PLATO'S USE OF ELEUSINIAN MYSTERY MOTIFS

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The Eleusinian Mysteries are religious rituals that include rites of initiation, purification, and revelation. The high point of these Mysteries is the moment when a priest reveals the secret of the Mysteries to the newly initiated. Plato frequently uses language and motifs from the Mysteries in his dialogues, yet Plato scholars have not paid much attention to this usage, and those who have done so have not found much philosophical significance in it. I argue that in explaining his epistemology in three middle and late period dialogues Plato consciously and systematically uses Eleusinian Mystery motifs to convey the idea of a unique kind of knowledge. This immediate, direct, and incorrigible knowledge bursts upon Plato's initiates after they undergo preparatory

processes such as purification through *elenchus*. I examine the Eleusinian Mystery motifs that Plato employs in the Ladder of *Eros* at *Symposium* 209e-212a, in the middle books of the *Republic*, including the Myth of the Cave at *Republic* 509a-518d, and in the Myth of the Soul at *Phaedrus* 246a-253c, and I argue that Plato finds these Mystery elements useful for two reasons. First, in many cases before an individual can come to know a form he must go through certain conditioning and transformatory processes to prepare him for it, and motifs from the Mysteries help Plato to describe these processes. Second, knowledge of a form is different from other kinds of knowledge, and the motif of the visual revelation of the *epopteia* helps him to express the direct, unmediated contact that constitutes knowledge of a form.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. In chapter one I present background information concerning the stages and events of the Mysteries. I consider the purpose and effects of initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries, paying special attention to the preparatory rituals. In chapter two I present a general discussion of certain aspects of Plato's epistemology and show how Plato employs the five Mystery motifs of progressing through a sequence of stages, purification, being led by a *mystagogos*, experiencing the *epopteia*, and achieving eudaimonia in order to explicate these aspects. In chapter three I consider the specifics of Plato's use of Mystery terminology in the *Symposium*. And finally, in an Appendix, I argue that Plato has a model of knowledge by acquaintance, since I assert in chapters two and three that Plato uses the Mystery theme of an *epopteia* to express features of this model.

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Chapter 1: Overview and Background

I: General Introduction and Overview

Plato in the three dialogues, *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, employs language and motifs from the Eleusinian Mysteries, rituals whose content seems very foreign to the endeavors of a rational philosopher. Yet Plato uses these elements when discussing the process of acquiring knowledge of forms, the form of beauty in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* and the form of the good in the *Republic*. I argue that Plato finds these Mystery elements useful for two reasons. First, in many cases before an individual can come to know a form he must go through certain conditioning and transformatory processes to prepare him for it, and motifs from the Mysteries help Plato to describe these processes. Second, knowledge of a form is different from other kinds of knowledge and the motif of the visual revelation of the *epopteia* helps him to express the direct, unmediated contact that constitutes knowledge of a form.

The structure of the dissertation will be as follows. In chapter one, after giving a review of the literature concerning Plato and the Mysteries, I will present background for the stages and events of the Mysteries. I will consider the purpose and effects of initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries giving special attention to the preparatory rituals designed to condition the initiates and prepare them to understand the meaning of the *epopteia*, the high point of initiation. Finally, I will consider in more detail five Mystery themes which Plato employs: progressing through a sequence of stages, being purified, being

led by a guide, seeing the *epoptic* vision, and achieving a blessed state. I wili consider extensively the *epopteia* since it is this motif that Plato employs to give an account of the nature of knowing a form. In chapter two I will present a general discussion of certain aspects of Plato's epistemology and show how Plato employs these five motifs to explicate them. In chapter three I will consider the specifics of Plato's use of Mystery terminology in the *Symposium.* And finally, in an appendix, I will argue that Plato has a model of knowledge by acquaintance, since I assert in chapters two and three that Plato uses the Mystery theme of an *epopteia* to express some features of this model.

IA: The Greek Mysteries

The Mysteries were rituals connected with ancient cults. To the extent that they were centered on the worship of gods and goddesses, these cults can be considered religious, but individuals in ancient Greece did not generally adhere strictly to one religion or identify themselves in terms of a religion.[1] For instance, an Athenian citizen could both worship the Olympian gods and be initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Mysteries were characterized by secrecy and the promise of the blessing of a god or goddess. Their rituals involved rites of purification, initiation, and, in some cases, the cultivation of ecstatic states. Initiation is the most central of these rituals. Through initiation an individual gained membership into the select group of the cult and became distinguished by knowledge of its secrets.[2] The Greeks believed that the

[1]W.Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (*AMC*), (Cambridge, Massachusettes, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 3-4.
[2]The Greek word for mystery is *mysterion*, used mostly in the plural, *mysteria* The verb for to initiate is *mueo* (in the passive, to receive initiation). An etymological connection has been

initiate experienced a personal change of status in terms of his or her relationship to the divinity of the cult. Burkert describes this as "a new state of mind through experience of the sacred."[3] Some of the cults were public and attached to fixed sanctuaries, while others were promulgated by traveling priests who performed initiations privately. In most cults there also existed worship for the non-initiated, independent of possible candidacy for initiation.[4]

The most prominent ancient Mysteries are the Mysteries of Eleusis, the Bacchic Mysteries or Mysteries of Dionysus, the Mysteries of Cybele, which include the Korybantic Mysteries, and the Mysteries of Orpheus. Plato makes reference to each of these Mysteries.[5] But my focus here will be on the Eleusinian Mysteries because Plato primarily uses motifs from these Mysteries when discussing his theory of knowledge.

IA1: Eleusinian Mysteries

The Eleusinian Mysteries honored Demeter, the goddess of physical sustenance, and probably derived from early agricultural festivals.[6] Our sources

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suggested between these words and the verb *muo*, which means to shut or close, as applied to the eyes or lips. Once an individual has been initiated, he or she must not reveal the secrets of the mysteries to any of the uninitiated, *i.e.*, the initiate must keep silent about them, keep them a secret. Walter Burkert in his *Ancient Mystery Cults*(pp. 8-9 and n. 36) proposes that this may just be a popular etymology. He points out that the verbal root *mu(s)-* seems to be attested in Mycenaen Greek, possibly for the initiation of an official.

[3] *AMC*, p. 8.

[4] *AMC*, p. 10.

[5] E.g. At *Euthydemus* 277d Socrates refers to the possibility that Clinias was initiated into the Corybantic Mysteries, and at *Phaedrus* 253a he refers to the Bacchants.

[6] The Eleusinian mysteries were celebrated in Greece for at least a thousand years from roughly 600 BC. to 400 AD. It is known for certain they were celebrated during this period, but they may have begun as early as 1500 B.C.E. See Diodorus Siculus i. 29. 1-3; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheke* III, 14, 7 and *Marmor Parium*, lines 22-30 for the legends about the advent of Demeter to Attika and the first celebration of the Mysteries. The rites were initially practiced only in Eleusis, but by the time of Solon, when Athens had incorporated Eleusis into its sphere, the Athenians as well as foreigners who came to Athens also took part in the Eleusinian

for these Mysteries include archaeological evidence from excavation of the buildings where the Mysteries were held, reliefs and vases, inscriptions, and references in literary sources such as the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter.*[7]

The Eleusinian Mysteries were open to anyone, man or woman, slave or free, who spoke Greek and who was free of blood guilt. There was a fee for initiation which was fifteen drachmas, the equivalent of about ten days wages at the time of the fourth century B.C.[8] The Mysteries were composed of two degrees of initiation, the Small (*smikra*) Mysteries, and the Great (*megala*) Mysteries. One could be initiated into the Great Mysteries only after having been initiated into the Small. The celebration of the Small Mysteries generally occurred in the spring, and the festival of the Great Mysteries was held in the fall.

IB: Previous Work on Plato and the Mysteries

Little work has been done in the area of Plato and the Greek Mysteries. The work there is primarily focuses on either the way in which Plato's use of Mystery language influences the structure of the dialogues or the attitudes of

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mysteries. From this time on, the first part of the rites was performed in Athens, and the initiates processed along a twelve mile route to Eleusis where they participated in the remaining rites.

[7]K. Clinton hesitates to take the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as an accurate account of the cult myth of the Eleusinian Mysteries. He believes that the form of the myth as it appears in the Mysteries is different than the one told in the *Homeric Hymn.* He thinks that the *Hymn* is largely an explanatory account of the Thesmophoria (*Myth and Cult: Iconography of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Stockholm: Svenska Institute i Athens, 1992, pp. 14, 32.)) While there are a fair number of literary sources that mention the Mysteries, problems with the *testamonia* include the facts that much of it is late (Plutarch) and/or its author has a religious bias against the Mysteries as dangerous pagan practices (Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria).

[8]H. Foley, ed. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 66).

both the Athenian audiences and Plato and Socrates toward the Mysteries and Mystery language. Very little attention has been given to the philosophical implications of Plato's usage of Mystery language and motifs.

One of the first works to appear that addresses Plato's use of Mystery terminology and motifs is A. Diès' early twentieth century paper "La transposition platonicienne"[9] Diès introduces the concept of transposition, the name he gives to the way Plato uses and reinterprets ideas and movements contemporary to him in order to express his own thought. Among the subjects he sees Plato transposing are Orphism and literary mysticism.

Between 1944 and 1950 I. Linforth wrote three papers concerning Plato and the Mysteries.[10] The first, "Soul and Sieve in Plato's *Gorgias*", is about *Gorgias* 492d-493c. Linforth examines Socrates' use of the analogies between an uninitiated soul and a sieve and between the desirous part of the soul and a leaky jar. He also considers Plato's treatment of the Orphic identification of the body as tomb of the soul and Plato's comparison of the foolish to the uninitiated. In the second article, "The Corybantic Rites in Plato," Linforth discusses the six references to the Corybantic rites found in Plato and reviews what we know about the rites from other ancient authors. He concludes from the way Plato employs references to the rites that Plato tacitly approves of them and even admires them. In the final article, "Telestic Madness in Plato,

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[9]This paper appeared as a chapter in his book *Autour de Platon.: essai de critique et d'histoire.* Second edition. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972 (1927)).

[10]"Soul and Sieve in Plato's *Gorgias*," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 12 pp. 295-213; 1946. "The Corybantic Rites in Plato," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13, 121-162; 1950. "Telestic Madness in Plato, *Phaedrus* 244DE University *of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13 pp. 163-172.

Phaedrus 244DE," Linforth examines and provides his translation of the passage in which Plato discusses telestic madness[11] as ritual madness that can cure the misery due to ancestral guilt.

One of the first people to focus on the Eleusinian Mysteries in Plato is E. Des Places, in a 1964 paper "Platon et la langue des Mystères."[12] In the first part of the paper he looks at Plato's use of the terms for initiation, *muezzin* and *telete*, and examines the level of consistency of Plato's usage as compared with conventions Des Places identifies in other works. In the second part he focuses on what the uninitiated represent for Plato by considering his use of the words *amuetos* and *atelestos* in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Theaetetus* and *Republic*. Adopting Diès' concept of transposition, in the third part Des Places examines how in the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Epinomis* Plato transmutes the sentiments of joy and ecstasy experienced in the Mysteries in order to describe his own beliefs about the Forms.

A.W.H. Adkins speculates in "Clouds, Mysteries, Socrates and Plato" (1970)[13] about the use of Mystery language by Socrates and Plato and about the response of the Athenians to mockery of the Mysteries. He identifies stages in Plato's use of Mystery language in his dialogues relative to the changing intellectual climate and believes that Plato's early usage was motivated by

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[11] Another paper on this theme is O. Balleriaux's "Mantique et telestique dans le *Phedre* Platon"(*Kernos* 3, 1990, pp. 35-43). Balleriaux concludes that the mantic priests of *Republic* 364b are the same as the telestic priests of *Phaedrus* 244d-e, but just as poets are seen in a negative light in the *Republic* and a positive light in the *Phaedrus*, the same is true of the priests of the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*.

[12] *Annalles de la Faculte des Lettres et Sciences Humaines d'Aix* 38 pp. 9-23.

[13] "Clouds, Mysteries, Socrates and Plato". *Antichthon*. Volume 4. 13-24.

Aristophanes' attack on Socrates in the *Clouds*. During the time period when Aristophanes wrote the *Clouds* Adkins thinks that the Athenians were disposed to take offense at mockery of the Mysteries and that Aristophanes purposefully juxtaposes the bogus Mysteries conducted by Socrates in the *phronesterion* to the Mysteries conducted in Athens in order to create a response of hostility toward Socrates and all the representatives of the New Thought. He believes that one of the things that motivated Aristophanes to do this is that Socrates employed Mystery terminology in discussing philosophical activity (whether ironically or not). Atkins thinks that Plato was moved by Aristophanes' attack on Socrates to include the scene at *Euthydemus* 277d in which Plato uses a sophistic "ritual" that imitates initiation into the Korybantic Mysteries. Atkins believes that Plato does this in order to shift from Socrates to the sophists the idea of teaching as initiation into the Mysteries. Atkins supports the view that Plato himself thought that Mystery language contained philosophical insight and that as a changing climate made it easier to use, Plato employed it more openly, moving from making it characteristic of sophists to putting it in Socrates' mouth with reservations and finally to putting it openly in the mouth of Socrates or the Athenian Stranger.

G.J. De Vries takes a very different position in "Mystery Terminology in Aristophanes and Plato"[14] criticizing Adkins on several points. First, De Vries argues that audiences would not take offense at jocular allusions to the Mysteries as long as they concern the public, preparatory aspects of the

[14]"Mystery Terminology in Aristophanes and Plato". *Mnemosyne* 1970, vol. XXVI pp. 1-8.

Mysteries as the allusions in the *Clouds* do. It is only when the secret, sacred rites are parodied as in the case of the defamation of the Mysteries in 415 B.C. that the Athenians take umbrage. DeVries also disagrees with Adkins' view that Plato believed Mystery language contained philosophical insight. He cites frequent examples where he thinks Plato is using Mystery language ironically, and, following Diès, he holds that Plato often uses Mystery motifs in connection with the literary device of transposition. On the whole, DeVries thinks Plato uses Mystery terminology with unfavorable import in half-pitying, half-contemptuous or mocking usages.

A more recent work on Plato and the Mysteries is Christoph Reidweg's book, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien*.[15] In the Plato section Reidweg focuses almost exclusively on Plato's usage in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. His objects are to see what is behind Plato's expressions marked with Mystery terminology and to determine where Plato supplements our knowledge about the ancient Mystery cults. Reidweg concludes that Plato uses the schematic organization of the Mysteries into stages to form the deep structure of the *Symposium* passages about Eros. He identifies the preliminary *katharsis* of the Mysteries with purificatory elenchus (199c3-201c9), the Small Mysteries with the teaching through aitiological-genealogical myths (201e8-209e40) and the *epoptic* revelation of the Great Mysteries with the vision of Beauty itself (209e5-212a7).

[15]Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987.

In the *Phaedrus* Reidweg focuses on the palinode. Unlike the *Symposium*, Reidweg does not believe that the Mystery terminology here has any pedagogic function. Rather, it is used to highlight the orientation of the philosopher toward the highest reality — the experience of it in viewing the forms and the re- experience of it through recollection. He thinks that Plato primarily utilizes the "showing" aspect of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In the *Phaedrus* Reidweg analyzes the three thematic points: 1) *pheggos*, light (250b3); 2) *pompe* (procession — looking at the relationship between the ascension and the Mysteries); and 3) *deimata* (the fear and trembling experienced by the initiate) (251a4).

Because Plato uses Mystery terminology so naturally, Reidweg concludes, the Mystery cult of Eleusis must have been very much in the awareness of the Athenians and that Plato must have been influenced in his use of the terminology by its use in other authors. Reidweg, taking a very different approach from Adkins, cites Aristophanes' use of Mystery metaphor in the *Clouds* as this influence.

One of the most recent works that discusses Plato and the Mysteries is Michael Morgan's article, "Plato and Greek Religion" in the *Cambridge Companion to Plato.*.[16] This article is very broad in its claims and is derivative of Burkert's work on Greek religion. Morgan's main thesis concerning Plato's use of Mystery motifs is that Plato modifies them by "replacing the emotional character of the ritual process with cognitive content. For Plato . . . a life aimed

[16]Richard Kraut, editor, (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

at salvation takes the form of a life of rational inquiry . . . " (p. 232). Morgan has also written a book, *Platonic Piety*, on which his article appears to be based.[17] His aim in the book is to show that Plato's epistemological and metaphysical thinking are aspects of his appropriation of certain modes of piety current in Athens. He recognizes that Plato is opposing the Delphic ideal where the gods are unapproachable ("Nothing too Much") and embracing the human aspiration to a divine status through Mystery ecstasy. This ecstasy, however, is representative of philosophical inquiry.

Before I give my own view on how Plato uses terminology and motifs from the Mysteries I will provide some background material on the Eleusinian Mysteries.

II: Stages and Events of the Eleusinian Mysteries

The Eleusinian Mysteries were comprised of two main rites: the Lesser Mysteries, which appear to have been conducted at Agrai near the banks of the Ilissos river in the springtime month of Anthesterion, and the Greater Mysteries, which took place in sanctuaries in Athens and Eleusis and along the processional route between the two cities. The Greater Mysteries were held during the fall month of Böedromion. The two rites, the Lesser and the Greater Mysteries, were collectively termed *telete*. In addition to the two distinct rites, there were also two different degrees of initiation: *myesis* and *epopteia*. The *epopteia* is the high point of the Mysteries and is a distinct rite conducted during the Greater Mysteries. It was only open to those who had allowed a year

[17]New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

to lapse after being initiated into the Greater Mysteries for the first time.[18] There is some controversy over the scope of the term *myesis*. It was generally understood to mean the total experience of the Lesser and Greater Mysteries so that upon being initiated into the Mysteries the first time one would be a *mystes*, and only after going through the *epopteia* would individuals attain the higher degree of initiation and become *epoptai*. H.G. Pringsheim, however, disputes this, and argues instead that *myesis* was a rite distinct from the *telete* of the *mysteria*, and that it constituted a pre-initiation. He believes that it could be conducted at any time of the year in either Athens or Eleusis being carried out by priests of the Eumolpidai and Kerykes families.[19] Clinton thinks that Pringsheim is correct concerning the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., but he does not think the thesis holds after 300 B.C. During this period *myesis* was applied to the whole process. Clinton also points out that Plato and Aristotle do not always observe the distinction.[20] R.M. Simms, on the other hand, rejects the view that there was any "free-floating *myesis* pre-initiation separate from the Eleusinian Mysteries."[21] Whether the term *myesis* referred to the process of initiation encompassing both the Lesser and Greater Mysteries or it was a distinct rite, it is clear that there were the two stages of the Greater and Lesser

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[18] *Plutarch's Lives*, Demetrius, 26.2.
[19] *Archäologische Beiträge zur Geschichte des eleusinischenen Kults* (Munich, 1905, pp. 39ff.). See P. Roussel ("L'initiation préalable et le symbole éleusinien," *BCH* 54, 1930, pp 53-67) for a list of others who hold this view.
[20] *Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries*, p. 13, n. 15. See references in P. Boyancé, "Sur les Mysteres d'Eleusis," *REG* 75 (1962), 460-482 for the instances in Plato and Aristotle where they do not keep the distinction.
[21] "Myesis, Telete, and Mysteria." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 183-195.

Mysteries and that the highest degree of initiation attained through the epopteia could only be achieve a year after one's first initiation.

IIA: The Lesser Mysteries

We know very little about what went on during the Lesser Mysteries. They served to purify the initiates and prepare them for what would occur during the Great Mysteries. An inscription attests that in the first half of the 5th century B.C. the rites of *myesis* were held in the courtyard of the Telesterion.[22] However, we have other evidence indicating that later the purificatory rites of the Small Mysteries were conducted in the Ilissos[23] and that these rites were connected to the rites at Agrai held along the Ilissos.[24] The rites at Agrai, according to one source, were "an imitation of the events concerning Dionysus."[25] According to myth, the Small Mysteries were founded in order to permit Herakles to be initiated.[26] After killing the Centaurs, Herakles was in need of purification of blood guilt. Several sources record that the rites were held in honor of Persephone.[27]

IIB: The Greater Mysteries

The Great Mysteries began in Athens, ended in Eleusis, and lasted for nine days during the month of Böedromion. Many of the rites involve

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[22]IG I^2 6 125.
[23]Polyaenus, Strat. 5.17.1: He mentions "purification in the Ilissos at the Lesser Mysteries."
[24]Stephanus of Byzantium under the entry *Agra;* Scholium on Aristophanes' *Plutos*, 845. Burkert denies the connection to Agrai. See *Homo Necans*. p.
[25]Stephanus of Byzantium under the entry *Agra*.
[26]Appolodorus II, 5, 12, 2; Diodorus, IV, 14.3; Scholium on Aristophanes' *Ploutos*, 1013.
[27]Scholia on Aristophanes' *Ploutos* 1013; Athenaios *Deipnosophistae* 6.253D; Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.8.

elements of the Demeter/Kore myth. What we know about the events of the nine days of the Great Mysteries I summarize below.[28]

IIB1: Stages of the Great Mysteries

The 14th of Böedromion — on the day before the festival began, the Hiera, the sacred objects of the Mysteries, were escorted from Eleusis to Athens by *ephebes* after preliminary sacrifices known as the *prothymata* were held. The *hiera* were placed in the Eleusinion in Athens and then transported back to Eleusis during the procession on the 19th.

The 15th — The first day of the Mysteries was known as *Agyrmos*. On this day the *hierophant* instructed the *hierokeryx* or sacred herald, to make the *prorrhesis* or proclamation inviting those who spoke Greek and who were free of pollution to take part in the initiation. This was also the day on which an animal was sacrificed at the command *hiereia deuro* (hither the victims).

The 16th — sacrifice continued on the second day. This day was known as *Halade Mystai* (To the sea, initiates). Initiates bathed in the sea off Phaleron with piglets whom they later sacrificed.

The 17th — This day was reserved for late arrivals. It was called *Epidauria* and commemorated Asclepius' late arrival at the Mysteries (his cult was introduced to Athens on this day in 420 B.C.). Following a procession

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[28]See K. Clinton, "The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis," *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches*, edited by Nanno Marinatos and Robin Hägg (London & New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 116-119); J. Mikalson, *The Sacred and Civil Calendar of the Athenian Year* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 54-60); and G. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, pp. 247-261, 278-280) for a discussion of the evidence for this information.

there was a major sacrifice and an all-night celebration in honor of Asclepius, the god of healing.

The 18th — This day appears to have been a day of rest.

The 19th — This was the day on which the officials of the Mysteries, *ephebes*, priests, and magistrates processed with the *hiera* back to Eleusis. The procession was known as the *pompe*.

The 20th — On this day the initiates set out on the 14 mile trip to Eleusis. The procession was headed by a statue of the god Iacchus carried by the *Iacchagogos*. As the initiates approached Eleusis, the *ephebes* came out of the sanctuary there to provide an escort for the remainder of the journey. As the initiates crossed the Cephisus river, they experienced the *gephyrismos*, in which a group of people standing on the bridge ridiculed and insulted them. The initiates arrived at the sanctuary near dusk and participated in an elaborate Reception of Iacchus, and danced at the Kallichoron Well (the Well of the Beautiful Dances).

The 21st — On this day the secret rites of the *telete* were performed inside the initiation building. The early part of the day was spent resting, and the secret rites took place in the evening.

The 22nd — This was a day of sacrifice and festivity. The sacrifices took place outside of the sanctuary and included the sacrifice of bulls to Demeter and Kore and the sacrifice of piglets by the initiates.

The 23rd — this day is known as *Plemochoai* because it was the day on which two vessels by that name were poured out, one while facing east, the

other while facing west. This was also the last day of the festival, the day on which the initiated returned to Athens.

IIB2: GEOGRAPHY AND TOPOGRAPHY OF THE GREAT MYSTERIES

In chapters two and three I will be suggesting that elements in Platonic myths, such as the ladder in the Ladder of Love and the cave in the Myth of the Cave, may have been inspired by the events of the Mysteries. Therefore, in what follows I will briefly give an account of some of the locations and physical features of the sites of the Mystery rites.

Eleusis is located about 14 miles to the north west of Athens. It is bordered on the south by the bay of Eleusis. A pair of small lakes, known as the Rheitoi, which must be crossed using a bridge, lie along the route from Eleusis to Athens. On the day before the festival began the *hiera* were transported from the *Anaktoron* in Eleusis to Athens where they were stored in the *Eleusinion*, the sanctuary of Demeter in Athens. Mylonas locates the *Eleusinion* below the northwest corner of the Acropolis and above the southern boundary of the Agora.[29] On the first day of the festival people assembled in the *Poikile Stoa* (the Painted Stoa) in the Agora for the *prorrhesis*. We can only surmise where the initiates went to bathe. The nearest shore is the Phaleron coast, but they also could have gone to the coast of the town of Peiraeus.[30] The *pompe* proceeded along a road known as "the road to Eleusis" which developed into the Sacred Way. The initiates not only crossed the bridge

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[29] *Eleusis*, pp. 246-7, with n. 114.

[30] Plutarch, in the *Life of Phokion*, gives an account of an initiate who was washing a pig in the harbor of Cantharus, which is part of the harbor of Peiraeus (28.3).

at the Rheitoi, they also crossed a bridge over the Eleusinian Kephisos. It was on this second bridge that the *gephyrismoi* occurred.

When the initiates entered the sanctuary from the Sacred Way, they would be at the North Pylon. Ahead on the right is an area containing a cave, which is believed to have been used to represent Persephone's ascent from the underworld.[31] Mylonas and Travlos identify the area surrounding the cave as the *Ploutonion* sacred to Plouton.[32] Clinton, however, argues that the *Ploutonion*, alluded to in IG II2 1672, is located in Athens near the *Eleusinion* and that the cave is the site of the Mirthless Rock where Demeter is said to have sat while grieving for Kore.[33] The cave has two main chambers that are separated by a rocky ledge. On the north wall of the smaller chamber is an elliptical opening measuring 1.30 meters by .54 meters. The floor of the cave ascends to the opening, and immediately in front of the opening the rock has been cut away to accommodate a stairway. A person of average size can fit through the opening, which leads to a spot which is outside the cave and at the top of a stairway of six steps which is cut into the rock. The stairway leads to a small triangular area that is separated from the main entrance to the cave. Mylonas believes that the opening was used to stage Kore's ascent to Eleusis from the underworld. According to Mylonas, a priestess representing Kore ascended the stairway and emerged into the cave where she could be seen by

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[31]For the evidence which indicates the underworld character of the cave see Clinton, *Myth and Cult*, p. 18, nn. 21-24.
[32]Mylonas, *Eleusis*, pp. 99-100, 146-149.
[33]*Myth and Cult*, pp. 14-27.

the initiates who could look into the cave from the Sacred Way.[34] Another possibility is that the initiates were in the area at the base of the steps outside the cave, and the priestess ascended out of the cave and walked down the steps. Clinton gives an account of a narrow inner cave 5 meters deep in which was found sacrificial remains. He believes that it was this chamber that was used to represent an opening to the Underworld.[35]

The *Telesterion* was located to the south of the cave. The *Telesterion* precincts went through many changes from the time of Solon through the Roman period as the *Telesterion* was expanded and reconstructed. We are concerned primarily with the *Telesterion* that Pericles had reconstructed after it was destroyed by the Persians, because this is the *Telesterion* as Plato would have known it. However, he may have also lived to have seen changes made in the fourth century. In the Periklean *Telesterion* along the walls of all four sides of the hall or *naos* of the Telesterion were tiers of eight steps. Another set of stairs ran along the northwest corner of the *Telesterion* and ascended to a terrace. This terrace probably was not part of the Periklean *Telesterion*. Mylonas dates it to either the fourth century or to the Roman period.[36] We don't know the route the initiates traveled while moving through the *Telesterion*, but given the abundance of the flights of stairs and the prominent location of them, it is likely that the initiates ascended them while traveling through the *Telesterion* before the final revelation.

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[34]*Eleusis*, pp. 147-148.
[35]*Myth and Cult*, p. 23. The chamber was excavated by Paul Faure. See *BCH* 82, 1958, pp. 800-801.
[36]*Eleusis*, pp. 121-122.

III: Purpose and Effects of Initiation

In section II, we saw just what the stages are that composed the Eleusinian Mysteries. In what follows I will examine the reason why people from Athens, from Eleusis and later from all around the Greek world sought out and participated in the Eleusinian Mysteries. And I will discuss how the specific stages of the Mysteries are connected to achieving the goal or end of being initiated On this basis, I will be able to consider reasons Plato may have had for choosing to employ Eleusinian Mystery motifs when giving an account of his theory of knowledge. The conditioning that the Eleusinian initiates undergo is similar in several respects to the conditioning Plato thinks is necessary before an individual can acquire knowledge of the forms.

IIIA: The Goal of a Blessed Afterlife

The primary goal of initiation was to secure a better fate after death. Belief in an afterlife was common among the Greeks.[37] What was at issue was what *kind* of afterlife would one have. One familiar account of the afterlife included souls that wandered as a shades, but initiates thought they could secure something better. The evidence we have indicates that those who saw the Mystery rites believed that they acquired a state of being blessed (*olbios*),

[37] Accounts of journeys to Hades to visit or bring back the dead are common in poetry, for example the *Nekyia* in Bk. 11 of the *Odyssey*, in the myths of Herakles and Theseus, and in Aristophanes' *Frogs* where Dionysus goes to Hades to bring back Euripides. These accounts vary concerning the kind of existence individuals have after death. In places in the *Odyssey* the *psyche* is described as fluttering like a shadow, lacking a vital force, and even lacking consciousness (Od. 10.495; 11.207; 24 6-9). Yet this does not seem consistent with other accounts such as the account of the punishment of Sisyphus and Tantalus in Hades (Od 11.576-600). In order for such punishment to be effective, one would have to have consciousness. See Burkert, *Greek Religion*, "Afterlife Mythology," pp. 194-199.

and this state of being blessed was believed by the initiates to have a direct correlation to one's fate after death.[38] Those who participated in the Mysteries made a sharp demarcation between the initiated and the uninitiated. The initiated received "true life" in Hades.[39] After the end of their mortal life, they experienced "the beginning of new life given by the gods."[40] The uninitiated individual, however, will only lie dead in the dreary darkness.[41] All in Hades is evil for him or her.[42] Believing that they had achieved such a state of blessedness changed the initiate's attitude toward death. Death was no longer something to be feared or anticipated with dread. A funeral inscription for a hierophant from the Imperial Age says of the hierophant that he had shown the initiates that "death is not an evil, but something good."[43]

Being granted such a state of blessedness, however, not only affected what happened to an initiate after death, but, according to evidence from Isocrates, Cicero, and Krinagoras of Mytilene, it was also supposed to have implications for the here and now. Isocrates, in his *Panegyric* on Athens, says that Demeter's gifts of the Eleusinian rites involve sweet hopes regarding both "the end of life and all *aion*."[44] The word *aion* can mean an individual's life

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[38] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 480, Sophocles, fr. 837 P, Pindar, fr. 137a Sn.
[39] Sophocles, fr. 837.
[40] Pindar, fr. 137a Sn.
[41] *Hymn to Demeter*, 480.
[42] Sophocles, fr. 837.
[43] I.G. II/III^2 5-6. Kerényi argues that the name city name, *Eleusis*, itself means, "the place of happy arrivals" and refers to the underworld. Although the Greek word for arrival is *Eleusis*, the two words differ by accent and inflection. Kerényi claims, however, that both words are related by the rules of vowel gradation to *Elysion*, the name of the realm of the blessed (*Eleusis*, p. 23).
[44] *Panegyrics*, IV 28.

span, an age or generation, one's destiny or lot, or eternity.[45] The first two and possibly the third meaning suggest that the sweet hopes encompassed one's life before as well as after death, while the forth suggests that the hopes are for the time of death and the period after it. Cicero, however, makes it explicit that some of the effects of initiation pertain to this life. He says that Athens has given to the world nothing more excellent and divine than the Eleusinian Mysteries, and part of the reason for this is that through the Mysteries the initiate learns "*how to live in joy*, and how to die with better hopes."[46] Krinagoras of Mytilene expresses similar ideas:

> Even if your life is sedentary and you never sailed the sea or walked the highways of the land, go nevertheless to Attica to see those nights of the Mysteries of Demeter: your heart shall become free of care while you live and lighter when you go to the realm of the majority.[47]

The benefit for this life might simply be the removal of anxiety about death, or it might, as Foley suggests, be bountiful crops which, according to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter gives to humans.[48] But whatever the benefit was in this life, it seems to have been something that had a significant impact on the initiate. This is borne out by a passage in the work of the fifth century historian, Zosimos. He gives an account of what happened when the Emperor Valentinian prohibited the Mysteries in 364 A.D. Vettius Agorius

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[45] *A Greek English Lexicon*. Compiled by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott. Revised and augmented by H.S. Jones with the assistance of R. McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1843, 1985).
[46] *De Legibus*, 2.14.36.
[47] A.P. 11.42; Crinagoras 35 in A.S.F. Gow and D.L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 218-219.
[48] *Hymn*, 469-473. See H.P. Foley, ed., *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 71).

Praetextatus, who was proconsul in Greece, explained to the emperor the devastating effect he thought it would have on the Greeks, and the emperor therefore allowed the rite to be performed. Zosimos describes the situation as follows:

> ...after Praetextatus, who held the office of proconsul in Greece, declared that this law would make the life of the Greeks unlivable, if they were prevented from properly observing the most sacred Mysteries, which hold the whole human race together, he [Valentinian] permitted the entire rite to be performed in the manner inherited from the ancestors as if the edict were not valid.[49]

That without them life would be "unlivable" and that they "hold the whole human race together" are strong claims to make about initiation rites. If the Greeks throughout the ages felt the same way about the Eleusinian Mysteries as Praetextatus did, then the blessings promised in the Mysteries, both for this life and the next, had central role among the hopes and goals of the people of Athens.

IIIA1: The Demeter /Kore Myth

The relationship in the minds of the Greeks between initiation and a good fate after death was closely tied to the grain symbolization of the Demeter/Kore myth.[50] The connection between grain and the rejuvenation of

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[49] *Historia nova* IV 33. Kerényi places great weight on the effect the Mysteries had on the lives of the Greeks, arguing that for the Greeks "their own existence was bound up inseparably with the Eleusinian Mysteries" (*Eleusis*, pp. 7-16).

[50]We have the myth of Demeter and her daughter Kore-Persephone preserved in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter and in Ovid. According to the myth, Kore's father, Zeus, promised her to his brother Hades. Hades kidnaps her and takes her down with him to the underworld to be his bride. They descend through a large gap that opens in the earth . When Demeter notices that Kore is gone, she wanders for nine days with burning torches looking for her. On the tenth day she meets Hecate, and from the sun god, Helios, they find out what happened to Demeter.

life is an ancient one.[51] Each individual grain is perishable, and in fact the grain is destroyed in the process of being eaten, yet collectively grain provides nourishment and promotes the flourishing of human life. Also, before a seed can regenerate and produce a new plant, it must die. This cycle of death and life is represented in the Demeter/Kore myth when Demeter's daughter, Kore, descends into the Underworld to be the bride of Hades, but later returns and is reunited with her mother. In the myth Kore represents the grain that must go under the earth. From her apparent death, new life appears. When Kore is gone, mortals are face with hunger, but when she returns, Demeter blesses human beings with a bountiful harvest.[52] In line with the myth the initiate is promised both a bountiful harvest and a blessed afterlife.

IIIB: Conditioning Stages

In what follows I will examine some of the preliminary rituals of the Eleusinian Mysteries and consider how creating experiences in the initiates such as terror and awe, which are connected to the Demeter/Kore myth, helped to condition the initiates and prepare them to understand the promise of the Mysteries which is revealed in the *epopteia*. Burkert explains the connection

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Demeter becomes angry and goes down among human beings. As one of the manifestations of her anger, she causes the earth to become barren so nothing can grow. When Zeus hears of this, he has Hades return Kore to Demeter, but because Hades had Kore eat a pomegranate while she was in the underworld, she has to return and spend time there for one third of the year. The people of Eleusis were kind to Demeter while she was among the mortals, and in return she gave them two gifts - bountiful crops and the rites of the Mysteries.

[51]Burkert traces the themes of "nourishment, death, and survival back to Paleolithic ritual where they are found in the joining of hunting and sacrifice, and he sees the symbolization of the grain as growing out of the sacrificial ritual (*Homo Necans*, p. 255), and Kerényi has discovered the same themes that have survived down to modern times among a tribe on the Indonesian island of Ceram (*Eleusis*, pp. xxiii-xxvi).

[52]*Homo Necans*, p. 260.

between the goal of the initiation rituals generally and their preparatory rites in this way:

> In order to reach a new plane of existence in the initiation ritual, one must normally undergo 'sufferings,' an encounter with death, through which death is overcome: in sacrifice, in the act of killing, the will to live rises triumphant over the fallen victim. After this, a real death seems no more than a repetition, anticipated long ago.[53]

The initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries encounter their own death vicariously during the rite of the pig sacrifice and are brought to a state of fearful confusion while traveling through the Telesterion. The encounter with death along with the promise of a blessed afterlife may be part of what contributes to the overcoming of their fear of death.

Burkert characterizes the events of the Eleusinian Mysteries as follows: "Anxious wandering is transformed through the terror of death into blissful joy."[54] I will examine the evidence we have for three of the events of the Mysteries: the pig sacrifice, *thronosis*, and the experience of fear (*ekpleksis*) during the journey through the *Telesterion*, and I will consider both what effect these rites had on the initiates and how they helped them understand the promise of the Mysteries concerning a blessed afterlife.

IIIB1: Pig Sacrifice

The pig sacrifice was part of the initial purificatory rituals, but the sacrifice of the piglet also appears to have served as a symbolic representation

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[53] *Homo Necans*, p. 296.
[54] *Homo Necans*, p. 276. See also Foley, *Hymn to Demeter*, p. 70.

of both the initiate's death and Kore's decent into the underworld.[55] The rite occurred on the second day of the Great Mysteries, the 16th of *Boëdromion*. On that day the initiates were called to the sea by the phrase *halade mystai* (To the sea, *mystai*), and the trip was known as *elasis*.[56] Plutarch gives an account of an initiate bathing in the sea with his piglet.[57] It is likely that all the initiates bathed with their piglets for purificatory purposes.[58] Mylonas cites a passage from Euripides' *Iphiginea at Tarsus* indicating that the sea was believed to cleanse individuals from evil.[59]

After the trip to the sea, the piglet was sacrificed.[60] Pig sacrifice was not specific to the Eleusinian Mysteries, but was a common feature of the Demeter cult. It was part of the Thesmophoria, the Demeter festival open only to women.[61] The sacrifice of the piglet is the initiate's first encounter with death in the Mysteries. The piglet serves as a proxy for the initiate and dies in

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[55]Several passages in Aristophanes refer to the role of the piglet in the Eleusinian Mysteries: *Peace*, 374, *Frogs*, 337, *Acharnians* 747. In the *Republic* when discussing what to do about the potentially dangerous myths about the gods, Socrates says, "the best way would be to bury them in silence, and if there were some necessity of relating them, only a very small audience should be admitted under pledge of secrecy and after sacrificing, not a pig, but some huge and unprocurable victim" (378a).

[56]I.G. II/III^2 847.20; I.G. I^2 94.35, Hesychios, s.v.. *halade mystai;* Polyaen. 3.11.2.

[57]*Lives*, "Phokion", 28.3. This is part of an account of a year in which several things went wrong in the course of the Mysteries, including a sea creature biting off the bottom half of an initiate's piglet.

[58]However, in the depiction of Herakles initiation on the Lovatelli urn, it appears that the piglet is being purified by a liquid being pored from a jug. See Mylonas, p. 205; Kerényi, p. 55. Parker disagrees that any ritual involving the "mystic pig" served a purificatory function in any strict sense. This is because the flesh of the pig was eaten (c.f. *Frogs*, 338), and generally purificatory sacrifices are not considered edible (See R. Parker, *Miasma Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 1985, p. 283 and n. 11).

[59]1193.

[60]Several iconographic representations, including the Lovatelli Urn, depict Herakles sacrificing a piglet during his initiation into the Mysteries. See Burkert, *Homo Necans*, p. 257, n. 3.

[61]*Homo Necans*, p. 258.

place of the initiate. According to the scholia on *Acharnians* 747, the initiate surrendered the piglet to death "in his stead" exchanging one life for another.[62]

Burkert interprets the pig sacrifice as also representing Kore's descent into the underworld.[63] According to one version of the myth of Demeter, recorded in an Orphic Hymn, Eubouleus, a swineherd, was watching over his pigs when the earth gaped open, swallowing his pigs as well as the goddess(es).[64] Because of this myth, during the Thesmophoria women sacrifice pigs by throwing them into a pit. In another version of the Demeter myth, based on Callimachus, which is preserved in Ovid's *Fasti* pigs destroy the tracks of Demeter.[65] Burkert speculates that based on this story the pigs serve as a proxy for Kore: "Kore had disappeared and in her place pigs were rooting about, therefore pigs had to die in the sanctuary of Demeter, just as Persephone had fallen to the god of the dead."[66]

Given these accounts, we see the pig sacrifice is symbolic of several things: purification, the initiate's death, and the promise of new life. The pig is purified with water and then is sacrificed, symbolizing the death of the initiate. And if the pig represents Kore, the sacrifice also embodies the promise of

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[62]Parker disagrees with this translation. The Greek is hekastos de tone muoumenone *huper* eautou ethuen. Parker takes the *huper* to mean *on behalf of* such that the piglet was sacrificed on behalf of the initiate. Burkert agrees with the translation of the *huper* as *instead of*. Both usages are attested to in LSJ. See R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 1985), p. 283, with n. 10.
[63]*Homo Necans*, p. 259.
[64]Orphic fragment 50.
[65]4.465-66.
[66]*Homo Necans*, p. 259.

renewed life since Kore's decent into the underworld resulted, in the end, in new life.

