

## The Jellyfish's Pleasures: *Philebus* 20b-21d

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### **Abstract**

Scholars have characterised the trial of the life of pleasure in *Philebus* 20b-21d as digressive or pejorative. I argue that it is neither: it is a thought experiment containing an important argument, in the form of a *reductio*, of the hypothesis that a life could be most pleasant without cognition. It proceeds in a series of steps, culminating in the precisely chosen image of the jellyfish. Understanding the intended resonance of this creature, and the sense in which it is deprived, is critical for reconstructing the argument, and yields new insight into Plato's views on the minimal conditions for pleasure.

### **Keywords**

Plato; *Philebus*; pleasure; reflexivity; jellyfish

### **1. Introduction**

At *Philebus* 20b-21d, the interlocutors pursue a novel means of deciding the question whether what renders a life good or happy is pleasure, intelligence or some third state or condition: a thought experiment in which they consider a life of knowledge stripped of any affect, and a life of pleasure stripped of the cognitive, in order to determine if either yields the perfect, desirable, and self-sufficient life they seek. In the latter case, the interlocutors are surprisingly liberal about what is included in the cognitive abilities stripped away, and the passage ends with what some take to be a pejorative remark, that the life of pleasure alone is that of a jellyfish. This has prompted some scholars to cast the trial sequence as an offhand digression, culminating in an insulting simile.<sup>1</sup> Others tend to overlook the image of the jellyfish or, when they take note of it at all, characterise the animal's deficiency in terms of a lack of awareness.

Contrary to scholars who take the trial sequence to be either digressive or primarily pejorative, I argue that the passage presents a clear argument that, if one strips cognition from the experience of pleasure, one ends up with a state which is not far elevated from that of a plant – this is the point of the comparison with the jellyfish that the passage ends with. I contend that

<sup>1</sup> I will cite two prominent examples of the latter in Section 2.1 below.

the jellyfish is a carefully chosen image with significant philosophical resonances, used to construct a *reductio* of a certain kind of assumption the interlocutors are making in the set-up of the trial, and to illustrate an important point about the minimal conditions of pleasure. Against readings which understand its deprivation as a lack of awareness, I argue that it is deprived specifically in terms of reflexivity, and that determining how Plato construes the cognitively liminal jellyfish is critical for reconstructing the argument.<sup>2</sup>

Here I first argue that the simile of the jellyfish serves an important dialectical function, and then survey a range of classical sources discussing the jellyfish. I then turn to the *Timaeus* in order to establish the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities Plato attributes to non-rational animals, and sea creatures in particular. I use these two examinations to establish governing assumptions for the *Philebus* passage, and finally I offer my own reading.

## 2. The Jellyfish's Pleasures

### 2.1. The Jellyfish as Simile

The jellyfish is introduced at *Philebus* 21c as part of the encouragement to Protarchus to see that the life he claims to be willing to live, and which he claims to be self-sufficient, would not be as he first envisions it. For he would be in possession of neither reason, nor memory, nor knowledge, nor true opinion (21b). The implication of this is that he would suffer from a series of deficiencies: ignorance of / failure to know / have in mind (ἀγνοεῖν) whether he was enjoying himself or not (εἰ χαίρεις ἢ μὴ χαίρεις), because of his lack of any kind of wisdom (φρόνησις, 21b); the inability to remember that he had enjoyed himself, because of his lack of memory (μνήμην, 21c); the inability to δοξάζειν (realise / believe / judge) that he was enjoying himself even when he was, because of lack of opinion or belief (21c); and the inability to calculate future pleasures, because of lack of the power to calculate (21c). If all of these conditions held, he would be living the life of a jellyfish (πλεύμων, 21c) or other sea creature like it, rather than the life of a human.

