

## *PUTTING THE PHILEBUS'S INDISPENSABLE METHOD TO USE*

### ABSTRACT:

The *Philebus* presents a comprehensive epistemological and metaphysical view in two of that dialogue's most difficult passages (15b-18c, and 23c-28c). In particular, the method described in the first passage is used in the second passage to do metaphysics; and the metaphysical picture it uncovers is precisely the one needed to support the epistemological presumptions of the first passage. This 'circularity' is not vicious, but elegant; seeing it so reveals most about Socrates' preferred candidate for the (cause of) good in human life.

There is considerable perplexity around the methodological discussion of the *Philebus* 16a ff. Quite apart from the vexed issues of what the method is, and what it is for, there is the awkward puzzle over why Socrates bothers bringing it up at all. As he introduces it, Socrates claims that this is a "gift from the gods to men...hurled down from heaven" (16c5) and that "everything in any field of art that has ever been discovered has come to light because of this" (16c2-3).<sup>1</sup> This gift is recommended not merely as a useful tool, but as a necessary one: no knowledge except by observing this procedure. Thus, I shall argue, the claim at the heart of this god-given method of inquiry is an epistemological one: knowledge is that state which results from observing these recommendations for inquiry.

Less than a page later, however, and as soon as his interlocutors indicate they have grasped the basic points, Socrates declares that the Divine Method, with its demand for an analysis of pleasure and knowledge, is not necessary after all. "Some memory has come to my mind," Socrates suddenly says, which may settle the dispute "so we will not have to worry any longer about the division of the kinds of pleasure" (20c5-6). Why does Plato have Socrates introduce as indispensable a method he immediately abandons? Was he so artless as to find this the only way to slip in a few footnotes to the *Sophist* and *Politicus*?

To complicate things further, after discussing his dreamy recollection (20c-23b), Socrates seems to revert to the earlier epistemological discussion, after all. The dream interlude prompts Protarchus to concede that the mindlessly pleasant life is not adequate; but Socrates foresees a long and difficult discussion if we subject pleasure to a more exacting

examination (23a6-b6) – that is, if we try to determine exactly what role, if any, pleasure plays in making a human life good. Protarchus insists on this further examination, and so Socrates appeals to “what we were talking about before” (23c7), a distinction made at 16c10, between limit and unlimitedness (23c1-9).

But while the second discussion thus employs some of the same vocabulary as the first – most obviously *peras* and *apeiron* (limit and unlimited) – these terms of art seem to mean importantly different things in the two discussions. In the first, methodological or epistemological discussion, ‘unlimited’ and ‘limit’ describe how we divide things – or at least, so it is often read: ‘limited’ is how our distinctions should be; ‘unlimited’ (or appealing to innumerable particulars) is what they must not be. Talk of ‘limit’ and ‘unlimited’ is principally a fancy way of making a mundane methodological point: If any countless variety is to be organized, or any complex whole understood, we should delineate our concepts as clearly and simply as possible before giving in to the sheer variety of possible, but pointless, distinctions that could be drawn. In the metaphysical discussion, on the other hand, ‘unlimitedness’ seems rather to be a kind of ‘stuff’, some ontological material almost which gets ‘mixed’ with ‘limit’ to form the unities which actually exist. These two stuffs mixed together form ‘mixtures’, *meikta*, or intelligible complex unities like music, and health.

Did Plato recognize the problem here? It is not clear; for once again, after laborious clarification (this time of the metaphysics), the whole project seems to get abandoned when the two interlocutors turn to the interesting business of investigating the nature of pleasure. Although the Divine Method and at least its key terms are now twice introduced in order to examine the unity and plurality of pleasure, they seem little used in the discussion of pleasure.

I will not attempt to decide here whether the method is in fact relevant to, and employed in, the examination of pleasure. If it is so used, this use is not so evident as it should be, given Socrates’ *post hoc* justification for introducing the Method at all: “This is the very point in question to which our preceding discussion obliges us to give an answer: to show how each of them [pleasure and knowledge] is one and many” (18e8-10). But there is, I

think, a clear use to which the Method is indeed put, which is interesting in its own right, and should help to address the prior question of how the two technical passages fit together. For the Method is most clearly at work in the metaphysics of 23c ff.,<sup>2</sup> the division of “all beings” (πάντα... ὄντα, 23c4), or panta-ontology. The Divine Method is employed there to do metaphysics, and more particularly to draw out the metaphysical implications of its own theory, or to set out explicitly the metaphysical picture that must underwrite it, if it is indeed a (or *the*) valid method of inquiry. Through this, we learn most about Socrates' candidate for the good in life, “intelligence and understanding and memory and things of that family, right judgement and true reasoning” (11b7-8).

I. The Divine Method is at Work in Panta-Ontology

Let us first consider the several indications Plato gives that the Divine Method is actually in use in the ‘panta-ontology’, the division of all existing things. The point is to show that Socrates is not just discussing some of the same matters in both passages, but is actually *using* the method to do metaphysics. I shall consider four aspects of the Divine Method that appear in the panta-ontology, beginning with the most obvious. If these considerations of the two passages together serve to illuminate the significance of each, then – as the Divine Method itself suggests – this fact will count in favour of the reading.

A. Counting

The problems that the Divine Method is introduced to solve are those that arise from complex unity, and its implicit claim “that the many are one and the one many” (14c8). How is it that something can be some *one* thing if it consists in several parts, some of which “are unlike each other and some are opposites” (13c3-4)?

This paradox is disarmed by acknowledging that diverse ‘things’ – whether these are parts, aspects, modes, or kinds<sup>3</sup> – can be grasped together as a whole. The difficulty, of course, is in understanding what this means and how it is possible. In describing how the Divine Method allows us to understand complex unity, Socrates emphasises again and again the

importance of knowing the right *number* of distinctions. We even see him, in the description of the Method, *counting*.

For each investigation,

we should always posit one form (μίαν ἰδέαν). . . then, we must look for two, as the case would have it, or if not, for three or some other number. And we must treat every one of those further unities in the same way, until it is not only established of the original unit that it is one, many and unlimited, but also how many kinds it is. For we must not grant the form of the unlimited to the plurality before we know the exact number of every plurality that lies between the unlimited and the one. (16d1, 3-7)

In his illustration of ‘speech’, Socrates insists we know “neither its unlimitedness nor its unity” (17b7) until we know *how many* kinds of letter, or spoken sound, there are.<sup>4</sup> Whether being taught (as Protarchus was taught his letters), or discovering for oneself (as Theuth discovered phonetics), one “should in each case grasp some number that determines every plurality whatever” (18b1-2). Likewise in the case of music, we must also know *how many* (17c11-12) kinds of musical modes there are if we are to be musical. The point culminates in some telling wordplay: Knowing only *that* there is variety “you count for nothing (οὐδ’ ἐνάριθμον) since you have never worked out the amount and number (ἀριθμὸν) of anything at all” (17e5-6).<sup>5</sup>

If we turn to the metaphysics of 23c ff., the concern with counting is ostentatious – almost slapstick. Although Socrates says we must “be very careful (διευλαβεῖσθαι) about the starting point we take” (23c1-2), he is dreadfully clumsy in articulating that starting point, and even calls attention to this fact himself: “I must look like quite a fool with my distinctions into kinds and enumerations (συναριθμούμενος)” (23d1-2). Indeed he does look inept, having ‘carefully’ begun with a division into two, he immediately revises this to a division into three: “Let us make a division of everything that actually exists now in the universe into two kinds, or if this seems preferable, into three” (23c4-5). Doesn’t he know

which is preferable? Clearly, Socrates is concerned to get right the *exact number* of different kinds we should divide reality into; for he then immediately goes on, as if he could not himself have anticipated it from the beginning, to ask if he might add a 'fourth kind' (23d4) into the divisional schema. This result of this rapid revision of a 'careful' starting is that *Socrates counts*.

