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*ΨΥΧΗ AS BIBLION: COGNITIVE DISPOSITIONS
AND PLEASURES AT PHILEBUS 38E12-40C*

APSTRAKT: In this paper the author attempts to elucidate comparison with the illustrated book in the Philebus (38e12) in a more detailed manner in order to find out what cognitive dispositions underlie our experiencing a variety of pleasures, particularly the pleasures of anticipation. In doing so, she shall argue against the commentators of the Philebus, who claim that only perception and memory are responsible for forming perceptual judgments concerning pleasures, supporting the interpretation, according to which our capacity to think (διάνοια) is also involved in that process.

KLJUČNE REČI: Plato, soul, illustrated book, scribe, painter, pleasures.

1. Introduction

Plato compares the soul with the most unusual things. In the *Theaetetus*, our soul is associated with a wax block (191c8) and with an aviary for birds (196d 5 ff.), while in the *Philebus* (38e12) it is said that the soul is similar to an illustrated book. Those epistemic metaphors play different roles in the context of the dialogues. All of them, however, being vivid and rich in imagination, disclose a complex, interwoven net of various cognitive dispositions our cognition and knowledge are based upon. Each of them, in its own way, depicts our mind not as a passive recipient of sensory impressions, but as an active and creative factor in giving their false or true interpretations.

In this paper I shall attempt to elucidate simile with the illustrated book as such in a more detailed manner in order to find out what cognitive dispositions underlie our experiencing a variety of pleasures, particularly the pleasures of anticipation. My aim is to question the epistemological aspect of Plato's concept of false anticipatory pleasure as it is discussed in the *Philebus* (38e12-41a6). First, I shall shed light on the context in which the simile appears. Second, I will endeavor to examine who are the participants of this extended analogy and what kind of "artistic" activities they perform. Finally, I shall try to point out what function the

comparison performs in reinforcing the entire argument about the possibility of error in pleasure and pain in the *Philebus* (36a3-41a6).

2. The book analogy and its first author: the scribe

The analogy between the ψυχὴ and βιβλίον emerges as a part of the argument, according to which epistemological “qualification” as true and false can be ascribed at least to certain kinds of pleasures. In order to justify this highly controversial thesis – which is completely unacceptable to Protarchus (36c9-10), Socrates’ interlocutor in the dialogue – Plato’s Socrates works out the analogy between pleasures (ἡδοναί) and opinions (δόξαι), since opinions are obviously true and false.¹ In both cases Plato’s Socrates distinguishes mental activity, i.e. opining or taking pleasure, and contents² of these activities, i.e. what opining or taking pleasure is about (37a8-11). In addition, there is another similarity between these two activities. Namely, whether or not one correctly (ὀρθῶς) opines or takes pleasure in, one really (ὄντως) opines or takes pleasure in (37a10-11b4).

In order to elaborate further on the similarities between δόξαι and ἡδοναί, Plato’s Socrates gives an account of the origin of δόξαι. Closely describing how δόξαι come about, he introduces, perhaps unacceptably, the simile of the book at 38e12. The wording of the comparison is as follows: “It appears to me that our soul is then comparable to a book (Δοκεῖ μοι τότε ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ βιβλίῳ τινὶ προσοικέναι)”.

At first glance and taken out of the context, one might think that by comparing the soul to the book Plato implies that language and grammatical structures are innate to the mind. It seems, however, that this simile speaks in favor of the empiricist viewpoint. Namely, somewhat earlier in the text Plato’s Socrates explicitly says in the form of a question that “always memory and perception give rise (γίγνεθ’) to opinion (δόξα) and to the attempt to make a definite opinion” (38b12-c1).³ Therefore, one may draw the conclusion that our opinions and judgments are at least causally based on perception and memory, and that they

1 The elucidation of false pleasures in the *Philebus* presupposes the discussion of the possibility of the false beliefs and statements elaborated in the *Theaetetus* (187c7-200d4) and the *Sophist* (259d-263d).

2 S. Delcomminette points out to the subtle difference between the object and the content of opining or taking pleasure. For example, what taking pleasure is about is content rather than the object of pleasure, since what we enjoy is not the pleasant object, but what we feel as pleasant. Cf. S. Delcomminette, “False Pleasures, Appearance and Imagination in the *Philebus*”, in: *Phronesis* XLVIII/3 (2003), 217-218.

