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THE EPISTEMIC COMPETENCE OF PLATO'S PHILOSOPHER-RULERS IN THE *REPUBLIC**

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1. Introduction

In the *Republic*¹ Plato proposes that philosopher-rulers should rule because they possess knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), and knowledge is necessary for governance.² I do not challenge this view. The dominant view is that by knowledge Plato means only knowledge of the Good (metaphysical ἐπιστήμη), this being a sufficient condition for good governance. Let us call this “the sufficiency condition thesis” (the SCT).³ It is this consensus I challenge, arguing that metaphysical ἐπιστήμη is only a necessary condition for good governance. Let us call this “the necessary condition thesis” (the NCT). The NCT does not deny that Plato conceives of

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¹ The translations of the *Republic* are based on GRUBE 1992 (in COOPER – HUTCHINSON 1997), and the Greek text follows the edition of BURNET 1903.

² I follow many scholars to translate ἐπιστήμη and γνῶσις as “knowledge” and δόξα as “opinion” or “belief”; I shall use ἐπιστήμη and γνῶσις and knowledge interchangeably. For a contrary view that ἐπιστήμη and δόξα cannot be translated as knowledge and belief, respectively, see Moss 2021.

³ For instance, Fine writes that for Plato “only philosophers should rule, since only they have knowledge, and knowledge is necessary for good ruling. Only philosophers have knowledge... because only they know Forms, a knowledge without which no other knowledge is possible” (FINE 1978, 122).

metaphysical ἐπιστήμη as the philosopher’s highest cognitive level; it is rather committed to the view that the philosopher-rulers must possess other kinds of epistemic competencies, which are practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and experience (ἐμπειρία) if they are to function optimally in governance. I am not the first to reject the SCT.⁴ Nonetheless, my goal in this paper is to improve the current understanding of it, and also draw out its consequences more forcefully than has hitherto been the case. To do this, I have two main aims. First, I attempt to show that the philosopher-rulers, to succeed at ruling, are to attain optimum cognitive success in these three modes of cognition.⁵ Second, I show how these three modes of cognition coalesce in ruling the perceptible world, emphasising how the philosopher-rulers will tackle concrete perceptible matters.⁶

I briefly explain how I understand “epistemic competence”. According to the *Wordweb* dictionary, “competence” is “the quality of being adequately or well fitted physically and intellectually”. The meaning of competence is far more nuanced than this basic understanding. Nonetheless, this basic meaning will suffice for our purpose. “Epistemic” plays an adjectival role here to specify the quality of being well fitted intellectually or cognitively to undertake something. Accordingly, I shall take epistemic competence to mean that the philosopher-rulers’ intellectual fitness to rule is fundamentally composed of three cognitive qualities, namely, metaphysical ἐπιστήμη, practical wisdom, and experience. To give the gist of what I will be arguing in this paper, consider the following. One of the functions of the philosopher-rulers is to be judges in Kallipolis. This means that they must pass judgements which involve an appeal to complex interlocking elements in the decision-making process, including an appeal to experience and practical wisdom. We are assured of a confirmation of this claim in Book IX, at *Rep.* 582a3–5, where Socrates queries whether there are better criteria for judging well than by experience, practical wisdom, and reasoning (ἐμπειρία τε καὶ φρόνησις καὶ λόγῳ), and Glaucon answers in the negative. These triadic modes of cognition are what I argue as defining the philosopher-rulers’ epistemic competence.

⁴ KLOSKO 2006 and SMITH 2000 (and 2019) are among the few scholars who reject the SCT.

⁵ That these kinds of epistemic competence are not pursued for their own sake but for the sake of functioning optimally in governance. Cf. PAYNE 2017, who presents a different account of the teleology of pursuing knowledge in the *Republic*.

⁶ I leave undiscussed the question as to whether or not Plato is serious about the realisability of his ideal polis. On this debate, see PIECHOWIAK 2019.

