

BEAUTY, PROPORTION, AND TRUTH:  
THE GOOD IN THE *PHILEBUS*

by

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**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY**  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how Plato reaches his definition of the good at the end of the *Philebus*, and the relation of this definition of the good to the various parts of the dialogue. Through an internal reading of the *Philebus* and a critical evaluation of secondary scholarship on this dialogue, I argue that the various parts of the dialogue, especially the sections on dialectic and on the four genera, can only be understood as a unified whole with a proper grasp of Plato's definition of the good. It is only in seeing the good as the first and last cause that the dialogue can be read as an organic whole.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The *Philebus* has been famously compared to a “gnarled and knotted old oak-tree, abounding in unexpected humps and shoots, which sadly mar its symmetry as compared with the fair cypress-trees and stately pines by whose side it stands in the ‘grove of Academe:’ but yet it contains as much of sound timber as the best of them.”<sup>1</sup> This opening to Bury’s 1869 Introduction to the *Philebus* is accurate. The dialogue twists and turns without any seeming purpose, yet it holds the clearest definition of the Good in the Platonic corpus. In 1875, George Grote described the *Philebus* as “neither clear, nor orderly ... Every commentator of Plato, from Galen downward, has complained of the obscurity of the *Philebus*.”<sup>2</sup> But this is not to suggest a lack of philosophical content at all. The dialogue is full of late Platonic thought, and is a profound exposition of the Good. That the dialogue is harsh and terse in style is undeniable, and it is painfully obvious that Plato underplays the highest and hardest parts of the dialogue (the definition of the Good is hardly two Stephanus pages long), but it is not devoid of its own style and it certainly does not lack Plato’s genius. The philosophical argument of the dialogue becomes clear once the thread is found that unites the apparently unconnected parts. It is the goal of this thesis to look at the dialogue as a whole and see beyond and through the difficulties in style and content to come to understand the central theme of the dialogue, namely the Good.

This thesis follows the structure of the dialogue. While the central theme of the *Philebus* is the Good, it takes working through the entirety of the dialogue before

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<sup>1</sup> Bury, Robert Gregg. *The Philebus of Plato*. New York: Arno Press, 1973, p. ix

<sup>2</sup> Grote, George. *Plato and Other Companions of Socrates*, Vol. 2., London, 1875, p. 584

Socrates can announce that they are at the “portico of the Good.”<sup>3</sup> It is first necessary to come to the ontology of the *Philebus* before one can see the true weight of the final definition. There is a great division in scholarship devoted to the *Philebus* found in where commentators find the Good: is the Good defined ontologically or is it the Good found in human life? J.C.B. Gosling, in his translation and notes of the *Philebus*, ignores the ontology of the *Philebus*, while Kenneth Sayre’s interpretation of *Philebus* overly emphasizes it.<sup>4</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer offers the best route into understanding the dialogue as a whole, through recognizing that the practical aspect follows directly from its ontological truths.<sup>5</sup> Gadamer argues that the practical side of dialectic, that of differentiating the Good in each situation, is only possible in Plato’s evaluation of the Good being found in the mixed genera, not existing in itself and by itself. Gadamer’s approach to the text is helpful in that it shows the Good as being present in everything. The Good for Gadamer is very real and is found in everything; the Good is intrinsic in all being.

By reading the dialogue as a synthesis of theoretical and practical aspects, I have followed Plato’s progression in the dialogue itself. Plato begins with addressing a fundamental problem: how can a one (*henad*) maintain its existence in the many?<sup>6</sup> Plato argues that the divine gift of dialectic provides answers to this problem. The first chapter of this thesis explores dialectic as it is laid out in the *Philebus* and comes to the

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<sup>3</sup> *Philebus* 64c1 All translations used in this thesis are my own. I am, however, indebted to both Dorothea Frede and J.C.B. Gosling’s translations of the text.

<sup>4</sup> Sayre, Kenneth M. *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983 and Gosling, J. C. B. *Philebus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991

<sup>6</sup> *Philebus* 11a1-16a3



conclusion that dialectic shows that nothing can exist in isolation from its *henad*. Plato moves from the conclusions he found while investigating the dialectical method and sees everything as being made up of four principles: Limit, the Unlimited, Mixture, and Cause. This is the introduction of the four genera. The second chapter investigates the way in which the four genera are set up as the underlying principles and fundamental building blocks of everything. Plato concludes the dialogue with a definition of the Good and the final ranking of goods. Likewise, I conclude with a close examination of the definition of the Good that Plato gives in order to see how this definition unites the various disparate parts of the dialogue into a whole.

There is a difficulty situating this thesis in the scholarly tradition on the *Philebus*., mainly because there is not much work devoted to the *Philebus* compared to most other dialogues. Beyond this, the aim of the majority of the existing work on the *Philebus* does not take the dialogue as a whole into account. Besides the complete commentaries on the dialogue,<sup>7</sup> the overwhelming focus of both older and more recent scholarship about the *Philebus* is on the initial breakdown of the one (*henad*) into the many found in sections 15a-b.<sup>8</sup> The majority of works devoted to the *Philebus* find this problem of the one and the many as a stumbling block, in that it appears to be a departure from both earlier and other later Platonic thought.<sup>9</sup> But even if this is the first and main riddle of the

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<sup>7</sup> Including: Gosling, Sayre, Hampton, Bury, and Benardete.

<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Hampton focuses on this problem in her book *Pleasure Knowledge and Being: An Analysis of Plato's Philebus*. The problems plainly put forth by Plato about the one and the many are whether *henads* such as Man, Ox, the Beautiful, and the Good truly exist as self-identical, ungenerated and indestructible, and what their relation is to their many instantiations (Hampton, Cynthia M. *Pleasure, Knowledge, and Being: An Analysis of Plato's Philebus*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Sayre sums this up well in his treatment of the *Parmenides*' criticism of earlier Platonic thought. He writes: "Plato never explicitly responded to the difficulties raised in

conclusion of the dialogue, namely Plato's determination of the Good as the unity of beauty, proportion, and truth. It is at this central point that the interpretation of this thesis differs almost entirely from contemporary scholarship, in that I approach the question as falling into the overall structure of the dialogue, not as a riddle to be studied in isolation from the conclusion of the text. Although Dorothea Frede warns against "streamlining" Plato, in that one should not, "present the dialogue as something it is not, namely, a philosophical treatise with a straightforward message,"<sup>10</sup> I find that looking at the three main areas of Plato's focus, namely, dialectic, the four genera, and the final definition of the Good, and seeing how they fit together, can show Plato's philosophical message, without viewing it as a straightforward treatise.

The rest of this introduction will serve as an overview of approaches to the *Philebus*. This will be done by focusing on the most important works exclusively devoted to the *Philebus*. In evaluating scholarship on the *Philebus*, it is key to identify *where* the author looks to solve the problems that come out in their evaluation of the text. There is no denying the difficulty of the *Philebus*, but many scholars look outside the dialogue, mainly to Aristotle and the unwritten teachings, to find solutions for the problems that come up in their interpretation. It is abundantly evident that for the most case scholars have imported problems extraneous to the dialogue into their analysis of the *Philebus*. While it is helpful, and moreover necessary, to see how the *Philebus* falls into the Platonic corpus, and how it is the most directly like Aristotle's criticisms of Plato, the

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*Parmenides I*, which seems peculiar given the intensity of that attack. A more severe problem arises with the fact that both the second part of the *Parmenides* and the *Philebus* contain lengthy passages on ontological issues that appear quite out of harmony with the *Timaeus* in particular" (Sayre 12).

<sup>10</sup> Frede, Dorothea. *Philebus*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993, p. xv

text should be read and understood in itself, and then only subsequently analyzed in light of problems found external to the text itself. The dialogue is difficult enough to understand in itself without reading into it the difficulties Aristotle had, or trying to use the *Philebus* as a way to piece together Plato's unwritten teachings. While these are both legitimate goals, the problem is that there must first be a sense of how the dialogue works internally. Cynthia Hampton most succinctly describes this phenomenon in relation to the two most influential readings, those of Kenneth Sayre and J.C.B. Gosling. She writes:

Sayre, like Gosling, also appeals to sources outside the Platonic corpus, such as Aristotle's testimony, instead of considering the *Philebus* either on its own terms or in relation to other Platonic dialogues. In general, these commentators produce coherent interpretations only by ignoring key aspects of the dialogue, and therefore do not reveal the coherent structure of the *Philebus* as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

Hampton has here identified the major trend in scholarship on the *Philebus*: namely importing other works to presumably enlighten one's reading. This use of external material as an aid seems to have overly influenced some scholars' reading of the *Philebus*. The best example of this is Kenneth Sayre, who focuses so much on other dialogues and Aristotle that very little of his book is devoted to interpreting the dialogue itself. Sayre's contribution is invaluable, nonetheless, for his reading of the *Philebus* in light of Aristotle's criticisms at *Metaphysics* 988a14-5, that Plato taught that Unity and the Great and the Small are causes of Good and Evil, respectively. This helps establish the connection between ontology and practical philosophy in the dialogue. Sayre also uses the criticisms of participation in the first half of the *Parmenides* to better understand

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<sup>11</sup> Hampton, Cynthia M. *Pleasure, knowledge, and being: an analysis of Plato's Philebus*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 1

the problems of the *Philebus*. But Sayre, like Gosling and Striker, is more focused on Plato's departure from seeing the Forms as existing in and by themselves. Sayre writes:

The ontology of the *Philebus* is entirely different. One fundamental departure from the earlier theory regards the ontological status of the Forms themselves. Whereas in the middle period Forms differed from sensible objects both in being non-composite and in not depending upon other things for what they are, in the *Philebus* the Forms are ontologically derivative. Like sensible objects, Forms are now constituted from more basic principles. The main difference between Forms and sensible objects with respect to their constitution is that the composition of the former is prior to that of the latter.<sup>12</sup>

The ontology of the four genera in the *Philebus* is intimately connected to the central theme of the dialogue, the Good, and so Sayre's emphasis on this aspect of the dialogue is important. It is necessary to understand the basic principles, if one is to have a good reading of the dialogue as a whole. I hold, like Sayre, that the four genera are fundamental to all reality, since, as Plato writes, they are involved in everything that now exists in the universe (*πάντα τὰ νῦν ὄντα ἐν τῷ παντί*).<sup>13</sup>

The dialogue is about the Good, and what the Good is. Plato moves through the ontological problem of the one and the many, through the four genera, and concludes with a definition of the Good. The dialogue progresses in a way that allows for the final definition of the Good to be present in all of reality and this conclusion can only be drawn if the opening of the dialogue is read with the closing in mind and the closing of the dialogue is read with an eye to the opening. That is, Plato is writing in a way that views the whole dialogue as an entity that one aspect cannot be divorced from another.

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<sup>12</sup> Sayre 14

<sup>13</sup> *Philebus* 23c4

This is where many scholars err. Even Kenneth Sayre looks to other means when investigating the dialogue. Sayre sees the three parts of the Good as coming out of the middle dialogues, rather than being integral to the argument itself, he writes, “the Good in some sense is a synthetic unity, incorporating not only truth (from the *Republic*) and beauty (from the *Symposium*) but also proportion.”<sup>14</sup> Sayre seems to apologize on Plato’s behalf for the arguments found in the middle dialogues and the criticism of Aristotle. This is best seen in his over emphasis on the ontological aspect of the Good. Sayre is the culmination of one school of thought devoted to finding both the ontology of late Platonic thought in the *Philebus* and comparing it with Aristotle’s analysis of Platonism in order to understand the dialogue.