3 This is just a part of the passage, which may be translated in the following manner: “Socrates: And is it not always memory and perception that give rise to opinion and to the attempt to make a definite opinion? Protarchus: Indeed.”

consist of the stored and preserved perceptions. Moreover, the subsequent passage, which explains to some extent this remarkable and striking simile by introducing its first agent, mentions also perception and memory as the sources of opinions. The translation of the passage at 39a1-7 might go as follows:

“Memory (μνήμη), coinciding with perceptions and what is related to these affections (τὰ παθήματα), appear to me so to speak to write the λόγοι in our souls. And if this affection (τό πάθημα) writes what is true, then in our soul opinion and λόγοι which are true come about. If our scribe (γραμματεὺς) writes what is false, then what is written will be the opposite to the truth.”

Since the passage is vague even at first sight, let me point out to some textual ambiguities before I examine the role of perception, memory and another cognitive disposition involved in the emergence of opinions. To begin with, one should also clear up what kind of activity the inscribing of the λόγοι represents. Secondly, it is said that “affection writes” the λόγοι, which is not consistent with the previous sentence, where besides affection, memory and perceptions are mentioned as responsible for inscribing the λόγοι. Moreover, how can something passive like affection alone be responsible for performing the active function of inscribing the λόγοι in our souls? At last, who then represents the internal scribe: an unspecified affection, or conjecture of memory, perceptions and affections or perhaps something else, which is not explicitly mentioned in the quoted passage.

In order to try to give some answers to the raised questions, let us elucidate this passage in a more detailed fashion. The comparison with the scribe contains three elements: 1. the agent of the activity 2. the activity itself and 3. its subject matter.⁴ The activity of writing the λόγοι requires both its author and products. It seems that Plato here compares the scribe with the soul’s disposition(s), and the activity of inscribing the λόγοι with the activity of forming δόξαι and λόγοι. Namely, the internal scribe symbolizes soul’s disposition or conjunction of some dispositions, which are responsible for creating true and false δόξαι and λόγοι. Neither can thoughts be written down in the external book all by themselves, nor can certain opinions and λόγοι be written down in our soul, unless we actively participate in this process. I think that the active role, that the author, i.e. the scribe performs, is of particular significance for understanding of this passage.

It appears that the internal writer is represented by memory, perceptions, and affections, which coinciding produce λόγοι as it is said in the first sentence of the quoted passage. In the second sentence, however, the scribe does not symbolize any more the plurality of dispositions, but a singular one, i.e. τό πάθημα, an affect. There are different explanations of this textual ambiguity. While Burnet⁵ puts into

4 Cf. D. Frede, *Platon. Philebos*, Übersetzung und Kommentar von, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen, 1997, 363.

5 Cf. J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, Vol. 2, Oxford, 1901.

brackets “τοῦτο τό πάθημα”, Diès⁶ considers that it should stay with a reference to *Republic* (511d7),⁷ where παθήματα mean the four cognitive capacities from the divided line. The latter reading implies that also here τό πάθημα can perform the activity of inscribing the λόγοι, as D. Frede remarks.⁸ I think that Plato here, instead of enumerating for a second time all dispositions from the previous sentence, mentions only one, which, in some sense, might represent all of them. In addition, it appears also that by this singular Plato suggests that only the unity of some dispositions, symbolized by the figure of the scribe, can produce δόξαι and λόγοι.

Memory and perception evidently play an important role in generating and forming opinions and statements which underlie our experiencing pleasures. Many commentators of the *Philebus* even identify the scribe in the soul with a joint of memory, perception and affections,⁹ whereby the role of memory is especially emphasized.¹⁰ First I shall consider how they contribute to that process as it is suggested in the cited passage and then examine if they are not only necessary, but also sufficient candidates for fulfilling this task.

