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Opinion, Knowledge, and Understanding in Plato's Meno and Republic

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OPINION, KNOWLEDGE, AND UNDERSTANDING IN
PLATO'S *MENO* AND *REPUBLIC*

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Abstract

In this dissertation I examine the conceptions of opinion (*doxa*), knowledge (*gnôsis*), and understanding (*epistêmê*) that are presented by the character Socrates in Plato's *Meno* and *Republic*. A central claim I make, and one that sets my interpretation apart from virtually all others on offer, is that there is, in fact, a distinction between knowledge and understanding to be found in those dialogues. I argue that Socrates conceives of knowledge *as such* as the optimal epistemic state a person can be in with respect to any given subject matter, where that can be a particular state of affairs (e.g. Achilles' being brave), a general phenomenon (e.g. global warming), or an entire domain (e.g. geometry). Socrates thinks that such knowledge comes in two types: first, there is understanding, which is the knowledge that can be had specifically of abstract theoretical matters (e.g. mathematics and the realm of Forms), and only of them; then there is knowledge of the perceptible world, which comes, for Socrates, in the form of the expert opinions of philosophers, based on Forms, about how things stand in that world. I argue that once we recognize that Socrates makes this distinction, we can better appreciate the overall merits of his philosophical view and defend it from some long-standing objections.

Chapter 1 is an introduction. In Chapter 2 I reconstruct the conception of *epistêmê* presented in the *Meno*. I argue that *epistêmê*, as Socrates conceives of it, more closely approximates understanding than knowledge. In Chapter 3 I argue against attributing three views to Socrates in the *Meno* that are often attributed to him in the literature and that threaten the consistency between the *Meno* and *Republic*. In Chapter 4 I argue for two constraints on any satisfactory interpretation of the *Republic*'s epistemology: first, that philosophers must come out as epistemic authorities, relative to non-philosophers, concerning matters in the perceptible world; second, that Socrates rules out understanding of perceptible objects. In Chapter 5 I examine the famous argument at the end of *Republic* 5 that is at the center of the controversies surrounding the *Republic*'s epistemology. I argue that close reading of that argument shows that Socrates distinguishes knowledge from understanding and that, while he does not take a stand there on the question whether there can be understanding of the perceptible world, he gives us the resources to see why he ultimately concludes that there cannot. In Chapter 6 I present my overall interpretation of Socrates' epistemology, arguing that it provides a philosophically interesting and, in many ways, attractive picture.

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My fellow graduate students have been excellent colleagues and I count many of them as great friends. For both helping me develop many of the ideas presented in this dissertation, and for making life much more enjoyable in general, I would especially like to thank Adam Crager, Nate Gadd, Andrew Huddleston, Errol Lord, Barry Maguire, Joe Rachiele, Jack Spencer, and Jack Woods.

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I had originally intended to write a dissertation on Aristotle's distinction between opinion and understanding. To provide the relevant background, I studied Plato's treatment of the issue for my general examination. Over the course of many discussions with Alexander Nehamas, my examination chair, I became enthralled with what Plato had to say and came to think that I might have something interesting to say about it. I owe Alexander a great debt for his investment in and encouragement of this project from its earliest stages.

Hendrik Lorenz was an excellent adviser and teacher. He has shown me the heights that disciplined and detailed attention to texts combined with philosophical creativity can reach. One of the things I will miss most about Princeton is knocking on his office door unannounced, hearing him cheerfully respond, "come in," and then engaging in an hours-long discussion of whatever newest idea had struck me. Those ideas, many of which have found their way into this work, were always the better for it.

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WS
Princeton
June, 2013

to my mom and dad,
for all their love and support

Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Opinion, Knowledge, and Understanding	1
1.2 Virtue and Recollection	5
1.3 Names, Dialogues, and Methodology	6
1.4 Chapter Summaries	6
2 <i>Epistêmê</i> in the <i>Meno</i>	9
2.1 Preliminaries	10
2.2 The Distinction Between True <i>Doxa</i> and <i>Epistêmê</i>	12
2.2.1 The Exchange Between Socrates and Meno's Slave	14
2.3 Socrates' Conception of <i>Epistêmê</i>	21
2.4 What Is <i>Epistêmê</i> ?	26
2.5 The Merits of Socrates' Account	29
2.6 <i>Epistêmê</i> in the <i>Republic</i>	31
2.7 A Final Objection and Reply	33
2.8 Philological Considerations	35
3 The Relationship Between <i>Doxa</i> and <i>Epistêmê</i> in the <i>Meno</i>	36
3.1 Introduction	36
3.2 Justification?	37
3.3 Is <i>Doxa</i> a Component of <i>Epistêmê</i> ?	41
3.4 The Objects of <i>Doxa</i> and <i>Epistêmê</i>	47
3.4.1 The Way to Larissa	47
3.4.2 Socrates and Meno's Slave	50
4 Introduction to the <i>Republic</i>'s Epistemology	55
4.1 Introduction	55
4.2 Preliminaries: The Two-Worlds Ontology	57
4.3 First Constraint: Philosophers as Epistemic Authorities	59
4.4 Second Constraint: No Understanding of Perceptible Objects	62
4.5 <i>Doxa</i> as Belief	66
4.6 <i>Doxa</i> as Opinion	68
4.7 Whither Belief?	72

4.7.1	<i>Hupolêpsis</i> as Belief	73
4.8	Brief Recap and Prospectus	75
5	The Argument of <i>Republic</i> 5	76
5.1	Introduction	76
5.2	Part 1: Philosophers Should Rule! But, Who Are They? (472a1-475c8) . . .	77
5.3	Part 2: Distinguishing Philosophers from the Lovers of Sights and Sounds (475d1-476d6)	80
5.3.1	The Beautiful Things: Particulars, Universals, or Both?	86
5.4	Part 3: The Nature of Knowledge, Opinion, and Ignorance (476d7-480a13) .	87
5.4.1	That Which Is, That Which is Not, That Which Both Is And Is Not .	88
5.4.2	Bridge on the Verb “ <i>Einaí</i> ”	89
5.4.3	Cognitive States vs. Cognitive Powers	94
5.4.4	Distinguishing Knowledge From Ignorance (476e4-477b2)	97
5.4.4.1	Distinguishing Knowledge From Understanding	101
5.4.5	Identifying Opinion as the “In-Between” Power (477b4-478d4) . . .	103
5.4.5.1	Distinguishing Opinion from Understanding (477b4- 478b4)	103
5.4.5.2	Distinguishing Opinion from Ignorance (478b5-478c9) .	107
5.4.5.3	Is Ignorance a Power?	108
5.4.5.4	Placing Opinion Between Understanding and Ignorance (478c10-478d4)	111
5.4.6	Identifying the Things that “Both Are And Are Not” (478e1-479c5) .	112
5.4.6.1	Participation	113
5.4.7	The Many Beautiful Things are the “In-Between” Things (479c6-d1) .	120
5.4.8	The Final Push (479d3-480a13)	121
5.5	The Range of Forms	124
5.6	Recap of the Book 5 Argument	129
6	Socrates’ Epistemology	132
6.1	Introduction	132
6.2	No Understanding Concerning Perceptible Objects	132
6.2.1	Understanding on an Alternative Metaphysics?	140
6.3	No Opinions Concerning Intelligible Objects	141
6.3.1	Philosophical Considerations	141
6.3.2	Textual Considerations	145
6.4	Resolving The Tension Between The Epistemology and the Politics	150
6.4.1	Authority in Matters of Opinion	152
6.5	<i>A Priori</i> Knowledge Vs. <i>A Posteriori</i> Knowledge	156
6.6	Socrates’ Conception of Knowledge	157

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Opinion, Knowledge, and Understanding

IN the course of laying out his utopian vision in the *Republic*, Plato's character Socrates boldly claims, "until philosophers rule as kings in their cities, cities will have no rest from evils, nor, I think, will the human race" (adapted from 473c11-d6).¹ This claim was no less controversial in Plato's time than it is in ours. Indeed, one of Socrates' interlocutors warns him that if people were to hear it, they would attack him mercilessly. Despite this warning, Socrates spends considerable time defending the claim, arguing that philosophers are best suited to rule because only they possess knowledge (*gnôsis*) and understanding (*epistêmê*) and are not limited to mere opinion (*doxa*) like the rest of the world.

In that discussion Socrates appears to distinguish understanding from opinion according to the objects they can take: whereas understanding can only be had of abstract theoretical matters, such as the objects of mathematics and natures or essences (which Socrates calls "Forms" (*eidê*)), opinion can only be had of the objects in the mundane perceptible world. Interpreters often refer to such a view as a "Two-Worlds" epistemology: corresponding to the two ontological "worlds" of perceptible objects and intelligible objects are two distinct cognitive relations, opinion and understanding, each of which is borne to the objects in only one ontological world.²

Although interpreting Socrates as advancing a Two-Worlds epistemology has been dominant in the tradition, it has recently been rejected for a host of reasons, two of which deserve special mention. First, philosophers often claim that distinguishing opinion from understanding on the basis of their objects would betray horrendous philosophical sense. It is

¹ Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. I have benefitted greatly, however, from consulting Grube's translation of the *Meno* and Reeve's and Shorey's translations of the *Republic*.

² G. Fine [1978, 121] popularized the use of the phrase "Two-Worlds" to describe this kind of epistemology. Crombie [1963 (Vol. 2), cf. 63-64] speaks of different "spheres of competence" for δόξα and ἐπιστήμη.

thought to be obvious, for example, that I can both have the opinion that *the liquid in the pot is boiling* and understand why it is (say because it is water and its current temperature is in excess of 212 °F (at sea level)). Or, if it sounds odd to say that one person both has the opinion that a certain fact obtains and also understands why it obtains, it certainly seems possible that I can first have the opinion and then come to have the understanding. Since the character Socrates is clearly no philosophical fool, it is often thought that we should only attribute such a bad view to him as a move of last resort. Second, it is often argued that, were Socrates to accept such an epistemology, he would undermine the very political aim that the distinction between opinion and understanding is introduced to achieve. Since ruling is a matter of ruling a particular city, philosophers, in their capacity as rulers, will have to make all sorts of judgments concerning the perceptible world. They must judge, for example, whether it is just to award John a settlement in this court case, whether Jill has demonstrated sufficient courage to be awarded a medal, whether Jane's new play should be presented at the festival or banned, and so on. Not only will philosophers have to make such judgments, their judgments must somehow be authoritative—otherwise, why would vesting political power in their hands have any greater hope of ridding us from evils than the status quo? On the Two-Worlds schema, however, these judgments about the mundane world fall within the purview of opinion. Given this apparent irrelevance of understanding to the business of ruling, then, how can Socrates think it is the possession of understanding that makes philosophers best suited to rule?

The title of this dissertation—*Opinion, Knowledge, and Understanding in Plato's Meno and Republic*—already marks a key difference between my interpretation and those on offer in the literature. Virtually all interpreters who approach the *Republic* take “knowledge” (*gnôsis*) and “understanding” (*epistêmê*) to be mere terminological variants that Socrates uses to denote the cognitive state that he takes to be the aim of philosophical inquiry. On the interpretation I advance, however, although Socrates conceives of knowledge and understanding as closely related, he nevertheless distinguishes between them.

To have knowledge of something, according to Socrates, is to be an epistemic authority concerning it. To be an epistemic authority about something is, in turn, to be in the optimal epistemic position concerning it—to be a person who can have no intellectual betters but, at most, intellectual peers. One way Socrates cashes this out is according to the range of questions a person can answer—the more questions he or she can answer correctly concerning some subject, the more legitimate is his or her claim to know it.³ Thus, according to Socrates, to have knowledge about some subject matter—whether it be a particular state of affairs

³ Thus, we find the character Socrates, in the *Meno* and elsewhere, subjecting alleged experts to a barrage of questions designed to test whether they actually have knowledge.

(e.g. Achilles' being brave), a general phenomenon (e.g. inflation or global warming), or an entire domain (e.g. medicine or geometry)—is to be an epistemic authority about it, to be able to answer correctly all questions concerning it.⁴

Socrates thinks that such knowledge comes in two main types. On the one hand there is understanding, which is the knowledge that can be had specifically of abstract theoretical matters (e.g. mathematics and the realm of Forms), and only of them. These abstract theoretical matters, for Socrates, form domains structured in terms of first principles and provable theorems. To understand, then, is to be an epistemic authority about some fact that can be either proven from first principles or is itself a first principle, and understanding consists precisely in a synoptic grasp of how that fact fits into the domain to which it belongs. Then there is the knowledge that can be had of matters in the perceptible world, about which Socrates' metaphysics precludes the possibility of proof from first principles. This type of knowledge consists in the expert opinions of philosophers about how things stand in the perceptible world. And, Socrates takes philosophical opinion to be expert precisely because it is informed by the philosopher's understanding of Forms. So, for example, a philosopher's opinion that *it is just to award Jack the wagon in this legal case* is expert because it is informed by her understanding of the nature of justice, her opinion that *this play should be performed because it is beautiful* is expert because it is informed by her understanding of the nature of beauty, and so on.

A key upshot of my interpretation, then, is that one of the the central questions that has vexed interpreters of the *Republic's* epistemology, namely “Does Socrates allow for knowledge about perceptibles and belief about Forms?,” is misguided. The mistake is not simply that *epistêmê* more closely approximates understanding than knowledge and *doxa* more closely approximates opinion than belief (as I will argue in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively). Rather, the problem is that taking this as a guiding interpretative question makes it difficult to be sensitive to the fine-grainedness of Socrates' conceptual scheme. Socrates does not simply contrast mere opinion (or mere belief) with one cognitive achievement, which he interchangeably calls “knowledge” or “understanding.” Rather, he contrasts mere opinion with two distinct cognitive achievements: understanding and expert philosophical opinion, both of which he counts as types of knowledge. So, as far as the question whether Socrates accepts a Two-Worlds epistemology goes, my answer is mixed: if the question concerns opinion and understanding, I answer “Yes”; if the question concerns opinion and knowledge, I answer “No.”

⁴ To forestall the worry that this is too demanding a conception of knowledge, note that this is what Socrates takes the nature, or ideal, of knowledge to be. As we will see in Chapter 5, on Socrates' metaphysics particular people merit a given title (e.g. “knower”) depending upon how closely they approximate the corresponding ideal.

As I will show over the course of this dissertation, recognizing that Socrates distinguishes knowledge from understanding allows us to better appreciate the philosophical merits of his epistemology. For now, however, I merely wish to note some of the chief benefits. First, we can see that Socrates makes a distinction that is philosophically important. We should want to distinguish, for example, an expert mathematician's grasp of some mathematical fact from that of a talented high school student, or the grasp I have of the grammaticality of a sentence from that of Noam Chomsky. If all we avail ourselves of is the concept of knowledge, we may end up either denying knowledge to people who have it, or failing adequately to distinguish exceptional cognitive achievements from the more humdrum. Second, once we recognize that *epistêmê* more closely approximates understanding than knowledge, we can see that his account of it is more satisfactory than has traditionally been allowed. I am, of course, not the first interpreter to argue that *epistêmê* more closely approximates understanding than knowledge. Indeed, in the last quarter of the twentieth century this thesis was advanced by many philosophers.⁵ This interpretation, however, has stalled somewhat and has certainly not achieved widespread acceptance.⁶ I think that this is in part attributable to the fact that the epistemological concept of understanding has only recently received focused and sustained attention by the broader philosophical community.⁷ In fact, in Chapter 2 I appeal to recent work on the nature and value of understanding to support my case that Socrates' account of *epistêmê* is better taken as an account of understanding than an account of knowledge. Third, in bare outline, on my interpretation a Two-Worlds epistemology is the view that an important difference exists between the cognitive relation people can bear to facts that can be proven from first principles and facts that cannot be so proven. Regardless of the exact place Socrates draws the line, this proposal should not be disregarded lightly. I see no pre-theoretical reason, for example, to think that I can bear the same cognitive relation to facts about mathematics as I can to facts about where the best Thai food in New York City is found.⁸ Perhaps the difference between the cognitive relations I can bear to these two kinds of facts is so stark that they do not have the same internal structure. At the very least, it is worth considering whether the focus solely on a single cognitive achievement (e.g. knowledge) has led philosophers to ignore important distinctions.

⁵ See, for example, Moravcsik [1979], Burnyeat [1980 and 1987], Annas [1981], Moline [1981], Nehamas [1985], and Benson [2000].

⁶ See, for example, the recent critiques by G. Fine [2004, 67-71] and Scott [2006, 184-85].

⁷ See, for example, the work of Zagzebski [1996, 2001], Kvanvig [2003, 2009], Riggs [2003], Elgin [2006, 2007], Grimm [2010, 2012], Pritchard [2009], Greco [Forthcoming], and Strevens [Forthcoming].

⁸ The fact that Socrates ultimately draws the line between intelligible matters and perceptible matters may suggest that his distinction between *ἐπιστήμη* and expert philosophical *δόξα* amounts to the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. I argue against this assimilation in Chapter 6 (p. 157).

Lastly, and internally to the *Republic*, my interpretation resolves the alleged tension between Socrates' epistemology and his politics. If Socrates did not distinguish knowledge from understanding, it would seem that he must allow philosophers to make the same cognitive achievement concerning the perceptible world as they do concerning mathematics and Forms. However, once we recognize the distinction, we see that Socrates can maintain that there is a cognitive relation philosophers bear to intelligible objects alone (i.e. understanding), while still thinking that philosophers can be authorities concerning the perceptible world (i.e. by having knowledge of it). Admittedly, once we recognize Socrates' distinction between knowledge and understanding, this solution seems obvious and it may be hard to see why other interpreters would reject it. This is often the case, however, when someone argues that previously unnoticed conceptual resources are available: clear-cut solutions to previously intractable seeming problems can readily present themselves.

In the remainder of this introduction I make a few broadly methodological points and then summarize the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Virtue and Recollection

The focus of this dissertation is on the character Socrates' conception of the nature of opinion, knowledge, and understanding as he presents it in the *Meno* and *Republic*. I will discuss other issues that are certainly central to Socrates' epistemology and his philosophy as a whole, but only insofar as they shed light on how he conceives of these three cognitive states. Two issues deserve explicit mention. First, in many Platonic dialogues Socrates and other characters inquire into the nature of virtue (*aretê*), which is conceived of, quite generally, as the characteristic or set of characteristics that dispose a person to flourish as a human being. In the *Meno*, Socrates and Meno seriously entertain the thesis that virtue is to be identified with *epistêmê*.⁹ In this dissertation, then, I discuss virtue, but only insofar as its possible identification with *epistêmê* sheds light on Socrates' conception of the latter.

Second, in the *Meno* the character Socrates famously proposes that “what we call learning (*mathêsis*) is, in fact, recollection (*anamnêsis*)” (81e4).¹⁰ Later in the *Meno* we learn that recollection is the process through which people work out the explanation of some fact, which is necessary for acquiring *epistêmê* (98a3-5). Clearly, then, the nature of recollection is important to Socrates' overall epistemology. However, since Socrates thinks that recollection

⁹ Other dialogues in which characters explore the thesis that virtue is ἐπιστήμη, or that a virtue is a kind of ἐπιστήμη, include *Protagoras*, *Laches*, and *Charmides*.

¹⁰ The thesis that learning is recollection is explored extensively in the *Phaedo* (cf. 72-77) and mentioned in the *Phaedrus* (cf. 249c). Although recollection is not explicitly discussed in the *Republic*, Socrates alludes to it when he claims, “Education is not what some people boastfully declare it to be. They presumably say they can put ἐπιστήμη into souls that lack it, as if they could put sight into blind eyes” (518b8-c2).

is the process whereby people *acquire epistêmê*, I am interested in it only insofar as the way in which a cognitive state is acquired is relevant to determining the nature of that state.

1.3 Names, Dialogues, and Methodology

As can already be seen from this introduction, although the name “Plato” seldom appears in this dissertation, the name “Socrates” occurs on almost every page. I use this latter name, however, not to refer to the historical figure but to the character Socrates. Even more specifically, the name refers to the character Socrates in only the *Meno* and *Republic*. When I do appeal to other Platonic works, even those in which a character with the name “Socrates” makes an appearance, I take pains to indicate that I do not necessarily think the views presented by that character are the same as those presented by the character Socrates in the two dialogues on which I focus. As the reader will also quickly notice, in the body of the text I focus almost exclusively on the *Meno* and *Republic*. Almost all discussion of other Platonic works is relegated to footnotes.

These two points are related and reflect my general methodological approach to Plato’s works and, in particular, how we should take what is presented there to relate to the views of the historical Plato. While I do think that the question “What did Plato (the person) believe?” is interesting, I find it difficult to answer. A more tractable question, but by no means an easy one, is to ask, “What views are presented by character *X* in dialogue *Y*?” Answering this latter kind of question requires a line-by-line reconstruction of the train of thought of a single dialogue. Once this task has been completed for multiple dialogues, we can ask questions concerning the relation between the views presented in them, such as, “Which dialogues present views on the same topic?” and “Which dialogues present refinements, developments, or even repudiations of the views presented elsewhere?” Even at this point, however, we are a long way from determining what Plato believed. In this dissertation I present the results of this task concerning central epistemological elements of the views presented by the character Socrates in two dialogues: the *Meno* and *Republic*. Any references to other Platonic works are merely to note points of contact and not to support a particular understanding of a passage or issue in the *Meno* or *Republic*.

1.4 Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 2 I reconstruct the conception of *epistêmê* Socrates presents in the *Meno*, focusing on his claim that people acquire *epistêmê* of a fact by working out its explanation. By examining the whole dialogue, and by situating it in its broader intellectual environment, I

show that working out the explanation of some fact is, for Socrates, coming to see how it is grounded in facts about the natures of the fundamental entities of the domain to which it belongs. So, for Socrates, to have *epistêmê* of something—for example, a geometrical theorem—is to grasp how the truth of that theorem is grounded in facts about the nature of the fundamental entities of geometry. I then argue that *epistêmê*, as Socrates conceives of it, more closely approximates understanding than knowledge, and that Socrates provides key insights into the nature of the former.

In Chapter 3 I trace the conceptual relationship between *doxa* and *epistêmê* in the *Meno*. In so doing, I argue against attributing three claims to Socrates that are often attributed to him in the literature. First, I argue that appealing to a notion of justification cannot help illuminate Socrates' conception of *epistêmê*. More specifically, I argue that we should not take Socrates to conceive of working out a fact's explanation as bringing about *epistêmê* of that fact by conferring a justification on a relevant *doxa*. Second, I argue that Plato does not commit himself to the view that *epistêmê* has any *doxa* as a component. Lastly, I argue that Socrates does not commit himself to the view that one and the same thing can be the object of both *doxa* and *epistêmê*. Rejecting these last two claims is particularly important for securing consistency between the *Meno* and *Republic*.

In Chapter 4 I transition to the *Republic*. After laying out the contours of my overall interpretation I argue for two constraints on any satisfactory interpretation of the *Republic*'s epistemology. First, I argue that, given Socrates' political aims, philosophers must come out as epistemic authorities, relative to non-philosophers, concerning matters in the perceptible world. Second, I argue that an overlooked passage in Book 7 clearly shows that Socrates thinks it is impossible to have understanding of perceptible objects. These two constraints together entail that any satisfactory account of the *Republic* must render philosophers epistemic authorities concerning the perceptible world *without* being able to have understanding of it. After laying out these constraints I consider why many interpreters have opposed any interpretation on which *doxa* and *epistêmê* are distinguished according to their objects. I argue that the hesitation largely stems from thinking of *doxa* as approximating the notion of belief. I argue that taking *doxa* to approximate opinion does a much better job of motivating the idea that it can be distinguished from *epistêmê* according to its objects since it allows us to avail ourselves of the common way of distinguishing “matters of opinion” from “matters of fact.” A consequence of this move seems to be that Socrates does not invoke the notion of belief *as such* in his epistemological theorizing. I briefly consider how this affects our understanding of the history of epistemology in the period surrounding and immediately following Plato's writings.

In Chapter 5 I examine the infamous and difficult argument at the end of *Republic* 5, which is at the center of the controversies surrounding the *Republic*'s epistemology. This chapter is markedly different from, and longer than, the others, since it contains a more or less line-by-line treatment of Socrates' discussion. Socrates' discussion begins in response to Glaucon's question whether the ideal city can be realized on earth or is merely a theoretical construct. In response, Socrates claims that the ideal city *cannot* be realized on earth, because nothing in the perceptible world can perfectly exemplify any ideal. However, he maintains that a city that closely approximates the ideal city can be realized by vesting political power in the hands of philosophers. Since that claim is so controversial, Socrates endeavors, in the rest of Book 5, to distinguish philosophers from non-philosophers so that he can show (in Books 6 and 7) that the former are best suited to rule. As I understand the Book 5 discussion, Socrates commits himself to the claim that only philosophers can achieve knowledge of the perceptible world because only they have cognitive access to the natures of things. However, I argue that Socrates distinguishes knowledge from understanding and, in Book 5, leaves open the question whether philosophers (or anyone) can have understanding of the perceptible world.

In Chapter 6 I present my overall interpretation of Socrates' epistemology. I argue that his conception of understanding, in combination with his metaphysical view of perceptible objects, naturally leads him to conclude that there can be no understanding of perceptible objects. However, despite claiming that perceptible objects cannot be understood, I argue that Socrates allows that philosophers can have knowledge of them because philosophers can bring their understanding to bear in their cognitive interaction with perceptible objects. This allows us to resolve the alleged tension between Socrates' epistemology and his politics. Just as we take a doctor's medical opinion to be expert and, thus, authoritative in particular matters of health, the opinions of philosophers, precisely because such opinions are informed by their understanding, are expert and, thus, have the requisite authority. This explains why Socrates is willing to say that philosophers *know* certain things about perceptible objects that non-philosophers necessarily do not know, even though he thinks that no one can have understanding of them. My controlling aim in this dissertation is to show that Socrates' distinction between modes of cognitive achievement provides a compelling epistemological picture that deserves serious consideration.

Chapter 2

Epistêmê in the *Meno*

AT the end of the *Meno*, the character Socrates famously claims that “[true *doxai*] are not worth much until one gets them bound down by a working out of the explanation....When they have been bound down, first they become *epistêmai* and thence stable things” (98a3-8). Many interpreters cite this as the first attempt in Western Philosophy to analyze knowledge as justified true belief.¹ Such an interpretation makes four key claims: first, that *epistêmê* is knowledge; second, that working out the explanation (*aitias logismos*) bridges the gap between true *doxa* and *epistêmê* by conferring a certain sort of justification on a *doxa*; third, that *doxa* is a component of *epistêmê*; fourth, that *doxa* is belief.

I have serious doubts about each of these claims. In this chapter I reject the first, in the next chapter I reject the second and third, and in Chapter 4 I reject the fourth. Thus, by the end of Chapter 4 I will have rejected the *K*, the *J*, and the *B* of the traditional interpretation of Socrates’ discussion of *epistêmê*. Not to be left out, in Chapter 5 I argue that, while Socrates does conceive of *epistêmê* as being connected, in some way, to truth, he has a somewhat odd conception of the *T*.

The resources needed to achieve these aims come from my interpretation of *epistêmê* on which it is a philosophically rich and important concept, albeit one that should be distinguished from knowledge. To reconstruct this concept, I examine Socrates’ claim that acquiring *epistêmê* of some fact requires working out the explanation of why that fact obtains. By examining the whole dialogue, and by situating the dialogue in its broader intellectual environment, I show that the nature of this requirement can be articulated quite specifically and precisely. According to the position I develop, working out the explanation of some fact is coming to see how it is grounded in facts about the nature of the fundamental entities of

¹ See G. Fine [2004], Scott [2006, 184-185], and Silverman [2012, §10] for recent defenses of this view. This interpretation is, in fact, widespread and has quite a tradition behind it: Armstrong [1973, 137] cites this passage as containing the first such attempt in Western Philosophy and even Gettier [1963, 121] suggests this interpretation in his famous paper ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’

the domain to which it belongs. So, for Socrates, to have *epistêmê* of something—for example, a geometrical theorem—is to grasp how the truth of that theorem is grounded in facts about the nature of the fundamental entities of geometry.

After reconstructing Socrates' conception of *epistêmê* I argue that it more closely approximates our modern concept of understanding than it does our concept of knowledge.² Moreover, I argue that Socrates' account of understanding is quite plausible. I do not go so far as to claim that it is the *correct* account of understanding, but it is one that any philosopher interested in understanding should take seriously. I also argue that taking *epistêmê* to be understanding, rather than knowledge, allows us to better see why Socrates might have thought that virtue is *epistêmê*.

Before I begin I wish to comment on some terminology I employ in this chapter. First, in order not to prejudge whether *epistêmê* more closely approximates knowledge or understanding, I leave “*epistêmê*” transliterated and use the verb “to apprehend” in a stipulated sense to denote the cognitive relation that someone with *epistêmê* of some fact bears to that fact. Thus, if I say, “S apprehends *p*,” this means that S has *epistêmê* of *p*.³ Second, I also leave “*doxa*” transliterated. For the purposes of this chapter, the reader won't go too far wrong in thinking of *doxa* as belief, but in Chapter 4 I reject this assimilation. In this chapter my main claims are (a) that to apprehend is not to know but to understand and (b) that Socrates' account offers key insights into the nature of understanding.

2.1 Preliminaries

As with many passages of Plato, we cannot simply consider Socrates' discussion of the difference between true *doxa* and *epistêmê* in isolation. The argumentative structure of the dialogue as a whole provides clues as to how we must understand it.

Meno poses the central question of the dialogue in its very first lines. He asks, “Can you tell me, Socrates, is virtue teachable? Or, is it not teachable, but reached by practice....or in some other way?” (70a1-4).⁴ Socrates, however, presents himself as being unable to answer Meno's question directly because he does not apprehend what virtue is. According to Socrates, apprehending what something is like (*hopoion estin*)—teachable, for example—is

² In doing so I develop an interpretation that has emerged in the last few decades (see, among others, Moravcsik [1979], Burnyeat [1980 and 1987], Annas [1981], Moline [1981], Nehamas [1985], and Benson [2000]).

³ Since it is unclear whether Socrates distinguishes between facts, propositions, states of affairs, and the like, I hope to avoid weighty metaphysical commitments on these matters. I will use the terms “facts,” “true propositions,” and “states of affairs which obtain” interchangeably. Nothing turns on this.

⁴ See Bluck [1961, 1-2], Nehamas [1985, 2-4], and Scott [2006, 14-18] for discussion of the ancient Greek background to the question whether virtue is teachable. For a discussion of education in ancient Athens (and, so, the kind of teaching that we can presume Meno takes to be at issue), see Marrou [1948].

epistemically posterior to apprehending what it is (*ti estin*) (71b3-4).⁵ In other words, Socrates claims that someone cannot apprehend whether *X* is *F* without apprehending what *X* is.⁶ As we learn from Socrates' discussion, apprehending what *X* is is a matter of apprehending the nature of *X*. This becomes clear later when he specifies that apprehending what *X* is requires that one apprehend the definition of *X* (72c6-d1).⁷ Socrates, then, says that he cannot apprehend whether virtue is teachable because he does not apprehend the nature of virtue. Thus, in the ensuing discussion Socrates and Meno attempt to determine the nature of virtue, by searching for its definition, in the hope of being able to answer Meno's original question.

Epistêmê becomes a topic of conversation because it seems to be a particularly good answer to the question, "What is virtue?" (88c1-3). The fact that *epistêmê* is being considered in this context gives a strong clue as to how it should be understood. Virtue, according to Socrates, is that characteristic or set of characteristics which, when present in the soul, disposes a person to act exceptionally well (cf. 87d2-89a5). As such, it is not the kind of thing that just anybody is going to have.⁸ The state Socrates is discussing under the heading "*epistêmê*," then, must be such that it distinguishes those people who possess it as exceptional. This makes it difficult to understand Socrates' discussion of *epistêmê* as being intended to cover, for instance, the knowledge that perception gives us of our immediate surroundings (e.g., the knowledge that *a piece of paper is in front of me*). Such knowledge is the kind of thing

⁵ Socrates asks Meno, "that which I don't apprehend what it is, how could I apprehend what it is like?" (ὁ δὲ μὴ οἶδα τί ἐστίν, πῶς ἂν ὁποῖόν γέ τι εἰδῆιν). I here translate εἰδέναι as "to apprehend" rather than as "to know" because I take Socrates to be discussing a condition on ἐπιστήμη. One difficulty surrounding the *Meno* is that, while Socrates specifically contrasts true δόξα with ἐπιστήμη in the passage we will focus on, he uses a variety of terms elsewhere in the dialogue to refer to this cognitive state (e.g. φρόνησις and σοφία) and to the activity that characterizes it (e.g. γινώσκειν, εἰδέναι, and ἐπίστασθαι). These terms are used interchangeably in the *Meno*. Thus, like most interpreters, I take the discussion elsewhere in the dialogue to illuminate Socrates' conception of ἐπιστήμη.

⁶ Many interpreters claim that Socrates posits the related requirement that one must apprehend the nature of *Fness* in order to apprehend whether any particular thing is *F* (see, most famously, Geach [1966, 371], who dubbed this part of the "Socratic fallacy"; cf. Irwin [1977, 133], Beversluis [1987], and Nehamas [1987, 277-293]). Although interpreters typically take Socrates' requirement to be too severe, on the conception of ἐπιστήμη I develop in this chapter, his demands are reasonable (see Prior [1998] for another sympathizer).

⁷ The seminal discussion of this notion of definition is Robinson's [1953, 49-60]. For more recent discussion see, among others, Beversluis [1974] and Irwin [1995, 22-27]. Kit Fine has recently argued, independently of any concern with the interpretation of Ancient Philosophy, that "the activities of specifying the meaning of a word and of stating what an object is are essentially the same; and hence each of them has an equal right to be regarded as a form of definition" [1994, 14].

⁸ Socrates makes it clear that he thinks virtue is possessed by only a select group of people in his discussion with Anytus at 91a-95a. This issue is slightly complicated by the fact that Socrates thinks ἐπιστήμη is present in everybody, albeit latently (see the discussion concerning recollection at 80d5-86b4). Even if Socrates does think that ἐπιστήμη (and, hence, virtue, on the proposal that virtue is ἐπιστήμη) is latent in everyone, the kind of ἐπιστήμη that can play the role virtue is supposed to play must be recovered ἐπιστήμη. Recovered ἐπιστήμη, however, is not something that everyone is going to possess.

that everyone has (barring radical skeptical worries). If everyone has such knowledge, however, it cannot be a plausible candidate for being virtue since such knowledge plays no role in discriminating exceptional from ordinary people. Thus, even if someone with *epistêmê* will have such perceptual knowledge and, indeed, even if such perceptual knowledge is necessary for possessing *epistêmê*, we should hesitate to think that it constitutes, even partially, the state Socrates is discussing.⁹

2.2 The Distinction Between True *Doxa* and *Epistêmê*

In a passage to which we will often return, Socrates tries to explain why *epistêmê* is more highly valued than true *doxa* and what the difference between them is:

[True *doxai*] are not worth much until one gets them bound down by a working out of the explanation. And that, my friend Meno, is recollection, as we previously agreed. When they have been bound down, first they become *epistêmai* and thence stable things. It is on account of this that *epistêmê* is more highly valued than correct *doxai*, and *epistêmê* differs from correct *doxa* in virtue of a bond. (98a3-98a8)

[Ἀληθεῖς δόξαι] οὐ πολλοῦ ἄξιαί εἰσιν, ἕως ἄν τις αὐτάς δήσῃ αἰτίας λογισμῷ. τοῦτο δ' ἐστίν, ὃ Μένων ἐταῖρε, ἀνάμνησις, ὡς ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἡμῖν ὡμολόγηται. ἐπειδὴν δὲ δεθῶσιν, πρῶτον μὲν ἐπιστήμαι γίνονται, ἔπειτα μόνιμοι: καὶ διὰ ταῦτα δὴ τιμιώτερον ἐπιστήμη ὀρθῆς δόξης ἐστίν, καὶ διαφέρει δεσμῷ ἐπιστήμη ὀρθῆς δόξης.

This passage shows that Socrates thinks true *doxa* is not sufficient for *epistêmê*. It also shows that Socrates thinks true *doxa* is upgraded to *epistêmê* by a working out of the explanation. That is, the person who has *epistêmê* of *p* is distinguished from the person who has a mere true *doxa* of *p* insofar as the former, but not the latter, has worked out the explanation of why *p* obtains.

Several interpreters take Socrates' claim that *epistêmê* requires working out the explanation to show that the kind of *epistêmê* Socrates is interested in more closely approximates understanding than it does knowledge. Nehamas, for example, writes:

We might want to say that Plato insists upon an unduly restrictive notion of knowledge; but we would do better, I think, to say that when he is discussing

⁹ This line of reasoning is similar to the one Socrates employs to reject Meno's attempt to define virtue as "desiring fine things and being able to attain them" (77b2-78b8). Since, according to Socrates, everyone desires only fine things, desiring fine things cannot explain why someone is virtuous and, hence, cannot be included in the definition of virtue.

epistêmê he is not producing unreasonable conditions on knowledge, but rather, quite reasonable conditions on what it is to understand something. For unlike knowledge, understanding involves, in rough and ready terms, the ability to *explain* what one understands. [1985, 25, emphasis original]

Likewise, in his famous paper arguing that *epistêmê* in Aristotle more closely approximates understanding, Burnyeat claims, “Explanation and understanding go together in a way that explanation and knowledge do not” [1981, 102]. Although I agree with these interpreters’ ultimate point, I think that a stronger case can be made than simply noting the (possibly conceptual) connection between understanding and explanation. In the remainder of this section and in the next two sections I will offer a robust reconstruction of Socrates’ conception of *epistêmê* by determining what, exactly, Socrates thinks working out the explanation consists in. Once I have done this, I will appeal to modern discussions of understanding to argue that Socrates’ conception of *epistêmê* more closely approximates understanding than it does knowledge.

What, then, is involved in working out the explanation such that it bridges the gap between true *doxa* and *epistêmê*? Unfortunately, this is a difficult matter, since the nature of explanation (like that of *epistêmê*) is not the topic of Socrates and Meno’s conversation in its own right. Recall, however, that from the beginning of the dialogue Socrates maintains that natures or essences play a fundamental explanatory role.¹⁰ As we have seen, in order to make progress on finding out whether virtue is teachable, Socrates implores Meno to specify “some one same form which they [sc. virtues] all have on account of which (*di’ ho*) they are virtues” (72c7-8). The nature of virtue, then, plays a fundamental explanatory role in determining whether virtue is teachable. That is, supposing that virtue is teachable, the fact that virtue is teachable is grounded in facts about the nature of virtue (and, presumably, facts about the nature of teachability). Thus, apprehending what virtue is will put a person in a position to apprehend whether (and, if it is, explain why) it is teachable. Generalizing this point, it is reasonable to think that working out the explanation of some fact involves coming to see how that fact is grounded in certain other facts, namely facts about the natures of certain things.¹¹

To develop this idea I turn to the famous episode between Socrates and Meno’s slave. This episode is particularly useful as it provides a case in which someone has a true *doxa* yet

¹⁰ According to G. Fine [1992, 216 n. 6 and 2004, 56-57], this is only true for the explanations of *some* facts. However, given that Socrates says there is a single process through which explanations are worked out, namely recollection, taking natures or essences to be involved in *all* explanations is the best way to maintain the unity of the dialogue. Fine, quite naturally, denies that recollection is the *sole* process through which explanations are worked out (on this see Ch. 3, p. 49).

¹¹ As we will see, this is similar to the way in which a theorem is derived from the principles of the domain to which it belongs.

is said not to have *epistêmê*. Moreover, we are shown exactly how he has come to hold that true *doxa*. Thus, it provides an opportunity to examine what Socrates thinks a person with mere true *doxa* lacks such that working out the explanation will bring about *epistêmê*.¹²

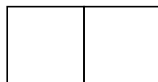
2.2.1 The Exchange Between Socrates and Meno's Slave

As part of his effort to show Meno that successful inquiry is possible even in the absence of *epistêmê* (see 80d5-8 for Meno's infamous statement of worry), Socrates engages in a back-and-forth discussion with one of Meno's slaves. After drawing a two-foot by two-foot square, Socrates asks the slave to specify on which line a square with double the area of the drawn square is based (82d8-e2). In the initial stages of the discussion the slave offers two suggestions that are rejected (82e2-83e10). He then states that he does not apprehend the answer to Socrates' question (84a1-2). Socrates, then, through additional questioning, gets the slave to evince a further *doxa* on the matter and this *doxa* turns out to be the true one (84d3-85b7). As the details of this last stage are crucially important, it is necessary to lay them out in full:

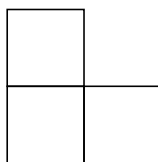
Socrates: You tell me, is this not a four-foot figure? You understand?—I do.



Soc.: We add to it this figure which is equal to it?—Yes.

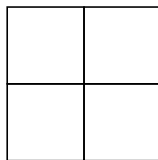


Soc.: And we add this third figure equal to each of them?—Yes.



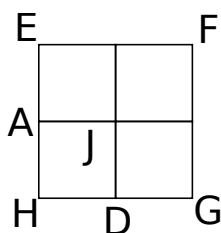
¹² This feature of Socrates' exchange with Meno's slave also makes it relevant to determining whether working out the explanation plays a justificatory role for Socrates. See Ch. 3, pp. 37-41.

Soc.: Could we then fill in the space in the corner?—Certainly.



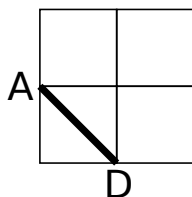
Soc.: So we have these four equal figures?—Yes.

Soc.: Well then, how many times is the whole figure [*pointing to square EFGH*] larger than this one [*pointing to square AJDH*]?—Four times.

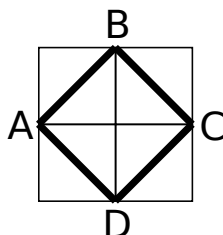


Soc.: But we should have had one that was twice as large, or do you not remember?—I certainly do.

Soc.: Does not this line from one corner to the other [*pointing to line segment AD*] cut each of these figures in two?—Yes.



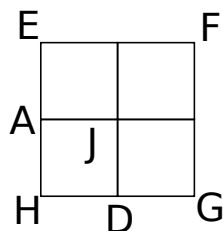
Soc.: So these are four equal lines which enclose this figure [*pointing to square ABCD*]?—They are.



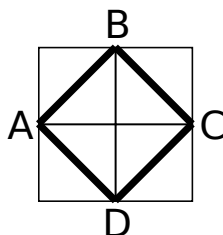
Soc.: Consider now: how large is the figure [*pointing again to square ABCD*]?—I do not understand.

Soc.: Within these four figures [*pointing to each small square*], each line cuts off half of each, does it not?—Yes.

Soc.: How many of this size [pointing to square AJDH] are there in this figure [pointing to square EFGH]?—Four.



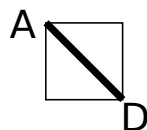
Soc.: How many in this [pointing to square ABCD]?—Two.



Soc.: What is the relation of four to two?—Double.

Soc.: How many feet in this [pointing again to square ABCD]?
—Eight.

Soc.: Based on what line?—This one [pointing to line segment AD].



Soc.: That is, on the line that stretches from corner to corner of the four-foot figure?—Yes.

Soc.: Clever men call this the diagonal, so that if diagonal is its name, you say that the double figure would be that based on the diagonal?—Most certainly, Socrates.

The slave, then, despite being completely ignorant of geometry at the outset of the discussion (cf. 85e6), has been led to think that the following claim is true:

(S): the double-area square is based on the diagonal of the original square

Despite the slave's coming to think, as a result of this discussion, that S is true, Socrates denies that the slave has *epistêmê* of S:

These *doxai* have now just been stirred up like a dream, but if he is asked these same questions many times and in various ways, you know that ultimately he

will apprehend these things no less precisely than anyone else ... And he will apprehend it without having been taught but only questioned, and find the *epistêmê* by himself from himself. (85c9-d1)

Καὶ νῦν μέν γε αὐτῷ ὥσπερ ὄναρ ἄρτι ἀνακεκίνηται αἱ δόξαι αὐταί· εἰ δὲ αὐτόν τις ἀνερήσεται πολλάκις τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πολλαχῇ, οἶσθ' ὅτι τελευτῶν οὐδενὸς ἦττον ἀκριβῶς ἐπιστήσεται περὶ τούτων ... Οὐκοῦν οὐδενὸς διδάξαντος ἀλλ' ἐρωτήσαντος ἐπιστήσεται, ἀναλαβὼν αὐτὸς ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην.

Socrates' claim that the slave does not yet apprehend *S* should give us pause.¹³ If the slave lacks *epistêmê* of *S* despite having gone through the exchange with Socrates, it would seem that having *epistêmê* of something is not simply a matter of knowing that it is true. If it were, we could reasonably ask Socrates what more someone would need to do to achieve *epistêmê* of a geometrical theorem. After all, the slave has acquired his *doxa* in a manner that seems both reliable and illuminating.¹⁴ At this point in the dialogue we have yet to see why Socrates denies that the slave apprehends *S*. All we are told is that, if the slave is to apprehend it, he must be asked these questions many times and in various ways.

At the end of the dialogue Socrates tells us why the slave lacks *epistêmê*: he has not worked out the geometrical theorem's explanation.¹⁵ The question we must answer, then,

¹³ Someone may contend that Socrates' formulation incurs a commitment to the notion that ἐπιστήμη comes in degrees of precision (i.e. because Socrates says that the slave "will apprehend *no less precisely*"). This, it may be argued, suggests that the slave already does, at least to some degree, apprehend *S*. Although such a reading is consistent with the text, it is not required. For example, someone might say that the person who drowns in shallow water drowns no less fatally than the person who drowns in deep water. In saying this, one is not committed to the claim that drowning comes in degrees of fatality—fatality is built into the concept of drowning. Similarly, maximal precision may be built into the concept of ἐπιστήμη. Also note that later in this very passage Socrates says simply that the slave, after further questioning, "will apprehend" (ἐπιστήσεται) the fact in question.

¹⁴ In fact, on most modern accounts of knowledge, the slave would count as knowing that *S* (so long as a minimal condition for possessing the δόξα that *p* is that one believe that *p* (see Ch. 4, pp. 66-72 for my understanding of the relationship between δόξα and belief)). His δόξα is, for example, justified, warranted, reliably formed, acquired through and because of an exercise of intellectual virtue on his part, and so on. Even if a modern epistemologist would deny that the slave's δόξα counts as knowledge, it would likely *not* be for the reason that Socrates denies that the slave lacks ἐπιστήμη and that we will consider in a moment. An important upshot, which I only have time to mention here, is that when Meno asks Socrates why ἐπιστήμη is more highly valued than true δόξα, we should understand Meno to include under the heading "true δόξα" cognitive achievements that count as knowledge. Given that I also think ἐπιστήμη amounts to understanding, I think Meno's question is best understood as "Why is understanding more highly valued than knowledge?" Thus, I think that what many modern philosophers label the "value problem" of knowledge, namely in what sense is knowledge more valuable than any proper subset of its components, whatever its merits, is not the question Meno asks (cf. Kvanvig [2003, Ch. 1]).

¹⁵ Scott [2006, 183] suggests that Socrates' use of words like "therefore" (ἄρα) (e.g. at 82d2, 83c1, 83d4) may indicate that he takes himself to be presenting the geometrical theorem's explanation. However, the mere use of such logical vocabulary to connect claims is not enough to show that such connections are, for Socrates, explanatory connections.

is, “What must the slave do after his conversation with Socrates in order to work out the theorem’s explanation?” First, recall Socrates’ commitment to the epistemic priority of apprehending the natures of things. Second, note that in the discussion with the slave Socrates does not appeal to facts about the natures of any entities in such a way that those facts do any explanatory work. Nor does Socrates make it apparent to the slave that natures have any explanatory power at all. Even though Socrates appeals to facts concerning the nature of some entity or that are true of an entity in virtue of its nature, he does not single out a class of facts concerning the natures of Square, Triangle, Diagonal Line, and so on such that those facts played a basic role in the discussion. For example, Socrates appeals to the fact that a line drawn from one corner of a square to the opposite corner divides the square into two triangles of equal area (84e5-85a1). This fact does hold in virtue of the nature of Square, the nature of Diagonal Line, and the nature of Triangle—that is, because a square is what it is, a diagonal line is what it is, and a triangle is what it is, a diagonal line cuts a square into two triangles of equal area. However, Socrates does not make the explanatory role played by the natures of Square, Diagonal Line, and Triangle perspicuous in any way. Moreover, he does not indicate that natures play any explanatory role at all. Any explanatory facts that Socrates may deploy, then, are not presented to the slave as having any special status.

In fact, if we look at people who were developing geometry in the time surrounding Plato’s writing, we can see that they share Socrates’ view that natures are explanatorily basic. Consider, for example, Euclid’s *Elements*. At the beginning of Book 1, Euclid lays out 23 Definitions, which Socrates would think should be statements of the natures or essences of certain geometrical entities.¹⁶ Euclid then proceeds to prove certain geometrical facts from those Definitions, in combination with five Postulates and five Common Notions. An interesting feature of Socrates’ discussion with Meno’s slave, which goes largely unnoticed by commentators, is that one of the facts Socrates appeals to is contained in Proposition 34 of Book 1 of the *Elements*:

Proposition 34: In parallelogrammic figures the opposite sides and angles are equal to one another, and *a diagonal cuts them in half*.¹⁷

The proof of Proposition 34, however, directly appeals to, and so rests on, Propositions 29, 26, and 4. The proof of Proposition 29, in turn, directly appeals to Propositions 15 and 13. By following this chain of dependencies, we see that the proof of Proposition 34 ultimately depends on Propositions 29, 26, 16, 15, 13, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1. In the proofs of each

¹⁶ I speak here of what Socrates would think the definitions “should” be in order to avoid the difficult question whether Euclid’s ὅροι are meant to be philosophically acceptable definitions.

