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Plato on Knowledge as a Power¹

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AT 471c4 IN Plato's *Republic*, the argument takes a sudden turn when Glaucon becomes impatient with all of the specific prescriptions Socrates has been making, and asks to return to the issue Socrates had earlier set aside—whether or not the city he was describing could ever be brought into being. In response to Glaucon's impatient question, Socrates articulates his "third wave of paradox" (472a3–7), namely, that the ills of the cities will never be ended until either philosophers become rulers or rulers become philosophers (473c11–d6). Glaucon immediately responds that such a view is likely to be greeted with violence and scorn (473e6–474a4), and so Socrates must hasten to explain his odd claim. His explanation, it turns out, is that true philosophers have an enormous cognitive advantage over non-philosophers—philosophers have and use knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), whereas non-philosophers have and use only opinion (δόξα).² This distinction, between ἐπιστήμη and δόξα, turns out to be a distinction between two different cognitive powers (δυνάμεις—477d7–e3). And different powers, Plato clearly tells us, apply to or take as their objects (Plato says they are "ἐπί") different things (477d1).

In this paper, I shall argue that the relationship between the cognitive powers and their various objects has been fundamentally misunderstood, which has led scholars into one or more misinterpretations of important and explicit features of the text. At the heart of these misunderstandings, I claim, is

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²The argument actually contrasts the philosopher with the lover of sights and sounds (see 475d2), but the identification of the latter with the generic non-philosopher is made clear at 484a1–3.

their shared misconception of the relation between the cognitive power and its objects as interpretable in terms of the relationship between a cognitive *state* and what the content of that state is *of* or *about*.³ One consequence of the view for which I shall argue is that what has come to be known as the "two-worlds theory"⁴ of Plato's epistemology is seriously mistaken, but no less mistaken than the alternatives given by its recent critics. Another consequence that I shall draw from my argument is that Plato should be understood neither as a kind of foundationalist with regard to knowledge and warrant, as some have supposed him to be,⁵ nor as a coherentist, as others have supposed,⁶ but, rather, as a kind of causal reliabilist.

³Gerasimos Santas, "Hintikka on Knowledge and Its Objects in Plato," in J. Moravcsik, ed., *Patterns in Plato's Thought* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1973), 31–51; C. D. C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Ian Crystal, "Parmenidean Allusions in *Republic V*," *Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1996): 351–363 offer the only interpretations which properly distinguish between cognitive powers and the cognitive states they produce. Crystal and Francisco Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects? A Critique of Gail Fine on Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*," *Phronesis* 41 (1996): 245–275) offer interpretations of this passage that are in many ways compatible with the one I offer in this paper, though without as clearly distinguishing between cognitive powers and cognitive states as I do. I will note several differences and common points in our views below. N. R. Murphy (*The Interpretation of Plato's Republic* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951], 97–129; esp. 116 ff.) attempts to distinguish between cognitive powers and states, I think, but does not manage in the end to distinguish the two clearly or say how they might be related. The view I advance in this paper is closest to that offered by Reeve, though our accounts differ on what Plato counts as epistemic powers as opposed to states (Reeve, for example, counts the παθήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ of 511d7–e2 as epistemic powers, whereas I count them as examples of the sorts of states produced by the epistemic powers). Several additional differences in our views are noted in my paper, "Plato's Divided Line," *Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1996): 25–46.

⁴See, for examples, R. C. Cross and A. D. Woodley (*Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* [London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966], 177); Norman Gulley (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge* [London: Methuen, 1961], esp. 62); Santas ("Hintikka on Knowledge"); Gregory Vlastos ("Degrees of Reality in Plato," in G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies*, second edn. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981]); and Lloyd Gerson (*Knowledge and the Self in the Platonic Tradition* [forthcoming]), all of whom endorse the "two-worlds theory" of Plato's epistemology. Gail Fine ("Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V–VII*," in S. Everson, ed., *Companions to Ancient Thought I: Epistemology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 85–115); Michael Stokes ("Plato and the Sightlovers of the *Republic*," in A. Barker and M. Warner, eds., *The Language of the Cave* [Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1992], 109–132); and Crystal ("Parmenidean Allusions") reject the "two-worlds theory." Francisco J. Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects?") argues against Fine's attack on the "two-worlds theory" on the ground that the sensibles are images of the Forms, and are, hence, not actually a different "world" at all. I will not, in this paper, deny that there are "two worlds" in Plato's ontology. I think Plato is very clear in identifying the two "worlds," though Gonzalez is right to insist that the two "worlds" are connected via the imaging/participation relationship. In this paper, I deny that the so-called "two-worlds theory" applies to Plato's epistemology in the way it has sometimes been taken to do.

⁵See Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality," 68–69, and "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1985): 16.

⁶See Fine, "Knowledge and Belief."

1. KNOWLEDGE AS A POWER

Scholarly interpretations of Plato's epistemology have routinely sought to understand the relationships between each cognitive power of *Republic* Book V and the objects of the ἐφ' ᾧ ("what it is related to") condition by which it is differentiated from other δυνάμεις as Plato's way of telling us what each sort of cognition is *of* or *about*.⁷ So, for example, we find Gail Fine using the expressions "belief [δόξα] is set over [Fine's translation of Plato's ἐπί] . . ." and "knowledge is set over . . ." interchangeably with "belief is of . . ." or "belief is about . . ." and "knowledge is of . . ." or "knowledge is about . . ."⁸ Against the "two-worlds theory," Fine argues that, for Plato, there can be knowledge of sensibles and beliefs about Forms. Accordingly, since she assimilates the power-ἐπί-object set of relations to the cognition-of/about-object relation, she concludes—in order to account for knowledge of sensibles and beliefs about Forms—that the objects of knowledge and opinion must be propositions. Plato's claims that knowledge is ἐπί what is, whereas opinion is ἐπί what is and is not, Fine understands as, "One can only know true propositions; one can believe both true and false propositions."⁹ We shall see later that this "veridical" understanding of what Plato means to identify as "what is," and "what is and is not" fails to account for important and explicit elements of Plato's exposition of the epistemological and metaphysical distinctions he is making. For now, it is enough to note that Fine understands the ἐφ' ᾧ relation in terms of our cognition-of/about-object relation. One finds the same assimilation made by those who advance existential readings of Plato's "is" and "is not,"¹⁰ as

⁷ Normally, we speak of "knowledge of x" and "belief(s) about y," and scholars have used these expressions as the English equivalents of Plato's power-ἐπί-object relationship. In what follows, I will use "of" and "about" in such a way as to suppose that the same relationship between cognition and object is identified.

⁸ Fine, "Knowledge and Belief," *passim*, esp. 86–88.

⁹ Fine, "Knowledge and Belief," 88; see also 91. Although few of those who endorse the "two-worlds theory" of Plato's epistemology share Fine's "veridical" reading of "what is" (see next two notes), most do share Fine's view that knowledge and belief are "propositional." Compare, for example, Gulley, *Plato's Theory*: "just as . . . Plato implies that knowledge is 'propositional,' so by what he says about *doxa* and the 'images' with which it deals he implies that *doxa* is propositional" (65–66). For dissenting views, see Terry Penner, *The Ascent from Nominalism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987) and John Moline, *Plato's Theory of Understanding* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), esp. 134–137. Both Penner and Moline accept, however, that Plato's epistemology may be understood in terms of cognitive states and what these states are *of* or *about*. My argument in this paper is that Plato's analysis of knowledge and belief as *powers* in *Republic* V requires that we *do not* understand them as "propositional," and *do not* understand Plato's "ἐπί" as "of" or "about." If Plato recognizes propositional or representational elements within his epistemology at all here, I claim, it would only be in the *cognitive products* of the cognitive powers, that is, in the cognitive states produced by those powers.