Readers have wondered how, exactly, we are supposed to conceive of the life of pleasure without reason, as symbolised by the jellyfish's existence. Is the comparison to the

<sup>2</sup> Modern translators of, and commentators on the *Philebus* often use 'sea urchin' or 'mollusc' for πλεύμων. But this is problematic, since molluscs are a different phylum altogether, many of which are more complex, and some of which are known to be highly intelligent creatures, such as the octopus. Thompson, in his comprehensive *A Glossary of Greek Fishes* (1947, 203), lists the modern equivalent of the πλεύμων as the jellyfish. Leroi 2014, 395 also suggests that the πλεύμων likely refers to the jellyfish (*Scyphozoa*) but that it is also possible, as Voultziadou and Vafidis 2007, 113 suggest, that it is the dead man's finger sponge (*Alcyonium palmatum*). While I will discuss the traits of this creature in detail below, I will translate πλεύμων as 'jellyfish' for the convenience of the modern reader, and since I find it the more likely referent, on which see n. 3 below.

jellyfish just an insult to the hedonist, or does it have more specific argumentative force? Dorothea Frede notes that Plato has a habit of comparing the life of an ‘uncompromising hedonist’ to that of lower creatures, citing the *χαραδριός* of *Gorgias* 494b, and she notes that here in the *Philebus* he chooses ‘an even lower type of animal’ (1993, 16 n. 1). Gosling suggests that the choice of ‘jelly-fish and shellfish might simply be for the purposes of abusive description’, and infers that the jellyfish represents animal intelligence in general (1975, 88).

While we cannot fail to appreciate the insults built into these images, it would be unfair to say that this was the main objective of the similes. In the *Gorgias*, the bird which evacuates as quickly as it takes in food is an appropriate image to evoke for the hedonist who is after flowing but not filling. It makes a specific point about the condition of fostering maximum need, and suggests that a life aimed at attaining pleasure will never succeed, since pleasure is never reliably retained. In the *Philebus*, we find another carefully chosen image. This time it is a *πλεύμων* or jellyfish, which is not just a lowly form of life, but one which lacks a specific cognitive ability. In order to appreciate the force of the image, I now turn to examine how the jellyfish was understood by ancient philosophers and scientists.

## 2.2 Classical Sources on the *πλεύμων*

In his *De Respiratione*, Aristotle notes that the referent of term *πλεύμων* in certain authors is equivalent to the referent of the term *πνευμά* – an organ – in others (479a9). In that context he seems to think of the creature as nothing but a sea-lung, the equivalent of an organ found in other, more complex creatures. This kind of reductive view of the animal and its abilities runs right through the ancient treatments. In *Historia Animalia*, Aristotle says that this creature arises spontaneously (548a11). In *De Partibus Animalium*, he says that they differ only slightly from sponges or plants, and only in that they are unattached, but they lack sensation (681a18). He then hesitates about whether sponges should be classed as plants or animals. On the one hand they resemble plants by being dependent on what they are stuck on, on the other they are fleshy and probably have *some kind* of sensation (681a25-9). He seems to be worried about what kind, or what degree of sensation to attribute to them. We might reasonably think that this worry about sponges and other free-floating sea creatures which most resemble the *πλεύμων*, extends to a worry about the sensations of a jellyfish, too. He diminishes the jellyfish’s complexity and abilities to such an extent that they are conceived of as barely better than, or different from, a sensationless sponge.

The picture gets filled in further from other sources. From Athenaeus we learn that the creature lacks joints, so we are picturing a fleshy mass (*Deipnosophistae* 7, 354a). From

Theophrastus we get some confirmation that this creature is what we now call a jellyfish, since he notes that a sign of an incoming storm is the gathering of οἱ πνεύμονες in the sea.<sup>3</sup>

A number of sources tell us that Epicurus employed πλεύμων as a term of abuse against Nausiphanes (fl. 325 BCE), a student of Pyrrho who is associated with Democritean atomism.<sup>4</sup> According to Diogenes Laertius (10.8), ‘Epicurus used to call Nausiphanes a jelly-fish, an illiterate, a fraud, and a trollop.’ According to Hesychius (s.v.), the term implied obtuseness and insensibility, not weakness or pliability. This reinforces that lack of intellect and sensation are the mark of this creature when invoked polemically. Sextus Empiricus also refers to this same account of Epicurus’ insult to Nausiphanes, reporting that he calls him a πλεύμων ‘as being without sense’ (ἀναίσθητον) (*M* 1.3). So at least by the time of these later reports, if not within Epicurus’ own time, the term connotes lack of sensation, in a way which is more firm than in Aristotle’s use. The term is insulting, but in this importantly specific sense of signalling insensibility.

