

Belief and Investigation in Plato's *Republic**

It is surprising that, traditionally, Plato scholars have been content with an interpretation of the *Republic* according to which Plato cannot allow for beliefs about the good. What we ideally come to know, the Form of the Good, is an intelligible object, not an object of belief (*doxa*). But how should we think of ethical investigation? From the point of view of contemporary ethics, and from the point of view of ordinary talk about our ethical lives, it seems obvious that we have beliefs about the good. Perhaps we would not say that we have beliefs about 'the' good, but rather, that we have beliefs about what is good, or beliefs about what it means to say that something is good. Starting from such beliefs, we might try to formulate a theoretical account of these matters. It would seem that an ethical theory according to which we cannot conduct this type of investigation must be misguided.¹ We should not ascribe such a theory to Plato—the *Republic* itself is an ethical investigation that begins from beliefs about intelligible matters.² Accordingly, Plato should be able to account for such beliefs, beliefs that figure in philosophical investigation.

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¹ Note that such beliefs can be of quite different kinds. Theorists will differ on whether ethics should begin from intuitions. Even if it does not, it will begin from some considerations, and as long as these are subject to revision, they will count, in Plato's framework, as beliefs.

² Cephalus', Polemarchus', and Thrasymachus' beliefs about justice, as well as Socrates', Glaucon's and Adeimantus' reactions to them, figure prominently in the *Republic* as a whole. Similarly, the saying of the poet Simonides, that justice is to give everyone his due (Rp. I, 331e), is an important starting-point of the discussions in the *Republic*. Again, this is not presented as a piece of knowledge. It is someone's view, and one that is worth engaging with.

Plato's conception of belief makes room for what I see as three distinctively different ways of believing. Plato ascribes features to beliefs—such as, that belief is with or without knowledge, that belief is ugly and blind, and so on—that allow us to draw a distinction between beliefs about the objects of belief, beliefs *without* knowledge about intelligible matters, and beliefs *with* knowledge about intelligible matters.³ First of all, Plato's conception of belief explains that the proper objects of belief are not knowable. The proper object of belief is the 'believable' (*doxaston*): roughly speaking, something in the domain of perception. To have beliefs about such matters is not second best. In relation to such matters, belief is entirely adequate. Second, the fact that there are beliefs about intelligible matters helps Plato account for investigation. Investigation begins from beliefs about matters that we ultimately want to know about. Our initial ideas are beliefs, not pieces of knowledge. But in the course of investigation, they can be examined, dismissed, and reformulated. Accordingly, they can be stepping-stones toward knowledge. Third, Plato envisages also another way in which we employ the faculties of belief without relating exclusively to the domain of believables: by creating poetic images. Myths, stories and similes are not themselves pieces of knowledge. To some extent, they engage with visible particulars—with protagonists, their deeds, clothes, shields, and so on. But they can also aim to capture truths about intelligible matters, such as courage or justice. Images and stories play an important role in education and in our everyday lives: they can

³ One might object that, rather than introduce a distinction between three modes of believing, we should keep apart a strict and a loose sense of belief. In the strict sense, belief is belief about believables. This proposal seems right to me insofar as beliefs about believables are, as I see it, the 'core' case of belief: here belief is applied in the manner that most immediately reflects the nature of belief. But I do not think that beliefs about intelligible matters are beliefs in a non-strict, and thereby ordinary sense. Beliefs about intelligible matters are as much the subject-matter of epistemological theorizing as beliefs about believables. As will become clear from my argument, beliefs about intelligible matters are beliefs in a lesser sense insofar as, in these beliefs, the faculty of belief is not employed in the manner that most fully represents its nature.

turn the soul toward intelligible matters. As I shall argue, we should understand this aspect of poetry as belief that is not without knowledge.

Consider the passage that leads up to the similes of the Sun, the Line, and the Cave.⁴ As Socrates reports, Adeimantus often heard people discuss the question of what the good is. To most people, pleasure seems to be the good, and to some, wisdom (VI, 505b).⁵ It takes just a brief remark by Socrates to remind us of well-known problems with these views.⁶ Adeimantus wants Socrates to say what *he* thinks about the good. Socrates declines; he does not know what the good is. Adeimantus, however, insists. Why should one not say what one believes, stating it as something that one believes, without implying that one knows it (506c)? Socrates replies by asking Adeimantus whether he has not realized that beliefs without knowledge (*aneu epistêmês doxai*) are ugly (*aischrai*), and that even the best of them are blind (*tuphlon*) (506c).⁷ Then, however, he relates the similes of

⁴ According to Charles H. Kahn, the passage is a "dramatical aside", "without consequences for the doctrinal account of *doxa*." As Kahn goes on to say, "[i]n every careful statement of the basic dichotomy, *doxa* and sense perception belong together as taking to *gignomenon* as their object (e.g. *Tim.* 28a2), whereas the reality of the Forms is *adoxaston* (*Phaedo* 84a8)." 'The presentation of the Forms,' in: *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue. The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: CUP 1996), 329-370, esp. 361. Cf. J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon 1981), 194.

⁵ For discussion of the two theses 'pleasure is the good' and 'wisdom is the good' in other dialogues, cf. *Euth.* 281d-282e, 288d-289d (wisdom), *Gorgias* 494c-505a (pleasure), and the *Philebus*.

⁶ Pleasure cannot be the good because there are also bad pleasures. When we ask the proponents of 'wisdom is the good' what it is that one is to be wise about, their answer is 'the good.' Thus while they presumably tell us what the good is, they at the same time assume that we already know it (VI, 505b-d).

