Notes on *Philebus*, Installment I

1. The two opposed arguments:
   a. The argument of Protarchus, inherited from Philebus, is that pleasure, enjoyment, feeling good, and suchlike (*chairein, χαίρειν*) are goods for living things.
   b. The argument of Socrates is that knowledge, thought, memory, right opinion, and true calculation are superior for those who can partake of them and are the best of all things.

2. Both of these arguments affirm that it is some sort of habit or disposition of the soul that is good for all humans.

3. (Thus there are three possibilities—that pleasure is the best, that knowledge is the best, or that there is some third thing [either a habit or disposition or something that is neither] that is better than both.)

4. If the last alternative is true, then the victor will be he who champions the contestant that is nearer the third (the thing that is better than both).

5. S. Are opposite kinds of pleasures like or unlike? (Examples: the pleasures of being temperate or intemperate, wise or foolish) [Seemingly the assumption here is that temperance is good, intemperance bad, and wisdom good, foolishness bad.]

6. P. Like, for they are both pleasures.

7. S. Kinds of the same (and self-like) thing can be opposite, for example, white and black as kinds of color.

8. P. How does that damage my argument?

9. S. There are good and bad pleasures, but insofar as they are all pleasures, they are alike. What is the common element?

10. P. No one who says that pleasure is the good can concede that there are bad pleasures.

11. S. But in some cases they are opposed.

12. Not insofar as they are pleasures.

13. S. This is worthless reasoning. It is to say that the unlike is most completely like that which is unlike it. [Seemingly Socrates’ point is that Protarchus is just refusing to admit that the unlike elements are unlike.]
   a. Note: Socrates’ reasoning here seems to follow the line of his rebuttal of Zeno in the *Parmenides*

14. S. We must back the ship out of our shipwreck. Ask me analogous questions to those I just asked you.

15. [Here Socrates is instructing Protarchus how to examine him to the greatest effect.] Protarchus should ask: aren’t there opposite and unlike kinds of knowledge?

16. S. It would be foolish to deny this, and we would lose track of the argument (as if our ship sank).

17. P. OK. So both kinds of pleasure and kinds of knowledge are many, unlike, and different.

18. S. We shall then start over and seek the truth.

19. The principle has just arisen that the one is many and the many are one.
20. P. You mean that I, Protarchus, being one, am great and small and heavy and light, etc.? [Note that again this is reminiscent of what Socrates says in the Parmenides in elaborating his initial rebuttal of Zeno.]

21. S. Everyone agrees that these difficulties are easy and should be disregarded because they are a hindrance to argument. [Is this because of the point in the Parmenides that sensibles always participate in contrary opposites, or because the examples concern relatives and parts, and can therefore be resolved either by specifying the thing one is being compared with when one is called great or small, etc., or by distinguishing between wholes and parts? I think the former.]

22. P. What other difficulties are there?

23. S. When the argument concerns the unities that do not arise and perish, like man, ox, the beautiful, or the good. [This contrast is also reminiscent of Socrates’ initial exposition of the Forms in Parmenides. Man and ox are examples of the second kind of which Parmenides asks Socrates whether he believes there are Forms. They are also examples that Aristotle uses in Categories of things of which there are both individuals and species (eide, εἴδη). (Note: because of Aristotle’s use of this word, and exposition of its concept, it usually, but not always, appropriately translated “species” in Aristotle, even though it is traditionally translated “Form” in Plato.)]

24. (Note: there is an apparent textual problem in the next passage, leading to disagreement among scholars about what three questions Socrates raises here about unities that do not arise and perish.)

25. My own translation of Burnet’s text, for the purpose of helping me figure this out, of 15b1-8:
   a. First, whether (μὲν εἰ) it is necessary to assume that some such units truly exist; then, again (αὖ),[concerning] these, how each single one, while always being the same and admitting neither generation nor corruption, can nevertheless be this steadfast single thing, and after this, in the infinite things that come to be, again (ἐν τοῖς γιγνομένοις αὖ), whether it ought to be maintained that it has dispersed and become many or that [as] a whole separate from itself—which indeed would seem to be the most impossible thing of all—one and the same thing comes to be at the same time in one and many.
   b. Note: editors have emended this text in various ways, indicating that many find the text as transmitted anomalous in some way (grammatically, semantically, or philosophically).

26. According to Fowler (Loeb) translation:
   a. S. Very important questions arise:
      i. Are there these unities?
      ii. If so, how is each, while forever remaining single and the same, and not admitting generation or destruction, able most permanently to be this single thing? [The question in this form does not make apparent sense.]
iii. How, in the infinite things that come to be, this unity, whether we are to say that it has dispersed and become many or that it is separated from itself—which would seem to be the most impossible thing of all—being the same and one, is to be at the same time in one and in many. [I disagree with the translation here.]

27. According to Philebus in the Cooper edition (translated by Dorthea Frede), two questions:
   a. S. Very important questions arise:
      i. Whether one ought to suppose that there are any such unities truly in existence? [Agreeing with Fowler.]
      ii. How they are supposed to be: whether such a unity, always being one and the same, admitting neither of generation nor destruction, remains most definitely one and the same even though it is later found also in things that come to be and are unlimited, so that it finds itself one and the same while being in one and many at the same time? [Frede makes more sense than Fowler does of the second question, although conceptually it seems that it could stop before the “so that” clause, which might be more appropriately be part of the last question.]
      iii. And must it be treated as dispersed and multiplied, or as entirely separated from itself, which would seem to be most impossible of all?

