

RECOVERING PLATO: A PLATONIC VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: Recently, there has been a move in contemporary epistemological philosophy toward a virtue epistemology, which sees certain character traits of the rational agent as critical in the acquisition of knowledge. This attempt to introduce virtue into epistemological investigations has, however, relied almost exclusively on an Aristotelian account of virtue. In this paper, I attempt to take a new tack and examine a virtue epistemological account grounded in Platonic thought. Taking seriously the distinction between knowledge and opinion found in the *Republic*, I then draw upon two virtues, humility and what I call sincerity, to flesh out this account.

KEYWORDS: virtue epistemology, Plato, knowledge, belief

Introduction

When Sosa wrote “The Raft and the Pyramid” in 1991, it signaled a major shift in epistemological thought. Through his criticism of both foundationalism and coherentism (at the time, the two competing epistemological systems), he moved away from an epistemology founded on the properties of beliefs and shifted the focus onto properties of the rational agent. Since his introduction of what is now called virtue epistemology, there has been an ongoing debate regarding what the appropriate disposition of the rational agent is. Some epistemologists focus on the dispositions of faculties, arguing essentially for a reliabilist account of virtue epistemology. In these accounts, the relevant agent dispositions, i.e. virtues, are the excellence of certain faculties, e.g. perception, memory, etc. Greco has gone so far as to claim that this is the consensus view.¹ The alternative account claims that the relevant virtues are character dispositions of the rational agent, and these accounts traditionally focus on virtues understood in an Aristotelian sense. Even Greco, who rejects Aristotle as providing an account of the virtues relevant for knowledge,² turns to Aristotle when he seeks an account of understanding.³ Thus, we have contemporary virtue epistemology dominated by Aristotle.

¹ John Greco, “Intellectual Virtues and Their Place in Epistemology” (paper presented at the University of Georgia, Department of Philosophy Colloquium, Kleiner Lecture Series, Athens, Georgia, April 13, 2012).

² John Greco, “Two Kinds of Intellectual Virtue,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LX, 1 (2000): 179. It might be argued that he is only rejecting Aristotle’s account of *moral*

Plato is rarely appealed to in the discussion, and when he is, he is often misunderstood. An example is Sosa's appeal to Plato as offering an account in which such things as eyesight are understood as "virtues."⁴ Zagzebski rightly points out that Sosa, and Greco following him, misunderstands the point of the passage and follows this response by stating, "I would find it very interesting if Sosa or Greco made a careful use of the work of Plato or Aquinas in their theories, and hope they will do so."⁵ What would a virtue epistemology look like from the Platonic perspective? What presuppositions would be necessary for such a view? How would such a perspective answer some of the perennial problems of epistemology? These are the questions I will attempt to answer in this paper.

The Epistemological Problems

The reason for the shift away from understanding knowledge as a relationship between beliefs, or a property of beliefs, lies in the problems that arose from this understanding. Traditionally, contemporary epistemology has understood knowledge in terms of *justified* true belief (however one understands justification). The fundamental question lay in how justification was to be understood. Some understood it in terms of foundations, i.e. what grounds a belief. One problem with this view is that it leads to an infinite regress. Ultimately one needs a foundation belief that is not itself grounded on any other belief. The alternative was a coherentist approach which viewed beliefs as justified based on their interrelations within a whole system of belief. One problem with a coherentist perspective is how one can account for beliefs which do not seem integral to the system, i.e. can be removed without damage to the overall coherence of the system.⁶ Sosa resolved this problem by turning to dispositions in the rational agent to understand justification.

virtues as a model for understanding knowledge, but I believe Zagzebski is correct in arguing that the Aristotelian distinction between moral and intellectual virtues is not a distinction in kind, and so to argue that one and not the other is an appropriate model for intellectual virtues is ultimately inconsistent. (Cf. Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 137ff.)

³ Greco, "Intellectual Virtues and Their Place."

⁴ Cited in Greco, "Two Kinds of Intellectual Virtue," 180.

⁵ Linda Zagzebski, "Responses," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LX, 1 (2000): 207-208.

⁶ I recognize the simplicity and superficiality of my account of these positions. It is not my intention to either refute them or to defend a virtue account against them. I merely offer a brief explanation of Sosa's motivation in positing virtue as a critical epistemological criterion.

This move, however, has not resolved all the problems. Conflict over how justification is to be understood rages still in the debate between internalists and externalists. Following Zagzebski, the difference between the two sides can be understood as follows: “Internalists claim, roughly, that the believer must have cognitive access to the justifying condition of a belief, and externalists deny this.”⁷ According to Zagzebski, the problems the debate seeks to resolve relate to the role of luck in justification and skepticism. Internalists are concerned to free knowledge or justification from luck, as far as possible, while externalists are willing to accept a certain amount of luck in their accounts, as long as they can avoid the skeptical dilemma and with it, the “worst sort of epistemic luck.”⁸

With this framework established, we have two of the fundamental problems of contemporary epistemology: 1) the role of luck in knowledge and 2) the skeptical dilemma. In addition to these two problems, we will also examine the problems posed by Gettier Cases. But before we move on, the skeptical dilemma requires further elaboration. The skeptical dilemma is a problem connected with two related aspects typically (or at least intuitively) associated with knowledge: meta-knowledge, i.e. how can I know that I know, and certainty. The problem of meta-knowledge is a concern because if it is not possible to know that one has knowledge, then there’s a question as to how belief is significantly different from knowledge. If I only think I know, then that that seems to be the same as merely believing that I know. It seems that knowledge requires meta-knowledge in order to be distinguished from mere belief. But this raises a further difficulty. If meta-knowledge is required for knowledge, then I must know that I know that I know or else my meta-knowledge is mere belief. Thus we seem trapped in an infinite regress (or ascent depending on your perspective). It seems that knowledge is impossible, at least if knowledge pretends to anything greater than belief. This seems to further entail certainty. Knowing that I know seems to mean I am certain that my belief is true. The classic formulation of the problem goes back to Descartes’ Evil Genius and is often represented by “Brain-in-a-Vat” scenarios. How do I know I’m not being deceived by an Evil Genius? How do I know I’m not simply a brain in a vat? If we can’t answer these questions, if I am

⁷ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 31. She also notes that there is an internalist/externalist debate in relation to knowledge as well as justification. However, as it seems to me the problems the debate is intended to resolve are the same, or at least relevantly similar, whether we are talking about knowledge or justification, the solution a Platonic virtue epistemology provides should resolve both, once such a view has been worked out. On this ground, I will not overly concern myself with the difference between internalism and externalism in relation to knowledge versus justification.

⁸ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 39.

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not certain this is not the case, then what claim can we make to knowledge? This account will attempt to address all of these problems.

A Platonic Virtue Epistemology: I The Epistemological Account – The Divorce of Knowledge and Belief

Contemporary epistemological accounts begin with an understanding of knowledge that entails belief. Sosa states, “despite leaving the word ‘knows’ undefined, one might proceed in three stages as follows: (a) affirm that knowledge entails belief [...]”⁹ Almost all contemporary epistemologists follow suit.¹⁰ But this is already a departure from a Platonic account of knowledge, and it is a critical one.

Plato’s account of knowledge is not unambiguous, and it is beyond the present scope to examine his account in detail and argue for a particular interpretation. Gail Fine notes, “The *Meno* tells us that knowledge is true belief bound by an *aitias logismos*, an explanatory account,”¹¹ and this is certainly the case. The *Meno* states, “True opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long[...], so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why[...]After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place.”¹² But the account is not so simple. As Zagzebski rightly notes, in the *Theaetetus*, 201c-210b, Plato examines and rejects knowledge as true opinion plus λόγος.¹³ To get a true picture of the distinction between belief and knowledge, we must turn to the *Republic*.