***IIIB2:* Thronosis**

Another preparatory and purificatory ceremony involves the initiate sitting down in a passive state while things are done to him or her by officials of the Mysteries. This rite is referred to as *thronosis* or *thronismos* because the initiate is enthroned on the seat during the process.[67] The evidence we have for this rite is meager. In the *Euthydemus*, when giving an account of two sophists who are elenchizing a young boy, Clinias, Plato alludes to a rite of *thronosis* that is part of the Corybantic Mysteries:

> ...My dear Clinias, do not be surprised if the arguments appear strange to you. Perhaps you do not understand what our visitors are doing with you. They are doing the same as the Corybantes do in their initiations, when the one to be initiated is being enthroned (*thronosin*). There is dancing and play (*paidia*) there also, as you know if you have been initiated; and now these are only dancing around you in play meaning to initiate you afterward. (277d-e) (W.H.D. Rouse translation)

The elements of the rite described here are the seating of the initiate, dancing and play, and the emphasis is on what is being done to the initiate. The initiate is not participating in the dancing but is sitting down while others dance around him. Socrates' comparison of the questioning of the sophists to the *thronosis* rite suggests that *thronosis* involves toying with the initiate, trying to create a certain response in him, in this case unsettling him or shaking him up.

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[67] A lexicon entry by Hesychius defines *thronosis* as an "introductory ceremony for those to be initiated."

We have an account of a similar rite which is referred to by the name *thronismos* by the first century writer Dio Chrysostos. Here, however, it appears that it is a rite of the Eleusinian Mysteries.[68] Again we have the elements of seating the initiate and dancing around him: "the inducting priests are wont to seat the initiates and dance around them."[69] Dio describes this rite in the context of giving a sort of Argument from Design for the gods. He compares the experiences of someone sensing the marvels (*thaumaston*) of the created world to the experiences of the initiate, and he emphasizes that someone going through the experiences of the rite of *thronismos* would "experience something in his soul" and recognize that what he was undergoing was the result of intention and preparation. Like the Plato passage, this also suggests that the rite was designed to create a certain response in the initiate.

Additional evidence for what may be the same rite includes iconographic evidence on the Lovatelli urn and the sarcophagus of Torre-Nova.[70] Both sculptures represent the initiation of Herakles. The urn depicts three scenes. The first is of Herakles with his piglet. The third is of Demeter sitting on a *kiste*[71] with Kore behind her holding a torch and a person who may be Herakles in front of her holding a snake. In the second scene, the one we are concerned with here, Herakles sits on a stool which is covered with a skin. His

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[68]Dio mentions an initiation building constructed by the Athenians and the alternation between light and darkness in the passage, and both are characteristic of the Eleusinian Mysteries.
[69]*The Twelfth*, or *Olympic Discourse*, sec. 33.
[70]These were made during the Roman Empire and echo a common model from which individual scenes were reproduced on Roman architectural or Campana reliefs. See *Homo Necans*, p. 267, for more detail about Campana reliefs.
[71]A basket used to hold the sacred objects of the Mysteries.

face is veiled, and his bare feet rest on a ram's head or at least on ram horns. A priestess stands behind him holding a *liknon* or winnowing fan, instrument was used to cleanse grain, over his head. It is not clear that this is the same rite as that described by Plato and Dio. There is no indication of dancing here, and there are elements here, such as the covered head, the fleece and the winnowing fan, that were not mentioned in the other accounts.[72] They are similar, however, in that in all of them the initiate is seated while things are done to him in order to create a state or generate a response. The rite depicted in the iconography is thought to be one of purification. The *liknon* was frequently used in rituals of purification.[73] As an agricultural tool it was used to expose grain to the wind in order to separate the chaff from the grain. In rituals it was used symbolically represent separating out the evil and leaving the good in an individual. The depiction of the seating ritual on the sarcophagus from Torre-Nova is very similar to that on the urn except that the priestess, instead of holding a winnowing fan over Herakles head is passing a burning torch near his hand. This too appears to be an act of purification, this time purification by fire.[74]

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[72]These same elements are found in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. When Demeter enters Meterneira's house, she does not accept the seat that Meterneira offers, rather she waits until Iambe sets out a stool for her and places a fleece over it. After Demeter sits down, she pulls a veil over her face and sits "voiceless with grief on the stool and responded to no one with word or gesture." 195-199. Aristophanes appears to be parodying this rite in the *Clouds* in the scene where Socrates is "initiating" Strepsiades in the *phronesterion*. Socrates has Strepsiades "sit down on the sacred seat, and "take this wreath. " Strepsiades fearing that he will literally rather than metaphorically experience death cries, "But please don't sacrifice me!" He pulls his cloak over his head so as not to get wet when the Clouds appear. See *Clouds* 140 -144; 256-275.

[73]Mylonas, p. 206.

[74]See *Homo Necans*, p. 268. It is possible that holding the torch near the initiate is supposed to be in line with the scene in the *Hymn to Demeter* where Demeter holds the child Demaphöon in

In the Plato passage above we saw a suggestion for how dancing around and "playing" with an individual could make him feel uncomfortable. We can ask what the effects would be of the elements represented in the iconography such as the veiling of the initiate. Demeter in the *Hymn*, when she sits on the stool and covers her head, is experiencing grief for the lost Persephone. Roussel suggests that the purpose of the veiling was to

> ...exclude the surrounding world and its distractions from the eyes of the person being purified, who thus, unmolested could concentrate his attention on penitent and purifying thoughts. Such penitence and humble respect is indicated by the bare feet of Herakles.[75]

Burkert, on the other hand, believes the covering of the head serves to prepare the initiate for the new kind of seeing he will soon experience:

> Blind, helpless, and abandoned, the candidate must suffer the unknown. He is captive and ignorant, surrounded by those who are active and knowing. Having previously been isolated, made insecure, and frightened, he must now experience the unveiling, his new sight, as a blissful liberation. His new contact with reality prepares him for contemplation of the divine.[76]

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the fire in order to purify him since she intends to make him immortal. Clinton disagrees saying that "extraordinary immortalization of the sort Demeter attempted on the boy does not reflect well the hopes of the initiates...The ordinary initiate does not seek to become , like Demaphon, explicitly athanatos...he was content with a more modest condition, that is" good things" in the afterlife..." (Myth and Cult, p. 30, n. 79). Richardson, on the other hand, cites Eitrem (*Symb*. Osl. 20 (1940), p. 148 ff) to make the point that the Demaphon story could be intended to explain why the initiates are not promised immortality - it is because human beings spoiled the work of the gods (as when Meterneira interrupted Demeter. But although they do not receive immortality, they do receive the Mysteries, which promise a better fate. (Richardson, *Hymn to Demeter*, p. 234).

[75]From P. Roussel, "L'initiation prélables et le symboles Éleusinien," *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellenique* 54, 1930, Translated and paraphrased by Mylonas in *Eleusis*, p. 206.

[76] *Homo Necans*, p. 268.

Burkert does not say on what grounds he infers that the initiate feels helpless and abandoned. We will examine evidence below that indicates that the officials of the Mysteries tried to cause the initiates to feel fear (*ekpleksis*), but we don't know that this occurred prior to the seating ritual. It seems to have occurred in the initiation building in Eleusis, and the seating ritual appears to have occurred prior to this.[77]

Parker too emphasizes both the deferential attitude of the initiate during the ceremony and the symbolism of a change in status. He says that in the relief Heracles seems to be experiencing a "ritual submissive 'sitting' that is common in initiations."[78] Parker recognizes that the reliefs depict purification rituals, but notes that "its expressive force clearly derives largely from the symbolism of admitting a candidate to a new status by raising him up from his humble posture."[79]

The evidence above still leaves much uncertain. For instance, do the scenes depicted in the iconography represent the same ritual described by Plato and Dio Chrysostos? Also, at what point during initiation did they occur? However, despite these unanswered questions, the evidence does indicate that there was a rite in the Mysteries where the initiate was seated in a passive posture while the officials did things to him, in order to provoke feelings of

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[77]Herychius refers to it as an introductory ceremony.
[78]R. Parker, Miasma: *Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 1985), p. 285.
[79]Parker, p. 285. Parker points out that the symbolism of the murder purification ceremony was similar and the two may be connected in aitiology.

ignorance (the veiling in the Herakles iconography), confusion (the *Euthydemus* passage), or awe (Dio Chrysostom).

***IIIB3:* Ekpleksis**

We have evidence that prior to the epoptic vision feelings of fear (*ekpleksis)* and terror were incited in the initiates. The main source we have for this is a passage that has been attributed to Plutarch.[80] In this passage Plutarch compares the experiences of the soul at death to the experiences of an initiate:

> Thus we say that the soul that has passed thither is dead, in regard to its complete change and conversion. In this world it is without knowledge, except when it is already at the point of death; but when that time comes it suffers something (*pasxei pathos*) like what those who participate in the great initiations (*teletai*) suffer. Hence even the word *dying* (*teleutan*) is like the word to be initiated (*teleisthai*), and the act (of dying) is like the act of being initiated. In the beginning there is straying (*planai*) and wandering (*peridromai*), the weariness of running around in a circle and suspicious journeys *(hupoptoi poreiai)* through the darkness that reach no goal, and then immediately before the end (*telous*) every possible terror (*deina*), and shivering (*phrike*), and trembling (*tromos*) and sweating (*idros*) and amazement (*thambos*). But after this a marvelous light meets the wanderer, and open country and meadowlands welcome him; and in that place there are voices and dancing and the solemn majesty of sacred music and holy visions. And amidst these, he walks at large in new freedom, now perfect (*pantelaes*) and fully initiated (*memuaemenos*), celebrating the sacred rites, a garland on his

[80]The passage is a fragment of the work "On the Soul" that is preserved in Stobaeus (*Anthologium* 4.52.49). Stobaeus attributes it to Themistius; however , several convincing arguments have been made for attributing it to Plutarch. Daniel Wyttenbach in his edition of *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* (1772, p. 129) argues that the style is characteristically that of Plutarch, and he believes that the fragment is an extract from a dialogue featuring Plutarch's brother, Timon and Patroclus, a relation by marriage. M.R. Jones has shown that phrases from the fragment are quoted by Clement (*Ecologae ex Scripturis Propheticis* 34) without acknowledgment, and Clement lived before Themistius, so he could not have been quoting Themistius, however Clement frequently quotes Plutarch without acknowledging him. (*Classical Review* 14, 1900, pp. 23-24). See *Plutarch's Moralia, Fragments: Other Named Works*, edited and translated by F.H. Sandbach (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp. 306-307.

> head, and converses with pure and holy men; he surveys the uninitiated, unpurified mob here on earth, the mob of living men who, herded together in muck and deep mire, trample one another down in their fear of death and cling to their ills, since they disbelieve in the good things there. Fr. 178 (After Sandbach and Clinton)

The initiates have been given experiences without being allowed to know where they will lead. This purpose only becomes clear at the end of the rituals. This passage helps to support the view that ultimately these experiences change the initiate's view about death. The uninitiated are described as those who fear death, while the initiated believe that they will experience good things in death.

Other sources refer to the fear and terror experienced by the initiates. Proclus says, "...just as in the most sacred Mysteries before seeing the *mystikon* the initiates are frightened (*expleksis*)."[81] Aristides uses a different term but connotes the same meaning when he describes Eleusis as "the most frightening (*phrikodestaton*) and the most resplendent of all that is divine for humankind."[82] It is not clear just what it is that incites this state in the initiates. Demetrius, a fourth century B.C. rhetor, when discussing the capacity of language—specifically of obscure and cryptic phrases—to create fear in listeners, mentions the Mysteries.[83] He says that,

> ...the Mysteries are revealed in an allegorical form in order to inspire such amazement (*ekplaesin*) and shuddering (*phrikae*) as are associated with darkness and night. ("On Style" 101)

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[81] *Platonic Theology*, III, 18.
[82] *Eleusinian Orationes*, 19.2.
[83] For more on the role of allegorical speech and riddling utterances in the mysteries see R. Seaford. 1981. "Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries" *Classical Quarterly* 31, pp. 254-255.

Additional speculation about what may have generated a state of fright in the initiates comes from a passage in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. When Dionysus and his slave, Xanthias, descend into the underworld to bring back the poet Euripides, they encounter many things along the way including *mystai* and an *Empousa* or hobgoblin. C.G. Brown argues that the specter of the *Empousa* that frightens Dionysus and Xanthias at 285-305 is similar to what terrified the initiates at Eleusis.[84]

IV: Five Mystery Themes Employed By Plato

So far, I've treated the Eluesinian Mysteries as if they were unchanged throughout antiquity. But the Mysteries as Plato knew them may differ from the accounts we have of them in later sources. In chapter two I will consider evidence we have for the Mysteries as Plato knew them, and I will show how Plato uses five Mystery themes when explicating his theory of knowledge: purification, being led by a *mystagogos*, the progression by the initiate through stages of initiation, and the experiencing of a visual revelation in the *epopteia*. I will briefly discuss these five themes, and where necessary discuss evidence for the fact that they were part of the Mysteries at a point prior to or contemporaneous with Plato such that he could have had knowledge of them. I give the epopteia extensive treatment because I make a great deal of how Plato

[84]"Empousa, Dionysus and the Mysteries: Aristophanes,. Frogs 285ff," *Classical Quarterly* 41 (i) 1991, pp. 41-50. He bases his argument not only on the *Frogs* passage but on a passage from Lucian's *Kataplous*. This is a satirical dialogue about individuals journeying through the underworld to face judgment by Rhadamanthys. Two of the individuals compare their experience to the Eleusinian Mysteries (saying that the present circumstances of the dead are like the Eleusinian Mysteries.) (Lucian, *Katapolous*, section 22).

use the motif of seeing a visual revelation and because much of the evidence we have for the *epopteia* is late.

IVA: Purification

Purification served at least three purposes in the Eleusinian Mysteries. First, it imparted sanctity or a state of purity upon a person about to encounter the sacred. In the later stages of the Mysteries, the initiates would be entering a sacred place and coming into contact with sacred objects, so they would need to be free of any *miasma* or pollution. In this way, rites of purification served to indicate that the initiates were approaching something of value and significance. The rites marked a transition between the realm of the common and the realm of the sacred.[85] Second, in the *epoptic* revelation the initiates gained knowledge of the secrets of the Mysteries, and the reliefs depicting the initiation of Herakles suggest that one of the purposes of purification was to put the initiate in a state of unknowing or ignorance prior to the revelation, in order to prepare him to experience a new kind of seeing through which he will be able to contemplate the divine. The third purpose is also connected to the depictions of the purification of Herakles. Herakles was being purified from blood guilt resulting from the murder of the centaurs, and many of the elements of his purification are elements of purification from homicide. These include sitting on a woolen fleece, wearing a veil on one's head, and sitting silently in a

[85]W. Burkert. 1977 *Greek Religion*, trans. by John Raffan (1985) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 76, R Parker, 1983. *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) pp. 19, 24, 31.

passive posture.[86] Parker points out that the general purpose of homicide purification may be similar to one of the purposes of purification in the Mysteries. A murderer was purified so that he could be reaccepted into social and religious life. In the Mysteries, a candidate is inducted into the society of the initiated. Here too, purification makes possible assimilation into a group.[87]

Several kinds of purification took place during the Eleusinian Mysteries. As we saw above, the purpose of the rites of the Small Mysteries held at Agrai were primarily purificatory. On the second day of the Great Mysteries, the initiates went to the sea for a purificatory bath with their piglet.[88] And the seating rite depicted in the Herakles reliefs includes purificatory elements. There is also some evidence that ritual washings were performed on the road to Eleusis and upon arriving there. Hesychius has entries for both *hoi reito,* stone maidens bearing streams of lustral water outside the Telesterion, and *hudranos*, an official who purified the initiates at Eleusis. In addition to purificatory rituals during the course of the Mysteries, there were also specific purificatory practices observed by the initiates. These included restrictions, such as the avoidance of certain foods and natural pollutants,[89] fasting,[90] and keeping to one's house for a day[91]

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[86]Fleece: Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 40-5., Cyrene Cathartic Law, *SEG* ix 72, *LSS* 115: covering the head Euripides *Iphigenia Taurica*, 1218; sitting as a sign of submission, J. Gould, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 93, 1973, pp. 95-97. See Parker, *Miasma*, pp. 370-374.
[87]*Miasma*, p. 374.
[88]*Halade Elasis*, IG II/III^2 847.20, Plutarch, "Phokion", 28.3., Polyaenus 3.11.2.
[89]Porphyry, *Abst.* 4.16; P.R. Arbesmann, Das Fasten bei den Griechen und Romern, *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorabeiten* 21.1, Giessen, 1929., pp. 76ff.
[90]N.J. Richardson on *Homeric Hymn to Cer.*, 47.
[91]Aristotle, *Athenian Politics*. 54.4.

A natural question that arises in a discussion of purification is, what were the initiates purified of or from? At the opening ceremonies of the Great Mysteries the *hierophant* issued a proclamation which excluded anyone "impure in hands" from the ceremony.[92] Therefore, at this point in the Mysteries, none of the candidates suitable for initiation can bear any significant pollution. Perhaps any serious pollutants, such as blood guilt, were believed to be removed in the initial purifications of the Small Mysteries.[93] Parker thinks that the practices of fasting, abstinence, and cleansings that preceded the final rite of the Eleusinian Mysteries were not directed against any doctrinally specified pollution, but were merely preparatory. They were required before the initiate could proceed to the final revelation, but the purifications themselves did not contribute anything to the initiate's salvation. Parker notes that similar preparations are recorded wherever a rite involves the psychological involvement of the initiate: "...the more closely involved psychologically the mortal was in the ceremony to be performed, the greater and more formal the preliminary requirement became."[94] This adds weight to the claim that a goal of the Mystery rites was to bring about a psychological change in the initiate.

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[92]Libanius, *Or. Corinth.*, IV.
[93]In Aristophanes *Frogs* during the scene where Xanthias and Dionysus come upon the procession of the Mystery chorus (whose members worship drama as much as they worship Demeter) in the underworld, the chorus proscribes various individuals from joining them because they are polluted. The sources of their the pollution range from not being able to get the jokes of the chorus and not knowing the speech of the comic poet Kratinos to taking bribes while holding a high office and using the shrine of Hecate as an outhouse (353-370).
[94]*Miasma*, pp. 20, 285.

Given this list of the kinds of purifications connected with the Mysteries, and the above claims about the purposes of the purification, we can ask the more specific question of whether these purificatory rites were practiced during Plato's time and if so, what did he perceive their purpose to be? The fact that some of the evidence above for the purification rites comes from Plato's contemporaries, including Aristophanes and Aristotle, shows that these elements were current in the Mysteries as Plato knew them.

We also have evidence for the role of purification in the Mysteries in Plato's own writing. In Book 8 of the *Republic*, when discussing the transformation of an individual who has an oligarchic constitution into a person with a democratic one, Plato uses a Mystery metaphor describing a person who is "purified" of virtues such as reverence and moderation before he is initiated into the rites of vice. This initiation is complete with torch light, garlands and a chorus, elements of the Eleusinian Mysteries.[95] Even more instructive, however, is a passage in the *Phaedo*. Here, Plato demonstrates a familiarity with the first purpose ascribed to purification above— that purification prepares an individual to encounter the sacred, that only the pure is fit to come into contact with that which is pure.[96] In this dialogue he defines purification as a separation of the soul from the body, which is necessary to acquire knowledge of the forms (67c, 65e). It is the person who applies his "pure and

[95]560c-e.

[96]Plato also emphasizes this in the Myth of the Soul passage in the *Phaedrus* where he describes coming to know the form of beauty as an *epopteia* — "...Complete and onefold and still and happy (*eudaimonia*) also were the apparitions which were revealed to us (*epopteuontes*) as initiates in pure light (*augai katharai*), being ourselves pure (*katharoi*) ..." (250c).

unadulterated thought to the pure and unadulterated object" who will reach the goal of reality (66a). Soon after this passage he connects philosophical purification to Mystery purification. He says that the virtues are a purging away of pleasures and fears, and that wisdom itself is a sort of purification, and then Socrates suggests that there is allegorical meaning to be found in the Mystery doctrine that he who enters the next world uninitiated will lie in the mud while he who has been purified can dwell with the gods, who themselves are pure (69b-c).

We have evidence, then, that Plato was familiar with the practices and purpose of Mystery purification. In chapter 2 I will say more about how Plato uses the motif of Mystery purification to develop points about his theory of knowledge.

IVB: *Mystagogoi*

The *mystagogoi* were members of an official body who performed several different functions during the initiation rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries. As their name indicates, they served to lead the initiates during the initiation rites.[77] They also may have examined initiates concerning their eligibility for initiation, conveyed preliminary information to the initiates, and accompanied initiates during purificatory rites.

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[77] *Hesychius Alexandrius Lexicon*, vol. III, s.v. *mystagogos, mustagogei*. Rec. M. Schmidt, post, Ioannem Albertum (Amsterdam: Aldolf M. Hakkert, Publisher, 1965). We do not know if each initiate had his or her own mystagogos or if several individuals were led by one mystagogos. Evidence from Menander (Fr. 714 K) and Philostratus (Lives of the Sophists V, II, 1, 12.) suggests that there was one mystagogos per initiate, but Nock (Mnemosyne, 1952, p. 180, n. 1) and Simms ("Myesis, Telete, and Mysteria," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2 Summer, 1990, p. 193-194) argue that each mystagogos had several initiates.

We do not have many early references to the *mystagogoi*.[98] The earliest is in the 4th century B.C. comic poet, Menander. He metaphorically refers to the *mystagogos* as the *daimon* of the individual, suggesting that the *mystagogos* guided the initiate as some sort of divine guardian being would guide his charge.[99] The next reference is in a first century B.C. inscription that is a record of laws regarding the Mysteries.[100] Lines 18-43 pertain to regulations concerning the *mystagogoi*, specifically, to how they must issue *deletaria*.[101]

However, a late reference indicates that the term *mystagogos* may have been current as early as the late fifth century. Plutarch uses it in his *Life of Alcibiades* when describing an event of 408. At this time the Spartans occupied the approach to Eleusis so that the rites of the Mysteries that were conducted on the procession from Athens to Eleusis had to be omitted. Alcibiades, who had been allowed to return to Athens seven years after he had

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[98]Some iconographic representations have been identified as depictions of *mystagogoi*. A red-figure skyphos in Brussels, which was decorated by the painted of the Yale Lekythos, which depicts the initiation of Herakles includes a long haired bearded man holding a torch in each hand which he is about to give to Herakles and another initiate. Because his garments are different from those traditionally worn by the Daduch, or torch bearer, Clinton has postulated that he could be a *mystagogos* (*Sacred Officials*, p. 49, n. 15). Mylonas identifies a youthful figure who appears both in Pantikapaionpelike and the Ninnion tablet, which each date to the fourth century B.C., as the god Iacchos serving the role of mystagogos. The figure is wearing a richly embroidered costume, a wreath of myrtle and elaborate boots, and he is holding lighted torches (*Eleusis*, pp. 210-211, 216-217).

[99]Fr. 714 K.

[100]Sokolowski, *LSCGS* 15. See J.H. Oliver, "Law Concerning the Mystic Procession", *Hesperia* 10, 1941, no. 31, pp. 70-71. Oliver dates the inscription to the first century B.C. based on the lettering.

[101]It is not certain what *delètaria* are in this context. The word comes from the verb *deltoö* which means to note on tablets, record, and Oliver proposes that the *deletaria* were tablets that the *mystagogoi* issued to candidates whose eligibility for initiation had been examined and established Oliver, p. 71. Nock speculates that the regulations concerning how the *mystagogoi* must issue the *deletaria* represents a measure taken after young Acharnanians boys wandered into the Eleusinian sanctuary while initiation rites were being conducted (See Livy 31.14.7 for an account of the event),A.D. Nock, *Mnemosyne*, 1952, p. 180, n. 1.

been condemned for defaming the Mysteries, sought to reestablish himself *vis-a-vis* the Mysteries by restoring the procession. He "took the priests, *mystae*, and *mystagogues*, encompassed them with his men-at-arms, and led them over the road to Eleusis in decorous and silent array."[102] And, according to Plutarch, the name *Mystagogue* was endearingly applied to Alcibiades as well: he was "hailed by those who were not unfriendly to him as Hierophant and Mystagogue."[103]

Simms, however, argues that Plutarch uses the term *mystagogue* anachronistically and projects it back to the fifth century. His reasons for believing this are, first, that Plutarch uses the words *hierophantian* and *mystagogian*, and such abstractions ending in -ia are characteristic of Plutarch's style. And second, he points to evidence that Plutarch does this elsewhere. In a passage in which Plutarch purports to be quoting from Plato, he introduces a verb form of the word *mystagogue* where it does not exist in the original Plato.[104] Simms proposes that the terms *mystagogos* and *mystagogia* were adopted in Hellenistic times. He thinks that the functions of the *mystagogoi* were performed earlier than this, but that they were referred to as the *myesis* performed by members of the Eumolpidae and Kerykes families.[105]

Above, we saw evidence for the functions of the *mystagogoi* as guides and possibly as examiners. Simms proposes that the *mystagogoi* not only examined the initiates but also indoctrinated them with knowledge that would

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[102]34. 4-5. Translated by B. Perrin.
[103]34.6.
[104] In *Dion* 54.1 Plutarch cites *Laws* 7.333. See Simms, p. 193 and n. 25.
[105]Simms, pp. 191-195.

prepare them for the "confusing and perhaps frightening events to come."[106] Like Nock, he uses the Livy passage as his jumping-off point. Since the Acarnanians gave themselves away by asking ignorant questions, this means that the initiates around them had information that the Acarnanians did not have. Simms concludes that at least part of this knowledge is due to the *mystagogoi*.[107] This conclusion is not warranted, however. I do not think we have evidence that knowledge was handed over to the initiates, even at this early stage in initiation. It is just as possible that the initiates "knew" more than the Acarnanians because of the experiences of the preliminary rituals. The Acarnanians walked in on the rites late in the festival. At this point the initiates had had many experiences that the Acharnanians had not, including the sacrificing of the piglet and the experiences of the procession to Eleusis. The knowledge the initiates had could have been a result of these experiences. It is not necessarily the case that it was acquired from a *mystagogos*.

Thus, there is not clear-cut evidence that the *mystagogos* served a didactic role, or even that he had the title *mystagogos* in the time of Plato. For my purposes, however, neither of these concerns is pertinent. What is important is that the Eleusinian initiate required a leader or guide in order to help him or her through the stages of the Mysteries.

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[106]R.M. Simms, "Myesis, Telete, and Mysteria," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2 Summer, 1990, p. 191.
[107] Simms, p. 191 and n. 19..

IVC: Stages

Since much of this chapter has been spent discussing the various stages of the Mysteries, I will not say much here about the stages. It should be clear from what we saw above that the Mysteries are not only divided into the states of Small and Great Mysteries, but the Great Mysteries themselves were also divided into several distinct rites. And the purpose of having the initiates ascend through the stages of these rites was to condition and prepare them for the final revelation of the *epopteia.*

IVD: *Epopteia*

We have four different kinds of evidence that a visual revelation played a role in the Mysteries: 1) references to a stage called *epopteia* (from the Greek *ephorao*, to observe); 2) the name *hierophant* (he who shows the holy things) for one of the priests of the Mysteries; 3) a description of the initiates moving out of darkness and into a lighted area where they see the holy things of the Mysteries; 4) the claim that those who have seen the things of the Mysteries have achieved a blessed state. Much of this evidence is late. In what follows I will evaluate each of the four kinds of evidence to see whether it is likely that the Eleusinian Mysteries, as Plato knew them, gave a prominent place to seeing. Plato uses forms of the word *epopteia* in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium.*[108]

IVD1: The Term 'Epopteia' and Its Cognates

One problem with saying that Plato uses the motif of the Mystery stage of *epopteia* is that almost all of the sources that talk about this stage of the

[108] *Phaedrus* 250c4, *Symposium* 210a1.

Mysteries come after Plato. One exception, however, is the epigraphical evidence. Unfortunately, much of this contains lacunae and requires reconstruction. The primary epigraphical evidence we have comes from regulations concerning the Eleusinian Mysteries. Laws concerning the Mysteries were posted on *stele* in or near the Eleusinian in Athens. One such series of regulations was published on a four sided *stele* some time prior to 460 B.C. On what has come to be referred to as side B of the *stele* we have the following inscription:

[ι σ]πονδὰς εἶν–
[αι] τοῖσι μύστ–
[εσιν] καὶ το[ῖς]
[ἐπ]όπτεισιν [κ]–
[αὶ τ] οἰκέτ[ο]–
[ύθ]οισιν καὶ [χ]–
[ρέ]μασιν τὸν [ὁ]–
[θ]ρέϊον καὶ [Aθ]–
[ε]ν[α]ίοισιν [h] ἅ–
πασιν.[109]

This section of the decree seems to concern either a truce or treaty (σπονδαι) between the foreign initiates, both *mystai*, *epoptes*, their attendants

[109]IGi^3 6; F. Sokolowski *Lois Sacrées Des Cités Grecques, Supplement* (Paris: Editions E. De Boccard, 1962), no. 3.

and their possessions and all the Athenians.[110] The word ἐπόπτειστν is not complete in the remains of the inscription we have; however, given the conjunction of terms in the accusative and the fact that the beginning of the names of other participants in the Mysteries such *mystai* and the *acolytes* or attendants is clearly visible, ἐπόπτειστν is a likely reconstruction. In fact, I don't see any other word that would be consistent with the -οπτειστν stem

Another set of regulations was issued at some point between 380 and 350 B.C.[111] The word [ἐπο]πτέιστν appears again in this fragment in A, ll 14-15. This led Sokolowski and Merrit, following Schweigert, to restore lines 14-16 using lines from the 460 B.C. stele.[112] Schweigert believed that the quote served to establish a line length of 56 letters. However, the new fragments discussed by Clinton establish a new line length, so Clinton concludes that the restoration based on the earlier stele must be either incorrect or incomplete. If

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[110]Originally the passage was taken to indicate that heralds (*spondophoroi*) were sent out to the cities that participated in the Mysteries inviting them to declare a truce during the time of the festival of the Great Mysteries. G. Mylonas describes a 55 day truce (*Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 244). M. Sakurai and A. Raubitschek believe the passage refers to a treaty (spondai) which was a "mutual guarantee and protection of foreign visitors" ("The Eleusinian Spondai (I.G. I^3,6, lines 8-47)," *PHILIA EPE in Honor of George Mylonas*, 103B (Athens: Archailogike Hetaireia, Athens Bibliotheke, 1987, pp. 263-265).

[111]The first 19 lines of side A of this inscription appeared as no. 12 in Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrées Supplement* (See also *Supplementum Ephigraphicum Graecum* (H.W. Pleket, R.S. Stroud, eds. (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben)) vol. 16, 50;vol. 17, 21; vol. 21, 257, 346), however, new fragments that have recently been found, and these are discussed by K. Clinton in "A Law in the City Eleusinian Concerning the Mysteries", *Hesperia*, vol. 49, no. 3, 1980, pp. 258-288.

[112]B.D. Meritt, *Hesperia* 14, 1945, p. 78; E.W. Schweigert, "Some Preliminary Observations on a new Inscription Pertaining to the Eleusinian Mysteries," *American Journal Of Archaeology*, 50, 1946, 287-288. Schweigert believes that the new set of laws contains a verbatim quote from the old set of laws. One argument he makes for this is that the dative *thesmothetais* in line twelve is a later form of the dative than the dative *[epo]ptaeisin* in line fifteen, suggesting that the reason for the archaic form is that *epoptaeisin* was preserved in the quote.

it is merely incomplete, one possibility he suggests is that additional information appears after the phrase *xramasi ton othneion.*[113]

While the new fragments cast some doubt on the reconstruction of εποπτεισιν in lines 14 and 15, they also serve to provide us with a clear instance of the use of a form of the word *epoptaes* in line 47. The perfect participle *epopteukotas* appears uncorrupted here. Unfortunately, we do not have much of the context to see how the word is being used. What is preserved is as follows:

46 [.....] ὄντος περὶ τὰ Μυστήρια· οἱ δὲ
θεσμοθέται [.....]
47 [.....τος μ]εμυημένος καὶ τοὺς ἐπωπτευκότας δέκα
ἡμ[ερ.....]
48 [.....τοὺς ἐπιστάτας Ἐλευσι]νόθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀργυρίου τοῦ
τοῖν Θεοῖ[ν.....][114]

While the date of composition for the *Phaedrus*, the dialogue in which Plato uses forms of the word *epopteia*, is speculative, it has been placed around 370 B.C.[115] The use of a form of the word in a statute that was executed between 380 and 350 increases the likelihood that the word was in usage prior to the composition of the *Phaedrus*. Even if the law was executed as late as 350, it is unlikely that a term newly coined by Plato would makes its way into

[113]Clinton, *Hesperia*, 1980, p. 277.
[114]Clinton, *Hesperia*, 1980, p. 264.
[115]R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus, Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952, 1982, p.7).

the text of an official regulation concerning the Eleusinian Mysteries so quickly.

In addition to epigraphical evidence, we have some early literary evidence for an epoptic stage of the Mysteries preserved in the work of the grammarian Harpocration, who wrote during the first or second century A.D. Harpocration quotes the 4th century B.C. Philochoros:

> ὁ Μὴ ἐποπτεύσαι τί δὲ τὸ ἐποπτεῦσαι, δηλοῖ Φιλόχορος ἐν τῇ ι· "τὰ ἱερὰ οὗτος ἀδικεῖ πάντα τά τε μυστικὰ καὶ τὰ ἐποπτικά"[116]

Here Philochoros distinguishes between the *mystika* and the *epoptika.*

Of the remaining later literary evidence, the sources fall primarily into two groups, each of which is problematic: 1) individuals who were clearly influenced by Plato and who, like Plato, often use Eleusinian language metaphorically when discussing philosophy; 2) Christian apologists who describe Christianity as a Mystery and write critically and with a negative bias about the false "heathen" Mysteries such as the Eleusinian Mysteries. The problem with this second group is compounded by the fact that some of the sources, such as Clement of Alexandria, may be describing Mysteries that took place in a suburb of Alexandria called Eleusis rather than in the city of Eleusis near Athens.[117]

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[116]F. Jacoby, *FGrHist*, Philochoros 328F 69/70. Later works that also make the distinction between the two grades of *myesis* and *epopteia* include the 10th century *Suda Lexicon*, s.v. *epoptai* and the scholia on Aristophanes *Frogs*, line 745, compiled by Johannes Tzetzae, who lived during the 12th century AD.

[117]See M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, vol. 2 (Munich: Beck, pp. 94-95); Mylonas, *Eleusis*, Appendix, pp. 287-316); K. Clinton, *Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1974, pp. 8-9). Kerenyi thinks

Sources who fall into the first category include Plutarch and Theon of Smyrna. Theon, who lived during the second century A.D., compares progress in philosophy to initiation into the Mysteries. In equating the stages of philosophy to the stages of the Mysteries, he uses the term *epopteia* for one of the stages:

> ...first one is led to purification,...after the purification, second is the handing down of the Mysteries (teletaes), third to be named, *epopteia.* *De utilit. Math.* p. 15 (tr. Hersher)

Theon lists two additional stages of initiation; the fourth is the crowning with a garland which becomes the badge of one who was initiated into the Mysteries, and the fifth is the happiness which results from communion with the god.[118] As Mylonas points out, the last two do not appear to be separate stages, but part of the second two stages.[119]

Plutarch, who lived approximately between 46 and 120 A.D., was an avid reader of Plato, and he, like Theon, consciously compares progress in philosophy to initiation into the Mysteries (*Moralia, Progress in Virtue*, 81 d-

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Mylonas is wrong to reject all Christian sources. He believes that Christian adversaries of the mysteries had to be careful not to invent anything which initiated pagan readers would know to be a lie. On the other hand, he believes that these writers quoted from several sources, some of which did not refer to the Eleusinian Mysteries; therefore, we need to find and reject the confusion in the sources, not the sources themselves (C. Kerényi, Eleusis: *Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, R. Manheim, trans. (New York: Bolligen Foundation, 1962, 1967, p. 108). Burkert also is less critical about the usefulness of these sources, saying that, "effective polemics must contain at least a kernel of the truth." He is especially optimistic about a passage from a Naassenian Gnostic preserved in the writings of the Bishop Hippolytus which says that an ear of cut wheat was what was shown to the initiates (*Refutation of All Heresies* 5.8.39), W. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, translated by P. Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, 1983, p. 251).

[118]Theonis Smyrnaei, *Philosophi Platonici*, ed. by E. Hiller, 1878, p. 14, 20ff.

[119]*Eleusis*, pp. 238-39. Mylonas notes that the *Refutation of all Heresies* has come down to us under the name of Origen, someone whom Hippolytus admired, but that there is no doubt that it was written by Hippolytus, p. 305.

e). Yet not all the references he makes to the Mysteries are in this context, and, if his quotations can be trusted, the works of Plutarch may be some of the better evidence we have that there was an *epoptic* stage of the Mysteries known to Plato. In his *Lives*, in the account of the life of Alcibiades, when discussing Alcibiades' sentencing for defaming the Mysteries, which occurred in 415 B.C., Plutarch claims to be quoting directly from the record of Alcibiades' impeachment:

> His impeachment is on record, and runs as follows: "Thessalus, son of Cimon, of the deme Laciadae, impeaches Alcibiades, son of Cleinias, of the deme Scambonidae, for committing crime against the goddesses of Eleusis, Demeter and Cora, by mimicking the Mysteries *(ta mysteria)* and showing them forth *(deiknuonta)* to his companions in his own house, wearing a robe such as the hierophant wears when he shows forth *(deiknuei)* the hiera, and calling himself hierophant, Poulytion Torch-Bearer, and Theodorus, of the deme Phegeae, Herald and hailing the rest of his companions as Mystae and Epoptae, contrary to the laws and institutions of the Eumolpidae, Heralds, and Priests of Eleusis."... XXVI 3-4

According to the record Alcibiades mocked the showing of the hiera, the holy things of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and he referred to his friends using the terms *Mystae* and *Epoptae,* indicating that there were at least two different terms used to refer to initiates.[120] In another of Plutarch's *Lives*, the life of

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[120]Other evidence we have indicates that Plutarch's citation of his sources is not always exact. In his account of the life of Dion, he paraphrases Plato from the 7th Letter: "Now there was a certain comrade of Dion's, who as Plato says, had become intimately acquainted with him, not as a fellow pupil in philosophy, but as a consequence of initiation in the mysteries (*ek mustagogion*)..." However, where Plutarch used the phrase, *ek mustagogion*, Plato, or whoever wrote the 7th Letter, uses the phrase "from mutual hospitality and *muein* and *epopteuein*." There is a difference between this instance and the reference in the account of Alcibiades' life, however. In the Dion passage Plutarch is only paraphrasing Plato, "as Plato says...," whereas in the Alcibiades passage Plutarch claims to be quoting the impeachment record. We know that Plutarch had access to 5th and 4th century source material, but what we don't know is how accurately he employed it in each case. For Plutarch's embellishment on a passage from

Demetrius, we also have quoted material to support the claim that the *epoptic* stage was a part of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Demetrius was not quite a contemporary of Plato. He was born 11 years after Plato died. And while it is possible that the *epopteia* became established as a stage of the Mysteries between the time Plato was writing the middle period dialogues and the time Demetrius came to Athens, it is unlikely. Here the quote by Plutarch is not as direct as in the case of Alcibiades' impeachment, but the delineation of the stages is more explicit:

> ...when Demetrius was getting ready to return to Athens, he wrote letters to the people saying that he wished to be initiated into the Mysteries *(muhethaenai)* as soon as he arrived and pass through all the grades of initiation *(teletene)* from the smallest *(mikron)* to the *epoptikon*. Now this was not lawful and had not been done before, but the Small Mysteries *(mikra)* were performed in the month of Anthesterion, the Great Mysteries *(megala)* in Boëdromion, and the epopteia *(epopteuon)* was celebrated at an interval of at least a year from the great Mysteries. And yet when the letter of Demetrius was read, no one ventured to oppose the proposition except Pythodorus the Torch-bearer, and he accomplished nothing; instead, on a motion of Stratocles, it was voted to call the current month, which was Munychion, Anthesterion, and so regard it, and the lesser rites at Agrai were performed for Demetrius; after which Munychion was again changed and became Boëdromion instead of Anthesterion, Demetrius received the remaining rites of initiation, and at the same time was also admitted to the highest grade of epopteia. Hence Philippides, in his abuse of Stratocles, wrote, "Who abridged the whole year in a single month."

Plutarch distinguishes between the Small Mysteries and the Great Mysteries and says that the initiate must wait at least a year after being initiated into the Great Mysteries before experiencing the *epopteia*. Plutarch quotes here

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Theopompus see D. Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica: A Political and Social Study* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 305-308).

from Philippides, a New Comedy poet who won the Dionysia in 311 B.C. The quote helps to support the idea that Plutarch is not simply making up or repeating a legend about Demetrius.

The primary example we have of one of the Christian apologists using a form of the word *epopteia* is in the work of Hippolytus, who lived in Rome as a presbyter during the first half of the 3rd century A.D. He was a pupil of Irenaeus. In the fifth book of his *Refutation of all Heresies*, which is know as the *Philosophoumena*, Hippolytus quotes the Naassene Gnostic and refers to those who experience the epopteia as *epoptai*:

> The Phrygians, the Naassene says, assert that he [Attis] is "the green ear of harvested grain", and after the Phrygians...the Athenians, performing the Eleusinian initiations and showing to the *epoptai* in silence the great and marvelous and perfect Mystery there, a harvested ear of grain. This ear is also for the Athenians...illumination great and perfect, just as the hierophant himself (not castrated like Attis...but made a eunuch by means of hemlock...) at night in Eleusis in the midst of much fire, performing the great and ineffable Mysteries shouts and cries the words: 'Potina gave birth to a sacred boy, Brimo to Brimo,' i.e. the "mighty" to the 'mighty one'... 5.8.39 (Clinton, trans.)

I will discuss this passage further below in connection with speculations about the object of the secret of the Mysteries.

