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The Good as Unity: Its Role in the Good Life in Plato's Later Thought

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In the sixth book of the Republic, Socrates begins leading his interlocutors down the 'longer road' that leads to the Form of the Good which is to complete the earlier account of virtue given in Book IV. The end of this road in the Republic is reached via the sketch of the Good portrayed in the famous Sun, Line, and Cave passages. In this paper, I wish to suggest that the road does not, in fact, end here, but extends to the account of the Good offered in one of Plato's latest dialogues, the Philebus.

This account, like the one in the Republic before it, has ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions, but in this paper, I shall concentrate on those aspects that have special relevance to the nature of the good life. Specifically, I shall focus my discussion on the role the Good as unity plays in the good life.

My argument shall run as follows. In the Republic, the Good's role is ambiguous since its unity is depicted in two different ways: as an organic whole of interrelated parts or aspects, and as an absolute and transcendent One. Corresponding to each of these models of the Good's unity is a different picture of the good life. According to the first model, we should seek to integrate the diversity of our experience, but according to the second, we should strive to minimize or even eliminate all diversity. In the Philebus, it becomes clearer that the second model of unity is the one we should take as our ideal. Thus the good life is one in which various types of knowledge and pleasure are properly arranged in imitation of the universal order provided by the Forms. The Philebus, then, presents us with a fuller understanding of how we are to use the Good as the pattern for our lives.

Let us first consider a few crucial features of the account given in the Republic. In Book VI (at 504A-506E), Socrates discusses why the Good is the highest form of study, and then proposes to give his own opinion of what the Good is like by comparing it to its offspring, the sun. During this discussion, which functions as a sort of prologue to the Sun, Line and Cave, Socrates makes a number of claims about why the study of the Good is essential. One crucial point is that an account of the virtues without the Good lacks precision and completeness because it is in relation to the Good that just actions and other things become beneficial. Thus the knowledge of anything else is of no help if we do not know the Good (505A-B). The ultimate goal of study for the philosopher-rulers must be the Good itself since it is by 'looking' to it as a model that they are able to order their own souls, the polis and its citizens properly (540B; see
also 484D; 500D-E, and 506A-B). The use of the Good as a model of order suggests that the Good is unity in some sense. If so, then we can understand better why the Good is the ultimate goal of desire which everyone should strive to acquire (505D). For in order to experience the true value of anything, one must be aware of its proper place within the whole of reality for which the Good is the model.

But how is the Good the model for all of reality in general, and for human life in particular? To give a definitive answer to this question is well beyond the scope of this paper and, perhaps, not fruitful to pursue in detail. After all, Socrates in the Republic (and also in the Philebus) warns us that he can provide only an outline of the Good. Still, we must have some idea of what its general contours are like in order to use it to guide our lives. It seems to me that one crucial feature of the Good is its unity. The unity of the Good is depicted in two different ways in the Republic. One is that the Good encompasses the World of the Forms and orders them, as it were, within itself. The Forms, in turn, are responsible for the basic structure of the sensible world. The other model of the Good is that of an absolute simple, and transcendent One. Corresponding to these two models are different pictures of the good life. According to the first model, those who aspire to pattern themselves after the Good will be concerned with ordering the different aspects of their lives so as to reflect the ideal order of the Intelligible World as much as possible. In the rightly ordered or virtuous life, the diversity of one's experience is not reduced but integrated to form an organic whole. According to the other model, imitation of the Good will require a reduction or even an elimination of diversity, a merging of all aspects of life into one. The best life is that of contemplation, the pursuit of mystical union with the One.

The Republic contains passages that can be used to support either of these views of the Good. Indeed, one could say that the first model is the one Aristotle developed into his ideal of the life of practical virtue, while the second model is the one that evolved into Neoplatonism. Let us briefly review the passages that give rise to each of these models of the Good.

Plato suggests in several places in the Republic that the Good is the unity of distinct but interrelated Forms. On the ontological level, Plato says that Forms combine with each other (476A) and that the Good presides over the Intelligible World yet is still a part of it, as the sun is part of the sensible world. It is reasonable to assume that the Good unifies the Forms by being present to them, not by being a transcendent One. The Sun Analogy also suggests that the Good has at least one aspect, Truth, which it emanates as the sun does its light (507D-508E).

The idea that unity among interrelated parts, rather than absolute simplicity, is Plato's ideal is most evident in the tripartite division of the State and soul. In both cases, oneness is achieved through the unity of distinct but
interrelated parts. Justice requires that each part retains its separate function while temperance insures that the parts will be in accord through their consent to be governed by reason (442D-443E). In short, the goal is the harmonious blending of distinguishable notes (443C-E) not the reduction of all into one monotonous hum.

We can find other evidence, however, that the Good stands in sharp contrast with plurality. As far as the ontological dimension of the Good is concerned, there is no clear indication that the other Forms are aspects of the Good. In fact, the reference in the Republic to the communion of the Forms is just that—a passing reference. Most of the time what is stressed is the unitary nature of a Form compared to the multiplicity of its sensible instances. So, one would expect the Good to be the most unitary entity of all. Socrates, in fact, explicitly states that Truth, along with knowledge, is "Good-like" but not the Good itself, which is beyond even Being in dignity and power (509A-B). Such language suggests the absolute transcendence of the Good.