⁹ Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 24.

¹⁰ I hesitate to assert “all epistemologists” only out of caution.

¹¹ Gail Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V-VII,” in *Epistemology*, ed. Stephen Everson, *Companions to Ancient Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 85. It should also be noted that understanding “αἰτίας” as “explanatory” is a bit idiosyncratic and already prejudices the discussion. The main definition is that of a “charge” or “accusation” as in an indictment. It can also be understood as “cause,” and it is likely this definition that Fine draws upon in her translation as “explanatory.” However, I think this already injects propositionality into the discussion, and I believe this creates problems which can be avoided by recognizing that knowledge, for Plato, is not propositional, even if belief can be. One might somewhat justifiably argue that λογισμός, with its correlation to λόγος, does inject propositionality into the account, but it is defining knowledge as true belief with λόγος that becomes a problem in the *Theaetetus*. (Cf. 201c9ff.)

¹² Plato *Meno* 97e5-98a4. All English translations are taken from Plato, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997) unless otherwise noted.

¹³ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 35.

In Book V 476e3ff, Plato lays out the distinction between knowledge, belief/opinion, and ignorance, and significantly, it is grounded in a particular metaphysical perspective. Knowledge is of “what is,” i.e. Being. Ignorance is of “what is not,” i.e. non-Being. Only “what is” can be known, so “what is not,” by definition, cannot be known and so is related to ignorance, since ignorance is the lack of knowledge. But the world isn’t divided only into what is and what is not. There is a category of “things” that participate in both. These are sensible objects, and it is of these that we form beliefs. Just as sensible objects lie between “what is” and “what is not,” so beliefs lie between knowledge and ignorance. Plato states, “Then we agree that opinion [δόξα] is clearly different from knowledge [ἐπιστήμη] [...] Hence each of them [opinion and knowledge] is set over something different and does something different?”¹⁴ So knowledge and opinion are specifically different. They are different not merely in degree but in kind.¹⁵

The conclusion to be reached is that knowledge must be true and ignorance must be false, but opinion can be either. So the first aspect of our account is that belief and knowledge are different in species, such that knowledge *qua* knowledge is unrelated to belief. The distinction will be critical, but it must be noted that this does not entail that it is impossible to move from belief to knowledge.

As noted above, this understanding depends on a particular metaphysical conception which also must be laid out in order to explicate the relationship between belief and knowledge further. In the Line Analogy,¹⁶ Plato divides reality into four sections: images, things, dianoetic concepts and the Forms.¹⁷ Images and

¹⁴ *Republic*, (477e8-478a1).

¹⁵ Fine claims that this leads to the consequence that objects of knowledge (Forms) and objects of opinion (sensibles) are at a disjoint, and then reaches the conclusion that “one cannot move from belief to knowledge about some single thing. I cannot first believe the sun is shining, and then come to know that it is.” Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V-VII,” 85. This is true. If my reading of Plato is correct, then we can never “know” that the sun is shining. What we have is a true belief. But as Plato notes in the *Meno*, knowledge and true belief, from a pragmatic perspective, are equally valuable. The difference is simply that true beliefs don’t “remain.” (97aff) However, her claim that objects of knowledge and opinion are at a “disjoint” ignores the fact that sensible objects participate in the Forms. It is the fact that they participate *in* the Forms while not *being* Forms that gives them their intermediary state between knowledge and ignorance, i.e. between being and non-being.

¹⁶ *Republic*, 509d6ff.

¹⁷ I am calling these dianoetic concepts for lack of a better term. The text does not give them a unique designation but includes such things as mathematical concepts in this category. At this level, conclusions are reached through a deductive, or dianoetic, process. Hence the designation.

things belong to the realm of Opinion (δόξα)¹⁸ and dianoetic concepts and the Forms belong to the realm of Knowledge (γνῶσις).¹⁹ The distinction is that images and things belong to the realm of sensible objects while dianoetic concepts and the Forms do not. The state of objects in these two realms is what determines the epistemic character they have. The problem with sensible objects, as Plato notes in the *Theaetetus*, is that they change.²⁰ This means they can't be known. Knowledge must always be true, and since sensible objects are not always anything, then they can't always be true and so can't be known.

It might be argued here that there is an easy solution which reveals itself by indexing beliefs regarding sensible things to a particular time. So, to use Fine's example,²¹ when I say "I know the sun is shining," what I mean is that the sun is shining *at a particular time*, and since it is always true that the sun was shining at that particular time, then the belief can always be true and so we escape Plato's dilemma: I *know* the sun is shining. However, indexing the belief to a particular time does not enable us to tie the belief down such that it can be subject to knowledge.²² The problem is that even if the belief is true, it cannot be

¹⁸ Until now, I have been using opinion and belief interchangeably, but in the Line Analogy, they have distinct usages. Opinion (δόξα) is used to refer to our epistemic relationship to both images and things, while belief (πίστις) refers properly to our epistemic relationship with sensible things (in relation to images it is imagination). The distinction will not be important for our account but does need to be noted.

¹⁹ Again, the proper epistemic states at this level are dianoia (διάνοια), in relation to mathematical concepts, i.e. concepts reached through deductive processes (beginning with a hypothesis and reaching a conclusion) and understanding (νόησις), which is described as "seeing" in the Cave Analogy (Book VII 514aff) and in the Line Analogy, it is described as "grasping" (ἄπτεται, the middle voice of ἄπτω) (511b3). This will have implications for the problem of meta-knowledge later.

²⁰ *Theaetetus*, (181cff).

²¹ Cf. n. 15 above.

²² I am consciously avoiding the term "proposition" because I believe it clouds the issue. I believe that propositions are properly the subject of belief and not knowledge, which should become clear as the argument progresses, for precisely the same reason the belief that the sun is shining is not properly subject to knowledge (cf. n. 15 above): propositions are essentially contingent, just as the shining of the sun is contingent, and because of their contingency, they can be true or false. One might raise the objection that some propositions are necessarily true, e.g. the principle of non-contradiction. The principle of non-contradiction cannot possibly be false. The *cogito* might be another example, although it is possible that it is only impossible for us to *imagine* the *cogito* to be false, while it might in itself be possible that it is false. While it may be the case that a certain proposition might entail truth, it is essential to the nature of propositions that they can be true or false. Insofar then as the principle of non-contradiction is a proposition, it is not necessarily true. What is necessarily true is the aspect of reality that it

knowledge. The belief is contingent, which entails that it is subject to the possibility of being false.²³ Knowledge cannot be false, and so anything that can possibly be false, even if it is not false (even *necessarily* not false, e.g. the sun was shining at a particular time which now is necessarily not false), cannot be a proper object of knowledge. Because knowledge and belief are essentially different, one can be false and the other cannot, knowledge *essentially* cannot be tied to belief. Thus, a fundamental assumption of contemporary epistemology is shown to be problematic. Sosa explicitly recognizes this as an assumption and states, “Not everything believed is known, but nothing can be known without being at least believed (or accepted, presumed, taken for granted, or the like) in some broad

represents. This signifies an important characteristic of propositions: they are images of reality, and it is this feature that makes them contingent. Just as sensible things are contingent, so also propositions about things are contingent. If there is a proposition that represents reality itself, then the truth of the proposition might be true necessarily, but the truth of the proposition *qua* proposition is contingent upon the reality it represents. This is a problem that arises in Plato regarding definitions. No definition can *be* the reality it defines, so just as things both are and are not the Form in which they participate, so also a definition both is and is not the Form it represents (if it is an accurate definition, it is the Form insofar as it accurately represents the Form, but it is not the Form insofar as it is an instantiation of the Form). This is why, I believe, definitions are so problematic in the Socratic dialogues: no definition is ever completely accurate because it is not, in some respect, that which it defines. So also all propositions are contingently true insofar as their truth depends on the reality they represent. Some might argue that Wittgenstein gives us a picture of the world as propositional, but I would argue this is not the case. He must, and does, I claim, recognize the necessity of presupposing some underlying metaphysical realm to ground logic, even if that underlying metaphysical ground cannot be expressed logically. It might be significant to note that the epistemological shift to propositions and logical forms was the result of a loss of metaphysics, and it is the problem which arises from this loss which Wittgenstein is addressing. If we can recapture metaphysics, then returning to a more Platonic epistemology might be less controversial and less difficult. With Zagzebski’s claim that knowledge involves “cognitive contact with reality,” it might be possible to see epistemology returning to a metaphysical ground. (Cf. n. 36 below.)

