Plato's "Side Suns": Beauty, Symmetry and Truth. Comments concerning semantic monism and pluralism of the "Good" in the Philebus (65A 1-5)

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PLATO'S "SIDE SUNS": BEAUTY, SYMMETRY AND TRUTH. COMMENTS CONCERNING SEMANTIC MONISM AND PLURALISM OF THE "GOOD" IN THE *PHILEBUS* (65 A 1-5) *

Abstract

Under semantic monism I understand the thesis "The Good is said in one way" and under semantic pluralism the antithesis "The Good is said in many ways". Plato's Socrates seems to defend a "semantic monism". As only one sun exists, so the "Good" has for Socrates and Plato only one reference. Nevertheless, Socrates defends in the *Philebus* a semantic pluralism, more exactly trialism, of "beauty, symmetry and truth" (*Phil.* 65 A 2). Therefore, metaphorically speaking, there seem to exist not only one sun, but three suns. If the platonic Socrates defends a semantic monism on the one hand and pluralism on the other, how can we unite his pluralism with his monism? My thesis is that the *three* references are "qualities" (*poia*) (cfr. *ep. VII* 343 B 8-C 2) of the *one* single reference, or again, speaking metaphorically, "side suns" (*Nebensonnen*) of the single sun. In the following, I propose first

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an exegesis of Plato's last written word on the Good in *Phil.* 65 A 1-5 by dividing it into five sentences. Second, I ask a philosophical question on this monism and the corresponding hierarchy of values (*Phil.* 66 A 6-C 6).

Keywords

Sun and side suns, semantic monism and semantic pluralism, symmetry, beauty and truth, fact of oppression

«Three suns I saw stay on the heaven»
First line of Max Mueller's poem *The side suns*
(*Die Nebensonnen*)

In memoriam Margherita Isnardi Parente

Under semantic monism I understand the thesis "The Good is said in one way" and under semantic pluralism the antithesis "The Good is said in many ways". Plato's Socrates seems to defend a principle of "semantic monism" [1]. He defends this principle not only concerning common nouns such as "pious" (*Euthyphr.* 6 D 2-E 7), "bravery" (*Lach.* 192 B 5-D 12), "beauty" (*Hipp. ma.* 288 A 8-289 C) and "virtue" (*Men.* 72 C 6), but also concerning the reference to the noun "Good". The Good, for the sake of which we do everything (cfr. *Hipp. ma.* 297 B 3-8; *Gorg.* 468 B 1-3; 499 E 9-500 A 9; *symp.* 205 E 7-206 A 1; *Phil.* 20 D 7-8), is *one* single good. In the *Republic* it is the Form of the Good (cfr. *resp.* 505 A 2; 508 E 2-3; 519 C 2). The *Philebus* starts not with the search for the Form of the Good, but for a certain state of the soul which can render the life of all human beings happy (cfr. *Phil.* 11

[1] I owe the expression "semantic monism" to J.H. LESHER, *Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», XXV (1987) p. 278: «In several early dialogues, he [Socrates] defends a principle of 'semantic monism': that whenever we employ a word there is a single quality designated by that term which, once properly identified, can serve as a distinguishing mark for all the things designated by that term [...] So multiplication of senses of 'know' would be thoroughly unsocratic».

D 4-6). But it asks nevertheless the Socratic question "what in fact is the Good" (ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶν ἀγαθόν) (13 E 5-6) and holds on to a "single form" (μία ἰδέα) of the Good (65 A 1). Just as in the *Republic* only *one* sun exists[2], so the "Good" has for the platonic Socrates only *one* reference. Nevertheless the platonic Socrates defends in the *Philebus* a semantic pluralism, more exactly trialism, of "beauty, symmetry and truth" (*Phil.* 65 A 2). Therefore, metaphorically speaking, there seem to exist not only *one* sun but – so to say – *three* suns. If the platonic Socrates defends a semantic monism on the one hand and pluralism on the other, how can we unite his pluralism with his monism?

My thesis is that the *three* references are "qualities" (ποῖα) (cfr. *ep. VII* 343 B 8-C 2) of the *one* single reference, or again, speaking metaphorically, "side suns" (*Nebensonnen*) or *parhelia*, of the single sun[3]. My aim is to cheer up those who may miss, after the fatiguing "second best sailing" (*Phil.* 19 C 2-3) in the *chiaro-oscuro* of the *Philebus vel de summo Bono*, the reward of a look on the *one* sun with the solace of a glance on

[2] Cfr. *resp.* 508 A 7, 11, D 1; 509 A 2, B 2, 9; 509 C 6; 515 E 8; 516 B 1-2, 4; 516 E 6; 517 E 4; 532 A 5; 532 B 8-9; 532 C 3 and *ad loc*. R. FERBER, *Platos Idee des Guten*, St. Augustin1989[2], pp. 49-79; ID., *L'idea del bene è o non è trascendente. Ancora su ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*, in M. BONAZZI-F. TRABATTONI (a cura di), *Platone e la tradizione platonica. Studi di filosofia antica*, Milano 2003, pp. 127-49; enlarged German version: *Ist die Idee des Guten nicht transzendent oder ist sie es doch? Nochmals Platons ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*, in D. BARBARIČ (Hrsg.), *Platon über das Gute und die Gerechtigkeit, Plato on Goodness and Justice, Platone sul Bene e sulla Giustizia,* Würzburg 2005, pp. 149-74; T. PENNER, *The Death of the so-called 'Socratic Elenchus'*, in M. ERLER-L. BRISSON (eds.), *Gorgias – Menon.* Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum, St. Augustin 2007, pp. 3-19, esp. p. 5.

[3] "Side suns", also called sundogs or *parhelia*, are bright, colourful light patches, which appear in ice clouds 22 degrees or more to either side of the sun. We don't know if this beautiful natural phenomenon was known to Plato. I use it here as an image of my own to capture Plato's thoughts on the Good in the *Philebus*. Although the sun is not mentioned explicitly in the *Philebus* – except in 28 E 4 – the image of the risky direct look on the sun (cfr. *Phaed.* 99 D-E; *resp.* 516 C 8; 515 E 2; 516 A 1-2) is still vivid in the *Laws*: «Still, in answering this question we mustn't assume that mortal eyes will ever be able to look upon reason and get to know it adequately: let's not produce darkness at noon, so to speak, by looking at the sun direct» (*leg.* 897 D 8-E 1, transl. T.J. SANDERS (ed.), *Plato. The Laws*, Harmondworth 1975).

three side suns. In the following, I propose first an exegesis of *Phil.* 65 A 1-5. Second, I ask a critical philosophical question on this monism and the corresponding hierarchy of values (66 A 6-C 6).

I

[S1] Οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ μιᾷ δυνάμεθα ἰδέᾳ τὸ ἀγαθὸν θηρεῦσαι,
[S2] σὺν τρισὶ λαβόντες,
[S3] κάλλει καὶ συμμετρίᾳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ,
[S4] λέγωμεν ὡς τοῦτο οἷον ἓν ὀρθότατ' ἂν αἰτιασαίμεθ' ἂν τῶν ἐν τῇ συμμείξει,
[S5] καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὡς ἀγαθὸν ὂν τοιαύτην αὐτὴν γεγενέναι

«[S1] So if we cannot hunt down the Good in a single form,
[S2] let us secure it by the conjunction of three,
[S3] beauty, symmetry and truth, and say:
[S4] [If we take] this [trinity] as if it would be a unity (τοῦτο οἷον ἓν), we may by right postulate [this unity] as the cause of that which is in the mixture,
[S5] and that through this unity as that which *is* good, also the mixture becomes so»[4] (*Phil.* 65 A 1-5).

[S1] and [S2] form a conditional sentence. [S1] is the antecedent and [S2] the consequent. The decisive question concerning [S1] seems to me to be the following: How can we understand the "cannot" (μὴ [...] δυνάμεθα)? Is it (a) a logical impossibility, (b) a general human impossibility or (c) an impossibility of the interlocutors Socrates and Protarchus?