2. The Value Question

The general context for my claim begins from the end of Book V, specifically at *Rep.* 473c10–d4, where Socrates declares his “third wave of paradox”, namely, that until political power and philosophy coalesce (συμπέση) completely, the evils in polities or the entire human race will never cease. Plato intends a means-end relation with this declaration: political power and philosophy must be instrumental means to solve concrete political problems, including how to organise a just state and ensure social harmony within it. Adams specifies that for Plato political evil is the result of a divorce between political power and knowledge of the Good, and it can only be tackled by effecting their coalescence.⁷ As scholars have observed, Plato sketchily explains how knowledge of the Good is relevant to ruling.⁸ Thus, Plato is not entirely clear as to how this is possible, and I do not pretend to know exactly what he means. Nonetheless, I try to show that what Plato attempts to achieve with the declaration is to reconcile the contemplative life and active life in founding Kallipolis, and Socrates’ defence from Books V–VII should be read as Plato’s foremost utilitarian justification of philosophy for active political life against the widespread view that philosophy and its practitioners (philosophers) are useless.⁹

Two provisos follow Socrates’ declaration at *Rep.* 473d1–e2: first, Socrates says that the many natures who at present pursue either philosophy or politics exclusively are compelled or forcibly prevented from doing so (τῶν δὲ νῦν πορευομένων χωρὶς ἐφ’ ἑκάτερον αἱ πολλαὶ φύσεις ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποκλεισθῶσιν). Second, Socrates says that until this coincidence happens, the polis-in-speech will never be born to the fullest extent or see the light of the sun. I shall not undertake a close discussion of these two provisos. The important point for here and now is that if politics and philosophy are to coincide before Kallipolis can see the light of the sun, then the proposal is that whoever becomes a ruler in Kallipolis must have political and philosophical epistemic competence, precisely because both politics and philosophy belong to different domains of knowledge (the former mainly practical and the latter theoretical). More precisely, both politics and philosophy have their epistemic demands, such that

⁷ ADAM 1963, 350.

⁸ KLOSKO 2006; SANTAS 2001, 168.

⁹ Here, Socrates has in mind “the prosecutor of philosophy” (τὸν ἐγκαλοῦντα τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ), who regards philosophy as downright useless, ἄχρηστοι, *Rep.* 487c3–495c7.

whoever is going to rule in Kallipolis must acquire knowledge of the Good and practical knowledge and experience (φρόνησις and ἐμπειρία) about governance.

Now, Glaucon casts doubt on Socrates' declaration because he shares the popular belief that philosophers are generally considered useless and vicious, and challenges Socrates to hold the sceptics off by argument and escape; otherwise, he will pay the penalty of great derision (*Rep.* 473e5–474a3). Socrates takes up the challenge with the following conviction:

T1: If we're to escape from the people you mention, I think we need to define for them who the philosophers are that we dare to say they must rule. And once that's clear, we should be able to defend ourselves by showing that the people we mean are fitted by nature both to engage in philosophy and to rule the city, while the rest are naturally fitted to leave philosophy alone and follow their leader (*Rep.* 474b2–c1).

In his defence from Book V to Book VII, Socrates, I think, uses justification by a comparative method. By this method, I mean that Socrates explicitly compares his true (τοὺς ἀληθινούς) philosopher-rulers with four categories of individuals:

1. lovers of sights and sounds, φιλοθεάμονες καὶ φιλήκοοι (*Rep.* 475d1–480a);
2. the intellectually blind (*Rep.* 484c3–d3);
3. people whose lives are impoverished and destitute of personal satisfaction, but who hope to snatch some compensation for their material inadequacy from a political career (*Rep.* 520e1–521b5); and
4. vicious and crank philosophers whose unscrupulous activities have led philosophy and its decent practitioners to be assailed by the prosecutors of philosophy as useless; they only appear to love the truth because they lack the natural qualities to be genuinely devoted to its pursuit (*Rep.* 489c8–490d7).

