

MARSILIO FICINO:
The *Philebus* Commentary

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MARSILIO FICINO:
The *Philebus* Commentary

A Critical Edition and Translation

by

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Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
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Dedicated
To
E.N.A. & W.

Corrigenda

- page 51.16up: Book 2, chapter 4 *not* 1.3
- page 134.4–5: You make the ship-bearing sea, the fruit-laden land teem with life; / For each race ...
- page 198.14–12up: although they are supposed not to understand [as such], since for understanding they too turn themselves towards objects within [the Ideas].
- page 222.17up: [genera] *not* [species]
- page 234.P1.3up: insane *not* insance
- page 253n: ὃς δαπανᾶς μὲν ἅπαντα καὶ αὖξεις ἔμπαλιν αὐτός· δεσμοῦς ἀρρήκτους ὃς ἔχεις κατ' ἀπέφρονα κόσμον· αἰῶνος Κρόνε παγγενέτωρ, Κρόνε ποικιλόμυθε (corrections to some of the characters and accents)
- page 472.12up: *add* 234 as a footnote number to the end of the chapter heading (i.e., 234 is currently missing)
- page 536.5up: 48, 49 *not* 38, 39
- page 539 n25: frag. 247 *not* 24
- page 542 n95: 401D, 402A. (i.e., *add* 402A)
- page 543.3: *add* In his *Protrepticus* 21, in elucidating “Don’t poke the fire with a sword” as the ninth Pythagorean dictum (symbol), Iamblichus had also cited the Heraclitus saw.
- page 543 n107: *passim* (cf. ref. 140 below).
- page 545 n156: see also *not just* see
- n158: 11–12 (i.e., *add* 11 to 12)
- page 547 n198.2: ref. 207 *not* 206
- n199: *add* For “chaos” see Orpheus’ *Argonautica* 12 and 415–25, and Kern’s frags. 24, 29, 66a, 76, 79, and 107; also Ficino’s own *De amore* 1.3, glossing Plato’s *Symposium* 178B. Cf. ref. 206 below.
- n204.2: *Ecclesiastica not* Ecclesia
- n206: *change to* Cf. ref. 199 above. (i.e., *not* Orpheus, *Argonautica*, 12 and Kern, frag. 66b)
- page 549 n233: *add* Cf. Iamblichus *Protrepticus* 21, symbol 6.
- page 552.9up: *Kunstgeschichtliches*

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Addenda

For end of Notes to Introduction, page 537

For a detailed study of Ficino's rendering of the *Philebus* itself, see now Ernesto Berti, "Osservazioni filologiche alla versione del *Filebo* di Marsilio Ficino," in *Il Filebo di Platone e la sua fortuna*, ed. Paolo Cosenza (Naples, 1996), 93–171.

MS Vat. lat. 5953 (see introduction page 8) was once owned and annotated by Pier Leoni. See J. Ruysschaert, "Nouvelles recherches au sujet de la bibliothèque de Pier Leoni, médecin de Laurent le Magnifique," *Académie royale de Belgique: Bulletin de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques*, 5th ser., vol. 46.1 (1960–61), 37–65 at 55–56 (No. 12).

For end of References, page 549

The quotation on page 482.12–13up, "finally conquered Earth gives him the stars," is from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* 4.7.34–35. See my "Homo ad Zodiacum: Marsilio Ficino and the Boethian Hercules," now in *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and Its Sources* (Aldershot, 1995), 13:218.

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Sigla

- W = Biblioteca Vaticana MS. *lat.* 5953
(the first version)
- X = Biblioteca Laurenziana MS. *Plut.* 21, 8
(the second version)
- Y = *Commentaria in Platonem*, Florence 1496
(the third version and the *editio princeps*)
- P = Biblioteca Oliveriana MS. 620
(fragments of the second version)

In pblicam.

Collecta cursim exlectionibus Martii sicini in Pbilibus q̄ sit ali
quis finis omniuz actionum:

Ca. i.