⁷ He also adds a third predicate to 'ugly' and 'blind': *skolia*, 'crooked'; and he contrasts these three predicates with 'clear' (*phana*) and 'beautiful' (*kala*) (506c-d). Throughout this paper, I am translating *doxa* as 'belief.' For a detailed discussion of traditional translations of *doxa* in Plato (opinion, belief, judgment), cf. Jürgen Sprute, *Der Begriff der DOXA in der platonischen Philosophie*, in: *Hypomnemata. Untersuchungen zur Antike und ihrem Nachleben*, Heft 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht 1962).

Sun, Line, and Cave, and refers to them as what seems to him. This indicates that the similes in some way capture Socrates' beliefs about the Good.

The traditional interpretation of the *Republic* cannot explain this passage. But neither can an interpretation that has been put forward in order to resolve the obvious problems of the traditional interpretation, an interpretation that I shall call countertraditional.⁸

*Traditional interpretation [T]*⁹

(1T) There is no knowledge about the objects of belief (perceptible things), and no belief about the objects of knowledge ('what is'). Each cognitive power is exclusively related to its objects.

(2T) 'What is' refers to the Forms.

⁸ The Two Worlds Doctrine is often presented in terms of a distinction between being and becoming; scholars tend to draw, next to the *Republic*, on the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Timaeus*. There is no consensus on whether the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus* should be interpreted as departures from the Two Worlds Doctrine, or merely as exploring knowledge from a different perspective. The idea that knowledge is true belief tied down by an account (*Meno* 98a), or true belief with an account (see the third part of the *Theaetetus*), may seem to not fit in with the idea that knowledge and belief each have their own objects, or it may only seem to fit in if we suppose that, once we are able to justify them or to provide an account, true beliefs *turn into* knowledge.

⁹ Francis M. Cornford may be considered a proponent of this position (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. 1933)). However, I am not engaging with any one interpretation specifically. Rather, I take it that these assumptions figure in many discussions of Plato's middle dialogues.

*Countertraditional interpretation [C]*¹⁰

(1C) We can have knowledge about perceptible things, and beliefs about 'what is.' Knowledge and belief engage with propositions—true propositions in the case of knowledge, true and false in the case of belief—not with this or that kind of object.

(2C) 'What is' does not refer to the Forms, but rather to what is true.

Neither of these interpretations can explain the conversation between Socrates and Adeimantus. T cannot accommodate the fact that people (including Socrates) have beliefs about the good. C cannot explain why there is anything wrong with beliefs without knowledge, other than that they may be false. Why should beliefs without knowledge, even if they are true, be ugly and blind? Both T and C rely on the idea that knowledge and belief relate to their objects in such a way that they cannot be deficiently applied to other things. But as I shall argue, this is not how Plato characterizes the relationship between cognitive powers and their objects. Rather, knowledge is directed toward and naturally suited for what is, and belief is directed toward and naturally suited for what is and is not. The claim that belief and knowledge have different objects does not imply that one *cannot* have beliefs about the objects of understanding. It implies that belief about intelligible matters is inherently deficient—deficient because it is generated through a kind of cognitive activity that is naturally adapted to a different task.

¹⁰ Gail Fine offers the most elaborate account of this kind. Fine has presented her views in several publications—first in 'Knowledge and Belief in Republic V,' in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 1978, 121-39; then in 'Knowledge and Belief in Republic V-VII,' in: S. Everson, ed., *Epistemology. Companions to Ancient Thought, 1* (Cambridge: CUP 1990), 85-115; reprinted in Fine, ed., *Plato 1, Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Oxford: OUP 1999), 215-246 and in Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms, Selected Essays* (Oxford: OUP 2003), 85-116. For an earlier, influential rejection of T cf. J. C. Gosling, 'Doxa and *dunamis* in Plato's Republic,' in: *Phronesis* 13 (1968), 119-30.

I begin with a close look at C (section 1). C has a great advantage over T: it can explain philosophical investigation. But as I shall argue, philosophical investigation can be explained in an even better way—and can be understood in a more nuanced fashion—if we resist C, and revise T. This revision relies in part on a re-translation of some key expressions in Rp. V (section 2). Beliefs about intelligible objects play an important role in philosophical investigation (Section 3).

1. The Countertraditional Interpretation

T and C refer to a number of passages in the *Republic*, but most importantly, they aim to interpret an argument at the end of Book V (476e-478e). Both the lover of sights and sounds and the philosopher 'love to see' (V, 475d-476e). But they look at different things. The lover of sights and sounds loves to see the many beautiful colors and shapes of perceptible things. He sees these things as beautiful, and does not concern himself with the question of whether this is all there is to beauty. In contrast with him, the philosopher loves all knowledge, and seeks the Beautiful itself. Philosophers and lovers of sights and sounds differ with respect to where they turn their souls. This idea is part of a larger discussion in the *Republic*. Education in the best city is a turning around of the soul (*psuchês periagôgê*), out of a night-like day into a 'true day of being' (VII, 521c5-8).¹¹ From the very beginning, it aims to turn the soul toward the Forms, and to inspire love for them.¹² The lover of sights and sounds has his soul turned the other way, toward

¹¹ On the importance of 'turning around' cf. Myles Burnyeat, 'Plato on why Mathematics is Good for the Soul,' in: *Mathematics and Necessity. Essays in the History of Philosophy*, Timothy Smiley, ed. (Oxford: OUP, published for The British Academy 2000), 1-81, esp. 42-45.

¹² Musical education, Socrates says, should end in love of the Beautiful (403c6-7). The kinds of games children are to play are conducive to producing a correct order in their soul, an order that mirrors the order of the law (IV, 424e-425a).

the many beautiful sights and sounds. For this reason, Socrates says that he can only have beliefs (476d).

