

# Plato's *Republic*: Knowledge and Belief

## Questions

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#	Year	#	Question Name	Tags	
	2020	7	In what sense is opinion intermediate between knowledge and ignorance? How does Socrates argue for this claim in book 5, and is he successful in persuading the sight-lovers that they lack knowledge?	5a. General evaluation	
	2019	5	Does Plato's view of the distinction between knowledge and belief require that if I know a thing I cannot have any belief about it?		
	2018	6	Are Socrates' arguments for the distinction between knowledge ( <i>episteme</i> ) and belief ( <i>doxa</i> ) sound? Is the distinction he draws philosophically tenable?		
	2017	5	Does Socrates' distinction between knowledge and belief in book V undermine his proposal for philosopher rulers?	5d. Implications	
	2016	6	'Of all the many beautiful things, is there one that will not also appear ugly? Or is there one of those just things that will not also appear unjust?' (book 5, 479b). Explain and assess the role that this phenomenon plays in Socrates' argument in book 5 about the difference between belief and knowledge.		
	2015	5	Should the sight-lovers in book V be convinced by Socrates' argument for his claim that they have opinion but not knowledge?	5a. General evaluation	
	2014	5	What is the 'two worlds' view? Is Plato committed to it, and if so, how damaging is it?	5b. Two Worlds	
	2013	4	Are the views of <i>Republic</i> , Book V compatible with the view that knowledge is some form of improved true belief?		
	2012	6	Does Plato think it possible to have knowledge of the many beautifuls? Is he right?	5b. Two Worlds	
	2011	4	'Lovers of sights and sounds are the experts in their fields just as philosophers are the experts in theirs.' What is Plato's answer to this?		
	2009	6	What is it to be a lover of sights and sounds, and why are such people important for Plato's argument?	5d. Implications	
	2009	7	'Plato does not mean to analyse what we mean by "knowledge", "belief", and "ignorance", but simply define three new notions for his own purposes.' Discuss.		
	2008	2	Does Plato's account of knowledge in the <i>Republic</i> allow the possibility of knowledge of sensible things? Does the <i>Republic</i> recognize any such knowledge?	5b. Two Worlds	
	2007	5	What, according to the <i>Republic</i> , are the objects of opinion ( <i>doxa</i> )?		
	2006	5	Is Plato's discussion of knowledge and opinion vitiated by confusing different senses of 'be'?		
	2005	5	What is 'ignorance' ( <i>agnoia</i> )?		
	2004	7	'Is any one of the manys what someone says it is, then, any more than it is not what he says it is?' (V, 479b9-10). Discuss.		
	2003	8	Is opinion intermediate between knowledge and ignorance?		
+ ::	2002	4	Is true opinion, like knowledge, set over what is? If not, what is it set over? <span>OPEN</span>		
	2001	5	Does Socrates' way of distinguishing opinion from knowledge recognize the difference between true and false opinion?		
	2000	6	Who are the 'lovers of sights' of <i>Republic</i> , V, and do Socrates' arguments succeed in refuting their views?	5a. General evaluation	

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# Building Blocks

## 1.1 Who are the lovers of sights and sounds?

- Lovers of sights and sounds are contrasted with philosophers (476a-d)
  - They “like beautiful sounds, colors, shapes, and everything fashioned out of them, but their thought is unable to see and embrace the nature of the beautiful itself”
  - They live in a dream, thinking that “a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like”, whereas philosophers live in a wakened state, as each “believes in the beautiful itself, can see both it and the things that participate in it and doesn’t believe that the participants are it or that it itself is the participants”
- Socrates intends to convince the lovers of sights and sounds that they have opinion rather than knowledge (476e)
  - They are convinced that they know (have knowledge of) what beauty is
  - Yet, according to Socrates, they cannot have knowledge because they are not accustomed to the Forms

## 1.2 What is Socrates’ argument for the lovers of sights and sounds?

1. Socrates makes the TRIPARTITE DISTINCTION between knowledge, ignorance, and belief, which correspond to what is, what is not, and what is and is not
2. He explains the distinction in terms of POWERS (capacities) – what they are set over and what they accomplish. Since knowledge is infallible but belief is, Socrates argues the two are different powers (capacities), and thus they are set over different things
3. He shows that any one of the manys (e.g. the many beautifuls) are ambiguous, always participating in both opposites (they are no more beautiful than ugly); these things being intermediate between being and not being, they are the things opinion is set over, not knowledge