¹⁰ See, for examples, F. C. White, *Plato's Theory of Particulars* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 87 n. 1 and "The Scope of Knowledge in *Republic* V," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62 (1984): 339–354; Stokes, "Plato and the Sightlovers," esp. 125.

well as those who have urged that we adopt predicative readings of "is" and "is not."¹¹

But I think there are very serious problems with this assimilation. Plato is very clear in saying that the two relevant forms of cognition, *ἐπιστήμη* and *δόξα*, are *powers*—the sorts of things "by which we and all other things are able to do what we or they are able to do" (477c1–2)—and he explicitly compares them, as *powers*, to other powers we have, vision and hearing (477c3).¹² Vision—the power—is not *of* or *about* anything, though its products, visual perceptions, may be *of* or *about* things. Certainly, there are objects to which vision naturally relates (see Plato's "*ἐφ' ᾧ*" at 477d1), which Plato generally identifies as the visibles (see 507c1). But our perceptual powers are not *of* or *about* their natural objects of contact—they simply make contact with their objects; it is, instead, what is produced in us by the perceptual power—cognitive or perceptual states—that are *of* or *about* their objects. For example, my power of vision (perhaps in conjunction with other mental powers and their processes¹³) makes contact with a certain cat (Felix), and produces a certain perceptual belief. Under the right circumstances, this belief will be *about* Felix. Seeing Felix (that is, the power of vision making contact with Felix) will be (at least a part of) what produces in me a perceptual belief *about* Felix, for example, "Felix is on the mat." But it is not the power of vision (or the various powers, including vision, which make up our perceptual/cognitive processing capacities) that is or are *about* Felix, or even *about* all visibles, including Felix; it is the product of that power—the perceptual belief—that is *about* Felix. Moreover, the content of my perceptual belief (the product of the power) may not be the same (or exactly the same) as the object contacted by

¹¹ See, for examples, Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), esp. 198; Cross and Woolley, *Plato's Republic*, 178; Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality," esp. 73; Gerson, *Knowledge and the Self*. Although generally considerably more sensitive to Plato's argument than others are, Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects?") also sometimes seems to assume that Plato's power-*ἐπι*-object set of relations can be made to conform to our the cognition-of/about-object relation: for example, when he says that what distinguishes the philosopher in Plato's cave from the prisoners is "not a knowledge of the shadows themselves, but a knowledge of the originals that cast them" (274). In this paper, I will argue that the difference between them is not a knowledge of originals, but the fact that the philosopher employs a cognitive power on the originals, which will be part of what produces a cognitive state whose content is *of* the images.

¹² The significance of this analogy is noted by Stokes, "Plato and the Sightlovers," 120, but then dismissed as a dialectical assumption, intended to secure the agreement of the sight-lovers to the rest of the argument. Far more plausible understandings are offered in Crystal ("Parmenidean Allusions") and Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects?").

¹³ I believe that Plato is committed to the view that sense perception cannot generate cognitions (e.g., beliefs) just by themselves, but only in connection with the cognitive powers. See Santas, "Hintikka on Knowledge," 43–44 *contra* I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 57. I cannot, however, argue for this claim here, nor discuss what I take to be its philosophical strengths or weaknesses.

the power. It is entirely possible that my perceptual power could make contact with Felix, but the perceptual belief that is produced will not be *about* Felix, but about some other cat—or even some other sort of animal; for example, if I look at Felix, but take myself to be seeing Sylvester, or Fido. As a cognitive power, then, vision is fallible—sometimes it will produce beliefs that are false.

Perhaps the clearest case against assimilating Plato's cognitive power-ἐπι-object relation to our own cognition-of/about-object can be made if we look briefly at ignorance. Plato places the power of opinion between that of knowledge and ignorance, and assigns to knowledge the ἐφ' ᾧ of "what is" and assigns to ignorance the ἐφ' ᾧ of "what is not." In the existential reading of "what is," the objects of ignorance are non-existents; in the veridical reading, they are falsehoods. But surely Plato did not mean to tell us that we could be ignorant only *of* or *about* nothing, or, for that matter, only *of* or *about* falsehoods. Rather, we are and can be ignorant of all sorts of things that are, and ignorant of all sorts of things that—to put it in Platonic terms—both are and are not; and all sorts of things that are true. The sight-lovers fail to recognize the existence of the Forms, Plato tells us at 476b4–c7. It seems reasonable to suppose, then, that they are ignorant of the Forms—in other words, Forms and truths about Forms are among the objects that the sight-lovers are ignorant *of* or *about*. But this does not and cannot mean that the objects that are supposed to be the bearers of the relevant ἐπι-relation to the power of ignorance must be, among other things, Forms or truths about Forms.¹⁴ So, either Plato cannot suppose that anyone is ignorant of Forms or truths about Forms, or else, as I have been arguing, he must not take his talk about the ἐφ' ᾧ of a power to identify what the states produced by that power are or can be *of* or *about*.¹⁵

¹⁴Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects?" 251) rightly insists that "We need to recognize that Socrates is here talking about what ignorance is 'set over,' what its *object* is." I find Gonzalez's explanation of this important point somewhat confused precisely, however, because it assimilates "ignorance is set over" to "ignorance is of": "In being totally ignorant of the form of beauty, the object of my ignorance is not the form of beauty—it is not an object for me at all—but nothing." I would claim that if I am ignorant of the Form of Beauty, then the object of my ignorance is the Form of Beauty, but this is to talk about a specific *state* of ignorance, and not the cognitive power. I aver that Plato would explain the production of this state by saying that (the cognitive power of) ignorance, in producing that state, failed to make any contact with that Form. Accordingly, I agree with what Gonzalez says next: "If knowledge, like seeing, is a direct cognitive relation to some object, then ignorance, like blindness, is simply the *absence* of such a relation or, stated differently, a relation to *nothing*." Crystal ("Parmenidean Allusions," 356) simply proclaims that "ignorance does not constitute a third faculty in addition to the other two (knowledge and opinion)."

¹⁵In the next section, I will argue for the predicative understanding of Plato's "is" in distinguishing the powers. Accordingly, in my view, the power of ignorance makes contact with what is not (in the predicative sense—that is, with what is not-F) and produces the state of ignorance, which amounts to a state whose propositional content is some falsehood (which would, presumably, be about some F thing). For example, the ignoramus makes cognitive contact with what is not

At 477c6–d5, Plato says that he distinguishes each power from the others by what it is related to (ἐφ' ᾧ τε ἔστι) and what it produces (ὁ ἀπεργάζεται). Scholars have generally focused on the first of these differentiae, and have generally ignored the second one.¹⁶ I have argued that scholars' understanding of the first of these two differentiae¹⁷ in terms of our cognition-of/about-

beautiful and on the basis of this contact forms some judgment, whose content is false, about beauty (or, about the beauty of the thing contacted). In this view, any object that is not at all F will qualify as an object of the power of ignorance, with regard to being-F. Knowledge will apply to the Form of F; opinion will apply to particular sensible F's; ignorance will apply to all those things that are not F at all.

I cannot address in this paper, however, whether Plato is committed to a kind of Platonized Anaxagorean view of reality, according to which for any quality (F), which is realized in a Form, every sensible particular is at least to some degree F. I am inclined to think that Plato would not accept such a view, however, but even if he did, he could claim that ignorance was related as a power to wholly non-existent things. This would not be to give in to the purely existential reading of "is," however (see note 21, below), since Plato might reasonably argue (as Russell did) that nothing can be predicated of non-existents, and so non-existents would qualify as what wholly is not, in the predicative sense of "is."

¹⁶ Crombie (*Examination*, 57) argues that taking these as distinct differentiae will make Plato's argument fallacious. Jaako Hintikka ("Knowledge and Its Objects in Plato," in J. Moravcsik, ed., *Patterns in Plato's Thought* [Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1973], 1–30) follows Crombie's interpretation (see following note). J. C. B. Gosling (*Doxa and Dunamis in Plato's Republic*, *Phronesis* 13 [1968]: 132), in spite of Plato's explicit listing of these two differentiae, simply proclaims that, "in fact, in Book V no distinction seems to be made between asking for the 'object' of a *dunamis* and asking what it does." Annas (*Introduction*, 202) is a bit more careful, but ends up agreeing with this view: "Plato carefully distinguishes two criteria for something's being a capacity, only to run them together." In my opinion, Crombie's argument (and Gosling's and Annas's claims) are adequately refuted by Santas ("Hintikka on Knowledge," 43–50). Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects?") rightly insists that Fine's interpretation "does not give the *epi* any meaning distinct from the *work* that the different powers do" (266), and cites several other interpretations that make similar mistakes. Crystal ("Parmenidean Allusions," 354–356) offers a very lucid and compelling critique of Gosling's argument. The interpretation that I offer in this paper, I believe, shows how Plato can validly maintain and distinguish the two differentiae, and use them in advancing his argument.

