

## Filebus

*Platon*

August 30, 2015

What is the ideal kind of life? Filebus has the simple answer, namely to maximize lust. The more lust in your life the better. Socrates is not so sure so he engages one of Filebus disciples - Protarchos for a discussion. It is not much of a discussion though, Socrates puts his famous questions and while Protarchos seems to listen attentively, he never even attempts to respond to them but begs Socrates to give the answers, nodding in agreement, only occasionally qualified by a mild protest. While Filebus has retreated from the start and sleeps through the proceedings.

As a counterweight to lust Socrates suggests, hardly surprisingly, thought, knowledge and memory. They agree that the perfect life should be complete and want nothing. Would a life of lust be self-sufficient? A life in which there is no thought, no knowledge nor any memory? A life in which pleasures are immediately forgotten, and in which there cannot be any anticipation of as well. That would be the existence of a jelly-fish. Protarchos admits that such a life would indeed want something. Conversely what about a life of thought, reflection and knowledge with a perfect memory, but with no lust nor any pain? Also such a life would be wanting. Thus Socrates concludes that the perfect life must be a mixture of the two and then starts to ask provocatively which type of life would be number two, an exploration that eventually would lead to the conclusion that a life of only lust would come down fairly low, and what else can you expect of Plato? But while coming to that expected conclusion certain interesting observations are being made.

An opinion can be true or false, but what about lust and discomfort (pleasure and pain)? Protarchos claims that in the latter case, unlike the former, when you feel lust or discomfort, those feelings are necessarily true and correct. It is further decided that pleasure and pain can be felt both by the body as well as the soul, and that they can be present at the same time. When you feel hunger or thirst, the body is in pain, while the soul is lusting, because it anticipated the pleasure of having the hunger stilled and the thirst quenched. Thus thought alone are necessary for some pleasures, namely those of the soul. The greater the physical discomfort the greater the mental pleasure of anticipation. Sometimes both can be present without the mind realizing it, as in a tragedy, but also in comedy. Ignorance is a source of discomfort, in yourself as well as in others. If ignorance is to be found in connection with the powerful it is indeed a terrible thing as it could be the cause of our destruction. However, if seen in the weak and harmless, it engenders only ridicule, and the pleasure in indulging in it. Thus the lust we feel when laughing is based on an unconscious discomfort. Thus to say that we feel lust and only lust is not correct. We feel the lust of course, but we also feel the discomfort which is a necessary condition for the former.

Socrates also engages in a discussion which I found somewhat obscure, namely of the distinction between the unbounded and measureless and the measured. Many properties such as hot and cold, hard and soft, pleasure and pain appear to be available in any degree.

They are unbounded, thus liable to excess. Other properties are measured and thus not liable to excess. If you want purity of a color, say that of white, you do not want a great quantity of it, only an unsullied sample. Mixtures seem to be of this type, when excesses are shunned. Yet Socrates speaks about four things. The unmeasured and the measured, as well as mixtures of both, and a fourth thing to which he refers to as cause. He makes a distinction between cause and effect. The cause is valuable only so far as it brings about the effect, while you never value the effect because it gives an object and an excuse for the cause, that would be absurd. Thus there is a difference between becoming and being, being being the end effect of becoming. The really valuable things are thus to be found among the effects not the causes.

Hardly surprisingly as well, Socrates makes a distinction about the value of truth of such things that do not change but are permanent, and those which are merely temporal, thus making a case for the transcendent values of thought and reflection. The calculations and measurements involved in building and construction are contrasted with those in geometry, and it is agreed upon that the latter are far more elevated and hence of an entirely different kind. There is also an aside on memory, something which is no doubt to be had in many of Plato's dialogues, namely that much of learning is a case of recalling forgotten knowledge. Implying that knowledge, not of ephemeral things and facts, but the deeper permanent ones, was always present in our souls and need only to be revived to be understood. This is indeed the experience we have of encountering abstract and persuasive reasoning<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It reminds me of Gödel, who claimed that once we encounter the right axioms of set theory, we will recognize them as the correct ones.