²³ The same argument applies to other types of beliefs, e.g. the sun is hot, the rose is red, etc. as well as propositions. Any belief which involves recognizing contingent properties of objects can be substituted here. Properties of objects which are necessary will be proper subjects of knowledge, e.g. it is a necessary property of fire that it is hot, although fire and hot are different, thus if fire is known, then it is also known that it has the essential property heat. Knowing the Form (to use Platonic terminology—we could use the word “essence” or “nature” as well) entails knowing its essential properties as well. This is possible because the connection is necessary, i.e. unchanging and unchangeable. The distinction might seem merely semantic, but I will argue that it will allow us to escape several problems which have arisen in contemporary epistemology.

sense.”²⁴ However, none of the broad senses which he requires can avoid the contingency in question. And seeking some additional property which eliminates this contingency, which is what, I believe, justification ultimately seeks to do, cannot solve the problem. None of the additional properties (whether justification by itself or causality (in the case of Greco²⁵ and Zagzebski²⁶) or aptness (in the case of Sosa²⁷) in addition to justification or understood as a component of justification) remove the essential contingency. Justification does not provide the necessity required, otherwise it would not be justified *true* belief which is knowledge; rather, it would simply be *justified* belief. Justification would remove the essential contingency through its own necessity.²⁸ Plato’s argument that knowledge cannot involve contingent things is much deeper than might appear at first glance, and solutions such as indexing a belief to time fail to resolve the problem. The problem relates to the essential nature of knowledge itself, and this prohibits knowledge from being related to anything contingently true.²⁹

This distinction between knowledge and opinion is what divides the sensible and intelligible realms from each other. Now we must examine how the two realms can be connected. Just as they are metaphysically connected, i.e. things are connected to Forms through their participation in the Forms while at the same

²⁴ Ernest Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge,” *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 5, 1 (1980): 3.

²⁵ John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 75.

²⁶ Linda Zagzebski, “What Is Knowledge?” in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 211.

²⁷ Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, 22ff.

²⁸ The same is true of any additional property. If it of itself removed the contingency, then we could simply say knowledge is belief plus this additional property. This is clearly revealed by the fact that we must always add “true” to the belief in any definition, but to add “true” to any definition of knowledge is redundant.

²⁹ This essential distinction between knowledge and belief is also noted by Plato in the *Timaeus* 51e2-4, regarding which Vlastos notes, “his [Plato’s] whole epistemology is built on the restriction of what is known to what is necessarily true.” Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 54. Fine argues that Plato does not restrict knowledge to necessary truths, that we can have knowledge of sensibles, i.e. contingent things. She states that once we have knowledge of the Forms, we “can apply these accounts [of the Forms] to the sensibles, in such a way as to have L4 [understanding or knowledge in Plato’s highest sense] type knowledge of them.” Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V-VII,” 111. However, I believe she misses Plato’s essential point. What we can understand of sensibles is only their essential nature, i.e. their Form. This entails that we cannot understand sensibles *qua* sensible but only as images of the Forms in which they participate. This is a significant point because divorcing belief from knowledge is essential to my account.

time they are metaphysically distinct from the Forms,³⁰ so also is there an epistemological connection.³¹ The path to knowledge through the sensible realm is most explicit in the Ascent passage of the *Symposium*.³² In the Ascent, Diotima describes how one moves to knowledge of Beauty Itself, or The Good (i.e. ultimate reality). She tells Socrates that the proper way to begin is with beautiful objects, and by realizing (κατανοέω) that the beauty of one object is “brother to” the beauty of another,³³ one can recognize that which is the same, unchanging, in both, and recognizing the superiority of the unchanging nature, i.e. Form, leave the particular behind and ascend, ultimately, to that which is True, Real. In the *Phaedo*, this process of recognition is used to argue for Plato’s theory of Recollection.³⁴ It is when one sees two equal objects that he recognizes that which is the same in both, i.e. the Equal Itself. In the Line Analogy as well we see this process at work. At the level of dianoetic concepts, which is deductive, one, using as images the things that were imitated before [at the level of the sensible, the objects which were imitated in images (such images as shadows and reflections)], is forced to investigate from hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle but to a conclusion. In the other subsection [the higher section where knowledge is of reality], however, it [the soul/mind] makes its way to a first principle that is *not* a hypothesis, proceeding from a hypothesis but without the images used in the

³⁰ For our purposes, we can understand Form as “nature” or “essence” or “reality.” What is essential here is that the essence does not change, even if the sensible aspects of the things do. The precise metaphysical details do not need to be worked out here.

³¹ Fine’s misunderstanding of this connection is what leads her to assert that sensibles are knowable. Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V-VII,” 86.

³² *Symposium*, 210a4ff.

³³ The use of κατανοέω here is, I believe, significant. The lexical definition of the word is “perceive,” but there is another Greek word for perception, αἴσθησις (verb form is αἰσθάνομαι), which is much more common in Plato, especially when referring to perceiving through the senses. Κατανοέω is a compound of κατά, a preposition with the general sense “down, downwards,” and νοέω, which means “to think.” The etymological background of this word is also interesting. There is a sense in which νοέω and its cognates, e.g. νόημα and νόησις, can be understood as perception. This must, however, be distinguished from perception through the senses and, as I believe Plato shows in the *Republic*, refers to a kind of immediate grasp or understanding (cf. n. 19 above). So what Plato seems to mean by κατανοέω is a kind of downward understanding or looking down with the mind (noting the etymological connection with νοῦς, i.e. mind). It is, I believe, a seeing of the Form *in* the particular object. It is significant that the words used for Form, ἰδέα and εἶδος, are etymologically derived from the verb “to see” (εἶδω).

³⁴ *Phaedo*, 73c1ff.

previous subsection [that of mathematical concepts], using Forms themselves and making its investigation through them.³⁵

At the level of δίανοια, we hypothesize what is the same in similar objects and use these hypotheses to draw further conclusions about the objects as they are in themselves. So we are already moving away from the sensible to something higher, i.e. Reality, but we don't have knowledge of these "Forms" yet, because they are merely hypotheses at this level, i.e. they are not first principles. It is at the higher level that reality, essence, the nature of things, is "grasped," i.e. understood, and so it is here that knowledge properly obtains. Yet, we can see an epistemic connection between the realm of belief and the realm of knowledge. We begin with belief but move through belief to knowledge.³⁶ Finally, in the *Phaedo*, to obtain pure knowledge "one must be free from it [the body] and one must, with the soul itself, see [θεατέον] the things themselves."³⁷ Again we see the attainment of knowledge described as a "seeing" but one that is not a perception through the senses. There are no senses without the body. What Plato is describing is an immediate grasp which occurs when the soul/mind comes into contact with reality. We must point out that part of Plato's argument in the *Phaedo* is that there can be no knowledge while the mind is embodied. This might seem to contradict our argument that one obtains, or *can* obtain (there is no reason to suppose that knowledge can *only* be obtained by moving from sensibles to reality), knowledge through sensible objects. But this need not be the case. Plato's point can be stated simply as a claim that knowledge and its object are essentially separate from the sensible, and if one focuses on the sensible, then one can never obtain more than true belief. The mind must move away from that which is sensible in order to obtain knowledge.³⁸

³⁵ *Republic*, 510b3-9.