In contrast to this is Gosling’s reading of the *Philebus*. Gosling finds the *Philebus* lacking any ontological content. Gosling writes about 15a-b, the section of the dialogue most directly concerning Forms and the ontological status of *henads*, that “the *Philebus* is silent on the subject [of Forms]. None of the categories in 23 seq. is to be taken as the class of Forms, nor is any to be taken as being a Form.”<sup>15</sup> For Gosling the *Philebus* is about finding the *τέχνη* that produces the best human life. Gosling writes: “The emphasis is on what a *techne* produces because the good life is a putative product. As the products have to meet the requirements of the *techne* they have to display the required *peras* or the relevant *apeiron*.”<sup>16</sup> Gosling’s interpretation denies the ontology found in the *Philebus*, and as Cynthia Hampton writes: “Gosling’s denial of an ontological dimension to the *Philebus* is the main reason he finds so many lacunae in Plato’s line of argument and

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<sup>14</sup> Sayre 173

<sup>15</sup> Gosling 204

<sup>16</sup> Gosling 205

gaps in the dialogue's structure."<sup>17</sup> In order to argue that there is no ontology in the dialogue, Gosling suppresses the sections dealing with Limit and the Unlimited as constituent principles of sensible things, seeing them rather as the tools for the τέχνη that gives the best human life.<sup>18</sup> Gosling, in his exclusion of an ontological interpretation of the dialogue, misses the universal aspect of Plato's definition of the Good.

The two readings most akin to my own are those of Cynthia Hampton and Hans-Georg Gadamer. This is because both these scholars find the dialogue to be a synthesis of the Good as ontological and practical. Cynthia Hampton sees the ethical implication founded on the ontology that Plato presents. She writes: "My major contention is that the classification of both pleasure and knowledge and their subsequent ranking in the good life is made on ontological grounds."<sup>19</sup> For Hampton the human good is foremost, because while Plato first establishes the ontology necessary for realizing the human good, the ontological discourse exists for the sake of finding the practical human good.<sup>20</sup> Gadamer finds the Good in everything. Gadamer finds that dialectic discovers the Good through differentiation and this is done both practically and theoretically. Gadamer writes that the Good,

does not exist somewhere apart for itself and in itself, somewhere 'beyond.' Rather, it exists in everything that we recognize as a beautiful mixture. What is viewed from the perspective of the *Republic* (or by the *Symposium*) as the pure unmixed good or

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<sup>17</sup> Hampton 5

<sup>18</sup> This is especially true when Plato speaks of the genera of Limit and the Unlimited at *Philebus* 16c10, 26a2, 26d4, 27a1-b7.

<sup>19</sup> Hampton 3

<sup>20</sup> Hampton sees mean and limit as the highest order of good because they "are crucial in producing health and excellence or virtue, which are the most basic expressions of Proportion, Beauty, and Truth, (i.e. the Good), in human life" (85).

beautiful 'beyond being' is here determined to be the structure of 'the mixed' itself.<sup>21</sup>

The task for the human, according to Gadamer, is to find the beautiful or the good in every choice or differentiation that is made. The Good is present in all of mixture because it is the principle behind and beyond mixture. I follow these two readings, but look into the way in which Plato's exploration of dialectic and the four genera leads to the final definition of the Good, the way in which Plato establishes the ontology that allows for the Good to be present in all being.

The ancient reception of the *Philebus* for the most part is lost. Damascius, however, has a commentary on the *Philebus*, that is very helpful for a line-by-line reading.<sup>22</sup> Sayre is very helpful in piecing together what the ancient readers may have thought about the *Philebus*.<sup>23</sup> From what remains, it is clear that the overall emphasis of ancient commentators is to use the *Philebus* to find out what Plato was talking about in his lost lecture on the Good. Sayre writes that Aristoxenus, "used to talk about Plato's discourse on the Good," and that there were, "later reports of Alexander, Simplicius, and Philoponus, each of whom refers to a work (now lost) in which Aristotle discusses what Plato said on this particular occasion."<sup>24</sup> Although the majority of ancient works devoted to the *Philebus* were lost, I do follow Sayre's reading that the majority of them were used to figure out what Plato was talking about in his lost lecture on the Good.

The dialogue as a whole aims at seeing the Good as the first and final cause. I see this as bridging the gap between the ontological and practical readings of the dialogue.

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<sup>21</sup> Gadamer 115

<sup>22</sup> Damascius. *Lectures on the Philebus wrongly attributed to Olympiodorus*. (Translated by Leendert Gerrit Westerink,) Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1982

<sup>23</sup> Sayre 75-117

<sup>24</sup> Sayre 80

On the one hand, in setting up the Good as an ontological principle which is the cause of all mixtures, the dialogue can be read as a work devoted to ontology. On the other hand, because everything is done out of desire of the Good, the dialogue can just as easily be seen as a work devoted to practical philosophy. I argue, however, that both readings emerge because Plato is setting the Good up as the first and final cause.



## CHAPTER 2 DIALECTIC

Plato<sup>25</sup> establishes dialectic in the *Philebus* to answer the question of how something can be one and many. The dialectical or divine method is crucial to understand the subsequent sections of the dialogue, since the problem Socrates is trying to answer concerns everything: everything consists of oneness and plurality. Where Plato has mentioned dialectic in other dialogues, especially the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* in the middle dialogues, and the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* in the later dialogues, even stressing the importance of dialectic to philosophy, it is in the *Philebus* that Plato most fully explains why dialectic is necessary. Dialectic is now necessary since Plato establishes limit and unlimited as the constituent elements of all being, and it is only dialectic which allows for knowledge when these two opposing principles are both at play, since the dialectical method separates the one from the many. Being a dialogue about the Good, the whole *Philebus* is organized in a way that leads the reader to understand the Good as proportion, beauty, and truth: a formulation that rests on a mode of knowing that dialectic allows. The dialectical method allows for an understanding of the building blocks of reality, which becomes a necessity for this final definition of the Good. Plato opens the dialogue with an introduction, analysis, and example of dialectic to prepare the reader for the upcoming argument. Hans-Georg Gadamer stresses both the importance of dialectic in opening access to the ontological definition of the Good and the practical purpose of dialectic as differentiation in human life. Gadamer explains that the dialectic exposed in

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<sup>25</sup> I have used Plato and Socrates interchangeably throughout this thesis because, like other late dialogues, the main speaker (in this case, Socrates) directly communicates Plato's view, rather than having Plato's view emerge through the give and take of the interlocutors.

the *Philebus* shows the Good in itself is “far removed here from some esoteric, abstract, dialectical argument.”<sup>26</sup> It is in viewing dialectic this way, as playing the dual role both in disclosing universal truths and differentiating particular goods in practical life, that the final definition of the Good locates the Good in all being. This chapter will focus on the dialectical method as it is laid out in the *Philebus*. Through an analysis of how Plato sets up dialectic, it will become evident that dialectic is necessary for knowledge and that dialectic works within the overall structure of the reality given at the conclusion of the dialogue and falling within the framework of the four genera. That is, Plato shows that dialectic is needed to know anything, and this is done through showing the dependent relationship of genus to species.

The dialectical method is the first major topic investigated in the *Philebus*. The rest of the dialogue hinges on an understanding of dialectic, because dialectic brings out the essential feature of an object: that it is a mixture.<sup>27</sup> Plato also shows the necessity of dialectic in bringing out the nature of limit and the unlimited from which everything is made. Dialectic is concerned with the understanding of a one and the way it maintains its being when the one becomes many. This knowledge is necessary when dealing with objects of thought, as Plato argues when dealing with Ox, Man, Beauty or the Good as *monads*, so that the *monad* does not cease to exist in the indefinite many.<sup>28</sup> In order to come to a full understanding of dialectic, this chapter will investigate the dialectical method in three steps: why is it necessary, what is it, and what is its purpose or result.

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<sup>26</sup> Gadamer 115

<sup>27</sup> Gadamer explains that, “Only when the mixture is no longer thought of as a diminution and clouding of the pure, true, and unmixed, but as a genus of its own, can it be the place where we see how the being of the good and the true is constituted” (113).

<sup>28</sup> *Philebus* 15b1-16c2

## 2.1 Why is dialectic necessary?

Dialectic is necessary because it allows an investigation into an object without destroying either its oneness or its plurality. This is crucial since the backdrop of the dialogue is the question of what is the best human life possible: the life consisting of pleasure or of knowledge. Plato identifies the difficulty with a principle that gives trouble to all mankind: that the many is one and the one is many.<sup>29</sup> This problem of the one and many emerges right from the opening of the dialogue: Socrates thinks pleasure is in the cause.<sup>30</sup> Protarchus argues that pleasure is in the result—or more simply: pleasure is one because it is the end or goal of any activity. Socrates makes a point that eludes Protarchus,<sup>31</sup> arguing that if pleasure is the genus of the Good, all the species of pleasure will in turn be good.<sup>32</sup> That is, if pleasure is the highest Good, then all pleasures and all causes of pleasures are good in their dependence on the genus.<sup>33</sup> The genus is present at

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<sup>29</sup> *Philebus* 14c4-8, τὸν πᾶσι παρέχοντα ἄνθρωποις πράγματα ἐκοῦσί τε καὶ ἄκουσιν ὧίοις καὶ ἐνίοντε. Plato also describes this as an amazing principle, whose nature is marvelous: φύσει πὼς πεφθκὸτα θαυμαστόν.

<sup>30</sup> This is seen in Socrates finding fault with pleasure coming from different sources, whereas Protarchus finds pleasure as the same in its result.

<sup>31</sup> *Philebus* 13b3-5

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted here that the literary structure of the dialogue has Protarchus taking the argument from Philebus. In this way Plato is showing that the argument of unlimited pleasure without reason cannot even enter the argument of what the Good is, because without any reference to mind pure hedonism becomes inarticulate.

<sup>33</sup> The importance of the reliant relationship of genus and species must be brought up here, for it becomes increasingly necessary to understand the dependence of species on genus to understand the final formulation of the Good. Dialectic brings out the relationship of the one and the many that is crucial to understanding the ontological formulation of the Good at the end of the dialogue

all times in the species.<sup>34</sup> Protarchus must then find each kind of pleasure to see what it is and how many there are, and he can only do this if he understands the congeniality of species.

At this point Plato is laying the foundations to understand the underlying workings of reality. Plato is establishing that everything is made up of principles that seem to be in conflict: two opposites—unity and multiplicity—reside in everything. This logical paradox—that opposites reside in the same object—must be tackled, because Plato is establishing that all being consists of two opposing forces, the limit and the unlimited, and these manifest themselves first in an object when it is seen as both one and many. This problem first arises in Protarchus’ inability to understand that although he is calling pleasures unlike, he is calling them all Good: he is calling something that is unlike ‘like.’<sup>35</sup> Protarchus is unable to understand the relationship of genus to species, itself an instance of the problem of the one and the many. Plato here is not referring to the childish problem of the one and the many; rather, he is looking to the relationship of the *henad* to the *monad*.<sup>36</sup> If there is a form, or a unity, it cannot lose its unity in the species.

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<sup>34</sup> Socrates refers to the one and the many as the limit and the unlimited in the section of the four genera 22c, and names them each as a γένος.

<sup>35</sup> *Philebus* 13a7-b5. Socrates explains that Protarchus is calling these unlike things (pleasures) by a different name: Good. Socrates must show Protarchus—and Plato must show the reader—that if pleasure is a henad, a one, then it must at all stages be like itself in some way. Plato writes: ὅτι προσαγορεύεις αὐτὰ ἀνόμοια ὄντα ἑτέρῳ, φήσομεν, ὀνόματι. Λέγεις γὰρ ἀγαθὰ πάντα εἶναι τὰ ἡδέα. τὸ μὲν οὖν μὴ οὐχ ἡδέα εἶναι τὰ ἡδέα λόγος οὐδεὶς ἀμφισβητεῖ: κακὰ δ’ ὄντα αὐτῶν τὰ πολλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ δέ, ὡς ἡμεῖς φαμέν, ὁμῶς πάντα σὺν προσαγορεύεις ἀγαθὰ αὐτά, ὁμολογῶν ἀνόμοια εἶναι, τῷ λόγῳ εἴ τις σε προσαναγκάζοι. τί οὖν δὴ ταυτὸν ἐν ταῖς κακαῖς ὁμοίως καὶ ἐν ἀγαθαῖς ἐνὸν πάσας ἡδονὰς ἀγαθὸν εἶναι προσαγορεύεις;

<sup>36</sup> *Philebus* 14d4-e4, Socrates is explaining that what Protarchus views as the problem of the one and the many is really childish and trivial and a hindrance to reason, ‘παιδαριώδη καὶ ῥάδια καὶ σφόδρα τοῖς λόγοις ἐμπόδια.’ Socrates is bringing the argument away from material objects to theoretical issues, namely how can something be said to be one and

There must be some way in which Socrates can take Protarchus out of this flawed belief, and show the nature of the structure of reality. Plato is setting dialectic up to be the foundation of knowledge and the only way to define an object.