From Aristotle we get a picture of a free-floating, waterborne creature which is not far from a plant-like filterer. It seems to lack intentionality in that it is described as floating rather than as self-moving, not being inclined to seek out food. It could have the power of touch, since that is common to all animals (*HA* 489a17), but its access to sensation is doubtful because of its problematic resemblance to sensationless plants and the creatures which resemble them, like sponges.

Turning back to the *Philebus*, what are we to make of what the πλεύμων can and cannot do? Does its purported lack of belief about and ignorance of enjoyment in the trial of lives passage pick up this ancient thread, and imply that it can’t sense at all? Or is Plato more moderate, attributing to this creature some kind of sensation, some type of non-cognitive awareness, albeit with uncertainty about what type, or how much? To answer these questions I now turn to the *Timaeus*, in order to analyse Plato’s understanding of the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities of non-rational animals.

<sup>3</sup> Theophrastus, *De Signis*, 40. Apparently Theophrastus’ report is largely correct, in that the moisture and humidity which precede storms is still known to attract blooms of jellyfish. By combining Theophrastus’ account with Aristotle’s description of the creature as unattached (*PA* 681a17-18, with *HA* 548a11 as related), we can see that the referent of the term πλεύμων is more likely to be the free-floating jellyfish than the dead man’s finger sponge. The latter is a type of coral which, while it can sometimes break off and be found floating free, more usually grows and lives attached to bedrock, boulders, stones, and occasionally the shells of crabs and other creatures. An alternative suggestion, made to me by Alan Love, is that πλεύμων could refer to a sub-species of tunicate, which look particularly organ-like, are passive, and are especially hard to classify, even by contemporary biologists, because of their complex life-cycle. However, tunicate don’t gather ahead of storms, which the πλεύμων does, according to Theophrastus. It could be that Aristotle simply grouped what is now known to be a tunicate with jellyfish, but this is speculative. For the purposes of this discussion I continue to refer to the πλεύμων as the jellyfish.

<sup>4</sup> Epicurus fr. 114, 236 Usener; Sedley 1976, 121.

### 2.3 The Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Resources of Non-Rational Animals

One way to narrow down the options for what abilities Plato attributes to the jellyfish, as representative of the life of pleasure alone, is to understand which abilities, and particularly which cognitive resources, he grants to non-rational animals in general, and waterborne animals in particular. While this is not a focus in the *Philebus*, it is a theme in the *Timaeus*. In this section, I make use of that account in order to better understand the capacities of the πλεούμεων.

According to the account of the generation of all living things in the *Timaeus*, even trees, plants and seeds have sensation.<sup>5</sup> By virtue of partaking in life they also partake of the third type of soul – namely appetite, the lowest type.<sup>6</sup> This type does not share in belief, reasoning or calculating ability, or mind, but does have sensation, both pleasant and painful, and, perhaps most surprisingly, desires, at least to a limited extent. It is by virtue of the fact that plants are passive and are not self-movers that they lack the capacity to discern or reflect on any of their own characteristics or generation.<sup>7</sup> Here plant sensation is explicitly connected with pleasure and pain in some way, as well as with desire, but yet plants are said to be deprived of belief. In addition, sensation is treated very minimally, as a necessary condition of bare awareness. The account implies that while plants have some relation to pleasure, there is a missing belief component, marked by an inability to take in or reflect on oneself. What does this belief component contribute, and what would pleasure and pain look like without it?<sup>8</sup>

Earlier in the *Timaeus*, at 64a-65b, Plato discusses the causes of pleasures and pains attaching to affections, as well as cases of both perceptible and imperceptible affections. This discussion arises in the context of animals with minds, since it explicitly describes *nous* as a key component of the operations. But it will be useful to understand how mindful sensation works, on his account, so that this can be contrasted with the mindless sensation of plants and the

