1. The *Philebus* begins with a statement of the One-Many problem, proceeds directly to a method showing how the problem can be dealt with, discusses the ontological categories on which this method is based, applies these categories in an analysis of what is good in pleasure and reason, and concludes with the disclosure that what makes all things good is a Unity of proportion, truth, and beauty. Viewed from this perspective, the *Philebus* appears to be a coherent and well knit dialogue. Yet scholars throughout the past century and into the present have persisted in finding it a confusing medley of disjointed sections. Grote, for example, reported more than 100 years ago that "Every commentator of Plato, from Galen downward, has complained of the obscurity of the *Philebus.*"¹ By the time of Bury the dialogue was still being perceived as "harsh and rugged in style" and "jagged and distorted in composition."² And Gosling, in a commentary barely ten years old, confronts the possibility that Plato in writing this dialogue was "hopelessly confused, or has put together a rag-bag of arguments and carelessly failed to note their mutual irrelevance."³

Matters of style aside, what commentators on the dialogue perhaps have found most disconcerting is the prevailing absence of favorite doctrines from earlier Platonic writings. Although major

portions are devoted to the ontology of knowledge, the Forms themselves are scarcely mentioned. Although its underlying theme is how human life should be directed, very little is said in the dialogue about the virtues as such. And when we catch a fleeting glance of the Good in the final pages, there is practically nothing to remind us of the sunlike Form of the Republic. These and other anomalies assure the standing of the Philebus among the more puzzling of Plato's writings.

In my recently published Plato's Late Ontology there was occasion to look carefully at several key passages in this elusive dialogue, and to propose interpretations which seemed both to fit the text with reassuring fidelity and to establish clear connections with Book A of Aristotle’s Metaphysics. Right or wrong, these interpretations have distinct consequences for our understanding of how the dialogue fits together, but there was little incentive on that occasion to pursue these consequences in detail. The present context provides an opportunity to return to the dialogue in hopes of gaining a clearer perspective of its overall contours. In the remarks that follow no familiarity is assumed with the previous discussion; and in the few instances where reference to it seems unavoidable, brief summaries have been provided of the views in question.

As already noted, the dialogue begins with a particular problem of how Unity can be found in many, and proceeds stepwise to the final conclusion that the Good is a particular kind of Unity. Each major step along the way has generated a budget of issues for scholars to comment on. Many of these I will pass over unacknowledged, since they contribute nothing of value to the argument being developed. Although it is not wholly unpromising to set about arriving at a cohesive overview of the dialogue by working through the roadblocks previous scholars have encountered, that is not the tactic of the present attempt. I propose instead to set sight on the final conclusion, and to consider step by step how Plato arrived at it.

The conclusion in question appears at 65A where, literally translated, Socrates remarks to a subdued Protarchus: "Since we cannot capture the Good in a single Idea, let us take the trio of truth, beauty and proportion; and regarding this as a particularly excellent Unity, rightly hold it responsible for the make-up of the