Socrates must show that although the physical enjoyment of pleasures may seem the same in every instance, this does not make pleasure necessarily a single unit. At this point Socrates begins an investigation into the one and the many, or as it emerges later in the argument, into the limit and the unlimited.<sup>37</sup> Protarchus is confused because he assumes that all pleasures are one. According to Protarchus, pleasures, although varied and multiform in their sources, are all singular insofar as an agent is pleased. There is a misconception on Protarchus' part about the problem of the one and the many: Protarchus is unable to see that, although it may seem that pleasure is a *henad*, or a singular unit, it is actually multifaceted and multiform in its very nature. In order to bring out the difficulty of the problem of the one and the many, Plato must show that unity and multiplicity are at play in the noetic realm and in material reality. Plato is taking into consideration the whole of reality, both sensible and intelligible, when he breaks down the question of the one and the many. He has shifted the problem away from strictly the physical realm and sees that there is also a misconception or misunderstanding of the role of the one and the

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many that does not come into being or perish (γίγνομένων or ἀπολλομένων, 15a). The childish problem of the one and the many was taken seriously by Plato at *Phd.* 101, *Rep.* 523c-25a, *Soph.* 251a-c, and *Prmd.* 129c, but in the *Philebus* Plato takes the one from something that neither comes to be nor passes away.

<sup>37</sup> At *Philebus* 23c9-10, Socrates alludes to this earlier section, saying that God revealed two principles in the universe: τὸ ἄπειρον and τὸ πέρας. This slight shift from one and many to limit and unlimited becomes important when investigating the four genera, but here the focus is specifically on the henadic relationship of the one to the many. The difference is that the one and the many does not capture the full nature of limit and the unlimited as the constituent principles in all being, because the one and the many refers mainly to an ideal object and its manifestation in sensibles.

many in the noetic realm. This is seen in Socrates leaving behind the childish problems of the one and the many and taking the *henad* from that which does not come into being or pass away, Plato is taking the one from things like Ox, Man, the Beautiful, or the Good.<sup>38</sup> Plato, in the *Philebus*, is lifting the problem of the one and many to the noetic realm, since the object of search is now the Good itself, as genus. Socrates explains that: “When someone attempts to posit man as one, and ox as one, and the beautiful as one, and the good as one, zealous concern with divisions of these unities and the like gives rise to controversy.”<sup>39</sup>

It is in this new formulation that Plato presents the reader with a new conception of the Good. Plato must first show how things are both one and many, so that he can show the mixed genus, and Plato finds the Good in the mixed genus. Mary Louise Gill brings out two very important points when considering this passage about the one and the many. The first is that the dichotomous division that was first explained in the *Phaedrus* and used in both the *Sophist* and *Statesman* is here not necessary, since it only brings one to the point of knowing where to seek the target kind, not necessarily bringing one to see it.<sup>40</sup> This is important to note, since Plato is bringing dialectic to the forefront, but here its use is to isolate out the one and find the relationship between a particular one and the many that are dependent on it. This, again, is necessary for the investigation of the

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<sup>38</sup> *Philebus* 15a1-7

<sup>39</sup> *Philebus* 15a1-7

<sup>40</sup> Gill writes: “In my view dichotomous division, when applied to hard topics, is a preliminary and exploratory technique, whose unsatisfactory outcome brings to light a puzzle about the target kind, which must be handled by some other means or at least in conjunction with some other method. Thus the sophist turns up, not at the tip of a single branch, but at the tips of branches all over the tree” (Gill, Mary Louise. “The Divine Method in Plato’s *Philebus*” from: *Plato’s Philebus: Selected Papers from the Eighth Symposium Platonicum*, ed. J. Dillon and L. Brisson. Auflage: Academia Verlag, 2010, p. 38).

*Philebus* into the highest Good from which all other species owe their being. The second and pivotal point that Gill brings up is the distinction that Plato makes between the *monads* and *henads*. She argues, along with Fernando Muniz and George Rudebusch,<sup>41</sup> that Plato is making a division into two kinds of units: *monads* and *henads*. Gill makes the point that at 15a Plato coins the term *henad*<sup>42</sup> and that, since *monad* is clearly available because he uses the word readily in the next paragraph, there must be a clear distinction between the two terms. Once this distinction is recognized, it is easier to interpret the following *aporiai*, as Cynthia Hampton defines the problems concerning the one and the many. Muniz and Rudebusch identify the difference between the *monad* and *henad* most clearly.<sup>43</sup> They argue that because the dialogue is ethical, the main focus of the dialogue is into the nature of pleasure, whether it is one or many.<sup>44</sup> In this light, Muniz and Rudebusch make a distinction between ‘vulgar’ and ‘aristocratic’ divisions. The division found in Protarchus’ division of the human into tall and small, and the like found at 14d-e, is termed ‘vulgar’. In contrast, the divisions found in what is eternal and self-same (Man, Ox, and what Socrates brings up as a *henad*) they call ‘aristocratic’.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In their paper, “Plato *Philebus* 15b: A Problem Solved”, *Classical Quarterly* 54/2 (2004): 394-405

<sup>42</sup> Gill 40

<sup>43</sup> Gill also argues that the existence of the *henads* is incontrovertible. See Gill: “No controversy arises about the existence of *henads* like man. Instead, controversy arises about the existence of a plurality of intelligible monads into which an original *henad* divides” (40).

<sup>44</sup> Muniz and Rudebusch, “the dialogue must take up the metaphysics of pleasure before it can proceed to the prudential value of pleasure in human life” (398).

<sup>45</sup> Muniz and Rudebusch, “Every interpreter to our knowledge has taken the word ‘monad’ to refer to the *henads* Man, Ox, Pleasure, Knowledge and so on ... there is no reason for Plato to have coined a new word, ‘henad’, if he intended to use it interchangeably with the established word, ‘monad’” (401). Here Muniz and Rudebusch show that the existence of the *henad* is given, but controversy arises when the division is made into *monads*. Gill further develops this argument.

These points serve to bring this distinction between *henad* and *monad* to the forefront of the initial issue of the one and the many. This is necessary when looking to the dialectical method, since dialectic is used to find the one, which is here seen as the *henad*.

This new distinction between the *henad* and the *monad* becomes critical to understanding the dialectical method based on the structure of reality as Plato will establish in the section on the four genera. Plato first shows that everything is both one and many, then he shows that the dialectic searches for the highest one and finds particular ones before letting the object of inquiry into the indeterminacy of sensible things. It follows that nothing exists alone and for itself, since there is a dependent relationship of every particular one to the genus that it is a part of. This notion of dependence of species on genus becomes crucial at the end of the dialogue, because Plato is looking for the Good as the highest genus, from which all species derive. So, it is necessary for Plato to give some mode of inquiry that follows the structure of reality. The conclusion of the dialogue will rest on understanding the nature of the one-many problem, in that there must be a *henad* of the Good, from which *monads* owe their existence. Plato begins to show the necessity of the dialectical method in his bipartite division of everything—both in the realm of being and becoming—into one and many, which is later seen as limit and unlimited. It is the task of dialectic to search into the one and discover other such unities before the one becomes an indeterminate many. Damascius accurately explains that we cannot understand when unity and multiplicity coincide, how opposites can reside together, and out of this confusion arises what Socrates calls a zealous concern about the division of these unities which belongs to



human nature.<sup>46</sup> It is the unique task of dialectic to search out the one and the particular ones that follow from it, before the ideal object is investigated in sensible things.

Dialectic is the mode of inquiry that follows the genus-species relationship at the heart of the structure of all reality.

Plato has lifted the one and the many problem out of the realm of sense perception into the noetic realm, while maintaining that the problem also exists in the physical world. This is because limit and the unlimited are the principles of all things, as Plato later shows in the dialogue. Plato stresses that the problem is inherent in discourse itself.<sup>47</sup> This is a problem in all things: two opposites reside together in the same object, and this appears logically impossible. Plato investigates the ethical question about the identity of pleasure and the Good in order to reach this ontological conclusion. That is, by seeing the fallacy of viewing pleasure as a *henad*, without understanding the relationship of the one to the many, Plato brought out the one and the many problem that is present in all of reality.

## 2.2 What dialectic is

Dialectic helps sort out and understand the one and the many, which becomes necessary when the structure of limit and the unlimited comes into play. Dialectic is collection and division: collecting like to like while dividing unlike from unlike.<sup>48</sup>

Dialectic in the *Philebus* is the ability to know the one and the many; moreover to know the first unit, then its subsidiary units, before the one dissipates into the unlimited sensible objects. Plato gives an example of dialectic through an exploration of the *henad*

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<sup>46</sup> Damascius 24

<sup>47</sup> *Philebus* 15d5-6

<sup>48</sup> *Phaedrus* 266a

φωνή in both grammar and music. The use of letters and grammar is familiar.<sup>49</sup> In the *Philebus*, however, Plato goes more deeply into this analogy, since he is bringing out the *henadic* relationship. Only in *Philebus* does Plato argue that limit and the unlimited are the causes of the difficulty of the one and the many; so it is now necessary to see how the nature of dialectic addresses this logical problem. Plato goes step by step in his approach to the new need and new form of dialectic. He explains that whatever is consists of one and many, since in its nature it has limit and the unlimited. If there is to be knowledge of anything, the one form must first be found, and this is the genus holding all the species together. Once this unit is grasped, the dialectician must work down until all units are known and from here see the one in the infinite variety of the material world. There can, however, be no knowledge of the indeterminate in isolation from the genus. Plato writes: “For we must not grant the form of the unlimited to plurality before we know the exact number of every plurality that lies between the unlimited and the one.”<sup>50</sup> That is, Plato must show the interdependence of objects of knowledge: since a *monad* is dependent on a *henad*, there must be a way to understand this dependent relationship. There can be no knowledge in isolation because there is no existence in isolation. It is the task of the *Philebus* to show the interdependent structure of all of being, but Plato eases the reader into the overall exposition by showing that knowledge of a unit cannot exist independently of the sensible that depends on it. The dialectical structure will become the way for Plato to expound the nature of the Good, but here Plato must show how a one becomes many, and how an inquirer can find the one from the dissipated many.

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<sup>49</sup> This is especially evident in *Phaedrus* 274c-d and 275e and the *Sophist* 253a-c

<sup>50</sup> *Philebus* 16d7-e2

Plato gives the reader three examples of the new meaning of dialectic, all of which belong to the *henad* φωνή, or sound. Everything is made up of limit and the unlimited (πέρας and ἀπείρον), and Plato will show how to find the *henad* from both the side of limit and the side of the unlimited.

The first example Socrates gives is of letters.<sup>51</sup> This is the simplest example but leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of dialectic. The sound (φωνή) that comes out of the mouth is one, in that the actual noise-making is the same, but it is also unlimited in number in that there is an infinite variety of sounds that can potentially be made. The sole fact of knowing the unity of vocal sound and the multiplicity of sounds the voice can make does not make one knowledgeable about language or sound: one must know the units of sound, and the amount of vocal sounds and their nature. The example of letters is used elsewhere in Plato<sup>52</sup> to establish the building blocks of nature and knowledge. This first example begins the inquiry into the *henad* φωνή, because it shows the initial step of looking for a *henad*: the inquirer must first recognize a single unit behind the various manifestations.