When Socrates begs his interlocutor's patience in adding a fourth kind to his initial three, Protarchus' suggestion that they might need a fifth kind (23d9-10) begins the counting in reverse: not five (23e2), but "of the four let us take up three, and since we observe that of two of them, both are split up and dispersed into many, let's make an effort to collect those into one (ἓν) again" (23e4-7).<sup>6</sup> Thus Plato has Socrates (and Protarchus), in effect, counting up, two, three, four, five; and back down, not five, but four, three, two and one. Clarity of exposition would seem to demand that Socrates state explicitly from the first that we are in fact dividing everything existing into four kinds. No explanatory content intervenes here between the revisions – indeed, that is how the effect of counting is achieved. Certainly Plato at least knows where he is going, and could have had Socrates propose a four-fold division in the first place. Instead, determining the starting point involves a great deal of gratuitous enumeration – Socrates is even made to comment on this. The passage thus calls attention to the fact that it is respecting the methodological demand that we be precise about 'the numbers of things', and it echoes textually the original exposition of the Method, which deftly slipped in "one...two...three" in rapid succession (16d1-4, cited above).

#### B. Starting and Ending with One

According to the Method of 16c *ff.* we must begin with unity. "We have to assume that there is in each case always one form for every one of them [the existing things being investigated], and we must search for it, as we will indeed find it there" (16d3-5). Even Theuth, who is "forced to start out with the unlimited" (18a8), and so illustrates the 'reverse', exploratory rather than expository, use of the Divine Method, cannot avoid this.<sup>7</sup> If he does not assume 'vocal sound' as some one thing, then his activity of bringing order to the

manifold sounds involved *in speech* could only be fruitless – for where on earth would he begin looking for things to organize, classify and relate to each other, and how would he limit his field? Any investigation must *assume* a single object or domain of investigation in order to get started. The initial injunction to start by positing some one thing applies equally to all uses of the method.

‘Starting with one’ is relevant at each step, for each distinction produces at least two new starting points, unities for further investigation. Once the object under investigation has been properly divided into two, three or some other number, “we must treat each of these ones in the same way” (16d7-9), to be divided into a definite number of parts or kinds. The counterpart of this, in the ‘reverse’ use of the Method, would be the recognizing of distinct kinds of similarity, and similarities between kinds. One “should in each case grasp some number that determines every plurality whatever, and from all of those finally reach the one” (18a9-b3). When describing the final state Theuth’s investigations arrive at, ‘one’ appears three times in a single line (18d1).

When Socrates turns his hand to metaphysics, he employs precisely this procedure of starting with one, and of treating each division as itself a ‘one’ to be divided. He proposes as the object of inquiry ‘everything existing now in the universe’; either he takes this as some one thing, or else he is attempting to establish this fact (depending on whether we take his position here to be expository or exploratory).<sup>8</sup> In either case, he divides the matter at hand into four, and carefully points out that he is selecting just one of these four to examine. Instead of simply dealing with each of the four genera in turn, Socrates announces that it is his intention to do so; and he announces that his aim is to treat each as a unity to be divided. “That the unlimited in a way is many I will try to explain now. The treatment of what has limit will have to wait a little longer” (24a1-4). These procedural remarks are not strictly necessary; but they effectively draw our attention to the method Socrates is following.

Socrates is then satisfied with his rough account of the ‘unlimited’ when – having adduced examples in order to illustrate varieties of unlimitedness – rather than the “needless length of going through a complete survey of all cases”, he can instead find some “mark of

the nature of the unlimited” (24b7-8). The characteristic uniting the whole class of ‘the unlimited’ is “admitting of more and less” (24e7-25a2). All such things are grouped as a unit, Socrates says, “in accordance with our earlier principle, that for whatever is dispersed and split up into a multitude, we must try to work out its unifying nature” (25a2-4). This is in accordance with the Divine Method’s claim that mere recognition of infinite variety leaves us infinitely ignorant.<sup>9</sup> The ‘earlier principle’ it picks up on, however, is at 23e: we must, “collect them into a unity again [ἐν πάλιν ἑκάτερον συναγαγόντες, e5], in order to study how each of them is one and many” (23e4-6).<sup>10</sup> And studying how each one is one and many is the essence of the Divine Method.

To further belabour the methodological self-consciousness, Socrates later regrets that he failed to find what marks out the unity in the many kinds of limit. “About limit, on the other hand, we did not trouble ourselves, neither that it has plurality nor whether it is one by nature”; to which Protarchus replies, “Why should we have done so?” (26d5-7). They should have done so in order to comply with the strictures of the Divine Method they are following, if they are to get a full understanding of the matter at hand, and be confident about the distinctions they have made up to now.<sup>11</sup>

### C. Mutual Illumination

Theuth will know he has done his work rightly when he can set out his phonetic system by showing the variety in each of the unified kinds that together make up spoken sound:

seeing that none of us would understand any one of them on its own, without all the others, he considered this the bond that somehow makes all these things one; and he pronounced the single skill that covered them all ‘grammar’. (18c7-d2)

Parts are mutually explanatory of a whole; and they make sense of each other as well. We know that we have the right parts, and they are parts of a genuine whole, because while in isolation each part may be incomprehensible, together with its relevant parts in the

appropriate context, its own nature becomes clearly defined and comprehensible. Theuth's more difficult task highlights the crucial importance of seeing the relations between parts, of understanding how they relate to one another in order to form a unity.