Thus, the question which I think preoccupied Socrates in the defence of his declaration is, therefore: *Who can be the best candidate for ruling?* I call this the “value question”. The value question searches for superior qualities which Socrates thinks describe his philosopher-rulers as the best candidates and distinguish them from the above four categories of people. Socrates thinks that such qualities are the cognitive and the moral superiority of his rulers. By cognitive competence, I mean that the philosopher-rulers possess the highest achievements in the triadic modes of cognition. And by moral competence, I mean that the philosophers have the inherent desire to consistently make morally right choices. Socrates makes four claims to this effect. First, he argues that his true

philosophers are cognitively superior to those in categories (1) and (4) because his philosophers genuinely love the sight of truth and can grasp what is always the same (*Rep.* 475e4; 484b3–c1, 489e3–490c3). Second, in contrast to those in category (2), Socrates says his true philosophers have a clear paradigm in their soul to mould an ideal polis and preserve it (*Rep.* 484c5–d3). Third, Socrates says his true philosophers are not inferior to others, either in experience (ἐμπειρία) and any other part of virtue (*Rep.* 484d5–10; see also *Rep.* 539e). Fourth, it is because of those in category (3) that Plato proposes that the only persons to be entrusted with political power are those who do not crave it; true philosophers despise ruling (*Rep.* 521b1–5); those who presently love ruling fight for it mainly because of the material pleasures and honours that come with it.

3. Previous Scholarship

However, scholarship on the philosopher-rulers' epistemic competence in the *Republic* has largely focused on metaphysical ἐπιστήμη. I will show that the current scholarly accounts and understandings of metaphysical ἐπιστήμη are even conceptually inadequate. Perhaps, the inadequacy exists because the discussion has narrowly focused on an aspect of Socrates' defence of his declaration, where, in Book V, he distinguishes between his true philosophers and the individuals in category (1), i.e. the lovers of sights and sounds. The range of the Book V passage is from *Rep.* 473c10–480a. Let us begin with some further prefatory remarks about Socrates' distinction.

According to Socrates, the lovers of sights and sounds can only be “*like* (ὅμοιους) philosophers”, because the difference between them and his true philosophers is that the latter are “those who love the sight of truth” (τοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας φιλοθεάμονας, *Rep.* 475e2–4). The “truth” here is a substantive (non-semantic) truth. Here, the substantive truth is distinguished from semantic (propositional) truth, i.e. truth which applies primarily to propositions or assertions. And to borrow Broadie's description of Aristotle's substantive “truth”, “truth” in this Platonic context indicates, simultaneously, (a) an actual cognitive achievement in relation to some reality, and (b) the reality itself insofar as it is successfully presented to rational cognition or an apprehending consciousness.¹⁰ As Socrates' defence of his declaration subsequently reveals, Plato's substantive truth has as its objects the Good and the Forms and their manifestations in

¹⁰ BROADIE 2020, 259.

concrete perceptible matters. Nonetheless, Plato's thesis, I claim, is that if one possesses substantive truth of/about an object, say the Good, then one has the cognitive advantage to semantically assert true propositions about the object in question: the former is prior to the latter.

The context for this claim is the following: Glaucon says he does not understand what Socrates means by "those who love the sight of truth," and implores him to explain. Socrates' explanation opens with (i) a distinction between a thing itself (reality itself) and its various manifestations; and (ii) a distinction between those who love reality itself and its manifestations, on the one hand, and those who only love the manifestations, on the other hand (*Rep.* 475e9–476b). The explanation leads to a further distinction between knowledge (ἐπιστήμη; γνῶσις) and opinion (δόξα). Socrates then argues that his true philosophers possess knowledge because they not only believe perceptibles about beauty itself but also believe in beauty itself, whereas lovers of sights and sounds possess only opinions because they believe only in sensible particulars about beauty but not beauty itself. Hence, to love substantive truth is to love the whole of being, including its manifestations. So I shall follow Heidegger in arguing that ἀληθεία (substantive truth) is "the *unhiddenness* of being in its totality" such that Plato's alethic inquirer, the philosopher, aims to grasp (ἐφάπτεσθαι) the "totality of being" and that since the Good and the Forms manifest themselves in concrete perceptible matters in the perceptible world, "totality" here includes the apprehension of the manifestations of the Good and Forms, and that to *know*, metaphysically, is to grasp the "totality of being" as it reveals itself to an apprehending consciousness.

