

Introduction

The *Philebus* is, arguably, the most intriguing and complex of Plato's dialogues. Within a most economical space of merely fifty-something Stephanus pages, it suggests the contours of a good human life mapped onto a cosmic background with clear metaphysical articulations. The text moves within a couple of pages from talking about the concrete sensation of itching to the most abstract speculations about the Good, while never missing the layers that are in between. The text provides a theoretical framework within which even the most concrete feeling of ridicule or the laughter that we experience when watching comedy on stage or in life can be mapped onto the broadest metaphysical view of reality. This framework is not advanced dogmatically, but rather explored with playful dialectical openness, envisioning the possibility of subsequent refinements.

The dialogue begins in the middle of a conversation about the good life, at the very moment when we are witnessing a switch between Socrates's interlocutors. Up to this point Philebus has been championing the absolute hedonistic position that pleasure is the good for all creatures, while Socrates has been arguing that knowledge, understanding, memory, opinion, and whatever else goes with them are in fact *better than pleasure* for those who can have them. At the outset of the dialogue, Protarchus takes over from Philebus the task of defending his hedonistic position, while Philebus retreats in self-assured arrogant silence once he declares with unshakable and dogmatic confidence that, as far as he is concerned, his thesis always wins no matter what (12a). From this point on, the conversation between Socrates and Protarchus develops in strikingly constructive fashion, for Protarchus, unlike Philebus, is open to being challenged and to learning. Soon enough Plato's Socrates and Protarchus realize that, neither pleasure as such, nor knowledge all by itself, is the good and self-sufficient element of a good human life, but rather some combination of them is. The focus

of the investigation is first on whether pleasure or knowledge is closer to the good for us, humans, and then, once the answer to this question is found, the focus is on exploring the right way to combine various kinds of pleasure with types of knowledge in a good human life. Note, however, that, from the very beginning Socrates has been defending only the more modest view that knowledge is *better* than pleasure, not that it is the absolute good, which is what Philebus has been claiming about pleasure. Hence, Socrates ends up defending throughout the dialogue, consistently, one and the same view, the superiority of knowledge over pleasure and the necessity to have a good combination of both as ingredients of a good human life.

The investigation is deepened and amplified when Socrates attempts to persuade Protarchus that there are several types of pleasures and, correspondingly, several types of knowledge, and, moreover, that sometimes we are mistaken in assessing the experience of pleasure that we have, confusing false pleasures with true ones. While for the absolute hedonist Philebus pleasure is all of one sort, reducible to some unreflective sensation of the moment, and absolutely good, Socrates provides a complex and nuanced account of pleasures, whereby there are distinct types thereof, some better than others, some intrinsically mixed with pains and others free of such admixtures, some more prone to be false than their truer counterparts, and all of them relying to a greater or lesser degree on our judgments and beliefs.

The major tools used to discern and arrange these types hierarchically are the dialectical method of collection and division and the fourfold articulation of reality in terms of Limit, the Unlimited, Mixture, the Cause of Mixture. These two pillars of the investigation, the dialectical method and the fourfold articulation of reality, will be essential in discerning the nature of pleasure, the possibility of various sorts of false pleasures, the hierarchical order of pleasures and of various types of knowledge. They constitute the metaphysical and epistemological scaffold without which the conversation would have dissolved in groundless speculations. Far from shifting Socrates's attention completely away from the immediate concerns of everyday life to some purely abstract speculations, the availability of this metaphysical and epistemological "arsenal" allows him to give more careful attention and detailed phenomenological description to the most concrete feelings and circumstances.

