

Las Ambigüedades del Placer. Ensayo Sobre el Placer en la Filosofía de Platón.

By Francisco Bravo. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2003. Pp. 259. €44,50.

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In this magisterial and elegant study, Bravo interprets and defends Plato's layered definition of pleasure and Plato's apparently conflicted view of hedonism. The content of the book makes definitive contributions to the study of Plato, the nature of pleasure, and hedonism. The subject and method of the book make it an excellent introduction to Plato's ethics and metaphysics for advanced students in any discipline.

The book's method is a model of expository writing, with an analytical table of contents providing easy access. (Unfortunately, the book lacks indexes of any kind.) The typical chapter begins with a summary of previous results and a statement of the problem at hand, followed by a review highlighting salient features of the Platonic text with Presocratic, Aristotelian, and Hellenistic context as needed. There follows a comprehensive evaluation both of secondary literature (in English, French, German, and Italian as well as Spanish) on Plato and primary work on the topic (including for example H. Sidgwick, G. Ryle, G. von Wright, D. Davidson, B. Williams, and D. Stampe). To the greatest possible extent, Bravo attributes the solutions he finds to his predecessors, modestly stating his own contribution in as few words as possible at the end of the chapter. Because his work takes little for granted, systematically covers relevant material,

and builds a comprehensive interpretation of Plato's ethics and metaphysics using pleasure as the cornerstone, it is at once a compelling contribution to scholarship and an excellent introduction for advanced students in any neighboring discipline.

Bravo's Plato is a worthy voice to heed in answering contemporary philosophical problems. Part One is introductory and reviews pleasure in ancient Greek culture, its semantic range of meanings, and its pre-philosophical and pre-Socratic evaluations and definitions. Part Two interprets and defends Plato's account of pleasure at each of the following levels: *physically* a movement, *physiologically* a repletion in two senses of 'replete'--both the movement of filling and the state of being full--*psychologically* a perceived repletion, and *ontologically* scaled in accordance with the Divided Line of being and knowledge at *Republic* 509-511. Part Two concludes with a comprehensive and critical review of the literature on false pleasures, defending Plato's account of pleasure as a propositional attitude and unifying the epistemological, ontological, and moral senses of 'true' and 'false' in terms of the general notion of correspondence. Part Three interprets Plato's attitude toward hedonism from early to late dialogues. The *Protagoras* is a portrait of the historical Socrates, from whom Plato inherited hedonism. In the process of refining this hedonism to make it compatible with his own developing philosophical Pythagoreanism, Plato seriously considers anti-hedonist arguments in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, and *Laws*. But according to Bravo's nuanced reading, Plato never rejects the doctrine that pleasure is an essential part of the ultimate good for human beings.

En route to the main theses of Parts Two and Three, the book synthesizes a vast number of solutions provided by articles and books on particular aspects of Plato's philosophy. One example is his account of Plato's changing ontology from middle to late dialogues (122-137), which convincingly defends K. Sayre's account in *Plato's Late Ontology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) against the alternatives. Another example is the discussion of false pleasure (151-174). While much of that literature has focussed only upon the false anticipatory pleasures of *Philebus* 37-39, Bravo rightly tries to give a coherent reading to the whole discussion of false pleasure. The deep connection he proposes underlying Plato's use of 'true' and 'false' throughout the *Philebus* and *Republic* is the single theme of truth as correspondence in the spheres of epistemology, ontology, and morality (167-174). His account of the correspondence in *epistemology* is between representation and object; in *morality* between what is and what ought to be; and in *ontology* between a thing and itself. One of the rare bibliographical omissions is the work of N. Mooradian on false pleasures of anticipation (*Phb.* 36b-41a) and estimation (*Phb.* 41a-42c). Mooradian criticizes the standard representational account endorsed by Bravo ("Converting Protarchus: Relativism and False Pleasures of Anticipation in Plato's *Philebus*," *Ancient Philosophy* 16 [1996] 93-112) and provides argument supporting Bravo's assertion (173) that "the ontological falsity of pleasure gives rise to epistemological falsity," *la falsedad ontológica del placer da lugar a una falsedad epistemológica* ("What To Do About False Pleasures of Overestimation? *Philebus* 41a5-42c5, *Apeiron* 28 [1995] 91-112).