Plato seems to endorse uniformity, and not just unity, as the ideal for the good life in many famous (and perhaps, infamous) passages. After all, a pluralistic society where the conflicting interests of different ethnic and religious groups within the State are resolved with peaceful compromises could be said to be unified, especially where citizens owe allegiance to the greater community as well as to smaller groups. But the minimization of conflict, or even its absence, is not the ultimate goal for Plato. He regards conflict as bad only insofar as he sees it as a threat to the organic oneness of the State with which citizens are to identify, seeing themselves as members of a single body (562B-D). Such complete identification with the State is crucial for the upper tier of society; hence Plato's proposals for the abolition of private families and property for the guardians. But even the artisans are to find their primary source of identity in the work that they do for the commonweal. Thus Plato says of a carpenter who has contracted a chronic disease that he will no longer wish to live if he can no longer contribute to society (406D-407A). Such passages make it clear that even when the diversity of human nature requires some division of labor, the ultimate goal is oneness with the State. Differences are tolerated but only as means to the end of oneness. In this sense, the different occupations are like the alternative paths in Hinduism; one chooses the marga that best suits one's temperament but what really matters is the common goal: liberation from the wheel of life and death.

Similar passages occur in Plato's discussion of the soul. The nature of that exemplary human being, the philosopher, he describes as follows:

In one whose passions flow towards knowledge and all that kind of thing, they would concentrate, I think, upon the pleasures of the mind alone and by itself, and he would give up the pleasures of the body, if he is a true philosopher and does not merely pretend to be one (485E).
Because of passages like this one, Plato has sometimes been accused of reducing the human being to pure reason and the good life to one of "fanatical single-mindedness."\(^9\)

Although it would be foolish to pretend that Plato presents in the Philebus an account of the good as unity which is completely free of the ambiguities found in the Republic, a much clearer picture does emerge in this later dialogue.\(^11\) I shall suggest that the Good in the Philebus is a unity of its different parts or aspects. The ideal of the good life is one in which various types of knowledge and pleasure are properly arranged in imitation of the universal order provided by the Forms. This last point is an important one, for the Philebus retains the notion that we can only realize our human good by shaping our lives so that they are true to the universal Good which unites all things. Thus the starting-point of his ethics differs from that of Aristotle, as Aristotle himself observed.\(^12\) The Good in Plato's later thought is neither Aristotelian nor Neoplatonic. Surprisingly enough, Plato remains, to the end, a platonist.

First consider the ontological dimension of the Good in the Philebus. In both the beginning and the end of the dialogue, Plato depicts the Good as a one which is not a completely transcendent simple, but rather is a unified whole which manifests itself in distinct but related aspects. Early on, the Good is described as an ungenerated and imperishable unit (monad) which is both one and many (12C-16A). In order to understand how the Good, or any other unit, is both one and many, Socrates introduces what he calls the Divine Method. This method is grounded on the assumption that all existent entities are from one and many and have inherent within them limit (peras) and indefiniteness (apeira). The practitioners of this method assume that there is one Form (or unit) for everything, and then look for it. They then look for the two, etc. according to whatever type of Form is being examined. Each original unity (form) must be seen not simply as being composed of one and many and indefiniteness, but how many it is (i.e. how many parts or aspects it has) must be made clear. Only at this point may each unity be allowed to pass unhindered into the indefinite. That is, one may acknowledge that the unit or Form has sensible instances which are infinite in number and indefinite in aspect. The key is to concentrate not on the indefinite many but on the intermediate many, the aspects of the one.

The illustrations used to clarify this method are linguistic and musical sound. In the case of learning to pronounce the letters of the alphabet, for example, one realizes that although the sounds that can be vocalized are infinite, the rules of grammar which determine the number and nature of distinguishable linguistic sounds—vowels, semi-vowels, mutes—make linguistic sound one comprehensive unit.\(^14\) One cannot learn to pronounce the letters in isolation from one another, but must do so by combining them. Thus the role of grammar is crucial in that it reveals the proper ways to unite the letters (18B-D).
[Presumably, letters form syllables, then nouns and verbs, then sentences. Cf. Cratylus 424D-425A.] The essence of the Divine Method, then, is to identify the intermediate aspects of the unit and how they are related to each other, to the unit, and to the infinite sensible instances.

Whatever the mechanics involved in actually plying the Divine Method, its aim is clear enough: to understand both the unit and infinitely diverse sensible phenomena by recognizing those parts or aspects which lie between them. This important point suggests that the goal of knowledge is neither contemplation of the absolute One nor the experience of infinite variety, but the articulation of unity as it is expressed in multiplicity. That Plato uses linguistic and musical sound as his illustrations of the Divine Method is no accident, for such examples depict the basic structure of reality as an organic whole rather than a mere aggregate of individuals. Parts are not discrete units but elements that blend together like sounds that form spoken syllables or musical scales. [Cf. Theaetetus 203E-204A where Socrates explicitly claims that the syllable is a single entity with a character of its own different from the letters that make it up; it is an example of a whole which is different from the aggregate of its parts.] Plato's use of auditory examples also presents an alternative to the model of knowledge which relies on the analogies of sight and/or touch. Such a model is prevalent in the Republic and other middle dialogues. The visual/tactile model suggests that the soul directly encounters the Forms as the eyes or hand must be in the immediate presence of the sensible in order to see or grasp its properties. Such a model suggests that the ultimate objects of knowledge, the Forms, are absolute simples with no parts: they can be seen all at once or grasped in their entirety. But the auditory model suggested by spoken and musical sound emphasizes the interconnections of the Forms which must be articulated as a system in order to be understood.