Perception is defined as a “motion”, “which occurs when the soul and body are jointly affected and moved by one and the same affection” (34a3-4), and memory is “a preservation of perceptions (σωτερία αἰσθήσεως) (34a10)”. Storing and preserving the perceptions or sensory impressions¹¹ could remind us of inscribing words in a book. Moreover, perceptions preserved by memory make up the content of our perceptual judgments and thus it seems that memory enables the connection of our previous perceptions with the actual, present ones. But, is a memory the disposition which connects compares and adjusts past with the present perceptions? It is highly unlikely, particularly if it is only a “preservation of perceptions”. What disposition is then responsible for connecting, and combining the perceptions, which is presupposed in the process of forming judgments? I will try to answer to this question by giving an example.

Namely, Plato provides an example of a wanderer who unclearly from the distance sees a man, and “judges” what he sees by asking himself: “What could that be that stands before me near the rock under a tree? (38c10-d1)” He could answer

6 Diès rightly claims that by this singular Plato prepares the following scribe. Cf. Diès, *Platon: Philèbe*, (Texte établi et traduit, Paris), 1941, 47, n.1.

7 This opinion is supported by J.C.B Gosling (*Plato. Philebus* 1975 110-111) and D. Frede (*Platon. Philebos*, 1997, 50).

8 Cf. D. Frede, *Platon. Philebos*, 1997, 50.

9 Cf. R. Hackforth, *Plato's Philebus*, Cambridge, 1972, 72; J.C.B Gosling, *Plato. Philebus*. 1975, 111.

10 Cf. J. C. B. Gosling and C.C.W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, Oxford, 1982, 434.

11 Nevertheless the language of sensory impression is more appropriate to the wax block model in *Theaetetus* 191c8-195b8.

either by saying it is a man, and be right, or by calling what he sees a statue and be wrong. One might say that what happens in the wanderer's soul is the process of adjusting his present, unclear perception with the stored perceptions of a man or a statue, which could easily mislead him to make a false judgment. What is at issue here, however, is not some process that spontaneously happens in his soul, but the process during which he deliberately arrives at a particular judgment. Plato's wanderer judges, he asks himself the questions and comes either to the true or false answers. Furthermore, if he is to connect his unclear, actual perception with the preserved perception of a statue or a man, Plato's wanderer requires the notion of the man and the statute. This is hardly the description of how memory functions, but it rather refers to the process Plato himself calls the dialogue of the soul with itself, which obviously involves the higher cognitive disposition than memory.

Although it seems clear from Plato's own example that forming opinions, personified in the figure of the scribe, involves higher and more powerful dispositions than the perception and memory, I shall attempt to give an additional reason for that claim.

The cognitive disposition whose function is to preserve the perceptions cannot be responsible for forming such complex units like judgments and statements, since they presuppose, among other things, using the concepts and establishing the various relation between different objects of perception. Although this is not said in such a manner in the *Philebus*, I think that Plato shares that opinion. This view is nevertheless supported by the similar place in the *Theaetetus* (184a-186c) where Socrates puts forward a considerably plausible argument that the formation of perceptual opinions presupposes "common lectures" like being, sameness, otherness (185d1ff), which cannot be accounted for by any of our senses, but by our mind's own activity to think.

Even the simplest judgments of the type: "This drink is bitter" presuppose the notion of drink, of being and of being bitter. Any perceptual judgment requires the ability to think, for example, that something is a case, or is not the case (186c1 ff.). In the *Philebus* as in the *Sophist* (263e3-264b5) and the *Theaetetus* (189e4-190a8), the mind's activity of thinking is described as an internal and silent dialogue of the soul with itself, which could be externalized and expressed in words. This process presupposes more than just perception or preservation of perceptions. It requires a significant contribution of a consideration, abstraction which are the operations of mind's δῖα νοῖα, even in the case of Plato's wanderer in the *Philebus* who is trying to establish whether at some distance there is a man or a statue.

The most serious objection to the interpretation that the scribe from this analogy represents also and above all δῖα νοῖα is that Plato in the quoted passage, where the scribe is introduced, never mentions our unique disposition to think. Nevertheless, he refers both to memory and perceptions as the sources of our

opinions. There are two possible replies to this objection. The first answer concerns the context, in which analogy appears. And that is Plato's example of the wanderer's dialogue that he has with himself. The second answer has to do with the quoted sentence itself that is to say with an expression "κάκεινα ἃ περὶ ταῦτ' ἐστὶ τὰ παθήματα", which Delcomminette,¹² following F. Teisserenc, rightly translates as "what is related to these affections". The expression is to be understood as referring to the activity of thinking, i.e. the internal dialogue of the soul with itself, while τὰ παθήματα in the same sentence corresponds to the memory and perceptions.