At present, what is noteworthy is that scholars have neglected to discuss Plato's conception of substantive truth in their attempt to understand metaphysical ἐπιστήμη. The implications of such neglect will become evident as we discuss the current debate on the philosopher-rulers' epistemic competence, relative to metaphysical ἐπιστήμη. On this debate, scholars have observed that Socrates' distinction between knowledge and opinion in the Book V passage above invites what has come to be known as "the two-world thesis" (the TWT), which asserts that Plato literally conceives two different worlds: a world of Forms and a perceptible world. The question is whether the TWT is a defensible thesis in the *Republic*. Defenders of the TWT hold that knowledge is *only* possible in the metaphysical world since objects of knowledge are Forms. On the other hand, when we come to the sensible world, the highest cognitive level is *opinion* (δόξα), since all objects of opinion are only perceptibles. Given this, the allegation is that ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles is not possible in the *Republic*. The implication of this allegation for Plato's political project is queried as follows:

- (a) If in Kallipolis the philosopher-rulers possess only metaphysical ἐπιστήμη, and the claim that ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles is impossible holds, how can they rule, e.g. judge and determine concrete perceptible matters in the sensible world? Is ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles possible?¹¹

In the next two subsections, I consider the views of rejecters and defenders of the TWT in their responses to question (a). This move will enable us to appreciate how the failure to discuss the substantive truth, and the value question in general, yields unsatisfactory accounts of the philosopher-rulers' epistemic competence, relative to metaphysical ἐπιστήμη.

3.1 Rejection of the TWT

Scholars who reject the TWT, including Fine, Nicholas Smith, and Verity Harte, have largely answered question (a) by concentrating on the part of Socrates' defence of his declaration where he maintains that knowledge is the power "set over what is" (ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι γνῶσις); ignorance is the power "set over what is not" (ἀγνοσία ἐπὶ μὴ ὄντι), and opinion, as an intermediate category between knowledge and ignorance, is the power "set over what is and what is not" (ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι τε καὶ μὴ, *Rep.* 477a-b). The suggestion is that Socrates' argument "treats knowledge and opinion not as mental states but as faculties or powers which produce mental states".¹² Socrates argues that knowledge is set over intelligibles, the Forms - entities that are not subject to spatiotemporal constrictions such as change or situations. This indicates that if knowledge is power, then the cognitive state or level of one who possesses knowledge is such that he possesses the power set over Forms. Thus the formula is that knowledge is the "cognition-ἐπὶ-Forms". On the other hand, opinion is the power set over perceptibles (entities which are susceptible to conditions of spatiotemporality, including situations and change). Therefore, if one possesses an opinion, then one's cognitive state is set over perceptibles. The formula is that opinion is the "cognition-ἐπὶ-perceptibles". Given these two formulae, it may seem *prima facie* that the TWT is a defensible thesis. Is ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles possible?

Despite the variations in their respective accounts, an overarching shared narrative among Fine, Harte, and Smith is that the TWT is indefensible, at least

¹¹ SCHWAB 2016, 42.

¹² SANTAS 2001, 170.

in the *Republic*. Their almost unanimous view is that Plato allows ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles, on the one hand, and belief or opinion about Forms, on the other hand. For instance, Fine argues that "... although Plato in some way correlates knowledge with Forms, and belief with sensibles, he does not say that there is knowledge only of Forms or belief only about sensibles. All he argues is the weaker claim that to know, one must, first, know Forms, restricted to sensibles, one cannot achieve knowledge. This makes Forms the primary objects of knowledge, but not necessarily the only ones; knowledge begins, but need not end, with knowledge of Forms."¹³ The difference for Fine is a difference in the propositional content of knowledge and opinion or belief in terms of truth-bearing: one who knows asserts true propositions, and one who has opinions can make true and false propositions.