But this inference needs an explanation, and Socrates proceeds to clarify it (476e-478e). Knowledge engages with what is (*to on*); ignorance with what is not (*to mê on*). Belief (*doxa*) is a different power (*dunamis*) than knowledge (*epistêmê*).¹³ Just as the powers of sight and hearing are directed at different objects, belief is directed at something other than knowledge. Accordingly, belief cannot be directed at what is. But belief is directed at something, not at nothing. The objects of *doxa* must be in the middle between what is and what is not: belief is 'darker' than knowledge, but 'brighter' than ignorance. Knowledge knows 'knowables,' belief believes 'believables,' and the latter are explained as 'what participates in being and not-being,' or 'what is and is not.'¹⁴ The lover of sights and sounds is confined to beliefs because he spends his life with 'what is and is not'; among the many beautiful things there is not one that would not, at the same time, be ugly (479a-b). He does not even acknowledge that there are things other than the many beautiful things, for example, the Beautiful.

Starting from this outline of the text, we can engage with some of the recent scholarly discussions. It is a core intuition of T that the Beautiful is an example for 'what is,' while things that are beautiful and ugly are examples for 'what is and is

¹³ Other words for knowledge that Plato uses in this passage are *gnôêmê* and *gnôsis*.

¹⁴ 478e1-2 and 478d5-6. In addition to Book V, interpretations of Plato's epistemology in the *Republic* draw on the similes and X, 601b-602b. In Rp. X, Socrates explains how only the user of something, e.g., a flute, knows what a useful and a bad flute is. The maker of the flute needs to trust him; he has only correct belief (*pistis orthê*). I cannot engage with the complex questions pertaining to this passage. But it seems important to note that it does *not* suggest that users and makers have knowledge versus mere belief of perceptible particulars, like 'this flute.' Rather, the user of flutes knows what it is for a flute to be a good flute; this is knowledge of a theoretical matter. The beliefs of the maker engage deficiently with this theoretical matter.

not.'¹⁵ As I shall argue, we should hold on to part of this assumption: that 'what is' refers to the Forms (T2).¹⁶ My argument for this claim is indirect. Even the proponents of C admit that the philosopher ultimately aims to know Forms, and that, in many passages in the *Republic*, Plato says that the Forms *are* (or that he refers to them as '*ta onta*', the things that are). I argue that we have no reason to suppose that Socrates, at Rp. V, 476e-478e, does not use 'what is' as a label for what, at other passages in the dialogue, is referred to as Forms (T2).

According to C, T2 is precisely where the traditional interpretation goes wrong. Once we take 'what is' to refer to the Forms, so the suggestion, we fall into the trap of not being able to account for philosophical investigation. If 'what is' and 'what is and is not' refer to different kinds of objects, belief and knowledge do not share any objects. Apparently, we cannot progress from belief to knowledge. Gail Fine proposes a reading that aims to remedy this, and thus to account for philosophical investigation: in core sections of Rp. V, 476e-478e, 'is' should be understood in a veridical sense.¹⁷ According to this suggestion, what we know is true, while what we believe can be true or false. The objects of knowledge are true propositions, and thus are the objects of true belief. In this way, there are not two separate

¹⁵ J. C. B. Gosling argues that the idea that beautiful particulars are also ugly does not make sense ('*Republic* V: *ta polla kalla*' etc., in: *Phronesis* 5 (1960), 116-128). If we accept this assessment (which I do not share, but do not have the room to discuss), it may seem less plausible that 'what is' refers to the Forms.

¹⁶ Much of the research on Rp. V, 476e-478e employs a distinction between a predicative, an existential, and a veridical use of 'is' (*esti*); however, this distinction has also been subjected to much criticism. For the distinction between different uses of '*esti*' cf. C. Kahn, 'The Greek Verb 'Be' and the Concept of Being,' in: *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 245-65, as well as 'Some Philosophical Uses of "to be" in Plato,' in: *Phronesis* 26 (1981), 105-35. While my argument engages with the veridical reading, it steers clear of many intricate issues pertaining to the existential and the predicative reading, both of which may seem to be closer to T than the veridical reading.

¹⁷ It is relatively uncontroversial that the Greek *esti* can mean something like 'is true.' Fine gives a very helpful summary of her views in the introduction to her recent book (2003, 1-43).

ontological realms, each with its own kind of object. Investigation engages, at every point, with propositions.¹⁸ This interpretation has the great advantage of appealing to a core intuition about knowledge: that what we know is true. But what, in Rp. V, 476e-478e, indicates, that '*esti*' should be read in the veridical sense? Certainly (and this is not disputed by Fine), the rest of the middle books makes it clear that philosophers aim at knowledge of the Forms, and that the Forms 'are' in the highest sense. It might seem overwhelmingly more plausible to assume that this is also at issue in Rp. V, 476e-478e.¹⁹

According to C, we can resist this conclusion, because in 476e-478e, Socrates does not talk with Glaucon. He talks with the lover of sights and sounds.²⁰ Socrates asks Glaucon to respond on behalf of the lover of sights and sounds (476e7-8). Glaucon assumes the role of the lover of sights and sounds. This change of personalities is, according to C, highly relevant to our reading of the text. Fine invokes what she calls the Dialectical Requirement: that the dialectically better investigation "should only use claims that are (believed to be true), and that the interlocutor accepts."²¹ This criterion is formulated, according

¹⁸ For this reason, Fine calls her interpretation a contents analysis, rather than an objects analysis of Plato's epistemology (1999, 221).

¹⁹ I do not discuss the individual lines of the passage with respect to whether the veridical reading makes sense. That this reading is at several places problematic has been argued by F. G. Gonzalez, 'Propositions or Objects? A Critique of Gail Fine on Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V', in: *Phronesis* 41 (1996), 245-275. Some similar points are made by Job van Eck in 'Fine's Plato', in: *OSAP* Vol. 28 (2005), 303-326. I engage with a premise of Fine's argument that is more widely accepted than the veridical reading: that in Rp. V, 476e-468e, Socrates talks with the lover of sights and sounds. For a discussion of Fine's interpretation that disagrees with the veridical reading, but agrees with the view that Socrates is, at this point, in an important sense not talking with Glaucon, see M. Stokes, 'Plato and the Sightlovers of the *Republic*', in: *Apeiron* 25 (1992), 103-32.