<sup>5</sup> *Tim.* 77a. On the question of whether plant sensation grants them intelligence in the *Timaeus* account, see Carpenter 2010. Carpenter notes that Plato grants plants perceptions of pleasure and pain, and desires. However, the plant case is described at *Tim.* 77b as αἴσθησις ἡδείας, which does not strike me as necessarily equivalent to pleasure. Instead it could be taken as something less than full-blown pleasure, perhaps implying a pleasure-apt thing, indicating that plants have a discriminating capacity whereby they distinguish sources of nourishment from things that will not contribute to their well-being. If pleasure is used in this source-sense here, it refers to the kinds of things congenial to the plant, with αἴσθησις picking out a kind of discrimination. On this reading, attributing αἴσθησις ἡδείας to plants is just a claim that plants discriminate between things that do and do not sustain them.

<sup>6</sup> *Tim.* 77b. The psychology of the *Timaeus* preserves the tripartite soul of the *Republic*, but transforms soul parts into three separate souls, each with its own location in the body (e.g. 90a).

<sup>7</sup> *Tim.* 77c.

<sup>8</sup> On the further question of how bare sensation could be accompanied by desire, in the absence of belief, see Lorenz 2006, chs. 6 and 7, making an exception of the ‘mollusc’ (102 n. 15).

lowest animals. After all, Plato calls what the lower part of the mortal soul possesses ‘irrational’ or ‘speechless’ sensation.<sup>9</sup> And, as we shall see, he attributes this kind of soul to plants and very basic animals.

In animals with minds, or those which are at least practically sensible (φρόνιμος), the nature of pleasure is conceived of as an intense return to the natural condition, while pain is a violent movement away from it.<sup>10</sup> Mild or gradual affections, by contrast, are imperceptible.<sup>11</sup> The cause of an affection is described as an impression made on the relevant part of the body. If it is strong enough, it will get transmitted via particles until an identical impression can ‘get to the mind and announce the quality of the agent’ (64b). This description makes the transmission of affections sound worryingly propositional, but it need not be read as such. We are accustomed to speaking loosely of signals or messages being sent from the body to the brain, and thereby registering to consciousness, without assuming that this registration takes a propositional form, or the form of a judgement. It *is* crucial that there be some instrument to receive these signals, and thereby register them globally rather than just regionally. Indeed, the conditions under which a pleasure or pain fail to register are specifically described in the text as those in which the affection affects one bodily part, but fails to be transmitted onwards from there, and therefore stays regional, never getting to the mind.<sup>12</sup> The implication is that some complexity is required of a creature for any experience of pleasure and pain to be possible.

The generation of animals, and water creatures specifically, is described at *Tim.* 91e-92b. Wild land animals are said to have come from men who fail to avail themselves of philosophy or the study of the nature of the heavens, instead following the part in their chest – the lower, appetitive soul. The most mindless of these land animals are the limbless creatures that squirm on the ground. Below these come creatures which are the instantiation of the most mindless and foolish of men, who are no longer worthy even of breath, and are thus thrust by the gods into the impure waters of the seas: fish, shellfish and all water-inhabiting creatures, whose extreme stupidity is justification for their extreme habitat. Plato evidently did not think much of the cognitive capacities of marine life.

The normal procedure for registering sensations, pleasant and painful, would have them proceed outside of the bodily region immediately affected by the external stimulation. From this

<sup>9</sup> αἰσθήσει δὲ ἀλόγῳ, *Tim.* 69d. This resonates with the speechlessness of Protarchus at *Phlb.* 21d.

<sup>10</sup> *Tim.* 64b. On the application of practical sagacity to animals, see Plato, *Statesman* 263d; in Aristotle, *HA* 488b15; *PA* 648a8, 687a8; *GA* 753a11.

<sup>11</sup> ἀναίσθητον, *Tim.* 64d.