³⁶ A pertinent question to ask at this point is whether a Platonic account such as I am laying out requires Plato's theory of Recollection to be coherent. Recollection significantly grounds the process of moving from sensibles to knowledge for Plato, but is it required for such a move? I believe not. In the Line and Cave Analogies, and even in the Ascent of the *Symposium*, the process is not grounded in previous forgotten knowledge of the Forms. Rather what is involved is a "grasp" or immediate understanding of the Forms once the mind comes into contact with them. I will rely on Zagzebski's "indisputable" claim that knowledge "puts the knower into cognitive contact with reality" to argue that such contact with reality is not a radically controversial claim (Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 45). However, I will, perhaps controversially, argue that knowledge does not *put* the knower into cognitive contact with reality; rather, knowledge occurs once cognitive contact with reality occurs.

³⁷ *Phaedo*, (66e1-2). My translation.

³⁸ That we can't take Plato too literally here can be argued from the fact that in the *Phaedo* he says that we can never obtain knowledge while in the body, but in Alcibiades' speech in the

But if we move from belief *to* knowledge, then is it not possible to argue that knowledge still entails belief? There is an important and significant difference here. In contemporary epistemology, knowledge is defined as a form of belief.³⁹ It is true belief plus something. In a Platonic account, knowledge might be obtained by moving *through* belief, but knowledge in no way includes belief. Belief, like the sensible realm upon which it is grounded, is left behind.⁴⁰

There is a final question to be addressed before we move on to discuss the possibility of Platonic epistemological virtues. There has been a discussion in current epistemological literature regarding the necessity of recovering understanding in any sufficient epistemological account. Is it possible that the account for which we are arguing is merely a semantic argument that claims understanding is knowledge and knowledge is belief? In other words, are we really making a claim that is significantly different from what some current epistemologists are already claiming? After all, the highest level of the Line is often translated as “Understanding.”

We have seen that in Platonic terms, this highest level is an immediate grasp of reality. Greco, following Kvanvig, Riggs and Hankinson, conceives of understanding as knowing the causal relations between things, such relations grounding explanation.⁴¹ He later explains that understanding is “a systematic knowledge of dependence relations.”⁴² This is not knowledge as we have explained it, because it isn’t connected to reality at all. Knowledge of the things that have such dependent relations is not part of Greco’s account of understanding. They belong, it seems, to knowledge. This is the essential aspect of Plato’s account of knowledge. We only have knowledge of the relations between things *through* knowledge of the essential nature of things themselves. Knowledge of these relations is part of what is known. It does involve causality, but causality is not the

Symposium (212c3ff), we get a picture of Socrates who, even while still alive, in the body, has separated himself from the body to a remarkable degree, indicating that perhaps it is not necessary to die in order to “see” reality, at least to some degree.

³⁹ Cf. Sosa’s assumptions above.

⁴⁰ Perhaps this seems counterintuitive. If so, perhaps it would be helpful to understand it in the following terms: once I know something, I no longer believe it. For example, I may have believed it was raining in Moscow, but once I checked the weather, I no longer believed it. Instead, I had come to know it. I recognize this is a problematic example, since it claims that something properly relegated to the realm of belief can be known, but for one who finds my claim difficult, the example should help clarify the difference between knowledge and belief.

⁴¹ Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, 9.

⁴² Greco, “Intellectual Virtues and Their Place.”

object of knowledge; it is not what we know.⁴³ It is a result of knowledge. By knowing reality, I know the essential relations entailed by reality, and only thus know any causal relations.⁴⁴

Riggs offers a notion of understanding that is an “appreciation or grasp of order, pattern, how things ‘hang together.’”⁴⁵ According to his conception, we can understand a variety of things, such as machines, people, mathematical proofs, etc., and of each thing we would have “a deep appreciation, grasp, or awareness of how its parts fit together, what role each plays in the context of the whole, and the role it plays in the larger scheme of things.”⁴⁶ In fact, Riggs' account of understanding might sound much like the account of knowledge we are offering. He even says, “One of the more significant differences between understanding and knowledge is that knowledge is a species of belief, but understanding is not (at least not necessarily).”⁴⁷ While Riggs' account seems promising, he stops short of explaining precisely what he means and falls back on “coherence” and “explanatory coherence” as “getting very close” to what he means.⁴⁸ Following Cartwright, he even considers the possibility that understanding doesn't entail

⁴³ In the Sun Analogy (507b1-509d1), knowing The Good does entail knowing that The Good is the cause of all things, but this is a result of knowing The Good. It is not any cause, as such, that is known.

⁴⁴ A question might be raised here whether causal relations can be the object of knowledge at all since one might see them as contingent. I would argue that causal relations can either be contingent, if grounded in contingent qualities of a thing, or not contingent, if grounded in the essential nature of a thing. The latter can properly be an object of knowledge while the former could only properly be the object of belief. A point must be made here regarding contingency. I have already argued that propositions are contingently related to that which they reference, even if that which they reference is eternally unchanging. Could one not make the same claim here, namely that causal relations are always contingent based on those things which are causally related? I would argue no, because propositions are always something external and apart from their referents. I would argue causal relations are not external to the things causally related; rather, the causal relation is inherent in the very nature of the things related. It is either inherent in the contingent properties of a thing, and so the causal relation is contingent, since the qualities which ground it are contingent, or it is eternal and unchanging since it is part of the very fabric of the unchanging and essential nature of the things so related.

⁴⁵ Wayne Riggs, “Understanding ‘Virtue’ and the Virtue of Understanding,” in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 217.

⁴⁶ Riggs, “Understanding ‘Virtue,’” 217.

⁴⁷ Riggs, “Understanding ‘Virtue,’” 217.

⁴⁸ Riggs, “Understanding ‘Virtue,’” 218.

truth.⁴⁹ I believe Riggs has some insight here, however. That knowledge, for Plato, is knowledge of the whole is clear. In the *Republic*, Book IV, 438e4-8, Plato says, “when knowledge became, not knowledge of the things itself that knowledge is of, but knowledge of something of a particular sort [ποιοῦ τινος], the result was that it itself became a particular sort of knowledge, and this caused it to be no longer called knowledge without qualification, but – with the addition of the relevant sort – medical knowledge or whatever.” Further, in Book V, 475b5, he says, “Then won’t we say that the philosopher doesn’t desire one part of wisdom rather than another, but desires the whole thing [the whole of this Form – παντὸς τοῦ εἶδους τούτου]?” So Riggs is correct in claiming that knowledge must be of the whole. However, as we noted above, understanding how the parts fit together, the relations, is grounded upon this knowledge of the whole. We can know the relations between the parts only because we know the whole. By knowing the whole, we know all the essential aspects and characteristics of it, and this entails that we know how the things that are its parts relate both to each other and to the whole. This further entails that we know the truth, in its fullness, about the whole. It is not possible to have partial knowledge or knowledge which is only partially true, at least not in the Platonic sense which we are advocating.⁵⁰

Zagzebski defines understanding as “the state of comprehension of nonpropositional structures of reality.”⁵¹ As she notes, she does not exclude understanding as having reality itself as its subject, however, it is not limited to this. She even asserts that philosophy “aims to understand the whole of reality.”⁵² Like Riggs’, this initially seems like a promising account. However, her account is grounded on understanding as deriving from skills, which is completely foreign to a Platonic account. Skills are too essentially involved with the sensible realm to be related to knowledge. Further, skills, understood as “how to do something,” cannot even lead to truth, since all they entail is knowing the means to achieve

⁴⁹ Riggs, “Understanding ‘Virtue,’” 219. Catherine Elgin also claims understanding does not entail truth. Catherine Elgin, “Is Understanding Factive?” in *Epistemic Values*, eds. Alan Millar, Adrian Haddock, and Duncan Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Does this rule out degrees of knowledge? This is an interesting and important question which deserves a more detailed examination than we can give it here. However, it is not ruled out necessarily. We could admit the possibility of degrees of knowledge as long as we recognize that this is not knowledge properly understood. It certainly is not understanding, although we might be able and willing to call it something else. Cf. n. 59 and n. 84.

