

# Sources For Text and Commentary on Philebus - The Jowett Edition

**Post by "Cassius" of January 9, 2022 at 8:04 PM**

I will come back here and post a link to where [Philebus](#) may be found on the [tufts.perseus site](#), but for now I want to link to what might be the best and most definitive free public domain edition: that by Jowett. This edition has extensive introduction and notes which I have not read, but in linking to pages and line numbers this might be the best way to link to sections of the text on the internet.

Let me be clear: [Philebus](#) is very difficult to follow, and I don't claim to have figured it out. It seems clear that there are points which are directly related to Epicurus, such as a very clear question about whether pleasure and pain have a limit. Socrates is very clear that he thinks pleasure does not have a limit, and it seems clear that Socrates thinks that Pleasure is disqualified from being "The good" for that reason, but Socrates combines this argument with other complicated arguments that seem to hinge on the nature of numbers, and I really don't understand where he is ultimately going with those: something to the effect that wisdom is the most important thing to have, apparently.

Here is the main archive.org page for Jowett : [https://archive.org/details/b24750189\\_0004](https://archive.org/details/b24750189_0004) and for Fowler: [https://archive.org/details/b2900049x\\_0008](https://archive.org/details/b2900049x_0008) and the main Perseus page: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?do...3Atext%3DPhileb>.

The start of the section on [Philebus](#) in the Jowett edition (extensive introduction and commentary): [https://archive.org/details/b24750189\\_0004/page/518/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/b24750189_0004/page/518/mode/2up)

The start of the dialog itself: [https://archive.org/details/b24750189\\_0004/page/574/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/b24750189_0004/page/574/mode/2up)

Start of the "Limit" discussion - page 593 of the Jowett text: [https://archive.org/details/b24750189\\_0004/page/593/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/b24750189_0004/page/593/mode/1up) This is according to Perseus [section 27e](#).

I intend to do more work on the "limit of pleasure" argument that is found here, and this is the place where I plan to provide page and line number links. (To be clear, I have now changed my mind and will link mostly to the Fowler pages, since that is what Perseus uses and probably therefore is easier to search. We can use Jowett as needed for comparison, because [Philebus](#) is a very complicated argument.)

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**Post by "Cassius" of January 9, 2022 at 8:35 PM**

Locations to Important points in text - Fowler:

Kinds of Pleasure: "For I think Socrates is asking us whether there are or are not kinds of pleasure, how many kinds there are, what their nature is, and the same of wisdom."  
[https://archive.org/details/b2900049x\\_0008/page/229/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/b2900049x_0008/page/229/mode/1up)

Is the Nature of the good perfect or imperfect, sufficient or insufficient? soc. Is the nature of the good necessarily perfect or imperfect ? pro. The most perfect of all things, surely, Socrates. soc. Well, and is the good sufficient ?

pro. Of course ; so that it surpasses all other things in sufficiency.  
[https://archive.org/details/b2900049x\\_0008/page/233/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/b2900049x_0008/page/233/mode/1up)

The good cannot have need of anything else. soc. Let there be no wisdom in the life of pleasure and no pleasure in the life of wisdom. For if either of them is the good, it cannot have need of anything else, and if either be found to need anything, we can no longer regard it as our true good. [https://archive.org/details/b2900049x\\_0008/page/235/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/b2900049x_0008/page/235/mode/1up)

The Limits Argument:

Consider the hotter and the colder, is there any limit in them? soc. Consider then. What I ask you to consider is difficult and debatable ; but consider it all the same. In the first place, take hotter and colder and see whether you can conceive any limit of them, or whether the more and less which dwell in their very nature do not, so long as they continue to dwell therein, preclude the possibility of any end ; for if there were any end of them, the more and less would themselves be ended. [https://archive.org/details/b2900049x\\_0008/page/245/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/b2900049x_0008/page/245/mode/1up)

Socrates suggests that a goddess higher than pleasure established law and order, which has a limit, to restrain pleasure, which does not have a limit:. soc. There are countless other things which I pass over, such as health, beauty, and strength of the body and the many glorious beauties of the soul. For this goddess , I my fair [Philebus](#), beholding the violence and universal wickedness which prevailed, since there was no limit of pleasures or of indulgence in them, established law and order, which contain a limit. You say she did harm ; I say, on the contrary, she brought salvation. [https://archive.org/details/b2900049x\\_0008/page/253/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/b2900049x_0008/page/253/mode/1up)

Have pleasure and pain a limit? (27e) Soc. Have pleasure and pain a limit, or are they among the things which admit of more and less phi. Yes, they are among those which admit of the more, Socrates ; for pleasure would not be absolute good if it were not infinite in number and degree. soc. Nor would pain, [Philebus](#), be absolute evil ; so it is not the infinite which supplies any element of good in pleasure ; we must look for something else. Well, I grant you that pleasure and pain are in the class of the infinite ; but to which of the aforesaid classes, Protarchus and [Philebus](#), can we now without irreverence assign wisdom, knowledge, and mind