## 1.3 What is the tripartite distinction? (476e-477b)

- Knowledge is set over what (purely) is
- Ignorance is set over what is not
- Belief / opinion is set over what is and is not
  - The object of knowledge and belief must be distinct because they are of different powers. Therefore, we do not believe either what is or what is not
- As what is and is not is conceptualised as the intermediate between what is and what is not, belief is conceptualised as the intermediate between ignorance and knowledge

## 1.4 What are powers (capacities)? (477c-478d)

- “Powers are a class of the things that enable us—or anything else for that matter—to do whatever we are capable of doing” (477c)
- Socrates’ criteria for individuation (477d)
  - What is set over the same things & does the same things is the same power
  - What is set over different things & does different things are different powers
- Knowledge is infallible, while opinion is fallible; so each of these two powers are set over something different and does something different (477e)

- **Problem** What about the possibility that two powers are set over the same things but do different things, or are set over different things but do the same?
  - Husbandry and butchery are set over the same object but have different effects (Baltzly 1997)

### 1.5 How does Socrates argue that the many are the things opinion is set over? (479a-480a)

- The many beautifuls, bigs, smalls, lights, heavies always participate in both opposites
- “They are ambiguous, and one cannot understand them as fixedly being or fixedly not being or as both or as neither” (479c)
- So, they should be placed in the intermediates between what is not and what is
- So, they belong to the opinable, not the knowable
- So, the sight-lovers opine everything but have no knowledge of anything they opine, whereas philosophers know and don’t opine

### 1.6 What might be the criteria for judging whether Socrates’ argument is successful?

- Dialectical requirement / condition of non-controversiality (Fine 1978): he cannot assume the theory of the Forms at the outset
- Non-equivocation: he cannot equivocate over the verb ‘to be’
- Validity: e.g. regarding the concept of powers
- More evaluation
  - It is not clear what is at stake: sensible particulars vs Forms? sensible universals vs Forms? both of those vs Forms?
  - Sensible universals: e.g. the colour red, the property of symmetry, or the action-type of giving back what is due: it is both just and unjust
  - Does Socrates distinguish between true and false opinion? Consider: what does it mean to say that “Mona Lisa is beautiful” is true?

### 2.1 What are the different readings of the verb ‘to be’ (*esti*)?

- Existential reading: ‘X is’ means ‘X exists’; this is object-oriented
- Predicative reading: ‘X is...’ must be completed, e.g. ‘X is F’; also object-oriented
- Veridical reading: ‘X is’ means ‘X is true’; this is content-oriented, i.e. contents are different but the objects can be the same
- Note: modern commentators have imposed their own distinctions onto the ancient Greek verb when none existed; the different readings are more connected than their categorizations suggest (Brown 1994)
  - **Example** ‘John teaches English’ implies ‘John teaches’; ‘John teaches’ implies ‘John teaches such-and-such’. The two statements are not rephrasings of one another, so there is not necessarily equivocation here
  - **Problem** ‘John does not teach English’ does not imply ‘John does not teach’, contrary to Plato’s inference that ‘X is not F’ implies ‘X is not’
  - **Response** ‘To be’ is not the same as ‘to teach’
    - Dancy suggests that in this schema, the complete ‘X is not’ may be understood as ‘there is some mode of being which X lacks’

### 2.2 What is two worlds theory (TW)?

- According to TW, there is no knowledge of sensibles, but only of Forms and no belief about Forms but only about sensibles (Fine 1999)

