view *your pleasure is false if the war's ending would be a bad thing, or would not be a good thing*.<sup>314</sup>

He criticises the evaluative reading of the argument *inter alia* on the grounds that this option carries the prohibitive cost of making the Fallibilism Argument invalid: Socrates would, after all, commit the fallacy of equivocation by shifting thoughtlessly between 'false' in a literal sense and 'false' in some mysterious moral or evaluative sense.<sup>315</sup>

*Pace* Evans, it strikes me that one may simply maintain that according to both the descriptive and the evaluative interpretation of Plato's Fallibilism Argument, falsity is a matter of *misrepresentation* or a *failure of correspondence* between the representational content of one's pleasure and some reality external to that pleasure with which it aims to make contact. To see why this is the case, consider the following instances of false pleasure. For starters, I might be thrilled that I am

---

<sup>312</sup> Evans (2008-a: 92) (my emphasis).

<sup>313</sup> Evans (2008-a: 92–3) (emphasis in original).

<sup>314</sup> Evans (2008-a: 92–93).

<sup>315</sup> Cf. Evans (2008-a: 102) ('[Socrates] gives no indication whatsoever that he expects these propositions to be assessed according to some non-veridical, evaluative standard') and his reconstruction of the argument on p. 98–101. Cf. Shorey (1903: 149n147): 'The epithet false is used as a mere rhetorical expression of the disdain or pity of the overlooker.'

running into an old friend I had not seen for a long while, even though he turns out to be a lookalike stranger. Likewise, I might remember a holiday to a Caribbean Island with great retrospective joy, even though I was in fact bored for the majority of the time while lying on the beach.

In a slightly different vein, a young student might experience great anticipatory pleasure before embarking upon a PhD trajectory because he represents the life of the mind as satisfying, rewarding, and perfectly aligned with his cares and concerns, although he soon discovers that academia has many powerful negative undercurrents which turns it into a place where you can easily lose yourself. Similarly, a technology lover might enjoy her new iPhone as pleasant ‘in its own right (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό)’ or ‘fine (καλόν),’ as Marechal has suggested in a recent paper, even though this pleasure misrepresents the actual value of things because, like all material possessions, iPhones are (at best) instrumentally or extrinsically valuable.<sup>316</sup>

What these examples should make clear, then, is that the evaluative reading is pretty similar to the descriptive reading—or at least far more similar than it is typically made out to be. In all these cases, whether they are strictly speaking factual or evaluative, a pleasure is false just in case there is a mismatch between the representational content of this pleasure—my interpretation of the world beyond my head—and how things really are. No matter how we gloss these cases of false pleasure, the falsity of any misleading pleasure always consists in a mismatch or failure of correspondence between the cognitive or representational elements we entertain in our heads, and which constitute our pleasures, and some (factual or evaluative) state of affairs in the world beyond our heads. A pleasure is not false, then, just because it is bad; a pleasure is false because its

---

<sup>316</sup> Marechal (2021: 296–299).

representational content fails to latch onto some state of affairs in actual reality.<sup>317</sup>

There is a second reason to resist this dichotomy. Since our choice of interpretation seems left underdetermined by the available textual data,<sup>318</sup> which explains why Socrates's example has been interpreted in various competing ways, charity arguably requires us to opt for the broader reading I have defended here. It suggests that our pleasures can be false in, at least, two different ways and this allows Plato to cast his net wider and argue for a larger set of cases where our pleasures get things wrong.

Thirdly and most importantly, though, there is good reason to believe that, like other emotions, any pleasure necessarily involves both a descriptive and an evaluative cognition: the factual belief that some state of affairs obtains and the evaluative belief—sometimes called 'appraisal' or 'construal' in the psychological literature—that this state of affairs is positively evaluatively charged because it somehow bears positively on the subject's cares and concerns.<sup>319</sup>

An insightful Medieval line of reasoning, recently rehabilitated by Kenny,<sup>320</sup> suggests that an emotion is not just concerned with some object or state of affairs in the world (its target or 'material object'), it also has a 'formal object.' This formal object can be understood as the

---

<sup>317</sup> Although he focuses on anticipatory pleasures, Warren (2013: 145–146) comes close to arriving at the same conclusion: 'the error involved [in Socrates's example] stems from some inconsistency between the present depiction of some future experience ... and how that future experience turns out to be.'

<sup>318</sup> See Warren (2013: 131).

<sup>319</sup> Alternatively, we might be dealing with just one factual-cum-evaluative belief—e.g. the belief that something *F* (positively evaluative charged) is present which contains a factual belief ('there is some *x*') and an evaluative belief ('*x* is *F*'). This seems to be the position of the (Chryssiopian) Stoics who defined pleasure as 'the fresh belief that something good is present.'

<sup>320</sup> Kenny (1963: 187–194).

property I implicitly ascribe to the object or state of affairs in virtue of the fact that I experience the relevant emotion about the target of my emotion.<sup>321</sup> Indeed, if the object or state of affairs did not have a certain character—or if I did not *represent* or *interpret* or *see* it as having that character—I would simply not be able to experience the relevant emotion.<sup>322</sup>

If I am afraid of a snake, for instance, I necessarily consider it as *dangerous* or as possibly *harmful*.<sup>323</sup> Likewise, if I feel angry because of what you did to me, I necessarily consider your action offensive and I cannot feel love towards you, unless I evaluate you as a worthwhile person. In a similar way, I argue, the thing I enjoy must have a certain character or I must at least see it under this description. Whenever I experience pleasure, I necessarily respond to something *as* (represented as) something satisfying—otherwise I would not experience pleasure but remain indifferent. The point, then, is that whenever I undergo an affective or emotional experience, I do not just believe that some object is present or that some state of affairs obtains, I also believe that the target of my experience has a certain character (that bears positively or negatively on my cares and concerns).

That our emotional and affective experiences necessarily

---

<sup>321</sup> Scarantino and de Sousa (2018: §4), de Sousa (2018: §3), Deigh (1994: 834–835). More generally, as de Sousa (2018: §3) points out, for any intentional state, its formal object is ‘that characteristic that must belong to something if it is to be possible for the state to relate to it.’

<sup>322</sup> The thought here, as Deigh (1994: 835) puts it, is that ‘there is a logic to the concept of [emotion] *x* such that to say that a person feels *x* toward *z* implies that he believes such and such about *z*.’

<sup>323</sup> As Socrates defines fear in the *Protagoras* (358d5–6), it is ‘something I describe as an expectation [literally ‘advance belief’] of something evil (προσδοκίαν τινὰ λέγω κακοῦ τοῦτο). Cf. *Laches* 198b8–9: ‘fear is produced not by evils which have happened or are happening but by those which are anticipated (τῶν κακῶν ... τὰ προσδοκώμενα) because fear is an expectation [literally ‘advance belief’] of a future evil (προσδοκίαν μέλλοντος κακοῦ).’

involve a factual and evaluative cognition is corroborated by the observation that these states can be punctured in two ways. The fear I experience while seeing a snake slithering across my path, to use a well-worn Buddhist example, collapses when I discover that I am mistaken about the material object (it is not a snake but a piece of rope) or when I discover that I am mistaken about the formal object (the snake is actually harmless). The same goes for my anger towards you: it will dampen if I discover that it was not you but someone else who wronged me or if I come to the realization that your action was not offensive or otherwise morally problematic. When this happens, the target or focus of my emotion fails to fit its formal object.<sup>324</sup>

In precisely the same way, I want to suggest, the pleasure I experience while thinking I have won the lottery can also collapse in two ways: when I discover that I misread the number of the winning lottery ticket, say, or when I discover that winning a lottery is strongly correlated with depression, anxiety, and suicide and thus not valuable, rewarding, or satisfying.

#### 4. Hedonic Cognitivism, Deceptive Pleasure, and the Good Life

Although Plato is well known for his restorative or improvement indicator model of pleasure, we have just seen that the *Philebus* also develops a cognitivist theory of pleasure on which (part of) its defence of hedonic fallibilism is predicated.<sup>325</sup> On this account, a pleasure is

---

<sup>324</sup> De Sousa (2018: §3).

<sup>325</sup> This raises the interesting question of how we should harmonize these seemingly conflicting restorative and cognitivist accounts. Following Aristotle (*On the Soul* 1.1, 403a–b), it could be argued that they are just two different ways—one philosophical, the other scientific—of describing one and the same thing: ‘The dialectician will define [anger] as desire for retaliation, or something of this sort, while the natural scientist

more than a subjective and private sensation or feeling or mere ‘smooth movement [of the soul] (λείαν κίνησιν τὴν ἡδονήν)’ (as the Cyrenaic hedonists liked to call them).<sup>326</sup> Instead, they are best understood as psychologically complex representational attitudes which make contact with the world or fail to do so. In short, Plato treats pleasure as some kind of openness to the world: like belief, perception, and other representational states, pleasure is a way of apprehending reality or taking the world to be a certain way.<sup>327</sup> To borrow a Proustian expression made famous by Martha Nussbaum, our hedonic experiences can be described as ‘geographical upheavals of *thought*.’<sup>328</sup>

Plato’s hedonic cognitivism involves two key ideas. Firstly, Plato claims that what we usually treat as one thing—our pleasure—can in fact be broken down in two parts, aspects, or faces: an act (*that* we are enjoying ourselves) and the content of this attitude (*what* we are enjoying) which derives from the representational elements (the δόξαι and φαντάσματα) that constitute a pleasure. When the representational content is false, when it gets things wrong, the pleasure as such gets infected with its falsity—even though Socrates concedes to Protarchus that it is impossible to detract from the fact *that*

---

will define it as boiling of the blood and heat around the heart. Of these, one describes the matter (τὴν ὕλην) and the other the form and the account (τὸ εἶδος καὶ τὸν λόγον). For this is the account of the thing, but it is necessary that it be in matter of this sort if it is to exist.’ In the same way, a house can be described as ‘a shelter capable of guarding against destruction’ or as a collection of ‘stones and bricks and timber.’ For discussion, see Charles (2009).

<sup>326</sup> SSR 4b.5 = Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 14.18.32.

<sup>327</sup> Plato—rather than the Stoics who defined pleasure as ‘a fresh belief that a good thing is present’ (SVF iii.391)—should be credited, then, with the invention of cognitivism about emotions and pleasures. See Moss (2012: 264n12) and Thein (2012: 121n24) who claims that ‘there is an obvious possibility of taking the *Philebus* to be one of the sources of the Stoic conception of emotions.’

<sup>328</sup> Nussbaum (2001) (my emphasis).

one is experiencing pleasure. That is to say, a false pleasure is still genuinely a pleasure and not something else. Secondly, I have suggested that any pleasure necessarily involves the factual belief that some state of affairs  $p$  obtains and the evaluative belief that  $p$  is  $F$  (positively evaluatively charged and closely connected with the subject's cares and concerns).

Accordingly, Plato recognizes two ways in which our pleasures—and other emotional or affective states like fear or anger—can be false: a pleasure can be false because its content represents the hedonic object as good, although it is indifferent or bad, and a pleasure can be false because its content represents the hedonic object as obtaining, although it is not-obtaining.<sup>329</sup> What this suggests, then, is that hedonic truth or falsity is always a matter of (mis)representation. Like any other representational attitude, a pleasure is true—or correct, or accurate, or hitting its aim—if its content represents the world correctly, it is false—or incorrect, or inaccurate, or missing the mark—if its content represents the world incorrectly.

Although Socrates himself suggests that the topic of false pleasure is 'directly relevant (πρὸς τὰ παρεληλυθότα ... προσήκοντα, 36d6–7)' to the discussion he and Protarchus are having, it is far from clear how hedonic fallibilism, as well as the underlying hedonic cognitivism, are meant to integrate with the dialogue's

---

<sup>329</sup> A similar take on Plato's fallibilism can be found in Damascius (*Lectures on the Philebus* 184 and 186) who also believes that Plato recognizes two ways in which a pleasure can be false: if the hedonic content is 'not present' or if it is 'not good'. What this suggests, then, Damascius continues, is that, like belief, pleasure aims at truth, but, unlike belief, it also aims at the good: 'the love of the ugly, or of what is not beautiful, is false, since it is a striving that seeks the beautiful.' Gosling (1975: 50) also broaches this interpretive option (albeit without endorsing it): 'for any given state of affairs, there is an appropriate reaction, and just as when we make a judgement we are aiming at the right judgement about the thing, so when we react, we are aiming at the right reaction.' See e.g. Evans (2008-a: 120 and 120n40) for brief discussion.



inquiry into what makes for a life worth living.

In this section, I turn to this puzzle and canvass what I take to be the most salient ramifications of this stretch of argumentation. More precisely, it strikes me that Plato's hedonic fallibilism, and the underlying hedonic cognitivism, make trouble for Protarchus' naïve thought that pleasure is self-sufficient.<sup>330</sup> For one, the proposal that pleasures have content in virtue of which they have semantic value is an apt illustration of the more general idea that pleasures cannot be understood independently from cognizance. For another, if our pleasures are in the business of representing the world and if we prefer true pleasures over false pleasures which mislead us about some way the world is, we are left to conclude that there are other values—such as truth—besides pleasure.

One of the unexpected take away messages of the *Philebus* is that there is a tight, if not inseverable link between pleasure and cognition—the two initial candidates for the good. Part of Socrates's strategy is to show that pleasure cannot be understood independently from cognition. Indeed, intellection, cognition, reason, or some other kind of mental operation turns out to be a *necessary condition* for pleasure: although 'the intelligent can be pleasant,' as Butler captures the spirit of the *Philebus* nicely, 'the pleasant is, in all ways, intelligent.'<sup>331</sup>

The elenctic part of the dialogue (20e4–21d5) already hints at this strong connection between pleasure and cognition. If we were

---

<sup>330</sup> Cf. 21a14–b2: '[Soc.] Might you not have some need of knowledge, intelligence, and calculation, or anything else that is related to them? [Prot.] How so? If I had pleasure, I would have everything (πάντα γὰρ ἔχοιμι ἄν που τὸ χαίρειν ἔχων)!'

<sup>331</sup> J. E. Butler (2007: 121). This idea also influences the picture of the good life (as a mixture of pleasure and reason) the dialogue ends up espousing: as J. E. Butler (2007: 120) again puts it, 'if you take any slice of the good life,' including one's pleasures, 'there is no chance that you will end up with an intellect-free slice.'

‘devoid of intelligence (κενόν ὄντα πάσης φρονήσεως)’ and did not possess ‘either reason, memory, knowledge, or true opinion (νοῦν καὶ μνήμην καὶ ἐπιστήμην καὶ δόξαν μὴ κεκτημένος ἀληθῆ, 21b6–7),’ our hedonic life as we know and love it could not exist. A lack of cognitive capacities would not just mean that we could not remember past pleasure and plan for future pleasure, it would even make us ignorant of our occurrent pleasures: like some kind of lowly sea creature, we would not have the self-intimating belief that we are enjoying ourselves while experiencing pleasure.

The *Philebus* also suggests that the mind is necessary for the experience of pleasure *überhaupt*. Although Socrates initially claims that pleasure is identical to the restoration of a previously disrupted state of harmony and balance—‘the return towards its own nature, this general restoration, is pleasure (τὴν δ’ εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ὁδόν, ταύτην . . . τὴν ἀναχώρησιν . . . ἡδονήν, 32b2–4)’<sup>332</sup>—he is quick to add that such a restorative process only turns into a pleasure if it provokes a kind of ‘upheaval (σεισμὸν)’ in the mind and enters conscious awareness. In a way, then, even raw material pleasures involve some mental operation (αἴσθησις) and there is another type of pleasure—including anticipatory and intellectual pleasures—which is solely mental or psychological.

I believe that the hedonic cognitivism fueling Plato’s hedonic fallibilism serves as a powerful third illustration of this general idea that pleasure and cognizance cannot be pulled apart. Its key proposal, recall, is that our pleasures have content and that the human mind is responsible for this content. Were it not for the activity of the writer and the painter in our minds—the psychological craftsmen who are in the business of claiming that some state of affairs obtains and that this state of affairs is positively tied to the things we care about—we would

---

<sup>332</sup> Cf. 32a8–b4 and 31d1–10.

not be able to experience pleasure.<sup>333</sup>

Hedonic cognitivism also suggests that our pleasures can be true or false. Again, Socrates refrains from spelling out how this defence of hedonic fallibilism is supposed to integrate with their attempt to delineate the good life. ‘One is left to assume,’ as de Sousa puts it, ‘that falsity might detract from the claim of any conditions to be life’s chief good.’<sup>334</sup> Throughout the *Philebus*, and especially in the discussion of the typology of false pleasure, a lot of emphasis is put on the association between pleasure and illusion or deception.<sup>335</sup> Towards the end of their discussion, Protarchus concludes that pleasure is ‘the greatest impostor of all (ἀπάντων ἀλαζονίστατον, 65c5)’ and throughout his account of false pleasure, Socrates repeatedly claims that such pleasure pulls appearance and reality apart.<sup>336</sup> Indeed, the

---

<sup>333</sup> Note that if the cognitive activities of the human mind are responsible for the content of our pleasures, this undermines another idea defended by Protarchus in the opening gambits of the dialogue. When Socrates tried to force him to accept that the pleasure of the moderate or wise person is different from the pleasure of the immoderate or foolish person, Protarchus responds as follows: ‘Well, yes, Socrates—the pleasures come from opposite things (ἀπ’ ἐναντίων), but they are not at all opposed to one another (οὐ μὴν αὐταί γε ἀλλήλαις ἐναντίαι). For how could pleasure not be, of all things, most like pleasure (ἡδονῆ γε ἡδονῆ μὴ οὐχ ὁμοίωτατον ἂν εἶη ... πάντων χρημάτων)? How could that thing not be most like itself (τοῦτο αὐτὸ εἰσὶ)?’ (12d7–e2) Plato’s Fallibilism Argument suggests, however, that pleasures are differentiated or individuated on the basis of their content in precisely the same way in which excitement and nervousity are differentiated on the basis of their content despite their identical phenomenal feel. What Plato suggests, in other words, is that the differentiae of specific, individual pleasures are not phenomenal, they are cognitive. See de Sousa (2018: §2) for good discussion of this line of thought.

<sup>334</sup> De Sousa (2013: 125).

<sup>335</sup> Moss (2006: 504, 533n64) and Mooradian (1992).

<sup>336</sup> Cf. e.g. 42b9–1c for the distinction between ‘mere appearance’ and ‘real being (τὸ φαίνόμενον, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ὄν)’ and 44c8–9 where merely apparent (rather than genuine) pleasure is associated with trickery or witchcraft and untrustworthiness or unsoundness.

very notion of falsity—being ψευδής—carries overtones of deception and illusion.<sup>337</sup> This suggests that a promising way to unpack this notion is to say that a pleasure is false just in case it deceives us about some way the world really is.<sup>338</sup>

While in the grip of such false or deceptive pleasure, one is in the grip of a misrepresentation of the world: the representational elements that constitute one's pleasure misrepresent some way the world outside oneself really is. My deceptive pleasure might involve the false belief, say, that I am drinking a fancy wine, although it is in fact simple *vin de table*, or it might involve the false belief that money is a final good, although it is merely instrumentally valuable. In both cases, how the world strikes me and how the world really is are not aligned—appearance and reality come radically apart.

What this suggests, then, is that the subject of a false or deceptive pleasure is out of contact with reality—he lives in what Iris Murdoch calls 'a private dream world'—even though this tragic predicament cannot be appreciated from an inside perspective. By its nature as a representational state highly similar to belief, a pleasure necessarily presents its content as *true*: it suggests that some state of affairs obtains and that this state of affairs is good or otherwise positively evaluatively charged.

Dangerously enough, though, from an inside, first-person perspective, such a false pleasure cannot be told apart from a true pleasure that gets things right and informs us about the way things really *are*. Like all illusions, the pleasure-seeker's predicament—the fact that he is living in a private dream world—cannot be directly seen for what it is. From a subjective perspective, a true pleasure that gets things right and a false or deceptive pleasure that gets things wrong can after all not be told apart—in the same way in which a true belief

---

<sup>337</sup> See LSJ (s.v. 2).

<sup>338</sup> See especially Whiting (2014: 24) but also Fletcher (2018-b: 395–396).

and a false belief feel exactly identical from the inside.

This arguably explains why Socrates calls such a false or deceptive pleasure a ‘ridiculous imitation’ of true pleasure: if my pleasure lacks justification and if it does not make contact with some deeper reality beyond my head, even though I am not in a position to register this from my first-person perspective, I am less well off than I take myself to be—as Socrates’s later discussion of ridiculousness suggests.<sup>339</sup>

The proposal that false pleasures mislead us about some way the world really is makes trouble for the hedonist’s intuition that all and only pleasure matters or that pleasure is sufficient for a life worth living. Socrates’s jelly-fish *elenchus* had already forced Protarchus to concede that a life full of pleasure lacks other things of value—if only because ‘not possessing right belief, [we] would not realize that [we] are enjoying [ourselves] while we do (δόξαν μὴ κεκτημένον ἀληθῆ μὴ δοξάζειν χαίρειν χαίροντα).’<sup>340</sup>

By introducing the possibility of false pleasure and hedonic mistakes, I argue, Socrates introduces an analogous line of thought. If pleasure is in the business of representing the world, it seemingly follows that we do not just want to experience pleasure *tout court* but that we want our pleasures to latch onto the world and get things right. Given the fact that false pleasures are excluded from the final ranking, Plato seems to suggest, in other words, that pleasures only have value if they are true or reality-based.<sup>341</sup> Nozick describes the

---

<sup>339</sup> I am very much indebted here to Whiting’s (2014) excellent discussion of Plato’s defence of fallibilism in the *Philebus*.