To put it simply, the method of collection and division is a strategy of reasoning which, while frequently used in any field of art (16c), is elevated in the hands of a dialectician to such an extent as to enable an account of things in terms of the ultimate principles of reality. What basi-

cally enables the elevation of this method in the philosopher's hands is the fact that he applies it within a horizon of assumptions consciously made about the structure of reality and with the ultimate aim of uncovering ever more clearly the actual structure of reality. In other words, we start off by identifying subdivisions within a unity and by collecting a plurality within corresponding units at first within a horizon of tentative presuppositions about reality, and then proceed with the aim of simultaneously discerning all the intermediaries between the one and the many and clarifying our understanding of that metaphysical horizon. In the *Philebus*, Limit, the Unlimited, the Mixture of these two, and the Cause of their mixture are the pillars of this ultimate metaphysical structure. Together they provide an understanding of reality that combines measure and determination, on the one hand, with indefiniteness and indetermination, on the other. The emerging worldview allows various degrees of happiness and accomplishment in our human lives, ranging from those bordering the level experienced by irrational animals to those bearing the highest resemblance to the divine. Whatever the object of the dialectician's investigation, whether it is types of pleasure, or knowledge, or anything else at all, Plato's Socrates insists on the need to be mindful of the intermediaries lying between the one and the indefinitely many, while dividing a unit into its kinds and collecting a multiplicity into a unitary form. Skipping any of the intermediary steps could be fatal to understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

The application of collection and division must begin with a unitary grasp of the one form under investigation, even if only a tentative grasp (16d). Pleasure, in our case, will be understood as perceived replenishment of a lack (31d, 33d). As I hope to show, the notion of "replenishment" here at stake is truly broad, covering not only physiological fillings, such as those that occur through eating and drinking, but also psychological ones that address our emotional needs, and, most importantly, it refers also to a metaphysical sense, whereby "replenishment" counts as the progress of our lives toward ever more thorough instantiations of the Good, by approximating ever more closely our respective normative standards of balance and well-being that correspond to the goodness of life. The broad range of meanings pertaining to the kind of replenishment that pleasure brings about reflects the large variety of pleasures we can experience and also the even wider variety of ways in which we can go astray in assessing our experiences of pleasure.

The investigation reveals first three types of false pleasures, all of which happen to be mixed with pains: false pleasures of anticipation, pleasures that

are false due to misestimating the degree of pain and pleasure experienced when comparing such experiences with one another rather than by reference to a normative standard, and, finally, pleasures that are false insofar as we reduce the nature of pleasures to mere absence of pain. In the next stage, Plato's Socrates develops his account of pure pleasures, unmixed with pains, a discussion that leads into the proper articulation of true pleasures and of truth itself manifest in various degrees in pleasure and in various types of knowledge.

Under the generous umbrella of "knowledge" (*epistēmē*) or "art" (*technē*), here used interchangeably, the interlocutors reveal several types, ranging from the most imprecise of the productive arts, guided by lucky guesses (flute playing, medicine, agriculture, navigation, strategy), to the more precise productive arts (shipbuilding, house building), which make use of applied mathematics, and leading up to knowledge associated with the educational arts, such as pure geometry and arithmetic, and ending up with the most valuable and precise knowledge of dialectic, dealing with pure and unchanging realities (55c–59d).

After a thorough examination of various types of pleasure and knowledge, the culminating point of the discussion is reached when pleasures and knowledge are suitably combined with one another and when, at the end of the dialogue, we are offered a hierarchy of the ingredients that are responsible for the goodness of life (66a–c). It is here that measure (*to metrion*) comes to the fore, ranking highest in this hierarchy along with the timely (*to kairon*). As I will argue, in the *Philebus* "measure" means basically *due measure* in the sense of an absolute normative standard that functions as a moving target depending on the concrete shifting circumstances, and not a mere abstract and inert principle. The hierarchical orderings of the various types of pleasures and knowledge obtained earlier were meant absolutely, but in the concrete circumstances of our lives, it is due measure that guides from one moment to the next our prioritizing of one over another of those types of pleasure and knowledge in such a way as to reflect our continuous effort to adjust the Good to the changing circumstances of our lives. Depending on our natural inclinations and talents and on the concrete circumstances of our lives, we sometimes *rightly* find craft knowledge more fulfilling than mathematics, or the enjoyment of the mixed true pleasures more fulfilling than pure ones. Although he regards the practice of dialectic as intrinsically superior to all the other pursuits and pleasures of life, Plato's Socrates never implies that we should, for the sake of philosophical pleasures, actively neglect bodily pleasures, cutting off, say, the healthy and true pleasures of eating

and rest. Due measure helps us understand what it means to say that any good mixture presupposes proportion and a harmonious combination of Limit with the Unlimited, or why, when arguing, it is important to proceed at the right pace, neither jumping too quickly to conclusions, nor arriving there too slowly after derailing detours.