Is it (a) a logical impossibility to hunt down the Good in a single form? Evidently it is not. It is, for example, not a logical contradiction to say that the essence of the Good is "the One itself" (cfr. Aristot. *metaph.* N 4. 1091 b 13-5)[5].

[4] Translations were done by me (modelled sometimes on Schleiermacher's translations) if not otherwise indicated.

[5] Cfr. W.D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotle's 'Metaphysics'*, Revised text with introduc-

Neither is it (b) a general human impossibility, for instance, in the sense of a pyrrhonic ἀκαταληψία (cfr. Diog. Laert. IX 61, 22). The Good is not by its own nature incomprehensible (φύσει τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀπερίληπτον) and our mind is not completely closed concerning the essence of the Good[6]. Also, in the *Philebus* the platonic Socrates defends neither a dogmatic nor a pyrrhonic scepticism [concerning the knowledge of the Good][7].

The impossibility arises because (c) the power of the Good (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δύναμις) has taken refuge from "us" (ἡμῖν) (*Phil.* 64 E 5)[8] "in the nature of the beautiful" (64 E 6). The impossibility is therefore an impossibility of the interlocutors. Until now it was "for us" (ἡμῖν), that is, Socrates and Protarchus, not possible to hunt down the single Good in *one* single form. For the *nous* of a "great man" (*Charm.* 169 A 2) – that is, a platonic dialectician or a philosopher king – it could be possible to come "for a short time" (κατὰ βραχύ) (*leg.* 875 D 3) at least "very close" (ἐγγύτατα) to an understanding of this single form (cfr. *ep. VII* 342 D 1)[9].

tion and commentary, II, Oxford 1924, p. 488: «*Hoi men* means primarily Plato (A. 988 a 14)». But cfr. Y. LAFRANCE, *Deux lectures de l'idée du bien chez Platon: 'République' 502c-509c*, «Laval théologique et philosophique», LXII (2006) pp. 260-3.

[6] Cfr. L.G. WESTERINK (ed.), *Damascius. Lectures on the 'Philebus', Wrongly attributed to Olympiodorus*, Text, Translation, Notes and Indices, Amsterdam 1959, p. 259: «Why has the dialogue no end? Because the rest can easily be gathered from what has been said. Or because the Good is, by its own nature, incomprehensible (ἀπερίληπτον). Or because the extreme grades of the Good, whatever is beyond animals or below them, have really been left out of account, as we already pointed out in discussing the theme of the dialogue».

[7] Cfr. for a detailed argument R. FERBER, *Platos Idee des Guten*, cit., pp. 49-56, 154-9; ID., *Was und wie hat Sokrates gewusst?*, «Elenchos», XXVIII (2007) pp. 5-39.

[8] TH.A. SZLEZÁK, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie*, Teil II: *Das Bild des Dialektikers in Platons späten Dialogen*, Berlin-New York 2004, p. 216, has made this point against H.G. GADAMER, *Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles*, Heidelberg 1978, p. 150. The "us" (*Phil.* 64 E 5) is also overlooked by G. SEEL, *Is Plato's Conception of the Form of the Good Contradictory?*, in D. CAIRNS-F.-G. HERMANN-T. PENNER (eds.), *Pursuing the Good. Ethics and Metaphysics in Plato's 'Republic'*, Edinburgh 2007, p. 192.

[9] Cfr. *pace* TH.A. SZLEZÁK, *Das Höhlengleichnis (Buch VII 514a521b und 539d541b)*, in O. HÖFFE (Hrsg.), *Platon. Politeia*, Berlin 1997, p. 219; ID., *Die*

The three characteristics of the Good on which Socrates and Protarchus agreed – (a) the "most perfect" (τελεώτατον, *Phil.* 20 D 3), (b) the "sufficient" (ἱκανόν, 20 D 4) and (c) the "desirable to all" (πᾶσιν αἱρετόν, 61 A 1; cfr. 20 D 8-9; 67 A 7-8) – are only formal characteristics. They exclude pleasure and knowledge as candidates for the top place. But these formal characteristics are not sufficient to indicate the positive content of what is "desirable to all", nor do they give a ranking of pleasure and knowledge [10]. Nevertheless, Socrates holds down to *one* single form of the Good when he tries to know «what in man and in the universe is good by nature and what one should divine (μαντευτέον) is its form (τίνα ἰδέαν αὐτὴν εἶναι)» (*Phil.* 64 A 2-4). In a similar vein, in the *Republic* "every soul" (VI 505 D 11) already divines the essence of the Good (ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, 505 E 2).

[S2] draws a conclusion from [S1]. If it is not possible to hunt down the Good in *one* form, then let us secure it by the conjunction of *three*. Although [S2] does not actually speak of *three* forms, it can be obviously understood as implying that the *three* are forms. In fact, it has been interpreted that the conjunction of *three forms* could secure

Idee des Guten in Platonis 'Politeia'. Beobachtungen zu den mittleren Büchern, in M. MIGLIORI, *Lecturae Platonis*, St. Augustin 2003, p. 142; R. FERBER, *Warum hat Platon die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben?* (St. Augustin 1991), München 2007[2], pp. 94-121.

[10] Cfr. D. DAVIDSON, *Plato's 'Philebus'*, New York-London 1990, p. 398: «The original three 'conditions' or criteria of the good showed no more than that the good life must contain both mind and pleasure; they made no pretence at proving one of the two elements superior to the other». Davidson criticises the following remark of R. DEMOS, *The Philosophy of Plato*, New York 1939, p. 50: «In the *Philebus* Plato gives two sets of grounds of the Good, each set consisting of three members. The Good, he says, is that which is desired, the self-sufficient, and the complete. The second triad is of the Good as beauty, measure, truth (20d, 60c, 61a). We will treat the first triad as basic, adding measure from the second triad. The other two members of the second triad are, as we hope to show, repetitions or variations of the other four». Davidson writes in the margin of his copy: «Are there really the same sort of grounds? One set are criteria of good, other set are [unreadable]». (Private library Ferber, quoted with the written permission of Marcia Cavell.) I would say: One set are formal criteria; the other set is substantive.

the *one form* [11]. In other words: If it is not possible to define the Good explicitly through one (higher) form or *summum genus* (μέγιστον γένος) [12], then we may add that it is possible implicitly through a conjunction of three forms or, speaking with an expression from the *Sophist*, with an "interweaving of the forms" (συμπλοκὴ τῶν εἰδῶν) (*soph.* 259 E 5-6) or, more exactly, with an "interweaving of three forms" (συμπλοκὴ τριῶν εἰδῶν).

Nevertheless, Apelt has already argued that we don't have to understand here the expression "idea" or "form" in the technical sense, but that it can be understood also in the colloquial sense of characteristic (cfr. *Phil.* 67 A 12; *Theaet.* 184 D 3; *Tim.* 35 A 7) [13], or, so to speak, of quality. But because in *Phil.* 64 A 2 "idea" or "form" is used in its technical sense, we may also in 65 A 1 not exclude completely the technical sense (cfr. 15 A 4-B 2). But on the other hand, here and now we stand finally only at the entrance of the Good (ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ νῦν ἤδη προθύροις) (64 C 1) and the domicile of "its quality" (τοῦ τοιούτου) (64 C 2) or what the Good is like. Therefore the colloquial sense of characteristic also cannot be excluded.

[11] So argues G. SEEL, *Is Plato's Conception of the Form of the Good Contradictory?*, cit., p. 192: «The Form of the Good cannot be conceived of as one single Form, but as a combination of several forms. Therefore the Form of The Good cannot be empty».

[12] Cfr. H. KRÄMER, *Platone e i fondamenti della metafisica. Saggio sulla teoria dei principi e sulle dottrine non scritte di Platone con una raccolta dei documenti fondamentali in edizione bilingue e bibliografia*, Introduzione e traduzione di G. REALE, Milano 1989[3], p. 251; R. FERBER, *Platos Idee des Guten*, cit., pp. 97-111, 149-54.