<sup>340</sup> For discussion of this stretch of argumentation, see Evans (2007-b), Mouroutsou (2021), and O’Reilly (2019).

<sup>341</sup> If this conviction counts as a kind of puritanism—as Sumner (1996: 111) thinks it does—it suggests that even the puritan elements in Plato’s hedonic theorizing are philosophically motivated and rather sophisticated.

intuition his famous experience machine thought experiment is meant to trigger in a strikingly similar way: '[Another reason for not plugging into an experience machine is that] there is no actual contact with any deeper reality, though the experience of it can be simulated. Many persons desire to leave themselves open to such contact and to a plumbing of deeper significance.'<sup>342</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined Plato's Fallibilism Argument. In it, Socrates develops weaker and stronger types of hedonic cognitivism to defend hedonic fallibilism and resist Protarchus' claim that pleasure is immune to error. On a weaker line of thought, our pleasures are often predicated on, or accompanied by, a false belief which suggests that we cannot experience the pleasure at hand without being in error about some way the world really is. On a stronger line of thought, a pleasure is not just predicated on a (potentially false) belief, it is constituted by (potentially false) representational elements which suggests that the pleasure *itself* can be true or false.

In addition, I have argued that true and falsity is always a matter of (mis)representation: a pleasure is true if it gets things right and represents the world correctly, it is false if it gets things wrong and represents the world incorrectly. I have also argued that pleasure involves both a factual belief and an evaluative belief which suggests that we should recognize two ways in which pleasure can be false: a pleasure can be false if it claims that some state of affairs obtains,

---

<sup>342</sup> Nozick (1974: 43). Interestingly, the contemporary hedonist Fred Feldman (2004: 109–114) attempts to circumnavigate this problem by introducing the notion of 'truth-adjusted hedonism' on which a pleasure is only worth having if it is true and makes contact with the world.

although it does not, and a pleasure can be false if it claims that this state of affairs is valuable, although it is not.

Lastly, I have suggested that, taken together, hedonic cognitivism and hedonic fallibilism put pressure on Protarchus's hedonistic claim that pleasure is sufficient for the good life. For one, hedonic cognitivism serves as a neat illustration of the dialogue's claim that pleasure and cognition cannot be pulled apart: our pleasures derive their content from some cognitive operation of the human mind. For another, the fact that pleasures can get things right or wrong in virtue of their representational content triggers the intuition that we want our pleasures to make contact with a deeper reality which invites the conclusion, in turn, that human beings care about other things besides pleasure.<sup>343</sup>

---

<sup>343</sup> The material contained in this chapter has been presented in London (*British Society for the History of Philosophy Annual Conference*) and in Oxford (*Curing Through Questioning: Philosophy as Therapy Across Ancient Traditions and Modern Applications*) (special thanks go to Sybilla Pereira for amazing discussion of (Platonic) philosophy's therapeutic potential and psychotherapy's (hidden) philosophical underpinnings).

#### 4. Problems with the Life of Pleasure: the Γένεσις Argument in Plato's *Philebus* (53c4–55a12)

At *Philebus* 53c4–55a12—right after the elaborate investigation into the nature and varieties of pleasure—Plato's Socrates puts forward an argument in which he identifies pleasure as a 'becoming' or 'going-on' (γένεσις) rather than a 'being' (οὐσία). He then uses this piece of information about pleasure's allegedly inferior nature to somehow bar it from having value or being good.

This Γένεσις Argument, as I will call it, must be an essential piece of argumentation in the overall economy of the *Philebus*, then, given its sweeping conclusion, its striking consequences for the dialogue's central question of what makes someone's life go best, and its outright dismissal of the hedonism propagated by Socrates's interlocutors, Philebus and Protarchus.<sup>344</sup> What is more, it is the only place in the dialogues where Plato puts one of the guiding concepts of his thinking—the stark opposition between becoming and being—to ethical rather than epistemological use and it must also be the claim Aristotle is wrestling with in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he emphatically rejects the idea that pleasure is a γένεσις and defines it as an activity or activation (ἐνέργεια) instead.<sup>345</sup>

We have ample reason, then, to try and come to grips with the Γένεσις Argument. Surprisingly, though, the argument has received little in the way of detailed, let alone constructive attention. Dismissive

---

<sup>344</sup> See e.g. 11b4–6, 60a7–b1, and 66d7–8. References throughout this chapter are to the *Philebus*, unless otherwise noted. Throughout this chapter, my references are to the *Philebus* (unless otherwise noted), my translations are loosely based on Frede (1993), and I go from the Greek text edited by Burnet (1901).

<sup>345</sup> See e.g. van Riel (2000) for a discussion of Aristotle's critical response to Plato's restorative theory of pleasure.



reactions come in roughly two forms. Plato's readers either choose simply not to pay any serious attention to the argument or they discard it as an awkwardly situated, poorly developed, philosophically hampered afterthought, which not only clashes with the rest of the dialogue, but also reeks of a Platonic bias against pleasure in favour of the lofty yet deeply obscure domain of being.<sup>346</sup>

Those, in contrast, who feel we should not downplay or jettison the argument so readily—a minority of voices in what is already a small amount of literature—generally try to soften the argument's sweeping and seemingly disharmonious conclusion by developing readings according to which the argument merely denies value to a limited class of pleasures or on which it does indeed deny value to *all* pleasures, albeit in a qualified way.<sup>347</sup>

The central aim of this chapter is to carve out and defend another way of reading the argument. Let me at the outset advertise two essential features of my interpretation. To begin, my central contention is that the Γένεσις Argument is not about the lack of goodness of individual and particular episodes of pleasure, as most readers have assumed. Instead, I argue, the argument targets the

---

<sup>346</sup> The argument is not discussed in any detail by e.g. Carone (2000) (for reasons I will address below), Carpenter (2010) (who nevertheless gives a valuable analysis of what Plato is driving at by calling pleasure a γένεσις), Irwin (1995), Gosling and Taylor (1982), and Wolfsdorf (2013-b). Gosling (1975) and Guthrie (1978), to give two authoritative examples, are highly critical.

<sup>347</sup> For limiting readings, see e.g. Fletcher (2014: 119–20 and 134–35), Fletcher 2017: 202n64), and Taylor (1926: 427–29). Later in her paper, having first pressed a skeptical reading, Carone (2000: 266–70) offers a limiting reading as well. Her tactic to make sense of the vexed γένεσις passage must be two-pronged, then, going something like this: Socrates does not himself appropriate the γένεσις theory that is expounded by other people—but even if he did, hypothetically speaking, the argument would only deny value to a limited class of pleasures. For qualifying readings, see e.g. Aufderheide (2013), Evans (2008-b), Frede (1993: 65), Frede (1997: 306–18), and Russell (2005: 196–99).

identification of pleasure as the (ultimate, highest) good (τὸ ἀγαθόν/τὰγαθόν), around which we ought to orient, organize, and structure our lives by putting pleasure at the centre of our agency.<sup>348</sup> Put succinctly, Plato aims to show that—due to its unstable and dependent nature as a γένεσις controlled by an οὐσία—pleasure cannot be the good our life as a whole is aimed at reaching.

Additionally, and this brings me to the second crucial feature of my interpretation, I will suggest that the Γένεσις Argument contains two independent yet closely related sub-arguments I will call the Argument From Finality and the Argument From A Life Not Worth Living. Although both arguments establish that pleasure fails to be the good, they slightly differ in the way in which they arrive at this conclusion. the Argument From Finality (*Philebus* 54c6–d8) offers us an abstract, deductive argument—from the armchair, if you will—purely rooted in metaphysical considerations pertaining to pleasure’s inferior ontological status. It suggests that pleasure—as a γένεσις happening for the sake and on account of an οὐσία—is not end-like or final enough to be the good.

An essential feature of the Argument From A Life Not Worth Living (54e1–55a12), in contrast, lies in the fact that it closely examines the messy details of the lives of those who take pleasure as the good and turn it into the overarching, central end their lives are aiming for. Such people necessarily get tangled up in a web of ἀλογία (absurdity,

---

<sup>348</sup> Taking the argument as addressing pleasure as the overarching good seems to find its first formulation in the ancient (Neo-)Platonist Damascius’s *Lectures on the Philebus* 214 and 223–24. More recently, Meinwald (2008: 490) and Delcomminette (2006: 493–505) have understood the passage along similar lines, although the Meinwald’s interpretation is rather piecemeal, whereas the one put forward by Delcomminette, while more elaborate, is primarily based on a metaphysical problematization of pleasure as the object of desire and, as such, markedly different from the one I will be developing here. For a refreshing, more general (re-)appreciation of the *Philebus* as a dialogue addressing the good and the good human life, see Vogt (2017: 13–40).

inconsistency, irrationality), Socrates claims, and this means—at least when looking at their life from a clear-headed, well-informed, rational perspective—that there must be something wrong with the premise shaping their way of life, that is to say, that pleasure, again, fails to be the good.

This chapter is organized as follows. In section 1, I introduce the Γένεσις Argument. I explain why Plato identifies pleasure as a γένεσις, unpack this identification, and discuss some recent interpretations. In section 2, I present and defend my own reading, according to which the Γένεσις Argument is designed to establish that pleasure cannot be the good in the centre of our agency and at the core of our way of life: it primarily targets the *life* of pleasure, we might say. In section 3, having briefly examined the conception of the good operative in the *Philebus* (section 3.1), I flesh out this reading and explain how the Γένεσις Argument arrives at the conclusion that pleasure cannot be the good. To do so, I distinguish the Sub-Argument From Finality and the Sub-Argument From A Life Not Worth Living and analyse both carefully (in sections 3.2 and 3.3, respectively). Finally, in section 4, I offer some concluding observations about the philosophical significance of the Γένεσις Argument and situate it in Plato's later thinking about pleasure.

## 1. Elucidating the Γένεσις Argument

Socrates launches the argument by suggesting that 'pleasure is always a γένεσις and that there is no οὐσία at all of pleasure (ἀεὶ γένεσις ἔστιν, οὐσία δὲ οὐκ ἔστι τὸ παράπαν ἡδονῆς, 53c5).'<sup>349</sup> When asked

---

<sup>349</sup> As regards the Γένεσις Argument, note that I am circumventing an interpretative hurdle. Some commentators—most notably Carone (2000: 264–65)—think we should take the argument 'with a pinch of salt': Socrates allegedly just reports the ideas of

to explicate this arcane suggestion, he divides reality into the domain of οὐσία and the domain of γένεσις and then ascribes to them the following features. Whereas an οὐσία (1) exists ‘itself according to itself (αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, 53d3),’ (2) is ‘of supreme worth (σεμνότατον ... πεφυκός, 53d6),’ and (3) exists on account or for the sake of (ἔνεκα/χάριν) itself (53e5–7 and 54a7–8), a γένεσις is (1) ‘desiring or aiming for something else (ἐφιέμενον ἄλλου, 53d4),’ (2) ‘inferior (to an οὐσία) (ἐλλιπὲς ἐκείνου, 53d6–7),’ and (3) merely existing or occurring on account or for the sake of (ἔνεκα/χάριν) an οὐσία (53e5–7 and 54a7–8).

The idea at play must be something like this.<sup>350</sup> Whereas an οὐσία is, so to speak, able to stand on its own two feet, a γένεσις depends on an οὐσία for its existence, its identity, and its value. The guiding concept is the notion of *stability*: in sharp contrast to γενέσεις, which need οὐσίαι to exist, to be what they are, and to have value, οὐσίαι rest stably in themselves and do not need anything external to bring about their existence, to give them their distinct identity, and to render them valuable.

Although Socrates boldly takes it for granted that pleasure is a γένεσις and also seems to have a firm handle on the ramifications of this claim, we might wonder *why* this is the case and *what* the

---

‘subtle thinkers or ‘smart guys (κομψοὶ τινες)’ (53c6) and casts the argument in a hypothetical, conditional form by using the connective εἴπερ. He is just floating an idea, then, Carone claims, without committing himself to the truth of this idea. However, as Carpenter (2010: 73n2) and Evans (2008-b: 125–26ns10–12) convincingly show, there is good reason to be critical of Carone’s reading: the particle εἴπερ often has causal rather than hypothetical force (especially when used in deductive arguments like the Γένεσις Argument or at 44a9), Socrates expresses immense gratitude to the ‘subtle thinkers’ and slowly but surely even takes ownership of their ideas, and, most importantly, there is strong circumstantial evidence for ascribing a γένεσις theory of pleasure to Plato—as we will shortly see.

<sup>350</sup> I am roughly following Carpenter (2010) here.

identification entails. Scholars almost unanimously agree that Plato identifies pleasure as a γένεσις because he thinks pleasure is intimately bound up with the restoration of a disintegrated equilibrium or harmony.<sup>351</sup> This is how Socrates summarized the restorative model of pleasure and pain earlier in the *Philebus*:

[T4.1] When we find the harmony in living creatures disrupted, there will at the same time be a disintegration of their nature and a rise of pain (λύσιν τῆς φύσεως καὶ γένεσιν ἀλγηδόνων ... γίγνεσθαι). But if the harmony is regained and the former nature restored, . . . pleasure occurs (ἀρμοσσομένης τε καὶ εἰς τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ἀπιούσης ἡδονὴν γίγνεσθαι). Every time the natural combination of limit and unlimitedness that forms living organisms . . . is destroyed, this destruction is pain (τὴν φθορὰν λύπην εἶναι), while the return towards the organism's own nature, this restoration, is pleasure (τὴν εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ὁδόν, ταύτην . . . τὴν ἀναχώρησιν . . . ἡδονήν). (31d4–32b4)

Note that pleasure's evil twin, pain, is referred to as a γένεσις connected with the disintegration of the living creature's nature, while pleasure is described as a return to the creature's own οὐσία and an instance of becoming (γίγνεσθαι). As the complex metaphysics developed earlier in the *Philebus* suggests, these οὐσίαι figuring centrally in our pleasures must be the harmonious and equilibrious mixtures (μεικτά) of limit (πέρας) and unlimitedness (ἄπειρον) that are constitutive of human nature, such as health and integrity, beauty, strength, harmony, and other good characteristics.<sup>352</sup> That the οὐσίαι

---

<sup>351</sup> See e.g. Carpenter (2010: 13–14 and 18–19), Delcomminette (2006: 497–99), Evans (2008-b: 129–30), Frede (1992: 454); (1993: lv), Frede (1997: 306, 314, and 316–18), Gosling (1975: 220–21), and Hackforth (1945: 107).

<sup>352</sup> See e.g. 25b5–26d10, 31c11, and 65a1–5 and compare the expressions γένεσιν εἰς οὐσίαν (26d8) and γεγεννημένην οὐσίαν (27b8–9). As Delcomminette (2006: 496) concludes: 'Les membres du troisième genre doivent donc être identifiés à des *ousiai*,

involved in pleasure are constitutive of human nature is corroborated by the fact that Plato frequently analyses pleasure and pain in terms of the disintegration and restoration of an organism's *nature* (φύσις),<sup>353</sup> a word that is virtually synonymous with οὐσία in Ancient Greek.

When we stray from such a natural, harmonious, and balanced οὐσία to a disbalanced, inharmonious, and unnatural state of depletion, disintegration, disruption, or destruction and then return to our natural state again during processes of repair, restoration, or replenishment—Plato is frustratingly but perhaps deliberately loose in his terminology—we psychologically experience this return to our baseline state as a pleasure.

Put differently, pleasure consists in the restorative process through which a state of disintegration makes place for a natural state of harmony and equilibrium, provided—as Socrates later adds in an important rider (e.g. at 43b2)—that this restorative process is registered through αἴσθησις (perception or sensation).<sup>354</sup> In still other

---

plutôt qu'aux *geneseis* qui y mènent.' This implies that the οὐσίαι restored by γένεσις are mixtures of unlimitedness and limit, while pleasures themselves—the γένεσις—typically belong in the unlimited class.

<sup>353</sup> E.g. at 31d5 and 32a6–8.

<sup>354</sup> Recently, some scholars—most notably Fletcher (2014)—have nevertheless resuscitated Gosling and Taylor's suggestion (1982: 132) that 'in the *Philebus* Plato has no general formula to encapsulate the nature of pleasure.' They claim, in other words, that the restoration model—and with it the γένεσις label—does not apply to *all* pleasures. I obviously cannot do full justice to this difficult interpretive issue here, let alone settle it. Let me nevertheless provide two strong considerations in favour of ascribing a wide scope, all-pleasure-encompassing restoration model to Plato. Most importantly, Socrates uses restoration language when he analyses the pure sensory pleasures of sound, smell, and sight and the pure cognitive pleasures of learning: the former are described as 'the perceived *replenishments* of painless and unperceived lacks (τὰς ἐνδείας ἀναισθήτους ἔχοντα καὶ ἀλύπτους τὰς πληρώσεις αἰσθητὰς καὶ ἡδέϊας)' (51b5–6, emphasis added) and the latter are said to be experienced by those who learn things by '*filling themselves* with knowledge (μαθημάτων πληρωθεῖσιν)'

words, pleasure is a γένεσις—the coming to be of a natural, harmonious, and equilibrated state of being—entering our conscious awareness.<sup>355</sup> This explains, then, why Socrates opens the Γένεσις Argument with a blanket identification of pleasure as a γένεσις rather than an οὐσία: according to the restoration model of pleasure, essentially and deep down, all pleasures are γενέσεις.<sup>356</sup>

This identification has multiple important ramifications. At the centre of Socrates’s conceptual analysis lies the idea that every γένεσις ‘necessarily (ἐξ ἀνάγκης, 54c7)’ takes place for the sake of (ἐνεκα/χάριτι) an οὐσία, as Socrates repeatedly and emphatically stresses throughout the argument. The fact that Socrates illustrates this

---

(52a5, emphasis added). Apart from this seemingly decisive piece of textual evidence, we can take issue with one of the main considerations often put forward for narrowing the application of the restoration model down to a limited group of pleasures. Fletcher (2014: 119–20 and 134–35), for instance, sees the Γένεσις Argument as strong evidence for a narrow scope reading of Plato’s restoration model: because some pleasures are called good in the final ranking and because the Γένεσις Argument seems to conclude that pleasures are *not* good, the Γένεσις Argument —along with the restoration model—cannot apply to the pleasures mentioned in the final ranking, on the reasonable assumption that Plato is not contradicting himself within one and the same dialogue. This is too quick, though. If the Γένεσις Argument aims to establish that pleasure cannot be *the* good, as I will argue below, the contradiction vanishes: some pleasures can be *good*, despite being γενέσεις, although, as a γένεσις, pleasure cannot be *the* good our life as a whole is aimed at.

<sup>355</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s summary of Plato’s take on pleasure in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: ‘every pleasure is a registered/conscious/perceived γένεσις toward (the organism’s) nature (πᾶσα ἡδονὴ γένεσις ἐστὶν εἰς φύσιν αἰσθητή)’ (1152b13).

<sup>356</sup> We might wonder with Hackforth (1945: 105) why Socrates—who has just developed a fine-grained typology of pleasure—suddenly zooms out again and treats pleasure as a unity. Delcomminette (2006: 493) offers a satisfying explanation of this surprising move, based on the nature of Socrates’s ‘divine method’: ‘[I]l est tout à fait normal que Socrate en revienne au plaisir en général au terme de son analyse: . . . la voie inverse de la méthode divine implique que l’unité du genre ne peut être pleinement déterminée qu’une fois la division en espèces accomplie.’

relation between the two by means of the relation between a lover and his beloved (53d9–10) implies that the relation also allows for a slightly looser construal. Although lovers obviously do not exist *for the sake of* what they love, we might nevertheless describe them as existing *thanks to* what they love, in the sense that to a large degree they depend on it.<sup>357</sup>

This dependency manifests itself in various ways. Most importantly, a γένεσις owes its existence to the superordinate οὐσία: were it not for the disintegrated οὐσία waiting to be restored, there would be no such thing as pleasure in the first place.<sup>358</sup> In this sense, pleasure—the γένεσις—quite literally occurs for the sake of (creating) the οὐσία. This picture entails, furthermore, that pleasure is intimately, if not inextricably bound up with the negative state of being at a distance from the harmony and equilibrium it is trying to restore—a negative state that typically manifests itself, psychologically, as need, lack, desire, or even *pain*.

It also means that pleasures are slippery and episodic: a pleasure dwindles and evaporates once it succeeds in re-establishing the disintegrated οὐσία.<sup>359</sup> (Paradoxically, though, and unlike pain,

---

<sup>357</sup> This makes better sense in the Greek, where the expression used to capture this relation between some *x* and some *y* (ἐνεκα/χάριτι) is ambiguous: it can both mean ‘for the sake of’ (*x* occurs *in order to* bring about *y*) or ‘on account of’/‘thanks to’ (*y* explains or justifies *x*).