Plato then turns to the example of music. Socrates shows the inadequacy of knowing only high, low, and equal pitch to having any knowledge of music because differentiating pitch is not the same as knowing the art of music.<sup>53</sup> Genuine knowledge of music emerges in knowing the intervals in pitch and the combination that leads to scales and harmony that allows for knowledge. There can be no knowledge in isolation, but if one is to know anything, one must know the connection and participation of each step.

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<sup>51</sup> *Philebus* 17a8-c10

<sup>52</sup> *Sophist* 253a-c, *Timaeus* 48b-c, *Theaetetus* 202d-6b

<sup>53</sup> *Philebus* 17c11-e6

Socrates explains that, “at the same time they have made us realize that every investigation should search for the one and the many.”<sup>54</sup> Plato says that one can only be an expert in music if they know the intervals of pitch (τὰ διαστήματα), how many they are (ὅποσα), of what source (ὅποῖα), the boundaries (τοὺς ὅρους), and the combinations (συστήματα). Here, Plato is showing that knowledge comes from knowing the *henad* φωνή in its *monad* form of music, when these criteria are met. Mary Louise Gill succinctly summarizes these first two examples by saying, “phonology and music concern themselves with the same object—sound, one thing—yet they focus on different aspects of it. So the one form posited at the outset by the two sciences is not considered in all its dimensions by either one. Sound has various features, and different sciences attend to some of them and ignore others.”<sup>55</sup> Gill accurately shows that Plato is investigating the *henad* φωνή in two separate sciences, thus allowing different perspectives on the nature of the *henad* depending on its relation to the *monad*. This will become increasingly important because of the way the one breaks down into parts before it is left to indeterminacy. These two examples show the way in which the *henad* is divided, but Plato also shows how to begin with the multiple and work up to the *monad* and eventually attain another perspective on the *henad*.

Plato gives the reader a clue to the importance of his description of dialectic at 18a. Philebus, who remains silent for the majority of the dialogue, pipes up, and asks what is the point of all of these descriptions. This is important because Socrates agrees with Philebus that he must explain why the relationship of the *henad* and *monad* are

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<sup>54</sup> *Philebus* 17d7

<sup>55</sup> Gill 43

important<sup>56</sup>, but before he can explain the purpose of what he doing, Socrates must explain what to do when faced with the unlimited. This is crucial to dialectic and learning as a whole, since the *henad* is not always immediately present, especially when observing material phenomena. If the Good is the ultimate goal, there must be a way to reach the end, not having the soul intuit some idea, and posit that as cause and purpose of all things. That is, since the Good is the ultimate object of investigation and the Good is the highest genus—that from which everything finds its source—there must be a way to harmonize dialectic as the mode of investigation that shows that nothing exists in isolation to the conclusion that the Good is the basis and cause of all things, because the Good is the source of mixture. The Good must be knowable in everything that exists. In order to show that there is no knowledge in isolation, Plato again looks to letters to elucidate this point, but this time in the form of a myth.<sup>57</sup>

Plato begins his analysis with the familiar myth of Theuth. Theuth realizes that vowels are unlimited in variety; they are not one but several, and there are other vocal noises that were not vowels but made sound, which also have number; and finally there are mutes that stop the vowel sounds. Thus, he found each unit, dividing each mute till he found the single one, then each vowel and semi-vowel, and gave the name of the whole ‘letters.’ Theuth found that one cannot learn any single unit without the whole and found the one art unifying all and called this grammar.<sup>58</sup> When Theuth perceives the unlimited, he finds links and connections that lead him to the *henad* φωνή. Plato is showing how to come to the *henad* without a single unit already in mind. Whereas the

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<sup>56</sup> *Philebus* 18a3-4, Socrates, having been asked why this digression was said, replies that it is a “very proper (ὀρθῶς) question Philebus asked.”

<sup>57</sup> *Philebus* 18b6-d2

<sup>58</sup> *Philebus* 18c3-d2

first two examples took it for granted that knowledge of either music or letters was the end because they are units, the third example shows that when looking at something that is seemingly indeterminate, there is a unifying cause—which is here  $\phi\omega\nu\eta$ . Mary Louise Gill accurately points out that Plato is expressing what the *henad*  $\phi\omega\nu\eta$  is by showing it through three different perspectives. She writes: “To grasp the *henad* not only as the common element in the variety but also as fully articulated in those manifestations, he needs to approach the *henad* in a different way, by division, and to determine the exact number and sorts of *monads*, and *monads* of *monads*, into which the *henad* divides.”<sup>59</sup> Dialectic, then, is the method by which one comes to know the *henad* and its manifestations as *monads* before it eventually becomes an unlimited many.

### 2.3 Result

The purpose or result of dialectic is the same as the purpose and result of the dialogue as a whole: knowing the Good. Socrates gives three attributes about the Good:<sup>60</sup> that it is perfect, self-sufficient, and desired by everything. The next step is to see whether pleasure, knowledge, or the mixture of the two can be adequately said to have these characteristics be the Good itself. The preamble about dialectic is entirely necessary since the object of inquiry is a unit, the oneness of the Good, so Plato has given the formulation of how to conduct that search. Plato ends the dialogue by showing the Good to be the highest genus, so the Good is a *henad*. Plato will leave behind the terminology of *henad* and *monad* because, as he says, he needs new armament. But this

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<sup>59</sup> Gill 46

<sup>60</sup> *Philebus* 20c4-d10

distinction and the dependent relationship of the many on the one should not be forgotten or left behind. The Good must be seen as *henad*, especially because this formulation of the reality is present throughout the dialogue, even though focus is shifted onto the four genera. Dialectic offers the way into seeing and defining the Good, but it is here just a preliminary way of investigation. It is important to see dialectic as fundamental in day-to-day life, while also being aware of the way dialectic works within the ontology Plato sets up. This follows from the structure of the four genera that Plato establishes.

Because of the dependent relationship of *monad* to *henad* and the interconnectedness of reality, dialectic is necessary at all stages of knowing, because everything is related to a higher *monad*, which are all particular manifestations of a single *henad*: the Good. Hans-Georg Gadamer accurately explains that everyone at all times is forced into differentiation and choice, and it is necessary to have a working knowledge of the Good in order to make the appropriate choice in every situation.<sup>61</sup> It is, then, pivotal to have a working knowledge of dialectic and a thirst for knowledge of the Good, because at every stage one must make a decision and each decision should be based on the Good. Every multiple relies on the individual unit; it is the sciences of grammar and music that know sounds and it is through these multiple lenses that one becomes more familiar and knowledgeable about a *henad*. Plato will use this structure later to show how the Good is not only the highest genus but is present in every being. Dialectic, then, is necessary, not only at the level of noetic ideas, but in everyday life, since everything is saturated with the Good. The remainder of the dialogue will be spent focusing on this art of dialectic

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<sup>61</sup> “To be a human being means always to be confronted with choices . . . They must choose. Having to choose, however, entails wanting to know, that is, to know what is best, to know what is good. And that means knowing reasons why, knowing grounds, and using grounds to differentiate” (Gadamer 109).

and this realization that nothing exists in isolation on an investigation into the Good  
itself.



### CHAPTER 3      FOUR GENERA

Plato establishes the dialectical method in the *Philebus* to understand the relationship of the one and the many. This aids in the pursuit of the Good in that it allows one to see clearly the end that is being sought. Clarity becomes increasingly necessary since Socrates and Protarchus are moving beyond partial ends, to the complete goal of all being, namely the Good. Plato, however, explains that now there is a need for new equipment, since they have established that the Good is found in a life of mixture of pleasure and knowledge, not in the life of pleasure only nor in the life of reason only. Socrates must now take up other weapons to seek out the Good.<sup>62</sup> This chapter will look into the first explication of the Good,<sup>63</sup> and explore how this division of the Good into three elements<sup>64</sup> leads to the four genera<sup>65</sup>, and in turn how the four genera are established as the building blocks of all things, which allows for an adequate definition of both knowledge and pleasure. This new development of the definition and the four genera is important for understanding the concluding definition of the Good and the overall structure of the dialogue, in that Plato is bringing the reader to an understanding of the principles that are present in everything. This is a necessary step if Plato is to define the Good as the principle behind all desire.

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<sup>62</sup> *Philebus* 23b: this is the introduction of the four genera.

<sup>63</sup> *Philebus* 23c1-d8

<sup>64</sup> That the Good must be perfect, self-sufficient, and desired by all.

<sup>65</sup> Limit, the Unlimited, Mixture, and Cause.

### 3.1 The Good

The *Philebus* as a whole is a dialogue about the Good.<sup>66</sup> This should constantly be borne in mind when reading or analyzing the text. Socrates and his interlocutors are vying for the best definition of the Good, whether it is pleasure or knowledge. In order to find what the Good is, Socrates must explain the elements of the Good as they are seen as elements of all things. When describing the elements of the Good, Plato is not giving the constituent parts, which when combined together create the Good as the sum total; rather, Plato is describing what the Good must be in a subject's relationship to it. The Good is first seen as the Good in human life, and only subsequently does Plato move to the Good as the principle behind all being. The Good comes up in two initial ways, as Robert Bury points out.<sup>67</sup> The Good is held by Philebus as the Good for all animals, whereas for Socrates the Good is initially seen as the object for the rational species of animals. Bury argues that the subject is narrowed to the question of the Good for Man, which is the best acquisition (κτῆμα) of man.<sup>68</sup> This leads, for Bury, to the idea of the Universal Good, who writes,

even in deciding on this narrower issue a larger consideration is involved, with some apparent inconsistency; for one of the three marks of the Good is stated to be Desirability for all plants and animals [22b]. This I take to be a subtle indication that the

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<sup>66</sup> This is the most common interpretation taken about the dialogue. There are rare exceptions, including J. Stenzel (Stenzel, Julius, and Donald James Allan. *Plato's Method of Dialectic*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), who mainly view the *Philebus* as one of the means for getting into Plato's 'unwritten teachings,' since the *Philebus* is most closely related to the criticisms Aristotle lays out especially in his description of the 'Great and the Small' in *Physics* 187a17 and his criticism of One and the Dyad of the Great and the Small in *Metaphysics* 998a7-17.

<sup>67</sup> Bury lx

<sup>68</sup> Bury lx

question of the Universal Good is bound up with the narrower question as to the Human Good.<sup>69</sup>

This follows when one sees the Human Good as being a part of mixture, which has as its genus the Good itself. In Plato's configuration of genus and species it becomes clear that the lower finds its source in the higher, so the Human Good depends on the Universal Good for its existence, and this logic leads to the concluding definition of the Good, where Plato writes that it is in the mixture of what is Good for man and the universe that one can discover the Good itself.<sup>70</sup>

In order to get here, however, Socrates must move away from the strict guidelines of dialectic and explain what was divinely inspired in his own recollection of the Good. Socrates asks Protarchus to give the forms of pleasure and knowledge, if there are any, as well as their exact quantity. Protarchus, at one of his most loquacious sections of the dialogue, pleads with Socrates to take over the task of differentiating all the various forms of pleasure and knowledge and define each. Plato here introduces a pivotal point in the dialogue. Socrates turns away from the present debate and recalls something he heard in a dream.<sup>71</sup> Proclus assigns this dream-state to the perfect intuitive knowledge given by intelligence as opposed to the waking-state where knowledge is based on perception.<sup>72</sup> Socrates believes he heard in the dream that neither pleasure nor knowledge is the Good, but there is something other and superior to both of them, lying

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<sup>69</sup> Bury lx

<sup>70</sup> *Philebus* 64a1-3: "To discover in this mixture what the Good is in man and the universe, and glimpse what its nature is in itself."

