

Perfect Knowledge and its Affects in the *Philebus*

Amber D. Carpenter

1. *What is so good about knowing or striving to know?*

As usual, knowing in the *Philebus* is not the good; as usual, however, intellect in its various forms and activities is given pride of place in an account of goodness in human life and the cosmos as a whole. This paper asks, 'what is the good of knowing, according to Plato in the *Philebus*'.

There is what one might call the Aristotelian answer to this question: We are by nature the sort of thing capable of knowing; when this capacity is activated in the full, then we are (in this respect at least) in our best natural state. And that is what is good about it.

I will not argue that this Aristotelian reply is *not* Plato's. But such a reply leaves important philosophical work implicit, and – since this makes its precise significance obscure – the claim often remains unconvincing, or even ends up looking like wishful thinking. What follows is an attempt to get at the answer in a different sort of way, and thus bring out a different range of what it could mean to suppose knowing, or striving to know, has the kind of value Plato accords it. When asking what the good is of knowing, I want to focus on what effect knowing has on the soul – on the person striving to know and on a life.

Some of these effects are affects. In considering the effects of knowing on the person striving for, and perhaps attaining it, we will have to first look closely at what this 'knowing' is; this will turn up what affects, if any, are proper to knowing; and then we might consider what affects are consequent upon knowing, or the active striving to know.

Regarding this latter, we might think that – by the time we come to the *Philebus*' explicit examination of knowledge at 55c – we have already been given our answer: Pleasures and pains, which in combination account for the wide range of affective variation, can be true or false. The true ones are the affects consequent upon knowing. In support of this, we might point out how false pleasures are associated at *Philebus* 40d with what 'is not nor ever was, nor will ever be'.

Here, too, I do not want to deny this. But I am interested as well in whether there are other ways affects may be proper to reason or to knowing – what ways these are and what affects. Looking more closely at what knowing is might help to make some of these claims more intelligible, plausible and meaningful. Along the way, we will discover an explanation for the curious under-thematization of virtue in the *Philebus*' concentrated attention on the good life and the good in human life. On an epistemology

which incorporates loving truth into its conception of the highest exercise of intellect, it turns out that once we have the intellectual virtues, their exercise and their felt qualities, we have said all there is to say about virtue *tout court*.

2. Knowing functions paradigmatically

Socrates' explicit treatment of his favoured candidate for good-making in the *Philebus* is as short as his name of it is long. 'Pleasure', simply named, is given twenty-four complex pages of examination; "thinking (*phronēin*), intelligence (*noēin*), memory and things of that kind: right judgement and true reckoning" (11b7-8) is only directly examined in a brief four and a half pages at 55c-59e, and even here not under a single name but as 'intelligence and knowledge' (*noūs kai epistēmē*). Of course, the curious cosmological argument of 28c-30d delivers the verdict that *noūs* belongs to the kind 'cause', and much else about Socrates' favourite can be gleaned indirectly from the 'methodology' of 15a-19c, and implicitly from the metaphysics of 23c-31a, and even the critique of pleasure. But Socrates is deliberate in introducing the passage at 55c as the counterpart to the examination of *Philebus*' favourite, even though the investigation into 'intelligence and knowledge' largely foregrounds the latter (*epistēmē*), which did not even appear on Socrates' original list.

In this examination of knowledge, Socrates is surprisingly generous about what gets to come under that umbrella. There are no disparaging remarks about cookery or other activities as flattery, a mere 'knack' and not any sort of knowledge at all. On the contrary, the *technai* all find a place here, including such dubious skills as flute-playing, which relies so heavily on readjustments responsive to perception, and can only be taught – if at all – in a 'monkey-see-monkey-do' kind of way. This unnecessarily discourteous way of putting the point reflects Socrates' attitude, but the point still holds without the discourtesy: certain skills require for their mastery the close association with a master, and dedicated repetition of attempts to do likewise. So the generosity is not boundless – flute-playing is brought in for consideration, but only grudgingly allowed to be "what many call *technē*" (55e7-56a1); the inadequacies of medicine and navigation are noted (56b1-2); and 'philosophical' mathematics is ranked more highly than applications of mathematics in the course of various productive crafts.