<sup>358</sup> The relation between the οὐσία and the γένεσις might seem bidirectional. To be sure, in Socrates’s example, the οὐσία (the ship) also owes its existence to the γένεσις (the shipbuilding) and not just the other way around. Things are different, though, in the case of pleasure: pleasure does not create the οὐσία from scratch but merely recreates it, bringing it *back* into existence.

<sup>359</sup> As Alexander Mourelatos has pointed out to me, this is confirmed on linguistic grounds by the fact that the verb ἴδεσθαι does not have a known perfect tense. See Owen (1971–172: 149–150) for a similar observation.



pleasure is nevertheless attracted to its very own annihilation,<sup>360</sup> like a moth attracted to a light source that kills it.) Lastly, labelling pleasure as a γένεσις taking place for the sake of an οὐσία is tantamount to claiming that the γένεσις derives its value from the value of the οὐσία it is bringing about, in the same way in which the process of building a ship—to follow Socrates’s other example (54b1–4)—derives its value from the value of the ship one is trying to create.

With this ontological machinery in place, Socrates offers a compressed argument against the ascription of value or goodness to pleasure (54c6–d8). Call this argument the Argument From Finality. The argument goes something like this. It starts by observing that because pleasure is a γένεσις, it necessarily comes to be for the sake of an οὐσία (54c6–7). We are then given the following axiological principle to assess whether something is good: what comes to be for the sake of something else belongs in ‘another class (than that of the good) (ἄλλην μοῖραν, 54c11),’ while that for the sake of which something else comes to be is placed ‘in the class of the good (ἐν τῇ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μοίρα, 54c10).’ It follows, given these premises, that pleasure does not belong in the class of the good (54d1–3).

This is a sweeping and rather puzzling conclusion, especially in light of the fact that there is ample reason for reading the *Philebus* as a dialogue in which Plato offers us a more nuanced and more welcoming stance toward pleasure and its possible role in the good life. Socrates and Protarchus almost immediately agree, for instance, that the good life will be a mixed life in which both pleasure and cognition have their place and they even dismiss a life without pleasure (yet filled with reasoning) as not worth living for a human being. In addition, at 13b1, it is admitted that pleasure can be good and

---

<sup>360</sup> I borrow this astute and important observation from Delcomminette (2006: 499) who writes: ‘à la différence de la peine, [le plaisir] tend néanmoins vers cet état — c’est-à-dire, paradoxalement, vers sa propre annihilation.’

at other places in the dialogue this is very strongly implied.<sup>361</sup> Finally, Socrates sharply distances himself from ‘Philebus’s enemies’ (44b6), the ‘grumpy’ (δυσχερεῖς) (46a5) and hard-headed ascetics who not only harbor an ‘inordinate hatred’ (44c7) of pleasure but even go so far as to deny its very existence (44b9–10).<sup>362</sup>

Somewhat confusingly, though, the Γένεσις Argument seems to arrive at precisely the opposite conclusion, according to which no pleasure deserves to be called good.<sup>363</sup> Readers of the *Philebus* have an interpretive problem on their hands, then, the problem of squaring these seemingly diametrically opposed lines of thought regarding pleasure’s alleged (lack of) value that we find scattered throughout the dialogue. Call this the inconsistency problem.<sup>364</sup>

The literature contains, roughly, three ways of dealing with the inconsistency problem. Some scholars throw their hands up and propose we ignore or jettison the Γένεσις Argument, usually justifying this extreme measure by complaining about the disappointing quality of the argument or by taking it as a mere hypothesis Socrates is just toying with for the sheer fun of it.<sup>365</sup> Others have advanced less radical and forbidding ways of dealing with the tension, mainly by claiming that the Γένεσις Argument merely denies

---

<sup>361</sup> E.g. at 21a8–22b9, 28a1–3, 50e5–53c3, 61d1–64b9, and 66c4–7.

<sup>362</sup> I thank Katja Vogt for making me more sensitive to the crucial importance of this bit of text for our appreciation of the fact that the *Philebus* is decidedly milder than other dialogues when it comes to the value of pleasure.

<sup>363</sup> This influential reading goes back to Hackforth (1945: 106).

<sup>364</sup> See Aufderheide (2013) who brings this problem into focus and puts forward a solution with which I will engage below.

<sup>365</sup> See e.g. Carone (2000: 264–65). Likewise, Gosling (1975: 220) complains that ‘one gets the impression that Plato had this piece to hand, was unwilling to abandon it, could not blend it in smoothly, so in desperation inserted it badly at this point,’ and Guthrie (1978: 228) rapidly dismisses it as ‘an unsatisfactory little argument, soon to be refuted by Aristotle.’

value to a *limited* class of pleasures or by claiming that it denies value to all pleasures but only in a *qualified* way. Call these readings *limiting* and *qualifying* readings, respectively.

If we think we should strive to read Plato as charitably as possible, the limiting and qualifying readings are obviously preferable to the dismissive readings. And if we care about textual support, as we should, the qualifying readings seem preferable to the limiting readings. As I explained earlier, there is no strong indication in the text that a certain class of pleasures falls outside Socrates's blanket identification of pleasure as a restorative process, and the same goes, even more straightforwardly, for Socrates's blanket identification of pleasure as a γένεσις. To repeat: all pleasures consist in a γένεσις or restoration of a disintegrated (bodily or psychological) balance and harmony, provided that this restorative process registers sensorily and passes the threshold of our conscious awareness.

This leaves us with the qualifying readings. When Socrates intimates elsewhere in the dialogue that pleasure can be good, on the qualifying readings he actually means that pleasure can be good *in some qualified sense*. Likewise, when he denies pleasure's goodness in the Γένεσις Argument, he actually means that pleasure fails to be *unqualifiedly good*. Pleasures are not *really* good, then, although they can be, say, conditionally good, dependently good, derivatively good, extrinsically good, imperfectly good, instrumentally good, not good in their own right but good in some other way, remedially good, subsidiarily good, therapeutically good, or whatever other kind of qualification of the good one might come up with.<sup>366</sup>

To see more exactly how such qualifying readings play out, let us examine a recent paper by Joachim Aufderheide that arguably contains the most developed and most sustained version of this type

---

<sup>366</sup> I have taken these different construals of pleasure's alleged qualified goodness from a variety of sources collected in note 344.

of interpretation. In an attempt to find his way around the inconsistency problem, Aufderheide begins by distinguishing three ways for something to be good. A thing can be good in its own right by either being (1) independently good or (2) dependently good, or a thing can (merely) be (3) derivatively good (by standing in a certain relation to dependent goods). A thing is independently good if, and only if, its goodness is in no way related to anything else (this only holds for the good itself); a thing is dependently good if it shares in what is independently good; and a thing is derivatively good if it stands in a certain relation to a dependent good.<sup>367</sup>

Aufderheide subsequently uses this distinction to argue that, as a γένεσις, every pleasure fails to be good in its own right, although a pleasure might still be dependently good—and thereby good in its own right—with respect to its objects, as Socrates seems to claim outside the Γένεσις Argument. There are, in other words, different ways to determine an entity's value. One way would be to consider the entity's nature or status as either a γένεσις or an οὐσία; another way would be to consider the entity's objects and the share these have in true goodness due to their share in the properties Plato takes to be the hallmarks of the good (beauty, measure, and truth).

A craft like medicine, for instance, may fail to be good in its own right and merely be derivatively good insofar as it takes place for the sake of something else (healing people), while simultaneously it may be dependently good—and hence good in its own right—insofar as it has a share in (scientific) truth. Likewise, pleasures may fail to be good in their own right and merely be derivatively good insofar as they are γενέσεις, while they may at the same time be dependently good—and thereby good in their own right—in virtue of having, say, beautiful objects.

---

<sup>367</sup> Aufderheide (2013: 819–20).

What Aufderheide is suggesting, then, is that we should unpack the argument's conclusion that pleasure does not belong in the class of the good as follows: insofar as pleasure is a γένεσις, pleasure is not good in its own right.<sup>368</sup> Crucially, though, this does not mean that a pleasure cannot at the very same time be dependently good and hence good in its own right—as Socrates suggests elsewhere in the dialogue—when evaluated from the perspective of the pleasure's relation with independent goodness through mediating true, beautiful, and/or measured objects.

Before proceeding, let me distinguish three important features of qualifying readings such as Aufderheide's. To begin, they are grounded in sharp distinctions in goodness or value and these interpretations only get off the ground by reading such distinctions into the text of the Γένεσις Argument. Qualifying readings, additionally, take the Γένεσις Argument to be mainly designed to expose the lack of value of *individual* and *particular* instances or episodes of pleasure.

Finally, qualifying readings—especially the one proposed by Aufderheide—typically understand the Γένεσις Argument as an abstract exercise in metaphysics, based solely on ontological considerations pertaining to an entity's nature that are inherently sufficient to bar the entity from having value or being good. They take Plato to be engaged in a project of ethicizing metaphysics or metaphysicizing ethics, as it were, in the sense that he allegedly derives an entity's value solely from its metaphysical nature.<sup>369</sup> Indeed, as Aufderheide himself writes, 'the metaphysical point paves the way for the normative one.'<sup>370</sup>

---

<sup>368</sup> Aufderheide (2013: 820 and 835).

<sup>369</sup> Thanks to Agnes Callard for this way of framing the point and for giving me a better handle on what must be driving these different types of interpretation.

<sup>370</sup> Aufderheide (2013: 821).

This also explains why Aufderheide, tellingly enough, ignores the passage immediately following the Argument From Finality in which Socrates firmly dismisses the lives of pleasure-seekers as ἀλογία-ridden and plainly not worth living: he seemingly does not consider this passage an integral and dialectically important part of the Γένεσις Argument as a whole.

## 2. The Γένεσις Argument and the Life of Pleasure

Although qualifying readings successfully skirt the inconsistency problem by drawing on different construals of the possible goodness of pleasure, I generally disagree with their underlying assumptions and develop an alternative reading in this section. Instead of targeting the goodness of individual, particular instances of pleasure and instead of operating purely on the basis of abstract metaphysical considerations, I contend that the argument concerns itself primarily with the concrete, indeed messy, lives of those who identify pleasure—a γένεσις—as the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν or τὰγαθόν) or whatever we have most reason to do in our lives.

These pleasure-seekers claim that pleasure should lie at the very centre of our way of life and be the one and only final end of our desires, practical deliberation, choices, and actions. The thing, that is, around which we should orient, fashion, and organize our lives in the expectation that doing so will make them go best and turn them into good lives worth living. The argument is about the value of a *life*, then, and it operates largely by examining the absurdity, irrationality, or inconsistency of a life in which pleasure is pursued as if it were the highest, ultimate, one and only good.

This interpretation of the argument—this ‘way of life reading,’ as we might call it—has many things going for it. It gives us an

exegetically attractive and philosophically powerful reading of the passage, it tackles the inconsistency problem identified above, and it is more firmly rooted in the text than the qualifying readings currently dominating the literature. Most importantly, reading the argument as an argument about the quality of a life lived as if pleasure were the good jibes nicely with the rest of the *Philebus* and the character of Platonic and ancient ethics in general. For as Julia Annas has convincingly shown, ‘the entry point for ancient ethical reflection is consideration of one’s life as a whole’ and its fundamental question is ‘what should my life be like?’<sup>371</sup>

Readers nevertheless tend to forget that, despite its extensive foray into heady metaphysical doctrines about the ultimate structure of reality and its nitty-gritty analysis of the nature and varieties of pleasure, the *Philebus* is first and foremost a dialogue about precisely this question—the question regarding the good, happiness or the good life (εὐδαιμονία), or what one’s life as a whole should be like.<sup>372</sup> As Socrates claims in the opening gambits of the dialogue, his quest for the good is an investigation into the ‘state and condition of the soul ... that can give all human beings a happy life (ἔξιν ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσιν . . . τὴν δυναμένην ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι τὸν βίον εὐδαίμονα παρέχειν)’ (11d4–6).’

This investigation, in its turn, is nothing but an examination of ‘the most loveable or desirable life (τὸν ἀγαπητότατον βίον, 61e7–8)’, ‘our well-being or living well (τὸ ζῆν ἡμῖν εὖ, 67b4)’, or ‘the good and choiceworthy life (ὁ βίος αἰρετὸς ἄμα καὶ ἀγαθός, 22d6–7)’, to use

---

<sup>371</sup> Annas (1993: 329 and 27). See also Annas (2008), Cooper (2012), Hadot (2002), Parry (2014), Price (2017), and Vogt (2017).

<sup>372</sup> See e.g. Frede (1999-b) and Frede (2010) for an argument to the effect that the *Philebus* is primarily a dialogue about εὐδαιμονία. Equally, Vogt (2010) and (2017: 13–40) argues that the *Philebus* is targeting questions concerning the good and the good life.

one of Socrates's multiple expressions to pick out the good.<sup>373</sup> For Plato, then, the questions 'what is the good?', 'what is happiness?', 'how should I live?', and 'what should my life be like?' are virtually synonymous, and this is why he uses them interchangeably throughout the *Philebus*.<sup>374</sup>

The intimate connection between the good and the life we live is most present in the trial-of-lives thought experiment found at the beginning of the dialogue (20e1–22c4)—a passage that is strikingly similar to the Γένεσις Argument, as some commentators have recently observed.<sup>375</sup> There, Socrates shifts nonchalantly, and without justification, from questions about the good—whether it is pleasure or cognition—to questions about the lives we would, or would not, consider worth living. Having just realized in a flash of insight that, perhaps, the good is neither pleasure nor cognition but a mixture of the two, Socrates hopes to corroborate this hunch by examining two different hypothetical ways of life—'the *life* of pleasure and the *life* of thought (τὸν ἡδονῆς καὶ τὸν φρονήσεως βίον, 20e1–2, emphasis added)—in which both conceptualizations of the good are fully and maximally realized. Positing  $x$  as the good means, in other words, that one should be willing to live a life filled with that  $x$ —otherwise  $x$  cannot be the good.<sup>376</sup>

---

<sup>373</sup> Additionally, Socrates speaks of 'the most beneficial thing there is (ὠφελιμώτατον ἀπάντων)' (11c1–2), 'the best of all human possessions (τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων κτημάτων ἀριστον)' (19c6), 'what is really good for us (τὸ ὄντως ἡμῖν ἀγαθόν)' (21a1–2), 'the completely good (τὸ παντάπασιν ἀγαθόν)' (61a1–2), 'the best (τοῦ ἀρίστου)' (65b1), the 'first possession (κτῆμα ... πρῶτον)' (66a5–6), and 'the good itself (τἀγαθόν γε αὐτὸ)' (67a6).

<sup>374</sup> See e.g. Annas (1993), Annas (2008), Irwin (1995: 52–55), and Vlastos (1991: 200–232) for the interrelation between these seemingly disparate questions.

<sup>375</sup> See e.g. Evans (2008-b) and Harte (2008).

<sup>376</sup> For good discussion of this casual shift on Plato's part from questions about the good to questions about good *lives*, see Vogt (2017: 21).



Similarly, in the Γένεσις Argument —right after what I have called the Argument from Finality—Socrates tries to give the Argument From Finality more teeth by having a closer look at the ridiculous life of ‘those who ascribe (ultimate) value to pleasure (τῶν φασκόντων ἡδονὴν ἀγαθὸν εἶναι, 54d7)’ and ‘whose life’s fulfilment is in processes of becoming (τῶν ἐν ταῖς γενέσεσιν ἀποτελουμένων, 54e1–2).’<sup>377</sup> These people, who posit pleasure as the end (τέλος) of their life, ‘say they would not want to *live* (φασὶ ζῆν οὐκ ἂν δέξασθαι, 54e6, emphasis added)’ without the pleasures attached to restoring disintegrated equilibria. And this means, as it turns out, that they ‘would opt for (a life of) destruction and γένεσις (τὴν δὴ φθορὰν καὶ γένεσιν αἰροῦτ’ ἂν τις, 55a5–6)’ instead of that more balanced kind of life that is not disturbed by the vicissitudes of affective upheaval ‘but oriented towards thought in the purest degree possible (τὸν . . . βίον, τὸν ἐν ᾧ . . . , φρονεῖν δ’ ἦν (δυνατὸν) ὡς οἶόν τε καθαρῶτατα, 55a6–8).’

If these suggestions about the intimate connection between the good and the good life are on target, we should expect the Γένεσις Argument —with its focus on the life of pleasure—to be about the good too and the way in which it shapes our lives. This expectation is indeed confirmed by a remarkable little passage following the Γένεσις Argument (55a12–c3) that is inextricably connected with the Γένεσις Argument itself. In this bit of text, Socrates derives patently weird consequences from the hedonist’s identification of the pleasant and the good in order to cast suspicion on hedonism—an argumentative *reductio* strategy that only works if Socrates is addressing the identification of pleasure and *the* good. Because the Γένεσις Argument

---

<sup>377</sup> I am following Gosling’s translation of τῶν ἀποτελουμένων here, which nicely brings out Socrates’s emphasis on the life lived by the pleasure-seekers. Others—e.g. Evans (2008-b: 135)—stress the τελ- root of the verb and translate the phrase, for instance, as ‘those who find their end (τέλος) in γενέσεις.’

segues so seamlessly into this passage, it makes best interpretive sense to assume that the Γένεσις Argument itself is also concerned with the original thesis of Philebus and Protarchus—as even Hackforth is willing to concede.<sup>378</sup>

Reading the Γένεσις Argument as targeting pleasure's identification with the good is also more textually rooted: although qualifying readings necessarily operate under the assumption that Socrates is working with a distinction between different types of goodness in the Γένεσις Argument (consider Aufderheide's 'good in its own right,' Evans's 'perfect good,' or Frede's 'good in itself'), we find no indication whatsoever in the text that Socrates is explicitly making such an evaluative distinction or implicitly drawing on it, although he could have done so, had he wanted or needed to.<sup>379</sup>

Nor is there reason or textual support for qualifying Socrates's conclusion, as Aufderheide finds himself forced to do. A more straightforward and parsimonious reading of the argument just takes Socrates's claims at face value without smuggling in qualifying expressions. When Socrates concludes at the end of the Argument From Finality that pleasure must be placed 'in another class than the class of the good (εἰς ἄλλην ἢ τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μοῖραν, 54d1–2),' he is saying just what he seems to be saying—that pleasure cannot be the good, not that pleasure, at least considered qua γένεσις, fails to be good in its own right or good in some other qualified and softened sense.<sup>380</sup>

---

<sup>378</sup> Hackforth (1945: 105).

<sup>379</sup> Think e.g. of the sophisticated evaluative distinctions drawn in book 2 of the *Republic* (357b4–d3). Fletcher (2014: 119n14) identifies a similar problem for Frede's qualifying reading.

<sup>380</sup> Indeed, according to LSJ (s.v.), μοῖρα (with a genitive) is often used periphrastically, citing precisely *Philebus* 20d1, 54c10, and 60b3–4 as examples of this kind of use. Construed this way, Socrates's talk of 'the μοῖρα of the good' is just a roundabout way of talking about the good *tout court*.

At this point, let me try to alleviate two possible worries one might have. For one, Socrates's double use of ἀγαθόν without a definite article at 54d7 and 55a10 seems to make textual trouble for the reading of the Γένεσις Argument I have just proposed. This worry is easily dispelled, though, if we consider that Plato often uses this expression as a shorthand for τὸ ἀγαθόν/τὰγαθόν. This happens regularly in the *Philebus*,<sup>381</sup> but we find the same use in the *Republic*'s famous discussion of possible candidates for the Form of the Good where Socrates complains about the conceptual confusion of 'those who define (the Form of the) Good as pleasure (οἱ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀγαθὸν ὀριζόμενοι, *Republic* 505c6).'<sup>382</sup>

One might still wonder, though, why Socrates—at least on the reading developed here—provides yet another argument against Philebus' take on the good. After all, the trial of lives argument had already exploded his bold hedonism and established, in addition, that the good life will be a mixed life. Still, it is undisputable that Philebus' blunt hedonism remains unmitigated and undiluted throughout the dialogue and is constantly lurking in the background of the ongoing discussion. Indeed, as D. Frede claims, it seems to be functioning as 'the counterpoint to the emerging solution to the question of the human good' and remains, in that role, under constant argumentative pressure throughout the dialogue.<sup>383</sup> That is to say, while developing

---

<sup>381</sup> E.g. at 11b4, 13e6, and 20e6.

<sup>382</sup> As Shorey (1935: 89n $\eta$ ) remarks, 'Plato is supremely indifferent to logical precision when it makes no difference for a reasonably intelligent reader.' See Shorey (1908) for a similar take on Plato's nonchalant use of ἀγαθόν in the *Philebus*.

<sup>383</sup> Frede (1996: 221). Hackforth (1945: 5–6) makes a similar point. For Socrates's critical engagement with hedonism, witness e.g. the reductio of hedonism at 55a12–c3, the extensive typology of false pleasures, Protarchus's concession that pleasure has been exposed as 'the greatest imposter' (65c5) and 'something quite ridiculous, if not outright repugnant or obscene (as well as) embarrassing' (65e9–66a3), and Socrates's

his novel pluralistic account of the good, Plato also felt the urgent need to keep hedonism at bay and the Γένεσις Argument can thus be understood, I take it, as one of the available moves in this larger argumentative strategy.<sup>384</sup>

### 3. Problems with the Life of Pleasure

So far, I have argued that there are powerful exegetical and textual reasons for reading the Γένεσις Argument as addressing the equation of pleasure and the good or the identification of the life of pleasure as the good life. This gives us the following interpretation of the Argument From Finality:

1. Pleasure is a γένεσις.
2. Every γένεσις happens for the sake of something else (an οὐσία), not for the sake of itself.
3. Pleasure happens for the sake of something else (an οὐσία), not for the sake of itself.
4. What happens for the sake of something else rather than for the sake of itself cannot be the good.