Although the case for an *epoptic* stage of the Eleusinian Mysteries must be constructed from widely spaced sources, the evidence suggests that it is likely that there was such a stage in Plato's time. From the epigraphical evidence we know that forms of the word *epopteia* were used fairly early. The way in which the word was used is not always clear from the inscriptions, but

the epigraphical evidence shows that the word was not coined by Plato. Plutarch, our primary literary source for the *epoptic* stage, is a potentially a poor source because of his Platonism. However, the two passages we have from the Lives of Alcibiades and Demetrius each have something to recommend them. In the Alcibiades passage Plutarch offers a quotation from the impeachment record of an actual event concerning the Mysteries in 415. And the Demetrius passage, which explicitly refers to the *epoteia* as a stage one goes through at least a year after first being initiated into the Great Mysteries, is also not a passage where Plutarch is trying to make a point about philosophy, but he is simply telling a story about Demetrius, who was almost a contemporary of Plato, and the credibility of that story is bolstered by the fragment of Pallides which Plutarch includes.

***IVD2:* Hierophants**

Another word that suggests that seeing played a role in the Eleusinian Mysteries is *hierophant*, the title of one of the most important priests in the Mysteries. This term is usually translated "he who shows holy things." Kerényi objects that this would be *hierodeiktes* in Greek, and instead he translates *hierophant* as "he who makes the holy things appear[121] In either case, however, we have the notion that the hierophant is presenting the holy things of the Mysteries so that they can be seen.

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[121]*Eleusis: Archetypal Images of Mother and Daughter*, R. Manheim, trans. (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1960, 1962, p. 90).

Until recently it appeared that we had epigraphical evidence confirming that hierophants had a role in the Eleusinian Mysteries as early as the end of the fourth century. IG II^2 1934, an inscription that gives an example of hieronymy, the practice of replacing the hierophant's name with the title, Hierophantaes, was originally dated to that period based on the letter forms and the chronology of the men listed in the inscription.[122] Tracy, however, has recently argued for a date between 170 and 135.[123] It appears that the individual who engraved the inscription is the same person who cut another inscription which was created during the second century B.C.

While this epigraphical evidence no longer appears to be as old as was once thought, we have literary evidence that places a hierophant as far back as the beginning of the fifth century B.C. In Lysias' account, *Against Andocides*, of the case brought against Andocides in 400 B.C. for defaming the Mysteries, one of the members of the Eumolpid family who delivers a speech against Andocides refers to his great grandfather as Zacorus, the hierophant *(tou hierphantou)*.[124] This would place Zachorus at the beginning of the fifth century. Earlier in the passage Lysias, in citing the things that Andocides did to defame the Mysteries, includes wearing the ceremonial robe (stolaen), showing (epedeiknue) the hiera to the uninitiated, and speaking the forbidden words.[125] Similar charges were brought against Alcibiades. In Plutarch's quotation of the

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[122]See Clinton, *Sacred Officials*, p. 22, n. 79.
[123]S.V. Tracy, *Attic Cutters of 229-86 BC.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, pp. 155-156).
[124]Sec. 54.
[125]Sec. 51.

record of Alcibiades' impeachment the title *Hierophantaes* is used explicitly. Two of the things for which Alcibiades was indicted were wearing the robe *(stolaen)* of the hierophant and for referring to himself by the title, Hierophant.[126]

IVD3: Torchlight and the Anaktoran

We have evidence that there was an official called the hierophant as early as the fifth century, but the primary evidence we have concerning how and where he revealed the holy things is later, and because the holy things were the secret objects of the Mysteries, we know very little about just what they were. The accounts we have indicate that the hierophant revealed the holy things to the initiates in or near the initiation building at Eleusis as they moved from darkness into bright light provided by torches. Below I will review some of the evidence for this and consider speculations about what the holy things were.

The initiation building has been referred to both as the Telesterion and the Anaktoran. On some accounts the Anaktoron has been identified as a shrine inside the Telesterion.[127] Clinton, however, argues that the Anaktoron is the hall of initiation itself, the building customarily referred to as the Telesterion.[128] The word *Telesterion* does not appear in any inscriptions from Eleusis, and according to LSJ, it appears in literature only seven times, five times where it has the meaning initiation building. Three of those usages occur in Plutarch.

[126]Plutarch's *Lives*, 22.3.
[127]See O. Rubensohn, *AA* 1933, col. 322.
[128]*Myth and Cult: The Iconography of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Stockholm: Svenska Institute i Athens, 1992, Appendix 7).

Clinton believes that modern scholars adopted the term from Plutarch, especially from the passage in the account of the life of Pericles (13.7) which discusses the construction of the Classical period building in Eleusis.[129] The word *Anaktoron* appears twice in the Classical period.[130] We do know that there was an initiation building at Eleusis both during the Archaic period and the Classical period. The Archaic building was dismantled in the 480's B.C.[131] And the new building was built at some point during the second half of the fifth century.[132]

The references we have as to what went on inside the initiation building are again late and possibly tinged with Platonic influence. One of the most frequently quoted pieces of evidence is from the Plutarch passage in the *Moralia* in which he compares someone engaging in philosophy to someone being initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries:

> Just as initiates first push against one another noisily and shout, but when the sacred matters are enacted *(dromenon)* and displayed *(deiknumenon)*, pay attention, awestruck and in silence, so too at the beginning of philosophy: about its portals also you will see great tumult and talking and boldness, as some boorishly and violently try to jostle their way towards the repute it bestows; but he who has succeeded in getting inside, and has seen a great light *(phos)*, as though the Anaktoron was opened,

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[129]*Myth and Cult*, p. 126.

[130]Herodotus recounts that Demeter was upset at what the Persians did to the Anaktoron in Eleusis (9.65) and in Euripides' Supplices the women point to the Anaktoron from their position near the Callichoron Well (88).

[131]T.L. Shear, "The Demolished Temple at Eleusis", *Hesperia* 20, Supplement, 1982, pp. 128-140.

[132]For arguments concerning just when it was completed see K. Clinton, "The Date of the Classical Telesterion at Eleusis", *PHILIA EPE in Honor of George Mylonas*, 103B (Athens: Archailogike Hetaireia, Athens Bibliotheke, 1987, pp. 254-262).

> adopts another bearing of silence and amazement, and "humble and orderly attends upon"[133] reason... *Progress in Virtue* 81 d-e

Here we find the idea of displaying the holy things in the Anaktoron in bright light. Given Plutarch's Platonism and his familiarity with Platonic texts, it is possible that this passage shows Platonic influence. We do, however, have epigraphical evidence from statues dedicated to two hierophants that express similar details. The problem with this evidence is that it is very late, from the third century A.D.

Philostratus in his *Lives of the Sophists* gives biographical information on two 3rd century hierophants: Apollonius and Glaucus.[134] Apollonius was in office around 215 A.D., and the epigram on a statue of him at Eleusis describes his role as a hierophant in terms of showing forth from the Anaktoron in the white night *(anaktorou ek prophanenta nuxin en argennais)* (I.G., II^2 3811). Glaucus was a hierophant from around 225 to 235. On a memorial erected after his death we find "Glaucus...revealed to all mankind the light-bringing rites of Deo[135] for nine years, but in the tenth went to the immortals" (I.G. II^2 3661), and in I.G. II^2 3709 he is called "the Hierophant from the radiant Anaktoron."[136]

While the evidence for the hierophant revealing the holy things in bright light inside the Anaktoron is late, we do have early evidence for the more

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[133]Here Plutarch quotes from Plato's *Laws*, 716a, a passage in which Plato contrasts two kinds of people: the humble and orderly, and the vain and wanton.
[134]Keyser, ed., vol. II. 20, p. 103.
[135]A name for Demeter.
[136]For other appearances of the term *Anaktoron* see Clinton, *Myth and Cult*, pp. 128-132.

general claim that light played a central role in the Mysteries. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*[137] Demeter gives her rites to the people of Eleusis:

> . . . Now let all the people build me a great temple with an altar beneath, under the sheer wall of the city on the rising hill above the Kallichron. I myself will lay down the rites so that hereafter performing due rites you may propitiate my spirit. (270-274)

And soon after doing this, she transforms herself in light:

> Thus speaking, the goddess changed her size and appearance, thrusting off old age...a light beamed far out from the goddess' immortal skin...the well built house flooded with radiance like lightning. (275-280)

Many of the events in the *Hymn* appear to mirror events of the Mysteries. For instance, the *gephyrismoi* that occurs when the initiates cross the bridge to Eleusis seems to be represented by Iambe jesting with and mocking Demeter at 202-204 in the Hymn. This suggests that the reference to the flooding of a building with light may also be part of the Mysteries. Other early references to the light of the Eleusinian Mysteries include reference in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides to the torchlight of the Mysteries.[138] However, it appears that torches were not only used in the initiation building, but during the procession to Eleusis, so these references may simply be to the torch light of the processions.[139]

The evidence we have that one of the functions of the hierophant was to show the holy things to the initiates in the initiation building is late. But we do

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[137]The Hymn dates at least to the mid sixth century BC., if not before.
[138]*Oedipus at Colonus* 1049, *The Phoenician Maidens* 687. For other references to the role of light in the Mysteries see Dio Chrysostom, *The Twelfth Discourse*, 33; Plutarch Fr. 178; Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.8.
[139]See Aristophanes' *Frogs*, 340-350 for a description of the torch light of the procession.

know that there was an initiation building in Eleusis as far back as the Archaic period, and we have evidence that individuals filled the post of hierophant as early as the fifth century B.C. While the etymology of the name, *hierophant*, is not itself conclusive evidence that there was an individual who showed the holy things to the initiates, when we combine this with the later accounts we have of the hierophant doing just this, they provides compelling, if not airtight, indications that this sort of showing went on in the Mysteries prior to Plato.

IVD4: The Secret of the Mysteries

Because of the proscription against revealing the secrets of the Mysteries, one of the aspects of the Eleusinian Mysteries we know the least about is what the sacred objects were. Before the festival of the Great Mysteries, the hiera were transported from Eleusis to Athens in a procession.[140] They were carried in *kistai*, cylindrical baskets with close fitting covers that were tied with specially dyed ribbons.[141] It may be the case that some of the holy things were seen during the preliminary initiation into the Great Mysteries. Clement of Alexandria in his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, purports to quote a password or *synthema* from the Eleusinian Mysteries. This evidence must be used cautiously since it is late, written around the late second century A.D., and because it is a work in which Clement derides the Mysteries. The password is as follows: "I fasted; I drank the kykeon[142] (a drink of barley water and herbs); I

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[140]I.G. II^2 1078. This decree passed around 220 AD. regulates the participation of the ephebes' in escorting the hiera from Eleusis to Athens.
[141]Plutarch's *Lives*, *Phocion*, 28.3.
[142]In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* Demeter has Metaneira make her up a similar drink (208-209).

took from the *kiste*; having done my task, I placed in the basket, and from the basket into the *kiste*."[143] This formula may show that an initiate has performed the proper preliminary ritual. Later in the work Clement lists the contents of the *kiste*:

> Consider, too, the content of the kiste; for I must strip bare their holy things and utter the unspeakable. Are they not sesame cakes, pyramid and spherical cakes, cakes with many navels, also balls of salt and a serpent, the mystic sign of Dionysus Bassareus? Are they not also pomegranates, fig branches, fennel stalks, ivy leaves, round cakes and poppies. These are their holy things! In addition, there are the unutterable symbols of Ge Themis, marjoram, a lamp, a sword, and a woman's comb, which is a euphemistic expression used in the Mysteries for a woman's secret parts. What manifest shamelessness! (2.19, G.W. Butterworth, trans.)

While the Clement passage provides speculation about some of the hiera that may have been part of the preliminary rites of the Great Mysteries, other sources offer evidence about what was a shown to the initiates during an *epoptic* stage of the Mysteries. Hippolytus is a late source for the view that what was shown was an ear of cut wheat. However, in the passage we have from him, he is quoting a Gnostic tract which itself preserves some of the form and content of an older pagan commentary on a hymn to Attis.[144] According to Clinton, most historians of Greek religion have accepted the basic information contained in the passage as valid, that an ear of wheat was shown during the *epopteia*, one of the stages of the Mysteries.[145] One possibility is that there was

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[143]2.18.
[144]*Myth and Cult*, p. 94. This Gnostic document is discussed by J. Frickel in *Hellenistische Erlösung in christlicher Deutung: Die gnostische Naassenerschrift* (Nag Hammadi Studies 19) Leiden 1984.
[145]*Myth and Cult*, p. 94.

an *epoptic* stage in which an ear of cut wheat was revealed but that this was a relatively late addition to the Mysteries. Yet the evidence discussed above suggests against this possibility that there was an *epoptic* stage in the Mysteries prior to the time that Plato was writing and something was shown to the initiates during this stage. The account which Hippolytus quotes in the *Refutation of all Heresies* is one we saw above in the discussion of the *epoptic* stage:

> The Phrygians, the Naassene says, assert that he [Attis] is "the green ear of harvested grain", and after the Phrygians...the Athenians, performing the Eleusinian initiations and showing to the *epoptai* in silence the great and marvelous and perfect Mystery there, a harvested ear of grain. This ear is also for the Athenians...illumination great and perfect, just as the hierophant himself (not castrated like Attis...but made a eunuch by means of hemlock...) at night in Eleusis in the midst of much fire, performing the great and ineffable Mysteries shouts and cries the words: 'Potina gave birth to a sacred boy, Brimo to Brimo,' i.e. the "mighty" to the 'mighty one'... 5.8.39 (Clinton, trans.)

If the ear of wheat (corn) was what was shown to the initiates, this would fit in well with the role of Demeter as the goddess of vegetation and with the theme of life - death - life that appears to run through the rites—Persephone went down to Hades and then was "reborn" when she returned to Demeter; the initiates die to their old ways and beliefs in the preliminary experiences of the initiation rites before being reborn when they become blessed initiates; and the grain of wheat dies before it can sprout and be born again and serve as nourishing food.

Another hypothesis about what was shown to the initiates that is also connected to the Demeter myth is that they saw the goddesses Demeter and

Persephone reunited. Clinton, when discussing the iconographic evidence for the *dromena* or sacred drama, develops the view that the dromena ends with a vision of Demeter and Persephone reunited when Persephone returns from Hades.[146] One piece of evidence in support of this is the text of a rhetorical exercise from Hadrian's time that has been preserved in a papyrus. Herakles is made to argue that he does not need the Eleusinian Mysteries since he was initiated through his journey through the underworld: "Lock up Eleusis and the sacred fire, dadouchos (torch bearer). I have experienced far truer Mysteries...I have seen Kore (an alternate name for Persephone)."[147]

The question arises in what sense would the initiates have "seen" the goddesses? Were they represented in the mind of the initiate either through suggestion or through the use of mind altering substances? Did individuals act out the roles of the goddesses? Were statues or images used?[148] Kerényi suggests the initiates may have experienced an hallucination produced by fasting and then consuming the alcohol and herbs in the kykeon drink.[149] Clinton appeals to references to the word *phantasmata*[150] and to a votive plaque[151] and proposes that what the initiates saw were sculptures illuminated from within.[152]

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[146]*Myth and Cult*, pp. 84-89.
[147]Milan Papyrus No. 20, line 31 in *Papiri della R. Universita di Milano*, I, 177.
[148]See Burkert, *Homo Necans*, pp. 286-288.
[149]*Eleusis*, Appendix 1.
[150]Plutarch Fr. 178; Aristides, *Eleusinian Oration*, 3; Proclus, *In R.* 2.185.3-4 Kroll.
[151]I.G. II^2 4639.
[152]*Myth and Cult*, pp. 89-90.

IVD5: Seeing and Becoming Blessed

While the evidence for an *epoptic* stage of the Eleusinian Mysteries in which initiates were shown the hiera by the hierophant in a blaze of bright light is not entirely certain, a good case can be made that initiates participated in an epoptic stage of the Mysteries prior to the writing of Plato. However, for my purposes a weaker claim — that vision played a significant role in the Mysteries — will be sufficient. And several pieces of literary evidence confirms that vision was important in the Eleusinian Mysteries. This early evidence indicates that the ancient Greeks made a connection made between seeing the Eleusinian rites and achieving a blessed state.

In lines 480-82 of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, we find the following:

> Blessed *(olbios)* is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites (*orgia*, referred to in line 476), but the uninitiated *(atelaes)* who has no share in them never has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness,

We find something very similar in a Sophocles fragment:

> Thrice happy *(trisolbioi)* are those of mortals, who having seen *(derkthentes)* those rites *(telae)* depart for Hades; for to them alone is granted to have true life there; to the rest all there is evil *(kaka)*.
>
> Fr.753N (837 P)

And again in Pindar we have:

> Blessed *(olbios)* is he who has seen *(idon)* these things before he goes beneath the hallowed earth for he understands *(oiden)* the end *(teleutan)* of mortal life and the beginning of new life given by the god.
>
> Fr.137a Sn. (121 Bo.)

Burkert argues that the sight that confers the blessedness upon an initiate occurs not during the *epopteia*, but during the *myesis* that precedes it: "It should be emphasized that the step that was the decisive one in a man's [sic.] life was his *myesis*, which occurred only once. All promises refer to the mystai."[153] His evidence in support of this is two passages from Aristophanes, one where an individual thought to be facing death asks to borrow the money to buy a pig so he can be initiated (*muaethnai*) before dying (*Peace* 375), and the second in which the chorus refers to themselves as *hosoi memuaemetha* (*Frogs* 456). This is not a compelling argument, however. Clinton shows that by the end of the fourth century, the terms *mueo* and *muaesis* were being applied to the whole process of initiation.[154] But whether seeing the *hiera* during the epoptic stage was the high point of the Mysteries or whether the Greeks believed that simply seeing all the phenomena that composed the rites generally is what made one blessed, we must conclude that seeing had a central role in the Eleusinian Mysteries prior to the advent of Plato.

V: Mysteries and Knowledge

The preceding discussion of the Eleusinian Mysteries—with their pig sacrifices, fear-inducing rituals, and displays of sacred objects—may make the Eleusinian Mysteries seem like an inappropriate vehicle to use when discussing a rational process like knowledge acquisition. I want to show, however, that it

[153]*Homo Necans*, p. 275.
[154]*Sacred Officials*, p. 13, n. 15.

is precisely these strange aspects of the Mysteries that make them effective vehicles for Plato to give an account of his epistemology.

Since secrets are revealed to the initiates in the final rites, many recent commentators have seen a connection between initiation into the Mysteries and knowledge. According to Dodds, "the Mystery cults offered their adepts a supposedly potent kind of *knowledge*, from which the profane were excluded."[155] And Richardson argues that the imparting of knowledge in the Mysteries was the basis for the adoption by philosophers of Mystery terminology, especially in the case of the pre-Socratics[156] In commenting on the *Hymn to Demeter*, he says that:

> The emphasis on knowledge is fundamental to later references to the Mysteries (cf. especially Pindar's fr. 137a), and explains why one finds the philosophers adopting so readily mystic terminology, the concept of knowledge as ultimately based on vision.[157]

The Pindar fragment he is referring to is, "Blessed (*olbios*) is he who has seen (*idon*) these things before he goes beneath the hollow earth; for he understands (*oiden*) the end (*telentan*) of mortal life, and the beginning (of a new life) given of god." Richardson makes a similar point later when commenting on line 480 of the *Hymn* where Demeter says that the mortal who has seen these rites is blessed. Richardson believes that

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[155]Euripides, *Bachae*, 2nd edition, edited with introduction and commentary by E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944, 1960, p. 76).
[156](p. 313). *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). See also. Seaford, "Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries", *Classical Quarterly* 31 (ii), 1981, p. 253.
[157]p. 28.

> . . . the *makarismos* of the Mysteries is taken over by the philosophers, who proclaim the blessed happiness of those who have gained enlightenment by contemplation, and who understand the nature of the world in the same way the initiate has insight or knowledge of the nature or purpose of his existence.

While I think that one of the reasons Plato chose to use Mystery terminology when setting out his views on knowledge is because of the connections of the Mysteries with attaining knowledge, I don't think that it is as clear as many commentators seem to think that there is a tradition of such an association that existed among philosophers going back to the pre-Socratics. Many of the fragments cited by Seaford and Richardson seem to be more general references to knowledge and or happiness without much to indicate that a Mystery reference was intended or served as an influence.

For example, the Empedocles fragment, "Happy (*olbios*) is he who has acquired the riches (ploutos) of divine thoughts, but wretched the man in whose mind dwells an obscure opinion about the gods" (fr. 132), that several commentators point to, refers only to divine thoughts not Mystery knowledge specifically.[158] Seaford points to Thomson's "From Religion to Philosophy"[159] as an example of a discussion of Heraclitus as a philosopher who adopted Mystery terminology in his writing because of the Mystery knowledge connection. Yet while Thomson points to the connection of Heraclitus' family to the priesthood of the Eleusinian Mysteries and makes an analogy between Heraclitus' *logos* and the *legomena* of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Thomson is

[158]Richardson, however, believes that the use of the word *ploutos* for riches and symbolism of light and darkness echo the language of the mysteries (p. 313).
[159]*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 73, 1952, pp. 79, 83.

primarily concerned with Heraclitus' style. He does not discuss any Heraclitean fragments that concern knowledge. In fact, Heraclitus appears to be fairly hostile to the Mysteries (see fragments 5, 14, and 15). Parmenides has also been cited as alluding to the Mysteries when discussing knowledge, but these too are not clearly references to the Mysteries specifically.[160]

It is clear, given the fact that secrets are revealed to the initiates in the Mysteries, that the Mysteries provide ripe metaphors for those discussing knowledge; however, I do not think that the specific passages that Dodds, Richardson, *et. al* point to bear out this connection. One of the reasons Plato adopted Mystery motifs and terminology is that the final revelation conveys knowledge to the initiates, but I argue that there is an additional aspects of the Mysteries that Plato finds fruitful for his purposes; *i.e.*, that they were largely experiential and that these experiences were prerequisite for understanding the final vision. The experiential nature of the Mysteries is emphasized in a fragment we have from Aristotle:

> Those undergoing initiation (*teloumenoi*) should not learn (*mathein*) but should be affected (*pathein*), be put into a state(*diatethaenai*).[161]

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[160]Dodds refers to C.M. Bowra's discussion in "The Proem of Parmenides" (*Classical Philology*, vol. 32, 1937, no. 2, pp. 109, 110) of the term *eidota phota*, knowing mortal (fr. 1, line 3). Bowra says of the term that it "comes from religion and has more than an echo of 'initiate'" such that "Parmenides refers to the man who travels the way of a goddess as he would to an initiate who belongs to a religious sect." And likewise when Parmenides describes those who move on the way of opinion as *brotoi eidotes ouden*, Bowra likens these to the uninitiated referred to at line 256 in the *Hymn to Demeter* and in Kern's Orphic fragment 233. Here, however, there is not enough to indicate that the reference is specifically to a mystery initiate and not simply to an enlightened individual. And the *Hymn to Demeter* line Bowra cites does not refer to the ignorance of the uninitiated but to the ignorance of mortals generally.
[161]Ross Fr. 15 = Synesius *Dio* 10 p. 48a.

The Aristotle fragment is preserved in Synesius, and Synesius refers to it when distinguishing between the "primitive mysticism" of the Egyptian monks who move to a state of high exaltation in one step and philosophical mysticism which leads to higher levels step by step. At the highest grade of philosophical mysticism learning stops and a pure vision compared to the *epopteia* is achieved. This happens "after they have become fit for the purpose" through the preliminary preparations.[162]

Clement of Alexandria makes a related point—the highest knowledge of the Mysteries is a matter of direct experience, not of discursive learning:

> After these [rites of purification] are the small Mysteries which are for the function of teaching (*didaskalias*) and preparing them for what follows. Next are the great Mysteries which concern everything together. Here there is no place for learning (*manthanein*), but to only for beholding (*epopteuein*) and conceiving nature and its effects.[163]

So, the mere fact that a secret is revealed to the initiates is not the main reason for Plato to use Mystery language and themes in his dialogues. He found useful for his purposes that the initiate had to pass through several preparatory rituals before he could understand the secrets of the Mysteries, and that this secret was in the form of a visual experience rather than a didactic lesson.

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[162]Synesius *Dio* 10 p. 48a. See Burkert *AMC* p. 69.
[163]*Stromata* V, 70, 7f. Care needs to be taken when evaluating Plato in light of late passages such as these for there are suggestions in them of Plato's influence.

Chapter 2: Plato's Use of Mystery Motifs and Terminology in Knowledge Contexts

I: INTRODUCTION

Plato makes references to Greek Mysteries throughout the dialogues in many different contexts.[1] Some of the references are isolated. For example, in the *Theaetetus* Plato calls people, who believe that only tangible things are real, 'uninitiated', but he makes no other allusions to the Mysteries in the dialogue.[2] However, he makes careful and systematic use of Eleusinian Mystery language and motifs in three dialogues: the *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, and he does this in a specifically epistemological context when discussing acquisition of knowledge of the forms. For instance, in each dialogue the moment when one comes to know a form is described in effect as an *epopteia*, whether through use of a form of the term, *epopteia*, as in the *Phaedrus* (250c4), or by using motifs of the *epopteia*, including the movement from darkness to light, as in the *Republic*, or the sudden bursting of a vision on an initiate in the *Symposium*.

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[1] It is clear that some of the references allude to specific Mysteries while others suggest mystery initiation generally. Plato makes non-specific mystery references at *Meno* 76e, *Theaetetus* 155e, *Gorg.* 493b *Phaedrus* 253c and *Eponomis* 986d. Given the prominence of the Eleusinian Mysteries in Athens, however, it is likely that the mysteries Plato had in mind here were the Eleusinian Mysteries. References that clearly refer to the Bacchic Mysteries are found at *Symp* 218b, *Laws* 672b *Phaedrus* 265b. Korybantic references include *Crito* 54d and Euthydemus 277d. Specifically Eleusinian reference include *Rep.* 560e, *Rep.* 378a, *Phaedo 69c*, *Gorgias* 497c, *Symp.* 209e, and *Phaedrus* 250b-c.

[2] 155e. Even though the reference is brief, Rosemary Desjardins uses it to structure her entire book, *The Rational Enterprise: Logos in Plato's* Theaetetus. She entitles Part One "The 'Mysteries' of *Aisthesis*" and Part Two "The 'Mysteries' of *Episteme*," and she emphasizes the theme that hidden levels of meaning are revealed to an initiate in initiation (NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

This seems odd. Given the many other motifs Plato could employ (e.g., the Route used by Parmenides) that are clearly more in line with a rational enterprise, why would Plato use motifs from initiation into the rites of a goddess? There are several possible answers. Perhaps, because the Eleusinian Mysteries were such a prevalent part of the lives of the Athenians (almost all Athenians were initiated, and rites of the Mysteries were held twice a year), language and motifs from the Mysteries became incorporated into everyday speech, and Plato was simply picking up on this common usage. This might be the case for isolated references such as the one at *Republic* 378a where Socrates suggests shrouding a Homeric myth in a silence which can broken only after sacrificing a pig. In the passages I will be discussing, however, I will show that Plato uses Mystery language and motifs in a more deliberate manner and for a definite end.

Another possibility is that Plato was trying to appropriate the authority of the Mysteries. Plato may not have been interested in the content of the Mysteries, but because the Mysteries were so important in the lives of the Athenians, he may have used imagery from the Mysteries to give his own ideas cachet in the eyes of his readers. I do not think this is the case either. As we will see, Plato is concerned not only with the imagery of the Mysteries, but with their content as well.

In what follows I will show that Plato deliberately appropriates the language and motifs of the Eleusinian Mysteries in the Ladder of Eros in the *Symposium*, the Myth of the Cave in the *Republic*, and in the Myth of the Soul

in the *Phaedrus* because they help him to express certain aspects of his theory of knowledge. Specifically, he uses them to express two things: first, that students must go through certain changes or conditioning before they can know the forms, and second, that knowledge of a form comes by a different means than does knowledge of the sensory world.

Concerning the first point, we saw above that the preliminary rites in the Eleusinian Mysteries served to provide conditioning experiences to prepare the initiates for the final *epopteia*. Plato in turn co-opts some of the language and motifs of the Mysteries to describe the kinds of preparatory experiences individuals must go through before they can acquire knowledge of the forms. These include experiences that help to rid one false beliefs and inappropriate desires as well as those that help an individual focus her attention on the appropriate objects of knowledge. As we will see, these conditioning experiences are similar in several ways to the conditioning an initiate into the Eleusinian Mysteries receives.

Second, Plato uses mystery language to express what it is like to have knowledge of a form or *eidos*.[3] Plato's primary epistemological concern is not

[3]Several recent commentators argue that the forms, so described, are not appropriate objects of knowledge. The only appropriate objects of knowledge are propositions. They contend either that the forms themselves are propositions or that one can only have knowledge that is propositional in nature *about* the forms. See R.C. Cross. 1954. "Logos and Forms in Plato" *Mind*, vol. lxiii, no. 252; J.C.B. Gosling, Ch. 8, "Knowledge as Vision" in *Plato* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 43-125; "Myths About Non-Propositional Thought" in both *Language and Logos: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, M. Schofield and M.C. Nussbaum, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 295-314 and *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).pp. 137-156; G. Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in Republic V-VII" in *Epistemology*, S. Everson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990,) pp. 86-87. I discuss these views in the Appendix.

knowledge about the physical world; rather, it is knowledge of forms of a primarily moral nature, such as justice, courage, and beauty.[4] Plato uses the motif of the *epoptic* vision to express his model of the direct acquaintance an individual achieves with a form when he acquires knowledge of it. As we saw above, the *epopteia* is primarily a *visual* revelation. While the preliminary rites of the Mysteries involve many kinds of experiences — visual, auditory, sensory deprivation—the *epopteia* is almost exclusively visual. The initiate is brought into the presence of the holy things, and these objects are revealed to him when light illuminates the darkness. It may seem inconsistent that Plato, who in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* disparages sense experience as unable to provide knowledge of the forms, would adopt visual language to give an account of such knowledge, as he does in the *Republic, Symposium.* and *Phaedrus.*[5] But of course, this is not perception, but a direct, unmediated contact with the object of knowledge, which Plato indicates through the metaphor of sight.

The goals and changes in the case of the Mysteries and the case of Plato's dialogues are different. Plato is primarily concerned not with overcoming the fear of death or securing a blessed afterlife, but with attaining knowledge.[6] Yet Plato is able to use the Mystery motifs for his own purposes.

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[4]In the *Cratylus*, when discussing the possibility of knowledge with the Heraclitean Cratylus, Plato expresses doubt about knowing the sensible objects of the physical world because physical things are always changing and in flux. Plato thinks that for knowledge to be possible, its objects must be unchanging (439b-440c). Another reason for this focus in his epistemology is that Plato's epistemology is closely linked with his ethics. One must know what justice, courage, etc., are before he can model his actions, the laws of a city, etc. in accordance with them.

[5]*Phaedo*, 65b-67e. For example, *Republic*, 540a.

[6]However, Socrates endorses the view that death is a benefit in the *Phaedo* (61b-69e). And, as we will see in both Plato and the Mysteries there is a goal of attaining *eudaimonia*, a state of blessedness.

For instance, the cycle of Life—Death—Life plays a central role in the Demeter/Kore myth. And Plato is able to play off this to express his idea that an individual must move from a state of purported knowledge through ignorance before he can attain genuine knowledge, a cycle of 'Knowledge' — Ignorance — Knowledge. Many of the interlocutors in Plato's accounts of *elenchus* believe themselves to have knowledge. Through the *elenchus* they are brought to a state of ignorance. Along with recognition of their ignorance comes feelings of humility, uncertainty and discomfort. (These feelings too are similar to those incited in Mystery initiates.) But a recognition of their ignorance also awakens in them a desire to seek after true knowledge, and Plato represents the attainment of this knowledge in terms of an Eleusinian *epopteia*. This parallels the Eleusinian cycle of ordinary life, symbolic death and the joyful life of the initiated.

In what follows I will consider how Plato uses the five mystery motifs of passing through a sequence of stages, being purified, being led by a *mystagogos*, experiencing an *epopteia*, and achieving a state of *eudaimonia* in order to give an account of the nature of the conditioning and transformations an individual goes through before he comes to know the forms. And I will pay special attention to how and why he employs the motif of the *epopteia* in order to convey what knowing a form must be like. But before I consider the motifs, let me first say why Plato believes that people must be transformed in order to acquire knowledge.

II: CONDITIONING AND TRANSFORMATION

Plato believes that most individuals, in their current state, are unable to attain knowledge. This is because of two principal reasons: first, often they do not desire to seek knowledge, either believing that they already possess it or having their desires focused on other things — wealth, status, or physical pleasures. Second, given the non-physical nature of Plato's forms, people need to learn a new way of thinking before they can access them. Therefore, on Plato's theory of knowledge, individuals must go through certain kinds of preparation and conditioning before they can achieve knowledge.[7] As in the Mysteries, this conditioning occurs by way of a progression through stages. First, an individual must be purified of false beliefs, humbled and brought to a state of uncertainty in order to motivate a desire to seek after genuine knowledge. Then she must be conditioned to learn to think abstractly.

Plato often represents this conditioning in terms of an ascent to the knowledge of a form which is similar to the journey of the Mystery initiates to the *epopteia*. In the *Republic* Plato illustrates this by the ascent out of the Cave and the ascent up the Divided Line, and he correlates these ascents to the conditioning of an individual in preparation to acquire knowledge, for example the conditioning of the guardians by leading them through abstract subjects, such as arithmetic, music and astronomy, and by teaching them dialectic. In the

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[7]For others who share this interpretation of Plato's theory of knowledge see chapters 6 & 7, "Knowledge Through Conversion" and "The Means of Conversion" in *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy*, R.E. Cushman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958) and chapter 6, "The Necessary Conversion of the Self" in *The Education of Desire: Plato and the Philosophy of Religion*, M. Despland (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1985).

Symposium the conditioning is represented by the ascent up the Ladder of Love as an individual move to more and more abstract instances of beauty until he or she is able to see beauty itself.

Yet not everyone is in an appropriate state to experience the conditioning ascent. Some require preparation before this. Given a person who does not desire to seek knowledge, the individual must be humbled and divested of misplaced confidence about his 'knowledge' and stripped of false beliefs. In the Mysteries the initiates are prepared for the ascent through the *Telesterion* by preliminary purification. Plato treats the *elenchus* as having the place of this purification, which in the Mysteries removes from a person the impurities that would prevent him from coming into contact with the *hiera*: Plato employs the interlocutor in dialectic as a *mystagogos* who both leads the initiates through the purification process and guides him once he has been brought to a state of confusion and uncertainty.

In addition to false beliefs, misplaced or excessive desires can also prevent an individual from gaining knowledge or achieving the Platonic *epopteia*. Plato uses Mystery motifs in this connection in at least two ways. First, in the *Phaedrus* Plato employs the Mystery motif of awe and reverence for the divine when discussing how feelings toward a beloved can help you check your desires and regain your wings. Secondly and more generally Plato exploits the connection between having well ordered desires and achieving a state of blessedness. In the Mystery initiates sought a state of blessedness, having a good life after death, and being recognized in the eyes of Demeter.

Plato's goal also is a state of flourishing or *eudaimonia*, and a prerequisite for achieving this state is acquiring both knowledge and well-ordered desires.

Once an individual has gone through the conditioning processes he is capable, cognitively speaking, of bringing his mind into the presence of a form. For Plato knowledge of a form is not propositional knowledge "that X is Y," but it is knowledge by acquaintance, knowing the form of X directly, and Plato finds the motif of the *epopteia* useful to describe this kind of knowledge. Below I will consider in more detail these aspects of Plato's theory of knowledge and how he uses the mystery motifs of stages, purification, being led by a *mystagogos*, the visual revelation of the *epopteia*, and achieving a state of *eudaimonia* to give an account of them. Let us turn first to the motif of proceeding through stages.

III: Proceeding Through a Sequence of Stages

The Eleusinian Mysteries are composed of a series of rites designed to prepare the initiate for the final rite, the *epopteia*, in a variety of ways. The purificatory rites remove any pollution and ready the initiate to come into contact with the sacred. Rites such as the *thronosis* shake up the initiate, open him up to give himself over to the goddesses, and prepare him to understand the meaning of the events of the *epopteia*.

As we saw with Plutarch's discussion of Demetrius, the order of the stages is important. One must be initiated into the Small Mysteries before the Great Mysteries, and one can experience the *epopteia* only after at least a year has passed since one participated in the Great Mysteries. This is because the

events of one rite build on or depend upon what the initiate underwent in the previous rite.

The situation is similar for the Platonic initiate who is seeking knowledge. In the *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*, one must go through an ordered series of experiences before he can acquire knowledge of the forms. The particulars of the stages differ from dialogue to dialogue, and I will discuss the specifics of those of the *Symposium* in Chapter 3. However, the general pattern consists in a purification through an *elenchus* conducted by a guide, which results in a state of shaken uncertainty or *aporia*. This motivates the initiate to make the assent to the *epopteia*, where the vision of a form bursts upon the initiate, and he acquires knowledge of it. In the same way that the Eleusinian initiate is led up through the *Telesterion* to the final vision of the *epopteia*, Plato's initiate is led through an ascent to his final vision, *e.g.*, the ascent up the Ladder of Love in the *Symposium* and the ascent out of the Cave in the *Republic*. In these cases, however, the ascent is cognitive. One moves in stages from more concrete to more abstract instances of properties until he is at last capable of bringing his intellect into contact with a non-physical, mind-independent form.

IV: From Hubris to Humility: the Shaking Up of the Initiate

Conditioning of the initiate is achieved in different ways throughout the stages. One of these means is by shaking up the initiate. This shaking up occurs during various stages of the initiation, including both stages in which purification occurs and those in which *ekpleksis* is induced. The processes that

a Platonic initiate goes through also involve such shaking up. One of the primary experiences an individual must go through in preparation for knowing the forms is to recognize his ignorance, to be dispossessed of beliefs that do not constitute true knowledge, in order that he may seek after such knowledge. This is often a painful process. Plutarch explicitly compares this process in philosophy to the discomforting procedures an initiate experiences during initiation into the Mysteries:

> ...the smart from philosophy which sinks deep in young men of good parts is healed by the very words which inflict the hurt. For this reason he who is taken to task must feel and suffer some smart, yet he should not be crushed or dispirited, but, as though at a solemn rite (*telete*) of novitiate which consecrates him to philosophy, he should submit to the initial purifications and commotions (*thorubous*), in the expectation that something delectable and splendid will follow upon his present distress and perturbation. "On Listening to Lectures," 47a, trans. Babbit

Plato gives an account of the need for this kind of shaking up in the early dialogues. In the *Apology*, Plato describes Socrates as going around questioning individuals who claim to have knowledge to show them that they do not in fact have the knowledge that they believe themselves to have.[8] Plato depicts the character Socrates doing this in many of the later non-Socratic dialogues as well. The purpose, as Plato says in the *Meno*, is to make an individual feel helpless and without a way so that he then tries to seek true knowledge. Meno describes Socrates' ability to cause such perplexity:

> Socrates, even before I met you they told me that in plain truth you are a perplexed (*aporeis*) man yourself and reduce others to perplexity (*aporein*). At this moment I feel you are exercising magic and witchcraft upon me and positively laying me under

[8]21b-22e.

> your spell until I am just a mass of helplessness...I think you are exactly like the flat stingray one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes into contact with it, it numbs him . . . (79e-80a) (trans. W.K.C. Guthrie)

And later in that same dialogue Socrates explains the purpose of causing such perplexity :

> Observe, Meno, the stage he has reached on the path of recollection. At the beginning he did not know the side of the square of eight feet. Nor indeed does he know it now, but then he thought he knew it and answered boldly, as was appropriate - he felt no perplexity. Now however he does feel perplexed...in perplexing him and numbing him...we have helped him to some extent toward finding out the right answer, for now...he will be quite glad to look for it . . . Do you suppose he would have attempted to look for, or learn, what he thought he knew . . . before he was thrown into perplexity, became aware of his ignorance and felt a desire to know? No. Then the numbing process was good for him. . . (84a-c) (tr. W.K.C. Guthrie)

Not only does being put into a state of perplexity and uncertainty cause an individual to seek after certainty, it also creates an attitude of humility that Plato thinks is necessary to attain knowledge.

Plato vividly express this idea of shaking up an individual to prepare him to acquire knowledge in the *Phaedrus* when describing how an individual recollects beauty based on the perception of the beauty of a single individual. Here he mirrors the Mystery practice of inducing *ekpleksis*. The recollection he describes involves experiences that include shuddering, sweating, feelings of awe and reverence for the object of beauty, fear and confusion. These are all experiences or states that are traditionally attributed to individuals experiencing

desire and love.[9] But they are also experiences and states that initiates are brought to in the process of being initiated,[10] and Plato draws a parallel between the experiences of the lover and the experiences of the initiate in the *Phaedrus*. Seeing a beautiful boy both stimulates desire for the boy and sets one on the path to recollecting beauty itself. The shuddering, fear, etc. are conditions that are constitutive of both of the experiences, which are occurring simultaneously.

The fear and confusion incited in the initiates by those officiating at the mysteries were intended as a transitional state. As we saw in the introduction, the goal of the Eleusinian Mysteries is to impart knowledge to the initiates, knowledge of the secrets of the Mysteries. The states of fear and frenzied confusion is a transitional state from ignorance to knowledge. It is a way to shake the initiate loose from his focus on the old realities and prepare him for a new way of seeing the reality that will be revealed to him.

Plato uses the same terminology that is used in describing the experiences of the fearful and stricken initiates. He talks of fear (*deina*), shuddering (*phrike*), sweat (*idros*), and amazement (*ekpleksin*). Consider the following passages:

> ...he who is newly initiated (*arititeles*), who at that time beheld many of those things, when he sees a god-like face or something which is a good image of beauty, first he shudders (*ephriksen*), and then something of the fear (*deimaton*) he experienced *at that*

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[9]We find individuals in love describes in these terms in Greek lyric poetry. See Sappho fragments 31, 47, 130; Anacreon fragment 398; and Pindar fragment 123.
[10]See above, Ch. 1, especially the passage from Plutarch , "Prof. of Virtue," and Demetrius, "On Style."

