# Anticipating Painful Pleasures: on False Anticipatory Pleasures in the *Philebus*

Abstract

In the *Philebus,* Socrates argues that some anticipatory pleasures can be false. The main argument for this claim that occurs at 38b6-41a4 has perplexed readers, however, and scholars have developed several different ways to understand the falsity of false anticipatory pleasures. Nonetheless, challenges remain for the existing interpretations. In this paper I argue that the anticipation argument should be read in conjunction with a later distinction in the *Philebus* between *intense* pleasures mixed with pain and *pure* pleasures free from pain. I suggest that anticipatory pleasures taken in *intense* pleasures are false because they misidentify an intense pleasure as a genuine pleasure when in fact intense pleasures are inferior and non-genuine due to being mixed with pain. I contend that the example of a false anticipatory pleasure supports recognizing this kind of falsity, and that doing so helps to resolve several challenges that face existing interpretations.

# 1: Introduction

The *Philebus* is devoted to a dispute between Socrates and Philebus as to which of two lives is best, the life of pleasure and enjoyment or the life of intelligence and understanding. After quickly deciding, however, that the best human life requires both intelligence *and* pleasure, they switch to investigating which of the two makes a more valuable contribution to the human good. Along the way Socrates famously, or perhaps notoriously, asks whether certain pleasures can be *false*, a problem he claims to have always wondered about (36e1-3). Socrates goes on to argue for the existence of at least three different kinds of false pleasures: false anticipatory pleasures caused by the anticipation of future pleasures, false pleasures that appear larger or more intense when juxtaposed with pain, and certain so-called ‘pleasures’ claimed to be experienced by those who are actually just in a state free from pain. In addition to those three, Plato also implies that pleasures mixed with pain are false and opposed to true ‘pure pleasures.’

Socrates is evidently not alone in his continual wonder about the problem of false pleasures; the *Philebus* has generated a large amount of scholarly debate as to how false pleasures should be understood. Most of the debate has centered on the first kind of false pleasures: false anticipatory pleasures. Though most interpreters agree that anticipatory pleasure consists in the experience of an occurrent pleasure due to anticipating a future pleasure, Plato’s argument is condensed and does not clearly explain exactly *how* anticipatory pleasures are false. As a result, multiple different interpretations have been proposed to fill in the gaps. Roughly speaking, one class of interpretations take anticipatory pleasures to be taken in some specific proposition *p.* When *p* is false, the anticipatory pleasure is itself false. I call these interpretations the ‘Mistaken Content Interpretations.’ However, these interpretations struggle to explain the falsity of anticipatory pleasures while simultaneously respecting Socrates’ additional claim that the wicked have mostly false anticipatory pleasures while the good have mostly true anticipatory pleasures. In response to such worries, another prominent class of commentators, holding what I will call ‘Mistaken Value Interpretations,’ take the falsity to instead be rooted in mistaken values.[[1]](#footnote-1) They all take someone having a false anticipatory pleasure to mistakenly take something to be good for them. Though this proposal can explain why the wicked have false anticipatory pleasures, we will see that it faces challenges of its own.

In this paper, I argue that the *Philebus* suggests a way to understand the falsity of false anticipatory pleasures that accommodates the insights of both schools of interpretation while also explaining why the wicked have mostly false anticipatory pleasures. In section 2 I review the argument for false anticipatory pleasures from 38b6-41a4 and argue that anticipatory pleasures are false because the corresponding ‘inner pictures,’ pictures that represent the future pleasures, are false in some way. Exactly how the inner pictures are false, however, is far from clear. In section 3 I argue that existing Mistaken Content Interpretations and Mistaken Value Interpretations both struggle to accommodate key claims made in the argument. In section 4 I suggest that Plato’s example indicates a way forward. In the example, the man sees himself in a painted image *intensely* (σφόδρα) enjoying himself. This is significant, as later in the *Philebus* we learn that intense pleasures are necessarily mixed with pain and therefore are inferior instances of pleasure. While Philebus and the wicked take intense pleasures to be pleasures most of all, Socrates instead argues that *pure* pleasures, free from pain, are the genuine instances of pleasure. In section 5 I consequently defend an interpretation in which the anticipatory pleasures had by the wicked are often false in virtue of systematically *misidentifying* intense pleasures as genuinely pleasant and explain how this view can resolve the worries that face other interpretations.

# 2: The Argument for False Anticipatory Pleasures

Before introducing anticipatory pleasures and pains, Socrates first establishes the restoration and destruction view of pleasure and pain. This basic view on pleasure and pain is expressed succinctly by Socrates:

Socrates: What I claim is that when we find the harmony in living creatures disrupted, there will at the same time be a disintegration of their nature and a rise of pain.

Protarchus: What you say is very plausible.

Socrates: But if the reverse happens, and the harmony is regained and the former nature restored, we have to say that pleasure arises. (31d4-10)[[2]](#footnote-2)

The destruction of our nature is accompanied by pain, while the restoration of our nature is accompanied by pleasure. After setting this down, Socrates goes on to introduce anticipatory pleasures and pains:

Socrates: But now accept also the anticipation (προσδόκημα) by the soul itself of these two kinds of experiences (παθήματων); the hope before the actual pleasure will be pleasant and comforting, while the expectation of pain will be frightening and painful. (32b9-32c2)

Socrates is here describing a different sort of pleasure and pain than those accompanying the bodily restorations or destructions discussed just prior. The anticipation of something pleasant will *itself* be pleasant before the anticipated pleasure occurs, while the anticipation of something painful will *itself* be painful. For instance, according to Socrates’ restoration theory the pleasure I experience when I quench my thirst with a glass of water is due to a restoration of my bodily nature. However, if I am terribly thirsty at the current moment, but anticipate being able to drink some water in the immediate future, I will feel occurrent pleasure despite not yet drinking any water and, consequently, not yet undergoing any bodily restoration.[[3]](#footnote-3) Conversely, the anticipation of imminent pain I have right before someone cuts into my arm with a knife can itself be extremely distressing even before the knife touches my skin. In short, anticipatory pleasures are pleasures experienced at some present time *t1* due to anticipating some future pleasure at a later time *t2*. Following others, I will refer to the future pleasure at time *t2* that is hoped for as the *anticipated pleasure* in contrast with the *anticipatory pleasure* felt and experienced at *t1*.

After introducing anticipatory pleasures, Socrates eventually asks whether pleasures and pains can sometimes be false, a question he claims to have lived in ‘continued perplexity’ about (36e1-3). The main argument for false anticipatory pleasures occurs at 38b6-41a4. Socrates suggests that anticipatory pleasures and pains involve something like writings and images within our soul, the falsity of which explains the falsity of our occurrent anticipatory pleasures. It is as if there are judgments (δόξα)[[4]](#footnote-4) written down within our soul by a scribe in addition to accompanying illustrations (εἰκόνας) of those judgments created by a metaphorical painter. The judgments can be either true or false, and Socrates says that the illustrations are similarly true or false based on the truth value of the judgments they are illustrations of (39c4-5). Moreover, our anticipatory pleasures and anticipatory pains about the future (προχαίρειν τε καὶ προλυπεῖσθαι περὶ τὸν μέλλοντα χρόνον; 39d4-5) are themselves based on judgments and accompanying illustrations about future times, which Socrates calls ‘hopes’ (ἐλπίδες) (39e4-6).

After outlining these different psychological activities, Socrates then appears to shift the topic abruptly by asserting that someone who is just and ‘good in all respects’ is loved by the gods, while a wicked and thoroughly evil person is not (39e10-40a1). After establishing this asymmetry between the good and the wicked, Socrates provides the one and only example of an image associated with an anticipatory pleasure:

Socrates: There are, then, assertions (λόγοι) in each of us that we call hopes?

Protarchus: Yes.

Socrates: But there are also those painted images. And often someone envisages himself in the possession of an enormous amount of gold and of a lot of pleasures as a consequence. And in addition, he also sees himself in this inner picture intensely (σφόδρα) enjoying himself. (40a6-12, translation modified)

In this example we can identify several elements of an anticipatory pleasure discussed in the *Philebus.* First, there are the assertions (λόγοι) in our souls, presumably about future times, that Socrates says we call hopes. These are most naturally identified with the products of the scribe within our soul. Secondly, we have the painted images associated with that hope. Here, the man sees himself with an enormous amount of gold and a great many pleasures, and in addition he sees his own intense enjoyment at that future time. The internal image seen by the man, therefore, depicts himself enjoying an *anticipated* pleasure at some future time. The envisioning of this image must in turn be responsible for an occurrent *anticipatory* pleasure felt in the present moment.

After describing these hopes, Socrates states that the ‘inscriptions and images’ (γεγραμμένα, which could refer to either written words, painted images, or both together), had by the good are for the most part true on account of their being ‘loved by the gods,’ while those had by the bad are for the most part false (40b2-4). Exactly how those painted images and inscriptions are true or false is not explained, nor is it explained why being ‘loved by the gods’ (τὸ θεοφιλεῖς εἶναι) would make those painted images more likely to be true. Socrates next argues that the images of pleasure present to the wicked are false:

Socrates: Therefore, painted pleasures are no less present to wicked people, but they are somehow false?