¹⁷ Hintikka ("Knowledge and Its Objects") is one of the few (see also Gonzalez ["Propositions or Objects?"], Reeve [*Philosopher Kings*] and Santas ["Hintikka on Knowledge"]) who take seriously Plato's insistence that it is cognitive *powers* that are at issue in *Republic* V. However, Hintikka misconceives Plato's argument by following Crombie (see above note, and Hintikka's citation of Crombie on page 15) and by adopting Shorey's translation (apparently—no citation is given; see Hintikka's translations on pp. 7, 10) of Plato's "δυνάμεως δ' εἰς ἐκεῖνο μόνον βλέπω" at 477c9–d1 as "I look to one thing only," and thus arguing that we should understand these two differentiae as a single differentia, so that both refer to the "respective aims" of the distinct "faculties" (see 10). Hintikka recognizes that "The ultimate, paradoxical consequence of this way of thinking would have been to think of the objects of knowledge as the products of the faculty of knowledge" (13). This paradoxical consequence, indeed, seems to me sufficient to undercut Hintikka's interpretation. In his response to Hintikka, Santas ("Hintikka on Knowledge," 38) rightly notes that Plato's text provides "strong evidence that two criteria are involved." At any rate, and despite having noted Plato's emphasis on knowledge and belief as δυνάμεις, Hintikka also understands Plato's power-ἐπί-object formula as stating "the things knowledge or belief is [sic] about" (10). Gosling (*Doxa and Dunamis*, 132) explains 477c9–d1 in this way: "in 477d the text suggests there is but

object relationship is mistaken. Instead, I claim that our notion of cognitive states refers to the second of Plato's two differentiae—cognitive states are produced in us by the cognitive powers.¹⁸ But since cognitive states are of or about certain things, we might now ask whether the objects of these cognitive states—that is, what these cognitive states are *of* or *about*—must be the same as the objects of the powers that produce them—that is, those things that Plato relates to the powers via his power-ἐπί-object formula. Before we answer this question, however, we must first carefully identify what Plato takes the objects to be in each of the relevant power-ἐπί-object formulas.

2. "WHAT IS"

Most of the recent controversy surrounding Plato's power-ἐπί-object formula has centered on how we should understand the object part of the formula. Plato tells us that knowledge is ἐπί τῷ ὄντι, related to "what is." Opinion, on the other hand, is ἐπί "what is and is not." As noted above, veridical, existential, and predicative readings of "is" have all been offered. Only one of these interpretations can provide a plausible and unforced account for the passage at 479a5–e8, however, where Socrates and Glaucon undertake to discern what the objects of the power of opinion might be. Having settled on the criterion that whatever they might be, they will have to be the sorts of things that are and are not "at the same time" (ἄμα—478d5),¹⁹ Socrates goes on to identify things that are both fair and ugly (479b1–2), things that are both just and unjust (479a7), holy and unholy (479a7–8), double and half (479b3–4), big and little (479b6), light and heavy (479b6). Being, as characterized in each of these examples, is obviously conceived predicatively—what Socrates and Glaucon identify are plainly not examples of individual sentences that are "at the same time" both true and false (as the veridical interpretation would require), or things that "at the same time" both do and do not exist (as the existential interpretation would have it). That Plato thinks it is possible for a single thing both to be and not to be, in the relevant sense, is patent from his use of the singular in his characterization of the relevant sort of object at 478d5–6 (see also 479b9–10). This alone should be grounds for rejecting both the veridical and the existential readings, on the ground that either reading would require Plato, in this passage, to be arguing for an incoherent descrip-

one criterion, and the expression 'what it performs' is glossing, not giving an alternative criterion to 'what it is *epi*.' Plainly, I find this a very implausible rendering of the text, and Gosling seems less forthcoming than Hintikka about the paradoxical consequences of this reading.

¹⁸ See Santas, "Hintikka on Knowledge," 45–49.

¹⁹ I am indebted to Lloyd Gerson for pointing out the significance of this qualification, and why it constitutes a fatal objection to both the veridical and existential readings of Plato's "is."

tion.²⁰ On the grounds of textual adequacy, then, the predicative understanding of "is" is quite obviously the correct one.²¹

Scholars have fled from the predicative interpretation of "is" in their accounts of Plato's argument here because they have supposed that the predicative reading requires "that one can only have beliefs about objects that are F and not-F."²² This argument, however, involves the assimilation of Plato's power-ἐπι-object formula to our own cognition-of/about-object relationship, which, I have argued, is a mistake. From Plato's formula, it only follows that the objects to which opinion is naturally related *as a power* must be both F and not-F at the same time, and Plato is clear enough in identifying the sorts of objects that satisfy this description. The objects to which the power of opinion is related are what Plato calls the opinables, or the sensibles. And the objects to which the power of knowledge is related—those things that are F purely and simply—are the Forms. Accordingly, we *do* have a "two-worlds" ontology in Plato. The question is: does this force us to commit Plato to the absurdities of a "two-worlds" epistemology?

If the power of opinion is distinguished from other cognitive powers (at least partly) by some special, natural (see πέφυκεν at 478a2, a6) relation to sensible particulars,²³ then there can be no beliefs (that is, belief-states) about

²⁰This embarrassing consequence did not prevent Gosling (*Doxa and Dunamis* and *Plato* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973]) from endorsing the veridical reading, or Stokes ("Plato and the Sightlovers") from accepting the existential reading, even though he recognizes this passage as an embarrassment to such a view (see esp. 129). Fine tries to escape the consequence by insisting that it is not the same thing (or proposition) that is true and is not true ("Knowledge and Belief," 89 ff.), but this reading is ruled out by Plato's explicit application of the "is and is not" formula to single things "at the same time." Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects?" esp. 261) argues that not being fully F implies not fully existing, and hence defends a version of the existential reading. (See following note.)

²¹In fairness to those who have preferred the existential reading of "is" here, it is also clear that Plato takes himself to be talking about existents, and not non-existents. My argument is only that when Plato talks about things that both are and are not, he is talking about things that most certainly *are* (in the existential sense), and in no way *are not* (in the existential sense). It is just that whatever they are (in the predicative sense) they also, in some way, are not (in the predicative sense). So, I am not claiming that existence has nothing to do with what Plato is saying. (See also note 15, above.)

²²Fine, "Knowledge and Belief," 88, cited this as a reason to prefer the veridical understanding of "is." See also Stokes, "Plato and the Sightlovers," 132. Stokes dismisses the predicative view on the ground that it would be impossible for "the poor sightlover to understand." I find this singularly unpersuasive—it seems to me that a predicative understanding of "is" is at least as natural and available to the Greeks (even to sight-loving Greeks) as it is to us; actually, rather more natural, I suspect. As on so many other issues, Gonzalez (1996) does a much better job of explaining how Plato's argument satisfies what Fine has called the "dialectical requirement" that the argument must be one that is comprehensible to a sight-lover.