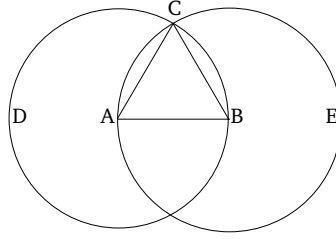
¹⁷ Translations of Euclid’s *Elements* are taken, with modifications, from Heath [1956].

of these Propositions, however, several of the claims directly depend upon the Definitions stated at the outset of the *Elements*. (Indeed, all of the claims ultimately depend upon the definitions, along with the Postulates and Common Notions.) To take just one such example, consider Proposition 1:

Proposition 1: On a given finite straight line to construct an equilateral triangle.¹⁸

Contained in the proof of Proposition 1 is the following claim:

And, [F1] since the point A is the center of the circle CDB, [F2] AC is equal to AB.¹⁹



The move from F1 to F2, in turn, is supported by the Definitions of Circle and Center:

Definition 15: A Circle is a plane figure contained by one line, such that all of the straight-lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal to one another.²⁰

Definition 16: And, the point is called the Center of the circle.²¹

In other words, it is precisely because a Circle is what it is and the Center is what it is, that the fact that A is the center of circle CDB makes it the case that AC is equal to AB. In order to see why Proposition 1 is true, then, one must see that its truth depends on the nature of Circle and the nature of Center. Thus, in order to grasp Proposition 34 fully, one must ultimately see how its truth is grounded in the nature of Circle (and in the nature of Center, Line, Triangle, Square, and so on).

¹⁸ Ἐπὶ τῆς δοθείσης εὐθείας πεπερασμένης τρίγωνον ἰσοπλευρον συστήσασθαι. The difficulties surrounding how to understand Propositions Euclid states using “construction” infinitives need not concern us here, but see Mueller [1981].

¹⁹ Καὶ ἐπεὶ τὸ Α σημεῖον κέντρον ἐστὶ τοῦ ΓΔΒ κύκλου, ἴση ἐστὶν ἡ ΑΓ τῇ ΑΒ.

²⁰ Κύκλος ἐστὶ σχῆμα ἐπίπεδον ὑπὸ μιᾶς γραμμῆς περιεχόμενον, πρὸς ἣν ἀφ’ ἐνὸς σημείου τῶν ἐντὸς τοῦ σχήματος κειμένων πᾶσαι αἱ προσπίπτουσαι εὐθεῖαι ἴσαι ἀλλήλαις εἰσὶν.

²¹ Κέντρον δὲ τοῦ κύκλου τὸ σημεῖον καλεῖται.

To return to the discussion between Socrates and Meno's slave, we can now see why Socrates denies that the slave apprehends *S* despite having acquired his *doxa* through the process depicted above. To put the point metaphorically, the slave fails to see a good deal of the "picture." To put the point more directly, the slave has accepted many claims without explanation that stand in need of explanation. Specifically, he fails to see how the truth of the theorem is grounded in facts about the nature of the entities cited in the theorem (seeing which will require him to grasp facts about the natures of additional entities). The slave, through being asked further questions many times and in various ways, must work out why, given what a square is, what a diagonal is, and so on, the double-area square is based on the diagonal of the original square. Presumably, this will involve reasoning all the way to facts about the natures of the fundamental entities of geometry. If, at some step, appeal is made to facts about the nature of some entity that are grounded in facts about the nature of some more fundamental entity, then appeal to facts about the nature of the more fundamental entity would have explanatory power (e.g. facts about the nature of Diagonal Line may be partially grounded in facts about the nature of Line). Such a process would bottom out at the fundamental entities. Thus, the slave must come to grasp what a point is, what a line is, what a figure is, and so on, so that he can see why, given the nature of those entities, the geometrical theorem is true. Only then will he have worked out the explanation of the geometrical theorem.²²

Before I flesh out Socrates' conception of *epistêmê*, I wish to consider an objection to my interpretation of Socrates' conception of working out the explanation of some fact. It may seem that I am building too large an edifice on Socrates' claim that the slave will apprehend the theorem after "he is asked these same questions many times and in various ways" (85c10-11). Despite his language, most interpreters agree that Socrates does not mean that the slave

²² Similarities exist between Socrates' discussion and current discussions of mathematical explanation. For example, Mark Steiner holds that "...an explanatory [mathematical] proof makes reference to a characterizing property of an entity or structure mentioned in the theorem, such that from the proof it is evident that the result depends on the property" [1978, 143]. Steiner speaks of characterizing properties rather than of natures because he thinks that an entity or structure's nature consists in its essential properties and, in turn, he thinks that essential properties just are necessary properties. Given that all the properties of a mathematical entity or structure are necessary, we cannot isolate a proper subset of its properties as constituting its essence. Kit Fine's work on essence and modality (esp. [1994]), however, provides a different way of conceiving the relationship between necessity and essentiality that allows a role for the concept of essence in mathematics.

However, Socrates' discussion differs from these modern discussions in important ways. Foremost, unlike current philosophers of mathematics, Socrates is not attempting to distinguish proofs that merely *prove that* some theorem is true from proofs that also *explain why* some theorem is true (see Mancosu [2011, §4] for a general description of issues in "mathematical explanations within mathematics"). Rather, Socrates is specifying conditions for being in a cognitive state of which he takes himself to have an independent grasp. He is *not* surveying the work of mathematicians and selecting out a proper subset of proofs as having some special (i.e. explanatory) status. Thanks to Jimmy Martin for discussion here.

must be asked literally the same questions over and over.²³ However, my claim that such questioning must take the slave all the way to fundamental entities may seem overblown. Perhaps all Socrates means is that the slave must be questioned a little more to make sure his grasp of the theorem is sufficiently secure.²⁴

I agree that if we consider this line in isolation my interpretation is too strong. However, it is precisely because Socrates only says that the slave must be asked further questions, and does not specify the ultimate aim of such questioning, that we must look elsewhere in the dialogue to fill in the details. At the end of the dialogue, we learn that acquiring *epistêmê* requires working out the explanation. So, the question becomes, "What does Socrates think explanation consists in?" By further examining the dialogue, and by considering the broader intellectual environment to which it belongs, I have argued that he takes it to consist in a demonstrative proof from the first principles of the relevant domain. Thus, although the line in isolation doesn't generate my whole picture, taken in its broader context it does.

It will be helpful to give some idea of how further questioning could lead the slave to facts about fundamental entities. Perhaps the slave must be asked the following kinds of questions: From what line does a square with half the area of a given square come to be? Triple the area? One-third? etc. Through such questioning the slave will realize that certain claims, such as the claim that a diagonal line cuts a square in half, keep appearing at crucial points in the discussion. He will then investigate those claims, aiming to verify that they are, in fact, true. In the course of investigating the claim that a diagonal line cuts a square in half, he will see that the claim, if true, depends upon facts about what a square is, what a line is, and what a triangle is. In this way, further questioning could lead the slave on the path to fundamental entities.

2.3 Socrates' Conception of *Epistêmê*

Now that we have determined what Socrates thinks is involved in working out the explanation of some fact, in this section I consider the conception of *epistêmê* that results from Socrates' claim that working out the explanation is required for *epistêmê*. The key characteristic of people with *epistêmê* is that they have worked out, for themselves, how some fact fits into a broader network of interrelated facts. Such a network crucially includes facts about the nature of the fundamental entities of the domain to which the fact in question belongs. The person with *epistêmê* of some fact, then, has a synoptic view of the way in which that fact fits into its domain.

²³ See Scott [2006, 106-07] for discussion.

²⁴ Thanks to Rachel Barney and Kirk Ludwig for pressing this objection.

Some interpreters maintain that *epistêmê*, according to Socrates, requires mastery of the entirety of some domain. According to Nehamas, for example, “We have *epistêmê* when we have learned the axiomatic structure of the system in question and can prove any one of its elements” [1985, 20]. Although this claim is consistent with my interpretation, nothing I have said requires it. On the picture thus far, *epistêmê* of some theorem requires that one has derived the truth of that theorem from facts about the nature of the fundamental entities that ultimately ground it. If a theorem *T* derives from a proper subset of the fundamental entities of the domain to which it belongs, then *epistêmê* of *T* does not require grasping the nature of the irrelevant fundamental entities. On this interpretation, one can have *epistêmê* of a theorem *without* having mastery of the entire domain to which it belongs.²⁵

Although I do not think that we can conclusively settle the matter, two reasons internal to the *Meno* suggest that Socrates would accept the further claim that *epistêmê* of some fact requires complete mastery of the domain to which it belongs. First, when Socrates says that the slave, through further questioning, will apprehend the theorem *no less precisely* than anyone else, it is natural to take him to mean that the slave’s future cognitive grasp of the theorem will be optimal (i.e. such that no one else is a greater epistemic authority concerning that fact). If Socrates thinks that being an epistemic authority about some fact requires seeing how it fits into its entire domain, then he would think that *epistêmê* requires mastery of an entire domain. Perhaps, for example, being an epistemic authority about a fact requires being able to answer all questions concerning it. In that case, people who grasp that a theorem derives from only a proper subset of the fundamental entities would be greater authorities concerning that theorem than people who do not (i.e. they would be able to answer a broader range of questions concerning it). And, in turn, grasping that some entity is a fundamental entity may require grasping what all the fundamental entities are. Second, recall that Socrates discusses *epistêmê* because it seems to be a good candidate for being virtue. Virtue, however, is supposed to dispose someone to act well in *all* facets of human life. If *epistêmê* is to play this role, it is unlikely to consist solely in apprehending some particular fact or even a limited number of interrelated facts within a domain. Rather, it would more likely consist in a synoptic view of an entire domain, for example, of the domain of value.²⁶

²⁵ This picture gets complicated when we consider the cognitive grasp of facts about the natures of fundamental entities that is required for *ἐπιστήμη* and how that grasp is achieved. If the requisite grasp requires grasping all the relevant facts about the natures of fundamental entities (if, for example, one must grasp that a given entity is fundamental and this requires, in turn, grasping what all the fundamental entities are), then Nehamas’ picture seems right (note that Nehamas only says that *ἐπιστήμη* requires *being able* to prove all the elements in some domain, not that it requires *having proved* all the elements). This issue will resurface in a moment.

²⁶ *Protagoras* 351ff. considers this view.

Even if Socrates would accept the further requirement that *epistêmê* of a fact requires mastery of the entirety of its domain, on the picture I have developed *epistêmê* can be had of discrete domains (i.e. domains that do not share fundamental entities) in isolation from one another. For example, if the domain of medicine and the domain of geometry share no fundamental entities, then one can have *epistêmê* of (facts of) medicine without having *epistêmê* of (facts of) geometry. Indeed, in the *Meno* Socrates suggests that *epistêmê* is domain specific in this way when he describes the future course of the slave's education:

For he will perform in this same way with all of geometry, and, indeed, all other subjects. (85e1-3)

Οὗτος γὰρ ποιήσει περὶ πάσης γεωμετρίας ταῦτα ταῦτα, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μαθημάτων ἀπάντων.

Socrates here suggests that the slave will first acquire *epistêmê* of all geometry, and then acquire *epistêmê* of other subjects (e.g. arithmetic, solid geometry, astronomy).²⁷ However, if Socrates ultimately thinks that reality as a whole forms a single unified domain (as, for example, *Republic* 6 and 7 suggest) then *epistêmê* requires grasping reality as a whole. In a sense, then, what I have provided is an interpretation of Socrates' answer to what Crombie calls the "formal" interpretation of the question "What can be apprehended?" Insofar as that question is understood to mean, "What does a fact have to be like for it to be a possible object of *epistêmê*?" the answer is "It must belong to a domain structured in terms of first principles and derivable theorems." The question whether objects of *epistêmê* form discrete domains depends on Socrates' metaphysics.²⁸

A few additional features of Socrates' conception of *epistêmê* require comment. First, it is unclear how, if at all, someone can have *epistêmê* of facts about the fundamental entities of a given domain. If acquiring *epistêmê* of some fact requires working out its explanation, it seems that facts about fundamental entities cannot be apprehended—being fundamental, no further fact explains them. If facts about fundamental entities can be apprehended, then,

²⁷ Despite initial appearances, this passage is neutral on the question whether ἐπιστήμη of some fact requires mastery of the domain to which it belongs. When Socrates says that the slave will perform this way in "all geometry" this may be what he thinks is required to achieve *any* ἐπιστήμη of geometry. He need not mean that the slave will acquire ἐπιστήμη of geometry in piecemeal fashion.

²⁸ Crombie helpfully distinguishes between what he calls "formal" and "material" interpretations of the question "What can be apprehended" as follows:

The answer to the formal version of this question will lay down the conditions that anything must satisfy in order to be knowable: the answer to the material version will tell us what things satisfy these conditions. [1963 (Vol. 2), 41]

the way in which they are apprehended must differ from the way in which derivable facts are apprehended.

Although Socrates does not directly discuss whether and, if so, how we can have *epistêmê* of facts about the natures or essences of fundamental entities, an answer readily presents itself. In the above discussion I argued that apprehending some fact, according to Socrates, is a matter of grasping how that fact fits into a broader network of interrelated facts that partially constitute some domain. For facts which can be proven from first principles, *epistêmê* requires grasp of the appropriate proof. There is, however, no reason why *epistêmê*, on this conception, would be limited only to provable facts. One can apprehend a fact about the nature of a fundamental entity by grasping how *it* fits into a network of interrelated facts, where this would involve grasping the fundamental explanatory role that it plays. Recall the example from Euclid above (p. 19) in which facts about the nature of Circle partially grounded a claim made in the course of proving Proposition 1. Socrates could maintain that part of what is required to apprehend facts about the nature of Circle is precisely to grasp the role they play in explaining various derivable facts, such as the one cited in the proof of Proposition 1.²⁹ Of course, this would require broadening Socrates' claim that *epistêmê* (i.e. all *epistêmê*) requires working out the explanation, but it is a natural extension of his thinking.³⁰

Second, although Socrates denies that the slave has *epistêmê* at the end of their discussion, this does not entail that the slave has not made cognitive progress. Socrates' position allows that the slave can be in a better epistemic position concerning the theorem than he would have been if he had acquired his *doxa* in some other way—if, for example, Socrates had simply told him the answer to the original question. Just because people do not have *epistêmê* of some fact does not entail that they are no better off than other people who also have mere true *doxa* about it. The slave, for example, can answer a wider range of questions concerning the geometrical theorem than he would have been able to had Socrates simply told him the answer to the question that guides their discussion. In short, all need not be cognitively equal in the realm of *doxa*.

²⁹ This way of distinguishing between *ἐπιστήμη* of provable facts and *ἐπιστήμη* of fundamental facts is similar to Strevens distinction between “understanding why” and “understanding with” (explored in his [Forthcoming]). This issue will resurface in Chapter 6 (pp. 141-44) when we consider how Socrates can motivate his idea that cognitively accessing intelligible objects requires a higher cognitive achievement than opinion.

³⁰ Perhaps Socrates would resist calling such a grasp of facts about fundamental entities *ἐπιστήμη* strictly speaking. In his discussion of the Divided Line in the *Republic*, Socrates claims that we grasp the objects in the highest subsection as a matter of comprehension (*νόησιν*) (511d6-8). However, comprehension seems to be a kind of *ἐπιστήμη* and, in a related passage in Book 7, he calls this grasp of the highest objects *ἐπιστήμη* (on Socrates' shifting language, see below Ch. 5, p. 108 fn. 55). In connection with this it is worth noting that, in *Posterior Analytics* 2.19 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.6, Aristotle also claims that the cognitive grasp we can have of first principles is comprehension (*νοῦς*) and not *ἐπιστήμη* strictly speaking.

This point is crucial to my interpretation of the epistemology advanced in the *Republic*. According to some interpreters (see, e.g., G. Fine [1990, 86] and Smith [2000, 153-154]), if Socrates were to deny that philosopher-kings can have *epistêmê* of perceptible objects, he would be unable to explain why they are best suited to rule a city (since this requires them to be in a privileged epistemic position concerning what states of affairs obtain in the perceptible world). If, however, Socrates can deny that there is *epistêmê* of perceptible objects while consistently maintaining that *doxai* about perceptible objects can differ in their authority (as my interpretation allows), this objection can be answered. I develop this idea in Chapter 6 (pp. 149-55), arguing that, while Socrates denies that there can be *epistêmê* of perceptible objects, he allows that the philosopher's *doxai* about them are sufficiently expert to count as knowledge (*gnôsis*).

Third, *epistêmê*, as Socrates conceives of it, cannot be acquired through several mechanisms that are nowadays considered paradigm ways of acquiring knowledge. Consider, for example, the knowledge that perception is supposed to give us of our immediate surroundings. We can certainly grant that there are explanations for facts about our immediate surroundings. Indeed, there may be all kinds of explanations for such facts. The point, however, is that all such explanations are bad candidates for that which must be grasped in order to know such facts. For example, if the chair in my room is black, one explanation why it is black is that Bob painted it black. It would be odd, however, to think that in order for me to know that *the chair is black* I would have to grasp that *it is black because Bob painted it black*. Or, if the explanation why the chair is black is a matter of reflectance properties and the structure of our visual system, it is even more implausible to think that one must grasp that kind of explanation to know that *the chair is black*.³¹ If Socrates' position would involve unreasonable claims about perceptual knowledge, then, as I have already suggested, charity demands that we should hesitate to think that his discussion of *epistêmê* is meant to cover it.

Likewise, *epistêmê* cannot be acquired through testimony, not even through authoritative testimony. Given that Socrates denies that the slave has *epistêmê* at the end of their discussion, he would surely deny that the slave could acquire *epistêmê* merely through the testimony of an authority in geometry. Mere testimony is insufficient for acquiring *epistêmê* because Socrates requires that the slave, by working out the explanation of the theorem, come to see for himself why it is true. The slave, that is, must come to have a command of the theorem that cannot be acquired through mere testimony.

³¹ Thanks to Jack Woods for pointing out this alternative kind of explanation.

2.4 What Is *Epistêmê*?

The difference between true *doxa* and *epistêmê*, as Socrates conceives of it, is the difference between the cognitive state of someone who has a non-systematic, piecemeal grasp of some fact and the cognitive state of someone who has a synoptic grasp of how some fact fits into a broader network of interrelated facts. Given this picture, it is unclear whether *epistêmê* should be thought of as approximating the state that modern day epistemologists are dealing with in their discussions of knowledge. The key difference that has emerged over the course of this chapter is that *epistêmê*, as Socrates conceives of it, cannot be acquired through perception or through testimony (even authoritative testimony), which are taken nowadays to be central ways of acquiring knowledge (barring radical skeptical worries). If, however, *epistêmê* fails to include what are taken to be paradigm cases of knowledge, we seem to be faced with two possibilities: either (a) Socrates is not discussing knowledge as such, or (b) Socrates is making the grave philosophical error of mistaking a sufficient condition on knowledge for a necessary condition.

I say that one option would be to conclude that Socrates is confusing a sufficient condition on knowledge for a necessary condition because someone who has *epistêmê* does seem to have knowledge. Once the slave, for example, has come to see why, given the nature of the fundamental entities of geometry, the double-area square is based on the diagonal of the original square, he will certainly count as knowing that fact. Indeed, the slave will likely acquire such knowledge long before he acquires the relevant *epistêmê*. Perhaps, as I suggested above (p. 17 fn. 14), he has that knowledge by the end of his discussion with Socrates. Thus, working out the explanation of some fact, in Socrates' sense, is certainly sufficient for acquiring knowledge. However, I find it unsatisfactory to say, as some interpreters have said, that Socrates is discussing knowledge as such, but simply has a more demanding conception of what knowledge requires.³² Rather, we should interpret him as discussing a state that overlaps with, but is neither coextensive with nor identical to, knowledge. In other words, *epistêmê* is a more high-powered state that entails, but is not identical to, knowledge. The principle of charity, then, demands that we accept option (a) and say that Socrates is not discussing knowledge as such.

If Socrates is not discussing knowledge as such, what is he discussing? Although the crucial issue is to determine the details of the concept Socrates presents, the above considerations naturally lead to the following picture. Let us first consider what the slave will achieve once he has worked out the explanation of the geometrical theorem under discussion. First, he will have figured out not only *that* the theorem is true but also *why* it is true. Follow-

³² See, e.g., G. Fine [2004, 68-71].

ing on from this, he will have come to see how that theorem fits into a broader network of interrelated facts that partially constitute the domain of geometry. Lastly, he will have a command of the theorem that can only be gained by working all of this out *for himself*. He will, in short, genuinely understand the theorem. The conditions that Socrates places on the possession of *epistêmê*, then, map on better to the conditions for possessing understanding than the conditions for possessing knowledge.

It may be incorrect, however, to speak of *the* concept of understanding. We certainly cannot expect Socrates' conception of *epistêmê* to fall in line with all uses of the English word "understanding." For example, cases of linguistic understanding (i.e. what is denoted when someone says "I understand what you're saying") will not be included.³³ There is a notion of understanding, however, as a cognitive state that consists in a synoptic grasp of (at least part of) some domain or phenomenon (e.g. geometry, medicine, or global warming). As Jonathan Kvanvig describes it:

Understanding requires the grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a large and comprehensive body of information. One may know many unrelated pieces of information, but understanding is achieved only when informational items are pieced together by the subject in question. [2003, 192]

Likewise, Wayne Riggs offers a similar description of this type of understanding:

‘Understanding’ has a range of meanings, some of which fall outside the boundaries of what I have in mind. The kind of understanding I have in mind is the appreciation or grasp of order, pattern, and how things ‘hang together’. ... Understanding something like this requires a deep appreciation, grasp, or awareness of how its parts fit together, what role each one plays in the context of the whole, and of the role it plays in the larger scheme of things. [2003, 217]

It is this notion of understanding that Socrates' conception of *epistêmê* best maps onto.³⁴ As some of the philosophers engaged in these discussions have themselves recognized, these recent discussions constitute a return to the central epistemological concern of Socrates (and Aristotle, but that is a story for another time).³⁵

Taking *epistêmê* to be understanding avoids the main objection I leveled against the claim that *epistêmê* is knowledge. The mechanisms through which knowledge, but not *epistêmê*, can be acquired are also mechanisms through which understanding *cannot* be acquired.

³³ Plato's characters, in fact, use a different word to denote linguistic understanding, namely *μανθάνειν* (e.g. at *Meno* 72d1, 75e6; *Phaedo* 100a8; *Theaetetus* 164d3; *Symposium* (206b10)).

³⁴ See Introduction, p. 4 fn. 7 for references to other recent work on understanding.

³⁵ Cf. Grimm [2012, 103] and Greco [Forthcoming].

Mere perception, for example, is not sufficient to generate understanding—merely perceiving that *p*, even in optimal conditions, will not render understanding of *p*, even though it will render knowledge that *p*. Likewise, mere testimony, even authoritative testimony, will not generate understanding.³⁶ Simply being told by an expert that *p* is true will not, on its own, lead a person to acquire understanding of *p*. Even if the expert were to tell the person what all of the true propositions in a given domain are and lay out the explanatory connections between them, acquiring understanding of that domain will still require the person to do some cognitive work to see for him or herself how it all fits together.³⁷ To put this point another way, understanding some domain requires a command of that domain that cannot result merely from testimony.

Jonathan Barnes objects to this last claim, contending that understanding simply amounts to a special case of knowledge, namely knowledge-*why*, which, in turn, he understands as a special case of knowledge-*that*:

I take the phrase [*x* understands that *p*] to mean ‘*x* knows why *p*’; and I construe that, in the present circumstances, to mean, ‘for some *q*, *x* knows that (*p* because *q*)’. [1980, 202]

I disagree with Barnes’ claim. Someone can know both that *p* and that *p because q* on the basis of testimony and yet fail to understand why *p* obtains. For example, suppose I know, by personal experience, that *the wind speed is accelerating now*. I ask my sister, who happens to be an expert meteorologist, why this is the case and she tells me that it is because the air pressure is dropping now. On that basis, I come to know that *the wind speed is accelerating now because the air pressure is dropping now*. I can know this last fact without *understanding* why the wind speed is accelerating now because I have no grasp of why the drop in air pressure accounts for the increase in wind speed. Generally speaking, because knowledge-*that* can be acquired by testimony and understanding cannot, understanding cannot be reduced simply to a specific kind of knowledge-*that*. And, if knowledge-*why* is a species of knowledge-*that*, then understanding cannot be reduced to knowledge-*why* either.³⁸

One final and important point: thinking of *epistêmê* in terms of understanding rather than knowledge also helps us better understand why Socrates might be attracted to the idea that virtue is *epistêmê*. If someone has the kind of understanding of moral matters that

³⁶ On these last two points, see Burnyeat [1980, esp. 186-188].

³⁷ See Grimm [2010, 87-88] for a similar claim.

³⁸ Perhaps, against Barnes, someone could argue that knowledge-*why* is *not* a kind of knowledge-*that*. Perhaps a more complicated story needs to be told about knowledge involving ‘because’ claims, such that knowledge-*why* *cannot* be acquired by mere testimony. If this is the case, then understanding-*why* and knowledge-*why* would be closer than I have claimed. Thanks to Ben Morison for this point. See also the discussion in Grimm [Forthcoming].

results from having worked out, for him or herself, how and why matters stand morally, that person is better equipped than someone who has mere piecemeal knowledge of such matters to act well in *all* facets of human life. For example, in novel or even abnormal circumstances the former person is better positioned than the latter to figure out what action is called for and, so, is better positioned to act correctly. Furthermore, grasping why, given how things in fact stand, the action one is performing is the correct thing to do in the circumstances is a plausible component of being a superlative moral agent.³⁹ These are among the reasons why we find the character Socrates, in the *Meno* and other Socratic dialogues, trying to determine not simply whether someone knows that something is the case, but whether he understands why it is the case. In the *Euthyphro*, for example, Socrates is not simply trying to determine whether Euthyphro knows that prosecuting his father is the pious action; Socrates wants to determine whether Euthyphro genuinely understands why prosecuting his father is the pious action. Quite reasonably, Socrates thinks that this will require that Euthyphro grasp what piety is, so that he can understand why, given the nature of Piety, it is (or is not) pious to prosecute his father for murder.⁴⁰ If we limit ourselves solely to the concept of knowledge, without making use of the concept of understanding, we are in danger of missing much of what is interesting in Socrates' idea that virtue may be *epistêmê*.

2.5 The Merits of Socrates' Account

Now that we have determined that Socrates' account of *epistêmê* is better understood as an account of understanding than an account of knowledge, it is worth considering how it fares as an account of understanding. In this section my aim is not to canvas all its strengths and weaknesses. Rather, I merely wish to argue that Socrates' account provides insights that any philosopher interested in understanding should take seriously.

To begin with, Socrates' account meets many of the desiderata for an account of understanding. First, it directly ties understanding to explanation, as it should. Intuitively, what distinguishes the person who understands some fact from the person who merely knows it, is that the former, but not the latter, can explain why that fact obtains. Secondly, on Socrates' account, understanding is synoptic, as it should be. Understanding requires being able to place something in a broader context. You can't just understand one single fact in isolation;

³⁹ In connection with these last two points, consider how natural it is for someone to distinguish between moral knowledge and moral understanding by claiming that "an agent who possesses moral knowledge in the absence of understanding is not only likely to misapply that knowledge in particular cases (and so do the wrong thing), but also such that his morally right actions are less valuable than they otherwise would be" (McGrath [2011, 132]).

⁴⁰ On the interpretation I develop in Chapter 6, Socrates is attempting to determine whether Euthyphro's opinion counts as an expert opinion.

it necessarily requires seeing how that fact fits into a broader network of facts structured in a certain way. Thirdly, and relatedly, Socrates' account gets the correct entailments between knowledge and understanding. On Socrates view, understanding entails knowledge but not vice-versa.⁴¹ Someone can have a good deal of knowledge of some domain without having understanding, but cannot have understanding without having a good deal of knowledge. Fourth, Socrates is right to hold that understanding requires a certain facility with the subject matter that one understands. Although the exact nature of this ability is hard to pin down, and it is difficult to determine exactly how Socrates conceives of it, it certainly involves grasping the relation among facts and being able to "move around" within the relevant domain (i.e. for provable facts, to be able to prove them; for first principles, to be able to use them to prove other facts).

More specifically, I think that the notion of one fact holding in virtue of another fact or set of facts has a central role to play in an account of understanding.⁴² When we say that we understand some fact, what we are claiming is that we grasp why that fact must obtain, given certain other facts. Since we can understand one fact in light of other facts even when the relation between them is not causal, we should appeal to the broader notion of grounding rather than to the narrower notion of causation to illuminate the nature of understanding. Mathematics is an obvious case where understanding is possible but the relationship between facts is non-causal.

If we do think that the notion of grounding can illuminate the nature of understanding, then appealing to the notion of a nature or essence is also attractive. Facts about natures or essences are good candidates for termini of chains of facts connected by the grounding relation. That is, facts about what *X* is can ground certain other facts without themselves being grounded in more fundamental facts. For example, the fact that water is H₂O partially grounds the fact that water boils at 212 °F (at sea level). But, the fact that water is H₂O is not grounded in some more fundamental fact: that just is what water is.⁴³ I am not saying that the grounding relation need be well-founded in general.⁴⁴ But, insofar as the notion of

⁴¹ Kvanvig [2003, ch. 8] has argued that understanding does *not* entail knowledge. For responses to Kvanvig, see Grimm [2006 and Forthcoming] and Greco [Forthcoming].

⁴² See Greco [Forthcoming], who presents what he calls a "neo-Aristotelian" account of understanding as systematic knowledge of grounding relations.

⁴³ This issue has recently been discussed by Dasgupta [Unpublished, 4-13]. According to Dasgupta, it is not that facts about natures or essences could have grounds but, as it happens, lack them (as is the case, he suggests, with facts about the initial conditions). Those kinds of facts he calls "fundamental" or "brute." Rather, he contends that facts about natures or essences lack grounds because they are not even *apt* for being grounded in the first place (he calls such facts "autonomous"). As an analogy, Dasgupta compares the way in which facts about natures or essences can ground other facts while not themselves being apt for having grounds to the way in which definitions can be used to prove things without themselves being apt for being proved.

⁴⁴ On this issue, see Rosen [2010, 116] and Clark and Liggins [2012, 8] and the references therein.

grounding has a role to play in illuminating the nature of understanding, I think that the grounding relation should be well-founded. Infinite chains of facts, since they cannot be grasped by finite minds, are ill-suited to be proper objects of understanding.⁴⁵

Despite its attractive features, the account of understanding I attribute to Socrates may seem to be too demanding. A plausible desideratum of an account of understanding is that it be rendered the kind of thing that people, indeed perhaps most people, can gain at least a little bit of. If, however, understanding why some fact *P* obtains requires being able to prove that fact from the first principles of the domain to which it belongs, then very few people will end up with any understanding. So, one may argue, while it is true that understanding some fact requires seeing how it fits into a network of interrelated facts, requiring that network to include facts about the natures of fundamental entities is too restrictive. While this is a powerful objection, I wish to put it aside for now and return to it after we consider the metaphysical view presented by the character Socrates in the *Republic* (see below, Ch. 5, 113-19). By way of preview: I will argue that the conception Socrates presents in the *Meno* is of the ideal of understanding. Given Socrates' metaphysics, particular people will deserve the title "understanding" (why some fact obtains) depending on how closely they approximate that ideal. The more fundamentally they can trace the explanation of some fact, the more appropriate it is to say that they understand it.

2.6 *Epistêmê* in the *Republic*

In this chapter I have reconstructed the conception of *epistêmê* presented by the character Socrates in the *Meno*. I contend that the character Socrates in the *Republic* is working with the same conception of *epistêmê*. In the next chapter I will argue that the main reasons that have been offered for taking the conceptions to differ are not compelling. In this section, however, I briefly wish to offer some positive reasons for taking the conceptions to be the same.

First, in the *Republic* Socrates retains the commitment that *epistêmê* requires working out explanations. This commitment crops up throughout the discussion, but is perhaps made most evident in Socrates' famous allegory of the Cave. In that discussion, Socrates argues that the Form of Goodness is the ultimate explanation (*aitia*) of everything and, as such, has authority over (*kuria*) and provides (*parechô*) truth and comprehension (*nous*) of everything (517a8-c4; cf. 516b8-c2) (we will consider the connection between comprehension and understanding in a moment).

⁴⁵ I say "proper" objects of understanding because it may be possible to first characterize understanding as a grasp of finite chains of grounding relations and then include grasp of infinite chains by analogy.

Second, Socrates also retains his commitment to the explanatory fundamentality and, thus, the epistemic priority of, answers to “What is X?” questions (as can be seen, in part, from the fact that, in the passages cited in the previous paragraph, he claims that the nature of Goodness is the first principle of everything). After his exhausting discussion with Thrasymachus, Socrates criticizes the course that discussion took, insofar as they attempted to determine whether Justice manifests some feature before they determined what Justice is:

Before finding the first thing we inquired about—namely the Just, what it is (*to dikaion hoti pot’ estin*)—I let that go, and turned to investigate about it whether it is a kind of vice and ignorance or a kind of wisdom and virtue. ... Hence, the result of the discussion, so far as I am concerned, is that I apprehend nothing. For when I do not apprehend what the Just is, I will hardly apprehend whether it happens to be a kind of virtue or not, or whether the person who has it is happy or not. (354b3-c3)

And, in a passage that will occupy us for a considerable time later, Socrates defends his claim that we should vest political power in the hands of philosophers by first determining the nature of Philosopher (cf. 473c11-480a13) and then arguing that such people are best suited to rule (cf. Books 6 and 7).

Third, in the *Republic* Socrates also retains the idea that the kind of explanation which confers understanding takes the form of broadly deductive proofs, such as those found in geometry. This is made most clear in his discussion of the Divided Line. In that discussion, Socrates divides understanding (*epistêmê*) into two species: thought (*dianoia*) and comprehension (*noêsis*). In two closely connected passages, Socrates makes it clear that both thought and comprehension require grasping a broadly deductive proof. First, concerning thought:

I think you know that students of geometry, arithmetic, and such subjects lay down the odd and the even, the figures, the three kinds of angles, and other things akin to these according to each pursuit, regarding them as known ... And beginning from these, proceeding through the remaining steps, they conclude in agreement at the point they set out to reach in their investigation. (510c2-d3)

Shortly after this passage, Socrates makes it clear that the person who has attained comprehension is able to prove any subordinate fact from the “unhypothetical first principle” of everything:

Also understand, then, that by the other section of that which is intelligible I mean that which reason itself grasps through the power of dialectic ... in order

to come to that which is unhypothetical and the principle of everything. Having grasped this, reason turns back again, reverses itself, and, keeping hold of what follows from it, thus comes down to a conclusion. (511b2-c1)

It will be pointed out that in this second passage Socrates says that dialectic is the power in virtue of which people acquire comprehension of the unhypothetical first principle. However, we must distinguish between the process through which people acquire comprehension and what they grasp when they are in that state. The second half of the quoted passage makes it clear that, when people are in the state of comprehension, they are able to prove deductively whatever follows from the unhypothetical first principle. Thus, all understanding, for Socrates, consists in grasping explanations that are broadly deductive in structure.

As these are the three main features of Socrates' conception of *epistêmê* in the *Meno*, I submit that we should proceed on the assumption that the same conception is at issue in the *Republic*. In Chapter 3 I will further defend this claim by rejecting the central arguments for taking the conceptions to differ.

2.7 A Final Objection and Reply

In this section I address a serious objection to any attempt to interpret *epistêmê* as not approximating knowledge. The objection is due to Barnes, who argues against the claim that *epistêmê* is not knowledge as follows:

[T]he verb '*epistasthai*', and its cognates '*epistêmê*' and '*epistêmon*', are not philosophical neologisms; they occur frequently in Greek literature from Homer onwards, and they are there correctly translated by 'know' and its cognates. (At all events, I have found no text which invites the translation 'understand'.) Both Plato and Aristotle talk of *epistêmê* without special qualification or apology; they give no indication that they intend the term in a novel or restricted sense: we are obliged to conclude that they thought they were investigating the ordinary concept of knowledge. [1980, 204]

As I understand Barnes' argument (which Fine cites approvingly [2004, 70 fn. 75]), it maintains that Plato presents his characters as explicating, and perhaps refining, whatever was denoted by standard uses of the word "*epistêmê*." Since, Barnes claims, at the time of Plato's writings, "*epistêmê*" denoted knowledge, he concludes that we must interpret Socrates' discussions of *epistêmê* as discussions of knowledge.

Barnes' claim that the standard use of "*epistêmê*" denoted knowledge, however, is false. Since I have focused in this chapter on the noun "*epistêmê*" I will restrict my discussion to it. The noun "*epistêmê*," in its use prior to and contemporary with Plato, denotes a superior

achievement to that of knowledge. To say that a person, or a group, has *epistêmê*, is to say that he, or they, have attained a level of expertise that a person or group with knowledge need not have attained (indeed, “expertise” might be a better translation of “*epistêmê*,” except that would leave us with no correlate English verb). I contend, in direct contrast to Barnes, that there are no passages in which “*epistêmê*” is inappropriately rendered as “expertise” or “understanding,” but that there are passages in which it would be inappropriate to render it as “knowledge.” If this is the case, it shows that we should *not* take Socrates’ discussions of *epistêmê* to be discussions of knowledge, but of something superior to knowledge.

The clearest support for the claim that “*epistêmê*” denotes something superior to knowledge comes from passages in which two people or groups are compared to one another and the following two conditions are met: (1) only one is said to have *epistêmê* but (2) both should be taken to have knowledge. Given that those with *epistêmê* are uniformly presented as being superior to those without it, if conditions (1) and (2) are met, “*epistêmê*” must denote a higher achievement than mere knowledge. Consider the following passage from Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*:

Hermocrates took the same view, and urged them [sc. the Syracusans] strongly not to be faint-hearted at the prospect of attacking with their ships ... He was quite sure that if they faced the Athenian navy suddenly and unexpectedly, they would gain more than they would lose; the consternation which they would inspire would more than counterbalance their own inexperience and the *epistêmê* of the Athenians. He told them therefore to try what they could do at sea, and not to be timid. Thus under the influence of Gylippus, Hermocrates, and others, the Syracusans, now eager for the conflict, began to man their ships. (7.21.3.1-7.22.1.1) [Trans. Jowett]

Ευνανέπειθε δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἑρμοκράτης οὐχ ἥκιστα, τοῦ ταῖς ναυσὶ μὴ ἀθυμεῖν ἐπιχειρῆσαι ... καὶ Συρακοσίους εὖ εἰδέναι ἔφη τῷ τολμῆσαι ἀπροσδοκῆτως πρὸς τὸ Ἀθηναίων ναυτικὸν ἀντιστῆναι πλέον τι διὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐκπλαγόντων αὐτῶν περιγενησομένους ἢ Ἀθηναίους τῇ ἐπιστήμῃ τὴν Συρακοσίων ἀπειρίαν βλάψοντας. ἰέναι οὖν ἐκέλευεν ἐς τὴν πεῖραν τοῦ ναυτικοῦ καὶ μὴ ἀποκνεῖν. Καὶ οἱ μὲν Συρακόσιοι, τοῦ τε Γυλίσπου καὶ Ἑρμοκράτους καὶ εἴ του ἄλλου πειθόντων, ὥρμητό τε ἐς τὴν ναυμαχίαν καὶ τὰς ναῦς ἐπλήρουν·

In this passage, Hemocrates implores the Syracusans not to fear the fact that the Athenians have *epistêmê* concerning naval warfare, claiming that a surprise attack will negate any advantage that *epistêmê* might otherwise give the Athenians. We cannot read this, however, as suggesting that only the Athenians, but not the Syracusans, have mere knowledge concerning naval warfare. If the Syracusans do not know how to sail, how to fight at sea, etc., then their eagerness mentioned at the end would be nothing short of sheer stupidity. Rather,

the Syracusans have the relevant knowledge; what they lack, and what the Athenians possess, is some higher achievement, such as expertise. In fact, many translators recognize that Hemocrates must be attributing something more than mere knowledge to the Athenians: Jowett, for example, translates “*epistêmê*” as “superior skill,” where no separate Greek word corresponds to “superior.” Jowett, in the translation just quoted, is correctly recognizing that the superiority must be built into the meaning of “*epistêmê*” itself.

Likewise, Isocrates responds to critics who claim that he does not improve his students because they are not immediately finished orators, by claiming that, “On the contrary, *epistêmê* accrues to us scarcely at all” (*Antidosis* 201.4).⁴⁶ While it may be the case that *some* knowledge accrues to us scarcely at all, we can certainly acquire some knowledge quite easily (e.g. by opening our eyes). It is more plausible, then, to take Isocrates to be claiming that a superior achievement to knowledge, such as expertise, is seldom achieved.

I do not wish to belabor the point, as Barnes, and Fine following him, do not offer any passages in support of their claim. At the very least, I take the above texts sufficient to shift the onus to those who would deny that the standard use of “*epistêmê*” denoted a superior achievement to that of knowledge. Socrates’ key claim, then, is that what distinguishes people who make this superior achievement is that they grasp appropriate explanations. And, while “understanding” is an imperfect rendering of “*epistêmê*,” it is, for the reasons given in this chapter, superior to “knowledge.”

2.8 Philological Considerations

The claim that *epistêmê* approximates understanding dovetails nicely with the fact that the Greek verb meaning “to have *epistêmê*,” namely “*epistasthai*,” and the English verb meaning “to have understanding,” namely “to understand,” are cognate. Both verbs are compound words formed by a preposition + the verb “to stand” (“*histasthai*” is Greek for “to stand”). The prepositions, however, do differ: “*epi*,” means “on, upon, at, or before” while the preposition from which “to understand” is formed is “under.” But, even so, the fact that both involve the verb “to stand” is a strong reason in favor of translating “*epistêmê*” (and related words) as “understanding.”⁴⁷ Although I have not discussed the Greek word “*gnôsis*” in this chapter, it will come to the fore when I discuss the *Republic*. It is thus worth noting, in connection with the etymological points concerning “*epistêmê*,” that “*gnôsis*” is cognate with “knowledge.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ἀλλὰ μόλις μὲν ἡμῖν τὰς ἐπιστήμας παραγινομένας.

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that the OED lists uses of “under” in Old and Middle English (from which the modern English verb “to understand” descends) that come closer in meaning to the Greek ἐπί (e.g. “under night” to mean “at night” §3.b).

⁴⁸ OED entry on “knowledge.”

Chapter 3

The Relationship Between *Doxa* and *Epistêmê* in the *Meno*

3.1 Introduction

AT the beginning of the previous chapter I noted that interpreters have traditionally cited the *Meno* as containing the first attempt in Western Philosophy to analyze knowledge as justified true belief. One of the chief aims of that chapter was to argue that *epistêmê*, as Socrates conceives of it, more closely approximates understanding than it does knowledge. In this chapter I focus on the alleged *analysans* of *epistêmê*—that is, on the justified true belief part of the traditional interpretation of *epistêmê* in the *Meno*. In particular, I argue that we should not attribute any of the following three claims to Socrates: (a) that working out the explanation upgrades true *doxa* to *epistêmê* because it confers a certain sort of justification on the *doxa*; (b) that *doxa* is a component of *epistêmê*; (c) that *doxa* and *epistêmê* can share the same objects. It is important to note that my aim is *not* to show that Socrates rejects these three claims but, rather, to show that he does not commit himself to them.

One of the central reasons for showing that Socrates does not commit himself to either (b) or (c) in the *Meno* is that he explicitly *rejects* them in the *Republic* (or so I will argue in Chapters 4 and 5). As I argued in the previous chapter, there are strong reasons for taking the conception of *epistêmê* to be consistent between the *Meno* and *Republic*. Showing that Socrates does not commit himself to claims (b) or (c), then, is of the utmost importance to maintaining this continuity.¹

¹ In fact, some interpreters take Socrates' alleged acceptance of (b) and (c) in the *Meno* as motivation for seeking an alternative interpretation of the *Republic* to the kind I will offer (see, e.g., G. Fine [1978, 121 and 1990, 85-86]).

3.2 Justification?

In reconstructing Socrates' conception of *epistêmê* in the previous chapter I made no appeal to a notion of justification. This was no mistake. At no point in the discussion does Socrates say that working out an explanation upgrades true *doxa* into *epistêmê* by making that *doxa* justified. Indeed, nowhere in the *Meno*, nor in any work of Plato, does a character use a word or phrase to describe a *doxa* that can be easily translated as “justified.”² *A fortiori*, Socrates never explicitly says that *epistêmê* is justified (true) *doxa*. Moreover, Socrates never says that a person has *epistêmê* because he has a true *doxa* of a certain sort, such as a *justified* true *doxa*, a *warranted* true *doxa*, a *reliably* formed true *doxa*, and so on.

It may seem that when Socrates says, at the end of the *Meno*, “Once [true *doxai*] have been bound down, first they become *epistêmai* and thence stable things,” (98a5-6) he is claiming that people with *epistêmê* have stable *doxai*. Although I will argue later in this chapter that we do not have to understand him as characterizing *doxai* as stable, it is important to note that, even if he is, he is not claiming that people count as having *epistêmê* *because* they have stable *doxai*. His use of the “first–thence” (*prôton–epeita*) construction shows that he takes stability to be an *effect* of having *epistêmê* and not what makes it the case that people have *epistêmê*.³ In modern discussions, however, justification is supposed to be (part of) what makes it the case that someone has knowledge. Thus, a serious structural asymmetry exists between Socrates' discussion of the role of working out the explanation in upgrading true *doxa* to *epistêmê* and modern discussions of the role of justification in upgrading true belief to knowledge.

Not only does no Platonic character ever describe a *doxa* as “justified,” it is unclear whether there are any words or phrases that Plato uses elsewhere that could have been appropriated for such an end.⁴ The most likely candidates would be the family of words surrounding the Greek word “*dikê*” (“right,” “custom,” “law”). Indeed, Plato often uses members of that family adverbially (e.g. “*dikaion*,” “*dikaiôs*,” and “*en dikê(i)*”). He uses such words and phrases in two main ways: (a) to describe the way in which an action is performed. So, for example, earlier in the *Meno* Socrates speaks of a person “managing [a city] moderately and justly (*dikaiôs*)” (73a9).⁵ Or (b) to describe the way a term is used.⁶ So, for example, in the *Republic* Socrates says, “Someone who is ready and willing to taste all learning and

² In the *Republic*, however, characters do speak of something “appearing” (φαίνεσθαι) or “seeming” (δοκεῖν) just to them (506b7-8, 506c1-2; cf. *Timaeus* 62d5-6). However, I do not think that such locutions necessarily describe a δόξα as justified. For more on this, see Ch. 6, p. 148.

³ On this point, see Perin [2012, 16-18].

⁴ G. Fine [2004, 62] notes this as well.

⁵ Cf. *Meno* 73a7-9; *Republic* 331c3-5; *Euthyphro* 4b7-11, 8e6-8; *Apology* 38e5-6.

⁶ This may not amount to a distinct use of such phrases, as using a term may be a particular type of action.

gladly goes to learning, being insatiable for it, this person we would justly (*en dikê(i)*) call a ‘philosopher’” (475c6-8).⁷ This latter use indicates that the term in question is being used appropriately, in line with its true meaning.

It is unclear, however, whether such phrases are intended to capture a notion similar to that of justification. It is essential to the notion of justification, as applied to actions, that someone could be justified in performing an incorrect (i.e. non-optimal) action. As Plato’s characters use the terms discussed above, however, they indicate an overall evaluation of an action as just. When a character describes an action as being done *dikaiôs* (*et al.*), he is stating an all-things-considered assessment of the action as just. There is no room for a person who performed an action *dikaiôs* to have, nevertheless, performed an incorrect (i.e. non-optimal) action.⁸ It is, as it were, a conceptual truth that an action performed *dikaiôs* is optimal in relation to justice.

Given both that Socrates never describes a *doxa* as being “justified” and that it is unclear whether he has the linguistic machinery to do so, perhaps we should conclude that he does not conceive of working out the explanation as bringing about *epistêmê* by playing a justificatory role. Drawing this conclusion, however, would be too quick. Even if Socrates himself does not describe *doxai* as “justified,” it may still be illuminating to understand his position as implicitly employing a notion of justification. That is, given what Socrates says about *doxa*, *epistêmê*, and the role played by working out the explanation in linking the two, it may be best to understand that role as justificatory. However, the onus is clearly on those who appeal to the modern notion to supply compelling reasons for doing so.

The most promising way to argue that appealing to a notion of justification illuminates Socrates’ position is to look at the motivations and concerns that lead epistemologists to introduce the notion of justification into philosophical discourse. If Socrates is motivated by similar concerns when he argues that *epistêmê* requires working out the explanation, we might be justified in claiming that Socrates conceives of working out the explanation as bringing about *epistêmê* by playing a justificatory role. Justification, as it were, serves to scratch a particular philosophical itch, and so we must determine whether Socrates posits working out the explanation to scratch that same itch.

The key feature of justification that interpreters point to is that, roughly speaking, justification is a matter of having good reasons for belief (with different conceptions of justification consisting, in large part, in different accounts of what it is for someone to have reasons to believe and what it is for those reasons to be good). Likewise, these interpreters argue, So-

⁷ Cf. *Republic* 352e9, 478e2-5; *Cratylus* 419d1-4; *Phaedrus* 278d8-e2.