Even the story told about the origins of the Divine Method emphasizes the point that in the Philebus what is important is how the different ontological levels are related. According to Socrates, the Divine Method was "thrown down by the gods in a blaze of light from some Prometheus" (16C5-6). The fire the mythical Titan stole from the gods to give to humankind symbolizes the enlightenment which helps us rise out of the condition described by Aeschylus in Prometheus Bound as "a dreamlike feebleness by which the race of man is held in bondage" (11. 549-550). Note how much these words sound like Plato's depiction of the prisoners in the Cave! In the Republic, though, what is 'divine' and 'blessed' is simply the contemplation of the Good alone, not the bringing of this vision back down into the Cave (517B-519E). In the Philebus, however, the method that provides the link of the one to the many--of the gods to humans--is said to be divine. Our participation in the divine is seen in terms of our ability to identify the presence of the one within the many. Earlier, Socrates had noted that the one and
the many are perennially present in all our logoi, reasoning and discourse (15D). Our task is to become aware of this presence and to embody it in our lives.

At the end of the Philebus, Plato reveals that through the agency of certain aspects of the Good (i.e. Proportion, Beauty, and Truth) the good life becomes possible for us. True to the general emphasis on interrelations in this dialogue, Socrates and Protarchus agreed early on that the good life consists of neither pleasure nor knowledge by themselves but the right mixture of the two (18E-22C). But the question of which should be the dominant element, knowledge or pleasure, is one that they do not consider to be answered in full even after lengthy discussion about each. The reason is that in order to make clear whether knowledge (including practical reasoning, i.e. phronesis) or pleasure contributes more to the goodness of the good, mixed life "we must get a clear conception, or at least an outline (typon) of the Good" (61A4-5). Whereas in the Republic such an outline was provided by the Sun analogy, in the Philebus it is presented by considering three aspects of the Good: Truth, Measure or Proportion, and Beauty. These three, when considered as one (i.e. the Good), are the cause of goodness in the mixed life (65A1-5).

Consider carefully how the Good is the cause of the mixture. Truth is said to enable the mixture—or anything else—to come into being (64B2-3) as well as to become intelligible. As has been widely noted, the use of truth (aletheia) here clearly means something other than just the correspondence of a proposition to reality, or a type of cognition. After all, the forms of cognition or knowledge were already included in the good mixed life earlier in the dialogue (55C-59D); if that is all truth means then nothing new would be added to the mixture. In fact, the presence of truth is necessary for the good mixture simply to exist, and in this sense is above knowledge. The same is true of the ontological dimension to the Sun Analogy of the Republic. The parallel between the sun's light and the Good's truth extends beyond the visual model of knowledge. Socrates points out that just as the sun not only makes things visible but also provides for their generation, growth and nurture, so too the Good is responsible not only for the intelligibility of the Forms but also for their Being (509B). Although Plato does not explicitly say that the Good provides for Being via Truth, it is a reasonable inference to make using the sun as the analogue since clearly sunlight is responsible directly for the generation, growth and nurture of sensibles. The Philebus is more explicit; it states that Truth is that part of the Good which enables the mixture to exist at all. If it weren't for Truth, there would be no knowledge and pleasure to mix together and form the good life. There would be no reality at all, at either the universal or the human level.

Proportion, or Measure, is likewise essential for the components of the good life to compose a mixture rather than a jumbled heap. In other words, Proportion brings unity. Beauty,
although this is not said explicitly, presumably brings a certain type of order, the perfect order that something displays once it has fully realized its function or achieved its excellence (arete). This idea is implied by the connection between Proportion on the one hand, and Beauty and Excellence, on the other (64E6-7). So all three--Truth, Proportion and Beauty--taken together make the mixture good.

By considering separately each part of the Good--Beauty, Proportion and Truth--in relation to both pleasure and knowledge, Plato shows that knowledge is more akin to the highest Good than pleasure. As such, it is more honorable among humans and gods (65A-B). In the dialogue, Socrates reaches these conclusions by comparing pleasure as a class to the highest type of knowledge, namely, nous (i.e. intuitive reason) and phronesis (practical reasoning). [Henceforth I shall only refer to these two Greek terms since they are less clumsy than the English ones. Also, the significance of the lumping of these two terms together I shall consider at the end of this paper.] He says that nous is either truth itself or the most like it while pleasure is the greatest of impostors (65C). Likewise, nothing is more in harmony with measure than mind while the opposite is true of pleasure. Finally, phronesis and nous are never unseemly whereas the greatest pleasures are ridiculous or disgraceful (65E-66A). Consequently, in the final ranking of possessions for the good life, the 'eternal nature' (i.e. the Good) has chosen measure, the mean, fitness and all considered similar to these to be first. Second is proportion, beauty, completeness and sufficiency, and all belonging to that kind. Third come nous and phronesis. To fourth place belong the lower forms of knowledge, technai (i.e. skills), and true opinions since they are more akin to pleasure than to the Good. In fifth and last place are the painless and pure pleasures (66A-C).