---

biting remark toward the very end of the dialogue that pleasure can really not turn out to be the good, even if all the animals in the world were to pursue it (67b1–7).

<sup>384</sup> The threat of hedonism seems to have been real, both inside and outside philosophical discourse. As James Davidson (1998) shows, ordinary Greeks in classical Athens were very much obsessed with the pleasures of ‘courtesans and fishcakes’ and Plato’s contemporary Aristippus of Cyrene, who was also a pupil of Socrates, defended—or indeed *embodied*—the idiosyncratic thesis that the human good lies in the experience of (bodily) pleasure rather than εὐδαιμονία. For good discussion, see Lampe (2015).

5. Pleasure cannot be the good.

We are dealing here, then, with the third and rather mild anti-hedonist viewpoint and argument that Aristotle examines toward the end of *Nicomachean Ethics* book 7. Besides recording the view that no pleasure is good and that most pleasures are bad, he also discusses a view on which ‘even if all pleasures are something good, pleasure can nevertheless not be the highest good (ὅμως μὴ ἐνδέχασθαι εἶναι τὸ ἄριστον ἡδονήν, 1152b11–12)’ or ‘the best thing there is,’ on the grounds that ‘it is not an end but a γένεσις (οὐ τᾶριστον ἡδονή, ὅτι οὐ τέλος ἀλλὰ γένεσις, 1152b22–23).’<sup>385</sup>

### 3.1. Features of the Good

To get a firmer grip on this argument, we must first better grasp the notion of the good operative in the *Philebus*. To repeat: when Plato speaks of the good, he is talking about what we have most reason to do, the overall end our lives as a whole are aimed at reaching, or happiness or the good life. At multiple points throughout the *Philebus*—but especially at 20d1–11—Socrates formulates structural criteria or formal constraints on what might pass as the good.<sup>386</sup> According to these, for any  $x$  that wants to qualify as the good,  $x$  must

---

<sup>385</sup> To be sure, Aristotle also records the more sweeping argument that, being a γένεσις, no pleasure is good. It is impossible, though, as we have seen, to square such a radical and sweeping anti-pleasure argument with the rest of the *Philebus*. According to Rackham (1956: 430nc) and Dillon (1996: 110), this version of the Γένεσις Argument must therefore have been espoused by Plato’s rebellious anti-hedonistic nephew Speusippus who—as Dillon (2003: 66–77) at least claims—might also have been the leader of the ‘grumpy pleasure-haters’ Socrates disagrees with.

<sup>386</sup> Cf. 22a9–b9, 60b10–c5, 61a1–3, and 67a2–9.

be:

1. (most) complete, perfect, end-like, or final (τέλεος) (20d1 and 22b4) or τελεώτατος (60c4);
2. adequate or sufficient (ικανός) (20d4 and 22b4);
3. such that ‘everything that has any notion of it hunts for it, desires it, aims for it, and wants to get hold of it and secure it for its own (πᾶν τὸ γιγνώσκον αὐτὸ θηρεύει καὶ ἐφίεται βουλόμενον ἐλεῖν καὶ περὶ αὐτὸ κτήσασθαι, 20d8–9),’ that is to say, *x* must be what is chosen, preferable, or worth choosing (αἰρετός, 22b5).’

Frustratingly, Socrates nowhere defines these criteria, refrains from working out the conceptual relations between them, does not tell us how to use them to assess possible candidates for the good, and tends to lump them together quite recklessly. Still, we can gather some useful information from the way in which he himself applies these criteria when concluding that neither a life chockful of pleasure (yet lacking cognition) nor a life chockful of cognition (yet lacking pleasure) realizes the good, on the grounds that ‘otherwise such a life would have been sufficient, final, and choiceworthy (ικανός καὶ τέλεος καὶ . . . αἰρετός, 22b4–5)’ for the subject living it.

His verdict, as John Cooper observes,<sup>387</sup> has two steps: from the fact that a life needs something else beyond what it is currently filled with (προσδεῖσθαι, 20e6; προσδεῖν, 21a11)—its lack of sufficiency, that is—he infers its unchoiceworthiness. A life can only be choiceworthy, then, if it is sufficient and needs nothing in addition. If, as we saw in his verdict, Socrates nonetheless thinks he has shown that neither pleasure nor cognition satisfies the first criterion of finality, it

---

<sup>387</sup> Cooper (1999: 272–273).

looks as if he must be silently assuming that any good that is not sufficient is also not final or that it is impossible for something to be insufficient and still final.<sup>388</sup>

Sufficiency and finality are so closely connected, it seems, because any good that is insufficient will by its insufficiency show that there is some further, still unachieved end lying beyond or above it; conversely, once you have achieved the good, there is nothing lacking in your life and it can be described as sufficient. Put simply, the idea here is that whatever the good consists in, it must be the best thing there is, for otherwise our lives would be lacking or needing something, and we could continue deliberating about how to go for something even better.<sup>389</sup> This also explains, I take it, why the *Philebus* repeatedly speaks of the good as ‘the most beneficial thing there is (ὠφελιμώτατον, 11c1–2),’ ‘the best of human possessions (τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων κτημάτων ἄριστον, 19c6),’ ‘the best (τοῦ ἀρίστου, 65b1),’ and ‘the first possession (κτῆμα ... πρῶτον, 66a5–6).’<sup>390</sup>

This means that once you have realized the good in your life, you have reached the place where the deliberative buck stops and where practical deliberation comes to a halt. You have, so to say, found a stable, Archimedean place to stand, from where there is nothing left to do, nowhere left to go, and nothing more to wish for. The good is,

---

<sup>388</sup> This must be why Socrates tends to equate the two criteria: at 60c3–4, for instance, finality and sufficiency are nonchalantly lumped together (τὸ δὲ ἰκανὸν τελεώτατον ἔχειν), and at 67a7–8 they are headed under one and the same concept of autonomy or autarky (αὐταρκείας καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἰκανοῦ καὶ τελέου δυνάμεως), at least if we take the καί—along with Cooper—epexegetically or explicatively.

<sup>389</sup> Cooper (1999: 272–73). Adopting Plato’s conceptual machinery, Aristotle indeed deduces the (self-)sufficiency constraint from the finality constraint in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097b7–8): because εὐδαιμονία is final, it must also be (self-)sufficient.

<sup>390</sup> See also *Euthydemus* 278e3–79a4, *Lysis* 219c1–4, *Symposium* 204e2–205a3. Price (2017: 9–32) offers a good discussion of Plato’s conception of εὐδαιμονία as the final end of desire and action.

in other words, something we can rest in once we have attained it and that does not bring with it further needs, lacks, yearnings, dependence, or cravings, but instead satisfies us.<sup>391</sup> In Socrates's own words, as expressed at the end of the dialogue, 'any creature that was in permanent possession of (the good), entirely and in every way, would never be in need of anything else, but would live in complete sufficiency (μηδενὸς ἑτέρου ποτὲ ἔτι προσδεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ ἰκανὸν τελεώτατον ἔχειν, 60c3–4).' Or as he puts the same point in the *Gorgias*, to the chagrin of Callicles, 'those who lack nothing are living the good life (οἱ μηδενὸς δεόμενοι εὐδαίμονες, 492e3–4).'<sup>392</sup>

### 3.2. The Argument From Finality

We are now able to see why Plato thinks pleasure cannot be the good. Because pleasure is a γένεσις, it happens for the sake of an οὐσία rather than for the sake of itself, and because pleasure does not happen for the sake of itself, it is not final, end-, or goal-like (τέλεος).<sup>393</sup> By applying the principle or criterion that the good must be final, it follows that pleasure—or any other γένεσις for that matter—cannot be the good.

This idea can be unpacked in at least two ways. On a more literal understanding of the for-the-sake-of relation between pleasure and the homeostatic state, the γένεσις takes place for the sake of the more final, more valuable οὐσία. It is the οὐσία that might perhaps be a possible candidate for the good, but not the pleasure happening with

---

<sup>391</sup> For good discussion of this criterion, see e.g. Pakaluk (2005: 70–71).

<sup>392</sup> Aristotle is, again, indebted to Plato: 'We take a self-sufficient thing to mean a thing which merely standing by itself alone renders life desirable and lacking in nothing (τὸ δ' αὐταρκές τίθεμεν ὁ μονούμενον αἰρετὸν ποιεῖ τὸν βίον καὶ μηδενὸς ἐνδεᾶ)' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b14–15).

<sup>393</sup> Cf. e.g. 31a8–10, where having a τέλος is among the features denied to pleasure.



an eye to this οὐσία.<sup>394</sup> Those who pursue pleasure as if it were an end in itself rather than a γένεσις fail to see that what is actually valuable and worth pursuing is the natural, balanced, and harmonious οὐσία brought about by pleasure rather than the pleasure itself, which is, after all, merely taking place for the sake of this superior state of being.<sup>395</sup>

Interestingly, this is precisely the way in which Aristotle will employ his own, very Platonic criteria of finality and self-sufficiency, as laid down in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7, to critically assess possible candidates for the good.<sup>396</sup> Because honour-lovers ‘seem to pursue honor for the sake of (ἵνα) believing themselves to be good’ (1095b26–28) and because those obsessed with material wealth use their money instrumentally or ‘for the sake of something else (ἄλλου χάριν, 1096a7),’ these two takes on the human good violate the requirement that the human good be an ultimate end or something pursued for its own sake so neither honour nor material wealth can be the good we are looking for when doing ethics.

Reading the argument along these lines also elucidates Plato’s reasons for openly flirting with the ideal of a pain- and pleasureless divine life in which our οὐσίαι would remain intact and in which we would engage in as much pure thinking as possible, unperturbed by pleasure and pain. Because the οὐσίαι are more valuable and more final than the pleasant γενέσεις leading toward them, a life as far as humanly possible devoted to the valuation and possession of these

---

<sup>394</sup> Meinwald (2008: 490) understands the argument in precisely this way, although she refrains from further analysis.

<sup>395</sup> Cf. Socrates’s claim in the *Gorgias* that ‘if a person does anything for the sake of something, he does not want this thing he is doing, but the thing for the sake of which he is doing it (ἐκεῖνο οὐ ἔνεκα πράττει, 467d8–e1).’

<sup>396</sup> Meinwald (2008: 490) concurs: ‘The family resemblance to the setup in the (*Nicomachean Ethics*) (1094a1–22, 1097a15–97b6) is striking.’

stable οὐσία will be better, more valuable, and indeed more divine than one devoted to the tantalizing pursuit of a slippery γένεσις like pleasure.<sup>397</sup>

Another option is to unpack the relation between the γένεσις, the pleasure, and the οὐσία more loosely, as Socrates himself did when he described lovers as existing on account of or thanks to their beloved. The idea would be that the subordinate pleasure is completely parasitic on the superordinate οὐσία and, as such, lacking the metaphysical features required to ground a good, meaningful, and satisfying life anyone in their right mind would reflectively endorse and choose as a life worth living—thus violating the third criterion, according to which the good should be worth choosing and yield a life worth living.

This point becomes especially clear in the Argument From A Life Not Worth Living (54e1–55a12)—the second line of sub-argumentation of the Γένεσις Argument—where Socrates presses the point that due to pleasure’s ontologically inferior and unstable nature, the pursuit of pleasure carries all kinds of problematic and absurd features with it and is unable to generate what would be recognized as a good and choiceworthy human life from the third-person perspective of a rational and informed outsider.

Both arguments seem to be closely related, though, because those who ascribe final value to pleasure in an abstract way and those whose life’s fulfilment consists in γενέσεις must be the same people: the connective particle καὶ μὴν (54e1) indicates, I take it, that their

---

<sup>397</sup> See e.g. Frede (1999-b), Frede (2010), and Obdrzalek (2012) for discussion of such (semi-)godlikeness in the *Philebus*. This ideal is nicely captured in the *Laws*, written slightly later than the *Philebus*, where ‘the right life’ (τὸν ὀρθὸν βίον) is described as ‘neither a single-minded pursuit of pleasure nor an absolute avoidance of pain, but a genial contentment with the state between those two (αὐτὸ ἀσπάζεσθαι τὸ μέσον, ὁ νυνδὴ προσεῖπὸν ὡς ἔλεων ὀνομάσας).’ (792c9–d2)

lives are even more ridiculous than their bizarre theoretical commitment to hedonism or, alternatively, that the ludicrousness of their philosophical commitments becomes especially clear when we examine their lives more closely.<sup>398</sup>

### 3.3. The Argument From A Life Not Worth Living

In this second part of the Γένεσις Argument, Socrates leaves metaphysical abstraction behind and turns to a close examination of the lives lived by the pleasure-seekers, lives in which he detects such ‘a considerable ἀλογία’ (55a9) that he rejects the premise—pleasure is the good—undergirding and structuring these lives, thus arriving at precisely the same conclusion as the Argument From Finality.<sup>399</sup>

The Argument From A Life Not Worth Living is, in other words, what we might call an ethical or existential *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>400</sup> The basic idea or argumentative structure behind such a *reductio* goes something like this. Suppose a person lives, or were to live, life based on a given axiological theory according to which *x* is the good one should aim for in one’s life. Suppose, further, that this person’s life exhibits multiple weird and unattractive characteristics: the life is, all things considered, an absurd life—at least when looked at from a third-person, well-informed, rational standpoint—and

---

<sup>398</sup> See LSJ, μήν II.2 and Denniston (1934: 351–52).

<sup>399</sup> As Vogt (2017: 29) rightly notes, in the *Philebus*, Plato often sidesteps abstract questions about the metaphysics of value by shifting to the perspective of *agency* and asking the comparatively easier question of ‘what it is that people desire and choose.’

<sup>400</sup> This ties in nicely with the bit of argumentation we find right after the Γένεσις Argument (55b1–c3), which is unmistakably a *reductio* of the thesis that the pleasant and the good are identical. Because this identification forces the obviously bizarre conclusion upon us that people are bad when, and only when, they are in pain, the thesis giving rise to such ‘extremely bizarre ramifications (ὡς δυνατόν ἀλογώτατα)’ (55c2–3) must be false.

because of this absurdity it also counts as an unchoiceworthy life one would not want oneself or one's loved ones to live, 'unless involuntarily, in opposition to what is really worth choosing (τοῦ ἀληθῶς αἰρετοῦ), from ignorance or some unfortunate necessity' (22b6–8). It follows, Socrates claims, that  $x$  cannot be the good and that the theory identifying  $x$  as the good to be placed at the very core of our life must be false too—at the very least in its current formulation or form.<sup>401</sup>

To see how this *reductio* strategy takes shape in the *Γένεσις* Argument, let us have a look at Socrates's depiction of the life of the pleasure-seekers who live their lives as if pleasure were the good and 'posit their highest end in processes of becoming (τῶν ἐν ταῖς γενέσεσιν ἀποτελουμένων, 54e1–2)':

[T4.2] I am talking about those who cure their hunger and thirst or anything else of the things that are cured by a process of becoming (τι τῶν τοιούτων, ὅσα γένεσις ἐξιᾶται). They enjoy becoming as a pleasure (χαίρουσι διὰ τὴν γένεσιν ἅτε ἡδονῆς οὐσης αὐτῆς) and claim that they would not want to live if they were not subject to hunger and thirst and if they could not experience all the other things one might want to mention in connection with such conditions (τᾶλλα ἃ τις ἂν εἴποι πάντα τὰ ἐπόμενα τοῖς τοιούτοις

---

<sup>401</sup> Similar *reductio*-style arguments are at work in e.g. Plato's jellyfish thought experiment developed earlier in the dialogue (21a6–d5), which reduces Protarchus to 'utter speechlessness' by making him realize that a life full of pleasure (yet without reasoning) is actually not worth living; the argument in *Republic* book 4 (445a5–b7), which suggests that those who believe that the unjust life is worth living should also believe the ridiculous (γελοῖον) thesis that life is still worth living after the destruction of the soul's healthy constitution (justice), although they do *not* think life is worth living after the destruction of the *body's* healthy constitution; Nozick's experience machine; and Rawls's genius Harvard mathematician turned grass counter. In all these cases, a life lived in accordance with a certain axiological theory—hedonism, moral nihilism or scepticism, desire-satisfaction theory—is described as a bizarre life not worth living, and this arguably forces us to dismiss the theory giving rise to such a flawed life.

παθήμασι). (54e4–8)

Due to pleasure's nature as an inferior γένεσις that depends completely on a superior οὐσία, those who organize their life around the experience of pleasure must necessarily organize their life around restorations of disintegrations of the harmonious and equilibrious οὐσίαι that constitute them as persons. To pursue pleasure, they must also pursue the disintegration on which pleasure is parasitic, and this means, as Socrates frames it in slightly more charged language, that they must necessarily pursue 'destruction' (τὸ φθειρῆσθαι/ἢ φθορά) too, which is after all the opposite of 'becoming' or 'coming to be' (τὸ γίγνεσθαι/ἢ γένεσις).

All of this, Socrates thinks, is a crystal-clear sign of absurdity, irrationality, or inconsistency (ἄλογία):

[T4.3] [Socrates] Would we not all say that destruction is the opposite of becoming or coming to be (τῷ γίγνεσθαι γε τοῦναντίον ... τὸ φθειρῆσθαι)?

[Protarchus] Necessarily.

[S.] So whoever makes this choice would choose (a life of) destruction and coming to be or becoming in preference to that third life (τὴν δὲ φθορὰν καὶ γένεσιν ..., ἀλλ' οὐ τὸν τρίτον ἐκεῖνον βίον), which consists of neither pleasure nor pain, but is a life of thought in the purest degree possible.

[P.] A considerable absurdity (πολλή τις ... ἄλογία) seems to appear, Socrates, if someone posits pleasure as the good (ἐάν τις τὴν ἡδονὴν ὡς ἀγαθὸν ... τιθῆται)!

[S.] Considerable indeed (πολλή). (55a2–12)

How should we understand Socrates's charge that the pursuit of pleasure as a way of life is extremely ἄλογος (absurd, irrational, inconsistent)? The concept ἄλογία is strictly speaking typically used to describe a situation in which two opposites somehow clash with

each other.<sup>402</sup> Applying this feature to the Γένεσις Argument, Socrates's ἀλογία charge could be understood as follows: because hedonists are committed to pursuing the γένεσις pleasure, they are also committed to pursuing destruction—pleasure's opposite—on which pleasure is ontologically parasitic. It is, after all, only by repairing a previously destroyed οὐσία that pleasure-seekers can experience their beloved pleasure. The absurdity would thus lie in the fact that pleasure-seekers must pursue both  $x$  and  $x$ 's opposite  $y$ .

Worse yet, as Evans points out in a very stringent reading of the absurdity charge, pleasure-seekers must make contradictory commitments by simultaneously pursuing and valuing and *not* pursuing and valuing their own pleasure and fulfilment.<sup>403</sup> As a result of these contradictory commitments, the pursuit of a γένεσις is necessarily tied to the paradoxical, irrational, and frustrating double bind of simultaneously valuing and *not* valuing, pursuing and *not* pursuing their beloved pleasure: the pleasure-seeker drives, so to speak, with accelerator and brake on at the same time.

We can also loosen the ἀλογία concept a bit and take it to refer not to a strictly formal type of irrationality, involving contradictions, paradoxes, and logical mistakes, but to a different, more practical kind of irrationality. Etymologically speaking, any  $x$  can be called ἄλογος just in case one is unable to give a λόγος—a satisfying rational explanation or account—of  $x$ .<sup>404</sup> On this construal of ἀλογία, even if the life of pleasure were unassailable on logical grounds, we might still consider it irrational in the sense that, existentially speaking, such a way of life just does not make any *sense*—in precisely the same way

---

<sup>402</sup> See LSJ (s.v.) and e.g. *Phaedo* 67e9.

<sup>403</sup> Evans (2008-b: 138–39).

<sup>404</sup> Cf. 63e8, where πολλή ἀλογία is not used in any technical, strictly logical sense but merely suggests that it would be senseless or unintelligible to mix foolish and base pleasures into one's life. I owe this observation to Tamer Nawar.

in which the ecstatic jellyfish-like life filled with pleasure but lacking cognitive activity or the life of cartoonish mythological archetypes such as the Danaids, Sisyphus, and Tantalus do not seem to make any sense, striking us as crazy or even ridiculous.<sup>405</sup> Indeed, Socrates comments that those who have a grasp of pleasure's deeper nature as a γένεσις are prone to 'make fun of' (καταγελαῶ, 54d7) pleasure-lovers and their way of life. Between 48a and 50d, Socrates offers some interesting observations about τὸ γελοῖον. His central claim is that, 'not only on stage, but also in all of life's ...comedies' (50b), ridiculousness comes down to a lack of self-knowledge. That is to say, someone is laughable or ridiculous in so far as he is mistaken, or mistakenly *optimistic*, about how well he is doing.<sup>406</sup> The point, then, is that these pleasure-seekers are worse off than they take themselves to be.