For it is, after all, a comprehensive *ranking* we are offered in the examination of knowledge. Rather than a dismissive attitude towards whatever is not 'real knowledge' in preference for what is, Socrates ranks various sorts of activities *qua knowledge* – and this ranking should function as an *analysis* of knowledge, or an exposition of its nature. This is possible because such ranking, for all that it differentiates, at the same time draws

disparate things together: in order to rank different things with respect to one another there must be a common dimension of value, or several, which the various ranked things share. It is these spectra that unify the class into a single kind.

In the first portion of this passage, we can identify criteria used to do the work of unifying and ordering the class of cognitive activities, as they hold less and “more closely to knowledge” (55d6). Relative purity and impurity appear immediately (55d7-8). This is a fairly uninformative criterion of proximity to knowledge; but it does indicate, and the comparatives (*katharōtata/akathartotera*) accentuate, that we are dealing with something that comes in degrees, and yet has a limit – as white was just given as an example of something that can be perfectly pure, unadulterated, so that something might be bigger or better than pure white, but not whiter. The appeal to purity here will tell us how to read, and what is significant about, the other criteria. Accuracy or precision (*akribēia*) appears several times (e.g. 56b5, c5, c8, 57c3, d1), as does clarity (*saphes*, *saphēneia* 56a7, 57b3, b6, c7) and also, less frequently, reliability (*to bebaion*, 56a7, 59b4, b5).

These features come in degrees – as they must do if they are to be useful in ordering varieties of cognitive activity hierarchically. But, unlike qualities belonging to the unlimited kind, the spectra they define cannot be extended indefinitely in both directions. While there may be no limit to how imprecise something may be, and how unclear and unstable, there is a limit to how precise, clear and reliable something can be – perfect clarity, perfect precision, perfect reliability cannot be improved upon. This is why they can act as a measure of purity in knowledge, when we return to that at 57b1-2. The closer a cognitive activity comes to these perfections, the closer it comes to perfect knowledge. Thus, indirectly, we are offered a characterisation of perfect knowledge, or pure knowledge – what knowledge paradigmatically would be like, which other forms of knowledge only approximate. It would have perfect accuracy, clarity and reliability.¹

What is noteworthy about these criteria, or dimensions of value, is that they are largely about practice – they capture a way of going about things, whatever it is one is going about doing. Knowing is, in the first instance, a way of having ideas. This is reflected in Socrates’ move of identifying the cognitive practices *within* the cognitive practices which make the difference for how accurate, clear and reliable some domain of cognitive activity is. ‘Measuring, counting and weighing’ (55e1-2) are calculating activities that can play a greater or lesser role within any particular skill, knowledge or cognitive practice. They can themselves be done more or less precisely, and their greater presence has the effect of the practice within which they are present being clearer, more precise and

¹ I examine this passage in more detail, and particularly explore the implied approximations to knowledge, in *Ranking Knowledge in Plato’s Philebus* (manuscript).

reliable – and so being credited, as is building, with being ‘more skilled than many knowledges’ (56b6). Here knowledge, and being more pure or closer to pure knowledge, is determined by a way of going about whatever it is one is doing.

But there are constraints on how far this increasing precision and clarity can go, and different constraints in different disciplines. One might gather this first by reflecting on the skills Socrates identifies as being least precise and less precise – playing a musical instrument in the former case, and carpentry in the latter. Flute-playing, we might reflect, would not be improved by introducing instruments for measuring each note and hand position more precisely; navigation, by contrast, would be (and has been) so improved – and we might ask ourselves why this is so. Carpentry would not be better carpentry if it demanded the extremely fine precision of contemporary scientific instruments – and we might wonder what this tells us about knowledge. Such reflections hint at the notion that there are constraints on the possible and desirable purity of knowledge, as so conceived, which are internal to the aims and natures of different skills or cognitive disciplines.