Part of the special character of this dialogue resides in that, instead of focusing exclusively on either sensible things, or Forms, the conversation focuses on both and also, most importantly, on the interval and possible mediations between them. In this way, it complies with its own injunction that reasoning ought never to go from a unity to the many or from the many to the one faster or slower than it should, omitting the intermediaries, when it is these that make all the difference between dialecticians and eristic debaters (17a). I, therefore, regard the *Philebus* primarily as a dialogue about mediation, in the sense of securing the right transitions from concrete instances to universals through intermediaries. Ontologically, the Cause and the Unlimited mediate between Limit and the Mixtures, the Cause mediating from above, the Unlimited from below. Epistemologically, for one thing, the method of collection and division is to be applied orderly and gradually from the Unlimited to the one and vice versa, skipping no levels in between; for another, in a broad sense, knowledge itself is revealed to be of as many types as the kinds of objects that it takes, sensible or intelligible, thus ranging from the most imprecise opinions based on guesswork to the most exact and stable grasp of dialectic. Ethically, among the ingredients of the good human life, highest in rank are due measure (*to metrion*) and the timely (*to kairon*), which represent reflections of the Good in the realm of the changing and shifting circumstances of our lives. While it itself is neither an intelligible Form nor a random sensible thing, due measure is a normative standard that accounts for the way in which the Good can be accommodated to our phenomenal and transitory world of becoming. By placing due measure as the most important ingredient of a good human life, the *Philebus* accounts for the way in which the exact proportion and combination of the ingredients of a good life will differ from one person to another depending on the specific natural talents and inclinations and on the distinct circumstances of our lives, while remaining, nevertheless, in each of these cases, a constant normative reflection of the Good. Finally, what more eloquent way of focusing on mediation than that of showing, through the detailed analysis of pleasure that, as human beings, we are constantly somewhere in between the lowest and the best! While some of our most undignified pleasures are hardly different from those enjoyed by unreflective

mollusks and beasts, our most elevated pure pleasures signal our bordering on divine status. Since pleasures are perceived replenishments of lacks, our very susceptibility to experience pleasure indicates that we are creatures of the interval, belonging somewhere between beasts and the divine.

There are several additional features that, I believe, recommend the *Philebus* as the most intriguing and complex of Plato's works. To begin with, the *Philebus* is the dialogue that addresses most explicitly the question that is constantly on Plato's mind: What is a good human life? It is in the *Philebus* that we find a most extensive discussion of the Good as the most final, self-sufficient, and the most choice-worthy object of desire, and with that, too, an understanding of the way the Good, if not accessible directly, is at least accessible through its reflection through Beauty, Proportion, and Truth. Again, it is in the *Philebus* that we can finally appreciate to its fullness the value of Plato's intellectualism or rationalism, which truly never presupposes sacrificing all pleasures, or excluding indeterminateness or chance from the fabric of human life. On the contrary, the rationalism here developed is robust all the more because it is built upon revealing the kinship that pleasures share with knowledge and argues for the possibility of a life ruled by reason in a universe permeated by chaos and indeterminateness. Furthermore, it is here that we get a most clear understanding of the interparticipation of Forms, a theme addressed also in the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, and a most detailed introduction and illustration of the dialectical method of collection and division, variants of which occur in the *Phaedrus*, the *Timaeus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*. Again, the *Philebus* draws at least implicitly upon a number of complex themes and theories explored in detail in other dialogues, and uses them in its own exploration of the good human life: the Divided Line, the *aporiai* of participation spelled out in the opening pages of the *Parmenides*, recollection, the science of calculating pleasures and pains first mentioned in the *Protagoras*, due measure, which receives its most extensive treatment in the *Statesman* and is mentioned also in the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Laws*. Drawing upon themes and views explored in other dialogues, the *Philebus* masterfully uses these insights as it proceeds to articulate the contours of a good human life: what ingredients it presupposes and why, what is their hierarchical order, and how they can combine with one another. Lest one be fooled to believe that Plato's Socrates might provide a closed systematic view prescribing a "one-size-fits-all" recipe for a good life, let it be said from the start that the presence of due measure at the top of that list of ingredients is by itself an invitation to the hardest task of a lifetime, the journey of self-discovery and responsibility.