### 2.3 What is two worlds theory *modified* (TW\*)? (Baltzly 1997)

- I shall argue that we ought to combine the predicative and veridical readings of *esti*
- TW\* allows that knowledge can be about sensibles (which TW precludes)
  - The motivation behind this is the idea that philosophers ought to have more knowledge of things in the cave than people inside
  - Otherwise they would struggle in ruling because what they have knowledge of is in a very different realm
  - However, no knowledge of the sensibles can count as Forms
- I propose that Plato imagined a correlation between statements and objects in matters of knowledge and opinion (p.259)
  - When Socrates asks a question like 'What is beauty?', he makes it clear that what he is seeking is that by virtue of which all beautiful things are beautiful. Such a thing I call a 'logical cause'. (p.248)
  - Knowledge (p.259-260)
    - Let w be the logical cause of F
    - w is completely F
    - 'The w is F' is completely true
    - e.g. The Form of Beauty is the logical cause of beauty, so it is completely true that the Form of Beauty is beautiful.
  - Opinion (p.260)
    - z is not the logical cause of F
    - Some of the F things are z and so that which is z is F (in part, at least) but it fails to be completely F. In such a case, 'the z is the F' is no more true than false.
    - e.g. The Form of a Chair is not the logical cause of beauty; hence, some chairs may be beautiful while others are not.
  - Ignorance (p.260)
    - z is not the logical cause of F
    - No F thing may turn out to be z. In this case the z is in no way F and the statement 'the z is the F' is only false.
    - e.g. The Form of Beauty is not the logical cause of ugliness, so no ugly things may turn out to be beautiful.
- **Statement** (p.267) Where C is a content which is alleged to answer a 'What is F?' question and O is the object or objects which correspond to C:
  - (a) if C is no more true than false, then C can only be the object of belief and O cannot be a Form, and
  - (b) if C is completely true because O is the logical cause of F, then C can only be known and O may be a Form
- On [Annas'] view, though I may know that Socrates is a man because there is no respect in which he fails to be one, I may only have beliefs about Socrates' beauty, for he is both beautiful and not beautiful. She finds the motivation for this view in the idea that Plato regards the hallmark of knowledge, not as certainty in the Cartesian sense, but as infallibility. But this does not explain why one could not know that Socrates is more beautiful with respect to eye colour than Simmias. That is, once all of the qualifications of an incomplete predication are filled in, it seems that we have something epistemically safe which is a candidate for knowledge
- While it might be true that Socrates is beautiful in a certain respect, Socrates cannot be the truthmaker for the *exceptionlessly* true account of what beauty is

- TW\*(b) says that O may be a Form because it is not yet clear that Plato thinks that the logical cause for each and every value of F must be a separated Form

## 2.4 What is the degrees of existence (DE) reading?

*Tutor: nobody argues for DE nowadays, the debate is mainly between DR and DT*

- Existential reading
- Object-oriented
- Knowledge is of what exists, belief is of what half exists or what both exists and does not exist, and ignorance is of what does not exist or is not anything at all (Fine)
- The notion of existence plays no role in the argument (Annas 1981)
  1. Existence, as a distinct notion, is *our* concept; if we are to use it to interpret Plato we must show that we can *already* make sense of the notion of degrees of existence *before* claiming to find it in Plato's metaphysics
  2. Even if Plato did have a deep metaphysical theory of degrees of existence, the notion would appear at the end of some argument, rather than as a common-sense point that Socrates and Glaucon share before it begins

## 2.5 What is the degrees of reality (DR) reading? (Vlastos 1965)

- Predicative reading
- Object-oriented
- Knowledge is of what is really F (for some predicate F), belief is of what is F and not F, and ignorance is of what is not F (Fine 1978)
- One sense of 'real': that which is cognitively dependable, undecieving
  - **Analogy** A 'real' friend is more of a friend than a 'fake' friend in the sense that the real one better embodies what it is to be a friend
- Rejects DE
  - The lovers of sights are mistaken about the reality of the beauty, not the existence, of the things of sense
  - Everything is equally existent but not everything is equally real; how real is how well the object approximates the forms

## 2.6 What are the degrees of truth (DT) / T readings? (Fine 1978, 1999)

- Veridical reading
- Content-oriented
- DT: Each token belief is "true and not true", in the sense of being partly true and partly false, or near the mark (p.126)
  - DT gives 'belief' a sense of being 'near the mark'; false beliefs are not beliefs, and the contents of knowledge and belief will be irreducibly different (truth and partial truths respectively)
  - The contents of knowledge and belief are irreducibly different
  - Something that is a content of knowledge cannot be a content of belief
  - **Problem** It is possible to have knowledge that something is beautiful, but it is also possible to have beliefs that something is beautiful, although that belief could be true at one point but not another
- T: The set of beliefs covered by the power contains true as well as false members, so some of my beliefs are true, others false (p.126)
  - Fine prefers this over the Degrees of Truth reading, since it is most intuitive

