

TWO LECTURES ON VARIETIES OF PLEASURE IN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

Anthony Price, Athens 21-22 March, 2017

LECTURE I : PLATO'S *PHILEBUS* AND ARISTOTLE'S *RHETORIC*

1. PREFACE

Plato associates pleasure especially with a process of restoration out of deprivation, whereas Aristotle distinguishes it from any process as a property or activity of a kind. Yet Aristotle draws on Plato when he offers a characterization of pleasure in *Rhetoric* 1. 11 before he presents his distinctive view in the *Ethics*. I wish to argue that both philosophers accommodate a variety of pleasures, but Aristotle more successfully.

2. PLATO'S *PHILEBUS*

Socrates distinguishes two opposite movements or processes: there is a physical disruption of the harmony of living creatures, which gives rise to pain, and a restoration of the harmony, which gives rise to pleasure (31^d4-10). Hunger involves 'disintegration and pain', whereas eating is a 'refilling' and pleasure (31^e6-8). There is also a different kind of pleasure, one of anticipation (32^b9-5), which involves the soul alone. This depends upon a memory of earlier refillings or restorations, and gives rise to simultaneous pleasure and pain (36^b8-9). Such mental pleasure depends, in its objects and in its causes, upon physical pleasure; though not itself a replenishment, it arises from the prospect of replenishment.

Yet a different view might be taken: desiring what one does not yet have might be conceived of as a conscious lack that is relieved by an imaginative replenishing. Then the pleasure of anticipation would turn out to be a replenishing of a kind, with the mind already being replenished though the body has to wait. Then *all* pleasure might be a replenishment.

Accordingly, Verity Harte has proposed that we view an anticipatory pleasure not as 'a pleasure *in* the anticipated pleasure', but as 'an advance instalment' of the anticipated pleasure. Yet an advance payment is just like a later payment, except in its timing; yet no psycho-physical restoration has yet begun. Sylvain Delcomminette has better suggested that the subject *experiences* the future pleasure *in advance*; he lives it *at a distance*, and *in his imagination*. This would constitute a purely mental replenishment that is derivative from, but not of a kind with, the psycho-physical replenishment that it anticipates.

However, we must consider this passage (40^a6-12):

λόγοι μὴν εἰσιν ἐν ἐκάστοις ἡμῶν, ὡς ἐλπίδας ὀνομάζομεν; καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ φαντάσματα ἐζωγραφημένα: καὶ τις ὄρᾳ πολλάκις ἑαυτῷ χρυσὸν γιγνόμενον ἄφθονον καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῷ πολλὰς ἡδονὰς: καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐνεζωγραφημένον αὐτὸν ἐφ' αὐτῷ χαίροντα σφόδρα καθορᾷ. ('There are statements in each of us that we call hopes ... But there are also those painted images. And someone often sees himself acquiring unlimited gold, and many pleasures in consequence; and he also sees himself within the picture, enjoying himself hugely.')

Harte rightly takes this pleasure to be *propositional*. Socrates here describes *being pleased that* (as one supposes, truly or falsely) one is about to enjoy oneself. Yet that is to be distinguished from *enjoying oneself in one's imagination*. As Richard Wollheim distinguished, picturing doing a thing exemplifies *central* imagining, within which one assumes the point of view of a subject, whereas picturing oneself doing a thing exemplifies *acentral* imagining, within which one imagines a scene from no point of view that is occupied within it. We read that he 'sees himself within the picture', and not that he imagines the scene as it would present itself to his view (with his own person scarcely visible) if he stepped into it.

So, as Socrates conceives it, an anticipatory pleasure is not one that brings forward the pleasure anticipated even experientially. We must count this neither as a full pleasure of replenishment, nor as its equivalent within the mind. Rather, we should accept that these pages of the *Philebus* in effect distinguish *two* varieties of pleasure, the one primary, the other derivative, of which only the first is a pleasure of restoration.

Anticipatory pleasures arising from physical depletion involve a mixture of pleasure and pain (47^c4-7):

λύπην τε ἅμα πρὸς ἡδονὴν καὶ ἡδονὴν πρὸς λύπην, ὥστ' εἰς μίαν ἀμφοτέρα κρᾶσιν ἵεναι, ταῦτα ἔμπροσθε μὲν διήλθομεν, ὡς, ὅποταν αὐτὴ κενῶται, πληρώσεως ἐπιθυμεῖ, καὶ ἐλπίζων μὲν χαίρει, κενούμενος δὲ ἀλγεῖ.