[13] O. APELT, *Platon 'Philebos'*, übersetzt und erläutert, Leipzig 1922, p. 152 note 109: «Es ist hier ebensowenig unmittelbar die Idee darunter zu verstehen, wie bald darauf (67[a] bei τῇ τοῦ νικῶντος ἰδέᾳ». Apelt translates *ibid.* ἰδέα with "Gedankenform": «Können wir also das Gute nicht in einer Gedankenform ergründen, so müssen wir es in dreien zusammen erfassen». Cfr. A.E. TAYLOR, *Plato: The Man and His Work*, New York 1936[2], p. 433: «We may thus take measure or proportion (*symmetria*), beauty (*kallos*), and truth or reality (*aletheia*) as three 'forms' or 'notes' found in the good and say that the goodness of our 'mixture' is due to the presence of this trinity in unity (65c)». Cfr. A. DIÈS, *Philèbe*, texte établi et traduit, Paris 1949, p. 89: «Si donc nous ne pouvons saisir le bien, sous un seul *caractère*, saisissons-le sous trois, beauté, proportion, vérité...» (my emphasis).

But how can we combine the technical and the colloquial sense of "idea"? We may join them together if we say, in the sense of the *Seventh Letter*, that we try to capture the "fifth" (πέμπτον, 342 E 2), that is, the one idea or the essence (τί ἐστι) [of the Good, cfr. 342 A 4], with three characteristics, "qualities" (ποῖα, 343 B 8-C 2) [of the Good] or aspects [of the Good] which intend "no less" (οὐχ ἧττον, 342 E 3) than to cover the "fifth" (πέμπτον) (342 E 2), that is, the essence (τί ἐστι) [of the Good] [14]. As the light of the *one* sun is broken in *three* side suns, so the *one* Good appears to "us" (*Phil.* 64 E 5) quasi in *three* qualities or aspects, namely, an "aesthetic" one, beauty; a relational one, symmetry; and an ontological or, more exactly, ontic one, truth [15]. Socrates and Protarchus could, in distinction from the future dialecti-

[14] For the question of the authenticity or at least indirect authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* cfr. W. BURKERT, *Neanthes von Kyzikos über Platon,* «Museum Helveticum», LVII (2000); M. ISNARDI PARENTE (a cura di), *Platone. Lettere*, traduzione di M.G. Ciani, Milano 2002, pp. IX-XI; R. KNAB, *Siebter Brief.* Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, «Spudasmata», CX (2006) pp. 45-50; R. FERBER, *Warum hat Platon die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben?*, cit., p. 95, and for an explicit argument on the subtle issue of *ep. VII* 342 E 3, *ibid.*, pp. 54-5, 149 note 130. F.J. GONZALEZ, *Dialectic and Dialogue. Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry*, Evanston 1998, p. 255, comes very near to the point: «It is true that 'Plato' here claims only that the four elements express a thing's quality *no less than* its being but, as some commentators have noted and as a later passage will confirm, this is an understatement. The weakness inherent in language is that it expresses *more* how a thing is qualified than what it is». D.T. RUNIA, *Didactic Enumeration in the 'Philebus' and other Platonic Writings*, in J. DILLON-L. BRISSON (eds.), *Plato's 'Philebus'*, cit., p. 109, makes again evident that the «*Letter*, if it is indeed by Plato's own hand, would have been written in the last phase of his life when he looks back at its most turbulent episode. It would be roughly contemporaneous with the other dialogues [cfr. the enumerations in *Phil.* 66 A-C, *Phaedr.* 266 D-E, *soph.* 231 D-E, *Tim.* 48 C, *leg.* 631 B-C with the enumeration in *ep. VII* 342 A-D] that we have studied in this paper». Cfr. J. BURNET, *Greek Philosophy*, I: *Thales to Plato*, London 1920, p. 206: «It would have been impossible to find anyone fifty years later who could handle the language as he does».

[15] Cfr. P. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Plato*, 3: *The Dialogues. Second and Third Periods*, Tr. from the German by H. Meyerhoff, London 1969, p. 542 note 73: «It seems that the number *three* is more important than the exact designation of the three *ideai*. Also this inconsistency might have been intended expressive as a warning that this trinity must not be frozen into dogma».

cians or philosopher kings, hardly ever bear (*resp.* 518 C 10) a direct look at the *one* single sun.

[S3] articulates these three qualities of the Good, beauty, symmetry and truth. The "Good" has in Frege's terminology *one* reference, but *three* different senses or three different "modes of presentation". To use Frege's analogy by replacing "moon" with "sun":

«Somebody observes the [Sun] through a telescope. I compare the [Sun] itself to the reference; it is the object of the observation, mediated by the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope, and by the retinal image of the observer. The former I compare to the sense, the latter is like the idea or experience. The optical image in the telescope is indeed one-sided and dependent upon the standpoint of observation; but it is still objective, inasmuch as it can be used by several observers. At any rate it could be arranged for several to use it simultaneously. But each one would have his own retinal image. On account of the diverse shapes or the observers' eyes, even a geometrical congruence could hardly be achieved, and an actual coincidence would be out of the question. This analogy might be developed still further...» [16].

If it is not possible to define the form of the Good with an "interweaving of three forms" (συμπλοκὴ τριῶν εἰδῶν), so at least it is possible to define it implicitly with an "interweaving of three qualities" (συμπλοκὴ τριῶν ποιῶν) or three "modes of presentation". This "interweaving of three qualities" does not make a strict unity of the three ποῖα, just as the "interweaving of forms" (*soph.* 259 E 5-6) does not make a strict unity of these forms (cfr. 253 D 1-E 3). Nevertheless, the "interweaving" of three "modes of presentation" gives them a kind of weaker unity than the unity of *one* form or ἕναϛ (cfr. *Phil.* 15 A 5-6) to be specified in [S4]. Let us elucidate now these three "modes of presentation": (a) beauty, (b) symmetry and (c) truth.

[16] G. FREGE, *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*, «Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik», C (1892) pp. 25-50. Repr. in I. ANGELELLI (Hrsg.), *Gottlob Frege. Kleine Schriften*, Hildesheim 1967, pp. 143-62. Partial English translation in P. GEACH-M. BLACK, *Translations from the Philosophical Writing of Gottlob Frege*, Oxford 1960, p. 60. I quoted with small alterations.

(a) Beauty evidently contains the "nature of the symmetrical" (*Phil.* 64 E 4-5). Just as the "nature of the symmetrical" beauty exists for Plato not only in the eye of the observer, but also in the world, "moderation" (μετριότης) and "proportion" (συμμετρία, 64 E 6) "becomes for us everywhere beauty and virtue" (64 E 7). It is not easy to see how the meanings of μετριότης and συμμετρία differ. But while the meaning of μετριότης accentuates more the "moral" aspect of the Good, the meaning of συμμετρία accentuates more the "aesthetic" one. Both expressions point to a value. Also, in the *Republic,* the Good was of an "overwhelming beauty" (509 A 6-7).

(b) Symmetry: It is decisive that both values – the "aesthetic" and the "moral" one – contain "a certain inborn order" (κόσμος τις ἐγγενόμενος, *Gorg.* 506 E 2). Order is an effect of the Good. So Socrates asks: «Is it not a certain inborn order, which is built in to everything, which makes everyman and everything good?» (506 E 2-3). Order makes evident that symmetry is also a quality of the Good. It is therefore clear that order makes symmetry a quality of the Good.

