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INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement nowadays that the six dialogues, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Laws*, were composed in the last two decades of Plato's life, and that the two first named were the first written, the *Laws* the last. The opening words of the *Sophist* link it formally to the *Theaetetus*, a work generally thought to have been written shortly after the death in battle (in 369 B.C.) of the brilliant mathematician after whom it is named; but although 368 or 367 may thus be taken as a *terminus a quo* for the six dialogues, it is difficult to determine the date of any of them more precisely. From the fact that in the *Sophist* Plato for the first time deliberately adopts the Isocratean fashion of avoiding hiatus it has been argued that there was a considerable gap in his literary activity between *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, and that the interruption may have been caused by his preoccupation with Syracusan politics in the years 367–360. But of the two visits to Syracuse, in 367 and 361, neither seems to have lasted as much as a year; and we may guess that Plato was not more distracted by Sicilian affairs in the interval between these visits than after his final return to Athens in 360, when the storm was blowing up which burst in 357 with Dion's return to Sicily and his expulsion of Dionysius II by force of arms. Indeed, if preoccupation with Dionysius and Dion deterred Plato from the composition of further dialogues, he would hardly have composed the *Sophist* until 352, the probable date of the eighth Epistle.

• There is perhaps rather more possibility of approximating to the date of the *Statesman*, which is formally attached to the *Sophist* just as the *Sophist* is to the *Theaetetus*. In that dialogue we seem to see Plato arguing with himself on the relative merits of autocracy and constitutional government. Ostensibly there is a clear answer given: the rule of one man, guided by his own wisdom and unrestricted by laws, is ideally the right form of government; but since the ideally wise ruler is nowhere to be found,¹ the best practical possibility of good government lies in monarchy tempered by the rule of law. Yet we are more than two-thirds of the way through the dialogue before the merits of the law-states begin to be discussed; and it may be conjectured that the reason for their discussion, and for the elaboration of an order of merit for the 'imitations' of the ideal state, itself now deemed impossible, was

¹ *Pol.* 301D νῦν δέ γε ὁπότε οὐκ ἔστι γιγνόμενος... ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι βασιλεύς... τό τε σῶμα εὐθὺς καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν διαφέρων εἰς κτλ.

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the final shattering of Plato's hopes of making Dionysius a philosopher-king. Those hopes were shattered by his experiences at Syracuse in 361–360: hence it is possible that the *Statesman* was begun just before, and finished just after the final visit to Syracuse.

The *Sophist* and *Statesman* were planned as the first two dialogues of a trilogy,¹ to be completed by the *Philosopher*. That the third dialogue was never written may have been due to the same cause that made the *Statesman* end as it does. We may be fairly sure that, when he began the *Sophist*, Plato intended to show that sophist, statesman and philosopher are not one nor three but two;² for he had not then abandoned—nor did he ever abandon as an ideal—the state of the philosophic ruler or rulers described in the *Republic*. The philosopher, however, was to have a dialogue to himself, in which it would be shown in detail (as in *Rep.* VI–VII) what the knowledge desiderated for the ruler in the *Statesman* was, and how his political activity was to reflect his knowledge of reality.³ It is easy to understand that when Plato became convinced of the improbability of the philosophic statesman ever appearing on earth, he had not the heart to complete his ideal account.

Did he thereupon project and start work on another unfinished trilogy,⁴ *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *(Hermocrates)*? Or did he now write the *Philebus*? The question cannot be answered with certainty, perhaps not even with probability. It is of course possible that the *Philebus* was composed concurrently with the *Timaeus* or *Critias*, just as it is believed by some scholars that the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus* were written together; it is in a sense, as we shall see, a *pièce d'occasion*, and as such Plato may have interrupted his large-scale project in order to write it. But on the assumption that one or the other (for convenience I speak of *Timaeus* and *Critias* as a single work) must have been composed first, arguments have been found for the priority of each: all, I think, far from cogent: but, such as they are, they seem rather in favour of the *Philebus* being the later work.⁵ There are at least three points on which

¹ See *Soph.* 253 E, *Pol.* 257 A–C, 258 A; Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 168. Henry Jackson rejects the idea of a trilogy (*J. Ph.* xv, pp. 282 ff.).