Quoniam omnis philosophicū sūma ad beata uitam refertur: atq; eā querentes homi
nes / se ad eius studia contrulerunt: beata autem uita in summo bono cōsistit: libzū
Platonis & sūmo hominis bono ante alios exponendū aggredimur. Sūmus quip
pe bonum finis est: cuius gratia omnia omnes agimus: finis autem uitę in primis
nosendus est: ut ad eum actiones omnes dirigere ualeamus: non minus q̄ nau
ganti potius ad quem ueniat ante omnia statuendus: & sagittario signus: & ad quē relā dirigat
primuz inspiciendū. Quod quidem uaticinatus Plato / in Alcibiade / in Eurydemō / in septimo
& re. pu. in legibus / ait si boni ipsius nobis cognitio testē: artes omnes alias & scientias i uiles
conatus / irritos / noxias actiones fore. Itē ¶ in arte & cōsilio nihil aliud est finis q̄ terminus / ad
quē mouetur agentis intentio potissimum: & in quo quiescit. Cum ergo in natura motus saliqd
proprie dirigatur quo habito cesset / agit ad finem. Similiter se habet dispositio reruz in arte & na
tura ad finem / quo sublato / non possunt cause assignari. Quāobrē ad Thylebi ipsius uelocitate /
qui & sūmo hominis bono / nostrarum omniū actionū sine disparat: nos primū parabimus. Quē
demusq; aliquem esse finem / ad quem actiones hominum tendant. Deinde quis iste sit & qualis
uocari conabimur: & falsas quidez & hoc opiniones reicere / ueras asserere uemus: qua uia ma
xime ad euz perueniat / monstrabimus. Id ergo libzū huius ppositum est. Itē ordo. ¶ Omnis
actio aut a natura corporum prouenit: aut animi spetu / aut rationis cōsilio / atq; habitu / aut men
tis intelligentia. Si a natura corporum prouenit / ad certum aliquid tendit. Nā corporū in eoz se
distincte substantię sunt: quare naturę erunt uiresq; discrete. Unde singulis corporibz singu
lę insunt / p̄prieq; naturę. Exibz p̄prie motus sunt. Proprie singuloruz motus secuntur opa
propria singuloruz: inque nature corporū / motusq; nitū: ut efficiat / & effecto ope p̄gescūt. Neq;
n. quilibet a quolibet: ¶ a p̄prie quibusdā propria quedam sūt / ab homine homo / a sicca ficus / ab
igni calor. Quis aut negabit finē esse cuiusq; naturę effectioisq; / id ipsū / quod p̄prie sępꝫ uiti
tur eius spetu: & i q̄cunq; cessat. Preterea dis corporū / motus aut eo cōtēdit ut uiter iteritū / aut
quē sibi pueniēz adsciscat / aut pimat p̄teritū simile gignat. Dum uitaē radsciscit / ad sui ipsius cō
seruationē mouet. Dum pimit atq; gignit / ad similes generationē. Omniū ergo corporū / motio
nū / p̄seruatio generatioq; est finis. ¶ Cecidit ad bec / q̄ si natura corporis sicutius dū agit / ad al
iquē effectū ueterminatū nō tenderet / omēs et effectus idifferētes esse: quod autē eque se hēt ad
multa / nō magis unū / e pluribz q̄ aliud efficit. Quare unū q̄q; corpus uel osa faceret / uel nihil
utriq; ipsibile est. Nāz quod facit osa primū rez p̄cipiū est: quod agit nihil / est otiosū. Quare
ad certum quendā tendit effectum. Certus autē uentus actionis finis cognominat. ¶ Item
corporis uis aut casu in opus scidit / aut necessaria quodam stentione nature. Non casu / q̄ a sique
cunq; opa / quodcūq; corpus scurreret / atq; ita quilibet aq; libere fierēt. neq; certo res semine in
digerent: & illud Lucretu eueniret. Nā si & nihilosierent / exoz by regu emnegnūs nasci posset / in
hūmine egeret. e mari primuz homiēs / e terra posse oriri / squamigez genus & uelucres erum
pere celo & p̄fecto quod casu sit raro cōstigit nec uno dumtaxat modo / p̄ uariis puenit. ¶ p̄ tamus
autē propria quedam / a singulis / certo semine / inuito tempore / solito ordine / modoq; / digesta se
rie / in sūda mediū eadē rōe / ut plurimū fieri. Ergo euz necessaria quādā intendēde corpora uis esse
erum producti / proprie illum intendit. Et quod intendit / naturalī instinctu appetit / quod ab ali
quo agente appetitur / actionis est finis. Omnis ergo actio corporum ē ad finem. Quinetis actio
quę animi impetum / ut iram / metum / cupidinez / sequitur / finē alique respicit. Nam si nihil moue
ret extrinsecus: animi spetuz nullus insurgeret. Ab aliquo ergo exteriori impetu iste uendēz /
quod uel bonum iudicium est / uel malum / uel neutrum. Si uenturum nouus exco impetus