> *famous time* (*tote*) comes over him, and then reverence as at the sight of a god (251a1-4).
>
> ...these when they see here some likeness of things of that place, are stricken with amazement (*ekplettontai*) and can no longer control themselves (250a6-7).
>
> And as he looks upon him, a change from his shuddering (*phrikes*) overtakes him with sweat (*idros*) and unexpected heat: for by reason of the stream of beauty entering through his eyes there comes a warmth, whereby his soul's plumage is fostered (251a7-b1).

The direct cause of the symptoms is seeing a beautiful individual, and the experiences, such as being flushed with warmth and not being able to control oneself, are those experienced by an individual who desires a beautiful body. But Plato makes it explicit that the symptoms are at the same time being caused by one's re-experiencing of the fear and confusion induced by the preliminary rituals carried out before the *epopteia*. He says "something of the fear he experienced *tote* comes over him" (251a4). *Tote* when used emphatically means *at that famous time*. Even when not used emphatically, it means *aforetime*, and since Plato is explicitly referring here to those who were newly initiated, the referent of the *tote* appears to be the time of initiation. One of the metaphorical effects of the vision of the beautiful boy is that it creates a warmth that begins to promote the growth of the souls' wings which allows the soul to re-ascend to the realm of the forms. This, for Plato, represents the return to knowledge of the form of beauty, In the *Phaedrus* Plato represents both the initial acquisition of knowledge of the forms as well as the recollection of them in terms of initiation into the Mysteries, so it is consistent with Plato's

use of Mystery motifs that before one re-experiences the *epopteia* he would re-experience some of the preliminary rituals.[11]

If the state of fearful confusion mirrors a state induced by some of the preliminary rituals of the Eleusinian Mysteries, we can ask what role these states play in the Platonic Mysteries. Some of our evidence indicates that in the Eleusinian Mysteries these states served as transitional states as the initiates moved from ignorance to knowledge of the secrets of the mysteries. The initiates were made to feel afraid, ignorant and without a way in order to move them away from their old way of seeing and to prepare them for the new way of seeing manifest in the visual revelation. I will argue that in the Platonic Mysteries this shaking up of the initiate in order to produce states of fear and confusion is done through dialectic, more specifically, through the negative form of dialectic, *elenchus*. In the *Symposium* chapter we will see that the *elenchus* serves a purificatory function for Plato, purging initiates of false beliefs. In the same way that one of the results of purification by fire in the *thronismos* ritual were feelings of insecurity and fright, once one has been through an *elenchus* and comes to realize that some of his beliefs are not true or that they are inconsistent with the other beliefs he holds, then he begins to feel insecure, frightened and without a way. The term Plato uses for this state, *aporia*, literally means without a way or path.

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[11]For more on Plato's use of the states of fear, trembling, etc. incited during the Mysteries see C. Reidweg. 1987. *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), pp. 60-65.

Plato employs both the motifs of purification and being guided by a *mystagogos* in connection with these processes of being humbled and brought to a point of uncertainty and self-surrender. I will consider these processes more specifically in what follows.

V: PURIFICATION

Purification served at least three purposes in the Eleusinian Mysteries. First, it prepared a person to encounter the sacred. In the later stages of the Mysteries the initiates would be entering a sacred place and coming into contact with sacred objects; therefore, they would need to be free of any *miasma* or pollution. In this way rites of purification served to indicate that the initiates were approaching something of value and significance.[12] Second, in the *epoptic* revelation the initiates gained knowledge of the secrets of the Mysteries, and the reliefs depicting the initiation of Herakles suggest that one of the purposes of purification was to put the initiate in a state of unknowing or ignorance prior to the revelation. The reliefs depict Herakles as an initiate being purified by fire[13] and by a *liknon* or winnowing fan.[14] In both cases Herakles is seated and his head is covered. As we saw, the intended purpose of

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[12]W. Burkert, 1977. *Greek Religion*, trans by John Raffan (1985) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 76; R Parker, 1983. *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) pp. 19, 24, 31.

[13]In one of the three scenes on the sarcophagus of Torre-Nova Herakles is seated on a stool with his head covered and his feet on a ram's pelt known as the "Fleece of Zeus". A priestess stands behind him and waves torches over him. See L. Deubner, *Attische Feste*, Berlin, 1932, pl. 7.1; G. Mylonas. 1961. (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 84.

[14] A scene on the Lovatelli urn depicts a situation similar to that on the sarcophagus of Torre-Nova, but the torches are replaced by a liknon. Liknons were traditionally used to purify wheat through a basket which allowed chaff to be blown away by the wind. Mylonas, pl. 83; Roussel, "L'initiation prealable et les symboles Eleusinien", BCH 54, 1930, pp. 58-65.

covering the initiate's head appears to be to veil the initiate's eyes and thus to symbolize a state of unknowing. Burkert speculates that when unveiled, the initiate has new sight in preparation for his or her vision of the *hiera*.[15] The third purpose of purification is to allow the candidate to join the society of the initiated. If he were still polluted, this would keep him as an outsider.

We can ask what specifically it was that initiates were being purified from. Possibilities include sins of the present life, ancestral sins, and or any unexplained accumulation of impurity, but none of the evidence we have, except in the case of the myth of Herakles (where Herakles is purified from blood guilt incurred by killing the Centaurs) indicates what it was specifically that initiates are being purified from.[16]

Plato uses the motif of ritual purification in each of the three ways mentioned above. He reveres the forms, and he also recognizes certain sorts of pollutants from which an individual must be purified. Before acquiring knowledge of the forms, one must be purified of false beliefs and wanton desires that would dampen his desire for the search for knowledge and impair his ability to understand the nature of the forms. Once he has the proper desires and wants to seek wisdom, he can become initiated and join the company of the philosophers, the lovers of wisdom.

Just as the Mystery initiate must be pure because he will come into the presence of the *hiera* which are pure and sacred, Plato indicates that both the

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[15]W. Burkert. 1972. *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans by Peter Bing (1983) (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press) p. 268.
[16]Parker, *Miasma*, p. 283.

objects of knowledge, the forms, as well as those who acquire knowledge of them are pure. In the *Symposium* he describes the form of beauty as pure (*katharon*), uncorrupted (*eilikrines*) and unmixed (*ameikton*) (211e). We can ask what it would be for a form to be pure. In the *Symposium* Plato says that they are pure in that they are not contaminated with things which are related to the physical, such as flesh and colors, and which would therefore link them to that which is mortal and changing. Epistemologically, too, however, there is a sense in which it is important that both the knower and the object of knowledge be pure. One of the shortcomings of knowledge based on sense perception in that the perceiver is plagued with problems of perspectivalism. The sense data an individual receives will be relative based on his or her position vis-a-vis the object. The perceiver must make inferences from his or her sense experiences of particular properties to form a concept of a whole object or state of affairs. This opens the way for false judgments and for applying subjective preconceptions when making the inference. Plato's objects of knowledge are pure in that they can be known directly without any of the distortions that come with knowledge based on sense perception. Descartes similarly regarded the objects of arithmetic and geometry in this manner. He said of them that they "alone deal with an object so pure and so uncomplicated, that they need make no assumptions at all which experience renders uncertain."[17] For Plato as one ascends up the Line he encounters objects not only of increased abstraction, but

[17]"Regulae" in *Philosophical Works*, vol. I, edited by E. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), I. 5. For a further discussion of the imagery of purity in philosophers including Locke and Quine see Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (NY: SUNY Press, 1987), pp. 76-82.

increased purity.[18] The objects of mathematics are purer than the objects of the physical world, and the forms are purer than the objects of mathematics.

Plato employs purification metaphors in both ethical and epistemological contexts. Rather than ancestral or blood guilt, the impurities from which one needs to be cleansed are overriding emotions and false opinion, things that would hinder one in apprehending the forms. The most explicit epistemological use of the metaphor of purification is in the *Sophist.* Here, when categorizing various types of ignorance and their remedies, the Stranger explicitly identifies *elenchus* with purification. The purification here, however, is not the purification of the Mysteries, but medicinal purification. He uses the simile of a physician who realizes that his patient will receive no benefit from taking food until internal obstacles have been removed, and he compares this to the purifier of the soul who is conscious that his patient will receive no benefit from the search for knowledge until he is refuted and shown which of his beliefs are false. The Stranger claims that "*elenchus* is the greatest and chiefest of purifications, and he who has not been refuted...is in an awful state of impurity..."(230c-d).

In the *Phaedo* Plato refers, not to false beliefs, but to inappropriate emotions as impurities to be purged, and here he explicitly draws an analogy to the Mystery motif of purification:

> The true moral ideal, whether self-control or integrity or courage, is really a kind of purgation from all these emotions [pleasure, pain, fear], and wisdom itself is a kind of purification. Perhaps these people who direct the religious initiations are not

[18]The purity in this case is tied to the abstract nature.

> so far from the mark, and all the time there has been an allegorical meaning beneath their doctrine that he who enters the next world uninitiated and unenlightened shall lie in the mire, but he who arrives there enlightened and purified shall dwell among the gods. You know how the mystery practitioner says, 'Many bear the emblems, but the devotees are few'? Well in my opinion these devotees are simply those who have lived the philosophical life in the right way — a company which all through my life, I have done my best in every way to join, leaving nothing undone which I could do to attain this end. 69b-d, trans., H. Tredennick

For Plato, in order to achieve virtues, such as temperance or courage, one must be purified of the controlling emotions which are the product of inappropriate desires. Plato indicates earlier in the passage that the only currency that such emotions should be exchanged for is wisdom, and that achieving wisdom is what allows one to acquire the virtues.[19] This wisdom is analogous to the enlightenment sought by the Mystery initiates.

In the *Phaedo*, it is the separation of the soul from the body that is represented as a type of purification. Instead of water or the blood of pigs, the purifying agents are the virtues and intellectual activity itself.[20] Parker points out that in the *Phaedo*, as in the Mysteries, we find a connection between purification and salvation, but unlike the purification of the Mysteries, Plato's purification does not consist in a one-shot ritual activity, but in living a certain kind of life in preparation for death. Plato's initiate seeks a pure death, free from the pollution of bodily attachments. The preparation for this is a life where one does not rely on sensory information from the body.[21] One way of

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[19]69a.
[20]*Miasma*, p. 282.
[21]*Miasma*, p. 282.

freeing one's focus from bodily things is to join the company of the initiated in this life — those who are living the philosophical life.

We see the idea of *elenchus* as purification at work in the *Symposium.* Socrates dispossesses Agathon of his false beliefs concerning the nature of Eros (199b-209c) before he gives an account of his own initiation into the Small Mysteries—the Mysteries of Eros. (209e-212b) I discuss this *elenchus* in more detail in my examination of the *Symposium* in Chapter 3.

Elenchus as purification is not as prominent in the middle books of the *Republic.* However, we can see this motif's operation within the overall structure of the dialogue. In Book I, Socrates attempts to purify Thrasymachus of his false beliefs concerning justice, but is unsuccessful because Thrasymachus is consumed by the desire for power. He would need to be purified of the false beliefs and desires before he could engage in the sort of constructive dialectic that Socrates engages in with Glaucon and Adeimantus. In the middle books, both Glaucon and Adeimantus have more appropriate desires. They eagerly desire to seek after the truth with Socrates, and they refuse to let Socrates off without discussing with him as best he can the nature of the good.[22]

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates purifies Phaedrus of the false belief that it is better to give oneself to a non-lover than to a lover. He does not do this directly through an *elenchus*, but by relaying the Myth of the Soul, developing the point that the madness of being in love can aid one in achieving knowledge of the

[22]504e.

forms. Socrates says that he has sinned against love by matching Lysias' speech on why it is better to give oneself to a non-lover rather than to a lover, and he claims that he must purify himself.[23] When he first gives the speech saying why one should prefer the non-lover to the lover, he covers his head in shame in a way reminiscent of the rite of *thronosis*. Before he begins his palinode, however, he uncovers his head in preparation for a new way of seeing, a new way of conceiving of love as a beneficial madness.[24]

And these parallels to the Mysteries are not by chance. The initial meeting between Socrates and Phaedrus is rife with allusions to the prepatory stage of the Small Mysteries. All the action in the dialogue occurs along the banks of the Ilissos river, the site of the Small Mysteries.[25] Phaedrus says that he, as well as Socrates, is barefoot, so that they can go wading in the river, and entering the Illissos river was one of the means by which the initiates were purified during the Small Mysteries.[26] Phaedrus emphasizes that the river is pure (*kathara*).[27] And Socrates mentions the nearness of Agrai and the connection of Agrai to a myth concerning the ravishment of a maiden. The rites of the Small Mysteries are said to have been held in honor of Kore, who according to myth was kidnapped and raped. Socrates does not refer directly to the Kore myth, but to a myth with the same theme — the abduction of Oreithuia by Boreas. Several myths with this theme seem to be associated with

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[23]242c-243b.
[24]237a, 243b.
[25]229a.
[26]229a.
[27]229b.

the area, which may be why the site and rites of Agrai were co-opted for the Small Mysteries.[28] The point Socrates makes in connection with the Oreithuia myth is that he will not spend his time creating scientific-aitiological accounts of myths, which try to explain them away, because it is more important to use his time examining himself concerning vices such as pride. Such vices are an example of precisely the kind of thing an individual must purify him or herself of before knowledge of the forms is possible.

VI: *MYSTAGOGOS*

The function of the *mystagogos* in the Eleusinian Mysteries is to make sure that the initiates are in an appropriate state to begin the initiation, to conduct them through the rites of purification, and to guide them physically through other rites and processions, especially after the initiate has been brought to a state of terror and confusion and needs the support of somebody to lead him to the next stage. Plato's *mystagogos* plays many similar roles. He purifies Plato's initiate of false beliefs by leading him through an *elenchus*. And, in the case of a successful *elenchus* where the initiate is shaken up and put into a state of uncertainty, having lost the beliefs that he thought were knowledge, the *mystagogos* shows him where to look to find the appropriate objects of knowledge.

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[28]Kerenyi has also recognized the connection between this scene in the *Phaedrus* and the Small Mysteries (*Eleusis*, pp. 45-47). He gives the evidence for some of the maiden myths connected to Agrai. Oreithuia is said to be one of the Hyakinthidai, daughters of a Spartan immigrant to Athens who were sacrificed in hopes of ending a plague on Athens (Phanodemos, fr. 4, in Jacoby, *FGrHist*, pt. II, B, pp. 79f.), and a frieze found in an Ionic temple along the Ilissos depicts the abduction of the Hyakinthidai (See Kerenyi, pp. 50-51).

Plato stresses the importance of reason in attaining correct beliefs — it cannot be simply a matter of one person handing knowledge to another. Because of this, it might seem that Plato would think of the attainment of knowledge as an autonomous, perhaps even solitary, endeavor. But individuals often need help from another in beginning the process. One is not going to rid oneself of false beliefs until one realizes that the beliefs that one holds do not constitute knowledge. This often requires the aid of another. Likewise, no one is going to bring oneself willingly to a state of uncertainty from a state of confidence. And once somebody has been brought to uncertainty, when he gives up his false beliefs, he may be unable to continue on without the guidance of another in recognizing the appropriate objects of knowledge.

Plato explicitly makes reference to a leader or guide in the Ladder of Eros in the *Symposium*, and in the *Republic*, the prisoner is able to leave the Cave only when forcibly turned around and dragged out into the sunlight by another. The parallelism between the Mysteries and Plato on this point suggests that, for Plato, just as in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the guide is another person. However, this is not necessarily the case. It is possible that, rather than another person, a text or even oneself, by playing the role of interlocutor in an internal dialogue, could serve the role of guide. But this would only be the case for an individual who is not clouded by hubris, who already recognized the need to be purified of false beliefs and is seek after knowledge. Often, dialogue with another or others is necessary.

The ultimate task of the *mystagogos* is to lead the initiate to the *epopteia*. Let us turn to Plato's use of the motif of the *epopteia* next.

VII: *EPOPTEIA*

The traditional view of the nature of the knowledge of the forms is a model of knowledge by acquaintance according to which knowledge of a form consists in a direct cognitive interaction between the mind (or *nous*) and the form. Some recent commentators have disputed this characterization of Plato for two reasons. First, they hold that knowledge must be propositional, *i.e.*, that the only appropriate object of knowledge is a proposition, and two, they believe that acquaintance isn't sufficient for knowledge. One must not only be acquainted with an object, but one must recognize that "it is X," i.e., express an identifying proposition about it.[29] In contrast to that contemporary view and in line with the traditional view, I hold that for Plato our knowledge of the forms needs to be direct and unmediated. In order to make judgments like "Helen is beautiful," Plato thinks, we need to know what beauty is. Our knowledge of this, in turn, cannot be based on other propositional knowledge, such as "Beauty is X," since this would lead to a regress. Acquaintance with forms provides the building blocks, as it were, for all propositional knowledge.[30]

The claim that Plato chooses to represent knowledge as an *epopteia* is not a new one. Plutarch, in a passage where he distinguishes between things

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[29]See the Appendix for a discussion of these views.
[30]See the Appendix for a fuller discussion of these issues.

that are sensible and things that are known by the intellect, says that both Aristotle and Plato used a form of this term when describing knowledge:

> The knowledge of that which is knowable, pure, and simple (*haplou*), flashing like lightning through the soul, grants it at times to touch and see. This is why both Plato and Aristotle call this part of philosophy '*epoptic*,' insofar as those who have passed beyond these confused and various objects of opinion leap in thought to that primary, simple, and immaterial object; and, gaining true contact with the pure truth about it, they think that, as though by initiation into the mysteries, they have attained the end of philosophy." Plutarch, *Moralia* , "Isis and Osiris" 382 d-e Trans. after Ross[31]

It is not clear what the reference is concerning Aristotle's usage. F.C. Babbitt connects this passage up to a passage in the *Life of Alexander* where Plutarch gives an account of Aristotle's instruction of Alexander and relates an anecdote in which Alexander is angry with Aristotle because Aristotle published material that he had told Alexander was both *acroamatic* (for hearing only) and *epoptic*.[32] The connotation of *epoptic* is different here than above Plutarch passage, however. Here it suggests something that is for the initiated only, in the way that the *epopteia* was only open to those who had been initiated into the Great Mysteries the previous year. It does not pick up on the aspects of knowledge Plutarch is concerned with in the *Moralia* passage.

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[31]W. D. Ross, *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, Vol. 12, *Select Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), fr. 10 of "Eudemus" or "On the Soul."

[32] *Plutarch's Moralia*, with translation and notes by F.C. Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936, 1962), p. 181. He connects it to Alexander VII. 3-5 (sec. 668). Aristotle apparently reassured Alexander that the work in question, his treatise on metaphysics, was in a sense both published and not published. It was not published in that what he wrote would not help any one teach or learn the subject, but would only help as a memorandum to those already trained in the science.

Another speculation comes from Burkert who believes that in one of his lost works Aristotle systematized the steps of Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium* and made the highest step of philosophy analogous to the *epopteia*.[33] He bases this assumption on the Synesius fragment in which Aristotle says that those being initiated into the Mysteries are expected not to learn but to experience a change and be put in a certain condition (Ross labels this as fr. 15 from Aristotle's "On Philosophy") Burkert reads this passage in connection with the Plutarch *Moralia* passage above (Ross, fr. 10 of "Eudemus" or "On the Soul") and Clement's Stromata V, 71, 2. I don't think that this is enough evidence to justify such a bold claim about Aristotle's systematization of the *Symposium*. I think it is more likely that at some point Aristotle used the term *epoptic* to refer to the knowledge that he believed we have of simple objects that are known directly such as first universals and principles.[34]

Concerning Plato's work it is much clearer which passages Plutarch was referring to. In both the Ladder of Love sequence in the *Symposium* (which I will discuss in Ch. 3 below), and the Myth of the Soul passage in the *Phaedrus*, Plato uses forms of the word *epopteia* when describing coming to know the form of beauty. I believe that he also intended Mystery allusions in the Myth of the Cave in the *Republic*. In what follows I will briefly discuss the relevant

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[33]*Ancient Mystery Cults*, p. 153, n. 13. See also Reidweg, pp. 127-130 and J. Criossant (*Aristotle et les mysteres* (Biblioteque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liege 51), Liege — Paris, 1932)for a discussion of a passage in Psellos which discusses Aristotle in connection with stages of learning and the stages of the Eleusinian Mysteries.
[34]See *Metaphysics* 430b26-32 and *Posterior Analytics*, 100b6-16.

epopteia passages from both the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* and in Ch. 3 I will offer a more detailed discussion of the Symposium passages.

VIIA: *Epopteia* in the *Phaedrus*

The most explicit use of Eleusinian Mystery terminology in the *Phaedrus* occurs at 250 b-c where Plato describes the knowledge a soul acquires of the form of beauty before the soul is embodied:

> Beauty it was ours to see(*idein*) in all its brightness (*lampon*).in those days when with that happy and blessed chorus (*eudaimoni chori*) we beheld with our eyes that blessed vision (*makarian opsin*) we, following after Zeus, and others after some other god. We saw and we were initiated (*etelounto*) into that which is rightly said to be the most blessed of Mysteries (*makariotatane tone teletone*) We celebrated the secret rites (*orgiazomen*) being complete and perfect (*holokleroi*) and without suffering the evils that awaited us in time to come. Complete and onefold and still and happy (*eudaimonia*) also were the apparitions which were revealed to us (*epopteuontes*) as initiates in pure light (*augai katharai*), being ourselves pure (*katharoi*) and not entombed in this which we carry around with us and call the body, just like an oyster in its shell. (250b5-c4) (trans. after Woodruff and Hackforth)

Plato here describes the experience of coming to know beauty as a visual (*idein, opsin)* revelation, and he explicitly refers to the revelation using a verb form of the word *epopteia*. He more generally characterizes the event as being initiated (*telete*) into the most blessed Mysteries and also uses the term *orgiazomen* to indicate a secret rite.

In addition to the explicit use of Eleusinian terminology, Plato also includes several Eleusinian Mystery motifs which remove any doubt that may have lingered about whether these references are to the Eleusinian Mysteries. We find the motifs of bright light, the states of blessedness and happiness, and

a Mystery chorus. Plato says at two points in the passage that the revelation takes place in bright light (250b6, c4). The representation here of the individuals in the privileged state as happy and free from evils reflects the fact that the primary reason people sought initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries was that they thought it would secure for them happiness and a blessed afterlife.

One of the more prominent features of the Myth of the Soul is the chorus of gods led by Zeus. We have a fair amount of evidence indicating that choruses played a role in the Eleusinian Mysteries.[35] Reidweg has identified another Eleusinian motif by recognizing Zeus here as playing the role of the *mystagogos*, but it appears that the leader of the chorus during the Mysteries and the *mystagogos* would have served two very different roles.[36] However, perhaps it is a mistake for me to identify the role of the chorus as Plato represents it in the myth too closely with the actual role of the chorus in the Mysteries.

In addition to representing prior knowledge by giving an account of an initial vision of the forms in terms of an *epoptic* vision, Plato likewise

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[35]The first piece of evidence is found in Plato's own work. At 560e in the *Republic* Plato uses Eleusinian Mystery motifs when discussing oligarchic and democratic character types. And along with the motifs of blazing torches and wreathing the initiates with garlands, he includes a chorus of followers. We also have epigraphical evidence that a chorus played a role in Eleusinian initiation. In this epigram the chorus again is connected with the stage of initiation where the initiates are crowned with a garland. Because of the occurrence of the word *promustone* Clinton believes that the chorus consists of children whom he identifies with hearth-initiates. (*The Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries* p. 111). However, it would be unlikely that Plato would represent a children's chorus with a chorus of Olympian gods led by Zeus

[36]C. Reidweg, *Mysterienterminologyiebei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrian* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), p. 59.

characterizes the recollection of that knowledge as a re-experiencing of this *epoptic* vision:

> If a man makes right use of such means of remembrance, and ever approaches to the full vision of the perfect Mysteries, he and he alone becomes truly perfect. (249c), Hackforth trans.

In this sentence Plato engages in some wonderful word play on the noun *to telos* which means both goal, completion and perfection and the cognate verb, *teleo*. In the Greek we find the phrase *teleous aei teletas teloumenos, telos ontos monos gignetai* (ever approaches to the full vision of the perfect mysteries, he and he alone becomes truly perfect). The mystery term *telete* seems to have been coined because it was believed that through initiation into the mysteries you were made complete or perfect. Plato takes full advantage of these overtones in order to suggest that by recollecting the forms one becomes complete and perfect in terms of knowledge and happiness.

Plato not only uses mystery terminology when describing the recollection of a lover, but when discussing the potential of recollection for the beloved. Socrates argues that love results in a beneficial madness, and one should give oneself to a lover rather than a non-lover because the madness is beneficial not only for the lover but for the beloved as well. The benefit for the lover is that consorting with the beautiful boy helps him to recollect the form of beauty. Yet, through his interaction with the lover, the beloved also may come to recollect the form of the beautiful. Plato expresses this point as follows:

> Thus, the zeal[37] and mystery rite (*telete*)[38] of true lovers,...become...when the lover goes mad with love, a source of both beauty and happiness for the beloved... (253c2-6).

Not only does Plato indicate that the relationship with the lover can be a source of knowledge of beauty for the beloved but, concomitantly, a source of happiness.

VIIB: *Epopteia* in the *Republic*

We don't find the explicit Eleusinian Mystery terminology in the *Republic* that we have in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, but several Eleusinian Mystery elements in the Myth of the Cave section suggest that Plato also intended the account of coming to know the form of the good to be interpreted in light of the Eleusinian *epopteia*. F.M. Cornford recognizes the Mystery parallels in his translation of the *Republic*. In the introduction to Ch. XXV he says of the image of the Cave that it

> ...was probably taken from Mysteries held in caves or dark chambers representing the underworld, through which the candidates for initiation were led to the revelation of the secrets in a blaze of bright light...One moral of the allegory is drawn from the distress caused by a too sudden passage from darkness into light. The earlier warning against plunging untrained minds into the discussion of moral problems (498a) as the Sophists and Socrates himself had done is reinforced by the picture of the dazed prisoner dragged out into the sunlight. Plato's ten years' course of pure mathematics is to habituate the intellect to abstract reasoning before moral ideals are called into question.[39]

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[37]Again, we find the word *prothumia* in connection with mystery terminology where it suggests a play on the word prothuma, preliminary sacrifices.

[38]C.J. Rowe in his translation (Warminster, Wiltshire, England: Aris & Phillips 1988) .and most manuscripts read *teleute* which Woodruff translates *consummation*. Most editors, however , prefer *telete*, "initiation," and I think the use Plato makes of *telete* in the passages above support this latter reading.

[39]*The Republic of Plato*, translated with an introduction and notes by F.M. Cornford (NY, London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 227.

Cornford points to the cave and the movement from darkness to light as Mystery motifs. We saw in Ch. 1 that there was a cave at the entrance to the sanctuary at Eleusis.[40] Archaeological evidence such as dedications to underworld deities indicates that the area was associated with the underworld.[41] If the initiates were taken into the cave to experience the fear and awe of the events of the underworld, it would make sense that they would have to ascend out of this cave before going to the *epopteia* held in the *Telesterion* which was next to the cave.

Cornford also emphasizes the distress an individual feels passing from a state of presumed knowledge (the darkness of the cave) to a state of enlightenment (when he knows the form of the good) as well as the need for training a mind before it is ready to contemplate the forms of moral ideas. Both of these are notions that I claim Plato chose to represent with Mystery motifs — the motif of the *ekpleksis*, the shaking up of the initiate and the general program of conditioning the initiates to prepare them for the final vision.

VIIC: *Epopteia* and Knowledge Acquisition

One of the reasons Plato found the motif of the *epopteia* appropriate to express knowledge of the forms is because the *epopteia* is a visual revelation. In the Mysteries the initiates are brought into the presence of the *hiera*, or holy things. They learn the secrets of the Mysteries by seeing these objects. Ultimately, the highest 'knowledge' of the Mysteries does not consist in

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[40]K. Clinton, *Myth and Cult*, pp. 16-19.
[41]Clinton, *Myth and Cult*, p. 18.

learning the truth of the series of statements. The initiates understand the secrets of the Mysteries when, given their previous conditioning, they suddenly see the holy objects and understand their meanings.

The student in Plato's dialogues goes through a similar process. Knowledge of beauty itself does not consist in coming to know a list of statements about beauty. Rather, after experiencing several instances of beauty, one's mind is suddenly in contact with beauty itself.

Another reason for using the *epopteia* metaphor is the suddenness with which the secret is revealed to the initiates. As their wandering in darkness comes to an end, the *mystagogos* leads them into a chamber, where the hierophant unexpectedly appears before them in torchlight, with the holy objects. In the same way, in the *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*, Plato emphasizes that the full vision of the form (of the good or of beauty), when it occurs, bursts upon one all of a sudden.

Finally, given the revered status of the forms for Plato, a metaphor of a religious ritual in which sacred objects are revealed is appropriate. Plato's initiate is not simply coming to know information, but his contact with the forms will have a significant impact upon his life, allowing him to live virtuously and achieve *eudaimonia*.

VIII: Moral Conditioning and the Goal of Eudaimonia

For Plato, there is a close connection between epistemology and ethics. He identifies a reciprocal relationship between one's ability to achieve knowledge of the forms and the state of one's moral development. On the one

hand, one must be in a good moral state in order to acquire knowledge. In the *Phaedrus* Plato says that being impure or having done unrighteous deeds will interfere with one's ability to recollect the form of beauty.[42] And in the *Republic* Plato goes so far as to characterizes the form of the good as that which allows the objects of knowledge to be known.[43] On the other hand, in order to act morally or virtuously, it is necessary to understand the essence of virtues such as justice and courage. Therefore, acquiring knowledge of these forms is a precondition for moral development.[44] Below I consider two ways in which Plato uses Mystery motifs in connection with his discussion of moral development. First, feelings of awe and reverence, which Plato's initiates feel when they look upon the beauty of their beloved and which are similar to what the initiates feel when they see the holy things, help Plato's initiate to control his desires and order his soul. And second, Plato and the Mystery initiates share a similar goal of achieving a state of blessedness or *eudaimonia*.

Plato appropriates Eleusinian motifs when giving his account of moral conditioning in the *Phaedrus*. The ascent to knowledge in the *Phaedrus* is different from that of the *Symposium* and *Republic*. Rather than moving to more and more abstract instances of a property until one understands the nature of the form of the property itself, in the *Phaedrus* an individual recollects the

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[42] 250a, e.
[43] 509b.
[44]Cushman supports a similar view: "...as there can be no virtue without knowledge of a superior, so also there can be no such knowledge without virtuous 'affections.' The recognition of this paradox ...is the first step in comprehending it. It is certain that knowledge is the conditioning ground of virtue, while, at the same time, virtue is quite as much the *sine qua non* of knowledge. Plato's teaching on *katharsis* in the *Phaedo* [65e-69d] supports the view that knowledge advances *pari passu* with amendment of life." *Therapeia*, p. 59.

form of beauty after perceiving one instance of it in the beloved. In this dialogue Plato invokes both the Mystery experience of feeling uncomfortable and perplexed as well as the later experiences of awe and reverence at the sight of the divine goddesses revealed to them at the high point of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Plato's lover experiences shuddering and feels amazed (*ekpleksis*) and perplexed both when he sees an instance of beauty in the physical world and when his wings begin to grow.[45] But he also experiences feelings of awe (*deina*) and reverence at the sight of the beauty of his beloved and when this vision causes him to recollect the form of beauty.[46] It is these feelings of awe and reverence for his beloved that help the initiate to control his wanton desires and lustful thoughts. The vision of the beloved causes him to recollect not only beauty, but temperance.[47] We see here an aspect of the surrender of the self to a god depicted in the Mysteries, a giving over of one's desires in the face of divine majesty. Hackforth says of the shuddering awe which the holiness of beauty inspires, "It may perhaps be thought of as the more positive aspect of *sophrosune*: not a passionless self-suppression but a passionate self-surrender, which nevertheless is a profound satisfying of self."[48] Plato's initiate, awed by and out of reverence for beauty itself, checks his lustful desires to consummate his relationship with his beloved, thus bringing harmony to his soul and putting himself in a position to acquire knowledge of all the forms. At the end of his

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[45]250a, 251a, 251d-e.
[46]251a, 254b, 254e.
[47]254b.
[48]Plato's *Phaedrus*, translated with an introduction and commentary by R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 98.

discussion of the struggle among the steeds, Plato contrasts the fates of the individuals who allows the higher elements of mind to rule with the individuals who desire honor excessively or who give into lustful desires, and only the former is able to immediately recover his or her wings.[49]

Plato's moral focus is not only on individual actions which are good or bad. His morality also concerns how one should live her life generally, what its ends and goals should be. The ultimate goal in life for Plato is achieving *eudaimonia*. This is a state of well-being or flourishing in which one's soul is well ordered. It is achieved when an individual desires, seeks after and attains the proper objects of knowledge which makes possible happiness.

Moral conditioning does not explicitly take place in the Eleusinian Mysteries.[50] The goal of the Mysteries, however, is a moral one in the sense that an initiate seeks a state of *eudaimonia*. The initiate seeks a good life, a happy state of being, albeit one after death. For the Eleusinian initiate it is not a state achieved by his actions *per se*. It is a gift from the goddess. The only requirement is going through the rites of the Mysteries. Nonetheless it is a moral consideration in so far as a *good* "life," a state of well being, is his goal.

I have given a general account of how Plato uses the five Mystery themes in connection with his epistemology. I will now turn to a more detailed

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[49]256a-e.

[50]There is a prohibition against anyone stained by blood guilt being initiated, but otherwise there is not an emphasis on one's moral state vis-a-vis individual actions. In the Orphic cult, on the other hand, there is a great deal of emphasis put on one's actions. The way one lives his life will determine his lot in the afterlife. In the Myth of the Soul in the *Phaedrus* Plato borrows the Orphic motifs of the fall from a privileged state and re-birth into various kinds of lives based on the actions of one's previous life.

examination of how Plato uses these motifs in one particular dialogue, the *Symposium*.

Chapter 3: The *Symposium*

In each of the three dialogues *Republic*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, Plato uses language and motifs from the Eleusinian Mysteries in giving an account of his theory of knowledge. In chapter 2, when discussing the Mystery themes, we saw some examples of how Plato uses the motifs and terminology in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. In what follows I will show in detail how these elements of the Mysteries inform the structure of the *Symposium* from 199c-212a.

Like the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium* is an erotic dialogue. One of the main themes is the role that Eros, or desire, can play in assisting an individual in acquiring knowledge of the forms. But when we recognize the Mystery terminology and motifs in the *Symposium*, we see that religious transformation is also a theme in the dialogue. In connection with his erotic pursuit of instances of beauty an individual is transformed in ways that allow him to acquire knowledge of the form of beauty, and acquiring this knowledge has a significant impact on his or her life.

We first find an explicit use of mystery motifs and terminology in the prologue to the Ladder of Love passage. Here Diotima uses the terms *muetheis*, to be initiated, *telea*, mystery rites, and *epoptika*, the highest mysteries. Diotima also alludes to the two stages of the Small and Great Mysteries. The passage is as follows:

> Into these things of *eros* Socrates, perhaps even you may be initiated (*muetheis*); but I do not know whether you are able (to be initiated) into the rites (*telea*) and *epoptika* for the sake of which these exist, if one pursues them correctly. Well, I will speak of them and spare no effort (*prothumias*)[1], she said; try to follow if you are able. (209e5-210a4) (trans. after R.E. Allen)

Plato does not use terms for the Small and Great Mysteries, but the *epoptika*, the highest mysteries, are associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries. And given that the Small Mysteries were preparatory for the Great Mysteries in the Eleusinian Mysteries, we can conclude that the when he mentions the things of eros that are *for the sake of* the *epoptika* he means the rites of the Small Mysteries in preparation for the Great Mysteries, the stage in which the *epoptika* occurred.[2]

Below I will discuss the moment of *epopteia* as the moment when an individual comes to know the form of beauty. I will also show the way that this passage at 209e-210a informs Plato's use, both in the passages that precede this passage and those that follow it, of the other Mystery motifs I mentioned in Chapter 2: purification, being led by a *mystagogos*, proceeding through stages of initiation, and achieving a state of *eudaimonia*.

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[1]Plato seems to be playing on the word *prothumos*, eager, willing. It is very close to *prothuma*, a preparatory or preliminary sacrifice. *Prothymatta* were public sacrifices held during the mysteries on the behalf of the Boule and Demos of Athens(*CIA* IV no. 385d, p. 104, l. 16; *Sylloge*[4], vol. 2, no. 540. See *Symposium* 253c2 and *Republic* 533a for a similar usage of the term in a mystery context.

[2]R.E. Allen recognizes Plato's allusion to the Great Mysteries in connection with coming to know the form of beauty in *The Symposium*, translation with commentary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 154, n. 241.

I: STAGES

IA: Evidence for Parallels to the Motif of Stages in the *Symposium*

An indication that what goes on in the Ladder of Love is similar to the stage-by-stage preparations that occur in the Eleusinian mysteries is the emphasis on the necessity of proceeding in right order (*ionta orthos*, 210a) and being led rightly (*orthos)* and in due order (*ephekses)* (210e). Plato emphasizes the order of events throughout the passage. Prior to the Ladder of Love sequence, Socrates purifies Agathon through elenchus, and he himself claims to have been similarly freed from false belief by Diotima as a preliminary to her later discussion of the Mysteries of Love. So we have Platonic initiation beginning with the stage of purification and, as we will see, it proceeded to the stage of *epopteia.*

In addition to the general structure of moving through the Small and Great Mysteries, from the stage of purification through to the stage of *epopteia*, the Ladder of Love itself embodies the idea of being conditioned as one moves through stages of ascent. We have some evidence that an ascent up steps was part of the progression to the *Telesterion* at Eleusis. As we saw in Chapter 1, along the wall of all four sides of the *naos*, a hall of the *Telesterion* in the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis, were tiers of eight steps.[3] We don't know today the route that the initiates took while processing around and through the *Telesterion*, but it seems that, given the prominent positioning of these steps,

[3]Mylonas, *Eleusis*, p. 121.

the candidates would have had to ascend them at some point in the initiation, and given that the final rites occurred within the *Telesterion*, it is likely that they ascended them soon before the final revelation. Some archaeologists hypothesize that there was an upper story on the *telesterion*. If this is the case, this fact also would have required an ascent by the initiates if the upper floor was a place where rites were conducted.[4]

Plato employs the notion of ascent through stages in the Ladder of Love. Plato's initiate begins by seeing and desiring a concrete instance of beauty in the body of a young boy and ascends to recognize and desire different instances of beauty. As he moves through the stages, the initiate acquires the capacity to think abstractly as he recognizes more and more abstract instances of beauty. He also reorients his desires as he comes to recognize that things such as the body are of little worth, while wisdom is the truly appropriate object of desire.

IB: Was There a Stage of *Paradosis*?

We know very little about what went on in the Small Mysteries. I've been supporting the view that they generally served a purificatory function and also prepared the initiates for the revelation of the *epopteia*. Christoph Reidweg, however, argues that there is an additional prepatory stage, which he calls *paradosis*, within the Small Mysteries, in which teaching went on.[5] I

[4] See p. 118, Mylonas for a list of those who endorse the view that there was an upper floor on the *Telesterion*.
[5] *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon, und Klemens von Alexandrien*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987).

think there are several reasons why we cannot accept his interpretation, and I will offer an alternative to it, but first let's briefly consider Reidweg's position.

Reidweg highlights the didactic nature of the exchange between Diotima and Socrates. His description of Socrates is that

> Socrates, in a state of childlike submission toward his teacher, is willing to get rid of his clichés about Eros, wholly receptive for 'true knowledge'...which Diotima gives him step by step.[6]

Reidweg also points to evidence from late sources to conclude that there was an Eleusinian Mystery rite, *paradosis*, in which knowledge was handed over to an initiate. Reidweg believes that the relationship between Diotima and Socrates models this rite of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

There are at least three problems with Reidweg's proposal. First, there is little evidence that there was a *paradosis* stage of the Mysteries. Second, the notion of giving knowledge to someone is antithetical to the Platonic conception of education. Finally, in the section of the *Symposium* Reidweg refers to, we find Socrates being anything but a passive participant in the discussion about Eros.

Let's briefly consider the evidence Reidweg offers for a *paradosis* stage in the Eleusinian Mysteries. He refers primarily to two passages, one from Clement of Alexandria, and the second from Theon of Smyrna. Clement does not use the word *paradosis*, but he identifies the Small Mysteries with the

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[6]p. 4. See also p. 10.

function of teaching, which is the activity Reidweg ascribes to the *paradosis* stage:[7]

> It is not unreasonable that the Greek mysteries begin with the rites of purification as non-Greeks begin with baths. After these are the Small Mysteries which are for the function of teaching (*didaskalia*) and preparing them for what follows. Next are the Great Mysteries which concern everything together. Here there is no place for understanding, but only for beholding (*epoptuein*) and conceiving nature and its effects. *Stromata* V, 70, 7ff

Theon of Smyrna also lists the stages of the Mysteries:

> ...first one is led to purification,...after the purification, second is the handing down (*paradosis*) of the Mysteries (*teletes*), third to be named, *epopteia*.[8]

Notice that Theon does not say that any specific doctrine or teaching was handed over to the initiates. The emphasis is on the *telete*, the initiation rites. The reference to the handing down (*paradosis)* of the Mysteries may simply be a way of saying that initial mystery rites were conferred upon the initiates, and this rites may in fact have nothing to do with teaching. Clement does refer to teaching, but this would be consistent with the telling of the story of Kore or Dionysus in order to help prepare the initiates for what occurs in the later stages. Hearing such stories would not constitute new knowledge for the initiates. The myths were familiar ones. However, being re-introduced to the myths at this point in initiation would help the initiates to put into context the

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[7]Hesychius of Alexandria, a fifth century lexicographer, defines *paradosis* as unwritten teachings.