Let us sum up the part of Plato's analogy concerning the γραμματεὺς, his origin and activity. The scribe dramatizes the process of forming the opinions. Perceptions and perceptions stored by memory contribute to that process mainly by providing the material out of which our δόξαι and λόγοι are made. It is, however, unlikely that memory alone or jointly with the perceptions and affections can form any, even simplest judgments. The memory is only a receptive power, not capable on its own to connect and combine the stored perceptions into the more complex and structured units such as opinions and statements. The higher cognitive disposition is needed for accounting for the articulation of certain opinions (δόξαι) and λόγοι about various states of affairs. That precisely is διάνοια, our power to think.

3. The second author of the book: its painter

According to Plato, the mental activity, when acquiring opinions which underlie our pleasures, is not entirely described by the figure of the scribe. So, he introduces the new artist in the soul: a painter (ζωγράφος). Like in the scribe's case, one could distinguish three different elements in the case of the painter: 1. the painter himself; 2. the activity of painting; and 3. paintings (εἰκόνες).¹³ This craftsman is present in our souls "at the same time (39b4)" as the scribe, but acts after him. It implies that the scribe's activity, i. e. the writing, is temporary, and, as we shall see, also logically prior to the painter's activity, i. e. the painting.

One might expect that the painter's role would be to use mental images to represent what one perceives. Likewise, his products could appear at first glance as mental images of perceptions or memory images. Plato's Socrates, however, assigns a different role to our internal painter. He "follows the scribe and paints images of what is said (τῶν λεγομένων) in the soul" (39b6-7).

12 S. Delcomminette, "False Pleasures, Appearance and Imagination in the *Philebus*", in: *Phronesis* XLVIII/3 (2003), 221.

13 Plato also calls them ζωγραφήματα (39d7) and φαντασμάτα (40a9).

The fact that the painter operates after the scribe, following him, and “illustrating” his λόγοι largely influences the understanding of the painter’s pursuit. He exercises his activity in representing certain λόγοι in the appropriate mental images. It is implied that a painter’s creation is some kind of a mental visualization, but not of what is actually perceived, but of what one believes is perceived, which could be an entirely different thing. In the case of the wanderer, who produces the false belief by misidentifying a man as a statue, the painter’s role is not to create the mental image of what the wanderer actually saw (a man), but of what he falsely believed he saw (a statue).¹⁴

The activity of the painter is depicted at 39b9-c1 in the following way: «When, having taken away (ἀπαγαγών) from a sight or some other perception what is then (τότε) opined and said, someone in a way sees in himself the images of what has been opined and said.”

To some extent this sentence is vague, especially concerning the understanding of how these images come about. The first stage is apparently the activity of “taking away (ἀπάγειν)”¹⁵ something from the received perceptions, which is then articulated in our perceptual judgments. This process results in the occurrence of the internal, mental images. It would be wrong to interpret the painter’s pictures as merely received and stored perceptions. Although his images contain the sensory material, it is not the originally perceived material, but the one, which is “taken away” from that experience, and then combined in our judgments. Therefore, these “paintings” are a kind of visual reinterpretation of what has already been interpreted by the scribe’s δόξαι and λόγοι. In this way, our internal painter does not “see” the object of the external, sensory world, but the internal conceptual and verbalized articulations of our sensory experience.

Let us consider what mental capacity is symbolized by the painter. It is very likely that this is a φαντασία, whose creations are called φαντασμάτα same as the products of the painter. Plato’s visitor in the *Sophist* defines φαντασία as “a mixture of perception and opinion (σύμμελις αἰσθήσεως καὶ δόξης) (264b1),”¹⁶ and this definition is similar to the description of the painter’s activity, since he uses perceptual material to represent certain δόξαι. The φαντασία occurs when we arrive at a δόξα by a way of sense perception, and not by thinking only.¹⁷ Never-

14 This properly remarks K. Lorenz. Cf. H. Lorenz, *The Brute Within. Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle*, Clarendon/Oxford, 2006, 105.