? I think we must find the right answer to this question, for our danger is great if we fail.  
[https://archive.org/details/b2900049x\\_0008/page/259/mode/1up](https://archive.org/details/b2900049x_0008/page/259/mode/1up) [Perseus Link](#)

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### Post by “Cassius” of January 9, 2022 at 9:29 PM

The plan is complicated, or rather, perhaps, the want of plan renders the progress of the dialogue difficult to follow. A few leading ideas seem to emerge: the relation of the one and many, the four original elements, the kinds of pleasure, the kinds of knowledge, the scale of goods. These are only partially connected with one another. The dialogue is not rightly entitled ‘Concerning pleasure’ or ‘Concerning good,’ but should rather be described as treating of the relations of pleasure and knowledge, after they have been duly analyzed, to the good. (1) The question is asked, whether pleasure or wisdom is the chief good, or some nature higher than either; and if the latter, how pleasure and wisdom are related to this higher good. (2) Before we can reply with exactness, we must know the kinds of pleasure and the kinds of knowledge. (3) But still we may affirm generally, that the combined life of pleasure and wisdom or knowledge has more of the character of the good than either of them when isolated. (4) To determine which of them partakes most of the higher nature, we must know under which of the four unities or elements they respectively fall. These are, first, the infinite; secondly, the finite; thirdly, the union of the two; fourthly, the cause of the union. Pleasure is of the first, wisdom or knowledge of the third class, while reason or mind is akin to the fourth or highest.

from [the](#)  
answer a  
elp:

(5) Pleasures are of two kinds, the mixed and unmixed. Of mixed pleasures there are three classes—(a) those in which both the pleasures and pains are corporeal, as in eating and hunger ; (β) those in which there is a pain of the body and pleasure of the mind, as when you are hungry and are looking forward to a feast ; (γ) those in which the pleasure and pain are both mental. Of unmixed pleasures there are four kinds : those of sight, hearing, smell, knowledge.

*The one and the many.*

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(6) The sciences are likewise divided into two classes, theoretical and productive : of the latter, one part is pure, the other impure. The pure part consists of arithmetic, mensuration, and weighing. Arts like carpentering, which have an exact measure, are to be regarded as higher than music, which for the most part is mere guess-work. But there is also a higher arithmetic, and a higher mensuration, which is exclusively theoretical ; and a dialectical science, which is higher still and the truest and purest knowledge.

*Philebus.*

INTRODUC-  
TION.

(7) We are now able to determine the composition of the perfect life. First, we admit the pure pleasures and the pure sciences ; secondly, the impure sciences, but not the impure pleasures. We have next to discover what element of goodness is contained in this mixture. There are three criteria of goodness—beauty, symmetry, truth. These are clearly more akin to reason than to pleasure, and will enable us to fix the places of both of them in the scale of good. First in the scale is measure ; the second place is assigned to symmetry ; the third, to reason and wisdom ; the fourth, to knowledge and true opinion ; the fifth, to pure pleasures ; and here the Muse says ‘ Enough.’

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**Post by “Cassius” of January 9, 2022 at 9:40 PM**

[Godfrey](#) I am going to tag you here due to your earlier comment about reading about "kinds of pleasure" in Gosling & Taylor. If (or anyone else) happens to get a chance to look at [Philebus](#) and develops any insight into the flow of Plato's argument, please let me know.

I am confident that Jowett's outline summary is correct. I think his point 4 is where we find the "pleasure has no limit so that means it can't be THE good" which is probably of prime importance in discussing Epicurus' "limit of pleasure" argument. But Plato goes on in points 5 through the end to make arguments about mixed and unmixed and pure / impure, and their relation to wisdom, which probably also have responses in epicurus, but we have yet to drag those out into the open. [PD18](#) and [PD19](#) and maybe others may relate to this, and this might be key to Epicurus' argument that the infinite life can contain no more pleasure than our own, which is finite. If so, that too would be a hugely important point to understand better - instead of skipping over it as we often do now.

There is LOTS more to get out of [Philebus](#) which will help us with Epicurus.

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### **Post by "Don" of January 9, 2022 at 9:51 PM**

I know I have to read [Philebus](#), but I'm not looking forward to it. I have to say that

#### [Quote from Cassius](#)

"pleasure has no limit so that means it can't be THE good"

doesn't even seem relevant to me! The reason pleasure is "the good" is because it is the thing to which everything else points and the reason we do everything. We are virtuous because it brings us pleasure. We make wise decisions to live pleasingly. We engage in some painful activities, knowing (we hope) more pleasure will come from our actions. It all points to pleasure.

