

The Generation of Desire: Plato's *Philebus* and *Timaeus*

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At *Philebus* 35a6–9 Socrates asks whether there is a way in which a new-born baby who is emptied for the first time could be in touch (ἐφάπτοτο) with filling with food or drink, either through sensation or memory. Many scholars have thought that there is not, taking the passage as suggesting that when one is emptied for the first time, one does not have desire for filling. And Plato thinks, they maintain, that new-born babies are usually given food or drink, and that only after that first experience of filling do they come to have a desire for it because of its memory. However, this interpretation is inconsistent with Plato's other passages (*Phaedrus* 237d6–9; *Laws* 782d10–e6), where all living things are said to be furnished with *innate* desire for bodily pleasure. In this paper I examine the mechanism of the generation of this innate desire described in the *Timaeus*. The key passage is 42a3–b1, where Timaeus claims that when human souls are implanted in bodies, 'single innate perception' necessarily arises from violent affections (βίαια παθήματα). The perception in question is often taken as meaning perception in general which the soul receives from a collision with external objects, or such a capacity to perceive them. I argue, in contrast, that 'violent affections' do not refer to those *powerful* affections which penetrate the body and cause the soul to see, hear and so on, but those which specifically produce pleasure and pain, and that human beings are born with desire for filling because of their embryonic exposure to the body's 'violent' streams of nutrition. On the basis of this understanding, in conclusion, I attempt to show a different reading of the argument on desire at *Philebus* 34c10–35d7.