This hint becomes more explicit in Socrates’ distinction between the mathematics embedded within various disciplines and ‘philosophical geometry and calculating’ (56e8-9). Not dealing in actual cattle that may have different sizes and shapes, as the farmer must; nor in actual battalions of differing strengths and weaknesses, as the general does, the philosopher can calculate most precisely, reckoning, comparing and calculating only entirely commensurable units. The farmer cannot do this and still be a farmer, and likewise the general cannot do this and still be a general. Although being closer to or further from knowledge consists, so far, in ways of conducting oneself cognitively, the purest forms of these modes of cognitive conduct – pure precision and clarity – are not available within domains where the objects or objectives defy perfectly commensurable treatment.

That is to say, in certain fields there are material constraints on how far cognitive virtues can be manifested without failing to be true to the objects, or objectives, of that field. This suggests a tension between the multiple desiderata of intelligence constitutive of knowledge – and it suggests an additional desideratum: flute-playing aims to get it right musically, and this is something different from putting one’s fingers precisely in the same place each time, for relevant conditions vary; farming aims to get it right agriculturally, and this requires overlooking some measurable differences between livestock. In each case there is a standard of correctness not exhausted by considerations of precision and clarity, and possibly coming into tension with them.

But so long as we are dealing with the various knowledges, however abstract, rather than knowledge itself, this suggestion remains implicit,

emerging only in the conclusion of the consideration of philosophical mathematics, where suddenly truth appears for the first time: the mathematics of the philosopher is far superior ‘in accuracy *and in truth* concerning measures and number’ (57d1-2, emphasis mine).²

Knowing, it seems, also has in addition to practical characteristics, ‘objective’ conditions – that is, only certain sorts of objects or domains will be suited for the co-instantiation of all characteristics of knowledge. Absolute precision can only be true to objects which themselves are precise – or rather, such as to admit of precise measure. The object known permits of stable knowledge when and to the degree that the object itself is stable. And it is stable to the extent that it is not dependent on other factors which are themselves unstable. Music-playing, for instance, is less able to be known because the right measure, and how to achieve it, depends upon variables that may change in each case: the quality of the wood, the dampness in the air, and so on.

3. *Dialectic and Reliability*

The sudden appearance of truth, as a mere addendum to superior precision in mathematics, is the slender thread holding together the consideration of the various disciplines (*Philb.* 55c-57d) and the surprising, and late, appearance of dialectic onto the scene at 57e. Notably absent from the discussion beforehand, truth is emphasised in the consideration of dialectic; and since dialectic is even more noticeably absent from the entire dialogue (17a4 excepted), its description here is all the more striking. Dialectic, says Socrates, “that which is concerned with being and reality entirely and always of the same nature, is acknowledged by all, even those of the smallest intelligence, to be by far the truest” (58a2-3).

The crowning of dialectic as queen of the sciences cannot come as a surprise to a reader of Plato generally, who indeed must rather have been wondering already at its absence from the entire contest over the good in human life. Yet there is something jarring in its introduction here. From the beginning of our examination of knowledge, we had been on a trajectory of increasing precision and clarity, sifting out the less precise as we identified the more precise ways of knowing. This process seemed to reach its peak with distinguishing the ‘philosophical’ mathematical arts –

² John Cooper offers an account of the difference between truth and purity in this passage, although he does not note the belated appearance of truth among the criteria of knowledge. On his view in *Plato’s Theory of the Human Good in the Philebus* (in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 74, 1977, 713-30), being more true has to do with being less misleading, specifically less misleading about what knowledge is – which implicitly acknowledges the importance of a conception of knowledge to our cognitive practice.

for what could be more precise than using only absolutely incommensurable units in one's measuring? How can, then, something be introduced as yet higher along this trajectory? Yet in fact, it is the designation of these high mathematical arts as 'most exact' at 57e3, the very pinnacle of the criteria of knowledge considered so far, that prompts the belated introduction of dialectic, which "would repudiate us if we put any other before her" (57e6-7).