This final ranking summarizes the previous discussion of the roles of pleasure and knowledge in the good life. An exploration of how Plato arrived at the ranking will provide a better understanding of his account of the Good. In general, the order of goods in the final ranking is determined by how we can best express the universal Good by realizing our proper place within the order of reality. This task requires an awareness of how our human needs for both pleasure and knowledge can be structured so as to reflect what is objectively good, i.e. what the "eternal nature" itself would choose. Earlier in the dialogue, Plato made it clear that limit and measure, as well as purity and truth, should be used as criteria in distinguishing between higher and lower pleasures and forms of cognition. To examine how Plato used these criteria is thus important.

During the classification of pleasure, two basic kinds emerged. First are the mixed pleasures, so called because they are mixed with their opposite, pain. These pleasures are classified differently depending upon what aspects of them are being considered. In regard to their inherent capacity for extension in degree of intensity, magnitude and number, the mixed or impure
pleasures belong to the indefinite class (52C-D). This aspect of the mixed pleasures is experienced when a pleasure originates from abnormal and/or inordinate desires, be they physical or psychological (44B-51A). The pleasures of the profligate, the homosexual prostitute, and the emotionally distressed would all fall into the indefinite category. On the other hand, when limit is imposed on the mixed pleasures through intelligence, then they are considered members of the class where the indefinite is mixed with the definite (31Aff.). The limited aspect of these pleasures would be experienced in connection with health and strength.

The second main type of pleasure consists of the pure pleasures which are by their very nature limited. These include not only ones free from pain (e.g. the smell of a rose), but also those whose objects are relatively simple: the formal representations involved in geometry, music, and art. These latter pleasures are considered to be 'divine' (51B-52C) because they are the closest link to the Forms the experience of pleasure can afford.

The key to the classification of pleasure is to compare the different varieties according to the criteria of limit, purity and truth. Those that are inherently unlimited are hopelessly impure, being mixed with their opposite, pain. These pleasures Socrates also considers to be false because their unlimitedness and indefiniteness inevitably lead to distortions of reality in one of three basic ways. In the first, the agent acts as if what is at best extrinsically valuable were intrinsically so, e.g. a miser who lives as if the acquisition of currency has value in itself. In the second, the agent exaggerates the pleasure of satisfaction, e.g., when someone breaks his diet and, in an attempt to rationalize what he knows is a poor choice, exaggerates his enjoyment while eating the forbidden sweets. In the third, what is really in itself neither pleasant nor painful is experienced as pleasant because one has just escaped from pain and this freedom seems pleasant by comparison to the pain just experienced. An example of this is the belief someone might have that she is experiencing pleasure because the dentist has stopped drilling. All these distortions have as their source the inherent indefiniteness of the pleasures involved. That is, the confused mixture of pleasure and pain in these situations will inevitably confuse the agent. By contrast, the pleasures that are intrinsically limited and pure are true, i.e. accurately reflect reality. Not surprisingly, in the final ranking the true and pure pleasures are admitted into the good life while the inherently indefinite pleasures are barred. These latter are a hindrance to the pure pleasures and prevent the higher types of intelligence from coming about at all (63D-64A).

Although the fact that the pure and true pleasures are superior to the impure, mixed ones is obvious enough, exactly how truth and purity are related is not clear. Throughout most of the classification of pleasure, Plato seems to have used the words "purity" and "truth" as more or less equivalent terms. But at one point (52D) Socrates asks whether pure or impure pleasures...
are more closely related to truth. To help explain what he means by "purity", he gives an example: unmixed white. Clearly, there is a sense in which unmixed white is more white than that which is mixed with other colors. But Socrates goes on to conclude that it is also the truest and most beautiful of all whiteness. Although he does not explain the relations between purity, truth, and beauty explicitly, he does say enough to convey the general point. Purity is valuable, even highly valuable, in its own right and not just as the absence of impurity, which in the case of pleasure means being mixed with pain. For something to be what it is and nothing else is to be a clear reflection of the definiteness of the basic structure of reality. Even in our experiences (pathē, 31B) of pleasure we may affirm our connection with the beautiful and well-proportioned whole of reality of which we are a part. This is the significance of the pure pleasures, which are true because they unambiguously exemplify the definiteness, proportion, and beauty that underlie the surface of human life.

Purity is likewise used as a criterion in the classification of knowledge, for it is equated to exactness (57B) and related to truth (57D). These criteria first are used to rank different kinds of skilled work according to the extent to which they employ arithmetic, the science of measurement and weighing. Music (i.e. playing by ear), medicine, agriculture, piloting, and generalship are all examples of imprecise skills (technai), while building is more exact because it uses a good number of measurements and instruments (55E-56C). Furthermore, within both arithmetic and the science of measurement are two distinct kinds: those of the many and those of the philosophers. Concerning arithmetic, some reckon unequal units, e.g. two armies, while others insist on units that are all equal to one another. Likewise, calculation (logistike) and measuring used in building and trade differ from the geometry of philosophers (56D-57A, 57D). The 'philosophic' arithmetic and metrical arts surpass the more pedestrian varieties in purity, exactness and truth (57D) just as some pleasures are purer and truer than others (57B). The truest form of knowledge is the dialectic, defined as "...that knowledge which has to do with being and reality and that which is always the same (58A1-2). It is called called nous and phronesis, "the contemplation of true Being" (59D4-5). So, the extent of truth or purity involved in the various forms of technai and knowledge depends upon the definiteness of their respective objects.