⁸ This claim will, in fact, require some fine-tuning in light of the metaphysical view of perceptible objects presented in the *Republic*. For now it should be taken to mean that the action is as optimal as actions in the perceptible world can be.

crates seems to be concerned with whether people have good reasons for the views they hold. Thus, they conclude, Socrates is interested in justification. Gail Fine offers a representative example of such reasoning:

Justification (of an internalist sort, at least) is generally thought to require good arguments or good reasons. In so far as Plato is concerned with the latter, it is reasonable to assume that he is concerned with the former. [2004, 66]

Likewise, Dominic Scott maintains that appealing to justification is warranted because “he [Socrates] wants good reasons for believing that virtue is a form of knowledge, teachable and so on” [2006, 184-85].

It is important, however, to distinguish between two questions: (1) is Socrates interested in a notion of justification (at all, ever)? and (2) does Socrates think that working out the explanation bridges the gap between true *doxa* and *epistêmê* because it plays a justificatory role? These are independent questions: just because Socrates may be concerned, in general, with whether people have good reasons for their views does *not* show that he intends working out the explanation to rectify a lack of having good reasons. The above quotations from Fine and Scott, however, show that they run the questions together: because Socrates seems concerned, in general, with whether people have good reasons for their views, they conclude that he thinks working out the explanation plays a justificatory role. In order to answer question (2), however, we must determine whether Socrates thinks that mere true *doxa* is debarred from counting as *epistêmê* for the same reasons modern-day epistemologists think true belief is debarred from counting as knowledge. If he does, it may be reasonable to understand working out the explanation as playing a justificatory role.

Let us return to the episode with Meno’s slave. As Burnyeat [1980, 187] points out, by most modern accounts of justification, the *doxa* the slave acquires at the end of the discussion is justified. Even Fine concedes this point. However, she argues that this only shows that:

Plato rejects a justified-true-belief account of knowledge, if the conditions for justification are construed weakly enough. But we should not infer that he rejects a justified-true-belief account of knowledge as such. Perhaps he favors such an account, but thinks that the sort of justification that is necessary for knowledge is more demanding than Burnyeat takes it to be. [2004, 64]

At this point the discussion becomes rather difficult. If someone claims that Socrates, despite never indicating that he thinks this way, may simply conceive of working out the explanation as providing a high-powered form of justification, it is difficult to argue against such a position. However, if we were to insist that Socrates thinks working out the explanation plays

a justificatory role this would direct attention away from the most pressing and interesting question. Rather than asking why Socrates offers this conception of *epistêmê*, we must ask why he offers this conception of justification (a conception which even Fine agrees would be highly restrictive). Claiming that Socrates thinks that working out the explanation plays a justificatory role, then, does not help illuminate his position.

The problem, however, may be worse than that. The main reason modern-day epistemologists think true belief is insufficient for knowledge is the problem of epistemic luck.⁹ If a person acquires the true belief that *p* merely as a matter of luck, she does not know that *p*. Justification, then, is considered as a further condition to rule out cases of epistemic luck from counting as cases of knowledge.¹⁰ In the discussion with Meno's slave, however, Socrates shows no concern that the slave may have acquired his true belief by luck. The slave has been led to that belief by a good teacher (i.e. Socrates) who intended him to come to have it; there is nothing deviant in the causal chain leading to the slave's belief; and so on. If Socrates claims that the slave lacks *epistêmê* despite the absence of luck, it cannot be the presence of luck that he is worried about when he posits working out the explanation as a condition on *epistêmê*. To the extent that Socrates is not motivated by the problem of epistemic luck, we should hesitate to think that he conceives of working out the explanation as playing a justificatory role. Otherwise we may impute philosophical concerns to Socrates that he does not have.

I think that the prevalence of taking working out the explanation to play a justificatory role in Socrates' epistemology is largely attributable to the fact that working out the explanation would make a *doxa* more justified. For example, although the slave's *doxa* is justified to some degree after the exchange with Socrates, it would become more justified after he worked out the relevant explanation. But, again, we must distinguish two claims: (a) that working out the explanation of some fact *P* would, as a matter of fact, make a *doxa* concerning *P* (more) justified, and (b) that Socrates conceives of working out the explanation as bridging the gap between true *doxa* and *epistêmê* because it provides such a justification. Because modern discussions of the relationship between belief and knowledge have focused so heavily on the role of justification, interpreters of Socrates too often move immediately from claim (a) to claim (b). That is, interpreters often think that, since working out the expla-

⁹ As Steup puts it in his *Stanford Encyclopedia Article* 'Analysis of Knowledge': "Why is [the justification] condition necessary? Why not say that knowledge is true belief? The standard answer is that to identify knowledge with true belief would be implausible because a belief that is true just because of luck does not qualify as knowledge."

¹⁰ Of course, one of Gettier's [1963] key insights is that even a justified belief can be true because of luck. The issue, however, is not whether philosophers think that justified true belief constitutes knowledge but, rather, what features debar true belief from constituting knowledge such that justification becomes an issue in the first place.

nation would make a *doxa* more justified, and since justification (perhaps with additional features) is what “bridges the gap” between true belief and knowledge, Socrates too must think that working out the explanation brings about *epistêmê* by playing a justificatory role. Distinguishing the two claims stated above, however, shows that such reasoning is invalid.

Thus, I conclude that appeals to a notion of justification are out of place in reconstructing Socrates’ conception of *epistêmê* in the *Meno*. At best, they are unilluminating; at worst, they are misleading. It is better, I think, to understand Socrates as holding that true *doxa* alone is insufficient for *epistêmê*, not because it necessarily lacks a justification, but because its possessor lacks certain relevant information.¹¹

3.3 Is *Doxa* a Component of *Epistêmê*?

In this section I argue that Socrates does not commit himself to the view that *doxa* is a component of *epistêmê*. There are, however, several possible versions of such a view. On one understanding, *epistêmê* is held to be a species of *doxa* and would be defined as *doxa* plus some further feature or features.¹² On another understanding, *doxa* is a component of *epistêmê* insofar as having *epistêmê* entails having a relevant *doxa* (of course, this entailment also holds for the previous view). This entailment can take one of at least two forms: conceptual necessity (i.e. given the nature of *epistêmê*, one can have *epistêmê* only if one has a relevant *doxa*), or psychological necessity (i.e. given the nature of human beings’ cognitive powers, people can have *epistêmê* only if they have a relevant *doxa*).¹³ On this understanding, having a *doxa* is a necessary condition of having *epistêmê*, but the latter is not a species of the former.¹⁴

¹¹ This brings Socrates’ conception of *epistêmê* closer to a view advanced recently by Foley [2012] (although, as I will argue below, I do not think δόξα should be understood as amounting to belief). Foley argues that much of recent epistemology has mistakenly thought that what must be added to true belief to render knowledge must be something different in kind from true belief (such as justification). Foley argues, on the contrary, that “[w]hat has to be added to S’s true belief *P* in order to get knowledge? More true beliefs.” Justification, he thinks, need not enter the picture. Interestingly, Kvanvig [2003, 199–200] argues that Foley’s account fares better as an account of understanding than an account of knowledge.

¹² For supporters of this positions, see Sedley [1996, 93], G. Fine [2004, 50–55], and Perin [2012, 16–17].

¹³ This latter view leaves open the possibility that other beings could have ἐπιστήμη without having a δόξα.

¹⁴ On this conception, the relationship between δόξα and ἐπιστήμη would be akin to that Tim Williamson argues holds between belief and knowledge. Although Williamson does not think that knowledge can be analyzed or defined in terms of belief plus some further features, he nevertheless thinks that knowledge entails belief [2000, esp. 41–48]. A further possibility is that some, but not all, instances of ἐπιστήμη require having a relevant δόξα. Perhaps, for example, ἐπιστήμη of the perceptible world requires having a relevant δόξα but ἐπιστήμη of the intelligible world does not. However, given that Socrates talks unqualifiedly in the *Meno* about how ἐπιστήμη comes to be and does not suggest any such distinction, I do not consider this possibility here. (I will, however, argue that something like this is true for Socrates’ conception of γνῶσις.)

The view that *doxa* is a component of *epistêmê* bifurcates further. Up to this point I have described such views as maintaining that having *epistêmê* requires having a *relevant doxa*. Views could differ, however, over what the relevant *doxa* must take as its object. On one view, the object of the relevant *doxa* must be the same as the object of the *epistêmê* (i.e. *epistêmê* of *p* requires *doxa* of *p*). On another view, the object of the *doxa* need not be the same as the object of the *epistêmê* (i.e. *epistêmê* of *p* requires *doxa* of *q*, but *p* and *q* could be distinct). On this latter view, although all instances of *epistêmê* require a concurrent *doxa*, it need not be the case that the *doxa* and *epistêmê* have the very same object.¹⁵

Despite the various ways in which *doxa* could be understood as a component of *epistêmê*, they all accept the following conditional:

KD: if *S* has *epistêmê* at *T*, then *S* has a relevant *doxa* at *T*

I add the qualifier “relevant” because the contents of the concurrent *epistêmê* and *doxa* must somehow be systematically related. It would not be satisfactory, for example, to show that Socrates thinks living a human life requires possessing some *doxai* or other and then argue that living a human life is necessary for possessing *epistêmê*. In what follows I show that, although Socrates does not reject KD, he does not commit himself to it either.

The locus for attributing KD to Socrates is his discussion of the difference between true *doxa* and *epistêmê*.¹⁶ In response to Meno’s question why the latter is prized more highly than the former and what the difference between them is (97c11-d3), Socrates begins by drawing an analogy with the statues of Daedalus. According to Socrates, if Daedalus’ statues are not bound down they are liable to “escape” (*apodidraskein*) and “run away” (*drapeteuein*). If, however, they are bound down, they remain in place (*paramenein*). Socrates expands and explains this analogy as follows:

[1] To acquire a loose work of Daedalus is not worth much, like acquiring a runaway slave, for it does not remain. But, when it has been bound down, it is worth much, for his works are very beautiful. For what purpose am I saying these things? True *doxai*. For true *doxai*, as long as they remain, are a fine

¹⁵ Gail Fine cites David Sedley as someone who suggests (presumably in personal conversation) that: “[One] might say that the true belief that *p* is replaced by knowledge that *q*. For example, a belief ranging over individual men one has encountered might be replaced with knowledge about the corresponding form or universal, man” (G. Fine [2004, 51 fn. 30]). Although Sedley’s comment concerns a diachronic situation, it can be adapted to a synchronic case. On such a view, ἐπιστήμη about, say, the universal man requires a δόξα about particular men. In general, it is possible to say that *S*’s bearing relation *R* to *Y* requires that *S* bear relation *R** to *Z* (where *Y* and *Z* are non-identical and *R* and *R** can be distinct relations).

¹⁶ See, for example, Sedley [1996], Fine [2004], Silverman [2012], and Perin [2012], among many others. Gettier [1963] and Armstrong [1973], though not concerned with textual exegesis, also attribute the view to Socrates based on this passage.

thing and all they accomplish is good. But, they are not willing to remain long and they escape from a man's soul, [2] so that they are not worth much until one gets them bound down by working out the explanation. And this, Meno my friend, is recollection, as was previously agreed by us. [3] When they have been bound down, first they become *epistêmai* [alternatively: first *epistêmai* come to be], and thence stable things. [4] It is on account of this that *epistêmê* is more highly valued than correct *doxa*, and *epistêmê* differs from correct *doxa* in virtue of a bond. (97e2-98a8)

[1] Τῶν ἐκείνου ποιημάτων λελυμένον μὲν ἐκτῆσθαι οὐ πολλῆς τινος ἄξιόν ἐστι τιμῆς, ὥσπερ δραπετέτην ἄνθρωπον—οὐ γὰρ παραμένει—δεδεμένον δὲ πολλοῦ ἄξιον· πάνυ γὰρ καλὰ τὰ ἔργα ἐστίν. πρὸς τί οὖν δὴ λέγω ταῦτα; πρὸς τὰς δόξας τὰς ἀληθεῖς. καὶ γὰρ αἱ δόξαι αἱ ἀληθεῖς, ὅσον μὲν ἂν χρόνον παραμένωσιν, καλὸν τὸ χρῆμα καὶ πάντ' ἀγαθὰ ἐργάζονται· πολὺν δὲ χρόνον οὐκ ἐθέλουσι παραμένειν, ἀλλὰ δραπετεύουσιν ἐκ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, [2] ὥστε οὐ πολλοῦ ἄξια εἰσιν, ἕως ἄν τις αὐτὰς δῆσῃ αἰτίας λογισμῷ. τοῦτο δ' ἐστίν, ὃ Μένων ἐταῖρε, ἀνάμνησις, ὡς ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἡμῖν ὡμολόγηται. [3] ἐπειδὴ δὲ δεθῶσιν, πρῶτον μὲν ἐπιστήμαι γίνονται, ἔπειτα μόνιμοι. [4] καὶ διὰ ταῦτα δὴ τιμιώτερον ἐπιστήμη ὀρθῆς δόξης ἐστίν, καὶ διαφέρει δεσμῷ ἐπιστήμη ὀρθῆς δόξης.

By examining each section of this passage, I will show that Socrates does not commit himself to KD.

Section [1] (97e2-98a3)

Interpreters who attribute KD to Socrates point to the very beginning of this passage: statues of Daedalus, after they have been bound down, remain statues. That which holds them in place—be it rope or whatever—is external to them and so they do not lose their identity as statues as a result of having been bound. If true *doxai* are supposed to correspond to the statues, it seems natural to think that what remains after a true *doxa* has been bound is identifiable as a *doxa*. Whatever holds the *doxa* in place is “external” to it, and so should not alter its status as a *doxa*. Given that *epistêmê* comes to be as a result of the binding, interpreters see a commitment to KD right here.

While this is a possible reading of this passage, it is not the only one. Serious difficulties surround the interpretation of the philosophical use of analogies. In particular, it is unclear what features of the analogous case are supposed to carry over to the target case. It is certainly illegitimate to conclude that whatever can be said of the analogous case can also be said of the target case (for that would make them identical, not analogues). For example, statues are made of some material such as stone, wood, or metal. Should we infer that Socrates thinks true *doxai* are made of stone, wood, or metal? The appropriate interpretive move is to see

what, exactly, Socrates' aim is in introducing the analogy and then isolate those features that are relevant to that aim. To extract any more from the analogy is to risk attributing commitments to Socrates that he does not have.

Socrates' aim is to show that *epistêmê* is more valuable than true *doxa* because it is more stable. All Socrates needs the analogy to do is to provide a case in which something that has undergone a certain process is more stable and, hence, more valuable, than something that has not undergone that process. No further commitment on the relationship between the two things is necessary. Socrates can be understood as simply maintaining that, just as one type of thing which does remain (i.e. a bound statue) is more valuable than something that does not remain (i.e. an unbound statue), so too *epistêmê* is more valuable than true *doxa* because it remains. Although statues remain statues after being bound, true *doxai* need not remain *doxai* after being bound.

Someone, however, may insist that it would be odd for Socrates to offer the statues of Daedalus as an analogy unless he thought there were some common feature between true *doxa* and *epistêmê*. Otherwise, he could have picked two things which differ in stability but clearly do not share any features. This, however, is simply one of the problems with philosophical uses of analogies. While we may wonder why the analogous case was chosen if some feature is not relevant, this does not entitle us to conclude that the feature is relevant. Furthermore, even if this objection is correct, it does not prove the point: the common feature between true *doxa* and *epistêmê* would not necessarily be *doxa*.

Connected to this last point, it is worth noting that Daedalus' statues lose their identity as *movable* statues after they have been bound. If we were to press a strict analogy between true *doxai* and movable statues, we should insist that true *doxai* surely do not lose their status as truths after they have been bound. If, then, we try to identify some element of a true *doxa* that does not persist after it has been bound down, it seems more likely that it loses its status as a *doxa* than that it loses its status as true. Of course, I am not proposing that this is how the analogy *must* be read. Rather, I am simply pointing out that there is a perfectly acceptable way of interpreting the analogy between true *doxai* and the statues of Daedalus that does not involve a commitment to the view that what remains in place after a true *doxa* has been bound to the soul is correctly identifiable as a *doxa*. That is all that is needed to resist attributing KD to Socrates.

Although I only aim to achieve the limited goal of resisting attributing KD to Socrates, I think that the last line of Section 1 strongly suggests that true *doxai* lose their status as *doxai* as a result of being bound to the soul. Socrates says simply that "[true *doxai*] are not willing to remain long and they escape from a man's soul" and then tells us that, because of this, we must bind them to the soul. The fact that he does not say true *doxai* are not willing to

remain long *unless* or *until* they are bound to the soul strongly suggests that he thinks *doxai* are *essentially* liable to escape.

Section [2] (98a3-a5)

Since true *doxai* are prone to fly away, Socrates claims that they “are not worth much until one gets them bound down by working out the explanation.” Again, this may seem to evince a commitment to KD. Since, according to Socrates, it is true *doxai* which are not worth much until they get bound, shouldn’t we think that it is true *doxai* that are worth much after they have been bound? Thus, true *doxai* must retain their identity as *doxai* after undergoing the process of getting bound down. Again, given that *epistêmê* comes to be as a result of the binding, this line may seem to commit Socrates to KD.

We can resist this line of thought. All Socrates states is the negative point that true *doxai* are not worth much until they are bound down. One way of understanding Socrates’ point is that true *doxai* are not worth much because they have not been bound down. This does not commit him to the claim that, when a true *doxa* has been bound down, what is held in place is appropriately described as a *doxa*. To give an example: if someone says, “coal is not worth much until it has been exposed to high temperature and pressure,” she is not committed to saying that a diamond just is coal + some further feature or features, nor that the presence of a diamond entails the (simultaneous) presence of coal. In general, then, saying “Xs are not worth much until they have undergone process *P*” does not commit one to saying that what remains after an *X* undergoes process *P* must be identifiable as an *X*.¹⁷ Thus, this section also does not commit Socrates to KD.

Section [3] (98a5-6)

According to Socrates “When [true *doxai*] have been bound down, first they become *epistêmai*, and thence stable things.” This line also does not commit Socrates to KD. As other commentators have pointed out, Socrates’ claim admits of two interpretations: (1) true *doxai* become *epistêmai* but remain *doxai*, in the way that a woman can become tall while remaining a woman or (2) true *doxai* become *epistêmai* but no longer remain *doxai*, in the way that a child becomes an adult but does not remain a child (i.e. S’s being an adult does not entail that S is a child).¹⁸

¹⁷ Of course, *something* may be present before, during, and after the process (e.g. carbon, in my example). However, for all Socrates says, something may remain after a true δόξα is bound down; the point, however, is that it need not be identifiable as a δόξα.

¹⁸ The example is from G. Fine [2004, 52], who is developing a suggestion in Sedley [1996, 93]. Vogt [2012, 13-14] also argues that this passage is compatible with the claim that ἐπιστήμη replaces δόξα.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is an alternative translation of the phrase “*epistêmai gignontai*.” Although it is frequently translated as “they become *epistêmai*,” another philologically acceptable translation would be, “*epistêmai* come to be.” In the first translation, which we were considering above, the subject of the verb “*gignontai*” is “*alêtheis doxai*.” In the second translation, however, the subject is “*epistêmai*.” Taken in isolation, the second translation makes Socrates’ neutrality on whether *doxai* remain *doxai* after they have been bound to the soul more evident. However, although either translation is acceptable, the first translation should be favored due to an earlier passage in which Socrates maintains that “there are in [the slave] true *doxai* which, when stirred by questioning, become *epistêmai*” (86a7-8).¹⁹ In this earlier passage the subject of “*gignontai*” must be “*alêtheis doxai*.” Although this does not render the alternative translation of the later passage impossible, it means that we cannot place any philosophical importance on it.

Section [4] (98a6-8)

Socrates closes his discussion by saying that it is precisely because *epistêmê* is stable that it is more highly valued than correct *doxa*.²⁰ Obviously, this is neutral as to whether *doxa* is a component of *epistêmê*. He then goes on to say, “and *epistêmê* differs from correct *doxa* in virtue of a bond.” This last clause is neutral as well. Gail Fine, however, argues that, if Socrates is citing the only difference between true *doxa* and *epistêmê*, he should be understood as taking *doxa* to be a component of *epistêmê*:

One might argue that 98a6-8, in saying that knowledge differs from true belief by being bound down with an *aitias logismos*, mentions just one difference between them. Perhaps there are others. Perhaps, in particular, knowledge also differs from true belief in not being a species of or even implying belief. But I do not think Plato means to leave this possibility open. For if there were cases of knowledge that were not cases of, or did not imply, belief, that would be such an obvious further difference between knowledge and mere true belief that it would be surprising in the circumstances if Plato did not mention it. It seems more likely that he does not mention it because he does not believe it... [2004, 53]

This is an odd argument. The fact that two things do not imply each other only tells you *that* they differ; it does not tell you *in virtue of what* they differ. For example, if I were

¹⁹ ἐνέσονται αὐτῷ ἀληθεῖς δόξαι, αἱ ἐρωτήσει ἐπεγεργεῖσθαι ἐπιστήμῃ γίνονται.

²⁰ In fact, Socrates may mean that ἐπιστήμη is more valuable because it is stable as a result of being bound to the soul by a working out of the explanation (i.e. it is the particular way in which ἐπιστήμη is stable that makes it more valuable than correct δόξα). This complication need not concern us here, but see Scott [2006, 180-82] for discussion.

trying to say on account of what walking differs from running, I would say something like “in walking, one or the other foot is kept on the ground at all times, whereas in running, both feet can be in the air at the same time.” I would *not* say something like, “and one can walk without running or run without walking.” Although this latter point would prove that walking and running are different, it would not in any way help us understand what it is about them that makes them different. But, it is precisely this latter point that Meno wants to understand concerning true *doxa* and *epistêmê*: he grants that they are different, he wants Socrates to say what their difference consists in. Even if Socrates thinks that they do not imply each other, telling Meno this fact would be irrelevant to answering his question.

Nothing Socrates says at 97e2-98a8 commits him to KD. *A fortiori*, Socrates does not analyze *epistêmê* as justified true *doxa*. Moreover, when Socrates argues, in the *Republic*, that *doxa* and *epistêmê* exclude one another, this does not threaten the consistency between the conception of *epistêmê* at issue in the two dialogues.

3.4 The Objects of *Doxa* and *Epistêmê*

As I will argue in the next chapter, in the *Republic* the character Socrates distinguishes between *doxa* and *epistêmê* on the basis of the objects they can range over. Some interpreters have maintained that this claim would be inconsistent with Socrates’ position in the *Meno* and have thus sought alternative interpretations of the *Republic*. In this section I argue that the *Meno* does not, in fact, contain a commitment to the view that one and the same thing can be the object of both *doxa* and *epistêmê*. There are two main passages in which Socrates has been thought to incur such a commitment: the exchange with Meno’s slave and the discussion of the way to Larissa. I begin with the latter passage.

3.4.1 The Way to Larissa

As noted in the previous chapter (p. 11), Socrates and Meno discuss *epistêmê* because it seems to be a good candidate for being virtue. They agree that *epistêmê* may be that thing which, when present in the soul, disposes one to act well because “all the efforts and endurances of the soul bring happiness if led by wisdom (*phronêsis*), but the opposite if led by foolishness” (88c1-3).²¹ Later in the discussion, however, Socrates notes that if some characteristic of the soul distinct from *epistêmê* is such that it guides action correctly, then it too, so far as that argument goes, will have an equal claim to being virtue. And, indeed, he thinks

²¹ As stated in the previous chapter (p. 11 fn. 5), despite Socrates’ use of the word φρόνησις I take him to be discussing a feature of ἐπιστήμη.

that true *doxa*, though distinct from *epistêmê*, does guide action correctly. He supports this claim with the following well-known example (97a9-c5):

Socrates: A man who knows (*eidôs*) the way to Larissa, or anywhere else you like, and walked there and led others, would surely lead them well and correctly?—Certainly.

Soc.: What if someone has correct *doxa* about what is the way, but had not gone nor had *epistêmê*, would this man not also lead correctly?
—Certainly.

Soc.: And so, I suppose, as long as the man has correct opinion about that of which the other has *epistêmê*, he will not be an inferior guide than the one who does have *epistêmê* (*phrônêsis*), since he thinks truly, but does not have *epistêmê* (*phrônêsis*).—No worse.

Soc.: So true *doxa* is in no way a worse guide to correct action than *epistêmê* (*phrônêsis*). It is this that we left aside in our investigation into what virtue is, when we said that only *epistêmê* can guide correct action, for true *doxa* can do so also.—So it seems at any rate.

It seems that Socrates here says that one and the same thing, namely the way to Larissa (*tên hodon tên eis Larissan*), can be the object of both *doxa* and *epistêmê* and, thus, that *doxa* and *epistêmê* can share objects.

The problem with this inference is that, despite the language he uses, Socrates is not here contrasting true *doxa* with genuine *epistêmê*. Given the account of *epistêmê* he offers immediately following this passage, Socrates cannot think that the way to Larissa is a possible object of genuine *epistêmê*. To see this, consider the role that Socrates claims recollection (*anamnêsis*) plays in the acquisition of *epistêmê*:

[True *doxai*] are not worth much until one gets them bound down by a working out of the explanation. And this, Meno my friend, is recollection, as was previously agreed by us. When they have been bound down, first they become *epistêmai* and thence stable things. (98a3-6)

Recollection, then, is the process whereby a true *doxa* is bound to the soul by a working out of the explanation. Although I will discuss recollection in more detail later in this chapter, for the moment it is sufficient to note that recollection is a process through which people come into cognitive contact with something they had cognitive access to in a previous disembodied state (cf. 81a10-e2; 85e9-b4). Whatever the exact explanation of the way to Larissa may be, it is certainly not the sort of thing that can be worked out through such a process. For example, why one should take this mountain pass rather than that mountain pass, or why one should always travel with a certain star on her right side, are not the sort of things that

can be worked out through a process of recollection. Thus, although Socrates uses the term “*epistêmê*” in this discussion, a person cannot have genuine *epistêmê* of the way to Larissa.

Gail Fine, however, argues that there are philosophical reasons for a restricted interpretation of the scope of Socrates’ claim concerning the role of recollection in the acquisition of *epistêmê*. She points out that Socrates thinks that discarnate souls possess *epistêmê*. Furthermore, she notes that Socrates leaves it open that discarnate souls do not acquire but, rather, always have *epistêmê* (cf. 85d9-86b4). Thus, she contends that, “he [Socrates] presumably would not make it definitionally true that one can know that *p* only if one acquires one’s knowledge through recollection or through any other method of acquisition” [2004, 60]. This argument, however, is unpersuasive. Although Socrates may leave it open whether discarnate souls acquire *epistêmê*, in this passage he explains how *epistêmê* comes to be (*gignesthai*). His discussion, then, only covers those entities that must acquire their *epistêmê* and his claim is that, for such entities, recollection is the process through which this is done. To point out that this would not cover entities that do not acquire but, rather, always have *epistêmê* is not relevant.

If having *epistêmê* of the way to Larissa is not an instance of genuine *epistêmê*, it is difficult to know what to make of Socrates’ discussion. It seems likely that he takes the mental state of such a person to be analogous to genuine *epistêmê*. In other words, Socrates is not comparing a person with mere true *doxa* to a person with genuine *epistêmê* but, rather, to a person who has a mental state that is analogous to genuine *epistêmê*.²² Thus, because it is meant as an analogy, we cannot draw a conclusion about how Socrates conceives of the objects of *doxa* and genuine *epistêmê* from it.

It is worth noting that Socrates’ overall point does not require the cognitive state he describes as “*epistêmê*” of the way to Larissa to be a case of genuine *epistêmê*. Recall that his overall aim is to show that the fact that *epistêmê* leads to correct action is insufficient to show that *epistêmê* is virtue. To do so, all he needs to show is that a cognitive state which is not *epistêmê* can also lead to correct action. True *doxa* is said to be that cognitive state. Even if the superior cognitive state of the person to whom the person with mere true *doxa* is compared does not amount to genuine *epistêmê*, his main aim can be achieved.

If Socrates is offering an analogy, we should ask why he offers this case. Although it is difficult to be certain about this, I wish to offer a few considerations by way of explanation. First, it seems reasonable to think that being in a superior cognitive state concerning the way to Larissa will require that one has made the trip several times, taking various routes, and overcoming various obstacles. Similarly, as we saw in the last chapter, acquiring *epistêmê*

²² In interpreting this as an analogy I join, among others, N. White [1974, 54 fn. 5], Bedu-Addo [1983, 233-34], Nehamas [1985, 27], and Ionescu [2007, 138-39].

requires that the slave be asked “these same questions many times and in various ways” (85c10-d1). Second, being in a superior cognitive state concerning the way to Larissa will require being able to overcome adverse situations. The person in such a state must, for example, be able to respond to the fact that there has been a rockslide on this path and take a different route. Likewise, the person with genuine *epistêmê* must be able to overcome adverse situations in the form of penetrating cross-examination from someone such as Socrates. Lastly, being in a superior cognitive state concerning the way to Larissa will likely require some sort of first-hand experience. The person must have, in a sense, worked out for himself how to get to Larissa. Of course, this does not mean that he must have gone alone, blindly plunging forth. Rather, the point is simply that, even if he is led by a guide, he must internalize the route to a large degree. Likewise, in the acquisition of *epistêmê*, even if the slave is led by Socrates, he must see for himself that the theorem in question is true and how the theorem is explained by the nature of the fundamental entities of geometry.²³

3.4.2 Socrates and Meno’s Slave

The claim that Socrates does not commit himself to the view that the same thing can be the object of both *doxa* and *epistêmê* in his discussion with Meno’s slave will strike most readers as odd. As we saw in the previous chapter (p. 17), at the end of that exchange Socrates says that the slave only has true *doxai* and has yet to acquire *epistêmê*. However, he says, “if someone asks him these same things many times and in various ways, you know that ultimately he will have *epistêmê* about these things no less precisely than anyone else” (85c10-d1). It is natural to take “these things,” about which he *will* have *epistêmê*, to be the very same things about which he currently has *doxai*. Indeed, Socrates makes the further claim that “in the man who does not have *epistêmê*, about whatever it is he does not have *epistêmê*, there are true *doxai* about those things of which he does not have *epistêmê*” (85c6-7).²⁴ How can it be denied that Socrates claims that an instance of *epistêmê* can have the same object as a *doxa*?

What we need is a convincing story as to why, if Socrates does ultimately think that the same thing *cannot* be the object of both *doxa* and *epistêmê*, he would say what he says here. Here is one possible story. It may turn out, once we take account of the natures of *doxa* and *epistêmê*, that something which we were originally inclined to think of as being a possible object of *doxa* cannot, in fact, count as one. If, for example, it turns out that *doxa* is essentially

²³ It is imperative to note that saying ἐπιστήμη requires working something out for oneself does not mean that it consists in or requires *acquaintance* with the object of ἐπιστήμη. The claim that ἐπιστήμη, in the *Meno*, consists in or requires such acquaintance is advanced by, among others, Bluck [1961, 32-33, 213-214], Thomas [1980, 201], Ionescu [2007, 138], and criticized (to my mind successfully) by Burnyeat [1987, 19-21].

²⁴ Τῷ οὐκ εἰδότηι ἄρα περὶ ὧν ἂν μὴ εἰδῇ ἔννευσιν ἀληθεῖς δόξαι περὶ τούτων ὧν οὐκ οἶδε.

tied to sense-perception, and mathematical objects cannot be grasped by sense-perception, then a genuine mathematical thought (i.e. a thought that is actually about a mathematical object) cannot be produced by the power of *doxa*. Perhaps the thoughts that originally seemed to be about mathematical objects were, in fact, about perceptible objects. The slave, for example, may have a *doxa* concerning the particular figure that Socrates draws in front of him. Perhaps one of the cognitive achievements that the slave will make through repeated questioning is moving from thinking about perceptible figures to thinking about the objects those drawn figures represent. I propose now to re-examine the exchange between Socrates and Meno's slave, arguing that Socrates leaves room for just such a picture.

Socrates begins the exchange by asking the slave, "you know the square that it is such as this" (82b9-10).²⁵ Socrates may mean one of two things by saying that a square is "such as this" (*toiouton*). On the one hand, he may mean that the figure he has drawn is not, in fact, a square, but is similar to a square in relevant respects. On this reading it is most natural to understand Socrates as meaning that a square, strictly speaking, is not a perceptible object, but that the drawn figure resembles a square. On the other hand, Socrates may mean that anything drawn in a similar fashion to what he has drawn on the ground (i.e. with four equal sides joined at four right angles) would be a square. On this reading Socrates holds the drawn figure to be a square and is noting that squares can come in other sizes. Given the ambiguity in Socrates' question, when the slave answers "I do," two possibilities arise for what the object of his thought might be: on the one hand, an intelligible mathematical object, on the other hand, the drawn (perceptible) figure. Both possibilities remain live throughout the discussion. Socrates consistently uses demonstrative phrases (e.g. "*this line* is two feet," "*this line* is a diagonal") to refer to the figures he draws on the ground. Socrates seems to be allowing that the slave may not be cognitively engaging with intelligible mathematical objects but, rather, merely with the perceptible diagrams to which he is exposed. It is entirely possible, then, to take the object of the slave's *doxa* to be the perceptible figure in front of him, rather than an intelligible mathematical object.

Furthermore, throughout the discussion Socrates uses language with which it would be inappropriate to describe genuine mathematical objects, but entirely appropriate to describe perceptible objects. Genuine mathematical objects are intelligible and, as such, are unchanging. However, in the discussion with the slave, Socrates consistently talks of objects "coming to be" (e.g. at 82d1-2, d2-3, d5-7, and e5-6).²⁶ Most importantly, at the end of the exchange Socrates asks the slave whether it is "From the diagonal, as you say, O slave of Meno's, that

²⁵ Γινώσκεις τετράγωνον χωρίον ὅτι τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν;

²⁶ Socrates addresses this feature of mathematical terminology in the *Republic*. I turn my attention to that issue in a moment.

the double area figure would *come to be*” (85b5-6).²⁷ If, when the slave replies, “Certainly,” we can take him to be indicating that he has a *doxa* whose content is expressed by Socrates’ question (and we have no reason to think that it is not), then the dynamic phrase “coming to be” is part of the content of his *doxa*. At the very least, Socrates is inviting us to understand the slave’s *doxa* as being about the drawn perceptible figure, and not a genuine intelligible mathematical object. It may turn out, then, that when the slave does come to have *epistêmê*, the object of his *epistêmê* will be an intelligible mathematical object and not the same object that is the object of his current *doxa*. Indeed, an essential part of his learning via recollection would be for him to realize that there are such non-perceptible entities.

The above discussion provides the resources to explain why Socrates would say that “in the man who does not have *epistêmê*, about whatever it is he does not have *epistêmê*, there are true *doxai* about those things of which he does not have *epistêmê*,” even if he ultimately thinks that *doxa* and *epistêmê* cannot take the same objects. In some contexts, Plato’s characters are willing to refer to perceptible shapes, such as the one Socrates draws, with the names of mathematical objects, such as “square.” After all, such a drawn figure more closely resembles the genuine mathematical square than, say, a drawn closed figure with only three lines and three angles does.²⁸ In other contexts, however, when greater precision is needed, his characters are unwilling to apply the names of mathematical objects to perceptible figures, reserving such titles for the intelligible objects that perceptible diagrams are meant to represent. If the above interpretation of the *Meno* is correct, then it is clear that Socrates is in the former mood here. On such a view, there is a sense in which a perceptible figure and an intelligible object can both be squares. Thus, there is a sense in which a *doxa* can be about the same thing that (a piece of) *epistêmê* is about even if, on a more fine-grained analysis, there is no particular object such that it can be the object of both *doxa* and *epistêmê*. Given that the *Meno* is not interested in detailed metaphysics, there is nothing wrong with Socrates’ speaking in the looser way here.

Two objections face my proposal that Socrates leaves it open whether the slave’s *doxa* is about a perceptible or intelligible object. First, in Book 6 of the *Republic*, Socrates directly addresses the mathematicians’ use of perceptible diagrams and dynamic language. In that dialogue, he states that such practices, though necessary to the conduct of mathematics, do not accurately characterize the objects of mathematical thought. Moreover, Socrates says that the mathematicians are *aware* of this fact:

Then don’t you [Glaucón] also know that they [mathematicians] use perceptible forms and make their arguments about them, although they are not thinking

²⁷ Ἀπὸ τῆς διαμέτρου ἄν, ὡς σὺ φής, ὃ παῖ Μένωνος, γίγνεται ἄν τὸ διπλάσιον χωρίον.

²⁸ As we will see, the notion of one thing’s resembling another comes to the fore in the *Republic*.

about them, but about those other things that they are like? They make their discourse with a view to the square itself and the diagonal itself, not the diagonal they draw, and similarly with the others. (*Republic* 6, 510d5-e1)

It may be argued that Socrates' claim that mathematicians, despite using perceptible diagrams and dynamic language, do succeed in cognitively engaging with intelligible objects rules out the possibility outlined above.

The problem with this objection, however, is that the people Socrates is talking about in the *Republic* are accomplished mathematicians. Given their experience doing mathematics, they are aware that the objects of their discipline are, in fact, intelligible and not perceptible. The slave, however, is a novice. This is, in fact, his first discussion concerning geometry (cf. 85e6). It is a cognitive achievement to "get off the page (chalkboard, sand, etc.)" and cognitively engage with intelligible objects. After all, when students first learn geometry we constantly have to say things like "don't worry about what the angles on the paper *look like*, just think about what I say about them" and "you won't be able to determine whether the angles are equal by pulling out your protractor." We would not have to say such things if it were not the case that many first time geometry students do cognitively engage with perceptible figures. It is an achievement to be able to use a diagram to think about something else, one that the mathematicians Socrates speaks of in the *Republic* effortlessly make, but one we should *not* expect Meno's slave to have made by the end of his first geometry lesson.²⁹

A second objection stems from the fact that, during their discussion, Socrates describes the slave as "recollecting" (at 82e12-13 and 84a3-4). As discussed above, however, recollection is a process whereby people gain cognitive access to objects to which they had cognitive access in a disembodied state. On the reasonable assumption that disembodied souls do not have perceptual faculties, such objects must be intelligible objects. Thus, the fact that Socrates says the slave is recollecting seems to entail that the slave is cognitively accessing intelligible objects.

Before responding to this objection it is important to distinguish this issue from the related question whether perception plays an essential role in the recollective process.³⁰ Regardless of how that issue is settled, it is clear that, when recollection has occurred, the recollector has gained cognitive access to an intelligible object. Thus, even if recollection does essentially involve sense-perception, Socrates' claim that the slave is recollecting still threatens my proposal.

²⁹ These issues will resurface in Chapter 6 (pp. 141-44) when we consider why Socrates thinks that there can be no opinions concerning perceptible objects.

³⁰ The literature on this issue is vast. For the classic discussion, see Ross [1951, 18], Vlastos [1965a], and Moravcsik [1971]. For more recent discussion, see Bedu-Addo [1983], Scott [2006, 103-05], and Ionescu [2007, 76-78]

In short, my response to this objection is to point out that Socrates only describes the slave as “recollecting,” but never as “having recollected.”³¹ From the fact that the slave is recollecting at some point, however, it does not follow that the slave has recollected anything by that point. We can see this by noting that Socrates thinks, first, that what people normally call “learning” is, in fact, recollection (81c9-d3), and, second, that someone has learned when he or she has acquired *epistêmê* (85d6-7).³² Given these claims, it is entirely possible for someone to be in the process of learning (i.e. in the process of acquiring *epistêmê*) while not yet having learned (i.e. not yet having acquired *epistêmê*). For example, if I am reading Euclid, my teacher can describe me as “learning geometry” (i.e. I am on the path to acquiring *epistêmê* of geometry). If, however, someone interrupts my learning before I have acquired *epistêmê* of geometry, I have not learned (i.e. do not have *epistêmê* of) geometry. Similarly, the slave can be recollecting during the discussion with Socrates (i.e. be on the path to acquiring *epistêmê*) but, since he has not acquired *epistêmê* by the end, fail to have recollected. The key upshot is that we do not have to think that the slave has, at any point in his discussion with Socrates, had any thought that will be constitutive of the thoughts he will have when he ultimately possesses *epistêmê*. Thus, Socrates’ describing the slave as recollecting does not entail that the slave has recollected and, thus, does not entail that the slave has accessed intelligible objects at any point during the discussion. It is entirely possible, therefore, for the slave’s *doxa* to be about the perceptible figure Socrates draws, in line with the interpretation outlined above.

Thus, I submit that, in the *Meno*, Socrates does not commit himself to the view that the same thing can be the object of both *doxa* and *epistêmê*. In the next two chapters I argue that, in the *Republic*, Socrates explicitly rejects this view.

³¹ For discussion related to the issues explored in this paragraph, see Nehamas [1985, 16-24] and Scott [2006, 182-84].

³² This can be seen by noting that the entire discussion with the slave is designed to show Meno that people can inquire successfully even if they seem to lack *ἐπιστήμη*. Cf. Lyons [1963, 151-55] who argues that in Plato’s works quite generally there is a “relation of consequence” between *μανθάνειν* and *ἐπίστασθαι*.

Chapter 4

Introduction to the *Republic's* Epistemology

4.1 Introduction

THE aim of the remainder of this dissertation is to offer an interpretation of the epistemology presented by Socrates in the *Republic* and to philosophically motivate that epistemology. On the interpretation I advance, Socrates distinguishes opinion (*doxa*) from understanding (*epistêmê*) by the fact that their objects form two wholly disjoint groups: perceptible objects and intelligible objects respectively. Such an epistemology is typically (and perhaps pejoratively) called a “Two-Worlds” epistemology: corresponding to the two ontological “worlds” of perceptible objects and intelligible objects are two distinct cognitive relations, opinion and understanding, each of which is borne to the objects in only one ontological world.¹

My interpretation of the *Republic's* epistemology, however, differs markedly from other versions of the Two-Worlds interpretation offered in the literature insofar as I distinguish Socrates' concept of understanding from his concept of knowledge (*gnôsis*). Virtually all interpreters who approach the *Republic* take “understanding” and “knowledge” to be synonyms denoting the cognitive state that Socrates takes to be the aim of philosophical inquiry.² On my interpretation, however, Socrates takes understanding to be a type of knowledge, namely the type of knowledge that can be had of intelligible objects and only of them.

¹ For the language of “worlds” see Introduction, p. 1 fn. 2. I will discuss the distinction between perceptible objects and intelligible objects shortly.

² Stokes is an exception. He takes γνῶσις to be “the recognition with certainty of a thing's distinguishable existence” [1992, 110] and ἐπιστήμη to be “the ordinary word for ‘knowledge’” [ibid., 115]. Stokes does not make much of the distinction, however, except to note that, in the Book 5 argument, Socrates moves from the one to the other.

There is, however, another type of knowledge, namely knowledge of perceptible objects. This latter type of knowledge comes, for Socrates, in the form of the expert opinions of philosophers about how things stand in the perceptible world. And, the opinions of philosophers are expert precisely because they are informed by their understanding of intelligible objects.³ So, for example, a philosopher's opinion that *Sophie is courageous* is expert because it is informed by her theoretical understanding of the nature of Courage, her opinion that *it is just to award Jack the wagon in this legal case* is expert because it is informed by her understanding of Justice, and so on. Although Socrates' distinction between opinion and knowledge/understanding has received much discussion in the literature, his distinction between knowledge and understanding has seldom been acknowledged, let alone discussed in detail. Indeed, the failure to recognize that Socrates draws this conceptual distinction is responsible for much confusion surrounding the *Republic's* epistemology and politics.

Much of the debate in the secondary literature over whether Socrates accepts a Two-Worlds epistemology focuses on a famous argument at the end of Book 5. While this argument is certainly important, and I will discuss it in great detail in the next chapter, in this chapter I propose two constraints on an interpretation of the *Republic's* epistemology: first, that philosophers must be in an epistemically privileged position, relative to non-philosophers, concerning perceptible objects; second, that there can be no understanding of perceptible objects. While few interpreters will balk at the first constraint, almost everyone will balk at the second. It might seem downright obtuse to claim that we are constrained to interpret the Book 5 argument as consistent with the claim that there can be no understanding of perceptible objects. After all, that is universally taken to be the very place where that issue is settled. However, I will show that the constraint is justified by examining a passage in Book 7 that is ignored in the literature.

After arguing for these two constraints I consider why there has been such difficulty surrounding the Two-Worlds interpretation. I argue that much of the confusion stems from an adherence to what I call the "belief vs. knowledge" model (and, really, it is the belief part that causes most of the difficulties). If *doxa* and *epistêmê* are understood, as they traditionally have been, as approximating belief and knowledge respectively, then it is virtually impossible to see why Socrates would distinguish between them on the basis of their objects—it seems a truism that at least some of the objects of belief and knowledge overlap (and this holds for the objects of belief and understanding as well). I argue that understanding *doxa* as more

³ Jan Szaif puts forward a similar interpretation, although he understands Socrates to work with two different "senses of knowing" [2007, 253-55] and he does not take this to correspond to the difference between γνῶσις and ἐπιστήμη. As I understand Socrates, he has a single concept of knowledge, namely as the optimal epistemic state someone can be in with respect to a given subject matter, but he thinks that this comes in two different forms depending on whether or not the subject matter is susceptible to demonstrative proof.

closely approximating opinion than belief provides conceptual resources for interpreting Socrates' discussion that have not been fully appreciated. In particular, we can avail ourselves of the common way of distinguishing "matters of opinion" from "matters of fact," where the hallmark of this latter group is that demonstrative proof is possible.

Once we move to this way of understanding Socrates' discussion, however, it seems that belief has fallen out of the picture. In the final section I argue that this is in a sense right. I should say upfront that I do *not* mean that Socrates lacks the concept of belief, nor that his possessing the concept of belief makes no difference to his discussion. Rather, it means that Socrates sees no reason to afford the notion of belief *as such* any important role in his epistemological theorizing. I argue, instead, that the notion of *hupolêpsis*, which first appears in the Platonic *Definitions* and plays a central role in Aristotle's epistemology, is the first concept in the history of philosophy that approximates the concept of belief.

4.2 Preliminaries: The Two-Worlds Ontology

Since the remainder of this dissertation will often speak of "perceptible objects" as opposed to "intelligible objects," we need to get clear on this distinction. Unfortunately, Socrates never presents anything like an explicit definition of either kind of object. However, when Socrates asks Glaucon what kind of object mathematicians take themselves to be dealing with when doing arithmetic proper, Glaucon provides a characterization of such objects that applies to all intelligible objects:

I think they would answer in this way: that they are talking about those things that admit only of being thought about and can be grasped in no other way.
(526a6-7)

Τοῦτο ἔγωγε, ὅτι περὶ τούτων λέγουσιν ὧν διανοηθῆναι μόνον ἐγχωρεῖ, ἄλλως δ' οὐδαμῶς μεταχειρίζεσθαι δυνατόν.

Intelligible objects, Glaucon tells us, are those that can *only* be grasped through the activity of thought. The qualifier "only" is crucial, since people can certainly think about perceptible objects. What is distinctive of perceptible objects, however, is that they can *also* be perceived. The best way to distinguish intelligible objects from perceptible objects, then, is according to their modes of access: intelligible objects are those objects that people can *only* gain information about through the activity of pure thought; perceptible objects are those objects that people can gain information about through the five senses.

Socrates thinks that the intelligible domain is populated by mathematics (i.e. the objects mathematicians deal with when doing mathematics proper) and natures or essences,

which he also calls “Forms” (*eidê*) or “Ideas” (*ideai*). A difficult question concerns whether Socrates thinks that mathematical and Forms belong to distinct ontological categories within the intelligible domain.⁴ Although I agree with Myles Burnyeat (and Aristotle, cf. *Metaphysics* 987b14-18) that the answer is “Yes,” this issue is, for the most part, not immediately relevant to our discussion.⁵

More care is needed in identifying the objects that populate the perceptible world.⁶ Certainly, the particular objects that we can directly perceive, such as Socrates, the tree in my garden, my dog Fido, and so on, are perceptible objects. Perhaps less obviously, collections or kinds of particular perceptible objects also count as perceptible objects. So, for example, human beings, trees, and dogs, conceived of as collections or kinds, also count as perceptible objects. Unlike Forms, however, these kinds or collections do not have independent existence. A possible source of confusion is that Socrates uses the same word to refer to such collections or kinds that he uses to refer to Forms, namely “*eidê*.” It is clear, however, that Socrates does not think that speaking simply of “*eidê*” is *ipso facto* to speak of Forms (see, e.g., 363e5, 402c2-8, 475b4-6). Importantly, this means that someone can make a claim about, for example, human beings without *ipso facto* making a claim about the Form (i.e. nature) of Human Being. To avoid confusion, I will follow scholarly tradition and use capitalization to demarcate when I am speaking of a Form. Furthermore, unless I explicitly use the phrase “kind(s) of Form(s)” I use the word “kind” to refer exclusively to such collections of particular perceptible objects.

In addition to particular perceptible objects and kinds of such objects, two further types of entity, which may not initially seem to count as perceptible, must be noted. First, with one possible exception (to be discussed momentarily), the constituents of perceptible objects, even if they are themselves imperceptible, belong to the perceptible world. If, for example, it turns out that material reality is ultimately composed of in principle unobservable entities, those entities nevertheless belong to the perceptible world in Socrates’ sense. The possible exception is the psychic constituents of living organisms (and perhaps just human souls). The souls of human beings occupy an odd place in Socrates’ ontology. It is clear

⁴ The key difference between viewing mathematical as Forms and viewing them as belonging to a distinct ontological category is that Forms are meant to be unique (e.g. there is one, and only one, Form of Square). Mathematics, however, requires multiple instances of the same kind of object (for example, the proof of the Pythagorean Theorem involves three squares (cf. Euclid’s *Elements* Book 1, Proposition 47)). See Burnyeat [2000, 33-42] for discussion and references.