Commentaria in Platonem. Florence, 1496. (In the 1496 corrigenda in quod
cunque cessat of paragraph two, line 9, is corrected to *in quo denique cessat*;
see p. 75 below.)

postuerit dicobas. Illis ego rationibus tuis iam ita
respondi, ut & eas libenter ad miserum & tanquam
uerissimas approbaui & Platonis nr̄i deson-
derim mixtionem. Reliquis tuis circa Platonē
subtilissimis questionibus alias respondobimus.;

Explicit liber primus Commentariorum Marselij sicij
in Platonem in Philebum de Summo
hominis bono.;

Secundus liber commentariorum Marselij sicij
Florentini in Philebum

O M N I A Quo nunc in uniuersis sunt
Postq̄ in prima libri parte quod
tractandum erat propositus Plato
& in secunda tractandi mundus
quendam & ingressum tradidit. in 3. qua cau-
tione differendum sit docuit. in quarta trada-
re cepit de bono. Et quoniam collaturus ad ip-
sum erat uoluptatem & sapientiam ut inspicere-
retur, nunquid istorum alterum ipsum sit bo-
num / & quid bonum sit explicauit: & ad ipsum
utraq̄ confrens. necurum et ipsum bonum
ostendit. hec hadenus. Deinceps inuestigandu
restat. Verum istorum utraq̄ ad bonum confre-
nit. quod mutari non potest, nisi & definiatur
& diuidatur in pars utriusq̄. Definitio autē q̄
nus requirit primo. post modum differentia
Ideo quinta habet in per genera utriusq̄ equirit
& infiniti quoddam genus: nec non terminu ge-
nus inducit: ad infinitum uoluptate ad terminu

PROHEMIUM IN PHILEBVM PLATONIS

ny celeritatem. breuitate admodum delectari.

Finis de Quatuor sectis phore Marsilij ficini florenti

PROHEMIUM MARSILII FICINI IN PHILE-
BVM PLATONIS AD MAGNANIMUM LAURE-
TIUM MEDICEM PATRIE SERVATOREM.

RES ESSE VITAS

MEMORATIONE UIVENS
DUBITAT. Contemplatiuam.

Actiuam. Voluptuosam Quom-
am. vs. tres ad felicitatem uis

homines elegerunt. Sapien-

tiam. Potentiam. Voluptatem. Nos autem sub Sapien-
tis nomine quodlibet liberatiam artium Sordium re-

ligiosumq; ocium intelligimus. Sub appellatione poten-
tis auctoritatem in gubernatione ciuili pariter atq; mi-

litari. Diuitiarumq; affluentiam & splendorem glorie
negociosamq; uirtutem comprehendimus. Sub

Voluptatis deniq; cognomento Quinq; sensuum oblecta-
menta & laborum curarumq; declinationem conino-

ri non dubitamus Primam igitur Poetz Mineruam. Se-
cundam uo Junonem. Tertiam deniq; Venerem nomi-

nauerunt. Tres olim apud Paridem de pomo auro

Da. Exemplum, in quo dicitur, ut intellecta
apparent intellecta est iam voluntate, et
propter seipsum et existens dicitur. Ita
propterque, in dicitur potestis firmid
fate legit auditus. Ratio in seipsum
fia videtur, Exemplum fuit in vo
luntate. Exemplum esse plerumque argu
mentacionibus demonstrabimus, si pro
ut videtur videtur, utque contra Christi
amorem, et dicitur, utque potestis pro
potestis ipse videtur, a plerumque
videtur videtur fuisse. Quippe Augustinus
Augustinus in libro de Trinitate
et quodam, audi ta dicitur; Quisquam
fuitur omnia que sunt, id est, quicquam
in suo genere propria quodam natura
contineretur, ut sunt, autem deo esse
pro veritate, singulariter tunc quodam
fia esse videtur quo videtur, quid autem dicitur
deum rationabiliter omnia videtur.
Rationes et omnia rationes sunt videtur.
Mox tamen rationes homo, quia tunc.
Eos tamen absurdum et impossibile. Sin
gula igitur propria sunt videtur ra
tionibus. Hoc tamen rationes ubi esse
videtur est, nisi in ipse nature videtur
videtur. Mox tamen dicitur se quodam
videtur videtur, ut videtur id
videtur, quod videtur. Quod se
de dicitur omnia videtur, videtur
videtur videtur dicitur nature videtur
tunc videtur in divina nature quicquam, nisi