Protarchus: Right.

Socrates: So wicked people for the most part enjoy false pleasures, but the good among mankind true ones?

Protarchus: Quite necessarily so.

Socrates: From what has now been said, it follows that there are false pleasures in human souls that are quite ridiculous imitations of true ones, and also such pains.

Protarchus: There certainly are. (40b6-c6, translation modified)

Though there is room for disagreement, I think we should understand the ‘false pleasures in human souls’ to refer to the false images of pleasure, that is the false painted pleasures referred to at 40b6-7.[[5]](#footnote-5) This implies that the wicked have anticipatory pleasure that is based on some false image of a future anticipated pleasure, while the good usually have anticipatory pleasures based on true images of future anticipated pleasures.

Finally, Socrates supports his contention that anticipatory pleasures can be false by making a final comparison to judgments. He says that someone *reall*y makes a judgment even if their judgment is ‘not about anything existing in the present, past, or future’ (40c9-10), but that these are ‘the conditions that produce a false judgment and judging falsely’ (40d1-2). Socrates claims that something similar should be held for pleasures:

Socrates: In the sense that whoever has any pleasure at all, however ill-founded it may be, really does have pleasure, even if sometimes it is not about things that either are or ever were, or often (or perhaps most of the time) is not about things that will ever come to be (40d7-10, translation modified)

Clearly, this account of enjoyment is meant to parallel the immediately preceding explanation of judgments being false when they are not based on anything existing in the past, present, or future. Furthermore, Socrates had earlier said that true and false judgments arise from the scribe in our souls writing true things and false things respectively (39a1-7). Having already suggested that the work of the scribe and painter produces representations in our souls, I suggest that we are meant to extend the analogy between judgments and pleasures and understand Socrates to be asserting that pleasures are false when they are based on false representations about the present, past, or future that exist in our soul.

# 3: The Mistaken Content and Mistaken Value Interpretations

There are some major interpretative issues with the above argument. The most pressing is that we are given very little explanation of *how* the pictures of anticipated pleasures present to the wicked are false, and no explanation of why the pictures of the anticipated pleasures present to the good and god-loved are true. Probably the most straightforward and common interpretation takes it that the pictures envisioned by the good depict the future state of affairs *accurately,* while those present to the wicked depict the future state of affairs *inaccurately.* I will call this school of interpretation the ‘Mistaken Content Interpretation.’ According to this view, a pleasure with the content that *p* is false just in case *p* is false.[[6]](#footnote-6) Applying this to the *Philebus*’ example of a man who has anticipatory pleasure while anticipating pleasures from his immense wealth in the future, the man’s anticipatory pleasure is false only if the content of his anticipatory pleasure is false.

I believe we can further divide this class of interpretation into two according to two separate *ways* that content can be false. Namely, we can distinguish between a failure of *state-of-affairs* preservation and a failure of *attitude* preservation.[[7]](#footnote-7) The idea here is that we can distinguish two relevant features included in the content of my anticipatory pleasure. On the one hand, I anticipate a certain state-of-affairs obtaining in the future. For instance, I anticipate gaining an immense amount of wealth in the future in addition to my own lavish expenditure that will follow at that time. This is the content of my anticipation with respect to the external state of affairs that I anticipate obtaining at that future time. Secondly, I anticipate my *attitude* at that future time. Namely, I anticipate *immensely* *enjoying* the lavish expenditure at that future time. The content of my anticipatory pleasure includes both these aspects, and a failure of either would be sufficient to make my anticipatory pleasure false. For instance, if I fail to become immensely rich in the future, the content of my anticipation will be false because the state-of-affairs I anticipated will fail to obtain.[[8]](#footnote-8) Alternatively, I might predict the future state-of-affairs accurately, as I *really will* gain an immense amount of wealth and spend my money extravagantly, yet nonetheless fail to *enjoy myself* at that future time. In this latter case I will be disappointed at the future time relative to my earlier expectation despite accurately predicting what occurred.[[9]](#footnote-9)

One problem with Mistaken Content Interpretations is that they do not obviously explain Plato’s claim that the good will have mostly true anticipatory pleasures while the wicked will have mostly false anticipatory pleasures. This is especially pressing if we assume that the anticipatory pleasures of the wicked usually have false content due to a failure of state-of-affairs preservation. For a wicked person’s anticipatory pleasure of rejoicing in immense wealth attained from unjust acts to be false, that wicked person must *fail* to gain immense wealth. But what if the wicked person is quite skillful at carrying out his plot?[[10]](#footnote-10) Indeed, we might worry that someone’s wickedness makes the proposition more likely to be *true* rather than false: the most wicked man will not hesitate to use any unscrupulous or underhanded method to succeed.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Now, a defender of the Mistaken Content Interpretation might here object that I am overlooking a natural reading of the passage that can explain why the wicked have false hopes while the good have true ones: namely that the gods will intervene to ensure that the hopes of the good are fulfilled. Conversely, the gods might intervene to frustrate the hopes of the wicked.[[12]](#footnote-12) After all, Socrates does say that the painted images in the souls of the good are usually true because ‘they are loved by the gods’ (40b2-3). Yet, this interpretation is implausible in light of Plato’s examples of anticipatory pleasures. Consider again the example of the man hoping for the many pleasures that will follow his acquisition of gold; it is implausible that Plato believes that the gods actively intervene in the lives of the unjust to ensure they do not gain an enormous amount of gold while conversely rewarding the good with monetary wealth. After all, Plato freely acknowledges the existence of wealthy but unjust tyrants. It is therefore unlikely that Plato supposes that the gods *make* the hopes of the bad false through causing there to be a failure of state-of-affairs preservation.[[13]](#footnote-13)

On the other hand, someone could also defend the Mistaken Content Interpretation by arguing that there is a failure of attitude preservation. This would be the case if what is anticipated with pleasure is not enjoyed when it eventually occurs. For instance, if a tyrant obtains the wealth he had anticipated acquiring but does not enjoy the life of luxury as he had hoped. The good, on the other hand, might be so disposed that they generally do enjoy the things that they had earlier anticipated enjoying.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Against this, note that on this interpretation the falsity of the anticipatory pleasure does not seem to depend on the falsity of the anticipated pleasure *itself*. The implication is that a vicious person *could* have true anticipatory pleasures, no matter what sorts of pleasures he anticipates, *were* he to enjoy them when they occur. However, Socrates’ comment that the false pleasures in the souls of the wicked are ‘quite ridiculous imitations of true ones’ (40c5-6) suggests that something about the pleasures envisioned by the wicked are *themselves* ridiculous or mistaken in some way. In particular, they are ridiculous imitations of the ‘true ones,’ presumably the true pictures of pleasure present to the good people loved by the gods. In short, I argue that a satisfactory account of the asymmetry between the anticipatory pleasures of the good and the wicked will need to capture the idea that they envision *different kinds* ofpleasures as enjoyable, pleasures that are, in themselves, somehow ‘ridiculous.’

In contrast to the ‘Mistaken Content Interpretations,’ another class of interpreters have defended what I will call ‘Mistaken Value Interpretations.’ They take the hopes of the wicked to be false because they are based on *mistaken values*. For instance, some scholars argue that false anticipatory pleasures are those caused by hopes for things that are *bad* for the agent, but which are mistakenly supposed to be good. On this view, an anticipatory pleasure associated with a hope for something bad will be a false pleasure, regardless of whether or not the anticipated pleasure occurs as envisioned.[[15]](#footnote-15) Unlike the Mistaken Content Interpretations, this view can more easily make sense of Socrates’ contention that the good have mostly true anticipatory pleasures while the wicked have mostly false ones. Since the good will have accurate value judgments, they will hope for things that are genuinely good for them. Conversely, the wicked have mistaken value judgments and desire bad things, so their hopes will consequently be false.

In my view, the main problem with the Mistaken Value Interpretation is that it makes the argument for false anticipatory pleasures rather unconvincing to a hedonist interlocutor such as Philebus. With respect to Socrates’ example of the man rejoicing in gold, the anticipatory pleasure would be false if the gold is not a good thing for the man to have.[[16]](#footnote-16) But, would a hedonist have a reason to reject this sort of false anticipatory pleasure? This seems unlikely if we grant that the possession and use of gold really *is* *pleasant*. After all, the hedonist presumably takes the gold to be good for him *because* it enables all sorts of pleasures. A hedonist such as Philebus has little reason to remove any false anticipatory pleasures from his life if those pleasures are false only according to an evaluative standard that he does not have any reason to accept.

