THE DYSCHEREIS OF THE MAGNA MORALIA

i. Introduction

The identity of the ‘enemies of Philebus’ at Philebus 44b-51a, known as the dyschereis thanks to the prominence of this adjective and of some striking related terminology,¹ has long been a matter of controversy. If we aim only to understand Plato himself, then it is arguable that the question does not require settling. But it is important for those wishing to understand some of the fragmentary thinkers (most notably Speusippus and Heraclides Ponticus),² with whom the dyschereis could plausibly be identified. Those who deal with these authors must decide whether Plato’s passage may be used as supplementary evidence for their moral

¹ Terms first occur as a cluster at 44c6, d2, d8, and e4, and Plato is conscious that he has invented a name by using this adjective (46a5). But the meaning of the name is not easily determined, as is well illustrated by M. Schofield, ‘Who were οἱ δυσχερεῖς in Plato Philebus 44A ff?’, MH 28 (1971), 2-20, who concludes that Plato is challenging us to think carefully about what he is doing here. An adjective that would normally seem to have meant by this time ‘problematic’ or ‘objectionable’, seems to be applied in the active sense to those given to raising problems or objections. It should not be forgotten, though, that before one meets the adjective one encounters phrases that prepare its way and flesh out its meaning, such as δυσχερεῖς φύσεως οὐκ ἄγεννος (44c6).

² The plausibility of seeing the passage as an oblique reference to the views of Speusippus, the popular thesis most eloquently defended by Schofield (above, n.1), is defended against L. Tarán, Speusippus of Athens (Leiden 1981), 78-85, by John Dillon, ‘Speusippe et le plaisir’, in M. Dixsaut, F. Teisserenc (eds), La Fêlure du Plaisir, Paris 1999, 83-98; cf. id. The Heirs of Plato (Oxford 2003), 67-76. K. Bringmann, ‘Platons Philebos und Herakleides Ponticus’ Dialog περὶ ἡδονῆς’, Hermes 100 (1972), 523-30, argues rather for Heraclides, but agrees on the Academy’s relevance to the Philebus (526). Nor would it undermine the argument for Speusippus, the first Academic that Heraclides attached himself to (DL 5.86 = fr. 3 Wehrli). However, it is strange to link the dyschereis with a dialogue in comic mode (fr. 52) that was a favourite of Athenaeus (frs 55-69, 71); for the weaknesses of Bringmann’s case see A. Brancacci, ‘Le περὶ ἡδονῆς d’Héraclide du Pont (fr. 55 Wehrli), in Dixsaut and Teisserenc (above), 99-125.