²⁰ T. Ebert, *Meinung und Wissen in der Philosophie Platons*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1974), 118 f.

²¹ Fine (2003, 87 f.).

to Fine, in the *Meno* (75d). As an impersonator of the lover of sights and sounds, Glaucon understands and accepts only what this person would understand and accept. If we read the argument on this assumption, it seems that 'what is' cannot be understood as referring to Forms. Only a person trained in Plato's philosophy will catch on to this sense. As Fine suggests, the idea that knowledge is true, while belief can be true or false, no matter how philosophically significant it may be, is relatively commonsensical. Even the lover of sights and sounds who dislikes philosophy should be able to see this point. The veridical reading of the passage thus seems to be required by the standards of dialectical investigation. And the problem that T poses—that there can be no investigation that begins with belief and progresses to knowledge—disappears.

However, it is not clear that we should accept Fine's premise, namely that the Socrates of the *Republic* adheres to the Dialectical Requirement. My reasons for resisting this premise relate to the *Meno* and to the *Republic*. The relevant passages in the *Meno* may be less straightforward than Fine suggests. They occur in the context of Socrates' and Meno's discussions about the difference between virtue and *a* virtue, shape and *a* shape, color and *a* color. These passages are notoriously difficult and their interpretation is controversial. Indeed, it is not even obvious that Socrates observes the Dialectical Requirement in the very conversation in which he formulates it.²² But independently of our interpretation of the *Meno*, it

²² I do not have the space to go into these matters. However, here is a brief sketch of some difficulties. In response to the question "What is shape?" Socrates suggests that shape is what follows color (FC) (75b-c). Meno responds with a point that Socrates dismisses: that this kind of reply is unsatisfactory, since we would need to know what color is. Socrates thinks that FC was correct. However, he goes on to say: if you were one of these people who fight with arguments, I would simply tell you that, if my reply is not correct, it is your task to refute it. But since Meno is not one of these eristic people, he (Socrates) ought to speak in a gentler and more dialectical fashion. He should give a correct reply, and he should only "answer through things" that his interlocutor agrees he understands. Dominic Scott argues, in my view rightly, that the core of the second idea is not that one should make use of premises that one's interlocutor understands, but that one should refer to things—or: make use of notions—that the interlocutor says he knows

is not clear to me whether we should assume that a dialectical guideline formulated in a specific context carries over from one dialogue to another. Accordingly, it would seem more promising to me to examine the *Republic* with a view to whether something like Fine's Dialectical Requirement is at work.

In the *Republic*, Socrates adopts a style of questioning that reflects whom he is talking to. He talks differently with Cephalus than with Thrasymachus, and many scholars think that we can detect a difference in how he talks, on the one hand, with Adeimantus, and on the other, with Glaucon. Thus a different dialectical requirement may be at work: that one should adapt one's questioning, depending on who one's interlocutor is.²³ This Revised Dialectical Requirement does not

(Plato's *Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 35-36). This is the way in which Socrates says he will now discuss shape with Meno. Does Meno call something *peras* (limit) and *eschaton* (the last)? Meno says 'yes.' As long as one does not ask for a deep understanding of geometry, but merely for familiarity with these notions, it is quite plausible that Meno knows, for example, what limit is. But would it not seem that, in this sense, he also knows what color is? After some more steps, Socrates arrives at his second definition of shape: shape is what limits an area (76a). However, if Socrates is to observe the first part of the Dialectical Requirement, that one is to give a true reply (or one that one holds to be true), why does he not stick with FC, the account that he thinks is correct? Since it is not clear that there are several true accounts of the same thing, does Socrates violate the first half of the Dialectical Requirement? (Cf. Scott, 2006, 45.) Socrates then gives in to Meno's request and explains color. He does so by invoking a theory about effluences, this time with even more explicit distaste for the account he is putting forward. He keeps emphasizing that Meno is so impressed with this account because the terms it uses are familiar to Meno. Meno *thinks* he understands it, because he has often heard his teachers speak about things of this kind. Socrates thus seems to put forward a distinction between the mere impression that one understands something, and a genuine understanding of it. Meno has only the former. Does Socrates now violate the second half of the Dialectical Requirement, which asks that one's interlocutor understands what he agrees to, not that he merely feels like he understands it? (Cf. Scott, 2006, 56-9.)

²³ Burnyeat argues that this is how the discussion in the *Republic* proceeds, and associates the method with *Phaedrus* 271e-272b ('Culture and Society in Plato's *Republic*, *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 20 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press 1999), 217-324, 293). There, Socrates says that the power of speech is to guide souls (*psuchagogia*), and that the rhetorician must study the different kinds of souls that his interlocutors may have, as well as kinds of speeches, and then match the appropriate kind of speech to whom he is talking to. I agree with Burnyeat's

demand that Socrates make only assumptions that his interlocutor *shares*. Witness Thrasymachus, who is explicitly uneasy with how things progress, because he does not, at heart, agree with the ideas that Socrates extracts from the points that he has granted.²⁴ And it pertains importantly—and in agreement with the metaphysical epistemology of the dialogue—to the objects of discussion. Scholars tend to think that Glaucon is more philosophically advanced than Adeimantus, and that it is usually when things become most abstract that Socrates turns to him.²⁵ If we can interpret Socrates's questioning as adhering to the Revised Dialectical Requirement, then it seems he really should not talk about epistemology with the lover of sights and sounds. This is not the kind of topic such a person is interested in, nor is he up to it. If anyone is a suitable partner for this discussion, it is Glaucon.