Each of the letters – elements or parts – becomes intelligible when all are jointly considered in their relations to each other.<sup>12</sup> This aspect of mutual illumination arises in the ontology, in an unfounded and otherwise irrelevant claim that follows Socrates' apology for having “omitted to collect together the class of limit” (25d6). Socrates goes on:

But perhaps it will come to the same thing even now if, through the collection of those two kinds [unlimited and mixtures], the unity of the former kind [limit]<sup>13</sup> becomes conspicuous too. (25d6-8)

There is no particular reason to have confidence in such a claim – won't building on confusion just produce more confusion? But we can at least see why Socrates does have such confidence, if we see him as here putting to use the Method described earlier. For it was part of the theory set out there that understanding each one of the parts or elements helped in understanding the others. It is the presumption of mutual illumination in the Divine Method that makes sense of Socrates' claim in the metaphysics that understanding 'mixture' and 'unlimited' together will help us to understand the 'limit'. As it turns out, the limits (or unity) of the kind 'limit' are marked out by *which* measures of unlimitedness define normative wholes – health, beauty, climate (25e-26b). Understanding what limit is, and what it does, is inseparable from understanding what a 'whole', or 'mixture' is.

#### D. Dialectic & Dividing

If Plato is signposting the earlier discussion in the panta-ontology, there are also noteworthy differences between what is described at 16c *ff*, and what is done at 23c *ff*. One difference in particular may help clarify the relation between the two passages I am arguing for.

When I say that the Divine Method is employed in the examination of 'everything existing', it might seem I am saying that the panta-ontology shows the application of the

Divine Method. But it would be more precise to say that the ontological passage shows an application of the Divine Method. That is, what happens at 23c ff. is *one* way of adhering to the strictures laid down at *Philebus* 16c ff. There may be other ways. The collection and division of all things existing is only one mode of what almost gets called 'dialectic' at 17a4. Obviously such a claim has wide-reaching implications for how we think of Platonic philosophical method. Here I hope only to show that this is happening, and what it means for the *Philebus*. The Divine Method is introduced with a preamble about trivial and serious troubles raised by the principle "that the one is many, the many one" (14c8):

When, my young friend, the *one* is not taken from the things that come to be or perish....zealous concern with divisions of these unities and the like gives rise to controversy. (15a1-2, 6-7)

Plato then scrupulously avoids any further language of 'collection and division' – language such as figures most prominently in the *Phaedrus*, for example – while nevertheless describing something apparently similar, and with the same enthusiasm.<sup>14</sup> The metaphysics of *Philebus* 23c ff., by contrast, liberally engages in 'dividing' and 'collecting'. This activity is explicitly related to seeing unity in plurality, and thus refers us back to the discussion of method.

While Socrates rarely describes the Divine Method as a process of 'dividing', and never as 'collecting together', it is worth attending to the language he does use instead. For it is striking just how entirely general the language, for the most part, is. "We must search for" unity<sup>15</sup> in each case (ζητεῖν, 16d2; σκοπεῖν, d3); if we grasp it (μεταλάβωμεν, d3), we look for two, or three – but two or three *whats?* –

and each of these in turn as one in the same way until it is not only established of the original unit that it is one, many and unlimited, but also how many it is (16d6-9).

Even in the examples he then gives, Socrates' language manages to remain astonishingly neutral: we must "know how many there are and what sort [ὅποῖα]" (17b7-8); we must "grasp the unity [ἐν...ἑλης]" (17e2). Again, how many *whats?* Is it how many and what sort of aspects, parts, kinds, things, properties? This neutrality will become important later. Only

Theuth “distinguishes” (διεστήσατο, 18c2-3) a third *kind* of sound (τρίπτον δὲ εἶδος, c2), and “divides” (διήρει, 18c3) one of these three kinds.<sup>16</sup>

Our second passage, by contrast, begins with a bold division: “let us divide everything actually existing now into two” (23c4, διαλάβωμεν); and we do this by recalling that “the god revealed among/of beings [ὄντων, 23c10] the unlimited, on the one hand, and the limit” (23c9). How much difference is there between *looking for* “two, as the case may have it, or if not three” (16d3-4) and *dividing* “into two, or if this seems preferable, into three” (23c4-5)? Indeed, so difficult is it to discern a relevant difference, that the language of ‘division’ is often read back into *Philebus* 16-18, although as we saw, it is not in fact used there.

One possible explanation of the difference in language, but similarity of procedure, might be that the divisions<sup>17</sup> into kinds<sup>18</sup> of *Philebus* 23c ff. represent only one manner in which we might search for and discover plurality within a unity.<sup>19</sup> We might instead distinguish parts within a whole, or discern aspects, properties, or characteristics of a unity. These will be different ways of grasping many as one. The panta-ontology is a particular kind of application of the very general Divine Method. This relation of generic description specifically applied is suggested by Socrates’ next remark, quoted in part above:

since we observe that two of them are split up and dispersed into many, let’s make an effort to collect them into a unity again [ἐν πάλιν ἐκότερον συναγαγόντες, e5], *in order to study how each of them is one and many*” (23e4-6).<sup>20</sup>

Studying how each is one and many is precisely what the Divine Method of 16c ff. is designed to do. In this case, we study ‘how each is one and many’ *by collecting into a unity* what is dispersed. This current business of “collecting” just is grasping the unity in a plurality, in this case by identifying the common character. Thus ‘the unlimited’ is successfully collected together into one (ἐτίθεμεν, 25c8-11; συνηγάγομεν, 25d5-6), when its unity is marked out by the characteristic of ‘more and less’ (26d1-2).<sup>21</sup> This is established at 24e7-25a2: “Whatever appears to us to become more and less...and all things of that sort, we should place all such

things into the genus of the 'unlimited' as its unity." Only later is this called having 'collected together' the unlimited. One way to study unity-in-plurality is collection and division.

Thus we need not be dismissive of the divisions of the *Sophist* and the *Politicus*,<sup>22</sup> nor deny their relation to the *Philebus*' own divisions at 23c ff., in order to maintain that this process nevertheless does not *exhaust* 'dialectic' or the Divine Method – it is one of the legitimate ways in which knowledge comes to light through examination of complex unity.<sup>23</sup>

## II. Limit & Unlimited: It is its own metaphysics the Divine Method unearths

### A. *Limit & Unlimited as Essentially Metaphysical*

I have so far said least about the most obvious similarity between the methodological discussion and the metaphysical one. Generally so free from 'jargon', Plato invokes the pairing of 'limit' and 'unlimitedness' (*peras* and *apeiron*) in both discussions. At the point of their re-introduction, Socrates indicates that some tools for the second discussion may be partly the same as those used in the first discussion. He recommends "taking up some of what has been said before" by recalling the earlier "division of what is into the unlimited and the limit" (23c6, 8). In spite of this, there are supposed to be insurmountable difficulties in taking the pair of terms to mean the same thing in both discussions. But we can see our way round these difficulties, I think, by taking the Method at 23c ff. to be at work upon *its own* metaphysical underpinnings.

The first difficulty arises from presuming that *apeiron* in the first passage refers to indefinitely many particular things; for it certainly does not refer to, or even contain, individual particulars (this dog, that cat) in the second passage.<sup>24</sup> But there is no need to suppose sensible particulars are the end-point of the analysis described in the Divine Method. 'Releasing them into the indefinite' can simply mean allowing that there are innumerable more distinctions one could, in principle, make, although in practice they would contribute nothing to understanding better the unity of the kind examined.