² This is probably hinted at *Soph.* 217 A: unless interpreted thus, Socrates's question 'Are they one, two, or three?' seems pointless.

³ For a somewhat different conjecture as to the contents of the *Philosopher* see Cornford, *PTK*, p. 169.

⁴ I agree with Cornford (*Plato's Cosmology*, p. 2), against the doubts of Taylor (*Comm. on Timaeus*, p. 14), that *Critias* 108 B makes it certain that a dialogue *Hermocrates* was planned.

⁵ So Bury, Taylor and (implicitly) Bäumker (*Prob. der Materie*, pp. 193–6: Taylor's reference to p. 130 of this work seems to be a wrong reference).

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the pronouncements of the two works are identical or closely similar, (1) the Cosmic Reason (νοῦς = τὸ δημιουργοῦν in *Philebus* and the Demiurge¹ in *Timaeus*, (2) the opposition of Unlimited and Limit in *Philebus* and that of pre-cosmic chaos and the εἶδη καὶ ἄριθμοί by which it is ordered in *Timaeus*, (3) the essentially similar replenishment-depletion formula for pleasure and pain in the two dialogues. It might be expected that careful examination of the two on these three points would enable us to decide, with at least reasonable assurance, on the question of priority; but I have not found it so.² Nor can I find any significance in the comparative figures for avoidance of hiatus (1.1 in *Timaeus* and 3.7 in *Philebus* per Didot page³); they only show that he was more careful in one dialogue than in the other, and carefulness may precede carelessness as well as succeed it.

The question is not perhaps of very great moment, but I am tentatively in favour of assigning priority to the *Philebus* on the following ground. The choice of Hermocrates, the distinguished soldier-statesman of Syracuse, as the leading speaker in the final part of the *Timaeus* trilogy suggests that Plato had in mind, when he began the *Timaeus*, a scheme of military and political organisation of which the outlines at least were clear in his mind; but that they should have been sufficiently clear soon after the disillusion of 360 seems improbable; a more likely time would be after the murder of Dion in 354, when, as the seventh and eighth Epistles show, his mind was busily engaged on schemes for the political salvation of Sicily in view of the menace of Carthaginians and Oscans.⁴ It would be particularly appropriate that one of the greatest Syracusans of the fifth century should propound advice applicable to his compatriots of the fourth.

It is not relevant to our purpose to speculate why the *Hermocrates* was never written, though we may guess that the death of Hipparinus in 350 and the discomfiture of the friends of Dion finally quenched Plato's hopes for Sicily. There is however some ground for believing that the *Laws*, whose composition was to occupy the few remaining years of

¹ I do not intend by this parallel to deny the partly mythical character of the Demiurge. See Cornford, *PC*, p. 38: 'He is mythical... on the other hand, he stands for a divine Reason working for ends that are good.'

² Even if we accept Taylor's suggestion (*Comm. on Timaeus*, p. 9) that Plato's source for the medical doctrine of the *Timaeus* was Philistion of Locri, it seems a doubtful inference that its date 'is likely to be nearer to 360 than to 347-346' and that 'probably... the *Philebus* will be later'.

³ I quote these figures, computed by Raeder, from Cornford, *PC*, p. 13.

⁴ Epistle VIII, 353 E.

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his life, incorporates¹ some of the material intended for the unwritten dialogue. It is of course possible that he turned aside during these last years to write the *Philebus*; but we have left a gap of some six years (approximately 360–354) into which our dialogue may perhaps most naturally be fitted. This conjectural dating (or rather placing) which, as I would emphasise, makes no pretence to certainty, would help to account for one notable feature, namely the complete absence of political reference. Socrates and his interlocutors discuss the good for man as individual, not as member of a community; this is surprising in the author of *Republic*, *Statesman* and *Laws*, and may be taken to reflect a deliberate detachment from political speculation such as better fits the years 360–354 than any other period in Plato's last two decades. He has despaired of Dionysius, he dislikes Dion's projected recourse to arms, and he has not yet been drawn back into the Syracusan turmoil by the urgent appeal of the murdered Dion's associates.