I \*know\* Socrates will NOT abide those statements and will engage in word games and goal-post moving, and I expect the reading of [Philebus](#) will be an exercise in aggravation and frustration. But I know it'll need necessary at some point. Arrgh. Where's the honey on the rim of this cup of wormwood? 🤔

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

### [Quote from Don](#)

doesn't even seem relevant to me!

Plato would probably sniff and say that's because you're not "golden" 😊

### [Quote from Don](#)

Where's the honey on the rim of this cup of wormwood?

That one might be easy: the honey is in the pleasure you will take in looking down at the poor wandering souls who are confused and listless, and knowing (once you see through Plato) that you have the medicine that will help them. Plus of course you will have the pleasure of actually helping them.

More precisely, I will argue (but am not yet articulate enough to be convincing) that this knowledge of seeing through Plato will allow you to treat a particularly important subset of the people who are confused and listless: those who have read Epicurus but think they should pursue "tranquility" rather than "pleasure."

And of course my argument there is that once you see a very practical and important reason for Epicurus to have been concerned about arguing over whether "pleasure has a limit," you'll begin to entertain that the reason PD3, and portions of the Letter to Menoeceus, are written the way they are is to refute Plato, not to suggest that tranquility is something separate and higher than pleasure, as so many people (trying to apply their Buddhism and Stoicism) want to interpret it.

At that point I think you'll begin to entertain that:

- (1) PD1 is mainly an antidote to the contention that there are supernatural gods;
- (2) PD2 is mainly an antidote to the contention that there is life after death; and then in parallel
- (3) PD3 and PD4 are mainly antidotes to Platonic arguments that pleasure cannot be the goal of life.

Having 'pleasure is the goal of life' somewhere near the top of the [principal doctrines](#) is pretty important to making sense of them. To me, the realization that these are refutations of Plato makes them much easier to understand and less likely to be twisted into some kind of "absence of pain as an end in itself" rabbit hole. And I am not happy to admit the "to me" part. I think that this seems significant "to me" and to others who are probably like me, is that we have previously been impressed with the Platonic/Stoic position that "logic" must rule, and we are looking for a "logical" solution to the trap that Plato has set with his arguments. My only consolation is that I think that a lot of Epicurus' students were that way too, which is the best

explanation for why he wrote his material the way he did. Approaching the dispute the way he did, Epicurus is able to slap the "logic-seekers" in the face with their own logic. "Pleasure DOES have a limit, you dolts! Why did you and Protarchus and [Philebus](#)' boys ever admit to Plato that it didn't!"

Note: i am personally still unclear where [Philebus](#) himself ended up, and that's why I reference "to take the better part." Philebus, who has withdrawn from the argument, is several times brought back again (pp. 18, 19, 22, 28), that he may support pleasure, of which he remains to the end the uncompromising advocate. On the other hand, the youthful group of listeners by whom he is surrounded, 'Philebus' boys' as they are termed, whose presence is several times intimated (16 A, B, 19 D, 67 B), are described as all of them at last convinced by the arguments of Socrates. They bear a very faded resemblance to the interested audiences of the Charmides, Lysis, or Protagoras.

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### Post by "Godfrey" of January 9, 2022 at 10:23 PM

Cassius in my notes on Gosling and Taylor I skipped over the Plato and Aristotle sections 😊 . It will be a few days before I'll be able to look it over but I'll see if I can find something. I did read [Philebus](#) quite a while ago but can't remember the details, however [Don](#) it's only about fifty pages or so, so it's relatively painless to give it a quick read. As for in depth study: now THAT could be torture!

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### 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. 1. 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.*

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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,

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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 (Theaetetus, 3, 6, 116, 10).

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.

Now this is interesting too:

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-

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### Post by "Joshua" of January 9, 2022 at 10:47 PM

Quote

I \*know\* Socrates will NOT abide those statements and will engage in word games and goal-post moving, and I expect the reading of [Philebus](#) will be an exercise in aggravation and frustration. But I know it'll need necessary at some point. Arrggh. Where's the honey on the rim of this cup of wormwood?

Quote

Cassius in my notes on Gosling and Taylor I skipped over the Plato and Aristotle sections 😊.

I have the rare feeling (for me) of being the only kid in class who did my homework! 😊 Though I must admit that Godfrey was one of the people whose discussion led me to actually read it.

Cassius, those passages from Jowett's commentary (if we can confirm that it *is* Jowett's commentary) do indeed seem very promising.

"Too much weight is given to measure and number as the sole principle of good."

Thank you especially for that one, Jowett!