This, however, gives rise to a more sophisticated objection of a similar sort. The generalized problem seems to be that in the first passage, numerability is at issue, whether of

kinds or of individuals; whereas in the second passage 'limit' and 'unlimited' are not ways of counting, but objects of examination. These are, in fact, two ways of making out the difference. Striker puts them together this way (p.80):

The two expressions have, to be sure, the same meaning in both places, but they do not refer to the same thing. On p. 23-27, the kinds 'limit' and 'unlimited' are under discussion; the particular number of species and the indeterminate number of particulars [presumably at issue in 16-18] (which are simply 'many', not of a particular number) are cases of the πέρας and ἄπειρον.<sup>25</sup>

There is something right in the observation that 'limit' and 'unlimited' appear as kinds in the second passage, but are not under discussion as such in the methodology – this will be important for getting clear on what exactly the relation between the two passages is. But why should this be an obstacle to understanding a consistent use of *peras* and *apeiron*?

Frede focuses on this difference, leaving to one side the questions of (in)numerability. In the first passage, she says, 'limit' and 'unlimited' are tools for the structural analysis of Kinds in the first passage, but are themselves 'kinds' in the second passage.<sup>26</sup>

Thus 'limit' in the divine method indicates the limitedness of genus and species, while in the four-fold division it indicates the right measure of mixtures. The unlimited in the dihypothetic method means the unlimited differentiability that [203] underlies particular things, while in the four-fold division on the other hand it indicates the class of things which have neither measure nor number.

This does not yet seem to constitute a difference so fundamental that Plato must have been blind to suppose the two uses might be related to, and consistent with one another.<sup>27</sup> Frede's argument seems to rest on the presumption that different use of the terms implies different reference and so different meaning. As she puts it elsewhere, the methodological passage invokes *peras* and *apeiron* as criteria in analysis,<sup>28</sup> while the second, metaphysical discussion, takes these two as 'kinds' among 'anything said to exist now'. Apparently it is obvious that a criterion or constraint cannot be an ontological *kind*.

But is this obvious? Consider the matter from the other direction: If there are ontological kinds, constitutive of any existing, intelligible object, then their presence in objects *would* no doubt constrain our investigations into these objects, and have an effect on what coming to know those objects would require. *Peras* and *apeiron* are such ontological kinds, and that fact is relevant to appropriate modes of inquiry, and conceptions of knowledge. In this case, *peras* and *apeiron* constrain intelligible inquiry not by being criteria themselves, but by grounding epistemological principles about plurality.<sup>29</sup>

Thus we see that even in the methodological discussion, *peras* and *apeiron* arise together only once – and they arise as a *metaphysical justification* for Divine Method's being the right way to come to know things. “What things are ever said to be consist of one and many, having in them together by nature limit and unlimited” (ἐξ ἑνὸς μὲν καὶ πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν ἀεὶ λεγομένων εἶναι, πέρας δὲ καὶ ἀπειρίαν ἐν αὐτοῖς σύμφοτον ἔχόντων, 16c9-10).<sup>30</sup> Because “things are thus arranged” – this is a claim about reality – there is a way for us to come to know multiplicities as unities. The limit and unlimitedness here are characteristics of how things actually are, they are aspects that any object of knowledge has – that any existing thing has, insofar as it is intelligible; and they *give rise to* the demand to seek exact numbers of differences and similarities,<sup>31</sup> because seeking the exact number of parts/kinds/aspects forces us to discover exactly where and how differentiability is bounded. It should, therefore, be no surprise to find that *peras* and *apeiron* turn up as *gene* of which ‘anything existing’ is composed in the rationalist ontology of 23c ff.<sup>32</sup> That is what they were in the first place.

Having bounded indeterminacy within it explains how it is possible and intelligible for us to grasp a single thing – spoken sound, pleasure, beauty – as a complex, differentiated unity. Because there are distinct, discoverable ratios, relations between undifferentiated qualities, there will be differences that matter, and some that do not. Some differences arise due to differences in intelligible, fixed relations; innumerable many differences simply exist, without constituting or contributing to the unity within or between kinds.

If we take seriously this sole occurrence of ‘*peras* and *apeiron*’ together, and its metaphysical character, then we see that the Divine Method had implicit within it a metaphysics – a metaphysics later spelled out in the Four-fold division. Although variations on *apeiron* appear throughout the passage, the pairing of limit and unlimitedness were only ever presented as metaphysical grounds for the Divine Method; it is these grounds that arise again in the panta-ontology. We saw linguistic reasons already for supposing Plato intends us to see that the metaphysical investigations are putting the Divine Method to use. These two together would mean that the Divine Method is put to use at 23c ff. in order to draw out precisely that metaphysical picture on which its legitimacy rested in the first place.

B. *The Divine Method as Epistemology*

This is why the panta-ontology’s division of “everything actually existing now in the universe” (23c4) picks up the Method’s claim to be relevant to “what is ever said to be” (16c9).<sup>33</sup> The Divine Method is as wide in its application as the panta-ontology.<sup>34</sup> “Anything in a *technē* which has ever been discovered, came to light due to” the Method (16c2-3).

Naturally, the illustrations of the Method invoke *successful*, completed and simple instances of the Divine Method – phonetics, music, possibly dance. These particular skills are familiar to Protarchus “from his own education” (17a9-b1), and the divisions, sub-divisions and relations are well-established, and can be easily recalled. But this should not make us suppose that the Method concerns *only* such well-established fields. “The gods,” Socrates tells Protarchus, “have given us this way to inquire, and learn and teach one another” (16e3-4) – quite generally. This is repeated after the second illustration of the method: “At the same time they have made us realize that *every investigation* should search for the one and the many” (17d6-7).<sup>35</sup>

In particular, the Divine Method must be applicable at least also to ‘man’, ‘ox’, ‘beautiful’, and ‘good’ (15a5) – the abstract unities specifically said to generate the problems resolved by the Divine Method; and also to ‘pleasure’, ‘knowledge’ (18e8-19a2), to meet the practical aims of the dialogue.<sup>36</sup> If there is patently no science or ‘skill’ of Good, of Beauty, of Man, or of Pleasure, this is only because we do not yet know what these things are; we lack

anything that could count as real – systematic and thorough – understanding. If we *were* to have knowledge of any of those objects, it would have the systematic character that our knowledge of phonetics or music currently has, and it would be acquired by carefully distinguishing parts, kinds, aspects, and so on. The sort of systematic knowledge we have in currently recognized fields or endeavours is the *only* sort of knowledge – it is the way of dealing with objects (or being able to deal with them) that allows us to count as knowledgeable (σοφοί, 17b6, σοφὸς, 17c7). For “when you have grasped the unity of whatever else you are investigating, you have become wise (ἐμφρῶν) about that” (17e1-3).