Multiple factors contribute to the weirdness of the life of pleasure and its failure to make sense. Due to pleasure's dependent and unstable nature as a γένεσις, pleasure-seekers must—in pursuit of what they mistakenly take to be the human good—pursue neediness and lack, damage and destruction. This should, in and of itself, raise some doubts in Protarchus and Plato's audience about such a way of life: in pursuit of one's good, one might feel, one should not have to damage or destroy oneself—especially given the fundamental Platonic conviction that the good is 'what is most beneficial (ὠφελιμώτατον, 11c1–2) and 'what preserves and benefits,' while 'the

---

<sup>405</sup> In line with the etymological point made above, we can describe the pleasure-seeker as suffering from the kind of irrationality Lear (1998: 81) calls 'reflexive breakdown' which he defines as one's 'inability to give a full or coherent account of what one is doing.' In other words, as Sebastian Gardner (1993: 3–4) puts it, they 'fail the test of self-confrontation': such an irrational person is either unable to provide an 'explanation-cum-justification' of him- or herself or, in doing so, they will betray a 'failure in self-knowledge.'

<sup>406</sup> See e.g. Evans (2008-a: 113) and Vogt (2012: 25–50).

bad is what destroys and corrupts (τὸ μὲν ἀπολλῦον καὶ διαφθεῖρον . . . τὸ κακὸν εἶναι, τὸ δὲ σῶζον καὶ ὠφελοῦν τὸ ἀγαθόν, *Republic* 608e4–5).<sup>407</sup>

Even more worryingly, though, the neediness, lack, damage, and destruction underlying this pursuit of pleasure will psychologically manifest themselves as *pain*. Consequently, and rather unexpectedly, the pursuit of pleasure turns out to be inseparable from the pursuit of its despised opposite—pain.<sup>408</sup> In the *Phaedo* (60b7–8), Socrates makes a similar point, noting that there is something ‘weird (ἄτοπον, 60b3)’ about pleasure and pain: one cannot have the one without having the other as well, ‘as if the two of them were attached to a single head.’ Indeed, as the Buddhists have it, chasing pleasure is like licking honey from a razorblade.<sup>409</sup>

This means, weirdly enough, that in order for pleasure-seekers to pursue what they take to be the good, they must be committed to value and pursue what they—by their very own standards—take to be the one and only thing that is emphatically *not* good. Worse yet, pleasure-seekers must pursue destruction and restoration actively, constantly, and repeatedly, having chosen pleasure as the central good and ultimate end around which they centre, orient, and organize their lives. The good is, after all, ‘that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all that it does (τούτου ἔνεκα πάντα πράττει, *Republic* 505e1–2),’ and ‘it is in pursuit of the good (τὸ ἀγαθὸν . . . διώκοντες) that we both walk when we walk and sit when we sit, for

---

<sup>407</sup> In sharp contrast, ‘the good will obviously never destroy anything (οὐ . . . τὸ γε ἀγαθὸν μὴ ποτέ τι ἀπολέσει)’ (*Republic* 609b1–2).

<sup>408</sup> Note that this seems to bring us back to Evans’s stricter understanding of the absurdity charge: in pursuit of pleasure, the pleasure-seeker is forced to pursue and value pain, pleasure’s despised opposite.

<sup>409</sup> Cf. e.g. Śāntideva, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra* 7.64: ‘One cannot get enough of the sensual pleasures in cyclic existence, that are like honey on a razor’s edge.’



the sake of the same thing, the good (τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα, τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, *Gorgias* 468b1–4).<sup>410</sup>

This leads to a troubling, unattractive picture of the pleasure-seeker's life as amounting to little more than a repetitive, cyclical pattern in which self-created neediness and self-inflicted desires, cravings, and pain are every now and then interspersed with the enjoyment of pleasures attached to the restoration of a disrupted balance, the repair of a broken harmony, the satisfaction of an itching desire. Thus, the life of pleasure is also besieged, Plato thinks, by a problem of insatiability, again caused by pleasure's ontologically inferior nature as a γένεσις controlled by an οὐσία.

For every single time pleasure-seekers try to lay their hands on a pleasure, the pleasure is itself, as it were, trying to lay its hands on the οὐσία for the sake and thanks to which it is going on, slowly but surely fading and slipping away—right until the moment the balance and harmony have been restored. Hedonists who identify pleasure as the good and actively organizes their lives around it have no choice, then, but to enter and re-enter a self-perpetuating cycle in which destruction and repair, desire and satisfaction, pain and pleasure alternately make place for one another, chasing the evanescent moments of pleasure they value so highly, 'always advancing and moving to keep erect,' as Schopenhauer would later describe this predicament, 'like an acrobat on a tightrope.'<sup>411</sup>

Since all pleasures are restorative processes, any life that is devoted to the single-minded pursuit of pleasure should strike us as flawed—even if the pleasure-seeker were restlessly pursuing the

---

<sup>410</sup> As Vogt (2017: 2 and 20), puts it, our desire for the good 'informs and supports all other motivations.' Consequently, 'life is organized around something that is especially important to an agent. . . . Something gets privileged, and other pursuits and values recede in the background.'

<sup>411</sup> Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena* XI.144.

elevated pleasures of, say, listening to Beethoven's brilliant late string quartets. If that is the case, though, we might wonder why Socrates focuses on the bodily pleasures attached to curing hunger and thirst toward the end of the argument (54e4). This narrower focus might give one the impression that the Γένεσις Argument is in fact merely targeting the life of a certain type of *lowly* pleasure, not the life of pleasure as such.

This seems too quick, though. Although Socrates does indeed explicitly mention hunger and thirst, he also speaks of 'all those (other) things fixed by a γένεσις (τι τῶν τοιούτων, ὅσα γένεσις ἐξιᾶται, 54e4–5; cf. 54e7–8),' and this class could surely include the disintegrated οὐσίαι underlying our higher pleasures. The focus on bodily pleasure also makes good dialectical sense: as I explained earlier, this blunt 'Phileban' hedonism was very much in the air when Plato wrote the *Philebus* and it also receives a lot of philosophical attention throughout the conversation.

But, most importantly, although the different types of pleasure share the deeper structural similarity of being γενέσεις, the dialogue's thorough exploration of the nature of pleasure in its different manifestations suggests that there are also subtle differences between them. Unlike their impure and untrue counterparts, Socrates points out that true and pure pleasures—also known as 'the soul's own pleasures (ἡδονὰς ... τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτῆς, 66c5)'—are not connected or mingled with pain and they are further characterized by the fact that they 'follow in the wake of cognitive achievements, some of them even in the wake of sensory experiences (ἐπιστήμας, τὰς δὲ αἰσθήσεσιν ἐπομένους, 66c5–6).'

This suggests that we can only experience such pleasures by focussing our attention on the sophisticated objects involved in them and that we do so for their own sake, experiencing the pleasures, so to speak, as unintended positive side-effects of the intellectual

achievement involved in grasping what is truly beautiful or really real.<sup>412</sup>

In other words, because these pleasures piggyback on such strenuous and complex cognitive effort, it seems impossible to pursue them actively and directly. But even if this *were* possible, once one is able to access the elevated objects involved in these pleasures—the sheer beauty captured in, say, Beethoven’s ‘Heiliger Dankgesang’—there are probably other things one will have come to care about besides merely experiencing pleasure. Accordingly, for those who aim to live a life of pleasure, there seems to be no way around the pursuit of less sophisticated, bodily pleasure.

Taking all this together, then, the problematic aspects of the life of pleasure just examined turn that life into a cartoonish and irrational life that strikes us as defective and not worth living—even if pleasure-seekers themselves go around claiming, mistakenly of course, that ‘pleasures are most effective in securing the good life (τὰς ἡδονὰς εἰς τὸ ζῆν ἡμῖν εὖ κρατίστας εἶναι, 67b4)’ or that they are living ‘the best possible life (εὐδαιμονέστατον)’ for the simple reasons that they are ‘almost dying with pleasure (ταύταις ταῖς ἡδοναῖς τερπόμενος οἶον ἀποθνήσκει, 47b3–7).’

---

<sup>412</sup> Delcomminette also maintains that ‘le plaisir pur . . . ne peut jamais être qu’une conséquence de la pensée’ (2006: 501, emphasis in original). See Fletcher (2014: 132–33) for an illuminating take on the ‘immense cognitive achievement’ involved in accessing nothing less than e.g. ‘the things that are by their very nature always beautiful by themselves (ἀεὶ καλὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ πεφυκέναι) (51c6–7) needed to experience such elevated pleasures. Focusing on the *Philebus*, Harte (2018) offers a more sustained account of these idle pleasures (as she calls them)—the ones we get without aiming at them.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Γένεσις Argument in Plato's *Philebus* has typically been ignored, criticized harshly, or found confusing. In this chapter, I have argued that we can better understand the argument by taking it to address the value of a *life* rather than the value of particular, episodic instances of pleasure. More specifically, the argument takes issue with the idea that pleasure should be the good at the center of human agency, the ultimate object of our pursuits, or the 'right target (σκοπὸν ὀρθόν, 60a7)' we should 'aim for (στοχάζεσθαι, 60a8)' in all the things we do.

Plato thinks this idea is deeply flawed: whatever the good might ultimately turn out to be, it will not be pleasure. Identifying pleasure as a γένεσις going on for the sake or on account of an οὐσία equips him with the conceptual tools to formulate two independent yet intimately related lines of argumentation against this mistaken idea. The deductive Argument From Finality claims, roughly, that the good should be a sturdy and final target we can reliably desire and aim for, but since pleasure is itself 'desiring or aiming at something else (ἐφιέμενον ἄλλου, 53d4),' it cannot be the good. Likewise, the Argument From A Life Not Worth Living is rooted in the observation that a life built around pleasure seems absurd, irrational, remarkably strange, and not worth living—at least from a rational, well-informed perspective. This means we should reject the axiological theory undergirding this flawed way of life and conclude, once again, that pleasure cannot be the good.

Not only is this reading of the Γένεσις Argument simpler, more straightforward, and more textually grounded than its alternatives, it also elegantly defuses the inconsistency problem that has bothered so many readers of the *Philebus*. The best way to solve this interpretive puzzle, I have proposed, lies in appreciating the fact that the core claim of the Γένεσις Argument is rather modest and less

sweeping than many commentators have thought. Even though many pleasures might be good and worth having, the argument suggests that it would nevertheless be a mistake to turn pleasure into the overarching and guiding good of one's life as a whole.

An important upshot of this reading is that, unlike some austere passages in, say, the *Phaedo*, the Γένεσις Argument does not urge us to shun or repress pleasure, nor does it force us to live an otherworldly life of self-denial—all it is trying to convey is that it would be a mistake to posit pleasure as the good and locate it in the centre of our life, from where it would push other projects and values into the background and make us live an irrational and unattractive life. Plato is therefore not inconsistent in simultaneously claiming that some pleasures are worth having because they are good, while also claiming that pleasure as such cannot be *the* good, understood as the dominant object of human pursuits and the thing around which people weave the fabric of their lives.<sup>413</sup>

My reading makes excellent exegetical and philosophical sense, then, of the dynamics of the argument and its place in the economics of the *Philebus* as a whole. Importantly, it also allows for a new and more illuminating perspective on Plato's later thinking about hedonism and the value of pleasure. On the reading of the Γένεσις Argument I have defended, in the *Philebus*, Plato finds a middle way between the extremes of idolizing pleasure on the one hand and downgrading it on the other. *Contra* 'Philebus' enemies,' the pleasure-haters, he argues that there is no point in denying pleasure's existence,

---

<sup>413</sup> The Γένεσις Argument does not give us enough information, I think, to specify the value of particular pleasures. Given their nature as γενέσεις, all pleasures will be less valuable than the 'supremely worthy (σεμνότατον, 53d6)' οὐσίαι controlling them, but this does not tell us much about the possible difference in value between, say, impure versus pure or bodily versus mental pleasures. For more guidance, see Aufderheide (2013).

that many pleasures are good and worth having, and that a life without pleasure would not be worth living.

But *contra* pleasure-lovers like Philebus and Protarchus, he also argues that a life without reasoning yet filled with pleasure would lack many goods and that a life devoted to the single-minded pursuit of a γένεσις like pleasure is not a life we would reflectively endorse ‘even if all the cattle and horses and the rest of the animals gave testimony by following pleasure (τῷ τὸ χάριεν διώκειν)’ (67b1–2). As such, we can conveniently describe Plato’s take on pleasure in the *Philebus* as a non-hedonist middle way between the extremes of hedonism and anti-hedonism: even though some pleasures are good and pleasure is not necessarily harmful or bad, this does not mean that pleasure is *the* good.<sup>414</sup>

What is more, although Plato breaks off the *Philebus* before revealing the identity of the good, keeping his audience in suspense and ‘standing on the very threshold of the good (ἐπὶ ... τοῖς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ... προθύροις, 64c1–2),’ the Γένεσις Argument nevertheless contains some important insights into the nature of the good and how best to go about trying to discover it. Regarding these methodological concerns, the argument is a fascinating showcase of how crucial it is to scrutinize *what* something is before one can assess whether or how *valuable* it is. Indeed, a more implicit takeaway message of the argument is that hedonists tend to walk into the trap of declaring the (ultimate) value of pleasure without first developing a solid understanding of the nature of pleasure.<sup>415</sup>

---

<sup>414</sup> I borrow this useful distinction from Vogt (2018). Reading the *Philebus* along these lines also fits the speculative interpretive hypothesis that Plato wrote the dialogue to settle the Academic dispute between Eudoxus’s hedonism and Speusippus’s anti-hedonism.

<sup>415</sup> In the *Gorgias* (501a5–6), Socrates makes the similar methodological point that one cannot evaluate pleasure without having first investigated its nature (τὴν φύσιν) and

As to its nature, the true human good, whatever it might turn out to be, should in contrast to a γένεσις like pleasure be something we can strive for without finding ourselves entangled in a web of contradictions, paradoxes, or cartoonish and irrational scenarios. It should not be a γένεσις, then, but something stable and final, something existing autonomously and sovereignly in and of itself. Only such a thing could halt practical deliberation and provide a stable, Archimedean place to stand—a place where the deliberative buck stops, where our lives are stabilized, and where we ‘would never be in need of anything else, but live in perfect sufficiency (τὸ δὲ ἰκανὸν τελεώτατον ἔχειν, 60c3–4). Then, and only then, would we be living the good life.<sup>416</sup>

---

cause (τὴν αἰτίαν). Likewise, in the *Meno* (71b3–5), he wonders: ‘If I do not know what something is (τί ἐστίν), how could I know what characteristics (ὅποῖόν γέ τι) it possesses?’

<sup>416</sup> The ideas in this chapter—or earlier, more embryonic versions of them—have been presented in Gainesville, Florida (*Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop*) (special thanks to Katja Vogt) and Groningen. I am indebted to both audiences. This chapter has been published (under the same title) in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

## 5. Conclusion

Ancient ethical reflection especially concerned itself with one's life as a whole and what it should be like.<sup>417</sup> 'It is not a trivial thing we are discussing (οὐ περὶ τοῦ ἐπιτυχόντος ὁ λόγος),' as Socrates captures the structuring question of Plato's *Republic*, 'but the way we ought to live (περὶ τοῦ ὄντινα τρόπον χρῆ ζῆν, 352d6–7).' Given the fact that pleasure is both an obvious ingredient in any life worth living yet at the same time something human beings struggle to come to grips with in their attempt to create a life worth living, it is not surprising that ancient philosophers grappled extensively with the nature and value of pleasure. Indeed, at no point in the history of Western philosophy has the topic of pleasure and its role in a good life been so important.

Of all these ancient treatments, Plato arguably explores the topic with special depth and thoroughness—especially in his *Philebus*. However, Platonic hedonic theorizing has come in for rough treatment. A common view, drawing upon the *Phaedo*, depicts Plato as an otherworldly and staunch anti-hedonist ascetic akin to the Cynic Antisthenes who would 'rather go mad than experience pleasure (μανεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ ἡσθεῖν).'<sup>418</sup> To give a striking example of this common view, Hare—the famous Oxford ethicist—described Plato as a 'stern and ascetic moralist ... [who] would have been at home in a Zen Buddhist monastery, or even in Egypt with the desert fathers.'<sup>419</sup> And C.S. Lewis, the famous writer and Christian apologetic, likewise called Platonism 'at bottom otherworldly, pessimistic, and ascetic; far

---

<sup>417</sup> See, e.g., Annas (1993), Annas (2008-a), Annas (2008-b), Cooper (2012), Frede (1999-b), Hadot (2002), and Vogt (2017).

<sup>418</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 6.1.3.

<sup>419</sup> Hare (1982: 25).



more ascetic than Protestantism.'<sup>420</sup>

Philosophical treatments of Plato's views on pleasure have also often been negative, claiming that Plato's hedonic theorizing is muddled, deeply flawed, and not worthy of our attention. Plato does not just lack a decent grasp of the central concepts that underpin his hedonic theorizing, some modern critics contend, but his restorative theory of pleasure is also unable to account for subtle pleasures (like the pleasures of reason) and cannot even make sense of all physical pleasures (such as the pleasures of sex). More problematically still, the Platonic view that our immediate pleasures can be false is often taken to clash with the strong and widely shared pre-theoretical intuition that error of this sort is absolutely impossible.

In this dissertation, I have sought to offer more charitable and more sympathetic treatments of some of Plato's central yet rather puzzling arguments concerning pleasure. What drives these arguments, or so I have argued, is the notion that pleasure is intimately connected with illusion and deception. To put it in Platonic terms, pleasure is 'the greatest charlatan (ἡδονὴ ... ἀπάντων ἀλαζονίστατον, *Philebus* 65c5)': a 'trickster (γόης)' who avails herself of deception and illusion to rob us surreptitiously of our true beliefs. The problem with pleasure, in a word, is that it often beguiles us with misleading appearances, thus creating a mismatch between our *experience* of the world and *actual reality*.

In chapter 1, I examined Plato's views about pleasure in the *Phaedo*. This dialogue suggests, rather bleakly, that the good life consists in a kind of embodied death: the philosopher distances himself from the unreliable deliverances of sense-perception as well as affective states like appetitive desire and bodily pleasure. Traditionally, this plea for affective detachment has been understood

---

<sup>420</sup> C. S. Lewis (1954: 386).

as a plea for renunciation or asceticism. More recently, though, scholars such as Woolf and Russell have argued that the good life just involves metaphorical abstinence from appetitive desires and bodily pleasures. When Socrates advocates affective detachment, the thought goes, he merely asks us to ascribe little or no value to the body and its affective states.

Having first shown that the evaluative reading is both exegetically and philosophically problematic, my next and more important aim has been to explain Plato's defence of renunciation. This plea for asceticism is not rooted in resentment or developed *ad* or *post hoc*, I argued, it is cogent, interesting, and tied to Plato's central views. In the Deception Argument (83b4–e4), Socrates suggests that bodily pleasure deceives us about the reality and clarity of the messy sensible world around us. While experiencing bodily pleasure, we are surreptitiously tricked into falsely taking the objects of our pleasures—the material, visible things around us—for 'most real and most clear' 'without being aware of this problem (οὐ λογίζεται αὐτό, 83c2–3).' The philosopher—who structures his life around the attempt to transcend the illusory world of seeming—has no choice, then, but to avoid bodily pleasure.

This reading does not just explain Plato's adherence to some kind of asceticism, it also fits the rest of the *Phaedo* and Plato's overarching hedonic theorizing with no rough edges, and it elucidates other passages in the corpus where a connection is drawn between the experience of pleasure and a mistaken sense of reality.

In chapter 2, I examined the discussion of pleasure offered in *Republic* 9. In his famous third demonstration of the superiority of the life of justice and rationality, Socrates seemingly suggests that 'ordinary people'—including Thrasymachus's beloved tyrant—can, and do, go wrong in their immediate self-ascriptions of pleasure. They erroneously claim to be experiencing pleasure but what passes itself

off as a pleasure in their case does not count as the real thing; it is a mere simulacrum—a fake or sham—of genuine, authentic pleasure.

Scholars typically resist this line of argumentation, treating it as an embarrassment to be explained away or rejected out of hand for the simple reason that we cannot go wrong in our honest, immediate self-ascriptions of pleasure. Whenever I believe I am experiencing pleasure, this standard objection holds, I *am* experiencing pleasure. In sharp contrast, I took the argument at face value, assuming that Socrates does indeed suggest that we are hedonically fallible, and aimed to make sense of this hedonic fallibilism. In brief, on the reading I defended here, Socrates argues that pleasure is more than a feeling.

That is to say, the raw feel of the hedonic experience—the feeling tone of our pleasure or that which enters our awareness—just partially constitutes a pleasure; in addition, it takes an underlying restorative process in which one of our physical or psychological needs is met. Because any representation can misrepresent and any appearance can fail to latch onto reality, Plato believes—or so I argued—that there is nothing crazy or counter-intuitive about the idea that there can be errors in our hedonic tone.