[8] He lists the stages in an attempt to equate the stages of philosophy with the stages of the mystery initiation. He lists two additional stages of initiation to the ones above, the fourth is the crowning with a garland which becomes the badge one who was initiated into the mysteries and the fifth is the happiness which results from communion with the god. *De utilit. Math.*, p. 15 (Hersher); *Philosophi Platonici*, ed. by E. Hiller, 1878, p. 14, 20ff.

events that take place later in the Mysteries. The other sources Reidweg cites also concern the process of the transmission of the mysteries themselves, not of any specific doctrines.[9] These sources do not mention *paradosis* as a stage, but simply use forms of the word *paradosis*, (or in the case of Cicero, the Latin word which is akin to *paradosis*, *traditio*).

Most of the sources Reidweg cites are late. The one early source that Reidweg does cite is column XVII of the Derveni Papyrus. He mentions the papyrus because of the reference to learning (*mathein*) during initiation. However, if anything, this passage undercuts Reidweg's claim. The papyrus states that an initiate could *not* simply passively receive the knowledge of the mysteries, but that they were required to actively engage in processes of questioning and or interpretation in order to acquire knowledge of the secrets of the mysteries.

The second point to be made against Reidweg is that even if there was a specific *paradosis* stage in which knowledge of some aspect of the mysteries was handed over to the initiate, which is unlikely, this is not something Plato

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[9] Cicero *Tusculans* I, 29: "Recall, as you have been initiated, the things imparted (*traduntur*) to you in the mysteries."
Diodorus Siculus III, 65,6: "Oeagrus, son of Charops, then took over both the kingdom and the initiatory rites which were handed down in the mysteries."
V, 77, 3: "The Cretans assert that the initiatory rites observed in connection with the mysteries were handed down from Crete to the rest of men."
Athenaeus II, 40d: "We call by the name 'mystic rites' (*teletao*) those festivals which are still more important and in which some things are handed down (*paradosio*).
Diodorus Siculus V, 49, 5: "Now the parts of the initiatory rite are guarded in the matters not to be divulged and are handed down to the initiates alone..."
Hippolytus, I, proem 2 *Refutation of All Heresies*: "...I am forced to proceed in my intention of exposing those unspeakable mysteries of theirs, which to the initiated, with a vast amount of plausibility they hand over. . ."

would choose to mirror in his dialogues.[10] Knowledge for Plato, as we saw above, is something that is not simply given over. In the early and transitional dialogues, Plato's Socrates engages individuals in *elenchus* to show them that they really do not know what they think they know. He does this in order to stir up the desire to further pursue knowledge. For example, when Socrates teaches the slave boy in the *Meno*, he does not hand the knowledge over to him but he says that he draws it from him.[11]

Furthermore, in the middle period dialogues, close in content to the *Symposium* such as *Republic*, knowledge is not simply handed over. The individuals have to work toward acquiring the knowledge. Specifically, I have been arguing that they have to go through several stages of transformation vis-a-vis their beliefs and desires. There is a sense in which Plato's initiate is passive, as I described above when discussing the transforming power of the preliminary stages of initiation. Plato's initiate must give himself over to be purged of false beliefs during elenchus. He must allow himself to be transformed in terms of the kind of objects he focuses on through processes such as studying mathematics and music, but knowledge of definitions or forms

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[10]Plato in several of his dialogue uses the adverb, *paradotos* and the verb *paradidomi* to describe that which is capable of being taught and the imparting of teachings by a teacher respectively. Yet it is usually in a context where he is distinguishing moral attributes as something which *can't* be taught or handed down by another. In the *Meno* Socrates questions whether good men of now and former times have known how to hand on (*paradounai*) to someone else the goodness that was in themselves, or whether on the contrary it is not something that can be handed over (*paradoton*) or that one can receive from another. Later in this same passage Socrates asks "do you suppose Themistocles purposely didn't pass on (*paradidonai*) his own virtue to his son?" See also *Tht.* 198b4-5;*Phdr.* 268d1, 270b9.

[11] "I shall do nothing more than ask him questions and not teach him." (84d).

per se is never given over to an individual in Plato's dialogues. Reidweg believes that there was a stage of *paradosis* in the Mysteries and that Plato chose to mirror it in the *Symposium*. There is little evidence indicating that there was such a stage, and even if there was, Plato would not mirror a process of passively receiving knowledge in his dialogues.

The third argument against Reidweg's interpretation is that his position is not borne out by the dramatic detail of the exchange between Diotima and Socrates. As we saw above, Socrates is an active participant in the discussion with Diotima. The section from 201e-203b is a question and answer exchange between Diotima and Socrates, and even in the section from 203b-209e, where Diotima relates to Socrates a story about Eros, Socrates frequently breaks in with questions.[12] One could imagine *paradosis* as a stage where students actively asked questions of a teacher who handed down answers, but this would only be a viable scenario for Plato if the replies handed down to the student consisted themselves in questions or at least in information that served to direct the student where to look further in his search for knowledge.

The account of the exchange between Diotima and Socrates does not appear to mirror a stage of the Mysteries known as *paradosis*, but it does function in a way similar to the Small Mysteries. The evidence we have for the Small Mysteries suggests that they involved the imitation of a story for the initiates, either the story of Kore or of Dionysus, in order to prepare the initiates to understand what would occur in the later stages of the Mysteries. Something

[12]For example see 204a 8-9; 204c 7-8; 205b 7.

similar goes on when Diotima recounts a story of Eros for Socrates. Coming to see that Eros serves a role as an intermediary prepares Socrates to understand the role Eros plays in the ascent to knowledge in the Ladder of Eros. In both the Eleusinian Mysteries and in the *Symposium*, the stories prepare the initiates to understand the meaning of what occurs later. We could say that there is a sense in which these stories are "given over" to the initiates when they are imitated or related to the initiates, but Reidweg makes too strong a claim when he identifies within the Small Mysteries an independent stages known as *paradosis* where knowledge or a doctrine was handed over to the initiate.

Reidweg does recognize that myths play a role in both Mystery initiation and in Diotima's account of "the things of love." He emphasizes that the account of Eros as the son of Poros and Penia is conceived of mythically. However, I do not think he convincingly shows the connections he alleges between the myth of Eros in the *Symposium* and the myth of the genesis of humans from the ashes of the Titans, which he identifies as an "Orphic Mystery logos."[13] First, he points to the fact that intermediate natures are emphasized in each myth. Eros is between the mortal and the immortal. He is also between ignorance and wisdom.[14] Humans, according to the myth of the Titans, are composed of both evil and divine. The evil nature comes from the Titans and the divine nature from Dionysus whom the Titans ate before they were incinerated.[15] A second similarity that Reidweg posits is "outwitting and deceit

[13]*Mysterienterminologie*, p. 12.
[14]*Symp.* 203e-204b.
[15]*Mysterienterminologie*, pp. 12-13.

that originated on the female side" play a role in both myths. Hera directed the eating of Dionysus, and Eros was born because Penia seduced Poros while he was drunk. Reidweg finds these similarities exciting because in other dialogues Plato indicates his familiarity with the myth of the Titans and makes use of it.[16] Plato refers to the body as a prison at *Cratylus* 400c when discussing the etymological similarities between the word for body (*soma*) and the word for tomb (*sama*), and in the *Phaedo* he refers to "the unspeakable account" that humans are put in a guardpost. (62b) (It is part of the Titan myth that because of their Titan nature, humans must atone by being entombed in a prison-like body.) Reidweg, however, does not show the relevance of the connections he points two in the two myths. He does not suggest any reasons that Plato would have for incorporating aspects of the Titan myth into the Eros myth except for suggesting that it adds a "mystery atmosphere to this section of the *Symposium*."[17] If the evidence connecting the two myths were stronger, Reidweg could do more to develop the idea that it is from the Orphic myth that Plato derives his view on the need to purify one's self from bodily things, or at least that he uses the Orphic myth to express this view, but the connections Reidweg draws are seemingly inconsequential.

While I don't believe that Plato mirrors a distinct stage of *paradosis* in the Mysteries, I do think that he makes explicit use of other less controversial stages. Next, I will consider the nature of this use.

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[16]*Mysterienterminologie*, p 14.
[17]*Mysterienterminologie*, p. 12.

IC: How Plato Employs the Stages Motif

Plato integrates the motif of stages into the *Symposium* because it allows him to express the idea that the transformations that are required before an individual can know the forms must proceed in a certain well-defined order. At least two types of transformation go on in the Ladder of Love: transformation of one's cognitive abilities, and moral transformation. Each kind of transformation occurs in discrete stages.

Concerning cognitive transformation, Plato's uninitiated candidates are not capable of recognizing beauty independent of its instances, and may not even be capable of recognizing the beauty of something as abstract as laws before they ascends the stages of the Ladder of Love But after being led progressively via dialectic to recognize the beauty of more and more abstract instances, Plato's initiates are transformed in terms of their cognitive abilities, and they develop the ability to access abstract forms.

In terms of moral transformation, one is purged of inappropriate desires. One's desires, however are not completely eliminated; rather, one's corporal desire for a beautiful body is successively re-oriented toward more and more abstract instances of beauty until one is able to realize that what he really wanted all along was to see beauty itself. The initiate thorough dialectic is able to reorient his desires and recognize what is truly valuable. For instance, at 210b, the initiate recognizes that the beauty of people's souls is more valuable than the beauty of their bodies. He is able to "seek to give birth to such ideas as

will make young men better." Previously, inappropriate wanton desires could have led him away from the search for knowledge, and toward baser carnal fulfillment, but the initiate now thinks of the beauty of bodies as a thing of no importance (210c). The cognitive transformation and the moral transformation do not occur as two separate processes. Rather, it is through recognizing more and more abstract instances of beauty that an individual gains a greater understanding of what he truly desires. Both these transformations occur as the individual ascends the incremental steps of the Ladder of Eros.

An important difference between Plato's Mysteries and the Eleusinian Mysteries in terms of the kinds of transformation that went on is that in the Eleusinian Mysteries, there was not an emphasis on *moral* transformation. While there was the requirement that one be free of blood guilt in order to be initiated, one's moral state had very little to do with one's success as an initiate. There were moral implications for those who successfully *completed* initiation in that the initiation conferred a state of blessedness upon them. Plato takes the idea of transformation that is present in the Mysteries and uses it to express his own very different notions of cognitive and moral transformation.

Recognizing this motif helps us to become aware of the sharp distinction between the emphasis in contemporary epistemology and the focus of Plato's theory of knowledge. While occasionally in contemporary epistemology there will be a discussion of non-standard conditions, such as occur in someone who is insane or blind or drunk, modern theories usually

consider standard conditions, both in terms of standard external conditions and the standard knower, and then contemporary epistemologists ask what must obtain in order for a belief to qualify as justified or as knowledge. Plato's main concern, in contrast, is the special condition that an individual him or herself must be in before being able to acquire knowledge. Plato would consider the standard person in standard conditions a very poor candidate for acquiring knowledge. Plato believes that it is more important to improve one's soul than to improve, say, the lighting conditions.

II: PURIFICATION

IIA: Evidence for a Stage of Purification in the *Symposium*

Although Mystery terminology does not appear in the dialogue until 210a, Diotima's allusion there to the Small Mysteries and her mention of initiation into the things of eros, encourages us to look at previous passages for structural parallels to the preparatory stages of the Mysteries. One of the primary purposes of the Small Mysteries was to purify the initiates. And we find a parallel to the Mystery rite of *katharsis* or purification at 199b8-201c. Here Socrates purifies Agathon of his false beliefs about Eros through the process of *elenchus* .[18] As we saw in chapter two, Plato in the *Sophist* explicitly describes *elenchus* as a purification from false beliefs that would hinder one in the search for knowledge, and in the *Phaedo* he refers to the Mysteries when making the point that the true moral ideal is a purgation from

[18]See C. Reidweg *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien.* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1987), pp. 18-21 on this point.

inappropriate emotion.[19] In the *Symposium* Socrates purifies Agathon of his false beliefs concerning Eros, but he does not address some of the inappropriate desires that Agathon also appears to have.

IIB: Platonic Purification

Unlike Eleusinian purification, Platonic purification in the *Symposium* is the removal of false beliefs. The *Symposium* consists primarily of encomia in praise of Eros. Each member of the drinking party gives his own speech in praise of Eros. If we look at Agathon's speech, which immediately precedes Socrates', we see why Agathon is in need of purification concerning his beliefs about the god Eros. Not only does he have false beliefs about the nature of Eros, but he also has misplaced desires which prevent him from seeking after knowledge. Agathon, the playwright in whose honor the symposium is being held, is depicted by Plato as someone who is in love with his own power of rhetoric. His speech in praise of Eros is a grandiloquent one. It imitates the style of Gorgias, the sophist, and Agathon is concerned more with persuading others of the praiseworthy characteristics of Eros, than with the actual truth about Eros.[20] The other members of the symposium were very taken with the speech.[21] Therefore both they and Agathon need to be prepared for the speech to follow by being disabused of their beliefs that the properties Agathon cited actually belong to Eros. Socrates goes on to show the role that Eros plays in

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[19]*Sophist* 230c-d, *Phaedo*, 69a-d.
[20]198c - 199a.
[21]198a.

helping an individual to achieve knowledge of the forms. and being polluted with false beliefs about Eros is a hindrance to such an achievement. At 199b8-201c Socrates purifies Agathon by stripping him of his purported knowledge about Eros through an elenchus, securing agreement that *Eros* is neither beautiful, nor good, but rather is in need of these things.[22] At the beginning of his own speech on Eros, Socrates tells his listeners that Diotima refuted (*elenche*) him by the same arguments he offered Agathon.[23]

Plato gives a blow-by-blow report of Socrates' elenchus of Agathon, in which Socrates removes Agathon's false beliefs about Eros, but he gives us only a bald statement that Socrates underwent a similar elenchus. We do have, however, the details of the discussion that followed after Socrates gave up his beliefs that Eros is beautiful and good. When we compare the elenchus of Agathon with the discussion between Socrates and Diotima after Socrates' elenchus, we see that Agathon and Socrates are two very different interlocutors. Whereas Agathon is primarily a *panu ge* interlocutor, unreflectively assenting to most of what Socrates is proposing, Socrates asks questions, [24] and when he does not understand, he says so and asks for clarification.[25] The difference between Agathon and Socrates as interlocutors may not be entirely due to the fact that the description we have Socrates is one of an individual after he has been purified of his false beliefs and the description of Agathon is of an

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[22]201c5.
[23]210e 3-7.
[24]E.g., 202d8, 203a9, 204c8.
[25]206b 9-10.

individual prior to this. While purification from false beliefs is a necessary condition to prepare one to seek after knowledge, it is not a sufficient one. Agathon's desires for fame and honor may still be hindering his suitability as an initiate. Perhaps, if he were also purified of these inappropriate desires, he would be an interlocutor more like the eager and engaged Socrates.

Note the fact that purification, the Mystery ritual to which elenchus is analogous, is involved in the *preparatory* rites of the Mysteries. This is significant in connection with the stages motif. The Mystery rites are organized into stages because the conditioning of the initiates is sequential. The experiences of one stage build upon the experiences of the previous stages. This is also the case with the conditioning that Plato describes as necessary for acquiring knowledge. Elenchus is a preliminary stage for two reasons: 1) false beliefs must be removed before true knowledge can be acquired and 2) once an individual realizes that she does not have the knowledge she previously thought she had, she will then desire to seek after it. She will be willing to be led through the later stages of initiation. At *Gorgias* 497a ff., when Callicles quibbles about having to endure an elenchus, when he already believes himself to understand the issues at hand, Socrates sarcastically says that Callicles is lucky to have been initiated into the Great Mysteries before the Small. Callicles already believes himself to have knowledge without having had gone through the process of eliminating false beliefs. In the *Symposium*, Plato tells us that both Agathon and Socrates are elenchized concerning their beliefs about

beauty. Yet neither is in the appropriate condition to go on to the final stage of the *epopteia*. Diotima merely gives an account of what the final stages are like.

An initiate's purification in the Eleusinian Mysteries was assisted by a *mystagogos*. Let us turn next to consider whether such a motif is found in the *Symposium*.

III: THE MYSTAGOGOS

IIIA: Evidence for Parallels in the *Symposium*

Plato refers to a leader or guide four times during the Ladder of Love sequence.[26] He never uses the term *mystagogos*, so we can ask what reason there is for taking this guide as representing a *mystagogos*. The main consideration in favor of taking the guide as a *mystagogue* is the context and structure of the passage. The Ladder of Love passage begins with the allusion to the Small and Great Mysteries. In the passage Plato uses Eleusinian Mystery terminology, and the high point of the passage is, as we will see, represented as an *epopteia*. Because of these obvious parallels between the ascent up the

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[26]Allen notes this repeated usage of the guide imagery, *Symposium*, p. 154, n. 244; p. 155, n.245; p. 156, n. 248. The first reference is when describing the beginning of the ascent. Here Diotima says that "if the guide(*ho hagoumenos)* guides (*hagetai*) rightly he [the person being led] should love one body and beget beautiful things there (210a). Next, while still describing the levels of ascent, she says that "After practices he must lead(*agagein*) him to the various branches of knowledge in order that he may in turn see their beauty too (210c). After that when giving an account of the *epoptic* moment when an individual comes to know the form of beauty, Diotima says, "he who has been led (*paidagogethei*) in the things of love up to this point, beholding beautiful things rightly and in due order, will then suddenly, in an instance proceeding at that point to the end (*telos*) of the things of love see something marvelous, beautiful in nature..." Finally, Diotima, when summarizing the Ladder of Love says, "But when someone, ascending from things here through the right love of boys, begins clearly to see that, the Beautiful, he would pretty well touch the end (*telos*). For this is the right way to proceed in matters of love, or to be led (*agesthai*) by another."

Ladder of Love and the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries, an Athenian reader would take the guide in the ladder of love as a *mystagogos,* an Eleusinian Mystery guide. Another approach is to ask, if Plato did not intend the guide to be a *mystagogos*, what else might the guide represent? One possibility is that it is supposed to be a pedagogue, one who leads children back and forth to school. This interpretation finds support in Plato's use of *paidagogethe* at 210e. The overtones of the guide as someone who leads you to learning are also in the passage, but it would be a mistake to think that we have to choose between the two interpretations. Plato is using the *mystagogos* to express a sort of guidance to education. It is not the sort of "education" that involves the handing over of information to an individual, but directing the progress of the student in acquiring knowledge. But as we will see below, reference to a *mystagogos* brings to this endeavor associations that go beyond the role of a pedagogue.

One lack of parallelism between the *mystagogos* of the Eleusinian Mysteries and the guide in the Symposium is that the *mystagogos* in the Mysteries serves to guide the initiate after he has been shaken up and brought to a point of uncertainty. The account in the *Symposium* moves directly from the account of the purification to the events immediately preceding the *epopteia.* While elenchus often serves to shake up an interlocutor, Plato does not depict the experience of being lost and uncertain in the *Symposium.* We do, however, see it in the accounts of new wing-growth in the *Phaedrus* and the dazed condition brought on by moving from darkness to light in the *Republic.* In the

Republic the *mystagogos* is depicted as the individual who drags the prisoner from the cave.

IIIB: How Plato Employs the *Mystagogue* Motif

We understand Plato's epistemology better by recognizing that the guide represents a *mystagogos* because it helps to bring home the point that in most cases acquiring knowledge of the forms is not a completely autonomous endeavor. Many individuals need to be led to the state in which such knowledge becomes possible. Such a point itself could be made using the motif of a *pedagogue*, but we will see that the *mystagogos* motif is useful to make the additional point that in Platonic education you are led to states you would not ordinarily seek out or cultivate. The *pedagogue* takes you to school each day. You know what is there, what to expect. The Eleusinian initiates had a certain very general goal in mind — to achieve a state of blessedness — but they knew almost nothing about how they were to attain it, or what they would have to go through in order to achieve it. Therefore, they put themselves in the hands of their *mystagogos* who would lead them through the necessary steps. The *mystagogos* brings the initiates to the experience of the *epopteia* in the *Anaktoron*, an experience they could not imagine. Likewise, Plato's initiates, after they have been elenchized have a general sense of the knowledge they desire, but they have no conception of the nature of this knowledge and the influence achieving it will have on their lives. They require the help of a *mystagogos* to get them there.

One of the main themes of the *Symposium* is a consideration of the role of Eros or desire. Specifically, it is an examination of how an individual's feelings of desire can be instrumental in acquiring knowledge of the forms. The role of the *mystagogos* in the *Symposium* is to help the initiate re-orient and transform his desires. Most individuals naturally desire the beauty of a beautiful body. Knowing this, the *mystagogos* leads the initiate there first, but then just as the guide in the Mysteries leads the initiates to previously unknown and unexpected experiences, such as the experiences of *gephyrismos* and the journey through the *telesterion*, Plato's guide leads his initiate to experiences he would not ordinarily have, experiences most would not be able to achieve on their own. It is difficult for the uninitiated person to recognize and pursue, delight in, or desire the beauty of laws, practices or knowledge. But Plato's *mystagogos* is able to lead the initiate to these experiences. Just as the Mysteries are a very controlled and planned out event, with the *mystagogos* leading one through the rites in proper order, Plato's guide is someone who knows the desired goal and what is required to get you there. Above in the section on Stages, I said that for Plato the uninitiated person is not going to be in an appropriate state to achieve knowledge. Likewise, most people will not be in a position to have the experiences that will bring them to that state without the guidance of another.

It is natural to ask who or what Plato intends to serve the role of the guide. Paul Woodruff, in his translation of the *Symposium*, identifies the leader

with Love or Eros, the object of praise at the symposium.[27] He thinks it is the desire for beauty that leads you to see that the boy is not identical with the beauty. Once you find in other boys the beauty you originally desired in the first boy, you realize that the beauty and the boy are distinct. Woodruff thinks that it is desire itself that leads you to reinterpret the beauty — to understand that it has an object that is universal.[28] It is not clear, however, how desire — a longing, an appetite, a craving, an urge — could be something that would allow you to re-interpret your conception of beauty. One possible reading of Woodruff's view is that desire is aware of when it is satisfied, and that it is satisfied by the beauty of the individual boy. When the desire is drawn to the beauty instantiated by many boys, it finds that it is satisfied by that too. Nonetheless, we would still need reason or some cognitive process to reflect on these two objects of desire and discern that the thing that satisfied the desire in each case was the same kind of thing. Desire can motivate action. It responds to stimulus, but it does not discern and interpret. Nor would desire on its own, even after being satisfied by several beautiful bodies, be able to recognize that there may also be beauty in objects such as laws. So desire could not be the guide that leads a person from the beauty of bodies to the beauty of laws.

Eros, or desire, plays an important role in the ascent up the ladder. The appropriate desire is what the *mystagogos* will be working to create and stimulate in the initiate in order to lead him from one level to the next. But

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[27]*Symposium*, translated with an introduction and notes by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989) p. 57.
[28]Woodruff conveyed this clarification of his position to me in correspondence.

Eros *per se* is not sufficient to bring the initiate to recognize that the beauty at each level is the same. Because of its capability for discernment, reason is better suited for the role of the *mystagogos*.

Plutarch in fact has describes Reason as a *mystagogos*.[29] In the case of an individual whose soul is already well-ordered reason may be sufficient as a guide to lead him to knowledge of the forms. I believe that in other cases, however, where an individual requires transformation, a more likely candidate for the *mystagogos* is a dialectician. A dialectician, through discourse and questioning you, can help to re-orient your desires toward the proper objects, rid you of false beliefs, and cognitively lead you to see relationships and make connections in order to recognize instance of beauty where you have never seen them before. Thus, Plato's use of the *mystagogos* motif shows that he thinks that the process of coming to knowledge requires the help of other people, and even though the seeker after knowledge must be autonomous in one sense, reaching knowledge is not a solitary pursuit.

IV: EPOPTEIA

IVA: Evidence for Parallels to the Motif of *Epopteia* in the *Symposium*

Epoptika is one of the mystery terms explicitly employed by Plato in the *Symposium*. When he uses it at 210a, it is not immediately clear what he

[29]The context is a discussion of religion: "Worshippers use different sacred symbols, some obscure, some clearer, by which they lead the mind along the path to divine things. But there is a danger; some stumble and slip into superstition...so we must take the Reason of philosophy as our mystagogue and consider reverently each one of the things that are said and done..." (trans. after both R.H. Barrow and F.C. Babbitt). *Plutarch's Moralia*, "Isis and Osiris", sec. 67-68, 378b.

intends the referent to be. What is it that the things of love prepare one for? It is only when we reach 210e, where Diotima describes coming to know the form of beauty after the ascent up the Ladder of Love, and she says that it is this for the sake of which his previous labors existed, that we know with confidence that Plato is using the motif of the *epopteia* to represent the moment of coming to know a form. As we saw in Ch. 2, Plato employs this motif in the same way elsewhere. In the *Phaedrus* Plato explicitly describes both the pre-birth vision of beauty and the recollection of it (250b-c and 249c, respectively) in terms of an *epopteia*. And the depiction of coming to know the form of the good in the *Republic* — ascending out of a cave, moving from darkness into bright light — also includes many elements of the *epopteia*. When we look at the passage describing coming to know the form of beauty in the *Symposium*, we see that there are other elements which mark it as Plato's *epopteia*:

> Plato describes this moment as follows:
>
> > He who has been guided in the things of love up to this point, beholding (*theomenos*) beautiful things rightly and in due order, will then suddenly (*eksaiphnes*) in an instant proceeding at that point to the end (*telos*) see (*katopsetai*) something wonderful, beautiful in its nature: it is *that*, Socrates, for the sake of which all his previous labors existed. (210e2-6), Allen trans.

First we have the emphasis on the visual nature of the experience — beholding (*theomenos*)things rightly, seeing(*katopsetai*) something wonderful.[30] The word *epopteia* is formed from the root *opteon* (part of the

[30]Plato refers to the sight of the mind later in the *Symposium*. When Alcibiades says to Socrates that he thinks Socrates can help him become good, Socrates replies, "if there is some power in me through which you might become better, you would then see (*horoes*) inconceivable beauty in me...". This would set Alcibiades up for the third stage of the ascent,

suppletive system for *horao*, to see) and from the prefix *epi-*, upon. It literally means a seeing or revelation which occurs when you look upon something, and Plato plays upon this meaning in the passage.[31]

Also relevant is the fact that this vision suddenly bursts upon the initiate. In the same way that initiates were taken through the dark in the initiation building and the *Hierophant* unexpectedly burst out from the darkness in a blaze of bright light, knowledge of beauty itself suddenly bursts upon Plato's initiate.

A third significant aspect of the description of coming to know the form of beauty is, as we saw in the discussion of the *mystagogos*, the fact that the initiate was led to this point by another. Fourthly, the order in which an individual is brought to knowledge of the forms is relevant for Plato, and this too is also an aspect of the *epopteia*. An initiate must go through the correct preparatory stages in the correct order before she can experience the *epopteia*. And finally, it is the *epopteia* that ultimately transforms the initiate by placing her or him in a new relationship to the god, and it in Plato's *epopteia* his initiate

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seeing beauty in the soul of another. But Socrates seemingly humbly urges Alcibiades to give the matter of whether he has seen such beauty in Socrates more thought claiming, "the sight of the mind *(dianoias opsis)* begins to see *(blepein)* when that of the eyes ceases to be at its peak; but you're still a long way from that" (218d-219a).

[31]See Reidweg, pp. 22-26 for a further discussion of Plato's use of visual terms in the *Symposium* in connection to the *epopteia*. Both Reidweg and Despland examine the possibility that some of the visual terms used in the Ladder of Love passage were actually mystery terms that played a role in the Eleusinian mysteries. Reidweg discusses *kathoran*, while Despland claims that the word *theoria* at Eleusis meant the mystic vision granted at the climax of the rite (*The Education of Desire*, p. 139). Unlike Reidweg, however, Despland just asserts this and gives no evidence or argument for his view.

comes into contact with a form and experiences the conclusive transformation where she or he acquires knowledge.

IVB: Platonic *Epopteia*

According to Plutarch, Plato chose to represent coming to know a form as an *epopteia* because "we leap in thought" to these objects, and the knowledge of forms "flashes like lightning through the soul" giving an individual "true contact with the truth about it."[32] I think he is right that these things were all contributing factors in Plato's choosing the *epopteia* theme. The image of the *epopteia* helps Plato to capture, first, the suddenness with which one acquires knowledge of the forms, and second, the fact that an individual is illuminated— moves out a state of ignorance to enlightenment about the nature of a form. But I believe that the main reason Plato employs this theme has to do with the third image — that of direct contact. The theme of the *epopteia* helps him to express the idea of direct contact or immediate acquaintance which constitutes knowledge of a form.

Forms are abstract objects. Therefore they cannot be known in a mediated manner through the senses. The forms are objects of a different ontological order than physical objects. They do not have properties that can be detected by the senses. Like universals, one can only know them by bringing them before the mind.[33] In the *Phaedo* Plato is very critical of sensation as a

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[32]*Moralia*, "Isis and Osiris", sec. 77, 382c-d.
[33]Plato alludes in several places to the fact that the vision of beauty takes place through the sight of the mind. See *Symp.* 211e-a1, 219a and *Rep.* 476b-c.

means to acquire knowledge of the forms. Despite this, he finds metaphors of vision useful to express acquiring knowledge of the forms in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* because he is suggesting not sensory vision, but the vision of the eye of the mind. The "eye of the mind" is itself a metaphor, but it conveys the notion that the domain of this "sight" is not the changing perceptible objects of the physical world, but one that the mind itself can access in an unmediated manner. Modern and contemporary philosophers such as Berkeley and Russell have made much of the distinction between what is known mediately and what is known immediately.[34] Plato did not have this terminology at his disposal, but he used the metaphors of the eye of the mind and of *epopteia* of the Mysteries to convey the immediate contact of the mind with a form.[35]

V: EUDAIMONIA

VA: Evidence for Parallels to the Motif of *Eudaimonia* in the *Symposium*

We saw in chapter two that in the *Phaedrus* Plato makes explicit the parallels between the blessedness and *eudaimonia* achieved by experiencing the *epopteia* of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the *eudaimonia* acquired by achieving a vision of a form such as beauty. Plato alludes to this connection in the *Symposium* as well. In the *Symposium*, prior to the Ladder of Love, when Diotima is discussing the nature of Eros, or desire, she asks, what will a man

[34]Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, Hackett, pp. 10-12, 27; Russell, *Problems in Philosophy*, Hackett/Oxford, pp. 11-13.
[35]See the appendix on why Plato thinks that knowledge of the forms require such immediate and non-discursive 'contact.'

have when the beautiful things he wants become his own? Socrates is not able to provide an answer. But when Diotima changes the question by putting "good" in the place of "beautiful," his answer is that he will have *eudaimonia*. Diotima paraphrases, "that's what makes happy people happy *(hoi eudaimones eudaimones)*, isn't it—possessing good things?"[36] At this point, Diotima isn't explicitly talking about desire for knowledge of the forms. But given the rest of the context of this passage, having knowledge of the form of beauty is going to be one of the good things that makes one happy.

At the end of the Ladder of Love, when Diotima describes the seeing of the form of beauty, she does not use the term *eudaimonia*. Nonetheless, she connects seeing the form of beauty to becoming beloved by the divine, and becoming beloved by the divine is integral to the goal of the Mysteries and is connected in the Mysteries to *eudaimonia*. She says that anyone who has given birth to true virtue and has nourished it is loved by the divine *(theophilei)*. Diotima also says that if any human being could become immortal, it would be this person.[37] The expectation of the Eleusinian initiate was that the love and blessings of the goddess Demeter would belong to him by means of initiation. Plato in the *Symposium* transfers this hope and expectation from the Mysteries to his own initiate.

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[36] 205a.
[37] 212-ab.

VB: How Plato Employs the Motifs of Blessedness and Happiness

According to the *Hymn to Demeter*, the Eleusinian Mysteries were established by Demeter to thank the citizens of Eleusis for their kindness while she was searching for her daughter, Kore.[38] The people had her blessing because of what they had done, and Demeter promised not only general good-will, but also specific blessings: bountiful crops and a blessed afterlife. These blessings made those who received them happy. The Greeks believed that these blessings were conferred upon them during the *epopteia* when they saw the *hiera*, the holy objects. Whatever these holy objects were — an ear of corn, or a pomegranate and a comb — they were connected to the myth of Demeter and her promises to the Greeks.

Plato employs the motifs of becoming blessed and achieving *eudaimonia* in ways that are similar to the ways they occur in the myth of Demeter and the Mystery lore. In the *Republic* Plato says that "the philosopher, by consorting with what is ordered and divine *(theioi)* . . . himself becomes as divine and ordered as a human being can." (500c-d).[39] For Plato, the forms are

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[38]*Hymn* 475 ff.

[39]In the passage just before this Plato remarks that the harshness the majority exhibits toward philosophy is caused by "those outsiders who don't belong and who burst in like a band of revelers, always abusing one another, indulging in their love quarrels..." (500b). And immediately following Diotima's account of coming into contact with the form of beauty, Alcibiades bursts in with a band of drunken revelers and engages in a lover's quarrel with Socrates and Agathon (212c-213e). Alcibiades in the *Symposium* appears to represent the uninitiated — someone whose beliefs and desires Socrates has been unable to transform. (The setting of the *Symposium* is 416 B.C. a year after a drunken Alcibiades defamed the Mysteries.)

divine and blessed objects, and it is by coming to know them, through "catching sight of them" (*Symp.* 210e), that Plato's initiate too becomes blessed.[40]

The *eudaimonia* Plato discusses is different in some aspects from the *eudaimonia* the Eleusinian initiates hoped for. While one of the things the Eleusinian initiates hoped for was happiness resulting from material prosperity, including such things as bountiful crops, Plato's initiates acquired happiness of a different sort. Diotima says that an individual becomes happy when the good things he desires become his own. What are these good things and in what sense are they one's own? In light of Diotima's later discussion of the role of desire in leading one to the forms, these good things must be the forms. The forms that Plato discusses in the dialogues generally are the form of the good and forms of the virtues which are related to the good. Two possible senses in which they could become one's own are 1) by attaining knowledge of them or 2) by instantiating them through acquiring the virtues. Let us briefly consider the relationship between *eudaimonia* and virtue for Plato's student, Aristotle. Aristotle conceived of *eudaimonia* as a flourishing life in which one acquires the virtues and exercises them. Aristotle thought that the main thing one can do in order to achieve *eudaimonia* was to develop virtue. The virtues are even more tightly connected to *eudaimonia* in Plato's theory: Being virtuous is at least the main constituent of happiness for Plato even if it is not identical to it.

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[40]Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* X 1177b27-1178a8 also claims that one becomes divine through intellectual activity.

The virtuous person will always be happier than the vicious person.[41] Acquiring knowledge of the forms of the virtues helps an individual to achieve psychic harmony, and it is this, rather than material prosperity, which will be the source of his happiness.

VI: CONCLUSION

Recognizing the ways in which Plato consciously employs the language and motifs of the Eleusinian Mysteries in the *Symposium* increases our understanding of this dialogue. Most Plato scholars have done little more than mention in a footnote that Plato refers to the Eleusinian Mysteries at 209e-210a, but a close examination of the dialogue reveals that the dialogue from 209e-212a is very much structured in terms of Mystery motifs. In addition to his explicit use of the terms *muetheis*, *telea*, and *epoptika* at 210a, Plato in the Ladder of Love passage alludes to initiation into the Small and Great Mysteries and includes the figure of a *mystagogos* who leads an individual through the stages of ascent up the Ladder. Plato also describes the moment at the top of the Ladder, when an individual comes to know beauty itself, in terms of an *epopteia*. This motif help him to express the direct, unmediated nature of knowledge of the forms and to indicate the way in which such knowledge consist in a sudden shift that involves a change in both awareness and knowledge.

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[41]For the view that virtue is the "dominant part" of happiness for Plato see T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 191-193). For my purposes I do not need to decide if being virtuous in sufficient for happiness or necessary or both.

By recognizing these motifs we see that the dialogue has not only erotic, but also religious overtones. The forms *are* holy for Plato. They are something that should be thought of with awe and reverence, and using Mystery motifs to couch a description of coming to know the forms helps Plato to express this. Individuals must be transformed in terms of their cognitive states and their desires before they can come into contact with these holy objects, and once they do attain knowledge of them, this knowledge will change their lives. Knowing the essences of things like the virtues allows an individual to actualize these virtues and achieve happiness.

Conclusion

There has previously been only a limited amount of scholarship on Plato and the Mysteries. Of this work, little of it has focused on the Eleusinian Mysteries specifically. Reidweg does discusses in detail the many Eleusinian motifs in Plato's work, but does not do much with these motifs philosophically. Morgan, however, does do some philosophical work with the motifs. He sees Plato as replacing the emotional character of the ritual process with cognitive content. However, Morgan fails to recognize how it is just this emotional content that Plato employs when giving an account of the transformation an individual must go through before acquiring knowledge. All in all, the previous works do very little to show how Plato uses Mystery motifs and language when giving an account of knowledge acquisition.

What I do that is new is to show the widespread and systematic usage of Eleusinian Mystery motifs by Plato in the central epistemological passages of three of his dialogues. There are more than just passing allusions to the Mysteries in these dialogues. Plato structures these passages in the dialogues according to the stages of the Mysteries. While none of the dialogues contain all of the stages (including all the stages in each of the dialogues might have made it difficult for Plato to incorporate other motifs that he had planned for these dialogues), among the three dialogues, we see the Mystery stages of purification, the shaking up of the initiate to put him or her into a state of

uncertainty, and the final revelation of the *epoptic* vision where the initiate acquires knowledge of the forms.

I have been arguing that Plato uses these Eleusinian Mystery motifs in order to express aspects of his theory of knowledge. It is true that many of these aspects can be gleaned from his writings without recognizing Plato's use of Mystery terminology. Nonetheless, there are other aspects of his theory which only become clear once his use of Mystery themes is seen.

For instance, Plato uses the theme of the *epopteia* in order to express the direct and unmediated nature of the final and full knowledge of a form. Now, Plato's use of visual terminology alone may be enough to express this idea. But once we recognize the context of the visual metaphors, situating them in the Eleusinian Mysteries, their meaning becomes more complex. Not only does the visual motif help to express the notion of direct and unmediated access to the forms, but of an access that significantly changes the initiate. The *epopteia* has religious overtones that are not present in a visual motif outside of the *epoptic* context.

This is true for the other motifs as well. One does not need to recognize the Eleusinian Mystery motifs in order to see that there is a leader in the *Symposium* and *Republic*. However, if one does not recognize the overall structuring of the passage in terms of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the nature and role of this guide will not be clear. Once we recognize the Mystery motifs, we can see that the primary role of the guide is to be like the *mystagogos* in the

Mysteries. He leads the initiates to experiences they would not have had if unaided, experiences which will help to put them in the proper state for later stages.

Like the motif of the *epopteia*, the motif of purification helps to emphasize the extent to which Plato takes the forms to be, in a sense, divine or holy. Before one can come into contact with the holy he or she must be pure. The motif also helps Plato to express the way in which he thinks sensory knowledge is tainted, in his view, and that knowledge of the forms is pure and certain.

While some commentators have written on it, people often do not recognize the great extent to which conditioning and personal transformation play a role in Plato's theory of knowledge.[42] Once we see how Plato is systematically using Eleusinian Mystery motifs in connection with his theory of knowledge, this becomes much more evident. The main obstacles to achieving knowledge — and hence, blessedness — are the impurities present in oneself, in the form of false belief and inappropriate desires. Plato's use of Eleusinian Mystery language in this connection underscores the seriousness of our predicament, the necessity for transformation, and the great potential rewards that await if one does change.

[42]Cushman and Despland, however, do emphasize this.

Appendix: Knowledge By Acquaintance In Plato

I have argued that one of the major themes that Plato appropriates from the Eleusinian Mysteries is the *epopteia.* Plato represents the moment when one finally comes to know the forms in terms of the *epopteia.* The motif of the *epopteia* allows him to convey that one's contact with the form is *direct* and *unmediated.* In the *epopteia,* one has immediate visual contact with the *hiera,* just as, when one finally apprehends the form of beauty at the top of the Ladder of Eros, one beholds beauty itself. In a visual revelation, one does not merely learn new information, one has an experience of the holy, which changes one.[123]

But this characterization of Plato's position *vis-a-vis* the nature of knowledge of forms has recently come under attack. Since I have argued that Plato uses the motif of the *epopteia* in order to express this position, I defend that position here. Insofar as I have been able to show that Plato does use mystery models of direct visual acquaintance in his middle period dialogues, the main body of dissertation serves as an argument for the traditional interpretation. But here, I will defend, on general grounds, the traditional interpretation, that Plato presents a model of knowledge by acquaintance in which knowledge of a form consists in a direct cognitive interaction between the mind or *nous* and the form. I will argue that it serves his other

[123]See Aristotle fr. 15, Ross.

philosophical concerns well, and that contemporary attacks on this interpretation are ineffective.

Recent commentators have characterized Plato's conception of knowledge in the middle period dialogues in the following way: knowledge for Plato is always "essentially articulate." It consists in one's abilities to make a judgment, identify an object, give an account or explain what one knows.[124] I will argue that this characterization does not adequately explain either the accounts of knowing the forms that Plato presents in the middle period dialogues or his motivations for presenting such accounts.[125]

In order to adequately address this dispute it will be necessary to take into account several other controversies concerning Plato's epistemology. The first is whether Plato's account of knowledge is similar to the contemporary view that knowledge is justified true belief, according to which the only proper object of knowledge is a proposition; or whether Plato grants a kind of knowledge that does not refer to the truth of propositions. On the first view, all

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[124]R.C. Cross. 1954. "Logos and Forms in Plato" *Mind*, vol. lxiii, no. 252; J.C.B. Gosling, Ch. 8, "Knowledge as Vision" in *Plato* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 43-125; "Myths About Non-Propositional Thought" in both *Language and Logos: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, M. Schofield and M.C. Nussbaum, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 295-314 and *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).pp. 137-156; G. Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in Republic V-VII" in *Epistemology*, S. Everson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990,) pp. 86-87.