This will be the case, no matter how abstract our ‘objects’ – whether we are investigating sound, or knowledge, or good – or, as 23c *ff.* ‘everything existing now’. This means that more than a method, the first passage is offering a description of knowledge. Our apparently merely methodological commitments are in fact an exercise in epistemology: the first passage tells us what being knowledgeable consists in, and hence what knowledge is.

This is why, when the Divine Method instructs us to find distinctions which collectively bring out the unity of the plurality, the sort of plurality at issue is deliberately left vague; for the ‘many’ might be many parts, or many kinds, or many aspects; and the ways these unite to form a whole will vary correspondingly. It may be easier and more convenient to speak of the ‘parts’ which jointly comprise a whole, as Socrates does in describing the different colours (μέρη, 12e7); but he also occasionally uses γένος or ἶδεα.<sup>37</sup> His most usual locution, however, is extremely abstract, contrasting ‘one’ or ‘unity’ with ‘many’, ‘plurality’, or ‘number’. If Plato is doing epistemology, he is right to be reluctant to specify the kind of multiplicity characteristic of complex unities – it will simply be different in different cases.<sup>38</sup>

Much later in the dialogue, Socrates praises dialectic extravagantly, and in spite of the fact that this is the first explicit mention of it, claims that “Clearly everyone would know what I am referring to now!” (58a1). It is hard to know why he expects everyone knows already what he means, unless he is referring to the remarks of 16c *ff.*, picking up perhaps on the fact that the Divine Method was described as making all the difference between *eristic* and *dialectical* discussion (17a4). But the extravagant praise of this discipline, and in

particular the subsequent claim that it alone deals with real being (58a),<sup>39</sup> implies that the Divine Method is not only suitable for specific, eternal objects – beauty, sound – but equally, or even especially suitable for doing ontology.

*Summary:*

The idea, then, is that Divine Method can be ‘*the way to become wise*’ *only* if existing things are of a certain sort – namely, having limit and unlimitedness in them together by nature. Any methodology implies an epistemology – a story about what knowledge consists in, what mental state, or capacity, it is that we are aiming at that will count as successful. But, since it is *knowledge* we want and not a beautiful arrangement of ideas, epistemology in turn implies something about what objects of (potential) knowledge must be like. Reality, or intelligible objects, must be such as to be comprehended or represented faithfully in *this way* – in the way specified by knowledge.

This connection is emphasised by Socrates’ appeal of ‘music’ in both passages: at 17b-e, music is an intelligible complex unity, a monad and object of knowledge; at 26a, music is a ‘mixture’ of limit and unlimited, a bounded entity of proportionately related qualities. Objects of knowledge, known through grasping their specific structures of one-and-many, can be such because they are indeed determinate measured relations between a specific subset of diverse qualities. Exactly what we had to assume at 16d,<sup>40</sup> in order to have confidence in seeking knowledge, is explained in the metaphysics of 23c ff., especially in the description of *meikta*.

Since knowledge consists in ascertaining the definitive relations between parts, kinds and aspects, we can infer that intelligible things must be such as to be known in this way – they must actually be constituted by determinate relations. The second discussion is an ontological analysis of this fact. It lays out what existing things (as such) must be like, what features any existing thing must have, if reality is to be intelligible – and it is conducted in the only way inquiry leading to knowledge can be, namely according to the

recommendations of 16b ff.. This is the one use of the Divine Method in the *Philebus* that Plato is at pains to advertise .

In treating, as such, the categories of being constitutive of intelligible objects, the Divine Method is used to lay out the metaphysical picture that underwrites the validity of the Method. Conversely, since the metaphysics underwrote the validity of the method in the first place, the metaphysical categories and structure manifest themselves in epistemological discussion as constraints and guidelines about counting and leaving uncounted – as the requirement to determine the definite number of distinctions appropriate from among the indefinitely many that might be made.

### III. Is There Objectionable Circularity Built into the Metaphysics and Epistemology of the *Philebus*?

In the order of exposition, Socrates declares that a certain method is necessary for acquiring knowledge. This has implications for the conception of knowledge at work. Socrates then uses this method in order to understand the fundamental constituents (categories of being) of intelligible reality. When he does so, he finds that these basic principles of reality are just the sort that would justify the Divine Method being used, and first set out as the right way of coming to know anything.

Since a conception of what knowledge is, how intelligence works, and the nature of what it works upon are jointly implied in the methodology, should we worry that the metaphysical picture at 23c ff. conveniently pops out simply because it was already built into the method used for discovering it?

There are two reasons, I think, why this dove-tailing of method and metaphysics need not worry us. First, we might consider the metaphysics as simply spelling out the views implicit in the methodology, with no claim to be doing otherwise. That is, Socrates is not offering us any further argument that reality is in fact constituted in the way described in the *panta-ontology*; the metaphysics is just one part of the *Philebus*'s comprehensive picture of

how an ethical rationalist, of the sort represented by Socrates here, might look at the mind, its proper activity, and its proper object – ultimately, at the world. This ‘comprehensive doctrine’ rejoinder might be more congenial in light of the observation that *any* account of epistemology and metaphysics must be comprehensive in just this way, if it will genuinely do what it promises: tell us what knowledge is, and so what about things makes them knowable.

But we may feel this ‘comprehensive doctrine’ defence too weak. After all, if I say looking is the best and only way of coming to know, then I am determining from the beginning that only visible things are knowable. This does not, of course, determine that there *are* any visible things; but it does preclude the possibility of knowing audible things. And if, guided by my peculiar epistemological views, I go on to deny the reality of sounds – since I didn’t see any when I looked, they must not be real – then pointing out that my metaphysics now neatly matches my epistemology is hardly a point in favour of this whole view, or of the argument that got us there.

There is, however, another reason why we should not worry about the mesh between methodology and metaphysics, in this particular case. Unlike my ‘vision-epistemology’, Socrates’ method does not determine the sort of reality it will find when employed, at least not at the most fundamental level.<sup>41</sup> If the universe were chaotic – not ordered at all – then the Divine Method could be expected to have found that, too. Its complete failure to articulate distinct parts or kinds and their relations, required for knowledge on this model of it, would have proved that reality was not so constituted as to be known according to the conception of knowledge informing the methodology. It could not have shown the universe to have some order and structure other than the embedded complex unities that the Method is designed to investigate; but then the notion of ‘complex unity’ is so general that anything short of chaos should be able to be discovered and described by it.<sup>42</sup> In a way, Plato is not building very much controversial into his conception of knowledge – at least he is not doing so here. The view aims no higher, and no more specific than the fundamental requirements for basic intelligibility. In allowing indeterminacy, and the innumerable distinctions this

makes possible, into his ontology, Plato in fact allows that reality may extend beyond our ability to make sense of it.

