

Αἴτιον and Αἰτία in Plato

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It is a question whether Plato uses the nouns αἰτία and αἴτιον synonymously. About twenty-five years ago Frede 1980 proposed that in the *Phaedo* αἰτία is used for propositional items, whereas αἴτιον is used for non-propositional items. A number of scholars have voiced reservations or objections (Lennox 1985, 197-199; Strange 1985, 3n1; Silverman 1992, 99n32; Irwin 1983, 126-134).¹ Most recently, on the basis of a review of all instances of these nouns in the Platonic corpus excluding the Letters and spurious works, Ledbetter 1999 has convincingly shown that Frede's distinction is untenable.² In the process, she also advances a novel, alternative proposal:

In some of its uses [in the Platonic corpus] *aitia* has a meaning that *aition* never has (258) ... Where Plato gives these terms different meanings, I shall argue that he distinguishes... between reasons and causes (255-256) ... This distinction between *aitia* and *aition* is applied generally throughout the corpus. Plato always uses *aitia* rather than *aition* to express his notion of 'reason'. (258) An *aition*, on the other hand, is a cause or causal explanation. (258-259)

Ledbetter then applies this distinction to the interpretation of Socrates' *aetiology* in *Phaedo* 95-105. In short, Ledbetter argues not only that Plato distinguishes reasons and causes in *Phaedo*, but that Plato does so in accordance with a corpus-wide deliberate and systematic semantic distinction between αἴτιον and αἰτία.³

In considering Ledbetter's proposal I have myself reviewed all instances of αἰτία and αἴτιον as well as the adjective αἴτιος in the corpus, like her excluding the Letters and spurious as well as controversially authentic works.⁴ In addition, I have excluded αἰτία, αἴτιον, and the cognate adjective in *Phaedo* because I do not wish to beg the particular question about Socrates' distinction of reasons and causes in this dialogue. Finally, I have excluded the strictly legal use of αἰτία meaning *charge* or *guilt*. Given these exclusions, a total of 242 instances of the

¹ All cited by Ledbetter 1999, see n3. In addition, cf. Sedley 1998, n1; Hankinson, 1998, 85n2.

² Ledbetter 1999, n4 makes clear that the evidence is derived from Brandwood 1976.

³ Note that this is consistent with Plato sometimes using αἰτία to mean *reason*.

⁴ My search employed the lexicographical tool at the Perseus digital library (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>). My search included the following dialogues: *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Cratylus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Theaetetus*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Protagoras*, *Apology*, *Ion*, *Menexenus*, *Timaeus*, *Republic*, *Philebus*, *Symposium*, *Hippias Major*, *Phaedrus*, *Laws*, *Euthyphro*, *Parmenides*, *Hippias Minor*.

words αἰτία and αἴτιον and the cognate adjective remain.⁵ Among these, the adjective αἴτιος occurs 105 times; the noun αἰτία occurs 90 times;⁶ and the noun αἴτιον occurs 47 times.⁷ On the basis of my analysis of these occurrences, my central conclusion is that Ledbetter's proposal is not defensible and that Plato does not employ the nouns αἴτιον and αἰτία with any significant semantic distinction.⁸

Let us clarify the notion of reason that Ledbetter attributes to Plato's use of αἰτία. She writes:

Plato always uses *aitia* rather than *aition* to express [the following] notion of 'reason': ...a reason attributed or attributable to someone as his ground or as part of his rationale for a conclusion or justification for an action that advances some good. (1999, 258)

The notion of reason that Ledbetter identifies is an agent's self-conscious and deliberate psychological grounds. I will refer to it as a 'deliberate reason'. Furthermore, her account of a deliberate reason incorporates a disjunction: [grounds] for a particular conclusion *or* for a desired course of action. So, for example, the