Insofar as all forms of cognition are limited or definite to some extent, all are included in the final ranking of the good life. Many commentators have taken this as a signal that the Philebus departs from the epistemology of the Republic in recognizing the technai as genuine forms of knowledge. However, a closer look at the two dialogues reveals that in both discussions the lower forms have a legitimate role in the good life provided that one first has the higher. In the Philebus, as we have seen, the distinction between philosophical and practical
mathematics is based on the types of objects with which each type of mathematics deals, e.g. practical arithmetic is concerned with unequal units while the philosophical variety has as its objects only equal units. In the Republic, the distinction between practical and philosophical mathematics arises in the context of Socrates' search for a program of study which would be appropriate for the guardian-rulers who eventually will become philosophers but will be trained as warriors when young. Thus one criterion for the type of study required will be that it "not be useless to soldiers" (521D, 525B). Number and calculation is then singled out as "the thing common to all crafts, thought, and forms of knowledge: (522C1-2) and as that which "every craft and form of knowledge must necessarily participate in" (522C7-8), including the art of war (550C10-11). Similarly, geometry can be used for organizing battle formations, etc. (526D). But the most important use of both arithmetic and geometry is to turn the soul away from the sensible world towards truth and Being (521C, 525B, 525C, 526E, 527B). This transition from a mere reckoner or calculator of troops or battle formations to a reckoner of Being (525B5-6) and contemplator of the Idea of the Good (526E1) is made possible by the study of pure numbers in which every unit is equal to every other (526A) and by geometry as the knowledge of what "always is being" (527B7-8).

As we have seen, the objects of philosophical mathematics are described in similar terms in the Philebus. Does this mean that these objects are meant to serve as a bridge to the realm of Being and the Good in the Philebus as in the Republic? The Philebus indicates that this is so, though less explicitly than the Republic. The objects of divine knowledge, as well as those of divine pleasure, are clearly objects of a higher ontological status than those of the less pure types of pleasure and knowledge. The divine circle, sphere, etc. are at least closer than sensibles to true Being if not members of the realm of Being themselves. At any rate, the knowledge of divine mathematical objects, along with phronesis regarding Justice itself and nous, is considered to be more important than the lower forms of knowledge which are needed for the practical purposes of life, so that one may "find his way home" (628B-8). But such practical types are truly good only if one has divine knowledge (62B;D). The latter, called nous and phronesis in the final ranking, is put into a separate class from the lower varieties of cognition. This fact underscores the point that the divine knowledge of the dialectic is significantly different from the lower types because it has as its explicit aim the discovery of ultimate reality.

Put differently, this last aspect of the ranking is important as an instance of where an appeal to the universal, and not just the human, Good is being made. Although recognition of the crucial importance of limit in terms of obvious human goods such as health and excellence may be easy, the superiority of the dialectic to all other forms of cognition takes us beyond what we can value in strictly practical terms. The dialectic is superior in terms of both knowledge and value simply because its objects
are ontologically superior. At 58A-59C, a passage very reminiscent of the Republic, the objects of the dialectic are contrasted to those of technē in terms of stability, purity and truth. The former are, to use Gregory Vlastos’ phrase, "cognitively dependable", but are so, as I have argued elsewhere26 because they, unlike sensibles, are real without qualification. The phrase, "true Being", also has evaluative connotations that are grounded in the ontological sense of truth as what must be present for anything to be. Truth, as an aspect of the Good, enables everything to have whatever measure of existence or Being it does. To appreciate fully the truth, then, one must accord to everything its proper value as an expression of a true understanding of reality, both distributively and collectively. The dialectic, which was earlier identified with the Divine Method (at 17A4), makes this understanding possible by revealing the basic structure of the realm of true Being, which in turn explains the underlying order of the sensible world. In fact, the dialectic here, as in the Republic, ultimately leads to the Good. Let us now consider how this is so.

The Divine Method assumes that there is a one, a comprehensive unit or Form which ultimately unites the indefinite sensible phenomena under it via a definite number of parts or aspects. In the final pages of the Philebus, the Good, described earlier (at 20D) as the most perfect or complete of all entities, appears as the ultimate one or unit. The point was also made earlier (at 54Cα10) that part (moira) of the Good is "that for the sake of which anything is generated", i.e., Being. In other words, Becoming (what is generated) is for the sake of Being in the sense that the latter is the end or good towards which the former moves. The suggestion here is that Being or the World of the Forms is that part of the Good which serves as the final or teleological cause for the sensible world.27 Plato does not explain this further but instead concentrates on those aspects of the Good which are particularly relevant to the question of the good life: Truth, Proportion and Beauty. This description of the Good, then, is what we would expect given the Divine Method's recommendation to look for a one, then the many parts it has, identifying those aspects that are relevant to the subject in question, and classifying sensibles according to these aspects into general types. Individual sensible phenomena are recognized as being indefinite.

In terms of the good life, the types of pleasure and knowledge that are part of the mixture are those which admit of some measure or proportion and truth while those pleasures that are inherently indefinite are left out. Measure or limit, as well as purity and truth, are used to rank the various types of knowledge and pleasure. The highest types are called 'divine' because their objects belong, or are most akin, to the realm of true Being, which is part of the Good. So when pleasure and knowledge are compared in terms of the three aspects of the Good—Proportion, Beauty and Truth—we should not be surprised that knowledge, in particular the highest type, is once again shown to
be the more important element in the good life.

