

Rowett (C.) *Knowledge and Truth in Plato. Stepping Past the Shadow of Socrates*. Pp. xxii + 305. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Cased, £50, US\$65. ISBN: 978-0-19-969365-8.

In this monograph Catherine Rowett attempts to show that Plato does not consider knowledge to consist in having a definition of a target object or any proposition about it but in pictorially grasping its concept. She thus challenges the orthodox view among scholars that Plato inherited from Socrates the project of searching for definitions as the most significant part of philosophical inquiry for the rest of his career. According to Rowett, Plato deliberately depicts Socrates as failing to find a successful definition to show that there are insurmountable problems with his definitional project itself, and that from the middle dialogues forward Plato therefore replaces it with such a new method for acquiring knowledge as to involve no definitions. She calls this alternative method of Plato's 'the iconic method', which is basically the way to visually grasp the true nature of the concept under discussion by observing its individual instance(s). Her view is that one can thus acquire quasi-pictorial knowledge of concepts or types, which is distinguished from *doxa* or belief, the objects of which are instances or tokens. Of course, one often makes a judgement about particulars, like that this is a horse, but such a propositional judgement, even if true and justified, is not what is known in Plato's sense but only a *symptom* of one's knowledge of the concept 'horse'. She emphasizes that knowledge enables one to do many kinds of activity, such as making judgements, identifying someone in a crowd, riding a horse, but that any of those symptoms of one's knowledge should not be identified with the knowledge itself. In the same vein she also argues that for Plato truth is not a property of propositions but a property of things: something (F) is true in virtue of actually *being* a thing of that kind (F). The truth of a thing is thus closely related to its reality and corresponds to non-propositional knowledge of what it really *is*. And she endorses the unitarian view that Plato does not discard but keeps this understanding of knowledge and truth in the later dialogues.

This is the gist of Rowett's overall argument in the book. Thus, she presents a novel interpretation of Plato's epistemology as a whole through detailed analysis of the three most relevant dialogues: the *Meno*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus*. As such, the book will primarily be of interest to those who engage with those dialogues in exegetical detail. Her ultimate aim, however, is not simply to interpret Plato as a historical figure but rather to use him for lodging a protest against the prevalent assumption in contemporary analytic philosophy that knowledge and truth are of propositions. For this purpose, she structures the book in a unique way: first explaining her basic positions about Plato's knowledge and truth in the philosophical context

in Part I, and then dealing with particular issues concerning how to interpret the three dialogues in Parts II–IV respectively. So readers who are interested only in the philosophical material in the book can grasp her main ideas by reading only Part I. The book ends with a short chapter (Part V), where she not only explains how her idea in the book came about, but sketches how she plans to expand the outcome to encompass other relevant dialogues, such as the *Cratylus* and *Sophist*.

Since space is limited, unfortunately, I cannot discuss her detailed readings of the three dialogues in question, many of which are strikingly original and should receive due examination elsewhere. Those ideas include: that Meno's paradox is the turning point at which Plato releases himself from Socrates' essentialism and pursues non-definitional knowledge of what virtue is; that the method of hypothesis introduced in the *Meno* is the best possible method for investigating concepts whose unitary definition is in principle not achievable; that the imaginary city Plato constructs in the *Republic* is not intended to provide a definition of justice but is only a token of justice analogous to the sensible particulars the lovers of sight and hearing are concerned with; that Socrates is not depicted anywhere in the *Republic* as embarking on the longer road; that the interlude at *Theaetetus* at 184a–187b is not intended as a refutation of Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge as perception but as refining it to introduce his second definition of knowledge as true belief; that what the jury is said to lack at *Theaetetus* 200d–201d is not so much factual knowledge about the incident as conceptual knowledge of justice.

Instead, I limit myself to a few remarks about the main topic of the book: conceptual knowledge. It is disappointing that Rowett does not really give a more positive answer to the question what conceptual knowledge is after all than that it is quasi-pictorial knowledge of types or Forms. Towards the end of the book, in fact, she claims, 'we should not find ourselves dissatisfied [...]. To give a definition of what conceptual knowledge is would betray the whole project' (p. 271); by 'giving a definition' she seems to mean a reductive analysis (p. 275). Even if knowledge is not analysable, however, that does not entail that there are not any informative distinguishing features for it. The mode of conceptual knowledge is all the more unclear because she also denies that it is a kind of knowledge by acquaintance, despite the strong impression that it is closely akin. Her denial seems to be based on the point that a concept or type is different from an object (pp. 60–5). But the object of one's acquaintance does not, as she supposes, need to be an extensional object (e.g. a mere particular or Form), but can be an intensional one (e.g. a *beautiful* particular or the Form of *Beauty*). We may thus be directly acquainted with what beauty is via particulars (belief) or the Form (knowledge), as often argued in the literature (e.g. F.J. Gonzalez, 'Propositions or Objects? A Critique of Gail Fine on

Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*, *Phronesis* 41 (1996), 116–28). So construed, knowledge by acquaintance does not seem substantially different from her conceptual knowledge. In addition, it is highly doubtful that all concepts we have are non-definitional or non-propositional. For example, when we judge whether a number is even or not, the kind of conceptual knowledge we refer to seems to be the explicit or descriptive idea that an even number is a whole number divisible by 2 without a remainder, rather than a visual image of the concept ‘even’. But it is such mathematical Forms (e.g. Even, Odd, Double, Half) or quasi-mathematical ones (e.g. Large, Small, Equal), which are arguably definable, that Plato routinely uses as models for discussing such ethical Forms as Justice and the Good. This consideration naturally indicates his belief that those more important Forms, even though very hard to define, are nonetheless in principle definable. My greater concern, however, is about the method of collection and division, to which she devotes only about a page of discussion (pp. 274–5). If Plato parted from Socrates’ definitional project in the middle dialogues, it would be mysterious why he was so obsessed in the later dialogues with that new method, whose primary aim is to acquire definitions? But this last is probably too much to ask for a single book, especially because she has already grappled with three of Plato’s most disputed dialogues. She herself notices at the beginning that ‘[t]he present volume examines a very small part of the whole story’ (p. v). Nevertheless, I have no doubt that this book sheds a fresh light on Plato’s and our notion of knowledge and truth.¹

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