Part Three is the most careful, comprehensive, and convincing development of the hedonist reading available. The general strategy is to show, by close reading of the text, that apparent anti-hedonist arguments in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Laws* are best understood as refutations of false theories of pleasure rather than of hedonism altogether. His Plato never refutes psychological hedonism (the thesis that all in fact seek pleasure) and affirms it in the *Republic* and *Laws* (213, 242-243). The same dialogues are not quite affirmations of ethical hedonism (that pleasure is the only good one ought to seek). His Plato recognizes *both* the “life of virtue” *and* the “true pleasures which spring mainly from that life,” *que tienen su fuente principalmente en la vida de virtud*, as the *two* distinct parts of human happiness, our supreme good (248, see also 220, 232). Bravo makes a convincing case that it is the best interpretation we can give to these later dialogues. With hedonism, therefore, as with false pleasure, Bravo’s work must be the starting point for future discussion of Plato.

In my judgment, the most provocative thesis of the book is its resurrection of Damascius’s reading that for Plato repletion includes *both* the the movement of filling *and* the state of being full (58-59), a thesis independently defended by G. Carone in work too recent for Bravo to have noticed: “Hedonism and the Pleasureless Life in Plato’s *Philebus*,” *Phronesis* 45 [2000] 257-283. All sides agree upon a processive interpretation of repletion: Plato means to count perceived *processes of filling* as pleasure. The issue is whether in addition there is a *stative* interpretation: that is, whether Plato also counts as pleasant *states of being full*. The motivation for Damascius as for Bravo is to enable them to

assimilate Plato's account of pleasure with the sophisticated and plausible accounts of Aristotle and Epicurus (59, 67-78), a reading that is charitable and therefore attractive. Despite its attractiveness, a number of reasons keep me from accepting this resurrection. I conclude my review by stating these reasons.

On the one hand, there are reasons of textual fidelity. 1. Movements are not states, and Plato classifies pleasure as a kind of movement throughout his middle and later dialogues, as Bravo himself carefully documents (43-45). 2. Plato unambiguously dismisses the state of repletion following a process of repleting as neutral and neither pleasant nor painful at *Republic* 583c-585a and *Philebus* 42e.

3. Bravo defends the textual fidelity of the stative in addition to the processive interpretation: "According to the *Philebus*, the 'natural state' consists in harmony, and the attainment and the enjoyment of this harmony *is* pleasure" (*el logro y el disfrute de esta armonía es el placer*, 59). He bases this interpretation upon his translation of *Phb.* 31c-d: "If in us organisms harmony is decomposed, then, at the time that the nature is decomposing (*se disuelve*) pains are born But if the harmony is recovered (*recuperada*), and the proper nature reconstituted (*reconstituida*), the pleasure is generated." His word *recuperada* mistranslates the Greek *present* passive participle ἄρμοστομένης, "getting tuned" as if it were the *perfect* passive participle ἡρμοσμένης, "tuned." (Likewise his word *reconstituida* mistranslates a present as a perfect.) Plato follows standard Greek grammar in keeping the senses of present and perfect distinct, always using the present form unambiguously for the process of

becoming tuned, e.g. at *Rep.* 349d and 591d, and always using the perfect form unambiguously for the state of *being tuned*, e.g. at *Rep.* 410e, 443e, 554e, *Pho.** 93d, and *La.* 188d. Properly translated, *Phb.* 31d does not support the stative interpretation but refutes it. Likewise Plato uses present not perfect forms at other passages cited by Bravo, such as the reiteration of this definition at *Phb.* 32e and 42d, as well as the complementary passages at *Tim.* 64d (Bravo cites 64c, but he must mean 64d) and *Rep.* 585a. Greekless readers beware: P. Shorey, in his Loeb/Perseus translation of this section of the *Republic*, apparently in agreement with Bravo's interpretation, systematically mistranslates present verbs as perfect.