The fact that the highest type of knowledge is referred to as nous and phronesis is also significant. Nous is related to noesis, the intuitive vision or grasp of the Forms in the Divided Line of the Republic. Although, as has been already noted, Plato is moving away from the visual/tactile model of knowledge in the Philebus, the term nous still might refer to a type of knowledge which, once realized, is self-evident. But what is of particular interest is the fact that nous is coupled with phronesis, practical reasoning. The implication is that we must have both an intuitive awareness of the basic structure of reality and the ability to make use of this insight in our attempt to order human life. Thus we might say, according to the Philebus, that the philosophers would not be tempted to stay in a state of perpetual contemplation in order to enjoy the Good. For even physical pleasures, if experienced in the right way, bear the imprint of the divine.
NOTES

1. The lone voice of dissent on the issue of the dating of the Philebus is that of Robin Waterfield who claims that it is a middle dialogue. He does so on doctrinal considerations, i.e. that since the Philebus makes an ontological distinction between Being and Becoming, retains paradigmatic Forms, etc. it must be a middle dialogue. But this conclusion only follows if one already assumes that Plato went through a 'critical period' when he wrote the Parmenides and afterwards abandoned these elements of his earlier metaphysics. (See his "The Place of the Philebus in Plato’s Dialogues," Phronesis Vol. XXV, no. 3, 1980, pp. 270-305.) Given the fact that Waterfield fails to justify this assumption, he offers no reasons to reject the traditional late dating of the Philebus based upon the stylometric evidence provided by the diverse methods of Campbell, Lutoslawski, Ritter, and Brandwood. The Philebus was certainly written after the Parmenides and Plato's first trip to Syracuse (367 B.C.) and perhaps after the second visit in 361 B.C.

2. Of course, there is a similar tension in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics between the life of practical virtue and that of contemplation. What I shall demonstrate above is that in the Philebus, Plato reduces this tension considerably with his idea of the mixed life where types of pleasure and knowledge are ordered in such a way as to reflect, as much as possible, the structure of the Forms. Here he makes it clearer that although we live in the sensible world, we are called to live within it in a way that helps embody its ultimate source: the universal Good.

3. All I am suggesting here is that this reading of the passage is plausible, not that it is true. In fact, I think that the evidence weighs heavily against this reading. I heartily agree with, e.g., David Hitchcock when he claims that the Good in the Republic is a Form (see 476A4-5, 505a2, 507B5-7, 508E2-3, 517B8-C1, 534B9-C1), 'has' being (509D1), and can be known (see 508E4, 517B8-C1, 534B3-C5). In light of this, it is important to note the way in which the Good is said to be beyond Being, i.e. in dignity and power. Similarly, the Good was said at 508E5-6 and 509a4-5 to be more beautiful and more greatly to be honored than being and truth. (See David Hitchcock, "The Good in Plato's Republic", Apeiron, vol. 19, Fall 1985, p. 90, n. 56.) It seems to me that the point here is that the Good is more valuable and powerful than anything else because it is the ultimate first principle of reality, not because it is completely transcendent.

4. Julia Annas raises the point about Plato wanting to remove conflicts of interests. [See An Introduction to Plato’s Republic, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 104-5.] She does so in the context of criticizing him from a contemporary liberal democratic standpoint which assumes the primacy of such values as the enhancement of individual autonomy. Whatever the merits of her
critique, I think that it is important to remember that Plato's primary aim is the embodiment of unity. Although, of course, the ancient Greeks were not generally concerned with individual autonomy, Plato is quite aware that his emphasis on unity may interfere with the happiness of the individual or at least with a particular class of society.

5. Annas cites this example, ibid., pp. 93-94.

6. This lack of appreciation of the intrinsic value of difference distinguishes Plato's ideal from other communitarians, including contemporary proponents such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. See, e.g., the former's After Virtue (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2nd ed., 1984), and the latter's A Community of Character Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981). MacIntyre's communitarianism is in the Aristotelian tradition while Hauerwas' is based on his conception of the Christian church as a community called to the telling and the enactment of the gospel story.

7. No doubt there are other interpretations of Hinduism. I don't wish to push the parallel between Plato and Hinduism too far. But given the Eastern influence found in Plato's mythology of the soul, reincarnation, and punishment in the afterlife found, for example, in the myth of Er in the Republic, there is some ground for comparison.

8. This is G.M.A. Grube's translation, Plato's Republic (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1974). All other translations are mine from J. Burnet, Platonis Opera, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1900-1905.)

9. See Hitchcock, ibid., p. 79. As evidence, he quotes 611B10-612a5 about the true nature of the soul which would be revealed only if it escaped bodily taint and gave itself entirely to the longing for the divine. For only then "one would see...whether it is many-formed or single-formed, or in what way it is and how". Hitchcock interprets this passage as a hint that the soul is in fact "single and uniform, monoeides (612a4). It is pure reason." Of course, it does not necessarily follow from the fact that the soul is said to be akin to the divine and the immortal that it is single-formed. But the entire passage certainly is ascetic in tone and this in itself is evidence of the contemplative model of the good life.