<sup>71</sup> *Philebus* 20b9-c1

<sup>72</sup> Proclus. *The Elements of Theology: Diadoxos Stoixeiosis Theologike*. (Translated by E.R. Dodds) 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, .; / p. II.1-3

beyond the distinction of the sensible and the intelligible.<sup>73</sup> There is a hesitation here because Socrates is moving beyond pleasure and knowledge to a mixture, and the source is left vague. Dorothea Frede associates this Plato's strange hesitation to use divine inspiration as an indication that Socrates is proposing un-Socratic theories.<sup>74</sup> It seems rather that Plato is not yet ready look at the Good head on, and so has Socrates recall hearing of the Good through a dream. The understanding of the Good as mixture in that the Good can be found in an examination of the best human life as a mixture of pleasure and knowledge is the focus of the entire dialogue, but before Plato explains mixture and its part in the universe and in the role of the Good, he defines the elements of the Good.

The goal of the second section of the dialogue is to set up the four genera and see all mixture as dependent on the Good, but in order to do this Plato must first show how the criteria of the Good can be met in mixture. Plato shows that the Good is simple in the way he lays out the three elements.<sup>75</sup> The Good is defined as the highest principle: it is the goal that lies in the background of every choice. The Good as principle is what everything strives for. Plato gives a threefold explanation of the Good: it must be perfect (τέλειον), sufficient (ικανόν), and desirable (αίρετόν). The Good is perfect, since it is whole in all its constituents, first, middle, and last. The Good is sufficient, since in its perfection the Good needs nothing external to it, to which it owes its existence, perfection, or goodness. Most importantly, the Good is desirable, since everything strives to be good; every choice made or every act done—not by some but all—is done for the sake of a good. This elemental description points beyond any particular good to the

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<sup>73</sup> *Philebus* 20b9-c1

<sup>74</sup> Frede 14 nt. 1

<sup>75</sup> *Philebus* 20c1-d8

Good itself as that to which all things strive, while showing that the Good is in some way knowable. The Good becomes knowable in its desirability because the Good sits latent in choice. When something is willed or chosen it is differentiated from its opposite by a desire for goodness—that is, any action is done through a desire for goodness. Pleasure or knowledge must be judged to be perfect, sufficient, and desirable in themselves if either is to get the laurels of first place. Plato now leads the argument to see what an unmixed life of either pleasure or knowledge would be, with the goal of showing that each requires the other for its very own existence.<sup>76</sup>

In showing the elements of the Good, Plato is establishing the highest principle that all things seek. Plato is showing the requisite parts of the highest genus, in a subject's relation to it. This exposition of the elements is necessary since it gives content to this principle. Plato moves away from the divine method of dialectic, but he never leaves the ontological foundation that dialectic is based on. Plato had explained that the one from which the many derive makes up the whole, in that it holds every part together. So, the Good must be seen in itself as perfect, sufficient, and fully desirable, so that each partial good finds its source and its being in the overall structure. There must be a species to genus relationship of partial goods to the Good itself. Plato takes the argument through two partial definitions of the Good—pleasure and knowledge—to show that neither is complete in its independence, as the Good must be. Neither pleasure nor knowledge is good in and through itself, so neither can be the Good itself. Socrates shows Protarchus that the life of pleasure devoid of cognition and remembrance is meaningless, since there is no awareness of pleasure, thus reducing life to that of a sea-

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<sup>76</sup> *Philebus* 20-22

lung (ὁ θαλάττιος πνεύμων).<sup>77</sup> The life of pure reason is also partial since there is no gratification for knowledge, and this life too falls short of the Good. The best life, then, must be a mixture of the two, since neither can even fully exist independent of the other. The way Plato sets up the mixture is of the utmost importance for the remainder of the dialogue, but also for the previous section on dialectic, since it answers the pressing question of how two opposites can reside together. Before analyzing the nature of the mixture, it is important to bring out the distinction Plato makes between the human sphere and the divine sphere.

### 3.2 Divine Reason

Plato gives the elemental knowledge of the Good in the *Philebus* in order to wean people away from equating the Good with pleasure, to see the Good as principle. Plato is showing the way in which the genera are constituent elements of everything that is. It is in showing the nature of underlying principles that Plato is capable of understanding the Good as highest genus or cause. Throughout the dialogue Plato hints at an understanding of the Good in itself.<sup>78</sup> Plato relies on the section of the dialogue devoted to the four genera on the divine sphere at two main points and for two different reasons. The first, at 20c, has been discussed, where Socrates explains that he recalls hearing an argument long ago or in a dream. This shows where his argument comes from. At 22c, Socrates polarizes reason: human on the one side, divine on the other. This shows where the argument will lead. Socrates explains that human reason cannot be the Good, but divine reason in some way is. This is important in that the Good is seen as mixture, and reason

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<sup>77</sup> *Philebus* 21c7

<sup>78</sup> *Philebus* 65a1-5

will come to be the cause, but here Plato is preliminarily equating the Good with reason, thus showing the Good somehow is cause in a divine sense; this will become clear later when mixture is seen as the cause imposing limit on the unlimited. This is important if one is to try to synthesize and understand the dialogue as a whole, since the Good as first principle must, in some way, be a cause of bringing objects back to it. All this is to say that the Good lies behind all mixture just as the Good lies behind all being, in that all being is made up of the mixture of limit and the unlimited. Plato concludes the dialogue by having the Good be the highest genus, and it follows from this formulation that everything is in some way tied to the Good, since everything owes its existence to a higher genus. This follows if the Good is the highest genus, which it must be if everything is to desire it so there must be a way that Plato shows the Good as a human goal and a goal for all being. In order to see the Good, though, Plato must first show the way in which all things exist as dependent on a higher genus.

### **3.3 The Four Genera**

Now that the investigation seeks the Good itself, a different way of viewing being is needed. Socrates explains that different equipment is necessary for awarding second prize, though it may be similar to the first.<sup>79</sup> Plato is moving away from the strict division and collection of the dialectical method and plunging into a more universal method. That is, where dialectic is universal in its ability to investigate all things against the background of genus and universality, here Plato needs to access the universal in its universality, in itself. Plato must bypass the method of expounding each *monad* until

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<sup>79</sup> *Philebus* 23b7

eventually reaching the *henad* because he needs to explain the structure in which the dialectical method works. The new approach is similar to dialectic in that it brings together like to like and separates out unlike from unlike. Where it is necessary for dialectic to expound each form and know it as individual and participatory, this new approach simply separates out each of the four genera, as those from which all things are made by arguing that these four genera are the four highest genera within which everything else has its being. There is a way in which dialectic makes it impossible to know the mixed as a genus, since it is always looking to unmix and find the source. So dialectic is necessary to find the elements of the Good, but now that there needs to be a way to give an explanation of things as a whole, dialectic must be supplemented. Plato has shown how the dialectical method has brought out the division of limit and the unlimited and pointed to the Good, but there must now be a different access to the Good, which is seen in the universal applicability of the four genera. This is present in the dialectic, but the demand of dialectic is too high in its need to find all intermediaries between a *henad* and sensible objects. The task would be too lengthy and difficult to find each *monad* and particular instance of pleasure and knowledge and follow this to the *henad* of each in order to find the *henad* of the Good. Plato must show what pleasure is, what knowledge is, and what the Good is, and this must be done through an investigation into the four genera.

Socrates explains that he needs ἄλλης μηχανῆς or a ἕτερα βέλη from before in order to fight for placing mind or reason in second place. Plato takes up the argument in a very particular way. The argument must be universal in order to address the universal character of the Good. Socrates explains that he must take up everything that now



exists.<sup>80</sup> Socrates wants to divide everything that now exists in the universe. Note that in contrast with dialectic, where the bifurcation leads to limit and the unlimited<sup>81</sup>, Socrates here explains that all things must be broken down into three, and eventually four.<sup>82</sup> Protarchus brings up the possibility of a fifth genus that of separation or dissolution *διάκρισις*, which Socrates says will be explored later if necessary.<sup>83</sup> John McGinley aligns this fifth genus with the unwritten doctrines.<sup>84</sup> The fifth genus is left out because it is unnecessary, since the power of mind, which is the responsible for connecting, is also the cause of separating. Much like the dream from which this discussion started, the four genera begins as more intuitive than its methodological predecessor, while still shaped by reason or *λόγος*. The language is filled with aids that seem to point to something beyond. Socrates explains the gods' revelation of the limited and unlimited (*δεῖξαι*), and when he introduces the third genus, he does so based on an assumption: "Let's assume these are our two classes, and a third made from combining the two."<sup>85</sup> The approach of the four genera does not hold the same rigor as the scientific bifurcation of dialectic, yet it serves to show the nature and building blocks of all things existent. Where dialectic shows how two opposites reside together, and the way to strip the opposite from its opposite, the new method shows the principles in all things, since the contradictory nature of their existence

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<sup>80</sup> πάντα τὰ νῦν ὄντα ἐν τῷ παντὶ διχῆ διαλάβωμεν, μᾶλλον δ' εἰβοῦλει, τριχῆ, *Philebus* 23c4-5

<sup>81</sup> *Philebus* 16c9-d7

<sup>82</sup> τετάρτου μοι γένους αὖ προσδεῖν φαίνεται, *Philebus* 23d5

<sup>83</sup> *Philebus* 23d9-e1

<sup>84</sup> McGinley, J. "The Doctrine of the Good in the *Philebus*," *Apeiron*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1977), p. 34

<sup>85</sup> Τούτῳ δὴ τῶν εἰδῶν τὰ δύο τιθώμεθα, τὸ δὲ τρίτον ἐξ ἀμφοῖν τούτοις ἔν τι συμμισγόμενον, *Philebus* 23c12-d3

has already been discredited.<sup>86</sup> This is possible since mixture is a genus that is based on the Good, as Plato will show, since everything is mixture and the Good is the principle of mixture. What Plato is left to do is to explain each of the four genera and find the Good as principle.

### 3.4 The Unlimited

Plato's task is to find how all things exist and to describe how pleasure and knowledge align with certain elements in the creative genera. Plato takes his beginning in the revelation of the limited and the unlimited that God gave, and then discovers mixture as the third kind, and the cause as the fourth. The task is not to describe each genus, but rather as Socrates puts it to, "try, by collecting each of them again into one, to learn how each of them was both one and many"<sup>87</sup> in order to find where the Good lies. Socrates begins with the unlimited and finds that what was one in name is in reality infinite.<sup>88</sup> The ἄπειρον is treated first. The ἄπειρον is investigated first because it is easiest to grasp in that Socrates just shows objects that admit of more and less<sup>89</sup> and it is upon an understanding of the ἄπειρον that Socrates bases his investigation into the other genera. The unlimited is seen as continuum in that the ἄπειρον can admit of no limit or

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<sup>86</sup> Some commentators try to over-assimilate the four genera with the dialectical method. John McGinley is right in pointing out that the new armament adds clarity to the one-many problem, but this is done more from the fuller understanding of limit and the unlimited, over the argument that Plato is situating the one-many problem in a philosophically casual relationship. See McGinley 34

<sup>87</sup> *Philebus* 23e4-6

<sup>88</sup> *Philebus* 24a1-4

<sup>89</sup> *Philebus* 24a6-25a4

definiteness. When something is labeled unlimited/indefinite/indeterminate, it can at no time be said to be one thing. Having no limit (περάς) or end (τέλος) makes the ἄπειρον fully indeterminate. As soon as an object is defined or described it cannot be said to dwell in the unlimited genus, but becomes understandable. Socrates leads Protarchus to understanding by showing that the unlimited is like the comparative adjective.<sup>90</sup> That is, when one looks at hotter as hotter, and not a particular object as hotter than another object, then one can glimpse at the unlimited genus because one is looking to the unlimited nature of hotter, not one sensible object's heat compared to another. Plato even describes earlier how the indefinite does not make one knowledgeable since sensible particulars are unknowable without a unity, but this should not devalue the unlimited or Plato's assessment of it.<sup>91</sup> Plato begins with investigating the unlimited because it leads away from understanding things as particular occurrences, and shows that knowledge must be of the principle behind the objects of investigation. That is, in looking at the principle of the unlimited—hotter as hotter, not as fire—one can see what is working behind the particular phenomena. This will become increasingly important, as understanding the underlying principles that shape reality is necessary to understand the Good itself. J.C.B. Gosling's commentary on section 23-8 of the dialogue is very useful here.<sup>92</sup> Gosling groups Bury, Jowett, Ross, Taylor, Gauss, Hackforth, and Robin together as an interpretation of the limit and the unlimited as following from the Heavenly Tradition of dialectic, while he himself holds that limit and the unlimited are cousins to