# 4: Intense Pleasure vs Pure Pleasures

We have seen that existing interpretations of the anticipation argument face several challenges. In the next two sections I will defend a new interpretation that I believe can overcome these issues. I will suggest that the sole example of an anticipatory pleasure suggests another way to understand the falsity of false anticipatory pleasures that draws on the *Philebus’* later distinction between *intense* pleasures and *pure* pleasures. My interpretation is similar to a common proposal: the wicked, but not the good, are mistaken about what sorts of experiences are pleasant.[[17]](#footnote-17) We have reason to believe, however, that the wicked are mistaken in a very specific way. The wicked, but not the good, mistakenly anticipate *intense* pleasures as genuinely pleasant experiences. According to the interpretation I defend here, an anticipatory pleasure directed at a future intense pleasure will be false because that anticipatory pleasure involves a judgment that an intense pleasure is genuinely pleasant. Yet, according to Plato, there is a sense in which an intense pleasure fails to be a genuine pleasure because intense pleasures are necessarily mixed with pain. In this section, I first detail the contrast between intense pleasures and pure pleasures as it is found in the unfolding argument of the *Philebus,* noting how intense pleasures are necessarily mixed with pain. In the following section I will explain how this contrast can explain why most of the anticipatory pleasures of the wicked are false.

To start, we should take a closer look at Plato’s main example of an anticipatory pleasure, a man envisioning himself enjoying a large amount of money:

Socrates: But there are also those painted images. And often someone envisages himself in the possession of an enormous amount of gold and of a lot of pleasures as a consequence. And in addition, he also sees himself in this inner picture intensely (σφόδρα) enjoying himself. (40a9-12, translation modified)

It is unclear whether this particular image is had by a good person, a wicked person, or both; all we know is that it is had by ‘someone’ (τις). The text itself is also not explicit as to whether this is a false image, a true one, or whether the truth or falsity depends on the virtue or vice of the person in which the picture exists. That said, I claim that there is good reason to think that Plato intends this image to be a false representation of pleasure had by a wicked person. To begin, note how the man envisages himself gaining an ‘enormous amount of gold’ (χρυσὸν γιγνόμενον ἄφθονον) and, consequently, ‘many pleasures’ (πολλὰς ἡδονάς). Most importantly, we should note that the man sees himself in the picture *intensely* (σφόδρα) enjoying himself (καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐνεζωγραφημένον αὐτὸν ἐφ’ αὑτῷ χαίροντα σφόδρα καθορᾷ*,* 40a11-12). The large amount of gold, the many pleasures, and the *intense* enjoyment all emphasize the envisaged pleasures being unlimited, large, and intense.

The example’s focus on *intense* enjoyment might seem innocuous. However, both intensity and intense pleasures are major topics of investigation in the *Philebus*. Earlier in the dialogue, Socrates specifically picked out the word ‘intensely*’* (σφόδρα) as being characteristic of the unlimited during the four-fold division of being. Intensity (τὸ σφόδρα) and its opposite, gentleness (τὸ ἠρέμα), are both described as preventing things from adopting a definite quantity (24b9-24c6). They are both contrasted with the class of the limit, which includes that which admits of ‘the equal,’ ‘the double.’ and ‘all that is related as number to number or measure to measure’ (25a6-25b3).[[18]](#footnote-18)

Socrates goes on to relate his discussion on limit and intensity to pleasure. He claims that ‘the goddess’ recognizes that wickedness ‘allows for no limit on our pleasures’ and that she therefore imposes law and order to limit such pleasures (26b5-c2). Socrates indicates that Philebus thinks this limitation ‘ruined them’ (ἀποκναῖσαι) while he in contrast thinks it ‘preserved’ (ἀποσῶσαι) (26b10-c1).[[19]](#footnote-19) In addition, Philebus’ insistence on pleasures being large and unlimited is in fact his final contribution to the dialogue: when prompted, Philebus insists that pleasure belongs in the class of the unlimited rather than the limited class, asking ‘how could pleasure be all that is good if it were not boundless in plenty and increase?’ (27e7-9). Evidently, Philebus takes boundlessness, unlimitedness, and intensity to be essential to pleasure: all of which Plato tightly associates with each other in the class of the unlimited.[[20]](#footnote-20) In contrast, the goddess’s imposition of a limit on our pleasures is fundamentally at odds with intense pleasures, as we just saw that intensity itself prevents things from taking on a determinate quantity and is opposed to limit.

The dialogue also contains an explicit investigation of intense pleasures that occurs after the anticipation argument. At that point, Socrates borrows the arguments of some unnamed individuals referred to as the ‘enemies of Philebus’ in order to investigate ‘the strongest and most intense’ (τὰς ἀκροτάτας καὶ σφοδροτάτας, 45a1, translation modified) pleasures more thoroughly. These enemies claim that pleasure is just an escape from pain, and they defend their claim by an examination of intense pleasures. They believe that ‘if we wanted to study the genus of pleasure, to see what kind of nature it has, in that case we ought not to look at low level pleasures, but at those that are said to be the strongest and most intense (σφοδροτάτας)’ (44e7-45a2, translation modified). Presumably, Philebus’ enemies aimed to show that all pleasure is an escape from pain by first showing that the most intense pleasure is an escape from pain, and then inferring that the same holds for all other pleasures since it holds for the most intense pleasure. Yet, this methodology assumes that intense pleasures are, as it were, paradigmatic instances of pleasure *par excellence* that can be used to make inferences about the entire genus of pleasure.

Now, even though this methodological argument is advanced by unnamed anti-hedonists who are referred to as the ‘enemies’ of Philebus, I believe that Philebus himself would nevertheless agree that intense pleasures most of all capture the nature of pleasure. We already saw that Philebus insisted that pleasure belongs in the class of the unlimited. Moreover, while investigating the intense pleasures, Socrates at one point interjects that he ‘did not raise this question with the intention of alluding to Philebus, but without a clarification of these pleasures and of those who cultivate them, we could hardly come to any resolution of our problem’ (46b1-4). The implication is that Philebus and his followers are those who cultivate and pursue the intense pleasures being investigated.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Continuing to follow the ‘enemies of Philebus,’ Socrates says that they must ‘pick out some of them < i.e., the large and intense pleasures> to find out what characteristic of theirs makes us call them the greatest’ (45e9-10). He first focuses on bodily pleasures. They quickly decide, however, that these ‘greatest’ pleasures are in fact mixed with pain (46a12-13). Socrates says the following about these intense bodily pleasures:

Socrates: Whenever someone experiences opposite experiences simultaneously in restorations or corruptions – when shivering (ῥιγῶν) he is warmed and warming up (θερμαινόμενος) sometimes is cooled, and is seeking, I think, to have the one and be rid of the other – then what is called a bitter-sweet mixture, when it is hard to get rid of, makes for irritation and later a violent strain. (46c6-46d2, translation Wood, modified).

Recalling Plato’s restoration theory of pleasure, the intense bodily pleasure arises when a pleasant restoration co-occurs with a painful destruction.[[22]](#footnote-22) I take it that the felt *intensity* of the intense bodily pleasure is explained by the ‘irritation’ (ἀγανάκτησιν) and ‘violent strain’ (σύντασιν ἀγρίναν) created by the ‘bitter-sweet mixture’ of pleasure and pain. Note too that the pain is not accidental to the intense pleasure, as it would be if someone were to randomly pinch me while I was enjoying the pleasant taste of ice cream. The pain is instead caused by an ongoing destructive process that is opposed to the pleasant restorative process that is being sought and experienced. It is as if someone experiencing an intense pleasure is pulled taut by the two directly opposed processes of restoration and destruction such that that they can never be fully restored. As we will see later, the intensity of this pleasure depends, constitutively, on the co-occurring pain.

The fact that intense pleasures are necessarily mixed with pain is borne out in the subsequent examples of intense bodily pleasures. Socrates first looks at the pleasure that can come from scratching an itch. Socrates claims that the example of scratching an itch is one where ‘pains outweigh the pleasure.’ This does not mean that the pain cancels out the pleasure such that only pain is felt; Socrates is clear that itching can give rise to ‘enormous pleasures,’ but that ‘pains arise beside the pleasure’ (46d7-47a1). Even in the example of a mixed pleasure where pleasure outweighs pain, we are told that the small amount of pain subsists and creates ‘a tickle and a mild irritation’ (47a4-5). I take it that this mild tickle *creates* the felt bitter-sweet mixture that gives rise to the wild and ecstatic reaction that Socrates describes: the tiny pain mixed in with the pleasure causes the man to leap in the air, change colors, and shout aloud like a madman (47a5-9). It is likely that Socrates is here referring to intense sexual pleasures, now taken to be bodily mixtures of pleasure and pain.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Not only are all intense pleasures mixed with pain, but they are also clearly associated with vice. Protarchus early on connects pleasures of overwhelming force and intensity with ‘foolish people and the hubristic’ (45e2-4, translation modified), and Socrates affirms that ‘it is in some vicious state of the soul and body and not in virtue that the greatest pleasures as well as the greatest pains have their origin’ (45e5-7). The wicked also direct their lives at such pleasures. Socrates says of someone experiencing these intense pleasures that ‘the more intemperate and mindless he is, the more will he pursue them by any means possible, and he calls them largest and considers as the happiest of all mortals whoever lives in continuous enjoyment of them, as much as that is possible’ (47b4-7, translation modified). This passage establishes a one-to-one relationship between intemperance and the pursuit of intense pleasures ‘by any means possible.’ It is moreover apparent that the intemperate constantly pursue pleasures of this sort, as they practically consider these pleasures to be the best things in life.