²³I take Plato's πέφυκεν to reflect an important consideration, since part of my argument will be that different cognitive powers can make different kinds of contact (including both direct and indirect contact) with a given set of objects. In my view, Plato's ἐπι-condition identifies some

Forms unless the objects of the cognitive states produced by the power of opinion are not (or not always) the same as the objects to which the *power* is naturally related, and by which the power is differentiated from other powers (including knowledge). Moreover, if the power of knowledge is naturally related (only) to Forms, then there can be no knowledge (*states*) of or about sensibles, unless the objects of the cognitive states produced by the power of knowledge are not (or not always) the same as the objects to which the *power* is naturally related. In other words, unless we can find some reason *not* to identify the distinguishing objects of the powers with the objects of the cognitive states they produce, we will be committed to a "two-worlds theory" of Plato's epistemology.²⁴ I have already shown why we should not simply assume that the same objects apply in each case, but it remains now to show how Plato's analysis not only permits this distinction to be made, but, I hope to show, actually *requires* that it be made.

3. BELIEFS ABOUT FORMS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SENSIBLES

When we teach our students about Plato's "Theory of Forms," one of the first principles of the "theory" we must explain is Plato's conception of the connection between Forms and sensible particulars. However we do this, if the "two-worlds theory" of Plato's epistemology were correct, the content of whatever we tell our students could not be something Plato took his philosopher-rulers to *know* (since part of what we would be talking about would be the sensible particulars, about which there can be no knowledge, in the "two-worlds theory"), and it could also not be anything about which Plato took himself or anyone else to have an *opinion* (since part of the content would be about Forms). (Henceforth, I will call any cognitive state that refers to both Forms and particulars a "mixed content cognition.") 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

distinguishing connection, for example, where there can be no operation of that cognitive power which does not involve cognitive contact with the "natural" objects of that power. Aristotle, too, seems to have held the view that some of our powers are distinctively, "naturally" related to certain sorts of objects—see *DA* 418a20–25. (I am grateful to Iakovos Vasiliou for pointing this out to me.)

²⁴Santas ("Hintikka on Knowledge," 47–48), offers an attractive understanding of why Plato would relate the different powers to different objects, but Santas takes his argument to require that not only must the cognitive *powers* be related to different objects, the cognitive *states* they produce must also be *of or about* different objects. This is the most significant difference between Santas's interpretation and the one that I advance in this paper: he is, and I am not, committed to the view that Plato had a "two worlds epistemology" regarding what the states of knowledge and opinion can be *of or about*.

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, however (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.

These embarrassing results, however, only follow if Plato's account requires that the objects of cognitive states must always be the same as the objects of the cognitive powers that produce the states. And since we have already established that there is no interpretive requirement to assimilate Plato's power-ἐπί-object formula to our own cognition-of/about-object formula, then we are free to consider what Plato might have included among the objects of his cognitive *states*, given what we have found he is committed to regarding the objects of his cognitive *powers*. From the considerations I have listed briefly above, there is compelling conceptual reason to suppose that Plato imagined that there could be beliefs about Forms and knowledge about sensible particulars. But the evidence is not limited to such conceptual reasons, for Plato himself actually refers to instances of "mixed content cognitions," as well as instances of what might be called "cognitive cross-over," where the cognitive states appear to make reference only to objects that are not those to which the relevant power is related:

A. Cognitive cross-over:

At 506e2 Socrates proclaims that he has no knowledge, but does have some opinions about, the Form of the Good, and contrasts his own opinions with those of others at 506c6-9.

B. Mixed content cognitions:

- (2) At 520c2-6, Socrates explicitly says that the returning philosopher-ruler will know (γνώσεσθε) the things in the cave better than those who have never escaped the place. But surely the things in the cave are neither Forms nor the cave parable's equivalents of Forms. Presumably, the way the returning philosopher-ruler will do this is by comparing what's in the cave with what is outside the cave, and, hence, his or her cognitive state will make reference to both sorts of objects.
- (3) At 506a4-7, Socrates plainly implies that proper rulers must know "in what way" (ὅπῃ) "just and fair things" are good. The only way Plato tells us one can do this is by comparing "fair and just things" with The Fair Itself and The Just Itself. Hence, the cognition whose content is constituted by this comparison will make reference to both sets of compared objects.

- (4) At 476c2–d6, the knower/philosopher is identified as analogous to someone who is awake, and the opiner/sight-lover is identified as analogous to someone who is dreaming, on the ground that the former does, and the latter does not “recognize (νομίζων—476c2, 3) that there is something fair itself and is able to catch sight both of it *and of what participates in it*, and doesn’t believe that *what participates is it itself, nor that it itself is what participates.*”

I believe that other passages such as these, which either identify instances of “cross-over” cognitions (as in [1]), or cognitions with “mixed” contents (as in [2]–[4]) can be found explicitly expressed or at least clearly implied in the texts, but these are sufficient, I think to establish at least that there is textual support that directly conflicts with the “two-worlds theory.”²⁵

It remains for me, therefore, to explain *how* Plato can accommodate “cross-over” or “mixed” content cognitive states, such as those identified in the above passages, given the distinction of the *powers* of knowledge and opinion by their association with different objects. Let us begin with beliefs about Forms. Surely, opiners could form beliefs about Beauty, for example, by employing the cognitive power of opinion in such a way as to make contact only with various beautiful sensibles. Opiners might (rightly) come to believe that “Beauty is something to be desired.” The beliefs thus generated will be about Beauty (the Form), but will in no way take the Form itself into consideration in their generation. This is not to say, of course, that the Form has nothing at all to do with the generation of the opiners’ beliefs—after all, it is none the less true (whether the opiners accept it as true or not) that the various beautiful sensibles are beautiful *just because* they participate in Beauty (the Form). The opiners (or sight-lovers) simply do not take this fact into account, nor do their cognitive powers make any contact with the Form. Indeed, Plato suggests that opiners would not even recognize such a thing as “Beauty itself,” apart from the many beautiful things (476c3). But even if they would never suppose that there is such a thing as “The Beautiful Itself,” they might well have a number of opinions about beauty. Sight-lovers simply miss the fact that beauty is none other than The Beautiful Itself, and so their opinion is about the Form, but the sight-lovers don’t realize that their opinions are about the Form.²⁶

²⁵Although I do not have time to argue for this here, I would argue that *every* case of “knowledge of sensibles” would be a case of a “mixed content cognition,” since every such case will involve a comparison of some sensible or sensibles with some Form or Forms, and *every* case of “belief about Forms” would be a case of “cognitive cross-over,” since the opiner does not recognize the existence of Forms—see below.

²⁶Gonzalez (“Propositions or Objects?” 272): “what is deficiently grasped in the *doxa* of the lovers of sights and sounds are not the sensible objects themselves—the lovers can probably perceive and describe them with perfect accuracy—but the form reflected in them. In this sense, and in this sense only, *doxa* must be about the form.” I agree, and claim that “this sense and this sense only” can be clarified and explained through the distinction I have drawn between the

Philosophers have paid extensive attention to the intensional features of mental states, including cognitive states, such as belief. Different analyses of the truth-conditions of descriptions of the contents of such states are available to us. In one sense, the content of a cognitive state is fixed in the terms in which it is represented. The propositional content, then, cannot undergo exchanges of expressions—co-referential expressions—within the intensional context and guarantee preservation of truth value. In this sense of “belief,” which is often called the “opaque” sense, I could believe that the morning star is Venus, but not believe that the evening star is Venus; I could believe that Mark Twain wrote *Tom Sawyer*, and also not believe that Samuel Clemens wrote *Tom Sawyer*. But there is another sense, often called the “transparent” sense, in which it is true that beliefs about the morning star, for example, are also beliefs about the evening star—that beliefs about Mark Twain are also beliefs about Samuel Clemens—*whether or not the believer would avow the one formulation of the belief and disavow the other.*

Imagine that I hear someone expressing all kinds of defamatory opinions about “Nicholas Smith.” I approach the person and ask to which “Nicholas Smith” she is referring, and she tells me it is the professor at Lewis and Clark College. When I go further and ask if the person realizes that she is *talking* to that same Nicholas Smith, she is terribly embarrassed and begins to apologize profusely. There is surely a very natural sense in which I can and should make the inference that the opinions she was expressing were opinions about *me*. But the person expressing them would not have recognized that they were opinions about *me*, that is, the very person who just now approached her. Just because she was expressing opinions about someone whom she did not recognize in person, and would disavow that her opinions were about the person who approached her, it does not follow that the opinions she was expressing were not opinions about the same person as the one who approached her. In making the inference I do, I rely on the “transparent” sense of belief, and it is clear enough that English (and also Greek) provides for this sense, and the inference that relies on it. Similarly, then, opinions about Beauty, which were formed entirely as a result of cognitive contact with sensible particulars and which were taken by the opiner to be about those sensible particulars and nothing more, Plato could nonetheless regard as opinions *about* the Form, relying on the “transparent” sense of belief.