We could have divided “all existing things” differently, and so come up with a different metaphysical perspective – we could even have *used the Divine Method* to divide things differently; but that would not have shown us what goes into being a knowable thing. Had we not been interested in finding our place in the universe, what we are and how we are situated, in order to see how the competing goods fit into such lives; had we also not needed some greater understanding of what Socrates' position is – of what he thinks reason is, and how he thinks it relates to the world, and relates us to the world; had we been interested in quite a different set of questions, then we might well have divided reality differently.<sup>43</sup> This is the dialectician's prerogative – and whether she has used it well shows in the clarity to be gained by looking at things carved up and related in the way she recommends.

#### IV. Failure of Dialectic?

By this measure of clarity, however, it may look as though the four-fold ontology makes a dismal showing. So far from illuminating anything else, it has often been considered a source of muddle and misunderstanding.

As I have tried to show, the metaphysics is opaque only if we lose sight of the kind of question it is trying to answer. There are in fact two tasks the metaphysical discussion must address: (1) implicitly, it should help us better understand the methodology, the epistemology implied by it, and in general the conceptions of mind and knowledge that Socrates defends as better for us than pleasure; and (2) explicitly, the metaphysics should somehow move us forward in our debate between hedonism and ethical rationalism. It is specifically in order to show which of pleasure and reason/knowledge is “more akin to the good” (22d8) that Socrates introduces the metaphysical distinctions.

Does the metaphysics do either of these?

Less noted in the general anxiety to sort out the details of the methodology and metaphysics is the fact that these passages shed most light on the conception of mind Plato is invoking, his conceptions of intellect, knowledge, and reason. Socrates gives a portrait of his candidate (the activity of soul that is truly grasping reality), completing it with a sketch of the pre-eminent case: *ontological* knowledge or understanding, etc. Intelligence, we learn, can tolerate a certain amount of 'resistance' from intractable variety, provided it patiently discerns what order there is to be found. Knowledge, in fact, *needs* there to be this complexity in its objects, since relating similarities and differences is what enables a mind to grasp a unified multiplicity, or even to grasp simples (if there are such) bound by relations to other things. Resting *contented* with indefiniteness may leave us in boundless ignorance; but boundaries themselves cannot even be articulated on their own, independently of the rich context of qualities, bounded for some common end. Articulating any distinct, bounded individual – 'man' or 'beauty' or 'white' or 'knowledge' – places it implicitly within a whole network of related concepts. Recognizing this fact, and being able to work within it, is what knowing *that individual thing*, requires.

The conception of mind and knowledge embedded in a metaphysically grounded epistemology thus provides a framework for a reasonable ethical rationalism. In understanding how to order a human life, just as in understanding any other object, mind must not exclude all of the messy inexactitude familiar to us. The Divine Method suggested that 'human being' was a complex unity that had to be approached in the way handed down by the gods; this suggestion is confirmed later in the dialogue: we are ordered mixtures of limit and unlimitedness, and so are our lives (30b-c). But unlimitedness is not to be altogether excluded from any complex whole, including ourselves.<sup>44</sup> If pleasure is a source of 'unlimitedness' in the complex whole that we are, then it cannot and should not be excluded from a human life. It should be even embraced to the extent that it co-operates in constructing for ourselves a well-ordered soul, and over time a well-ordered life.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is repeated in the conclusion of his presentation: “Unless we are able to do this for every kind of unity, similarity, sameness and their opposite, in the way that our recent discussion has indicated, none of us will ever turn out to be any good at anything” (19b5-8).

<sup>2</sup> Dorothea Frede makes a similar claim, though in less detail: see Frede 1993, xxxviii; and also Frede 1997, 203-5.

<sup>3</sup> Parts, as Socrates' limbs; aspects, as Protarchus' height; modes, as Protarchus' colour, or as red is to colour; kinds, as 'temperate pleasures'.

<sup>4</sup> It is not immediately apparent what it means to know that “the sound that comes out of the mouth is one...[and] also unlimited” (17b3-4), whether the unity refers for example to the fact that we all speak the same language, or to each of us having a distinctive idiolect; whether the unlimitedness refers to the countless times any given word is or might be used, or whether it refers to the countless subtle variations in pronunciation that fall within permissible linguistic sounds. Since there is a clear connection between the two, we may not need to decide the issue now, in order to understand the point. Whatever the unlimitedness and unity of vocal sound might refer to, it is only “if we know how many kinds of vocal sounds there are and what their nature is” that we count as literate (17b8-9); the kinds offered are consonants and vowels, which suggests that the unity of a single language and the multiplicity of sounds involved in speaking it are at issue. But the same exercise could be repeated at ever more refined levels to delineate dialects and even idiolects.

<sup>5</sup> In illustrating the Method, Socrates never does this himself – but then he makes no claim to be a grammarian or a musician. Theuth determined the number (ἀριθμόν, 18c1, c5) of sounds in inventing writing (18c1-2), and it was in part this that made his enterprise a valid one.

<sup>6</sup> The reader for *Ancient Philosophy* asks why only 'limit' and 'unlimited' are here described as 'dispersed' and in need of collecting together – does this imply that the other two kinds are not many? I think this should not be the implication; at least the third kind, mixtures, are described as many, and therefore difficult to grasp (26c8-9); and Socrates does offer a 'unifying mark' of this third kind (the notorious '*geneseis-eis-ousian*' description at 26d8). But this does make more pressing the question of why Socrates does not try to collect the many mixtures, or analyse them by kind, nor does he do this for the fourth kind, 'cause', which although it turns out to be one thing, *noūs*, may yet have many parts or kinds (how does '*phronēsis*', or '*epistēmē*', relate to '*noūs*'?). The pessimistic answer to this vexing question is that Plato does not actually believe what he says about the Divine Method being necessary

for inquiry. The more generous answer, and the one I favour, would argue that one of the great features of the Divine Method is that it is at the dialectician's discretion how far to pursue the detailed investigation. Unless we need complete knowledge of the object under investigation, then we may pursue the analysis only so far as necessary to grasp the point being made in the argument. Luckily, in order to understand the kind of thing pleasure is, its relation to intelligence and their place in human life, we do not need to *know* all existing things in so much detail.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., Hackforth 1945, 25-26. However his conclusion, that "Plato's notion that a One-Many can be dealt with by science in two alternative ways is incorrect" seems hasty. There is an important difference between exposition and exploration, between teaching and discovery, and the methods appropriate to each. Plato at least has it right that the different methods appropriate are related and deal with the very same material. How do we explain the sense in which new work turns up *discoveries* unless there is *some sense* in which we did not already have the thing discovered available to us – the unity of the object of study (we must lack it in the same sense in which we have it in teaching). Cf. also Gosling 1975, 86-7 and 171-2, who also notes this, and recognizes this need pose no difficulty.

<sup>8</sup> So if we think of Socrates as here going Theuth's direction, and reformulating the injunction that 'when forced to start with a many...', then we might take 'τὰ νῦν ὄντα ἐν τῷ παντί' (23c4) to be referring severally to each and every existing thing, of which we are trying to establish that they form a unified cosmos.

<sup>9</sup> The dialectic here is actually slightly more complicated than this; see section D, below.