- T allows both false and true beliefs, and that the same proposition can be the content of belief and of knowledge
- I do not claim that T is ever required, but it is a plausible argument
- Plato distinguishes knowledge and belief not by reference to their objects, but by reference to the truth implications of their contents
- This would not commit Plato to TW; his arguments neither require nor suggest it
- Although the sight-lovers thus lack any knowledge about beauty, they have belief, not ignorance, about it. For although beauty should not be defined in terms of bright colour, many brightly coloured things are beautiful; and so, guided by their false definition, they will be led to some true beliefs about beauty, such as that this brightly coloured painting is beautiful. These true beliefs cannot constitute knowledge, since they are not adequately explained in terms of a correct *aitias logismos*; but the fact that the sight-lovers have them shows that they are not ignorant about beauty, even if they do not know anything about beauty. The sight-lovers thus have some true beliefs (about what things are beautiful) and some false beliefs (at least about what beauty is). Each of their beliefs is determinately true or false
- To say that knowledge is set over Forms is shorthand for the claim that all knowledge requires knowledge of Forms; to say that belief is set over the many Fs is shorthand for the claim that if one is restricted to sensibles, the most one can achieve is belief

Theory	Author(s)	Reading of <i>to be</i>	Orientation	TW?
DE	N/A	Existential	Object-oriented	Yes
DR	Vlastos	Predicative	Object-oriented	Yes
DT	Fine (1978, 1999)	Veridical	Content-oriented	No
T	Fine (endorsed)	Veridical	Content-oriented	No
Existence/truth	Cooper (1986)	?	?	?
Reality/truth	Baltzly (1997)	P + V	Both	Modified

### 2.7 What is Cooper's (1986) view?

- I contend that expressions of the form "this is no more X than not-X" are used by Plato to refer to things or classes of things about which the same statements do not hold in all aspects, respects or relations
- The contrasts which Plato has led us to draw by the end of Book V and the beginning of Book VI are between stable or eternal objects, on the one hand, and shifting and fleeting objects on the other, between stable and eternal truths on the one hand and unstable and fugitive truths on the other. It may seem strange to us that Plato should be drawing both contrasts at the same time, but it is really very intelligible.
  - **Example** "This is odd" is eternally true of the number 3
  - **Example** "He is asleep" is only sometimes true of Neil Cooper
- The basis for the tripartite ontological classification is Plato's distinction between ordinary existence/truth and stable existence/truth

- The extremes are that-which-is-stably and that-which-is-not-at-all. That-which-is-not-at-all has not even an instantaneous existence for Plato; there is no truth about "it" and so we can say nothing and know nothing about "it". That is why the state corresponding to "it" is ignorance. At the other extreme is that-which-is-stably. It is stable in that not only does it neither come into being nor pass away, but also in that anything which is true of it at one time or in one relation is true of it at another time or in another relation. It exists "completely" or "wholly", and it is, unlike "the things between", pure or unmixed
- Between these lie the ordinary objects which we encounter in space and time. They exist and are the subjects of properties; knowledge and belief are true of them at given times and in given relations, but not at all times and in all relations. They therefore in a sense "are", but in another sense "are not"; they are excluded both from what-is-stably and from being nonentities, and so are "neither" that-which-is-not nor that-which-is
- It is not that the Forms exist to a greater degree than other things which either cannot or do not go out of existence [...] The ontological grade of his entities is dependent on the status of the truth of the sentences in which they figure

## 2.8 What are the arguments for DT/T over DE/DR? (Fine 1978, 1999)

- Both DE and DR violate the condition of non-controversiality
  - DE and DR both separate the objects of knowledge and belief, which the sight-lovers don't necessarily have to accept
  - DE additionally introduces 'half-existent' objects
  - In contrast, DT/T only claims that knowledge entails truth
- Plato's claim is that knowledge is of what is true, that belief is of what is and is not true, that ignorance is of what is false
- Unlike DE and DR, it does not force a separation of the objects of knowledge and belief, only their content
- But this does not entail TW: the claims that are known or believed can be directed to the same objects
- DT/T explains how Plato can infer from two powers having different effects to them being set over different things
  - According to TW, different powers must have different objects; but the inference would be invalid
  - According to contents analysis: powers can range over contents as well as objects → when one knows, one knows a piece of knowledge; and when one believes, one believes a belief; so the inference is valid
  - Moreover, if we read the argument this way, then Plato leaves open the possibility (although, again, he does not require) that one can know and have beliefs about the same objects, and even of the same proposition (i.e. it is a belief when it is believed; and a piece of knowledge when it is known)
  - A valid, suitably non-controversial argument goes hand in hand with avoiding TW
- DE/DR renders the following part either fallacious or unfair, but T does not
  1. Each of the many Fs is no more F than not F