(c) Truth is, since the *Republic*, related to ἐμμετρία (486 D 6-7), and of course also ἐμμετρία, fit measure, points to a value. Further, we read in the *Philebus*: «... but if in our soul by nature is a force, to love the truth and to do everything for it *(πάντα ἕνεκα τούτου πράττειν)*» (58 D 4-5). "Truth" is here, like the truth which the "true" philosophers (*resp.* 475 E 3) in the *Republic* "love to look at" (475 E 4), primarily used in the ontic sense of authenticity or in the sense of "the really real" (τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὄντως ὄν, *soph.* 240 B 3)[17]. Now every

[17] Cfr. R.G. Bury, *The 'Philebus' of Plato,* Ed. with introduction, notes and appendices, Cambridge 1897, Appendix F, pp. 201-11 quoting Trendelenburg, *ibid.*, p. 203; F.A. Trendelenburg, *De Platonis Philebi consilio*, Berlin 1837, p. 15 note 38: «... res enim, nisi ipsis veritas et ratio inesset, hominem plane deciperent. Coginitionis veritas nihil est nisi rerum veritatis simulacrum». The platonic correspondence theory of truth (cfr. *Crat.* 385 B 5-8; *soph.* 263 B 3-7) is founded in an intuitionist theory of truth, cfr. *symp.* 212 A 1-2. I have to see the counterpart before I am able to compare my statements with it, cfr. H. Krämer, *Ist die Noesis bei Platon fallibel?*, in E. Jain-St. Grätzel (Hrsgg.), *Sein und Werden im Lichte Platons*. Festschrift für K. Albert zum 80. Geburtstag, Freiburg-München 2001, p. 119.

creature that has any knowledge does everything for the sake of the Good (*Phil.* 20 D 7-10; cfr. *resp.* 505 D 11-E 1). If in our soul by nature there is also a force to do everything for the sake of the truth, that is, to go to all lengths for the sake of the truth [18], then truth is also a good in the sense of an ultimate end and has an intrinsic value. But the fugitive platonic Good is in the *Philebus*, as opposed to the *Republic*, no more the "*one* σκοπός" or the *one* (exclusive) "dominant end" [19], «for the sake of which they [the future philosopher kings and queens] have to do everything they do» (*resp.* 519 C 3-4). For a dominant end is *per definitionem* «at least lexically prior to all other aims and seeking to advance it always takes absolute precedence» [20]. For example, the philosopher kings and queens have to renounce private property and a family. It seems to be also an "inclusive end" [21] insofar as it includes at least beauty, symmetry and truth, which we can capture, and allows pleasure also its appropriate place (that is, the fifth in the final ranking) [22]. Like truth (cfr. *Phil.* 58 D 4-5), beauty and symmetry have an intrinsic value and belong in an Aristotelian terminology to that «which is intrinsically and for the sake of itself desirable (κατὰ αὑτὰ καὶ δι' αὐτὸ αἱρετ[ά])» (*eth. nic.* A 7. 1097 a 32). So the ultimate end in the *Philebus* as an inclusive end includes at least the intrinsic values of beauty, symmetry and truth. Of course beauty, symmetry and truth are not *simpliciter* the ultimate Good, for Aristotle Eudaimonia, for Plato the

[18] I understand πάντα ἕνεκα τούτου πράττειν (*Phil.* 58 D 5) here in distinction to *resp.* 505 D 11- C 1, cfr. R. FERBER, *Was und wie hat Sokrates gewusst?*, cit., p. 27 note 40, like T.H. IRWIN, *Plato's Moral Theory*, Oxford 1977, p. 336 note 45, in the sense of "go to all lengths". *Ibid.*, p. 336 note 4, quoted in M. BURNYEAT, *The Truth of Tripartition*, «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society», CVI (2006) p. 14 note 20.

[19] Expression from W.F.R. HARDIE, *The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics*, in J.M.E. MORAVCSIK (ed.), *Aristotle. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Garden City-New York 1967, p. 299.

[20] J. RAWLS, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge-Mass. 1971, § 83, p. 553.

[21] Expression from W.F.R. HARDIE, *The Final Good in Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., p. 299.

[22] Cfr. K. VOGT, *Why Pleasure Gains Fifth Rank: Against the Anti-Hedonist Interpretation of the 'Philebus'*, in J. DILLON-L. BRISSON (eds.), *Plato's 'Philebus'*, cit., pp. 250-5.

Form of the Good. But also for Plato the Good in the *Philebus* is said or "captured" not in only *one*, but in *many* ways insofar as we have not *one*, but *three ultimate* goods or, more exactly, three *ultimate* "qualities" (ποῖα) of the ultimate *Good*. And of course the platonic Socrates does not say in the words of John Keats in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn:* «Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know». Beauty is not truth, truth not beauty. Truth and beauty are not identical. But they are related to each other insofar as they are, like symmetry, "qualities" (ποῖα, *ep. VII* 343 B 8-C 2) or aspects of the Good and therefore of the orderly. These intrinsic values go with the pure pleasures, that is, pleasures not intermingled with pain, like the aesthetic pleasure to see beautiful colours and shapes (cfr. *Phil.* 51 B 3) and the pleasure of true knowledge (51 E 7-52 A 1). This pleasure is related to the "aesthetic" one in that knowledge of the truth may give pleasure, which is comparable to the "aesthetic" one.

[S4] unifies these aspects of the Good in a certain way and comes to the following conclusion: «[If we take] this [trinity] as if it would be a unity (τοῦτο οἷον ἓν), we may by right postulate [this unity] as the cause of that which is in the mixture». The trinity is characterized in a certain sense as unity (*velut unum*) [23] and postulated as the cause of that which is in the mixture. Socrates defends neither an equivocal seman-

[23] I read with the majority τοῦτο οἷον ἓν and not τοῦτο οἷον like K.M. SAYRE, *Plato's Late Ontology. A Riddle Resolved*, Princeton 1983, p. 171 note 81; cfr. *contra* Sayre, V. HARTE, *Quel prix pour la vérité*, in M. DIXSAUT (éd.), *La fêlure du plaisir. Études sur le 'Philèbe' de Platon*, I: *Commentaires*, Paris 1999, pp. 400-1. Cfr. Ficino: «Quod si bonum ipsum una idea consequi non licet, saltem una cum tribus, pulchritudine, commensuratione, veritate comprehendentes, dicamus id universum *velut unum* causarum eorum quae in mixtione sit, esse, et propter hoc utputa quod bonum sit, mixtionem fieri talem» (*Philebus vel de summo Bono. Ad morum doctrinam pertinens*, ed. Bipontina, p. 317. My emphasis). In the same way also D. FREDE, *Plato. Philebus*, Translated with introduction and notes, Indianapolis-Cambridge 1993: «Well, then, if we cannot capture the good in *one* form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth. Let us affirm that these should by right be treated *as a unity* and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one» (my emphasis).

tic pluralism or, to be more precise, trialism, nor a univocal semantic monism, but a postulated univocal monism and a factual pluralism or trialism. We can call it a *quasi*-monism, which is also the cause of that which is in the mixture. It is the cause of the right mixture of pleasure and knowledge. This mixture not only has to obey the formal criteria of the Good (cfr. *supra*, p. 56), but also has to contain the substantive criteria "beauty, symmetry and truth". Since order is a common trait in these three aspects, it must be an ordered mixture.

[S5] adds «*that* through this unity as that which *is* good, also the mixture becomes so». The τοῦτο οἷον ἓν is nevertheless the ἀγαθὸν ὂν or the *quasi*-unity is the real Good, if not by nature (φύσει), so at least "for us" (ἡμῖν). The fictitious or only semantic unity of the three qualities of the Good becomes "for us" nevertheless a reality. In Frege's terminology: The sense of the expression "unity" becomes for us its real reference [24]. If it becomes for us a real reference, then it also becomes a causal force. Indeed, the Good is also the cause of the quality of the mixture in the good life. This means that it satisfies not only the substantive criteria of beauty, symmetry and truth, but, as the platonic Socrates repeats, it also becomes "perfect" (τέλεον, *Phil.* 61 A 1), "sufficient" (ἱκανόν, 66 B 2) and "desirable for all" (πᾶσιν αἱρετόν, 61 A 1).