However, note that the mixture of these pleasures with pain, and indeed their *dependence* on pain, immediately calls their status *as pleasures* into question. Recall, in fact, that this was the original aim of the ‘enemies of Philebus’ to whom Socrates credited the argument: they focused on these pleasures to show that pleasure itself *does not at all exist*, and that pleasure is nothing but an ‘escape from pain’ (44c1-2). We can understand one way this conclusion might have been inferred: since the intense pleasures described involve a destructive bodily process being counteracted by some restorative process, it is open to the ‘enemies of Philebus’ to insist that pain (from the destructive process) and the escape from pain (from the restorative process) explain all the qualitative features of the experience.

Yet, while Socrates seems to agree with the ‘enemies of Philebus’ that intense pleasures are mixed with and depend on pain, he clearly disagrees that intense pleasures reveal the nature of pleasure itself. Indeed, he prefaces his discussion of their arguments with the caveat that he will later discuss ‘true pleasures’ that will help reveal ‘the power of pleasure’ (44d3-5). He follows through on this promise and eventually claims that the true pleasures are those that are *pure* and *unmixed with pain*: those ‘based on imperceptible and painless lacks, while their fulfillments are perceptible and pleasant’ (51b5-7). Examples of pure pleasures include the pleasures taken in beautiful geometrical figures and solids, shapes that are ‘not beautiful in a relative sense, as others are, but are by their very nature forever beautiful by themselves’ (51c6-d1) as well as the pleasures of learning (52b6-8).[[24]](#footnote-24)

Socrates goes on to argue that pure pleasures are ‘more true’ than intense pleasures by making an analogy with pure and impure instances of the color white. Socrates claims that a small patch of pure white, unmixed with any other color, is ‘whiter’ than a ‘larger quantity of mixed white’ (53b4-6, translation modified). Mix white paint with a small amount of blue paint, for instance, and you get white paint with a slightly bluish tint. It is natural to think that the resulting color is ‘less white’ than the original, pure white paint. Crucially, Socrates claims that pure white is the ‘truest (ἀληθέστατον) and most beautiful of all instances of white’ (53a9-b1) and that it is ‘more true’ (ἀληθέστερον) than even a large amount of white mixed with some other color (53b4-6). Extending the analogy to pleasure, he asserts that ‘every small and insignificant pleasure that is unadulterated by pain will turn out to be pleasanter, truer, and more beautiful than a greater quantity and amount of the impure kind’ (53b10-c2). Since we have already seen that the most intense pleasures are impure and mixed with pain, it follows that even a ‘small’ pure pleasure will be both more true and more pleasant than any intense pleasure.

Note that the dispute between intense pleasures and pure pleasures for the title of ‘true pleasures’ seems to amount to a claim about what kinds of pleasure express the nature of pleasure itself. As others have noted, calling pure pleasures the ‘most true’ pleasures seems to appeal to a different kind of truth that can come in degrees.[[25]](#footnote-25) It has been noted, for instance, that Plato seems to believe that a pleasure is ‘more true’ than another pleasure if it is mixed with less pain.[[26]](#footnote-26) On this construal, the claim that pure pleasures are ‘more true’ is equivalent to the claim that pure pleasures partake more in the *being* of pleasure itself: they more truly *are* pleasures. Indeed, despite containing *some* pleasure, intense pleasures partake less in the being of pleasure precisely insofar as they necessarily also partake in its opposite: pain. This dependence on pain gives us a determinate sense in which intense pleasures are non-genuine and, *qua* pleasures, inferior to pure pleasures.

5: Anticipating Painful Pleasures

So far, we have seen that the dialogue contains two different views on the nature of pleasure. On the one hand, I argued that Philebus and his enemies are both committed to *intense* pleasures most of all expressing the nature of pleasure itself. I further claimed that Plato, in contrast, thinks that this nature is expressed by *pure* pleasures. Arguments in the *Philebus* reveal that the intensity of intense pleasures is not due to those pleasures being especially pleasant; the intensity is in fact due to their ‘bitter-sweet mixture’ with pain. In addition, I argued that Plato’s sole example of a false anticipatory pleasure involves a man anticipating *intense* pleasures enabled by his future possession of gold. In this section, it remains to show how these insights can help us understand why the anticipatory pleasures had by the wicked are for the most part false, while those had by the good are for the most part true.

We have already seen Socrates suggest that the wicked pursue intense pleasures relentlessly. I suggest it is also likely that the wicked *hope for* intense pleasures. Since the wicked but not the good hope for intense pleasures and take such pleasures to be pleasures most of all, we could comprehend why the wicked have mostly false anticipatory pleasures if the anticipatory pleasures associated with such hopes were false. However, note that hopes for intense pleasures are surely founded on a judgment that such intense pleasures *are pleasant.* It is this judgment, I claim, that is responsible for the occurrent anticipatory pleasure that is felt and experienced. Yet, it is precisely this judgment that is false and mistaken. As we have seen, intense pleasures are inferior instances of pleasure mixed with pain that fall short of true, pure pleasure. I will call the relevant kind of error a *failure of identification*, as the person having a false anticipatory pleasure in this way misidentifies an intense pleasure as genuinely pleasant.[[27]](#footnote-27)

To illustrate how someone anticipating an intense pleasure has a false anticipatory pleasure, imagine someone comparing two possible future outcomes that they can choose between. Suppose a researcher is considering whether she should continue her study of advanced topology or sell her research to a software company to instead pursue a lavish lifestyle of constant gratification and excessive indulgence. She might feel quite a lot of anticipatory pleasure and excitement as she envisions the life of luxury that awaits her were she to sell her research, while feeling only minimal pleasure (if any!) when she anticipates continuing her humble study of topology. I suggest that in this case she represents the pleasures from the lavish life of luxury as more truly pleasant than the pleasures from studying topology. Yet, on the assumption that the pleasures from studying topology are pure[[28]](#footnote-28) while the pleasures from the lavish lifestyle are intense, she is making a mistake. As we have seen, Plato claims that even a small pure pleasure is more true and more pleasant than a large and intense pleasure (53b10-c2). Therefore, an anticipatory pleasure that represents the pleasures from studying topology as genuine pleasures will be true, while an anticipatory pleasure that represents the lavish pleasures of excessive indulgence as genuine pleasures will be false. Indeed, if our topology researcher had true beliefs about pleasure then she should feel more anticipatory pleasure directed towards her research in topology: according to Plato that would be the more pleasant life.

Recognizing that failures of identification can give rise to false anticipatory pleasures finally allows us to give a plausible explanation of why most of the anticipatory pleasures of the wicked are false, while those of the good are for the most part true. As we already saw, the wicked take intense pleasures to be the greatest of all pleasures, and practically direct their whole lives towards undergoing them. It is thus likely the case that Plato believes that the wicked systematically misidentify pleasures throughout their lives. Their whole lives are spent pleasantly anticipating experiences that lack the true nature of pleasure. This can explain why the wicked have mostly false anticipatory pleasures without proposing that they are inept at predicting the future or usually fail to carry out their nefarious plots.

We can also make sense of Socrates’ claim that the wicked anticipate pleasures that are ridiculous imitations of the pleasures anticipated by the good (40c5-6). The foolishness of the wicked is, on this interpretation, explained by the fact that they do not even know what pleasure isand take the (partly) painful experience of an intense pleasure to be pleasure most of all.[[29]](#footnote-29) Moreover, it seems quite apt to characterize intense pleasures as ‘ridiculous imitations’ of pure pleasure. They count as imitations insofar as they at least approximate the nature of pleasure and contain some degree of pleasure. After all, it is not as if the person experiencing an intense pleasure feels nothing or feels only pain. Yet, like all ‘ridiculous imitations,’ intense pleasures fall well short of the genuine pleasures of which they are imitations.[[30]](#footnote-30) Furthermore, intense pleasures are particularly ridiculous imitations of pleasures insofar as they are prized for their intensity. Yet the pain that is *responsible* for that intensity is exactly why intense pleasures *fail* to be genuine pleasures. I also believe that my interpretation is more plausible than the failure of attitude interpretations that suggest that the wicked will not enjoy the things that they anticipated enjoying. The wicked might very well anticipate and then experience intense pleasures, (recall that Socrates and Protarchus suggest that it is the hubristic, rather than the moderate, who experience the most intense pleasures (45d2-e4)), yet their anticipatory pleasures are still false simply in virtue of those pleasantly anticipated experiences being defective, non-genuine pleasures.