4. Bravo also cites, without discussion, 32b. Socrates calls this definition a *reiteration* of the definition at 31d (περ ἔλεγον ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν, “the very thing I said before”), not as adding new meaning to that previous definition. The reiteration defines pleasure as τὴν δ' εἰς τὴν . . . οὐσ' ἀν' ὁδόν, ταύτην δὲ αὖ πάλιν τὴν ἀναχώρησιν, “*the way* to the [state of] being, *this return* back again.” The second clause is naturally read as restating the same meaning as the first clause. (Liddell and Scott's *Greek English Lexicon* lists αὖ πάλιν as an Attic pleonasm in the entry for αὖ.) Such a reading is confirmed by the immediately preceding use of ‘way’ at 32a, not cited by Bravo, where Plato defines pleasure as “*the way back* to the same” (πάλιν δ' εἰς ταύτῳν . . . ἢ . . . ὁδός): “the way back” must refer to the process of repleting, not the repleted state, which would be the *end* of the way.

On the other hand, there are reasons of theoretical insufficiency. As I said above, Bravo wishes to assimilate Plato to Aristotle's attractive definition of pleasure as "unimpeded activation of the state that fits one's nature" (ἐνέργειαν τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἕξεως . . . ἀνεμπόδιστον, *Nic. Eth.* VII.xii 1153a13-15). There is no controversy that the *Philebus* defines pleasure as repletion. I have just argued that 'repletion' refers unambiguously to the process not the state of repletion. If we, for the sake of argument, expand the definition to include the state as well as the process of repletion, then we can attribute to Plato, in addition to the repleting *processes* of, say, recovering my health or of learning a skill, also the replete *states* of being healthy or of possessing skill. But such states are theoretically insufficient; they fall short of Aristotle's view. In order to be assimilated to Aristotle, Plato would need to admit as pleasure also the *activation* of one's states of, say, health or skill. Mere replete states are insufficient to count as activations, as Aristotle points out (*Nic. Eth.* I.i 1095b30-*, X.vi 1176a30-*). It is no wonder, then, that Aristotle did not take Plato's position to be assimilable to his own, as Bravo's discussion shows (62-64). Likewise, in an early dialogue, Plato himself anticipates Aristotle's distinction between our merely *having* (εἶναι μόνον ἢ μὴ) and *activating* (χρημεθα) a thing and affirms that mere having is insufficient for goodness (*Euthyd.* 280c-d). Therefore the stative interpretation falls short of the goal of attributing to Plato an attractive, Aristotelian theory of pleasure. The *Philebus* does admit that the activation of intellect can be *accompanied* by pleasure (ἡδονὰς . . . ἐπιστήμῃς . . . πομένῃς, 66c). But Socrates there appears to deny that the unimpeded activity of intellect

itself *is* a pleasure. For he says that it is ἴσως οὐδὲν ἄτοπον, “perhaps not unlikely” that the gods activate their intellects --surely, without impediment-- yet feel no pleasure; “at any rate” (γούνη), for them to feel pleasure would be unseemly (*Phb.* 33b).

On Bravo’s interpretation pleasure is a repletion on the *physiological* level, while on the *psychological* level it is a perceived repletion. It does not help the stative interpretation gain theoretical sufficiency to move from the physiological to the psychological level in this way. As Aristotle points out, “unimpeded activation of the state that fits one’s nature” (ἐνέργειαν τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἔξεως . . . ἀνεμπόδιστον) is a distinct and better definition of pleasure than as something “perceived” (αἰσθητήν), a definition that “does not hold up well” (οὐ καλῶς ἔχει, NE VII.xii 1153a13-15). As an illustration, suppose that one’s nature is to be a weaver, such that one weaves not out of necessity for money or clothing but chooses weaving freely for its own sake. Such a one might enjoy (i) the *filling* pleasure of learning to weave and (ii) the *activation* pleasure of weaving. There seems, however to be no necessary pleasure in (iii) the *state* of being a weaver; for there is no pleasure when asleep, though the state exists. Nor is there necessarily pleasure in (iv) the event of my *perceiving my own state* of being a weaver. For on the one hand, although weaving pleasure might require consciousness; it does not require and may even be lessened by self-consciousness while weaving. And on the other hand, the pleasure κατὰ φύσιν, “that fits the nature” of a weaver is not to *perceive* one’s own talent but to *activate* it; for it is misery, not pleasure, for a weaver to be inactivated by impediments

such as disease or lack of resources. Indeed the misery may be magnified not lessened by the weaver's perception of his own, inactive state of talent. Thus neither the event of perceiving one's own repletion nor the mere state of repletion is the definitive element of Aristotelian pleasure: activation is.