

Sources For Text and Commentary on Philebus - The Jowett Edition

Post by "Cassius" of January 9, 2022 at 10:36 PM

One more (or perhaps a couple) of clips from the Jowett commentary that seem particularly important:

III. I. Plato speaks of pleasure as indefinite, as relative, as a generation, and in all these points of view as in a category distinct from good. For again we must repeat, that to the Greek 'the good is of the nature of the finite,' and, like virtue, either is, or is nearly allied to, knowledge. The modern philosopher would remark that the indefinite is equally real with the definite. Health and mental qualities are in the concrete undefined; they

Plato's criticism of pleasure criticized.

531

are nevertheless real goods, and Plato rightly regards them as falling under the finite class. Again, we are able to define objects or ideas, not in so far as they are in the mind, but in so far as they are manifested externally, and can therefore be reduced to rule and measure. And if we adopt the test of definiteness,

Philebus.

INTRODUC-
TION.

The following is not what Plato said in [Philebus](#), but commentary from the writer (Jowett himself?) which seems pretty sound:

absolute. But this distinction seems to arise from an unfair mode of regarding them; the abstract idea of the one is compared with the concrete experience of the other. For all pleasure and all knowledge may be viewed either abstracted from the mind, or in relation to the mind (cp. Aristot. Nic. Ethics, x. 3, 4). The first is an idea only, which may be conceived as absolute and unchangeable, and then the abstract idea of pleasure will be equally unchangeable with that of knowledge. But when we come to view either as phenomena of consciousness, the same defects are for the most part incident to both of them. Our hold upon them is equally transient and uncertain; the mind cannot be always in a state of intellectual tension, any more than capable of feeling pleasure always. The knowledge which is at one time clear and distinct, at another seems to fade away, just as the pleasure of health after sickness, or of eating after hunger, soon passes into a neutral state of unconsciousness and indifference. Change and alternation are necessary for the mind as well as for the body; and in this is to be acknowledged, not an element of evil, but rather a law of nature. The chief difference between

accompanied by generation (Nic. Eth. x. 3, 4, 10, 11).

4. Plato attempts to identify vicious pleasures with some form of error, and insists that the term false may be applied to them: in this he appears to be carrying out in a confused manner the Socratic doctrine, that virtue is knowledge, vice ignorance. He will allow of no distinction between the pleasures and the erroneous opinions on which they are founded, whether arising out of the illusion of distance or not. But to this we naturally reply with Protarchus, that the pleasure is what it is, although the calculation may be false, or the after-effects painful. It is difficult to acquit Plato, to use his own language, of being a 'tyro in dialectics,' when he overlooks such a distinction. Yet, on the other hand, we are hardly fair judges of confusions of thought in those who view things differently from ourselves.

adequate conception of the beautiful in external things.

7. Plato agrees partially with certain 'surly or fastidious' philosophers, as he terms them, who defined pleasure to be the absence of pain. They are also described as eminent in physics. There is unfortunately no school of Greek philosophy known to us which combined these two characteristics. Antisthenes, who was an enemy of pleasure, was not a physical philosopher; the atomists, who were physical philosophers, were not enemies of pleasure. Yet such a combination of opinions is far from being impossible. Plato's omission to mention them by name has created the same uncertainty respecting them which also occurs respecting the 'friends of the ideas' and the 'materialists' in the Sophist.

On the whole, this discussion is one of the least satisfactory in the dialogues of Plato. While the ethical nature of pleasure is scarcely considered, and the merely physical phenomenon imperfectly analysed, too much weight is given to ideas of measure and number, as the sole principle of good. The comparison of pleasure and knowledge is really a comparison of two elements, which have no common measure, and which cannot be excluded from each other. Feeling is not opposed to know-