My interpretation can also resolve the challenges that faced Mistaken Value Interpretations. I worried that such interpretations would see Plato rely on a non-hedonistic evaluative criterion for goodness and badness that the hedonist has no reason to accept. Note, however, that Plato does not appeal to any such external criterion in his analysis of intense pleasures. Rather than merely rejecting the hedonist’s conception of what is valuable and insisting on his own conception, Socrates instead investigates the very nature of the thing the hedonist purports to value: pleasure. That very investigation eventually leads to the realization that intense pleasures are mixed with pain. Since a hedonist takes pain to be bad (indeed, *the only* thing that is bad), if she accepts Plato’s analysis of intense pleasures then she will have reason to reject her single-minded pursuit of intense pleasures and pursue pure pleasures instead.[[31]](#footnote-31)

This might be contested. Someone could claim that the person seeking intense pleasures would not care whether those pleasures are mixed with pain and non-genuine so long as they are intense. This is roughly analogous to the criticism I raised earlier against the Mistaken Value Interpretations: hedonists do not care if the pleasures they enjoy are not good so long as they experience pleasure. Though the person seeking intense pleasures could certainly make this reply, Plato’s arguments have nonetheless significantly undermined the hypothetical objector’s claim to be a ‘hedonist’ who thinks that the best life is one in which we experience as much pleasure as possible. Plato’s arguments purport to show that intensity, the very feeling the hypothetical ‘hedonist’ actually desires, is not a property of pleasure itself but instead a property of the mixture of pleasure and pain. The person pursuing intense pleasures is therefore not pursuing or maximizing pleasure *per se*, but rather whatever bizarre mixtures of pleasure and pain give rise to the felt intensity.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The objector might counter back that, even if intense pleasures are mixed with pain, they nonetheless *feel* more pleasantthan non-intense, pure pleasures. Presumably the hedonist could take this to be a brute and irrefutable preference for how intense pleasures feel based on the phenomenology of the two different experiences. Now, though everyone would agree that an intense pleasure feels *different* than a pure pleasure, the claim that it feels *more pleasant* requires some justification. Indeed, while describing a second kind of false pleasure in the *Philebus*, Socrates in fact argues that our perception of pleasure can give rise to mistakes about the size and intensity of pleasures that are juxtaposed with pain: we make mistakes when judging the size of such pleasures just as we can make mistakes when judging the sizes of distal objects (41e9-42a2). Pleasures, Socrates claims, can mistakenly appear ‘larger (μείζους) and more intense (σφοδρότεραι)’ when next to pain (42b4-5). Yet, if Plato thinks we can be mistaken about the relative *intensity* of a pleasure, it is likely that he also thinks we can be mistaken about the relative *pleasantness* of a pleasure.[[33]](#footnote-33)That is, Plato could respond to the objection by granting that intense pleasures *feel* (or appear) more pleasant than non-intense pure pleasures, but insist that this is a mere appearance that should be corrected by our reasoned investigation into the nature of pleasure itself, rather than an unassailable datum of such an investigation.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Indeed, by the end of the dialogue it is clear that the single-minded pursuit of the most intense pleasures not only fails to bring about a truly pleasant life, but also prevents the best, mixed life of pleasure and intelligence[[35]](#footnote-35) from coming about. The most intense pleasures are said to *destroy* intelligence: they ‘infect the souls in which they dwell with madness’ and prevent its development (63d5-e1). They likewise destroy memory, as they ‘create forgetfulness because of neglect’ (63e1-2, translation modified). Indeed, there is a sense in which intense pleasures, pleasures that are ‘forever involved with foolishness[[36]](#footnote-36) (ἀφροσύνης)’ (63e7), bring us closer to the life completely devoid of intellect that was rejected earlier on in the dialogue.

To elaborate, Socrates and Protarchus had agreed that everyone would prefer to have pleasure *and* intelligence, rather than pleasure by itself; Socrates even suggests that a life without any sort of intelligence (and therefore without any knowledge, memory, or true judgment) resembles the life of some sort of jellyfish rather than a human being (21c6-7). Socrates and Protarchus re-affirm this conclusion towards the end of the dialogue: no-one ‘would want pleasure, as much and as intense as it can be, without true opinion that he enjoys it, without recognizing what kind of experience it is he has, without memory of this affection for any length of time’ (60d6-e1, translation modified). Yet, a life full of intense pleasures turns out to somehow *create* this sorry state. To be sure, a human being pursuing intense pleasures possesses the intellectual capacities that a jellyfish lacks. However, those very capacities continually misfire and are systematically undermined in the life of a Phileban hedonist. In particular, I argued that a follower of Philebus mistakenly takes intense pleasures filled with pain to be pleasures most of all. In this respect he fails to recognize ‘what kind of experience it is he has,’ and is ‘without true opinion’ about the nature of his own enjoyment.[[37]](#footnote-37) We also saw that intense pleasures destroy memory by creating forgetfulness. Finally, like the jellyfish that is unable to calculate, the devotee of intense pleasures cannot ‘figure out any future pleasures’ (21c5-6) since he constantly misidentifies intense pleasures as genuine pleasures and therefore has false anticipatory pleasures. Indeed, there is a sense in which the life of someone devoted to intense pleasures seems even *worse* than the jellyfish life that is devoid of all intellectual capacities. Though the life without intellect was stipulated to be pleasant in the earlier argument,[[38]](#footnote-38) we have seen that even the pleasantness of a life filled with intense pleasures is called into question by the dialogue’s later arguments that intense pleasures are, as opposed to pure pleasures, non-genuine.[[39]](#footnote-39)

If intense pleasures systematically undermine our intellectual and cognitive capacities, however, we can understand the contention made at the end of the dialogue that such pleasures must be excluded from the best human life and are ‘totally unreasonable for anyone who aims at the best and most stable mixture and blend’ (63e8-64a1). As we have seen, intense pleasures hinder and *destroy* our intellect, effectively causing ignorance. They are therefore directly opposed to the mixed life of pleasure *and intelligence*. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that intelligence and intellect themselves,[[40]](#footnote-40) personified, determine which pleasures belong in a good life. Socrates first asks the personified pleasures what sorts of intelligence they would like to live with in the mixed life, to which they answer that they would ‘prefer to live side by side with that best kind, the kind that understands not only all other things *but also each one of us*, as far as that is possible’ (63c1-3, modified, emphasis mine). Crucially, then, the intelligence and knowledge in the best human life includes knowledge *of pleasure* itself. It is this intelligence, when queried by Socrates, who insists that the ‘greatest’ (μεγίστας) and ‘most intense’ (σφοδροτάτας) pleasures should be excluded from the best, mixed life (63d3-4). Yet, that intelligence is happy to live with the true and pure pleasures, calling those ‘our kin’ (63e4), as well as with the pleasures that accompany virtue and health.[[41]](#footnote-41) Since the good will form their hopes in light of their knowledge and understanding of pleasures and the best human life, it follows that they will hope for pure pleasures but not hope for intense pleasures. Pure pleasures are important constituents of a good human life, while intense pleasures are incompatible with it and, as we have seen, non-genuine.

My interpretation can also help make sense of another aspect of the anticipation argument that has puzzled scholars: Socrates’ claim that the anticipatory pleasures of the good are mostly true because they are ‘loved by the gods.’ Though Protarchus may very well take this comment to imply some sort of divine reward theory, by the end of the dialogue we can appreciate a different understanding that connects with the other arguments in the *Philebus*. In particular, we can connect the distinction between pure and intense pleasures to Socrates’ earlier comment during the four-fold division of being that ‘the goddess’ imposes limit on pleasures (26b7-c1). My own argument is precisely that the good, but not the wicked, often have true anticipatory pleasures in virtue of recognizing pure pleasures as genuine pleasures, pleasures that are also described as limited and measured (52c1-d1). In this sense, the good conform their hopes to the law of the goddess, imposing limit on their pleasures as they attempt to bring about a well-mixed life, while the wicked fail to do so and constantly seek excessive, intense pleasures. Moreover, by the end of the dialogue we learn that a life with measured, pure pleasures is in fact the truly pleasant life, as opposed to a life full of the non-genuine intense pleasures. In addition, the god-loved will approximate the gods insofar as they rule their lives through reason and understanding. Their understanding of pleasures, which we saw is a crucial element in the well-mixed human life, will allow them to grasp the difference between pure pleasures and intense pleasures. It is this understanding that will allow the god-loved to accurately represent pleasures.

Finally, it might be objected that my claim that the good anticipate pure pleasures goes too far, as there is no reason to think that a good person will not sometimes pleasantly anticipate impure pleasures mixed with pain. Indeed, some scholars have explicitly argued that impure pleasures mixed with pain contribute to a good human life,[[42]](#footnote-42) and if this is the case it might seem natural that a good person would anticipate them with pleasure. However, granting that certain impure pleasures belong in a good human life (for instance, the pleasures of health and virtue mentioned at 63e4) I think we can nonetheless insist that a good person would not pleasantly anticipate such pleasures *insofar as they are intense*, as I argued Philebus and the wicked do. A good person’s anticipatory pleasures would therefore not be based on mistaken judgments that intense pleasures are genuine pleasures and pleasures most of all. Moreover I argue that a good person would never make the mistake of our topology researcher and anticipate those impure pleasures as *more genuinely pleasant* than the pure pleasures. Instead, I suggest that she will see such impure pleasures as what they are: pleasures that contribute to more valuable goods such as health and virtue. It is in this respect that her anticipatory pleasures can be based on true beliefs about pleasure and therefore be mostly true, unlike the anticipatory pleasures of the wicked.