If there is the felt appearance of having one's needs fulfilled without the underlying restorative process, we are dealing with a case of deceptive pleasure or hedonic illusion akin to perceptual illusion. It *seems* as if we are experiencing pleasure—as if we undergo some relative improvement—although we are not. In such a situation, as Plato has it, our putative pleasure is a mere trick, εἶδωλον, or *trompe l'oeil* painting: an insubstantial, deficient, specious, false simulacrum of the real deal which misinform us about some way the world really is.

In chapter 3, I examined (part of) Socrates's discussion of false pleasure in the *Philebus*. To counter Protarchus's passionate defence of the idea that pleasures are immune to error, this strand of

argumentation, I explained, suggests that our pleasures are—at least partially—constituted by cognitive or representational elements. This entails that our pleasures can misrepresent objects or states or affairs which means, in turn, that they can be true or false: true if they get things right and represent the world correctly, false if they misrepresent the world and get things wrong.

According to an interpretive dichotomy currently dominating the literature, we have to choose between a factual and an evaluative reading of Socrates's line of thought. On the first construal, a pleasure taken in some descriptive state of affairs  $p$  is false if  $p$  does not obtain; on the second construal, by contrast, a pleasure taken in  $p$  is false if I take  $p$  to be  $F$  (good or otherwise positively evaluatively charged) even though  $p$  is *not*  $F$ . I resisted this dichotomy for a variety of reasons. For one, on both construals, false pleasure is a matter of misrepresentation; for another, I argued that it takes both a factual and an evaluative cognition to get a pleasure going in the first place.

While in the grip of deceptive pleasure, the subject is out of contact with some reality beyond their heads. By its nature as a cognitive or representational state, and just like a belief, a pleasure necessarily presents its content as *true*: it suggests that some state of affairs obtains and that this state of affairs is good or otherwise positively evaluatively charged. A false pleasure, then, is a pleasure that misinforms us about some way the world really is. Dangerously enough, though, from an inside, first-person perspective such a false pleasure cannot be told apart from a true pleasure that gets things right and informs us about some way the world really is—and this is what makes it a 'ridiculous imitation (μεμμημέναι τὰς ἀληθεῖς ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιώτερα, 40c5)' of a true pleasure.

Lastly, the *Philebus* also suggests, as we saw in chapter 4, that those who organize their life around the pursuit of pleasure suffer from two grave epistemic defects. Firstly, they think they are pursuing

and experiencing an entity with an independent, intrinsic essence of its own whereas the pleasure they are pursuing is actually nothing more than the mere removal of pain—an ontologically derivative state that rests on trouble and imperfection. What they place in the centre of their life, then, is not what they think it is: they are seriously mistaken about the fundamental nature of the very thing that shapes the contours of their life. Secondly, those who live the life of pleasure think they are living the good life, although they actually find themselves in an irrational, plainly weird, ridiculous predicament: their commitments are contradictory, they are forced to pursue and value what they emphatically do not care about (pain), and they can never lay their hands on the thing they aim for.

In all these cases, the subject who is making the hedonic mistake as a result of hedonic deception finds herself in what Iris Murdoch calls a ‘private dream world,’ severed from what is actually going on in the world beyond her. What characterizes this private dream world, in brief, is that there is a mismatch between actual reality and the agent’s experience of the world—even though she is unaware of this misalignment between the two.

To be sure, there are various ways in which pleasure can drive a wedge between us and the world. For one, in the *Protagoras*, *Philebus*, and (parts of) *Republic* 9, Plato suggests that human beings are poor at what contemporary behavioural economists call affective forecasting: they often fail to predict the intensity or size of their future affective states correctly. More specifically, pleasures and pains in the distant future often look larger or smaller than they actually are. For another, as evidenced in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and parts of *Republic*, Plato also argues that pleasure and pain are unreliable sources of evidence about what matters. Appetitive desire and pleasure have a tendency to represent an indifferent, bad, or qualifiedly good object or states of affairs as (really) good.

These types of hedonic illusion will probably strike most people as acceptable—if only because they are so recognizable. Anyone who has ever suffered from lack of self-control—eating a whole bar of chocolate, say, although you are trying to lose weight—has first-hand experience with the fact that our appetitive desire for immediate gratification can cloud our grasp of what is really good for us and that, when this happens, such immediate pleasure often looks more appealing than it actually is—as we might come to appreciate retrospectively.

However, as I have emphasized throughout this dissertation, Plato also claims that there are other more radical, seemingly less intuitive ways in which appearance and reality can come apart in our pleasures. On the Platonic arguments discussed here, pleasure can mislead us about the reality and clarity of the messy and obscure material world around us; there are cases where what presents itself as a pleasure does not count as the real thing (it is a mere εἶδωλον) or where the pleasure we experience misrepresents some state of affairs in the world (even though this cannot be appreciated from a first-person, inside perspective); and pleasure (a mere γένεσις) also misleads the pleasure-seeker about itself—it is not quite the thing these pleasure-seekers think they are pursuing—and, much worse, their obsession with pleasure also makes them less εὐδαίμονες than they take themselves to be.

Many scholars have tried to reinterpret these more extreme hedonic illusions in terms of the more palatable types of hedonic deception—especially the evaluative hedonic illusion where pleasure misleads us about what matters. The *Republic* can serve as a good example of this interpretive move. Even though the most natural reading of the pleasure argument of book 9 claims that it is possible to go wrong in our self-ascriptions of pleasure, most modern scholarly readings claim instead that Plato's basic message is that pleasure

misleads us about *what is valuable*.

However, as I have argued, such readings do not fit the textual evidence and require that Plato equivocates significantly on the meaning of 'true' and 'false'. Thus, for instance, some readers understand the *Republic's* talk of 'true pleasures' in such a way that the adjective ἀληθής is meant to pick out what is 'truly valuable.'<sup>421</sup> In the same vein, an increasingly popular reading of the *Philebus* suggests that Platonic claims about pleasures being false are in fact merely saying that such pleasures are *bad*.

These readings attempt to reduce Plato's critique of pleasure to an entirely normative exercise, then, which merely consists in censuring pleasure or certain pleasures (such as bodily pleasures) in much the same way as some moderns may censure certain pleasures or desires as morally blameworthy. I believe this approach misses much of what is most interesting and distinctive in Plato's theorizing about pleasure. In sharp contrast, I have endeavoured to show that Plato's criticism of pleasure is not just a straightforward moral or ethical exercise; it is a moral or evaluative exercise which precisely *consists in* an epistemic exercise that locates pleasure in the space of reasons and analyses whether it makes contact with the world or fails to do so.

If this suggestion gets things right, the tendency to view Plato's theorizing about pleasure as more straightforwardly normative theorizing can be understood as an instance of what is sometimes called 'the moralistic fallacy': 'the imperialistic tendency of moral

---

<sup>421</sup> Nussbaum (1986: 458) continues: '[T]o call a pleasure false means not that it is not really enjoyed, but that it is enjoyed only relatively to some contingent deficiency, not from the standpoint of correct judgment.' Similarly, Shorey (1903: 149n147) claims that Plato's use of the predicate 'false' should be understood 'as a mere rhetorical expression of the disdain or pity of the overlooker', that is to say, as something like 'pitiful' or 'pathetic'.

considerations to take over the entirety of the evaluative space.<sup>422</sup> Put differently, the thought here is that there are other dimensions for the evaluation of our affective experiences: our pleasures can fall short of other kinds of standards besides propriety or morality. One might try to find out, for instance, whether our pleasures (fail to) accurately represent the world, whether they really count as instances of what they claim to be, or whether they otherwise cast a veil between us and the actual world beyond our heads—especially if you are a Platonist who is convinced that ‘being deceived about the truth is a bad thing, while possessing the truth is good (τὸ μὲν ἐψεῦσθαι τῆς ἀληθείας κακόν, τὸ δὲ ἀληθεύειν ἀγαθόν, *Republic* 413a).<sup>423</sup>

As the Socratico-Platonic philosophical project is described in the *Theaetetus* (148e7–151d7), the philosopher’s (in this case Socrates’s) ‘greatest and noblest function is to distinguish between the true and the false (μέγιστόν τε καὶ κάλλιστον ἔργον ... τὸ κρίνειν τὸ ἀληθές τε καὶ μὴ)’ and to tell apart ‘deceptive images and impostures (ψευδῆ καὶ εἰδῶλα)’ from what is true and real for the simple reason that ‘it is quite out of the question for [a philosopher] to accept a lie or allow an imposture and to do away with the truth (ψεῦδος τε συγχωρῆσαι καὶ ἀληθές ἀφανίσαι οὐδαμῶς θέμις)’ or ‘to set more value upon lies and deceptive images than upon the truth (ψευδῆ καὶ εἰδῶλα περὶ πλείονος ποιησάμενοι τοῦ ἀληθοῦς).’

In many dialogues, this attempt to pierce through what is illusory or less than fully real manifests itself in the attempt to identify what is authentically *F* and set it apart from the changing, qualified,

---

<sup>422</sup> D’Arms and Jacobson (2001: 75).

<sup>423</sup> Cf. *Republic* 382a7–b4: ‘[N]o one is willing to tell falsehoods to the most important part of himself about the most important things, but of all places he is most afraid to have falsehood there. ... [T]o be false to one’s soul about the things that are, to be ignorant and to have and hold falsehood there, is what everyone would least of all accept, for everyone hates a falsehood in that place most of all.’



misleading instances of *F*-ness that merely look *F* in certain contexts. This method also informs the attempt—so characteristic of Plato's earlier, Socratic dialogues—to differentiate genuine ἀρετή or εὐδαιμονία from merely apparent success or accomplishment. The very same approach also animates Plato's hedonic theorizing, I have suggested, and especially its attempt to identify cases of hedonic deception or illusion where appearance and reality come apart in a similar way.

What makes pleasure ethically problematic for Plato, then, is that defective and deceptive pleasure blurs our vision, casts a veil between us and actual reality, and prevents us from seeing clearly. A certain type of defective, deceptive pleasure makes us accept a counterfeit reality, thus directly undermining our attempt to penetrate the world of appearances and see reality face to face.

However, Plato believes that taking ourselves seriously—as the rational beings and self-interpreting animals we are—centrally involves avoiding mistakes and trying to get things right. This, in its turn, involves not being prepared 'to accept ourselves just as we come' as Harry Frankfurt has put it.<sup>424</sup> Instead, Frankfurt continues, we want our thoughts, our choices, and our actions to make sense and to get things right. To that end, our aim should be to inform our responses to the world with the clearest possible view of the world.<sup>425</sup>

Plato's fundamental insight is that our hedonic experiences are not excluded from this crucial task of making sense and getting things right. One of the key thoughts fuelling Platonic hedonic theorizing is the thought that, like our beliefs, our pleasures should latch onto the world and make contact with reality. Having pleasures that get things

---

<sup>424</sup> As Socrates puts it in the *Laches* (201a6–7), 'what I don't advise is that we leave ourselves as we now are (ἐὰν δὲ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἔχειν ὡς νῦν ἔχομεν οὐ συμβουλεύω).'

<sup>425</sup> Frankfurt (2006: 2).

right is not just intrinsically valuable, though, Plato also understood that there is an intimate link between the truth or falsity of our pleasures—whether they get things right or not—and whether our life counts as worth living or not.

Indeed, the idea of a really good, really happy person living in Murdoch's 'private dream world' filled with deceptive pleasures is unacceptable. For just like we would not opt for a supremely pleasurable jellyfish-like life if these pleasures come without the self-intimating belief *that* we are experiencing pleasure, Plato also thinks, conversely yet similarly, that we would not opt for a life in which our pleasures are completely out of touch with reality. This must be one of the reasons why pleasure, and especially the possibility of being *deceived* by pleasure, figure so centrally in *Republic* 9 and *Philebus*—two dialogues in which Plato is seriously concerned with the question what our lives should be like. To put it boldly, Plato seemingly holds that a hedonic experience only enhances the value of a life if it is reality-based.<sup>426</sup>

If our pleasures fail to make contact with the world—even though this cannot be appreciated from an inside, first-person perspective—we have an inflated, mistaken sense of how well we are doing. As Plato is fond of saying, there is something darkly comic about people in the grip of deceptive pleasure: their false pleasure is a 'ridiculous imitation' of true pleasure and those who think they are living a life worth living because they are living the life of pleasure are the laughing stock of the better-informed people who understand that pleasure is a γένεσις and not what the pleasure-seekers think it is.

In the *Philebus*, between 48a8 and 51a1, Socrates offers some interesting observations about τὸ γελοῖον. His central claim is that, 'not only on stage, but also in all of life's ...comedies (τῆ τοῦ βίου

---

<sup>426</sup> Cf. Sumner (1996: 111).

συμπάση ... κωμωδία, 50b3),’ someone is laughable or ridiculous in so far as he is mistaken, or mistakenly *optimistic*, about how well he is doing.<sup>427</sup> The experience of deceptive pleasure constitutes a failure of self-knowledge, then, in at least two ways. Most obviously, the subject of the deceptive pleasure is ignorant, say, about the fact that he actually finds himself in a state of calm masquerading as pleasure, although he takes himself to be experiencing real pleasure. Additionally, his deceptive pleasure makes him ignorant about how good his life actually is. Tragically enough, though, neither of these failures of self-knowledge can be directly seen for what they are from a subjective perspective: necessarily, all our beliefs strike us as true—otherwise we would not hold them.

It is sometimes said that one of the benefits of doing history of philosophy is that it can enable us to free our thought from ‘what it silently thinks’<sup>428</sup> by ‘making the familiar look strange, and conversely.’<sup>429</sup> I agree: though *prima facie* strange and counter-intuitive, Plato’s hedonic theorizing can serve as a welcome antidote to our familiar ways of thinking about pleasure. Let me canvass three ways in which engagement with Plato’s thoughts about pleasure might allow us to think differently. For moderns in the grip of a roughly Cartesian psychological and epistemological picture, it must come as a surprise, firstly, that Plato held that, in a deep sense, people often do not know their own minds—including their pleasures. Self-knowledge (even of our occurrent states) is not a given, then, it is an

---

<sup>427</sup> Evans (2008-a: 113). See Vogt (2012: 25–50) for a more detailed examination of this type of ignorance.

<sup>428</sup> This is Foucault’s (1984: 9) justification for his renewed interest in Greek (and especially Platonic) thought concerning ‘the use of pleasure.’

<sup>429</sup> Williams (2000: 478). Wolfsdorf (2013-b: 278) also thinks that history of philosophy can provide ‘conceptual perspective on the present by offering an array of theoretical options within a broader field of conceptual or logical possibility.’

achievement—and an *ethical* achievement for that matter.

Secondly, Plato resists the idea that pleasure is a sensation, feeling, or private and subjective experience (comparable with a tickle or itch). Instead, much of the heavy lifting of Plato's account of pleasure is done by the idea that pleasures are—at least partially—constituted by representational attitudes. Plato treats pleasure as a special way of taking the world to be a certain way—our pleasures are experiences, as McDowell puts it, in which the world reveals itself to us.<sup>430</sup>

This is philosophically important for at least two reasons. [i] If our pleasures involve cognitive elements, this entails, firstly, that, unlike brute sensations and like our beliefs, our pleasures can be scrutinized, tested, and examined by philosophy—'the cultivation of the soul, based on true reasoning' (as the pseudo-Platonic definitions define the term). Indeed, Plato claims that much ordinary pleasure—such as the deceptive pleasure of the patients in *Republic* 9—involves some kind of thinking disorder that stands in need of correction.

[ii] Plato's account suggests that pleasure is not just a mental state, but that is a complex whole consisting of the agent's enjoyment and some intentional object (which will often be a state of the world). It follows, given this account, that I am not enjoying some intentional object unless that object really exists: in order to enjoy a piece of classical music, say, I must actually be listening to a piece of classical music instead of floating in a tank, having a realistic dream, or being plugged into some kind of simulation machine. Plato can easily account, then, for the intuition that we should not hook ourselves up to Nozick's experience machine. Most moderns, in stark contrast, are held captive by a mistaken picture of pleasure which is why they struggle to explain their reluctance to entering such a simulation.

---

<sup>430</sup> McDowell (1998: 334).

Thirdly and lastly, if Plato is right that we are subject to a variety of errors concerning our present hedonic experience, this puts pressure on the liberal principle that ‘all pleasures are equal and must be valued equally (ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις ἀνανεύει τε καὶ ὁμοίως φησὶν ἀπάσας εἶναι καὶ τιμητέας ἐξ ἴσου, *Republic* 561c3–4). The fact that some pleasures are systematically misleading suggests, in other words, that there are situations where we have reason to call into question someone else’s pleasures. For instance, we might be inclined to resist an addict’s honest self-report that they are experiencing pleasure while getting high if we learn that they merely use their drug of choice to self-medicate and numb the painful feeling of unresolved childhood trauma. Even though liberal moderns might struggle to justify the intuition triggered by this case, Plato’s account is in a position to explain it. There is something sketchy about the pleasure at hand, a Platonist might argue, because a true or real pleasure is more than the mere numbing of pain or because the addict’s deceptive pleasure fools the agent into thinking that his life is going better than it actually is.

## **6. Bibliography**

Adam, J. (1902), *The Republic of Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Alston, W. P. (1967), 'Pleasure', in Edwards P. (ed.) (1967), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, London and New York: Macmillan, pp. 341–347.

Annas, J. (1980), 'Aristotle on Pleasure and Goodness', in Oksenberg Rorty, A. (ed.) (1980), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 285–299.

Annas, J. (1981), *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Annas, J. (1993), *The Morality of Happiness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Annas, J. (2000), *Platonic Ethics: Old and New*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Annas, J. (2008-a), 'Plato's Ethics', in Fine, G. J. (ed.) (2008), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 267–85.

Annas, J. (2008-b), 'Ancient Eudaimonism and Modern Morality', in

Bobonich, C. (ed.) (2008), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 265–280.

Anscombe, G. E. M. (1977), *Intention*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Appolini, D. (1996), 'Plato's Affinity Argument for the Immortality of the Soul', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34 (1): 5–32.

Armstrong, D. (1963), 'Is Introspective Knowledge Incorrigible?', *The Philosophical Review* 72 (4): 417–432.

Aufderheide, J. (2013), 'An Inconsistency in Plato's *Philebus*', *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21: 817–37.

Aufderheide, J. (forthcoming), 'Extended Replenishment in Plato's *Republic*: How Pleasure Can Be an Essential Part of the Happy Life', in

Aufderheide, J. and Erginel, M. M. (forthcoming), *Plato's Pleasures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Aufderheide, J. and Erginel, M. M. (forthcoming), *Plato's Pleasures: New Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baltzley, D. (1996), 'Socratic Anti-Empiricism in the *Phaedo*', *Apeiron* 29: 121–142.

Bayne, T. and Spener, M. (2010), 'Introspective Humility', *Philosophical Issues* 20: 1–22.

Beere, J. (2011), 'Philosophy, Virtue, and Immortality in Plato's *Phaedo*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 26 (1): 253–288.

Besong, B. (2019), 'Virtue and Asceticism', *Philosophy* 94 (1): 115–138.

Bloom, P. (2010), *How Pleasure Works*, New York: W. W. Norton Company.

Bluck, R. S. (1955), *Plato's Phaedo*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Bommarito, N. (2018), *Inner Virtue*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bommarito, N. (2020), *Seeing Clearly: A Buddhist Guide to Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bostock, D. (1986), *Plato's Phaedo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bramble, B. (2016), 'A New Defense of Hedonism about Well-Being', *Ergo* 3: 85–112.
- Brickhouse, T. C. and Smith, N. D. (1994), *Plato's Socrates*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Broadie, S. (2001), 'Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 101 (1): 295–308.
- Burnet, J. (1900), *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera, Vol. 1*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burnet, J. (1901), *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera, Vol. 2*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burnet, J. (1903), *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera, Vol. 3*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burnet, J. (1907), *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Opera, Vol. 5*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Burnyeat, M.F. (1990), *The Theaetetus of Plato*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.
- Butler, J. E. (2007), 'Pleasure's Pyrrhic Victory', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 33: 89–123
- Butler, J. (1999), 'On Whether Pleasure's *Esse* is *Percipi*: Rethinking *Republic* 583b–585a', *Ancient Philosophy* 19: 285–298.



- Butler, T. (2012-a), 'A Riveting Argument for Asceticism in the *Phaedo*', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29: 103–123.
- Butler, T. (2012-b), 'Intellectualism in the *Phaedo*', *Analytic Philosophy* 53 (2): 208–215.
- Butler, T. (2019), 'Refining Motivational Intellectualism: Plato's *Protagoras* and *Phaedo*', *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie* 101 (2): 153–176.
- Bywater, I. (1894), *Oxford Classical Texts: Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Callard, A. (2018), *Aspiration. The Agency of Becoming*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carey, J. (2018), 'Dispassion as an Ethical Ideal', *Ergo* 5 (24): 645–663.
- Carone, G. R. (2000), 'Hedonism and the Pleasureless Life', *Phronesis* 45 (4): 257–83
- Carpenter, A. D. (2006), 'Hedonistic Persons. The Good Man Argument in Plato's *Philebus*', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14 (1):5–26.
- Carpenter, A. D. (2011), 'Pleasure as Genesis in Plato's *Philebus*', *Ancient Philosophy* 31 (1): 73–94.
- Chappell, T. D. J. (2005), *Reading Plato's Theaetetus*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.
- Charles, D. (2009), 'Aristotle's Psychological Theory', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 24 (1): 1–49.
- Churchland, P. (1988), *Mind and Matter*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Clerk-Shaw, J. (2015), *Plato's Anti-Hedonism and the Protagoras*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cooper, J. M. and Hutchinson, D. S., *Plato. Complete Works*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Cooper, J. M. (1999), 'Plato and Aristotle on 'Finality' and '(Self-)Sufficiency'', in his *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 270–308.