⁵ *Charmides* (1 occurrence): 156e3; *Laches* (2): 190e7, 191c7; *Lysis* (6): 209b8, 221c2, 3, 5, d1, 3; *Cratylus* (8): 396a7, 399d12, 401d6, 411c2, 413a3, 4, 416c1, 418a2; *Sophist* (3): 253c3, 265b9, c7; *Statesman* (12): 269c1, 270a3, b4, 273b4, 274b3, 281d11, e5, 10, 287b7, c1, e5, 294d1; *Theaetetus* (8): 149b2, 9, 150c7, e1, 169a4, 205c9, d1, e4; *Gorgias* (12): 447a7, 452c7, d6, 457a3, 465a5, 501a2, 6, 503b7, 518d2, 7, 519b1, 520e7; *Meno* (2): 70b3, 98a3; *Protagoras* (2): 323a4, 352d8; *Apology* (3): 24a8, 31c7, 40b6; *Ion* (2): 532b8, 536d1; *Menexenus* (2): 238e1, 244a2; *Timaeus* (39): 18e3, 22c1, e4, 28a4, 5, c2, 29a6, d7, 33a6, 38d7, 40b4, 42e4, 44c7, 45b4, 46d2, 7, 47a2, b6, 48a7, 58a1, 61b6, c5, 63e8, 10, 64a3, 8, 65b7, 66b6, 67b1, c8, e4, 68e6, 69a7, 76c6, d7, 79a6, c7, 80a1, 87c2, e5; *Republic* (36): 329b3, 4 (twice), d3, 366d5, 379b9, 13, 15, 16, c3, 4, 380b6, c8, 435e6, 443b1, 464a8, b5, 471a12, b4, 474a5, 489d7, 11, 490d4, 491e6, 495a6, 500b2, 508b9, e3, 509c3, 516c2, 517c2, 528b6, 536c4, 578d11, 615b3, 617e4; *Philebus* (18): 15c2, 22d2, 23d7, 26c3, 7 (twice), 27a8, 9, b2, 29a6, 30a10, c5, d3, e1, 31a8, 58b7, 64c6, d4; *Symposium* (14): 178c3, 184a5, 192e9, 192e9, 193c8, 194e7, 195a2, 197c3, 198e6, 204b5, 205b9, 207a7, b7, c7; *Hippias Major* (17): 281c4, 296e9, 297a1, 2 (twice), 3 (thrice), 4 (twice), 8 (twice), 297b1, 2, c2 (twice), 299e4; *Phaedrus* (10): 229e4, 238d5, 239b2, 242b4, 243a7, 246d4, 252c2, 266b1, 271b2, d6; *Laws* (47): 624a2, 672d3, 676c7, 679e4, 688c5, 692b1, 693a7, 694a1, 695e5, 697c7, 713c4, 727b5, 731e4, 737b7, 776c1, 790e5, 821a3, 831b4, c2, d2, e5, 832a7, b10, c8, 838c1, 856e7, 862a8, 863c2, 4, 870a7, 872a2, 875a2, 886a9, b3, d3, 887d1, 896b1, 899b6, 891e5, 896d7, 900a7, 904c2, 7, 908a7, 955c4, 963e3, 967c5. These words do not occur in *Euthyphro*, *Parmenides*, or *Hippias Minor*.

⁶ *Ly.* 221c3, 5, d1, 3; *Sph.* 265b9, c7; *Plt.* 270a3, 274b3, 281d11, e5, 10, 287b7, e5, 294d1; *Thr.* 169a4, 205c9, d1, e4; *Grg.* 465a5, 501a2, 503b7; *Meno* 98a3; *Prot.* 323a4; *Ti.* 22e4, 29d7, 33a6, 38d7, 40b4, 44c7, 45b4, 46d7, 47b6, 48a7, 63e10, 64a8, 65b7, 67b1, e4, 68e6, 69a7, 79a6, c7, 87c2; *R.* 329d3, 489d11, 491e6; 617e4; *Phlb.* 23d7, 26c3, 7, 27a8, 9, b2, 30a10, c5, d3, 31a8, 64d4; *Smp.* 184a5, 205b9, 207b7, c7; *Phdr.* 243a7, 246d4, 252c2, 271b2, d6; *Lg.* 624a2, 676c7, 688c5, 692b1, 693a7, 697c7, 790e5, 821a3, 831b4, c2, d2, e5, 832a7, b10, 870a7, 875a2, 886a9, 896b1, 904c2, 7, 908a7, 963e3, 967c5.

⁷ *Ly.* 209b8; *Cra.* 401d6, 413a3, 4, 416c1; *Plt.* 287c1; *Thr.* 149b2, 150c7; *Ap.* 24a8; *Ion* 532b8, 536d1; *Ti.* 22c1, 28a4, 5, c2, 29a6, 63e8, 64a3, 66b6, 67c8, 76c6, 80a1; *R.* 329b4, 578d11; *Phlb.* 26e7, 29a6; *Smp.* 192e9; *Hp. Ma.* 281c4, 296e9, 297a1, 2 (twice), 3 (thrice), 4 (twice), 8, 299e4; *Phdr.* 229e4; *Lg.* 679e4, 694a1, 695e5, 731e4, 776c1, 832c8, 838c1, 886b3.