<sup>12</sup> *Tim.* 64c. Compare the image of the trojan horse at *Theaet.* 184d (though the parallel is limited since there the soldiers appear to be conscious).

description, which calls sea creatures mindless, it is clear that their sensations would have nowhere to go: there is no central mind in place to receive and register any affection which is transmitted, and render it global. When Plato speaks of ‘irrational sensation’, I take it that he is thereby excluding plants and the lowest, waterborne animals from anything other than regional sensations, though these are still counted as pleasure-apt or pain-apt.<sup>13</sup> Further, plants at least are said to lack the capacity to discern or reflect on any of their own experiences (77c). A very basic animal which is plant-like might easily be tarred with the same brush.

Recall that, for Aristotle, resemblance to sensationless plants suggests that the jellyfish is either sensationless, or its sensory abilities are questionable. The later classical accounts suggest even more firmly that the creature is known for its insensibility. Plato conforms to this trend by making the jellyfish’s sensation questionable, but he does so in a manner different to Aristotle. Plato’s account of plants grants them some regional registration of pleasant sensation (αἴσθησις ἡδείας, 77b), but no ability to reflect on themselves, or to form beliefs, because of their lack of intellect (77c). Plants are described as completely passive, lacking self-motion (77b), just as the jellyfish is among animals. He also positions the jellyfish as a uniquely intellectually deprived creature. The source of the jellyfish’s inability to access its own pleasures, on Plato’s account, is its distinctive lack of self-awareness and sensory reflexivity. Its body parts experience the restorative process which underlies pleasure, but is it unable to form beliefs about it, and therefore to sense it *as* pleasure at the global level.

The missing belief component, then, seems to be a mark of mindlessness, and indicates that the ability to register regional sensations in the being as a whole is a key aspect of what belief would contribute. It would presumably also underlie the ability of an animal to discern or reflect on their experiences, and hence contribute the reflexivity of sensation. This indicates that the experience of pleasure is itself complex: there is a regional somatic registering of a sensation (a movement towards or away from the natural condition), and then there is a global registration of that same sensation, in which the subject of it becomes aware of it, which aligns with belief formation.<sup>14</sup> The jellyfish is barred from the latter.

Two abilities are missing in animals which possess only the lowest type of soul, according to the *Timaeus*. The first is the ability to register sensations ‘rationally’ or in the mind, therefore registering sensations globally, insofar as it reaches ‘the whole creature’ (64c). The second is the ability to discern or reflect on one’s own experiences, including affective experiences. Together, these two deprivations amount to a life of near insensitivity, where the

<sup>13</sup> On which see again n. 5 above.

<sup>14</sup> This complexity is also suggested at *Phlb.* 33e10-34a5, where Plato is explicit that there is no possibility of sensation without some bodily change affecting the soul, too. Cf. Carpenter 2010, 292.

subject is unable to register their sensations as pleasant or painful. The conclusion of the passage is that this life is effectively without affection, contrary to expectations (at least those of Protarchus). Plato anticipates the trend found in Aristotle and later ancient sources, but in a uniquely nuanced way.

Plato seems to deny that there could be a non-cognitive experience of pleasure or pain that nevertheless reaches the level of subjective awareness. The minimal conditions for the awareness of pleasure require some level of cognitive ability, which is denied to the jellyfish specifically and notably by ancient philosophers and scientists. In this sense classical thinkers differ from contemporary philosophers of biology such as Peter Godfrey-Smith who, in *Other Minds* (2017), suggests that there are many examples of animals that possess some degree of subjective experience (including primordial emotions like thirst, physiological pain, and the sensation of oxygen deprivation) which nonetheless fall short of full consciousness. These sensations can supposedly be experienced even without a subjective, reflexive perspective on the world. They might be exactly what we imagine for a jellyfish, whose movements strike us as reactive and passive. But from our analysis, we can see that Plato draws a firm line between regional and globally registered sensation, and that the most basic version of *enjoyment* cannot be thought of as a primordial emotion which would survive cognitive deprivation. It cannot be experienced without a subjective, reflexive perspective, so cannot be experienced by the jellyfish. This stance is a natural development of the general ancient analysis.

The jellyfish's is an extreme and particularly base existence and, in response to Gosling, it is deprived even by general animal standards. An examination of the account of animal rationality and irrationality from the *Timaeus* has thus clarified that, however we understand the jellyfish, it must be within the scope of the specific and extreme cognitive constraints set out for creatures of this kind.