⁵¹ Linda Zagzebski, “Recovering Understanding,” in *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility and Virtue*, ed. Matthias Steup (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 242.

⁵² Zagzebski, “Recovering Understanding,” 243.

some end.⁵³ Given that better means may, and often do, come along in time, this is deeply problematic for a Platonic account which ties knowledge essentially to the unchanging, and thereby to truth. Finally, structure, on her account, is essentially tied to understanding “the relation of parts to other parts and *perhaps even* the relation of part to a whole.”⁵⁴ This account of Plato turns him on his head. We only understand the relations between parts *by* knowing the whole. Her account clearly bases any possible knowledge of the structure of the whole on understanding the relation of parts *qua* parts.

We have now explicated a Platonic epistemology which has several features. First, knowledge and belief are distinct. Knowledge necessarily entails truth and cannot be false, while belief can be either. On this ground, knowledge cannot be of the sensible realm, which is changing. It is precisely because the sensible changes that it is properly the object of belief, which can be true or false, and not the object of knowledge. Second, knowledge and belief are, nevertheless, both metaphysically and epistemology related. One can obtain knowledge by moving through belief, i.e. sensible things. Third, the object of knowledge is what is real; the object of belief is what appears, i.e. what changes, the sensible.

Finally, we need to answer the question: What is the value of knowledge in Platonic terms? It can't be pragmatic and isn't. Pragmatic concerns are the domain of contingency. Although there, perhaps, will be a pragmatic value (e.g. knowing what Larissa *is* might entail knowing where it is which will entail knowing how to get there, to borrow an example from the *Meno*⁵⁵), this isn't its essential value.⁵⁶

⁵³ She explicitly ties understanding to “knowing how to do something well” (Zagzebski, “Recovering Understanding,” 241).

⁵⁴ Zagzebski, “Recovering Understanding,” 241. (emphasis added)

⁵⁵ 97a1ff. It should also be noted that Socrates emphasizes here that for the sake of pragmatic concerns, true belief is just as efficient as knowledge.

⁵⁶ Another issue arises here: Can we have knowledge of the particular? Knowledge involves knowing what is unchanging and thus what is eternal. When we have true opinion we do not know the necessary unchanging essence of things. The difference between knowing Larissa and having a true opinion about Larissa (in each case I can direct someone to Larissa) is that in the former, I know what it is in a way that is unchanging. I know what a city *is*. I thus know what makes Larissa a city. An essential characteristic of cities is to be spatially located, so I know Larissa is spatially located. Can I know where it is, i.e. the specific spatial location? It would seem that, on Platonic terms, the answer has to be no, since this is contingent. Larissa may or may not be at the specific location it happens to be currently. So can there be knowledge of contingency, or better particularity, itself? To follow an earlier example, we know it is the nature of the sun to shine, but we do not know that the sun is shining now. The former is an essential characteristic of the sun, but the latter is a particular instance of which we can have true (or false) opinion but not knowledge. It is an essential characteristic of Larissa to be in a

The essential value of knowledge for Plato is ethical. We must know the Good in order to *be* good. This entails that we cannot live a good life without knowledge of the Good.⁵⁷ As Socrates notes in the *Meno*, it is only through ignorance that men are bad.⁵⁸ As we have seen, true knowledge is knowledge of the whole, and so true knowledge will entail that one knows fully what is good in all its aspects. So in order to be able to live well, one must have knowledge, particularly knowledge of what is good. But this involves knowing the whole and how one relates to it.⁵⁹

particular spatial location, so if Larissa has an essential nature distinct from other cities, e.g. if Larissa is *this* city located at *this* spatial location, and this essential nature does not and cannot change, then I can know Larissa as a particular city. Suppose one of the essential characteristics of a city is a contingent characteristic, e.g. its essential nature is to be inhabited by people? But being inhabited by people is something that can be the case at one time and not the case at another, and so it is contingent. We seem to have the paradox of a necessary contingency, or a contingent necessity. This type of knowledge might be possible but might be impossible for a contingent being, such as a human being. One way it might be possible to know this is if we can have knowledge of time. But to know time is to know the whole of time in an unchanging manner, i.e. I must know temporal things in an eternal manner. This would entail knowing all moments of time “simultaneously.” If this type of knowledge is possible, then I might be able to know Larissa as a particular city located in a particular place at a particular time. What I would have knowledge of is when Larissa *became* a city and when it *ceased to be* a city. I must know both in order to *know* Larissa and not simply have a true opinion regarding Larissa. This might not necessarily entail eternal knowledge, if Larissa existed in the past, for example. However, to have knowledge of a particular present city, I would have to know when it ceased to be a city, and this I can only know if I have future knowledge or eternal knowledge. Knowledge of these aspects *is* knowledge of contingent things as contingent, but in such a way that they are no longer contingent. They are unchanging. Is this different from indexing the shining of the sun to a particular time? Doesn't this remove the contingency from the sun's shining? No, because it is not knowledge of the whole. To know the shining of the sun as a particular event (as opposed to the essential nature of the sun, which entails shining), I would need to know the sun's shining as it occurs *at all times*. Only then do I have knowledge of the sun's shining, and not true opinion. This is a critical question that requires a detailed exploration in order to fully explicate an account such as the one for which I am arguing, but the foregoing should be sufficient to offer a possible solution to the problem. Another, and perhaps better, solution is to simply admit that my epistemic relationship with all particular things is one of belief, either true or false. Nothing significant is lost in such an admission.

⁵⁷ As we saw earlier, The Good is the highest Form for Plato. Plato says, “not only do the objects of knowledge [Forms] owe their being known to the good, but their being is also due to it, although the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power.” (*Republic*, 509b6-10) So when we speak of knowledge of The Good, we are speaking of knowledge in its fullest sense.

⁵⁸ *Meno*, 77c4-78b1.

⁵⁹ It may be the case that this is not attainable, or at least not fully attainable, for human beings. Plato does indicate this in several places. In the *Phaedo* he claims we can only truly obtain knowledge after death. (66e) In the *Timaeus*, “of true belief, it must be said, that all men have a

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Thus, we can already see that knowledge, in Platonic terms, will entail virtue. Knowing seems to entail being virtuous.⁶⁰ But is this a reciprocal relationship or does it only go in one direction? In other words, is virtue required for knowledge? If so, which virtues and how are they related to knowledge?

A Platonic Virtue Epistemology: II The Virtues

Now that we have explored the nature of knowledge itself on a Platonic account, what role do the virtues play in such an account and would such virtues be? Plato clearly follows the four traditional Greek virtues: wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage. But only one of these relates to knowledge, i.e. wisdom. The other three follow from wisdom, i.e. when wisdom rules, then the other three come to be.⁶¹ But are there any virtues that are required in order for one to attain knowledge? We will argue that there are two: humility and sincerity. To understand both, we turn to the *Meno*.