Now, Fine does not directly discuss question (a). But the basis of her rejection of the TWT points out her probable answer. Fine's propositional knowledge thesis hinges on her reading of the "is" in the various "set-overs". Thus the "is" in the various "set-overs" evokes a scholarly debate about how it should be read. The alternatives offered are the *is*-veridical, *is*-predicative, and *is*-existential readings. Fine settles on the veridical reading, arguing that the TWT rests on *is*-existential and *is*-predicative readings, yielding a degree of existence (DE) and a degree of reality (DR) interpretation.¹⁴ Thus, DE claims that knowledge is what exists, and belief or opinion is what half-exists. On its part, DR claims that "knowledge is of what is really F (for some predicate F), belief is of what is F and not F, and ignorance is of what is not F".¹⁵ For Fine, both DE and DR suggest that Socrates adopts a defence strategy to convince the sightlovers on controversial premises which they are likely to reject. For instance, Socrates tells us the sightlovers do not believe in the beautiful itself, and they are not willing to follow anyone who could lead them to the knowledge of it (*Rep.* 476c2-3); DR and DE, however, assume the Form and its existence as the premises Socrates uses to convince the sightlovers to accept their cognitive inferiority.

Socrates, argues Fine, appeals to non-controversial premises to convince the sightlovers to accept their intellectual inferiority. Fine believes strongly that the *is*-veridical reading is based on a non-controversial ground: Plato distinguishes "knowledge and belief not by reference to their objects but by reference to the

¹³ FINE 1978, 122.

¹⁴ For the debate about DE and DR, see VLASTOS 1981.

¹⁵ FINE 1978, 122.

truth implications of their contents".¹⁶ In other words, "Plato's claim is that knowledge is of what is true, that belief is of what is and is not true, and ignorance is of what is false".¹⁷ Fine concludes that this "claim states familiar conditions of knowledge and belief that the sightlovers can be expected to agree to: knowledge, but not belief, entails truth."¹⁸ By endorsing the veridical reading, Fine is committed to the view that the one whose cognitive competence is defined by the "cognition-ἐπι-Forms" formula, i.e. the philosopher, asserts only true propositions and the one whose cognition is defined as "cognition-ἐπι-perceptibles" asserts true and false propositions. This is because for Plato, Fine argues, "knowledge, but not belief, entails truth; there may be false beliefs, but there is no false knowledge".¹⁹

The possible implication of Fine's veridical and propositional thesis for question (a) can be stated as follows. If the philosophers' cognition is defined by the "cognition-ἐπι-Forms" formula, and if their assertions, denials, judgements, and determinations of/about concrete perceptible matters constitute propositions, then their judgements and determinations of concrete perceptible matters are *always* true (semantically).²⁰ Apparently, Fine reduces the distinction between knowledge and opinion in the Book V passage to semantic truth, i.e. the truth of a proposition that represents things as they are.²¹ Truth in this sense is a property of the assertion or proposition.²² Fine's propositional thesis may provide the answer for question (a): the philosopher-rulers will always assert propositional truths in judging concrete perceptible matters. But her non-controversial thesis rejects a discussion of Plato's substantive truth, which is, however, the initial premise of Socrates' explanation of who his true philosophers are, and how they differ from the sightlovers. In my discussion of Schwab's work in the next subsection (Section 3.1), we will find out why it is not enough to say that the philosophers are cognitively superior to the sightlovers because they can assert true propositions, whereas the latter make true and false propositions. To summarise, I am not denying the fact that the philosophers will assert true

¹⁶ FINE 1978, 122.

¹⁷ FINE 1978, 122.

¹⁸ FINE 1978, 122.

¹⁹ FINE 1978, 132.

²⁰ I am sceptical about this conclusion (see Section 5).

²¹ See BROADIE 2020, 259.

²² HAACK 1978, 83.

propositions; my argument is that their cognitive superiority is far more than this basic cognitive achievement.