[125]There are several passages where Plato emphasizes the connection between knowing and being able to give an account. For instance in the *Meno* Plato distinguishes knowledge from true opinions by saying that true opinions "are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reasons why." (98a) And in the *Republic* Plato defines a dialectical individual as on who can "give an account of the being of each thing." And he goes on to claim that one does not know the form of the good unless he can come through attempts at refutation "with his account still intact." (534b-c). I will argue, however, that knowledge of the forms consists in more than being able to give an account. Being able to give an account is not sufficient for knowledge of the forms.

knowledge reduces to knowledge of propositions. For instance, we may speak of knowing a person or thing (I know X) of knowing the essence of a person or thing (I know what X is), and of knowing a proposition (I know that X is Y), but on this view the first two kinds of "knowledge" reduce to the third. To know X is to know the essence of X, to be able to say what X is. And to know the essence of X is to know and be able to assert certain propositions about X such as "X is Y," *etc.* On the second view, it is possible to know an X directly, independent of propositions, by being acquainted with it. I will say more about the nature of this acquaintance relation below.

The second controversy relevant to the dispute about the nature of knowledge of the forms in the middle period concerns the structure of Plato's account of knowledge. Does Plato ascribe to a foundationalist account of knowledge in which there are basic or foundational elements that are self-evident and can be known without inference, or does he offer a coherentist account[126] in which the elements are known and justified in terms of each other?[127] Connected to this second question is a third disputed issue concerning the ontological nature of the forms. Are they simples or internally complex, and do they exist as isolated individuals or are they interconnected?

In what follows I will argue that Plato offers a foundationalist account of knowledge where the basic elements are objective ideas or forms. It is these universals that are the building blocks of propositions and accounts. I will also

[126]For instance p is explained in terms of q, q in terms of r, and so on until one eventually appeals to p again. The account is circular but in a way that is "virtuous" not "vicious."(Fine supports this view in "Knowledge and Belief..." p. 109)
[127]Another possibility is that he gives some third sort of account.

defend the view that Plato grants a kind of knowledge that does not refer to the truth of propositions, and that he views this kind of knowledge as necessary given his foundationalist account. If knowledge is essentially propositional, it appears that this would return us to the regress that foundationalism is designed to resolve. If knowledge of an object requires that one can predicate something of it or assert a proposition about it, for example, if one does not know X unless one can state a truth about X, such as "X is Y," then one encounters the problem that before one can predicate Y of X, one must know what Y is, and thus know various truths about Y such as "Y is Z." But this analysis of one ideas in terms of another cannot go on forever. At some point one must be able to know some basic elements in and of themselves. I will argue that it is for reasons similar to these that Plato thought we must have foundational knowledge of universals and that such knowledge is gained through acquaintance, independent of propositional accounts.

In connection with arguing that Plato is a foundationalist I will also focus on Plato's claim at *Phaedo* 74c[128] that our understanding of universals is incorrigible. Generally on foundationalist accounts, certainty, incorrigibility or infallibility characterize one's knowledge of the foundational elements so as to ensure the veracity of the knowledge built upon them. I will examine what it is about the objects of knowledge as well as the nature of the cognitive relationship of the knower to the objects that makes such incorrigibility possible.

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[128]The claim is that the equals themselves have never appeared to you unequal, nor equality inequality.

My position is at odds with many contemporary interpretations of Plato, but I believe that these interpretations are the product of two mistaken tendencies: either the interpreters anachronistically import their own philosophical concerns and current conceptions of knowledge into their interpretation, or they dismiss what appears to be the obvious interpretation of Plato's text on the grounds that Plato was a better philosopher than to have held say, a 'two world' view or the view that we can be acquainted with mind-independent objects in a non-propositional manner. In order to avoid such anachronism, I will explicate Plato's position in the contexts of his predecessors and contemporaries. But also, to show that some of the apparent readings of Plato are not as unsophisticated as some take them to be, I will point out the similarities between the Platonic account of knowledge of universals in the middle period and those of more modern philosophers such as Descartes and Bertrand Russell. Russell develops an account of knowledge by acquaintance that is similar in many ways to the account that I will argue Plato presents. Both Plato and Russell countenance timeless, mind-independent objects that can be incorrigibly known without intermediary knowledge of truths or propositions.

The structure of this appendix will be as follows. First, I will give a brief description of what knowledge by acquaintance is. Then, I will present the positions of several of the commentators who argue that Plato did not hold a knowledge by acquaintance view. Next, I will show that the idea of knowledge by acquaintance was not alien to the ancient world, and that a connection

between knowledge and some sort of direct access to an object of knowledge can be found in works from Homer to Aristotle. I will pay particular attention to Aristotle's accounts of non-discursive knowledge concerning both universals and first principles. After that, I will show that knowledge by acquaintance is still a respectable concept today. I will survey Russell's account of knowledge by acquaintance, which is more developed than Plato's. (However, Russell was sympathetic to Plato's account of universals and was influenced by it.) I will then consider views of those commentators who argue that Plato needs knowledge by acquaintance in his account of knowledge in the middle period.

After this, I will present my own defense for the view that Plato gives an account in the middle period of objects of knowledge that are known through acquaintance. I will argue that Plato had a foundationalist view of knowledge, and that knowledge by acquaintance was part of this foundationalist view. Also, given that the primary characteristic of universals is that they are objective and mind-independent, I will work out what Plato must have considered the mechanisms for bringing the mind into the presence of a universal. According to Plato, it is the nature of the forms that they are not bound by time, context or perspective. They are independent of the perspective from which an individual might consider them, and they are independent of any context or circumstance in which they might be located.[129] I will consider what the process of coming to know universals must be such that it preserves the objectivity of the forms and allows for the certainty that Plato seems to suggest

[129]On this see N. White, "Plato's Metaphysical Epistemology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, R. Kraut, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially pp. 290-291.

is characteristic of our knowledge of universals. I will argue that in order to meet these criteria the process must be such that it does not involve subjective identification or categorization. I will discuss the problems that using language in such a process could raise given the opacity and relativity of reference that language is subject to. I will argue that knowledge of the forms must be direct and in a manner that is transparent.

I will also consider what needs to be the case for knowledge of universals to be incorrigible. The cognitive relationship between the mind and the universal must be more than some sort of intellectual vision since seeing red is distinct from knowing red, yet I will argue that the cognitive process involved cannot be anything similar to judgment or inference since these processes admit of error.

Finally, I will examine the role that *knowing what* plays in Plato's conception of knowledge. John McDowell has criticized Plato for holding the view that when you are acquainted with an object, you know *what that object is*. McDowell argues that to know *what a thing is* is to have propositional knowledge of it, and this is not something one can merely acquire by being acquainted with a thing. Three other commentators, Jakko Hintikka, Nicholas Smith, and Francisco Gonzalez, agree with McDowell that *knowing what* is a component of Plato's conception of knowledge, but they have varying views on whether this knowledge is propositional or non-propositional and on whether or not acquaintance is also a component of Plato's conception of knowledge. I will give an account of the role that each of these three philosophers believes

knowing what and acquaintance play in Plato's philosophy, and I will explicate the conception of *knowing what* that I think Plato is operating with.

WHAT IS "KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE"?

When people hear the term *acquaintance,* they usually think of meeting or coming into contact with another individual or thing. But it is usually not enough to have met him, you must also be familiar with him in some way. In the phrase "knowledge by acquaintance," *acquaintance* is used in a more technical sense, but it maintains the association that there is some sort of *object* or *thing* with which you are acquainted. Knowledge by acquaintance is usually contrasted with propositional knowledge. One has propositional knowledge when the object of his knowledge is a proposition that expresses a fact, e.g., "I know that X is Y." In knowledge by acquaintance, what one knows is the object itself rather than knowing things about the object, *i.e.,* "I know X." The distinction between propositional knowledge and knowledge by acquaintance is often compared to the distinction between the French knowledge verbs *savoir,* to know that... , and *connaître,* to know or recognize a person or thing. Commonly, what one knows by acquaintance are physical things that we become acquainted with through sensation. In characterizing *connaître* knowledge, Gilbert Ryle gives the following description, in which he emphasizes the need for a capacity to recognize and distinguish the objects:

> To say that I know (*connaître*) a person, a letter of the alphabet, a town, a numeral[130] or a piece of music, I must have met it enough to recognize

[130]That here Ryle is referring to the physical representations of the letters and numbers and not any abstract entities that they might represent is clear from an example he gives prior to this description where he says, "...for me to know (*savoir*) or even suppose that in the word

> it on meeting it again and to distinguish other things from it when I meet them. It is to be well enough acquainted with the thing both to recognize it and not to mistake other things for it and it for other things.[131]

I will show, however, that in the epistemologies of both Plato and Russell there is a sense of knowledge by acquaintance in which the object of acquaintance is an abstract object that is before the mind in an unmediated manner. It is something with which one is directly aware rather than something one comes to know through sensation. This direct awareness allows the individual to know *what* the object of awareness is so that an individual can recognize other instances of it at a later time. Because the object of knowledge is directly before the mind, the propositions and truth values usually associated with knowledge do not play a role here. This notion of knowledge by acquaintance where the object of knowledge is an abstract entity will become clearer below when I give an account of Russell's explication of the idea.

The primary reason Plato has been identified as having a knowledge by acquaintance view is because of the visual terminology Plato uses to describe knowing the forms. For example, when one completes the ascent up the Ladder of Eros in the *Symposium*, he will then "suddenly...see something marvelous,

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"ceiling" the "e" proceeds the "i", I must know (*connaître*) the letters "e" and "i". (Logical Atomism in Plato's *Theaetetus*" a paper delivered to the Oxford Philological Society on February 16, 1952. It was later published in *Phronesis*, Vol. 35, no. 1, 1990. The citations here are from the *Phronesis* article: p. 26.)

Ryle makes it even more explicit later that he does not think that abstract objects are the proper objects of acquaintance:

> In the sense, the perfectly proper sense, in which we do become slightly or well acquainted with people, towns, tunes and letters of the alphabet, it rings falsely to say that we do or do not become slightly or well acquainted with similarity, circularity, quintuplicity or murder. ("Logical Atomism...". p. 45)

[131]"Logical Atomism in Plato's *Theaetetus*", pp. 26-27.

beautiful in nature..." (211e). In the *Republic* the philosopher is contrasted with the lovers of sights and sound in that the thought of the philosopher is able to see and embrace the nature of beauty itself. philosophers are those who can "reach the beautiful itself and see it by itself" (476b). The Lovers of Sights and Sounds, on the other hand, can only see fleeting instances of beauty in the changing things of the physical world. In addition to descriptions of intellectual seeing, Plato also describes knowing the forms in terms of intellectual touching or grasping (Rep., 511b, 533b)[132] The terminology of intellectual seeing and touching seem well suited to convey the idea of direct and unmediated awareness. Before I go on to give a positive account of knowledge by acquaintance in Plato's middle period dialogues, let me survey the positions of those who have thought that Plato could not have believed that we know the forms through knowledge by acquaintance.

Why Plato Doesn't Have an Acquaintance Account of Knowledge

Those who argue against the view that Plato gives an acquaintance account of knowledge in the middle period are motivated by two primary concerns. The first is that the forms, characterized as simples, are the wrong sort of thing to be objects of knowledge. Propositions are the only appropriate objects of knowledge. Knowledge must be true, and the only bearers of truth are propositions, that is, statements describing the way the world is which are either true or false. Simples cannot be true or false. To surmount the problem this raises for knowing the forms, proponents of this view generally adopt one

[132] For additional descriptions of knowledge in terms of vision in the *Republic* see 475e, 476d, 479d-e, 484c, 510e, 515e, 519a-b, 527d, 533a, 533c-d, 537b-c.

of two positions. They either describe the forms such that the forms are internally complex, e.g., as logical predicates displayed in *logoi*[133] and thus which can be known, or they offer accounts on which the forms are externally complex, i.e., are interconnected with or bear relationships to one another such that the knowledge we have of forms is not knowledge of individual forms but of the interrelated structure of the forms.[134]

The second problem raised for an acquaintance account of knowledge is that the relationship of direct acquaintance is not sufficient to provide knowledge. In the metaphors Plato uses and in the way it is often described, acquaintance is compared with visual perception and with physical contact. Those who have this concern point out that having knowledge of a thing requires more than simply seeing it or being in the presence of it. One must be able to identify or recognize it. In what follows I will set out the positions of four philosophers who voice such concerns. I will begin with the position of R.C. Cross who was the first to raise these issues.

R.C. Cross

Cross points out problems for the view that forms are simple nameables and offers an alternative, according to which they are complex entities of a more linguistic nature. He argues that forms themselves are similar to propositions or at least parts of propositions. Cross sets out, in various places, what he calls the "orthodox view" against which he argues. The orthodox view

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[133] See Cross below.
[134] This is the position held by Gosling and Fine.

runs as follows: Plato discovered universals, of which words are names. These forms or simple nameables are known by direct insight or acquaintance.[135] The jumping off point for Cross' criticism of this view is a passage found in one of Plato's late period dialogues, the *Theaetetus*. It is the passage which commentators refer to as the "Dream Theory." In this passage (201d-202d) Socrates relates a dream he had and recounts the position of those in the dream who express the view that simples are unknowable because knowledge requires an account (*logos*) and no account can be given of simples. Cross considers the relevance of this position for Plato's own theory of forms if they are considered as simples. He cites a passage from a paper by Gilbert Ryle to make the point[136]:

> ...if the doctrine of the Forms was the view that these verbs, adjectives and common nouns are themselves the names of simple, if lofty, nameables, then Socrates' criticism of Logical Atomism is, *per accidents*, a criticism of the Doctrine of the Forms, whether Plato realized it or not...If a Form is a simple object or logical subject of predication, no matter how sublime, then its verbal expression will be a name and not a sentence; and if so, then it will not be false but nonsense to speak of anyone knowing it (*savoir*) or not knowing it.[137]

Why it would be nonsense to speak of anyone knowing (*savoir*) a form is made clear by Ryle in an earlier paper:

> And this means...that knowledge requires for its expression not just a name but a sentence or statement. And what a sentence or statement

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[135]R.C. Cross. 1954. "Logos and Forms in Plato" Mind, vol. lxiii, no. 252, reprinted in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, R.E. Allen, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul and New York: The Humanities Press, 1965)(pagination will be from the latter publication), pp. 18, 22, 27.

[136]Ryle himself drew a conclusion very different from that of Cross concerning the nature of knowledge of the forms for Plato in the middle period. I will discuss Ryle's view below when discussing those who endorse a *connaître* account of knowledge in Plato.

[137]When Cross cited Ryle, Ryle's paper was yet unpublished. I have cited the passage as it appears in Ryle's paper as published in *Phronesis*. p. 44.

> expresses is always a plurality, at least a duality of distinguishable elements or factors. Knowledge as well as true and false belief and opinion cannot be expressed just by a proper name or demonstrative for some simple object, but only by a complex of words which together constitute a sentence.[138]

Cross absolves Plato of this criticism by arguing that for Plato the forms never were simple nameables known by acquaintance.[139] He defends the view that a form for Plato is not a logical subject that can be known by acquaintance; rather, it is "the logical predicate in a *logos*." It is "what is said of something, not something about which something else is said."[140] Contrary to the traditional view, Cross does not think Plato is the discoverer of or that he is particularly concerned with universals.[141] When Plato asks a "What is X?" question such as "What is figure," he is not asking for knowledge of the universal, figure. Rather, he is asking to know the form of figure, and this is something that can be come to be known by way of statements, Cross' translation of *logoi*.[142] For Cross, to give the *eidos* or form of figure is to give a statement with the structure "X is Y," e.g. "figure is the limit of a solid." The form is "displayed in the logos, and displayed in the predicate of the logos."[143]

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[138]G. Ryle. 1939. "Plato's Parmenides", *Mind* , reprinted in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, p. 136-137.

[139]Cross grants that the view of the forms that he advocates is not found explicitly in Plato and that Plato does not even have the technical equipment to formulate it until the period of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, yet he believes the view is there implicitly throughout the dialogues in the way Plato develops and operates with the theory of forms (pp. 29-30).

[140]"Logos and Forms in Plato", pp. 27-28.

[141]In support of this claim he cites the passage from the *Meno* (72b-76a)where Meno first begins to give answers to the "What is X?" question, "What is Virtue?" saying that neither Meno nor Socrates seem to find anything particularly striking about in the fact that we use a word like "bee" or "figure" as a general term for any one of a group of particulars. They "take it for granted that there is something common to a group of particulars that are called by one name" ("Logos and Forms...", p. 20).

[142]"Logos and Forms", p. 22.

[143]"Logos and Forms", p. 27.

R. Sorabji

Sorabji also believes that the only appropriate object of knowledge is a proposition, but instead of arguing that forms are propositions, he holds that we cannot have knowledge of forms themselves. Rather, we can only have knowledge *about* forms, and the knowledge we have about forms will be propositional in nature.[144] Sorabji considers the *Republic* passage, 509d-541b, which many have considered to contain a knowledge by acquaintance account. He makes three main points. First, he points out that all the thought involved in the progress toward knowledge of the forms is propositional. Second, he claims that knowledge of the forms is definitional knowledge, which is itself propositional knowledge. Third, he says that forms are the wrong kind of things to be objects of acquaintance. I will set out each of these three points and respond to them briefly.

First, Sorabji emphasizes that all the thinking described in this passage of the *Republic* is propositional. "[T]he questions, answers and refutations all bear on propositions, and what is being sought is definitions,"[145] which are propositions. In response to this, I think that it is important to point out that the fact that the stages leading up to knowledge of a form involve propositions is not incompatible with the possibility that the knowledge of the forms that

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[144]Sorabji sets out his view in two places. Both pieces are entitled "Myths About Non-Propositional Thought". Each appears as a chapter in a book: *Language and Logos: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, M. Schofield and M.C. Nussbaum, eds (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), pp. 299-301; *Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).pp. 142-144.
[145] *Language and Logos*, p. 300; *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, pp. 142-143.

occurs at the end of these stages is itself not propositional. I argue later that the preliminary propositional stages are necessary to put an individual in a proper cognitive state and allow him to bring his mind before the object of knowledge but that the knowledge itself consists of a direct cognitive relationship.

Sorabji thinks that knowledge of the forms is propositional because what one knows when one has knowledge of the forms is a definition. Sorabji grants that forms, such as the form of the good, are not themselves propositions, but he believes that to know a form is to know a definitional proposition, e.g., "that goodness is so-and-so."[146] There is a problem with this position, however. This account of knowledge of the forms leads to regress problem discussed above.[147] Sorabji believes that to know a form is to know propositions about a form, such as goodness is so-and-so, but when we analyze the proposition and ask what the schema, "so-and-so," stands for, we realize that it stands for another idea that we must know in order to understand the definition. For instance, if the proposition is "goodness is beautiful," we have to know what beauty is before we can understand the definition. And if this knowledge also consists in knowing a definitional formula of the type "beauty is so-and-so", we have a potentially infinite regress. I believe that Plato posits knowledge by acquaintance as foundational in order to avoid this infinite regress.

Finally, while it is frequently argued that the forms as simples are not appropriate objects of knowledge, Sorabji makes the different point that forms

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[146] *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, p. 143.
[147] Aristotle clearly sets out this problem in *Posterior Analytics*, Bk. Alpha, ch. 1.

are the wrong kind of thing with which to be acquainted. There may be things with which we can be acquainted, but forms are not those kind of things. He remarks,

> I must confess that I do not understand what Plato can plausibly be referring to if he has in mind some *non*-propositional acquaintance with such things [goodness, justice, beauty] — they seem to be things of the wrong kind. A god might be thought to admit of such acquaintance in mystical experience, but even if goodness and justice are thought of as divine, I do not quite understand how they can [admit of acquaintance].[148]

This appears to indicate a very narrow conception of acquaintance on Sorabji's part. It is unclear just what aspects he is considering that would make a god a suitable object of acquaintance and not a form, but he seems to characterize acquaintance as something related only to a mystical experience. Above I briefly characterized acquaintance for Plato as being directly aware of something, and I will flesh this out more below. But it is difficult to see why forms as universals would not be appropriate objects for such a cognitive relationship.

J.C. Gosling

The second kind of objection to the knowledge by acquaintance position is discussed by J.C. Gosling and Gail Fine. The essence of this objection is that the acquaintance relation isn't sufficient to provide knowledge. We can get at what is behind this objection if we consider the following points. Hearing a foreign language is not enough to be able to know what is being said. Similarly, seeing a letter from an unfamiliar alphabet does not allow us to

[148] *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, pp. 142.

identify it, to know what it is. It seems that in order to have knowledge one must be able to formulate a proposition of recognition or identification such as, "I see *what* letter it is" or "I know *that* it is the letter aleph."[149] Gosling recognizes in Plato a visual model of knowledge, but he asks what knowledge by acquaintance would amount to. Knowing the form of Beauty or the form of Justice consists in viewing Beauty or Justice with an intellectual vision. Gosling emphasizes that if knowing Beauty or Justice is viewing beauty or justice with intellectual vision, "then the subject must be able to recognize the object as Beauty or as Justice if knowledge is to do the work required."[150] And this seems to require cognitive processes in addition to intellectual seeing. He concludes that while acquaintance might be a necessary condition for knowledge, it is not a sufficient condition for knowledge.

I think that Gosling makes the mistake of assimilating Platonic acquaintance too closely to acquaintance with a physical object. When we are acquainted with a physical object, we receive sensory information from the object, and then we must interpret and identify that information in order to identify the object. Cognitive processes are necessary for this interpretation and identification. I think that Gosling is mistaken to assume that intellectual or cognitive vision does not involve cognitive process. Acquaintance does not involve propositions, but it does not follow from this that no cognitive

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[149] Socrates makes a similar point in the *Theaetetus* when demonstrating that knowledge is not perception (*Tht.*, 163a).
[150] J.C. Gosling, Ch. 8, "Knowledge as Vision" in *Plato* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 122.

processes at all are involved. Below I will show that both *nous* and memory are involved in acquaintance and each of these are cognitive processes.

Plato describes acquaintance with a form in terms of an intellectual vision in which we don't experience an object by way of information that is initially taken in through our physical senses, but we see the form directly with the vision of our minds. Gosling believes that in this case we will need cognitive processes over and above those of the intellectual acquaintance to recognize and identify the object of acquaintance. This is necessary because when we identify an object, we identify it in propositional terms. We must be able to say, "I know what beauty is" or "I know that justice is X." Gosling, however, fails to recognize the disanalogy with physical acquaintance, both in terms of the object of acquaintance and in terms of one's relationship to that object. First, one does not identify objects of cognitive acquaintance through sensing their properties, even abstract properties. One may move from the observations, "it's warm blooded," "it's a vertebrate," "it nurses its young," to the conclusion, "oh, it must be a mammal." But one does not say, "it is undivided," "it is unchanging," "so it must be the form of beauty." In particular, it is difficult to see what kind of properties a form would have to have in order for you to identify it as a *specific* form. What are the character traits that the form of beauty would have that would allow you to identify it as the form of *beauty*?

In addition to arguing that the acquaintance relation is not sufficient for knowledge, Gosling, like Cross, believes that forms understood as simples are

the wrong kind of thing to be an object of knowledge. Rather, for Gosling, knowledge of forms consists in knowledge of explanations or functions. He gives an account of the forms as being externally complex, as bearing relations to one another, and he believes that knowledge of the forms consists in knowledge of those interrelations which themselves constitute an explanatory system. Gosling's position that the forms must be interrelated is also grounded in the view that all knowledge must be propositional. Gosling acknowledges that the traditional view of Plato's development is that in the early to middle dialogues the concern is to isolate justice, courage, etc. as forms which can be known through direct acquaintance. Yet, Gosling believes that if Plato conceives of knowledge as supplying the answer to a "What is X?" questions, for instance to know the form of beauty is to know the answer to the question, "What is beauty?", then the forms must be interrelated. The answer to a "What is X?" question must be expressible in terms of "X is F and G," and this would reflect the view that the forms are interrelated. Contrary to the picture that I painted earlier, here it does not seem that one identifies a form in terms of properties it has *per se*, but rather, one identifies it in virtue of the relations it bears to other forms.[151]

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[151] These forms themselves, however, are forms of properties: justice, equality courage, etc. I agree with Gosling that Plato conceives of the forms as interrelated as early as the middle period, but I believe that an individual seeking knowledge makes use of these interrelationships in preparatory processes that she must engage in before gaining knowledge. These include processes such as abstraction and dialectic. It is through following out interrelationships and testing coherence in terms of logical relations in processes such as dialectic that one puts herself in a position to know the forms. Knowledge of the forms consists in more than knowledge of the interrelationships between the forms, it will be knowledge of the forms themselves.

According to Gosling the visual imagery Plato employs can equally well express a grasp of a set of interrelations as it can direct acquaintance with an individual object. He believes that the visions described in the middle period dialogues *Symposium* and *Republic* are visions of explanations rather than of individual objects. In this vision an individual suddenly sees how a structure hangs together. In the *Symposium* the vision of beauty is a vision of the explanation of why all beautiful things are to be called beautiful. In the *Republic* the vision of the good is a vision of what makes all good things good.[152] For Gosling, an answer to a "What is X?" question is an answer in terms of function. He believes that Plato wants to interpret inquiries into the nature of things in a functional way. To talk of a thing's essence or being will be to talk of its function or good state.[153] In the *Republic* the ascent toward the form of the good involves working out the interrelations of the functions taken as good by particular disciplines until an individual can exhibit them as a unified system. For Gosling, the vision of how everything fits together in this way is the vision of the form of the good.

G. Fine

Fine also advocates the position that knowledge must have propositions as its objects and it must involve truths, and she believes that Plato held this view as well.[154] In a manner similar to Gosling, she argues both that the

[152]Gosling, p. 123.
[153]Gosling, p. 115.
[154]Fine recognizes that Plato often speaks of knowing things(virtue, knowledge, Theaetetus, the sun), but she believes that the difference between this kind of knowledge and knowing propositions should not be pressed too far for two reasons: "First, the account that certifies that one knows a particular thing will itself be a proposition: one knows a thing through or by

acquaintance relation is not adequate to provide knowledge, and that Plato does not need a foundationalist account involving acquaintance with the basic elements because he offers a coherence theory of knowledge instead.

Fine puts forth her view on the possibility of knowledge by acquaintance in connection with a discussion of the simples of the Dream Theory in the *Theaetetus*. Fine considers two conceptions of the acquaintance relation and rejects each as a cognitive relation that could provide knowledge of simples. First, if the acquaintance relation is construed as a direct contact between a person and an object, a relation that, because it is direct, is not mediated by truth, then it fails to be knowledge, because, on Fine's view, knowledge obtains only when knowledge of truths is available.[155]

The second conception of acquaintance, Fine's own view, is that to be acquainted with something or to know it *connaître* is *not* to know it independently of truths about it. She believes that cognitive functions must necessarily be involved, and these functions will include propositional truths. As she puts it:

> ...one does not know (*connaitre*) a person or thing unless one also knows various truths about the person or thing; *connaitre*-knowledge is always knowledge under a description, or acquaintance with something *as* being something. To count as knowing something, I must not merely have seen it; I must be able to identify it and recognize it, say various things about it. *Connaitre*-knowledge is linked to, not divorced from, propositional knowledge.[156]

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knowing certain propositions to be true of it...Second, Plato tends to speak interchangeably of knowing x and knowing what x is (Meno 79c8-9, Tht. 147b2-5). Hence even if Plato's primary concern is knowledge of objects, this concern can readily be phrased in the modern idiom as knowledge that a particular proposition is true." (pp. 366-367)

[155]"Knowledge and Logos...", p. 378.

[156]"Knowledge and Logos...", p. 377.

Below I will introduce two considerations in response to these points made by Fine. First, while the criterion that knowledge obtains only when knowledge of truths is available is essential to the contemporary conception of knowledge, I believe that Fine is working with too narrow a conception of truth when interpreting Plato. She fails to recognize that for the Greeks *aletheia* also means true in the sense of real. For Plato the forms are true in that they exist, are real, and they serve as truth makers. The proposition "X is beautiful" is true if and only if X participates or shares in the form of beauty. In this sense, forms, even as simples, are true. Second, Fine and others believe that *connaître* knowledge cannot be simply a matter of direct acquaintance with an object of knowledge, but must involve subjective cognitive processes such a placing the object in a category to identify it *as* something. I will consider whether employing such subjective processes would compromise the certain and objective nature of the knowledge that Plato is aiming at.

While I will argue that Plato employs a knowledge by acquaintance view in response to a regress concerning knowledge, Fine offers an alternative solution to the regress problem by giving a coherentist account of knowledge. She sets the regress out in terms of the following conditions on knowledge from the *Meno*. At 98a Plato claims that knowledge must be "fastened with an explanatory account (*aitias logismos*)," *i.e.*, it requires a *logos*.[157] At 75c8-d7 Plato also requires that one know the referents of any terms contained in an explanatory *logos*. If I define x in terms of y and z, I know x only if I also

[157]Fine fails to recognize how Plato identifies this logos with recollection.

know y and z. Yet these two claims taken together engender the regress. According to the first condition, to know an object **o** I must give a true account of **o**. But according to the second condition, I must know any objects mentioned in the account. Yet given the first condition, this requires a further true account, which given the second condition requires knowledge of any objects mentioned in it, and so on.[158]

Fine fails to make an important distinction between being able to give a propositional account and knowledge which is itself propositional. It is possible to have knowledge which itself is not propositional and yet have that knowledge be such that it allows you to give an account of the object of knowledge. I think that in order avoid the regress problem, Plato posits the forms as simples know by acquaintance, but this does not preclude the possibility that cognitive contact with a form will allow you to express a series of propositions about it, even if this is not what the knowledge of the form itself consists in.

Fine, however, contends that Plato does not provide an answer to the regress with acquaintance knowledge of foundational elements. Instead, she argues that Plato gives an account of the regress that is virtuously circular. Fine finds what she calls the interrelation model of knowledge throughout Plato. She believes that knowledge for Plato involves "the mastery of a field, an ability systematically to interrelate the elements of a particular discipline." The *logoi* that Plato requires are accounts "explaining the interrelations among the

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[158]"Knowledge and Logos in the *Theaetetus*", pp. 367-368.

element of a discipline."[159] This account is very similar to the one provided by Gosling.

Some Conceptions of Knowledge By Acquaintance Among Plato's Predecessors and Contemporaries

Many contemporary philosophers are reluctant to ascribe a knowledge by acquaintance account to Plato because, as we saw above, they believe that the only adequate conception of knowledge is a propositional account, or they believe that Plato is a better philosopher than to have countenanced mind-independent objects that are known by direct acquaintance. In this section I will do two things. First, I will consider some conceptions of knowledge among Plato's predecessors and contemporaries, including Homer and Aristotle, and show that a prevalent conception of knowledge among the Greeks was knowledge-by-personal-experience, a kind of knowledge that shares several aspects with knowledge by acquaintance. Next, I will indicate that non-propositional accounts of knowledge by acquaintance have been extensively developed by later philosophers such as Descartes and Russell.

We have evidence in the poems of Homer that in his time knowledge was conceived of as acquired by direct perception. In Book II of the *Iliad* the poet refers to the goddesses as knowing everything and offers as a reason for this that they have been present for everything, whereas humans don't know anything since they only "hear the report" (484-7).[160] Further support for the

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[159]p. 369.
[160]See E. Hussey, "The Beginnings of Epistemology", in *Epistemology*, S. Everson, ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 11-17.

view that the Greeks conceived of knowledge in this way is found in the use of forms of the verb *eidenai*—literally to see—to mean to know on the basis of one's own observation.[161] A common way to express, "I know" was to use *oida*, the perfect form of the verb, literally meaning I have seen what I claim to know.[162]

This may not have been the primary Greek conception of knowledge. Edward Hussey argues against the view that the Greeks had *no* general concept of knowledge and *only* one of knowledge-by-personal-experience. He cites passages such as *Iliad* XX 203-5 where Aeneas says to Achilles, "We know each other's lineage and parents, hearing the words of mortal men...but you have never seen my parents with your eyes, nor I yours with mine." Yet it is clear that the early Greek conception of knowledge was closely tied to direct experience of an object or situation and did not necessarily involve knowledge of a statement that something was the case.

I will be arguing below that the knowledge by acquaintance we find in Plato is not knowledge gained by experience with sensible objects; rather, for Plato, one is acquainted with non-tangible objects that the mind is brought into the presence of. We find this idea of direct mental access in some of Plato's predecessors . Empedocles, when discussing Love as one of the motive forces

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[161]On this see B. Snell. 1924. "Ausdrücke für den Begriff des wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie", vol. 29 (Berlin), p. 25.

[162]Snell makes the point that the Greeks recognized that more than vision was required in order to have knowledge. Some sort of mental activity must go on. According to Snell, in Homer "frequently it [*noos*] is combined with *eiden* but it stands for a type of seeing which involves not merely visual activity, but the mental act which goes with vision. This puts it close to *gigniskein* But the latter means "to recognize"; It is more properly used in the identification of a man, while *noein* refers more particularly to a situation.

of the cosmos says, "Observe her with your mind, and do not sit staring dazed."[163] And we have recorded from Parmenides, in a passage that seems to emphasize his view concerning the similarity in nature between thought and the object of thought, "Observe nevertheless how things absent are securely present to the mind;[164] for you will not sever being from its connection with being, whether it is scattered everywhere utterly throughout the universe, or whether it is collected together."[165] For these two philosophers we can *think* of things that are not immediately present to our senses by bringing our mind into their presence.

ARISTOTLE

Perhaps some of the most relevant evidence when considering the views of other ancient Greeks on knowledge is provided by Aristotle. Although Plato and Aristotle differed greatly on issues such as the separability of forms, I will show that they had very similar positions concerning foundational knowledge and the processes through which such knowledge might be obtained. Aristotle directly addresses the regress problem of knowledge and concludes that we must have knowledge of foundational elements, and that knowledge is acquired through an intuitive apprehension or direct mental perception.

In Book 1, chapter 3 of the *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle specifically addresses the regress problem of knowledge. Here Aristotle is discussing demonstrative knowledge, knowledge gained through scientific deduction.

[163]*On Nature* B17.
[164]S. Austin reads, "Behold alike things absent from the mind and things present to it firmly."
[165]*On Nature* B4.

Like any knowledge that requires giving reasons, demonstrative knowledge falls prey to the regress problem — explaining my knowledge of p in terms of q, and my knowledge of q in terms of r, etc. seems to require an infinite chain of explanations. Aristotle explicitly rejects two possible solutions to the problem —accepting the regress or allowing circular proof — and advocates a foundationalist position positing first principles that are known directly:

> For the one party, supposing that one cannot have scientific knowledge at all—they claim that we are led back indefinitely ...The other party ...<argue that> nothing prevents there being a demonstration of everything; for it is possible for the demonstration to come about circularly and reciprocally[166]...But *we* say that neither is all knowledge demonstrative, but in the case of the immediates it is non-demonstrable—and that this is necessary is evident; for it is necessary to know the things which are prior and on which the demonstration depends...and we also say that there is not only scientific knowledge, but some principle of knowledge by which we become acquainted with definitions. (72b 9-26)

Because of the regress problem, Aristotle is moved to deny that all knowledge is demonstrative, i.e., that we can demonstrate or give an account of all knowledge. Instead, he gives an account of what here he refers to as a principle of knowledge, but elsewhere[167] calls *nous* or intuition, that which allows us to know the basic principles or definitions.

In Book II, chapter 19 Aristotle pursues the issue of knowledge of basic principles further. The processes he explicitly describes here are those for grasping universals, but he indicates that the processes for grasping both first

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[166]See J. Barnes notes on the passage in his commentary (Oxford: Clarendon Press) for a list of the ancients who accepted the possibility of circular proof, among them , the followers of Xenocrates. Aristotle presents three arguments against this position at 72b25ff.

[167]Aristotle also uses the phrase, *principle of knowledge* at Book I chapter, 88b36 and at Book II chapter 19, 100b15. Here he identifies the principle as nous or intuition.

principles and universals are parallel.[168] At the beginning of the chapter Aristotle raises two questions concerning first principles: 1) how do they become objects of acquaintance? 2) What is the state that becomes acquainted with them?[169] I

In brief, Aristotle answers the questions as follows. First principles become the objects of acquaintance through the process of *induction*, and the state that becomes acquainted with them is *nous* or intuition. Aristotle suggests that we have *capacities* that makes induction possible. These capacities allow us to grasp universals. Some animals are designed such that they can move from experience of the physical world to the grasping of universals.

Aristotle says more about the notion of *nous* when spelling out some of the differences between scientific knowledge, where the knowledge is gained through scientific deduction, and intuition or *nous*, which is the state in which we are acquainted with universals or immediate premises.[170] He emphasizes the infallibility of intuition (*nous*):

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[168]100b3.

[169]99b17-18.

[170] Although he describes the process by which one is brought to the point where he grasps first principles and universals, Aristotle is not very specific about the nature of the state in which one grasps them. Commentators have traditionally translated Aristotle's term for the *hexis*, *nous*, as intuition, indicating that the state is one of mental perception. Intuited truths are simply seen to be true. Aristotle's use of the term at *Nichomachean Ethics* Book 6 chapter 9 seems to support this translation. Here he says of nous that it "is about what is ultimate in both directions;for nous and not reason (*logos*) is about both the primitive definitions and the ultimate things...one needs to have perception <of the latter>, and that is nous" (1143a35-b5). Jonathan Barnes in his translation of the *Posterior Analytics* disagrees with the translation of *nous* as *intuition* and translates it as *comprehension* instead. Barnes argues that as a *hexis* or state *nous* is not a faculty or a means of acquiring knowledge, rather as a state it is more like a disposition. Aristotle identifies induction as the method of gaining knowledge of first principles, and Barnes believes that nous stands to induction as understanding (Barnes translation of scientific knowledge) stands to demonstration. It is the state one is in at the end of the process. (Aristotle's Posterior Analytics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 19750, p. 257).

> Now, of the intellectual states that we use in the pursuit of truth some (e.g., scientific knowledge and *nous*) are always true, whereas others (e.g., opinion and reasoning admit falsehood, and no kind other than *nous* is more certain than scientific knowledge. Also, first principles are more knowable than demonstrations, and all scientific knowledge involves an account. It follows that there can be no scientific knowledge of the first principles; and since nothing can be more infallible than scientific knowledge except *nous*, it must be *nous* that apprehends the first principles...since we have no other infallible faculty besides scientific knowledge *nous* will be the first principle of scientific knowledge. (100b6-16)

Aristotle also points to the infallible nature of our acquaintance with universals in the *De Anima*,

> But a statement asserts something of something like any affirmation, and everyone is either true or false; but this is not always so with the mind (*nous*): when it is dealing with the nature of a thing in the abstract sense, and not with any particular example of it, it is always true[171]; just as vision of a particular thing is always true, but when seeing whether the white object is a man or not, it is not always true, so it is with every quality apart from its matter. (430b26-32)

Here Aristotle compares the apprehension of a universal to visual sensation. Just as one can't be mistaken that one is sensing such and so, when a universal such as whiteness is before the mind, one cannot be mistaken about it. Once a

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[171]Aristotle's point here seems to be that knowledge of essences is always true, because unlike statements, they are incomposite. He makes a similar point in *Metaphysics* IX concerning knowledge of essences and of incomposite things generally: "it is impossible to be deceived with respect to what a thing is (tÚ tˆ §stin), except accidentally (katå sumbebhkÒw); and the same applies to incomposite substances" (1051b26-27)As Hugh Tredennick a commntator on the passage puts it, "We cannot be mistaken with regard to a simple term. We either apprehend it or not. Mistakes arise when we either predicate something wrongly of X, or analyze X wrongly" (but analysis is not possible in the case of an incomposite thing. Aristotle characterizes truth for incomposite things as distinct from truth for composite things. He identifies truth for incomposite things with contact (yˆgein),which seems to indicate some sort of direct apprehnsion, and ignorance with non-contact.(1051b24-26).Sorabji argues against the view that Aristotle posits any sort of direct apprehension either here or in the De anima passage cited above. See *Language and Logos*, 296-299; *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, pp. 139-142.

judgment is involved, however, such as "that white object is a man," then the way is open for error.

While there are some fundamental differences in the epistemologies of Aristotle and Plato — for Aristotle knowledge of universals and first principles requires only the teleological structure and capacities of the individual interacting with the physical world, and Plato's account invokes the recollection of knowledge — I will show that Plato's account is similar to Aristotle's in involving preliminary discursive processes which make possible the incorrigible non-discursive grasp of basic elements of knowledge. Also, that Aristotle held these positions makes it more plausible that Plato did as well. At the very least, it helps to disprove the view, held by some philosophers, that the 'traditional' view could not have really been Plato's because any philosopher of his caliber during that time would have known that a view of incorrigible non-discursive 'knowledge' is not a tenable position.

Modern and Contemporary Accounts of Knowledge by Acquaintance[172]

Many philosophers are reluctant to attribute certain kinds of beliefs to Plato, such as a belief in extensionless mind-independent entities or the view that there can be a kind of knowledge independent of truth or propositions, because they themselves think these are untenable positions, and they believe

[172]We find accounts of knowledge by acquaintance between the ancient and modern periods in the work of neo-Platonist, Plotinus (See *Enneads*.)(Sorabji also argues that there is no non-propositional thought in (but that any non-propositional experience is *above* the level of thinking) Plotinus, *Language and Logos*, pp. 137-139, 154-156; *Time, Creation and the Continuum* 295-296, 309-314.) and the medieval theologian, Augustine (*De Magistro* (*The Teacher*)(12.40, 29-39) where he offers a "theory of illumination" to explain how knowledge is acquired). Both these works, however indicate direct influence from the Platonic dialogues.

Plato was a better philosopher than to have held them. In what follows I will give evidence that such positions are not as implausible as they may initially seem by showing that we find well developed accounts of such views in the work of the modern and contemporary philosophers. I will give the most attention to Russell's account since I think his explication is the most fruitful when it comes to understanding the notion of knowledge by acquaintance we find in Plato.