15 The verb “ἀπάγειν” Hackford translates as “clear of” (R. Hackforth, *Plato’s Philebus*, 1972, 75) and Gosling as “isolate” (J.C.B Gosling, *Plato. Philebus*. 1975, 35).

16 In a certain sense Plato is a precursor of Aristotle’s concept of φαντασία “imagination or image making”, as it has been noticed by Hackforth (Cf. R. Hackforth, *Plato’s Philebus*, 1972, 72).

17 Cf. *Soph.* 264a4-b5.

theless, what makes the painter products (φαντασμάτα) true or false is not their perceptive, visual component, but the fact that they are “structured by a δόξα”.¹⁸ And this is particularly important for understanding the role of this analogy in Plato’s argument of false, future pleasure.

4. The role of the analogy in Plato’s argument of false, anticipatory pleasures

I shall briefly point out the contribution of the simile with an illustrated book in Plato’s much-discussed argument¹⁹ of the possibility of the error concerning prospective pleasures, without entering in details. As it has been already shown, both in the example of the scribe and the painter, the agent’s activity should be distinguished from the results of that activity. The veracity could be ascribed only to the results of the scribe and the painter’s activity, i.e. their products: λόγοι and εἰκόνες.

This parable, among other things, reveals that while we are enjoying ourselves, a complex cognitive enterprise is going on in our soul. It results in true or false λόγοι, upon which true and false pleasures rely. So, if a λόγος, upon which a corresponding pleasure is based, is false – that is, when what we think is the case is not the case and *vice versa* (39c, 40d) – then the pleasure in question is false. And this applies to the present, past and future λόγοι, and their corresponding pleasures. Moreover, the εἰκόνες, which represent λόγοι, can also be true or false concerning past, present and future state of affairs (39c10-11).

The word λόγος, plural λόγοι, which has a wide range of connotations, in this context does not mean words, or lists of various words, but it refers to the more complex syntactic units, statements. Or, to put it more precisely, it seems that Plato has in mind a kind of specially structured statements that represent the content of

18 Cf. S. Delcomminette, “False Pleasures, Appearance and Imagination in the *Philebus*”, 223.

19 J.C.B. Gosling (“False Pleasure: *Philebus* 35c-41b”, *Phronesis* 4 (1959), 44-54) and A. Kenny (“False Pleasures in the *Philebus*: a Reply to Mr. Gosling”, in: *Phronesis* 1(1960), 45-52) think that this argument confuses the picture and picturing, and J. Dybikowsky (“False Pleasure and the *Philebus*”, in: *Phronesis* 1 (1970), 147-165) supplementes it by claiming that this conflation depends on the conflation between the picture and the object depicted. On the other hand, T. Penner (“False Anticipatory Pleasures: *Philebus* 36a3-41a6, in: *Phronesis* 15 (1970), 166-178) and D. Frede („Rumpelstiltskin’s Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato’s *Philebus*”, in: *Plato 2. Ethics, Politics, Religion and the Soul*, ed. by G. Fine, Oxford, 1999, 345-372) advocate Plato’s argument by showing that some pleasures can be true or false, because they have propositional content. In criticizing mainly D. Frede interpretation, C. Hampton (“Pleasure, Truth and Being in Plato’s *Philebus*: A Reply to Professor Frede”, in: *Phronesis* 32 (1987), 252-62) offers somewhat unconvincing reading, in which she emphasizes the ontological aspect of Plato’s notion of truth and the significance of Theory of Forms for the understanding of false, anticipatory pleasure. One cannot find, however, even a hidden reference to the knowledge of the Forms in this argument in the *Philebus*.

our opinions. These statements may be articulated in the following manner: “A person (x) enjoys that something is (was, will be) the case”, showing its propositional structure, as rightly emphasized by some of the contemporary interpreters²⁰ of the false pleasures in the *Philebus*. Due to such a structure, the pleasures can be judged and analyzed also in terms of their veracity.