⁵ It is only relevant insofar as I think mathematical (unlike perceptibles) *do* instantiate Forms (e.g. each of the squares involved in the proof of the Pythagorean Theorem instantiates the Form of Square). I discuss the difference between instantiation and the metaphysical relation Socrates thinks perceptibles bear to intelligibles (i.e. participation) in the next chapter.

⁶ I do not intend what follows to be an exhaustive list of perceptible objects. Rather, I wish to catalogue the kinds of perceptible objects that are most relevant to our discussion.

that Socrates thinks they are not themselves directly perceivable (see, for example, his discussion of cognitive powers at 477c6-d6). However, unlike possible imperceptible material constituents of perceptible objects, souls have access to the intelligible domain.⁷ Ultimately, I think that we should count the souls of particular people as part of the perceptible world, but we should bear in mind their distinctive status. Lastly, things produced by or composed out of perceptible objects, which may not be themselves directly perceptible, such as rules, laws, or cities, count as part of the perceptible world.

This, then, is Socrates' basic ontological distinction: perceptible objects on the one hand, intelligible objects on the other. Socrates also thinks that a metaphysical relation exists between the objects in the two groups. Perceptible objects, he tells us, "resemble," "approximate," or "participate in" intelligible objects.⁸ In the next chapter we will consider this metaphysical relation in more detail (pp. 113-20). At present, however, it is sufficient to note that Socrates thinks intelligible objects are, in some sense, prior to, or more fundamental than, perceptible objects.

Now that we have a grip on Socrates' basic ontological distinction, we can begin considering how his epistemology relates to his metaphysics.

4.3 First Constraint: Philosophers as Epistemic Authorities

After laying out the constitution of the ideal city in Books 2-4, Socrates and his interlocutors consider particularly controversial aspects of it in Book 5. Towards the end of this Book, Glaucon presses a particularly difficult question concerning "the possibility of this very constitution coming to be and in what way it could" (471c6-7).⁹ Glaucon is willing to admit that *if* a city with such a constitution could be realized then it would be the most blessed of all cities (471c7-d1). What he wants to know is whether the ideal city can be realized or is merely a theoretical construct.

In response to Glaucon's question, Socrates offers what he takes to be the most likely (and, he hints, only) way in which the ideal city can be realized¹⁰:

⁷ Cf. the argument in the *Phaedo* in which Socrates argues for the immortality (or, at least, long-lastingness) of the soul on the basis that it is "more akin" (συγγενέστερον) to Forms than perceptibles (78cff.).

⁸ I use "resemble" to correspond to Socrates' use of ὅμοιος (cf. 472d1), "approximate" to correspond to his use of the superlative form of ἐγγύς (cf. 472c1), and "participate" to correspond to his use of μετέχειν (cf. 472c2).

⁹ τὸ ὡς δυνατὴ αὕτη ἡ πολιτεία γενέσθαι καὶ τίνα τρόπον ποτὲ δυνατή.

¹⁰ In fact, it is not strictly speaking correct to say that Socrates thinks the ideal city can be realized. On Socrates' general metaphysical picture, no perceptible object can instantiate any ideal (473a1-3). What Socrates offers here, then, is his plan for how a city whose constitution is closest (ἐγγύτατα) to that of the ideal city can be brought about (473a5-b2). Although this metaphysical claim and its implications will loom large in the next two chapters, we can ignore them for the moment.

Until philosophers rule as kings in their cities, or those who are nowadays called kings and leading men become genuine and adequate philosophers so that political power and philosophy become thoroughly blended together, while the numerous natures that now pursue either one separately are forcibly prevented from doing so, cities will have no rest from evils, my dear Glaucon, nor, I think, will the human race. And until that happens, the very constitution we have now described in our discussion will never be born to the extent that it can, or see the light of the sun. It is this claim that has made me hesitate to speak for so long, seeing how very paradoxical it would sound. For it is difficult to see that there can be no happiness, either public or private, in any other way. (473c11-e2)

Ἐὰν μή, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, ἣ οἱ φιλόσοφοι βασιλεύσωσιν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἢ οἱ βασιλῆς τε νῦν λεγόμενοι καὶ δυνάσται φιλοσοφήσωσι γνησίως τε καὶ ἱκανῶς, καὶ τοῦτο εἰς ταῦτόν συμπέσῃ, δυνάμεις τε πολιτικῇ καὶ φιλοσοφίᾳ, τῶν δὲ νῦν πορευομένων χωρὶς ἐφ' ἑκάτερον αἱ πολλὰ φύσεις ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποκλεισθῶσιν, οὐκ ἔστι κακῶν παῦλα, ὧ φίλε Γλαύκων, ταῖς πόλεσι, δοκῶ δ' οὐδὲ τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ γένει, οὐδὲ αὕτη ἡ πολιτεία μή ποτε πρότερον φυῇ τε εἰς τὸ δυνατόν καὶ φῶς ἡλίου ἴδῃ, ἣν νῦν λόγῳ διεληλύθαμεν. ἀλλὰ τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ ἐμοὶ πάλαι ὄκνον ἐντίθησι λέγειν, ὀρῶντι ὡς πολὺ παρὰ δόξαν ῥηθήσεται: χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἰδεῖν ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ἄλλη τις εὐδαιμονήσειεν οὔτε ἰδίᾳ οὔτε δημοσίᾳ.

This has to rank as one of the most controversial proposals in Plato's works. As we can see, Socrates is fully aware of how counterintuitive it will sound. Indeed, he calls it the greatest paradox (*paradoxon*, lit. "contrary to (received) opinion") he has offered in the discussion of the ideal city (472a1-7). Glaucon agrees, claiming that, upon hearing it, people will "immediately throw off their cloaks and, stripped for action, snatch any available weapon and make a headlong rush at you, determined to do terrible things to you" (474a1-4). In fact, the consensus among Glaucon and the other interlocutors is that the Greek elite conceive of philosophers as, at best, useless (*achrêstos*) and, at worst, downright injurious (*ponêros*) to cities.¹¹

Socrates lays out a familiar plan for defending his controversial claim:

If we are going to escape somehow from the people you mention, it seems to me necessary to define for them who the philosophers are that we dare to say

¹¹ In Book 6 Socrates explains why philosophers have this reputation (487b1-497a7). In some cases, philosophical natures mature properly but the current constitution of cities makes it impossible for them to be used properly. In other cases, however, the current constitution of cities perverts those with philosophical natures in such a way that they are detrimental to cities. Lastly, many people who are ill-suited to engage in philosophy claim the title "philosopher" and bring disrepute on the group as a whole. Thus, Socrates thinks that the reputation of philosophers is somewhat justified, but that the blame ultimately lies with the current constitution of cities and not with philosophers *as such*.

should rule; so that, once that is clear, one can defend oneself by showing that some people are fitted by nature to engage in philosophy and take the lead in a city. (474b4-c2)

Ἀναγκαῖον οὖν μοι δοκεῖ, εἰ μέλλομέν πη ἐκφεύξεσθαι οὓς λέγεις διορίσασθαι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τοὺς φιλοσόφους τίνας λέγοντες τολμῶμεν φάναι δεῖν ἄρχειν, ἵνα διαδήλων γενομένων δύνηται τις ἀμύνεσθαι, ἐνδεικνύμενος ὅτι τοῖς μὲν προσήκει φύσει ἄπτεσθαι τε φιλοσοφίας ἡγεμονεύειν τ' ἐν πόλει.

Here Socrates emphasizes the same priority of definition advanced in the *Meno* (and reiterated at *Republic* 354c1-3): it is necessary first to determine the nature of Philosopher and then to determine whether, given its nature, certain features belong to Philosopher, such as being best suited to rule. The first part of this task occupies the rest of Book 5; the second part is the primary focus of Books 6 and 7.

Although we will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter, for now it is sufficient to note that Socrates distinguishes philosophers from non-philosophers according to the cognitive achievements they can make. Whereas philosophers achieve knowledge (*gnôsis*), non-philosophers only achieve, at best, opinion (*doxa*) (cf. 476d5-6; 479e10-480a13). Socrates then argues that it is because their knowledge makes them epistemic authorities concerning matters in the perceptible world that philosophers are best suited to rule (cf. 484a1-484d9; 428b7-8).¹² We thus have our first constraint on an interpretation of the *Republic's* epistemology: philosophers must be epistemic authorities, relative to non-philosophers, concerning matters in the perceptible world.

Although many interpreters recognize this constraint, they misunderstand its consequences because they fail to distinguish between Socrates' concept of knowledge and his concept of understanding. Without this distinction, they conclude that Socrates must allow philosophers to make the same cognitive achievement concerning perceptible objects that they make concerning intelligible objects. Thus, Gail Fine argues that, were Socrates to claim that there cannot be knowledge of perceptible objects, he would undermine his political aims:

¹² Although Socrates clearly thinks that knowledge is a necessary condition for being best suited to rule, it is unclear whether he thinks it is a sufficient condition. According to Socrates, we should vest political power in the hands of those with knowledge, so long as they "have no less experience than the others, and are not inferior to them in any other part of virtue" (484d5-6). This suggests that he takes knowledge to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for being best suited to rule. However, in the ensuing discussion, Socrates argues that a person cannot attain knowledge unless he also possesses experience (ἐμπειρία) and the other virtues, and is good at remembering (μνημονικός), quick to learn (εὐμαθής), high-minded (μεγαλοπρεπής), and graceful (εὐχαρής) (cf. 486e1-487a5). If these other qualities are necessary for knowledge, then, so long as Socrates does not think that there are any further qualities necessary for being best suited to rule, Socrates ultimately does think that knowledge is both a necessary and sufficient condition for being best suited to rule.

[T]his sceptical result would be quite surprising in the context of the *Republic*, which aims to persuade us that philosophers should rule, since only they have knowledge, and knowledge is necessary for good ruling. If their knowledge is only of Forms—if, like the rest of us, they only have belief about the sensible world—it is unclear why they are specially fitted to rule in this world. They don't know, any more than the rest of us do, which laws to enact. [1990, 86]

Likewise, Nick Smith argues the same point:

Moreover, the “two-worlds theory” of Plato's epistemology manages to destroy the very argument Plato takes himself to be advancing—after all, the entire distinction the “two-worlds theory” seeks to explain is embedded in an argument context, the main point of which is that philosophers would be better rulers than sight-lovers, and it is the power of knowledge that is supposed to make philosophers better. Unless the judgments involved in ruling are judgments about Forms (which they plainly would not be), the “two-worlds theory” requires that Plato's aim in this argument is actually made unattainable by the very distinction he makes in order to reach it. [2000, 153-154]

Once we distinguish Socrates' concept of knowledge from his concept of understanding, however, we see that Socrates can maintain that there is a cognitive relation philosophers bear exclusively to intelligible objects, namely understanding, while still allowing that philosophers have a privileged cognitive grasp of perceptible objects, namely knowledge.

4.4 Second Constraint: No Understanding of Perceptible Objects

Most interpreters will balk at my claim that we are *constrained* to read Socrates' argument in Book 5 as consistent with denying understanding of perceptible objects, since that is precisely where people think he settles the issue. Although the Book 5 argument is certainly important, a passage in Book 7 contains a clear commitment to the claim that there can be no understanding concerning perceptible objects. Despite its importance, this passage has been overlooked by participants in this debate.¹³ Proponents of a Two-Worlds interpretation do not marshal it as support and opponents do not explain how they would deal with it.

The passage comes during Socrates' discussion of the educational curriculum the future rulers will undergo (521c1-541b5). Having claimed that the ultimate aim of their education

¹³ It has, of course, not been ignored by participants in other debates. See, for example, the lively discussion between Mourelatos [1980] and Vlastos [1980] of the “invisible astronomy” Socrates seems to describe (also see Burnyeat [2000, 56-67]).

is to acquire understanding of the Form of Goodness (cf. 504e6-519d2), Socrates discusses the subjects (*mathêmata*) that should be included in the curriculum to achieve this end. At a metaphorical level, Socrates says that these subjects must “lead them up to the light” (521c2), effect an “ascent to true being” (521c7), and “draw the soul from that which becomes to that which is” (521d4-5). It is clear that Socrates’ aim is to find subjects that concern the right *kinds* of objects.

Famously, Socrates claims that certain branches of mathematics are among the subjects that will lead the soul appropriately “upward.” Indeed, Socrates thinks that the future rulers will exclusively study mathematics for ten years, taking them to the cutting edge of the discipline (cf. 537b1-d8).¹⁴ As Socrates lays out the various branches of mathematics the future rulers will study—arithmetic and calculation, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, and musical harmonics—he insists that such disciplines should not concern perceptible objects. In doing arithmetic and calculation, for example, students must not “propose for discussion numbers attached to visible or tangible bodies” (525d7-8). Likewise, despite the fact that geometers “talk as if they were practical people who make all their arguments for the sake of action” (527a6-8), and so may suggest that geometry deals with perceptibles, true geometry is “knowledge of what always is, not of something that comes to be and passes away” (527b4-5).¹⁵ True mathematics—i.e. the mathematics that can form part of the path towards understanding the Form of Goodness—does not concern perceptible but, rather, intelligible objects.

By the time Socrates discusses astronomy, Glaucon thinks that he has grasped the kind of disciplines Socrates wants the future rulers to study. Accordingly, he praises (*epainein*) astronomy by saying, “it seems to me clear to everyone that it compels the soul to look upward and leads it from things here to things there” (529a1-2). The context shows that Glaucon first points at the mundane objects around them (“the things here”) and then points up to the heavens (“the things there”). Glaucon, then, thinks that the kind of astronomy the future rulers should study concerns the heavenly bodies and takes himself to be praising astronomy

¹⁴ Interpreters have intensely debated why Socrates prescribes so much mathematics. The traditional view is that it is because Socrates thinks mathematical study provides particularly useful mental training (cf. Taylor [1926, 283], Shorey [1933, 236], and Irwin [1995, 301]). However, Burnyeat persuasively argues that Socrates’ primary reason for prescribing so much mathematics is that “The mathematical sciences are the ones that tell us how things are objectively speaking, and they are themselves sciences of value” [2000, 8]. As such, Burnyeat argues, mathematics is a constitutive part of the *ethical* training of the future rulers, since understanding value is, according to Socrates, a necessary component of being a superlative moral agent.

¹⁵ Ὡς τοῦ ἀεὶ ὄντος γνώσεως, ἀλλὰ οὐ τοῦ ποτέ τι γιγνομένου καὶ ἀπολλυμένου. We must be careful in understanding Socrates’ criticism of the geometers’ speech. Many interpreters think that Socrates is criticizing mathematical practice *as such* (e.g. Robinson [1953, 146-56]). However, I agree with Burnyeat [2000, 37-42] that this view is mistaken. Although Socrates calls the geometers’ language “ridiculous” (γελοῖως), he also says it is necessary (ἀναγκαῖως) (527a6). That is, such language is essential to the practice of mathematics. Here Socrates is simply emphasizing that, despite its language, geometry does not concern perceptibles.

in the right way by pointing out that such astronomy concerns objects in a “higher” domain. Hence, he takes himself to be following Socrates’ demand that they identify subjects that lead the soul “upward.”

Socrates, however, admonishes Glaucon’s praise in no uncertain terms:

It seems to me your conception of “higher studies” is a good deal too generous! For it seems that if someone were looking at something by leaning his head back and studying ornaments on a ceiling, you think that he is beholding them with his intellect, not with his eyes! Maybe you are right and I am foolish. For I just cannot conceive of any subject making the soul look upward except that which concerns that which is, and that is invisible. If anyone tries to learn something about perceptible things, whether by gaping upward or squinting downward, I would say that he never learns—*since none of these things admits of understanding*—and that his soul is not looking up but down, whether he does his learning lying on his back on land or on sea! (529 a9-c2)

Οὐκ ἀγεννῶς μοι δοκεῖς, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τὴν περὶ τὰ ἄνω μάθησιν λαμβάνειν παρὰ σαυτῷ ἢ ἐστὶ: κινδυνεύεις γὰρ καὶ εἴ τις ἐν ὀροφῇ ποικίλματα θεώμενος ἀνακύπτων καταμανθάνοι τι, ἡγεῖσθαι ἂν αὐτὸν νοήσῃ ἀλλ' οὐκ ὄμμασι θεωρεῖν. ἴσως οὖν καλῶς ἡγῇ, ἐγὼ δ' εὐηθικῶς. ἐγὼ γὰρ αὖ οὐ δύναμαι ἄλλο τι νομίσαι ἄνω ποιοῦν ψυχὴν βλέπειν μάθημα ἢ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἂν περὶ τὸ ὄν τε ἦ καὶ τὸ ἀόρατον, ἐάν τέ τις ἄνω κεχηνῶς ἢ κάτω συμμεμυκῶς τῶν αἰσθητῶν τι ἐπιχειρῇ μανθάνειν, οὔτε μαθεῖν ἂν ποτέ φημι αὐτόν—ἐπιστήμην γὰρ οὐδὲν ἔχειν τῶν τοιούτων—οὔτε ἄνω ἀλλὰ κάτω αὐτοῦ βλέπειν τὴν ψυχὴν, κἂν ἐξ ὑπτίας νέων ἐν γῇ ἢ ἐν θαλάττῃ μανθάνῃ.

Socrates finds Glaucon’s praise of astronomy inadequate because Glaucon mistakenly thinks that the kind of astronomy the future rulers should study concerns the heavenly bodies. However, the heavenly bodies, despite their exalted status, are perceptible. As such, Socrates says, they cannot be the kind of object that the future rulers will study, because studying them will not lead to understanding. And, the reason Socrates gives is simple: perceptible objects do not admit of understanding.¹⁶ In sum, no one can understand why perceptible objects are the way that they are.¹⁷

¹⁶ Aristotle also uses the verb ἔχειν in combination with ἐπιστήμη to indicate that the latter can be had of a given subject matter at *De Partibus Animalium* 1.1, 639a1-4.

¹⁷ This passage rules out Nick Smith’s [2000] interpretation of the *Republic*’s epistemology. Smith rightly points out that we must distinguish between two things: (1) what objects a cognitive power is set-over and (2) what objects a cognitive state is of or about (I elaborate on this distinction in the next chapter, see pp. 94-97). Smith argues that just because Socrates maintains (in Book 5) that ἐπιστήμη, the cognitive power, is set-over Forms, this does not commit him to the view that ἐπιστήμη, the cognitive state, can only concern Forms (and similarly for δόξα and perceptibles). The passage under consideration here, however, clearly states that ἐπιστήμη concerning perceptibles is impossible (note the genitives: αἰσθητῶν, τοιούτων). In this context,

Given the importance of this passage to my overall interpretation of the *Republic*, it is worth considering how those who deny that Socrates rules out understanding of perceptible objects might handle it. The most promising move would be to argue that Socrates does not mean that understanding concerning perceptibles is impossible *tout court* but, rather, that it is impossible to acquire understanding of them without having understanding concerning Forms. On this interpretation, all Socrates claims in this passage is that understanding *requires* understanding concerning Forms, not that it is *limited* to Forms. I suspect that this is how Gail Fine would attempt to deal with this passage, given that she claims,

To say that knowledge is set over Forms is shorthand for the claim that all knowledge requires knowledge of Forms; to say that belief is set over the many Fs is shorthand for the claim that if one is restricted to sensibles, the most one can achieve is belief. [1990, 94]

Such a reading, however, is not consistent with the text. Socrates says that no one ever (*oute pote*) learns anything about perceptibles. He even goes so far as to say that it does not matter how one examines them (“whether by gaping upward or squinting downward”). The reason why (*gar*) is simple: none of these things (i.e. perceptibles) admits of understanding. He does not add any qualifier, such as “in this way” or “without understanding concerning Forms,” that may salvage the alternative reading. His point, then, is not that learning about perceptibles requires understanding concerning Forms. Rather, his point is that one cannot learn about perceptibles because, to put it bluntly, there is nothing to be learned about them.¹⁸

We thus have our second constraint: we must read the Book 5 argument as being consistent with the claim that there cannot be understanding concerning perceptible objects. In combination, our two constraints entail that we must find an interpretation of the *Republic*’s epistemology such that philosophers are epistemic authorities concerning the perceptible world *without* being able to have understanding of it. In the remaining chapters of the dissertation I endeavor to do just that. Before I turn to that task, however, I wish to discuss one of the main reasons why so many philosophers have opposed a Two-Worlds interpretation. This discussion will suggest that we should significantly alter the traditional framework in which Socrates’ discussion has been understood.

ἐπιστήμη must be thought of as a cognitive state. Thus, Smith’s argument, though ingenious and insightful, ultimately cannot accommodate the text.

¹⁸ Socrates here conceives of learning (μάθησις) as a matter of coming to acquire understanding. As noted above (Ch. 3, p. 54 fn. 32), Lyons [1963, 151-55] argues that, in Plato generally, there is a “relation of consequence” between μανθάνειν and ἐπίστασθαι.

4.5 *Doxa* as Belief

One of the chief obstacles to attributing a Two-Worlds epistemology to Socrates is the tendency to understand *doxa* as approximating belief. Regardless of whether one takes *epistêmê* to approximate knowledge or to approximate understanding, the fact that it might have been a live question for Socrates whether belief and *epistêmê* can take the same objects has been a source of puzzlement, and even embarrassment, for interpreters of Ancient Philosophy.¹⁹ If understanding entails knowledge, distinguishing understanding from belief according to their objects is no less problematic than distinguishing knowledge from belief in the same way. And, even those philosophers who think that understanding does *not* entail knowledge typically take belief to be the psychological underpinning of understanding.²⁰ In what follows I show just how odd the idea that belief and *epistêmê* can be distinguished according to their objects is by focusing on the case of belief and knowledge. I then give a diagnosis of this oddity, which will motivate seeking an alternative understanding of *doxa*.

Discussion of the relationship between belief and knowledge typically concerns differences in justificatory or evidentiary support. In such discussions, the question is “What is the difference between merely truly believing that *p* and knowing that *p*?” Obviously, it is a presupposition of this question that belief and knowledge *can* take the same objects. To the extent that the question *whether* they can might arise, it seems to have an obvious answer: “Yes.” Traditional justified true belief accounts of knowledge, for example, take knowledge that *p* just to be belief that *p* plus some further feature or features.²¹ More recent philosophers, such as Tim Williamson, who deny that knowledge can be analyzed in terms of more basic components (e.g. belief, truth, justification) still take knowing that *p* to entail believing that *p* [2000, 41-48]. And, even those few philosophers who argue that a person *can* know that *p* without believing that *p* still think that it can and often does happen that a person both believes and knows that *p*.²²

A debate did exist, primarily among mid-twentieth century natural language philosophers, over whether belief and knowledge exclude each other. Noting that it is odd for people to say that they believe something they take themselves to know, or to say that they know something they take themselves only to believe, philosophers such as H. A. Prichard

¹⁹ The question whether δόξα and ἐπιστήμη can take the same objects was not a live one just for Socrates. Aristotle also considers it, and also answers negatively (albeit in his typical, “in one sense no, in another sense yes,” fashion), in *Posterior Analytics* 1.33. Although Socrates’ treatment of the issue has been much discussed, Aristotle’s has received less attention. However, see, G. Fine [2010].

²⁰ See, for example, Kvanvig [2003, 185-203]).

²¹ This is the “traditional” analysis of knowledge we have inherited from Gettier. He uses “belief” to capture a variety of attitudes that philosophers use to analyze knowledge, such as Chisholm’s “acceptance” and Ayer’s “being sure” (see Gettier [1963, 121 fns. 1 and 2] for the references to Chisholm and Ayer).

²² See, for example, C. Radford [1966] and Myers-Schulz and Schwitzgebel [2013].

(cf. [1950, 86-89]) argue that belief and knowledge *do* exclude each other.²³ However, this debate only concerns whether belief that *p* excludes knowledge that *p* and vice-versa. No party to this debate claimed that the fact that something is a possible object of belief *excludes* its being a possible object of knowledge. It was, again, a presupposition that belief and knowledge *could* take the same objects, just not necessarily for the same person at the same time. According to a Two-Worlds epistemology, however, it would be impossible, in principle, for the same thing to be the object of both belief and knowledge, whether for one person at two different times or two different people at the same time.

Zeno Vendler [1972, ch. 5] is perhaps the only philosopher who argues that belief and knowledge are distinguished according to their objects. According to Vendler, whereas belief is an attitude borne to propositions, knowledge is an attitude borne to facts. Although such a view may be considered a version of a Two-Worlds epistemology, it is not in the spirit of the Two-Worlds epistemology Socrates presents in the *Republic*.²⁴ As we saw earlier in this chapter (pp. 57-59), the alleged distinction between the objects of *doxa* and the objects of *epistêmê* rests on their different modes of cognitive access: we have perceptual access to the former and only noetic access to the latter. No one, so far as I know, distinguishes between propositions and facts along these lines. Moreover, even an interpreter such as Gail Fine [1978, 1990], who argues that Socrates distinguishes *doxa* from *epistêmê* on the basis of the propositions they can range over, still holds propositions to be the objects of both kinds of cognitive state.

On the traditional understanding of *doxa* as approximating belief, then, the Two-Worlds epistemology finds few sympathizers. The reason for this is fairly obvious. Although philosophers might disagree over the exact nature of belief, it is generally agreed that belief is, minimally, a relation in which a thinker takes something to be true.²⁵ That is, if *S* believes *p*, *S* takes *p* to be true.²⁶ If this is how we understand belief, it is clear that belief and knowledge can take the same objects because in knowing something a thinker takes that thing to be true. To put the point of this paragraph slightly differently: belief just is the subjectively similar component of that family of cognitive states that consist in taking the world to be a certain way. Regardless of what, exactly, *epistêmê* amounts to, it clearly involves taking the world to be a certain way. Given this, it would seem absurd for Socrates to deny that the objects of *epistêmê* and belief can overlap.

²³ Other philosophers only maintained that knowledge excludes belief, but not vice-versa. For further discussion, see Harrison [1963].

²⁴ Crombie, however, says a few things that might hint at such an interpretation [1963 (Vol. 2), 41-50].

²⁵ This definition comes from Zagzebski [1999, 93]. It echoes Augustine's famous claim that "to believe is nothing other than to think with assent" (*credere, nihil aliud est, quam cum assensione cogitare*) (*Predestination of the Saints* 5). "Take" should be understood broadly so as to include both active and passive endorsement.

²⁶ This is taken from G. Fine [2000, 82].

Of course, someone may conclude that Socrates is simply wrong on this issue. Indeed, many prominent interpreters of the *Republic* criticize Socrates for accepting a Two-Worlds epistemology concerning belief and knowledge. R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, for example, argue that Socrates was right to distinguish between belief and knowledge, but that he erred in attempting to draw a hard line between the objects of these two mental states [1971, 70-78].²⁷ And, I suspect that many interpreters who argue that Socrates does *not* distinguish between *doxa* and *epistêmê* according to their objects are motivated to find such an alternative interpretation because they think such a view concerning belief and knowledge would be ludicrous.²⁸

I think, however, that we have sufficient motivation for seeking an alternative understanding of *doxa*. What we want is an understanding on which the idea that *doxa* and *epistêmê* can be distinguished on the basis of their objects does not seem so absurd. If we can find such an understanding, as I think we can, we will be better positioned to evaluate the philosophical merits of Socrates' overall position.

4.6 *Doxa* as Opinion

In this section I argue that taking *doxa* to approximate opinion allows us to better see the motivation for thinking that *doxa* and *epistêmê* might be distinguished according to their objects. While several translators and interpreters have proposed understanding *doxa* this way, I think that the conceptual resources it puts at our disposal, especially for understanding Socrates' position, have not been fully recognized. However, I wish to say upfront that opinion is not a perfect correlate and serious problems still face a Two-Worlds epistemology even on such an understanding of *doxa*. My aim is only to show that certain features of opinion make it a considerable improvement over belief in understanding Socrates' position.

At first blush, it may seem that belief and opinion are so closely related that not much philosophical mileage can be gained by insisting on a change from the former to the latter. Indeed, there seems to be a use of "opinion" in which it is more or less interchangeable with "belief." That is, if *S* believes that *p* then *S* is of the opinion that *p* and vice-versa. It is not immediately clear that substituting different values for "*p*" will make us reject that

²⁷ According to Cross and Woozley, Socrates became entangled in these difficulties because he conceived of thinking as "a sort of ghostly sensing" [1971, 79]. Because Socrates understood thinking as somehow analogous to sense-perceiving, they argue, he was led to think that the objects of both belief and knowledge must be things "out there" in the world with which one can become acquainted (of course, however, intelligible objects are not supposed to be spatio-temporally located).

²⁸ Even Szaif, with whom I find myself in much agreement, claims support for his interpretation from the fact that "it does not lead into the absurd consequence that it is impossible to form an opinion *about* a Form or that one cannot know anything *about* concrete objects" [2007, 266].

biconditional. Indeed, I suspect that the similarities between belief and opinion lead even those philosophers and translators who render “*doxa*” as “opinion” not to place too much philosophical importance on the move. Gail Fine offers a representative example of this sentiment in a comment on her use of the word “belief”:

I use ‘belief’ merely as a counter for *doxa*; ‘opinion’ or ‘judgement’ are equally possible translations. [1978, 121 fn. 2]

Despite this, there is a use of the word “opinion” on which it denotes a more specific notion than that of belief. In particular, there is a use of the word “opinion” on which it denotes a belief held without proof. That is, whereas a belief is any relation in which a thinker takes the world to be a certain way, an opinion is a relation in which a thinker takes the world to be a certain way without being able to prove that the world is that way. The key difference in what we might call the “color” or “flavor” of the words “opinion” and “belief,” is that the former has built into it an evaluation of the cognitive achievement its possessor has made that the latter lacks. In this use of the word, to call a view an “opinion” is to indicate that it is, in some sense, epistemically deficient. To call a view a “belief,” on the other hand, does not necessarily indicate such an evaluation. It is this difference that makes “opinion” a better correlate than “belief” for “*doxa*.”

The connotation of relative epistemic deficiency that “opinion” has and “belief” lacks has been noted by other interpreters.²⁹ However, it has not been fully appreciated that this connotation allows us to better understand the motivation for distinguishing between *doxa* and *epistêmê* according to their objects. It is a commonplace to distinguish domains where it is a “matter of opinion” what states of affairs obtain from domains where some superior cognitive achievement is possible.³⁰ For example, whether some particular object, like a glass of wine, has some particular aesthetic property, like tastiness, is often said to be a matter of opinion; whether $2+2=4$, however, is not a matter of opinion. The standard way to characterize the latter domains is as “matters of fact,” but that is an unfortunate description, since it contrasts a metaphysical notion (i.e. fact) with an epistemological one (i.e. opinion). When we characterize a domain as a “matter of fact,” however, we are indicating that stronger grounds can be given for accepting a view concerning that domain than can be given for accepting a view concerning something that is a matter of opinion.

One immediate worry is that, when we describe something as “a matter of opinion” or, even worse, “*just* a matter of opinion,” we often mean that it doesn’t much matter which way one goes on the issue. For example, while some people may say that the question whether

²⁹ Cf. Vogt [2012, 10].

³⁰ “Domains” should be taken quite broadly, so that it can include particular issues and subject matters.

the predicate “tasty” holds of a particular quantity of wine is a “matter of opinion” for sophisticated philosophical reasons, typically that phrase suggests that it is of no consequence whether one answers “Yes” or “No.” “Opinion,” however, does not always have this connotation. Consider, for example, the way we speak of “expert opinions,” such as a doctor’s “medical opinion” that a particular patient should undergo a particular course of treatment. We certainly do not think that such an issue is subjective, nor do we think that it doesn’t matter which way the doctor’s opinion goes: matters of life and death depend on it!

I think that the notion of a doctor’s medical opinion provides a helpful model for understanding Socrates’ idea that the objects of *doxa* and *epistêmê* are distinct. To begin, note that we do not think that all the issues that are relevant to a doctor’s medical practice are matters of opinion. It would be odd, for example, to describe the question whether *HIV causes AIDS* as a “matter of opinion.” And this, I take it, is because we think it can be proved (and, indeed, has been proved) that HIV causes AIDS. As a result, it would be odd to refer to a well-informed doctor’s view that *HIV causes AIDS* as one of her “medical opinions.”³¹ We are most comfortable speaking of a doctor’s “medical opinion” with respect to her views concerning matters in the messy perceptible world: for example, a doctor’s view that *Susan should undergo thus-and-such a course of chemotherapy*.

In calling such views “opinions,” we indicate that they are somehow epistemically deficient. This epistemic deficiency, however, need not consist in a deficiency compared to other views about the very same matter. That is, in calling a doctor’s view that *Susan should undergo thus-and-such a course of chemotherapy* an “opinion” we are not necessarily saying that it is less authoritative than a colleague’s view that *Susan should undergo thus-and-such a course of chemotherapy* could be.³² Indeed, the reason we consult multiple doctors is to get “second opinions.” The deficiency manifests, rather, relative to the epistemic status of views that can be had concerning other matters, such as on the question whether *HIV causes AIDS*. In particular, whereas it can be, and, indeed, has been, definitively proved that HIV causes AIDS, it cannot be definitively proved that a particular course of treatment is best for a particular patient. Importantly, however, this inability to prove whether a prescribed course of treatment is best is not necessarily due to epistemic limitations on the part of doctors. After

³¹ Of course, perhaps it is impossible to prove causation. If we are worried about that, we can substitute some other medically relevant issue for which we think definitive proof is possible (e.g. that the heart pumps blood). It is interesting to note that we do seem comfortable calling a view an “opinion” to the degree that we think it cannot be proved. For example, it is not absurd to refer to the medical community’s opinion that *smoking causes cancer* and this may be because we think that causation eludes definitive proof (or, at least, eludes definitive proof in this area).

³² Of course, the doctor’s view can be more authoritative than some other person’s view about that matter, such as the hospital janitor. The point here, however, is that the deficiency is not necessarily relative to other views about the same matter.

all, a doctor's opinion may be informed by a full understanding of medicine and full information concerning the condition of the patient. It may, in other words, be the best that is humanly possible concerning the matter. Rather, it is certain features of the subject matter itself that make proof impossible.

It is difficult to come up with precise criteria for when it is a matter of opinion what states of affairs obtain in a given domain and when a superior cognitive achievement is available. The above discussion, however, suggests that it is helpful to understand the distinction as connected to different expectations we should have with respect to "Whether" questions. When we ask "Whether p ?", there are some domains where we should not expect proof of whether p . Perhaps the best example of such domains are aesthetic, but the example of the doctor's medical opinion provides another domain. There are some domains, however, where we should expect definitive proof in response to "Whether" questions. In mathematics, for example, we should not rest content with an answer to "Whether p ?" that did not consist in a proof of whether p (of course, maybe we should not rest content with just any proof of whether p , but only with proofs of a certain kind). Although this is a rough characterization of the distinction between matters of opinion and matters where a superior cognitive achievement is available, it provides a sufficient working conception to see if it can make better sense of Socrates' position.

If we understand *doxa* as opinion rather than belief, we can understand Socrates' question whether the objects of *doxa* and the objects of *epistêmê* are the same as asking whether there is a genuine distinction between domains where it is a matter of opinion what states of affairs obtain and domains where a superior cognitive achievement is possible. And this, I submit, is a more intelligible and philosophically interesting question than asking if the objects of belief and knowledge (or understanding) can overlap. If there is such a distinction, the question becomes, "Where do we draw the line?" As we will see in the next chapter, Socrates draws the line between the perceptible realm and the intelligible realm, with the former being a matter of opinion and the latter being a matter for understanding. Ultimately, I will argue that it is Socrates' metaphysical view of perceptible objects that leads him to conclude that the kind of explanation required for understanding (i.e. demonstrative proof) cannot be given of matters in the perceptible world. However, just as we take doctors' medical opinions to be expert and, hence, authoritative, Socrates takes philosophers' opinions to be expert and, hence, authoritative. This idea is the key to reconciling his epistemology with his politics.

It is worth noting that, as the example of the doctor's medical opinion indicates, taking *doxa* to approximate opinion does a better job of motivating the idea that there are certain things that can only be grasped as a matter of *doxa* than it does the converse claim that there

are certain things that can only be grasped as a matter of *epistêmê*. If the distinctive feature of an opinion is that it is held without proof, it seems clear that someone can have an opinion about some subject matter where proof is, in fact, available. For example, someone can have the view that $2+2=4$ despite being unable to prove that $2+2=4$. Wouldn't such a view, since it is held in the absence of proof, count as an opinion, even though it concerns a matter where proof is available? But, if it is an opinion, doesn't this entail that it must be about perceptible objects? Where, then, would Socrates classify it?

This is a serious worry and I do not have a fully satisfactory solution. Indeed, I ultimately think Socrates' view that there can be no opinions concerning intelligible objects is the most questionable part of his epistemology.³³ Remember, however, that my aim in this section is not to solve all the problems surrounding a Two-Worlds epistemology. Rather, I am developing a framework in which the issue does not seem as intractable as it does when *doxa* is taken to approximate belief. Nevertheless, in the final chapter I propose a way of motivating Socrates' claim that, while not fully satisfactory, shows that it has philosophical merit (see pp. 141-45).

4.7 Whither Belief?

If *doxa* approximates the more specific notion of opinion, the question arises whether some other element of Socrates' epistemology approximates the more general notion of belief. I submit that the answer is, "No." That is, insofar as belief is the generic relation of taking the world to be a certain way, Socrates is not interested in belief *as such*. Let me be clear: opinion (*doxa*), understanding (*epistêmê*), and knowledge (*gnôsis*), as well as imagination (*eikasía*), conviction (*pistis*), thought (*dianoia*), and comprehension (*noêsis*) (into which Socrates divides opinion and understanding in his discussion of the Divided Line) are all cognitive relations in which a thinker takes the world to be a certain way. None of them, however, corresponds to the generic notion itself. Nor, I submit, does any other epistemic concept Socrates explicitly invokes.³⁴

³³ Of course, I have not yet argued that it *is* part of his epistemology. I do so in the next chapter (pp. 96-97).

³⁴ Katja Vogt accepts this point but thinks that it tells in favor of rendering δόξα as "belief" [2012, 10-11]. She objects to translating δόξα as "opinion" because, "This translation, though tempting because it captures the derogative sense of *doxa*, is misleading. It suggests that there is a broader category, belief, of which opinions are a subclass." [ibid. 10]. According to Vogt, then, to translate δόξα as "opinion" would suggest that Socrates thinks there is some broader category of which δόξα is a subclass. However, given that "belief" is used today precisely to denote such a broader category, I think it is more dangerous to translate δόξα as "belief" and thereby suggest that δόξα itself is that broader category. I think it preferable to render δόξα as "opinion" and just bear in mind that Socrates does not himself explicitly invoke any such broader category. Moreover, as we will see in a moment, there is good reason to think that Socrates thought there was such a broader category, but just did not think it necessary to invoke it explicitly in his epistemology.

In order to be clear on what I am claiming, I want to consider two similar claims that I am *not* making. First, I am not claiming that Socrates does not *have* the concept of belief. Socrates certainly respects the distinction between, on the one hand, the way the world is and, on the other hand, the way someone takes the world to be. So, I am not saying that Socrates does not have the concept of belief in the sense that he might not have, say, the concept of nuclear fusion. Second, I am not saying that his possession of the concept of belief makes *no difference whatsoever* to the way he presents his epistemological views. One way we can see its influence is in Socrates' use of the same verb to characterize both opinion and understanding. For example, Socrates uses the verb "to acknowledge" (*nomizein*) to characterize, on the one hand, an opinion concerning the many perceptible beautiful things and, on the other hand, understanding concerning the Form of Beauty (476c1-2).³⁵ The best way to explain Socrates' use of such verbs is by assuming that Socrates does think there is at least a subjectively similar component to (at least some of) the various cognitive relations on which he focuses. Contrast this with the way in which Socrates may possess, say, the concept of Pegasus, but his possession of that concept makes no difference to the presentation of his epistemology. In fact, for the sake of ease of presentation, I will at times use the noun "view" to correspond to Socrates' generic use of such verbs. It should be borne in mind, however, that my use of "view" corresponds to no noun in Socrates' epistemological vocabulary.

Someone may wonder what my claim that Socrates is not interested in the concept of belief *as such* amounts to, given that I (1) think that Socrates possesses the concept of belief, (2) think that his possession of that concept makes a difference to the presentation of his epistemology, and (3) will employ the noun "view" to explicate his position. It amounts to the claim that Socrates is interested in problems specific to species of belief that are not necessarily problems with the general notion of belief. Moreover, it means that Socrates does not think that the correct way to define, analyze, or even characterize the epistemological concepts he *is* interested in is by means of some common genus of which they are species (unlike, as we will see in a moment, Aristotle does).

4.7.1 *Hupolêpsis* as Belief

In order to both buttress and develop the preceding ideas, I wish to propose the thesis that the first concept explicitly employed in the history of philosophy that does approximate the concept of belief is *hupolêpsis*.³⁶ The noun "*hupolêpsis*" does not appear in any authentic Platonic dialogue, although the verb "*hupolambanein*" and adjective "*hupolêpton*" do. The

³⁵ Socrates also uses the verbs "to think" (ἡγέομαι) and "to seem" (δοκέω) in such a way.

³⁶ I am unsure how widespread this view is. Although some translators render ὑπόληψις as "belief" (cf. Barnes' *Posterior Analytics*), I have not seen any systematic defense of the view in print. In recent personal conversation, at the conference 'Doxa in Aristotle' organized by Katja Vogt at Columbia University (April 26-

noun, however, does appear in the Platonic *Definitions*.³⁷ In the *Definitions* the concept of *hupolêpsis* is invoked in a structurally similar manner to the way in which the concept of belief is employed today, namely to define (or analyze, characterize, etc.) various other cognitive states. Consider, for example, the following three definitions:³⁸:

Pistis: *hupolêpsis* that things are as they appear to one (413c4)³⁹

Doxa: *hupolêpsis* that is changeable by argument (414c3)⁴⁰

Epistêmê: *hupolêpsis* of the soul that is unchangeable by argument (414c1)⁴¹

Aristotle's use of "*hupolêpsis*" is entirely consistent with its use in the Platonic *Definitions*. Aristotle explicitly says that *epistêmê* and *doxa* (as well as *phronêsis* and the opposites of these three) are the differentiae of *hupolêpsis* (*De Anima* 427b24-26).⁴² As this claim would lead us to expect, Aristotle uses the notion of *hupolêpsis* to characterize various cognitive relations: non-demonstrative understanding (*epistêmê anapodeiktos*) is "*hupolêpsis* in an immediate proposition" (*APo* 88b36-7) and *doxa* is "*hupolêpsis* in an immediate and non-necessary proposition" (*APo* 89a3-4).⁴³ These Aristotelian passages, as well as the Platonic *Definitions*, would be impossible to understand if we approached them thinking that "*doxa*" means "belief." The Platonic definition and Aristotle's characterization of "*doxa*" as a certain type of *hupolêpsis*, would amount to characterizing belief as a certain type of some more basic cognitive state. Trying to identify that more basic cognitive state would likely be a wild-goose chase. If, however, we take "*doxa*" to mean "opinion" and "*hupolêpsis*" to mean "belief," these passages would be characterizing opinion as a certain type of belief, which is perfectly comprehensible and, as discussed above, quite natural.⁴⁴

Although this issue clearly warrants further development, I submit that if we are looking for a correlate for the concept of belief in the philosophical period surrounding Plato's writing, *hupolêpsis* is a more promising candidate than *doxa*.

27, 2013), Marko Malink said he agrees with it. It was clear, however, that the view was not generally held by the conference participants.

³⁷ Controversy exists over the authenticity of the *Definitions* (see Hutchinson's discussion in Cooper's *Plato: Complete Works*, 1167-68). It would, in fact, help my argument if the *Definitions* are not by Plato. What is important is that the concept of ὑπόληψις was employed, either in Plato's time or immediately thereafter, in a structurally similar manner to the way in which the concept of belief is employed today.

³⁸ Translations of the *Definitions* begin from Hutchinson.

³⁹ Πίστις ὑπόληψις τοῦ οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς αὐτῷ φαίνεται. I accept Hutchinson's contention that ὁρθή has been inappropriately transposed.

⁴⁰ Δόξα ὑπόληψις μεταπειστός ὑπὸ λόγου.

⁴¹ Ἐπιστήμη ὑπόληψις ψυχῆς ἀμετάπτωτος ὑπὸ λόγου.

⁴² Εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ὑπολήψεως διαφοραί, ἐπιστήμη καὶ δόξα καὶ φρόνησις καὶ τὰναντία τούτων.

⁴³ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 1140b31-32.

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the standard meaning of the verb ὑπολαμβάνειν is "to take up," which dovetails nicely with the general notion of belief presented above.

4.8 Brief Recap and Prospectus

We have seen that the traditional understanding of Socrates' discussions of *epistêmê* in the *Meno* and *Republic* is misguided. While it has traditionally been thought that those discussions attempt to analyze knowledge as justified true belief, I have argued that Socrates is not concerned to analyze knowledge, that it is not helpful to appeal to a notion of justification to illuminate Socrates' epistemology, and that Socrates shows no philosophical interest in belief as such. Rather, Socrates is interested in understanding, which he takes to be a matter of grasping a deductive proof of some fact from first principles at least one of which states the nature or essence of some entity. Thus, according to Socrates, in order for a fact to be a possible object of understanding it must belong to a domain structured in terms of first principles and provable theorems. As we will see in the next two chapters, Socrates' metaphysics entails that propositions about perceptible objects do not fit into such a domain and, hence, cannot express the content of any (piece of) understanding. Nevertheless, he thinks that philosophers' opinions concerning perceptible objects are expert precisely because they are informed by their understanding of intelligible objects.

Chapter 5

The Argument of *Republic* 5

5.1 Introduction

IN this chapter I turn my attention to the discussion at the end of *Republic* 5, which is at the center of debates over the Two-Worlds issue. This chapter is considerably longer than, and is of a different tenor from, the previous chapters, since it contains a more or less line-by-line examination of Socrates' entire discussion. As there is always a danger that such examinations will lose sight of the woods for the trees, I first wish to provide an overview of how I understand the entire discussion.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the discussion at the end of Book 5 constitutes the first stage of Socrates' response to Glaucon's question concerning the realizability of the ideal city. As I understand the discussion, it consists of three main parts. In Part 1 (472a1-475c8) Socrates claims that the best way to bring about a city whose constitution is closest to that of the ideal city is to vest political power in the hands of philosophers. He then identifies philosophers as those who are desirous of all learning and wisdom. In Part 2 (475d1-476d6) Socrates distinguishes philosophers from certain people with whom they may be mistaken: the lovers of sights and sounds. He argues that, whereas philosophers achieve knowledge (*gnôsis*), the lovers of sights and sounds can achieve, at best, opinion (*doxa*). In Part 3 (476d7-480a13) Socrates defends the conclusion reached in Part 2 by turning his attention to the prior notion of a cognitive power. Since possession of a cognitive state requires the exercise of a corresponding cognitive power, Socrates aims to show the lovers of sights and sounds that they cannot achieve knowledge, the cognitive state, because they do not exercise their power of knowledge. Although I cover the entire argument, spatial limitations force me to discuss some parts in less detail than others. And, since the majority of scholarly debate focuses on Part 3, I discuss it in greatest detail.

5.2 Part 1: Philosophers Should Rule! But, Who Are They? (472a1-475c8)

Before directly answering Glaucon's question, Socrates attempts to manage his interlocutors' expectations concerning the sort of answer he can give. He reminds them that the aim of their discussion is to determine what justice and injustice are (472b3-5). That discussion is embedded, in turn, in a larger discussion aiming to show that it is always better for everyone to be just rather than unjust (472c4-d2; cf. 357a1-368c4).¹ The specific purpose of their discussion of the good city was to develop a model (*paradeigma*) with which to determine whether a just city is happier than an unjust city.² Socrates insists that the importance of their model does not depend upon its realizability: even if it is unrealizable, it can still serve as a model by which to determine whether justice and happiness go together (472b3-e5).

Socrates, in fact, makes it clear that the ideal city *cannot* be realized on earth. This is not due to particular features of cities, however, but is a result of his general metaphysical thesis that no perceptible object can instantiate any ideal. Socrates offers this thesis in the form of a rhetorical question:

Is it possible for anything to come to pass exactly as described in speech, or is it natural for practice to have less of a grasp on truth than speech does, even if it does not seem so to some people? (473a1-2)

Ἄρ' οἷόν τέ τι πραχθῆναι ὥς λέγεται, ἢ φύσιν ἔχει πρᾶξιν λέξεως ἥττον ἀληθείας ἐφάπτεσθαι, κἂν εἰ μή τῳ δοκεῖ;

In other words, nothing that comes to pass (i.e. nothing in the perceptible world), whether it be an object, action, event, etc., can perfectly exemplify any nature. As we saw in Chapter 4, Socrates thinks that, rather than instantiating natures, perceptible objects resemble, approximate, or participate in them.³ Although we will discuss the nature of participation in detail later (see p. 113-20), I wish to develop a working understanding of it by considering a case from geometry:

¹ This structure reflects, yet again, Socrates' commitment to the idea that facts about what something is are prior to facts about what it is like.

² On the discussion in this passage, see J. Cooper [1977, 151-52]. Socrates' ultimate aim of showing that it is better for an individual, and not just a city, to be just depends upon the famous city-soul analogy. The details of that analogy do not concern us here, but see the seminal discussion in Williams [1973] as well as Smith [1999] and Ferrari [2003].