However that may be, we can point with some assurance to a more positive reason for the composition of the *Philebus* than a temporary distaste for politics. At or about the time when Plato paid his first visit to Dionysius II there arrived in Athens the famous mathematician, astronomer and geographer Eudoxus of Cnidus. In the history of philosophy Eudoxus is chiefly of importance on account of his planetary theory, which was adopted with modifications by Aristotle; but we are here concerned only with his pronouncement, reported and discussed in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that pleasure is the good. From that discussion, or rather from the whole treatment of pleasure and pain by Aristotle in the seventh and tenth books, it has been reasonably inferred that this was a much contested topic in the Platonic Academy both before and after Plato's death. That the *Philebus* influenced the discussion is obvious; what is difficult, indeed I should say impossible to determine is how many, and which, of the views reported by Aristotle had already been formulated before the *Philebus* was written. It would in particular be helpful if we knew that Speusippus had already put forward his assertion that both pleasure and pain are evils and opposed to the neutral state which is good.² There is no mention of this doctrine in our dialogue, and in my judgment there is no direct allusion to Speusippus to be found there; but that of course does not prove that the doctrine was unformulated,

¹ Especially in Book III. So Cornford, *PC*, p. 7, developing a suggestion by Raeder.

² *E.N.* 1153 B5, 1173 A6; Aulus Gellius ix, 5.

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or unknown to Plato when he wrote. What does seem probable is that Speusippus's dictum, whenever it was announced, was provoked by the doctrine of Eudoxus; and that one of Plato's own motives in writing the *Philebus* was, not indeed to confute Eudoxus, but rather to restate and to some extent modify his own doctrine of pleasure and pain in the light of Eudoxus's pronouncement. At the earliest date at which our dialogue can reasonably be put, namely 360, Eudoxus had been in Athens, and in close touch with the Academy, for some seven years, and it is most unlikely that he had not by that time put forward his views about pleasure.¹

It is however quite clear that Plato is not directly attacking Eudoxus. He might be said to attack the character called Philebus, though this would be a misleading account of a dialogue which is constructive rather than destructive, and which seeks to do justice to the rightful claim of pleasure to be a factor in human happiness. The direct refutation of Philebus's contention, that pleasure is the good (as it is expressed at the outset), or that pleasure and good are identical in nature and in meaning (as it is more definitely expressed near the end²), occupies only a small fraction of the discussion; the great bulk of the dialogue is devoted to the demonstration that pleasure is less valuable than intellectual activity, but that some pleasure is necessary for happiness: a demonstration which involves discriminating various kinds of pleasure, and distinguishing between true or pure pleasures and false or 'mixed'.

Hedonism is a term which may be, and has been used in various senses; but understood as the doctrine that 'pleasant' and 'good' are synonymous terms, and hence that pleasure is the 'right aim' (σκοπὸς ὀρθός) for all creatures capable of experiencing it, it had been long since refuted by Plato in the *Gorgias*. He did not want to go over the old ground again; yet he did want his readers to remember the *Gorgias* as they read the *Philebus*, and by calling the dialogue after Philebus, who takes a very small share in it, rather than after Protarchus, the chief respondent, he intends, I would suggest, to make us feel that behind the new topic—the discussion of the kinds of pleasure admissible in the good life—and conditioning that topic, there lies the old truth, so passionately proclaimed by his Socrates in a dialogue written some

¹ The received date of his death is circ. 355.