Two thinkers whose conceptions of knowledge by acquaintance seem to be directly derivative of the works of Plato are Plotinus and Augustine. The 3rd century CE. neo-Platonist, Plotinus, give an extensive account of non-propositional thought in his work the *Enneads*.[173] A defining aspect of non-discursive thinking for Plotinus is that it involves no distinction between the thinker or thinking, on the one side, and the object of thought, on the other.

The medieval theologian, Augustine, borrows the Platonic imagery of knowledge acquired through the vision of the mind's eye, and he even incorporated the motif of illumination by bright light, but Augustine in addition places his theory in the context of the Christian tradition by making God the source of the light which makes the objects of knowledge manifest:

> ...when it is a question of things we behold with the mind, namely, with our intellect or reason, we give verbal expression to realities which we directly perceive as present in that inner light of truth by which the inner man, as he is called, is enlightened and made happy. But, here again, if the one who hears my words sees those things himself with that clear and inner eye of the soul, he knows the things whereof I speak by

[173]See A.C. Lloyd, "Non-Discursive Thought — An Enigma of Greek Philosophy," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 70 (1969-1970), pp. 262-274;"Non-Propositional Thought in Plotinus," *Phronesis* 1986, Vol. XXXI/3, pp. 258-265;

> contemplating them himself, and not by my words. Therefore, even when I say what is true, and he sees what is true, it is not I who teach him. For he is being taught by the realities themselves made manifest to him by the enlightening action of God from within.[174]

Two more recent philosophers who develop some of the same notions as Plato are Descartes and William James. Descartes argues for the two ideas which are so antithetical to the contemporary notion of knowledge as justified true belief and which I think are central to Plato's conception of knowledge: that truth is not a property only of sentences, and that propositions are not the only objects of knowledge. In arguing this, Descartes posits simple natures that are known *per se* and that are free from falsity. These simple natures include not only things such as extension, figure and motion, but simple truths and simple propositions as well as what Descartes calls pure and simple essences (Rule 6). According to Descartes, if our mind "attains to the least acquaintance with one of these, we know it completely, for otherwise it could not be said to be simple."[175]

James, who may have influenced Russell's conception of knowledge by acquaintance, makes the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and what he calls "knowledge about." For James, we are acquainted with people and things when they are present to us but we do not operate upon them with our thought. For example, I am acquainted with the color blue when I see it or the flavor of a pear when I taste it. Like Plato, James believes that this is not

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[174]*De Magistro* (*The Teacher*), ch. 12, sec. 40, trans. by R.P. Russell (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1968), pp. 53-54.
[175]"Rules for the Direction of the Mind" in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol., I, E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, trans.,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) Rules, VI, XII.

the kind of knowledge one can transmit to another, but it is something that one experiences after having undergone certain conditioning or experiences :

> I cannot impart acquaintance with them to anyone who has not already made it himself. I cannot *describe* them, make a blind man guess what blue is like...At most I can say to my friends, Go to a certain places and act in certain ways, and these objects will probably come. All the elementary natures of the world, its highest genera, the simple qualities of matter and mind, together with the kinds of relations that subsist between them, must either not be known at all, or known in this dumb way of acquaintance without knowledge about.[176]

Also like Plato, James believes that simples such as qualities must be known by acquaintance. They are not something we have knowledge about. When we have knowledge about something we think over its relations, subject it to a sort of treatment, and operate on it with our thought (p. 218).

James emphasizes the subjective aspect of knowledge by acquaintance: the knowledge is only achieved after an individual has had certain subjective experiences. Russell is influenced by James, but he points up the objective aspect: the object of acquaintance is a mind-independent entity.

RUSSELL'S KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE

One of the primary reasons that those who deny that Plato has an acquaintance account of knowledge do so is that forms, the objects of acquaintance, are not the sort of thing that can be an object of knowledge. Only propositions can be the object of knowledge. Below I will set out Russell's notion of knowledge by acquaintance both because it is similar to the one I will

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[176]*The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I>. 1890. F.H. Burkhardt, general editor, F. Bowers, textual editor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 217. James further distinguishes between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge about in terms of the absence or presence of what he calls psychic fringes or overtones (pp. 248-251).

ascribe to Plato and because, like Descartes, Russell holds a view that is at odds with the position, held by most contemporary philosophers, that we can only have knowledge of propositions.

In *The Problems of Philosophy* Russell distinguishes between two different senses of the word *know*: knowledge of truths and knowledge of things. He characterizes them each as follows:

> (1) Knowledge of Truths
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> In its first use it [the word *know*] is applicable to the sort of knowledge which is opposed to error, the sense in which what we know is true, the sense which applies to our beliefs and convictions, i.e. to what are called judgments. In this sense of the word we know *that* something is the case. This sort of knowledge may be described as knowledge of *truths*.
>
> (2) Knowledge of Things
>
> In the second use of the word "know"...the word applies to our knowledge of *things*, which we may call *acquaintance*...(The distinction involved is roughly that between *savoir* and *connaître* in French, or between *wissen* and *kennen* in German.)[177]

Russell goes on to distinguish knowledge by acquaintance from knowledge of truths:

> ...knowledge by *acquaintance* is essentially simpler than any knowledge of truths, and logically independent of knowledge of truths, though it would be rash to assume that human beings ever, in fact, have acquaintance with things without at the same time knowing some truths about them...We shall say that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths.[178]

It may, at this point, be unclear how one could have knowledge of something without having knowledge of truths. Russell gives an example of

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[177]*The Problems of Philosophy*, Home Universe Library, Oxford University, 1912. Reprinted with the same pagination by the Hackett Publishing Company, p. 44.
[178]*Problems of Philosophy* (*PP*), p. 46.

being acquainted with a color that goes some distance toward giving a sense of what he means by this. In discussing being acquainted with the color (a sense datum) of a brown table Russell distinguishes between knowing the color itself and knowing truths about the color:

> The particular shade of colour that I am seeing may have many things said about it — I may say that it is brown, that it is rather dark, and so on. But such statements, though they make me know truths *about* the colour, do not make me know the color itself any better than I did before: so far as concerns knowledge of the colour itself, as opposed to knowledge of truths about it, I know the colour perfectly and completely when I see it, and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically possible.[179]

When Russell distinguishes between knowledge of truths and knowledge of things, he may seem to be talking of the knowledge of things generally, but according to Russell, not all things can be known by acquaintance. As he suggests above, we are acquainted with things of which we are directly aware, things which we can bring directly before the mind. These objects for Russell include sense data, universals and perhaps ourselves.[180] All other things which we can't know directly by bringing them before our minds, such a physical objects or the minds of other people, we can only know by description. Unlike knowledge by acquaintance, knowledge of things by *description* "always involves...some knowledge of truths as its source and ground."[181]

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[179]PP, pp. 46-47.
[180]Russell seems unclear about his view on the possibility of being directly acquainted with ourselves. See "Knowledge by Acquaintance and "Knowledge by Description". p. 204-205: *PP*, p. 50-51. In "On the Nature of Acquaintance" he defends the position that the subject is not acquainted with itself.
[181]PP p. 46.

Russell gives an account of this direct acquaintance with an object in several different works describing it variously as "awareness of an object" and "experiencing an object". In his 1910-1911 paper, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," Russell gives the following account of acquaintance, comparing it to the notion of presentation:

> I say that I am *acquainted* with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e. when I am directly aware[182] of the object itself. When I speak of the a cognitive relation here, I do not mean the sort of relation which constitutes judgment, but the sort which constitutes presentation. In fact, I think the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation. That is, to say that S has acquaintance with O is essentially the same thing as to say that O is presented to S. But the associations and natural extension of the word *acquaintance* are different from those of the word *presentation*....the word acquaintance is designed to emphasize, more than the word presentation, the relational character of the fact with which we are concerned.[183]

Russell stresses the relational character of acquaintance in "On the Nature of Acquaintance" where he identifies being acquainted with an object as experiencing it:

> ...experiencing must be a relation, in which one term is the object experienced, while the other term is that which experiences...Now since we have decided that experience is constituted by a relation, it will be

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[182]On awareness Russell has the following to say: "At any given moment there are certain things of which a man is 'aware', certain things that are 'before his mind'. Now although it is very difficult to define 'awareness', it is not at all difficult to say that I am aware of such and such things. If I am asked, I can reply that I am aware of this, and that, and the other...If I describe the objects I may of course describe them wrongly; hence I cannot with certainty describe with certainty communicate to another what are the things of which I am aware. But if I speak to myself, and denote them by what may be called 'proper names', rather than by descriptive words, I cannot be in error. So long as the names which I use really are names at the moment, i.e., are naming things to me, so long as the things must be objects of which I am aware, since otherwise the words would be meaningless sounds, not names of things. ("On the Nature of Acquaintance"(ONA)(1914) in *Logic and Knowledge*, R.C. Marsh, ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1956), p. 130.

[183] "KbA and KbD", pp. 202-203.

> better to a employ a less neutral word; we shall employ synonymously the two words 'acquaintance' and 'awareness', generally the former. Thus when A experiences an object O, we shall say that A is acquainted with O.[184]

Now although the object of awareness or of experience is an object that is directly before one's mind, Russell emphasizes that the object itself is not a mental object. In a passage in the *Problems of Philosophy* where he is responding to Berkeley's idealism, Russell says the following about the objects of acquaintance and the power of the mind to know things:

> The question of the distinction between act and object in our apprehending of things is vitally important, since our whole power of acquiring knowledge is bound up with it. The faculty of being acquainted with a thing other than itself is the main characteristic of a mind. Acquaintance with objects essentially consists in a relation between the mind and something other than the mind; it is this that constitutes the mind's power of knowing things.[185]

Two aspects of Russell's theory of acquaintance will be especially relevant for our discussion of Plato's theory of knowledge below. The first is the fact that acquaintance plays a foundational role in Russell's theory of knowledge — knowledge is based on being acquainted with an object—and the second is the fact that acquaintance is incorrigible or immune to error. In the passage above, Russell says that the power to acquire knowledge is bound up with capacity to be acquainted with objects. He goes on to claim that the state of being acquainted with an object is foundational for having any knowledge:

> All our knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon acquaintance as its foundation.[186]

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[184] "ONA", p. 162.
[185] PP. p. 42.
[186] PP. p. 48.

There are two ways in which we can know things — by acquaintance or by description. Unlike knowledge by acquaintance, knowledge by description requires knowledge of truths as its source. However, both knowledge of truths and knowledge by description are grounded in acquaintance. Russell explains that

> We have *descriptive* knowledge of a thing when we know that it is *the* object having some property or properties with which we are acquainted...All propositions intelligible to us, whether or not they primarily concern things only known to us by description, are composed wholly of constituents with which are acquainted, for a constituent with which we are not acquainted is wholly unintelligible to us.[187]

We can be acquainted with different kinds of things — sense-data, universals, but Russell is specific that it is acquaintance with universals that is the foundation of knowledge of truths:

> ...knowledge of truths...demands acquaintance with things...which are sometimes called 'abstract ideas', but which we shall call 'universals'.[188]

The second aspect of Russell's theory of acquaintance that will be particularly relevant for us is the claim that acquaintance is always without error. Deception is not possible regarding acquaintance. According to Russell:

> So far as things are concerned, we may know them or not know them, but there is no positive state of mind which can be described as erroneous knowledge of things, so long, at any rate, as we confine ourselves to knowledge by acquaintance. Whatever we are acquainted with must be something; we may draw wrong inferences from our acquaintance, but the acquaintance itself is cannot be deceptive.[189]

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[187] "KbA and KbD", p. 223. See also p, 211, and *Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 57-57.
[188] PP, p. 48.
[189] PP, p. 119.

We will consider below what the nature of the cognitive relationship between the mind and the object of acquaintance must be to make such incorrigibility possible.

Since many people are made uneasy by talk of a supra-sensible world, let us consider Russell's arguments for why universals must exist as supra-sensible entities. Often when people consider the nature of ideas, concepts or universals, they countenance them as mental entities. Russell, however, argues that universals as mental entities would lose their universality. He begins his argument by distinguishing between the act of apprehension or awareness, on the one hand, and the object which we apprehend or are aware of, on the other. The act of apprehending a thing is a mental act, but Russell thinks that we have a tendency to equivocate between the act of apprehension and the thing apprehended and that this tendency leads people to identify the object as mental as well.[190]

He gives an example of this with respect to the universal whiteness. If an individual is thinking of whiteness, then there is a sense in which whiteness is in her mind. It is in her mind insofar as the *act* of thinking of whiteness is in her mind. But, Russell contends, we can't locate the whiteness as an object of the thought in the mind as well, for then whiteness itself would be a thought, and as a thought it would be characterized by all the subjective, particular, time-indexed aspects of an individual's thought. It would lose the characteristics that are essential to a universal. Thoughts are particular, distinct entities. One

[190]He attributes such a mistake to Berkeley in his argument for idealism, PP, p.41-42.

person's act of thought is different from another person's act of thought, and even given the thoughts of the same individual, a person's act of thought at one time is necessarily different from the same person's thought at another time. Therefore, Russell concludes that if whiteness were a thought instead of the object of thought, no two different people could think of it, and the same person could not think of it twice.[191] Many different thoughts of whiteness share a common object, but this objects is distinct from the act of thought.[192] Concerning the ontological status of universals, Russell states that they are neither mental, nor material, and they are not in space or in time.[193]

Given such a description of universals, one is faced with the questions, what is the nature of the relationship of the mind to such objects and how does one bring such objects before the mind? How is it that we come to know universals? Like particulars, Russell believes that universals can be known by acquaintance, known by description, or known by either acquaintance or description. We will be concerned here with the process by which universals are brought before the mind and known by acquaintance. Russell gives two accounts of this process, neither of which is very extensive. In "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" Russell says:

> Not only are we aware of [acquainted with] particular yellows, but if we have seen a sufficient number of yellows and have sufficient intelligence, we are aware of the universal *yellow*...(p. 205)

In *Problems of Philosophy* he gives a slightly more detailed account:

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[191]PP, p. 99.
[192]PP, p. 99.
[193]PP., p. 98. See "On the Nature of Acquaintance" for a discussion of the relation between a subject and object when the object is in the past or is not in the time series, p. 171.

> It is obvious, to begin with, that we are acquainted with such universals as white, red, black, sweet, sour, loud, hard, etc., i.e. with qualities which are exemplified in sense data. When we see a white patch, we are acquainted, in the first instance, with the particular patch [a sense datum]; but seeing many white patches, we easily learn to abstract the whiteness which they all have in common, and in learning to do this we are learning to be acquainted with whiteness. A similar process will make us acquainted with any other universal of the same sort. Universals of this sort are called 'sensible qualities'. They can be apprehended with less effort of abstraction than any others, and they seem less removed from particulars than other universals are. (p. 101)

Both passages suggest that repeated experience of particular sense-data is a necessary condition for becoming acquainted with a universal.[194] They also each suggest that some cognitive process is involved. In the first passage Russell says that sufficient intelligence is required. In the second passage he is more specific, identifying the cognitive process as abstraction and saying that the ability to abstract must be learned, but he does not say anything else by way of spelling out the mechanics of the process. How is the universal, a non-physical, non-mental entity, brought before the mind? Russell leaves us with the question, If the universal is not part of one's sense-data and it is not in the mind, how is it brought before the mind? Below I will consider Plato's account of how a universal is brought before the mind in the relationship of acquaintance and why such a relationship is sufficient for knowledge given the nature of Platonic forms.

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[194]Note the similarity of the account with Aristotle's account in *Posterior Analytics*, II 19 discussed above. Aristotle, of course, does not posit entities such as sense data.

WHY PLATO NEEDS AN ACQUAINTANCE ACCOUNT OF KNOWLEDGE

Several commentators have argued that Plato's theory of knowledge requires an acquaintance account of knowledge. I will briefly review those positions and then develop my own account of Plato's acquaintance view. Cherniss, Ryle and Ross each portray Plato as a foundationalist concerning knowledge. Cherniss believes that direct and antecedent knowledge of universals is needed to make possible the cognitive processes, sensation and opinion, which deal with phenomena. Ryle thinks that for Plato knowledge by acquaintance is required to make propositional knowledge possible, and according to Ross, given Plato's account of recollection stimulated by sensory objects, Plato needs some mode of knowledge by acquaintance distinct from the knowledge gained through the senses for recollection to be possible.[195]

H.F. Cherniss

According to Cherniss, Plato thinks that knowledge cannot be synthesized out of or derived from mental processes such as sensation or opinion because these processes require antecedent knowledge in order to be possible.[196] Opinion is distinct from knowledge because it involves the possibility of error, and error can only be explained as a mistaken reference to something known.[197] Likewise, "knowledge cannot be sensation or derived

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[195]See also Lutoslawski, Cornford, Bluck, and Runcimann for accounts of knowledge by acquaintance in Plato.

[196]"The Philosophical Economy of Plato's Theory of Ideas" *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. lvii., 1936 Reprinted in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, R.E. Allen, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul and New York: The Humanities Press, 1965), p. 8.

[197]See *Theaetetus* 200b-d for an expression of this view.

from sensation because sensation itself implies a central faculty to which all individual perceptions are referred and which passes judgment on them all."[198]

Cherniss sums up his view as follows:

> Knowledge as a special faculty dealing *directly* with its own objects must be assumed in order not only to explain the fact of cognition but also to make possible opinion and sensation as they are given by experience. The special faculty of knowledge, however, is characterized by direct contact[199] of subject and object; since phenomena cannot enter into such a relationship with the subject, mediating organs being required in their case, it is necessary that the objects of knowledge be real entities existing apart from the phenomenal world and that the mind have been affected by them before the mental processes dealing with the phenomena occur.[200]

Cherniss articulates very well the point that some sort of antecedent knowledge is required, not only for other knowledge to be possible, but even for sensation and opinion about sensible objects to be possible.

G. Ryle

Gilbert Ryle presents an account on which knowledge by acquaintance of the forms is a necessary condition for propositional knowledge to be possible. Ryle himself does not take a stand on whether the forms are simples. But he believes that if one does take the forms to be simples, then one should not take the implication of the Dream Theory of the *Theaetetus* to be that the forms are unknowable. Rather, he thinks that although the forms may not be knowable propositionally, this does not rule out the possibility of their being known by acquaintance, and in fact such knowledge by acquaintance of

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[198]Cherniss, p. 6. See *Tht.* 184b5-186e10.

[199]Earlier Cherniss points out that in the *Meno* when Socrates talks about the initial acquisition of knowledge (81c6) he uses a form of the verb to see, which suggests direct contact on a visual analogy, p. 4.

[200]Cherniss, p. 8.

foundational elements is required in order for there to be propositional knowledge. In response to Cornford, who appears to both approve of the criticism of the Dream Theory and hold that the forms are simples, Ryle makes the following suggestion:

> He [Cornford] should have accepted the argument of the *Theaetetus* that what I know (*savoir*)...is something statable and not namable; and therefore that Forms are not the sort of thing that we can know (*savoir*)...But he should have argued, with Russell, that knowledge (*savoir*) *rests on* knowledge (*connaître*), and that among the things I can know (*connaître*) are Forms. So forms would at least be part of the alphabet of knowledge (*savoir*), though never its syllables...He could have said that we must *connaître* or *edenai* Forms if we are to *epistasthai*[201] anything at all or even believe or suppose anything at all, and this would have been very consoling as well as having the backing of Russell.[202]

Ryle, himself, does not put much stock in the role of acquaintance in such an account, because he thinks that while it makes sense to talk of being acquainted with things such as people and letters of the alphabet, it "rings falsely" to say we do or do not become acquainted with similarity or circularity.[203] I will argue, however, that for Plato the acquaintance we have with universals is a different kind of acquaintance than that which we have with people or chairs. It is a direct cognitive acquaintance unmediated by perception of physical objects. Indeed, this is the kind of acquaintance that Russell is concerned with, for according to Russell, we are not acquainted with tables and chairs but with sense data and universals.

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[201] This is the Greek word for scientific knowledge.
[202] "Logical Atomism in Plato's *Theaetetus*, p. 45.
[203] "Logical Atomism...", p. 45.

W.D. Ross

Ross thinks that Plato needs knowledge by acquaintance in order to make possible a process that is central to Plato's epistemology, *i.e.*, recollection. In order to recollect knowledge, one must already have that knowledge. One is then faced with questions about the origins of this prior knowledge. When discussing recollection that is stimulated by sensation, Ross makes the point that in order for the notion of prior knowledge to have any explanatory value, it must have been acquired through different mechanisms than that of sensation. According to Ross,

> If the coming to know Ideas on the suggestion of sensible things is not intelligible in itself but presupposes a prior knowledge of Ideas, a previous knowing of Ideas on the suggestion of sensible things would be no more intelligible than such an occurrence now. Thus, if recollection is to explain what it is introduced to explain, the previous knowledge of the Ideas must have been a knowledge of them *not* on the suggestion of things of sense, but direct and immediate.[204]

WHY ACQUAINTANCE IS SUFFICIENT FOR PLATO'S KNOWLEDGE

In the following section I will present my own arguments in support of the view that in the middle period Plato gives an account of knowledge by acquaintance, that is, direct non-propositional knowledge of objects. I will argue that Plato holds an acquaintance view for three reasons. The first concerns foundationalism, the second, "knowledge" of simples, and the third, incorrigible "knowledge." I will also respond to the two primary criticisms of the position that Plato has an acquaintance view, *i.e.*, that forms or abstract concepts are the wrong kind of thing to be objects of knowledge and that

[204]W.D. Ross. 1951. *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 25.

acquaintance isn't the kind of relation that could provide knowledge. The criticisms assume the contemporary conception of knowledge as justified true belief, but I will show that, according to Plato, a cognitive relation like a acquaintance is necessary for such knowledge to be possible.[205]

Foundationalism

The first reason that Plato needs an acquaintance account is to allow for knowledge of foundational concepts.[206] Any theory of knowledge has to address the regress problem discussed above. The two most viable solutions are a foundationalist account and a coherentist account (assuming that we are not willing to accept a regress that is infinite). Some, such as Gosling and Fine, argue that Plato runs the coherentist line. We saw some of the problems with their positions above, but in addition, notice that the focus and emphases of the Platonic dialogues are on coming to understand basic concepts, concepts which might serve as the object of foundational knowledge in a foundationalist theory. In the early dialogues, Socrates is seeking answers to the "What is X?" questions, where X is a basic concept such as courage, piety , or virtue. The early dialogues for the most part end in *aporia*, but in the middle period dialogues we find a discussion of specific processes and stages that bring one to

[205]I may make some distinction early in the dissertation saying that it is wrong to even call knowledge by acquaintance knowledge given the contemporary conception of knowledge, but that on Plato's view something like K by A is necessary for knowledge to be possible. Perhaps we should identify Kby A as a cognitive state which is a knowledge precursor.

[206]That Plato is aware that such knowledge is foundational for knowing propositions is clear in the *Meno*. When Socrates defines a shape for Meno as "that which alone of existing things always follows color." Meno replies, "Well then, if someone were to say that he did not know what color is, but that he had the same difficulty as he had about shape, what do you think your answer would be?" And Socrates says, "...the answer must not only be true, but in terms admittedly known to the questioner..." (75c-d).

true knowledge of such entities as beauty and justice.[207] These include abstraction to arrive at a conception of beauty in the *Symposium*, and dialectic to understand the good in the *Republic*.

One might respond that knowing the answer to the "what is X?" question will involve knowing a certain proposition or propositions. For instance, one might need to know that X is Y or for complete knowledge of X or one might need to know a set of exhaustive conjunctions of identity statements such as { X is R, & X is S, & X is T...}, but this brings us back to the problem of regress. To understand these statements we first need to understand R and S and T, etc. One could then give a coherentist response here and say that the concepts shed light on one another, but while methods such as dialectic involve plumbing connections between concepts, what Plato characterizes as epoptic moments of complete knowledge involve grasping the forms in and of themselves, as I showed in my earlier discussion of how Plato characterizes the moment of coming to knowledge, and as I will discuss below.

Simples

The second reason Plato requires an acquaintance account is that he needs to explain how we can have knowledge of simples. The arguments in favor of this position are connected to the responses to the criticism of the acquaintance view that the forms as simples are the wrong kind of thing to be objects of knowledge. We saw above that several commentators deny that

[207]We already operate with loose and popular conceptions of these ideas, but we do not have complete knowledge of them.

forms are simples. Cross claims that a form is not a logical subject that can be known by acquaintance, rather, it is "the logical predicate in a logos". It is "what is said of something, not something about which something else is said.'[208] Gosling and Fine also give accounts of the forms on which they are internally complex. Their accounts are very similar to one another. They both describe forms in terms of structure. Fine characterizes the form of the good, for instance, as the teleological structure of the world. And for Gosling the "visions" Plato describes in the middle period are moments of understanding when one suddenly sees how a structure hangs together. For example, the vision of how everything fits together in a unified system is the vision of the form of the good. Knowledge of the other forms likewise consists in knowledge of explanation rather than knowledge of objects.[209] Of the commentators surveyed earlier Sorabji was the only one who did not insist that the forms themselves are complex. He says that to know a form it is not necessary that the form itself is a proposition, but he does require that to have knowledge of a form will be for us to have knowledge of a proposition. For instance to know the form of the good is "to know the proposition that goodness is so-and-so."[210]

I'll reiterate my position concerning Sorabji's view first, and then go on to address those who claim that the forms themselves are complex. As I have been emphasizing, any claim that to know a form is to know a proposition runs

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[208]"Logos and Forms in Plato", pp. 27-28.
[209]*Plato* (pp. 115, 117, 123).
[210]*Time Creation and the Continuum*, p. 143, *Language and Logos*, p. 300.

into the regress problem. To know what it means for goodness to be beautiful, I have to know what beauty is. If it is the case that beauty is truth, then to understand this, I have to know what truth is. This response will also apply to those accounts on which to know a form is to know an explanation if the explanations are of a kind where one thing is predicated of another. Fine and Gosling theoretically could provide an answer to the regress by supplying a coherence account of how we know individual concepts, but Sorabji nowhere suggests that he would be sympathetic with a coherentist interpretation of Plato.

Concerning those who want to make the forms internally complex, evidence in the *Symposium* and *Phaedo* indicates that Plato does not conceive of the forms as structures or explanations but as things which are internally simple.[211] The most explicit evidence for this is in the *Phaedo* at 78b-d. In this passage Socrates is responding to Cebes claim that the soul may be dispersed at death. Socrates argues that only composite objects can undergo dispersal. To make the point that the soul is not composite Socrates likens it to the forms, claiming that they too are incomposite:

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[211]Henry Teloh (1976. "The Isolation and Collection of the forms in Plato's Dialogues." *Apeiron*, vol. X. no. 1, pp. 20-33. and *The Development of Plato's Metaphysics*.(University Park and London:Penn State University Press, 1981)pp. 6-9, 98-146.) argues that Plato presents two incompatible models of the forms in the middle period. On the one hand we have the visual model where the forms are internally complex and grasped by means of intellectual vision. On the other hand we have what Teloh calls the discursive model. On this model a condition of knowledge of the forms is the ability to give an account. Teloh believes that this model assumes that the forms are composite and interconnected and that the correct connection of names in logoi mirror the connection of the forms (DPM p. 139) so that through examining logoi, a philosopher can come to know the forms. I will argue that the forms are internally simple for Plato throughout the middle period, but that this does not preclude the possibility that they are externally complex, that is interconnected to one another.

> And isn't it most probable that the incomposite things are those that are always constant and unchanging, while the composite ones are those that are different at different times and never constant? I agree. Then let us revert to those objects we spoke of earlier. What of that reality of whose existence we give an account when we question and answer each other? Is that always unchanging and constant, or is it different at different times? Can the equal itself, the beautiful itself, the being itself whatever it may be, ever admit of any sort of change? Or does each of these real beings, uniform and independent[212] remain unchanging and constant, never admitting any sort of alteration whatever? (78c-d)

While Socrates doesn't say all constant and unchanging things are incomposite and only constant and unchanging things are incomposite, given the above context, I think we can assume he intends the biconditional. Therefore since the forms are constant and unchanging, we can conclude that they are incomposite. In the description of the form of beauty at *Symposium* 211a-b we find a similar description of the form as constant, unchanging, and uniform or single in nature:

> First, it ever is and neither comes to be nor perishes, nor has it growth nor diminution but it exists in itself by itself single in nature (*monoeido*) forever...[213]

Socrates uses the term *monoeido* in both the *Phaedo* and *Symposium* passages, and while it does not follow that if something is uniform or single in nature that it is incomposite, this term as well as several other characteristics Plato ascribes to the forms here[214] seem to have been borrowed from

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[212]This is Hackforth's translation. Grube translates the passage : "Or does each of them that really is, being simple by itself, remain the same and never in any way tolerate any change whatever?"

[213]This is primarily R.E. Allen's translation. Woodruff and Nehamas translate the last line "but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form."

[214]See 80b for a further characterization of the forms in Parmenidean terms.

Parmenides' characterization of being in fragment 8.[215] Parmenides describes being using the following terminology: *changeless*, (B8; 26,38), *not divided* (B8, 22), continuous (B8; 6, 25), of one kind (B8, 4). The Parmenidean characteristics of being that Plato ascribes to the forms seem to indicate that like Parmenides' being the forms too were internally simple. Of course, there are many dissimilarities between Plato's account of the forms and Parmenides account of being. Parmenides' Being was necessarily unitary because Parmenides thought that the existence of anything in addition to the well rounded sphere of Being would make possible the existence of negative predicates and therefore not being. For Plato, however, there is a multiplicity of forms even though each form itself is simple. It is as if each form itself is a sphere of being.[216] Such a description of the forms is not compatible with the account of the forms as teleological structures or explanations as Fine and Gosling wish to understand them.

If the forms are simple we are faced with the problem of how we can have knowledge of such things. Earlier we saw passages from Cross which brought to light the difficulties of this kind of knowledge. Acquaintance with simple objects in the form of direct apprehension by the mind would provide us with a viable account of it. The *Phaedo* passages we were just considering are compatible with such a description. The similarity in nature between the soul

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[215]See F. Solmsen (1971. "Parmenides and the Description of Perfect Beauty in Plato's *Symposium*", *American Journal of Philology*, vol. XCII, no. 1) for a further discussion of these parallels.

[216]Many of Parmenides followers, such as Empedocles and Anaxagoras, who did not share his monistic conception of being, also adopted several of Parmenides' characterizations of being (See Solomsen, p. 63).

(that with which the mind is identified) and the forms make the mind well suited to apprehend the forms given the common Greek belief that like knows like. And in these passages Socrates describes the forms as "accessible to thought" (80b) and as that which "cannot be apprehended except by the mind's reasoning" (79a). None of this explains how the mind can directly apprehend the forms in an unmediated manner, but I will give an account below of what it is for the forms to be directly apprehended according to Plato, and also of what preparation is required for such apprehension to be possible.

Incorrigibility

The third argument I will give in support of the position that Plato held an acquaintance view concerns his claim at *Phaedo* 74c that our understanding of universals is incorrigible ("The equal themselves never appear to you unequal nor equality inequality")[217]. Given the claim that true knowledge of universals is certain, we can ask two questions. First, what must the nature of universals be for such knowledge of them to be possible? And second, what must the nature of the cognitive relation an individual bears to the universals be in order to facilitate certain knowledge? In answering these questions I will begin to address some of the issues that are relevant to the topics of the nature of the acquaintance relation and how universals are brought before the mind. Concerning the nature of universals, Plato tells us that they are objective and mind independent. They are not relative to a circumstance or an observer.

[217]This claim of indubitable knowledge would tie in well with the position that Plato is a foundationalist. On foundational accounts one's knowledge of the foundational elements is generally indubitable in order to ensure the veracity of the knowledge built upon it.

They are independent both of context and any subjective perspective from which an observer might consider them. Plato gives us such a characterization of the form of beauty in the *Symposium* at 210e-211a. Beauty is

1) Not beautiful in one way and ugly in another
2) Nor is it beautiful at one time, but not in another
3) Nor is it beautiful in relation to one thing, but ugly in relation to another
4) Nor is it beautiful here, but ugly there
5) Nor is it beautiful to some but ugly to others[218]

Given such a characterization of universals, we can ask, "how can these entities be brought before the mind such that they remain mind-independent?" A necessary condition is that no subjective organization or categorization of the universal is employed. This condition is also necessary to ensure certainty. When a concept is identified according to one's own scheme of organization, it becomes viewed relative to one's own conceptual framework. Such categorization also opens one up to error since one could place a concept in a category to which it is not appropriate.

Another requirement that is necessary to ensure that one's knowledge of universals be incorrigible is that no cognitive processes which can be subject to error be employed in bringing them before the mind. These would include the processes of judgment and inference.[219] In making both judgments and inferences one can employ false beliefs, and this can compromise the certainty

[218]These claims are discussed by N. White, "Plato's Metaphysical Epistemology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, R. Kraut, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 290-291.
[219]I will argue below that such processes can play an important role in preparing one to become acquainted with a universal, but the acquaintance itself won't involve these processes.

of the knowledge one arrives at through these means. I argue that for Plato to know a universal by acquaintance is to grasp it in a way that does not involve placing the universal in pre-conceived categories. This must be the case first because different people can categorize things differently, and second because if Plato is a foundationalist, he needs to be able to account for knowledge of foundational concepts, and there will not be any prior concepts in which to organize these.

This brings us to a response to the second main criticism often raised against the possibility of knowledge by acquaintance. Critics object that the relationship of direct acquaintance is not adequate to provide an individual with what is needed in order to gain knowledge. They say knowing a thing requires more than simply seeing it or being in the presence of it. One must be able to *identify* or *recognize* it. Gosling comments that while acquaintance might be a necessary condition at some level for knowledge, it is not a sufficient condition. He emphasizes that if knowing Beauty or Justice is viewing beauty or justice with intellectual vision as Plato suggests, "then the subject must be able to recognize the object as Beauty or Justice if knowledge is to do the work required."[220] Such recognition or identification would be manifest in the formulation of a proposition, for instance, "I see what beauty is" or "I know that it is justice" Fine makes a similar point identifying knowledge by acquaintance with *connaître* knowledge:

> *connaître*-knowledge is always knowledge under a description, or acquaintance with something *as* being something. To count as knowing

[220]Gosling, p. 122.

> something, I must not merely have seen it; I must be able to identify it and recognize it, say various things about it. *Connaître*-knowledge is linked to, not divorced from, propositional knowledge.[221]

I want to make two responses to this criticism. The first is connected to the point above concerning the objective nature of the forms and the requirement that one bring them before the mind in a way that does not involve subjective perspectives. A criterion like Fine's that knowledge is always knowledge under a description requires subjective categorization. Things can be identified and organized in different ways by individuals. The same so-and-so can be identified as a different such-and-such. It's clear, however, that Plato will not be sympathetic with any Goodman-type world making. According to Plato reality can be carved at its joints into natural kinds.[222] The question is, how can we know the essence of these kinds? Fine's claim is that all knowledge is of propositions and these propositions identify a thing by placing it in a specific category. The problem is that these propositions each only pick out a particular aspect of a thing. "Beauty is truth" means something very different from "Beauty is a joy forever," and neither proposition captures the essence of beauty. Again, we have the possibility of knowing what beauty is through knowledge of a conjunction of propositions. However, Fine, et. al. seem to think that knowledge is knowledge of something under *a* description or as *something*.[223] There is also the possibility that we could identify forms in

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[221]"Knowledge and Logos...", p. 377.

[222]See *Phaedrus* 256e.

[223] We may need to make a distinction here concerning what kind of knowledge we are discussing. Knowledge of a universal will require complete knowledge of the universal. Knowledge of propositions is adequate to provide knowledge of particular aspects of things, but

terms of some all inclusive meta-concepts that capture their essence, but the universals themselves are the basic concept we operate with and in terms of which we identify and categorize things, and positing such meta-concepts would only serve to lead to a regress once we tried to know these meta-concepts.

The experience of being acquainted with something is subjective in several senses, but the object in the case of being acquainted with a form is objective. Unlike the experience of secondary properties, which is influenced by the physical conditions of the subject and his environment, forms are objective ideas, and everyone who experiences them will have the same experience. One's state will determine how, when, and if she will experience them, but everyone who does experience them will have the same experience and the nature of the experience cannot be on of subjective categorization.

Forms are objective ideas or concepts, but they are not ideas one forms oneself *based* on one's experience, rather they are ideas that have an independent status and with which one tries to come into contact. While subjective associations and connections may play a role in helping one recall such an idea and bring one's mind before it, the experience will be purely of that form, and the experience itself will be uninfluenced by any subjective associations.

I think the problem of subjective descriptions and categorizations will become clearer if we consider some observations White makes concerning the

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Fine seems to want to give a complete account of knowledge of universals in terms of propositions.

Phaedo passage where Socrates claims that our knowledge is incorrigible. In this passage Socrates says that while equal sticks and stones, being the same, sometimes appear equal to one person and not another, the equals themselves never appear to you unequal nor equality inequality. The point is that physical phenomena are subject to perspectivalism. They can be perceived from different perspectives so that they appear to be different than they are. Universals, on the other hand, cannot appear other than they are. White observes that someone could object to the claim that Socrates makes about universals by saying that how something appears to a person, even if that thing is a concept or universal, is a feature of the *way* in which it is thought about. Specifically, it is a feature of "the terms by which it is designated and brought, so to speak, into one's thinking."[224] Consider the following example. If the phrase, "Plato's second-least favorite political concept" refers to equality, it is possible that one could mistakenly use the phrase to identify inequality, thus what is in fact equality (Plato's second least favorite political concept) would appear to the confused individual as inequality.[225]

White's conclusion, in response to the objection, is that for Plato not just any way of referring to a thing counts as relevant. On White's interpretation, the scenario constructed above concerning Plato's least favorite concept would not count as "appearing" to be inequality. I think White's point is on target. Plato requires that we have a unique way of apprehending universals, and that way is through direct acquaintance with them. We are

[224] "Plato's Metaphysical Epistemology," p. 281.
[225] White, p. 281.

directly acquainted with an object when we are aware of the object itself rather than propositions which predicate things about it. And because one's direct knowledge of a universal is not a matter of predicating properties of the universal which pick out certain aspects of it, the universal is not open to being thought about in different ways.

It might be useful here to bring in the contemporary distinction between transparent and opaque contexts. Transparent contexts are those in which terms serve a purely referential function. We can substitute one term for another as long as they both refer to the same object. For example, "Cicero was a Roman senator" is true if we replace *Cicero* with *Tully*. In opaque contexts, terms don't have a purely referential function but have a very specific sense or meaning. In these contexts one term cannot be substituted for another, even if they both refer to the same object. For example given the sentence, "Col. Mustard is looking for the murderer." we cannot substitute "the man who kills with a lead pipe" for "the murderer," even if they both refer to the same man. Col. Mustard may not know that the murderer used a lead pipe. Thus he is not looking for someone who fits that description. Terms in referential contexts are not intersubstitutional because they have specific connotations. Normally, knowledge and belief contexts are opaque. For instance, if a=b and P knows Fa, it does not follow that P knows Fb. First of all, P may not know that a=b, and even if he does, we do not always believe the logical consequences of our beliefs or know the logical consequences of pieces of knowledge of which we are aware. Direct acquaintance, on the other hand, is defined such that when an

individual is directly acquainted with an object, he will have transparent access to it.

My second response to those who criticize acquaintance on the grounds that acquaintance is not the kind of relationship that could provide one with knowledge is that they seem to be conceiving of acquaintance on the model of acquaintance with a physical object rather than considering what it would be to be acquainted with an abstract concept. Russell used *acquaintance* in a specialized sense, and I'm using it in a specialized sense when I ascribe it to Plato. Although this kind of acquaintance is similar in many ways to being acquainted with a physical thing, such as a person or a place, it is also very different. Critics object that knowing a thing requires more than seeing it or being in its presence. But even though Plato may use the metaphor of intellectual seeing, it is a cognitive, not a perceptual, process. Concepts have no physical characteristics that could be perceived, and the mind had no sense organs with which it could perceive them if they did. What Plato calls intellectual seeing and I am calling acquaintance is more like apprehending, grasping or understanding than seeing. It requires cognitive activity on the part of the intellect and results in cognitive content that is appropriate to knowing.

Knowing x and Knowing What x Is

In order to develop further points about both the cognitive activity involved in acquaintance and the transparent nature of acquaintance, it will be helpful to bring in some considerations raised by John McDowell about the role

of *knowing what* in Plato's account of knowledge.[226] Like Gosling and Fine, McDowell argues that being acquainted with X is not sufficient for knowing X. But McDowell takes a much more responsible position than Gosling and Fine. He recognizes that it is possible for a view to be wrong and yet for it to be a view held by Plato. McDowell grants that there is a knowledge by acquaintance account in Plato's dialogues,[227] but he does not think knowledge by acquaintance can do the work that Plato wants it to do. Plato believes that when you have knowledge by acquaintance, you have knowledge of *what that object of acquaintance is*. But, according to McDowell, to know X, to be acquainted with X, is not to know *what X is*. To know *what X is* is to have propositional knowledge about X. I will argue against McDowell that knowledge by acquaintance is sufficient for Plato's purposes.

Three other commentators, Jakko Hintikka, Nicholas Smith, and Francisco Gonzalez, agree with McDowell that *knowing what* is a component of Plato's conception of knowledge, but they have varying views on whether this knowledge is propositional or non-propositional and on whether or not acquaintance is also a component of Plato's conception of knowledge. I will briefly give an account of Hintikka's and Smith's views. I will fill out

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[226] "Identity Mistakes: Plato and the Logical Atomists", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, N.S. vol. 70, March, 1970, pp. 181-195.

[227] McDowell has identified knowledge by acquaintance even in the late period dialogue, *Theaetetus*. At 147b when discussing what knowledge is Socrates says "...do you suppose anyone has understanding of the name of a something, if he doesn't know what that thing is? Certainly not. So someone who doesn't *know knowledge* doesn't understand knowledge of shoes?" McDowell points out that the idiom "know knowledge" would incline Plato to "understand knowing what, say, knowledge is as a matter of acquaintance with an object" and that "Such a view is characteristic of the Theory of Forms..." (*Theaetetus*, translated with notes by J. McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 115).