Cooper, J. M. (2012), *Pursuits of Wisdom. Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Crisp, R. S. (2006), 'Hedonism Reconsidered', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73 (3): 619–645.

Crisp, R. S. (2021), 'Well-Being', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/well-being/>.

Crombie, I. M. (1962), *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, New York: Humanities Press.

Cross and Woosley (1964), *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*, New York: Macmillan.

D'Arms, J. and Jacobson, D. (2001), 'The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61 (1): 65-90.

Davidson, J. (1998), *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Deigh, J. (1994), 'Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions', *Ethics* 104 (4): 824–854.

Delcomminette, S. (2003), 'False Pleasures, Appearance and Imagination in the *Philebus*', *Phronesis* 48 (3): 215–237.

Delcomminette, S. (2006), *Le Philèbe de Platon. Introduction à l'Agathologie Platonicienne*, Leiden: Brill.

Denniston, J. D. (1954), *The Greek Particles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

De Sousa, R. B. (1987), *The Rationality of Emotion*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

De Sousa, R. B. (2013), 'Plato's *Philebus*', *Topoi* 32 (1): 125–128.

De Sousa, R. B. (2018), 'Emotion', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/emotion/>.

Dickie, M. W. (2001), *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, London: Taylor and Francis.

Dillon, J. M. (2003), *The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy (347–274 BC)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dillon, J. M. (1996), 'Speusippus on Pleasure', in Algra, K. A., van der Horst, P. W., Runia, D. D. (eds.) (1996), *Polyhistor: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ancient Philosophy*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 99–114.

Dimas, P. (2019), 'Two Ways in which Pleasures can be False: *Philebus* 36c–42c', in Dimas, P., Jones, R. E., Lear, G. R. (2019), *Plato's Philebus: A Philosophical Discussion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 124–140.

Dodds, E. R. (1951), *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dorter, K. (1976), 'Plato's Image of Immortality', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (105): 295–304.

Dybikowski, J. (1970), 'False Pleasure and the Philebus', *Phronesis* 15 (2): 147–165.

Ebrey, D. (2017), 'The Asceticism of the Phaedo: Pleasure, Purification, and the Soul's Proper Activity', *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie* 99 (1): 1–30.

Eck, van, J. A. (2000), 'Plato's Logical Insights', *Ancient Philosophy* 20: 53–79.

Erginel, M. M. (2006), 'Plato on a Mistake about Pleasure', *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 44 (3): 447–468.

Erginel, M. M. (2011), 'Inconsistency and Ambiguity in *Republic IX*', *Classical Quarterly* 61 (2): 493–520.

Erginel, M. M. (2019), 'Plato on Pleasures Mixed with Pains: An Asymmetrical Account', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 56: 73–122.

Evans, M. (2007-a), 'Plato on the Meaning of Pain', *Apeiron* 40 (1): 71–93.

Evans, M. (2007-b), 'Plato's Rejection of Thoughtless and Pleasureless Lives', *Phronesis* 52 (4): 337–363.

Evans, M. (2008-a), 'Plato on the Possibility of Hedonic Mistakes', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 35: 89–124.

Evans. M. (2008-b), 'Plato's Anti-Hedonism', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 23 (1): 121–45.

Feldman, F. (2002), 'The Good Life. A Defense of Attitudinal Hedonism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (3): 604–628.

Feldman, F. (2004), *Pleasure and the Good Life. Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fine, G. J. (1990), 'Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V–VII', in Everson, S. (ed.) (1990), *Epistemology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 85–115.

Finn, R. (2009), *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fletcher, E. (2014), 'Plato on Pure Pleasure and the Best Life', *Phronesis* 59 (2): 113–42.

Fletcher, E. (2017), 'The Divine Method and the Disunity of Pleasure in the *Philebus*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55 (2): 179–208.

Fletcher, E. (2018-a), 'Two Platonic Criticism of Pleasure', in Shapiro, L. (ed.) (2018), *Pleasure*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 15–41.

Fletcher, E. (2018-b), 'Plato on Incorrect and Deceptive Pleasures', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 100 (4): 379–410.

Fletcher, E. (2021), 'Pleasure, Judgment and the Function of the Painter-Scribe Analogy', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (published online), <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/agph-2017-0082/pdf>.

Foucault, M. (1984), *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, London: Penguin.

Fowler, H. N. (1914), *Plato: Euthyphro, Criton, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fowler, H. N. (1962), *Plato: Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Frankfurt, H. G. (2006), *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, Stanford University Press.

Frede, D. (1985), 'Rumpelstilkin's Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato's *Philebus*', *Phronesis* 30 (2): 151–180.

Frede, D. (1992), 'Disintegration and Restoration: Pleasure and Pain in the *Philebus*', in Kraut, R. (ed.) (1992), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 425–63.

Frede, D. (1993), *Plato. Philebus. Translated with Introduction and Notes*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Frede, D. (1996), 'The Hedonist's Conversion: The Role of Socrates in the *Philebus*', in Gill, C. and McCabe, M. M. (eds.) (1996), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 213–48.

Frede, D. (1997), *Platon. Philebos. Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Frede, D. (1999-a), *Platons Phaidon. Der Traum von der Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Frede, D. (1999-b), 'Der Begriff der *Eudaimonia* in Platons *Philebos*', *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 53: 329–54.

Frede, D. (2010), 'Life and Its Limitations: The Conception of Happiness in the *Philebus*', in Brisson, L. and Dillon, J. (eds.) (2010), *Plato's Philebus: Selected Papers from the Eighth Symposium Platonicum*, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, pp. 15–33.

Gallop, D. (1960), 'True and False Pleasures', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (41): 331–34.

Gallop, D. (1975), *Plato. Phaedo. Translation, Commentary, and Notes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gardner, S. (1993), *Irrationality and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gibbs, B. (2001), 'Pleasure, Pain and Rhetoric in *Republic* 9,' in Baltzly, D., Blyth, D., Tarrant, H. (eds.) (2001), *Power and Pleasure, Virtues and Vices*, Auckland, pp. 7–34.

Gosling, J. C. B. (1959), 'False Pleasures: *Philebus* 35c–41b', *Phronesis* 4: 44–54

Gosling, J. C. B. (1975), *Plato. Philebus. Translation, Commentary, and Notes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gosling, J. C. B. and Taylor, C. C. W. (1982), *The Greeks on Pleasure*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grote, G. (1875), *Plato and Other Companions of Socrates*, London: Murray Press.

Grube, G. M. A. (1977), *Plato: Phaedo*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Guthrie, W. K. C. (1975), *A History of Greek Philosophy. Plato: The Man and His Dialogues (Earlier Period)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guthrie, W. K. C. (1978), *A History of Greek Philosophy. The Later Plato and the Academy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hackforth, R. (1945), *Plato's Examination of Pleasure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hackforth, R. (1972), *Plato's Phaedo. Translated with commentary and notes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hadot, P. (1981), *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes.

Hadot, P. (2002), *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hampton, C. (1987), 'Pleasure, Truth, and Being in Plato's *Philebus*: A Reply to Professor Frede', *Phronesis* 32 (1): 253–262.

Hare, R. M. (1982), *Plato*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harte, V. (2004), 'The *Philebus* on Pleasure: The Good, the Bad and the False', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104 (2): 113–130.

Harte, V. (2008), 'Commentary on Evans', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 23 (1): 147–53.

Harte, V. (2014), 'Desire, Memory and the Authority of Soul: Plato *Philebus* 35C–D', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 46: 33–72.



Harte, V. (2018), 'Plato's *Philebus* and the Value of Idle Pleasure', in Brink, D. O., Sauvé Meyer, S., and Shields, C. (eds.) (2018), *Virtue, Happiness, Knowledge: Themes from the Work of Gail Fine and Terence Irwin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 110–128.

Haybron, D. (2007), 'Do We Know How Happy We Are? On Some Limits of Affective Introspection and Recall', *Noûs* 41 (3): 394–428.

Haybron, D. (2008), *The Pursuit of Unhappiness. The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haybron, D. (2020), 'Happiness', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/happiness/>.

Hitz, Z. (2021), *Lost in Thought. The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Holmes, B. (2017), 'The Body of Western Embodiment: Classical Antiquity and the Early History of a Problem', in Smith, J. E. H. (ed.) (2017), *Embodiment: A History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 17–50.

Huxley, A. L. (1945), *The Perennial Philosophy*, London: Harper & Brothers.

Irwin, T. H. (1977), *Plato's Moral Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Irwin, T. H. (1991), 'Aristippus against Happiness', *The Monist* 74: 55–82.

Irwin, T. H. (1995), *Plato's Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jäger, C. (2009), 'Affective Ignorance', *Erkenntnis* 71 (1):123–139.

- James, H. (1977), *The Princess Casamassima*, New York: Penguin.
- James, W. (1884), 'On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology', *Mind* 9 (33): 1–26.
- Johansen, T. K. (2017), 'The Separation of Soul from Body in Plato's *Phaedo*', *Philosophical Inquiry* 41 (2–3): 17–28.
- Jowett, B. (1930), *The Phaedo of Plato*, London: Golden Cockerel Press.
- Johnston, M. (2016), 'The Authority of Affect', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63 (1): 181–214.
- Johnstone, M. A. (2015), 'Tyrannized Souls: Plato's Depiction of the 'Tyrannical Man'', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23 (3): 423–437.
- Kahn C. H. (1981), 'Some Philosophical Uses of 'To Be' in Plato', in Kahn, C. H. (2009), *Essays on Being*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kahn, C. H. (1999), *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kamtekar, R. (2017), *Plato's Moral Psychology. Intellectualism, the Divided Soul, and the Desire for the Good*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Katz, L. D. (2016), 'Pleasure', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/pleasure/>.
- Kenny, A. J. P. (1960), 'False Pleasures in the *Philebus*: A Reply To Mr. Gosling', *Phronesis* 5 (1): 45–52.
- Kenny, A. J. P. (1963), *Action, Emotion and Will*, London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul/ Humanities Press.

Keuls, E. (1975), 'Skiagraphia Once Again', *American Journal of Archaeology* 79 (1): 1–16.

Keuls, E. (1978), *Plato and Greek Painting*, Leiden: Brill.

Korsgaard, C. M. (1983), 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', *The Philosophical Review* 92 (2): 169–195.

Kraut, R. (1992), 'The Defense of Justice in Plato's *Republic*', in Kraut, R. (ed.) (1992), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 311–337.

Kripke, S. A. (1980), *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lampe, K. W. (2015), *The Birth of Hedonism. The Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lear, J. (1998), *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lewis, C. S. (1954), *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, D. (1980), 'Mad Pain and Martian Pain', in Ned Block (ed.) (1980), *Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 216–222.

Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., and Jones, H. S. (1843), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. [LSJ]

Lorenz, H. (2006), *The Brute Within. Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lovibond, S. M. (1989), 'True and False Pleasure', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 90: 213–230.

Marechal, P. and Jones, R. (2018), 'Plato's Guide to Living with Your Body', in Sisko, J. (ed.) (2018), *History of the Philosophy of Mind, Volume I: Philosophy of Mind in Antiquity*, London and New York: Routledge.

Marechal, P. (2022), 'Plato on False Pleasures and False Passions', *Apeiron* 55 (2): 281–304.

Maslow, A. H. (1971), *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, London: Penguin Arkana.

Mastrorarde, D. J. (2002), *Euripides Medea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McDowell, J. H. (1994), *Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McDowell, J. H. (1998), 'Aesthetic Value, Objectivity and the Fabric of the World,' in his *Mind, Value and Reality*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 112–130.

Meinwald, C. (2008), 'The *Philebus*', in Fine, G. J. (ed.) (2008), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 484–503.

Mesquita, A. P. (2020), 'People in a Siege: On the Relationship between Ethics and Epistemology in Cyrenaic Philosophy', *Ancient Philosophy*, 40 (2): 307–328.

Millgram, E. (1993), 'Pleasure and Practical Reasoning', *The Monist* 76 (3): 394–415.

Millgram, E. (2000), 'What's the Use of Utility?', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (2): 113–136.

Mooradian, N. (1992), *Pleasure and Illusion: False Pleasure in Plato's Philebus*, unpublished PhD dissertation, the Ohio State University.

Mooradian, N. (1996), 'Converting Protarchus: Relativism and False Pleasures of Anticipation in Plato's *Philebus*', *Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1): 93–112.

Morgan, M. L. (1992), 'Plato and Greek Religion', in Kraut, R. (ed.) (1992), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 227–47.

Moss, J. (2005), 'Shame, Pleasure and the Divided Soul', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 29: 137–170.

Moss, J. (2006), 'Plato on Pleasure and Illusion', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 72 (3): 503–535.

Moss, J. (2007), 'The Doctor and the Pastry-Chef: Pleasure and Persuasion in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2): 229–249.

Moss, J. (2008), 'Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 34: 35–68.

Moss, J. (2009), 'Akrasia and Perceptual Illusion', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91 (2): 119–56.

Moss, J. (2012-a), *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire*, Oxford University Press.

Moss, J. (2012-b), 'Pictures and Passions in the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*', in Barney, R., Brennan, T., and Brittain, C. (eds.) (2012), *Plato and the Divided Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 259–280.

Moss, J. (2021), *Plato's Epistemology: Being and Seeming*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mouroutsou, G. (2019), 'Plato's *Phaedo*: Are the Philosophers' Pleasures of Learning Pure Pleasures?', *Classical Quarterly* 69 (2): 566–584.

Mouroutsou, G. (2021), 'Choosing a Life and Rejecting a Thoughtless Life in *Philebus* 20-22', *Ancient Philosophy* 41 (2): 393–411.

Murdoch, I. (1971), *The Sovereignty of the Good*, London: Routledge.

Murphy, N. R. (1953), *The Interpretation of Plato's Republic*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Nagel, T. (1986), *The View From Nowhere*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nawar, T. M. (2018), 'Thrasymachus's Unerring Skill and the Arguments of Republic 1', *Phronesis* 63 (4):359–391.

Nawar, T. M. (2021), 'Augustine's Master Argument for the Incorporeality of the Mind', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (2): 422–440.

Nehamas, A. (1998), *The Art of Living. Socratic Reflections From Plato To Foucault*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Notomi, N. (1999), *The Unity of Plato's Sophist*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nozick, R. (1974), *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books.

Nussbaum, M. C. (1986), *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2001), *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2022), 'On Not Hating the Body', *Liberties* 2 (2).

Obdrzalek, S. (2012), 'Next to Godliness: Pleasure and Assimilation in God in the *Philebus*', *Apeiron* 45 (1): 1–31.

Onfray, M. (2015), *A Hedonist Manifesto*, New York: Columbia University Press.

O'Reilly, K. R. (2019), 'The Jellyfish's Pleasures: *Philebus* 20b–21d', *Phronesis* 64 (3): 277–291.

Owen, G. E. L. (1971–1972), 'Aristotelian Pleasures', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1 (12): 135–152.

Pakaluk, M. (2003), 'Degrees of Separation in the *Phaedo*', *Phronesis* 48 (2): 89–115.

Pakaluk, M. (2005), *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parry (1992), 'Ancient Ethical Theory', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/ethics-ancient/>.

Pearson, G. (2019), 'Putting the "Stroppies" to Work: *Philebus* 42c–47d', in Dimas, P., Jones, R. E., Lear, G. R. (2019), *Plato's Philebus: A Philosophical Discussion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 141–162.

Penelhum, T. (1964), 'Pleasure and Falsity', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (2): 81–91.

Penner, T. 'False Anticipatory Pleasures: *Philebus* 36a3–41a6', *Phronesis* 15 (2): 166–178.

Price, A. W. (2017-a), *Virtue and Reason in Plato and Aristotle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Price, A. W. (2017-b), 'Varieties of Pleasure in Plato and Aristotle', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 52: 177–208.

Rackham, H. (1956), *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reeve, C. D. C. (1988), *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Reeve, C. D. C. (1992), *Plato's Republic*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Rijksbaron, A. (2002), *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Rosen, S. (1966), *Plato's Republic*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rowe, C. J. (1993), *Plato's Phaedo*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rowett, C. J. (2021), 'Pre-Existence, Life after Death, and Atemporal Beings in Plato's *Phaedo*', in Long, A. A. (ed.) (2021), *Immortality in Ancient Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 93–117.

Russell, D. C. (2005), *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ryle, G. (1949), *The Concept of Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scarantino, A. and de Sousa, R. (2021), 'Emotion', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N.



Zalta (ed.),

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/emotion/>.

Scheffler, S. I. (2001), 'Valuing', in his *Equality and Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 15–40.

Schwitzgebel, E. (2002), 'A Phenomenal, Dispositional Account of Belief', *Noûs* 36 (2): 249–275.

Schwitzgebel, E. (2008), 'The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection', *The Philosophical Review* 117 (2): 245–273.

Schwitzgebel, E. (2021), 'The Pragmatic Metaphysics of Belief', in Borgoni, C., Kindermann, D., and Onofri A. (eds.) (2021), *The Fragmented Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 350–376.

Schroeder, T. A. (2001), 'Pleasure, Displeasure, and Representation', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 31 (4): 507–530.

Schroeder, T. A. (2004), *The Three Faces of Desire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schroeder, T. A. (2007), 'Unexpected Pleasure', in Faucher, L. and Tappolet, C. (eds.) (2007), *The Modularity of Emotions*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, pp. 255–272.

Scott, D. (2005), *Levels of Argument. A Comparative Study of Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shorey, P. (1903), *The Unity of Plato's Thought*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Shorey, P. (1908), 'Note on Plato *Philebus* 11b–c', *Classical Philology* 3 (3): 343–345.

Shorey, P. (1935), *Plato: Republic. Books VI–X*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Silverman, A. (1991), 'Plato on *Phantasia*', *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1): 123–147.

Slings, S. R. (2003), *Oxford Classical Texts: Platonis Rempublicam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Storey, D. (2020), 'What is *Eikasia*?', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 58: 19–57.

Strohl, M. (unpublished manuscript), 'A Unified Interpretation of the Varieties of False Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*', <https://philarchive.org/archive/STRAUI-3>.

Sumner, L. W. (1996), *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Szaif, J. (1996), *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*, Freiburg and München: Verlag Karl Alber.

Szaif, J. (2018), 'Plato and Aristotle on Truth and Falsehood', in Glanzberg, M. (ed.) (2018), *The Oxford Handbook of Truth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 9–49.

Szaif, J. (2021), 'The Place of Flawed Pleasures in a Good Life: A Discussion of Plato's *Philebus*', *Plato Journal* 22: 133–157.

Tappolet, C. (2016), *Emotions, Values, and Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor, A. E. (1926), *Plato: The Man and His Work*, London: Butler and Tanner Ltd.

Taylor, C. C. W. (2003), 'Pleasure: Aristotle's Response to Plato', in his (2008), *Pleasure, Mind, and Soul*, Oxford, pp. 240–264.

Tuozzo, T. M. (1996), 'The General Account of Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34 (4): 495–513.

Tsouana, V. (1998), *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Urmson, J. O. (1984), 'Pleasure and Distress: A discussion of J. C. B Gosling and C. C. W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2: 209–21.

Vlastos, G. (1965-a), 'A Metaphysical Paradox', in his (1973), *Platonic Studies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 43–57.

Vlastos, G. (1965-b), 'Degrees of Reality', in his (1973), *Platonic Studies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 58–75.

Vlastos, G. (1991), *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vogt, K. M. (2010), 'Why Pleasure Gains Fifth Rank: Against the Anti-Hedonist Interpretation of the *Philebus*', in Brisson, L. and Dillon, J. (eds.) (2010), *Plato's Philebus: Selected Papers from the Eighth Symposium Platonicum*, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, pp. 250–258.

Vogt, K. M. (2012), *Belief and Truth: A Skeptic Reading of Plato*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vogt, K. M. (2017), *Desiring the Good: Ancient Proposals and Contemporary Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vogt, K. M. (2018), 'What Is Hedonism?', in Harris, W. V. (ed.) (2018), *Pain and Pleasure in Classical Times*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 93–110.

Vogt, K. M. (forthcoming), 'Perception, Pain, and Desire in Plato's *Philebus*', in Aufderheide, J. and Erginel, M. M. (forthcoming), *Plato's Pleasures: New Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wallace, R. J. (2013), *The View from Here: On Affirmation, Attachment, and the Limits of Regret*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Warren, J. (2001), 'Socratic Suicide', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 121: 91–106.

Warren, J. (2011), 'Socrates and the Patients', *Phronesis* 56 (2): 113–137.

Warren, J. (2014), *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weiss, R. (1987), 'The Right Exchange: *Phaedo* 69a6–c3', *Ancient Philosophy* 7: 57–66

White, N. P. (1979), *A Companion to Plato's Republic*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

Whiting, J. (2014), 'Fools Pleasures in Plato's *Philebus*', in Lee, M.-K. (ed.) (2014), *Strategies of Argument. Essays in Ancient Ethics, Epistemology, and Logic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 31–59.