In the *Meno*, when Socrates is demonstrating his notion of Recollection with the slave boy, he brings the slave boy to the point where the slave boy recognizes his own ignorance. The slave boy thought he had knowledge but now is forced to admit that he doesn't. In fact, Socrates asserts that this state of recognizing one's ignorance is an important condition for knowledge. Without this, one will not know one is ignorant and so will not seek the knowledge he does not know he lacks.⁶² That this is not simply a passing comment on this particular person's epistemic state can be seen if we consider this passage in light of the discussion about Socrates' wisdom in the *Apology*. In the *Apology*, Socrates asserts that true wisdom is recognizing one's lack of knowledge.⁶³ So in order for one to

share, but of understanding, only the gods and a small group of people do." (51e8-10) And in the famous passage in the *Apology*, Socrates asserts that true wisdom is knowing that one does not know. (23b1-5) This has special significance for the skeptical problem, as we will see.

⁶⁰ Can I have knowledge of what is good without applying it? This is another important question we cannot fully address here. However, I certainly cannot have a good life without knowing the good, or, assuming that it might be possible to have a good life accidentally, I at least cannot have the best life. It is at least better to have a good life through knowledge rather than through accidental circumstance.

⁶¹ In the *Republic*, justice is understood as each part of the soul doing its job. The job of reason is to rule the other parts, so it is only when wisdom is attained and rules over everything in the city (or soul) that the other parts can function properly, i.e. can do their jobs, being moderate and courageous and just. So wisdom/knowledge is essentially the source of the other virtues. (*Republic*, 248a1ff.)

⁶² *Meno*, 84a2-c8.

⁶³ *Apology*, 23b1-5. Ionescu also recognizes the connection between the *Meno* and the *Apology*, stating, "it is worthwhile comparing *Meno* 84b9-c2 with *Apology* 29b" (Cristina Ionescu,

attain knowledge, humility, in the sense of recognizing one's ignorance, is a necessary condition. As long as one arrogantly thinks one knows, then knowledge cannot be attained. The result of one failing to recognize one's ignorance and the corresponding arrogant state of character can be seen in the *Euthyphro*, where Euthyphro makes no progress in his search for knowledge of piety. In fact, Euthyphro continually repeats the same definitions Socrates has refuted, and even when it is obvious that his definitions don't work, rather than accept that there's a problem with his understanding, he blames Socrates for the perplexity. "I am not the one who makes them [the definitions] go round and not remain in the same place; it is you who are Daedalus; for as far as I am concerned they [the definitions] would remain as they were."⁶⁴ Meno, on the other hand, is able to make progress precisely because he admits the problem is with him.⁶⁵ "I have made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions, very good speeches as I thought, but now I cannot even say what it is."⁶⁶ Thus, by the end of the dialogue, Socrates can say to Meno, "Convince your guest friend Anytus here of these very things *of which you yourself have been convinced* [σὸ δὲ ταῦτὰ ταῦτα ἄπερ αὐτὸς πέπεισαι][...]"⁶⁷ Meno has made epistemic progress. So the first Platonic epistemic virtue to be recognized is humility.

The second is what we will call sincerity. It is related to humility but is slightly different. It is an openness to honest discussion, a sincere search for understanding. Again, this is reflected in the *Meno*. When Meno asks Socrates what kind of answer he would give a questioner, Socrates replies, "A true one,

Plato's Meno: An Interpretation (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 100 n. 71); however, she doesn't follow through and strangely focuses on 29b where Socrates claims his superiority lies in his ignorance of things regarding the underworld, rather than his far more significant claim, it seems to me, that human wisdom in general is "worth little or nothing."

⁶⁴ *Euthyphro*, 11c9-d1.

⁶⁵ In identifying Meno with the "friends" as opposed to the disputatious (i.e. eristic) debaters (cf. the quote from the *Meno* below) and identifying in him the virtue of humility which I am distinguishing, it must be recognized that I am disagreeing with a significant movement in contemporary scholarship which views in the distinction a criticism of Meno, including him among the eristic debaters (cf. Klein, Weiss, Scott, Ionescu). I believe this to be a mistake which hinders us from seeing the full significance of this distinction and its importance in a Platonic epistemology. It can too easily obscure the fact that Meno has made epistemic progress by the end of the dialogue and the reason for this progress. Ionescu, interestingly, recognizes the importance of *aporia* in attaining knowledge, but she doesn't make the connection to virtue, making it seem like a technical requirement, and fails to identify it in Meno. She sees Meno's epistemic progress as "slow and doubtful." (Ionescu, *Plato's Meno*, 72)

⁶⁶ *Meno*, 80b2-4.

⁶⁷ *Meno*, 100b8-9. (emphasis added)

surely, and if my questioner was one of those clever and disputatious debaters, I would say to him, 'I have given my answer; if it is wrong, it is your job to refute it.' Then, if they are friends as you and I are, and want to discuss with each other, they must answer in a manner more gentle and more proper to discussion."⁶⁸ Why the different method of response? Because the debater is not sincere in his search for knowledge, and as we see in the *Euthyphro*, unwillingness to listen to rational argument obstructs knowledge.⁶⁹ What is a friendly interlocutor as opposed to a "disputatious debater"? Speaking of why the majority of people aren't persuaded by philosophical arguments, Socrates says in the *Republic*, "Nor have they [the majority] listened to sufficiently fine and free arguments that search out the truth in every way for the sake of knowledge but that keep away from the sophistications and eristic quibbles that, both in public trials and in private gatherings, aim at nothing except reputation and disputation."⁷⁰ So sincerity or honesty in discussion is also required for to attain knowledge.⁷¹

It might seem that these aren't truly epistemic virtues but merely states of character that affect one's willingness to seek knowledge but don't really impact the acquisition of knowledge. One might argue that these alleged virtues merely involve a willingness to look for truth. However, we will attempt to show that they involve more than that. The type of humility and sincerity we are discussing involve an orientation of the mind (or soul, to use the Platonic terminology). It is

⁶⁸ *Meno*, 75c8-d4.

⁶⁹ This might sound similar to Zagzebski's account of motivation. However, it should be noted that in her account, the virtues *arise from* a motivation for knowledge, but they are distinct from this motivation and each virtue has its own distinct motivation. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 166ff.

⁷⁰ *Republic*, 499a2-5. "Eristic" is also the word used in the *Meno* passage to describe the disputatious debaters.

⁷¹ This is different from what Montmarquet views as open-mindedness. He states, "The open-minded person must tend to see others' ideas *as* plausible." James Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 24. The Platonic "sincerity" is not a tendency to see others' ideas as plausible but a willingness to listen to arguments. Zagzebski's account of open-mindedness is similar to Montmarquet's but includes receptivity to arguments. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 269. The difference hinges on the distinction between simply considering someone's idea or argument as possibly true and recognizing the truth *in* an argument. This is intimately related to our account of knowledge insofar as knowledge entails recognizing truth, but to do this, you must be open to seeing it. The difference lies in that our account entails an orientation of character not an acceptance of possibility, as we hope to show.

active rather than passive.⁷² We have already seen that knowledge, in its true sense, is immediately grasped rather than actively acquired. Now we must examine the state one must attain in order to be properly prepared or oriented to grasp knowledge.

