

**THE PHILEBUS OF PLATO,
WITH A REVISED TEXT
AND ENGLISH NOTES**

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The Philebus of Plato, with a revised text and English notes by Edward Poste

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THE PHILEBUS

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A REVISED TEXT AND ENGLISH NOTES.

BY

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P R E F A C E.

NO edition of the works of Plato quite calculated to meet the wants of the student has as yet appeared. This deficiency it is proposed to supply by the joint labours of some members of the University of Oxford. The present edition of the *Philebus* is therefore to be regarded as one of a series.

The whole series is intended to follow a uniform plan: as, however, each dialogue will be entrusted to a single editor, differences of individual taste or opinion may possibly appear in the execution.

An introduction, indicating the general scope and character of each dialogue, will be prefixed.

Many difficulties in the interpretation of Plato vanish before an insight into the arrangement of parts, or plan of structure, of a dialogue. This arrangement, though always artistic, is often intricate. A running analysis will, therefore, be given in the margin, sufficient, it is hoped, to furnish a clue to the course of the argument through its occasional mazes.

As scholars are generally agreed to refer to the edition of Stephanus in their references to the writings of Plato, the corresponding pages of that edition will be indicated in the margin.

The conceptions unfolded or made the subject of passing allusion in the *Philebus* have been chiefly elucidated in the notes by a comparison of Plato's with previous or subsequent speculations. Where it was necessary to examine any point at greater length, longer notes, or rather essays, have been appended at the end of the volume.

An English translation, intended to be sufficiently close to perform the office of a philological commentary, is published separately for the use of the English reader, or of such students as may require any further assistance in comprehending the original.

INTRODUCTION.

THOUGH Socrates directed speculation to moral problems, he did not himself construct any definite moral creed. After his death two opposite ethical schools arose. The form that the fundamental problem of morality assumed was: What is the Highest Good, or, the End of life? This the Megarians maintained to be Knowledge, the Cyrenaics Pleasure. In the PHILEBUS these rival doctrines are proposed and examined, and contrasted with Plato's own more comprehensive theory.

It is first inquired whether either Pleasure or Knowledge is the Absolute Good, and fit to be proposed as the End of life.

This question is soon determined. Our preconception of the Highest Good involves three characters. It must be Desirable, Adequate, and Perfect. Neither Pleasure nor Knowledge satisfies these conditions. They are each of them but partial Ends, and a combination of them is clearly a more Perfect Good.

A second problem is next proposed: Which of the two, Pleasure or Knowledge, approaches more nearly to whatever is the Perfect Good.

This problem, like the former, is easily determined by the consideration of three characters assumed to belong to the Perfect Good. These are Truth, Measure, and Beauty, and it is decided with-

out much difficulty that these conditions are satisfied in a higher degree by Knowledge than by Pleasure. This is the whole substance of the dialogue if we only consider the inquiries originally proposed.

Another question, however, though not expressly stated, receives at least a partial solution: What is the exact composition of that Highest Good of which Pleasure and Knowledge are but fractional ingredients? and what kinds of Pleasure and Knowledge are its components?

This question is approached more methodically than the others. At the commencement of the dialogue it is stated, with the solemnity befitting the inauguration of a new Method, that no question can be treated Scientifically without Generalization and Division. To answer, then, the question just proposed we must ascertain the Genera and Species of Pleasure and Knowledge. Accordingly both Pleasures and Sciences are Classified, and this broad distinction is found to run through the species of both, that some are Pure, others Mixed. It is first agreed that the Purest portions of each have the best title to be considered as components of the Highest Good. Besides these, however, all the Mixed kinds of Knowledge, and, even of the Pleasures Mixed with Pain, those that are necessary to life and in allegiance to the virtues, are admitted as elements. The Greatest, however, and the Vicious Pleasures are pronounced to be the Greatest, are thus excluded. So the third ethical problem is solved.

But it is the characteristic of Plato's philosophic

treatment of any subject that it presents the three branches of speculation, Ethical, Logical, Physical inquiries in intimate and organic combination.

The Ethical element we have found in the subject of the problems.

The Dialectical element forms the vestibule of the dialogue, where the doctrine of Method is enunciated in somewhat mystic tones, but with unrivalled impressiveness. The Dialectical Method is afterwards partly exemplified in the Classification of Pleasure and Knowledge.

The Physical or Metaphysical element is introduced by a further application of the Method, the reference of Pleasure and Knowledge to higher Genera. This involves a systematic exposition, with more or less elucidation, of the four great Principles, the Limit, the Infinite, the Product, and the Cause: a list that resumes the highest philosophic abstractions of Plato's predecessors, and was not much varied in subsequent Greek philosophy.

The final comparison, too, of Pleasure and Knowledge assumes a Metaphysical character, as it determines not only their position in respect of the Ethical Good, but, partially at least, in relation to this catholic system of Principles. The highest place in this more general arrangement of things placed in their order of excellence, belongs to nothing within the worldly sphere, but to the Absolute Cause, the Divinity, the Eternal Good and Measure of all perfection. Second is the Perfect Derivative Good, Physical or Moral, the latter of which, the highest End of created life, was the subject of the Ethical problems. The third rank

belongs to the highest kind of Knowledge, Wisdom, or Reason in its apprehension of the highest truth. The fourth rank is assigned to the lower kinds of Knowledge, the Scientific comprehension of truths of a less exalted order. The fifth to the Pure Pleasures. The sixth to such of those Mixed with Pains as are necessary to man's physical existence, and sanctioned by the moral law.

From the wealth of thought which Plato has lavished on this, as indeed on every other subject that he handled, it has been disputed what is the leading idea of the *Philebus*.

It is obvious that the fundamental problem is Ethical, the character of the highest attainable Good. The most distinctive feature of the dialogue, however, is perhaps, not the subject, but the mode of handling the question, the instrument employed for its solution, Classification and Division of the Pleasures and Sciences. That Plato intended to direct the attention to this, we may infer from the emphatic manner in which this is indicated as the true philosophic Method at the commencement of the dialogue. This Classification then, eclipsed as it became in the execution by more striking features, seems to have been the germinal idea of the *Philebus*. It is the portion earliest in development, about which the other members of the organism grow and cluster; the mass in the picture which, though somewhat pale in colour, dominates the composition, as the centre to which the other masses converge or from which they radiate. It is the key applied to determine, partly at least, the elements in the Platonic definition of the Highest Good, or what we