USE OF THESES

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PLATO'S THEORY OF PLEASURE

Essays on Plato's Protagoras, Gorgias, Phaedo, Republic, and Philebus

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Australian National University

April, 1967
In a thesis of this kind, one's debts to others cannot but be very great. I have tried to acknowledge mine, though I would not claim to have been completely successful in doing so. These apart, the thesis is my own work.

[Signature]
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Abstract

The essays presented in this thesis are all concerned in some way with Plato's views on pleasure. However I have not hesitated to discuss both topics and particular arguments which, strictly speaking, are ancillary to this central theme.

The order followed is this. In Chapter I, I discuss first of all the influence of contemporary medical theory on fifth- and fourth-century Greek ethics. I then mention the views of Prodicus on the semantics of pleasure, and argue that his distinctions were not necessarily mere quibbles: Greek ethical writers needed, and lacked, an enjoyment-exhilaration distinction (of the sort drawn nowadays by authors like Ryle), and one might possibly have been founded on Prodicus's semantics. Next I discuss the family of akrasia idioms and their possible origin, together with the anti-hedonist bias of some of the pre-Platonists. I argue that the status of 'pleasure' in the 'overcome by pleasure' idiom is doubtful: that it is not clear whether 'pleasure' is supposed to function as an intentional or a non-intentional motive word - in other words, whether pleasure is taken to be a goal, or an impulse, or neither of these things. Finally I discuss the Socratic paradoxes, arguing
that the paradox S2 ('No one errs willingly') does not represent a corollary of the paradox S1 ('Virtue is knowledge'), and indeed that the two paradoxes are inconsistent if 'knowledge' is taken in its everyday sense of 'craft-expertise': I suggest also that S1 may have been something of a commonplace in the intellectual circles of Socrates' day, while S2, with 'err' used in the sense of 'do evil' or 'do injustice' was distinctively Socratic. I have added three supplementary notes.

In Chapter II, I discuss the Protagoras. While not completely ruling out the possibility that the Protagoras is a hedonist dialogue, I suggest that it is more plausible to take the hedonism of the Protagoras as akin to that of the Laws, hedonism in both dialogues being regarded by Plato as a sort of moral deuteromelos - as a second-best way of exhorting people who lack dialectical ability. I suggest also that some of the contributions to the discussion of both main speakers indicate that Plato is probing the basis of ordinary (as opposed to philosophic) morality. Other points made in Chapter II are these. Plato is not putting fallacious arguments into the mouth of Socrates. The hedonist thesis propounded by Socrates is convertible ('All pleasant things are good and all good things are pleasant'). Socrates is probably not sponsoring the hedonist thesis (though I despair of ever being certain about this).
Socrates could have disproved the theory of *akrasia* without invoking hedonism. It may be that Protagoras has a vested interest in opposing the theory of *akrasia*, insofar at least as the practice of rhetoric encourages ordinary people to hold it, since it attacks the worth of *episteme* or knowledge, and he is a pedlar of knowledge. Notes are appended on the minor arguments for the identity of the virtues, and on some other points.

Chapter III deals with the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*. I give a brief exposition of the argument of the *Gorgias*, and discuss the dialectical proofs of the non-identity of pleasure and goodness. I suggest that the hedonist thesis is shown no mercy in the *Gorgias* because, 'while in the hands of honourable men like Protagoras, it can even be a power for good, in the hands of moral morons like Callicles, it cannot but be a power for evil'. I suggest also that the dialectical proofs apply to pleasure generally, and not just to profligate pleasure. The extreme anti-hedonism of the *Phaedo* is noted.

Chapter IV opens with a statement of the hygienic theory of pleasure, put together from the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Philebus*. I follow this statement with a brief criticism
of the theory. The theory (i) permits of no distinction between the mere perception of a restorative process and the enjoyment of it, and (ii) assuming a distinction between bodily and mental pleasure, permits no uniform account to be given of mental pleasure. This statement and criticism is followed by a brief discussion of the account of pleasure in the ninth book of the Republic. The Republic is to some extent an antidote to the Phaedo: the Phaedo sponsors a two-level view of morality (ordinary morality and philosophic morality) and repudiates pleasure along with lower-level morality; the Republic continues this sponsorship, but devises a true or superior type of pleasure to accompany higher-level morality.

Chapter V deals with the Philebus to 31. I consider in particular the statement of dialectical method in these pages. I suggest that the dialectical method of the Divine Gift (16c foll.) and the Kinds of Beings (23c foll.) represents an attempt to apply the procedures of harmonics to collection and division, and that Plato has in mind those cases in which kinds may be said to 'overlap' and (possibly) those cases in which difference in kind is constituted by difference of degree. Plato's immediate purpose in introducing this material is to provide a metaphysical basis for the theory of the mixed life.
In Chapter VI two aspects of the second half (31 foll.) of the Philebus are dealt with. I discuss first the treatment of mental concepts.* This discussion is intended to indicate the rationale of the theory that anticipatory pleasures and pains can be true or false: they can be said to be true or false because their content is expressible as a set of judgements; and I add some remarks designed to suggest in what respect wicked anticipatory pleasures are false. I discuss secondly the important of the type of 'falsity' which arises when the natural state or phusis of a creature is wrongly dubbed 'pleasure'.

Chapter VII is devoted to pleasure in the Laws, and to the Conclusion of the thesis as a whole.

* A published abridgement of pages 297-314 of Chapter VI has been inserted in the back cover.