In Plato’s view, the most interesting case is that of the false prospective pleasures, because they entirely depend on our soul and its operations, dispositions and products (λόγοι and εἰκόνες). Plato’s Socrates claims at 40a 4-5 something even stronger than that. He says that “our hopes are λόγοι”, the products of the scribe’s work, which are evident cases of something either true or false. Indeed, when we hope that something pleasant will happen, we do not take pleasure in the pleasant, anticipatory event as such, but in our descriptions (λόγοι) of that event.

One may ask why Plato introduces images, the painter’s creations, in the discussion concerning the false pleasures of anticipation,²¹ when the veracity of those pleasures can be explained in the terms of λόγοι, the scribe’s products. A possible answer could be that in such case we would no longer be talking of pleasures since they have their affective side, too, symbolized by the painter’s εἰκόνες, which are the strong, visual representations. The interpretation, according to which in Plato’s account of false, prospective pleasures the painter and his εἰκόνες represent their affective side, is convincingly supported by his famous, and only example of this kind of false pleasures: “a person often sees himself in the possession of an enormous amount of gold and of a lot of pleasures because of it. And in addition, he also sees in this inner picture himself, that he is beside himself with delight” (40a9-12). As we can see the painter’s illustrations are not the neutral mental images of any kind of perceptual judgments, but filled with intensive emotions, like delight in the quoted sentence.

It is the very nature of the painter’s mental images which do not represent the stored perceptions, but certain δόξαι and λόγοι that make them suitable for depicting anticipatory pleasures. The prospective pleasures are, namely, based upon those judgments, whose content is not what we have already experienced, but what we hope to experience, so that the visualization of that content is needed, if not necessary. The intensity and vividness of our anticipatory pleasures could only be fully experienced by our internal, mental images, or in other words, by our imagination about their content.

20 Cf. T. Penner, “False Anticipatory Pleasures: *Philebus* 36a3-41a6, 171-3, D. Frede, «Rumpelstiltskin’s Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato’s *Philebus*», 367-9.

21 This question is raised by D. Russel. Cf. D. C Russel, *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life*, Clarendon Press/Oxford, 2005, 178.

5. Conclusion

Plato's analogy of the soul as the book with the pictures has a role that surpasses the discussion of the false, prospective pleasures. It provides a significant and fertile contribution to his account of human psychology. Using the vivid figures of the scribe and the painter, Plato describes the processes happening in our soul that we are not usually even aware of. The simile shows that our pleasures have their *doxatic* side represented by the scribe, as well as its affective side, represented by the painter. Pleasure and pain can only be accurately described by the appropriate opinions and vivid mental images.

The simile of the book illustrates that even the simplest activities can be explained by the complex, mental enterprises, the splice of mutually harmonized and hierarchically ordered cognitive activities. By introducing the metaphor of the internal scribe in the *Philebus*, Plato depicts our mind as an active, productive enterprise, where "translation" of stored perception into the medium of δόξα and λόγοι involves also a great deal of the rational operations like articulation, classification and structuring of our sensory experience. Another craftsman in the soul, i. e. the painter performs the activity highly dependable on the previous one. His role is to "reinterpret" δόξα and λόγοι in the medium of internal pictures, which contain sensory materials, and thus to connect anticipatory pleasures with their sensory origin, perception and memory. The perceptive judgments and mental images are formed only with the help of the mind and imagination whose activities enable the unity and completeness of our experience. Our soul, after all, is really a book, the book that is never to be fully completed, in which the scribe always inscribes the new λόγοι, and reinterprets the old, while the painter illustrates them.

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**Ψυχή kao Βιβλίον. Kognitivne dispozicije i uživanja
u *Filebu* 38e12-40c**

(Apstrakt)

U ovom radu autorka teži da rasvetli poređenje sa ilustrovanom knjigom u dijalogu *Fileb* (38e12) na podrobniji način, kako bi se videlo koje se kognitivne dispozicije nalaze u osnovi naših, različitih uživanja, i to posebno uživanja koja se tiču budućnosti. Ona će nastojati da pobije one komentatore koji smatraju da su samo opažanje i sećanje utiču na obrazovanje sudova opažanja, koji se tiču zadovoljstva, i da potkrepi njenu vlastitu interpretaciju, po kojoj je razum (διάνοια) takođe uključen u taj proces.

KLJUČNE REČI: Platon, duša, knjiga, pisar, slikar, uživanja.