<sup>10</sup> In full: "since we observe that two of them are split up and dispersed into a manifold, let's make an effort to collect them into a unity again [ἐν πάλιν ἐκάτερον συναγαγόντες, e5], in order to study how each of them is one and many" (23e4-6). Note the repetition of δίσπασσμενον, ἐξισμύνον and συναγαγόντες in both texts. See section D for further discussion.

<sup>11</sup> Of course all this only shows Plato depicting Socrates as asserting that he is availing himself of the principles set out by the Divine Method; it does not show Socrates actually engaging in the exhaustive collecting, dividing, inter-relating and grasping exactly 'how many' that we would expect from the description of the Method at 16b ff. This may be Plato's way of undermining the very suggestion he has Socrates so overtly making: that we are now being obedient to the lessons learned in the Divine Method passage. Or, it could rather be a recognition that – as we will see later in the dialogue – knowledge comes in degrees, and we are only 'closer to knowledge' (55d5-8) to the extent that we do

follow these principles. No one supposes they really *know* the four kinds set out in the panta-ontology; but such complete knowledge is not necessary for our project. Rather more clarity than we had before will suffice, in this case.

<sup>12</sup> At the very least, relations of similarity and differences holding at various levels of generality.

<sup>13</sup> Frede has reasons for thinking the first two must be limit & unlimited (Frede 1997, 191-3); see also Gosling's note on the text (Gosling 1975, 92-3), where he comes to the same conclusion: substitute συναγομένων at 25d8 with συμμισγομένων. This would secure the meaning the way they want (limit and unlimited will help us to understand mixtures), but at the price of a failure of contextual sense. For Socrates has just claimed he has not unified 'limit', and said that *this* failure might be made good by going on to look at mixtures.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Socrates' love of the Method (ἐγὼ ἐραστῆς μὲν εἰμι ἅει) at 16b6 with "I am myself a lover of these [collections and divisions]" (τούτων δὲ ἔγωγε αὐτός τε ἐραστῆς) at *Phaedrus* 266b3, where the favoured method is also associated with the gods.

<sup>15</sup> Or 'one form', μίαν ἰδέαν (16d1); this is one of the few places that anything more concrete than the numbers or pronouns, 'one', 'two', 'each', 'many' is referred to in describing the Method. The other is 'form of the unlimited' at 16d7; see note 34 below.

<sup>16</sup> The fact that it is sound-types here designated with 'εἶδος' might encourage us to be cautious about just how much we want to read into the 'ἰδέαν' with which the passage begins (cited in the note above). Plato surely wants to designate these as distinct from sensible particulars; but does he want to call them Forms?

<sup>17</sup> And the corresponding 'collections', on which exaggerated emphasis is laid at 25d5-9, where συναγαγεῖν and cognates appear four times. "The very one we have so far omitted to collect together, the class that has the character of limit, although we ought to have collected it together, just as we collected together the unlimited kind into one. But perhaps it will yet come to the same, if that comes out in the collecting together of the other two." (25d5-7)

<sup>18</sup> εἰδῶν, 23c12; εἶδη, 23d2

<sup>19</sup> J. R. Trevaskis suggests this relation between 'Collection & Division' – as a Platonic mode of inquiry – and the Divine Method: "the subject of pages 16-17 may not be Division specifically but classification in its more general aspect. The method of Division may be no more than a type of the classification Plato

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has in mind” (Trevaskis 1960, 42). We needn't be wedded to the centrality of *classification* in order to take the point on board.

<sup>20</sup> As noted above, this is repeated at 25a2-4; see note 9.

<sup>21</sup> “Although the unlimited also displayed many forms, it nevertheless appeared as one kind, marked out by having more and less” (26c9-d2).

<sup>22</sup> As, for example, C. C. Meinwald 1998, 180.

<sup>23</sup> Thus one of the very questions at issue between Protarchus and Socrates is whether pleasures should be distinguished into kinds according to their objects, or rather they should be distinguished according to the circumstances in which they arise – that is, which *sort* of differentiations in pleasures are the ones that matter. If this is right, then we perhaps look for the wrong thing in the lengthy pleasure passage, when we seek but miss a distinction in kinds of pleasures. Relevant is rather “in what kind of thing each [pleasure and knowledge] resides and what kind of condition makes them come to be when they do” (31b2-4); and these distinctions we do get in the discussion of falsity in pleasures. Likewise, we find that kinds of knowledge are distinguished, at 55c-59d, partly according to their objects, but mostly according to their degree of manifestation of various aspects or characteristics of knowledge.

<sup>24</sup> Meinwald, who is not sympathetic to the view, puts the problem more simply, but perhaps more contentiously: “on most views of 16b ff., the *apeiron* there (into which we release our ones when all possibilities for division have been exhausted) is the endless number of sensible individuals that are members of a given kinds (so that '*apeiron*' refers to the endless number of sensible individuals that participate in a given Form). However, at 23b ff., '*apeiron*' cannot possibly refer to the endless number of sensible individuals falling under a given kind.”

<sup>25</sup> Striker says merely that “The fact that in both places the concepts ἄπειρον and πέρως are being worked one [bearbeitet wird] carries on the other hand less weight”, (Striker 1970, 80); and she concludes, “That the concepts ἄπειρον and πέρως show up in both sections can be seen as an indication that these two are important fundamental concepts [Grundbegriffe], which play a role in more than one area. A substantial connection is not thereby grounded.” (Striker 1970, 81)

<sup>26</sup> “There the difference between limit and unlimited serves the structural analysis of each sort of kind [Gattung] in that they bring out their [the kinds'] inner Unity and Plurality. Here, on the other hand, Limit and Unlimitedness are themselves highest kinds. We have, therefore, two entirely different uses

of 'limit and unlimitedness', having only in common that both cases turn on the opposition between numerical limitedness and unlimitedness. The objects at issue, however, are entirely different." (Frede 1997, 202)

<sup>27</sup> Frede seems to think that Plato himself must have seen, and could not have made so crude an error. "If one does not want to impute to Plato an astounding blindness to the difference in the two usages, then one should search for a better explanation of the purported continuity between the two passages" (Frede 1997, 203).

<sup>28</sup> Compare remarks from the Introductory Essay to the *Philebus* (Frede 1993, xxxviii): "In the 'divine method', *peras* and *apeiron* were used as *criteria* for the division of the genera as a means to control the numerical completeness of the divisions on every level".

<sup>29</sup> This also addresses Striker's objection that *peras* and *apeiron* have to do with numerability. Compare Meinwald 1998, 172: "Finally, we may observe a connection between *peras* and number, which parallels that between indefinite (run together) and indefinite (in number). Given an original one, finding the natural boundaries that mark off parts of it allows a person to know the number of such parts, and if there are finitely many natural boundaries, the parts will be of a definite number. Hence we can see the heavy stress the Promethean Method lays on finding the number...as its orientation to *peras*." I would suggest the same point in fact runs in the opposite direction: we look for the definite number of parts/kinds, because by looking for this we will find the natural boundaries.