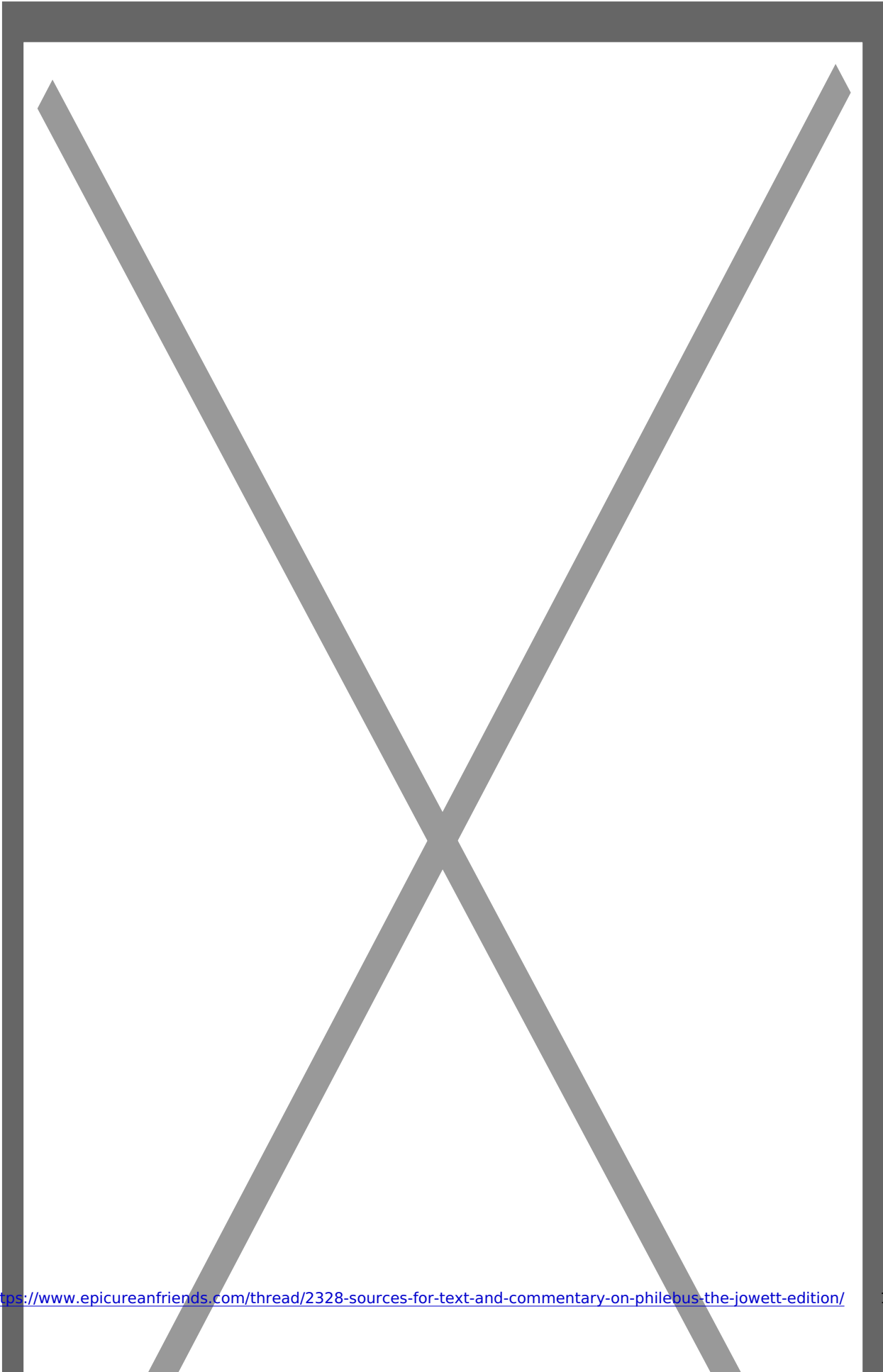
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### **Post by “Cassius” of January 10, 2022 at 6:01 AM**

I am not sure whether I remember this from college or somewhere else, but Jowett seems to have been considered a huge figure in classical greek studies. I see on Archive.org that he did a full set of translations of Plato's Dialogues prior to the Loeb Classical Library (translated by Fowler?) seeming to take over as the main source.

It appears from this bio that Jowett had an extremely active and interesting personal history, with lots of fairly "liberal" or 'reformist' opinions that he freely offered, so i bet we are going to find that most if not all of the commentary is his.

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[Benjamin Jowett - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org



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## Post by “Cassius” of January 10, 2022 at 6:04 AM

I don't see any indication that any of the extensive introductions and analysis sections are by anyone but Jowett, and after reading the bio at wikipedia I doubt too many people would have dared to try to correct or give opinions to him about the texts - and maybe for good reason as he seems to have been a huge figure.