6: Conclusion

I have argued that the wicked usually have false anticipatory pleasures due to anticipating intense pleasures as genuine pleasures. These intense pleasures are not genuinely pleasant, so anticipating them with pleasure demonstrates a failure to identify what sorts of experiences are pleasant. We saw that the anticipation argument suggests that wicked people often anticipate intense pleasures, however in the *Philebus* Plato argues that intense pleasures are inextricably mixed with pains. Others have emphasized that the falsity of wicked people’s pleasures arises from mistaken value judgments about the good, but we have seen that Plato likely believes that the wicked are also mistaken about the nature of pleasure itself. A good person who experiences pure pleasures experiences a more pleasant and more truly enjoyable life than a wicked person even if the good person’s life lacks the ‘large’ and ‘intense’ pleasures that the wicked person pursues.

Whether Plato’s overall view is attractive depends on the degree to which we think Plato has accurately assessed the nature of pleasures. Though I believe that Plato attempts to argue for the hedonic superiority of the good life, I do not believe that he ever claims that *anyone* who has experienced both a pure pleasure and an intense pleasure will choose the life of only pure pleasures. Quite the opposite is the case: intense pleasures, which are all necessarily mixed with pain, can appear *especially* pleasant; they are likely to mislead anyone who does not critically investigate the nature of pleasure. We need to understand pleasure through doing philosophy before we can understand that pure pleasures are hedonically superior to those pursued by Philebus. Though it might be initially surprising that the life guided by the subjective experience of pleasures is not as pleasant as the life guided by a philosophical understanding of those pleasures, this result fits well within the overall argument of the *Philebus*. As we have seen, the discussion of the mixed life of pleasure and intelligence suggests that it is *intelligence and understanding*, rather than our unexamined experiences, that determines which pleasures belong in the best life. Indeed, Socrates emphasizes this at the end of the dialogue when he criticizes those who suppose pleasure to be the most important factor in living well. Such people model their lives on animals that unreflectively pursue pleasure, ‘trusting in them just as the diviners trust in birds’ (67b3). They ‘suppose that the love had by beasts is a more authoritative witness than the arguments that are each time divined in the philosophical muse’ (67b4-7, translation modified). Plato contends that only philosophy and philosophical arguments can guide us to the best, finest, and most truly pleasant life.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**References**

Arenson, K. 2016. ‘Impure Intellectual Pleasure and the *Phaedrus*’ *Epoché* 21: 21-45.

Austin, E. 2012. ‘Fools and Malicious Pleasure in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29: 125-139.

Burnet, J. 1901. *Platonis Opera*, vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Carone, G. 2000. ‘Hedonism and the Pleasureless Life in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *Phronesis* 45: 257-283.

Carpenter, A. 2006. ‘Hedonistic Persons. The Good Man Argument in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14: 5-26.

Delcomminette, S. 2003. ‘False Pleasure, Appearance and Imagination in the *Philebus*’ *Phronesis* 48: 215-237.

Delcomminette, S. 2006. *Le Philèbe de Platon: introduction à l'agathologie platonicienne*. Leiden: Brill.

Dimas, P. 2019. ‘Two Ways in which Pleasures can be False’ 124-140 in P. Dimas, R. Jones, and G. Lear edd. *Plato’s* Philebus*: A Philosophical Discussion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dybikowski, J.C. 1970. ‘False Pleasure and the Philebus’ *Phronesis* 15: 147–65.

Erginel, M. 2019. ‘Plato on Pleasures Mixed with Pains: An Asymmetrical Account’ *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 56: 73-122.

Evans, M. 2008. ‘Plato on the Possibility of Hedonic Mistakes’ *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 25: 89-124.

Fletcher, E. 2014. ‘Plato on Pure Pleasure and the Best life’ *Phronesis* 59: 113-142.

Fletcher, E. 2017. ‘The Divine Method and the Disunity of Pleasure in the *Philebus*’ *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55: 179-208.

Fletcher, E. 2018. ‘Plato on Incorrect and Deceptive Pleasures’ *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 100: 379-410.

Fletcher, E. 2022. ‘Pleasure, Judgment and the Function of the Painter-Scribe Analogy’ *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 104: 199-238.

Frede, D. 1985. ‘Rumpelstiltskin’s Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *Phronesis* 30: 151–80.

Frede, D. 1992. ‘Disintegration and Restoration: Pleasure and Pain in Plato’s *Philebus*’ 425-463 in R. Kraut ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frede, D. 1993. *Plato’s* Philebus.Indianapolis: Hackett.

Frede, D. 1997. *Platon:* Philebos, *Ubersetzung und Kommentar*. Göttingen: Vandenhoek und Ruprecht

Freeland, C. 2019. ‘Pleasure, Perception, and Images in Plato’ 161-178 in H. Fossheim, V. Songe-Møller, and K. Ågotnes edd. *Philosophy as Drama: Plato’s Thinking Through Dialogue*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gosling, J.C.B. 1959. ‘False Pleasure: *Philebus* 35C – 41B’ *Phronesis* 4: 44-54.

Gosling, J.C.B. 1961. ‘Father Kenny on False Pleasures in Plato’s Philebus’ *Phronesis* 6: 41-45.

Gosling, J.C.B. and Taylor C.C.W. 1982. *The Greeks on Pleasure.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hampton, C. 1990. *Pleasure, Knowledge, and Being:* *An Analysis of Plato’s* Philebus. Albany: SUNY Press.

Harte, V. 2004. ‘The *Philebus* on Pleasure: The Good, the Bad, and the False’ *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104: 113-130.

Ionescu, C. 2019. *On the Good Life: Thinking Through the Intermediaries in Plato’s Philebus*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Kenny, A. 1960. ‘False Pleasures in the Philebus: A Reply to Mr. Gosling’ *Phronesis* 5: 45–52.

Marechal, P. 2022. ‘Plato on False Pleasures and False Passions’ *Apeiron* 55*:* 281-304.

Mooradian, N. 1996. ‘Converting Protarchus: Relativism and False Pleasures of Anticipation in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *Ancient Philosophy* 16: 93-112.

Muniz, F. 2014. ‘Propositional Pleasures in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 8: 49-75.

O’Reilly, K. 2019. ‘The Jellyfish’s Pleasures: *Philebus* 20b-21d’ *Phronesis* 64: 277-291.

Penner, T. 1970. ‘False Anticipatory Pleasures: *Philebus* 36a3–41a6’ *Phronesis* 15: 166–78.

Price, A.W. 2017. ‘Varieties of Pleasure in Plato and Aristotle’ *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 52: 177-208.

Proios, J. Forthcoming. ‘A Story of Corruption: False Pleasure and the Methodological Critique of Hedonism in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *Ancient Philosophy*

Russell, D. 2005. *Plato on* *Pleasure and the Good Life*.Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sommerville, B. 2019. ‘Attitudinal Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*’ *Phronesis* 64: 247-276.

Szaif, J. 2021. ‘The Place of Flawed Pleasures in a Good Life. A Discussion of Plato’s *Philebus*’ *Plato Journal: The Journal of the International Plato Society* 22: 133-157.

Thein K. 2012. ‘Imagination, Self-Awareness, and Modal Thought at *Philebus* 39-40’ *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 42: 109-149.

Tuozzo, T. 1996. ‘The General Account of Pleasure in Plato’s *Philebus*’ *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34: 495-513.

Van Zoonen, D. 2021. ‘Problems with the Life of Pleasure: the Γένεσις Argument in Plato’s *Philebus* (53c4-55a12)’ *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 59: 167-191.

Warren, J. 2014. *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Warren, J. 2019. ‘Truth, Beauty, Purity and Pleasure; *Philebus* 50e-53c’ 184-201 in P. Dimas, R. Jones, and G. Lear edd. *Plato’s* Philebus*: A Philosophical Discussion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Whiting, J. 2014. ‘Fools’ Pleasure in Plato's *Philebus*’ 21-59 in M.K. Lee ed. *Strategies of Argument: Essays in Ancient Ethics, Epistemology, and Logic.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolfsdorf, D. 2013. *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, J. 2019. *Plato’s* Philebus*.* Peterborough: Broadview Press.