What about instances of knowledge about sensible particulars? Plainly, Plato’s philosopher-rulers will have to be able to distinguish Forms from par-

cognitive *power* of δόξα and the cognitive states it produces. It will sometimes be the case that the cognitive states produced by the power of δόξα are *about* Forms.

particulars, and it seems equally obvious that in order to do so they will not have to use a number of different cognitive powers to make contact with the relevant sets of objects, or there would be no power or ability by which we could compare the different sorts of objects. But for any such cognition to qualify as a *knowledge* state, the philosopher-ruler will employ the power of ἐπιστήμη, and so the cognition he or she generates as a result must be the product of the contact of this power with the Forms.

But there is more to the story than this. In the famous cave parable, Plato offers us an image of the philosopher-ruler's education (παιδεία—see 514a2). The allegory ends in a way that might seem puzzling: at 519c8–520c3, Socrates proclaims that the founders of the καλλίπολις must compel the philosophers who have achieved an intellectual contact with the Form of the Good (see 517b8–c1) to go back down into the cave to do their share in the ruling of the state. Those who have “seen” the Good, however, are reluctant, and require persuasion that this is a “just command given to just men” (520e1). But the very fact that they initially resist and must be compelled and persuaded shows that they are not—or not yet—infallible at making the sorts of judgments given in the relevant command, or they would require no such persuasion, since they would unfailingly form the correct judgment by themselves, without compulsion or persuasion.

Now, Plato allows that those newly trained in dialectic, though they will make cognitive contact with the Form of the Good at the end of their training (517b8–c1, 532b1), will require a period of habituation and undergo a period of apprenticeship before they are called upon to rule (520c1–5, 539e2–540a2). This period of habituation and apprenticeship is required precisely because the education they have received in dialectic (“outside the cave”) does not *by itself* provide them with an infallible power of judgment about the things “in the cave,” or the sensibles. Plato makes the point quite vividly that when the philosopher returns to the cave, he will at first be “blinded” by the “gloom,” and will temporarily be even less able to make the relevant judgments than those who remained “below” and never received the higher education (see 517d4–e2). After receiving their training in dialectic, the philosophers will require fifteen years of habituation-training, during which they will be tested and guided (539e2–540a6)—all of which would not be required if dialectical training and cognitive contact with The Good were sufficient of itself for inerrancy of judgment. The philosophers' blunder, as it were, in initially resisting the return to the cave, can thus be accounted for by showing that their judgment of such things (not the Form, but an instance of justice) is, at this stage of their development, actually quite poor—indeed, not even as good as those who have no cognitive contact with Forms to rely on. The philosophers will need another fifteen years of apprenticeship-habituation

before they will be able to make these judgments in a way that Plato says ends up being "ten thousand times better" than those who never leave the cave (520c3-6).

This feature of the educational system Plato advocates for his philosopher-rulers has important consequences for how we are to understand the role of *ἐπιστήμη* in Plato's account. Those who accept the "two-worlds theory" are forced to account for the philosopher's return to the cave and apprenticeship-habituation in such a way as to require the philosopher to leave his or her *ἐπιστήμη* at the mouth of the cave, as it were, for the minute they turn their gaze back on the sensibles (within the cave), they can no longer apply *ἐπιστήμη*. If so, then what is it about their time outside the cave that eventually allows them to form the correct judgments in a way that is "ten thousand times better" once they become habituated to the gloom of the sensible world (in the cave)? Given the separation of the "two worlds" in Plato's ontology, why should the philosophers' development of *ἐπιστήμη* outside the cave make their power of *δόξα*, the only cognitive power available to them inside the cave, in the "two-worlds" view of Plato's epistemology, so much more powerful?

On the other hand, if we reject the "two-worlds" view of Plato's epistemology, and assume that the philosophers bring their *ἐπιστήμη* back into the cave with them, then it would seem that this power requires additional development (which it gets in apprenticeship-habituation) in order to be applied effectively to the sensibles. But this means that the power of *ἐπιστήμη* cannot be fully developed *without* training that applies this power in judging sensible instances of Forms. It is clear enough, at least, that *ἐπιστήμη* (if it is *ἐπιστήμη* that the philosopher uses, as I am proposing) is not infallible in the judgments relevant to ruling, at least until it has been habituated in being applied to the relevant realm. In my view, it is exactly this—the habituation of *ἐπιστήμη*—that Plato thinks will take fifteen years to accomplish. Once accomplished, however, the philosopher-ruler will be by far the best of all judges of sensibles, and can rule more effectively (by "ten thousand times") than any sight-loving competitor.

In judging sensibles, the philosopher-ruler will compare them to the relevant Forms (see esp. 500e5-501c8). Accordingly, in order to arrive at a ruling in a lawsuit (see 433e3-4), the ruler will seek to create the best possible image of justice from the materials at hand, that is, given the exact nature of the dispute, the characters of the parties to the suit, and the properties or activities pertinent to the suit itself and how these can be distributed or assigned. To make the best possible image, the philosopher-ruler will have always to keep the Form clearly in mind, and to shape his or her ruling as closely as possible after the pattern or model given in the Form. The ruler will know which ruling is most just, in every case, precisely because he or she will make his or her

ruling on the basis of a cognitive contact with the Form of Justice.²⁷ But by doing so, and by comparing the requirements of the case at hand to the Form, the ruler will be able to form a cognition which is *about* sensible particulars, which was generated *by* the power of ἐπιστήμη.

The problem we confronted with beliefs about Forms was that Plato characterized the opiner as someone who failed to recognize the existence of Forms. I argued that nonetheless it made sense to claim that Plato could hold that there could be beliefs about things even though the believer did not recognize their existence. At any rate, this is not a problem for the case of knowledge of sensibles, since Plato distinguishes the knower from the opiner partly on the ground that the knower recognizes the existence of *both* Forms and their sensible participants. But a different problem confronts my claim that there can be knowledge about sensibles. Someone might object that however the philosopher-ruler might form judgments about such things, these judgments cannot count as *knowledge* and they cannot be the products of the power of ἐπιστήμη precisely because, at 477e6, Plato makes it clear that he regards the power of ἐπιστήμη to be infallible (ἀναμάτητον). But if we regard infallibility as guaranteeing the truth of the propositional content of the resultant cognitive state, it might be supposed that cognitive states whose content was not *about* Forms could never qualify, on the ground that only claims about Forms can be unqualifiedly true.²⁸ Sensible instances of justice will all be both just and unjust, and so it can never be entirely true to conceive of one simply as just.

²⁷I am not claiming that this result reveals that the power of ἐπιστήμη thus turns out, after all, to be ἐπί both Forms and sensibles. As Gonzalez puts it, "The philosopher knows sensibles *precisely as imperfect images* of forms that transcend them, while the prisoners clearly lack such knowledge. Yet it is inaccurate to say that the objects of this knowledge are the sensibles *per se*; it is precisely because this knowledge is *not* of sensibles, but of the forms, that it can reveal sensibles for what they are: nothing but deficient imitations of these forms" (273). Although I agree with the gist of Gonzalez's claim here, I think that we can understand the issue more clearly by saying that the objects of such knowledge really are the sensibles (though plainly not "the sensibles *per se*")—that is, after all, what such knowledge is knowledge *about*—but that this does not show that the power of knowledge is ἐπί sensibles. In my proposed reformulation, we should say that "it is precisely because the power of knowledge makes cognitive contact with the Forms that it can reveal sensibles for what they are . . ." and, I would add, can produce states whose contents distinguish Forms from sensibles. I agree with Crystal ("Parmenidean Allusions," 357) when he says, "[O]ne could argue that the sensible world is knowable to the extent that it participates in the forms." But I do not agree with what he says immediately after this: "But the faculty of knowledge will not be fully effective in relation to the sensible world because it examines as intelligible an object that, strictly speaking, is unintelligible. That is, there is an object—in this case, a particular—but that object is put into a mode of presentation for which it is not best suited, and to that extent has a lesser effect on the mental process of the faculty" (*ibid.*). I do not agree that, for Plato, sensibles are "strictly speaking . . . unintelligible," for I think that it is their participation in the Forms that makes them intelligible (though less so than the Forms in which they participate). For further discussion of this issue, see my "Plato's Divided Line."