While each of the chapters is a self-standing discussion, there are nonetheless a few threads running through all of them and unifying the work into a complex coherent whole.

A first thread concerns mediation and thinking in terms of intermediaries. Taking their clue from the advice that we should avoid advancing too quickly or too slowly from the one to the many and from the many to the one, and should, instead, make sure that we omit none of the intermediaries, the studies collected in this book emphasize Plato's concern for mediation expressed throughout the *Philebus*. Mediations take place simultaneously at different levels in our text: the dialectical method mediates between one Form and its many instances (chapter I); Limit and the Unlimited serve as mediators between pleasure and knowledge and secure the possibility of the final dialogue between them (chapter II); hybrid pleasures, which are true while being mixed with pain and false while being pure of such admixtures, mediate between pleasures that are pure and true, on the one hand, and those that are false and mixed, on the other (chapter III); due measure mediates between the Good and the particular circumstances of our lives (chapter IV) and proves to be essential in calibrating our pleasures of learning to our distinct natural talents and inclinations (chapter V); finally, the discussion developed in the last chapter attempts a different kind of mediation, one whereby what at first seem to be utterly irreconcilable views of pleasure, Plato's and Aristotle's, are in the end shown to be less at odds with one another than typically thought. I argue here that Plato's view of pleasure survives some of the Aristotelian critique, and that Plato could even incorporate Aristotle's account of pleasure as unimpeded exercise of our faculties in their natural condition as a phenomenological description of what it *feels* like to experience pleasure, while maintaining his own metaphysical understanding of pleasure as *genesis* (chapter VI).

As a second thread, a constant preoccupation throughout these chapters is integration of the discussions of specific issues—such as the distinction between mixed and pure pleasures, the possibility of true mixed pleasures or of false pure pleasures, the importance of due measure, the nature of our pleasures of learning, the nature of knowledge, the mixed pleasures of lamentation or anger, the pleasure of comic malice, etc.—into the metaphysical background of the fourfold structure of reality composed of Limit, the Unlimited, the Mixture of the two, the Cause of the mixture. Any attempt to discuss issues concerning ethics, methodology, or moral psychology independently of the metaphysical framework would necessarily be too narrow and superficial, and would compromise the teaching about the good life.

Conversely also, any attempt to study the metaphysical background for its own sake and without connection to the quest for the good life would be equally misguided and wrongheaded, as it would fall into pure abstractions detached from life.

A third thread throughout the book is the realization that the method of collection and division needs to be understood in relation to the metaphysical assumptions spelled out through the fourfold articulation of reality through Limit, the Unlimited, Mixture, and Cause of mixture. When the dialectical method of collection and division is first introduced in the dialogue it is introduced as a method that is not difficult to describe, but very difficult to use (16c). The reason for the difficulty at issue is that, discerning the joints where cuts are to be made by means of the dialectical method requires that the nature under investigation be understood in terms of the metaphysical structure of reality, here articulated in terms of that fourfold. Both a dialectician and an eristic debater might be using collection and division—the difference between the ways the two are using this method of search resides in their respective assumptions about the structure of reality and their respective metaphysical commitments. An absolute hedonist, for instance, might accept the four articulations of Limit, the Unlimited, the Cause, and the Mixture, while believing that the Unlimited is to be given priority over Limit, whereas a rationalist would see the order of priority reversed. The normative order in which we arrange the classes obtained through our cuts is determined by whether we view the universe as one in which the Cause keeps the Unlimited in check by the imposition of Limit, or as one in which the Unlimited overwhelms the rational strictures of Limit. Understanding the application of the dialectical method as dependent upon the metaphysical framework in which it is used is an essential clue for deciphering all of Plato's dialogues, and especially his late ones, in which variations in understanding collection and division from one dialogue to another depend on the different aspects of reality that constitute the focus of those dialogues.