28. My own tentative view. Neither the Fowler nor the Frede translations has all three questions right. The three questions are
   a. (As both Fowler and Frede agree) whether it is necessary to assume that such unities exist,
   b. How each single one, while always being the same and admitting neither generation nor corruption, can nevertheless be this steadfast single thing, [even though] later, [it comes to be] in the infinite things that come to be, (Frede adds, “one and the same thing at the same time in one and many.”)
   c. Whether it ought to be maintained that it has dispersed and become many or that [as] a whole separate from itself—which indeed would seem to be the most impossible thing of all—one and the same thing comes to be at the same time in one and many. (Frede limits the third question to the italicized words.)

29. (I don’t have great confidence in my view.)

30. So, broadly speaking, the questions are
   a. Whether the Forms exist
   b. How do the forms, while eternally remaining one and the same, come into the infinite things that become 
   c. Do the forms disperse when they come into many or do they remain themselves but become separated from themselves, being at the same time in one and in many?
31. Interpreted in this way, the first question is about the very concept of the Forms and their necessity, the second about reconciling their being with their apparent becoming, and the third about their apparent simultaneous unity and multiplicity.

32. Note that, roughly speaking, these are questions carried over from the *Parmenides*
   a. Perhaps these three questions are intended to be a summary of Parmenides’ “demonstration” in *Parmenides*

33. S. It is through discourse that the same things become one and many in all sorts of ways. The youth revel in this, but perhaps we can solve this dispute in a peaceful way.

34. What way?

35. A gift of the gods: that all things are composed of limit and the unlimited, and that we shall find the one of each thing in this structure. And we must not be satisfied with simply the one and the unlimited, but trace the increase from the one through as many finite numbers as there are between the one and the unlimited. (Note that the Greek work “apeiron” is susceptible of both the translations “unlimited” and “infinite.”) (This seems to mean to trace a path from each genus through its species to the innumerable individuals.)
   a. As a metaphysical concept, this is from the later Pythagoreans
   b. This passage could roughly reflect the theory of the Forms as analyzed by means of the One and the Indefinite Dyad that Aristotle ascribes to Plato in *Metaphysics* I.

36. Only then is it permitted to release each kind of unity into the unlimited (?)

37. Skipping these steps produces eristic in place of dialectic.

38. Examples:
   a. Letters: not only the infinite (individual) sounds that people make, but their kinds: vowels, semivowels, and mutes, and their respective kinds
      i. This kind of theory is set forth by Aristotle in *Poetics* 20
   b. Not only high and low pitches, but the number and kinds of intervals and harmonies. (The mathematical basis of harmony supposedly was discovered by the Pythagoreans.)
   c. Rhythms and meters

39. Likewise, if one starts from the unlimited, one should go through the finite numbers before attaining the one. (This process is shortly to be called collection, and the earlier one division.)

40. These tasks, once accomplished, are called “arts.”

41. P. We do not know how to divide knowledge or pleasure. So either do it yourself or find some other way to solve our initial problem.

42. S. Socrates’ dream: there is a third kind besides knowledge and pleasure, superior to both.

43. But first we need an additional principle: the good must be perfect and sufficient.

44. We need to consider both knowledge and pleasure in isolation. Is either perfect and sufficient without the other?
This seems reminiscent of *Republic* II, in the challenge to Socrates to show that the purely just man is happier than the purely unjust.

45. He who is pleased without knowledge or memory is not even aware that he is pleased.

46. No one would choose a life of knowledge without pleasure.

47. Everyone would choose a life that was a mixture of these two over either of the unmixed lives.

48. S. So pleasure cannot be the good.

49. P. Nor can reason.

50. S. Perhaps not our reason, but the divine reason (?)

51. S. I am not going to argue that reason should get first prize now, but am going to discuss second prize.

52. S. Maybe either reason or pleasure is the reason why the combined life is good, and thereby deserves second prize. But not pleasure.

53. Don’t stop now, Socrates.

54. New principle. A division of being into two or three. The limit and the unlimited, and the mixture of these.

55. A fourth kind, perhaps.

56. Let us divide the other two:

57. The unlimited: whatever admits of more and less is unlimited. Measure and definite quantity, such as double or equal destroys the more and less.

a. I have trouble understanding this. I think it’s because of my training in math.

b. Are more and less directions without destinations?

c. This seems reminiscent of Book VII of the *Republic*, where more and less are summoners to measurement and quantity, or stimuli for the soul to the ascent to the intelligible.

58. So measure and definite quantity fall under limit.

59. What is the nature of mixture? Generation.

60. Examples: health, music, the balance of the seasons, the healthy life that results from laws of limits on pleasure that the goddess herself imposes (?)

61. The fourth kind: everything comes to be from some cause.

62. Cause = maker.

63. Caused = made.

64. Maker leads made.

65. Therefore distinct.

66. Therefore (?) what comes to be and that from which it comes to be represent the first three kinds (?)

67. The craftsman is the fourth kind.

a. Is there an implication that these exhaust being and becoming?

68. Back to our original question. The mixed life of knowledge and pleasure was the winner.

69. It must fall under the third kind, the mixture of the unlimited and limit.

70. Pleasure falls under the unlimited.

71. The universe shows an order that indicates it was created by intelligence.

72. Our bodies are microcosms, and show the same structure—body, soul, mind.
73. We are sustained by the universe, not the reverse.
74. Reason rules, and knowledge falls under the fourth kind. (We are at Stephanus 31)
   a. Are these distinctions an attempt to resolve the aporiae that Parmenides’ demonstration (possibly) contains and that (possibly) are summarized at page Stephanus 15 of this dialogue?