² ΣΟ Α: Φίληβός φησι τὴν ἡδονὴν σκοπὸν ὀρθὸν πᾶσι ζῴοις γεγυῖναι καὶ δεῖν πάντας τοῦτου στοχάζεσθαι, καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰγαθὸν τοῦτ' αὐτὸ εἶναι σύμπασι, καὶ δύο ὀνόματα, ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἡδύ, ἐνὶ τινὶ καὶ φύσει μιᾷ τοῦτω ὀρθῶς τεθέντ' ἔχειν.

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thirty years earlier, that the man who seeks pleasure indiscriminately, and confounds it with good, is untrue to his nature as a reasoning being, and degrades himself to the level of a gluttonous animal.¹

Philebus has said his say before the dialogue opens, but he is allowed to say a few words now and then, just often enough to remind us that he is there, in other words that the ideal of Callicles lurks in the background of any talk about pleasure and pain, indeed of any talk about human life. But he does not take any real part in the discussion, for as Friedländer truly says,² 'Lust kann nicht Rede (Rechenschaft) geben'. Callicles could be confuted, and was, for he was willing to argue, as most people are willing to argue on matters of right and wrong, however confidently they hold their views; but Philebus is not a real person: he is the mere embodiment of an irrational dogmatic hedonism, a Callicles without the passion, the fighting spirit which makes him live in our memory, and even attracts us against our better judgment. It was, I imagine, just because Plato did not want a real man that he used a name borne, so far as we know, by no one.³

No contemporary reader could have imagined that Philebus stood for Eudoxus.⁴ Even if we do not agree with Karpp⁵ that Eudoxus's so-called hedonism was a psychological rather than an ethical doctrine (in other words, that he emphasised the fact, or apparent fact, that man like other animals aims at pleasure, but did not advance to any ethical theory as to what pleasure man, quâ rational, *ought* to pursue), in any case Philebus does not suggest the man known to his contemporaries as 'eminently moral'.⁶ And, in general, it would have been a poor method of attacking Eudoxus to write a dialogue in which he was not allowed to defend his thesis himself, and in which his nominal disciple

¹ χαραδριοῦ τινα βιον, *Gorg.* 494 B.

² *Die plat. Schriften*, p. 558.

³ Except indeed by a character in Lucian's *Asinus* (36). As this Philebus was a κίναιδος, it looks as if Lucian believed the name to be significant; he may be right: cf. the 'disclaimed innuendo' at 46 B, which suggests 'nastiness'.

⁴ Prof. Taylor identifies the position of Philebus with that of Eudoxus and concludes (*Plato*, p. 410) that 'the issue discussed in the dialogue is one which had actually divided the members of the Academy, the question what is really meant by the Platonic "Form of the Good". One party thinks that it means pleasure, the other that it means thought'. I cannot understand how anyone who had read *Rep.* VI could think that the αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν meant pleasure; at the very outset of the discussion (505 c) Socrates warns us against such a supposition.

⁵ H. Karpp, *Untersuchungen zur Phil. des Eudoxos*, p. 20 f.

⁶ ἐπιστεύοντο δ' οἱ λόγοι διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἡθους ἀρετὴν μᾶλλον ἢ δι' αὐτοῦς· διαφερόντως γὰρ ἔδοκει σώφρων εἶναι· οὐ δὲ ὡς φίλος τῆς ἡδονῆς ἔδοκει ταῦτα λέγειν, ἀλλ' οὕτως ἔχειν κατ' ἀλήθειαν (*E.N.* 1172 B15). Contrast Philebus's 'mulishness' at 12 A with the reasonableness (by which I do not mean cogency) of the arguments in *Ethics* K 2.

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(Protarchus) brings forward not one of the arguments which he (according to Aristotle) advanced.¹

At this point it is convenient to notice the other two characters (apart from *personae mutae*) of the dialogue, Protarchus and Socrates. I am inclined to think that Protarchus also is an imaginary person. He has, it is true, a 'real' name,² and may conceivably be the same as the Protarchus whose remark is quoted by Aristotle at *Physics* 197 B 10. He is also represented as having 'heard' Gorgias (57 E), but I do not feel sure that this necessarily represents historical fact; the mention of Gorgias may be no more than an obvious device for bringing up the comparative merits of rhetoric and dialectic. In general, Protarchus seems to be just the 'ordinary listener', the average educated interlocutor needed to keep up some semblance of real discussion; not a mere dummy, for he makes, or tries to make, a point or two against Socrates, and relieves bare exposition by an occasional 'intelligent anticipation' of Socrates's points. Although he starts by donning the mantle of Philebus, his hedonism is of so eminently reasonable a type that before long he turns into a collaborator rather than an opponent of Socrates.