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<sup>90</sup> *Philebus* 24a6-b4

<sup>91</sup> *Philebus* 17e3-6

<sup>92</sup> Gosling 186-206

Aristotle's form and matter.<sup>93</sup> Gosling goes further and groups Stenzel, Crombie, and Striker in a second interpretation where the *πέρας* and *ἄπειρον* are seen as highly metaphorical.<sup>94</sup> This interpretation points to Plato's inability to properly describe the concepts of *πέρας* and *ἄπειρον*, so he simply calls them genera. This interpretation does not take into account the importance of seeing the four genera as principles in everything. The unlimited is necessary in the mixture to bring in change and becoming to the static nature of the limit: it is the dynamic principle of mobility in a being.<sup>95</sup>

### 3.5 The Limit

The definite genus is given in contrast to the indefinite. The definite is seen as ratios or numerals. Socrates defines the definite in opposition to the more and the less of the indefinite. That is, the definite is equal, and double, and all other ratios, number to number and measure to measure.<sup>96</sup> Socrates does not, however, positively define the definite genus; he rather explains that what does not admit of the unlimited must be *πέρας*. The limited genus is not seen in the same way as the unlimited, since it is more easily seen as unity and its multiplicity is found in number—that is, one can grasp the limit by seeing how number impresses itself upon or limits an object, for instance four is the double of two: limit is working here in the ratio 2:1, where the limit found in ratio is impressing itself on an unlimited two and making it four. There is not the necessity to

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<sup>93</sup> Gosling 186

<sup>94</sup> Gosling 193

<sup>95</sup> This is seen at *Philebus* 24e3-5, where the unlimited is hinted to be a principle of becoming, this would make the unlimited necessary in the mixture.

<sup>96</sup> *Philebus* 25a6-b3

fully explain the limit as there was when describing the unlimited; limit places boundaries on the unlimited. Limit, then, is to be seen as the principle of number or ratio, that which is determined. The definite is best described as, “whatever stops the differences between opposites and makes them commensurable and harmonious by introducing number.”<sup>97</sup> Socrates explains the limit most clearly when he introduces the third kind: the mixed.

### 3.6 The Mixed

The purpose of setting up the four kinds must be to better understand the mixture. For Plato is investigating the Good itself, and Socrates finds the Good in mixture. Socrates stresses above all the importance of the third kind, especially in his language. When Protarchus says ἐμοὶ φράσεις,<sup>98</sup> Socrates replies, θεὸς μὲν οὖν, ἄνπερ γε ἐμαὶ εὐχαῖς ἐπήκοος γιγνηταί τις θεῶν,<sup>99</sup> and follows by saying, σκοπῶ καὶ μοι δοκεῖ τις: ὃ Πρώταρχε, αὐτῶν φίλος ἡμῖν νῦν δὴ γεγονέναι.<sup>100</sup> This points to the importance and the divine nature of this genus. The third class is the mixture of the limit and the unlimited; it is the proper mixture of the two. Socrates explains that beauty and health come from the proper mixture and that, “for this goddess, fair Philebus, beholding the violence and universal wickedness which prevailed, since there was no limit of pleasures or

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<sup>97</sup> *Philebus* 26e1-8

<sup>98</sup> “you will tell me” *Philebus* 25b7

<sup>99</sup> “It is a God that will do so, if any will give ear to my prayers,” *Philebus* 25b8-9

<sup>100</sup> “I am watching, and it seems to me, Protarchus, that one of the gods at this moment is being gracious to me,” *Philebus* 25b11-12

indulgences in them, established law and order, which contain a limit.”<sup>101</sup> This goddess can refer to Μουσική, since music was spoken of at 26a, but since Socrates addresses Philebus, it seems to point back to 12b and Socrates’ hesitancy to name the Ἀφροδίτη. The mixture, though, is the creation of beauty and harmony in the proper proportion of the limit and the unlimited. Protarchus still does not understand.<sup>102</sup> Socrates explains that the difficulty is in the multitude (τὸ πλεθός) that springs up.<sup>103</sup> Where the genera of limit and the unlimited are easily seen as principles outside the world of becoming, the mixed genus is easily grasped in both the spheres of being and becoming, and must be seen in both. The particular and the universal are encompassed by all four genera, but Damascius shows that Plato points to this in the mixed genus in his use of examples, by giving two particulars (harmony and health) and two universals (the order of the elements and the seasons.)<sup>104</sup> In the third genus Plato gives real examples of mixture, rather than the principle lying behind them, as he did for the previous two genera. This is because the mixed is seen in everything that comes to be or is, so Plato can point to any object and show mixture. The use of the universal and particular examples serves to show mixture at work in both spheres. All four genera are constituent elements of being, but the Good is aligned with mixture since its beauty is in proportion, as Socrates will show at the end of the dialogue.

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<sup>101</sup> *Philebus* 26b5-c2

<sup>102</sup> *Philebus* 26c5-7

<sup>103</sup> *Philebus* 26c8-d1

<sup>104</sup> Damascius, “Of the examples that Socrates gives of the mixture two are particular, two universal; in each the extremes, because, measureless, stand for infinitude, proportion and ratio for limit, the whole for a mixture of the two. The particular examples are health and harmony, the universal ones the order of the elements and the cycle of the seasons” (Damascius 51).

### 3.7 Cause

The fourth and final genus is cause. Everything that is generated must have some cause.<sup>105</sup> There must be a cause for everything that is, so cause must be a genus. The explanation of the dialectical method is still necessary to see what Plato is doing with the four genera. As was seen, the dialectical method is used to see the particular and the general, since every species is part of its genus. This can be done either through looking at what Plato calls the many or what he calls the one. Everything that exists is made up of limit, the unlimited, mixture, and cause, so these are the four genera. Cause is included as that which brings together limit and the unlimited in mixture.

It follows, then—since the four have been enumerated—that unmixed pleasure, having no limit, is part of the unlimited genus. The argument Socrates uses to find where knowledge belongs is worth exploring. Socrates leads Protarchus to agree that the whole universe (τὰ ξύμπαντα) is not governed by irrationality and chance, but by mind (νοῦς) and a marvelous wisdom (φρόνησιν τινα θαυμαστήν), so everything must be ordered by mind. He then asks Protarchus to observe the argument as it comes to them.<sup>106</sup> Socrates explains that in nature there are certain elements that constitute the universe: earth, air, fire, and water; and, likewise, these elements in us are small, weak, and poor (σμικρόν, ἀσθενές, φαῦλον),<sup>107</sup> and these elements in us are nourished by the elements in the universe. Socrates concludes the argument by explaining that when the elements are found together, they make a body, and the universal body nourishes our body, and both bodies have soul. The next step in the argument is somewhat difficult yet logically

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<sup>105</sup> Socrates explains at *Philebus* 26e1-4, “for see, if it seems to you that everything that comes into being must through necessity come to be through a cause.”

<sup>106</sup> *Philebus* 28e7-29a4

<sup>107</sup> *Philebus* 29c1-2

follows: Socrates argues that the soul of the universe orders and governs everything using the limit and the unlimited, thus creating the seasons and health and all such mixed things, and that which orders the limit and the unlimited and governs all things must most rightly be called wisdom and mind (σοφία and νοῦς). Mind is the cause.

What Plato does in this section on the four genera is elaborate the way all things must be. The conclusion of the dialogue relies heavily on understanding the nature of the genera and the elements of the Good. One must see the deficit in an object to show the perfection in what it desires, and since the object being sought is wholly desirable, there must be an understanding of what that could be.

This section of the dialogue on the four genera is important for the way Plato brings the reader to see the principles behind being, the building blocks of the universe. The section on dialectic showed the way inquiry must be made, but here we see what comes from understanding the universe as made of one and many. The concluding section of the dialogue is devoted to understanding the Good itself and the rank of Goods. But, before Plato can define the Good as Good, he must show how to understand principles as they work in every object.



## CHAPTER 4 THE GOOD

The conclusion of the *Philebus* is crucial to understanding everything that precedes it. Where the dialectical method is set up as a mode of inquiry and the four genera are established as ontological categories, the conclusion investigates the ideal mixed life as a whole. Only in defining the Good and coming to realize what the Good is can Plato show the way in which the Good is present in all mixtures. Plato, in the conclusion of the dialogue, brings Socrates to the portico of the Good. That is, having shown the proper mixture of the limit and the unlimited in a human life, he brings the discussion to the Good itself. Here in the final evaluation of the Good Plato ties the whole dialogue together through his definition of the Good. This chapter will evaluate and parse the definition of the Good that Plato gives, and examine what this definition entails for how the Good is manifest in individual lives.

Since the Good is the highest principle, this chapter will also attempt to see the Good in *Philebus* as cause and highest genus of all things, thus allowing for Plato's examination of dialectical method in the first part—showing the reliance of the many on the one—to be at work through to the end of the dialogue. This will be done through a close examination of the Good as beauty, proportion, and truth, alongside the final ranking of Goods, since it is necessary to see how Plato establishes the Good as the foundation of everything in order to grasp the dialogue in its entirety. The dialogue works towards the final definition of the Good and the final ranking of Goods, to show that everything has its source and its end in the Good.

As was seen in the previous chapter, Plato is expounding the principles that work behind the world of becoming and being. Plato is looking to the sensible world and the

intelligible world and investigating that which allows them to be. The final mixture is investigated with the same goal in mind. Plato isolates pleasure and knowledge and sees that the Good does not find refuge in either. He must, then, turn to mixture to see what the Good is. The Good, however, is not mixture, but the principle behind the mixed. The Good resides in the background as the object desired, the beloved, so that when something is mixed ( or when something is made) it is mixed with an eye to the Good. The Good holds together the proper mixture of limit and the unlimited found in all of being, but beyond this, the Good is the object from which all action stems. Every choice is made for the sake of the Good at some level, so it becomes increasingly important as the dialogue progresses to come to a full understanding of what the Good is.

Plato goes through and systematically proves the insufficiency of both a life of pure pleasure and a life of pure knowledge. The mixed, then, is where the Good is to be found, but the Good is found only after establishing the stable, proper mixture of knowledge and pleasure. Plato explains that one must, “discover in this mixture what the Good is in man and in the universe and [from this] get some vision of the nature of the Good itself.”<sup>108</sup> This is the argument Plato has reason personified speak. That is, reason is pointing beyond itself—in that reason is telling Socrates and Protarchus to look to the proper mixture—to show that in the proper mixture they will find the nature of the Good itself. Before seeing this however, it is necessary to see the structure of the argument that leads one to the threshold of the Good.