²⁸Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality," 68–69, and "Socrates' Disavowal," 16.

But there are several problems with this argument. First, there is no reason to suppose that simple predications represent accurately what the propositional content of the philosopher-ruler's judgments of sensibles would be. The philosopher-ruler would presumably *not* form the judgment that his or her ruling in a lawsuit was just *simpliciter*; rather, he or she would form the judgment that a certain ruling was as good an image of justice as can be created, under the relevant circumstances. And *this* judgment, it seems, might well be unqualifiedly true. Certainly, despite the notorious metaphysical slipperiness of the sensibles, Plato never suggests that there is sentential truth-slippage in the claim that sensibles can be better or worse images of the relevant Forms.

Second, even if we accept that the power of ἐπιστήμη must be infallible, it does not follow that every judgment produced when it is employed must be true, for not all judgments will be the products of only one power at work. In judging sensibles, the philosopher-ruler will still have to rely on sense-perception—whose cognitive products are not infallible—in order to achieve an awareness of what he or she will compare to the Forms. What makes the philosopher-ruler so much better than the non-philosophical ruler, in my view, is *not* that he or she will be free from the use of sense-perception altogether, and, hence, free from its fallibility, but only that whatever judgments he or she will generate will be the product of a comparison of what is perceived with the relevant Forms, and this comparison will be made, I claim, by ἐπιστήμη and not by δόξα, since δόξα fails (and ἐπιστήμη does not fail) to recognize one of the classes to be compared. But even if it is ἐπιστήμη which makes the comparison, the fallibility of sense-perception, without which, plainly, there could be no comparison to make, opens the door for error. Such errors do not prove that only δόξα can be used for judgments about sensibles, however, since there is no requirement for us to attribute the potential for error in such judgments only to the cognitive power by which they are finally generated. In general, as long as the potential for error can be accounted for in another way (that is, other than by assigning it to the cognitive power at work), the potential for error does not count against the relevant cognitive power being ἐπιστήμη and not δόξα.²⁹ Accordingly, I would argue that although Plato characterizes ἐπιστήμη as infallible, he would not and need not

²⁹ Plato does mention one error in judgment the philosopher-rulers will ultimately make, in introducing the degeneration of the state in Book VIII (546a ff.). Though I cannot argue for this at length here, I believe that this error can be accounted for in the way I am sketching here, that is, as the product of a mistake in sense-perception (see 546b), rather than as a product of the natural fallibility of δόξα, which is what it would have to be if the "two-worlds theory" were right. Accordingly, I do not think that this error counts against the claim that the philosopher-rulers will use ἐπιστήμη in their judgments of sensibles. This case also shows, I think, that Plato was not an infallibilist with regard to knowledge-states, as he has been generally assumed to be. Rather, he is an infallibilist only with regard to knowledge *as a power*.

claim that any of our cognitions of sensibles (that is, our cognitive *states*)—even those produced by ἐπιστήμη—are infallible. However, to maintain consistency in these claims, he would always have to locate the fallibility of such judgments in sense-perception, rather than in the cognitive power which makes use of the sense-perception.

4. PLATO AS A CAUSAL RELIABILIST

At the beginning of this paper, I promised to show how my account revealed Plato to be, not a kind of coherentist or foundationalist, as other scholars have supposed, but a kind of causal reliabilist with regard to knowledge and warrant. We are now in a position to see why this is so. Scholars have divided on the question of how to characterize Plato's epistemology, given the categories of contemporary epistemology. The traditional view has been that Plato must be a kind of foundationalist, where knowledge of the Forms is epistemically basic, and the content of such knowledge would be infallible precisely because its content would include only claims of logical necessity. I plainly do not accept that all knowledge states must have content that is logically necessary. But I also do not think that the foundationalist reading of Plato's epistemology is wholly mistaken, for surely the connection between knowledge *as a power* and the Forms is epistemically basic in some sense, and Plato also explicitly says that it is the Form of the Good that makes all knowledge possible (508e3). Of course, it is not knowledge of the Forms, where knowledge is counted as a *state*, that is properly basic to all other knowledge, nor would such knowledge count as what warrants or justifies other knowledge. Moreover, Plato surely does not count such knowledge *states* as self-evident or self-justifying. Those with no cognitive contact with the Forms, surely, find the content of such knowledge states eminently deniable and dubitable.

Others³⁰ have argued that Plato must be a kind of coherentist, by connecting the account we find in the *Meno* with that of the *Republic* and arguing that the tethering *logos* Plato discusses in the *Meno* must be a coherence-connection. Again, there can be no doubt that Plato and Socrates emphasized coherence and took it as a necessary condition of knowledge—otherwise Socrates' use of the *elenchos* to reveal inconsistencies in his interlocutors' belief-sets would not have counted, as it did, as showing that his interlocutors lacked knowledge. But coherence among one's cognitions is not what warrants knowledge, in Plato's view; rather, the coherence of one's cognitions is a causal artifact of the knower's cognitive contact, via the power of knowledge, with the Forms.

The heart of Plato's epistemology in the *Republic*, at least, is that knowledge and opinion are different *powers*, and this most important fact cannot, I think,

³⁰For example, Fine, "Knowledge and Belief."

be accounted for in existing interpretations. If we reject the "two-worlds theory" of Plato's epistemology and affirm that Plato did recognize that there could be knowledge and belief of or about the same objects (where we are talking about objects appearing in the content of cognitive states), then it is fair to ask what differentiates knowledge states from belief states. In other words, what was Plato's conception of what we now call the "warrant" condition, by which a knowledge state is distinguished from a true belief state?

Let us return to what Plato tells us in Book V of the *Republic*, and see what answer he gives to this question. Consider, again, a sight-lover who proclaimed that "Beauty is something to be desired." According to our earlier account, this would qualify as a belief about a Form. But the philosopher-ruler would also generate a cognition with the same content, and he or she, too, might proclaim that "Beauty is something to be desired." What does Plato tell us is the difference between the states each—the sight-lover and the philosopher-ruler, that is—is in when making such a proclamation? The answer, plainly, is that the way the relevant cognition was generated is radically different. The sight-lover generated the relevant cognition by employing an unreliable cognitive power—that of $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ —which in this case generated a cognition whose content is true, but which often generates cognitions whose content is false, where, moreover, it is the cognitive power itself which is accountable for the error. Like Goldman's case of a correct barn-identification in a land of barn-facades,³¹ the sight-lover gets it right more or less by luck. The philosopher who generates the relevant cognition, however, has done so by using a cognitive power that is infallible—that is, one that will always produce true judgments whenever it is given the correct initial information. Again, as in Goldman's barn-facade case, Plato's philosophers recognize the differences between barns and their images, and, hence, may be regarded as warranted in their judgments in virtue of the reliability of the cognitive powers and processes that generate them.

But it is not just the reliability of the cognitive processes (or powers) that establishes the warrant, because their reliability is accounted for, at least in part, in Plato's view, by the fact that these powers work on different sorts of objects, whose metaphysical properties make such reliability possible (in the case of the Forms), or not possible (in the case of the sensibles). To put this point in more modern terms, part of what warrants the philosopher's judgment that Beauty is something to be desired is that it is *caused* by the right sort of contact with Beauty. And part of what is lacking in the warrant for the sight-lover's judgment with the same content is that the sight-lover's judgment is

³¹ Alvin Goldman, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," *Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1976): 771–791, esp. 772–3. Note how this case involves the Platonic concern for the possible confusion of images with what they image.

caused not by the right sort of contact with Beauty, but by other things. This causal connection in Plato's epistemology, then, shows that he is not simply a reliabilist, but a causal reliabilist, where the causal feature and the reliability condition are connected.