⁸ Hereafter, unless otherwise specified, I will only use αἰτία and αἴτιον as nouns.

explanatory clause in 'John pursued pleasure because he was ignorant of the good' does not state the deliberate reason that John pursued pleasure. In contrast, the explanatory clause in 'John pursued pleasure because he thought pleasure was the highest good' states the deliberate reason that John pursued pleasure. It is important to be clear on this distinction since there are many examples in the Platonic corpus where Socrates (or some other speaker) explains human action or a psychological state on psychological grounds, but not on self-conscious and deliberate psychological grounds. For example, at *Ion* 532b, Ion asks Socrates:

Then what is the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why I pay no attention when someone discusses any other poet and am unable to offer any remark at all of any value...?

And at 536d, Socrates explains to Ion:

And when you ask me the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why you can speak at length on Homer but not on the other poets, I tell you it is because your skill in praising Homer comes not by art, but by divine inspiration.

I believe that 'reason' is the correct translation of τὸ αἴτιον in both passages. But it is also clear that Socrates is not attributing inspiration to Ion as self-conscious and deliberate psychological ground for Ion's inability to expatiate on poets other than Homer. In such cases, it is consistent with Ledbetter's thesis that the speaker uses either αἴτιον or αἰτία.

But contrary to Ledbetter's strong thesis that Plato *never* uses αἴτιον for deliberate reason, there are at least five such occasions. In *Lysis*, Socrates asks Lysis:

Then what on earth is the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why your parents do not prevent you [from doing what you desire] in this case, while in the matters we were just discussing they do prevent you? (209b8-c1)

It is then explained that the reason Lysis' parents allow him to do certain things is that they believe Lysis knows how to do these particular things and will therefore do them in such a way as to contribute to his well-being.⁹

In *Phaedrus*, Socrates speaks of the reason why he has no time to explore

⁹ The referee suggested rendering Socrates' question as: 'What is the *cause* of your parents' not preventing you [from doing what you desire] in this case, while in the matters we were just discussing they do prevent you?' The referee supported this rendition by reference to Lysis' reply to Socrates' question: 'I think', he said, 'it's because I understand these things but not those' (*Ly.* 209c2). Accordingly, Lysis' knowledge or ignorance is understood to be the cause of Lysis' parents' prevention and permission of Lysis' actions. I grant that Lysis' ignorance and knowledge, more precisely his parents' conception of his ignorance and knowledge, play a causal role in his parents' prevention and permission of his actions. But Lysis' knowledge and ignorance alone do not cause his parents' prevention or permission of his actions. Indeed, the referee admits that in the causal chain are included Lysis' parents' 'beliefs and rational grounds'. But central to Lysis' parents' beliefs and rational grounds, of course, are their desire that Lysis be well and their belief that his acting in ignorance is not conducive to his well-being, whereas his acting knowingly is. Therefore, Lysis' reply should be understood to mean that Lysis' parents prevent him from doing things in which he is ignorant insofar as they desire that he be well and believe that acting in ignorance is not conducive to well-being, etc.

explanations of mythological events:

I have no leisure for [these things] at all, and the reason (τὸ αἴτιον), my friend, is this: I am not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself. (229e4-6)

In this passage, Socrates explains the deliberate reason he does not investigate mythological events: he believes that the pursuit of self-knowledge is of greater value.¹⁰

Three examples concern deliberate reasons for particular conclusions rather than desired courses of action.

In *Republic* Socrates asks why the citizens should not fear slaves:

'What should they fear?' 'Nothing,' I said; 'but do you perceive the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why?' 'Yes, because the entire state is ready to defend each citizen.' (578d8-12)

This passage indicates that the citizens believe that they have nothing to fear from their slaves because the citizens believe that the state is ready to defend them against slave revolts.¹¹

In *Statesman* the Stranger speaks of the difficulty of dividing the real causes from the auxiliary causes of the political arts:

It is not easy to divide them into halves, you know. But I think the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) will nevertheless become clear as we proceed. (287b10-c1)

In *Laws* the Stranger considers a problem regarding slave-ownership:

As to most chattels it is easy enough both to see what they should be and to acquire them; but servants present all kinds of difficulties. The reason (τὸ αἴτιον) is that our language about them is partly right and partly wrong. (776b6-c2)