Socrates tells Glaucon to reply in the place of the lover of sights and sounds. But it is not clear what exactly this means. Is Glaucon asked to impersonate the lover of sights and sounds? Or should he reply instead of the lover of sights and sounds? If we consider the philosophical psychology of the *Republic*, it seems very unlikely that Socrates would ask a truth-loving person to impersonate someone whose soul is turned away from philosophy; such impersonation taints the soul, and must be avoided.²⁶ Glaucon should not do this. And he does not. In reply to Socrates' instruction, Glaucon says 'I will respond,' and from here on the phrasing continuously makes it clear that we are dealing with: what seems to be the case to Socrates (477c5) and to Glaucon (478c13); what they want to say (477a); what Glaucon understands (477c); whether he shares Socrates' notion of a power

thesis that this is similar to what Socrates does in the *Republic* – he adapts his mode of discussion to whom he is talking to (and that means, to the state in which his interlocuter's soul is).

²⁴ Cf. for example Rp. I, 342c10, 342e6, 346c12, 350c12-d3.

²⁵ Cf. Burnyeat (1999, 293).

²⁶ Like the young guardians of the ideal city, Glaucon should not imitate anything lowly. There is danger that imitation grows into 'being' (395b9-d1).

(477c9-d6); what Socrates and Glaucon can agree on (478a1-2); what Glaucon needs to consider (478b7), and so on.²⁷ (Further, the aim of the argument is to point out why the lover of sights and sounds can only have beliefs, not knowledge; presumably the lover of sights and sounds does not like this idea. However, nothing in Rp. V, 476e-478e reflects that the answerer is steered into a view that he dislikes, a view that leaves him solely with belief.²⁸)

Suppose that some will not be persuaded by these considerations, and hold on to the view that Fine's Dialectical Requirement applies and that Socrates' interlocutor is the lover of sights and sounds. If so, then 'what is' must mean something that at least sounds commonsensical, even if it has deep philosophical implications. And the claim that 'everything that we know is true' may appear to be such a claim, acceptable to non-philosophers. However, matters are by no

²⁷ At the end of the argument, Socrates summarizes the results, and again addresses the lover of sights and sounds. He says 'these things now being presupposed,' *he* should tell me whether, among the many beautiful things there is one that is not also ugly, etc. But even though Socrates seems to directly engage with the lover of sights and sounds at this point, Glaucon again gives an answer that reflects his own perspective. Necessarily, he says, it will be somehow beautiful and somehow ugly (478e8-479b2). If he were taking the perspective of the lover of sights and sounds, the answer would have to be along the lines of 'he agreed only grudgingly that these things are beautiful and ugly.' We should not forget that the lover of sights and sounds still—after Rp. V, 476e-478e—does not acknowledge that there is Beauty (479a).

²⁸ Socrates says that the lover of sights and sounds will be mad with us if we say that he only has beliefs, and no knowledge. He suggests two ways of engaging with him: First, we could manipulate him into agreeing with our point of view, without letting him feel that he is not in his right mind. Second, we might say 'fine, so much the better if you have knowledge, we like meeting people who have knowledge.' But Socrates pursues neither of these options. He switches gears and says 'but tell us this: He who knows, does he know something or nothing?' adding 'you [Glaucon], respond in his place' (476d8-e8). This abstract question neither adopts the manipulative strategy indicated at first, nor the second, confrontational approach. As I would suggest, Socrates changes gears because ultimately, we are not in this investigation in order to bash the lover of sights and sounds. Rather, *we* want to understand something. And if we want to understand why someone who immerses himself in the sphere of many beautiful things has only beliefs, we need a serious and difficult investigation.

means that straightforward in Rp. V, 476e-478e. Socrates does not say things like 'whenever we know something, what we hold to be true is true.' Rather, he says things like 'knowledge is directed at what is.' And while it is possible that this claim means 'knowledge is directed at what is true,' this is not the most natural reading of the Greek. Rather, it is a sophisticated interpretation. Indeed, it is an interpretation that introduces the notion of truth into a passage that does not directly talk of it. But the lover of sights and sounds does not engage in philosophy. His understanding of things would have to be an unsophisticated and pre-theoretical understanding. It is not clear whether there is any such reading of the text. What, for example, might the claim, 'belief is directed at what participates in what is and what is not,' mean to someone without philosophical inclinations and training? Whatever Socrates means by such expressions, his interlocutor must engage in philosophy in order to grasp it. If this is so, then Socrates must be talking to a philosopher: Glaucon.

2. The Directedness of Knowledge and Belief

We thus have no reason to doubt the most straightforward reading of 'what is'—that it refers to the Forms. But how is philosophical investigation possible, if belief and knowledge do not share objects?²⁹ For investigation to be possible, I suggest, it is not necessary that belief can engage with matters that, as the very same things, we can also know. Rather, we must be able to hold beliefs on questions to which we want to know the answers. While we make progress in investigation, we on the one hand keep studying the same question (e.g., 'what is the good?'). But on the other hand, we improve our grasp of the question (e.g., coming to see that it does

²⁹ Gonzalez notes that insofar as sensibles are participants, engaging with sensibles constitutes *some* engagement with Forms; "in this sense, and in this sense only, *doxa* must be about the form." (1996, 272). I agree with Gonzalez that, even within a traditional Two-Worlds interpretation, these two worlds are not entirely separate; it is integral to the doctrine that they are related. However, my interpretation goes beyond this. I suggest that there are beliefs which are, as it were, deficiently 'turned toward' the objects of knowledge.

not ask which particular good we consider the greatest), and we come to engage with different objects (e.g., we begin by thinking about pleasurable episodes in our life and end up understanding the Form of the Good).³⁰ For this to be possible, belief must be able to engage deficiently with matters of understanding.