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<sup>108</sup> *Philebus* 63e7-64a3

Socrates explains that the Good must be taken up precisely (σαφῶς)<sup>109</sup> or at least in outline (τινα τύπον),<sup>110</sup> in order to find who will get second prize of the best life after the mixed. They must then take the well-mixed life and search for the Good as that which makes the mixed life the best life. Socrates explains that there is greater hope (ἐλπις μὴν πλείων)<sup>111</sup> for finding the Good in the well-mixed life (ἐν τῷ μιχθέντι καλῶς τὸ ζητούμενον).<sup>112</sup> The search, then, is for the best mixture. What must now be done, Socrates explains, is that the pleasurable fountain of honey must be mixed with the sobering fountain of intelligence, and Socrates prays to Dionysus or Hephaestus to oversee the comingling.<sup>113</sup>

The way Plato progresses through the mixture shows a declining order of rank. That is, Plato begins with the highest and progresses through to the lower levels of knowing and eventually to pleasure. Socrates speaks of reason and knowledge (νοῦς and φρόνησις) as that which is most accurately defined as investigating true being (ὀρθῶς κείμενα),<sup>114</sup> and this is the highest form of knowing. This investigation into the self-same and eternal is the beginning of the mixture. Socrates begins with this because it is most pure in that the objects of knowledge are most true. In starting with the highest forms of knowing Plato allows for the lesser forms of knowing, in that true knowledge will know the appropriate use and definitions of all things. When one knows the divine sphere<sup>115</sup> one necessarily also knows the human sphere and how to live a good human life.

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<sup>109</sup> *Philebus* 61a4

<sup>110</sup> *Philebus* 61a4

<sup>111</sup> *Philebus* 61b8

<sup>112</sup> *Philebus* 61b8-9

<sup>113</sup> *Philebus* 61b11-c2

<sup>114</sup> *Philebus* 59d5

<sup>115</sup> *Philebus* 62b5-7

Socrates finds that the inexact sciences are necessary to human life, but he must first start with the exact sciences to see the true nature of reality.

The same logic holds when pleasure is mixed: Socrates must begin with pure pleasure and move on to impure pleasures. This is done, however, by Socrates asking the pleasures who should be let in.<sup>116</sup> Pleasure speaks, saying that it is impossible to live in isolation—just as it is impossible to know in isolation—and that the pleasures must live side-by-side with the best kind of knowledge that understands pleasure.<sup>117</sup> Socrates then turns to knowledge, who responds that the innocuous and extravagant pleasures hinder knowledge and foster forgetfulness through neglect.<sup>118</sup> In order to have the stable mixture, by which one can find the Good, the most intense pleasure must be left out. This is how Plato sets up the mixture, the underlying logic shows that in order to properly mix there must first be knowledge, and then only that which is most pure, so that reason and knowing (νοῦς and φρόνησις) remain, as much as possible, untainted. Plato is showing that there must first be an understanding of the proper limit to be placed on the unlimited before the mixture is enacted. There must be a foreknowing of the outcome before one engages in mixture: one must know the end they are seeking.

In the mixed life the four genera are maintained, but limit is more associated with reason and intelligence and the unlimited is associated with pleasure, grounding the way the Good will be viewed at the final section of the dialogue. In the mixed life, Plato is setting up the appropriate way for the human to live both a contemplative and practical life as a product of mixture—this is seen in the need for inexact measure and music—and

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<sup>116</sup> Plato also has a dialogue within a dialogue at *Crito* 50c-2a

<sup>117</sup> *Philebus* 63d2-4

<sup>118</sup> *Philebus* 63d5-64a3

this is done through the coupling of knowledge to pleasure. Pleasure speaks of living side-by-side with the best kind of knowledge, the kind of knowledge that understands everything including each pleasure—thus limiting the unlimited nature of pleasure. In this way knowledge is both cause and limit: cause in that knowledge brings about the right proportion of knowledge and pleasure, and limit in that knowledge can keep pleasure in check so that the appropriate pleasure is gained from the proper object. Damascius aligns the appropriate pleasure to the kind of knowing. He generates the following table of oppositions within the dialogue:

Forms of knowing:	Forms of pleasure:
conjectural and necessary	impure and necessary
those using fixed standards	physical and pure
mathematical, with opinion	attending true opinion
theoretical mathematics	attending exact science
dialectic	attending dialectic <sup>119</sup>

In Damascius' reformulation we see on both sides a hierarchy leading towards dialectic as the proper mixture of limit and the unlimited. The use of limit and the unlimited as ontological categories should not be forgotten in the final mixture. When viewing the dual nature of knowledge as cause and limit it is easier to understand the priority of knowledge, which must be borne in mind in the final ranking of Goods.

In seeing the need for knowledge to limit pleasure, Plato brings Socrates and Protarchus to the threshold of the Good (τοῖς προθύροις τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ).<sup>120</sup> Plato is now

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<sup>119</sup> Damascius 108

searching for what part or principle in the mixture makes it Good. Plato is now ready to give his final definition of the Good. He does this by bringing out the necessary functions of a good mixture. The Good, then, is proportion (μέτρον/συμμέτρον), beauty (καλόν), and truth (ἀλήθεια). These three are taken to be the Good, but, what is more, they are the Good both when taken individually or taken as a unity of the three, they are said to be the cause (αἰτιασαίμεν') of Goodness, and that through these a mixture is made Good (γεγονέναι). It is now necessary to analyze each of the three parts of the Good and see their interdependent relationship to each other in their unity in order that the Good may be seen as the highest principle and cause of all beings

#### **4.1 Proportion**

It is necessary to see the way in which the three parts of the Good work in unison to be the Good, but first each must be analyzed in itself. The investigation into proportion is first. Being properly measured is at first most important to mixture, lest the elements corrupt each other, resulting in a poor mixture. Goodness, then, rests on the properly proportional. The right proportion is the way in which the elements are in themselves and the way in which they relate to the others, in that when mixing proportion governs the way two come together to create the proper or appropriate mixture. When mixing one must know each constituent element in itself in order to know how it will relate to the particular other through which it will fuse into a good mixture. The knowledge of the parts, then, is necessary prior to mixture, so that one can see how to find the proper mixture. There is a need to see the relationship of each element prior to mixture, so that mixture is possible, the limit and the unlimited must be known prior to

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<sup>120</sup> *Philebus* 64c1-3

the mixture. When looking at the Good through proportion, it becomes clear that Goodness is here associated with the way in which elements can be known in their sameness and difference, so that they can be fused properly. Goodness as proportion removes the obstacles to mixture, allowing fusion to be possible. Plato is not speaking only of technical mixtures, but of everything that has being as mixed. Since everything is made up of limit and the unlimited, knowledge of the proper relationship between the two is imperative. The Good must be measure and proportion (μέτρον/συμμέτρον) so that it has a harmonious mixture. As was seen earlier, Plato is not merely looking into the way in which the world of becoming exists; rather, Plato is looking into the way in which all things are. The Good, then, as seen in mixture must be proportion and measure, since without these there is no way in which limit and the unlimited can come together in a stable existence: nothing would be bound without measure, but as Socrates puts it, “an unconnected jumble, the ruin of that which contains it.”<sup>121</sup> Cynthia Hampton is right in aligning the proportional and measured with the beautiful.<sup>122</sup> Hampton writes that, “Proportion brings unity, so the good, mixed life would be a unified one with its primary focus on what is most true, real, and valuable.”<sup>123</sup> This understanding of proportion as the means of focus in practical life is important, but she misses the ontological importance of each part of the Good in her focus on a good life, instead of the Good beyond the distinction of ontological and practical. This distinction of the good life instead of the Good is further seen as she continues, “The good life would be the one led by the person whose life displays the kind of order that is grounded in reality (truth and

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<sup>121</sup> *Philebus* 64d9-e3

<sup>122</sup> Hampton 84

<sup>123</sup> Hampton 84

intelligence), beauty, and excellence. All three—Truth, Proportion, and Beauty—taken together make the mixture of the good.”<sup>124</sup> The focus on practical life is important to the dialogue as a whole, but the practical component to the Good becomes more evident only after having come to see the ontological status of the Good itself. In order to fully grasp the importance of the final definition of the Good, it is necessary to see each part of the Good in its independence. Proportion, then, is the Good in that it is cause of everything’s existence, since the principles of limit and the unlimited are in all things. It is through measure and proportion that anything can exist, since without it there would be nothing to bind the elements of an object, as Damascius says, “it is proportion that removes the impediments to fusion, whose aim is fulfillment.”<sup>125</sup> Proportion, then, is an appropriate way in which limit and the unlimited can be brought together in mixture.

#### 4.2 Beauty

In proportion Plato finds the Good as the way in which the elements fit together. Plato finds beauty as the refuge (*καταπέφυγεν*) of the Good. The Good finds refuge in beauty because, as Plato says, “measure (*μέτρον*) and proportion (*συμμέτρον*) are everywhere identified with beauty (*κάλλος*) and virtue (*ἀρετή*).”<sup>126</sup> It is in beauty that the proper mixture is manifest, since desire comes from wanting the right mixture. There is a desire for the beautiful, since it is perfect in itself. Damascius writes of beauty that beauty adds a superiority, “with regard to other things that is at once the object and the subject of desire, the cause desiring to fulfill, its product to be fulfilled; for beauty exists

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<sup>124</sup> Hampton 84

<sup>125</sup> Damascius 236

<sup>126</sup> *Philebus* 64e5-7



in two phases, in the participated and in the participator.”<sup>127</sup> Damascius is showing the way in which beauty works in both objects of mixture.

Beauty is present both in the final mixed form, but must also be there prior to mixture, for how else but through desire could two opposites become one, and what desires anything but the beautiful? Here Plato is getting deeper into the nature of the Good because he is looking at that in which the proportionate is found. Damascius argues that beauty comes in with the form of the whole, since it is the Form of forms.<sup>128</sup> He sees proportion as being Goodness in the parts, beauty as Goodness in the whole, and truth as Goodness in both the whole and the elements. This is a very persuasive point, but it ultimately falls short: for beauty must somehow be in the elements for them to desire each other. This view also isolates each part of the Good too much from the other, in that there must be an interpenetration in each that results in the Good as one, because each part does not exist in complete isolation from the others, or else there could be no unity of the three. There must be play between the limit and the unlimited that allows for them to coalesce and become one. This play must be found in beauty. That is, if the mixture is to be stable, the elements must not be contrary to each other, but must in some way desire the wholeness of the mixed, and this desire could only be related to beauty, for desire is for the Good as represented in the beautiful. The Good as beauty is also present in the final mixture, since a good end must hold beauty if it is to be desirable. Damascius articulates this by saying that, “Beauty is at once the object and subject of desire, the cause of desiring fulfillment, its product to be fulfilled.”<sup>129</sup> It is in beauty that

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<sup>127</sup> Damascius 110-3

<sup>128</sup> Damascius 110

<sup>129</sup> Damascius 110-3

the Good finds refuge, because beauty is the result of measure and proportion and because the Good is wholly desirable. The power of the Good is in beauty, since the mixed genus represents everything that is. If everything that has existence is a mixture of limit and the unlimited—which has been shown both in dialectic and in the four genera—then the Good must dwell within beauty because choice must be made for the best, and the best is seen in the proper proportion and measure found in beauty. Beauty leads to the truth in the same way that proportion leads to beauty, in that, where proportion is manifest in beauty.

### 4.3 Truth

Truth is the last feature Socrates aligns with the Good. By truth Plato is not merely asserting the validity of a statement or object, but is also explaining the way in which it exists. Truth is that which allows an object to be what it is, not a phantom—*εἶδωλον* as Damascius says<sup>130</sup> nor an object contaminated by another. It is a principle of self-identity. It is in truth that the mixture finds its true being, in its allowance to be itself. That is, without truth there would be no independent being outside of limit and the unlimited because nothing could be said to be. It is important to note Damascius' etymology of *ἡ ἀλήθεια* as either 'θεῖον ἀλέξ'—meaning complete and divine; or 'θεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀλέξ'—that is, a rushing towards completeness. In this etymology it is plain to see that the word means a wholeness or completeness that could only be found in being what it is. It is in truth that an object's reality is preserved. If beauty is seen as desirability, and proportion is seen as knowledge of the necessary relations, truth is seen as being. All three are necessary to each mixture, but Plato is working to find the unity of the three,

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<sup>130</sup> Damascius 110-3

which is most closely related to the Good. At 64b Socrates first speaks of truth, and immediately after this notion that without truth nothing could come to be or be, he finds himself at the threshold of the Good. It is in truth that the mixture can exist, because truth binds the mixture to being. What Plato has done in this analysis of the parts of the Good is show the requirements of mixture to exist, thus finding the three principles behind the mixture. Yet the argument must still move even deeper, as it points to the Good as unity.