Finally, common to these chapters is also the realization that, contrary to what traditional scholarship has been claiming, collection and division are not to be restricted either to sensible things or to intelligible Forms, but rather can be applied to both sensible and intelligible realities as long as we are clear about what we take to be the level at which the investigation is carried out each time. One and the same nature, say that of pleasure, or of the statesman, can be analyzed at various levels of comprehension. For example, in the *Philebus* the way we understand replenishments of lacks at the sensible level differs from how we understand those in an intelligible

account. In the former case the replenishment is purely psycho-physiological, in the latter it is metaphysical, in the sense of revealing how the Good is instantiated in a fulfilling human life. Similarly, in Plato's *Statesman*, at a sensible level the method of collection and division discerns the nature of statesmanship strictly in terms of the statesman's provisions for food and necessary materials for the community that he rules, while at an intelligible level it reveals the nature of the statesman in terms of his art of cultivating virtue in the citizens' souls, thereby making manifest the instantiation of the Good in the life of a thriving community.

Before proceeding to specify the focus of each chapter it might be helpful to clarify that, while the relevance of Forms for the *Philebus* has been an object of controversy among scholars, I believe the text offers strong support for recognizing their presence and important role throughout. From its outset, the dialogue declares it of paramount importance to solve three *aporiai* of the One and the Many, specifying that these are meaningful as long as they are understood to be dealing with the unchanging monads of Goodness, Beauty, Man, Ox, and not with the perishable and changing attributes of particular things (14d–15b). At least two of the difficulties concerning monads raised in the *Philebus* occur also in the *Parmenides* (130b–e, 131a–c, 132b–d), where they unequivocally refer to the middle dialogues' Forms. Socrates describes the monads as nongenerated, indestructible, and always the same (15b), the same way that he characterizes Forms in other dialogues (*Symposium* 211a–d, *Phaedo* 78d–e, *Timaeus* 52a), and contrasts them with the perishable and changing things (15a). At 16c Socrates describes the dialectical method that he always admired as beginning with the identification of a single form (*mian idean*), then searching for “two or three or however many,” where “three” is given in the feminine and, hence, continues the reference to *idea*. Later, in the section explicitly dedicated to the analysis of knowledge, Plato's Socrates talks distinctly about the intelligible realities that make the object of pure mathematics (56d–57d) as well as the objects reserved for dialectic “what really is forever eternally safe-same” (58a12–13), mentioning also explicitly the Good itself reflected through Beauty, Proportion, and Truth (65a). Beauty and the Good are explicitly treated as Forms in the middle dialogues (*Symposium* 211a–d, *Phaedo* 65d, 75d, 78d, 100, *Republic* 476b, 479a, 507b), and in the *Parmenides* Socrates wonders whether he should not posit also the Form of Man (*Parmenides* 130c). Whether in the *Philebus* Forms have in every respect the same meaning and function as they used to have in Plato's middle dialogues matters less than the realization that, whatever else might be true

about these intelligible realities, they certainly function as universal, eternal, and unchanging principles of order and determination, and that without them we would be unable to articulate and comprehend Plato's complex understanding of the good human life.