1. My distinction between ‘Mistaken Content Interpretations’ and ‘Mistaken Value Interpretations’ loosely follows Matthew Evans’ distinction between ‘Old School Interpretations’ and ‘New School Interpretations’ of the argument for false anticipatory pleasures. See Evans 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All translations of the Greek come from Frede 1993 unless otherwise noted. For the Greek text I use Burnet’s OCT edition of the *Philebus*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. There is substantial scholarly debate as to whether the restoration account of pleasure and pain is meant to be extended to all pleasures and pains and, *a fortiori,* to anticipatory pleasures and pains. For scholars who believe the restoration account of pleasure should be extended to all pleasures, see Frede 1992, 440-441; Tuozzo 1996, 507-508; Wolfsdorf 2013, 101; Ionescu 2019, 17-21, and van Zoonen 2021, 171. Against this, others deny that the restoration account is meant to be a general account of pleasure in the *Philebus*, including Gosling and Taylor 1982, 140; Carone 2000, 264-270; Fletcher 2014, 118-120; Fletcher 2017, 198-199; Price 2017, 183-184; and Sommerville 2019, 259. Erginel 2019 argues that Plato has a process or restoration view of pleasure, but a *state* view of pain in which we feel pain whenever we are in a non-natural state. In this paper I wish to remain neutral on these debates. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I follow Frede 1993 in translating δόξαas ‘judgment,’ though it is also commonly translated as ‘belief’ or ‘opinion.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It must be noted that this is a contested interpretation of the argument, as many commentators take this phrase to refer to false *anticipatory* pleasures, as opposed to false *images* of *anticipated* pleasures. Gosling and Kenny both seem to accept this and take 40c1 to state that the wicked have false anticipatory pleasures. Likewise, Fletcher has recently argued that ‘painted pleasures’ refers directly to anticipatory pleasures. Dybikowski, on the other hand, takes falsehood to be attributed to anticipatory pleasures as early as 40b6-7. See Gosling 1959, 52; Gosling 1962, 43-44; Kenny 1960, 52; Fletcher 2022, 230-231; and Dybikowski 1970, 160. In contrast, the reading I prefer, in which falsity is not attributed to anticipatory pleasures till 40d7-10, is defended by Penner 1970, Delcomminette 2003, and Evans 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This classification of interpretations loosely follows that made by Evans 2008. Evans himself calls this group of interpretations ‘Old School Interpretations.’ Evans gives the following general account of false anticipatory pleasures according to this school of interpretation: ‘If a person experiences a pleasure with the content that *p*, then that pleasure is false if it is not the case that *p*’ (Evans 2008, 100). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I am slightly modifying terms coined by James Warren to describe this distinction. However, I have replaced Warren’s own term, ‘content preservation,’ with ‘state-of-affairs preservation’ to avoid confusion with Evans’ ‘Content Account.’ For more on this distinction, see Warren 2014, 129-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Interpreters who appear to think false anticipatory pleasures are mainly false in this way include Penner 1970; Frede 1985,1992, 1993, and 1997, 248-260; Carone 2000; Delcomminette 2003 and 2006, 383-390; Evans 2008; Thein 2012; Wolfsdorf 2013; and more recently Sommerville 2019, Freeland 2019, and Fletcher 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Interpreters who think that anticipatory pleasures are false due to a failure of attitude preservation include Kenny 1960, Mooradian 1996, Harte 2004, Russell 2005, Carpenter 2006, and Warren 2014. Note that Evans himself actually counts both Russell and Harte as New School Interpreters that take the falsity of anticipatory pleasures to be rooted in mistaken values (Evans 2008, 102). I have classed them differently, however, as both at times suggest that false anticipatory pleasures require anticipating an experience to be pleasant that is not actually pleasant when it occurs (c.f. Harte 2004, 129 and Russell 2005, 179-181). Against this, the Mistaken Value Interpreters I focus on think that an anticipatory pleasure can be false even when it accurately anticipates some event being pleasant. That said, I will later describe how my own proposal can be seen as developing an idea suggested by both Harte and Russell: the wicked are mistaken about the nature of pleasure itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Note Gosling’s comment that ‘it is not at all obvious why wicked men have also to be so inept as to characteristically experience false hopes’ (Gosling 1975, 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Dimas 2019 makes similar points, saying these interpretations give Plato the wrong theory of value and imply that the wicked but successful tyrant would have *true* anticipatory pleasures. C.f. Dimas 2019, 132-134. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Evans suggests this reading for the anticipation argument, saying that Plato ‘may well think that the gods, knowing what is best, intervene in the world frequently enough (or imbue the world with enough justice) to ensure the hopes of the bad are generally thwarted’ (Evans, 2008, 103). Evans appears to endorse a Mistaken Content Interpretation for this particular argument. However, Evans thinks that Plato *should* endorse something closer to a Mistaken Value Interpretation of false pleasures in order to explain the badness of false pleasures, and he argues that arguments from later on in the *Philebus* show Plato has the resources for defending such a view (Evans, 2008, 114-115). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In addition, Marechal points out that this reading wrongly suggests that a wicked person who tricked or persuaded the gods to answer her prayers would have *true* anticipatory pleasures. Yet, the passage implies a stronger, less accidental connection between being a wicked person and having mostly false anticipatory pleasures (Marechal 2022, 285-286). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For instance, Warren says that the good harmonize their lives using reason and have stabler preferences over time that undergo less fluctuation; therefore, their anticipatory pleasures are mostly true (Warren 2014, 140). Similarly, Carpenter explains how the good can have true anticipatory pleasures in virtue of having self-knowledge and knowing what sorts of experiences they will enjoy (Carpenter 2006, 12-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I include Hampton 1990, Whiting 2014, Dimas 2019, Ionescu 2019, and Marechal 2022 as proponents of this interpretation. Whiting takes anticipatory pleasure to present some activity as good, and false anticipatory pleasures to so present an activity that is not actually good (Whiting 2014, 50-51). It should be clarified, however, that strictly speaking Whiting does not think that this false presentation necessarily implies a mistaken *belief* about the good, since someone might reject the appearance (Whiting 2014, 39). Dimas believes that false anticipatory pleasures are based on hopes for things that are not good for the agent but which are mistakenly thought to be good, where it is to be understood that things that restore an agent to a natural and harmonious condition are good for the agent (Dimas 2019, 136). Ionescu, like Dimas, is clear that a false anticipatory pleasure mistakenly takes some process to be one that will bring about a genuine return to our natural condition, which she takes to imply a mistaken value judgment about what is truly good (Ionescu 2019, 46-47 and 78-79). Hampton seems to hold a similar view: ‘the miser’s pleasures are not fulfilling, although they may feel pleasant, because he has a distorted view of what is truly valuable and pleasant’ (Hampton 1990, 59). She therefore appears to accept a Mistaken Value Interpretation: anticipatory pleasures are false in virtue of underlying mistakes about what sorts of activities are valuable and good. Likewise, Marechal 2022 believes that false anticipatory pleasures ‘represent as valuable something that is not good, thereby involving evaluative error’ (Marechal 2022, 283). However, Marechal’s view is quite complementary to my own, as she emphasizes that false anticipatory pleasures occur when ‘the things in which we take pleasure are not pleasant in their own right,’ and also argues that impure pleasures are not pleasant in their own right while pleasures taken in ‘the fine’ are (297). However, Marechal takes the value error to be more fundamental, and suggests that impure pleasures involve pain *because* they misrepresent something bad as something good (296). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For instance, Dimas says that ‘the reason the man sees himself pleased in his inner picture is that he values gold. The important thing for him while indulging in seeing himself next to gold is not whatever pleasure he might be getting if he gets the gold, though of course he is certain he would be pleased if he does. The important thing is what makes him pleased in the picture he sees, namely that he thinks gold is good for him to have’ (Dimas 2019, 135). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For instance, as mentioned, Hampton says the miser has a ‘distorted view of what is truly valuable and *pleasant’* (Hampton 1990, 59, emphasis added). Harte similarly suggests that a false anticipatory pleasure is false due to an ‘inadequacy of its view of what is pleasant’ (Harte 2004, 128). Likewise, in a footnote Russell floats the possibility that anticipatory pleasures are false due to anticipating a pleasure that might feel satisfying but is ‘not really satisfying for a being like me’ (Russell 2005, 181). All these philosophers suggest that false anticipatory pleasure involves a mistaken view about what pleasure *truly is*. However, these scholars do not describe *how* the views of the wicked about pleasure are mistaken. I believe we can identify a more concrete mistake in the views of the wicked: they take intense pleasures to be genuine pleasures and spend their whole lives hoping for such intense pleasures. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Delcomminette also notes the use of ‘σφόδρα’ at 40a12 and connects it to the earlier discussion of theunlimited, but he understands its significance somewhat differently than I do. Rather than connecting it to the later discussion of intense pleasures, Delcomminette claims that pleasures are *not* *good* in virtue of beingunlimited. He also argues that we all ultimately desire the good, and that as a result the hopes of someone anticipating pleasure will be continually frustrated so long as he aims at pleasure. (Delcomminette 2006, 393-395). In contrast, I will later argue that someone anticipating *pure* pleasures can have true anticipatory pleasures. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The Greek here is difficult, as it does not specify the object of the verbs. Frede takes the subject of ἀποκναῖσαι and ἀποσῶσαι to be the goddess and the object to be the pleasures themselves: ‘the goddess must be Aphrodite herself, because it is she who puts a curb on pleasure, thereby saving it’ (Frede 1993, 23). Gosling, in contrast, takes what is worn down or preserved to be the *people* who allow for no limits in their pleasures and fulfillments (Gosling 1975, 18). Regardless of which reading we decide on, in both we see that Philebus is *against* the limitation of pleasure and fulfillment, while Socrates is for it. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This, of course, closely links Philebus’ view to the view of Callicles in the *Gorgias*. Callicles first claims that someone should ‘allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them’ (491e8-9) and later that ‘living pleasantly consists in this: having as much as possible flow in’ (494b1-2, translation by Donald Zeyl). For Callicles, the pleasant life comes from the continuous satisfaction of unrestricted appetites, as the satisfaction of unrestricted appetites gives rise to large and unrestricted pleasures. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. John Proios likewise argues that hedonists such as Philebus pursue the extreme, greatest, and most intense pleasures. Proios describes how Socrates’ own anti-hedonist argument involves undermining the appeal of those very pleasures (Proios forthcoming, 3-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Above, I mentioned that there is a debate as to whether Plato has a state or process view of pain, c.f. Erginel 2019. Even if we accept a state view of pain, it is noteworthy that the intense bodily pleasures Plato describes here seem to involve opposed *processes* of warming and cooling. This would explain why the sensation is ‘hard to get rid of’ (δυσαπαλλακτίας): the attempt to warm up is constantly being counteracted by the opposite process of being cooled down. It might be the case that other impure pleasures, such as drinking when thirsty, are dependent on a painful state (that can be easily restored) rather than an ongoing, painful process. Indeed, Frede observes that many mixtures of pleasure and pain do not cause a ‘violent strain’ because the unnatural condition can be easily replenished by the restoration (Frede 1997, 277-278). My thanks to Ron Polansky for asking me to clarify this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Socrates also goes on to describe mixtures of pleasures and pains *in the soul alone.* He focuses on the mixture of pleasure and pain found in the emotion of malice (φθόνος) but states that such mixtures are also found in ‘wrath, longing, lamentations, fear, love and jealousy’ (50b7-c3). When introducing his investigation into these psychological emotions, Socrates furthermore claims that ‘we will find them full of enormous pleasures’ (ἡδονῶν μεστὰς εὑρήσομεν ἀμηχάνων). Since those emotions are found to be mixed with pain, I take it that we are justified in concluding that the intense psychological pleasures, just like the intense bodily pleasures, are intense *precisely* *because* of their mixture with pain. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Debates on the precise character and scope of pure pleasures are beyond the scope of this paper. For helpful discussion see Fletcher 2014 and Warren 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For instance, c.f. Wolfsdorf 2013, 69; Fletcher 2018, 407; and Szaif 2021, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Wolfsdorf 2013, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. It is important to note that this still allows anticipatory pleasures to be false according to the other two versions of the Mistaken Content Interpretations that I surveyed earlier. For instance, my anticipatory pleasure directed towards reading some philosophy tomorrow will be false if all my books are destroyed in a fire. In that case there is no failure of identification, reading philosophy *really is* pleasant, but there is a failure of state of affairs preservation. I see no reason why the good would in general be immune to errors of this kind. Indeed, Szaif has recently argued that some false anticipatory pleasures will be present in a good human life, as the good will likely have some hopes that turn out to be mistaken due to the uncertainty of future outcomes (Szaif 2021, 147). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Studying topology is plausibly one of the ‘pleasures of learning’ that are classified as pure at 52b6-8. The abstract mathematical objects studied in topology are also likely candidates for things that are beautiful in their own right and thus a source of pure pleasures to those who contemplate them. See 51c1-d3. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Note that this corresponds well with a later part of the *Philebus* that identifies the ‘nature of the ridiculous’ as a failure to ‘know thyself’ (48c4-48d2). A hedonist like Philebus fails to know himself due to taking his life to be the most pleasant life when it is actually a life full of pain due to the impure nature of his enjoyment. Indeed, Carpenter points out that the Phileban hedonist must pursue acute pains to gain intense pleasures (Carpenter 2006, 21-22), and van Zoonen argues that the *genesis* argument at 53c4-55a12 criticizes the irrationality (ἀλογία) of hedonists by showing that a life directed at pleasure is also a life directed at destruction and pain (van Zoonen 2021, 182-187). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Indeed, I think this interpretation answers one charge that Muniz raises against views that take anticipatory pleasures to be propositional attitudes. He claims that an adequate interpretation of the anticipation argument will need to connect the ‘epistemic, ethical, and ontological sense of truth’ to account for the ‘mimetic context’ of the passage (Muniz 2014, 72-73). My own interpretation makes strides in this direction by grounding the representational falsity of one’s occurrent anticipatory pleasure on a failure to grasp the nature of pleasure itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Of course, note too that investigating the nature of pleasure is precisely what Philebus, the silent interlocutor, does *not* do, handing off the argument to Protarchus before the dialogue even begins. Whatever is guiding Philebus’ pursuit of pleasure, it certainly is not a philosophical understanding of its nature. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Delcomminette makes a similar observation. Hedonists who pursue the intense bodily pleasures are also pursuing what they most despise: pain (Delcomminette 2006, 439). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Indeed, at this point in the dialogue Protarchus might still assume that the intensity and size of a pleasure directly track its pleasantness. Pleasantness and intensity most clearly come apart only later in the dialogue when Socrates puts pure, limited pleasures into a different class than the large and intense pleasures (52c1-d1) and claims that a small but pure pleasure is more pleasant than a large pleasure (53b10-c1). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Fletcher makes a similar point in her own discussion of the false pleasures of juxtaposition: Socrates’ discussion calls into question our ability to accurately judge the size of a pleasure from its phenomenology (Fletcher 2018, 391). Similarly, Proios’ discussion of the false pleasures of juxtaposition emphasizes how our perception of these experiences as the ‘greatest’ pleasures is a kind of perceptual illusion caused by the juxtaposition of pleasure and pain. Proios describes how such perceptual errors lead to the false judgment that pleasures mixed with pain are the ‘greatest’ pleasures and that someone enjoying such pleasures is ‘happiest’ (Proios forthcoming, 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Note that I follow Plato and use ‘intelligence’ (φρονήσις) in a broad sense to refer, more generally, to intellectual and cognitive capacities. Hence, Socrates assumes that a life devoid of all intelligence (κενόν γε ὄντα πάσης φρονήσεως) lacks intellect (νοῦς), memory (μνήμη), knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), and true judgment (δόξα ἀληθής) (21b6-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Note that this description recalls the earlier discussion of the intense sexual pleasures, which were said to ‘produce shouts along with foolishness’ (βοὰς μετὰ ἀφροσύνης ἐνεργάζεται) (47a8-9). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Relatedly, Proios argues that the intense pleasures hedonists constantly pursue cause perceptual illusions (Proios forthcoming, 33). In that case hedonists are no better off than jellyfish, despite possessing the cognitive capacities jellyfish lack, because their use of such capacities is systematically plagued by illusion and error. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. However, in a detailed overview of the choice of lives argument that emphasizes the importance of the jellyfish image, O’Reilly argues that the pleasantness of the jellyfish life devoid of cognition is itself already called into question. Indeed, O’Reilly argues that, though a jellyfish can *experience* pleasures, the absence of cognition and self-awareness implies that it does not *feel* them because ‘felt pleasure, that which can be enjoyed, looks, on this picture, like a kind of proprioception that presupposes rationality’ (O’Reilly 2019, 290). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. It is worth noting that a human life devoted to intense pleasures can also be *far* *more dangerous* than the jellyfish life. Indeed, recall the definition of the ridiculous (τὸ γελοῖον) as ignorance combined with weakness (49b6-c5). While both a harmless jellyfish and a wicked tyrant devoted to intense pleasures lack self-knowledge, a politically powerful tyrant cognitively capable of taking revenge and carrying out his sordid plots is no laughing matter but in fact a danger to himself and others. My thanks to Patricia Marechal for drawing this to my attention. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Socrates refers to them as τὴν φρόνησιν καὶ τὸν νοῦν (63c5). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Indeed, far from undermining intellect, the pure pleasures instead accompany its best uses. Recall, for instance, the pure pleasures of learning (51e7-52a3). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. For instance, Szaif argues there is good reason to think that Plato intends for some impure pleasures to be included in the best human life (Szaif 2021, 141-144). Arenson also argues that impure intellectual pleasures have an important and necessary place within the lives of philosophers, even if such pleasures are not the goal of a philosophical life (Arenson 2016). Finally, Austin has argued that the impure pleasure of ‘philosophically refuting fools and the self-blind’ belongs in the best human life (Austin 2012, 125). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Monte Johnson for his steadfast support and guidance throughout the development of this paper. In addition, I would also like to sincerely thank Patricia Marechal, Jan Szaif, Sam Rickless, David Brink, Don Rutherford, Blythe Greene, and the other participants of the UCSD History of Philosophy Reading Group for their feedback on various earlier versions of this paper. Finally, I would also like to thank Ron Polansky and anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)