Let me turn to the key expressions for how cognitive powers and their objects relate in Rp. V, 476e-478e. This relationship is most explicitly expressed by the verb *tassô*, used with the preposition *epi*. Grube's translation renders the relationship as 'is set over.' Knowledge is set over what is, belief is set over what is and is not.³¹ Scholarly debates on the passage largely render it in this translation. This reading takes *tassô* to be used in a relatively specific sense, prevalent in military contexts: something is 'posted at a place.' But in a more general sense (also relevant to military contexts) *tassô* means 'to order' or 'to array.' If we translate the verb in this sense, the relationship we are interested in looks quite different. The text now says that knowledge is a cognitive power that is structured (or: arrayed)

³⁰ Ebert (1974, 139-140) thinks that the proponent of 'wisdom is the good' answers a different question, namely, 'what is the greatest good?' (not the question 'what is the good?'). I am sympathetic to this proposal. In making progress toward knowledge, one not only comes to get a sense of what one's object of investigation really is; one also progressively reformulates one's question, gaining a better sense of what it is one is looking for.

³¹ *Republic*, tr. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett 1992). Fine discusses the relevant passages in this translation, and so do her critics (see Job v. Eck (2005) and Gonzalez (1996)). Cornford renders the relationship that is expressed by '*epi*' in terms of correspondence ('knowledge corresponds to the real,' etc.) and in terms of different *fields* that knowledge and belief have. He translates the clause with *tassô* as 'knowledge and belief have different objects' (*The Republic of Plato*, tr. with introduction and notes by Francis MacDonald Cornford (London et al.: OUP 1945)). In their commentary on the *Republic*, Campbell and Jowett do not explain *tassô*. They only refer back to 345d; there, *tassô* and *epi* express the relationship of the art of the shepherd to his subjects, the sheep (the art is directed at its subjects). They, too, render the relationship that is expressed by '*epi*' in terms of 'A corresponds to B' (*Plato's Republic*, edited by Lewis Campbell and Benjamin Jowett, Vol. III, Garland Publishing: New York and London 1987, 258-259). Desmond Lee says that knowledge relates to what is, and belief relates to what is and is not, and that knowledge and belief each have their own 'natural field' (*Republic*, tr. and comm. by Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books 1974).

for what is, and belief a cognitive power that is structured (or: arrayed) for what is and is not.³² The cognitive acts of understanding and believing engage with 'something' (*ti*). But the cognitive powers are, in themselves, constituted in ways that make them relational. They have a directionality toward that for which they are suited. This relational aspect is, throughout the passage, expressed through the preposition *epi*. Knowledge is described as 'toward' or 'for' (*epi*) what is (477b1; 478a7). Socrates says that powers (*dunameis*) are, partly, to be described by their directionality toward or relationship to something (*epi' hō*, 477d1). The combination of *epi* and *tassō* is used as a more elaborate formulation of this point (cf. e.g., 477d1 as compared to 477d3). At some places, these expressions are combined with *pephuke*: it is the *nature* of knowledge and belief to be arrayed so as to relate to their objects (477b12; 478a4-5; 478a7-8).³³

Socrates explains toward which kinds of things knowledge and belief are turned when they are used for that which fully fits and reflects their natures. Thus knowledge and belief have each their own kinds of objects. However, this does not mean that they cannot—deficiently—be directed at what they are *not* adequate for. Belief can engage with matters that it 'does not live up to,' and since people have views about all kinds of matters, this happens all the time. Similarly, knowledge could be directed at what it is not made for, and this, too, would be a deficient kind of approach. It is, according to the *Republic*, a substantive insight that we cannot, strictly speaking, know such things as whether this piece of cake is small—that is, matters within the domain of perception.³⁴ The powers of belief

³² In Rp. VII, 523a f., Plato discusses which sense perceptions lead us into theoretical thought and which do not. In this context, Plato uses *epi* and *tassō* with respect to what each sense engages with: the sense that is ordered (*tetagmenē*) toward (*epi*) the hard is necessarily also ordered *epi* the soft (524a1-2).

³³ I am grateful to Wolfgang Mann for emphasizing this point in conversation.

³⁴ The details of how the sphere of believable is to be characterized are complicated and lead beyond the topic of this paper. I am confining myself to relatively simple examples, namely beliefs about particular perceptual matters.

deal adequately with such matters. As long as we have not understood this, we might direct the powers of knowledge toward believables, and try to know things which are simply not such as to be known. But once we understand the nature of knowledge and belief, we see that we do not miss anything if we have beliefs about believables. Belief is exactly what we should bring to bear on such matters as whether a piece of cake is small, and so on. However, we are still interested in engaging with intelligible objects before we know them. Thus Plato must find room for the deficient application of belief to intelligible objects in a way in which he need not be concerned with the deficient application of knowledge to believables. This reading of Rp. V, 476e-478e is traditional insofar as it takes 'what is' to refer to the Forms (T2) and ascribes their own objects to belief and knowledge. It is in disagreement with (T1) insofar as it allows for and ascribes an important role to deficient application of belief to intelligible matters.

The comparison with vision and hearing in Rp. V, 476e-478e confirms this reading. Belief and knowledge are, as Socrates argues, different powers similar to sight and hearing. However, we can use the faculties of sense perception not only for what they are naturally suited for. Both sight and hearing are naturally adapted to specific objects (visible things; sounds). But we can redirect them to some extent, and use them for what they are not made for. Suppose that we read the notation of a sonata and get at the sound of the sonata in a less direct way than if we were to listen to it. Or suppose we train our powers of hearing so that they can take over some of the tasks in orienting ourselves in the world that are usually performed by sight. In both cases, we do not engage with the same things that the naturally fitted sense would engage with (e.g., with the notation instead of the sound of the music). But we can still aim at that which the better-fitted sense directly engages with, just as we can deficiently direct our powers of belief toward objects of understanding.