Surprise has sometimes been felt that Socrates should lead the conversation, when his rôle in all the other late dialogues, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, is quite small, and he is absent from the *Laws*. But it should be remembered that he had been cast for the questioner's part in the *Philosopher*,³ and that there are obvious reasons why others should take the lead in the 'divisional exercises' of *Sophist* and *Statesman*, and in the physical and physiological speculations of the *Timaeus*. It is quite mistaken to suppose that 'Socrates' in our dialogue is a mere label affixed to an uncharacterised figure who might just as well have been called by any other name.⁴ No doubt he is not so strongly characterised as in some of the dialogues of Plato's early and middle

¹ Timaeus seems to be another imaginary character, though invented for a different kind of reason; see Cornford, *PC*, pp. 2-3. He could be given a 'real' name, because there was nothing offensive in his rôle.

² He has also a father named Callias (19 B): but this need be no more significant than Strepsiades having a father called Pheidon, or his wife an uncle called Megacles.

³ *Pol.* 258 A, where I follow Cornford's highly probable interpretation (*PTK*, p. 168) of Socrates's words: ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν εἰς αὐτῆς, σοὶ δὲ νῦν ἀποκρινέσθω (sc. ὁ νέος Σωκράτης).

⁴ So Raeder, *Platons phil. Entwicklung*, p. 354: 'Der Sokrates, der hier auftritt, hat mit dem Sokrates, der sonst in den platonischen Dialogen als Leiter des Gesprächs erscheint, nur den Namen gemeinsam.'

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periods; but there are a number of passages which recall the Socrates that we know: for example, his diffidence in attaching names to the gods (12 C, cf. *Crat.* 400 D), his habit of deliberately nonplussing his hearers, as it seemed to them (20 A, cf. *Meno* 80 A), his attribution of a novel idea to something that he might have dreamt or 'heard from somebody' (20 B, cf. *Theaet.* 201 D), his bantering self-depreciation (εἰμι δ' ὡς ἔοικεν ἐγὼ γελοῖός τις ἄνθρωπος 23 D, cf. *Phaedrus* 236 D, *Rep.* 392 D); the semi-ironical compliment (ἀλλὰ προθύμως ἀμύνεις τῷ τῆς ἡδονῆς λόγῳ 38 A, cf. *Euthyphro* 7 A, *Theaet.* 146 D); the device of the 'dialogue within the dialogue' involving a personification of abstractions (the speeches of the pleasures and intelligences, 63 B ff.: compare the speech of the laws at *Crito* 50 A ff.). These are all distinctive traits of Plato's Socrates, though they may not all be proper to the Socrates of history.

It has been urged that in the *Philebus* Socrates is unlike himself in that he expounds rather than argues or persuades; and attention has been called to a passage (19 C) where Protarchus says: 'You made all of us a free offer of this discussion, in which you yourself were included, for the purpose of deciding what is the best of all things possessed by man.' Protarchus is here merely recalling what Socrates had arranged in the first page of the dialogue, and the word translated 'discussion' carries no necessary implication of formality, or of the relation of professor and students: it is in fact used of a Socratic conversation in such 'non-professorial' dialogues as *Laches* (201 C) and *Symposium* (176 E), as well as in *Theaetetus* (150 D) and *Sophist* (217 E). Nor do I think Socrates has become any more of an *ex cathedra* lecturer than he was already in the *Republic*; doubtless the part played by his respondents is not comparable to those of Simmias and Cebes, of Polus and Callicles, or even of Glaucon and Adimantus; but it is considerably more than that of Aristoteles, of Young Socrates, or of Megillus and Cleinias: in other words, Plato could still write a Socratic dialogue.