Williams, B. A. O. (1959), 'Pleasure and Belief', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 33 (1): 57–92.

Williams, B. A. O. (2000), 'Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline', *Philosophy* 75: 477–496.

Wilson, T. D. (2002), *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wolfsdorf, D. C. (2013-a), 'Pleasure and Truth in *Republic 9*', *Classical Quarterly* 63 (1): 110–138.

Wolfsdorf, D. C. (2013-b), *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolfsdorf, D. C. (unpublished manuscript), 'Protarchus' Reasons For Believing That Pleasure Can Only Be True: *Philebus* 36c3–e13.'

Woolf, R. (2004), 'The Practice of a Philosopher', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 26: 97–129.

Wright, R. (2017), *Why Buddhism is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Zilioli, U. (2012), *The Cyrenaics*, London and New York: Routledge.

Zoonen, van, D. H. C. (2021), 'Problems with the Life of Pleasure: The Γένεσις Argument in Plato's *Philebus* (53c4–55a12)', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 59 (2): 167–191.

Zoonen, van, D. H. C. (forthcoming), 'Tricked by Pleasure: Plato's *Phaedo* on the Dangers of Bodily Pleasure', in: Aufderheide and Erginel (forthcoming), *Plato's Pleasures: New Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## 7. Nederlandse samenvatting

Antieke ethiek hield zich voornamelijk bezig met hoe ons leven eruit zou moeten zien en wanneer een leven telt als een leven dat de moeite waard is geleefd te worden. Plezier, je goed voelen, of genot is volgens velen een centraal element in een geslaagd leven, maar tegelijkertijd ook iets wat vaak voor problemen zorgt in onze pogingen een waardevol leven te creëren. Het is dan ook geen verrassing dat antieke filosofen uitvoerig nagedacht hebben over de aard en de waarde van plezier en genot (ἡδονή) en hun plek in een gelukkig leven. Sterker nog, op geen moment in de geschiedenis van de Westerse filosofie is die vraag zo belangrijk geweest en zo uitvoerig en doorwrocht behandeld.

Van alle antieke filosofische besprekingen van dit vraagstuk springt die van Plato er qua diepte, qua grondigheid, en qua uitvoerigheid uit—vooral in zijn latere dialoog de *Philebus*. Toch wordt het Platoonse gedachtengoed over de natuur en waarde van plezier doorgaans zeer kritisch behandeld of simpelweg genegeerd. Een populaire visie, die zich min of meer baseert op een oppervlakkige lezing van de *Phaedo*, ziet Plato als een strenge en wereldvreemde anti-hedonist of asceet '[who] would have been at home in a Zen Buddhist monastery, or even in Egypt with the desert fathers'—zoals de beroemde Oxford ethicus Richard Hare ergens schrijft.

Wetenschappelijke behandelingen van Plato's ideeën over genot zijn over het algemeen ook weinig positief geweest. Het Platoonse gedachtengoed over genot, zo beweren recente filosofische critici, is warrig en gebrekkig en verdient derhalve onze aandacht niet. Het meest problematische aan Plato's visie, zo luidt de *communis opinio*, is zijn bizarre idee dat onze genotservaringen *onwaar* kunnen zijn—een opvatting die ogenschijnlijk botst met de sterke, pre-

theoretische intuïtie dat een subjectieve mentale toestand als plezier niet onwaar kan zijn. Een genotservaring is immers niets meer of minder dan een gevoel of sensatie, zo luidt de tegenwerping, en zulke private mentale toestanden, aldus een van de hedonisten in de *Philebus*, 'zijn louter wat ze zijn, zonder nadere bepaling.' Anders gezegd, in het affectieve, of hedonische, domein is er geen tegenstelling tussen lijken en zijn and dus geen ruimte voor illusies en andere fouten.

Deze dissertatie is een poging een welwillender en sympathieker licht op Plato's visie op genot te schijnen. Een van de centrale boodschappen die ik hoop over te brengen is dat het Platoonse gedachtengoed verfijnd en overtuigend is en serieuze aandacht verdient. Een rode draad in deze studie, die teruggevoerd kan worden op een artikel van Jessica Moss (2006), is de suggestie dat Plato meent dat genot ethisch en filosofisch problematisch is omdat genot innig verbonden is met illusie en deceptie. Zoals Protarchus het in de *Philebus* zegt, 'een grotere bedrieger dan genot bestaat er niet.' Genot bedriegt ons met misleidende verschijningen, en drijft daarmee een wig tussen onze *ervaring* van de wereld buiten ons en hoe die wereld werkelijk *is*. Wie in de greep is van zo'n bedrieglijke genotservaring bevindt zich 'in zijn eigen droomwereld,' om een metafoor van Iris Murdoch te gebruiken, gevangen achter een 'valse sluier die de wereld aan [zijn] blik onttrekt.'

Plato stelt dat misleidende genotservaringen ons op meerdere manieren kunnen afsnijden van wat er buiten ons gebeurt. Argumenten in de *Protagoras*, (delen van) *Politeia* 9, en *Philebus* suggereren bijvoorbeeld dat mensen slecht zijn in wat gedragseconomen affectieve voorspelling of prognose noemen: de gedachte is dat affectieve toestanden — zoals plezier en pijn — die in de toekomst liggen vaak groter of kleiner lijken dan ze werkelijk zijn. En volgens argumenten in de *Gorgias*, *Protagoras* en *Politeia* 4 en 10, die

uitvoerig bestudeerd zijn door Moss en anderen, verschaffen plezier en pijn onbetrouwbare informatie over wat (alles in acht genomen) goed of waardevol is. Preciezer gezegd, (verlangen naar) genot heeft de neiging neutrale, slechte, of gekwalificeerd of voorwaardelijk goede objecten en standen van zaken als (werkelijk) goed te representeren.

De suggestie dat dit soort hedonische illusies voorkomen zal op weinig weerstand stuiten—al was het maar omdat ze zo herkenbaar zijn. Iedereen die ooit ten prooi is gevallen aan een gebrek aan zelfcontrole—een hele reep chocola eten, bijvoorbeeld, terwijl je probeert af te vallen—heeft directe ervaring met het feit dat ons verlangen naar onmiddellijke behoeftebevrediging de grip op wat écht goed voor ons is kan vertroebelen en dat, wanneer zoiets gebeurt, een bepaalde genotservaring zich aantrekkelijker voordoet dan ze eigenlijk is—hetgeen we soms retrospectief beseffen.

Plato claimt echter ook dat er andere, radicalere, en op het eerste gezicht tegen-intuïtievare manieren zijn waarop een genotservaring ons weet te misleiden over hoe de wereld in elkaar steekt. In de vier hoofdstukken van deze dissertatie bespreek ik vier van zulke argumenten—zoals het ogenschijnlijk absurde idee, verdedigd in *Politeia* 9 en *Philebus*, dat wat zich aan iemand *voordoet* als een genotservaring niet altijd ook daadwerkelijk een echte genotservaring is.

In tegenstelling tot veel interpreten en commentatoren—van wie de meesten deze argumenten doorgaans simpelweg verwerpen of ruimte voor een acceptabelere positie proberen te creëren door te tekst geweld aan te doen—streeft dit onderzoek ernaar de tekst te accepteren zoals ze nu eenmaal is en Plato's posities en zijn argumenten voor die posities beter te *begrijpen*. Wanneer we het Platoonse gedachtegoed eenmaal verhelderd en correct begrepen hebben, zo suggereer ik, blijkt het verfijnder, overtuigender, en



interessanter te zijn dan doorgaans gedacht wordt. Sterker nog, Plato's ideeën omtrent dit thema zijn ook nu nog relevant en verdienen de aandacht van filosofen, psychologen, en iedereen die probeert een bewust en waardevol leven te leiden.

In het eerste hoofdstuk onderzoek ik Plato's opvattingen over genot zoals die naar voren komen in de *Phaedo*. Deze dialoog stelt, grimmig genoeg, dat een geslaagd leven bestaat uit een soort belichaamde dood: de filosoof 'oefent de dood' (gedefinieerd als de scheiding van lichaam en ziel) door zich te distantieëren van zintuiglijke input en appetitieve verlangens en lichamelijk genot. Recent hebben interpreten betoogd dat het hier slechts om *metaforische* abstinentie van lichamelijke verlangens en genotservingen draait: in een goed leven gaat het erom weinig waarde te hechten aan het lichaam en zijn affectieve toestanden zonder daadwerkelijk radicaal afstand te nemen van appetitieve verlangens en materiële genietingen door deze uit de weg te gaan.

Nadat ik heb laten zien dat deze zogeheten evaluatieve lezing zowel exegetisch als filosofisch problematisch is, bestudeer ik de filosofische motivatie voor de verdediging van ascetisme, renunciatie, of onthechting zoals die in de *Phaedo* naar voren komt. Plato's verdediging van radicale distantie van lichamelijk genot is niet geworteld in ressentiment of *ad* of *post hoc* ontwikkeld, zo laat ik zien, het centrale argument tegen lichamelijk genot is juist overtuigend, interessant, en verbonden met Plato's centrale ideeën.

Wanneer we materiaal genot ervaren, zo stelt de *Phaedo*, worden we voor de gek gehouden en beginnen we te geloven dat het hedonisch object van ons genot—en daarmee de zintuiglijke, materiële wereld als zodanig—'compleet waar en totaal helder' is terwijl dat alleen geldt voor de diepere, intelligibele structuur van de werkelijkheid (de Ideeën of Vormen). Niet alleen verhelder ik het waarheidsbegrip dat werkzaam is in deze passage, ook laat ik zien hoe

genot ons misleidt—iets wat Plato niet uitlegt—en contextualiseer ik dit argument door het bijvoorbeeld te verbinden met de beroemde allegorie van de grot waarin zonder verdere uitleg gesteld wordt dat genot of plezier ons gevangen houdt in de lagere, sensibele wereld.

In het tweede hoofdstuk bestudeer ik de discussie van genot die we in *Politeia* 9 vinden. In zijn derde argument tegen Thrasymachus lijkt Plato te suggereren dat ‘normale mensen’—mensen die niet volledig geactualiseerd of gerealiseerd zijn, zoals humanistische psychologen dat noemen—soms *denken* dat ze genot ervaren terwijl dat niet het geval is. Hun genot, om Platoonse termen te gebruiken, is ‘noch puur, noch waar, maar doet denken aan een *trompe l’oeil* afbeelding.’ Wat zich aan hen voordoet als een genotservaring is niet echt dus, maar iets neps—een simulacrum zonder substantie (εἰδωλον).

De meeste geleerden verzetten zich tegen deze suggestie en beschouwen het als een filosofische blunder die verworpen of weggeredeneerd moet worden. Wanneer ik *denk* dat ik aan het genieten ben, *ben* ik ook daadwerkelijk aan het genieten—in het hedonische domein is er immers geen tegenstelling tussen lijken en zijn en ook geen ruimte voor fouten. Technischer gezegd, genot behoort tot het fenomenale domein waartoe we onfeilbare epistemische toegang hebben.

Door de tekst aan een zeer nauwkeurige lezing te onderwerpen, laat ik zien dat Plato’s verdediging van hedonisch fallibilisme—de claim dat we foutief kunnen denken dat we genot ervaren—geworteld is in een verfijnde theorie van wat genot is. Genot, zo stelt het argument, is meer dan een gevoel. Naast het gevoel—dat wat ons bewustzijn betreft en doorgaans als genot bestempeld wordt—bestaat een genieting ook uit een onderliggend restoratief of reparatief proces waarin een van onze fysieke of psychologische behoeftes vervuld wordt. Anders gezegd, een genieting traceert,

signaleert, of representeert iets anders—een soort van relatieve *verbetering* van onze toestand—en aangezien alles wat representeert ook kan *misrepresenteren*, is er niets gek aan hedonisch fallibilisme. In een geval van deceptief genot hebben we te maken met iets wat grofweg op een perceptuele illusie lijkt—een geval waarin iets zich anders voordoet dan het werkelijk is. Preciezer gezegd, het lijkt erop alsof onze toestand zich verbetert—bijvoorbeeld doordat een van onze behoeftes vervuld wordt of doordat een toestand van homeostase hersteld wordt—hoewel dat in werkelijkheid niet zo is.

In het derde hoofdstuk richt ik me op Plato's discussie van 'onwaar ( $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\acute{\eta}\varsigma$ )' genot in de *Philebus*—het eerste type van onwaar genot, om precies te zijn, waarin het draait om genietingen die op exact dezelfde manier onwaar zijn als een overtuiging of oordeel ( $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ ) onwaar kan zijn. Om Socrates' gesprekspartner Protarchus en andere hedonisten ervan te overtuigen dat genietingen niet immuun tegen fouten zijn, suggereert Plato dat genotservaringen net als overtuigingen representatieve inhoud hebben doordat ze ten dele bestaan uit representatieve, cognitieve, of doxastische elementen.

Dit betekent dat genietingen objecten of standen van zaken representeren en dit betekent, op zijn beurt, dat genietingen waar of onwaar kunnen zijn: waar als ze het bij het juiste eind hebben en de wereld correct representeren, onwaar als ze de wereld misrepresenteren en de mist ingaan. Preciezer gesteld, ik betoog—in tegenstelling tot de standaardpositie in de literatuur—dat elke genotservaring ten minste twee cognities in zich bergt: de overtuiging dat een stand van zaken  $p$  het geval is en dat  $p F$  is (waarbij  $F$  staat voor 'goed' of een ander positief geladen evaluatief predicaat). Genietingen kunnen dus op twee manieren onwaar zijn, hoewel onwaarheid altijd een kwestie van misrepresentatie is: doordat  $p$  niet het geval is of doordat  $p$  niet  $F$  is.

Zoals alle cognitieve of representatieve mentale toestanden,

presenteert een genieting haar inhoud noodzakelijk als *waar*: een genotservaring doet ons geloven dat een stand van zaken plaatsvindt en dat die stand van zaken goed is. Het probleem met onware, misleidende genietingen is dus dat ze ervoor zorgen dat hun slachtoffers in ‘hun eigen droomwereld’ leven en losgesneden zijn van wat er werkelijk buiten hen gebeurt. Vanuit een eerstepersoons, introspectief perspectief kan er immers geen onderscheid gemaakt worden tussen een ware genieting (die contact met de wereld maakt) en een onware genieting (die dat niet doet) en daarom, zo beweert ik, noemt Plato onware genietingen ‘belachelijke nabootsingen van het ware genot.’

Deze cognitivistische genotstheorie, zo betoog ik verder, past naadloos in de *Philebus* en de zoektocht naar ‘een bepaalde toestand en instelling van de ziel ... die alle mensen het gelukkige leven kan bezorgen’ waar de dialoog om draait. Niet alleen suggereert Plato’s hedonisch cognitivisme dat genot onlosmakelijk verbonden is met cognitie—er bestaat niet zoiets als rauw, bruu, onintelligent genot—ook ondermijnt dit hedonisch cognitivisme, en het hedonisch fallibilisme dat eruit volgt, het hedonisme van Socrates’ gesprekspartners. Als onze genietingen immers waar of onwaar kunnen zijn en als we willen dat onze genietingen waar zijn door contact te maken met een realiteit buiten ons hoofd, dan volgt hieruit dat we om andere dingen geven behalve genot en dat hedonisme dus een gefaalde theorie is aangezien het hedonisme stelt dat slechts één ding (je goed voelen) ertoe doet.

In het vierde hoofdstuk onderzoek ik een ander argument in de *Philebus*. Tussen 53c4 en 55a12 identificeert Plato genot of plezier als een ontologisch minderwaardig proces van ‘worden ( $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ )’ in plaats van een ontologisch superieure toestand van ‘zijn ( $\text{o}\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\alpha$ ).’ Vervolgens gebruikt hij deze informatie om te concluderen dat genot, op de een of andere manier, niet waardevol is. In dit hoofdstuk stel

ik—in tegenstelling tot de standaardpositie in de literatuur—dat deze vaak bekritiseerde passage niet gaat over de goedheid of waarde van individuele, particuliere genotsepisodes; het argument richt zich daarentegen op de suggestie dat genot het enige en hoogste goed is dat in het centrum van het menselijke handelen zou moeten staan en datgene is waar mensen hun leven omheen zouden moeten organiseren. Wanneer we dit vaak verkeerd begrepen en veel verguisde argument eenmaal op deze manier benaderen, blijkt het subtieler, sterker, en interessanter te zijn dan typisch gedacht.

Volgens mijn lezing bestaat dit argument uit twee nauw samenhangende sub-argumenten die beide, ieder op hun eigen manier, stellen dat genot niet het hoogste goed kan zijn dat ons leven probeert te bereiken omdat plezier een restoratief proces of γένεσις is. Het hoogste goed is datgene wat omwille van zichzelf gedaan wordt—zoals Plato op proto-Aristotelianse wijze betoogt—maar genot vindt plaats omwille van de stabiele toestand van harmonie en balans die tijdens een genotservaring hersteld wordt en kan dus niet het hoogste goed of het doel van ons leven zijn.

Dit blijkt ook als we naar het leven van hedonisten kijken die genot in het centrum van hun handelen en leven plaatsen. Zo'n leven is dusdanig absurd, inconsistent, of irrationeel (ἄλογος) dat het geen waardevol of goed leven kan zijn—onder meer omdat de hedonist paradoxaal genoeg genoodzaakt is *pijn* na te jagen in zijn zoektocht naar genot en omdat plezier, als glibberige en ontologisch inferieure γένεσις, nooit de stabiliteit kan genereren die bij een geslaagd leven hoort en die gekarakteriseerd kan worden door het feit dat we in het huidige moment kunnen rusten zonder verder nog iets te hoeven najagen. De hedonist is dus niet alleen verward over wat genot is—hij ziet niet dat genot iets ontologisch derivatiefs of parasitairs is—hij is ook niet in staat te begrijpen dat zijn leven niet telt als een leven dat het waard is geleefd te worden.

Er zijn allerlei goede redenen om de geschiedenis van de filosofie te bestuderen. Een van die redenen is dat de confrontatie aangaan met denkers uit het verleden ons denken kan bevrijden van ‘wat het stilletjes denkt’ ‘by making the familiar look strange, and conversely’ –zoals Michel Foucault en Bernard Williams deze gedachte respectievelijk geformuleerd hebben.

Dit geldt mijns inziens ook voor Plato’s ideeën over genot. Hoewel op het eerste gezicht vreemd en tegenintuïtief, geloof ik dat er meerdere manieren zijn waarop het Platoonse denken óns denken kan informeren of zelfs corrigeren. Als Plato het bij het rechte eind heeft, betekent dit bijvoorbeeld dat mensen hun eigen geest—inclusief hun eigen genotservaringen—vaak slecht kennen. Zelfkennis—zelfs kennis van een onmiddellijke, episodische mentale toestand als plezier—is dus geen gegeven, het is een prestatie—en ook nog eens een *morele* prestatie. Wie in de greep is van een misleidende, illusoire genotservaring zonder het door te hebben is met andere woorden een vreemde voor zichzelf die niet helder ziet, en dat is ethisch problematisch.

Daarnaast geeft Plato goede redenen om de wijdverspreide opvatting te weerleggen dat genot of plezier niets meer is dan een sensatie, gevoel, of private en subjectieve mentale toestand (vergelijkbaar met jeuk of een kriebel). Plato stelt daarentegen dat genietingen—tenminste ten dele—uit representatieve attitudes bestaan wat erop neerkomt dat plezier of genot een speciale manier van kijken naar de wereld is, vergelijkbaar met het hebben van een overtuiging of een perceptie. Onze genietingen zijn ervaringen, in andere woorden, ‘in which the world reveals itself to us’ –om John McDowell te citeren.

Dit is een belangrijk inzicht. Als genot of plezier deels uit cognitieve elementen bestaat, betekent dit dat onze genietingen zich net als onze overtuigingen in de ‘space of reasons’ bevinden en dus

onderzocht en getest kunnen worden (bijvoorbeeld op (on)waarheid). En als genot een unitair complex is dat bestaat uit een mentale toestand en een intentioneel of representationeel object, zoals *Philebus* en *Politeia* 9 volgens deze dissertatie beweren, dan volgt hieruit dat we slechts van een intentioneel object genieten als dat object—vaak een stand van zaken in de wereld—ook daadwerkelijk bestaat.

Dit verklaart, op zijn beurt, waarom velen de intuïtie hebben dat we ons niet aan Nozicks ‘ervaringsmachine’ zouden moeten koppelen. Het is niet alleen zo dat we dingen van waarde missen als we in een simulatie stappen, belangrijker nog is dat onze zogeheten genotservaringen in dit scenario niet als echte genotservaringen tellen: het zijn—om Platoonse termen te gebruiken—onware, neppe, insubstantiële simulacra die niets met echt genot te maken hebben.

Als Plato, tot slot, gelijk heeft dat onze genietingen onwaar of misleidend kunnen zijn, creëert dit problemen voor de liberale of liberalistische overtuiging dat ‘alle genotservaringen gelijk zijn en allemaal op gelijke voet behandeld moeten worden’—zoals Plato deze gedachte in *Politeia* verwoordt. Het feit dat sommige gevallen van plezier systematisch misleidend zijn suggereert namelijk dat er situaties zijn waarin we gegronde redenen hebben om vraagtekens bij de genotservaringen van een ander te plaatsen.