The *Philebus* as a whole returns to inquiry on a scale familiar from the *Republic*: it represents a discussion about what makes our life good, with studies of the claims of pleasure and knowledge to play a key role. For Plato this is inextricably connected with work in metaphysics. Thus, the initial discussion of pleasure finds the progress of Socrates and Protarchus blocked by disagreement over whether there really are different kinds of pleasure. This leads Socrates to announce that they have to deal with the wonderful saying that the many are one and the one many (14c1-10). Protarchus and Socrates each produce a sensible illustration presenting a one/many problem, both of which are dismissed by Socrates as being childish and no longer worth handling. He then unveils the problem in which he is interested. And we can immediately see why this question will be an important one for Plato: its introduction of a controversy affecting entities μὴ τῶν γνωμένων τε καὶ ἀπολλυμένων ("not among the things that come into being and are destroyed," 15a1-2) indicates that the passage has to do with further developments in the theory of the objects he considers fundamental. Indeed, in light of the circumstance that the apparent theme question of the *Philebus* is not actually asked directly in the course of the dialogue (but only recalled), we might consider taking 15b as the locus of the real theme question. Unhappily, interpreters have had as little success at identifying the problem expressed in 15b as Protarchus did with 14c: it seems that there is actually a one/many problem about the One/Many Problem!

Put broadly, the problems in understanding our passage are these: it is difficult to attach any sense to the question that appears to be posed in lines 15b2-4, and the straightforward bits, 15b1-2 and 15b4-8, fail to satisfy our expectation that this speech connects with the concerns of the surrounding discussion. (14c7 indicates that the problem has come up during the preliminary discussion of

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1 *Philebus* 15b has become a favorite *topos* in the secondary literature. For extensive bibliography and discussion of this literature see Hahn, Dancy, Löhr.

2 The apparent theme question has to do with the good. For instability when recalling answers to it, compare 11b4-c3, 13a7-8, 13b7, 13e4-7 and 19c4-d6 (in both of which the question is recalled too, but unstably), 60a7-b5; see also analysis of positions at 11d4-6.

For the formal presentation usual in setting a theme question compare *Gorgias* opening to 449d, *Protagoras* opening to 318d, *Republic* opening to 331e, *Theaetetus* opening to 146c.

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pleasure and knowledge, 16a6-c3 shows that it is addressed by the Promethean Method, and 18e8-19b4 suggests that investigation in accordance with that method answers the question how a subject is one and many by studying the genus and its species.)

The passage runs as follows.3

ΣΩ. Πρώτον μὲν εἶ τινας διὰ τοιαῦτας εἶναι μονάδας 15b1
ὑπολαμβάνειν ἀληθῶς οὐκείς· εἶτα πῶς ἀν ταῦτα, μίαν
ἐκατέρτευ οὐκείς· ἦν τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ μήτε γένευν μήτε διενεργοῦν
προοδευκυμένην, ἡμεῖς εἶναι βεβαιώσαται μίαν ταυτήν; μετὰ
δὲ τούτων ἔν τοῖς γεγογμένων ἀσ καὶ ἀπειρώς ἐτειχεπι-
ομένην καὶ πολλαὶ γεγογμέναι δεδομέναι, ἐδ’ ἤλθεν αὐτὴν αὐτὴν
χαρὰς, δ’ ἐτ’ ἀπὸ τῶν δύνασταις φανεῖν; ἄν ταυτά καὶ
ἔν ἄμα ἐν ἐνὶ τε καὶ πολλοῖς γεγογμέναι.

In approaching this text, two basic strategies are open to us. One is to see it as posing two problems only.4 The first (fairly uncontroversially) is whether one ought to suppose that such monads (as Man, Ox, The Beautiful, and The Good) really are. This leaves all the rest of the speech to pose the second problem, which on this view is “the” One/Many Problem. Mainstream proponents of this strategy regard the problem as echoing one posed in the first part of the *Parmenides* (130e4-131c11).5 There a dilemma arose from the question whether participants get the whole or a part of a form in which they participate: if the whole form is of each of several participants that do not coincide with each other, then the form will be literally beside itself; while if we seek to assign each participant only a proper part of the form we seem to threaten the form’s unity by making it into parts.

Since 15b4-8 indeed repeats this dilemma, the type of interpretation under consideration sees all the key elements of 15b as being in its second half. Lines 1-2 pose an issue which can hardly be an open question at this time of day, while lines 2-4 are muddling around without really contributing anything at all. To have to admit the uselessness of several lines is always undesirable, and the important role of 15b means that for b2-4 to be wasted lines within it would be miscomposition of a type highly uncharacteristic of Plato. Moreover, “the” One/Many Problem described in 15b4-8, concerning as it does difficulties arising from the relations between sensibles and forms, has nothing to do with the

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3 Using the OCT since the interpretation that I will develop is consonant with Burnet’s (conservative) editorial decisions. For obvious reasons, I postpone translation.

4 This is the approach that is taken, in one form or another, by Hackforth, Striker, Gosling, and D. Frede; it involves dropping the question mark Burnet prints in 15b4.

5 For the mainstream view see Hackforth (p. 20), D. Frede (pp. xxi-xxii, 6-7). Striker (pp. 11-17) points out a difference between the *Parmenides* presentation and that of the *Philebus*: only the *Parmenides* stresses participation. Gosling (pp. 143-147) thinks the context of the *Philebus* problem does enough to free us from seeing the basic issue as the one in the *Parmenides*.