Few contemporary philosophers find Plato's theory of Forms at all plausible as a metaphysical doctrine. If the argument of this paper is at all correct, however, I think we should all be far less dismissive of Plato's contributions to epistemology, for his account includes elements of all of the major contemporary accounts, and even better, provides a way to see how and why these elements are there and how they fit together. If I am right, at the heart of Plato's epistemology in the *Republic* is a causal reliabilist account, and yet, as I conceded at the beginning of this section, he also seems to recognize that there is something to the idea that some knowledge must be epistemically basic, and he counts coherence as a necessary condition of knowledge and measures cognitive success in part by the knower's ability to produce and maintain a coherent system of judgments. Finally, although at the heart of his view is a form of naturalism, Plato connects all knowledge with the Good, and thereby shows a clear commitment to the anti-naturalist's claim that knowledge requires a normative element. If there is some element of truth in all of the many contemporary approaches to knowledge and warrant, then, Plato may be regarded as one of the first—if not the first—to have recognized the need for a richer analysis than one often finds in purely foundational, coherentist, causal, or reliabilist theories. Whatever we may think of the metaphysics to which he attaches his theory of knowledge, then, the epistemology of Plato's *Republic* is more sophisticated and deserves more credit than it has received.³⁷

APPENDIX: HOW PLATO REFERS TO THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF HIS EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEORY

I have not claimed that Plato refers exclusively to powers, at the end of Book V, nor have I claimed that he distinguishes between philosophers and non-philosophers exclusively through an appeal to their different cognitive powers. Instead, I claim only that all of the relevant differences—between the powers, their natural objects, and their distinctive products (see 477d1–5)—

³⁷ Gonzalez criticizes Fine's assessment that Plato's epistemology is, as Fine puts it "surprisingly up to date" ("Knowledge and Belief," 115). Gonzalez retorts that "The failure of this [Fine's] otherwise ingenious interpretation has the positive result of making clearer than ever how far Plato's *episteme* is from 'knowledge' as generally understood today. Plato is, for good or bad, *not* 'up to date'." ("Propositions or Objects?" 275). I agree with most of Gonzalez's criticisms of Fine's view, and I also agree that Plato's ἐπιστήμη is not at all what most contemporary epistemologists call "knowledge." But as my interpretation of how Plato's analysis would deal with cognitive *states* shows, however, I find myself more in agreement with Fine's claim that Plato was, indeed, "surprisingly up to date."

are present in the argument and used to make the distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers, from the very beginning.

Plato does not use terminology in careful and technical ways; instead, he makes his presentation in his customary conversational way. So it is that he sometimes uses more than one term to refer to the same element in the theory, or the same term to refer to different elements in the theory. This conversational style is also evident in the fact that his presentation of the theory is not systematical: only after he has referred in various ways to several of the elements of his theory does Plato briefly pause to focus on the powers themselves (477c1–d5), before “returning” to the main argument, which now more explicitly calls attention to the difference of power as the central one, upon which the other distinctions are to be understood as based, and from which they are to be understood as flowing.

Accordingly, I offer the following “map” of my interpretation of the theory (noting Plato’s terminology), to clarify how I claim Plato’s presentation should be understood.

Knowledge

- (1) One who uses the power of knowledge: the knower, the philosopher (ὁ γινώσκων—476e7; ὁ φιλόσοφος—473c11, 474b6, 475b8, c2, c8, d4, e1, e2, 476b2, 480a7, a12)
- (2) Cognitive activity or process (identified by cognitive verbs): knowing (γινώσκειν—476d9, e7, e9, 478a10, 479e4, e8; γινῶναι—477b10, 478a6)³³
- (3) The power (δύναμις): knowledge (ἐπιστήμη—477b1, b5, b7, b10, d7, e5, e8, 478a6, 10, b1, d7, d9; γινῶσις—477a9, 478c4, c8, c10, c13, 480a1)
 “Powers are a class of thing that are, by which we and all other things are able to do what we or they do”—δυνάμεις εἶναι γένος τι τῶν ὄντων, αἷς δὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς δυνάμεθα ἃ δυνάμεθα, καὶ ἄλλο πᾶν ὃ τί περ ἄν δύνηται (477c1–3). Different powers are related to (ἐπί) different things and produce (ἀπεργάζομαι) different things (477d1–5), so each of these elements must also be identified.

³³ Santas (“Hintikka on Knowledge,” 39) identifies these expressions as referring to the same things as what I characterize as referring to the products of the power. Santas and Hintikka (“Knowledge and Its Objects”) both (I think rightly) see a connection between Plato’s talk of powers here in *Republic V*, and the way in which he distinguishes different crafts by objects and products. A similar distinction applies to craft as the one for which I am arguing here: it is one thing to say that the shoe-maker produces shoes, and another to talk about the activity (shoe-making) by which the shoe-maker produces shoes. Just as shoe-making is not strictly a *product* of the shoe-maker’s craft, but rather the activity of the craft, so I take “knowing” and “opining” not to be the products of these powers, but rather the activities by which their products are produced.

- (4) The objects with which knowledge (the power) makes natural contact (what the power is ἐπί): the knowable (γνωστόν—477a3, 478a10, b2, 479d8; τι γνωσθείη—477a1)
- (5) Plato's argument makes clear that the knowable and "what is" (τὸ ὄν) are to be identified.
- (6) What is produced (δᾶπεργάζεται—477d1, d3, d4) by the power working on its objects: knowledge (the state)³⁴ (γνώσις—476c3; γιγνώσκοντος—476d5; γνώμην—476d5; γινώμαι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν—477b10–11; τὸ ὄν γινώμαι ὡς ἔχει—478a6³⁵)

Belief

- (1) One who uses the power of belief: the believer, lover of sights, sounds, opinion (ὁ δοξάζων—478b7, b10; ὁ φιλοθεάμων—475d2, e4, 476a10, b4, 479a3; ὁ φιλήκοος—475d3, 476b4; ὁ φιλόδοξος—480a6, a12)
- (2) Cognitive activity or process (identified by cognitive verbs): believing (δοξάζειν—476d6, d8, 477e2, 478a8, b6, b8, b10, c6, 479e4, 8)
- (3) The power (δύναμις): belief (δόξα—477b3, b7, 477e1, e3, e5, e8, 478a8, a13, b7, c7, c12, d3, d11, 480a1)
- (4) The objects with which belief (the power) makes natural contact (what the power is ἐπί): the opinable (δοξαστόν—478a11, b2, 3, e3, 479d7)
- (5) Plato's argument makes clear that the opinable and "what is and is not" (τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν) are to be identified.
- (6) What is produced (δᾶπεργάζεται—477d1, 3, 4) by the power working on its objects: belief (the state) (δόξα—476d6)

Ignorance

- (1) One who uses the power of ignorance: (no word used)
- (2) Cognitive activity or process (identified by cognitive verbs): (no word used)
- (3) The power (δύναμις): ignorance (ἄγνοια—477a9; ἀγνοία—477b1, 478c3, c8, c11, c14, d8)

³⁴I also claim that the products of the power of knowledge include νοήσις (see 511d8), where the power is fully developed, and—where the power is not yet fully developed, and must make its contact with the Forms only indirectly (via images)—διάνοια (see 511d8). See my "Plato's Divided Line."

³⁵Santas ("Hintikka on Knowledge") also notes that the expressions "γινώμαι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν" at 477b10–11 and "τὸ ὄν γινώμαι ὡς ἔχει" at 478a6 refer to the products of the power of knowledge. Although Penner (*Ascent*) does not recognize any significance in the distinctions between powers, their objects, and their products, he also sees special significance in these expressions—see next note.