2. Therefore, each of the many Fs is and is not
3. The many Fs, therefore, are between being and not being
  - Any observable property is both F and not F, since it collects F as well as not F cases (some cases of bright colouring are beautiful, others not)
  - The sight-lovers can be expected to agree; it is because no one explanation of beauty, phrased in terms of sensibles, will account for all cases of beauty, that sight-lovers insist on many accounts; no one account will do
  - On DE, (2) is a shift from 'is no more F than not F' to 'does and does not exist', but this is fallacious
  - On DR, all previous uses of 'is' are 'is-p', then we can only know what is really and fully F, or the Forms, and at best have beliefs about sensibles which are F and not F

### 2.10 Does Plato endorse TW?

- No (Annas 1981)
  - Plato has not argued, and the argument does not imply, that *only* Forms can be objects of knowledge. Knowledge is of what is *F* and cannot be not-*F*. This indication would let me *know* that Socrates is a man
  - Plato has contrasted Forms, which are objects of knowledge, with particular instances of Forms (things that 'partake in' Forms), which are objects of belief. But this contrast cannot be identified with the contrast between universals and particulars
  - Particulars are objects of belief or knowledge, depending on the kind of claim being made about them (e.g. whether this is a man vs whether this action is just)
- No (Fine 1978)
  - Although Plato correlates knowledge with Forms, and beliefs with sensibles, he does not claim that all knowledge concerns only Forms, or that all beliefs concern only sensibles
  - Restricted to the many Fs (the sensibles), the most one can attain is belief; for knowledge, one needs an account in terms of Forms. But the content of this account need not be restricted to Forms (Forms are the primary objects of knowledge, but not necessarily the only ones), nor need every claim about a Form be knowledgeable
  - If TW is Plato's argument, it violates his condition of noncontroversiality, misuses his criteria for capacity-individuation, and on at least some interpretations equivocates
  - On my interpretation, knowledge and belief are distinguished not by their different sets of objects, but by their truth implications: knowledge, but not belief, entails truth
  - Plato has precluded neither knowledge of sensibles or beliefs about Forms
  - But this will lose TW, but that's fine
- No: Plato committing to TW would bring consequences of note (Fine 1999)
  1. The objects of knowledge and belief are then disjoint; one cannot move from belief to knowledge about some single thing. I cannot first believe that the sun is shining, and then come to know that it is
  2. Plato rejects the *Meno's* account of knowledge: for the *Meno*, knowledge implies true belief; on TW, knowledge excludes true belief



3. Plato is then quite sceptical about the limits of knowledge; although at least philosophers can know Forms, no one can know items in the sensible world. No one can know, for example, what actions are just or good; no one can know even such mundane facts as that they're now seeing a tomato, or sitting at a table
  4. This sceptical result would be quite surprising in the context of the *Republic*, which aims to persuade us that philosophers should rule, since only they have knowledge, and knowledge is necessary for good ruling. If their knowledge is only of Forms—if, like the rest of us, they only have belief about the sensible world—it is unclear why they are specially fitted to rule in this world. They don't know, any more than the rest of us do, which laws to enact
  5. The text of the *Republic* seems to contradict TW. At 506c Plato says that he has beliefs about, but no knowledge of, the Form of the Good; and at 520c he says that the philosopher who returns to the cave will know the things there, i.e. sensibles. Contrary to TW, then, one can have beliefs about Forms, and know sensibles
- TW is hard to reconcile with things said later in the *Republic* (Baltzly 1997)
    - In the figure of the cave at 520c4-6, Plato claims that the philosophers "will know each image, whatever it is and of what it is, since you have seen the truth concerning the fine, the just and the good". The images on the wall in the cave, of course, are supposed to be analogous to sensible things. It makes a certain amount of sense to suppose that the philosopher-kings are able to have knowledge (or at least some kind of reliable or even infallible cognitive attitude) of these sensible things. Otherwise, what would be the practical point of having knowledge of the Forms if it did not improve one's ability to operate within the shadow world?