Introduction

In 1462 Cosimo de' Medici granted Marsilio Ficino a villa at Careggi and put at his disposal a number of precious Greek manuscripts, including a complete manuscript of Plato. Afterwards two or three dialogues became especially dear to Ficino, among them the *Philebus*. Like the majority of the Platonic dialogues, the *Philebus* had been unavailable to the Latin west since antiquity, and it was Ficino who translated it from the Greek for the first time.¹ More than this, he deliberately placed it in the climactic final position of the initial decade of dialogues he prepared for Cosimo's study. Cosimo and his friends discussed the decade culminating in the *Philebus* and these discussions informally constituted the inaugural meetings of the Florentine Academy. In 1464, as Cosimo lay dying in the last two weeks of July, it was the *Philebus* that was read to him; and during the reign of his successor, Piero, it was on the *Philebus* that Ficino first chose to lecture to the city's patricians, including the young Lorenzo. Since the lectures were composed on the broad problems posed by the dialogue, they were of seminal importance: they contributed an introduction not just to the *Philebus* but to Platonism itself.

Platonism had never died during the Middle Ages. In the west it flourished under the guise of Augustinianism and mysticism, and even such staunch Aristotelians as St. Albert and St. Thomas Aquinas were imbued with certain Platonic concepts. In the Byzantine east Plato always occupied a premier position and in the last decades of the empire's existence it was Pletho's outspoken championship of Plato which initiated a prolonged academic controversy among the Greek exiles in Italy.² But the actual face-to-face encounter with Platonic and Neoplatonic texts which took place in the Florentine Academy under the leadership of Ficino was responsible for the European diffusion of Platonism in its distinctively Renaissance form. As Paul O. Kristeller observes, the "direct access to the work of Plato, of Plotinus, and of the other Platonist philosophers of Greek

antiquity . . . was in itself a major event in the intellectual history of Europe, and its importance was not diminished by the fact that the understanding of these Platonist sources continued to be affected by Neoplatonic and medieval ideas.”³ The first public articulation of Ficino’s “direct access” to the Plato text was the series of lectures he delivered on the *Philebus*, a series which later formed the basis of the written commentary. Consequently, the *Philebus* was in the vanguard of what was both a revival of an ancient academic philosophy, and also a wide-ranging religious, cultural and intellectual movement peculiar to the Renaissance and constituting one of its chief glories, Florentine Platonism.

Apart from its historical importance, the commentary had a crucial role to play in the development of Ficino’s own philosophical system; for along with the *Symposium* commentary (1468-69), the huge *Platonic Theology* (1469-74) and the treatise *On The Christian Religion* (1474) it bears witness to the generation of his most profound and luminous ideas. It is remarkable for its broad orientation, the profusion and scope of its major theses, and the suggestiveness of its detail. Even in the longueurs, one can detect Ficino’s enthusiasm for the dialogue’s intricacies and his sense of continual intellectual excitement. After lavishing much energy and concentration upon the commentary initially, he returned to it at least twice and he made it the longest of his Plato commentaries with the exception of the commentary on the *Parmenides*.

Despite its signal interest, however, scholarship has hardly begun to give it its due. Its various arguments, and particularly those concerning the universal act, the primacy of the intellect and the psychology of perception, have been referred to individually, but the whole commentary has not been studied carefully for its own sake. Hidden away in three manuscripts, in the first edition of Ficino’s *Commentaria in Platonem*, and in the corrupt, mispunctuated texts of the Basle and Paris editions of his *Opera Omnia*, it has neither been edited in modern times nor ever translated. Now, by chance, it follows the *Symposium* commentary as the second principal