- (4) The objects with which ignorance (the power) makes natural contact (what the power is ἐπί): the unknowable (ἄγνωστον—477a4)
- (5) Plato's argument makes clear that the unknowable and "what is not" (τὸ μὴ ὄν) are to be identified.
- (6) What is produced (ὁ ἀπεργάζεται—477d1, 3, 4) by the power working on its objects: (no word used)

I have claimed that Plato refers to many of the elements of the theory—including especially to the idea of cognitions as powers—even before he specifically explains what he means by powers and how they fit into his account. A brief review of the arguments before the explicit focus on the powers (at 477c1–d5) will show how Plato introduces each element into the argument. Plato's first characterization of the difference between philosophers and non-philosophers is this one (476b4–c1):

- (1) Those who are fond of hearing and seeing love (ἀσπάζονται) beautiful sounds and colors and shapes and everything made from them, but their thought (διάνοια) is not able (ἀδύνατος—476b7) to behold (ἰδεῖν) the nature of The Beautiful Itself, or love it (476b4–8).

These people are contrasted with:

- (2) Those few who are able (δυνατοὶ—476b10) to behold (ὁρᾶν) The Beautiful Itself (476b10–c1).

This characterization of the different sorts of cognizers makes reference, I claim, to a difference in ability (or powers), in the contrast between the incapacity noted at 476b7 and the capacity noted three lines later. The contrast of ability is also plainly linked to differences between the sorts of objects with which the two different sorts of cognizer are able to make cognitive contact.

Plato's second characterization of the difference by a comparison to the difference between dreaming and being awake goes like this (476c2–d7):

- (3) One who recognizes (νομίζων) beautiful things, but who neither recognizes the Beautiful Itself, nor is able to follow (δυνάμενος ἔπεσθαι—476c4) when led to the knowledge (γνώσιν—476c3) of it, has a life that is (like) a dream—for dreaming (whether asleep or awake) is when one mistakes the likeness for what it is a likeness of (476c2–8).

This is contrasted with:

- (4) The opposite case, being awake, in which one does conceive of the good itself, and is able (δυνάμενος—476d1) to distinguish it from what participates in it, and neither conceives of what participates as it nor of it as what participates (476c9–d4).
- (5) Accordingly, the thought (διάνοιαν) of one is rightly called knowledge, as

knowing (ὡς γιγνώσκοντος γνώμην—476d5), whereas that of the other is belief, as believing (δόξαν ὡς δοξάζοντος) (476d6).

Again, this distinction, I claim, recognizes the appropriate differences between “dreamers” and “wakers” in terms of different abilities or powers, and the sorts of objects these abilities or powers enable one to cognize. This passage adds another element to the picture, however: what these powers produce. The one who is “awake” is able to achieve γῶσις of The Beautiful Itself and the dreamer is not, achieving only belief; one is able to distinguish Forms from participants, and one cannot. Γῶσις, in this passage, then, is something *achieved or produced by* the power (which is not yet named), as is living in a dream (*state*) or being awake (or in the waking *state*), and should *not* be identified with the power (sometimes also called γῶσις, but usually called ἐπιστήμη—which Plato does not use to refer to the state in Book V). Moreover, in this passage, Plato tells us something about the *content* of the cognitions that are produced: In γῶσις (the state), one distinguishes between participants and what they participate in, whereas in δόξα (the state), one does not make this distinction.

Although Plato has not yet introduced his criteria for distinguishing powers, it is clear that his argument already recognizes them and their significance, as well as calls upon the differences of objects which the different abilities contact, and upon the differences in the cognitive states that will be produced by these powers, when present and used. The last of these preliminary distinctions then proceeds in such a way as to connect the differences in cognitive states with the differences in the objects to which they are naturally related. For the first time, now, we are told “what is” is “the knowable” (477a2–3), and “what is not” is “the unknowable” (477a3–4), and that knowledge (for the first time explicitly called a δύναμις at 477b5) is ἐπί “what is” (477b10), and ignorance is ἐπί “what is not” (477a9–10). If there is something that is “between” what is and what is not, therefore, whatever is ἐπί that will be between knowledge and ignorance. Socrates gets Glaucon to agree that belief is, in fact, a different power than knowledge (at 477b5–6), and therefore must be ἐπί something different from what knowledge is ἐπί, in virtue of being a different power (477b7–8).

Just before breaking the argument off, to make his clarifications about cognitive powers and how they are to be distinguished (at 477c1), Socrates begins to make the next step in the argument:

Is it not, then, that knowledge is naturally related to what is, knowing how it is? (Οὐκοῦν ἐπιστήμη μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι πέφυκε, γῶναι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν;—477b10–11)

This introduces a new element into the discussion, but before Glaucon can respond to it, Socrates interrupts himself (and the “μὲν . . . δέ . . .” contrast he had begun), in order to make his references to powers and how they fit into his

analysis clearer. As soon as he has finished that explanation, however, he reintroduces what I am calling the "new element" (and completes his "μὲν . . . δὲ . . ." contrast):

Knowledge, at any rate, I presume, is related to what is, knowing how what is, is?
(Ἐπιστήμη μὲν γὰρ τοῦ ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι, τὸ ὄν γινῶναι ὡς ἔχει;)

Yes.

Whereas belief, we say, believes? (Δόξα δὲ, φαμέν, δοξάζειν;)

Yes. (478a6–8)

In both places, Socrates does not just make the point that knowledge is ἐπὶ what is, he adds to this characterization, as well, what knowledge *does*. Knowledge, he and Glaucon agree, not only is ἐπὶ what is, it also knows how what is, is. This addition, like his earlier characterization of what the knower distinguishes in knowing, must be understood as identifying something about the *content* of what the knower achieves in knowing, or comes to know, and this, in my view, must be understood as a characterization of the kind of *state* which the power of knowledge produces. But if this is so, then it would seem that Plato conceives of the relevant states as being about ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν, or (what I take to be equivalent to this) ὡς ἔχει τὸ ὄν. The knower, then, uses the power of knowledge on what is, and by this comes to know ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν.³⁶

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³⁶Penner (*Ascent*) and Gonzalez ("Propositions or Objects?") have argued, no doubt with this specific (ὄν) qualification in mind, that the content of the relevant states in this passage are judgments about what things are—for example, the knower knows what beauty is—whereas (in Penner's view) the believer believes that "Beauty itself just *is* beautiful sights, sounds, etc." (65). This seems an apt way to understand Plato's characterization of the knower knowing ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν, and also as having the power or ability to distinguish between Form and participant at 476c7–d4. But Penner takes this to show that the distinctions between knowledge and opinion in this passage are *only* intended to extend to judgments of "questions of the sort 'What is beauty? 'What is justice?'"—and so on for all those other Socratic 'What is X?' questions. It is not a question of knowledge vs. opinion on just any old (as they say) 'matter of fact' (such as the right road to Larisa or the square double a given square, or whether the accused is guilty as charged). Rather it is a question of knowledge vs. opinion on *what beauty is (what justice is, and so forth)*" (110–111). Gonzalez makes similar claims (see 252–258, 271). I disagree. First, there is no reason to suppose that the sorts of judgments need to be narrowed to this group—after all, Plato would take the question: "Is the accused guilty as charged?" as a question about *what* the accused is. If we narrow the scope of the issue, as Penner and Gonzalez do, then particular sensibles cannot be the subjects of the relevant sorts of questions—but Plato plainly says that the knower will be able to distinguish Form and participant, as we have seen (476c9–d4), and the only way to do this, surely, is to be in a position to know what the participant is—in particular, to know what the relationship of the participant is to the relevant Form (which is, perhaps among other things, to know *that* this participant is a participant of (merely an image of, and an image of such-and-such degree of likeness to) the Form of F. This is why Plato can urge that rulers be philosophers—for only they (and not sight-lovers, who cannot make such distinctions and do not recognize such connections) can make such judgments in a way that is reliably correct.