For his part, Smith rejects Fine's veridical reading as conceptually inconsistent to account for the true nature of the "is". Smith observes that Plato has Socrates go on to identify things that are both beautiful and ugly, just and unjust, holy and unholy, big and small, among others: "Being, as characterised in each of these examples, is obviously conceived predicatively."²³ Smith then argues that "it is obviously nonsense either to talk about something as being both true and false *at the same time*, or as existing and not existing *at the same time*".²⁴ Smith argues that the predicative reading of "is" is the correct one among the three alternatives. But predication still falls within the domain of semantics. So here again, as with Fine's *is*-veridical reading, Smith's *is*-predicative reading does less to establish the cognitive superiority of the philosophers. This, however, does not mean that we should dismiss the various *is*-readings. I shall argue for what I call the *is*-absolute reading, which can accommodate the other three alternative *is*-readings. Therefore, I shall postpone any further comment on the *is*-readings for later consideration.

Now, I will pay attention to Smith's response to question (a). In his showing, Smith advances two main theses to support the claim that ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles is possible in the *Republic*. The first is what he calls the "cognitive crossover", according to which knowledge and opinion, as cognitive states, appear to refer to objects that are not those to which their relevant powers are related. Smith supports this thesis with the passage *Rep.* 506e, where Socrates says that he does not know, but does have some opinion about the Good. Smith also writes about the "mixed content cognitions" thesis, which straightforwardly means that there could be beliefs about Forms and knowledge about sensible particulars. Smith and Fine both cite as a confirmation text *Rep.* 520c1-6, where Socrates mentions that the philosopher-rulers will know (*gnōsesthe*) the things in the cave better than those who have never escaped from the place. From this text, Smith rightly says that the things in the cave are neither Forms nor the cave parable's equivalent of Forms.

It is noteworthy that among the rejecters of the TWT we have considered it is Smith who openly says something about the philosopher-rulers needing other epistemic competencies apart from metaphysical ἐπιστήμη. To his credit,

²³ SMITH 2019, 61.

²⁴ SMITH 2019, 61.

Smith acknowledges that the philosopher-rulers will need training to acquire other kinds of epistemic competence to rule, thereby endorsing the NCT. Thus, Smith argues that the potential guardians will require a period of habituation and undergo a period of apprenticeship before they are called upon to rule (520c1–5; 539e2–540a2). “This period of habituation and apprenticeship is required precisely because the education they have received in dialectic (‘outside the cave’) does not *by itself* provide them with an infallible power of judgement about the things ‘in the cave’, or the sensibles.”²⁵ I agree with Smith’s habituation thesis but I think more needs to be said than his passing comment on this important subject.²⁶

3.2 Defence of the TWT

Two current defenders of the TWT in the *Republic* are Whitney Schwab and Jessica Moss.²⁷ There are fundamental similarities between their views, especially the claim that there is no δόξα of Forms and ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles. Nonetheless, I shall concentrate on Schwab’s work here because he actually raises question (a) by way of defending the TWT and the SCT. Schwab hopes that the following conception of ἐπιστήμη will catch hold of the actual meaning of how Socrates conceives it:

[F]or Socrates, *epistēmē* of some fact *P* consists in grasping that *P* either is a fact about, or is grounded in facts about, the natures of certain fundamental entities. For example, to have *epistēmē* of the fact that the just person is happy is to grasp how that fact obtains in virtue of facts about the nature of justice

²⁵ SMITH 2000, 157

²⁶ Smith made significant changes in his view about metaphysical ἐπιστήμη when he featured his “Plato on Knowledge as Power” (SMITH 2000) in his *Summoning Knowledge in Plato’s Republic* (2019). But he makes little effort to show how practical knowledge and experience will coalesce with metaphysical ἐπιστήμη in the rulership of the philosophers. For Klosko, in addition to knowledge of the Good Plato recognises that the philosophers will need other kinds of knowledge, including practical experience: Plato “insists that they be superior in moral knowledge, but also not deficient in practical experience” (KLOSKO 2006, 174). However, Klosko asserts further that “Though Plato stresses the importance of the philosophers’ having absolute knowledge ... philosophers must rule, not because of the practical value of their absolute knowledge, but because absolute knowledge ensures proper values” (KLOSKO 2006, 175). I find this last assertion of Klosko worrying.