The platonic Socrates defends a postulated *quasi*-monism of the Good and a factual pluralism. If we do everything for the sake of *the* Good (cfr. *Gorg.* 468 B 6-8; *resp.* 505 D 11-E 1; *Phil.* 20 D 8-9), we desire the *one single* Good. But most of us can't reach it and even the embodied *nous* of the dialecticians or philosopher kings and queens can only come very close (ἐγγύτατα) to understanding it (*ep. VII* 342 D 1) [25]. In fact, if we do everything for *the* Good, we do everything for the "qualities" (ποῖα) of *the* one single good, which are approachable also "for us" (ἡμῖν). The *one ultimate* good appears to us broken into *three*

[24] G. FREGE, *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*, cit., p. 59: «The indirect reference of a word is accordingly its customary sense», cfr. R. FERBER, *Philosophische Grundbegriffe*, I, München (1994) 2008[8], p. 140. Italian translation: *Concetti fondamentali della filosofia*, I, Torino 2009, p. 119.

[25] Cfr. for an explicit argument R. FERBER, *Warum hat Platon die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben?*, cit., pp. 106-20.

ultimate goods. Or to say it in scholastic terminology: The *bonum simpliciter* appears to us broken in three *bona secundum quid* or three ultimate ends in a certain respect. To speak again metaphorically: The *one* sun shows us in *three* side suns. But this fictitious or *quasi*-monism we can nevertheless unite with a *factual* pluralism.

Only *after* this *quasi*-monism does the *locus nobilissimus de boni summi gradibus* follow [26], although – from a logical point of view – it cannot be easily deduced *from* the three criteria. Strictly speaking, it is the *locus nobilissimus* of the grades of goodness of men's "possession" (κτῆμα, *Phil.* 66 A 5) [27]: (a) «The measure (μέτρον) and the measured (μέτριον) and the right moment (καίριον) and whatever else the eternal nature has chosen to be similar (τὴν ἀίδιον ἠρῆσθαι φύσιν)» (66 A 6-8) [28]. (b) «The well-proportioned (σύμμετρον), the beautiful (τὸ καλόν), the perfect (τὸ τέλεον), the sufficient (ἱκανόν) and all that belong to this gender» (*ibid.*). (c) The third «as I divine reason and insight» (66 B 5-6). (d) The fourth the inexact «sciences and arts and the right opinions» (66 B 9). (e) The fifth «the pleasures, which we have determined as painless and have called pure pleasures of the soul alone, which follow the perceptions» (66 C 4-6).

I will not on this occasion take up once again the discussion concerning this *locus nobilissimus*. (The research history on this *locus nobilissimus* could alone fill the space of an article [29].) I will only summarize what seems clear and unclear in the *locus*. It seems clear that

[26] Stallbaum quoted in R.G. Bury, *The 'Philebus' of Plato*, cit., p. 169.

[27] This point has been made by D. Frede, *Philebos,* in *Platon Werke*, 3, 2, Göttingen 1997, p. 364.

[28] Conjecture R.G. Bury, *The 'Philebus' of Plato*, cit., p. 13.

[29] Cfr. the doxography, *ibid.*, pp. 169-78, *contra* Trendelenburg, for whom the 1st class contains "ipsius boni idea" and "the cognate ideas"; A. Diès, *Autour de Platon. Essais de critique e d'histoire*, II: *Les Dialogues – Esquisses Doctrinales*, Paris 1927, pp. 385-97; H.G. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, V, Tübingen 1985, pp. 152-3; R. Hackforth, *Plato's Examination of Pleasure*, Translated with an introduction and commentary, Cambridge 1945, pp. 137-9; J.C.B. Gosling, *Plato. Philebus*, Transl. with an introduction, Oxford 1975, pp. 224-5; M. Migliori, *Plato. Philebus*, Transl. with an introduction, Oxford 1993, pp. 315-23; D. Frede, *Philebos*, cit., pp. 362-9; V. Harte, *Quel prix pour la vérité*, cit.; S. Delcominette, *Le 'Philèbe' de Platon: introduction à l'agathologie platonicienne*, Leiden 2006, pp. 615-27. For a short overview on the *status quaestionis*, cfr. M. Erler, *Platon*, in

there is no one-to-one correspondence of this ranking to the fourfold division of «everything that actually exists now in the universe» (*Phil.* 23 C 4)[30], although the first grade seems to correspond to πέρας, the second grade to the mixture of πέρας and ἄπειρον, and the third grade to the cause (αἰτία) of this mixture[31]. But it is, first, at least *prima facie* not clear how this ranking is related to the ranking of external, bodily and psychic goods in the *Philebus* (cfr. 48 D 4-49 A 2; *leg.* 631 B 3-D 6; Aristot. *eth. nic.* 1098 b 12-8). It is, second, not clear what the ontological status is of the two first goods, especially because the first class (a) (above) seems not to point to platonic ideas, as the expression the "appropriate" (καίριον) indicates. It is, third, not clear why the formal criteria of the ranking, the "perfect" (τέλεον) and the "sufficient" (ἱκανόν), appear again in the ranking itself. It is, fourth, not clear why the substantive criterion of beauty *of* the ranking appears again *in* the ranking, but the criterion of truth does not. It is, fifth, finally not clear where the difference lies between the first and the second class, although the second class seems to refer to things that have measure in some ways and are therefore well proportioned. But *both* classes correspond to the "measured" (μέτριον) of the *Statesman*, which is circumscribed also as the «graceful (πρέπον), the opportunity (τὸν καίριον) and the right» (τὸ δέον) and «all that is in the middle of two extreme ends» (*pol.* 284 E 6-8). I have called it a non-mathematical μεταξύ between the transcendent idea of the Good and the phenomena[32]. But then the two top classes of the *Philebus* would not be on the top but, like πέρας and ἄπειρον, "derived principles"[33]. Socrates

Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie der Antike 2/2, Basel 2007, p. 258 and K. VOGT, *Why Pleasure Gains Fifth Rank*, cit., pp. 250-5, esp. 254.

[30] Transl. D. FREDE, *Plato. Philebus*, cit.

[31] Cfr. e.g. H.G. GADAMER, *Gesammelte Werke*, cit., p. 152.

[32] Cfr. R. FERBER, *Für eine propädeutische Lektüre des 'Politicus'*, in CH. ROWE (ed.), *Reading the 'Statesman'*. Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum, St. Augustin 1995, p. 68; ID., *Did Plato ever Reply to those Critics, who Reproached him for, the Emptiness of the Platonic Idea or Form of the Good*, in E.N. OSTENFELD (ed.), *Essays on Plato's 'Republic'*, Aarhus 1998, p. 55.

[33] Cfr. C.J. DE VOGEL, *Rethinking Plato and Platonism,* «Mnemosyne», XCII (1986) p. 16: «And not even the *peras* and the *apeiron* are to be taken as the

seems to hold the circumscription of the two first classes rather vaguely because the aim seemed to him to have been attained already by removing reason and pleasure from the top place (cfr. *resp.* 505 B 5-C 11).

If the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* has left out the περὶ αὐτὸ τἀκριβὲς ἀπόδειξις (*pol.* 284 D 2) [34], it is at least plausible to suppose that the platonic Socrates also left out the ἀπόδειξις of the *one* single form of the Good. The phrase of Protarchus, «There is still a little left to say (σμικρὸν ἔτι τὸ λοιπόν), Socrates» (*Phil.* 67 B 11), would then have to be understood, like the Socratic "Something small" (σμίκρ' ἄττα, 20 C 8), in the sense of "simple irony": «A lot is still left to say». As mentioned above, the passage περὶ αὐτὸ τἀκριβὲς ἀπόδειξις (*pol.* 284 D 1-2) and also the passage σμικρὸν ἔτι τὸ λοιπόν would then each be a "passage of omission" (*Aussparungsstelle*) [35]. The quasi-unity or trinity of "beauty, symmetry and truth" is only the entrance to the Good and the domicile of "its quality" (cfr. *Phil.* 64 C 1-2) or that which is like it. In other words, at the end of the dialogue we have not yet arrived at that which is dear to us in the top place (πρῶτον φίλον, *Lys.* 219 D 1) or the Good itself. We have only arrived at that which is dear to us, so to speak, in the second place (δεύτερον φίλον). We don't know what the Good is, but only where it can be found, namely, in beauty, symmetry and truth. At least Socrates is very clear about the fact that at the end of the *Philebus* we have not yet finished the search for the Good: «And divining (ὑποπτεύων) that there are many other things (ἄλλα πολλά) [than

ultimate principles in that dialogue. Here J. Krämer rightly remarks that in the *Philebus peras* and *apeiron* are derived principles».