In the Sun Analogy,⁷³ we see that The Good, i.e. the ultimate reality,⁷⁴ is what makes knowledge possible. Plato says, “what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower is the form of the good.”⁷⁵ How does it give the power to know to the knower? One way this can be understood is that by making things knowable, it allows the knower to know. Or, more precisely, since knowledge is of *what is*, by giving being to things,⁷⁶ it makes them knowable and so allows the knower to know. While this is certainly the case, the true understanding of this passage can only be grasped if one recognizes the connection between these statements and the analogy Plato uses. The image is one of the Sun which, by shining light on visible objects makes it possible for the eye to see them.⁷⁷ It is this image which corresponds to the way reality makes knowledge possible. But with sight, it is the light moving from the object to the sense organ which *is* sight. The eye receives the light and it is this receiving of the light which is sight. Knowledge works in the same way. The mind receives the reality (or the essence/nature) which is in a thing, and it is this reception of the reality which is knowledge.⁷⁸ This is why Plato can talk about knowledge as a “seeing.”⁷⁹

⁷² It might seem strange that we argue that this orientation is an active state, since we will argue (in fact, have argued) that knowledge is passively received rather than actively acquired. But the state one must be in in order to grasp knowledge is not passively attained. We must and can work toward it.

⁷³ *Republic*, 507b1-509d1.

⁷⁴ Plato does say The Good is superior to Being and so is “beyond being,” so it might be somewhat misleading in equating it with Being or Reality. However, this is a complex and difficult passage with a long history of interpretation. Since The Good is the source of all being, and in order to be an object of knowledge (cf. n. 75) it must be real, it will suffice here to identify it with Being. This also allows us to remain uncommitted to this aspect of Platonic metaphysics. What our account requires is an understanding that the object knowledge is what is real and that this reality is what reveals itself in knowledge. We do not need to adopt the specific details of the Platonic metaphysical account for our account of knowledge.

⁷⁵ *Republic*, 508d8. It should also be noted that Plato goes on to say that The Good is an object of knowledge.

⁷⁶ *Republic*, 509b6-8.

⁷⁷ *Republic*, 507d5-508b6.

⁷⁸ I see no problem in replacing “reception of reality” with Zagzebski’s “cognitive contact with reality,” as long as we understand such cognitive contact properly. The difference, as I see it, lies fundamentally in the metaphysical understanding. The reality which we receive and with

But it is here the virtues of humility and sincerity play their role. Just as the eye must be in the proper orientation in order to see its object, and no matter how brightly the sun shines, unless the eye is open and oriented appropriately, nothing will be seen, so also unless the mind is sincere and open to grasping the truth and recognizes that it does not already possess the truth, no truth, or knowledge, can be obtained. One will not seek knowledge, i.e. turn the mind toward the knowable, as long as one thinks one already knows. Thus, it is necessary to recognize one's ignorance, i.e. possess humility, in order to know. And one cannot grasp the truth unless one is sincere in the desire to "see" the truth. Arrogance and close-mindedness prevent the mind from being able to receive knowledge, i.e. to come into contact with reality. We must orient ourselves, turn our eyes in the proper direction, focus them properly (in epistemological terms, recognize our ignorance and be open to the truth of arguments and reality), but once we do these things, knowledge happens. Knowledge is essentially a passive activity. It is passive insofar as knowledge is received, immediately grasped, but it is active insofar as it involves our orienting ourselves properly.⁸⁰ In the Cave, the prisoner must walk out into the Sun. He must look at the Sun. He must open his eyes. But assuming he has the proper character, i.e. is properly oriented, he simply receives knowledge. He immediately grasps it. So we can see that both humility and sincerity are necessary if one is to have knowledge.⁸¹

which we have contact does not belong to sensible, tangible objects which change, as we noted above.

⁷⁹ Cf. particularly the Cave Analogy. (*Republic*, Book VII 514aff.)

⁸⁰ We have argued, on Platonic grounds, that knowledge must be received and cannot be acquired by the rational agent himself. Are there other reasons to believe this to be the case? Two things to note here. 1) Given the nature of knowledge, i.e. that it is of what is eternal and unchanging, its source cannot be something temporal and changing. The source can only be eternal and unchanging itself. We, given our finite nature, cannot be that source. 2) If such knowledge of eternal realities (I avoid the term "eternal truths" as it seems to me to imply propositionality) is to be possible at all, it can only be received, again, because we are finite.

⁸¹ It might be objected that in order to show the *necessary* (rather than merely practical) connection between humility and knowledge, I must show that truth reached without virtue is not knowledge. Two things need to be pointed out here. 1) Truth is not a sufficient condition for knowledge. The necessary condition for knowledge is the fixed, eternal, unchanging nature of reality. Knowledge must *be* true and always true, but that it is true does not make it knowledge. The truth of knowledge follows from the relation to reality. Truth doesn't ground that relation. In other words, there can be truth without knowledge, e.g. true belief. So when we use "truth" and "knowledge" interchangeable, it must be understood that this truth is of a certain type, i.e. unchanging, and actually follows on the reality given in knowledge. It is not that once we have truth, we have knowledge. It is rather once we have knowledge, then we know truth. A question arises here whether I can know my belief to be true. We will examine

We must now offer a better explanation of the value of knowledge according to our account. We noted above that the value of knowledge can essentially be seen as ethical, according to Plato. Knowing The Good entails being good. But that explanation requires accepting the Platonic metaphysical theory in greater detail than might be desirable or necessary for our account. Knowing The Good is equivalent to knowing reality, and knowing reality entails knowing the characteristics of reality in its unchanging nature. This also entails knowing reality as a whole, which involves knowing how the different aspects of reality interrelate. As we have noted,⁸² full knowledge might be beyond human capacity, but two things should be noted here. Our account does not necessarily exclude partial knowledge.⁸³ Although such partial knowledge would not be knowledge, neither would it be belief.⁸⁴ Knowing reality and how it interrelates is necessary in order to properly guide one's life, and so our account, like Plato's, has the same ethical value.⁸⁵

A Platonic Virtue Epistemology: III Solutions to the Problems

Earlier, we discussed several problems that arise in the current epistemological debate. How would the account we have laid out respond to those problems? The essential divorce of knowledge from belief solves several of them in itself.

this later. 2) Knowledge cannot be attained without these virtues because knowledge is received, not acquired. Since knowledge occurs by receiving what is offered, without the proper orientation, knowledge cannot occur. To receive what is offered (this is true regardless of what is being offered), there must be a recognition that one does not already possess what is being offered. To receive knowledge, the mind must recognize that it lacks knowledge, i.e. must have humility, and consequently must open itself up (I avoid the word "seek" since it implies active acquisition) to a position whereby what is offered can be received, i.e. must have sincerity. Thus, knowledge cannot occur without the virtues, although truth can be obtained without the virtues, e.g. the truth of beliefs.

⁸² Cf. n. 59.

⁸³ Cf. n. 50.

⁸⁴ What such partial knowledge would be is an interesting question, and one I wish to leave open for further discussion. However, I see no necessary problem in recognizing the possibility of an incomplete knowledge; one in which certain unchanging aspects of reality are understood while others are not. One might also ask whether it would be problematic should one ever actually attain knowledge, since then it seems one could no longer be virtuous, i.e. have humility or sincerity. This could only arise as a problem if meta-knowledge is possible, i.e. if one knows that one knows, as I hope to examine in more detail shortly.

⁸⁵ Whether it has other types of value and whether the conclusions of science can be knowledge are things I will leave for further exploration, although I believe we have offered some insight into the latter question.

Recognizing that belief is not a part of knowledge removes the problem of justification. We can ask whether a belief is justified or not, but it no longer has the significance it had before. In fact, how beliefs arise is no longer an essential epistemological concern, and so epistemological luck does not enter into the discussion.⁸⁶ This also removes Gettier concerns from our epistemological account. Since all that matters as far as beliefs are concerned is whether they're true, that they are arrived at by luck is unproblematic.⁸⁷ With the removal of justification as an epistemological problem, much of the concern surrounding the internalist/externalist debate loses its force, since this debate is primarily concerned with justification of true beliefs.