³ For the Greek terms to which my English corresponds, see Ch. 4, p. 59 fn. 8. The key difference between instantiation and the relationship Socrates is interested in is that the former is an all-or-nothing matter whereas the latter comes in degrees. An important upshot of this difference is that, whereas *X*'s instantiating *F* entails that *X* is *F* unqualifiedly, *X*'s participating in *F* does not.



Consider Figure 1. Although in many situations we are comfortable calling it a “square,” it does not perfectly exemplify the nature of Square. For example, its lines don’t meet at perfect right angles and aren’t of exactly the same length (indeed, the things I’ve referred to as “lines” don’t perfectly exemplify the definition of Line either).⁴ However, although Figure 1 does not instantiate the nature of Square, it more closely resembles or approximates that nature than, say, Figure 2 does. As Socrates would put it, Figure 1 participates in the nature of Square to a greater degree than Figure 2. Contrast the way in which Figure 1 lives up to the definition of Square with the way in which the square on the hypotenuse of a particular triangle that the geometer is thinking about when considering the proof of the Pythagorean Theorem lives up to the definition of Square. Whereas the former merely resembles or approximates the nature of Square, the latter perfectly exemplifies it. Although this picture will become more complicated later, it will serve as our initial understanding of Socrates’ claim that perceptible objects do not instantiate but, rather, participate in natures. Given this metaphysical view, Socrates sets his task as follows:

Then do not compel me to demonstrate [a city] as coming about in practice exactly as we have described it in speech. Rather, if we are able to discover how a city that most closely approximates to what we have described could be founded, you must admit that we have discovered how all you have prescribed could come about. (473a5-b1)

Τοῦτο μὲν δὴ μὴ ἀνάγκαζέ με, οἷα τῷ λόγῳ διήλθομεν, τοιαῦτα παντάπασιν καὶ τῷ ἔργῳ δεῖν γιγνόμενα <ἀν> ἀποφαίνεσθαι· ἀλλ’, ἐὰν οἷοί τε γενώμεθα εὐρεῖν ὥς ἂν ἐγγύτατα τῶν εἰρημένων πόλις οἰκήσειεν, φάναι ἡμᾶς ἐξηυρηκέναι ὥς δυνατὰ ταῦτα γίνεσθαι ἃ σὺ ἐπιτάττεις.

Socrates claims that the best way to bring about a city whose constitution is closest to that of the ideal city is by vesting political power in the hands of philosophers (473c11-d4). As we saw in the previous chapter (p. 60-61), Socrates sets out to defend this claim by first defining Philosopher and then showing that such people are best suited to rule (cf. 474b6-c3). Socrates notes that the name “philosopher” (“*philosophos*”) is a compound of two words: “*philos*,” meaning “lover,” and “*sophia*,” meaning “wisdom.” As a first pass at defining Philosopher, then, he discusses each component word in turn.

⁴ Cf. Euclid’s *Elements* Book 1, Definitions 22 and 2.

Socrates claims that if someone is correctly described as a “lover of *X*,” where *X* denotes a kind of thing (e.g. boys, wine, honor, wisdom), then he or she loves every instance of that kind (474c8-10, 475b4-6).⁵ One cannot be a genuine lover of *X* yet desire only some instances of *X* and be averse to other instances of *X*. So, for example, if someone is a genuine lover of boys (*philopais*), he must desire all boys and be averse to none. To illustrate this idea, he reminds Glaucon (alleged to be a lover of boys):

One, because he is snub-nosed, will be praised by you people and called “cute,” another who is hook-nosed you say is “regal,” and, indeed, the one between these two is “well-proportioned.” (474d5-e1)

ὁ μὲν, ὅτι σιμός, ἐπίχαρις κληθεὶς ἐπαινεθήσεται ὑφ’ ὑμῶν, τοῦ δὲ τὸ γρυπὸν βασιλικὸν φατε εἶναι, τὸν δὲ δὴ διὰ μέσου τούτων ἑμμετρώτατα ἔχειν.

The claim that a lover of *X* must love every instance of *X* may seem too strong. Can’t we say that someone is, for example, a lover of wine despite disliking Merlot? Indeed, we can imagine such a person saying, “It’s because I’m a true lover of wine that I hate Merlot. Those dilettantes just don’t know what they’re talking about.” Although this may be a common way of speaking, it is best to take Socrates’ point as a logical one: if *Y* is genuinely *X*, and *S* does not love *Y*, then *S* is, at most, a lover of *X-minus-Y*.

I have spoken thus far of the lover of *X* loving every *instance* of *X*. Such instances will include both sub-kinds of *X* (if there are any) and particular, individual *X*s. For example, the lover of wine will love all sub-kinds of wine (e.g. Merlot, Chardonnay, Riesling) and all particular quantities of wine (e.g. this Merlot in this glass here; that Chardonnay in that carafe there), the lover of boys will love all kinds of boys (e.g. snub-nosed, hook-nosed, well-proportioned) and all particular boys (e.g. this snub-nosed boy here; that hook-nosed boy there), and so on. The importance of this point will become clear when Socrates discusses the lovers of sights and sounds, with whom philosophers are directly contrasted. As we will see (pp. 86-87), some interpreters have argued that the things which the lovers of sights and sounds love are universals (e.g. kinds of colors, kinds of sounds, etc.) rather than particular instances (e.g. this color, this note, etc.). However, in his general discussion of lovers of *X* here, Socrates includes both sub-kinds of *X* and particular *X*s as objects of the lovers’ affections. Nothing indicates that this point changes during Socrates’ discussion.

⁵ Recall that Socrates’ use of the word “kind” (εἶδος) need not refer to a Form (and clearly does not here) (Ch. 4, p. 58). Socrates discusses the lovers of boys at 474d1-475a2, of wine at 475a5-7, of honor at 475a9-b2, and of wisdom (at a general level) at 475b8-c8. Socrates seems to be invoking the famous “three kinds of lives”: of pleasure, honor, and wisdom (with the life of pleasure being broken down into love of sex and love of wine) (cf. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5, 1095b13-1096a11).

Since philosophers are a kind of lover, Socrates applies the general claim about love to them:

In the case of the philosopher as well, will we say that he is desirous for wisdom—not for some part of it but not another, but for all of it... Someone who is ready and willing to taste all studies, who turns gladly to learning and is insatiable for it, he is the one we would be justified in calling a philosopher. (475b8-c8)

Οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον σοφίας φήσομεν ἐπιθυμητὴν εἶναι, οὐ τῆς μὲν, τῆς δ' οὐ, ἀλλὰ πάσης; ... Τὸν δὲ δὴ εὐχερῶς ἐθέλοντα παντὸς μαθήματος γεύεσθαι καὶ ἀσμένως ἐπὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἰόντα καὶ ἀπλήστως ἔχοντα, τοῦτον δ' ἐν δίκῃ φήσομεν φιλόσοφον·

We have, then, a provisional definition of Philosopher as someone who is desirous of all wisdom and learning. Now we are in a position to see how the philosopher differs from the lover of sights and sounds.

5.3 Part 2: Distinguishing Philosophers from the Lovers of Sights and Sounds (475d1-476d6)

Glaucon worries that Socrates' definition will overgenerate because there are people who seem to display a love of learning yet would be strange to count as philosophers:

In that case, many strange people will be philosophers! For, all the lovers of sights seem to me to be such as they are because they take pleasure in learning things. And the lovers of sounds are absurd people to include as philosophers: they would never willingly attend discussions or such pursuits; yet, just as if their ears were under contract to listen to every chorus, they run around to all the Dionysiac festivals, whether in cities or villages, and never miss one. Are we to say that all these people—and others who are students of similar things or of petty crafts—are philosophers? (475d1-e1)

Πολλοὶ ἄρα καὶ ἄτοποι ἔσονται σοι τοιοῦτοι. οἳ τε γὰρ φιλοθεάμονες πάντες ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσι τῷ καταμανθάνειν χαίροντες τοιοῦτοι εἶναι, οἳ τε φιλήκοοι ἀτοπώτατοί τινές εἰσιν ὥς γ' ἐν φιλοσόφοις τιθέναι, οἳ πρὸς μὲν λόγους καὶ τοιαύτην διατριβὴν ἐκόντες οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλοιεν ἐλθεῖν, ὥσπερ δὲ ἀπομεμισθωκότες τὰ ὦτα ἐπακοῦσαι πάντων χορῶν περιθέουσι τοῖς Διονυσίοις οὔτε τῶν κατὰ πόλεις οὔτε τῶν κατὰ κώμας ἀπολειπόμενοι. τούτους οὖν πάντας καὶ ἄλλους τοιούτων τινῶν μαθητικούς καὶ τοὺς τῶν τεχνυδρίων φιλοσόφους φήσομεν;

Glaucon, then, thinks that the lovers of sights and lovers of sounds show that Socrates' definition is mistaken.⁶ In the ensuing discussion Socrates argues that these people, despite initial appearances, are not genuine lovers of learning. Unlike philosophers, lovers of sights and lovers of sounds only acknowledge the existence of the multitude of perceptible objects around them—they do not acknowledge the existence of the intelligible natures that those perceptible objects resemble. Thus, they do not have cognitive access to the entities that can factor into the kind of explanation that, as we learned in the *Meno*, Socrates thinks is necessary for achieving better than opinion. We must, then, determine who these people are such that we can (a) make sense of Glaucon's claim that they might fall under Socrates' definition of Philosopher but (b) explain why Socrates thinks that they can't attain a higher cognitive achievement than opinion. Answering these questions will allow us to understand why Socrates thinks that philosophers *can* (and do) achieve knowledge (*gnôsis*), which is what he thinks ultimately distinguishes them from non-philosophers.

It is important to note that, in addition to the lovers of sights and lovers of sounds, Glaucon includes “students of other such things” (*alloi toioutoi mathêtikoi*) and “students of petty crafts” (*technudriôn mathêtikoi*) as possible candidates for the title “philosopher” under Socrates' definition. Later, Socrates mentions “lovers of crafts and practical people” (*philotechnoi kai praktikoi*), but this is intended to refer back to the list Glaucon offered (476a9-11). Although I will follow Socrates in focusing on the lovers of sights and lovers of sounds, I wish to say something about the other two groups. If, as we learn later, lovers of sights and lovers of sounds are primarily interested in visual stimuli and auditory stimuli respectively, it is reasonable to think that the “students of other such things” will be lovers of the stimuli of the other senses. So, for example, a lover of tastes may be primarily interested in gustatory stimuli, such as those experienced in tasting food and drink; a lover of smells may be primarily interested in olfactory stimuli, such as those experienced in smelling flowers or perfumes; and a lover of touch may be primarily interested in tactile stimuli, such as those experienced during sex. As we will see in a moment, there is, in fact, good reason to think that the same person can belong to multiple categories.

The “students of petty crafts” are harder to identify. In particular, it is difficult to determine whether Glaucon is singling out a sub-class of crafts as “petty” (with the diminutive “*technudriôn*”) or whether he means to include all crafts. Socrates' later use of the generic “lovers of crafts” (*philotechnoi*) may incline us to the latter understanding. However, one consideration in favor of the former is that certain crafts, such as architecture, require a good deal of cognitive sophistication, and so it may not seem absurd to count a craftsman

⁶ In a moment I consider whether Glaucon has ignored Socrates' claim that philosophers are desirous of *all* wisdom and learning.

of that kind as a philosopher. I do not think that we can decisively settle the issue, but that does not matter all that much since I will follow Socrates in focusing on the lovers of sights and lovers of sounds.

I now wish to survey all the descriptions we are given of such people. On the positive side, we are told that they acknowledge the existence of beautiful things (*nomizein kala pragmata*) (476c1) and “warmly welcome beautiful sounds, colors, shapes, and everything fashioned out of such things” (476b4-6).⁷ On the negative side, Glaucon says that such people “would never willingly attend discussions or such pursuits.”⁸ Socrates tells us that “the thought of such people is incapable of seeing and warmly welcoming the nature of Beauty itself” (476b6-7).⁹ Moreover, Socrates tells us, not only do they not acknowledge the existence of Beauty itself, they “would be unable to follow anyone who tried to lead them to knowledge of it” (476c1-3).¹⁰ Lastly, Socrates compares the mental condition of such people as akin to those who are in a dream (476b4-c6). These descriptions, and Glaucon’s claim that they “seem to be such as they are because they take pleasure in learning things,” are all we are given.

This is a scant basis. The following, however, is reasonably clear: lovers of sights and lovers of sounds are people who thoroughly enjoy and immerse themselves in the cultural events common in ancient Greece (they “run around” to all the latest events). The lovers of sights, for example, enjoy looking at beautiful colors and shapes, admire paintings and sculptures (i.e. things fashioned out of colors and shapes), and so on. Likewise, the lovers of sounds enjoy listening to beautiful sounds, attending music festivals, listening to performances by poets and rhapsodes (i.e. things fashioned out of sounds), and so on. Moreover, one and the same person can certainly be a lover of both sights and sounds. Such people would undoubtedly also enjoy plays, which are constructed out of both sights and sounds. In short, lovers of sights and sounds are people who would have been considered “cultured” by the standards of the time.¹¹

⁷ Οἱ μὲν που, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, φιλήκοοι καὶ φιλοθεάμονες τὰς τε καλὰς φωνὰς ἀσπάζονται καὶ χροῶς καὶ σχήματα καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων δημιουργούμενα.

⁸ On a common translation of this line, Glaucon only claims that lovers of sights and sounds would never willingly engage in “serious” discussion. This alternative translation is, in fact, crucial to the arguments of some interpreters, such as Baltzly [1997, 245-252 esp. fn 14] (cf. Gosling [1960, 120-21]). Although I do not have time to defend this claim here, I think that this alternative translation rests on a misunderstanding of the meaning of διατριβή.

⁹ Αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ καλοῦ ἀδύνατος αὐτῶν ἢ διάνοια τὴν φύσιν ἰδεῖν τε καὶ ἀσπασσθαι.

¹⁰ Ὁ οὖν καλὰ μὲν πράγματα νομίζων, αὐτὸ δὲ κάλλος μήτε νομίζων μήτε, ἂν τις ἡγῆται ἐπὶ τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτοῦ, δυνάμενος ἔπεσθαι.

¹¹ See Burnyeat’s Tanner Lectures, ‘Culture and Society in Plato’s *Republic*,’ for an excellent discussion of these issues.

I do not think that we can say more about the lovers of sights and sounds with any certainty. Why, then, does Glaucon think that Socrates' definition of Philosopher might include them? Before answering this question, we should note a *prima facie* problem with Glaucon's claim. Socrates defined Philosopher as "one who is desirous of *all* wisdom and learning." Even if he were to grant that the lovers of sights and sounds' attachment to their objects counts as loving to learn about them, this would be insufficient to count them as lovers of all learning. Since Socrates ignores this point, it is best to think that he and Glaucon primarily have in mind people who desire pleasures of all the senses. So, rather than understanding Glaucon as proposing people who, say, only love the pleasures associated with having sex as possible lovers of learning, we can understand him as proposing people who love those pleasures *and* the pleasures associated with experiencing sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and the things fashioned out of such things. Although I will continue to refer to the "lovers of sights and sounds," it should be noted that Glaucon and Socrates might have in mind lovers of the pleasures of all the senses.

With this modification, we can now see why Glaucon might think that such people count as lovers of all learning. It is common to describe someone who is constantly seeking new cultural experiences as someone who "loves to learn."¹² The answer to the question, "Why are you always going to the museum?" or "Why are you always going to the newest plays?" can often be "I just love to learn." Glaucon, then, worries that, because lovers of sights and sounds are constantly seeking new cultural experiences, they might count as philosophers on Socrates' definition. Indeed, to someone who thought that all that exists is the material, perceptible world, people who are constantly seeking out novel experiences through the five senses could seem to desire learning all that there is to learn.

We must now determine why Socrates thinks that the lovers of sights and sounds cannot count as genuine lovers of learning. This will bring into sharp focus exactly why Socrates thinks philosophers are cognitively superior to them. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Socrates grants that, despite their cognitive shortcomings, they are, in some way, like (*homoiōs*) philosophers (475e1). Specifically, philosophers are those who love to see the truth (*philothēamones tēs alētheias*) (475e4). As Socrates uses it here, "truth" has strong connotations of what is real or what is fundamental.¹³ Glaucon agrees with this claim but thinks that it is too vague to do much good (475e5).

The basis for Socrates' claim that only philosophers love to see the truth is his metaphysical distinction between, on the one hand, things such as "the Beautiful itself" (*to auto kalon*)

¹² Crombie [1963 (Vol. 2), 53] also emphasizes the lovers of sights and sounds' desire for novel experiences. This explanation can also account for why the students of petty crafts might be considered lovers of learning: they try to master the entirety of a domain and constantly seek out the newest developments relating to it.

¹³ Cf. Crombie [1963 (Vol. 2), 53] and Szaif [2007, 256].

and, on the other hand, the many beautiful things (*ta polla kala*) that participate in, and are mere likenesses of, the Beautiful itself (475e6-476d5).¹⁴ Remembering our earlier discussion of participation, Socrates' claim is that there is such a thing as the nature of Beauty and the many beautiful things will inevitably fail to instantiate that nature in various ways. Whereas philosophers can "see the nature of the beautiful itself" (476b6-7), lovers of sights and sounds do not acknowledge its existence and focus only on the many beautiful things. As a result, Socrates thinks, they are radically mistaken about the nature of reality. Like people in a dream, they take something that is, in fact, a mere likeness of something to be an original (476c1-5). Since these people cognitively engage only with likenesses and not with originals, Socrates contends that the highest cognitive achievement they can attain is opinion (*doxa*). Philosophers, on the other hand, because they are aware of this metaphysical distinction and because they are aware of the relationship between the two kinds of objects, can achieve knowledge (*gnôsis*) (476d4-5).¹⁵

We need to make sense of Socrates' move from the claim that lovers of sights and sounds cognitively engage only with likenesses to the claim that they cannot achieve better than opinion. As we learned in the *Meno*, Socrates thinks that the key difference between people with opinion and people who attain a higher cognitive achievement is that the latter grasp an explanation that eludes the former. And as we learned there, and as was just reiterated at *Republic* 474b4-c3, the right kind of explanation is one that grounds the fact to be explained in natures. Because lovers of sights and sounds only acknowledge things that are, according to Socrates, likenesses of natures, they cannot appropriately explain any view they have.

Socrates is right to think that only cognitively engaging with likenesses renders people incapable of providing fully satisfactory explanations. Consider the following example. Imagine that Tom points at a picture and says "That is Barack Obama." If someone asks Tom, "Why did you predicate "Barack Obama" of that [pointing at the figure in the picture]?", Tom will say something like "Because it looks like Barack Obama." Now imagine that Tom is pressed to defend this second claim. It would be highly unsatisfactory if all he could do is point to another picture and say something like, "Well, it looks like the figure in this (second) picture, and the figure in this (second) picture is Barack Obama." It would be satisfactory, however, if Tom could point at Barack Obama himself and say, "Because it looks like *him*." Socrates' charge, then, is that the lovers of sights and sounds are like people who do not acknowledge that there is an object, namely Barack Obama, that all the things of which they (correctly) predicate "Barack Obama" resemble (and of which it is appropri-

¹⁴ Socrates also mentions Ugliness, Justice, Injustice, Goodness, Badness, "and all the Forms" (πάντων τῶν εἰδῶν).

¹⁵ Socrates' claim here strongly suggests that philosophers can achieve knowledge of perceptible participants.

ate to make that predication precisely in virtue of that resemblance). They can only defend their views in a manner analogous to Tom's unsatisfactory response. Philosophers, on the other hand, are analogous to people who both acknowledge the existence of Barack Obama and things that resemble Barack Obama and grasp the relationship between them. They can defend their views along lines analogous to Tom's satisfactory response.

That case concerns someone who cites a *particular* likeness to explain a view concerning a particular. Let us consider a case in which someone cites a *universal* likeness to explain a view concerning a particular. Imagine Tom says, "Jane is my friend." If, when asked to defend this claim, he can only say something like "Because she and I interact in the way the characters on the show *Friends* interact," this would again be unsatisfactory. His answer is culled only from representations of (alleged) friends and not necessarily from any grasp of what it is to be a friend.¹⁶

Let us move from analogy to the lovers of sights and sounds themselves. Suppose such a person judges that *Helen is beautiful*. If asked why he predicated "beauty" of Helen, there are two main ways he can answer: (1) he can cite some other particular thing and use it as a benchmark. For example, he can say, "Because she looks like Aphrodite." If pressed to defend this latter claim, he can either (1a) cite some further entity (either particular or universal) or (1b) attempt to end the exchange by saying something like, "Aphrodite is the model of beauty" or "Aphrodite is beauty itself." If he opts for (1a), and is then pressed to defend this further claim, he can either (1c) offer a version of (1a) with some other entity or (1d) offer a version of (1b) with the entity he cited in (1a). If he opts for (1c) he can ..., and so on. Or, (2) when asked why he predicated "beauty" of Helen, he can cite some general feature that (he thinks) Helen possesses in virtue of which (he thinks) she counts as being beautiful. For example, he can say, "Because Helen has feminine form." He says this because he has repeatedly thought of something as beautiful when he experiences it as having feminine form. If asked to explain why Helen's having feminine form explains her being beautiful he can either cite some further entity (either particular or universal) or can again attempt to end the discussion by saying something like, "Because feminine form is beauty itself." The central point is that, regardless of the exact course such a question-and-answer session takes, the lovers of sights and sounds can only attempt to end them at a point where they have cited what Socrates thinks are likenesses.

¹⁶ Similar stories can be told for (a) cases in which someone cites a *particular* likeness to explain a view concerning a *universal* (e.g. citing a picture to explain why it is appropriate to predicate "Barack Obama" of "the figure on the 44 cent stamp" (let us suppose)) and (b) cases in which someone cites a *universal* likeness to explain a view about a universal (e.g. citing the characters of *Friends* to explain why it is appropriate to predicate "friend" of "sports teammates").

Because the only answers that the lovers of sights and sounds can offer ultimately come to an end at things that are in fact likenesses, Socrates thinks their views cannot rise above the level of opinion. Whereas they should cite natures or essences as first principles in their answers, they can only cite likenesses of natures or essences. That is what Socrates means when he says that they treat likenesses as originals: they cite likenesses at the point in their answers where they should cite originals (i.e. as principles). Thus, Socrates thinks, because they do not acknowledge the existence of the original natures and have no grasp of them, they cannot provide satisfactory explanations and, thus, cannot achieve anything higher than opinion.

Philosophers, on the other hand, can provide the right kind of explanation. Because they have a firm grasp on the originals, a firm grasp on the likenesses, and a firm grasp of the relationship between the two, their explanations do not fail in the way that the lovers of sights and sounds' explanations fail. They can cite as principles things that can in fact serve as principles. Thus, Socrates thinks, they can do better than opinion. In fact, they can achieve knowledge. And this, Socrates claims, is the key distinguishing mark of philosophers.

5.3.1 The Beautiful Things: Particulars, Universals, or Both?

As I have understood Socrates' discussion, the many beautiful things (*ta polla kala*) include both particulars and universals (i.e. collections or kinds of particulars). This position goes against a popular interpretation, beginning from Gosling [1960], according to which they *only* include universals.¹⁷ According to Gosling, the feature that distinguishes lovers of sights and sounds from other non-philosophical Greek people is that they are concerned with figuring out what beauty is, what justice is, and so on (they differ from philosophers, however, in getting it wrong). Gosling thinks that it would be absurd for someone to cite a particular thing in response to a question like "What is beauty?" On the other hand, Gosling contends, it would be entirely appropriate to respond to such a question by citing a universal, such as "feminine form," even if one thought that other universals (e.g. "bright red color" or "symmetry") could, with equal propriety, be cited. In response to Gosling, however, I wish to point out three things. First, it is unclear whether we should attribute to the lovers of sights and sounds a specific interest in answering abstract questions such as "What is beauty?" Everything we are told about them concerns their lack of cognitive sophistication.¹⁸ Second, as indicated in the above discussion, it is unclear whether it would be absurd for someone to

¹⁷ For other supporters of this view, see Crombie [1963 (Vol. 1), 102], G. Fine [1990, 91], Irwin [1995, 264-65]. My view, on which they include both particulars and universals, is also advanced by F. C. White [1977 and 1978] and Szaif [2007, 256]. Annas [1981, 224-25] recognizes that both strands are present but seems to plump for taking τὰ πολλὰ καλὰ to be particulars.

¹⁸ On this point, see F. C. White [1978, 130-31].

cite a particular thing in answer to such a question. People do often say things like, “Helen is beauty itself” or “Achilles is courage itself.” Third, and following on from this, people certainly do answer questions of the form “Why is X F?” by citing a particular thing as a benchmark.¹⁹ For example, someone may respond to the question “Why is Helen beautiful?” by saying, “Because she looks like Aphrodite.”²⁰ Thus, I do not think that the fact that the lovers of sights and sounds *may* try to explain the views they have is a threat to the view that the many beautiful things include both particulars and universals.²¹

5.4 Part 3: The Nature of Knowledge, Opinion, and Ignorance (476d7-480a13)

Socrates, then, has argued that philosophers are distinguished from non-philosophers insofar as only philosophers achieve knowledge. He recognizes, however, that the lovers of sights and sounds will dispute this claim—they certainly take themselves to know a good number of things (476d7-e2). In order to “soothe and gently persuade” (*paramutheisthai kai peithein êrema*) them that he is right, Socrates proceeds in the remainder of Book 5 to discuss opinion and knowledge in more detail.

At this point the going gets very tough. I first wish to provide, in the broadest possible way, an overview of Socrates’ position. This overview is too broad to be very informative, but it will help frame the ensuing discussion. In broad outline, then, Socrates distinguishes three groups of objects: that which is; that which is not; and that which both is and is not.²² Socrates also distinguishes three cognitive powers (*dunameis*): knowledge or understanding; ignorance (*agnoia*, *agnôsia*); and opinion.²³ Socrates claims that each cognitive power is set-over (*epi*) the objects in one of the three groups. He compares the way in which these cognitive powers are set-over objects to the way in which sight (*opsis*) and hearing (*akoê*)

¹⁹ Note that the question “Why is X beautiful?” (on which I focused) and the question “What is Beauty?” are ultimately asking after the same thing. The latter kind of question asks after something that can then be used to answer the former question.

²⁰ Someone may point out that “looking like Aphrodite” is a universal. While that is correct, it is not to the point. The question is whether τὰ πολλὰ καλὰ cannot include particulars because it would be absurd to cite such things in explanations at all.

²¹ The other chief motivation for Gosling’s view is the claim that taking τὰ πολλὰ καλὰ to include particulars cannot make sense of a later passage in the argument (i.e. 478e7-479d5). I will consider and reject that claim when I arrive at that passage.

²² Some interpreters have claimed that these are not distinct groups of *objects* but distinct groups of *propositions* (see, most famously, Fine [1978 and 1990], but also Gosling [1968].) I note difficulties with this alternative along the way.

²³ I argue later that Socrates does not, in fact, conceive of ignorance as a cognitive power nor of “that which is not” as describing a group of genuine objects (pp. 108-111). For the moment, however, it is easier to speak as if he does.

are set-over objects (477c1-d6). Although we do not learn in Book 5 what Socrates takes the objects of sight and hearing to be, in Book 6 he identifies them as colors (*chrômata*) and sounds (*phônai*) respectively (507c10-e1).²⁴ So, just as we have:

sight—set-over—colors
hearing—set-over—sounds

we also have:

knowledge/understanding—set-over—that which is
ignorance—set-over—that which is not
opinion—set-over—that which both is and is not

Having set up this triadic structure, Socrates argues that the many beautiful things are members of the group ‘that which both is and is not.’ Thus, he concludes, because lovers of sights and sounds only cognitively engage with the objects over which opinion is set, they cannot actualize their power of knowledge and, so, cannot hope to achieve knowledge. Philosophers, on the other hand, because they do turn their minds to the objects over which the power of knowledge is set, can actualize their power of knowledge and, so, can hope to achieve knowledge. Thus, Socrates thinks, by reflecting on the status of knowledge and opinion as cognitive powers, the lovers of sights and sounds will agree that they have no hope of attaining knowledge.

My plan for the remainder of this chapter is as follows. First, I will discuss the three groups of objects Socrates distinguishes. As will become clear, this will require a discussion of the Greek verb “*einai*.” I then discuss the difference between cognitive powers and cognitive states, which is crucial to my understanding of Socrates’ argument. Having laid this groundwork, I will then proceed to discuss Part 3 more or less line-by-line.

5.4.1 That Which Is, That Which is Not, That Which Both Is And Is Not

Let us consider the groups of objects Socrates distinguishes: (1) that which is (*to on*), which he also characterizes as “that which purely (*eilikrinôs*) is” and “that which completely (*pan-telôs*) is.” Socrates ultimately identifies the things in this group as the eternal, intelligible Forms and mathematical objects (507b1-517c4; cf. 484b4, 485a10-b3). (2) that which is not (*to mê on*), which he also characterizes as “that which in no way is” (*to mê on mêdamê(i)*).

²⁴ *Contra* Gosling [1968, 123] who argues that the text does not identify what the objects of sight and hearing are and then uses this fact to advance his interpretation.

Socrates ultimately claims that this group is to be identified with “nothing” (*mêden*), by which I understand him to mean that this is not, in fact, a group of genuine objects. Lastly, (3) that which both is and is not (*to on te kai mê on*), which Socrates also characterizes as “that which is between” (*to metaxu*) that which is and that which is not. Socrates ultimately identifies the things that both are and are not with perishable, perceptible objects (cf. 484b4, 485a10-b3).

Part of the difficulty in understanding Socrates’ taxonomy is that he uses the verb “*einai*” in constructions that sound very odd when rendered with the English verb “to be.” For example, to a modern English speaker, “that which purely is,” sounds like an incomplete sentence that needs a complement. In Greek, however, “*to pantelôs on*” can express a complete sentence. What we need, then, is a way of understanding the verb “*einai*” such that Socrates’ descriptions of the various groups of objects make sense. By this I do *not* mean that we must find an understanding according to which Socrates’ claim that “knowledge is set-over that which purely is,” for example, *means* “knowledge is set-over Forms.” After all, as many commentators have noted, if Socrates were to state this claim outright, this would not serve his aim of “soothing and gently persuading” the lovers of sights and sounds (who he has just claimed do *not* acknowledge the existence of Forms).²⁵ My point, rather, is that, since we know that Socrates ultimately thinks Forms purely are, perceptibles both are and are not, and nothing in no way is, we need to find a reading of the verb “*einai*” such that (a) the lovers of sights and sounds would accept the claims Socrates goes on to make but, also, (b) Socrates’ characterization of Forms, perceptibles, and nothing makes sense.

5.4.2 Bridge on the Verb “*Einai*”

As will become eminently clear, my understanding of the verb “*einai*” owes much to the work of Charles Kahn and Lesley Brown.²⁶ In his seminal work on the verb, Charles Kahn argues that such (allegedly) complete uses of “*einai*” as Socrates employs can have a variety of meanings.²⁷ The three meanings that have been considered most relevant to the *Republic* are the so-called “existential,” “predicative,” and “veridical.” This trichotomy gives us three ways of understanding the sentence “*X esti*”:

²⁵ The demand that Socrates’ argument must in some way be acceptable to the lovers of sights and sounds, which Gail Fine famously calls the “dialectical requirement” [1990, 217], has been advanced by many interpreters. See, for example, Gosling [1968, 120-21], Annas [1981, 195], N. Cooper [1986, 233], Stokes [1992, 103], and Crystal [1996, 351]. Baltzly [1997, 233-34], however, contends that no such acceptable reading can be found.

²⁶ See, esp., Kahn [1981, 2003, and 2004] and Brown [1986 and 1994].

²⁷ “Allegedly” is my interpolation. According to Kahn, the syntactic distinction between complete uses of εἶναι and incomplete uses (such as occur, for example, in the sentence “*X ἐστὶ F*”) is genuine. Brown (I think) joins me in rejecting the distinction as basically illusory. More on this in a moment.

Existential: *X* exists²⁸

Predicative: *X* is *F* (for some *F*)

Veridical: *X* is true.

Applying this framework to Socrates' taxonomy gives us the following options:

Existential: that which exists (purely exists, completely exists)
that which does not exist (does not in any way exist)
that which both exists and does not exist

Predicative: that which is *F* (purely *F*, completely *F*)
that which is not-*F* (not in any way *F*)
that which both is *F* and is not-*F*

Veridical: that which is true (purely true, completely true)
that which is not true (not in any way true)
that which both is true and is not true

Typically, a philosopher's interpretation of the Book 5 passage depends upon which of these three options (or some combination thereof) he or she thinks makes the most sense of it (and, to a certain degree, in its own right).²⁹

Lesley Brown, however, has given compelling reasons for thinking that this way of approaching the Greek verb "*einai*" is mistaken. Although Brown's work is important and expansive, I can only state what I take to be her most important results (although my way of presenting them differs from hers). According to Brown, the alleged syntactic distinction between complete and incomplete uses of the verb "*einai*" is, at bottom, illusory.³⁰ Thus, any attempt to base a semantic distinction on a syntactic distinction is futile. Rather, Brown argues, there is a single use of the verb "*einai*" and it can appear in uncomplemented and

²⁸ Prior to Kahn's work it was generally agreed that all (alleged) complete uses have existential meaning. One of Kahn's chief achievements, then, was to reject that tradition. Of course, Kahn's claims were contested. Owen [1971, 223-24], for example, attempts to understand Kahn's innovations concerning complete uses of the Greek verb as reducing to versions of the existential reading.

²⁹ Defenders of the existential reading include, among others, Cross and Woosley [1964, 1971], Brentlinger [1972], and Stokes [1992]. Of the predicative reading: Vlastos [1966], Annas [1981], and Smith [2000]. Of the veridical reading: Crombie [1963], Gosling [1968], G. Fine [1978, 1990], and Irwin [1995, 267-69]. The veridical reading divides into those who think "that which both is true and is not true" invokes a notion of "degrees of truth" (e.g. Gosling) and those who think it does not (e.g. G. Fine). Defenders of a combination reading include Gonzalez [1996], Baltzly [1997], and Szaif [2007] (for Gonzalez, it is a combination of the existential and predicative readings; for Baltzly and Szaif, of the predicative and veridical.)

³⁰ Although, at the outset of her 1994 paper (cf. p. 214), Brown states that she aims to dispute the viability of the syntactic distinction, she later characterizes some uses as "complete" and some as "incomplete" (cf. p. 226). Her main point, then, seems to be that no *sharp* distinction between the two uses can be drawn. I think it better simply to avoid all talk of "complete" vs. "incomplete" uses and instead adopt the language of "uncomplemented" vs. "complemented" uses. The latter locution makes clear that εἶναι is a single verb with a single meaning whose occurrences can be either uncomplemented or complemented.

complemented constructions. The meaning of the verb, however, is the same in both types of construction. In complemented constructions, the verb does not, as is often said, lose the meaning it has in uncomplemented constructions and serve merely to connect the subject and predicate.

In order to illuminate her position, Brown draws an analogy between the Greek verb “*einai*” and English verbs such as “to teach.” The verb “to teach” can appear in both uncomplemented and complemented constructions:

Uncomplemented: Jane teaches.

Complemented: Jane teaches French.

Moreover, as Brown points out, certain entailments exist between uncomplemented and complemented uses of the verb “to teach.” First, if Jane teaches, it follows that Jane teaches something. That is, if Jane teaches then there is something such that Jane teaches it. Any time someone says “X teaches,” then, a reasonable question to ask is, “Teaches what?” Second, if Jane teaches French, then Jane teaches. Thus, complemented constructions entail uncomplemented constructions and vice-versa. Given these entailments, it is obviously wrong to say that the meaning of the verb “to teach” differs depending on whether it appears in uncomplemented and complemented constructions. Less obviously, but equally important for the discussion of “*einai*,” it is also wrong to say that uncomplemented uses can actually have a variety of meanings, some of which differ from the meaning of complemented uses. If it were correct to say this, we would not unhesitatingly accept the entailments, since we would have to check whether the relevant meaning of the uncomplemented use is the same as the meaning of the complemented use.

Brown proposes to understand the Greek verb “*einai*” analogously to the English verb “to teach.” She claims that the same entailments that exist between uncomplemented and complemented uses of “to teach” exist between uncomplemented and complemented uses of “*einai*.” For example, if *X esti*, then *X esti* something. That is, if *X esti*, then there is some *F* such that *X esti F*. Whenever someone says “*X esti*,” then, it is reasonable to ask, “*Esti* what?” Likewise, if *X esti F*, then *X esti*. The crucial upshot is that the meaning of the verb is constant regardless of the type of construction in which it occurs.

To press the analogy, foisting the traditional trichotomy outlined above onto ancient uses of the verb “*einai*” would be akin to people 2,500 years from now claiming that our uncomplemented uses of the verb “to teach” mask distinctions that their conceptual scheme endorses. Regardless of whether that is true, it would be inappropriate for them to attempt to shoehorn any given use of “to teach” into one of the meanings that their conceptual scheme endorses. It would also be inappropriate, however, for them to claim that our uses of “to

teach” are a “fusion” of any or all of those meanings. If they did either of these things, they would have no hope of recovering how our uses of “to teach” express our conception of (part of) the world. What would be needed is a single rendering of the verb “to teach” in their conceptual scheme such that the various entailments go through.³¹

As Brown understands it, the verb “*einai*” has the force of “to be something.” The uncomplemented construction “*X esti*,” then, has the force of “*X is something*,” which makes perfect sense in English. Likewise, from the complemented construction “*X is F*” it follows that “*X is (something)*.” The only difference between uncomplemented and complemented uses, then, is that, in the latter, the “something” is specified. So, one way of understanding the complemented construction “*X esti F*” is as “*X is something, namely F*.”

It may initially seem that little distance separates Brown’s suggestion for how uncomplemented uses of “*einai*” should be understood and what was called the “predicative” meaning above. While there are points of contact, two important differences must be noted. First, to speak of a “predicative” meaning suggests that there are other meanings, which we want to avoid. Second, and more importantly, whereas Brown’s reading understands uncomplemented uses to *entail* complemented uses, predicative uncomplemented uses are thought to be *elliptical* for complemented uses.³² To see the difference between these two positions, consider the following four claims that Socrates makes in the course of the ensuing discussion (this is modified from Brown [1994, 222-23]):

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1: <i>X is F and not-F</i> | 3: <i>Y is purely F</i> |
| 2: <i>X is and is not</i> | 4: <i>Y purely is</i> |

It is clear that Socrates thinks [1] is related to [2] and [3] is related to [4]. The question is, “How does Socrates think they are related?” On the predicative model, Socrates takes the relation to be basically that of identity, with [2] being an elliptical version of [1] and [4] being an elliptical version of [3]. On Brown’s model, however, Socrates thinks that, while [1] and [2] are substantially different claims, the former entails the latter (and similarly for [3] and [4]). Thus, the difference between Brown’s model and the predicative model leads to markedly different understandings of Socrates’ train of thought.

To see why Brown takes Socrates to view claims [1] and [2] to be distinct but related, consider how she understands claim [2]: “*X is and is not*,” for Brown, has the force of “*X is*

³¹ Of course, this would require taking into account the kinds of things that can be subjects, objects, direct objects, etc. of the verb “to teach.” If, for example, a verb Φ in their language exhibited the same entailments between sentences of the form “*X Φ* ” and “*X Φ Y*,” and so on, yet the kinds of things that serve as values for *X* were of a radically different kind from the things that can serve as the subjects of “to teach,” they would have good reason for thinking that “ Φ ” and “to teach” do not have the same meaning.

³² Brown [1994, 226] makes this point quite lucidly.

something and is not something,” which, in turn, she understands to mean “ X is something and X is nothing.” This claim is more general and, hence, distinct from, “ X is F and not- F .” However, as Brown herself notes [1994, 228-30], on her model Socrates’ move from [1] to [2] is problematic. Although the first conjunct of [2] is validly inferred from [1] (i.e. from “ X is F ” it follows that “ X is something”), the second conjunct of [2] is invalidly inferred from [1] (i.e. from “ X is not- F ” it does not follow that “ X is not something”). The main problem is that, for “ X is not something” to be the direct negation of “ X is something,” the former must have the force of “ X is nothing.”³³ But, just because X is not- F , it does not follow that X is nothing. On the analogy Brown proposes, while it follows from “Jane teaches French” that “Jane teaches something,” it does *not* follow from “Jane does not teach French” that “Jane teaches nothing.” Thus, although Brown takes Socrates to view [2] as a distinct claim that he infers from [1], she understands his inference to be invalid.³⁴

In order to get around this problem I propose a slight modification to Brown’s model. Rather than taking “*einai*” to have the force of “to be something,” we should take it to have the force of “to be whatever it is.”³⁵ Although I will not go through them, I submit that the appropriate entailments exist between uncomplemented and complemented constructions of “*einai*” on this proposal. On this model, I understand claim [2] as “ X is whatever it is and is not whatever it is.” While this does not, strictly speaking, follow from [1], we can see Socrates’ overall reasoning to be valid, so long as we bear in mind that Socrates thinks [1] will be true of any perceptible object no matter what value we plug in for F . According to Socrates, *no* predicate corresponding to a Form applies unqualifiedly to a perceptible object. That is, for any such predicate that appropriately applies to a perceptible object, the negation of that predicate also appropriately applies to it. But that is just to say that, for any such predicate that applies to X , X both is and is not whatever that predicate denotes. And that, in turn, just is to say that X is whatever it is and is not whatever it is. Not only does my model allow for a better understanding of Socrates’ reasoning at the point where Brown’s model goes slightly awry, as I show in what follows it provides a reading of the entire argument that the lovers of sights and sounds can accept.

Let us consider how my understanding of uncomplemented uses of “*einai*” accommodate Socrates’ other two groups. I understand “that which purely or completely is” as “that which purely or completely is whatever it is.” This appropriately describes Forms since Forms are whatever they are in such a way that they are not also not whatever they are. I understand

³³ I.e. the direct negation of $\exists F(F(x))$ is $\neg\exists F(F(x))$.

³⁴ Brown argues that it is not until the *Sophist* that a Platonic character recognizes and tries to resolve these problems associated with not-being [1994, 230-31].

³⁵ I think that Palmer [2012, §3.5] works with a similar understanding of εἶναι in his use of locutions like “to be (what it is)” and “things that are (what they are).”

“that which in no way is” as “that which in no way is whatever it is.” This, in fact, cannot characterize a group of genuine objects, since it is impossible for something to be such that it in no way is whatever it is. Thus, Socrates is right to say that this locution denotes “nothing” (*mêden*) (478b11-c1).

With this understanding in hand, we can now see how Socrates attempts to soothe and gently persuade the lovers of sights and sounds by relating various cognitive powers to the objects in his taxonomy.

5.4.3 Cognitive States vs. Cognitive Powers

Up to this point in the dissertation we have considered Socrates’ discussion of opinion, knowledge, and understanding conceived of as cognitive states.³⁶ In the broadest possible terms, a cognitive state is a state in which a thinker makes mental contact with something in a certain kind of way.³⁷ In virtue of making mental contact with that thing in that way, the thinker is said to bear a corresponding cognitive relation to that thing. So, for example, for *S* to have an opinion is for *S* to bear the relation of opinion to something, for *S* to have knowledge is for *S* to bear the relation of knowledge to something, and so on. In virtue of bearing that relation to that thing, the thinker is also said to engage in a certain activity (in fact, it may be better to say that the state, relation, and activity just are the same thing.) For example, for *S* to bear the relation of opinion to *X* is for *S* to opine *X*, for *S* to bear the relation of knowledge to *X* is for *S* to know *X*, and so on. Socrates’ conclusion in the preceding stretch of argument, then, is that the lovers of sights and sounds cannot know anything but can only opine.

In his ensuing attempt to soothe and gently persuade them, however, Socrates turns his attention to opinion, knowledge, and understanding conceived of as cognitive powers (*dunameis*).³⁸ Powers quite generally, Socrates tells us, are those things “by which we are able to do what we are able to do” (477c1-2).³⁹ More specifically, he tells us that powers are individuated according to the kind of object over which they are actualized (i.e. the objects they are “set-over” (*epe*)) and the kind of activity they enable us to engage in (i.e. what they

³⁶ I use “cognitive state” to correspond to Socrates’ phrase *πάθημα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ* (cf. 509d6-511e5, esp. 511d6-e4). The importance of distinguishing Socrates’ conception of cognitive states from his conception of cognitive powers was first brought to my attention by the work of Nick Smith [2000].

³⁷ In Chapter 2, for example, we considered what Socrates thinks is required for a thinker to make mental contact with a fact in the “understanding” kind of way.

³⁸ According to Socrates, knowledge and understanding, conceived of as powers, are the *same* power. If it is difficult to hear “opinion” as denoting a power, bear in mind that *δόξα* has connotations of “judgment,” which is often called a “power.” Socrates also discusses ignorance (*ἄγνοια*, *ἄγνωσία*) but, as I will argue later, he does not conceive of it as a cognitive power.

³⁹ *Δυνάμεις εἶναι αἷς ἡμεῖς δυνάμεθα ἃ δυνάμεθα.*

“accomplish” (*apergazesthai*)) (477c6-d6).⁴⁰ The various cognitive powers, then, enable us to interact with objects in the world in various cognitive ways.

To help us understand the sense in which opinion, knowledge, and understanding are cognitive powers, Socrates draws an analogy to sight and hearing. In virtue of possessing the power of sight, human beings are able to interact cognitively with colors and, when the power of sight is actualized, human beings see (i.e. sight is “set-over” colors and “accomplishes” seeing). In virtue of possessing the power of hearing, human beings are able to interact with sounds and, when the power of hearing is actualized, human beings hear (i.e. hearing is “set-over” sounds and “accomplishes” hearing). Thus, just as sight and hearing are set-over certain objects and enable us to engage in certain activities, so too opinion, knowledge, and understanding are set-over certain objects and enable us to engage in certain activities. In what follows, Socrates’ aim is to identify the objects and activities proper to each power.⁴¹

As the preceding discussion makes clear, cognitive powers are, in a sense, prior to cognitive states. It is in virtue of an exercise of a cognitive power that someone acquires a cognitive state. People can possess cognitive powers, however, independently of cognitive states. People can only see, for example, through an exercise of the power of sight but can possess the power of sight without engaging in the activity of seeing (e.g. when they are asleep). It is this priority that, I think, explains why Socrates shifts to speaking of cognitive powers here. Having argued that the lovers of sights and sounds cannot know anything (i.e. cannot possess any knowledge) and having noted that they will dispute this claim, he aims to soothe and gently persuade them by arguing that they do not actualize their power of knowledge. Since exercising a power is necessary for possessing the corresponding state, he thinks they will agree that their failure to actualize knowledge entails that they cannot know anything.

A crucial difference between cognitive states and cognitive powers is that the former have intentional objects but the latter do not. Whereas, for example, the powers of sight and hearing are actualized over objects, the cognitive states produced by exercises of those powers are *about* or *concern* objects. Likewise, whereas the powers of opinion, knowledge, and understanding are actualized over objects, the cognitive states of opinion, knowledge, and understanding are about or concern objects. It is important to note, however, that the objects over which a power is actualized do not necessarily exhaust the things that can be the intentional objects of the state that results from an exercise of that power.⁴² Although the

⁴⁰ I discuss the relation between these two criteria of individuation later (see pp. 104-06).

⁴¹ Socrates’ analogy with sight and hearing puts pressure on the idea that he distinguishes the powers of knowledge and opinion by relating them to distinct groups of propositions. Since the analogy is intended precisely to help us understand how the powers of knowledge and opinion are set-over things, it is most natural to take those things to be groups of objects, rather than propositions, as is the case with sight and hearing.

⁴² This point is the crux of Smith’s argument [2000, esp. 147-151].

power of sight, for example, is set-over colors, colors do not exhaust the things that can be the intentional objects of visual impressions (i.e. the states produced by the power of sight). We can see, for example, both colors and the things that are colored. Likewise, although the power of hearing is set-over sounds, we can hear both sounds (e.g. the wail of a siren) and the things that emit sounds (e.g. the fire truck). Moreover, as these two examples show, the fact that two distinct powers are set-over two distinct groups of objects does *not* entail that one and the same thing cannot be the intentional object of states produced by each power (e.g. the fire truck can be the intentional object of both a visual and an auditory impression). With respect to the powers of opinion, knowledge, and understanding, then, to claim that each is set-over its own group of objects is *not* to say that the cognitive states of opinion, knowledge, and understanding cannot have the same intentional objects.

The importance of this last point to understanding Socrates' ensuing argument and, in particular, its place in the overall discussion of the *Republic*, cannot be overstated. Because Socrates aims to show that the lovers of sights and sounds cannot achieve knowledge by arguing that they do not actualize their power of knowledge, he does not, and *need* not, argue that it is impossible to have opinions and knowledge *about* the same things. The failure to distinguish Socrates' conception of cognitive states from his conception of cognitive powers has led interpreters to think that, if Socrates wants to conclude that the lovers of sights and sounds do not have knowledge, he must be arguing for the latter claim. Once we respect that distinction, however, we can see that he need do nothing of the sort.