[34] Cfr. R. Ferber, *Für eine propädeutische Lektüre des 'Politicus'*, cit., pp. 63-75, but *contra* L. Brisson-J.-F. Pradeau, *Platon. Le Politique*, Paris 2003, p. 241 note 209.

[35] Cfr. M. Migliori, *L'uomo fra piacere, intelligenza e Bene. Commentario storico-filosofico al 'Filebo' di Platone*, Milano 1993, p. 325; *contra* Th.A. Szlezák, *Das Bild des Dialektikers in Platons späten Dialogen,* cit., p. 209 note 35: «Dass eine sachlich an sich gebotene Thematisierung der Idee des Guten mit Bedacht aus der Diskussion herausgehalten wird, darin wird man Migliori zweifellos zustimmen müssen [...]. Doch die Gestaltung des Schlusses entspricht keineswegs der bekannten literarischen Technik Platons an den Aussparungsstellen. Der Hinweis auf die Notwendigkeit der Behandlung des höchsten Prinzips steht nur dem Gesprächsführer zu, im Munde des Protarchos wäre er nicht überzeugend».

pleasure and knowledge], I said, that if something would show up which is better than both, I would fight for the second prize for reason, and pleasure should lose the second prize» (*Phil.* 66 E 7-10).

But since *not* Socrates *but* Protarchos is uttering σμικρὸν ἔτι τὸ λοιπόν, we could say instead of "passage of omission", in the words of Friedlander, that the phrase σμικρὸν ἔτι τὸ λοιπόν is one of the "many hints of the dialogue" which open to us «a window to other things beyond its main topic [the ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθόν]»[36]. These things are not necessarily «the value[s] of the rest of the pleasures»[37] or «trivial problems»[38]. They could be the "many other things" (ἄλλα πολλά, *Phil.* 66 E 7) Socrates mentions which could unveil further the entrance to the house of Good. Again speaking metaphorically, for Protarchus and the platonic Socrates, the Sun itself is not something they see, but can only glimpse at between or behind the side suns.

II

Nevertheless, despite the many cautionary hints of the platonic Socrates (cfr. *Phil.* 66 B 5-6), the above quoted hierarchy of the Good did not convince everyone, if anyone. Richard Robinson (1902-1996), for example, writes in his book *An Atheist's Values*:

«In the *Philebus* he [Plato] seems to be preparing himself to give the answer [on the question "What is the good?"], and does at the end say something that looks as if it might be meant to be the answer; but it is completely unsatisfactory. The good, we seem to hold, is in the first place measure, secondly symmetry, thirdly mind, fourthly knowledge,

[36] From the report of P. Friedlander to H.G. Gadamers *Habilitationsschrift*: H.G. GADAMER, *Platos Dialektische Ethik. Phänomenologische Interpretationen zum 'Philebos'*, Hamburg 1931, correctly quoted by J. GRONDIN, *Hans-Georg-Gadamer. Eine Biographie*, Tübingen 1997, p. 162. I took the liberty of making a free translation.

[37] R.G. BURY, *The 'Philebus' of Plato*, cit., p. 163.

[38] S. SCOLNICOV, *The Wonder of One and Many*, in J. DILLON-L. BRISSON (eds.), *Plato's 'Philebus'*, cit., p. 335.

and fifthly pure pleasure. I have not yet heard of anyone who felt enlightened by this. No subsequent writer has redeemed the master's failure. The suspicion arises that the question is unanswerable because wrongly put» [39].

In fact, no philosopher after Plato seems to have adopted this hierarchy or to have redeemed Plato's failure. The mistake lies in using «the word "the" so as to imply that there is only one thing of a certain kind when in fact there are many» [40]. Furthermore, Plato closes his eyes to the unavoidable conflict between different goods and the potential ill effects of the one *single* Good or, as we may call it, the principle of the potential double effect of the one *single* Good: «*The* good is conceived as being a good that never conflicts with any other good and never has any kind of ill effect. But there cannot be such a good» [41].

But let's nevertheless assume that the answer is clear [42]. We have a further problem, which to my knowledge has been made explicit only by Rawls (1921-2002) in his *Political Liberalism* (1993). Of course, Rawls' perspective is in the broadest sense political; he is not deciding the *Philebus* issue *de boni summi gradibus*. He is, rather, saying that that issue is not relevant for, and ought to be excluded from, considerations of justice. But he makes a footnote on any metaphysical theory *de summo bono* and *de boni summi gradibus*. The footnote is especially important if the Socratic principle of "semantic monism" gets transformed into a metaphysical *and* political conception of the Good, as was the case with Plato (cfr. *resp.* 519 c 2-4; *pol.* 284 d 1-e 8) [43]. The footnote becomes even more important if we read the determination of the good life for every individual in the *Philebus* as "a preface" to the

[39] R. Robinson, *An Atheist's Values*, Oxford 1964, p. 17.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Cfr. A. Diès, *Autour de Platon, Essais de critique e d'histoire*, II, cit., p. 385: «Au surplus, le raisonnement de Platon est, en son ensemble, si clair, et sa thèse est si simple, qu'il suffira de l'analyser fidèlement pour que le lecteur en définisse de lui-mème la portée».

[43] Cfr. to *resp.* 519 c 2-4, R. Ferber, *Platos Idee des Guten*, cit., pp. 130-1; to *pol.* 284 d 1-e 8, Id., *Für eine propädeutische Lektüre des 'Politicus'*, cit.

«ideal social life described in the *Laws*»[44]. Also, the happy life in the *Laws* is a well-mixed life of pleasure and reason (cfr. *leg.* 636 D 4-E 3; 653 B 1-C 3; 658 E 6-659 C 7; 689 A 1-9; 696 C 8-10; 700 D 2-701 A 1)[45]: «State and individual and every living being are on the same footing here» (636 E 1-2, transl. Saunders, cit.).

Let's now assume that there is *this one* Good and a shared understanding of *this* Good and its degrees. Together with Rawls, let's call this a "comprehensive view" of the Good. A «comprehensive view», Rawls tells us, «includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships»[46]. Rawls distinguishes between religious and philosophical, reasonable and unreasonable "comprehensive views". Plato's view of the Good was the first philosophical "comprehensive view". Since Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* do not yet know the human rights of freedom of opinion and conscience, Plato's philosophical view seems to be for us rather the first (partially) unreasonable philosophical "comprehensive view". But such a "comprehensive view", reasonable or not, seems to survive in the change of generations only by the oppressive use of state power: «... a continuing shared understanding on one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power»[47]. Rawls calls this "the fact of oppression"[48]. *One* testimony among others

[44] So D. FREDE, *Plato. Philebus*, cit., p. LXVII; cfr. also ID., *Life and its Limitations: the Conception of Happiness in the 'Philebus'*, in J. DILLON-L. BRISSON (eds.), *Plato's 'Philebus',* cit., p. 16: «Thus, there is an analogy between the result of the *Philebus* and the chief contention of the *Laws*. Plato makes provisions there for the second best form of the state as the best constitution attainable for human beings. In the *Philebus* humanly attainable happiness is not a god-like state of permanent (pleasure and painless) equilibrium».

[45] Cfr. the pertinent remarks of R. STALLEY, *The 'Philebus' and the Art of Persuasion*, in *ibid.*, pp. 234-6.

[46] J. RAWLS, *Political Liberalism*, New York 1996, lecture 1, § 1, p. 13.