Finally, in two additional passages Plato may be using αἴτιον for deliberate reason. In *Theaetetus* Socrates proposes to explain why his practice of midwifery has led his contemporaries to regard him as weird: 'Should I tell you the reason

¹⁰ The referee suggested that 'the text says...that Socrates' all absorbing search for self-knowledge causes it to be the case that he has no time for anything else; the fact that he does only x causes it to be the case that he cannot also do y'. The text literally says that Socrates has no leisure time because he is not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know himself. It is a question of interpretation how (x) his current inability to know himself relates to (y) his lack of leisure time. As in the case of the *Lysis* passage, there is a causal relation between Socrates' inability to know himself, more precisely his conception of his inability to know himself, and his lack of leisure time. But, again, in this causal chain are included Socrates' commitment to obey the divine and the high value he places on the pursuit of self-knowledge. These give Socrates' deliberate reason for occupying his time as he does and, thereby, lacking time for other pursuits.

¹¹ The referee suggested that the text 'explicitly [cites] the fact that the state is ready to defend each citizen as the cause of the fact that they lack fear' and that although 'there is a "reason" in the relevant sense implied as part of the causal chain...the causal chain is what Plato emphasizes'. This is inaccurate. Note that the question is in the optative: Τί γὰρ ἂν φοβοῖντο; So the reply 'Nothing' to the question 'What should they have to fear?' should be interpreted to mean that the citizens have no reason for fear. Accordingly, the citizens' belief that the state is ready to defend them is the central component of their rationale for the conclusion that there is nothing to fear.

(τὸ αἴτιον) [why people have this opinion of me]?' (149b2). The passage suggests that Socrates' contemporaries have reached a particular conclusion about Socrates' character on the basis of their interpretation of his dialectical practice.

In *Hippias Major* Socrates asks Hippias:

And yet, Hippias, what on earth is the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why those men of old whose names are called great in respect of wisdom...refrained from affairs of the state? (281c3-8)

I presume that Socrates expects Hippias to answer this question by describing the deliberate reason why certain wise men of former times did not engage in politics. As it happens, Hippias claims that these wise men did not engage in political affairs on account of their ignorance. The sentence 'the wise men avoided political affairs through their ignorance of politics' could be interpreted as giving psychological grounds for the wise men's action that are not self-conscious or deliberate. For instance, it simply did not enter the wise men's heads to go into politics. But since Socrates asks the question with the understanding that the men at issue are wise and on the assumption that wise men would normally make a contribution to the political affairs of their city-states, it is likely that Socrates expects the answer to his question to give the wise men's self-conscious and deliberate reasons for avoiding politics. For instance, the wise men did not think they could make any valuable contribution in that sphere, or they regarded the study of cosmology as being of greater value. As such, this passage is similar to the *Phaedrus* passage discussed above in which Socrates gives his reason for not exploring explanations of mythological events. And thus Socrates' use of τὸ αἴτιον probably does seek the deliberate reason for the wise men's avoidance of politics.

The preceding examples do not constitute a wealth of evidence of Plato using αἴτιον to mean *deliberate reason*. However, they do demonstrate that Ledbetter's thesis, stated in its absolute exclusive strong terms, is incorrect. Still, it may be reasonable to modify her thesis to state that although occasionally Plato uses αἴτιον to mean *deliberate reason*, he mainly uses αἰτία for this purpose. This hypothesis is also untenable. In presenting her thesis that in 'some of its uses *aitia* has a meaning that *aition* never has', Ledbetter refers to the activity of the Demiurge in *Timaeus*:

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this distinctive use of *aitia* is in *Timaeus*... There, Plato distinguishes teleological from non-teleological explanations for various features in the cosmos. The teleological explanations...all make reference to the Demiurge's intentions and purposes in order to explain how a given feature of the cosmos is directed toward the good. They accordingly make frequent reference to the Demiurge's reasons or grounds. Plato uses only *aitia* and never *aition* to describe the Demiurge's reasons or grounds. (1999, 258)