Gonzalez's account in more detail since I believe he is most on the mark concerning the role *knowing what* plays in Plato's theory, but I will also point out some of the shortcomings of Gonzalez's account.

McDowell points out that Plato explicitly equates *knowing what x is* with *knowing x* in the sense of being acquainted with x. Consider again the passage from the *Theaetetus*:

> Or do you suppose anyone has an understanding of the name of something, if he doesn't know *what that thing is* (*ti estin*)? Certainly not. So someone who doesn't *know knowledge* doesn't understand knowledge of shoes? *Theaetetus* (147b2ff)

Here Plato equates knowing a thing with knowing what that thing is, and later in that same dialogue Plato again identifies knowledge of the object of inquiry with knowledge of what that thing is,

> You seem not to be bearing in mind that our whole discussion, from the beginning, has been a search after knowledge , on the assumption that we don't know *what it is* (196d8-10).

McDowell attributes Plato's tendency to slide so readily between *know X* and *know what X is* to the prevalence of an idiom in the Greek language. This is the idiom "know X what it is." The idiom is equivalent in meaning to the phrase "know what X is", but because the structure of the idiom is such that what goes in place of the X is the direct object of the verb, it is easy to slip to the very different formulation "know X."[228]

McDowell believes that Russell continues to propagate this error in his works. Remember we said that knowledge by acquaintance is foundational for

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[228] J. McDowell. "Identity Mistakes: Plato and the Logical Atomists", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* , N.S. vol. 70, March, 1970, p. 190.

Russell, because he thinks that we can't understand a proposition without first being acquainted with the elements of the proposition.[229] This is the case not only with understanding propositions but also with making judgments and suppositions. In defending this point, Russell makes the following identification between knowing or being acquainted with a thing and knowing *what that thing is*,

> It scarcely seems possible to believe that we can make a judgment or entertain a supposition without knowing *what it is* that we are judging or supposing about.[230]

and again a bit later,

> Whenever a relation of supposing or judging occurs, the terms to which the supposing or judging mind is related by the relation of supposing or judging must be terms with which the mind in question is acquainted. This is merely to say that we cannot make a judgment or supposition without knowing *what it is* that we are making our judgment or supposition about.[231]

The reason that McDowell thinks that both Plato and Russell are wrong to equate *knowing X* and *knowing what X is* is that he believes *knowing what X is* is always propositional knowledge (*savoir*, knowledge) while knowing X consists in *connaître* knowledge. In order to understand his point more fully consider a version of an example McDowell himself gives. Imagine the following conversation,

> Adolphus: (with face twisted in disgust) "What is that smell?"
>
> Barbara: "I know what you are smelling. What you are smelling is the dead cat under the floor boards."

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[229] See above.
[230] "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description"("KbA and KbD"), p. 212.
[231] "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," p. 213.

When Barbara says, "I know what you are smelling," she is not indicating that she now is or has ever been acquainted with the dead cat under the floor boards. Rather, she is indicating that she has knowledge of and bears some sort of cognitive relation to the proposition, "What you are smelling is the dead cat under the floor boards."[232] In order to know or be aware of this proposition one does not have to know the cat directly. This knowledge can be arrived at through inference. For instance, if Barbara knows that there is a dead cat under the floor boards (imagine that this information was relayed to her by a reliable source), and she has the beliefs a) that dead cats give off a malodorous scent as they decay, and b) that there is currently a malodorous scent in the room, she can infer that what Adolphus is smelling is the dead cat under the floor boards.

Even if Barbara had been unfortunate enough to have come into contact with the dead cat at issue, knowing what Adolphus is smelling is a matter of knowing the proposition, "what you are smelling is the dead cat under the floorboards," not simply of knowing the cat itself. We can imagine a scenario where Barbara is acquainted with the cat but does not know the proposition. Consider a case where Barbara is born without a sense of smell and where she

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[232] McDowell emphasizes that in "I know what you are smelling" "what you are smelling" is not a referring expression that picks out an object such that "I know what you are smelling" is equivalent to "I know X" where X is a possible or actual object of acquaintance. Rather, "what you are smelling" is an interrogative nominalization. ("Identity Mistakes...", p. 189.) McDowell borrows this idea of an interrogative nominalization from J.L. Austin, "Other Minds" (1946) (in *Philosophical Papers*, J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)pp. 64-65). Austin develops the notion in response to John Wisdom's use of direct objects after the word *know* in expressions such as "know the feelings of another."

has at some point taken at face value someone's sarcastic remark that dead cats smell like roses, such that this had become one of her beliefs (an unlikely but imaginable possibility). Then Barbara could have seen the dead cat under the floor boards but failed to make the inference that Adolphus is doubled over in disgust because he is smelling this erstwhile cat.[233]

McDowell criticizes Plato for identifying *knowing X* with *knowing what X is* on the grounds that *knowing what X is* requires propositional knowledge, and acquaintance is not the kind of relation that can provide propositional knowledge. I will argue that this distinction is not relevant to the kinds of objects with which Plato and Russell are concerned. Forms and universals are essences, and essences are such that one can know what they are simply by being acquainted with them. In what follows I will show that McDowell fails to take into account the specific nature of the object of knowledge with which Plato is concerned, *i.e.*, the forms, and, I will illustrate why given the nature of the forms, the acquaintance relation is sufficient for knowing *what a form is*.

As I said, McDowell's criticism is similar in many ways to the criticism made by Gosling and Fine above. According to Gosling and Fine, being acquainted with an object, X, is not sufficient for knowing X. One must perform additional cognitive steps through which one identifies the object, *i.e.*, says *what it is*. This recognition or identification will take the form of an identifying proposition with the structure X is Y. As was the case with Gosling

[233] However, in this second scenario we can ask, is Barbara really fully acquainted with the dead cat, since she is missing the sense organ by which to register an identifying characteristic, *i.e.*, the smell?

and Fine, I think McDowell's mistake is to consider the nature of the acquaintance relation on analogy with an acquaintance relation to a physical object. When one is acquainted with a physical object, one can recognize it or identify it based on its properties. For instance, if one perceives that X is white, X is furry, X is four legged, X has whiskers, and X makes a meowing sound, and one possesses the concept of a cat., then one can conclude that X is a cat, If one does not have the concept related to that with which one is acquainted, then one cannot make the identification. If one perceives that X is white, X is three lobed, X is an arthropod, and X is found on the ocean floor, but one does not have the concept of a trilobite, then one could not identify an object as a trilobite fossil. Plato in the middle period dialogues, however, is not concerned with our knowledge of physical objects or states of affairs. He has a more fundamental interest. Before I can understand a proposition of the form X is Y, I must know the idea Y which is being predicated of X. Before I can understand that X is white, I must know what *white* is. And *this* is the knowledge with which Plato is concerned, knowledge of essential properties or universal ideas such as white, beauty, four, justice, and equality. To say that this knowledge is knowledge of a proposition would be a category mistake: it is knowledge of these things that make propositional knowledge possible.

Again, as I pointed out when discussing Gosling above, one cannot come to know what X is, when the X in question is a form, in the same way that one knows a physical object, *i.e.* by identifying it in terms of its properties. This is because precisely what is at issue is knowledge of those properties.

Plato believes that we do not recognize properties in terms of further properties which they instantiate. Unlike physical objects, we do not identify forms by interpreting information about them that has come in through the senses.

I should clarify two things at this point. First, the knowledge of the forms that Plato discusses is a special kind of knowledge. It is knowledge of a property in and of itself. I will discuss below what kind of capacities this knowledge imparts upon an individual. But that is not to say that before we achieve this knowledge we do not already have a loose and popular sense of these ideas. I do not have to wait until I have an *epoptic* vision of the form of beauty before I have some notion of beauty, but this notion will not be complete, and it will not be sufficient to allow me to identify all instances of beauty or prevent me from being wrong in my identification of certain things as beautiful. Second, both sensation and this loose and popular conception of an idea can be instrumental in coming to know a form itself. As we saw in the description of the ascent to Beauty in the *Symposium*, it is by identifying instances of beauty (where initially those instances are sensory instances), and by using our loose and popular conception of beauty, that we are able to abstract out[234] what is essential to beauty itself. It is after we go through the preparatory process of abstraction that the idea of beauty itself is directly before our minds, *i.e.*, we are aware of it, we are acquainted with it.

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[234]When I use the verb *to abstract* or the noun *abstraction*, I don't mean it in the specialized sense used by empiricists to indicate the movement from the sensation of physical instances to the formation of a general concepts. I mean more generally any movement from more concrete to more abstract or conceptual instances. This would include abstraction which involved the recollection of ideas.

Plato's forms and Russell's sense data[235] and universals are not physical things; therefore, we do not know them in the way that we know physical things. According to Plato and Russell, we know forms and universals when they are directly before our minds in an unmediated manner, when we are acquainted with them. And forms and universals as essences have a nature such that we can know *what they are* by being acquainted with them. If I am physically acquainted with a letter of the Arabic alphabet, I may not be able to tell you what it is, but for Plato if you are acquainted with whiteness or beauty, you will know *what whiteness is* or *what beauty is*.

To make it clear why this is so, let's go back to McDowell's dead cat example and the distinction between *knowing X* and *knowing what X is*. I want to argue that there is a relevant sense in which being acquainted with a form for Plato or being aware of a universal for Russell is more like knowing a proposition such as "what you are smelling is the dead cat under the floor boards" than knowing a physical object such as the dead cat. A proposition is not a physical thing. It may represent physical things or states of affairs and the relations among them, but the proposition itself is not a physical thing. Certain situations can cause these propositions to come before one's mind, can cause one to become aware of them. For instance consider the case of Barbara above. She had various bits of information: Adolphus has a look of disgust on his face and claims to be smelling something bad, there is a dead cat under the floor

[235] However, sense data are directly caused by sensation and having had several experiences of sensing a property seems to be a necessary condition for being able to abstract to a universal for Russell. Note, however, that the sensory information from physical objects somehow must be translated into information that the mind can be aware of.

board, and dead cats smell bad. Without even having to puzzle much over this, it can suddenly dawn on Barbara that "what Adolphus is smelling is the dead cat under the floor boards." It is similar to what happens with many different kinds of inductive and deductive inferences. If one knows that all X's are Y and one comes to see that b is an X, then the proposition that b is a Y suddenly bursts upon one.

Something similar also happens when we become acquainted with a form or universal. According to Russell after several instances of being acquainted with sense data of the color yellow, suddenly the universal yellow bursts upon you, you become acquainted with the universal yellow, and you know what yellow is. For Plato there is more than one process through which we can become acquainted with a form. In the *Symposium* Plato gives an account where an individual recognizes more and more abstract instances of beauty until suddenly the form of beauty itself bursts upon him, whereas in the *Republic* engaging in dialectic about the good can be sufficient[236] for putting one in a state such that suddenly he becomes acquainted with the form of the good. When such essences are before one's mind, because they are essences, because they represent what is essential to an idea or concept, one knows what they are.

[236] It may be misleading to use the term sufficient here. Plato's guardians will have been through fifty years of vigorous training which will put them in the proper state so that they can become acquainted with a form through dialectic. For instance, they will have studied many disciplines that deal with abstract objects such as the disciplines of geometry and music. This will have prepared them to be able to think abstractly.

Hintikka

Hintikka shares with McDowell the view that acquaintance is *not* a relation that can provide you with knowledge of what a thing is. Writing at the same time as McDowell, Hintikka also criticizes Russell's claim that we cannot make a judgment about a person or a thing without knowing who or what it is we are judging about. Russell recognizes a dichotomy between being acquainted with a person (knowledge by acquaintance) and merely knowing (truly judging) that the person exists (knowledge by description). Hintikka believes that this is a false dichotomy precisely because "there is also a third type of proposition here, *viz.*, knowing *who* that someone is."[237] Hintikka argues that we do not need to be acquainted with what we are making a judgment about, rather, "we must know *what it is* in the straightforward sense which does not seem to reduce to acquaintance" (p. 229).

For Hintikka *knowing who* and *knowing what* are both propositional and distinct from acquaintance, however, he thinks *knowing what* plays a central role in Plato's conception of *episteme*. Hintikka notes that *episteme* can mean both knowledge and skill, and he focuses on Plato's use of the word in the latter sense in passages where Socrates makes an analogy between *episteme* and *techne*[238] or where Plato identifies having knowledge of an idea with

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[237] "Knowledge by Acquaintance - Individuation by Acquaintance." This paper was first read at the Meinong Colloquium in Graz in 1970 but has been reprinted in several places, including a collection of Hintikka's essays entitled *Knowledge and the Known: Historical Perspectives in Epistemology*, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1974), p. 229.

[238] *Ion* 537d, 538aff; *Charmides* 165d; *Euthyphro* 14c; *Republic* 342c, 428b-c, *Euthydemus* 289c.

having the ability to identify instances of that idea.[239] *Episteme* includes not only the notion of *knowing that* but also the notion of knowing how.[240] Contrary to the view of some, Hintikka believes that *knowing how*, like *knowing that*, is propositional.[241] In fact it is propositional because it will always involve a very specific *knowing that* proposition, *viz.*, *knowing what*:

> the 'knowing that' aspect that there is to the *episteme* is of a certain very special kind: it is knowledge of essences or definitions, knowing *what* rather than (unspecified) knowing *that*.[242]

While Hintikka does not believe that we can acquire *knowledge what* by way of knowledge by acquaintance, he does think that we can talk about knowledge by acquaintance as something which is useful for purposes of individuation. And the situations where acquaintance is useful are precisely those where one cannot give an account in terms of *what* or *who*. Hintikka recognizes the frequency of the direct object construction in Plato's dialogues (know X, rather than know that X), but he does not take this preference for the direct object construction as evidence that Plato viewed knowledge as a direct acquaintance relation between the knower and the known. Rather, he takes the direct object construction to indicate a reliance on " 'methods of individuation'

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[239] *Laches* 195c; *Charmides* 170a.
[240] "Plato on Knowing How, Knowing, That and Knowing What", *Knowledge and the Known*, p. 31.
[241] Hintikka explicitly argues against the view of John Gould (*The Development of Plato's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 52) who believes that the moral *episteme* Socrates was concerned with was a skill, a non-propositional *knowing how*. In defense of his own position that this knowledge is propositional, Hintikka brings to bear Vlastos' argument printed in *Philosophical Review* 66 (1957) 226-238) that if *knowing how* was simply a skill or an ability, then the *elenchus*, which tests *statements* and looks for mistaken *beliefs* would not be an effective tool for identifying those who did not have this knowledge (Hintikka, *Knowledge and the Known*, pp. 32-33).
[242] "Plato on Knowing How, That and What", p. 37.

which depend on the personal situation (personal history) of the knower, or perceiver, or rememberer."[243]. This is easiest to understand in the case of perception where the relevant personal situation is the perceptual context. For example, I may be standing next to a person and not be able to see who (Harry) or what (the mail carrier) that person is. Nonetheless, given my perceptual context, I may still be able to individuate him as the individual to my right. In the case of knowledge Hintikka identifies the relevant personal history as the "cognitive *Lebenswelt* created by one's first-hand acquaintance of persons, things, and facts" Hintikka thinks that Plato, and the Greeks in general, tended to think of cognitive matters from the point of view of someone's "personal acquaintance-situation", from someone's particular vantage point (p. 20).[244]

Hintikka, therefore, recognizes a conception of *knowing what* in Plato. We try to acquire *knowledge what* of the forms so that we can produce instances of the forms in our lives. We seek know what justice is in order that we might be successful in bringing justice about in ourselves and our society. Knowing what, however, is not connected to knowledge by acquaintance for Hintikka. He does not accept the metaphysical/epistemological thesis on which forms are the appropriate objects of knowledge, and we know what they are by

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[243] "Knowledge and Its Objects in Plato," in *Knowledge and the Known: Historical Perspectives in Epistemology*, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1974), p.20. See also "Objects of Knowledge and Belief: Acquaintances and Public Figures," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 67, no. 21, Nov. 1970. p. 869-883.

[244] While I disagree with Hintikka that this is the main purpose the direct object construction serves for Plato, I think it important to recognize that even while what one knows is objective (and forms as objects free of context and perspective and outside of both space and time are about as objective as things get) individuals still have subjective knowledge experiences — points at which they come to know certain thing. Below I will outline the methods Plato describes which we can use to have such experiences, to bring the forms into our awareness.

being acquainted with them. The notion of acquaintance is only relevant insofar as it indicates that an individual's personal situation is relevant to his knowledge state.

Smith

Smith not only thinks that *knowing what* plays a central role in Plato's conception of *episteme*,[245] he believes that it is constitutive of it. He gives an account of Plato's conception of knowledge, as expressed at the end of Book V of the *Republic*, as "a blend of knowledge by acquaintance and knowing what."[246] Smith sees as an indicator that Plato's conception of *episteme* includes knowledge by acquaintance the fact that Plato uses the word in direct object constructions. This construction frequently involves the *epi* relation. Knowledge is set over (*epi*), or has as its province or domain, being (pp. 282-283).[247] He find the *knowing what* requirement in the claim at 477b and 478a that knowing involves *gnonai hos exei to on.* This literally means knowing how being is or how *that which is* is. Smith does not think, however, that Plato is concerned here with knowing how being is, either in the sense of what its condition is or how it came about, but rather he thinks that a person who *gnonai hos exei to on.* knows *what* being is. Specifically, he knows what the different manifestations of being such as beauty, justice, etc. are. Smith suggests that to

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[245] And *gnosis*. Smith believes that Plato is using *gnosis* and *episteme* interchangeably at this point in the *Republic*.
[246] N.D. Smith, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and 'Knowing What' in Plato's Republic," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, vol. xviii, no. 3, 1979, p. 283.
[247].See Republic 477a, b; 478a.

know what, say beauty, is to be able to recognize beauty itself and to distinguish it from the things that participate in it.

While Hintikka explicitly states his belief that *knowing what* is propositional, Smith deliberately sets out to distinguish *knowing what* from propositional knowledge, yet, in the end, concerning the aspects which are most relevant, *knowing what* is very similar to propositional knowledge on Smith's account. The first difference between knowing what and propositional knowledge that Smith observes is a formal difference. Propositional knowledge necessarily takes propositions or sentences as its objects whereas *knowing what* can have other objects. (p. 282) For instance, I can know what beauty is, but I cannot know *that* beauty.[248] In this sense knowing what is more like knowledge by acquaintance. In the case of both knowledge by acquaintance and *knowing what* one can have something other than propositions as his object of knowledge. I might know (be acquainted with Smith) and also know what Smith is. In addition to knowing that p, we can both be acquainted with f and know what f is. (p. 281). However, *knowing what* is also distinct from knowledge by acquaintance and it is in just this difference where the relevant similarity between *knowing what* and propositional knowledge surfaces. According to Smith, to be acquainted with f may be no more than to be familiar

[248] Some may object that knowing what beauty is will consist in knowing a series of propositions such as " beauty is X" and "beauty is Y", and therefore that this knowledge is propositional. Yet, knowing what beauty is could consist rather in an ability, such as the ability recognize instances of beauty.

with f. But *to know what f is* is "to have at one's disposal certain truths[249] about f that are essentially related to the nature of f." (p. 282) Smith recognizes how this aspect renders *knowing what* similar to propositional knowledge, but he points out as a difference between the two that "the truths for knowing what are *essentially related to the nature of their subjects*, while no such condition is required for propositional knowledge." He notes that if we transformed *knowing what* claims to claims of propositional knowledge, the propositions that resulted would be a *subset* of the propositions "of which one could claim propositional knowledge about the subject."(p. 282). Therefore, having propositional knowledge of a thing does not entail knowing what that thing is. One can know that X is large without knowing what X is.

On Smith's account *knowing what* appears to be propositional in a relevant sense. Once Smith says that to *know what f is* is "to have at one's disposal certain truths about f", *knowing what* becomes propositional. It doesn't matter that these truths are only a subset of the propositions that can be asserted about the subject. On Smith's account *knowing what* requires knowing propositions.

In general terms Smith distinguishes knowing what from knowledge by acquaintance. Being acquainted with a thing is not a necessary condition for knowing what that thing is. I may know what or who Jones is without ever having met Jones. (p. 282). Concerning Plato's theory of knowledge Smith

[249] This is one of the elements which Russell says is not a part of knowledge by acquaintance - "we shall say that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without...any knowledge of truths." (*Problems of Philosophy*, p. 46.).

believes that being acquainted with a thing and knowing what it is are connected. He claims that for Plato, "having some special acquaintance with the object of knowledge is ... a necessary condition and partial explanation of our knowing what it is." (p. 287) Smith, however, never explicates this relationship. He never explains how being acquainted with a thing, a state which does not involve knowing truths about it, can result in knowing what the thing is, in knowing essential truths or propositions about it. Below I will say more about what I think the nature of this relationship is.

Another reason Smith's account of acquaintance and *knowing what* is problematic is because he chooses to explicate it in terms of physical acquaintance. He talks of being acquainted with a person and knowing who (Jones) or what the person is. Yet in his dialogues Plato gives us an account of being acquainted with abstract entities that have no physical dimensions. The mechanism of being acquainted with a physical entity and knowing what it is and the mechanism of being acquainted with an abstract entity and knowing what it must be different since we come into contact with each of them in a different manner. Therefore it would not be useful to try to discern one based on the other. Smith, however, does not in the end provide us with any account of how knowledge by acquaintance allows us to know what a thing is, so this criticism is not as germane as it might be.

Gonzalez

While Smith distinguishes between *knowing what* and propositional knowledge, propositions, nonetheless have a central role in Smith's account of

knowing what. Gonzalez's position is very different from those of both Hintikka and Smith. He argues that *knowing what* can be non-propositional. And he believes that the relationship between *knowing what* and knowledge by acquaintance in the *Republic* is not one of a blend, as on Smith's view, but rather it is "more of an identity."[250] Gonzalez sets out his conception of *knowing what* in Plato in an article in which he criticizes Fine's view that the only appropriate objects of knowledge, even for Plato, are propositions. Therefore, it might be best to explain Gonzalez's notion of *knowing what* in connection with this and other anachronistic views ascribed to Plato. These include views about the relationship between properties and substances and the view that truth can only be construed as a property of a proposition.

Gonzalez takes as his starting point the passage near the end of Book V of the *Republic* where Socrates, discussing knowledge as a *dunamis* or power, says that

> as knowledge is set over what is *(epi toi onti)*,while ignorance is set over what is not *(epi mê onti)*, mustn't we find an intermediary [belief] between knowledge and ignorance to be set over what is and what is not, if there is such a thing? 477a-b

This passage is much discussed because of the controversy over the interpretation of the onti or *is* in the phrases *what is* and *what is not.* The existential, predicative, and veridical interpretations each have supporters. Fine supports the veridical interpretation. If the only proper objects of knowledge are propositions, and propositions are statements with a truth value, then

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[250] F.J. Gonzalez, "Propositions or Objects? A Critique of Gail Fine on Knowledge and Belief in Republic V", *Phronesis*, vol. XLI/3 1996, note 24, p. 258.

knowledge of what is must be knowledge of what is true. (1981, 23-126; 1990, 87-89.) Gonzalez, on the other hand, endorses a view on which the existential, predicative, and veridical are each appropriate and interentail one another. This veridical interpretation is different from the one Fine has in mind. Here what is true is what is really real or what truly exists.

Fine's main criticism of the predicative reading is that on this reading, according to Plato, we can only have opinion, but not knowledge of things that are both F and not F, and yet, as Fine points out, there is no apparent reason why we cannot know that an object has a predicate in one respect or context, but not in another. For instance, there is no reason one cannot know that a person is big relative to a bread box but not big relative to a building. Gonzalez's criticism of Fine is that she is assuming that the knowledge at issue here is propositional knowledge, knowledge *that* a thing is F or not F. He proposes instead that the knowledge at issue is knowledge of *what* F is. According to Gonzalez, on the predicative reading knowledge of what F is must have as its object what is truly F, as opposed to either what is not F or what is both F and not F. (pp. 252-253). As on Smith's reading, Gonzalez takes Plato's use of the term §p¤ to indicate an acquaintance relation, and *what is truly F* is the object that one is aquatinted with, the domain over which knowledge is set.

To flesh out the notion of "what is truly F" Gonzalez draws on interpretations of Plato offered by Kahn and Allen. (It is here that Allen, Kahn and Gonzalez challenge some contemporary interpretations of Plato as anachronistic). According to Kahn, "to speak of *what F is* or of *what is (truly)*

F for Plato, is to speak of the same thing"[251]. For us today the phrase *to know what is F* suggests knowing what objects or objects bear the property F, but this is assuming a distinction between objects and their properties, which it is not clear that Plato made. If instead there is a kind of object (a form) which *constitutes* a property, then in that case *to know what is F* is to know *what F is*, to know the nature of the thing itself. Allen and Gonzalez endorse the view that Plato had a very different conception of predication than the contemporary conception and a different notion of substance than the Aristotelian, Cartesian and Lockean conceptions on which a substance is distinct from its properties (even if they are only separable in thought, as is the case for Aristotle). According to Allen, in the predication "x is F" it is the F, not the x which is primarily referred to. The predication serves to express the relation of the x to the F, not the F to the x, and this relation can be one of two kinds. It can be, as in the case of forms, a relation of identity, or, as in the case of physical objects, a relation of approximation and imperfect instantiation.[252] On Allen's interpretation, particulars "have no independent ontological status, they are purely relational entities, entities which derive their whole character and existence from the Forms." (p. 181) Forms as "exemplifications" are not substances, but relational entities. In these relational entities "resemblance and dependence so combine as to destroy the possibility of substantiality" (p. 183).

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[251] "Some Philosophical Uses of 'to be' in Plato," *Phronesis* vol., XXVI 1981, p. 109.
[252] R.E. Allen, "Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues" *in Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, vol. 1, ed. G. Vlastos (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1971), p. 169.

In the above account we see how predicative and existential readings of ˆnti can be consistent with one another. On this account a thing cannot simply exist, it must exist *as* something, bear a relation to a predicate.[253] The veridical interpretation which Kahn recognizes is also compatible with the predicative and existential interpretations. In fact, Kahn sees the predicative and existential interpretations of being as special cases of the veridical interpretation. On Kahn's reading " 'X is Y' is true only if and because X participates in Y-ness or in the Y."[254] Or in more familiar terms, "Athena is beautiful" is true only to the extent that Athena participates in the beautiful.[255] Existence must always be existence as something, and in this case X exists as Y. The form or predicate Y is the truthmaker in this case.[256] Forms are the real existents or true being for

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[253] As Kahn recognizes, "for Aristotle as for Plato, existence is always enai ti, being something or other, being something definite. There is no conception of existence as such, for subjects of an indeterminate nature." ("Why Existence Does not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* vol. 58, 1976, p. 333).

[254] "Linguistic Relativism and the Greek Project of Ontology" in The Question of Being: East West Perspectives, ed. Mervyn Sprung (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), p. 40.

[255] Because Athena only approximately and imperfectly instantiates beauty, she is not an exemplification of true beauty or beauty itself. Therefore she is not an appropriate object of knowledge. This is not to say that coming into sensory contact with a beautiful person cannot help to bring one to the state where he knows beauty itself. As we will see below, this is the case in the Ladder of Eros in the *Symposium*.

[256] While Kahn emphasizes the centrality of being h is also alive to the connection between knowledge and language or propositions. He distinguishes between the seeking of knowledge and the expression of knowledge. True being is the object we seek to know, while propositions are used to express what we know:

> ...the Greek view is that being or reality is logically prior [to knowledge]. Knowledge is determined by its object, by what there is to be known. But being is 'encountered' as what is known or knowable: knowledge, or successful inquiry, is our mode of access to reality. Cognition and inquiry, together with the language which mirrors or articulates them, constitute the dimension within which being comes into view. Or perhaps we can say more precisely that, for the Greeks, the question of being is originally *asked* within the context of inquiry or search for knowledge of the truth. But it is eventually *answered* within the context of a theory of

Plato, and one of the reasons we cannot know sensible objects is because they do not fully exist, and, given the connection between the existential and veridical meanings, this means that they are not true being, and therefore not appropriate objects of knowledge.

The connection that Gonzalez sees between *knowing what* and knowledge by acquaintance is that we can only know what F is when we are acquainted with what is truly F. In the case of belief the object of acquaintance is what is both F and not F. According to Gonzalez,

> Knowledge is assigned to 'what is' in the sense that to know what F is is to have direct acquaintance with what truly exists as truly F. For example, I know what beauty is through direct acquaintance with what determinately and completely exists as determinately and completely beautiful. Belief is set over "what is and is not" in the sense that merely to "believe what F is" is to be confined to acquaintance with what does not fully exist by being no more F than not F. For example, I can only have belief about what beauty is in perceiving things that only imperfectly exist by being only imperfectly beautiful (p. 262).

When giving an account of Plato's conception of knowledge, Gonzalez also discusses it in terms of understanding. He says,

> knowledge is here understanding *and* acquaintance, understanding achievable only in direct acquaintance with certain objects; *doxa* is the failure to achieve such understanding on account of the character of the objects with which it is acquainted (p. 258).

Yet, Gonzalez is not clear about what he means by *understanding*. In a rather cryptic sentence in which he seems to be personifying knowledge and belief Gonzalez describes knowledge and belief as having understanding. He says,

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predication or *logos*, the expression of true cognition in rational discourse ("Linguistic Relativism and the Greek Project of Ontology," pp. 41-42.

"what knowledge understands clearly and distinctly through acquaintance with its object is the same as what belief understands confusedly through acquaintance with its objects: What F is ." (p. 258). But knowledge and belief are not things that understand, individuals understand, and Gonzalez does not tell us the nature of that understanding. He does not give an account of how one arrives at this state and of what cognitive processes are involved in achieving it. While I think Gonzalez's account of Plato conception of knowledge is a good one in several ways — for example it avoids the anachronistic ascription of contemporary conceptions of substance and truth to Plato and recognizes the role of true being in Plato's theory —I also think it suffers from some of the same shortcomings as Smith's account, *viz.*, not giving an adequate account of the nature of acquaintance and knowing what and how they are related.

***Nous* and Knowing What**

In what follows I will give an account of the cognitive state which for Plato makes possible acquaintance and knowing what. While Hintikka does think that acquaintance is useful for purposes of individuation, he does not see a connection between knowledge by acquaintance and *knowing what.* Smith believes that acquaintance is a necessary condition of and a partial explanation for knowing what, but he does not explicate the connection between the two. Gonzalez sees the relationship between acquaintance and knowing what as "more of an identity" than a blend as on Smith's description. Gonzalez also brings in the state of understanding defining knowledge as understanding and

acquaintance, but he does not give an account of this cognitive process of understanding. I agree with Gonzalez that when you are acquainted with a form, you thereby know what it is. I also agree that understanding plays a role in having knowledge of a form for Plato. Unlike Gonzalez, however, I think that understanding, in the technical sense Plato uses the term, is exclusively linked to the province of knowledge of forms. One in a state of belief cannot understand, even confusedly, what X is, contrary to Gonzalez's claim (p. 258). Below I will go farther than Smith and Gonzalez in explicating the relationship between knowledge by acquaintance and *knowing what* in Plato. I will show how, Plato, in Books V-VII of the *Republic*, systematically uses forms of the term *nous* to mean understanding in connection with being acquainted with forms, and how in Book VII Plato explicitly identifies this understanding with knowing what.

Plato does not give us the detailed account of sensation and knowledge acquisition that Aristotle does, but in the *Republic* he does use the terms *nous* and *noesis* in a technical manner. On Plato's account one is in the state of understanding when one is acquainted with a form, with true being, and what one understands is the nature of that form. We find this state represented at the end of Book VI in the *Republic* in the description of the divided line. In this account we have one of the clearest and most well known distinctions between kinds of cognitive states in Plato. Here Plato sets out four epistemological states, one appropriate for each of the four metaphysical levels: conjecture (*eikasia*) for shadows, reflections and images of physical objects; belief (*pistis*)

for physical objects such as animals, plants, and artifacts; thought (*dianoia*) for the theoretical objects of math and science; and understanding (*noesis*)[257] for the forms (509d-510a, 511c-e).[258] It is this state of understanding or *noesis* with which we are primarily concerned.

Plato uses the term *noesis* with some consistency in Books V-VII.[259] It is characterized as state which is something over and above states produced by the sensation of physical objects. *Noesis* is achieved through acquaintance with the forms and is the understanding of what a thing is. Consider the following passages.

At the end of Book V when discussing the Lovers of Sights and Sounds, those who focus only on the properties of objects of the physical world, Plato says that their thought (*dianoia*) is unable to see, contemplate (*idein*) and embrace the nature of the beautiful itself (476b). Because of their focus on the wrong object, their thought is limited. They cannot achieve the additional element of understanding. The same is true of all who are at the level of opinion. In Book VI Socrates, himself, when he demurs to discuss the good because he only has opinion about it, describes those who have opinion as being without knowledge. He also describes those who have opinion as being without understanding (506c). Yet, what is the nature of this additional state, how is it attained? Earlier in Book VI Plato tells us that this additional

[257] Plato uses forms of both noËw and nohsiw to denote understanding.
[258] In chapter three I will provide a full account of these passages explaining how thinking abstractly helps put one in an appropriate state to bring the forms before her mind.
[259] Plato also uses forms of the word in a non-technical sense. For instance at 510a Socrates asks Glaucon if he understands what he means by images, and Glaucon says he does. However, this usage contains vestiges of the technical sense.

cognitive state is produced by acquaintance with the forms. Using a sexual metaphor he describes begetting understanding through acquaintance:

> ...it is the nature of the real lover of learning to struggle toward being, not to remain with the many particulars that are opined to be real...as he moves on he neither loses nor lessens his erotic love until he grasps the being of each nature itself with the part of his soul that is fitted to grasp it, because of its kinship with it, and that, once getting near to what really is and having intercourse with it, and having begotten understanding and truth, he knows... (490 a-b)

This is a highly metaphorical description, even more so than those that employ the metaphors of seeing of touching a form. But it serves well to make the point that acquaintance with the forms is very desirable, and that understanding is a product or consequence of such acquaintance.

In Book VII Plato discusses calling on understanding in connection with thinking abstractly and acquiring knowledge of *what* something is. He uses the example of perceiving aspects of three fingers to make the point that understanding is not involved in sensation, but when one begins to think abstractly about what a thing is, she then calls on understanding. When the faculty of sight senses a finger, it does not get any information at the same time about something that is the opposite of a finger.[260] Therefore, one is not impelled to bring in understanding, to ask. 'What in the world is a finger' (523d). But if one receives sensory information that opposite properties apply to the same thing, as in the case where the ring finger is big relative to the

[260] There is a problem with this example since strictly speaking sight does not sense fingers *as* fingers. Sense faculties sense properties such as long, white, etc. and then one must use cognitive faculties to interpret these as properties composing a finger.

pinkie but small relative to the index finger, then the soul calls to its aid calculation and understanding (524b). And understanding[261] does not focus on the physical objects bearing the properties, but considers the abstract concepts:

> for clarification...the understanding is compelled to see, contemplate the big and the small[262]...in the opposite way from sensation...And is it not in some such experience as this that the question first occurs to us, *what in the world, then is the big and the small?*...and this is the origin of the designation intelligible for the one, and visible for the other (524c).

Visible things are those that are accessible to the senses, and we bring visible things before our minds insofar as we are aware of them through sensation. But the intelligible is that which we can both bring before the mind and know *what it is* because it is conceptual by nature and has cognitive content. In the same way that when a sense datum, such as a color, is before our mind, we are aware of it and we know it insofar as we can identify other instances of it, when we are intuiting a form, when we are in a noetic relationship with it, we are aware of it, and know what it is. Knowing blueness is very much like having a sense datum of blue before the mind. The primary difference is that blueness is more general and one can recognize many different instances of it. Below I will say more about the connection between acquaintance and the capacity to recognize instances.

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[261] At points in this passage Plato refers to understanding more as a faculty than a state, and he personifies understanding as something which itself can engage in contemplation.

[262] Since this is an everyday example, it is probably the case that "the big" and "the small" here are not the forms of big and small, but the abstract concepts, big and small. So Plato uses the term *noesis* to also refer to understanding of abstract concepts, but it seems that given the rest of his account, you could not know what something truly is until you had the form itself before your mind.

Knowledge by Acquaintance and the Capacity to Identify Instances

I pointed out above that the kind of knowledge with which Plato is concerned in the middle period dialogues is a special kind of knowledge. It something beyond the loose and popular conceptions we have of beauty, justice, etc. It is knowledge of what is essential to those ideas, and one of the characteristics of this kind of knowledge is that it imparts a capacity on the knower to identify or recognize all instances of these essences or forms. It is characteristic of acquaintance generally, whether it be acquaintance with a physical thing or with an abstract idea, that once you have been acquainted with something, you can recognize it or other instances of it again. This is true whether or not you believe the acquaintance relation allows you to know *what a thing is*. Imagine a member of the Taliban who is visiting the United States. While he is being taken on a tour of a college campus, he visits a fraternity house and experiences the fraternity house smell which is a combination of the odors of stale beer and aftershave. Suppose he has never smelled either of these things before, so he cannot identify the smell. It is still the case that if he smells the same smell someplace else, let us say a local bar where he goes to witness the evils of alcohol in the U.S., he will be able to recognize the smell as what he smelled at the fraternity house.

According to Plato, not only does being acquainted with a form provide you with the knowledge of what a thing is, it also imparts on you the capacity to recognize *all* instance of the form without error. Instances can be misleading. You and I may disagree about whether a Philip Glass song is beautiful, but the

form of beauty itself is not misleading, and according to Plato, once we have been acquainted with it, we will never again be misled or mistaken about an instance of beauty. Seeing or being acquainted with the beauty itself allows you to correctly recognize all instances of beauty. This capacity to recognize all is a capacity unique to those who have attained knowledge by acquaintance. Definitional or propositional knowledge is not sufficient to provide such a capacity.[263]

In book seven of the *Republic* Plato indicates that acquaintance with the form of the good imparts on you the capacity to adequately recognize instances of the good. Only if you have been acquainted with the form of the good are you in an appropriate condition to be a ruler of the city for only then will you know without error what laws, institutions, political organizations, etc. are good

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[263]In order to explain the nature of Plato's knowledge by acquaintance more fully it might be useful to consider the distinction between *episteme* and *phronesis*. *Episteme* is scientific knowledge. It includes knowledge of universal truths such as "the sum of the internal angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles" and "trilobites are arthropods." *Phronesis* is practical wisdom. It is the knowledge that guides your actions in specific situations. Aristotle emphasizes that ethics cannot be done with scientific knowledge because ethics deal with specific situations that alter, and therefore it is *phronesis* which is appropriate in the realm of ethics. Definitional or propositional knowledge would be categorized as *episteme*. Even though knowledge of the forms for Plato is knowledge of *universal* essences, it seems that this kind of knowledge can be most instructively compared to *phronesis* since once one has this knowledge one can identify specific instances of the form in different situations.

Plato specifically uses the term *phronesis* when describing knowledge of the form of the good in the *Republic*: "Is it not absurd...if while taunting us with our ignorance of the good they turn about and talk as if we knew it? For they say knowledge of the good as if we understood their meaning when they utter the word 'good.'"(505c) Also, in the *Symposium* in the passage right before the description of the ascent to beauty, Diotima describes *phronesis* and the rest of virtue as things which the soul can "conceive and bear."(209a) And she says that "the greatest and most beautiful kind of practical wisdom by far...is that concerned with the right ordering of cities and households, for which the name is temperance and justice." (209a) It seems that the forms Plato is in general most concerned that individuals gain knowledge of are forms connected to ethics such as justice, the good, the beautiful (fine, noble, the *kalos*).

for the city Plato describes the responsibilities such an experience brings with it as follows,

> Then, at age fifty, those who have survived the test and been successful both in practical matters and the sciences must be led to the goal and compelled to lift up the radiant light of their souls to what itself provides light for everything. And once they've seen the good itself, they must each in turn put the city, its citizens and themselves in order, using it as their model. (540a-b)

If knowledge of the good consisted in knowing various propositions about the good, even if these propositions formed a very large set of conjunctive propositions, such knowledge would not be sufficient to allow one to identify every instance of the good. I have gone part of the way to fill out an account of knowledge by acquaintance, but what is still unclear is the mechanism by which an individual can bring the mind into the presence of objective, mind-independent objects. In the following chapters I will argue that Plato uses motifs from the Eleusinian Mysteries to express his position that it is through transformative experiences that an individual cognitively arrives at a position where he has direct unmediated contact with the forms. These experiences include the removal of false beliefs through elenchus, exercises which allow one to focus on more and more abstract objects, and the achieving of a state of moral purity.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary philosophers have argued that Plato cannot have an acquaintance account of knowledge for two reasons. First, such an account requires that we have knowledge of simples, and simples are the wrong sort of

things to be objects of knowledge. And second, the acquaintance relation is not sufficient to provide the kind of knowledge Plato is after, *i.e.*, knowledge of what a thing is. I believe that these contemporary interpretations are the product of two mistaken tendencies: either the interpreters anachronistically import their own philosophical concerns and current conceptions of knowledge into their interpretation, or they dismiss what appears to be the obvious interpretation of Plato's text on the grounds that Plato was a better philosopher than to have held say, a two world view or the view that we can be acquainted with mind independent objects in a non-propositional manner. I have tried to defend the position that Plato has an acquaintance theory of knowledge in the middle period dialogues. I have shown that once we recognize the nature of Plato's objects of knowledge as essences, we see that essences are the sort of thing that one can have knowledge of in a direct and unmediated manner, and such knowledge is sufficient for providing one with knowledge of what that particular essence is. Moreover, I have argued that knowledge by acquaintance of forms is superior to knowledge of propositions or definitions in that such knowledge can provide you with the capacity to recognize all instances of the form in a way that knowledge of a proposition cannot.

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