(‘When there is pain over and against pleasures, or pleasure against pain, both are finally joined in a mixed state. We have talked about them earlier and agreed that in these cases it is the deprivation that gives rise to the desire for replenishment, and while the anticipation is pleasant, the deprivation itself is painful.’)

Such a mixed pleasure is in no way a *remedy*; yet it may provide some *relief*.

This pattern is then further extended into an account of mixed pains and pleasures *within the soul itself* (47^d5-50^d6). This is illustrated by a quotation from Homer (*Il.* 18. 108-9) about the pleasure, sweeter than honey, that accompanies anger. As I read him, Plato is extending his conception of pleasure step by step: he starts with pains of deprivation and pleasures of replenishment; he continues with pains of deprivation that are accompanied by pleasures both reminiscent and anticipatory of replenishment; and he comes eventually to a mixture of pleasures and pains within the soul itself that no longer relate to deprivation and replenishment, but where each pleasure owes its being to an accompanying pain that it serves to relieve.

Yet may there not be pleasures that are *not* parasitic upon pains? Socrates not only concedes this, but allows Protarchus to count these alone as ‘true’ pleasures (51^b1-2). He specifies them as follows (b3-6):

τὰς περὶ τε τὰ καλὰ λεγόμενα χρώματα καὶ περὶ τὰ σχήματα καὶ τῶν ὀσμῶντὰς πλείστας καὶ τὰς τῶν φθόγγων καὶ ὅσα τὰς ἐνδείας ἀναισθητῶν ἔχοντα καὶ ἀλύπους τὰς πληρώσεις αἰσθητῶν καὶ ἡδείας καθαρὰς λυπῶν παραδίδωσιν.

(‘Those that are related to so-called fine colours and to shapes and to most smells and sounds and in general all those that are based on imperceptible and painless lacks, while their fillings are perceptible and pleasant.’)

Note that Socrates does not commit himself here to any claim that what was true of the pleasures of physical replenishment, and may *also* be true of certain perceptual pleasures (as well as those of learning and relearning, 51^e7-52^b8), is true of *all* pleasures, including those of anticipation. All pleasures turn out to be phenomena of transition – and it is *this* that Socrates is concerned to establish, in order to infer that pleasure belongs ‘in a class different from that of the good’ (54^d1-2).

For all its looseness, the account remains in a way restrictive. Comparing the *Philebus* with the less consistent *Republic*, Dorothea Frede has remarked, ‘Being true to his definition of pleasure as the filling of a lack, Plato can no longer accept any other pleasures of the mind, such as pleasures of “contemplating reality”.’ Which is well observed, even if we take not all pleasures to be of that kind. Attempts to bring even these within the category of processes of replenishment of a kind do not, I think, succeed.

3: ARISTOTLE’S *RHETORIC*

And yet *Rhetoric* 1. 11 opens with what is ostensibly a definition of pleasure, and one that apparently derives from the initial characterization of pleasure in the *Philebus* (1369^b33-5):

ὑποκείσθω δὴ ἡμῖν εἶναι τὴν ἡδονὴν κίνησιν τινα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ κατάστασιν ἀθρόαν καὶ αἰσθητὴν εἰς τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν φύσιν, λύπην δὲ τοῦναντίον.

(‘We may lay it down that pleasure is a movement, a settling-down by which the soul as a whole [or suddenly?] is perceptibly brought into its natural state of being; and that pain is the opposite.’)

There has been much discussion of why Aristotle should draw on Plato in this way. Justin Gosling and Christopher Taylor have suggested that the present account is ‘a commonly accepted view sufficiently close to the truth to meet the orator’s needs’. Alternatively, if we follow Christof Rapp, the Platonic view can serve as a ‘Hintergrundstheorie’ (background theory) for popular conceptions of pleasure. This last proposal fits what immediately follows, which is an easy transition into commonplaces: what is habitual is pleasant, for habit resembles nature (1370^a5-9); so is what is unforced, for force is unnatural (^a9-11); so are relaxation, amusement, and rest, being free of necessity (^a14-16).