Ledbetter then cites *Tim.* 29d6, 33a6, 38d7, 40b4, 44c7, and 47b6 as examples. I grant that all but one of these instances exemplify deliberate reasons and that in

addition *Tim.* 45b4 does. *Tim.* 29d6, however, states a reason that is not self-conscious and deliberate rather than deliberate reason for the Demiurge's creation.¹² In addition to these six examples, Ledbetter cites *Grg.* 501a2 and *Phdr.* 271d6. But neither *Grg.* 501a2 nor *Phdr.* 271d6 involves a deliberate reason.¹³ Furthermore, in a footnote, Ledbetter 1999, n8 cites an additional twenty-one examples: *Prt.* 324a4; *Smp.* 184a5; *Ti.* 18e3, 22c1, e4, 29d7, 33a6, 38d7, 40b4, 44c7; *Th.* 149b9, 205c9, e4; *Grg.* 452c7; *R.* 491e6; *Phdr.* 246d4, 270b4, 273b4, 287c1; *Lg.* 776c1, 863c4.¹⁴ Five of these simply repeat the *Timaeus* passages cited immediately above: *Ti.* 29d7, 33a6, 38d7, 40b4, and 44c7. Three employ αἴτιον rather than αἰτία: *Ti.* 22c1; *Th.* 149b9; *Lg.* 776c1. Three are adjectives: *Ti.* 18e3; *Grg.* 452c7; *Lg.* 863c4. Three do not exist: *Phdr.* 270b4, 273b4, and 287c1 (!)—*Phaedrus* ends at 279c7. And among the remaining seven examples, four (or perhaps three) do not involve deliberate reasons.¹⁵ This leaves three (or perhaps four) genuine examples of Plato using αἰτία for reason. For example, in *Protagoras* Protagoras explains why in the assembly under certain conditions the Athenians accept the advice of all citizens:

But when they meet for a consultation on political excellence, where they should be guided by justice and sound-mindedness, they reasonably allow the advice of everybody since they believe that everyone partakes of this virtue—or else city-states cannot exist. This, Socrates, is the reason (αἰτία) for this. (*Prt.* 323e2-324a4)

And in *Symposium*, Socrates explains why the Athenians conventionally view it as disgraceful when a boy quickly capitulates to his lover:

And so it is for this reason (τῆς αἰτίας) that our convention regards a quick capitulation as a disgrace: first, there ought to be a certain interval of time—the generally approved touchstone; and, second, it is disgraceful if the surrender is due to gold or public preferment. (184a4-b3)

There are no additional instances of αἰτία used to mean *deliberate reason*.

¹² 'Let us now state the αἰτία through which the creator created becoming and the entirety. He was good, and no ill-will ever exists in something good. And being completely devoid of all ill-will, he desired everything to be as much like himself as possible' (*Ti.* 29d7-e3).

¹³ Ledbetter 1999, 259 writes: 'at *Gorgias* 501a2 *aitia* refers to the rational grounds upon which certain medical procedures are employed by doctors'. But this passage, like 465a, where Socrates gives an account of τέχνη in contrast to ἐμπειρία, states that a given τέχνη involves knowledge of the φύσις and αἰτία pertaining to a given subject matter. Likewise, at 501a3-b1 Socrates criticizes cookery as ignorant of the φύσις and αἰτία of pleasure. So, here at 501a2 Socrates means that medicine endows the doctor with knowledge of the φύσις of the patient, that is, the constitution of the patient's body, as well as understanding of the αἰτία of the therapy, that is, understanding of the processes by which the therapy heals the patient. Here Ledbetter herself is confusing deliberate and non-deliberate reasons.

¹⁴ Ledbetter also cites *Phd.* 98e1.

¹⁵ At *Phdr.* 246d4 Socrates proceeds to explain why the soul loses its wings. The reason at *Rep.* 491e6 is not deliberate. *Ti.* 22e4 is causal. *Th.* 205c9 is arguably merely logical; I admit to some uncertainty in this single case.

Thus, in sum, there are nine (or perhaps ten) examples of αἰτία and five to seven examples of αἴτιον used to mean *deliberate reason* in the Platonic corpus. Furthermore, given that in general αἰτία is used almost twice as much as αἴτιον, it is slightly surprising that more instances of αἰτία meaning *deliberate reason* do not occur. In any event, Plato clearly does not *tend* to use αἰτία to mean *deliberate reason*. The weight that Ledbetter places on the six examples from *Timaeus* in clarifying her account of reason is disproportional and misleading.