The complexities here revealed regarding the Forms, the dialectical method, the fourfold articulation of reality, etc. make it very likely that we are dealing with a late dialogue, written at a time of mature insight and nuance. The interpretation proposed in this book does not depend on placing this dialogue among Plato's late works, though I do nonetheless find that view most plausible.¹

Chapter I: *The Unity of the Philebus: Metaphysical Assumptions of the Good Human Life*. While scholars as astute and refined as Charles Kahn complain about the "extraordinary lack of unity" of the *Philebus*, which Kahn describes as having "a series of poorly integrated discussions,"² I propose a reading that reveals the interrelations between the most abstract and the most concrete moments of the dialogue. Far from the lamented disunity whereby "the course of the argument is repeatedly interrupted by problems of dialectic, cosmology and metaphysics that are very loosely tied up with the topics of pleasure, knowledge and the good" (Kahn *ibid.*), I propose a reading according to which the metaphysical articulation of reality accounts for the cognitive structure of pleasure and the role that pleasure and knowledge play in the good life.

Why does revealing this unity matter? To begin with, by integrating the analysis of pleasure into the metaphysical background we understand the specific hierarchy of pleasures, whereby pure pleasures are superior to impure or mixed ones, and true pleasures are superior to false ones, and we also understand why, among the false pleasures, some are falser than others. Secondly, revealing this unity also helps us make sense of the specific hierarchical order of knowledge, whereby pure knowledge that is more exact and precise is superior to the more imprecise types. Thirdly, it reveals to us the specific hierarchy of the ingredients of a good human life. And, finally, it clarifies that pleasure and knowledge share enough in common to be able to be combined as ingredients of a good human life.

Chapter II: *The Placement of Pleasure and Knowledge in the Fourfold Articulation of Reality*. Traditional interpretations place pleasure in the class of the Unlimited and knowledge in that of Limit. I challenge this interpretation and defend instead the view that pleasures, insofar as they are true, belong to the class of Mixtures, while knowledge and its cognates are among the Causes of mixtures.

To understand that pleasures, as Mixtures, are dependent on knowledge, as Cause, means to realize not only that pleasures have a cognitive structure and thus are irreducible to mere sensations of the moment or instinctual reflexes, the way *Philebus* would want us to believe, but also that, because of this, our intellectual growth and maturation will contribute to raising the quality of our pleasures and implicitly of our lives. That the type of pleasures we privilege in our lives depends on the knowledge we have and on the cluster of beliefs articulating our value judgments and commitments, is an insight that lies also at the basis of contemporary cognitive and behavioral therapy. When we understand that pleasure always presupposes a cluster of beliefs about what we value and why we value certain things in our lives, we can see how we can vary and modify the preference we give to some pleasures by refining that belief system. So too, we can become better at enjoying more true pleasures by increasing our self-knowledge and our awareness of what truly replenishes us and of the extent to which it does so.

Chapter III: *Hybrid Varieties of Pleasure: True Mixed Pleasures and False Pure Pleasures*. The third chapter stems from the need to determine whether the pairs of truth/falsehood and purity/impurity respectively overlap completely and, in case they don't, whether it is possible to have hybrid pleasures that combine the terms in the two pairs mentioned. Thus, can mixed (impure) pleasures of eating when hungry or drinking when thirsty be either true or false, or do they always have to be false? Can our pure pleasures of learning ever be excessive, or deficient, and therefore false? I argue that Plato keeps the criteria of truth/falsehood and purity/impurity of pleasures distinct and that allowing for such hybrid varieties of pleasure has significant consequences for the account of the good life here advanced.

Chapter IV: *The Nature of Pleasure: Absolute Standards of Replenishment and Due Measure*. Plato's view that pleasure is the perceived replenishment of some lack has often been subject to criticism as too narrow and incapable of accounting for some of the corporeal and all the noncorporeal pleasures. It seems at first hard, if not impossible, to specify what exactly must have been initially lacking and is correspondingly refilled through our pleasures of sight, smell, learning, recollecting pleasant memories from our past, or projecting hopes for the future, when these experiences are not preceded by any perceptible lack. What kind of replenishment are we undergoing when experiencing any of these pleasures? This difficulty seems to be only deepened when we realize that Plato suggests a reply based on objective standards in relation to which we are supposed to estimate the reality and degree of replenishment that we experience when taking pleasure in various

things. For if there are objective standards of pleasure (replenishment), how can we account for the *legitimate* diversity of our natural talents, tastes, and for the correspondingly diverse ways of experiencing pleasure? In this chapter then, I explore (1) whether Plato's notion of pleasure as perceptible replenishment of a lack can account for our pure pleasures, and (2) whether and, if so, how Plato's understanding of objective standards of pleasure fits in with the recognition of a legitimate diversity of natural talents and tastes.