Precision, standing for the criteria of clarity and reliability which have acted as the measure of purity in knowledge thus far, is not – at it turns out – enough. Pure arithmetic is most precise, but dialectic is nevertheless superior because it is still more true (58a4). And it is more true, apparently because it treats unrestrictedly of unchanging things – dialectic has not just a subset of stable, perfectly determinate objects, as mathematics, but whatsoever has an unchanging nature, so that it may lay claim to authority over the whole of being.³ Dialectic is superior in virtue of *what* it attends to, and not just in virtue of how it attends to it. Here the objective conditions on purity of knowledge come to the fore.

But this is not the only, or most jarring feature of the introduction of dialectic. Still more curious – more out of keeping with the analysis of knowledge that we thought had been underway up to now – is the new criterion on purity that Socrates now introduces. Explicitly recalling the previous discussion of purity in whiteness (58c7), Socrates says we are concerned not with usefulness but with "the power of the soul to love truth and to do everything for its sake" (58d4-5); this will be the mark of "purity of *noûs* and *phronēsis*" (58d6-7). Notice that *epistēmē* is now out of the discussion, and we may well suppose that we have simply changed the subject – first we discussed knowledge; then, as a distinct and even better thing, we discuss intelligence. But, we might suspect, the two are not illuminatingly related.

Such a reading would be supported by the way that, in the ultimate ranking of goods with which the dialogue concludes, Socrates' plural candidate finally bifurcates into '*noûs* and *phronēsis*' in third place (66b5-6), and '*epistēmē* and *technē* and right judgement' in fourth (66b9). In preparation for this later bifurcation, we have here switched from discussing everyday knowledge and ordinary knowers to describing those exceptionally few epistemological virtuosi for whom seeking truth is paramount.⁴ Someone for whom truth is of over-riding importance no

³ It is, in fact, not entirely clear what grounds dialectic's claim to greater truth, except the suggestion (58a) that it studies entirely whatever is perfectly knowable.

⁴ In a contemporary platonising vein, R. F. Holland distinguishes ordinary virtue of the 90% of us, such as truth-telling for instance, from that of those moral virtuosi for whom "not to falsify became a spiritual demeanour" (*Is Goodness a Mystery?*, in *Against Empiricism*, Blackwell, 1980, 107).

longer has much to do with the carpenters, ship-builders, astronomers or even the mathematicians that had been under discussion up to now.

So Socrates may be reminding us – in a kind of postscript to his discussion of the ordinary 90% of us – that there are still, after all, the philosophical few, who are quite different from the rest of us. For the rest, there may be mundane knowledge, and mundane virtue to go with it – the *Philebus*, on one reading, is offering a less ambitious morality for the many, as a way of being more accommodating. But Plato is still unwilling to renounce his intellectualist ideal, and reminds us of that here. In the best of all possible worlds, there are philosopher-kings and -queens taking turns ruling and contemplating.

It is only slightly strange, on such a reading, that this re-assertion includes the re-introduction of affect to knowledge. For what distinguishes the finest sort of cognition is not its greatest precision (it shares that with theoretical mathematics); nor is it even its greater truth, even if its greater range of perfectly clear and stable objects does make its claim on truth greater still than that of the particular abstract sciences. The purest form of cognition, properly deserving of the finest names (*noûs* and *phronēsis*, 59d), will be whatever loves truth, and does everything for its sake.

But it may be otherwise. Even if the passage is setting us up for the distinction between intelligence and knowledge which comes later, it may still be informatively relating these two as different manifestations of the same thing. While dialectic may not at first appear to be a further refinement on the trajectory set out so far, it seems that the structure established between the different forms of cognitive engagement in the ranking passage nevertheless invites us to take dialectic as the integrated culmination of that line of thought. We can see continuity in the trajectory in two ways, the second of which will occupy me more.