The skeptical problem gains a new intrigue on our account. Understood as a meta-question problem, i.e. how do we know that we know, it becomes unnecessary to answer. In fact, it becomes necessary that it cannot be answered. Understood as a problem of certainty, i.e. how I can be certain of my knowledge, not only is skepticism not a problem, but to be certain of our knowledge runs counter to the conditions necessary for knowledge to begin with. If it is a necessary condition of knowledge to be humble, i.e. recognize one does *not* know, then certainty becomes an obstacle to knowledge. To be certain would be to remove the possibility of knowledge. Skepticism not only ceases to be a problem but becomes a necessary condition for knowledge, if we understand skepticism properly, i.e. as a lack of knowledge regarding one's knowledge.⁸⁸

We should clarify what is meant by "certain." To say that one is certain is to say that one knows that one knows. But this has implications. To say that one

⁸⁶ Is there luck involved in our account of knowledge? Perhaps it is easier for some to possess the appropriate virtues. Some might find humility and sincerity easier to come by than others, but unless it turns out to be the case that these virtues are impossible for some to attain, I do not see a problem here. And while one might not be praiseworthy for possessing the appropriate virtues (after all, if virtues have a normative character, i.e. if one *should* be virtuous, what is there to be praised for in simply being what one *should* be?), one is certainly responsible for being virtuous, as long as it is up to the agent to orient himself properly.

⁸⁷ For example, Susan has reason to believe that John owns a car. She therefore believes that someone owns a car. John turns out not to own a car, but her belief that someone owns a car is still true. Good for Susan. She has a true belief. She formed it improperly, perhaps, but that is not a problem, because she doesn't (*and never did and never could* on our account) know that someone owns a car. She only believes it, because the object of her belief isn't a proper object of knowledge.

⁸⁸ Whether this could entail a radical pyrrhonian skepticism is an interesting question. Since knowledge might be relegated to only a few, and full knowledge is certainly unattainable by most, if not all, it is possible a pyrrhonian skepticism, at least of some kind, might actually play a role here.

knows is to say that what one knows cannot be false (especially given our account of knowledge). This is, obviously, antithetical to humility. One cannot recognize one's lack of knowledge if one claims to know. Thus, humility and certainty are mutually exclusive.⁸⁹ And thus, if we are correct that humility is a necessary condition for knowledge, one cannot know that one knows. The meta-question is excluded as unanswerable. In fact, meta-knowledge is not properly an object of knowledge at all. One must ask: What is the proper object of meta-knowledge? The object of meta-knowledge is the interior state of the rational agent regarding knowledge, i.e. does the rational agent possess knowledge or not? This is contingent. It can be either true or false. Thus, since the state of one's knowing is always contingent and can be either true or false, the knowledge of one's knowledge falls in the realm of belief. The knowledge one has must necessarily be true, but knowledge of one's knowledge does not entail such necessity and so isn't the proper object of knowledge at all. Thus, meta-knowledge as *knowledge* is impossible on these grounds as well.

It seems that given the considerations just discussed one might ask the question: Must one always doubt one's knowledge in order to have any knowledge at all? This seems paradoxical, to say the least. If one does indeed possess knowledge, to claim one does not know is false, and how can this be virtuous? A couple of considerations here. First, a lack of humility cuts one off from the source of knowledge, and since knowledge is given, to cut one off from the source of knowledge is to abandon both knowledge and its possibility. Does this entail that knowledge is constantly being given? It seems so. Knowledge can never be fully possessed, because then I no longer need to look at that which is known; I, rather, look inward at that which I possess. Since I am not what is known, such a course of action immediately cuts one off from what is known.⁹⁰ For this not to be the case, I must become that which is known, and this would entail that I become eternal and unchanging. This also entails that sincerity must always be present since one must also always be open to seeing that which is offered. Second, humility, at the meta-level, would simply be recognition that I can never have meta-knowledge. We might call this meta-humility. Thus, even after knowledge has been acquired, the virtues play an essential role.

⁸⁹ This also has implications in the realm of public discourse, but such a discussion does not belong here. I wish here merely to raise the issue for thought.

⁹⁰ Can I be the object of knowledge? In other words, what about self-knowledge? If this is a question of knowing one's *particularity* as a human being, which I believe it is, then it falls under the question of whether particularity can be known, which was examined earlier. Cf. n. 56.

A brief examination should be made regarding the level of belief. We have spent much of this paper discussing knowledge, but there are several questions which arise regarding beliefs which deserve some consideration. First, can we know the truth of our beliefs? If this is a meta-question, i.e. can I know that I know my belief is true, then the answer is no on the grounds already stated for rejecting the meta-question. If we are simply asking whether I can have knowledge of the truth of my belief, the answer remains no. This is not the proper domain of knowledge, since such truth is contingent, i.e. can either be true or false. The most I can ever say about my own belief is that I believe it to be true. Second, do the virtues play any role on the level of belief?⁹¹ It may be the case that humility is only necessary at the level of knowledge, but this does not entail that it is unimportant on lower levels. If one lacks humility in one area of one's life, it seems difficult that it might be claimed in another. One must at least, even on the level of belief, realize that one's beliefs are uncertain and further realize that belief is of lesser importance than knowledge. One must always recognize a certain deficiency in one's epistemic state, as long as one remain on the level of belief.⁹²

Finally, it should also be noted that nothing in our account entails infallibility on the part of the knower. Just as the eye can be defective or some obstacle can hinder its ability to receive what the light gives to it, so also the mind can be obscured by a variety of possible factors such that its reception of the reality revealed to it is obscured. This does not entail that one's knowledge is false. Rather it entails that one does not know.⁹³

⁹¹ I thank Dr. Sarah Wright who raised the question of what advice might be given regarding thinking well on the level of belief, which led to these concerns. I do not completely answer her question here, but I hope I offer some insights into a direction such an exploration might go.

⁹² Even if one could be certain that the sun shone yesterday, it must be recognized that such certainty is far inferior to knowledge of the eternal and unchanging nature of the thing which makes such things as "shining" possible. One is reminded here of the prisoners in Plato's Cave who mock and ridicule the returning philosopher for failing to understand the shadowy relations of things as well as they do. However, as a reminder, certainty on any level is excluded. Perhaps a recognition and embrace of this principle could be seen as a gift of post-modernism. Lyotard's definition of post-modernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv) reflects this. By recognizing the inadequacy of metanarratives, we must suspend any claims to meta-knowledge even of ourselves.

⁹³ Again, partial knowledge is not necessarily excluded here.

Conclusion

To summarize our account, we have argued that properly speaking, knowledge and belief are specifically distinct epistemological states.⁹⁴ Each has its own proper object: belief is oriented toward things that change, the sensible, contingency, while knowledge is oriented toward reality, nature, what is unchanging and necessary. Knowledge requires a proper orientation, which is primarily an orientation of character, involving humility, i.e. a recognition of one's ignorance, and sincerity, i.e. an openness to seeing the truth when it presents itself. Without these virtues, knowledge is impossible. This means that while perhaps we are not to be praised for our knowledge, we are still responsible for our knowledge. Finally, knowledge has value in how we live our lives. This does not exclude other values of knowledge, but, we have argued, this is its primary value. The relationship between virtue and knowledge is reciprocal. Just as one must have knowledge to be good and live well, so also one must be virtuous (humble and sincere) in order to live a good life.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ If belief is an epistemological state at all.

⁹⁵ I recognize that explanation of the relationship between knowledge and the good life might be unsatisfactory, but we will leave that to be explored in more detail later.