The philosophical suggestiveness of Plato's discussion of false pleasure has been noted in some contemporary analyses of the concept of pleasure. But the interpretation of Plato's account of how it is that these pleasures are false is still in doubt. J. C. Gosling and A. Kenny have debated this issue, centering their attention on the passage extending from 35 c to 41 b. In this paper I attempt to isolate an issue on which the debate has been inconclusive and move on from there to make some further suggestions for the interpretation of this controversial passage. What I shall argue is that Plato does indeed make a mistake in his defence of the concept of false pleasure. But it will be my further claim that the mistake is not such a consequential one because the concept can be defended on other grounds. And, finally, I shall maintain that the concept is not only of considerable importance to the philosophy of mind owing to the analysis of pleasure which grounds it, but that it is of importance to moral philosophy as well and of greater importance than Plato insists upon in the Philebus.

I. Gosling's Account

Mr. Gosling's initial paper provoked the debate. In it Gosling examines a possible interpretation of the passage which he thinks does not do full justice to Plato's position. According to this inadequate interpretation, Socrates is indeed prepared to argue that a pleasure is false if it is accompanied by a false belief, but it is only in a loose and not in a strict sense that the pleasure is termed false. Strictly speaking, only


the belief can properly be termed false and not the pleasure. This account will not do, Gosling argues, for it reflects the view adopted by Protarchus (38 a) and not the position of Socrates. Furthermore, if this were the correct account, it would be very difficult to see what contribution Socrates' succeeding description of the relation between pleasures of anticipation and imagination would make to the argument. On the contrary, Gosling maintains, Socrates "is persisting in holding to some more intimate connection between pleasure and falsity" and thinks "that pleasures may be false in a more genuine way than this account [i.e. the inadequate account] recognizes" (1959, p. 46). By this last remark, I take it, Gosling intends to identify Plato's position as a defence of the view that pleasures may be false in the strict sense.

According to Gosling, Socrates constructs his account of false pleasure by developing an analogy between pleasure and belief. When Protarchus rejects the view that there can be false pleasures (at least in the strict sense), although he is quite willing to admit that a pleasure, like a belief, can be characterized as ἀλήθη or that it can ἀμφιλόκειται (37 d-e), he does so on the ground that these parallels between pleasure and belief are not yet sufficient to warrant the inference that pleasures can be like beliefs in the further respect of falsity. The analogy is thereupon strengthened by the argument about picturing. Gosling explains the role of the pictures constructed by the imagination as follows: "Anticipatory pleasures can be said to be correct or incorrect, right or mistaken, because they are in fact pictures, and pictures, when based upon beliefs, can be correct or mistaken, and so false" (1959, p. 53). It is Gosling's contention that Socrates secures Protarchus' assent to his position by demonstrating that the pleasure of a picture and the picture of a pleasure are one and the same (1959, p. 52).

References to Gosling are by year of article and page number.
Incidentally, irrespective of whether the thesis is that pleasures are pictures (or picturings) or that they merely depend on pictures, a limitation is placed on the scope of the theory. For whereas the scribe's job is described as that of recording our beliefs of what we are perceiving, the painter has the job of recalling these beliefs on a later occasion. As an account of memory, the theory makes no provision for mistakes of memory, since the truth or falsity of the paintings is directly dependent upon the truth or falsity of the scribe's records. Socrates then adds that both the scribe and the painter have a function to perform with respect to our beliefs about the future, although their respective competences are not delineated. It would follow that the theory could only cover the pleasures of memory and of anticipation. But there seems to be no very good philosophical reason for so restricting the theory.