### **3. The Argument**

#### *3.1 Governing Assumptions*

I will now draw from this exploration of the ancient understanding of the cognitive limitations of the jellyfish three governing assumptions for reading the trial of the life of pleasure passage (*Phlb.* 20b-21d).

The first is that any interpretation of the *Philebus* passage should respect the care Plato takes in his choice of image. The creature must have at least the *possibility* of the power of touch and sensation, not least because Plato chooses it for his example rather than a plant or a stone, which he is unhesitant to do in other contexts (i.e. *Gorg.* 494a). Further, he does not include sensation on the list of functions this creature lacks, whereas he is careful to list a

number of others. But we should be inclined to think, from Aristotle's account, and from the *Timaeus*, that there is a contemporary worry about whether these creatures lack sensation entirely, or rather have some kind of it. And it is precisely this worry that I think Plato wants us to have in mind when he invokes this creature in this context.

The specific example he names is this being which, in the minds of his near contemporaries, is a strange creature which defies easy classification as either plant or animal. In a contemporaneous dialogue, it is treated as a case of extreme cognitive deprivation, and an exception to the general account of animal cognition. So the questions of whether or not it is capable of the sensation of pleasure, and what the minimal cognitive conditions are for the experience of pleasure, are precisely those Plato wants us to have in mind when reading this passage. Interpreters should bear in mind that Plato has chosen an image which is not a stone or a plant, but which is *only barely or uncertainly* superior to or different from a plant in terms of its sensory faculties.

A second governing assumption is that the life being conceived of in this passage is not just a pleasant jellyfish life. It is, rather, explicitly described as one in which the subject has the greatest pleasures throughout (*Phlb.* 21a8-9, b3-4). The simile of the jellyfish is an image of a being that does not have to toil or hunt for food, but is well provisioned. It is an appropriate image to represent a maximal pleasure, minimum toil life. We ought, then, to read the passage as a good-faith attempt to portray a life which, while stripped of the cognitive, is nevertheless maximally pleasant. The jellyfish's life ought to be read, *ex hypothesi*, as a life of *possible* pleasure. It cannot be that whatever the jellyfish lacks prevents it from having pleasure in some very obvious way, such as it would if we took it to be blatantly insensitive, in the way that a stone is.

The third governing assumption is that understanding the precise nature of the jellyfish's deprivation is critical for understanding the argument itself. When they take note of the jellyfish at all, modern commentators tend to characterise its deficiency in terms of lack of awareness.<sup>15</sup> Below I will offer my own reading of the passage, which adheres to these three governing assumptions, and provides a detailed analysis of the deprivation represented by the jellyfish, as an alternative to the existing accounts.

### 3.2 *The Reading Offered*

<sup>15</sup> Modern commentators who address the cognitive capacities of the jellyfish in this argument, sometimes in passing, include Hackforth 1945, 32; Gosling 1975, 88-9, 183-4; Warren 2014, 142-3; Taylor 1956, 36; Irwin 1995, 333-4; McCabe 2000, 130-2; Whiting 2014, 26-7. My own reading, below, comes closest to those of McCabe and Whiting, though Whiting has a different view of the jellyfish as a subject of sensation.

In our passage, the life of pleasure alone is explicitly described as one in which the subject would enjoy the greatest pleasures throughout (*Phlb.* 21a9, b3-4).<sup>16</sup> But this does not mean that the assumption is preserved all the way through the passage. I want to introduce an alternative reading in which, by the end of the passage, the life of pleasure alone is understood to be one which lacks subjectivity. On my reading, the passage is an argument in the form of a *reductio* of the assumption that a human life could be most pleasant without any cognition. The jellyfish image it ends with represents the failure of a life of pleasure alone to be most pleasant, and to be valuable, for the subject whose life it is. The conclusion of the argument is that a life is most pleasant only if it is somehow pleasant for the subject, and this requires cognitive capacities such as memory and thought, so that pleasure *qua* pleasure will not suffice to make a life best.