To elaborate: one of the chief questions I consider in this dissertation is whether Socrates distinguishes the cognitive states of opinion, knowledge, and understanding according to the intentional objects they can take (I have called this the "Two-Worlds issue"). Because the ensuing discussion focuses primarily on the cognitive *powers* of opinion, knowledge, and understanding, I think that it leaves most elements of the Two-Worlds issue open. However, as we will see, Socrates does suggest that opinion and knowledge, the cognitive states, can have the same intentional objects, but this is done in passing and is not necessary to his aim of persuading the lovers of sights and sounds. What is left open in Book 5 is whether opinion and understanding, the cognitive states, can have the same intentional objects. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, I think that the passage in Book 7 shows that Socrates thinks perceptible objects *cannot* be intentional objects of understanding, the cognitive state. By parity of reasoning, I conclude that he must also think there cannot be opinions concerning intelligible objects. On the 'cognitive power—set-over—group of objects' schema, opinion and understanding are treated as parallel. It would be odd if Socrates ruled out that there could be understanding concerning the objects over which opinion is set yet still allowed that there could be opinions concerning the objects over which understanding is set. However,

since this issue is not settled in Book 5 on its own, we must look elsewhere to understand Socrates' motivation for adopting this position. In the next chapter I will do precisely this, showing how his conception of explanation, in combination with his metaphysics, leads him to conclude that opinion and understanding, the cognitive states, cannot share intentional objects.

With the distinction between cognitive powers and cognitive states in hand, we can proceed to see how Socrates attempts to persuade the lovers of sights and sounds that they cannot have knowledge by arguing that they do not actualize their power of knowledge.

5.4.4 Distinguishing Knowledge From Ignorance (476e4-477b2)

Socrates begins the task of soothing and gently persuading the lovers of sights and sounds as follows (476e7-477a1):

Socrates: Does the one who knows know something or nothing? You answer for him.

Glauc.: I will answer that he knows something.

Soc.: Which: something that is or something that is not?

Glauc.: That is. How could something that is not be known?

Soc.: Ὁ γινώσκων γινώσκει τὸ ἢ οὐδέν; σὺ οὖν μοι ὑπὲρ ἐκείνου ἀποκρίνου.

Glauc.: Ἀποκρινούμαι, ἔφη, ὅτι γινώσκει τί.

Soc.: Πότερον ὃν ἢ οὐκ ὄν;

Glauc.: Ὅν· πῶς γὰρ ἂν μὴ ὄν γέ τι γνωσθείη;

Socrates' demand that Glauc. answer for the lovers of sights and sounds reinforces the idea that we must find a reading of this discussion that could seem (to Glauc. at least) acceptable to them. On a straightforward hearing of Socrates' first question, Glauc.'s answer, namely that the person who knows knows something rather than nothing, has to be correct. As we saw above, to know is to bear the cognitive relation of knowledge *to something*. Of course, for any particular person who is said to know something, there would naturally be the question, "What does he know?" An answer to this question would cite something that he knows, such as a particular object (e.g. Meno), a proposition (e.g. that Albany is the capital of New York), a skill (e.g. how to tie his shoes), a domain (e.g. geometry), and so on. Each of the things that we may cite as that which the knower knows is clearly something rather than nothing.

Socrates then asks Glauc. a more general question, something that concerns each of the things that can be cited as that which the knower knows: is it something that is or something that is not? On the understanding of the Greek verb "*einai*" developed in Section 4.2 (pp. 89-94), the way to understand Socrates' question is as follows: "is it something that is

(whatever it is) or something that is not (whatever it is)?” Again, the natural answer to this question is the one Glaucon gives, namely that the thing the knower knows is (whatever it is). Each of the things we cited above as a possible thing that the knower knows (i.e. Meno, the proposition that *Albany is the capital of New York*, and so on) is whatever it is. That which is not (whatever it is), on the other hand, cannot be characterized in any way. It is natural to think that something that cannot be characterized in any way cannot be known.

Socrates then makes a claim that is crucial to my interpretation (477a2-4):

We hold this sufficiently, then, even if we examined it from many angles: that which completely is is completely knowable; and that which in no way is is in every way unknowable.

Ἰκανῶς οὖν τοῦτο ἔχομεν, κἂν εἰ πλεοναχῇ σκοποῖμεν, ὅτι τὸ μὲν παντελῶς ὄν παντελῶς γνωστόν, μὴ ὄν δὲ μηδαμῇ πάντῃ ἄγνωστον;

Two points require comment. First, note that Socrates has shifted from speaking simply of “that which is” and “that which is not” to speaking of “that which completely is” and “that which in no way is.” Although we may wish to determine exactly why Socrates makes this shift and why he says that the former are “completely knowable” and the latter are “in every way unknowable,” his claim that we would hold this view “even if we examined it from many angles” suggests that he does not take himself to have definitively supported the move. Thus, without knowing what supplementary reasoning Socrates would offer, I do not think that we can be precise on the matter. However, I see no reason why the lovers of sights and sounds would balk at the move. They take the many beautiful things to be completely whatever they are (e.g. beautiful) and also think that the many beautiful things are completely knowable.

Second, in the cited passage, Socrates makes the following two claims:

[A] that which completely is is completely knowable

[B] that which in no way is is in every way unknowable

An upshot of these two claims, which, so far as I am aware, no interpreter has pointed out, is that everything that does not belong to the group ‘that which in no way is’ is at least in some way knowable. Importantly, this entails that the things that ‘both are and are not’ are in some way knowable. If Socrates were to deny this, he would have to claim that such things are either completely knowable or completely unknowable. Suppose he were to claim the former. On that reading, whereas [A] would only state some of the things that are completely knowable, [B] would be an exhaustive statement of the things that are in every way unknowable. On the other hand, were Socrates to claim the latter, [B] would only state some

of the things that are in every way unknowable and [A] would be an exhaustive statement of the things that are completely knowable. However, Socrates treats [A] and [B] as parallel. We should not, then, take one claim as exhaustive and the other as non-exhaustive. Thus, we must treat them both as exhaustive and conclude that the things that both are and are not are in some way knowable. Since the things that both are and are not are later identified as the objects over which the power of opinion is set, Socrates here commits himself to the view that it is possible to have knowledge, at least in some way, of the objects over which opinion is set. And, since we can certainly have opinions about the things over which the power of opinion is set, this entails that Socrates thinks opinion and knowledge, the cognitive states, can take at least some of the same objects.

Socrates then asks how objects that both are and are not would relate to the groups he has just mentioned (477a6-8):

If anything is such as to both be and not be, wouldn't it lie in between that which purely is and that which in no way is?

Εἰ δὲ δὴ τι οὕτως ἔχει ὥς εἶναί τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι, οὐ μεταξὺ ἄν κέοιτο τοῦ εἰλικρινῶς ὄντος καὶ τοῦ αὖ μηδαμῇ ὄντος;

Note the conditional nature of Socrates' question. He does not baldly assert that there *are* things that both are and are not. The lovers of sights and sounds would surely balk at that claim. Rather, he asks Glaucon where such things would lie *if* there were such things.⁴³ Socrates will ultimately argue that there are such things (at 478e1-479d4), but he is not taking it for granted at this point.

Socrates' description of a group of things that "both are and are not" may suggest that he is talking about the intersection of the things that are and the things that are not.⁴⁴ One of the major difficulties facing this interpretation is that it is difficult to see why Socrates would use the metaphor of "lying between" to describe the relation of that which both is and is not to the other two groups. In order for *A* to be between two distinct things *B* and *C*, *A* must have at least some parts that are neither parts of *B* nor parts of *C*. If *every* part of my body were a part of either Jack's body or Jill's body, it would make no sense to say that my body

⁴³ Gail Fine wrongly takes the force of this question to be categorical and then interprets it in light of her dialectical requirement. See Gonzalez [1996, 250] for a criticism of Fine on this point.

⁴⁴ I think that Gail Fine understands this group as the union of the other two groups. Since Fine advances a veridical reading of εἶναι, she understands "that which both is and is not" to mean "that which both is true and is not true." Since she denies both that a single proposition can be true and false and that propositions display "degrees of truth," she must understand "that which both is true and is not true" as the union of the set of true propositions and the set of false propositions [1978, 126; 1990, 89-90]. However, it is difficult to see how the set of all true and false propositions counts as something (τι) that is both true and false. A set of propositions, unlike individual propositions, is not the kind of thing that can be either true or false (let alone both).

is “between” Jack’s body and Jill’s body. If, however, *some* members of the group ‘that which both is and is not’ must neither belong to the group ‘that which is’ nor to the group ‘that which is not,’ it is best to think that no member does, to maintain the unity of the group. After all, Socrates only gives us one descriptor for the objects in this group. Thus, Socrates here singles out a group of things that is wholly distinct from both that which purely is and that which in no way is. Of course, he does not claim that there *are* such things; he simply claims that *if* there are, they will be distinct from the two groups he has already discussed.

In closing out his discussion of the distinction between knowledge and ignorance, Socrates mentions understanding for the first time in the Book 5 discussion (477a10-b2):

Then, since knowledge was set-over that which is, ignorance must be set-over that which is not, and we must look for something between understanding and ignorance that is set-over that which lies in between, if there happen to be such things.

Οὐκοῦν ἐπὶ μὲν τῷ ὄντι γνῶσις ἦν, ἀγνοσία δ’ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐπὶ μὴ ὄντι, ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ μεταξύ τούτῳ μεταξύ τι καὶ ζητητέον ἀγνοίας τε καὶ ἐπιστήμης, εἴ τι τυγχάνει ὄν τοιοῦτον.

When Socrates says, “we must look for something between understanding and ignorance,” it is clear that “understanding” refers to the same thing that “knowledge” refers to in the first line of this passage. This strongly indicates that Socrates conceives of understanding as the same thing as knowledge, insofar as knowledge is something that is set-over that which is. Moreover, in the ensuing discussion Socrates moves back-and-forth between using “knowledge” and “understanding” to refer to something that is “set-over that which is.”⁴⁵ Given that Socrates immediately proceeds to describe understanding as the *power* that is set-over that which purely is (477b11-12), I conclude that when Socrates uses “understanding” and “knowledge” to refer to cognitive powers they refer to the same power. However, as I will argue presently, the same does not hold when “understanding” and “knowledge” refer to cognitive states.

⁴⁵ Socrates uses “understanding” twelve times in this way (at 477b1, b6, b8, b11, d8, e6, 478a1, a7, a11, b1, d7, and d9) and “knowledge” six times (at 477a10, 478c3, c7, c9, c12, and 480a1). While it is clear that these two words refer to the same power, I think that there is actually some method to Socrates’ madness. Whereas in all but one of the occurrences of “knowledge” (at 480a1) the distinction with ignorance is highlighted, this contrast is absent in all but three of the occurrences of “understanding” (at 477b1, 478d7, d9). Noting that in Greek the contrast with ἀγνοία and ἀγνοσία is made more evident by using γνῶσις, I tentatively propose the following thesis about Socrates’ terminology: “understanding” is his preferred name for the highest cognitive power; however, when he wants to make the contrast with ignorance clearer, he tends to use “knowledge.”

5.4.4.1 Distinguishing Knowledge From Understanding

Socrates' willingness in this passage and the remainder of Book 5 to move from speaking of "knowledge" to speaking of "understanding" has led interpreters to assume that the terms are interchangeable everywhere, even when they refer to cognitive states. However, a decisive argument can be given against this view. First, recall that in Book 7 Socrates maintains that there can be no understanding of perceptible objects (at 529a9-c2). In that passage, Socrates must mean that perceptible objects cannot be the intentional objects of understanding, the cognitive state. Second, as we have just seen (at 477a1-4), in Book 5 Socrates commits himself to the view that philosophers can have knowledge, at least in some sense, of perceptible objects.⁴⁶ Nowhere, however, does Socrates use the family of words surrounding "understanding" to describe a cognitive relation philosophers can bear to perceptible objects. Thus, when Socrates uses "understanding" and "knowledge" to pick out cognitive states they do not necessarily pick out the same cognitive states. In particular, there are cognitive states that count as knowledge that cannot count as understanding. That is sufficient to show that Socrates does not use "understanding" and "knowledge" interchangeably when they refer to cognitive states.

It must be noted, however, that on several occasions Socrates uses the family of words surrounding "knowledge" to pick out cognitive states that also count as understanding (cf. 476c1-2, 527b4-7). The best way to account for Socrates' language, then, is as follows: "knowledge" and "understanding" have overlapping but non-identical semantic fields. Specifically, the semantic field of "understanding" is wholly contained in the semantic field of "knowledge." Both words pick out the same cognitive power, and every cognitive state picked out by "understanding" can also be picked out by "knowledge." However, there are cognitive states that count as knowledge but do not count as understanding.

A good model on which to understand the relationship between Socrates' use of these two words, as they refer to cognitive states, is provided by the English words "teacher" and "professor." The semantic field of "teacher" wholly contains the semantic field of "professor" (i.e. all professors are teachers), but it also extends more widely (i.e. there are people that are teachers but not professors). Moreover, the model is particularly useful because professors are chiefly distinguished from other kinds of teachers by the "objects" they take. That is, professors are teachers of a certain kind of object, namely college students. But, there are teachers of other kinds of objects, such as elementary-school students. Likewise, "understanding" refers to knowledge of a certain kind of object, namely intelligible objects. But, there is knowledge of other kinds of objects, namely perceptible objects.

⁴⁶ A view that we also saw was suggested at 476c7-d5 (p. 84 fn. 14) and will be repeated at 520c3-6 (Ch. 6, pp. 150-51).

Given my understanding of how Socrates employs the words “knowledge” and “understanding,” I disagree with those interpreters who claim that when Socrates says philosophers know things about perceptible objects this directly contradicts the Two-Worlds interpretation.⁴⁷ Rather, I take such passages, in combination with the Book 7 passage, to show that knowledge and understanding are, for Socrates, distinct concepts. In a sense, then, I look at the same evidence as these interpreters and just draw a different conclusion.⁴⁸ In the next chapter I show how the distinction between knowledge and understanding allows us to respond to the most serious objection leveled against any interpretation that takes Socrates to distinguish his cognitive states according to the intentional objects they can take.

In what follows I will continue to use “understanding” to translate Socrates’ uses of “*epistêmê*” and “knowledge” to translate his uses of “*gnôsis*.” However, when I comment on what he says I will use “understanding” to refer to the power that is set-over that which purely is and the cognitive relation that philosophers bear to such objects. I will use “knowledge” to refer to the cognitive relation that philosophers alone bear to perceptible objects. It must be borne in mind, however, that Socrates thinks that the powers of knowledge and understanding are the same power, and that understanding, the cognitive state, is a kind of knowledge.

Summary

Let us take stock. In his attempt to persuade the lovers of sights and sounds that they cannot achieve better than opinion, Socrates maintains that understanding is set-over that which purely is and ignorance is set-over that which in no way is. He then sets up a double conditional: *if* there is something between ignorance and understanding, that thing will be set-over the objects between that which purely is and that which is no way is, *if* there are such objects. Given this double conditional, Socrates argues in two steps: first, that opinion is the thing between ignorance and understanding (477b4-478d11); second, that the objects which preoccupy the lovers of sights and sounds are between that which purely is and that which in no way is (478e1-480a13). Thus, he takes himself to establish that, since the lovers of sights and sounds do not turn their attention to the objects over which understanding is set, they cannot hope to achieve understanding or knowledge.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Fine [1990, 86] and Smith [2000, 153-55].

⁴⁸ That is not quite right, since, as noted in the previous chapter, neither Fine nor Smith include the Book 7 passage as part of their evidence.

5.4.5 Identifying Opinion as the “In-Between” Power (477b4-478d4)

Socrates argues that opinion is a distinct cognitive power between understanding and ignorance by first distinguishing it from the former (477b4-478b4), then from the latter (478b5-c9), and then “placing” it between the two (478c10-d4). I discuss each step in turn.

5.4.5.1 Distinguishing Opinion from Understanding (477b4-478b4)

Socrates begins to distinguish opinion from understanding as follows (477b4-14):

Socrates: Well then, do we say that opinion is a thing?—Of course.

Soc: Is it a different power (*dunamis*) from understanding, or is it the same?—Different

Soc.: So, opinion has been assigned over one thing, and understanding over something different, based on the power each has?—It is so.

Soc.: Well then, understanding has been assigned by nature over that which is, to know how that which is is.

It is interesting to note that Glaucon immediately accepts not only that opinion and understanding are different powers but that each is set-over a different kind of thing, since Socrates goes on to present what seems to be an argument for the latter claim. Given Glaucon’s immediate agreement, one may wonder why Socrates thinks the argument necessary.

Whatever Socrates’ reasons may be, he supports his conclusion with general considerations about the individuation of powers (477c1-d6):

We say that powers are a kind among the things that are, by which we—and everything else which is able to do things—are able to do whatever we are able to do. For example, sight and hearing are among the powers, if you understand what I want to mean by this kind... Listen, then, to what appears to me to be the case about them. A power has no color for me to see, nor a shape, nor any feature of the sort that many other things have, and to which I can look in order to distinguish for myself as different from one another. In the case of a power, I can consider only both what it is set-over and what it accomplishes, and it is on that basis that I come to call each the power it is: those assigned to be set-over the same things and accomplish the same, I call the same; those that are set-over different things and accomplish different things, I call different.

Φήσομεν δυνάμεις εἶναι γένος τι τῶν ὄντων, αἷς δὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς δυνάμεθα ἃ δυνάμεθα καὶ ἄλλο πᾶν ὅτι περ ἂν δύνηται, οἷον λέγω ὄψιν καὶ ἀκοὴν τῶν δυνάμεων εἶναι, εἰ ἄρα μανθάνεις ὃ βούλομαι λέγειν τὸ εἶδος... Ἄκουσον δὴ ὃ μοι φαίνεται περὶ αὐτῶν. δυνάμεως γὰρ ἐγὼ οὔτε τινὰ χροῖαν ὁρῶ οὔτε σχῆμα

οὔτε τι τῶν τοιούτων οἶον καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν, πρὸς ἃ ἀποβλέπων ἔνια διορίζομαι παρ' ἑμαυτῶ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα εἶναι, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα· δυνάμεως δ' εἰς ἐκεῖνο μόνον βλέπω ἐφ' ᾧ τε ἔστι καὶ ὃ ἀπεργάζεται, καὶ ταύτῃ ἐκάστην αὐτῶν δύναμιν ἐκάλεσα, καὶ τὴν μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτῷ τεταγμένην καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀπεργαζομένην τὴν αὐτὴν καλῶ, τὴν δὲ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ καὶ ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένην ἄλλην.

Socrates here offers two criteria for the individuation of powers: (a) what kind of object that power is structured to interact with and (b) what activity we engage in when that power is actualized. An important question, which has garnered considerable controversy, is whether Socrates thinks that (a) and (b) are distinct criteria. It certainly seems that Socrates introduces them as distinct, and the majority of interpreters have understood him in this way.⁴⁹ Socrates' use of the "*te-kai*" construction suggests that he conceives of them as being at least logically distinct. When people explicitly say "*both X and Y*" they typically do not conceive of "*X*" and "*Y*" as having the same meaning.⁵⁰ In other words, the use of "*te*" typically rules out the "*kai*" from being exegetical.⁵¹ It seems clear, then, that Socrates conceives of (a) and (b) as being *logically* distinct.

However, even if Socrates conceives of them as logically distinct criteria, it is important to distinguish two possibilities: (1) (a) and (b) can be satisfied independently of each other (i.e. a single power can be set-over different things but accomplish the same thing; or, two distinct powers can be set-over the same thing but accomplish different things).⁵² (2) (a) and (b) cannot be independently satisfied. On this second option, a necessary link exists between the kind of thing a power enables us to interact with and the activity we engage in when the power is actualized. Thus, if powers are set-over the same thing, they accomplish the same thing (and the converse holds); if powers are set-over different things, they accomplish different things (and that converse holds as well). In support of this latter option I first wish to explain how it could make philosophical sense and then argue that the text demands it.

It is possible for there to be a necessary link between the objects over which a power is set and the activity we engage in when that power is actualized in the following way. It can be the case that the features of the objects determine the kind of activity human beings can engage in when they cognitively interact with them. For example, given what colors are like, seeing may be the only activity that human beings can engage in in such a way as to interact cognitively with colors. Conversely, given what the activity of seeing is like, it may

⁴⁹ Fine [1978, 1990], Annas [1981], Crystal [1996], and Smith [2000], among others, support this reading. Gosling [1968] and N. Cooper [1986] argue that they amount to the same thing.

⁵⁰ They can, of course, take "*X*" and "*Y*" to refer to the same thing (e.g. "it's both a fortnight and fourteen days," "it's both trilateral and triangular"). Thanks to Jack Woods for this point.

⁵¹ See Denniston [1954, 503-511] and Smyth [1984, §2974].

⁵² This way of understanding the relationship between the two criteria is crucial to the arguments of many interpreters, including Fine [1978, 1990] and Crystal [1996].

be that the only way human beings can see is by interacting with colors. Thus, even though we can distinguish between the objects over which sight is set (i.e. colors) and the activity we engage in when sight is actualized (i.e. seeing), a necessary link between that object and that activity would mean that Socrates' two criteria cannot be satisfied independently.

It is imperative to note that, even on this option, we are not committed to saying that the intentional objects of the cognitive states produced by a power are limited to those objects over which the power is set. Simply saying, for example, that, given what the activity of seeing is like, human beings can only see by interacting with colors, is only to say that seeing *requires* interacting with colors. It is not to say that we are limited to seeing only colors. Likewise, saying that, given what colors are like, seeing is the only activity human beings can engage in in such a way as to interact with colors does not entail that human beings can only see colors. Similarly, even if forming an opinion requires interacting with 'that which both is and is not,' opinion would not necessarily be limited in its intentional object to 'that which both is and is not' (and similarly for understanding and 'that which purely is').

The text, in fact, requires that we attribute some picture such as this to Socrates. In summarizing his discussion of the criteria of individuation, Socrates only says,

Powers assigned to be set-over the same things and accomplish the same, I call the same; those that are set-over different things and accomplish different things, I call different.

Although Socrates does not explicitly deny that distinct powers can be set-over the same object or accomplish the same thing, the fact that he does not mention this possibility here is a strong reason for thinking that he does not accept it. Socrates is trying to state, in general terms, the ways in which one can go about individuating powers. If he thought that distinct powers could either be set-over the same objects or accomplish the same activity, it is unthinkable that he would not mention it here.

Fortunately, however, we do not have to rely solely on the above argument from silence. If we turn our attention to the next stretch of text, we see that Socrates must be thinking of the criteria along the lines I have proposed, on pain of arguing invalidly. The exchange continues as follows (477d8-478b4):

Socrates: Going back, then, to where we left off, my very good fellow: do you think understanding is itself a power? Or to what type would you assign it?

Glaucon: To that one. It is the most effective power of all.

Soc.: What about opinion? Shall we include it as a power or assign it to a different kind?

Glaucon: Not at all. Opinion is nothing other than the power by which we are

able to opine.

Soc.: But a moment ago you agreed that understanding and opinion are not the same.

Glauc.: How could anyone with any sense think a fallible thing is the same as an infallible one?

Soc.: Fine. Then clearly we agree that opinion is different from understanding.—Yes, it is different.

Soc.: Each of them, then, since it is a different power, is by nature set-over something different?—Necessarily.

Soc.: Surely understanding is set-over that which is, to know what it is, how it is?—Yes.

Soc.: Whereas opinion, we say, opines.—Yes.

Soc.: The very same thing that understanding knows? Can the knowable and the opinable be the same? Or is that impossible?

Glauc.: It is impossible, given what we have agreed. If different powers by nature deal with different things, and both opinion and understanding are powers but, as we claim, different ones, it follows from this being the case that the knowable and the opinable cannot be the same.

Soc.: Then if what is is knowable, mustn't the opinable be something other than what is?

Glauc.: Yes, it must be something different.

It is clear that, although Socrates conceives of criteria (a) and (b) as logically distinct, he must think that they cannot be satisfied independently of one another. Glaucon agrees that opinion and understanding are distinct powers because they accomplish different things (i.e. the former is fallible but the latter infallible). On this basis, they conclude that opinion and understanding are set-over different things. If criteria (a) and (b) could be satisfied independently, then Socrates would be arguing invalidly: even if opinion and understanding were different powers and accomplished different things, they could still be set-over the same objects. Thus, unless we are to saddle Socrates here with an invalid argument, we must understand him as connecting criteria (a) and (b) in such a way that they can only be satisfied together.

Socrates, then, takes himself to have established that the things over which opinion is set are different from the things over which understanding is set, or, as he puts it, that the opinable and the knowable are different. Socrates has already identified the objects of understanding as the things that purely or completely are. The objects of opinion, then, must be different from the things that purely or completely are.

We may wonder why Socrates uses the term “knowable” (*gnôston*) rather than “understandable” (*epistêton*) to denote the objects of understanding. Remember, however, that

“knowledge” and “understanding” can refer to the same cognitive power, and so there is no difficulty in using “knowable” to pick out the objects over which that power is set. Moreover, it seems that Plato himself introduced the word “*epistêton*” into philosophical discourse. He uses it only three times, all in a single passage in the *Theaetetus*.⁵³ When the character Theaetetus uses the word, in fact, he comments on its oddity:

He said the things of which there is no account are not understandable (*ouk epistêta*) (that was the word he used), those which have an account he said are understandable. (201d3-4)⁵⁴

Presumably, Theaetetus is not remarking on the man’s applying “*ouk*” to a perfectly standard word. Rather, it must be that the word “*epistêta*” itself strikes Theaetetus as odd. Thus, Socrates’ use of “*gnôston*” rather than “*epistêton*” to denote the objects over which understanding is set should not give us pause.

5.4.5.2 Distinguishing Opinion from Ignorance (478b5-478c9)

Having distinguished opinion from understanding, Socrates is halfway to his conclusion that opinion is distinct from both understanding and ignorance. He thus proceeds to the second distinction (478b5-c8):

Socrates: Does opinion, then, opine what is not? Or is it impossible even to opine what is not? Consider this: doesn’t an opiner take his opinion to be set-over something? Or is it possible to opine, yet to opine nothing?—No, it is impossible.

Soc.: In fact, there is some one thing that an opiner opines?—Yes.

Soc.: But surely what is not is most correctly characterized not as some one thing, but as nothing?—Of course.

Soc.: But we gave ignorance to what is not out of necessity, and knowledge to what is?—Correct.

Soc.: So opinion neither opines what is nor what is not?—No, it does not.

Soc.: Then opinion cannot be either ignorance or knowledge.—Apparently not.

There is a striking dissimilarity between the way in which Socrates distinguishes opinion from ignorance and the way in which he distinguished opinion from understanding. In making the latter distinction he inferred that opinion and understanding must be set-over

⁵³ Only one occurrence, in a fragment of Epimenides, predates Plato. I am unsure what to make of this occurrence.

⁵⁴ Trans. M.J. Levett, revised M. Burnyeat, accepting Cooper’s suggestion for the translation of οὕτως καὶ ὀνομάζων.

distinct objects from the claim that they are distinct powers. Here, however, he seems to argue in the reverse way: opinion and ignorance are set-over different things, therefore they cannot be the same thing.

In fact, it is unclear whether Socrates is even arguing that opinion and ignorance, *conceived of as powers*, are set-over different things. We will consider ignorance in a moment, but first note that, when Socrates asks Glaucon, “[D]oesn’t an opiner take his opinion to be set-over something? Or is it possible to opine, yet to opine nothing,” it is natural to take “opinion” to refer to a cognitive state rather than a cognitive power. That is, rather than claiming that the person who has the power of opinion takes that power to be set-over some group of objects, it is more natural for Socrates to claim that a person who has an opinion takes his opinion to be *about* something (i.e. it is more natural to take “*ho doxazôn*” to refer to someone who has exercised the power of opinion than to someone who merely has the power). The idea, then, would be that, if someone has a cognitive state that counts as a genuine opinion, that cognitive state must be about something. That which in no way is, however, is not something but, rather, nothing. Thus, it cannot be the object of a mental state that counts as a genuine opinion.

Before considering whether Socrates conceives of ignorance as a power, it is worth noting that he loses interest in ignorance in the subsequent discussions of Books 6 and 7. Although the terminology he uses to refer to the upper two sections of the Divided Line differs at times, he consistently refers to the bottom two sections individually as “imagination” (*eikasia*) and “conviction” (*pistis*) and collectively as “opinion” (533e3-534a8; cf. 510a8-10).⁵⁵ The fact that Socrates focuses in what follows solely on issues related to opinion and understanding gives us strong reason for suspecting that there is something different about ignorance even in the Book 5 argument.

5.4.5.3 Is Ignorance a Power?

The majority of interpreters agree that Socrates conceives of ignorance as a cognitive power.⁵⁶ In fact, some interpreters explicitly present their interpretation of the Book 5 argument as motivated largely by the need to accommodate ignorance as a power (cf. Smith [2000, 149]). Since Socrates does not explicitly call ignorance a power, the main evidence for thinking that he conceives of it as one is the parallelism between the way in which he

⁵⁵ In his initial presentation of the Divided Line, Socrates divides the upper section into comprehension (νόησις) and thought (διάνοια) (511d8-e1). In Book 7, however, he calls the highest subsection “understanding” (ἐπιστήμη) and uses “comprehension” to refer collectively to understanding and thought (533e3-534a1). Immediately before that Book 7 passage, however, Socrates implores us not to “dispute about names, with matters as important as those before us to investigate” (533d7-9).

⁵⁶ Indeed, the only interpreters I am aware of who deny this claim are Denyer [1991, 51-59] and Crystal [1996, 356 fn. 15].

discusses ignorance, on the one hand, and opinion and understanding, on the other.⁵⁷ In particular, Socrates twice uses the same “*epi* + dative” construction to relate ignorance to that which is not (at 477a8-9 and 478c3) that he uses to relate understanding to that which is and opinion to that which both is and is not. Since Socrates explicitly calls opinion and understanding “powers,” it is understandable that interpreters have inferred that he also conceives of ignorance as one.

However, both textual and philosophical considerations tell against this conclusion. First, the parallelism is not as straightforward as it may initially seem. Socrates is guarded in using the “*epi* + dative” construction concerning ignorance in a way that he is not concerning opinion and understanding. On both occasions he says that ignorance is being assigned “by necessity” (*ex anankês*) to that which is not. In the first passage, Socrates says, “since knowledge was set-over that which is, ignorance *must be* set-over that which is not” (477a10-11). Socrates has already (in some sense) established that knowledge is set-over that which purely is (at 477a2-4) and, in this passage, says that we must, because of that, assign ignorance to that which in no way is. In the second passage he refers back to the first passage, saying simply, “*out of necessity* we gave ignorance to that which is not” (478c3). No such language occurs when Socrates relates either understanding or opinion to their respective objects. Socrates’ wording, then, suggests that there is something forced about relating ignorance to that which is not.

Secondly, and more importantly, in identifying that which is not with nothing (*mêden*), Socrates indicates that the phrase “that which is not” does not pick out a class of genuine objects. Nothing is such that it is not in any way (whatever it is). Given that Socrates thinks powers are individuated by the objects they are set-over, he cannot conceive of something which is set-over nothing as a genuine power. If ignorance were a power, it would somehow be a power that not only systematically fails to interact with any object, but for which there is, in fact, no object with which it is naturally structured to interact.

We should pause to consider whether there is another way of understanding what counts as “nothing” such that it could make sense to say that there is some power which is exercised over objects meeting that description. In fact, many interpreters, noting that there is something odd with the case of ignorance, have made various attempts at characterizing its alleged objects. Gail Fine [1978, 131], for example, maintains that propositions which are “very false,” such as “justice is a vegetable,” are appropriate objects of ignorance.⁵⁸ Another

⁵⁷ It is worth noting that, so far as I am aware, no supporter of this interpretation argues for it. Presumably, they take Socrates’ presentation alone to make it obvious.

⁵⁸ Fine’s position is very problematic: she wants to distinguish between “very false” and “false” propositions yet still somehow claim that her position is not committed to the notion of degrees of truth. See Gonzalez [1996, 268-69] for discussion of Fine on this issue.

approach is to argue that we can only specify objects of ignorance relative to a person. So, for example, Gosling [1960, 124] argues that X is an object of ignorance for S just in case the question “What is X ?” has not arisen for S or S has a complete lack of interest in the question. A more developed version of this latter approach is to say that X is an object of ignorance for S just in case either S has no view concerning X or, for all the predicates $F, G, H, \dots$ that S thinks hold of X , X is in no way, $F, G, H, \dots$.

The main problem with these last two approaches is that they seem to identify objects of ignorance, the cognitive state, rather than ignorance, the alleged cognitive power. Whether something belongs to a group of objects over which a cognitive power is set should not be a relative matter. It does not make sense to say, for example, that something can be the proper object of sight for one person, but the proper object of hearing for another. Similarly, whether something is such that opinion or understanding is set-over it is determined by features of the thing itself (i.e. it is because it both is and is not that opinion is set-over it; it is because it purely is that understanding is set-over it). Of course, it is *not* inappropriate to think that whether something is the object of a cognitive state is relative in this way. My dog, for example, may be the intentional object of an opinion I have but not the intentional object of any of your opinions. Likewise, I may be ignorant *about* or *concerning* something of which you are not ignorant. But, that is to treat ignorance as a cognitive state and not a cognitive power, which is precisely what is at issue here.

These considerations point to a larger problem with thinking of ignorance as a power. When we say that people are ignorant of something, we are describing them in a wholly negative manner. We are saying that there is something of which they fail to be aware (perhaps with some other requirements). Such failure typically comes in one of two forms: either they are completely unaware of the matter or they have a relevant view about the matter, but that view is false (i.e. something like that last view I sketched out above). Given that opinions can be either true or false, it would seem that the latter case of ignorance would, for the most part, be included under false opinion. If, on the other hand, a person is ignorant in virtue of being completely unaware of a given matter, it seems better to say that she has not exercised any cognitive powers concerning that matter, rather than to say that there is some power through whose exercise she became unaware. In either case of ordinary ignorance, it seems implausible to think that being in a state of ignorance is to be explained by the exercise of a power wholly distinct from opinion (or understanding, for that matter).

Ultimately, I do not think that we should take “that which in no way is” to describe a group of genuine objects. Consequently, we should not take Socrates to conceive of ignorance as a cognitive power. If we accept this position, how does it affect our overall understanding of the argument? I think that the answer is, “Not that much.” We should treat

ignorance as a sort of limiting case: for that which in no way is whatever it is, ignorance is all there is. Of course, there is nothing such that it meets the description “that which in no way is.” Socrates’ focus in what follows is on the distinction between opinion and understanding, and his main point here is that the objects of opinion are something rather than nothing.⁵⁹

5.4.5.4 Placing Opinion Between Understanding and Ignorance (478c10-478d4)

Socrates, then, has argued that opinion is distinct from both understanding and ignorance. In the next stretch of text, he argues that opinion is that thing they were looking for *between* understanding and ignorance (478c12-478d12):

Socrates: Well, then, does it lie outside these two, surpassing knowledge in clarity or ignorance in opacity?—No, it does neither.

Soc.: Then does opinion seem to you to be more opaque than knowledge but clearer than ignorance?—Very much so.

Soc.: It lies inside them?—Yes.

Soc.: So opinion will lie in between the two?—Absolutely.

Soc.: Now, didn’t we say earlier that if something turned out to both be and not to be at the same time, it would lie in between what purely is and what in every way is not, and that neither understanding nor ignorance would be set-over it; but whatever it was again that turned out to lie in between ignorance and understanding would?—Correct

Soc.: And now, what we are calling opinion has turned out to lie in between them?—It has.

Saying that opinion does not surpass knowledge in clarity (*saphêneia*) nor ignorance in opacity (*asapheia*) seems to be a natural way for Glaucon to understand opinion, as Socrates does not belabor the point. Presumably, the idea is that, because people can attain a greater cognitive achievement than ignorance through an exercise of opinion, opinion must be clearer than ignorance. But, since opinion is fallible and understanding infallible, opinion must be darker than understanding. Thus, we have seen how Socrates argues that opinion is a distinct cognitive power which lies between understanding and ignorance.

⁵⁹ Some interpreters read Socrates’ point here as anti-Parmenidean (see, e.g. Crystal [1996]). The central idea is that, whereas Parmenides maintains that the existence of perceptible objects is wholly illusory and, so, afford nothing greater than ignorance, Socrates wants to grant them some reality and, consequently, susceptibility to a superior cognitive grasp. However, I am unconvinced that this is Parmenides’ position. Palmer [2012] has recently argued that all Parmenides claims is that perceptible objects are not necessarily whatever they are and, thus, the cognitive grasp we can have of them is deficient compared to the cognitive grasp we can have of those entities that are necessarily whatever they are. On Palmer’s interesting proposal, Parmenides’ position has many similarities with the one I attribute to Socrates.

5.4.6 Identifying the Things that “Both Are And Are Not” (478e1-479c5)

So far we have seen how Socrates deals with the first conditional outlined above (see p. 102): opinion is that thing between ignorance and understanding. Given that conclusion, the second conditional becomes: if there are objects between that which purely is and that which in no way is, opinion will be set-over those objects. Thus, Socrates sets the remainder of his task as follows (478e1-5):

Apparently, then, it remains for us to find what participates in both, namely in being and not being, and cannot correctly be called purely one or the other, so that if we find it, we can justifiably call it the opinable, thereby assigning extremes to extremes and in-betweens to in-betweens.

Ἐκεῖνο δὴ λείποιτ' ἂν ἡμῖν εὐρεῖν, ὥς ἔοικε, τὸ ἀμφοτέρων μετέχον, τοῦ εἶναί τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι, καὶ οὐδέτερον εἰλικρινὲς ὀρθῶς ἂν προσαγορευόμενον, ἴνα, ἔαν φανῇ, δοξαστὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐν δίκῃ προσαγορεύωμεν, τοῖς μὲν ἄκροις τὰ ἄκρατοῖς δὲ μεταξὺ τὰ μεταξὺ ἀποδιδόντες.

He then tries to accomplish that task as follows (478e7-479c5):

Soc.: Now that all that has been established, I want him to answer this—the excellent fellow who does not believe that there is Beauty itself, that is, some form of Beauty itself that always remains the same in all respects, but who does acknowledge the many beautiful things. The lover of sights who cannot bear to hear someone say that Beauty is one and Justice and the rest likewise—“My good man, we will say, of those many beautiful things, is there one which won’t present as ugly; and of those just things, one which won’t present as unjust; and of the pious things, one which won’t present as impious?”

Glauc.: No, rather it is necessary that they will present both as beautiful and as ugly, and the same for the other things you ask about.

Soc.: What about the many doubles? Do they present any less as halves than doubles?—No

Soc.: And, again, the things that are big and small, light and heavy, will they rather present as what we say they are than as the opposite of what they are called?

Glauc.: No, rather, each will always share in both.

Soc.: Then for each of the many things is it, rather than is it not, whatever someone says it is?

Glauc.: No, they are like people who speak ambiguously at dinner parties, or like the children’s riddle about the eunuch who threw at a bat—the one about what he threw at it and what it was on. For these things too, are ambiguous, and

one cannot firmly conceive of them as being or not being, or both, or neither.

Soc.: Τούτων δὴ ὑποκειμένων λεγέτω μοι, φήσω, καὶ ἀποκρινέσθω ὁ χρηστός ὃς αὐτὸ μὲν καλὸν καὶ ἰδέαν τινὰ αὐτοῦ κάλλους μηδεμίαν ἡγεῖται ἀεὶ μὲν κατὰ ταῦτα ὡσαύτως ἔχουσιν, πολλὰ δὲ τὰ καλὰ νομίζει, ἐκεῖνος ὁ φιλοθεάμων καὶ οὐδαμῇ ἀνεχόμενος ἄν τις ἐν τὸ καλὸν φῇ εἶναι καὶ δίκαιον καὶ τᾶλλα οὕτω. “Τούτων γὰρ δὴ, ὦ ἄριστε, φήσομεν, τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν μὲν τι ἔστιν ὃ οὐκ αἰσχρὸν φανήσεται; καὶ τῶν δικαίων, ὃ οὐκ ἄδικον; καὶ τῶν ὁσίων, ὃ οὐκ ἀνόσιον;”

Glauc.: Οὐκ, ἀλλ’ ἀνάγκη, ἔφη, καὶ καλὰ πως αὐτὰ καὶ αἰσχρὰ φανῆναι, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐρωτᾷς.

Soc.: Τί δὲ τὰ πολλὰ διπλάσια; ἥττον τι ἡμίσεα ἢ διπλάσια φαίνεται;—Οὐδέν

Soc.: Καὶ μεγάλα δὴ καὶ σμικρὰ καὶ κοῦφα καὶ βαρέα μὴ τι μᾶλλον ἢ ἂν φήσωμεν, ταῦτα προσρηθήσεται ἢ τάναντία;

Glauc.: Οὐκ, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ, ἔφη, ἕκαστον ἀμφοτέρων ἔξεται.

Soc.: Πότερον οὖν ἔστι μᾶλλον ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν τοῦτο ὃ ἂν τις φῇ αὐτὸ εἶναι;

Glauc.: Τοῖς ἐν ταῖς ἐστιάσεσιν, ἔφη, ἐπαμφοτερίζουσιν ἔοικεν, καὶ τῷ τῶν παίδων αἰνίγματι τῷ περὶ τοῦ εὐνούχου, τῆς βολῆς πέρι τῆς νυκτερίδος, ὃ καὶ ἐφ’ οὗ αὐτὸν αὐτὴν αἰνίττονται βαλεῖν· καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα ἐπαμφοτερίζειν, καὶ οὐτ’ εἶναι οὔτε μὴ εἶναι οὐδὲν αὐτῶν δυνατὸν παγίως νοῆσαι, οὔτε ἀμφοτέρα οὔτε οὐδέτερον.

5.4.6.1 Participation

In order to understand this passage, we must discuss the nature of participation in detail. In the course of this discussion, it will become clearer what Socrates means when he says that certain things “purely” or “completely” are and other things “both are and are not.” I think that any discussion of participation in Plato, however, is helpfully introduced by a cautionary note found in the secondary literature. In the survey of his predecessors’ views in *Metaphysics A*, Aristotle accuses Plato of leaving the nature of participation vague:

Things of this other sort, then, he [Plato] called Ideas, and perceptible things, he said, were apart from these, and were all called after these; for the multitude of things which have the same name as the Form are what they are by participation in it. Only the name “participation” was new; for the Pythagoreans say that things are what they are by “imitation” of numbers, and Plato says they are what they are by “participation,” changing the name. But what the participation or the imitation of the Forms could be they left an open question. (987b7-14) (Trans. Ross, with modifications)

Οὗτος οὖν τὰ μὲν τοιαῦτα τῶν ὄντων ἰδέας προσηγόρευσε, τὰ δ' αἰσθητὰ παρὰ ταῦτα καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα λέγεσθαι πάντα· κατὰ μέθεξιν γὰρ εἶναι τὰ πολλὰ ὁμῶνυμα τοῖς εἶδεσιν. τὴν δὲ μέθεξιν τοῦνομα μόνον μετέβαλεν· οἱ μὲν γὰρ Πυθαγόρειοι μιμήσει τὰ ὄντα φασὶν εἶναι τῶν ἀριθμῶν, Πλάτων δὲ μεθέξει, τοῦνομα μεταβαλὼν. τὴν μέντοι γε μέθεξιν ἢ τὴν μίμησιν ἥτις ἂν εἴη τῶν εἰδῶν ἀφεῖσαν ἐν κοινῷ ζητεῖν.

Given that a philosopher of Aristotle's ability, who also spent twenty years working with Plato, criticized Plato's notion of participation for being underdeveloped, I think that we should not aim for a comprehensive analysis of its nature, especially not on the basis of the *Republic* alone. Rather, my aim is to develop a conception of participation that will be adequate for two aims: (1) seeing why Socrates would claim that the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things "both are and are not" and (2) determining, in the next chapter, why Socrates thinks that the fact that perceptible objects participate in Forms excludes them from being objects of understanding.

Here is how I understand the argument Socrates makes using claims about opposites in the second passage cited above (478e7-479c5).⁶⁰ Although Socrates takes predicates such as "beautiful" ("just," "double," etc.) to be absolute, one-place predicates, he thinks that whether such predicates appropriately apply to any one of the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things depends upon various factors, such as the circumstances in which it exists, the perspectives from which it is being considered, and so on (in what follows I will speak only of "circumstances" but this should be taken very broadly).⁶¹ Concerning Helen, for example, there will be some circumstances in which it is appropriate to predicate "beautiful" of her (e.g. when she is standing among other earthly women or being evaluated in a culture that finds fair skin pleasing), but other circumstances in which it is inappropriate (e.g. when she is standing next to the Goddess Aphrodite or being evaluated in a culture that finds fair skin unpleasant). This is what Socrates means when he says that each of the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things will inevitably also present as not-beautiful (not-just, not-double, etc.). The fact that these considerations lead Socrates to conclude that we cannot simply say

⁶⁰ In this discussion I am heavily influenced by the work of Nick White [1989, 1992].

⁶¹ In the *Republic* Socrates does not offer anything like a catalogue of the various circumstances that are relevant. In the *Symposium*, however, the character Diotima describes the Form of Beauty as follows:

First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful in this way and ugly in that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor is it beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people but ugly for others. (210e6-211a5) (Trans. A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff)

If we take the negations of these descriptions to characterize the many beautiful things, it is clear that Diotima includes a broad range of circumstances that can affect the appropriateness of predicating "beauty" of them. For discussion of the *Symposium* passage, see Vlastos [1965b, 9-10].

that any of the many beautiful things are whatever they are shows that he is working with a particular conception of the conditions under which an object X is F without qualification. In short, Socrates thinks that, for X to be F without qualification, X must manifest F ness in all circumstances.⁶²

Socrates' conception of unqualified being can be motivated by considering a few cases.⁶³ First, consider some plausible claims about courage. In order for a person to be courageous, he or she must possess what I call a certain "modal profile." That is, in order for X to be courageous, X must manifest certain features in a broad range of circumstances. If, for example, X never flees in the face of the (not too great) danger he or she actually faces, but would have fled in the face of slightly greater danger, X is not courageous. In a sense, it is a matter of luck that X only manifests the features in virtue of which it might be appropriate to predicate "courageous" of him or her. Similarly, consider the case of beauty. It would seem that, for the predicate "beautiful" to apply to someone, he or she must likewise exhibit certain features in a broad range of circumstances. If, for example, he or she presents as physically beautiful but as morally ugly, the appropriateness of predicating "beautiful" of him or her is questionable. Or, if he or she has features which present as beautiful in one culture but as not-beautiful in another culture, the predication is again questionable. Lastly, take the case of double. I think that many interpreters are led astray in thinking that Socrates must mean "double" in the sense of "twice" (i.e. as a relative predicate). However, it is perfectly possible for him to mean "double" in the sense that, for example, a patron asks a bartender for "a double." It is obvious, however, that the application of the predicate "double" in this sense is only appropriate in certain circumstances. In some cultures, the quantity of, say, whiskey that gets called a "double" in our culture could be called a "half," since their standard shots are four times as large as our standard shots.

Thus, it would seem that, for at least some predicates, the existence of circumstances in which an object X fails to manifest the relevant features does raise the question whether the predicate appropriately applies to X . Socrates' position takes these kinds of considerations to the extreme: in order for X to be F , full stop, X must manifest F ness in all circumstances. Socrates' central claim in this passage, then, is that, since all the predicates that the lovers of sights and sounds apply to the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things fail to apply unqualifiedly to them, none of those things purely is whatever it is.⁶⁴ Thus, for any of the

⁶² Cf. Burnyeat [2000, 19-22] who also argues that unqualified being, for Socrates, amounts to invariance across all circumstances.

⁶³ In what follows I choose three predicates as representatives of the three main kinds of predicates Socrates mentions (i.e. moral, aesthetic, and quantitative.)

⁶⁴ I take the fact that Socrates identifies the many beautiful things as the very things that both are and are not to show that he cannot be distinguishing opinion from understanding on the basis of the propositions they

many beautiful things, if “*F*” appropriately applies to it, “not-*F*” also appropriately applies to it.⁶⁵ The corresponding proposition ‘*X* is *F*’ then, cannot be unqualifiedly true.⁶⁶

The lovers of sights and sounds will likely have one of two reactions to Socrates’ argument. First, they may just dig in their heels and deny that every particular thing to which they apply, say, the predicate “beautiful” will, in some circumstance, present as not-beautiful.⁶⁷ They may insist, for example, that Helen will not, in any circumstance, present as not-beautiful. Socrates’ response will likely just be to point out circumstances that seem to go against their claim. He may point out that Helen, like all earthly women, will inevitably age to a point where she presents as not-beautiful.⁶⁸ If the person responds with the (reasonable) claim that, while all earthly women age, not all reach a point where they present as not-beautiful, Socrates can take another tack. He may, for example, ask, “if you are admiring the beauty of Aphrodite, and then your eyes fall on Helen, don’t you think she’ll present as not-beautiful?” Or he may point out that other cultures have other standards of beauty which Helen does not meet. If all Socrates needs is for them to agree that at least one circumstance exists in which Helen *would* present as not-beautiful, he has many avenues to argue against this response.

The second response that the lovers of sights and sounds will likely have, and one that cuts deeper against Socrates’ metaphysics, is to reject his conditions for unqualified being. They may, for example, grant that circumstances exist in which Helen would present as not-beautiful, but deny that this entails that the bare assertion “Helen is beautiful” is inappropriate. In other words, they will deny that the existence of such circumstances requires them to move from saying “Helen is beautiful” to “Helen is and is not beautiful” (or something similar). This response seems to have merit. When we say something like “*X* is *F*” we often do not take ourselves to be making a claim about how *X* is in all circumstances. It may seem, for example, that such statements implicitly restrict the domain of circumstances that

range over. Regardless of how one understands the many beautiful things, it is clear that they are objects and not propositions.

⁶⁵ I consider the range of predicates to which Socrates thinks this claim applies later (see pp. 124-29).

⁶⁶ The natural next step, of course, is to consider propositions that have qualifications built into their content. As it is difficult enough to understand Socrates’ position on unqualified propositions, I leave the issue of qualified propositions for the next chapter. See below, pp. 137-40.