In the first place, dialectic's superiority rests on its objects being *cognitively* superior objects – they lend themselves to maximal precision and clarity, because of their own stability and independence, and because, dealing in all of them, they can each be properly related to and integrated with each other.⁵ This, I had suggested, in fact only makes explicit what was implicit in the ranking passage already. We could say that this aspect of the discussion of dialectic completes the discussion of knowledge by adding the fact that the object matters, and thus prompting us retrospectively to see that it had mattered all along.

In the second place, we do have an addition and refinement in how we go about our cognitive activity. We must be as accurate as possible in our measuring, and we must aim to get it right about, or stay true to the objects of the discipline. Just as standards of accuracy are set by the philosophical mathematicians who deal in fully commensurable units, so

⁵ We may think here of the integrative epistemology of *Philebus* 16a ff.

standards for the *value of truth* are set by dialectic. Other disciplines value truth of course, in a certain respect. But while they each value truth only in some partial way, what it is for them to value truth is determined by the way that dialectic values truth above all else.

In agriculture, the units of measure are necessary deviations on the perfect commensurability of pure mathematics – deviations necessary if it is to be *agriculture* (growing things on actual fields, extended, with hills and soil liable to the elements and changes of seasons). One makes compromises with one's measuring so that one can get on with the business of planting and harvesting. If the trajectory of ranking runs through the entire passage, and does not stop short and switch tracks at the introduction of dialectic, then we should likewise recognize everyday cognitive endeavours as compromised instances of *prioritizing truth* – of loving and acting for the sake of truth. Even flute-playing aims at truth within its limited domain in the following sense: Playing in tune is not a matter of wishful thinking; in order to succeed, I must aim to recognize and be appropriately responsive to how things are.

Just as the acknowledgement of the cognitive superiority of dialectic's objects draws out retrospectively how cognitive inferiority limited the purity – accuracy, clarity, stability – of skills and disciplines differentially in the foregoing discussion, so the identification of dialectic as love of truth, and willingness to do anything for its sake, draws out retrospectively how aiming at truth characterizes any cognitive activity. It may be less obvious how this latter is something that can come in degrees. It seems we have instead turned up a distinction between the absolute and the partial love of truth: either a love of truth (aiming at getting it right) is limited by some other aim – playing fine music, building a water-tight ship, harvesting plenty, winning the war – or else it is not. Here, too, however, we may discern a difference between an applied discipline which values truth for the sake of the goods of their particular discipline (a fine melody, a noble victory) and those which value getting it right just because it is true (theoretical mathematics, for instance), which latter set still fail to manifest an absolute love of truth because their truth-seeking is circumscribed by a severely restricted range of objects.⁶ The theoretical sciences do not subordinate truth to some other aim; but they fail to love the whole of

⁶ This tri-fold distinction may be manifested in the immediately subsequent passage, at *Philebus* 60a-61e, where *technai* are discussed as more accurate than one another, while *epistēmai* are discussed as more *true* than one another. While the *technai* are truth-aiming, they all subordinate this to lesser ends – and necessarily so, if they are to be the skills that they are, and useful as such; so that it is in virtue of their relative accuracy that they appear as finer and lesser approximations of knowledge. The *epistēmai*, by contrast, can be ranked according to their relative truth, for they are giving truth-aiming the right sort of priority, but with respect to more and less knowable objects, or with a more modest or ambitious range of objects.

truth, and in this way can be seen as a lesser approximation to the absolute love of truth which is dialectic.

4. *Affects of Knowing*

We have now arrived at the affects proper to knowing and intelligence rather than consequent upon them: love of truth is the highest form of cognition. This may be an affect in the sense that it is something that befalls a person, rather than something that one does; having intelligence, in one sense of it (as a capacity to value truth), is not something I choose or do. But it is not an affect in the sense of 'mere feeling', as if this were distinct from actual doings and valuing that a person actively engages in. Loving truth is virtually synonymous with 'doing everything for the sake of truth'.