Nor has he forgotten or discarded what he had written in the greatest of all Socratic dialogues. If the Callicles of the *Gorgias* is to be descried behind Philebus, it is equally true that the Socrates of the *Republic* is to be descried behind Socrates. It may seem surprising that the dialogue contains no explicit account of moral virtue and its relation to happiness or the 'good life'. At the very outset it is agreed that the quest is for 'a state or condition of the soul which can render the life

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of every man a happy life', and it is natural to ask what has become of the account given in the *Republic* of 'justice' in the tripartite soul, and of the assignment of moral virtues to its parts and their relations.

As the tripartite soul reappears in the *Timaeus*, it is not likely that Plato has abandoned it, or its implications with regard to the nature of moral goodness, in the *Philebus*. But he does not want to go over familiar ground again. That no life can be happy unless reason controls appetite, with θυμός enlisted on the side of reason, is taken for granted; when we are told on the first page that Socrates has been contending that 'thought, intelligence, memory, right opinion and true reasoning' are more valuable than pleasure, we are doubtless meant to recall, and to take as the background of all that Socrates is going to argue, the part which he had previously shown to be played by these activities in regulating the moral life. Moreover, the ἐξίς ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσις which the dialogue ultimately finds in the well-mixed life is one in which the types of pleasure admitted are welcomed by intelligence (in the speech of the personified intelligences at 63 D-E), and include 'all such as accompany every sort of ἀρετή', while those that attend upon 'folly and vice in general' are rejected. Plainly then Plato's conception of moral goodness as requisite for happiness is unchanged: the welcome given by intelligence to pleasure, and the exclusion of vicious pleasures, implies the control of ἐπιθυμία by φρόνησις. It is only the false assumption that Plato must explicitly formulate the whole of his ethics whenever he writes on an ethical subject that might lead us astray.

Plato's range of thought is so wide, and his dialogues usually show such a diversity of interest, that it is hazardous to pronounce that any single idea is dominant in a particular dialogue. Nevertheless it is perhaps permissible to pick out one conception which permeates the *Philebus*, the conception namely of pleasure as an ἀπειρον, an 'unlimited' thing. It is best to leave the meaning of this unexplained in an introduction; but if we allow it to be the dominant thought, or I would rather say the dominant conception with which Plato works, it will follow that the method of the dialogue is to apply Pythagorean categories to an ethical doctrine. But at least two other ideas are prominent. First, the procedure of classificatory division, on which he had recently lavished so much pains in *Sophist* and *Statesman*. Division as a master-key of science, an instrument, if not for solving, at least for dealing with the perennial problem of the One-Many, is extolled early in the dialogue: but its subsequent application is concealed, not

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open: instead of the formal dichotomies—so immeasurably wearisome to modern readers, and, one would suppose, to ancient also—we get various kinds of pleasure and of intelligence discriminated through an informal¹ procedure, which any one who cared to do so could easily remodel into a divisional scheme. Secondly, there is the religious conviction of a Divine Mind, the cause of all that is good, rational and orderly in the universe, a νοῦς βασιλεὺς οὐρανοῦ τε καὶ γῆς (28c): a Mind which moreover, as in the *Timaeus* and *Epinomis*, expresses itself in a mathematical ordering or determination, in fact a θεὸς αἰὶ γεωμετρῶν.

The three ideas I have mentioned are worked into the ethical and psychological discussion with no little skill and artistry. Nobody would claim for the *Philebus* the architectural mastery displayed in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*: on the other hand the formlessness of the work has been often exaggerated. The more I have studied it, the clearer has its structure become, and the more understandable its transitions, digressions, and postponements. If any reader of this book comes to feel the same, I shall not have spent my time to no purpose.

¹ In the case of intelligence, however, the procedure approximates much more closely to formal division: but it is a much shorter treatment than that of pleasure.