<sup>30</sup> Verity Harte (Harte 2002, esp. 195-8) also emphasizes the significance of this lone appearance of the pair in the methodology, and argues for this being, from the first, a metaphysical claim.

<sup>31</sup> To insist on the 'schematic' role of *peras* and *apeiron* in the metaphysics – to look at them as aspects which any existing thing must have – goes against Striker 1970, 76, in a way that is illuminating. She says that *peras* and *apeiron* must be considered both as objects and as constituents; and I agree with that, but not in the way she intends. The *genus* 'limit' is indeed an abstract, intelligible object, capable of being studied, understood, and so on; likewise, the *genus* 'unlimited'. And if this is right, they are objects, although abstract objects, each kind must itself 'have limit and unlimited in it'. So to take the class 'limit', we might point out that there are indefinitely many ratios, and infinitely many numbers; distinguishing between ratios and numbers, between whole numbers and fractions, as such, might be a good way to understand this abstract object 'the class of limit'. But there are innumerable other ways one might want to conceive of the class as forming a unity. Conversely, the class of the unlimited must

itself, as an abstract object of knowledge about which we can speak intelligibly, have limits. Here's one: the class includes only things which are in themselves of indeterminate quantity. This limits what may belong to the class. Perhaps there is a relevant difference between indeterminate tactile qualities (textures) and indeterminate visible qualities (colours). That some such delineations could be exposed is indicated in the way that Socrates claims that they *ought* to have 'collected' together the classes of limit and unlimited in some way that they have failed to do.

<sup>32</sup> It is true that in our first passage we continue to hear later of '*apeiron*' (with the definite article: 16d7, e1, e2; 17b7, 17e3, 18a9, 18b9; no article: 17b4 (sound; again at 18b6), 17e4 (unlimitedly many), 18a8) and '*apeira*' (16d6, 18e9, 19a2). But that is the last we hear of *peras*, limit. The 'unlimitedness' we get in the rest of the discussion is problematic. It is not clear whether it is a reference to unlimitedly many things, or the unlimitedly many potential divisions. Most often, in the rest of the discussion, *apeiron* is contrasted with 'one' or set alongside 'many', as the extreme other end from one to many, to indefinite/indefinitely many. The suggestion may be that 'having unlimitedness in it' is responsible for indefinite differentiations, and so for indefinite differences between any two particular things.

<sup>33</sup> The ἀεὶ of 16c8 has an indefinite sense ('at any time'); νῦν at 23c4 picks this up, specifying 'at the time'. This latter should be taken inclusively, rather than as limiting the scope – it is always true of eternally existing things that they exist now; it is *also* true of any changing thing that it now exists, although it might not later. So the Method makes a claim on what is at any time said to be; the pantalogy is one of those times.

<sup>34</sup> Contra Meinwald 1998, 168-72, and also Frede 1997, 185-6: "Plato in the discussion of the dialectical method applies it to the domain [Gegenstandsbereich] of each respective *technē*. By contrast, 'everything existing now in the universe' indicates an extension beyond the domains of individual *technai*, and refers to the entire domain of everything existing [Gesamtbereich alles Seienden]." This need not be incompatible with her overall thesis about the relation between these two passages, namely, that the Divine Method is used on 'everything existing in the universe', if she thinks that ontology is its own special field – but then it is hard to make sense of the point of the contrast here between special fields and all of being.

<sup>35</sup> So, Socrates' use of '*technē*' is not restrictive in this portion of the *Philebus*, and should not be taken as contrastive – as if he thought there were some other way of getting some other kind of knowledge. See

19d4-5, where *technē* is included alongside νοῦν, ἐπιστήμη, σύνεσις, τέχνην καὶ πάντα αὐτὰ τῶν συγγενῶν. This makes its omission from the initial list at 11b7-8 look less significant.

<sup>36</sup> Trevaskis 1960, 43, makes this point forcefully: “unless he has confused the argument he should mean this to apply to Man, Ox, the Beautiful, and the Good equally with the examples of music and language which he goes on fully to set out”.

<sup>37</sup> There is one ἰδέα (16d1); ἀπείρου ἰδέων at 16d7 may be a reference to the kind, Unlimited. The sense would be, ‘at some point the only thing to do is to grant that in this respect it partakes of unlimitedness and there is no more to be said – but you will not appeal to this fact until then’. εἶδος appears at 18c2, of Theuth’s work. See note 13, above.

<sup>38</sup> Talk of ‘parts’ suggests anatomical dissection (as in Socrates’ contribution to the childish puzzles, 14e); talk of ‘kinds’ suggests taxonomy into species. Either way of dividing an object of study may be appropriate, depending upon what the object is, and what one wants to know.

<sup>39</sup> “For I take it that anyone with a share in reason at all will consider the discipline concerned with being and with what is really and forever in every way eternally self-same by far the truest of all kinds of knowledge.” (58a2-5)

<sup>40</sup> “We have to assume that there is in each case always one form for every one of them [the existing things being investigated], and we must search for it, as we will indeed find it there” (quoted in section I.B, above). I do not claim that this assumption is *justified* by anything said in the panta-ontology, only that we are given a better understanding of just what it is we have had to assume.

<sup>41</sup> Compare T. Irwin’s comparable point about that other Platonic method, the *elenchos* (Irwin 1977, 70): “How can principles be justified by the elenchos which presupposes them? Socrates’ defence of the principles by appeal to the elenchos will be circular, but not clearly vicious. For the elenchos is not doomed to success.”

<sup>42</sup> The reader for *Ancient Philosophy* worries that I underplay the possibility of systematic distortion in our view of the universe, and in particular (in light of what I go on to say) the possibility of motivated systematic distortion. It may be that the view rests ultimately on an underlying optimism about our ability to know reality, and in particular to discern falsehoods as such; but the possibility of illusory results is, I think, tempered by the fact that, since our current understanding of the universe must always be “still under construction”, it must also be open to the challenge to explain, and to attempts

to expose errors. This may be the most minimal presumption necessary to makes sense of any attempt to seek knowledge at all.

<sup>43</sup> Consider Socrates' explicit claim that "sound is also the unit in this art [music], just as it was in writing" (17c1). Sound is not two different things, one for music, one for speech; rather it is the same one thing, divided in different ways, in order to make different systematically related aspects of it perspicuous.

<sup>44</sup> Rather, all that is unlimited should be understood as "made commensurate and harmonious by imposing a definite number on them" (25e1-2; cf. 26d10).

<sup>45</sup> I would like to thank the audience at the Northern Association of Ancient Philosophy's 2006 meeting for valuable questions and discussion; Sarah Broadie and Basil O'Neill provided very helpful feedback on an earlier draft, for which I am very grateful; and finally my thanks to the anonymous reader for *Ancient Philosophy*, whose insightful comments were a spur to further thought, in this paper and beyond.