

EXCERPTS FROM PLATO'S

# PHILEBUS

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11b

SOCRATES: Philebus says that what's good for all living things is enjoyment and pleasure and gaiety and whatever else goes along with that. We disagree and contend that wisdom and thought and memory and this kind of thing, right opinion and true calculations, are better and more agreeable than pleasure for anyone who can get them. Se say that anyone (including both the people now alive and future generations) who can get these things gets the maximum possible benefit from having them. Those are pretty much the two doctrines we hold, aren't they Philebus? c

PHILEBUS: Yes, Socrates, exactly.

SOCRATES: And do you, Protarchus, agree to take over Philebus' doctrine, which is not offered to you?

PROTARCHUS: I must accept it; for handsome Philebus has given up.

SOCRATES: And we must do everything we possibly can to get at the truth about these matters?

PROTARCHUS: Yes, we must. d

SOCRATES: Then let us further agree to this...

PROTARCHUS: To what?

SOCRATES: That each of us will try to prove clearly that a certain condition or state of the soul can make life happy for all men. Isn't that what we are going to do?

PROTARCHUS: It is.

SOCRATES: Then you will show that it is the condition of pleasure, and I that it is that of wisdom?

PROTARCHUS: True.

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SOCRATES: I remember now having heard long ago in a dream, or perhaps when I was awake, some talk about pleasure and wisdom to the effect that neither of the two is the good, but some third thing, different from them and better than both. However, if this be now clearly proved to us, pleasure is deprived of victory for the good would no longer be identical with it. Isn't that true? c

PROTARCHUS: It is.

SOCRATES: And we shall have, in my opinion, no longer any need of distinguishing the kinds of pleasure. But the progress of the discussion will make that still clearer.

PROTARCHUS: Excellent! Just go on as you have begun.

SOCRATES: First, then, let us agree on some further small points.

PROTARCHUS: What are they?

SOCRATES: Is the nature of the good necessarily ultimate or non-ultimate? d

PROTARCHUS: The most ultimate of all things, surely, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And is the good sufficient?

PROTARCHUS: Of course; that's how it surpasses everything else.

SOCRATES: And nothing, I should say, is more certain about it than that every intelligent being pursues it, desires it, wishes to catch and get possession of it, and has no interest in anything that's not connected with the good.

PROTARCHUS: There is no denying that.

SOCRATES: Let us, then, look at the life of pleasure and the life of wisdom separately and consider and judge them. e

PROTARCHUS: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: Let there be no wisdom in the life of pleasure and no pleasure in the life of wisdom. For if either of them is the good, it cannot need anything else; and if we find that either needs anything, we can no longer regard it as our true good. 21a

PROTARCHUS: No, of course not.

SOCRATES: Shall we use you as the test case for them?

PROTARCHUS: By all means.

SOCRATES: Then answer.

PROTARCHUS: Ask.

SOCRATES: Would you, Protarchus, be willing to live your whole life in the enjoyment of the greatest pleasures?

PROTARCHUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Would you think you needed anything further, if you were in complete possession of that enjoyment?

PROTARCHUS: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: But consider whether you would not have some need of wisdom and understanding and the ability to calculate your wants and the like. b

PROTARCHUS: Why should I? If I have enjoyment, I have it all.

SOCRATES: Then, if you lived in this way, you'd enjoy the greatest pleasures for your whole life?

PROTARCHUS: Yes; why not?

SOCRATES: But if you did not have understanding or memory or knowledge or true opinion, in the first place, you would not know whether you were enjoying your pleasures or not. That must be true, since you are utterly devoid of understanding, must it not?

PROTARCHUS: Yes, it must.

SOCRATES: And likewise, if you had no memory, you could not even remember that you ever enjoyed pleasure, and no recollection whatever of present pleasure could remain with you; if you had no true opinion you could not think you were enjoying pleasure at the time when you were enjoying it, and if you weren't able to calculate you would not be able to calculate that you would enjoy it in the future; your life would not be that of a man, but of a mollusk or some other shell-fish like the oyster. Is that true, or can we imagine any other result? c  
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PROTARCHUS: We certainly cannot.

SOCRATES: And can we choose such a life?

PROTARCHUS: This argument, Socrates, has made me utterly speechless for the present.

SOCRATES: Well, let us not give in yet. Let us take up the life of understanding and

scrutinize that in turn.

PROTARCHUS: What sort of life do you mean?

SOCRATES: I ask whether anyone would be willing to live possessing wisdom and understanding and knowledge and perfect memory of all things, but having no share, e great or small, in pleasure, or in pain, for that matter, but being utterly unaffected by everything of that sort.

PROTARCHUS: Neither of the two lives can ever appear desirable to me, Socrates, nor, I think, to anyone else.

SOCRATES: How about the combined life, Protarchus, made up by a union of the two? 22a

PROTARCHUS: You mean a union of pleasure with understanding or wisdom?

SOCRATES: Yes, I mean a union of such elements.

PROTARCHUS: Everyone will prefer this life to either of the two others—yes, every single person without exception.

SOCRATES: Then do we understand the consequences of what we are now saying?

PROTARCHUS: Certainly. Three lives have been proposed, and two of them are not b sufficient or desirable for any man or other living thing.

SOCRATES: Then isn't it clear already that neither of these two contains the good; for if one of them did contain the good, it would be sufficient and ultimate, and such as to be chosen by all living creatures which would be able to live thus all their lives; and if any of us chose anything else, he would be choosing contrary to the nature of the truly desirable, not voluntarily, but from ignorance or some unfortunate necessity.

PROTARCHUS: That seems at any rate to be true.

SOCRATES: And so I think we have sufficiently proved that Philebus's good is not to be c considered identical with the good.

PROTARCHUS: But neither is your "mind" the good, Socrates; it will be open to the same b objections.

SOCRATES: Perhaps my mind will be Philebus; but I think not for the true mind, which is also divine; that is different. I do not as yet claim for mind the victory over the combined life, but we must look and see what is to be done about the second place; for each of us d might perhaps put forward a claim, one that mind is the cause of this combined life, the other that pleasure is the cause and thus neither of these two would be the good, but one or the other of them might be regarded as the cause of the good. On this point I might

keep up the fight all the more against Philebus and contend that, in this mixed life, mind that is more akin to and more similar than pleasure is to the thing (whatever it may be) that makes the life both desirable and good; and from this point of view pleasure could advance no true claim to the first or even the second place. It is farther behind than the third place, if my mind is at all to be trusted at present. e

PROTARCHUS: Certainly, Socrates, it seems to me that pleasure has fought for the victory and has fallen in this bout, knocked down by your words. And we can only say, as it seems, that mind was wise in not laying claim to the victory; for it would have met with the same fate. Now pleasure, if she were to lose the second prize, would be deeply humiliated in the eyes of her lovers; for she would no longer appear even to them so lovely as before. 23a