[47] *Ibid.*, § 6, section 2, p. 37. Cfr. *Ibid.*, note 39: «With unreasonable doctrines, and with religions that emphasize the idea of constitutional authority, we may think the text correct; and we may mistakenly think there are exceptions for other comprehensive views. The point of the text is: there are no exceptions».

[48] *Ibid.*

for this thesis is Plato's *Laws*. In the *Laws* the third rank of the final ranking in the *Philebus* – "reason and insight" (*Phil.* 66 B 5-6) – is enforced on his citizens "by the oppressive use of state power". The law is "reasons distribution" (τοῦ νοῦ διανομή, *leg.* IV 714 A 2) or – so to say – petrified reason: «... we should run our public and our private life, our homes and our cities, in obedience to what little spark of immortality lies in us, and dignify these edicts of reason with the name of "law" (τοῦ νοῦ διανομὴν ἐπονομάζοντας νόμον)» (*leg.* 713 E 8-714 A 2). Although the legislator uses prefaces which appeal to reason also by argument (cfr. 718 A 6-723 D 4; 726 A 1-734 C 2), "reasons distribution" (τοῦ νοῦ διανομή) contains coercive prescriptions (cfr. 773 C 6; E 4) and stipulates penalties (cfr. 789 E 4; 790 A 1-2) [49]. So the Athenian says, for example, concerning the Socratic opinions that the just is happy and the unjust unhappy (cfr. *Gorg.* 470 C 1-471 D 9; *resp.* 618 E 4-619 B 1):

«If I were a lawgiver, I should try to compel (ἀναγκάζειν), the *authors* and every inhabitant of the state to take this line; and if anybody in the land said that there are men who live a pleasant life in spite of being scoundrels, or that while this or that is useful and profitable, something else is more just, I should impose pretty nearly the extreme penalty (ζημίαν τε ὀλίγου μεγίστην)» (*leg.* II 662 B 4-8) [50].

(The "extreme penalty" that is, the death penalty is reserved for the "dissembling atheist" who «deserves to die for his sins not just once or twice but many times, whereas the other kind needs simply admonition combined with incarceration» (cfr. *leg.* 908 E 2-3) [51]. Those who deny only the Socratic opinions that the gods exists and are concerned about the world and our affairs (cfr. *apol.* 27 D 3-4; 35 D 6-8; 41 D 2) have to be imprisoned «as prescribed by law in the prison in the center of the country; no free man is to visit him at any time, and slaves must hand him his ration of food fixed by the Guardians of the Laws» (*leg.* 909 B 7-C 4).)

[49] Cfr. now the excellent book of A. LAKS, *Médiation et coercition. Pour une lecture des 'Lois' de Platon*, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2005, esp. pp. 71-7.

[50] Transl. Saunders, cit.

[51] *Idem*.

To maintain the same conception of the happy life as the well-mixed life of pleasure and reason the "noocracy" of the second best state will evidently need the "oppressive use of state power" at the discretion of the Guardians of the Law, that is, the members of the "nocturnal council" (*leg.* 962 C 9-10; cfr. 961 A 1-C 1). In comparison, the elder platonic academy was neither a *Kallipolis* (*resp.* 527 C 2) nor "a second best voyage" (*pol.* 300 C 2; *leg.* 874 E 7-875 D 6) instead of the *Kallipolis,* but shows us healthy differences of opinion concerning even the theory of ideas *and* principles (cf. Aristot. *metaph.* M 6. 1080 b 25-30) [52].

This lack of agreement is for us not necessarily a bad thing. For example, Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) writes: «To assume that all values can be graded on one scale [*uni summi boni gradus*], so that it is a mere matter of inspection to determine the highest, seems to me to falsify our knowledge that men are free agents» [53]. A reasonable pluralism concerning the Good is not, as Rawls following Berlin writes, «an unfortunate condition of human life» [54]. A reasonable pluralism which we find *de facto* in modern democracies is also *de iure* a good, in comparison to which a reasonable monism would be *de facto* and *de iure* an evil. This is especially true of political values such as maximal freedom and maximal equality whose incommensurability seems evident.

But is the thesis of substantive incommensurability also true of the ultimate end? If this is the case, it would be logically possible that Socrates and Protarchus would defend another good, knowledge *versus* pleasure. But because there is no common currency, it would not be possible to say which of the two is better. Indeed, Aristotle had already denied that all goods are commensurable (συμβλητά, cfr. *pol.* 1283 a 3-10; *eth. nic.* A 9. 1164 b 2-6) [55]. For instance, «money and

[52] Cfr. H. Krämer, *Philosophie der Antike*, 3: *Die hellenistische Philosophie*, I Kap.*: Die ältere Akademie*, Basel 1983, pp. 1-174; J. Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato*, Oxford 2003; L. Brisson, *L'histoire de l'Académie et la tradition platonicienne*, in L. Brisson-F. Fronterotta, *Lire Platon*, Paris 2006, esp. pp. 249-54.

[53] I. Berlin, *Liberty*, Oxford 2002, p. 217.

[54] J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, cit., lecture 1, § 6, p. 37.

[55] M. Burnyeat, *Aristotle on Learning to be Good*, in A. Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Berkeley *et al.* 1980, p. 91, draws attention to this point.

knowledge have no common measure» (*eth. eud.* 1243 b 22). In the same vein, we could then say: knowledge and pleasure have no common measure [56].

The Socratic reply *could* be that the thesis of substantive incommensurability is only true for *such relatively briefly stateable moral principles*, as we need them in *political* contexts such as maximal freedom and maximal equality. Concerning the ultimate end of an *individual*, such incommensurability could be overcome in a temporally unlimited dialogue [57]. But even if nobody can exclude that at the end of the day we get a consensus on the ultimate end (*summum bonum sive Deus*) [58], an unlimited dialogue is for mortals not possible. Therefore, for human beings the end result will be empirically rather a pluralism of incommensurable ultimate substantive ends. Or we could say with the commentator of Aquinas, Cajetan (1468-1534), «... a unity in disorder which constitutes the City of Babylon, not the order in love of Jerusalem» [59]. But is "a unity of disorder which constitutes the city of Babylon" really the last word on the issue? Do we have to decide between "the order in love of Jerusalem" and "a unity of disorder which constitutes the city of Babylon"?

If the Good is not a platonic idea, «which thinking is determined to see [that is to understand]» (*Tim.* 52 A 4), the Good could nevertheless still be an idea in the Kantian sense (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 327/B 384), which is not given to us to know, but only to search for. Such an

[56] Cfr. B. Jowett, *Plato. Philebus*, Transl. with an introduction, Oxford 1892[3]: *Introduction*, p. 138, quoted in R.G. Bury, *The 'Philebus' of Plato*, cit., p. 202: «The comparison of pleasure and knowledge is really a comparison of two elements which have no common measure ...».

[57] So T. Penner-Ch. Rowe, *Plato's 'Lysis'*, Cambridge *et al.* 2005, p. 293.

[58] Concerning the historical question of the identification of the platonic good with God cfr. R. Ferber, *L'idea del bene è o non è trascendente,* cit., p. 130 note 9; enlarged German version, cit., pp. 151-3.

[59] Cajetan, *ad Sancti Aquinati Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 1, art. 5: cfr. M. Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, München-Leipzig 1919, p. 27: «The impossibility of 'scientific' advocacy of practical standpoints – except in the case of discussion of means to a *given*, presupposed end – is rooted in reasons which lie far deeper. Such advocacy is meaningless in principle because the different value systems of the world stand in an irresolvable conflict with one another».

idea has no objective reality and admits not a schematic but only a symbolic *hypotyposis* (*Critique of Pure Judgment*, § 59, A 255). The sun would not be the real offspring (ἔγκονος) of the Good, but only a symbolic *hypotyposis* of an ideal of reason. It would symbolize the complete teleological explainability of the world (whereas the "side suns" would symbolize only fragments of its teleological explainability).