Here is where we begin to see the significance of Socrates' criteria of cognition taking the form of cognitive behaviours or practices. Valuing truth, like calculating, is a mode or manner of engaging with the material at hand; it is a manner by which one establishes standards and the relevance of precision and clarity. What relates the two halves of the discussion, and one way in which it turns out we have not just changed the subject, is that all cognition is implicitly – and could become explicitly – a form of respecting reality, of wanting to be held to its standard and to orient one's activity accordingly. What this means for the person knowing is that however lowly her craft or skill, she is in practicing that craft also practicing the valuing of truth, just as she is also practicing measuring – even if only in a defective or limited way. So cognizing of any kind will be good for the soul because through it one gets practice in valuing truth and coming to attain it.

Of course this valuing may be, and usually is, localised: the flautist aiming at being true to the material conditions of this performance may care a great deal to get it right about the atmospheric conditions and their consequences on the tone and pitch of the instrument; she may not care a great deal about the truths of mathematics or about just whose expertise – and whose labour – built the hall in which she is performing. Still, the connection with dialectic, though distant, ensures that here too such skill is a practice of the soul, and a practice in particular at valuing truth and acting accordingly.

Within the activity of playing the flute, the *dominant* value, if the flute-playing is skilful, is truth – and, by implication in the context of the *Philebus*, not pleasure. It will be caring about getting it right, attending to reality as something one must respond to rather than ignore, that may enable a certain pleasure to arise, which pleasure would be partially constituted by having got it right (this is the argument about false

pleasures, earlier); there is no aiming at pleasure quite separately from that, or if there is this would not improve one's flute-playing.⁷ Though our lives may be dominated by pleasure-seeking, though we may choose our activities for the sake of pleasure, if those activities are in any way cognitive, they engage the soul in the practice of loving truth and choosing and acting for *its* sake. They are edifying insofar as, within the context of that skill, practice or discipline, the capacity of the soul to love truth is exercised.

The optimism about the edifying nature of all skills, however far they fall from pure knowledge and intelligence, rests on a conceptual point about what makes something cognition at all. Something is cognition insofar as it shares in a limited way the unlimited valuing of truth, and determining one's behaviour accordingly, characteristic of dialectic, the highest form of intelligence. And any practice in valuing truth over pleasure, and determining ourselves (and our pleasures) accordingly is valuable. Hence all forms of knowledge are permitted into the good human life.

But this may remind us of just how misplaced such optimism is. When Protarchus allows every sort of knowledge into the good life, saying "I don't really see what harm one would suffer" (62d1-2), we might be inclined to reflect that we *do* see the harm in certain noxious skills. Knowing itself is not good because there are some forms of knowledge (that of the sadist, of the torturer) that are wicked. But Protarchus is not quite so stupid. All knowledges are harmless or good, he says, "provided one has the first sort" (62d2-3). Since 'the first sort' refers to pure knowledge, however – to the sort by which one is able to give and account of the divine circle and the divine sphere (62a7-8) – we might still be inclined to think Protarchus is foolishly optimistic. For most people practicing the various skills, crafts, arts and disciplines do not have this. Making this the condition on which all other cognitive disciplines are harmless, and then blithely letting them in, seems foolhardy.

But then it was *Socrates'* suggestion to open the floodgates. Protarchus may not be stupid, but he is also not the subtlest or most conceptually refined of thinkers. If Socrates makes the suggestion, might there be some more sophisticated understanding of the normative relation between the cognitive disciplines that allows him to accept Protarchus' generosity?

One possibility might be that the normative seed (that one here ought to aim at truth) planted by dialectic in the other disciplines in virtue

⁷ That the pleasure is *constituted* by having got something right is an implication of taking seriously the final word on pleasure, that it is *genesis*. Not everyone does take this seriously, of course, but I do so in *Pleasure as Genesis* (in *Ancient Philosophy* 31, 2011, 73-94), and explore it further in *Pleasure as Complex, Pleasure as Temptress*.

of their normative relation (that cognition aims to approximate knowledge) grounds a reasonable expectation that practicing desiring and valuing truth in a limited way leads to the explicit and unlimited valuing of truth for its own sake. That is to say, all cognition aims to approximate knowledge – this is the point of ranking all knowledges in terms of their proximity to knowledge, as this passage does. Because of this, perfect knowledge's valuing of truth is incorporated partially into any cognitive practice – it will only be in virtue of this, along with the other aspects in which something approximates knowledge (aiming at precision, and so on) that something gets to count as a cognitive practice, or exercise of intelligence, at all. But what is thereby incorporated, partially, is the absolute love of truth, which has a natural tendency to escape the confines of any particular discipline.