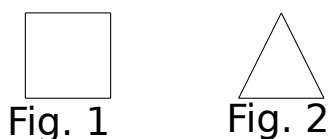
⁶⁷ Gosling [1960, 118-19] takes the obviousness of this response to be a reason for taking τὰ πολλὰ καλὰ to include only kinds and not particulars, since he thinks the lovers of sights and sounds would more readily grant that a kind will have instances that are beautiful and (distinct) instances that are not-beautiful. However, I agree with F. C. White [1978, 129] that the lovers of sights and sounds are no more likely to grant this for kinds than they would for particulars.

⁶⁸ Perhaps Socrates could appeal to Helen’s mortality to secure agreement that she will, in some circumstances, present as not-beautiful. However, it is unclear whether something that does not exist can *present* as anything (distinguish “presenting as not-beautiful” from “not presenting as beautiful”). Since Socrates only appeals to claims about how things present, I think it best to leave issues of mortality aside.

are relevant. That is, that their truth-value is determined by the circumstances relevant, in some way, to the utterance. On this alternative metaphysical picture, X would not have to manifest F_{ness} in all circumstances to be F unqualifiedly, but only in a subset of circumstances. Indeed, in the next chapter we will consider how such an alternative metaphysics (which, in fact, I will claim is presented in Plato's *Philebus*) would affect Socrates' claim that there can be no understanding of perceptible objects.

One way of understanding Socrates, however, is as maintaining that, if we just ask "Is X F ?" in the abstract, then the mere existence of one circumstance in which X fails to manifest F_{ness} should give us pause to answering simply "Yes." Of course, he does not think that the existence of one such circumstance gives sufficient reason for rejecting the statement. After all, the existence of a circumstance in which X manifests F_{ness} should likewise give us pause to answering the question "Is X F ?" with a simple "No." Socrates' ultimate claim is that, since each of the many beautiful things is such that, for any predicate " F " that applies to it, "not- F " also applies to it, we cannot firmly conceive of it as being F or not being F , or as both being F and not being F , or as neither being F nor not- F .

None of this is to say that Socrates thinks it does not matter what predicates you apply to the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things. Indeed, philosophers, in their capacity as rulers, will have to make judgments of the form " X is F " about them. As we have seen, Socrates is committed to the view that participants can vary in the degree to which they participate in a given Form and, thus, in the degree to which they merit the relevant predicate. To understand this point, it is helpful to return to the case from geometry presented above:



In many contexts, it is entirely appropriate to predicate "square" of Figure 1 and "triangle" of Figure 2. However, given the standard Euclidean definition of Square as "A right-angled and equilateral quadrilateral figure," it is clear that there is a sense in which Figure 1 is not a square: it's not perfectly right-angled, its lines aren't perfectly equal, and so on. Some people may be inclined to say that applying the name "square" to Figure 1 is simply inappropriate, and that a proposition such as 'Figure 1 is a square' is simply false. Perhaps it is a "useful fiction" to call Figure 1 a square but, they will claim, it is nonetheless false to do so. Socrates, however, opts for a more nuanced position. He thinks that there is a sense in which Figure 1 is a square. After all, it more closely resembles or approximates the definition of Square than, say, Figure 2 does. To use Socrates' language, the proposition 'Figure 1 is a square' has a "stronger grasp on truth" than the proposition 'Figure 2 is a square.' Socrates' position

here seems well motivated as we should distinguish the way in which, and degree to which, Figure 1 and Figure 2 fail to be squares. Likewise, concerning two figures, both of which, in some circumstances, present as squares, we can distinguish between them insofar as one is “more a square” than the other:



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Although in some circumstances it would be appropriate to predicate “square” of Figure 4, it is certainly “less a square” than Figure 3, because its lines are less straight. Simply saying, “Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 are not squares,” and leaving it at that, then, seems to mask distinctions we should want to make. Contrast all this with the way in which the object geometers deal with when they are doing geometry proper is a “square.” That thing just is a square, full stop. No circumstances exist in which it will present as not a square.

If we are to understand Socrates as allowing that the many beautiful (just, etc.) things can vary in the degree to which they participate in a given Form, we have to understand his claim “*Poteron oun esti mallon ê ouk estin hekaston tôn pollôn touto ho an tis phê(i) auto einai*” (479b8-9) in a slightly non-standard way. Reeve’s translation of this sentence is typical: “Then is each of the many things any more what one says it is than it is not what one says it is?” On a straightforward hearing of this sentence, Socrates says that none of the many things is more *F* than not-*F* for any given *F*. This, however, entails that none of the many things can participate in *F*ness to a greater degree than it fails to participate in *F*ness, which would, in turn, entail that none of the many things merits any predicate “*F*” more than the predicate “not-*F*.” In my translation I made Socrates’ eschewal of this claim clear by rendering the phrase “*mallon ê*” as “rather than” instead of Reeve’s “more than.” While this translation is certainly philologically acceptable, it leads to an admittedly more awkward reading of the sentence. However, even if someone insists on a standard translation such as Reeve’s, there is a way of hearing the sentence “each of the many things is no more what we say it is than it is not what we say it is” as meaning that we cannot simply say “*X* is *F*” without also saying “*X* is not-*F*.” No commitment to the view that none of the many things merits a given predicate more than its opposite is required.

This, then, is how I understand Socrates’ idea that the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things participate in Forms. Because none of them manifests any feature in all circumstances, there is no predicate that applies to them unqualifiedly. Thus, for any predicate “*F*” which appropriately applies to one of the many beautiful (etc.) things, the predicate “not-*F*” will also appropriately apply to it. As a result of this metaphysical view, Socrates does not

think that propositions concerning perceptible objects, such as ‘Figure 1 is a square,’ ‘Helen is beautiful,’ ‘Socrates is a human being,’ are unqualifiedly true. But, he also doesn’t think such propositions are unqualifiedly false.⁶⁹ However, although Socrates does not think that the many beautiful (etc.) things can be *F* unqualifiedly, he does think that they can differ in the degree to which they merit the title “*F*.” Thus, even though propositions about perceptible objects are neither unqualifiedly true nor unqualifiedly false, they differ in their grasp on truth. For example, since Helen approximates the nature of beauty to a greater degree than Medusa, she is more deserving than Medusa of the predicate “beautiful,” and the proposition ‘Helen is beautiful’ has a stronger grasp on truth than the proposition ‘Medusa is beautiful.’

My reconstruction of Socrates’ reasoning differs from a long-standing one presented in the literature. According to this tradition, part of the difficulty in understanding Socrates’ reasoning stems from the fact that it rests on a confusion on Socrates’ part. It is often argued that Socrates fails to distinguish properly between absolute, monadic predicates on the one hand, and relative, polyadic predicates on the other: for example, between predicates like “beautiful” and predicates like “more beautiful than” or “beautiful according to.” The idea is that, as a result of this failure, Socrates illicitly moves from claims involving relative predicates to claims involving absolute predicates—that he illicitly “drops his quantifiers.” So, for example, Socrates is thought to move illegitimately from the claim ‘Helen is beautiful relative to earthly women and not-beautiful relative to Goddesses’ to the claim ‘Helen is beautiful and not-beautiful’ (and similarly for the other predicates Socrates discusses). If Socrates had adequately distinguished between absolute and relative predicates, the thought goes, he would have recognized that Helen’s presenting as beautiful relative to one group and not-beautiful relative to another group does not warrant predicating “beautiful” or “not-beautiful” *simpliciter* of Helen. Cross and Woozley offer a representative sample of such an interpretation:

Assuming then that this is so [sc. that Plato did not view relational and absolute predicates as fundamentally different], we must repeat what was said above that relational concepts, when rightly understood, do not produce the puzzling situations of the sort Plato seems to envisage and to require in the present passage. Granted an act is just in this set of circumstances, and the same type of act unjust in different circumstances...this does not establish that particulars have contradictory attributes...Yet the present argument would seem to require that

⁶⁹ The last example is meant to be provocative. Many interpreters have questioned whether Socrates’ thinks that the considerations at issue here also apply to predicates like “human being.” I take up that issue after I discuss the rest of the Book 5 argument.

one and the same particular act done in one and the same particular situation is both right and wrong...” [1964, 159]⁷⁰

On my interpretation, I do not understand Socrates as “dropping his qualifiers” because I do not understand him as beginning with qualified predicates and then moving to unqualified predicates.⁷¹ Rather, I understand his focus to be on unqualified predicates throughout—he does not “move” from claims involving qualified predicates to claims involving unqualified predicates but, rather, claims that whether certain (perhaps all) unqualified predicates appropriately apply to certain objects depends upon various circumstances.⁷² Although, in one sense, the alternative reconstruction offered by Cross and Woosley attributes the same final view to Socrates (i.e. that the many beautiful (etc.) things both are and are not beautiful (etc.)), the fact that it understands his reasoning as involving a fundamental confusion is a strong point against it. Moreover, by understanding Socrates’ position in the way I do, we can better motivate his conception of unqualified being and his claim that the many beautiful (etc.) things do not exhibit it.

5.4.7 The Many Beautiful Things are the “In-Between” Things (479c6-d1)

Socrates has argued that each of the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things both is and is not beautiful (just, double, etc.). Given that the many beautiful things are neither purely beautiful nor in no way beautiful, Socrates asks Glaucon where to place them in relation to that which purely is and that which in no way is (479c6-9):

Do you know what to do with them, then, or anywhere better to put them than in between being and not being? Surely they cannot be more opaque than what is not, by not-being more than it; nor clearer than what is, by being more than it.

Ἔχεις οὖν αὐτοῖς, ἣν δ’ ἐγώ, ὅτι χρήσι, ἢ ὅποι θήσεις καλλίῳ θέσιν τῆς μεταξὺ οὐσίας τε καὶ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι; οὔτε γάρ που σκοτωδέστερα μὴ ὄντος πρὸς τὸ μᾶλλον μὴ εἶναι φανήσεται, οὔτε φανότερα ὄντος πρὸς τὸ μᾶλλον εἶναι.

Socrates, then, contends that the many beautiful things, since they both are and are not, must lie in between the things that purely are and the things that in no way are. They are not more opaque than what is not, because what is not is best identified as nothing, and the

⁷⁰ For similar interpretations that take Socrates to be confused, in one way or another, with relative vs. absolute predicates, see Owen [1957, 107-110] and Kirwan [1974, 117-19].

⁷¹ This point is the crux of Nick White’s interpretation [1989, 48-51].

⁷² Indeed, in the next chapter I consider whether Socrates might have thought that the appropriateness of applying even qualified predicates to the many beautiful (etc.) things is circumstance dependent (see pp. 139-40).

many beautiful things certainly are something (e.g. beautiful). However, even though they are something, they are not purely anything. Thus, Socrates thinks, they are not clearer than the things that purely are. Therefore, Socrates concludes, the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things are precisely the “in-between” things that they have been trying to identify.

As discussed in the section on the verb “*einai*” (see pp. 92-93), many interpreters take Socrates’ claim that the many beautiful things both are and are not to be invalidly inferred from the previous discussion. Even Lesley Brown, who is most sensitive to the manner in which the verb “*einai*” should be understood, accuses Socrates of this mistake. As she understands the verb “*einai*” the claim ‘the many beautiful things both are and are not’ has the force of ‘the many beautiful things both are something and are nothing.’ And, while it does follow from the claim ‘the many beautiful things are beautiful’ that ‘the many beautiful things are something,’ it does *not* follow from ‘the many beautiful things are not-beautiful’ that ‘the many beautiful things are nothing.’ Thus, Brown concludes that Socrates is involved in serious confusions surrounding the nature of not-being (which, she thinks, Plato’s characters attempt to clear up in the *Sophist*).

On my model of the verb “*einai*,” however, Socrates’ conclusion has the force of ‘the many beautiful things are and are not whatever they are.’ We can see that this claim does follow validly from the preceding discussion, so long as we recognize that Socrates does not infer it solely from the claim, ‘the many beautiful things are and are not beautiful.’ Rather, he uses that claim as *evidence* for the more general claim ‘it is not the case that each of the many things is rather than is not whatever we say it is’ (478b8-9).⁷³ It is from this more general claim that Socrates infers his conclusion. And, his inference seems to be valid, since the more general claim entails that, if any predicate “*F*” applies to one of the many beautiful things, the predicate “not-*F*” applies to it as well. But, this is just to say that the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things are and are not whatever they are.

5.4.8 The Final Push (479d3-480a13)

Having identified opinion as the power between understanding and ignorance and the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things as the objects between that which purely is and that which in no way is, Socrates draws a conclusion about the views of those who only cognitively engage with such in-between objects (479d1-3):

So, we have now discovered, it seems, that most of the conventional views of the many about beauty and the rest are somehow rolling around between what

⁷³ I adapt this claim from Socrates question whether “for each of the many things is it rather than is it not whatever someone says it is?” (Πότερον οὐν ἔστι μᾶλλον ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν τοῦτο ὃ ἂν τις φῇ αὐτὸ εἶναι;) (478b8-9).

is not and what purely is.

Ἡύρῃκαμεν ἄρα, ὥς ἔοικεν, ὅτι τὰ τῶν πολλῶν πολλὰ νόμιμα καλοῦ τε πέρι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μεταξύ που κυλινδεῖται τοῦ τε μὴ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ὄντος εἰλικρινῶς.

Socrates' claim strikes me as straightforward: the conventional views of the many about beauty and the rest "roll around" between what is not and what purely is insofar as the things that their views are about "roll around" between what is not and what purely is.⁷⁴ The views of the many concerning, say, beauty consist of predicating "beauty" of the many beautiful things and features of such things, identifying beauty with the many beautiful things and features of such things, and so on. These views "roll around" between being and not-being in the sense that their intentional objects both are and are not beautiful.⁷⁵ On my interpretation, this follows straightforwardly from the preceding discussion, as Socrates' use of the term "*ara*" would lead us to expect.

Gosling, however, claims that this passage poses insurmountable difficulties to the view that the many beautiful things include particulars (and *a fortiori* any view, such as mine, on which it includes both particulars and kinds). The problem, according to Gosling, is that "Whatever νόμιμα means it does not mean particulars" [1960, 120]. Gosling's statement, however, strikes me as odd. What Socrates says is that the *nomima* of the many *about* beauty and the rest roll around. Why would anyone think that the *nomima* of the many are particular objects? All that is needed is that it be possible for them to be *about* particular objects.⁷⁶

Socrates then states the main conclusion towards which he has been building (479d6-480a12):

And we agreed earlier that if anything turned out to be of that sort, it would have to be called an object of opinion, not an object of knowledge—a wandering, in-between object grasped by the in-between power ... As for those, then, who look at many beautiful things but do not see the beautiful itself, and are incapable of following another who would lead them to it; or many just things but not the just itself, and similarly with all the rest—these people, we will say, have opinions about all these things, but have no knowledge of what their opinions are about... On the other hand, what about those who in each case

⁷⁴ The fact that Socrates draws a conclusion about the views of "the many" (οἱ πολλοί) shows that he was using the lovers of sights and sounds as mere representatives for everyone who only acknowledges the existence of perceptible objects (i.e. all non-philosophers).

⁷⁵ As F. C. White puts it, it is "a perfectly natural piece of metonymy" to speak of opinion as having characteristics associated with its objects [1977, 303].

⁷⁶ F. C. White [1978, 130] forcefully makes this point against Gosling.

look at the things themselves that are always the same in every respect? Won't we say that they have knowledge, and not opinion? Shall we say, then, that these people warmly welcome and love the things that knowledge is set-over, as the others warmly welcome and love the things that opinion is set-over? We have not forgotten, have we, that the latter love and look at beautiful sounds, colors, and things of that sort, but cannot even bear the idea that the beautiful itself is a thing that is?... Will we be striking a false note, then, if we call such people "lovers of opinion" rather than "lovers of wisdom"? Will they be very angry with us if we call them that?...So, those who in each case warmly welcome that which is are the ones we must call, not "philodoxers," but "philosophers."

Πρωμολογήσαμεν δέ γε, εἴ τι τοιοῦτον φανείη, δοξαστὸν αὐτὸ ἀλλ' οὐ γνωστὸν δεῖν λέγεσθαι, τῇ μεταξὺ δυνάμει τὸ μεταξὺ πλανητὸν ἀλισκόμενον... Τοὺς ἄρα πολλὰ καλὰ θεωμένους, αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ καλὸν μὴ ὁρῶντας μὴδ' ἄλλω ἐπ' αὐτὸ ἄγοντι δυναμένους ἔπεσθαι, καὶ πολλὰ δίκαια, αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ δίκαιον μὴ, καὶ πάντα οὕτω, δοξάζειν φήσομεν ἅπαντα, γινώσκειν δὲ ὧν δοξάζουσιν οὐδέν... Τί δὲ αὖ τοὺς αὐτὰ ἕκαστα θεωμένους καὶ ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ὡσαύτως ὄντα; ἅρ' οὐ γινώσκειν ἀλλ' οὐ δοξάζειν;...Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀσπάζεσθαι τε καὶ φιλεῖν τούτους μὲν ταῦτα φήσομεν ἐφ' οἷς γνῶσις ἐστίν, ἐκείνους δὲ ἐφ' οἷς δόξα; ἢ οὐ μνημονεύομεν ὅτι φωνάς τε καὶ χροᾶς καλὰς καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτ' ἔφαμεν τούτους φιλεῖν τε καὶ θεᾶσθαι, αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ καλὸν οὐδ' ἀνέχεσθαι ὥς τι ὄν;... Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀσπάζεσθαι τε καὶ φιλεῖν τούτους μὲν ταῦτα φήσομεν ἐφ' οἷς γνῶσις ἐστίν, ἐκείνους δὲ ἐφ' οἷς δόξα; ἢ οὐ μνημονεύομεν ὅτι φωνάς τε καὶ χροᾶς καλὰς καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτ' ἔφαμεν τούτους φιλεῖν τε καὶ θεᾶσθαι, αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ καλὸν οὐδ' ἀνέχεσθαι ὥς τι ὄν;... Τοὺς αὐτὸ ἄρα ἕκαστον τὸ ὄν ἀσπαζομένους φιλοσόφους ἀλλ' οὐ φιλοδόξους κλητέον.

Socrates, then, concludes that the many beautiful (just, double, etc.) things are the objects over which the power of opinion is set. Since the lovers of sights and sounds turn their minds solely to such objects, they can actualize their power of opinion but not their power of knowledge. Since actualizing a power is necessary for being in the corresponding state, Socrates thinks that they will agree that they cannot acquire knowledge. Philosophers and philosophers alone are capable of knowledge, because only they turn their minds to the objects over which the power of knowledge is actualized. By arguing in this way, Socrates has not claimed, and has not needed to claim, that perceptible objects cannot be the intentional objects of knowledge or understanding.⁷⁷ For all that he has said in soothing and gently persuading the lovers of sights and sounds, he has left it open that philosophers may even be able to have understanding of the perceptible world. As we have seen, however, Socrates

⁷⁷ Thus, I do not find it surprising, as interpreters such as Irwin do [1995, 266-67], that Socrates does not appeal to the notion of an "account" to distinguish knowledge here. The notion of an account is relevant to identifying the cognitive state of knowledge, not the cognitive power.

ultimately rejects this possibility. Before explaining why he does so in the next chapter, I need to tie up one loose end.

5.5 The Range of Forms

Since Socrates accepts the general metaphysical thesis that no perceptible object can perfectly instantiate any Form, we need to determine the range of Forms he countenances so that we can determine the range of predicates for which the claim, “perceptible objects both are and are not *F*,” is true. Two questions are particularly important: first, does Socrates countenance Forms corresponding only to predicates that have readily identifiable opposites? Does Socrates, for example, only countenance Forms corresponding to predicates like “good,” “beautiful,” “double,” and so on, or does he also countenance Forms corresponding to predicates like “human being,” “horse,” and “city”? Second, for Forms that correspond to evaluative predicates that have opposites (which may include all evaluative predicates), is there a Form corresponding to both the positive and negative predicate? For example, does Socrates countenance, in addition to the Forms of Goodness, Beauty, and Justice, the Form of Badness, Ugliness, and Injustice? These two questions are related, since, for all evaluative predicates that have opposites, one member of the pair is positive and one member is negative.

In the discussion of Book 5 it is clear that Socrates allows a Form of Beauty, Justice, and Goodness (475e6-476a8), and fairly clear that he also countenances a Form of Piety, Half(ness), Double(ness), Big(ness), Small(ness), Light(ness), and Heavy(ness) (478a7-479b6). Many interpreters, noting that each of these Forms corresponds to a predicate that has a readily identifiable opposite (e.g. “beauty”-“ugliness,” “justice”-“injustice,” “double-half”) answer the first question affirmatively. As a result, these interpreters maintain that Socrates does not countenance Forms corresponding to predicates like “human being,” “horse,” and “city,” which do not seem to have opposites—i.e. there is no Form of Human Being, no Form of Horse, no Form of City, and the like.

The idea that Socrates’ discussion in Book 5 restricts the range of Forms to correspond only to those predicates that have readily identifiable opposites is often connected to a particular interpretation of the passage I labeled “Identifying the Things that Both Are and Are Not” (pp. 112-21). In an interpretative tradition dating at least to Allen [1961], this passage has been said to contain the “Argument from Opposites.” Since Socrates clearly appeals to claims about opposites, I do not reject this description. However, we must determine what the claims concerning opposites are supposed to establish. In other words, what is the Argument *from* Opposites an argument *towards*? According to Allen, the Argument

from Opposites is supposed to be a proof of the existence of Forms [ibid., 326].⁷⁸ Given that the predicates Socrates deals with all come in pairs of opposites, Allen thinks that the only Forms that will be generated by this argument are Forms corresponding to such predicates.

The idea that Socrates appeals to claims about opposites to argue for the existence of Forms strikes me as importantly wrong. As I understand the Argument from Opposites, it purports to show that the objects with which the lovers of sights and sounds cognitively engage both are and are not. It is further embedded in an argument to the effect that if there are objects which both are and are not, opinion is set-over such objects. And this latter claim is, in turn, embedded in a discussion of the difference between the powers of opinion and knowledge. At no point in this discussion does Socrates argue for the existence of Forms. Moreover, as I have interpreted the argument, the claim that Forms exist is not needed for the argument to go through.⁷⁹ Indeed, Allen admits that in order to understand the Argument from Opposites as an argument for the existence of Forms “certain missing premises must be supplied” [1961, 326]. Those missing premises, however, are precisely where Allen thinks Socrates gets into trouble. It would be better, I think, to take the aim of Socrates’ argument to be what he says it is. Thus, we should not take the fact that Socrates only appeals to predicates that have readily identifiable opposites to restrict the range of Forms he countenances.

Not only should we not reach this conclusion on the basis of the Argument from Opposites, we have positive reasons for rejecting it. First, remember that the entire discussion we have been considering is part of Socrates’ attempt to determine how to bring about a *city* that is closest (*engutata*) to the ideal city (p. 78). Socrates set this aim because he thinks that cities in the perceptible world, like everything that comes to pass, cannot perfectly instantiate ideals. This strongly suggests that he countenances a Form of City, but “city” has no readily identifiable opposite. Second, if I am right that Socrates thinks geometry provides good examples of the way in which perceptible objects both are and are not, we should think he allows for Forms corresponding to mathematical predicates.⁸⁰ Many mathematical predicates, however, such as “square” and “triangle,” do not have readily identifiable opposites. Third, in Book 10 Socrates reminds Glaucon that “we usually posit some one particular form in connection with each set of many things to which we apply the same name” (595a6-

⁷⁸ Other interpreters who understand the argument in this way include Annas [1981, 223] and Fine [1993, 56-57] (however, Annas is ambivalent as to whether this is Socrates’ only argument for the existence of Forms and, hence, whether these are the only Forms he countenances). Other interpreters who think that considerations of opposites lead Socrates to posit the existence of Forms (although not necessarily finding such an argument here) include Nehamas [1973, 1975] and Irwin [1995, Ch. 10].

⁷⁹ That is, all Socrates needed was for the lovers of sights and sounds to agree that the power of knowledge is set-over that which purely is whatever it is. Although Socrates ultimately thinks that only Forms (and mathematics) purely are whatever they are, this further point was not necessary to the argument.

⁸⁰ This is *not* to say that mathematics proper deals with such Forms. Rather, mathematics proper deals with intelligible objects that perfectly exemplify such Forms (see, Ch. 4, p. 58 fn. 4).

8).⁸¹ While the exact import of this claim is controversial, he explicitly mentions the Form of Couch (*klinê*) and Form of Table (*trapeza*) as examples (596b1-2), but, again, neither “couch” nor “table” have readily identifiable opposites.

A passage in Book 7 deserves special mention. In a famous exchange, Socrates shows Glaucon three fingers held up next to each other and asks the following:

It is obvious, surely, that each of them is equally a finger, and it makes no difference whether it is seen to be in the middle or at either end; whether it is dark or pale, thick or thin, or anything else of that sort. You see, in all these cases, the soul of most people is not compelled to ask the mind what a finger is, since sight does not at any point suggest to it that a finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger. (523c10-d6)

Δάκτυλος μὲν που αὐτῶν φαίνεται ὁμοίως ἕκαστος, καὶ ταύτη γε οὐδὲν διαφέρει, ἔαντε ἐν μέσῳ ὁρᾶται ἔαντ’ ἐπ’ ἐσχάτῳ, ἔαντε λευκὸς ἔαντε μέλας, ἔαντε παχὺς ἔαντε λεπτός, καὶ πᾶν ὅτι τοιοῦτον. ἐν πᾶσι γὰρ τούτοις οὐκ ἀναγκάζεται τῶν πολλῶν ἡ ψυχὴ τὴν νόησιν ἐπερέσθαι τί ποτ’ ἐστὶ δάκτυλος· οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ ἡ ὄψις αὐτῇ ἅμα ἐσήμηνεν τὸ δάκτυλον τούναντίον ἢ δάκτυλον εἶναι.

Although interpreters often cite this passage as evidence for the view I oppose, I think that close reading shows it is not.⁸² To see this, note that Socrates is attempting to determine which kinds of things “summon” (*parakalein*) the soul to inquiry. He is not attempting to determine what exhausts the things that can be studied by a soul that has been summoned. The “summoners” are particularly effective impetuses to inquiry, and Socrates claims that things which strike the mind at the same time as their opposite can best play that role. This is certainly not to say that, once a soul has been compelled to inquire into the nature of things, it won’t discover that there are natures corresponding to things like fingers.⁸³ Moreover, not only does Socrates not say that there is no Form of Finger, his language strongly suggests that there is. In saying that the souls of “most people” are not compelled to ask the mind what a finger is, he strongly suggests that the souls of some people are so compelled and, at the very least, that there is something there into which one can inquire.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Εἶδος γάρ πού τι ἐν ἕκαστον εἰώθαμεν τίθεσθαι περὶ ἕκαστα τὰ πολλά, οἷς ταῦτὸν ὄνομα ἐπιφέρομεν.

⁸² See Nehamas [1973, 467-68] and Annas [1981, 218-19] (although Nehamas notes the alternative reading I propose).

⁸³ In connection with this consider Sextus Empiricus’ claim that “Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil” (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 12) [Trans. Annas and Barnes]. Sextus is fully aware that many of the people he is talking about posit natures corresponding to predicates that do not have readily identifiable opposites. All he is talking about, however, and all Socrates need be talking about, is the impetus to inquiry.

⁸⁴ It is not, in fact, implausible that something could strike someone as both being and not-being a finger. Consider, for example, the “finger” of a statue’s “hand.”

I submit, then, that we have good reason to take Socrates to countenance a wider range of Forms than those corresponding to predicates that have readily identifiable opposites. It is difficult, however, to determine exactly what Forms Socrates countenances. In fact, if I am right that nothing in the *Republic* amounts to an argument for the existence of Forms (or the existence of a (particular) Form), I don't think we should attempt to be exact or exhaustive. The best way to proceed is by analogy from the Forms that we have good reason to think Socrates countenances. So, for example, since Socrates explicitly mentions the Forms of Justice and Piety, it seems reasonable to conclude that he recognizes Forms corresponding to other moral predicates, such as "courage," "temperance," and "wisdom." Socrates also explicitly recognizes the Forms of Beauty, Table, and Couch, and so it is reasonable to think he countenances Forms for other aesthetic and artifact predicates. If I am right that Socrates countenances a Form of City, he likely countenances Forms corresponding to predicates that denote other communal human enterprises, such as "friendship." Lastly, if Socrates recognizes a Form of Finger, it is reasonable to conclude that he recognizes Forms corresponding to predicates that denote other bodily organs and, likely, whole organisms.⁸⁵

If Socrates does posit Forms corresponding to predicates that do not have readily identifiable opposites, it is difficult to see how his claim that perceptible objects do not instantiate any ideals can be extended to such Forms. As Annas puts the worry:

The terms that Plato picks out as having only qualified application to particular things are a mixed bag—just, pious, beautiful, double, big, heavy—but they are united in all having opposites: what shows us that this thing or action is only qualifiedly *F* is precisely the fact that it can also be said to be (from some point of view, etc.) not-*F*. There is a contrast here with a term like 'man'. We apply it to many particulars, and take it that there are 'many men'. But this assumption of ours is not faulty in the way that the assumption that there are 'many beautifuls' can be faulted. For each of the many beautiful things turned out also to be (from some point of view, etc.) ugly. But we cannot appeal to the same kind of considerations—change, context, relativity to standard or interest—to show that each particular man is also (from some point of view, etc.) a not-man. Nothing can be, even qualifiedly, both a man and a not-man. [1981, 209]⁸⁶

The basic idea is that, while Socrates' considerations may show that Helen, for example, is both beautiful and not beautiful, they do nothing to show that she is not purely human.

⁸⁵ In connection with this it is worth noting that, in the *Parmenides*, the character Socrates readily agrees that there are Forms of "just, beautiful, good, and everything of that sort" (130b7-9) (trans. M. L. Gill and P. Ryan). Concerning Forms of "human being, fire, or water," however, he says, "I've often found myself in doubt whether I should talk about those in the same way as the others or differently" (130c1-4). Lastly, he adamantly denies that there are Forms of "hair, mud, and dirt, or anything else totally undignified and worthless" (130c5-d4).

⁸⁶ Cf. Allen [1961], Nehamas [1975], and others for a similar view.

We must, then, find some way of understanding how Socrates could have thought that even predicates like “human being” do not apply unqualifiedly to any perceptible object. I have thus far spoken of Forms that do and Forms that do not correspond to predicates with “readily identifiable opposites.” One option is simply to claim that some Forms correspond to predicates that do not have opposites and then try to find some way of understanding their application to perceptibles as subject to circumstance-variation. Perhaps, in order to accommodate how such predicates fail to apply unqualifiedly to perceptible objects, issues of mortality will have to be introduced. Since Socrates thinks that being unqualifiedly *F* requires manifesting *F*ness in all circumstances, the fact that, for any perceptible object there will be times at which it does not manifest, say, humanity, entails that it cannot be a human being unqualifiedly.⁸⁷

Another option, and one that promises a more satisfactory solution to this problem, is to focus on the notion of a *readily identifiable* opposite. Perhaps there is a way of understanding all the predicates corresponding to Forms as having opposites, even if not readily identifiable ones. Although my idea here is tentative, consider the following possibility. Suppose that Socrates thinks things are defined via genus and differentia. Suppose further that he takes final differentiae to have opposites. For example, suppose the definition of Human Being is “rational animal.” Here, the differentia “rational” has an opposite, namely “irrational.” If this were the case, the predicate “human being” would have an opposite, just not a readily identifiable one. A point in favor of developing this option is that it offers a nice and consistent solution to the above problem: particular things in the perceptible world will fail to instantiate some Form whose final differentia is *D* insofar as, in some circumstances, they manifest the opposite of *D*. For example, particular things will fail to instantiate the Form of Human Being insofar as, in some circumstances, they manifest irrationality.⁸⁸

So much for the first question—Socrates does countenance the existence of Forms that do not have readily identifiable opposites. The second question was whether, for Forms that correspond to evaluative predicates that have opposites, Socrates countenances a Form corresponding only to the *positive* member of the pair? In the Book 5 argument, Socrates suggests that the answer is “No” (476a1-6):

⁸⁷ Baltzly [1997, 268-71] proposes this solution. However, see my hesitation concerning issues of mortality stated in p. 116 fn. 68 above.

⁸⁸ Perhaps the failure of perceptible objects to instantiate one Form could, as it were, piggy-back on their failure to instantiate another Form. For example, if the Form of City is defined, in part, in terms of human beings being related in a certain way, maybe the failure of perceptible objects to instantiate the Form of Human Being would entail a failure to instantiate the Form of City.

Socrates: Since beautiful is the opposite of ugly, they are two things.—Of course.

Soc.: And since they are two things, each of them is also one?—That's true too.

Soc.: And the same account applies, then, to just and unjust, good and bad, and all the forms (*eidê*)?

However, serious difficulties would result if Socrates countenances Forms corresponding to such negative predicates. First, it is difficult to see how negative Forms, such as Badness, could owe their being and knowability to the Form of Goodness (as Socrates tells us all Forms do at 508d10-509a5). Following on from this, it may be both metaphysically and epistemologically otiose to posit Forms corresponding to the negative predicate of a given pair. Perhaps we can maintain that perceptible objects merit the negative predicate, not by participating in a corresponding negative Form, but simply insofar as, and to the degree to which, they fail to exemplify the positive Form. Likewise, perhaps people understand the Form corresponding to the positive predicate and then apply the negative predicate insofar as objects fail to exemplify that Form. Lastly, it is unclear whether Socrates would think that there is one thing in virtue of which, for example, all ugly things are ugly or all bad things are bad. If there is any such unity, it would likely consist only in not being beautiful, not being good, and so on. On balance, then, I think that, for evaluative Forms that correspond to predicates that have opposites, we should take Socrates to countenance a Form corresponding to only the positive predicate.

5.6 Recap of the Book 5 Argument

In closing I wish to provide a summary of how I understand the entire discussion we have spent so long examining. It begins when Glaucon asks Socrates whether a city with the same constitution as the city they had laid out in the previous discussion can be realized on earth (471c3-e4). Socrates replies that the answer is “No,” because no perceptible object can perfectly instantiate any ideal, but that this does not render their discussion pointless (472a1-473a3). It is possible to bring about a city that is close enough to the ideal city to be worthy of the titles “just” and “happy.” And this can be done, he claims, by vesting political power in the hands of philosophers (473a5-e4). Recognizing that this claim is wildly controversial, Socrates sets himself the task of first defining Philosopher and then showing that such people are best suited to rule (473e5-474c3). Since a genuine lover of *X* must love *all* of *X*, he claims that philosophers are distinguished from non-philosophers in loving all wisdom and learning (474c8-475c8).

Glaucon, however, worries that this definition will include the lovers of sights and sounds, who are obviously not philosophers. His worry is that these people, despite their

cognitive shortcomings, nevertheless seem to display a love of learning since they are always running around to the latest cultural events (475d1-e1). Socrates argues that such people are not, in fact, genuine lovers of learning because they do not turn their minds to the natures of things. Instead, they content themselves solely with the many beautiful perceptible things that are mere likenesses of such natures. As a result, they cannot provide the kind of explanation necessary for going beyond opinion and achieving knowledge. Philosophers, on the other hand, because they *do* turn their minds to the original natures, *can* provide the right kind of explanation and, so, *can* achieve knowledge. The distinguishing mark of philosophers, then, is that their love of learning leads them to acquire knowledge, whereas whatever love of learning the lovers of sights and sounds *seem* to exhibit leads them to no better than opinion (475e2-476e2).

Socrates recognizes that he has again embroiled himself in controversy—the lovers of sights and sounds will certainly dispute the claim that they know nothing. Moreover, his argument for that claim assumed the existence of original natures, which is, to say the least, a highly suspect assumption (476d7-e2). To soothe and gently persuade the lovers of sights and sounds that they cannot achieve knowledge, Socrates gives up that assumption and turns his attention to the prior notion of a cognitive power. Since being in a given cognitive state requires an exercise of a corresponding cognitive power, Socrates thinks that he can get the lovers of sights and sounds to accept that they know nothing because they do not exercise their power of knowledge. To do this he first argues that the power of knowledge can only be actualized over things that purely are whatever they are (476e4-477b2). Since distinct cognitive powers can only be actualized over distinct kinds of things, the fact that fallible opinion and infallible knowledge are distinct powers entails that opinion cannot be actualized over that which purely is whatever it is (477b4-478b3). Opinion, however, cannot be actualized over that which in no way is whatever it is, since nothing is such that it in no way whatever it is, and powers must be actualized over something (478b5-c5). But, if the objects of opinion cannot be things that in no way are whatever they are, nor things that purely are whatever they are, they must be things that, in some sense, both are and are not whatever they are (478d5-e5). But, what things are like that? Well, Socrates claims, precisely the many beautiful things that preoccupy the lovers of sights and sounds. For any such thing, there are circumstances in which the predicate “beautiful” applies to it and circumstances in which the predicate “not-beautiful” applies to it. Thus, each of the many beautiful things both is and is not beautiful. Since the same considerations of circumstance-variance apply regardless of the predicate we are considering, for any predicate that applies to one of the many beautiful things, the negation of that predicate will also apply. But, that is just to say that each of the many beautiful things both is and is not whatever it is (478e7-479d4). Those

are the kinds of things, then, over which the power of opinion is set (479d6-8). Thus, because the lovers of sights and sounds only turn their minds to the objects over which the power of opinion is set and do not turn their minds to the objects over which the power of knowledge is set, they can only actualize their power of opinion and not their power of knowledge. Since exercising a power is necessary for acquiring the corresponding state, Socrates takes himself to have soothed and gently persuaded the lovers of sights and sounds that their single-minded focus on the many beautiful things entails that they do not, in fact, know anything. Since philosophers, on the other hand, *do* turn their minds to the objects over which the power of knowledge is set, they *can* actualize their power of knowledge and, therefore, can know things (479d10-480a12).

Chapter 6

Socrates' Epistemology

6.1 Introduction

IN this final chapter, which serves as a conclusion, I tie together the various threads of the previous chapters to present the full picture of Socrates' epistemology. In doing so, I lay out and motivate three of its central commitments. First, that there can be no understanding concerning perceptible objects. Second, that there can be no opinions concerning intelligible objects. Third, that people with understanding of intelligible objects (i.e. philosophers) can bring their understanding to bear in their cognitive interaction with the perceptible world so as to form expert opinions, which count as a kind of knowledge. This third claim is the key to resolving the alleged tension between Socrates' epistemology and his politics. I aim to show that each of these claims is a natural consequence of Socrates' metaphysics and his epistemology.

6.2 No Understanding Concerning Perceptible Objects

In the previous chapter we saw how Socrates argues that the lovers of sights and sounds' failure to turn their minds to the natures of things renders them incapable of attaining any knowledge or understanding. As we have seen, however, in a passage of Book 7 Socrates rules out there being any understanding whatsoever of perceptible objects. Thus, we must now determine why he thinks that even those who *do* turn their minds to the natures of things (i.e. philosophers) are unable to achieve understanding of anything about the perceptible world. I argue that it is because Socrates thinks that even the best kind of answer that can be given to a "Why is *X F*?" question concerning a perceptible object (i.e. the philosopher's answer) does not rise to the level of a genuine explanation.

It is tempting to think that Socrates concludes there can be no understanding of perceptible objects solely because he thinks there can be no unqualifiedly true propositions concerning them. Perhaps it could be argued that, since understanding is factive, propositions that are not unqualifiedly true cannot express the content of any piece of understanding.¹ However, while this point is certainly relevant, I do not think that it provides a complete account of Socrates' reasoning. First, as we saw in the previous chapter, Socrates does think that some propositions concerning perceptible objects have a stronger grasp on truth than others. Moreover, philosopher-kings, in their capacity as rulers, will have to make all kinds of judgments about perceptible objects. Since Socrates thinks that philosophers should rule because they are epistemic authorities, he must think that some answers to questions of the form "Is X F " are warranted, even if X is a perceptible object. Lastly, as we have repeatedly seen, for Socrates the key distinguishing mark between various cognitive achievements is the kind of explanation people can provide for the views they hold. Thus, the entire picture requires seeing why Socrates' metaphysics leads him to think that philosophers' answers to "Why is X F ?" questions concerning perceptible objects, although better than the answers lovers of sights and sounds can give, do not count as the kind of explanation necessary for understanding.²

To put my main contention briefly: Socrates thinks that putative explanations of even warranted propositions about perceptible objects "break down" because the failure of perceptible objects to instantiate natures or essences entails that propositions about them cannot be appropriately grounded in facts about natures or essences. The fuller story goes as follows: for Socrates, understanding requires grasping explanations. Explanations, in turn, consist of broadly deductive proofs at least one of whose premises states the nature or essence of something. When it comes to propositions about perceptible objects, any putative proof of such a proposition will have to include a premise or premises about that object. Schematically: if we are trying to prove that X is F , this will have to be via some other fact about X , say, that it is G . For example, if we are trying to prove something about Helen (e.g. that she is beautiful) one of the premises of the relevant proof has to be about Helen and make some other claim about her (e.g. that she exhibits the appropriate symmetry). Otherwise,

¹ The claim that understanding is factive has been disputed in recent years. See, for example, the debate between Elgin [2009] and Kvanvig [2009]. Cf. Kvanvig [2003, 190-91], Elgin [2007], and Greco [Forthcoming]. Szaif [2007, 255] seems to understand Socrates as ruling out knowledge (or, at least, one kind of knowledge (see above, Ch. 4, p. 56 fn. 3)) of perceptible objects on the basis that truth is a necessary condition for knowledge.

² To see that this fuller picture is required, imagine that Socrates *did* think that propositions about perceptible objects could be unqualifiedly true. If we then asked, "Why can such propositions be understood?," the answer would not simply be "Because they are unqualifiedly true" (although this would be relevant). Rather, the answer would point to why they could then be *explained* in the appropriate kind of way.

the conclusion could not be about Helen.³ Given Socrates' metaphysics, however, perceptible objects do not instantiate natures or essences and so the linking proposition will not be unqualifiedly true. Hence, any putative proof of a proposition about a perceptible object cannot properly connect that proposition to facts about natures or essences. Thus, they will not meet Socrates' requirements for the kind of explanation that can confer understanding. Let us now run through the full story.

To begin with I wish to consider how someone who shared Socrates' conception of understanding could, nevertheless, conclude that it is possible to have such understanding of perceptible objects. Of course, Socrates rejects this claim, but considering how such a view would go will help us focus on where, exactly, Socrates' picture differs.⁴ Someone could maintain that people who have understanding of natures can bring their understanding to bear in their cognitive interaction with perceptible objects in such a way as to achieve understanding of the latter.⁵ Consider, for example, the following putative proof from biology:

[P1] To be an Animal is to be capable of perception

[P2] This object, Plato, is an Animal

[C1] Plato is capable of perception

It seems that this proof, which has a premise stating a fact about the nature of Animals [P1] and concludes with a proposition about Plato [C1], meets Socrates' conditions for the kind of explanation capable of yielding understanding. Shouldn't grasping this proof, then, allow people to understand why Plato is capable of perception? Consider also this putative proof from chemistry:

[P3] It lies in the nature of water to be H₂O

[P4] H₂O boils at 212 °F (at sea level)

[P5] This quantity of stuff *X* in this pot (at sea level) is water

[P6] *X*'s current temperature is in excess of 212 °F (at sea level)

[C2] *X* is boiling

³ This is not quite true since from $\forall x F(x)$ it follows that $F(a)$. I consider a related point when I discuss whether Socrates allows for understanding why something that holds of all perceptible objects holds of a particular perceptible object (p. 138).

⁴ Moreover, this discussion will help us later when we compare Socrates' distinction between *ἐπιστήμη* and expert philosophical *δόξα* to the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge (see below, p. 156).

⁵ As I discuss later (see below, p. 141), I think that this view is presented by the character Socrates in the *Philebus*. Aristotle also advances such a view: in *Posterior Analytics* 1.8, he claims that, while there is no proof (*ἀπόδειξις*) *simpliciter* (*ἀπλῶς*) and, so, no understanding *simpliciter* of perishable things, there is proof incidentally (*κατὰ συμβεβηκός*) and, so, understanding incidentally of them (75b21-26). Cf. *APo* 1.24, where he claims that "particular demonstrations terminate in perception" (*ἡ [ἀπόδειξις] δὲ κατὰ μέρος εἰς αἴσθησιν τελευτᾷ*) (86a29-30).

Again, this proof seems to meet Socrates' conditions and, so, seems able to yield understanding of why the stuff in this pot is boiling. Since the premises that state facts about the relevant natures or essences are certainly acceptable to Socrates, it would seem that any problem has to reside with the premises that refer to the particular perceptible objects.

Consider one more example. Suppose we determine, through intense philosophical reflection, that Beauty is Symmetry. Thus, 'Symmetrical things are beautiful' is true, and it is true in virtue of the nature of Beauty. Suppose we determine, through further reflection, including reflection on the nature of Human Beings, that Beauty in Human Beings' faces is left-right symmetry (as opposed to, say, top-bottom symmetry). Thus, the proposition 'Left-right symmetrical human faces are beautiful' is also true, and it is true in virtue of the nature of Beauty and the nature of Human Beings. Now imagine that we are trying to explain why Helen's face is beautiful. Consider the role that the true proposition about beauty in human faces can play in a putative proof of that putative fact:

[P7] Beauty in Human Beings' faces consists in left-right symmetry

[P8] Helen's face is left-right symmetrical

[C3] Helen's face is beautiful

The first thing to note about what I've presented is that it can't hope to meet Socrates' conditions for a genuine explanation because none of its premises state the nature or essence of anything. To fix this, just imagine that this represents the final stage of the genuine explanation. The full explanation will go all the way back to the premise 'Beauty is Symmetry' (and, in fact, all the way back to the nature of Goodness).⁶

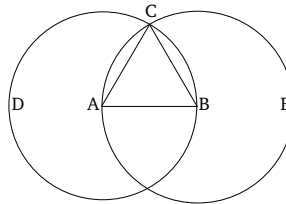
Putting this complication aside, the problem with this putative proof, according to Socrates, is that the linking proposition [P8] is not unqualifiedly true. Socrates thinks that this proposition is not unqualifiedly true because, on his metaphysical view, Helen's face does not, and cannot, instantiate the Form of Symmetry. This point will generalize to any proposition in which a predicate corresponding to a Form is attributed to a perceptible object. For example, since perceptible things do not instantiate the Form of Animal or the Form of Water, propositions [P2] and [P5] in the above putative proofs also fail to connect facts about natures to the relevant conclusion in the right kind of way. There is, according to Socrates, no way to provide a demonstrative proof of even warranted propositions about perceptible

⁶ A possible way that this explanation could go is: Goodness is Unity; Beauty is Goodness made manifest → Beauty is Unity made manifest; Unity made manifest is Symmetry made manifest → Beauty is Symmetry made manifest; Human beings are thus-and-such kind of Animals → the axis of symmetry in Human Beings is the vertical axis; Therefore, Beauty in Human Beings' faces is left-right Symmetry made manifest. Thanks to Ben Morison for this example. The point of saying "made manifest" is that Beauty may be Goodness' capacity to *strike* people in a certain kind of way. In the body of the text, however, I ignore that qualification.

objects because any attempt to “bring the explanation down” into the perceptible world will require the use of propositions about perceptible things. To put it one final way: Socrates thinks that in order for a proposition to be a possible object of understanding it must belong to a domain structured in terms of first principles and provable theorems. Since such first principles are, for Socrates, statements of natures or essences, no proposition about a perceptible object belongs to such a domain. Thus, while Socrates’ conception of understanding does not, on its own, entail that perceptible objects cannot be understood, given his particular metaphysics, it is a natural conclusion for him to draw.

To bring this picture into focus by way of another contrast, recall the Euclidean proof of Proposition 1 considered in Chapter 2 (p. 19). The following claim is made in the course of that proof:

And, [F1] since the point A is the center of the circle CDB, [F2] AC is equal to AB.



It is because the object that this proof is about is not the drawn figure on the page but an intelligible object which the drawn figure resembles that the move from F1 to F2 is legitimate. The intelligible object perfectly exemplifies the nature of Circle and so anything true of circles as such is true of the circle that the proof concerns. Perceptible objects, on the other hand, do not perfectly exemplify natures and, so, the same kind of proof is not available for propositions about them.

The discussion of medical opinions offered in Chapter 4 (pp. 69-71) can help motivate Socrates’ idea that matters in the perceptible world elude demonstrative proof and, so, understanding. Recall that it is most natural to speak of “medical opinions” in reference to doctors’ judgments concerning particular matters of health: most notably, their judgments that a particular patient should undergo a particular course of treatment. I think that we call such judgments “opinion” because we think that they are deficient in some way. This deficiency, however, does not manifest itself relative to other judgments about the very same matter. That is, we do not call one doctor’s judgment that a particular patient should undergo a particular course of treatment an “opinion” because we think some other doctor’s judgment about that very same matter is better.⁷ Rather, the deficiency manifests itself relatively

⁷ Of course, we do think that doctors’ medical opinions can differ in their quality—that is why we seek second opinions. In doing so, however, what we seek are second *opinions*.

to the kind of cognitive achievement that can be made in other domains (e.g. concerning the causes of various infections, diseases, syndromes, etc.). Whereas other domains afford demonstrative proof, particular matters of health do not. And, I propose, this is why we refer to judgments concerning such matters as “opinions.” Importantly, however, the doctors’ inability to provide proof in such matters does not necessarily stem from any cognitive limitations on their part. Rather, it is something about the subject matter itself that renders such proof impossible. Socrates’ basic idea, then, can be well motivated.