In her discussion, Ledbetter notes that the semantic distinction she attributes to Plato between αἴτιον and αἰτία appears to conform with Thucydides' and Herodotus' uses of these terms.¹⁶ However, that evidence should also be considered in conjunction with instances of αἴτιον used to mean *reason* not *cause*, among prose writers contemporary with Plato. No instance of αἴτιον occurs in Antiphon or Andocides. Two instances of αἴτιον occur in Isocrates, and neither describes reasons: 12.203; 15.230, 257. However, αἴτιον occurs twice in Aeschines, and both instances describe reasons. At 3.79 the speaker questions the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why Philocrates was impeached and exiled through policies identical to those of Demosthenes; and at 3.139 the speaker mentions the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why certain Athenian ambassadors were unable to persuade the Thebans to ally with Athens. One instance of αἴτιον occurs in Lysias; and in this case, at 1.15, the speaker questions the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why Eratosthenes no longer visited a woman with whom he had been having an affair. Five instances of αἴτιον occur in Xenophon. At least one describes reasons. *Hell.* iii 2.7 speaks of the reason (τὸ αἴτιον) why the Lacedaemonians are not at fault.

Finally—in view of the title of Ledbetter's article, which alludes to Vlastos 1969 which argues controversially that Socrates distinguishes reasons and causes in *Phaedo*—it is worth mentioning that in several passages in *Hippias Major* Socrates speaks of the Form of the beautiful as τὸ αἴτιον of beautiful things: 296e9, 297a1, a2 (twice), a3 (thrice), a4 (twice), a8, 299e4. Yet following Vlastos's interpretation of the Form-participant relation in the proposition 'beautiful things are beautiful because of beauty' as logical, not causal, Ledbetter would be bound to interpret this relation as causal. Alternatively, she would be compelled to admit that αἴτιον is being used in these passages in a non-causal way.

In conclusion, the preceding investigation demonstrates the untenability of Ledbetter's thesis that Plato distinguishes reasons and causes by means of a systematically distinct use of αἴτιον and αἰτία throughout the corpus. And given that Frede's propositional/non-propositional distinction is, indeed, also untenable, it is questionable whether there is any noteworthy semantic distinction in Plato between αἴτιον and αἰτία. On the basis of my examination, I submit that

¹⁶ 'For example, in Thucydides *aitia* is, according to Kirkwood, a "subjective" cause, defined as a cause relevant to or associated with a state of mind, whereas *aition* is rarely or never used to name that sort of cause' (Ledbetter 1999, 260). On Thucydides and Herodotus, see Kirkwood 1952; Immerwahr 1956.

there is not.

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Plato's Theory of Forms Reconsidered: Radical Purity in *Philebus* 11a-15b?

Andrew Hamilton

Plato can meet four of Parmenides' five challenges in the *Parmenides*, Rickless 1998, 544 argues, by reformulating the so-called Middle Period Theory of Forms (MPTF) in a way that does not include the axiom that no Form can have contrary properties. This axiom Rickless calls Radical Purity (RP). As he points out, if this reading is correct, we should expect to find in the later dialogues a reformulated theory, MPTF-(RP). And Rickless 1998, 543n39 points us to passages in later dialogues—the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*—that are taken to show that Plato has indeed rejected (RP).

The *Philebus*, however, is among Plato's most difficult dialogues. For this reason it is not clear at first (or second) look whether there is support for Rickless' view in the passages he identifies. The first of these, 15a-b, poses especially serious problems for interpretation:

Firstly, whether one ought to suppose that there are any such unities (μονάδας) truly in existence. Then again, how are they supposed to be: whether each one of them is always one and the same, admitting neither of generation nor of destruction; and whether it remains most definitely one and the same, even though afterwards it is found again among the things that come to be and are unlimited, so that it finds itself as one and the same in one and many things at the same time. And must it be treated as dispersed and multiplied or as entirely separated from itself, which would seem most impossible of all?¹

According to Rickless, Socrates accepts in this passage 'that the Forms are both one and many', and then goes on to suggest at 18e that he and Protarchus, his interlocutor, investigate how it can be the case that Knowledge and Pleasure are each one and many. Rickless takes these passages to be supportive of his thesis because 'it should be clear that this investigation cannot get off the ground unless the falsity of (RP) is assumed'. And so it is. What is not clear, however, is whether Plato is undertaking *this* investigation at all.

This lack of transparency is due to several long-standing exegetical debates that are themselves due in part to the notoriously problematic nature of the so-called metaphysical preface that runs from the beginning of the dialogue (11a) to

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all translations of the *Philebus* and the *Parmenides* are from Cooper ed. 1997.