10. Ibid., p. 82.

11. Throughout the Philebus, there are references to the divine, including passages where he implies that the divine life which is free from pleasure and pain is the best one of all (22C5-D5; 32E-33C; 55A; 65B). Thus the divine life is held up as an ideal that
we are to approximate. It is unclear, however, whether this means that we should minimize or avoid all pleasures, or all those mixed with pain, or just those which are indeterminately mixed. I shall discuss these difficulties above, but some ambiguity still remains.

12. See Book I of the Nicomachean Ethics, especially Aristotle's critique of the universal Platonic Good in Chapter 5.

13. The key passage is 15B1-8 where these serious puzzles (aporiai) are stated. The passage is rather ambiguously worded and thus much controversy surrounds how to interpret the puzzles and even how many (two or three?) of them there are. For a brief overview of the controversy, see R. M. Dancy, "The One, The Many, and the Forms: Philebus 15B1-8," Ancient Philosophy, vol. 4, 1984. Fortunately, for the purposes of this paper, this issue need not be explored.

I also think that the units (which Plato calls "monads") are Forms which are ontologically prior to their sensible instances but to argue for this would go beyond the scope of this paper.

14. Waterfield notes that the Greek classification was based on how much breath it took to sound a particular letter; vowels took the most, mutes (our 'stops') took the least, with the semi-vowels (our nasals, sibilants and continuants) in-between. See Waterfield, Plato Philebus, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England and New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1982,) p. 63, n. 2. Perhaps Plato sees the letters, as well as musical notes, forming a continuum. When making the same division of letters in the Cratylus, Plato does draw a parallel between this division and the one of musical sound into rhythms (see 423E-425A; cited by Waterfield, ibid.). For our present purposes, the details of this account need not be determined.


17. I agree with Bury and Hackforth in emphasizing the close tie between truth and reality or Being. See R.G. Bury, The Philebus

18. The personification of the Good occurs elsewhere in the Philebus, notably in the discussion of the Cause at 26E-31A where it is depicted as the creator of all (30E1-2), including the mixed kind (26E-27C). As I have argued elsewhere, there is no need to take the talk of the Cause's generation and production literally. (See Cynthia Hampton, "Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Unresolved", Ancient Philosophy, vol. VIII, no. 1, Spring 1988, p.110-111; 115, n.16.) Here I would like to add that one reason Plato might have in using such language and for personifying the Good as a creator is to give us a representation of the Good which makes it clearer to us how we can model our own activities in imitation of the Forms. For if we think of the Good itself as the producer and governor of the cosmic order according to nous, phronesis, and sophia, then we can better grasp the fact that the exercise of our own versions of these intellectual faculties is crucial in bringing about and maintaining order in the human sphere. (A similar reason might also help to explain the use of the demiurge in Republic Book X and in the Timaeus.) The significance of coupling nous with phronesis in describing the mental powers we are to employ I shall discuss above.

19. Unfortunately, Plato is not terribly forthcoming with clear examples of abnormal and inordinate pleasures. One example he gives is the pleasure an invalid experiences when scratching an itch caused by a disease (44B-46B). He also alludes to a sexual experience at 46D-47A but does not indicate whether the pleasures here are abnormal, inordinate, or both. The example of the passive homosexual (the kinaidōs) whose passivity may include 'being kept' or even being a prostitute, and whose life is compared to one of perpetual scratching, I have borrowed from Gorgias 494E. The life of such a one is clearly thought by Plato to be disgraceful, and perhaps abnormal. As examples of pleasures that arise from psychic abnormalities and/or excesses he refers to those involving anger, fear, yearning, mourning, love, jealousy, envy, etc. (46B-48B). The only emotions he actually analyzes here are those aroused by comedy: the mixture of the pain of malice with the pleasure of laughing at the misfortunes of others (48B-50E). But discussion of this complicated case would take us too far afield from our present purpose.

20. Somewhat confusingly, Plato refers to both the pleasures that are mixed with pain, and those which are limited by intelligence, as being mixed, measured, or limited. But I take the mixture with pain to be the broader category, including both
the inherently indefinite pleasures and those limited by intelligence. For the pleasures limited by intelligence still include pain, e.g. the pleasures of health involve the restoration of bodily imbalances.

21. For more on these two types of false pleasure, see Cynthia Hampton, "Pleasure, Truth and Being in Plato's Philebus: A Reply to Professor Frede", Phronesis Vol. XXXII, no. 2, 1987, pp. 253-262.

22. There remains the problem of where the pleasures which are limited by intelligence (i.e. the necessary pleasures attending health, strength etc.) are supposed to fit in the final ranking. Taylor and Hackforth speculate that the reference to a sixth class at 66C-D is meant to encompass the necessary pleasures while Gosling explains the omission by pointing out that the prize-giving is not between all elements of the good life but only those which contribute to its goodness. See Taylor, op. cit., p. 91; Hackforth, op.cit., p. 139; p.140, n. 3; and Gosling, op.cit., p. 224. Perhaps Taylor and Hackforth are right but it is still puzzling why there is no explicit reference to what comprises the sixth class. I find Gosling's suggestion unsatisfactory because the necessary pleasures include those which promote fitness, health and virtue (62E-63A, 63E), and these elements, (especially virtue), surely contribute to the goodness of the mixed life.