3. Beliefs With and Without Knowledge

According to this reading of Rp. V, 476e-478e, belief has its proper objects: believables, or what is and is not. Belief about believables, that is, roughly speaking, perceptual matters, is in some sense the standard case of belief. The powers of belief are adequate to the task of cognitively engaging with such matters. But engagement with some of these matters leads us beyond the sphere of belief (VII, 523a-524d). Considering how something looks both small and large may make us raise questions about smallness and largeness, and so on. Even belief about believables thus need not turn the soul toward the sphere of belief.

However, the powers of belief can also be applied to questions about intelligible matters, questions such as 'what is the good?' or 'what is justice?'; but they do not succeed in engaging with the very object that knowledge of such matters would engage with. This conception, I think, has a great advantage over C. It captures a key feature of learning and investigation that C cannot accommodate: that while we come to better understand something, our conception of the very thing that we are studying undergoes change. In some cases, we see that we have thought about it in an entirely misguided way. For example, we might have thought that atoms are one kind of thing, and now it turns out that they are something quite different. In other cases, the object of our study becomes a more clearly defined object. There is a sense in which we only know what we are studying when we have concluded the study, and possess knowledge of the given matter. It is this process that Plato's conception of beliefs without and with knowledge elucidates.

Let us return to the brief conversation between Socrates and Adeimantus that leads up to the similes (VI, 505a-506e). We can learn more about the deficient application of belief to intelligible matters by looking closely at Socrates' stance with respect to beliefs about the good. Socrates calls beliefs such as 'pleasure is the

good' beliefs without knowledge (*aneu epistêmês*). For T, this notion does not make sense. If belief can only be directed toward its own objects, then no particular case of belief can be said to lack knowledge. For C, 'belief without knowledge' might either mean that a particular belief lacks justification, or that it is false. However, justifications of beliefs do not figure at all in the epistemological discussions of Rp. V-VII; it would seem quite arbitrary to interpret Socrates' expression along these lines. And Socrates himself makes it clear that he is not referring to false belief. He elaborates on the notion of belief without knowledge by asking Adeimantus whether those who, without understanding (*aneu nou*), believe something true (*alêthes*), do not seem like blind people who still happen to find the way (506c6-8).

Beliefs without knowledge are beliefs about questions to which one could know the answer. Both 'pleasure is the good' and 'wisdom is the good' respond to the question 'what is the good?' But as we can immediately see, they are not beliefs about the Form of the Good. One way of describing their deficiency is to say that, while they claim to say what the good is, they do not refer to the Good (or at least, they do not fully refer to it). That is, they do not successfully refer to the very object which one would need to know in order to answer the question adequately. Further, most holders of beliefs without knowledge do not hold their beliefs in any preliminary or hypothetical way. They are not aware of the fact that they are not referring to that which really is good. That is why they are not merely failing insofar as they do not know the Good. They fail in a deeper fashion: they are content with their beliefs.

Socrates calls beliefs without knowledge ugly. The Greek term that Socrates uses —*aischron*—is the opposite of *kalon*.³⁵ When Socrates calls something *aischron*, he presumably uses the word in its wide sense, a sense in which 'ugly' is close to 'shameful.' Why does Socrates use a value term in describing belief without knowledge? The beliefs of the lover of sights and sounds are ugly because they are part of a life that is ultimately miserable. The lover of sights and sounds engages only with the sphere of belief, and he is content to do so. He does not even acknowledge that there is Beauty, and thus cannot seek to know it. Nothing in his beliefs can steer him beyond the sphere of beliefs. A life that is confined to this sphere is 'turned away' from the objects which most deserve our love, and which are the only ones that can truly give pleasure.³⁶ It lacks the kind of conversion that proper education aims at, and that is integral to leading a flourishing human life. Belief without knowledge is part of a lowly, and ultimately unhappy, existence.

Socrates says that beliefs without knowledge are ugly, and that even the best of them are blind (506c).³⁷ This way of phrasing the claim may imply that, while even the best of them are blind, the best of them may not be ugly. Or at least: there is a way of engaging with beliefs without knowledge that would allow us to escape from their ugliness. Socrates' own beliefs about the good seem to be an example for this. Socrates says that it would take far too long to get to the point

³⁵ This term is at the center of the discussion of the lover of sights and sounds. The many beautiful things that he is attracted to are beautiful (and ugly) in what we might call an aesthetic sense. But the Beautiful itself is beautiful in a broader sense, a sense that includes ethical beauty. Socrates says that both the Just and the Beautiful are also good (506a4-5).

³⁶ This is the conclusion of the lengthy discussion of pleasure and pain in books VIII and IX of the *Republic*: only the pleasures of the reasoning faculty 'sate us.' Turning toward the objects of understanding is integral to a good life.

³⁷ A little later Socrates says that he would be happy to discuss the good in the way in which the interlocutors have discussed justice and the other virtues (506d6). He then suggests to turn to the offspring of the good, arguing that it would take much too long to discuss the good in that manner, and that he might make a fool of himself in trying to do so (506d).

where his interlocutors could see how matters seem to him as regards the good (506e). Such advanced belief without knowledge seems different from standard cases of belief without knowledge. It is aware of its deficiency, and someone like Socrates, who desires knowledge, deals differently with beliefs without knowledge than others do. Rather than endorsing them, he uses them as stepping-stones in philosophical investigation. As parts of a life that is devoted to investigation, beliefs without knowledge can contribute to a good life. While they may, in themselves, be ugly, they need not be part of a miserable life.

However, all belief without knowledge is blind. Consider the lover of sights and sounds. According to Socrates, he lives in a dream, defined as a state in which one regards what is similar not as being similar, but as being the very thing which it is similar to. The philosopher, by contrast, recognizes Beauty itself as something, and he sees that which participates in Beauty as being a participant, rather than as being Beauty itself; he is awake (476c-d). Holding beliefs about something that one does not know is like trying to hit a hidden target: one takes oneself to be talking about the very thing which one wants to know about, but in fact one has no idea what this thing is, and cannot even recognize that the things one engages with are only similar to it. Even the best beliefs without knowledge are blind because only when one finally understands what the matter is, is one actually referring to it. Before that, one refers to things which are merely related to the object of understanding, and one is unable to see how these are not the thing itself. (In a limited fashion one might, blindly, hit the target. One might come up with a view that indeed is true of the intelligible matter itself. For example, the view that justice has something to do with order can be held as a true belief without knowledge, a belief which one holds while not knowing the Just. However, in this belief, one is not, strictly speaking, referring to the Just, even though one's claim is a true claim about the Just.)