In support of this reading, I suggest that it is crucial to understand the different parts of the claims at 21b-c, and why we get all of them. The argument is set out very carefully, in what I suggest we understand as a series of steps or stages, in which first the more obvious, and more obviously *cognitive* capacities are removed. The argument then moves in ever more surprising and radical steps, each attributing greater deprivation to the life represented by the jellyfish.

The passage begins with a general counterfactual claim, marked as first by the  $\pi\rho\tilde{\omega}\tau\omicron\nu$ , when Socrates asks whether or not Protarchus would be ignorant of or fail to have in mind whether he was enjoying himself or not (21b). This initially preserves reflexivity and self-ascription, since it asks him to reflect on whether he has this intelligence; in phrasing this as a question, there is a presumption of reflexivity. But, at the same time, in answering the question negatively, and establishing that he would have no way to find out if he was experiencing pleasure, it challenges our intuition about infallible access to our affective states, and suggests that reflexivity is stripped through the stages of cognitive extraction. I take this as a first, general description of the main three steps which follow it.

The first stage of cognitive deprivation establishes that a person occupying this position could not remember that he had enjoyed himself, and that their pleasures could not be preserved from one moment to the next (21c). The imagined subject loses access to memories of pleasures of their past. The procedure the interlocutors are following in the thought experiment, described as one in which they test the two lives as they are lying side by side in our memory, is no longer one which this subject could participate in (19d).

The second stage marks an even more radical move, which is importantly different from the first, and from the general description, in its emphasis on belief: by removing belief or opinion, we are shown that he would be unable even to realise, believe or judge he was enjoying

<sup>16</sup> Irwin, too, notes this as a starting assumption of the passage (1995, 334).

himself even when he was.<sup>17</sup> By removing an even more important capacity, Protarchus, as a representative figure occupying this position, is now imagined to be unable not just to access the fact of his enjoyment (characterised in the general claim), he has also lost his ability to form a judgement and to attribute enjoyment to himself. He has lost self-awareness as a subject of pleasure. It seems he could not even raise the question, let alone have a view on it.

Finally, in the third stage, we are to imagine him as being unable to calculate any future pleasures, or make any plans for himself (21c). He has lost access to the idea of himself as subject of possible future pleasures. There is no conception of self to attribute future plans to that is accessible to him.

Understanding the passage as this series of ordered stages of deprivation helps us to appreciate that this is an argument rather than a digression, and why the jellyfish is an appropriate representation of the most radically cognitively deprived life. Many readers will approach the passage with the assumption that, if you have a pleasurable experience, there may be room to be ignorant about it in theoretical terms, but there is no room for a failure to enjoy it: pleasure is inherently enjoyed. There is either pleasure or lack thereof, but no middle ground of ignorant pleasure, or ignorance of pleasure, in the sense of pleasure which fails to be enjoyed. Yet here Socrates seems to be trying to make room for just that, through the ἄγνοια claim of 21b, with the *reductio* ultimately showing that there is none. The question of whether pleasure has an essential cognitive aspect is exactly what is at stake, and the conclusion shows that its value is tied to the cognitive, despite an attempt to find an account of it as valuable which is divorced from the cognitive. The second step goes further: not only does pleasure have an essential cognitive component, but try to remove it, and we are left with a subject who is unable to access their own enjoyment. The pleasure does not disappear, but barely deserves the name, since it cannot be enjoyed.

<sup>17</sup> *Phlb.* 21c. One might wonder, from the phrasing, whether there is still enjoyment here in the second stage. The presence of the participle, χαίροντα, suggests that there is. The standard English translation, ‘But, not possessing right judgement, you would not realize that you are enjoying yourself even while you do’ (Frede, 1999), claims that lack of δόξα leads to lack of awareness of enjoyment, but implicitly concedes that it does not lead to lack of enjoyment *per se*. One possible linguistic dodge (which I am grateful to Tad Brennan for suggesting) is to suggest that this phrase functions as a counterfactual conditional. If that were so, we could read it as emphasizing the lack of awareness, while not entailing that enjoyment is compatible with lack of δόξα. It would instead imagine that one could have enjoyment without δόξα as part of a counterfactual scenario. Does the Greek permit this reading? The protasis can be read that way unproblematically. But we would expect an ἄν to mark the contingency in the apodosis, which we do not find. We could consider it as having dropped out. Or this could be explained by the apodosis being governed by the ἀνάγκη at the head of the sentence, by analogy to the rule Smyth recognizes (1956, §2315 *ff.*) We could then read the phrase as meaning ‘even if you *were* enjoying, you would not be aware of enjoying’. This is my preferred rendering.