Chapter V: *Pleasures of Learning and the Role of Due Measure in Experiencing Them*. In the *Philebus* Socrates talks explicitly only about a very narrow category of pleasures of learning, namely, the pleasures we take in practicing dialectic (52a–b). These he describes as being always pure and true. This chapter steps beyond the letter of the text while remaining loyal to its spirit, as it attempts to explore what Plato's Socrates would say about pleasures of learning when we take "learning" in a broader sense, to include not only dialectic, but also the study we undertake in a variety of branches of knowledge, from the most imprecise to the most precise disciplines. In this vein, I am going to address a number of questions: (1) Can pleasures of learning be pure even when they emerge in response to the experience of *aporia*, which seems to be painful? (2) Once we broaden the meaning of "learning" as suggested above, can there be different kinds of pleasures of learning, some of them true, others false, some pure, others mixed? And, finally, (3) Since due measure and the timely (*to metrion, to kairion* 66a6–8) are the most important ingredients of a good human life, what role exactly do they play in our experience of the pleasures of learning?

Chapter VI: *Plato's Conception of Pleasure Confronting Three Aristotelian Critiques*. Much has been made of what appears to be Aristotle's rejection of Plato's understanding of pleasure as process and his replacement of this with an understanding of pleasure as an activity that is complete at every moment. The final chapter of this book attempts to explore whether the account of pleasure developed in the *Philebus* can survive at least some waves of criticism that Aristotle formulates in the *Nicomachean Ethics* against the understanding of pleasure as process or becoming (*genesis*), whether Aristotle had Plato's view in mind as target of his criticism or not. While recognizing the undeniable differences between the two conceptions, I argue that Aristotle's criticism does not pose crucial threats to Plato's understanding of pleasure. In fact, I focus here on *the positive requirements for a robust understanding of pleasure* that those critical points suggest, and basically emphasize, once again, the strength and complexity of Plato's account, as one that is able to meet these requirements. I hope to show that Plato might learn a great

deal from Aristotle and even adopt some of his student's insights regarding *the experience* of pleasure as an activity that is complete at every moment, while preserving nevertheless his own account of *the nature* of pleasure as perceived replenishment of a lack and his metaphysical understanding of it as a coming into being (*genesis eis ousian*).

Beyond the suggested solutions to specific problems of interpretation, this book attempts to reveal the carefully woven unity of the *Philebus* and to bring to light once again the complexity of Plato's understanding of human nature and the good life. Unlike a host of scholars who claim that, in order to pay attention to life in its immediacy, Plato had to give up the high-flown metaphysical speculations of his middle dialogues, this book argues that, in the *Philebus* Plato develops an in-depth account of the concrete phenomena and changing circumstances of life precisely by intensifying and amplifying his exploration and grasp of the underlying metaphysical reality, and not at the expense of these.

Finally, writing this book has been itself an exercise in mediation, not simply between what Plato says and how we are to understand that, but also between what Plato says explicitly and what he only hints at implicitly. As it will be obvious, on several occasions I venture beyond the letter of the text and explore the rich and complex territory of what Plato *might have said* or *might have allowed to be said* on issues he does not explicitly address. Thus, for instance, in Chapter III I discuss the possibility of hybrid pleasures, namely, true mixed pleasures and false pure pleasures, in Chapter V I explore what Plato might have said about "pleasures of learning" when "learning" is broadly construed, and exercised in fields other than dialectic, whether such pleasures can also be mixed and perhaps sometimes even false, in Chapter VI I envision what could have been some of Plato's replies to some criticisms formulated by Aristotle, and in the closing Appendix I explore the way in which the *Philebus* offers us clues for constructing a plausible reply to the *aporiai* of participation articulated in Plato's *Parmenides*.