But this has a consequence: The Socratic principle of "real reference", after which we pursue only the real, but not the apparent, good (cfr. *resp*. 505 D 5-9) [60], is to be combined with the Socratic insight that we, or at least the majority of us, like Socrates, do not know the real Good (cfr. 505 D 6-8) or ultimate end [61]. Knowledge would be for Plato in the final analysis not opinion and also not right opinion with justification, but an immediate vision, that is, an immediate understanding (νόησις), of the Good [62]. Even Socrates knows at the end of the *Philebus* only «what one should divine (μαντευτέον) is the form (τίνα ἰδέαν αὐτήν εἶναι) [of the Good]» (64 A 2-4). But even if the platonic dialecticians or the members of the nocturnal "council" (cfr. *leg*. 961 A 1-C 1) had captured the fugitive Good and could "stand" the view on it (*resp*. 518 C 10), could they communicate this shared understanding over the generations without the oppressive use of state power? And would such an oppressed shared understanding still be understanding (νόησις)?

To be precise: After the Socratic principle of the epistemological priority of definitional knowledge, we would not be able to capture the human good without having first captured the essence of the Good. But how should we know «what in fact is the Good (ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶν ἀγαθόν)» (*Phil*. 13 E 5-6) without starting from some human good, knowledge or pleasure? This circle is unavoidable. It hangs together with the fact that

[60] I take the expression "principle of real reference" from T. Penner-Ch. Rowe, *Plato's 'Lysis'*, cit., pp. 205-10.

[61] Cfr. also T. Penner, *The Death of the so-called 'Socratic Elenchus'*, cit., p. 17: «Hence in general, people do not know, what it is that they are referring to».

[62] Cfr. for an explicit argument R. Ferber, *Warum hat Platon die "ungeschriebene Lehre" nicht geschrieben?*, cit., pp. 102-6, where I correct an error of R. Ferber, *Platos Idee des Guten*, cit., p. 101.

as philosophers we are situated "between wisdom and ignorance" (*symp.* 204 B 4-5). So also our knowledge of the Good is situated between wisdom and ignorance. But as the *Philebus shows*, Socrates and his *interlocutor* Protarchus do not have only incommensurable ideas of the Good, as Socrates and the *silent* Philebus may have.

Protarchus is not closing as Max Mueller has closed his poem *The side suns* (*Die Nebensonnen*): «In the dark I will feel better» («Im Dunkeln wird mir woehler sein»). Perhaps Philebus could have agreed with this, after he has uttered his unexamined (false) opinion and prophecy on the Good: «In my opinion [Aphrodite's] pleasure wins and always will win, come what may» (*Phil.* 12 A 7). Protarchus and Socrates can nevertheless *talk* and *argue* with each other and understand each other's viewpoint and find a temporally limited agreement in the relative order of human goods, such as pleasure and knowledge, even if they can't look back like the philosopher king or "royal man with insight" (*pol.* 294 A 8) on the kingly knowledge of the absolute Good, «through which only the just and what else makes use of it becomes useful and benign» (*resp.* 505 A 3-4). They share, despite their definitional ignorance, thanks to their common language, a common understanding and a common world against which the relativistic thesis of substantive incommensurability of pleasure and knowledge only makes sense. They share especially a common (formal) understanding of what they are searching for, namely, (a) the "most perfect" (τελεώτατον, *Phil.* 20 D 3), (b) the "sufficient" (ἱκανόν, 20 D 4) and (c) the "desirable to all" (πᾶσιν αἱρετόν, 61 A 1; cfr. 20 D 8-9; 67 A 7-8).

In fact, despite his definitional ignorance, Socrates arrives also at a shared substantive understanding with Protarchus, the "son of Kallias" (*Phil.* 19 B 5), the "son of that man" (36 D 6-7) – *perhaps* an allusion to Kallias, son of Hipponikos, the admirer (cfr. *apol.* 20 A 5) and host of the sophist Protagoras (*Prot.* 310 A 7-311 A 1)[63] and listener to his relativistic account of the human good. Against such a relativis-

[63] Cf. O. APELT, *Platon 'Philebos'*, cit., p. 137; D. FREDE, *The Hedonist's Conversion: The Role of Socrates in the 'Philebus'*, in CH. GILL-M. MC CABE (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford 1996, p. 221.

tic account of the good as something «multifaceted and variable (ποικίλον [...] καὶ παντοδαπόν)» (*Prot.* 334 B 6), Socrates arrives through discussion at a shared substantive and positive understanding on a presumed objective hierarchy of the human goods [64] when he gives the "gold medal" to the orderly mixed life of pleasure and reason, the "silver medal" to reason and the "bronze medal" to pleasure as far it is pure [65]. The mixed pleasures, like the pleasure of food, drink and sex, are of course necessary for the survival of the individual and the species. Nevertheless, despite the opinion of the majority (*Phil.* 67 B 1-2), they get no medal because they have, in distinction to beauty, symmetry and truth, only an instrumental but not an intrinsic value. On the other hand, Socrates *divines* that there are still better things than the "gold medal", namely, «the absolute Good (τὸ παντάπασιν ἀγαθόν)» (*Phil.* 61 A 2) or that «what in man and in the universe is by nature good» (64 A 2), or, so to speak, the form of the Good [66]. Plato's first interpreter, Aristotle, says that the essence of th[is] Good is «the One itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἕν)» (cfr. Aristot. *metaph.* N 4. 1091 b 13-5). But despite what has been said by Aristotle, in the possibly last written *and* published word of Plato on the Good, the *Philebus* [67], the sun itself, the Good or "the One itself", is only visible in the "quasi-unity" (οἷον ἓν) of the three side suns of beauty, symmetry and truth.

[64] Cfr. R. Ferber, *"The Origins of Objectivity in Communal Discussion" – Einige Bemerkungen zu Gadamers und Davidsons Interpretationen des 'Philebos'*, in F. Renaud-Ch. Gill (eds.), *Hermeneutic Philosophy and Plato*, St. Augustin 2010, pp. 211-44, esp. pp. 222-9.

[65] Cfr. already R.G. Bury, *The 'Philebus' of Plato*, cit., p. 173 note.

[66] Cfr. W. Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, Transl. with the authors corrections and additions by R. Robinson, Oxford 1948^2, p. 159 note 1: «Presumably it was Plato who first took the notion of inner divination (*manteuesthai*), which the poets were already using in the sense of the presentiment of external events, and stamped it with the philosophical meaning of a divination not of the future but of deep and hidden attributes».

[67] Cfr. H. Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, «Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum», LXX (1982) pp. 198-9: «The late date and the authenticity of the *Philebus* have not been seriously questioned since the beginning of this century. [...] the dialogue almost certainly takes account of doctrines of Eudoxos of Knidos».

A modern Italian victim of the above-mentioned "fact of oppression" (cfr. *supra*, p. 69) , Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), writing to his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht, has formulated this achievement of a dialogue of coming to an agreement in the middle of ignorance on the ultimate issues in a more general way. He wrote not like Plato from the viewpoint of an imaginary "cave" or so with harmless fictitious inhabitants to convert from their hedonism like Philebus and Protarchus. He wrote from a real and probably rather dark prison in a region – where Plato during his first visit to Sicily (cfr. *ep. VII* 324 A 5) and «Archytas and his Tarentine friends» (338 C-7 D 1) may have left his footprints too – (in Turi near Bari) in the following way: «When the two of us write to each other, don't we often tend to get irritated (*scopriamo continuamente motivi di attrito*), [that is, don't we write "with a lot of friction" (μετὰ τριβῆς πάσης, *ep. VII* 344 B 2-3)]? Yet, in the end, we manage to settle many of our differences»[68].

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[68] A. Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere*, Torino 1947, p. 175: Letter from October 5, 1931. English translation L. Lawner. The Italian original runs as follows: «Noi due, scrivendoci, non scopriamo continuamente motivi di attrito e nello stesso tempo non troviamo o riusciamo a metterci d'accordo su certe questioni[sic]?».