#### 4.4 Unity

Socrates says that the Good was unable to be captured in one idea ( $\mu\tilde{\alpha}\ \iota\delta\acute{\epsilon}\alpha$ ) but that it can still be considered as one ( $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ ). The Good, when seen as cause, is one. This is crucial to the conclusion of the dialogue. Plato looks to mixture to find the Good. He cannot find the Good as limit or unlimited, but the Good as the principle behind mixture. The definition of the Good he arrives at is different than the discussion at 20d—where the Good was seen as self-sufficient, perfect, and totally desirable—because there Plato is finding what the Good must be in a subject's relation to it. Here, Plato looks to the stable mixture and finds that in order for mixture to be good it must be where proportion, beauty, and truth reside. When these three parts of the Good are seen in unity they are the cause of any mixture. The Good is the cause of all being, and one can see the ultimate genus or highest cause when looking at anything that exists because of the dialectical method. Damascius explains concisely and eloquently how the Good is first principle. He writes,

The three monads are in a mystic way in the First Cause; they are in a unitary way and together in Limit; in a plurified form and as it were in the throes

of differentiation in the Infinite; and in the first stage of differentiation, which is united, but not isolated completely, as intellective essences are, in the Third God, who is the Cause of the mixture qua mixture.<sup>131</sup>

In this unity it is possible to see the way in which the Good is cause. Socrates says: “Its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one.”<sup>132</sup> Again, this is not to say that the Good is the immediate cause of all things, or necessarily the technical cause; but the Good is seen as the highest genus, so every species is related back to the Good. The Good, then, is not the immediate cause of a particular object, for instance a piece of art, but since the Good is the cause of being, that particular piece of art shares in some form of Goodness. The argument follows that everything done is done for the sake of the Good because it is the highest cause. This is the terminus of the argument, that the Good is first and last cause, for everything is done for the sake of some Good. What Plato has done is isolate the highest genus, give the way in which it is perceived and known—proportion, beauty, and truth—and point to the highest cause, which is the one principle, the Good. When looked at as unity and as the most choice worthy, the Good beyond being<sup>133</sup> becomes knowable, because it the Good is seen in every mixture.

#### 4.5 Final Ranking

The Good is seen as the highest principle. Everything, then, finds its being in the Good, in that the Good is the cause of proportion, beauty, and truth of any mixed being. But it is important to see that beyond this, every action that is willed is done for the sake

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<sup>131</sup> Damascius 114

<sup>132</sup> *Philebus* 65a1-5

<sup>133</sup> *Republic* 504b

of Goodness. Gadamer appropriately explains that the unique role of the human is differentiation because only humans can decide based on choice. One must at all times differentiate between two ends and choose what is best. He writes, “Having to choose, however, entails wanting to know, that is, to know what is best, to know what is good. And that means knowing reasons why, knowing grounds, and using grounds to differentiate.”<sup>134</sup> This beautifully brings out the point that the practical requires the theoretical and is already implicitly theoretical, and that both practical and theoretical are united in the Good. Plato’s primary task in the *Philebus* is to set up mixture as a genus to show that all things rely on the Good for their very existence. Plato does this by bringing out the principles underlying everything: the Good is behind mixture and everything that is, is mixture. While the Good is the first cause because everything relies on the Good for its existence, the Good is also the final cause, because everything is done for a desire of the Good. In viewing the Good this way, it is plain to see the Good as both the principle of ontology and practical philosophy: because the Good is first cause and genus, the dialogue can be read as an ontological treatise, and because everything is done through a desire for the Good, the dialogue can be read as a practical treatise.

The structure of the Good as highest principle is manifest again at the final ranking of the Goods. At 54c Plato explains that part (μοίρα) of the Good is that for the sake of which anything is generated; that is, the Good is in every being, since the Good is behind the differentiation that precedes choice. This leads to seeing the Good as cause, since everything is done for the sake of bringing about and preserving. The Good causes all order; this is seen in each part of the Good: the Good is proportion, allowing for

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<sup>134</sup> Gadamer 109

elements to mix; the Good is beauty, allowing for desire and a need for the commingling of parts; and the Good is truth, allowing for a wholeness and a completeness extending throughout the mixture. Cynthia Hampton explains the necessity of looking at the Good as cause: “the Good is the Cause of all order and hence enables the basic elements to join and work together and form a functioning (living) organism. In other words, the Cause ensouls the cosmos and human body.”<sup>135</sup> Damascius too sees the Good as cause, but he sees the cause in truth. He writes: “That the Good is the ‘cause of all things’ (αἴτιον πάντων) is expressed in Truth; that all things ‘converge in it’ (περὶ ἐκεῖνο πάντα), by Beauty; that all things are ‘because of it’ (ἐκείνου ἔνεκα πάντα), by Proportion, for if the Good were not adapted to things, nothing could be constituted.”<sup>136</sup> Here we see an overall understanding of the Good that is reflected in all things at each stage. It is in seeing the Good as first cause and last cause that allows for everything to share in Goodness in some way, since, as first and last cause, everything is done for some good, thus, in a way, for Goodness itself. In the final ranking of goods, Plato shows a dependent relationship of goods—in that each rank relies on the previous rank—that points to the Good as highest cause.

When looking to the final ranking of Goods at first it seems odd that Plato waits until the third ranking to place either pleasure or knowledge. This is necessary, however, since Plato is showing the manifestations of the Good from the purest to the more diluted. Damascius explains that Socrates is following the Orphic tradition when at 66c he quotes the 14th fragment of the Orphica, for in the Orphic tradition there are six heads and six is

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<sup>135</sup> Damascius 88

<sup>136</sup> Damascius 246

a perfect number.<sup>137</sup> Putting aside the question of his debt to Orphic tradition, it is important to note that Plato is giving three sets of pairs, and neither pleasure nor knowledge can vie for either of the first pair. In the final ranking Plato brings out a reliant relationship, where the Good is seen most clearly in the highest, then as one moves further down the ranks one sees a less pure version of the Good, since at each subsequent stage there is a necessity for the higher. Each stage relies on the foundation of the stage that precedes it. The Good itself as unity and cause is not given, because it is beyond the mixed genera.<sup>138</sup>

In the final ranking Plato shows the way in which the Good unfolds. He begins with the closest relative to the Good: what is connected with measure, the measured, or timely.<sup>139</sup> The first rank is associated with the perfect, as it is, before it is involved in mixture. This is the place of limit, the unlimited, and the mixed, in that μέτρον is the measure, the limit, μέτριον is the measured, the unlimited, and κείροσ is the mixture that is appropriate, the proper season of an object when it comes into being. The first ranking then is the Good as the three parts of the Good, existing eternally (τὴν αἰδίων). Kenneth Sayre is helpful in understanding the final ranking, based on his understanding of Plato's use of limit. Sayre sees the association made at 25a-b and 26d as measure (μέτρον) being introduced by the imposition of limit.<sup>140</sup> Sayre also argues that at 25e proportion (σύμμετρον) is produced by number, which at 25b is identified with limit and that

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<sup>137</sup> Damascius 118

<sup>138</sup> Damascius brings out the transcendental nature of the unity of the Good at 118, where he says that Plato does not include the Good itself, because it is ineffable, but defines it in that which it appears.

<sup>139</sup> *Philebus* 66a4-8

<sup>140</sup> Sayre 172

proportion at 26a is mentioned as directly resulting from limit.<sup>141</sup> This aids Sayre's overall argument that the dialogue is about the Good as measure and proportion (μέτρον and συμμετρόν), which are responsible for beauty, virtue, and truth. Sayre's close reading brings out the feature of the Good as using Limit to create proper mixture, and that measure and proportion are the highest because it is from them that all proper mixtures can be made.

The second ranking, again, is about the Good, but in its manifestation and a participant's relation to it. The second ranking is where the first elemental definition of the Good comes in,<sup>142</sup> since the Good is here seen as posterior to the first rank. There is a movement towards how the Good is seen in a particular mixture, that it is proportionate (τὸ σύμμετρον), beautiful (τὸ καλόν), perfect (τὸ τέλειον), and self-sufficient (τὸ ἰκανόν).<sup>143</sup> The Good here is seen in its manifestation in an object, whereas in the first ranking the Good is itself before the mixture. This first pair deals with the Good in itself; the second pair takes up the first realization of the Good in the world.

The subsequent set of pairs follows this same pattern: for both knowledge and pleasure, he looks at the object in itself and then in another. The third rank goes to νοῦς and φρόνησις, since these are necessary for the fourth rank. That is, Plato continues the structure of the first pair, by having the thing in itself, then its faculties. The fourth, then, is the faculties of mind and thinking; these are the properties of the soul: ἐπιστήμη, τεχνή, and δόξα ὀρθή. Mind is first and then its properties. That is, in νοῦς and φρόνησις show the operation of mind in itself, where the fourth rank shows the operation of mind in what

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<sup>141</sup> Sayre 172

<sup>142</sup> *Philebus* 20b6-c2

<sup>143</sup> *Philebus* 66b1-3



is other than itself. From this Plato gives the fifth and sixth rank to pleasure, again following the method of a thing in itself rather than in another. The fifth place goes to pure pleasure, most akin to thinking, and he ends with impure pleasure in his quotation of Orpheus.

Cynthia Hampton understands the final ranking of goods not ontologically, but rather as a determination of, “what will bring about the ideal human situation in terms of how we can best express the universal Good by realizing our proper place within the order of reality.”<sup>144</sup> For Hampton, the final ranking is about what to secure first in order to have the best human life. In order to do this, Hampton is following the schema of having the second in the pair of rankings rely on the first, but she ignores the ontological nature of the ranking, in order to focus on its practical implication. Hampton sees Plato as placing measure and the measured above proportion and beauty because, as she writes: “Proportion and Beauty may be higher-order goods in the general scheme of things, the mean and other points of limit are crucial in producing health and excellence or virtue, which are the most basic expressions of Proportion, Beauty, and Truth, (i.e., the Good), in human life.”<sup>145</sup> For Hampton, the emphasis is on the practical aspect of the Good, and all ontology is simply used as an aid in the practical life. This reading is possible and comes out naturally from the dialogue, but there must also be an emphasis on the ontological status of each rank.

Plato drives his argument home one final time in the ranking of Goods in following the dialectical method previously described, which is only possible because of the ontological status of the Good. He begins with the one and finds particular ones

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<sup>144</sup> Hampton 85

<sup>145</sup> Hampton 85

before releasing the *monad* into the indefinite. Plato has found the Good, and finds each successive step until he releases the Good into the indeterminacy of impure pleasures. It is in his structure and method that Plato reinforces his argument to show that the Good as first and highest cause allows for goodness at each level of existence.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Plato sets the Good up as the first and the last cause so that the Good lies within every being. By working through the nature and object of dialectic and expounding the four genera that are fundamental to all being, Plato can conclude by having the Good be both the originating cause behind all mixture and the object of desire motivating every action. In this way the Good has been shown to be a principle that exists in everything. The movement of the dialogue brings out the meaning Plato is trying to convey. With the conclusion's final ranking of goods exemplifying the dependent structure of species and genus that was found in the first section of dialectic, Plato brings the whole dialogue together.

Just as there was no real beginning, the *Philebus* has no real end.<sup>146</sup> Plato, having defined the Good and outlined the final ranking, ends the dialogue with Socrates asking if he can leave, while Protarchus says there is something missing. The dialogue is like the Good, it has no real beginning and no real end. The structure may point to the Good in this way, but there is no doubt that the argument has been concluded. Plato has established the Good as both an ontological and practical principle. Nothing remains except to let Socrates go.

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<sup>146</sup> *Philebus* 67b13

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