As in the *Philebus* (as I read that), we have not a single identification of pleasure with a process of restoration, but rather a developing characterization that branches and spreads. For Aristotle then quickly moves to desire: ‘Everything, too, is pleasant for which we have the appetite within us, since appetite is desire for pleasure’ (^a16-18). He distinguishes different kinds of appetite, natural or rational. He first focuses on natural bodily desires for nourishment and kinds of nourishment, which are precisely the ones privileged in the *Philebus* as anticipations of physical replenishment. He then generalizes to the pleasures of sense, including hearing and seeing (^a24-5). Rational desires arise from receiving information and being persuaded (^a25-7). He thus takes Plato’s concession that pleasures can derive from replenishment without being pleasures *of* replenishment as a general permission to extend the realm of pleasures indefinitely in the light of experience. Consequently, the *Rhetoric* maintains no unifying conception of them beyond a family resemblance whereby new types of pleasure relate, closely or loosely, to old ones.

Another source of appeal is Plato's description in the *Philebus* of the mixed pleasures and pains that go to make up human emotions (47^c3- 50^d6). Here we need to distinguish different structures. What Rapp calls 'Gegen-Emotionen' (counter-emotions) arise in three different kinds of context:

(i) One emotion may be the converse of another, and arise in converse circumstances: enmity so relates to friendship (2. 4), confidence to fear (2. 5, 1383^a14-25), and calmness can so relate to anger (2. 3, 1380^a9-14).

(ii) One emotion may arise as the pacification of another. Calmness can so relate to anger (e.g., 2. 3, 1380^a14-19): it can function, in language reminiscent of the *Philebus*, as 'a settling-down and quieting of anger' (1380^a8-9).

(iii) Two emotions may co-exist, one painful, one pleasant, one of them intensifying the other. Anger so relates to pleasure at the thought of revenge (2. 3, 1378^a30-^b10).

(ii) is analogous to what count as primary pleasures in the *Philebus*: after anger may follow a restoration of calm (though this is not its goal). (iii) may detain us briefly. Salient here is the following passage (2. 2, 1378^a30-^b10):

ἔστω δὴ ὀργὴ ὄρεξις μετὰ λύπης τιμωρίας φαινομένης διὰ φαινομένην ὀλιγορίαν εἰς αὐτὸν ἢ τι τῶν αὐτοῦ, τοῦ ὀλιγορεῖν μὴ προσήκοντος ... πάσῃ ὀργῇ ἔπεσθαί τινα ἡδονήν, τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ τιμωρήσασθαι: ἡδὺ μὲν γὰρ τὸ οἶεσθαι τεύξεσθαι ὧν ἐφίεται, οὐδεὶς δὲ τῶν φαινομένων ἀδυνάτων ἐφίεται αὐτῷ, ὁ δὲ ὀργιζόμενος ἐφίεται δυνατῶν αὐτῷ. διὸ καλῶς εἴρηται περὶ θυμοῦ: ὅς τε πολὺ γλυκίων μέλιτος καταλειβομένοιο ἀνδρῶν ἐν στήθεσσι ἀέξεται: ἀκολουθεῖ γὰρ καὶ ἡδονὴ τις διὰ τε τοῦτο καὶ διότι διατρίβουσιν ἐν τῷ τιμωρεῖσθαι τῇ διανοίᾳ: ἢ οὖν τότε γινομένη φαντασία ἡδονὴν ἐμποιεῖ, ὥσπερ ἢ τῶν ἐνυπνίων.

(1378^a30-2: 'Let anger be a desire with pain for an apparent revenge because of an apparent slight by people for whom it was not fitting to slight oneself or someone close to one.'

^b1-4: 'Every occurrence of anger must be accompanied by a certain pleasure, that which arises from the anticipation of taking revenge. For it is pleasant to expect to achieve what one aims at, and no one aims at things that appear impossible for him.'

^b4-9: 'So it has well been said of anger (θυμός), "It is much sweeter than dripping honey, and spreads through the breasts of men." For a certain pleasure attends it, both because of this, and because men dwell upon taking revenge in thought.'

^b9-10: 'So the imagining that then arises causes pleasure, as it does in dreams.'

Such pleasures may be viewed as pleasures of replenishment in a figurative sense: the man who has been slighted has lost face, and needs to recover his social standing. Might such anticipations of revenge themselves count as already a kind of psychic restoration? Hardly; for how can his entertaining the prospect of getting his own back, with the thought that it is realizable, *already* constitute even a partial restoration of his slighted honour? The anticipatory pleasure can only be a private rehearsal, perhaps bringing some relief.

I conclude that no more in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* than in Plato's *Philebus* is there any attempt to extend pleasures of replenishment to include anticipatory pleasures.