So put, this option might seem no less unreasonably optimistic than Protarchus' presumption. We should seriously suppose that the builder who cares about the straightness of his two-by-fours will, through his building, be led as a matter of course to care about the perfect circle, and in fact Truth-as-Such? Enough to do everything for its sake?

If the thought was that the builder, by her building, or the general by marshalling his troops, should just naturally discover that truth is important in determining ends and not just in pursuing ends one already has, this seems hopeless. There might, however, be a slightly less hopeless (if still quite optimistic) thought at work. The idea may be that it is not *building* and so on which naturally tend to exceed their own bounds, so to speak, in their valuing of truth, but rather that becoming aware of the connection between dialectic and other forms of knowing is itself the solvent that opens up the way from limited valuing of truth, for the sake of this end or that, and global valuing of truth for its own sake. This would be why, and why it means that it is on condition of the highest forms of knowledge that the lower are safe for human consumption.

The thought is that by making explicit the conceptual and normative priority of dialectic in determining the value of our other cognitive activities we set our limited aims within a context which transforms them – or transforms our way of relating to them. When we see that the modest love of truth required for building well and navigating well is of a piece with the more ambitious love of truth which governs our choice of disciplines, practices and life, if we are living well, then we engage in these things differently. We respect reality as necessary in order to get the house built; but we do so recognizing this as practice in disciplining ourselves according to reality generally.

It is not building, then, playing the flute or leading armies to victory that converts a limited love of truth subordinated to the end of a particular discipline into the independent and pure love of truth for its own sake. These daily disciplines are good for us insofar as they actually are an exercise in loving truth, and making ourselves conform to reality rather

than wishfully desiring the reverse. But they do not improve the state of our soul substantially without philosophy (which is, of course, no more than what Protarchus actually says). Without engaging in the sort of analysis that Socrates and Protarchus model, revealing the connection between cognitive activities in the desire for truth, flute-playing is just flute-playing. With such analysis – actually engaging in some dialectic – flute-playing can also become for us a way of loving truth for its own sake, and engaged in as such.

5. *Dialectic's values transform lesser practices*

Dialectic, the perfect intelligence that all cognitive activity aims to emulate, feels like desire and consists in granting practical authority to truth.

The affect proper to perfect knowing is the perfect love of truth – the care for truth and prioritization of it in our doings. This is the end that determines the value and relevance of other cognitive aims and activities, while other forms of knowledge are, conversely, subordinated to pure or perfect knowledge as lesser, imperfect or compromised manifestations of this love of truth. It is this, as much as accuracy, reliability, and clarity, that draws together and unites the collection of activities treated as *Philebus* 55c-59e. (And it is this which unites Socrates' favoured candidate – which is never given a single name.)

This is, in the first place, a conceptual point: this is how cognitive activities are in fact related to each other, so that some limited version of aiming at accuracy, reliability, clarity and truth are at work in every craft-exercise, and are what make something counts as a cognitive activity – skill or discipline – at all. In this way, all forms of knowledge-seeking transform the soul, because each is an exercise in respecting reality and trying to stay true to it.

But there is a further practical point, and practical good, to be gained by making explicit and acknowledging this conceptual point. As related by their common love of truth, as respecting reality over wish, as an imperfect version of a perfectible activity: this how we *ought to regard* our engagement with all crafts. Socrates may be pessimistic about how many people will in fact acknowledge this, while remaining optimistic that doing so will indeed be beneficial. It is by seeing mundane skills as inheriting their value from their approximation to pure knowledge that we can conceive of and begin to develop a desire and love of truth for its own sake, and transform the practice of everyday life into embodiments of striving for the good.