23. As Hackforth notes (op.cit., p. 124, n.1), Plato does not always restrict the meaning of the terms nous, phronesis and episteme. But the context strongly suggests that the first two terms refer to a specially elevated form of knowledge. The reference to 'contemplation' simply means knowledge of the Forms which includes intuiting them (i.e. nous), but also involves knowing how to embody them in our lives (i.e. phronesis). We shall discuss this more above.

Concerning the use of the term 'episteme', it is used in the Philebus in a general sense as something roughly equivalent to 'cognition', the term I use above. In this general sense, it is sometimes used in conjunction with techne. Roger Shiner in his monograph, Knowledge and Reality in Plato's Philebus, (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum & Comp. B.V., 1974), p.55, points to the interchangability of the terms episteme and techne as evidence of the radical shift in the Philebus from the epistemology in the Republic. But as Richard Mohr has pointed out [in "Philebus 55C-62A and Revisionism", New Essays on Plato, ed. Francis Jeffry Pelletier and John King-Farlow, (Guelph: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, The University of Calgary Press, 1983), p. 166] Plato does not consistently use technical language even in the Republic. Note Republic 533B1-6 where the dialectic is called a techne. In response to Mohr, Shiner claims (in "Knowledge in Philebus 55C-62A; A Response", New Essays on Plato,
p.172) that the language in the Republic suggests that the dialectic is the only way to knowledge whereas the Philebus does not. But as I argue above, it is true that in both dialogues, the dialectic is the highest form of cognition and hence knowledge in the full or true sense, and the lower forms, including techne, presuppose it. For more on Shiner's position and my responses to it, see n. 24 below.

24. Commentators who argue that such a radical shift between the epistemologies of the Republic and the Philebus has taken place include Roger Shiner and Henry Teloh. Besides the points mentioned in n.10 above, Shiner also cites as evidence: 1) the absence of the contrast in the Philebus between the visible and the intelligible, 2) the absence of a 'definitional association' of the dialectic with being able to 'give an account' in the Philebus as compared to the Republic (e.g. 531D9-E5), and 3) the fact that in the Philebus, the dialectic and techne are distinguished only in terms of purity, accuracy and clarity, i.e. in terms of degree rather than in kind. (See Shiner, op.cit., pp. 56-57;61-66.) Henry Teloh makes a similar point when he says that in the Philebus, the Divine or the Collection and Division Method can be applied by everyone, cobblers as well as philosophers. But in the Republic only the philosophers can know the Forms and it is this knowledge, combined with erotic desire for the truth, that distinguishes them from the warriors and artisans. So the dialectic is the only form of knowledge, not just the highest. See Teloh, op.cit., p.181.

My response is as follows: 1) If, as we have said (see n. 10), the use of terminology is inconclusive then so is the absence of any particular phrase. Instead of isolating certain words from the context, the similarities and differences between the Republic and Philebus must be judged according to the overall point and tone of their respective discussions on the subject of knowledge and methodology. As I argue above, on these grounds it seems that the Philebus can be seen as an extension of the discussion of the Republic at least in terms of the good life. 2) Shiner seems to forget that the dialectic is associated with the Divine Method which is based on the assumption that there is a 'one'. As I argue above, the ultimate 'one' turns out to be the Good. This idea is not far from the description of the dialectic in the Republic which involves the descent from the unhypothetical first principle of the Good (533C). 3) As I argue above, the distinction between techne and the dialectic is grounded on the ontological status of their respective objects so to speak of differences in degree only is misleading since the objects of higher ontological status actually belong to a different category of reality than those of a lower status. This point comes out clearly in the final ranking where the dialectic is singled out and placed in a separate and higher class than the other forms of cognition.
It is also worth remembering that in the Republic, the dialectic, as the study of the Good, is the only road to knowledge (533C) but this does not mean that it will be the only form of knowledge once that road is taken up to the Good and then back down the Divided Line. Once grounded in the Good as the unhypothesized first principle, mathematics could become genuine knowledge.

25. Of course, the ontological status of the mathematical realities is not left obscure in the Philebus alone; there is considerable controversy surrounding those entities that correspond to dianoia on the Divided Line as well. Are these Forms or the 'intermediate mathematical objects' Aristotle says were a part of Plato's ontology (e.g. at Metaphysics 987B15)? It goes beyond the scope of this paper to engage in this discussion. My only point here is that whatever the exact ontological status of the mathematical entities, it is clear in the Republic that the study of them is to lead the aspiring philosophers to contemplation of Justice itself, etc. and there is reason to believe that a similar point is being made in the Philebus as I suggest above.


27. The "for the sake of" relation is illustrated at 53D and 54C-D with the following: brave lovers for the sake of beloved boys, shipbuilding for ships, and drugs for health. It is fairly clear that the beloved boys, ships, and health function as the raison d'être for the activities of acting bravely, shipbuilding, and taking (or prescribing) drugs respectively. Cf. Nicomachean Ethics 1152B12-15 where Aristotle says that Plato believed the end to be superior to the process of reaching it. Plato's immediate point in this passage of the Philebus is to argue that pleasure cannot be the good since it is always becoming, but he does so by appealing to the general inferiority of Becoming to Being. I think that ultimately the ontological implications of this passage should be seen in terms of the causality of the Good. The Good is the direct cause of the order of the World of the Forms which in turn serves as the teleological cause of the sensible world. But to prove this point would take us beyond our present discussion.