Thus far we have considered why Socrates thinks that unqualified propositions about perceptible objects, such as ‘Helen’s face is beautiful,’ cannot express the content of any (piece of) understanding. I have argued that it is because he thinks any proposition through which such unqualified propositions might be proven cannot be unqualifiedly true. This raises the question whether there are any closely related qualified propositions about perceptible objects that can be appropriately proven and that are plausible candidates for what an expert about the perceptible world must be able to grasp. Since, as we saw in Chapter 5, it is considerations of circumstance-variation that lead Socrates to think that some propositions about perceptible objects cannot be unqualifiedly true, a reasonable proposal is that we build such circumstantial considerations into a proposition to render an unqualifiedly true one. For example, Socrates thinks that the proposition ‘Helen is beautiful’ cannot be unqualifiedly true because Helen presents as beautiful in some circumstances (e.g. relative to Medusa) but not beautiful in other circumstances (e.g. relative to Goddesses). What about the proposition ‘Helen’s face is beautiful relative to Medusa’s face.’ This qualified proposition may seem to be unqualifiedly true on Socrates’ picture. Of course, such a proposition cannot be proven by appeal to the unqualified proposition ‘Helen’s face is left-right symmetrical,’ but it seems it could be proven by appeal to a similarly qualified proposition such as ‘Helen’s face is more left-right symmetrical than Medusa’s face.’ Moreover, it seems plausible that philosophical expertise concerning the perceptible world could consist precisely in grasping such qualified propositions about it. In a sense, their expertise could consist in being able to pick “the best of a bad lot” (while acknowledging that it is the best of a bad lot).

Before I consider such qualified propositions, I wish to note that in doing so we have to go well beyond what Socrates says. He only focuses on unqualified propositions and so we can only speculate about why he might think that there cannot be understanding even of such qualified propositions. However, if we are to take Socrates at his word that he thinks perceptible objects do not admit of any understanding, we must find some way of extending that claim to qualified propositions. Moreover, if I am to defend my analysis of why Socrates rules out understanding of unqualified propositions, I must find some way of extending the

above account to cover qualified propositions. In what follows, then, I offer what I think are the most promising avenues for doing so.

First, consider the proposition ‘Helen’s face is beautiful to the degree that it manifests left-right symmetry.’ It may seem that the following proof can be given of this proposition:

[P9] Perceptible objects are *F* to the degree that they manifest *Fness*

[P10] Beauty is left-right symmetry, so

[P11] Perceptible objects are beautiful to the degree that they manifest left-right symmetry

[P12] Helen is a perceptible object

[C4] Helen’s face is beautiful to the degree that it manifests left-right symmetry⁸

Perhaps Socrates thinks that the proposition ‘Helen is a perceptible object’ is not unqualifiedly true. If he does, then the above account concerning unqualified propositions extends directly to this kind of qualified proposition. However, even if he does not, note that the conclusion is actually just a statement of what it means for a perceptible object to be beautiful at all. It is in no way unique to Helen: you could substitute the name of any human being (or, indeed, any perceptible object) for “Helen” and the proposition would still be true. In fact, a family of propositions share this feature, such as ‘Helen is and is not beautiful,’ ‘Helen participates in the Form of Beauty,’ and so on. Such propositions are, in one way or another, merely statements of Socrates’ conception of how perceptible objects exhibit all of their features. To grasp such propositions is just to grasp the metaphysical status of perceptible objects.⁹ None of them is true of Helen as opposed to other perceptible objects. Perhaps, then, I could say that such propositions do not threaten Socrates’ general claim that perceptible objects do not admit of understanding because they cannot yield understanding of why Helen’s face, as opposed to other people’s faces, is beautiful.

The above propositions, in one way or another, were merely statements of Socrates’ metaphysical view concerning perceptible objects. Let us now consider propositions that are more substantive. Take, for example, the explicitly comparative proposition ‘Helen’s face is more beautiful than Medusa’s face.’ The linking proposition needed to prove this comparative proposition would be something like ‘Helen’s face exhibits left-right symmetry to a greater degree than Medusa’s face.’ Isn’t this hedged proposition unqualifiedly true and, hence, can’t it be used to prove, in the appropriate sort of way, that Helen’s face is more

⁸ Again, for the sake of clarity I suppress some premises that may be needed for a full proof (e.g. premises to the effect that Helen is the kind of perceptible object that has a face).

⁹ As we have already seen (Ch. 5, p. 84 fn. 15), and as will see again later (pp. 150-51), Socrates does say that philosophers can *know* such propositions concerning the metaphysical status of perceptible objects.

beautiful than Medusa's face? Thus, even if I cannot prove that Helen's face is beautiful, can't I prove that Helen's face is more beautiful than Medusa's face?

I see two ways in which to deal with such explicitly comparative propositions. On the one hand, we could argue that, in order for the relevant proof to go through, it must be possible to specify the degree to which Helen's face exhibits left-right symmetry and the degree to which Medusa's face exhibits left right symmetry. That is, perhaps "exhibiting left-right symmetry to a greater degree than" does not, for Socrates, denote a basic predicate. Rather, the basic predicate is "symmetry." We could then say that the truth of any comparative proposition is derivative from the truth of the propositions involving the basic predicate. In a sense, the lack of unqualifiedly true unqualified propositions "bleeds into" comparative propositions.

So, what about propositions that attempt to specify the degree to which, say, Helen's face manifests symmetry. That is, not the general proposition 'Helen's face is beautiful to the degree that it manifests left-right symmetry,' but the more specific proposition 'Helen's face is beautiful to degree N .' This proposition again seems to avoid the main problem discussed above, because now the linking proposition is not the unqualified 'Helen's face is left-right symmetrical' but, rather, the qualified proposition 'Helen's face manifests left-right symmetry to degree N .' Perhaps Socrates would respond by arguing that there is no way to quantify precisely the degree to which Helen's face exhibits left-right symmetry. To achieve the appropriate level of precision would require us to delineate all the ways in which Helen's face both exhibits and fails to exhibit left-right symmetry.¹⁰

On the other hand, perhaps Socrates would simply say that, despite initial appearances, all such qualified propositions contain predicates that also display the same kind of circumstance-variation that leads him to conclude that unqualified propositions cannot be unqualifiedly true. Remember, Socrates thinks that in order for the proposition ' X is F ' to be unqualifiedly true, X must manifest F ness in all possible circumstances. If he thought that no matter how many qualifications are built into " F ," there are possible circumstances in which a perceptible object X fails to manifest F ness, he would also think that no proposition of the form ' X is F ' is unqualifiedly true. To see why he might find such a view plausible, consider the predicate "exhibiting left-right symmetry to a greater degree than Medusa." Although it may initially seem to apply unqualifiedly to Helen, there are circumstances in which it fails to apply to her. Suppose, for example, that Helen and Medusa are both being compared alongside the Goddess Aphrodite. Perhaps in such a circumstance the symmetry manifested by Aphrodite's face so overwhelms whatever symmetry may be manifested by

¹⁰ In connection with this it is worth noting that in the *Philebus* (cf. 55-57) the character Socrates, as I understand him, allows understanding, in some sense, of perceptible objects and claims that the susceptibility of a given domain to understanding covaries with the degree to which features of it can be precisely quantified. I discuss further connections with the *Philebus* in the next subsection.

Helen's and Medusa's face that Helen's face does not present as more left-right symmetrical than Medusa's. Or, more easily, suppose Helen were in a car accident such that her face, while still being *her* face, would not present as more symmetrical than Medusa's face. If Socrates thought that such considerations of circumstance-variation would apply no matter the predicate, then he has a consistent way to deal with all propositions, whether qualified or unqualified.

We now see why, given Socrates' metaphysics and his account of understanding, he thinks that there can be no understanding of perceptible objects. Simply put, it is because he thinks that explanations must invoke natures or essences and perceptible objects do not instantiate natures or essences.

6.2.1 Understanding on an Alternative Metaphysics?

It is worth considering how an alternative metaphysics could lead Socrates to conclude that there can be understanding of the perceptible world *without* having to alter his conception of understanding.¹¹ If I am right, Socrates would need to adopt a metaphysics on which some propositions about perceptible objects can be unqualifiedly true. A relatively simple way for him to do this would be by altering the conditions under which he thinks an object counts as being *F* unqualifiedly.¹² Perhaps he could maintain that exhibiting *F*ness to a certain degree or manifesting *F*ness in a sufficiently broad range of cases is a way of being *F* unqualifiedly. For example, he could hold that *X*'s exhibiting rationality to a sufficiently high degree is a way of *X*'s being rational in such a way that *X* is not also not rational. On such a metaphysics, the predicate "rational animal" could apply to Socrates in such a way that the proposition 'Socrates is a rational animal' would be unqualifiedly true and, hence, could be included in a satisfactory proof of the proposition 'Socrates is a human being.' In short, if he took perceptible objects to instantiate Forms, Socrates could allow that philosophers' cognitive interaction with perceptible objects could be informed by their understanding of Forms in such a way as to achieve understanding of the former.

On the proposal I am considering Socrates would *not* have to think that perceptible objects could perfectly exemplify any feature. He does not have to think, for example, that

¹¹ Of course, Socrates could reach this conclusion while keeping his metaphysics constant by altering his conception of understanding. However, I do not pursue this line because I think that the conception of understanding remains relatively constant throughout Plato's dialogues (i.e. I see no dialogue in which a character seriously considers "loosening" the requirements on the kind of explanation required for understanding). Moreover, as we will see in a moment, I do think that in other dialogues Plato has characters explore alternative metaphysics and, subsequently, the possibility that understanding extends more widely than Socrates allows in the *Republic*.

¹² In essence, this would be to capitulate to one of the lovers of sights and sounds' objections to Socrates' Book 5 argument that we considered in Chapter 5 (pp. 116-17).

a perceptible object must manifest perfect rationality in order for the predicate “rational animal” to be applied to it unqualifiedly. Rather, the idea is that the degree to which certain perceptible objects exemplify rationality, even though imperfect, is a way of *being* rational unqualifiedly. Thus, he could think that perceptible objects could instantiate Forms without having to think that they can perfectly exemplify the relevant feature.

Although I will not defend this claim here, I think that this is the metaphysical view the character Socrates advances in the early pages of the *Philebus* (esp. 16d-18). As I understand the view laid out there, Socrates maintains that the being of Forms is partly constituted by perishable perceptible objects. While the details are complicated, the important upshot is that perceptible objects, on this view, instantiate Forms so that it can be true to predicate *F* of them unqualifiedly, at least for some values of *F*.¹³ As my account of Socrates’ conception of understanding would lead us to expect, in the later pages of the *Philebus* (cf. 55ff.), the character Socrates extends understanding into the perceptible world. Although he thinks that such understanding is still deficient in some way, he thinks it counts as a kind of understanding. On my interpretation, this need not reflect a change in his conception of understanding but, rather, in his metaphysical conception of perceptible objects.

6.3 No Opinions Concerning Intelligible Objects

In this section I consider the second half of the Two-Worlds epistemology, namely the claim that there can be no opinions concerning intelligible objects. This half is much more difficult to provide support for than the first for both philosophical and textual reasons. First, it seems entirely possible for people to have views that succeed in being about intelligible objects *without* being able to prove that those views are true. Second, many interpreters have claimed that there is a text in which Socrates explicitly says that he has opinions about the Form of Goodness. I consider each issue in turn.

6.3.1 Philosophical Considerations

The main philosophical problem with this half of the Two-Worlds epistemology can be stated as follows. Socrates seems to classify all cognitive achievements as either opinion

¹³ In a nutshell, I understand the claim that the things that always are “have both limit and unlimitedness in their nature” (16c9-10) and that the original unit is “one, many, and unlimited” (16d5-6) to mean that Forms (the one) have both sub-Forms (the many) and perishable things (the unlimited) as constituent parts of their being. Furthermore, when Socrates speaks of the clever people who “go straight from the one to the unlimited and omit the intermediates” (17a1-3), I take him to be referring to the kind of discussion carried out in the *Republic*. In the *Republic* they did not pay any attention to the structure of the intelligible domain and, specifically, the question whether Forms have sub-Forms as constituents.

or understanding. However, consider a view that seems to be about an intelligible object but whose possessor cannot prove that it is true. For example, take the budding geometry student who seems convinced that the Pythagorean Theorem is true, but cannot prove it. It would seem that, since the student cannot prove it, this view cannot count as (a piece of) understanding and, so, must count as an opinion. However, on the Two-Worlds epistemology, opinions only concern perceptible objects. Thus, it seems that this view, which seems to concern geometrical objects, cannot count as an opinion either. We have two options to deal with such cases: (a) argue that such views, despite initial appearances, are actually about perceptible objects and so can count as opinions, or (b) argue that such views are neither opinions nor (pieces of) understanding. Either way, trouble looms.

We should, in fact, distinguish between the views of two kinds of people, each of which pose distinct problems. On the one hand, people who are studying a subject matter but have not yet adequately grasped any proofs concerning it. For example, the view of the geometry student considered above, or the view I express when I say “ $1+1=2$.” Call such people “learners.” Then, on the other hand, people who are experts in some domain who have the view that some proposition within that domain is true but have not yet proved it. For example, consider Andrew Wiles at some point after he is convinced that Fermat’s Last Theorem is true but before he has discovered its proof. Call such people “convinced inquiring experts.”

I think that a plausible case can be made that when learners utter sentences that seem to be about intelligible objects they in fact express views about perceptible objects.¹⁴ First, note that Socrates thinks the only way to access intelligible objects is through precise definition (510b4-d3).¹⁵ Second, recall that, as we discussed in Chapter 2 (p. 24), adequately grasping a definition is a serious cognitive achievement. Adequately grasping the definition of, say, some geometrical entity requires more than simply being able to parrot back its Euclidean Definition. Indeed, in Chapter 2 I suggested that adequately grasping such a definition would require being in a position to use it to prove other subordinate facts. The idea, then, would be that, since one can access intelligible objects only through precise definition and grasping a definition requires being in a position to prove various things about the defined object, people can only cognitively access an intelligible object if they are able to employ its definition in various proofs. And, if having understanding is, in the first place, a matter of *being able* to prove various facts, rather than necessarily *having proved* them, there

¹⁴ I here develop a suggestion I explored in Chapter 3 when I argued that we are not required to take the δόξα the slave acquires at the end of his discussion with Socrates to be about intelligible objects (pp. 50-54).

¹⁵ On this, see Burnyeat [2000, 27-33].

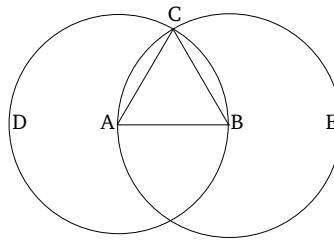
is a sense in which people can only have thoughts about mathematical objects if they have understanding.

Let us see how this will work with a specific example from geometry. Take the Euclidean Definition of Circle:

A Circle is a plane figure contained by one line, such that all of the straight-lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal to one another.

I submit that the first time people read this definition it is unlikely that they adequately grasp what it is to be a circle. As a result, it is not implausible to say that they have not, in fact, cognitively accessed the nature of Circle, and so have not necessarily had a thought about any intelligible object. As they work through more of Euclid and see the definition put to use in proving various geometrical theorems, they come better to comprehend what it is to be a circle. For example, they come to see why, given what a Circle is, the following claim is true:

And, [F1] since the point A is the center of the circle CDB, [F2] AC is equal to AB.



By considering more and more such applications of the Definition of Circle, people come better to comprehend what a Circle is until, finally, they grasp the definition of Circle. Since intelligible objects can only be accessed through definition, we can say that people only have thoughts that are genuinely about intelligible circles when they are able to put the definition of Circle to use to prove any fact it grounds. But, this is just to say that they only succeed in cognitively accessing the intelligible domain at the same time as they acquire understanding.

Although, on this picture, access to the intelligible realm is acquired only when understanding is acquired, this does not entail that people can make an immediate, almost magical, jump from not giving geometry a moment's thought to being able to think about geometrical objects (for example). Recall the position of the slave at the end of his exchange with Socrates. He is on the path to cognitively accessing mathematical objects. Through repeated questioning, he can form ever more abstract representations of the various perceptible diagrams etc. he is exposed to until he comes to grasp the nature of the relevant geometrical

entities. He can, in other words, generalize over his experiences and have ever more abstract thoughts until he ultimately accesses the intelligible domain by genuinely grasping the natures of the relevant mathematical entities. It is in this sense, then, that we can take the views of learners, despite initial appearances, to concern perceptible objects and, so, to count as opinions.

The case of convinced inquiring experts, however, poses much greater difficulties. Indeed, it is here that I think Socrates' picture ultimately breaks down. It seems absurd to think that, when Andrew Wiles says, "Fermat's Last Theorem is true," he is, in fact, expressing a view about collections of perceptible objects and not genuine intelligible objects. Thus, the solution that presented itself in the case of learners does not seem applicable here. If the views of convinced inquiring experts cannot count as opinions, however, it seems we must say that they are neither opinions nor understanding.

It may be tempting to appeal to Socrates' discussion of the Divided Line to solve this problem (509d1-511e5). In that discussion Socrates divides the intelligible portion into two sections: one populated by mathematical objects, the other populated by Forms. He then claims that thought (*dianoia*) is the cognitive state in which people grasp mathematical objects and comprehension (*noêsis*) the cognitive state in which people grasp Forms. However, this distinction is no help here, because thought is not a state of mathematical conjecture (or anything similar, which is what we need). Rather, thought is the state of mathematical success: it is understanding of the mathematical domains. It is, for example, the state Andrew Wiles achieved when he proved Fermat's Last Theorem, and not the state he was in when he was only convinced it was true.

At this point I only have a few things to say, none of which is wholly satisfactory. First, we can say that the views of convinced inquiring experts succeed in being about mathematical objects in virtue of the understanding they possess. The view Andrew Wiles expresses when he says, "Fermat's Last Theorem is true" succeeds in being about mathematical objects because he is sufficiently expert in mathematics that he has understanding of the natures of the relevant entities. However, while this may explain how his view succeeds in being about mathematical objects, it does not explain why it does not count as a piece of understanding in its own right. Perhaps the best thing to say is that Andrew Wiles is exercising his power of understanding, and that he can exercise his power on this occasion in virtue of the understanding he has of the rest of mathematics, but that he exercises it in such a way that it does not generate any new (piece of) understanding.

Despite the difficulties posed by convinced inquiring experts, I do not think that we should regard Socrates' idea that there can be no opinions concerning intelligible objects as wholly nonsensical. There is something to the idea that certain entities are such that

being able to have a thought about them is a serious cognitive achievement. We should not think that a person who has never given geometry a moment's thought suddenly has accessed a new realm of objects simply by being told (and coming to think that) "a double-area square comes to be from the diagonal of the original square." Or that, simply because my physics teacher tells me that "Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared," I suddenly succeeded in thinking about the very same objects that Einstein did. Moreover, it seems desirable to distinguish the kind of thoughts that, for example, Andrew Wiles had when he was investigating Fermat's Last Theorem from the kind of thoughts that the slave has during his exchange with Socrates. The level of abstract representation that Wiles achieves, and the amount of understanding that is required for it, is of such a different order that it may turn out that the only generic concept that covers both what is going on in Wiles' head and what is going on in the slave's head is explanatorily unhelpful. Lastly, and following on from this, in our discussion of the convinced inquiring experts we were not tempted to think that Socrates actually should hold their views to be opinions. Rather, the worry was that he needs to recognize a cognitive attitude that corresponds to expert mathematical supposition. Thus, even though Socrates' view certainly has rough edges, I do not think that we should dismiss it outright.

6.3.2 Textual Considerations

Some opponents of the Two-Worlds interpretation claim that Socrates explicitly says he has opinions about the Form of Goodness in the preamble to his presentation of the Sun, Line, and Cave.¹⁶ First, Socrates and Adeimantus have the following exchange (506b2-c9):

Adeimantus: But you yourself, Socrates, do you say the good is understanding or pleasure, or some other thing beyond these?

Socrates: What a man! You made it good and clear long ago that how things *dokein* about these matters to other people would not be sufficient for you.

Adeim.: Well Socrates, it does not appear right to me to state the convictions of others but not your own about it, especially since you have spent so much time occupied with these matters.

Soc.: What? Does it seem right to you for someone to speak about those things he does not know as if he knew them?

Adeim.: Not as knowing them, but, at any rate, you should be willing to state

¹⁶ Fine [1990, 86], Smith [2000, 154].

the things that you think as what you think?¹⁷

Soc.: What? Aren't you aware that *doxai* without understanding are all shameful and the best among them are blind? Do you think that those who *doxazein* something truly without comprehension differ from blind people who happen to travel the correct road?

Adeim.: ἀλλὰ σὺν δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, πότερον ἐπιστήμην τὸ ἀγαθὸν φῆς εἶναι ἢ ἡδονήν, ἢ ἄλλο τι παρὰ ταῦτα;

Soc.: Οὗτος, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἀνὴρ, καλῶς ἦσθα καὶ πάλαι καταφανὴς ὅτι σοι οὐκ ἀποχρήσοι τὸ τοῖς ἄλλοις δοκοῦν περὶ αὐτῶν.

Adeim.: Οὐδὲ γὰρ δίκαιόν μοι, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, φαίνεται τὰ τῶν ἄλλων μὲν ἔχειν εἰπεῖν δόγματα, τὸ δ' αὐτοῦ μή, τοσοῦτον χρόνον περὶ ταῦτα πραγματευόμενον.

Soc.: Τί δέ; ἦν δ' ἐγώ· δοκεῖ σοι δίκαιον εἶναι περὶ ὧν τις μὴ οἶδεν λέγειν ὡς εἰδότα;

Adeim.: Οὐδαμῶς γ', ἔφη, ὡς εἰδότα, ὡς μέντοι οἰόμενον ταῦθ' ἃ οἶεται ἐθέλειν λέγειν.

Soc.: Τί δέ; εἶπον· οὐκ ἦσθησαι τὰς ἄνευ ἐπιστήμης δόξας, ὡς πᾶσαι αἰσχυραί; ὧν αἱ βέλτισται τυφλαί—ἢ δοκοῦσί τί σοι τυφλῶν διαφέρειν ὁδὸν ὀρθῶς πορευομένων οἱ ἄνευ νοῦ ἀληθές τι δοξάζοντες;

Immediately following this exchange, Glaucon implores Socrates (506d1-e3):

Glaucon: By Zeus, do not stop now, with the end in sight, so to speak! We will be satisfied if you discuss the good the way you discussed justice, temperance, and the rest.

Soc.: That, comrade, would well satisfy me too, but I am afraid that I won't be up to it and that I will disgrace myself and look ridiculous trying. No, bless you, let's set aside what the good itself is for the time being. You see, even to arrive at how it *dokein* to me now seems beyond the range of our present discussion.

Glauc.: Μὴ πρὸς Διός, ἦ δ' ὅς, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὁ Γλαύκων, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τέλει ὧν ἀποστῆς. ἀρκέσει γὰρ ἡμῖν, κἂν ὥσπερ δικαιοσύνης πέρι καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ τῶν ἄλλων διήλθες, οὕτω καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ διέλθης.

Soc.: Καὶ γὰρ ἐμοί, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ ἑταῖρε, καὶ μάλα ἀρκέσει· ἀλλ' ὅπως μὴ οὐχ οἶός τ' ἔσομαι, προθυμούμενος δὲ ἀσχημονῶν γέλωτα ὀφλήσω. ἀλλ', ὦ μακάριοι, αὐτὸ μὲν τί ποτ' ἐστὶ τἀγαθὸν ἐάσωμεν τὸ νῦν εἶναι—πλέον γάρ μοι φαίνεται ἢ κατὰ τὴν παροῦσαν ὁρμὴν ἐφικέσθαι τοῦ γε δοκοῦντος ἐμοὶ τὰ νῦν.

¹⁷ Reeve's translation of this sentence—"Not as if you know them, but you ought to be willing to state what you believe as what you believe"—is highly misleading. Since Reeve uses "belief" to translate δόξα, he should not translate οἶομαι as "to believe."

Interpreters have claimed that Socrates' use of the verbs "*dokein*" (at 506b6 and 506e1) and "*doxazein*" (at 506c9), and of the noun "*doxa*" (at 506c6), show that he takes himself to have opinions about the Form of Goodness.¹⁸ Since, presumably, Socrates would not say that he has opinions about the Form of Goodness if he thought it impossible to have opinions about intelligible objects, many interpreters conclude that he must think that it is possible.

Although I think that a close reading of this passage shows that Socrates does not make such a claim, I first want to consider its broader context. The context suggests that, even if Socrates did explicitly say he has opinions about the Form of Goodness, we should not take this to reflect his considered epistemological view. Just before this passage, Socrates and Adeimantus survey the views of other people concerning the good. Socrates notes that "to the many, pleasure seems to be the good, to the more refined, intelligence" (505b5-6).¹⁹ Given that their discussion of the views of the many leads immediately on to the passages cited above, we should think that Socrates takes the many to have views about the very same thing he says he has views about. If, then, we take Socrates to say that he has views about the Form of Goodness, then the views of the many must also be about the Form of Goodness. However, we have strong reason to think that the latter is impossible. In the analogy of the Cave, as well as the Divided Line, Socrates makes it clear that cognitively accessing the intelligible realm is something that can only happen through serious study (with comprehending the Form of Goodness being the most difficult step in this process) (cf. 516b4-6). Indeed, we are led to believe that the many will never break free of their chains and begin on the path Socrates outlines. Thus, unless we want to attribute to Socrates the claim that the unrefined many can have opinions about the Form of Goodness, we should avoid attributing to Socrates the claim that even *he* has opinions about the Form of Goodness.

If we did find Socrates explicitly saying that he has opinions about the Form of Goodness, but did not think that this reflected his considered epistemological view, how could we handle it? We could point out that, insofar as the many are competent speakers of Greek, they will be able to answer questions like, "What is the good?" In that sense, we can say that their answer states their opinion about what the good is.²⁰ Importantly, we do not have to understand such opinions as succeeding in being about the Form of Goodness. Perhaps

¹⁸ It should be noted that the word δόγμα also appears in this passage (506b8). However, I will not discuss it since (1) it is Adeimantus, and not Socrates, who uses it and (2) it is unclear how δόγμα relates to δόξα.

¹⁹ Ὅτι τοῖς μὲν πολλοῖς ἡδονὴ δοκεῖ εἶναι τὸ ἀγαθόν, τοῖς δὲ κομψοτέροις φρόνησις.

²⁰ Recall that, at the end of the Book 5 argument, Socrates claimed that the views of the many about beauty and the like roll around between being and not-being (Ch. 5, p. 121-22). I do not think that any interpreter seriously considers taking those views to be about the Form of Beauty.

such an explicit statement on Socrates' part could simply be read as claiming that he has opinions about the good in this sense.²¹

Although I think that the above considerations are sufficient to show that, even if Socrates did explicitly say that he has opinions about the Form of Goodness, we should not take that to entail a rejection of the Two-Worlds epistemology, it is worth looking at the passages in detail. First, let us consider Socrates' use of forms of the verb "*dokein*," which occurs in both passages. I think that interpreters mistakenly infer from Socrates' use of this verb that he means that either he or someone else has some corresponding *doxa*. For example, when Socrates says that it would take him a long time to express "*tou ge dokountos emoi ta nun*," they understand him as meaning that it would take him a long time to express his "*doxai*" about the Form of Goodness.²² To be sure, there is an etymological link between the verb "*dokein*" and the noun "*doxa*." However, in its standard meaning, the verb "*dokein*" means "to seem." As such, from '*p dokei to S to be the case*' it does not follow that '*S has the doxa that p*.' Of course, it could be true both that *p* seems to *S* to be the case and that *S* has the *doxa* that *p*. Indeed, the former may be a necessary condition for the latter. Regardless, however, the claim that someone has a *doxa* cannot be validly inferred from the use of the verb "*dokein*" itself. There is a standard verb, which Socrates himself uses in the *Republic*, that means "to hold (a) *doxa*," namely "*doxazein*." Given that Socrates has the verb "*doxazein*" at his disposal, we should take his use of the verb "*dokein*" as avoiding the commitment to a corresponding *doxa*.²³ Thus, when Socrates says, "You see, even to arrive at how *tou ge dokountos emoi ta nun*," we should take him to be saying that it would take a long time to arrive at how these things *seem* to him. He does not explicitly say that it would take a long time to express some *doxa* he has.

Aristotle shows that *p*'s seeming to *S* to be the case does not entail that *S* has the *doxa* that *p*. In *De Insomniis*, for example, he says that something can seem to people to be the case even if they know that it is false:

²¹ In connection with this, note that the phrase used in this passage is actually "the good" (τὸ ἀγαθόν) and not the full "the Form of Goodness." Then, recall that, back in Chapter 3 (p. 52), I noted that there are stricter and looser applications of predicates like "square." Similarly, there are stricter and looser interpretations of phrases like "the good." In its strict interpretation it refers to the Form of Goodness. In its looser interpretation it refers to what we might call the whole phenomenon of goodness (i.e. anything to which the predicate "good" can apply at all, which will also include participants in the Form of Goodness). Thus, insofar as the many have views about the latter, they can be said to have views about the good.

²² Similarly, when Socrates says, at 506b6, that Glaucon made it clear that mere reports of τὸ τοῖς ἄλλοις δοκοῦν περὶ αὐτῶν would not be sufficient, interpreters take him to mean that Glaucon would not be satisfied with reports of the δόξαι of other people about what goodness is.

²³ Of course, in the final section of the first passage Socrates uses the verb δοξάζειν. I consider that section in a moment.

So, even when persons are in good health, and know the facts of the case, the sun, nevertheless, seems to them to be a foot wide. (458b28-29)

καὶ ὑγιαίνουσι δὲ καὶ εἰδόσιν ὅμως ὁ ἥλιος ποδιαῖος εἶναι δοκεῖ.²⁴

People who know that the sun is *not* a foot across will not have a *doxa* to the effect that the sun is a foot across, although it still *seems* to them that it is. If someone were to object that it is illegitimate to appeal to Aristotle to understand how a word operates in Plato, because Aristotle, as is well known, often introduces technical meanings for standard Greek words, I would reply that it is highly unlikely that “*dokein*” is one of those words. Nowhere does Aristotle give a quasi-definition of the verb as he does when he appropriates common Greek words for specific philosophical uses.

Now that we have dealt with Socrates’ use of the verb “*dokein*” it remains to deal with his use of the words “*doxa*” and “*doxazein*.” To refresh: Socrates asks Glaucon whether he is aware that “opinions without understanding are all shameful” and whether he thinks that “those who opine something truly without comprehension differ from blind people who happen to travel the correct road.” Interpreters have claimed that the “shameful” opinions Socrates says he has must be about the Form of Goodness and that, were he to happen to opine something truly, he would be opining something about the Form of Goodness. However, I do not think that we must take Socrates in this way. He may simply be saying that, since he lacks understanding, whatever opinions he may have, regardless of what they are about, will be no better than blind guesses. Adeimantus presses Socrates to say something, anything, about what he thinks goodness is. Socrates may be understood as saying “whatever I tell you is going to be no better than what a blind man who happened on the right road could tell you about how to get somewhere.” As discussed in Chapter 3, we do not have to think that someone who is on the path to acquiring understanding of something has yet to have any thoughts about that thing (pp. 53-54). Thus, we do not have to take Socrates to think that he does, in fact, have opinions that somehow succeed in being about the Form of Goodness.

Summary

We have now seen why Socrates accepts a Two-Worlds epistemology. Given his metaphysics, he thinks that matters in the perceptible world elude the kind of demonstrative proof necessary for explanation. Also given his metaphysics, he thinks that accessing intelligible objects requires a higher cognitive achievement than mere opinion. Although we discovered some serious difficulties with the latter view, we saw that the basic idea has merit.

²⁴ Similar uses of δοκεῖν occur at 460b26-27, 461b30-462a2, and elsewhere.

6.4 Resolving The Tension Between The Epistemology and the Politics

In this section I show how my interpretation can accommodate the second constraint laid out in Chapter 4, namely that philosophers must be epistemic authorities, compared to non-philosophers, concerning matters in the perceptible world. In short, although Socrates rules out, as a result of his metaphysical view, understanding of perceptible objects, he allows that people who understand the natures of things can bring their understanding to bear in their cognitive interaction with the perceptible world. Because philosophers' opinions are informed by their understanding, Socrates considers such opinions to be expert. Moreover, given their privileged status, he is willing to say that such opinions count as a kind of knowledge. The rest of this section is devoted to laying out this picture.

In order to bring the alleged tension into focus, I begin with two presentations of it in the recent literature. Gail Fine objects to the Two-Worlds interpretation because:

[T]his sceptical result would be quite surprising in the context of the *Republic*, which aims to persuade us that philosophers should rule, since only they have knowledge, and knowledge is necessary for good ruling. If their knowledge is only of Forms—if, like the rest of us, they only have belief about the sensible world—it is unclear why they are specially fitted to rule in this world. They don't know, any more than the rest of us do, which laws to enact. [1990, 86]

Likewise, Nick Smith:

Moreover, the “two-worlds theory” of Plato's epistemology manages to destroy the very argument Plato takes himself to be advancing—after all, the entire distinction the “two-worlds theory” seeks to explain is embedded in an argument context, the main point of which is that philosophers would be better rulers than sight-lovers, and it is the power of knowledge that is supposed to make philosophers better. Unless the judgments involved in ruling are judgments about Forms (which they plainly would not be), the “two-worlds theory” requires that Plato's aim in this argument is actually made unattainable by the very distinction he makes in order to reach it. [2000, 153-154]

These interpreters are surely right to point out that if philosophers are better than non-philosophers merely at understanding abstract, theoretical matters, Socrates would not have made any advance in overturning the common perception of philosophers as being useless, with their heads in the clouds while their feet lead them into wells.

Moreover, these interpreters claim that the text directly contradicts the Two-Worlds interpretation at several points. As discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 101), Socrates uses the family

of words surrounding the Greek “*gnôsis*” to characterize the cognitive relation philosophers bear to perceptible objects. Most famously, in describing the philosophers’ descent back into the cave (i.e. to rule the city), Socrates says:

When you are used to it, you’ll see vastly better than the people there. And, because you’ve seen the truth about the Fine, Just, and Good, you will know each image, what it is and what it is an image of. (520c3-6)

συνεθιζόμενοι γὰρ μυρίῳ βέλτιον ὄψεσθε τῶν ἐκεῖ καὶ γνώσεσθε ἕκαστα τὰ εἶδωλα ἅττα ἐστὶ καὶ ὧν, διὰ τὸ τάληθῃ ἔωρακέναι καλῶν τε καὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀγαθῶν πέρι.²⁵

Socrates here uses the verb “to know” (*gignôskein*) to characterize the cognitive relation philosophers will bear to the images found in the cave. It is clear from the context that the images correspond to non-intelligible objects in the perceptible world. In effect, then, Socrates is here saying that the philosopher will know certain things about perceptible objects. For some perceptible object, for example, the philosopher will know what it is, say, beautiful, and what it is an image of, namely, the Form of Beauty.²⁶

The objections of Fine and Smith presuppose that Socrates makes no distinction between knowledge and understanding. Indeed, if Socrates did contrast the opinions of non-philosophers with only one superior cognitive state, it seems he would have to allow that philosophers can bear the superior cognitive relation to perceptible objects. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how Socrates could distinguish between the opinions of philosophers and those of non-philosophers, which he must do to defend his claim that philosophers are epistemic authorities about the perceptible world. Once we recognize that he does distinguish knowledge from understanding, it is crucial to note that in those passages in which Socrates describes the cognitive relation philosophers bear to perceptible objects with vocabulary that suggests a superior cognitive achievement to mere opinion, he *only* uses knowledge-terminology; he *never* uses understanding-terminology. Thus, we can attribute the following picture to Socrates: there is a superior cognitive relation that only philosophers can bear to the perceptible world (i.e. knowledge) but there is also a distinct cognitive relation that philosophers bear exclusively to intelligible objects and not to perceptible objects (i.e. understanding).²⁷

²⁵ Cf. 476c7-d5, 477a2-4, and 506a4-7 for similar uses of knowledge-terminology.

²⁶ The context makes clear that Socrates means the philosophers will know that certain predicates hold of perceptible objects, rather than know just their metaphysical status. In particular, Socrates claims that the philosopher will be better than the prisoner at the “game” they play, namely attributing various predicates to the shadows. Cf. Burnyeat [2000, 44 fn. 60].

²⁷ Remember, however, that understanding is, for Socrates, a type of knowledge.

6.4.1 Authority in Matters of Opinion

We have seen that Socrates' language indicates that he distinguishes between knowledge and understanding and we have also seen that he has philosophical need to do so. It is not enough, however, to note that Socrates has room in his philosophical position for a superior cognitive achievement that philosopher's alone can make concerning the perceptible world—we need some idea of how this is supposed to work. That is, we need to see why Socrates thinks that philosophers' understanding concerning Forms puts them in a privileged epistemic position with respect to the perceptible world.

The main mistake made by those who level the objection outlined above is to think that, if it is a matter of opinion what states of affairs obtain in a given domain, then all opinions concerning that domain are equally authoritative. That is, if Socrates argues that it is a matter of opinion what states of affairs obtain in the perceptible world, then he is committed to the view that all opinions concerning the perceptible world are equally authoritative. This is false. It is entirely possible for opinions to be distinguished according to their authority in such a way that the opinions of some people are maximally authoritative. In the rest of this subsection I develop this idea.

I begin with an example. Suppose we think, as Socrates does, that it is a matter of opinion whether a particular quantity of wine is good. It is still entirely possible to differentiate between the opinions of different people concerning the quality of the wine on the basis of their authority. First, consider two people who form opinions concerning the quality of the wine but whose causal interaction with it differs. For example, suppose John forms the opinion that *the wine is good* solely on the basis of looking at it. Jane, on the other hand, forms the opinion that *the wine is good* on the basis of looking at, smelling, and tasting it. It is clear in this case that Jane's opinion is more authoritative than John's opinion. The difference in authority, however, cannot be due to the fact that Jane's opinion is more likely to be true—John and Jane form the same opinion, after all. Rather, the superior authority of Jane's opinion is due to the fact that her causal interaction with the wine provides her with information about the wine that John lacks.

These considerations can be extended to cases in which the causal interaction between the people whose opinions we are comparing and the object of their opinion is the same. Consider a case in which both John and Jane look at, smell, and taste the wine (controlling, as much as possible, for any variations). John and Jane again both form the opinion that *the wine is good*. However, whereas John is a neophyte, Jane has been a professional wine critic for 30 years. It again seems clear that Jane's opinion is more authoritative than John's opinion, even though in this case the causal interaction that John and Jane have with the wine is the same.

If there is no difference in causal interaction, however, it seems that the reason why Jane's opinion is more authoritative than John's opinion is due to differences in their respective psychologies. Jane, as a professional wine critic, can avail herself of all the experience she has with wine—evaluating, comparing, studying, etc.. Indeed, there may be a good deal of abstract understanding concerning what makes wine good, or perhaps about goodness itself, which she can bring to bear in forming her opinion concerning this particular wine. Her opinion concerning the wine is more authoritative precisely because it is informed by her more sophisticated conceptual apparatus. In particular, her experience and understanding make her sensitive to the features that are relevant to making determinations about the quality of particular quantities of wine.

Consider again the model of a doctor's medical opinion. Although we do not think that doctors can prove that a particular course of treatment is best, their opinions concerning which course of treatment a patient should undergo are expert and, hence, authoritative. Their opinions, for example, should be followed more than mine should or more than the hospital janitor's (if he or she has any opinion on the matter). Whatever deficiencies their medical opinions may have are not necessarily relative to the views other people can have of the very same matter. Indeed, doctors are in a position to make the highest possible cognitive achievement concerning particular matters of health in the perceptible world. And, the doctor's medical opinions, despite being only opinions, are expert precisely because they are informed by their understanding of health. Their understanding makes them sensitive to the features that are relevant to determining which course of treatment a particular patient should undergo.

If we look at Socrates' descriptions of the way in which the philosopher's understanding of Forms plays a role in her cognitive interaction with the perceptible world, we see that this is precisely the picture he is working with. In Book 6 we learn that philosophers should be entrusted with political power because they,

Are able to look away, like painters, to what is most true, and [can] by making constant reference to it and by studying it as exactly as possible, establish here on earth conventional views about beautiful, just, or good things when they need to be established, or guard and preserve those that have been established.²⁸
(484c6-d2)

δυνάμενοι ὥσπερ γραφῆς εἰς τὸ ἀληθέστατον ἀποβλέποντες κάκεῖσε ἀεὶ ἀνα-
φέροντές τε καὶ θεώμενοι ὡς οἷόν τε ἀκριβέστατα, οὕτω δὴ καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε νό-

²⁸ In fact, I have inferred this description of philosophers from the description of non-philosophers Socrates actually gives. However, since he says that non-philosophers should not be entrusted with rule because they cannot do such things, I take my inference to be valid.

μιμα καλῶν τε πέρι καὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀγαθῶν τίθεσθαι τε, ἐὰν δέη τίθεσθαι, καὶ τὰ κείμενα φυλάττοντες σῶζειν;

Likewise, in describing philosophers' role as guardians of the city,

I suppose that, as they work they would look often in each direction: on the one hand, toward what is in its nature just, beautiful, temperate, and all the rest; and, on the other, toward what they are trying to put into human beings, mixing and blending pursuits to produce a human likeness, based on the one that Homer too called divine and godly. (501b1-7)

Ἐπειτα οἶμαι ἀπεργαζόμενοι πυκνὰ ἂν ἐκατέρωσ' ἀποβλέποιεν, πρὸς τε τὸ φύσει δίκαιον καὶ καλὸν καὶ σῶφρον καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα, καὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖν' αὖ τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐμποιοῖεν, συμμειγνύντες τε καὶ κεραννύντες ἐκ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων τὸ ἀνδρείκελον, ἀπ' ἐκείνου τεκμαιρόμενοι, ὃ δὴ καὶ Ὅμηρος ἐκάλεσεν ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐγγιγνόμενον θεοειδές τε καὶ θεοείκελον.

And, at the very end of the entire discussion occupying Books 5-7, Socrates describes the task of the philosopher-king:

At the age of fifty, those who have survived the tests and are entirely best in every practical task and every science must be led at last to the end and compelled to lift up the radiant light of their souls, and to look toward what itself provides light for everything. And once they have seen the good itself, they must use it as their model and put the city, its citizens, and themselves in order throughout the remainder of their lives, each in turn. (540a4-b1)

γενομένων δὲ πεντηκοντούτων τοὺς διασωθέντας καὶ ἀριστεύσαντας πάντα πάντῃ ἐν ἔργοις τε καὶ ἐπιστήμαις πρὸς τέλος ἤδη ἀκτέον, καὶ ἀναγκαστέον ἀνακλίναντας τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς αὐγὴν εἰς αὐτὸ ἀποβλέψαι τὸ πᾶσι φῶς παρέχον, καὶ ἰδόντας τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτό, παραδείγματι χρωμένους ἐκείνῳ, καὶ πόλιν καὶ ἰδιώτας καὶ ἑαυτοὺς κοσμεῖν τὸν ἐπίλοιπον βίον ἐν μέρει ἐκάστους.

Philosophers, then, are able, as a result of understanding the Forms, to use those Forms as a model (*paradeigma*) in their cognitive interactions with the perceptible world. As a result of understanding the true nature of Beauty, Justice, Goodness, and the like, they are sensitive to the features that are relevant to making discriminations in the perceptible world about what is beautiful, just, and good in it. Thus, the notion of a doctor's medical opinions provides a perfectly sensible model for how Socrates could hold that, despite the fact that it is irremediably a matter of opinion what states of affairs obtain in the perceptible world, the philosophers' opinions concerning it are expert and, hence, authoritative. It is not simply

that the philosophers' opinions are more reliably true (although they certainly will be). It is also because the philosophers' opinions are grounded in the correct theoretical understanding of what it is for something to be Just, Beautiful, Good and the like that Socrates takes them to be expert.

I close this section by considering how this is supposed to work by taking a specific example. Suppose a battle has occurred, the city has been saved, and now it is time for awards to be handed out for courage. This is something that the philosopher, in her capacity as ruler, is going to have to do—one way to get people, especially young people, to emulate the right sort of behavior is to reward it. Suppose, then, that a philosopher and a non-philosopher both form the opinion that *Sarah is courageous*. Suppose, further, that the definition of Courage is “the disposition of the spirited part of the soul to preserve through pleasure and pain the pronouncements of reason about what should inspire terror and what should not.”²⁹ The crucial difference between the philosopher's and the non-philosopher's opinion that *Sarah is courageous* is the grounds on which each forms that opinion. When asked why she has formed the relevant opinion, the non-philosopher is likely to say something like “Sarah stood her ground, and that's courageous,” or “Sarah did exactly what Achilles did in the *Iliad*, and Achilles is the model of courage.” The philosopher, on the other hand, will speak about the relationship between the rational and spirited part of Sarah's soul. She will be aware, of course, that Sarah does not perfectly instantiate Courage. But she will be able to delineate the ways in which the functioning of Sarah's soul parts meets or lives up to the definition of Courage. The philosopher's opinion, then, is informed by her correct theoretical understanding of the nature of Courage. And that is why, according to Socrates, philosophical opinion is expert.

This picture also explains why Socrates is willing to call the philosopher's cognitive relation to perceptible objects “knowledge.” Given that the philosopher's opinions are authoritative, it would be natural to describe her as knowing certain things about the perceptible world: they are the best that can be done concerning that realm. This is especially the case in contexts in which he is explicitly contrasting the philosopher's and the non-philosopher's cognitive relation to the perceptible world (as he is in most instances in which he does describe the philosopher as having knowledge of it). If you are considering two people's opinions side-by-side, only one of which you take to be expert, it seems perfectly natural to describe that expert opinion as constituting knowledge. This is acceptable even if you think that opinion is deficient when compared to the sort of cognitive relation that one can bear

²⁹ This definition of courage is adapted from Socrates' discussion at 442b10-c2. Of course, it is not clear that Socrates intends this to be a specification of the nature of Courage. However, for our purposes, this does not matter.

to the objects in some different domain. Thus, it is perfectly reasonable for Socrates to say that philosophers can have knowledge concerning the perceptible world even though, like everyone else, they cannot have understanding concerning it.

6.5 *A Priori* Knowledge Vs. *A Posteriori* Knowledge

Since I think that Socrates allows knowledge, in the form of understanding, of the intelligible world, and knowledge, in the form of expert philosophical opinion, of the perceptible world, it is worth considering how his distinction relates to the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. Indeed, it is not uncommon for interpreters to claim that Socrates' account of *epistêmê* is an account of *a priori* knowledge.³⁰ Maybe my account of expert philosophical opinion, then, should be interpreted as Socrates' account of *a posteriori* knowledge. However, I think that we should reject this assimilation for two important reasons.

First, although Socrates calls both understanding and expert philosophical opinion "knowledge," he thinks that their structure is markedly different. Most notably, whereas the latter is a species of opinion, the former does not involve opinion at all. "*A priori*" and "*a posteriori*," however, are typically taken to be qualifiers of a single cognitive relation with a single structure (e.g. justified true belief). Thus, assimilating Socrates' distinction to the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge runs the risk of masking an important difference between his two kinds of knowledge.

Secondly, and most importantly, Socrates rules out understanding of the perceptible world on the basis of his metaphysical view of perceptible objects. However, it is not the fact that they are *perceptible* but, rather, the fact that they both are and are not, that leads him to his conclusion. As we saw (pp. 140-41), on an altered metaphysics he would have allowed (and, indeed, elsewhere does allow) understanding of perceptible objects. But if that's the case, he clearly cannot think that a distinguishing feature of understanding is that it can be acquired through *a priori* means, since the mere fact that such a cognitive achievement would *require* perceptual information would rule it out as counting as understanding. Whereas Socrates' denial of understanding of the perceptible world is an accidental feature of his epistemology, it is essential to the notion of *a priori* knowledge that its acquisition does not require experiential input. Thus, Socrates' understanding/expert-philosophical-opinion distinction and the *a priori* knowledge/*a posteriori* knowledge distinction are certainly not

³⁰ See, for example, Moravcsik [1978], Wilkes [1979, 146-47], and Scott [2006, 103-05] (although Scott is more cautious than the others.)

intensionally equivalent and, if they are extensionally equivalent, they are only accidentally so.

6.6 Socrates' Conception of Knowledge

On my interpretation, Socrates has what can be called a “disjunctive” conception of knowledge. On the one hand, there is the knowledge that can be had of domains that are structured in terms of first principles and provable theorems. Knowledge of the theorems in those domains consists in being able to prove them from their relevant first principles; knowledge of the principles consists in being able to prove the theorems from them. Such knowledge, for Socrates, counts as understanding. On the other hand, there is knowledge of the perceptible world, whose propositions are not structured in terms of first principles and provable theorems. Knowledge of the perceptible world comes, for Socrates, in the form of the expert opinions of philosophers, based on their understanding of Forms, about how things stand in that world.

In calling his conception of knowledge “disjunctive” I do not mean that it lacks unity. We can understand Socrates' general conception of knowledge as being the optimal epistemic state that someone can be in with respect to a given subject matter. Given his metaphysics, he thinks that the optimal epistemic state concerning intelligible matters differs markedly from the optimal epistemic state concerning perceptible matters. Not only do these two kinds of knowledge differ in their objects, they differ in their internal structure. Whereas knowledge of the perceptible world consists in opinions of a certain sort, knowledge of the intelligible world does not involve opinion at all. Indeed, these differences lead Socrates to bestow a distinct title on the latter, namely “understanding.”

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