Socrates himself does not want to say what he believes about the good. It seems that he does not want to propose a belief that has, *qua* belief, the same characteristics as 'pleasure is the good,' or 'wisdom is the good.' Instead, he turns to the similes. But by doing so, he does not turn to knowledge. Socrates begins by saying what 'seems to him' about the sun (506e). However, he certainly does not present a belief about the sun as part of the world of perceptible objects. Rather, he presents a belief about the sun *as* an offspring of the Good. Like the similes of the Line and the Cave, the Sun expresses beliefs about the good.

What kind of beliefs are the similes? The similes neither express knowledge, nor do they inculcate knowledge. They provide belief, but they do not seem to be bare of understanding (*aneu nou*), and they are not ugly and blind. I would suggest that we call them beliefs with knowledge. We can see this more clearly by comparing the similes to the poetry that is part of the best city. A poet can 'make everything' (X, 596c3-597e); he can tell stories about all kinds of ordinary events. But poetry does not restrict itself to the sphere of particulars of ordinary experience (agents, shields, etc.). Rather, poetry conveys views about matters of understanding, for example about courage, or the gods. If it conveys insights about these matters (II, 377a5-6), poetry is in some sense true, even though, in a literal sense, its stories are false.³⁸ Poetry about the gods is not based on knowledge. We do not know the truth about them (382d1-2).³⁹ But by relying on core insights—such as that the gods are good—a poet may tell stories that contain some element of truth. However, even if this is the case, his poetry falls short of providing knowledge. As Socrates says in the discussion of education, poetry makes children adopt beliefs (II, 377b7-8). Children should be raised with stories that represent the gods and humans in certain 'true' ways. When children are told such stories, they are made to engage with beliefs about intelligible things. But are

³⁸ Children must at first be educated with *false* stories, but only those that pass censorship (II-III, 377a-392c). Similarly, the myths that are integral to sustaining the political arrangements of the best city are false speeches (III, 414-415). However, falsehood in such mimetic story telling is different from 'true falsehood' (382b9-c2).

³⁹ On the lack of knowledge in traditional poetry cf. 598d8f.

these beliefs ugly and blind? It does not seem so. The beliefs that such poetry produces are beautiful insofar as they turn the souls of children toward intelligible matters. And they make the children see things as they are, even if only in an image-like way. Insofar as they have the power to turn the soul toward the objects of understanding, and provide some preliminary and deficient understanding, they are beliefs with knowledge (or perhaps: not without knowledge).

The same, it seems to me, applies to the similes. To some extent, the similes are stories, and they certainly are images. As in poetry, the physical objects and the agents (such as the puppets, or the person who leaves the cave) are not what matters most. What matters most is what the similes aim to convey about the Good. Like a poet whose work meets the standards set up in the ideal city, Socrates relates beliefs that are 'true'—true in the limited sense in which the false speech of metaphor and poetry can be true.⁴⁰ The similes do not turn us into knowers. They can only offer beliefs for us to think about. But they are neither ugly nor blind. It is good for us to engage with them, and they make us see things about the Good. In this way, the similes are beliefs with knowledge. As we might say, such belief with knowledge is belief about the Good (rather than belief about the good), but it self-consciously is not knowledge of the Good.

Books V and VI have, on the suggested reading, implications for Plato's conception of truth as related to his notion of belief. C assumes that true belief about intelligible objects is true in a straightforward, non-deficient manner. But according to the interpretation that I propose, belief about intelligible matters never is true in a full sense.⁴¹ Belief about intelligible matters involves a misidentification. Only when one knows the Good, is one finally able use the term 'good' so as to successfully refer to the Good. Belief *with* knowledge may

⁴⁰ Note that on this interpretation, Socrates does not have knowledge of the Good. However, his conception of it is so advanced that he can come up with images that resemble it very closely. In this way, he is like the perfect poet.

⁴¹ This interpretation allows us to integrate Rp. V, 476e-478e with the comparative notion of truth that Plato employs in the simile of the Line (VI, 510a9-11). While belief about intelligible matters may be true in the sense of 'blindly hitting the target,' it is not true insofar as the reference of key terms is not what the speaker takes it to be.

have the advantage of not even pretending to be knowledge about the Good. However, it is false in its own way—in the way in which even true poetry is false speech.

Conclusion

Plato's metaphysical epistemology in the *Republic* gives a complex picture of belief, a picture that is more multi-faceted and detailed than either T or C suggests. The powers of belief can be applied to the proper objects of belief, or to intelligible objects. Both of these applications are vital to human thought. Beliefs about believable things are how we deal with many of the everyday things in our lives. Beliefs about intelligible matters are integral to investigation—without them, we cannot begin to study. Beliefs about intelligible objects can explicitly acknowledge that they do not refer to these objects by retreating into myth or simile. Such beliefs fall short of knowledge; but they direct us toward the objects of understanding and have an element of deficiently acquainting us with them. They can thus legitimately be called beliefs with knowledge, or beliefs with understanding. Beliefs without knowledge, on the other hand, involve a misidentification; they take themselves to refer to the object of understanding while in fact they do not. They do not provide us with even the first glimpse of understanding. But they are indispensable as starting-points of investigation. While similes make us 'see' something, they may not invite critical engagement. According to the *Republic*, philosophical investigation must engage, to an important extent, with beliefs without knowledge.