I claimed above that the steps represent both increasingly radical and increasingly surprising deprivation. In support of the latter claim, I suggest that in addition to ordered steps, there is also dependency between them: each deprivation after the first is a result of the previous one, and in laying them out as a chain of dependent capacities, the hedonist interlocutor is surprised to learn that in giving up cognition, one is sacrificing much more than expected. The capacity removed in step two is lacking as an effect of the removal of the capacity in step one; the capacity in step three presupposes the capacity removed at step two. The second step is failure to believe one is enjoying oneself, because of a failure of δόξα. We need only think of the account of memory as essential to belief formation in the *Theaetetus* to appreciate that it would be fitting for this to be the result of the removal of memory in the previous step.<sup>18</sup> This seems to be the place where self-awareness is removed, and suggests that memory is required even for occurrent experiences of pleasure to be enjoyed. Finally, lacking the power to calculate (λογισμοῦ δὲ στερόμενον, 21c) would be a result of these previous deprivations, since doing so requires remembering what did please us, and occurrent belief and self-awareness. The idea of using these two capacities to anticipate what will please us in future, and to plan for that, is taken up again in the account of the pleasures of anticipation at *Phlb.* 32c-34c and 38e ff., where the lower parts use images stored in memory to generate desires.

The argument starts as a good faith attempt to hypothesise a life of pleasure alone devoid of cognition, but the interlocutors find that when the cognitive elements are removed, pleasure as something recognisably good and choice-worthy goes with them. It is impossible to divorce pleasure from any cognitive involvement, as the attempt to do so rests on the false assumption that there is such a thing as pleasure that is self-sufficient and worth having all by itself. The argument shows exactly that you cannot separate the value of the cognitive elements from the contribution they make. It is an early argument in support of the mixed life as not just preferable but essential.

The jellyfish is a uniquely appropriate simile to invoke in this context. While it may have the life of most pleasurable states or conditions, in some quantifiable sense, it cannot enjoy them, because the cognitive deprivation described in this passage renders it insensible, in the way associated with this creature in antiquity. It therefore does not have a pleasurable and valuable life by the standards of the thought experiment. At any given moment, it would be true to say that the jellyfish is experiencing but not enjoying pleasures: there is a form of pleasure which is restoration, which this creature undergoes, and which is strong enough that it would normally please a living creature. But in a sense it does not have access to this, and it is unable

<sup>18</sup> *Theaet.* 191e-194d, where δόξα involves matching perception with memory. I am indebted to a reviewer for pushing me on this point.

to enjoy that pleasure. Felt pleasure, that which can be enjoyed, looks, on this picture, like a kind of proprioception that presupposes rationality. And pleasure which is experienced but not enjoyed, and not felt, is possible but not choice-worthy. From the jellyfish's own perspective there is no past, present or future self to attach it to, or conceive of. The question is therefore not whether it is experiencing the state or condition definitional of basic pleasure, but whether that renders its life pleasant, and happy. The answer Plato gives is that the locus of hedonic value is cognitive self-awareness.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The crux of *Philebus* 21a-d is the question whether the enjoyment of pleasure does or does not have a reflexive component. I have argued that the *reductio* sets out to prove that pleasure worth having does have an essential reflexive component, and that without this component a life may meet the technical requirements for pleasure, but this pleasure cannot be enjoyed, such that it fails to count as a pleasurable life at all, for its subject. In doing so, I have revealed the importance of the jellyfish image which represents the life of pleasure, and established it as neither purely pejorative nor general, but rather a precisely chosen image whose ancient philosophical resonance yields new insight into Plato's view of the minimal conditions for pleasure.<sup>19</sup>

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