²⁷ Moss 2021.

and the nature of happiness. A consequence of this conception of *epistēmē* is that a fact is a possible object of *epistēmē* only if it either is, or follows from, a fact about the natures of certain entities. There are two main components of the view I attribute to Socrates: first, ἐπιστήμη requires grasping chains of facts linked by the grounding relation; second, that facts about natures form the termini of such chains of facts.²⁸

Two main points are noteworthy about Schwab's ἐπιστήμη. First, Schwab takes the grounding relation between a fact and another fact or set of facts to be an explanatory one: if the fact that *P* grounds the fact that *Q*, then *P* explains *Q*. Schwab illustrates: suppose it is in the nature of piety that piety is what is dear to the gods. To have ἐπιστήμη of the fact that sacrificing is pious consists in grasping the explanatory relation between it and the fact that it is in the nature of piety that piety is what is dear to the gods.²⁹ The suggestion is that Schwab is not only offering a coherentist theory of truth but also a coherent criterion of verification: the verity and inferential structure of the proposition "the just person is happy" are assessable by means of its metaphysical (logical) relation with other facts or sets of facts of/about the natures of justice and happiness. Second, and unlike Smith and Fine, Schwab commendably accounts for ἐπιστήμη in a way that does not reduce it to competence in asserting semantic truths. The philosophers' love of truth and search for it are more than asserting or possessing propositional truths and knowledge. That is, the philosophers' highest cognitive level (metaphysical ἐπιστήμη) enables them not only to assert true propositions but also to grasp the basis upon which such propositions are grounded. This partly explains why I think Fine's propositional thesis is inadequate to account for the philosopher-rulers' superiority over the lovers of sights and sounds, as I promised to show.

Now, Schwab uses his conception of ἐπιστήμη to reject the claim regarding ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles:

Given this conception of *epistēmē* ... we can see that Socrates' metaphysics of perceptibles led him to conclude that *epistēmē* of perceptibles is impossible, since the fact (as he sees it) that predicates apply to perceptibles only in certain circumstances plausibly entails that facts about perceptibles are not appropriately grounded in facts about natures.³⁰

²⁸ SCHWAB 2016, 42, 56.

²⁹ SCHWAB 2016, 42, 56.

³⁰ SCHWAB 2016, 42, 56.

Schwab's rejection of ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles is similarly grounded in the reason we noted above: perceptibles are subject to spatiotemporal constrictions. Based on his conception of ἐπιστήμη and its ramifications, Schwab offers the following response to question (a):

[In] my interpretation, although Socrates thinks that facts about perceptibles are not possible objects of *epistēmē* because they do not follow from facts about natures, he nevertheless thinks that philosophers' opinions concerning perceptibles are expert, and hence, authoritative. And Socrates thinks that philosophers' opinions concerning perceptible matters are expert because they are informed by their *epistēmē* of intelligibles. That is, Socrates does think that *epistēmē* is necessary for good ruling, but that is because *epistēmē* of intelligibles informs philosophers' opinions concerning perceptibles and not because philosophers have *epistēmē* of perceptibles.³¹

This is a summary of Schwab's argument to reject ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles. Let me say that Schwab's exposition is worth studying to understand Plato's metaphysical epistemology. However, I think his thesis is fraught with some issues. I shall be concerned with three here: the first is a question to be explored later; the second is a logical counterargument, and the third is textual criticism.

First, and as stated earlier, Schwab's account of ἐπιστήμη is more comprehensive than those of Smith and Fine. But there is still the question as to whether Schwab's conception of ἐπιστήμη is what substantively accounts for metaphysical ἐπιστήμη in the *Republic*. I shall argue that "understanding" (νοῦς), guaranteed by knowledge of the Good, is the ultimate cognitive success of the philosopher's metaphysical epistemic pursuit. Schwab only mentions "understanding" and puts it aside.

Second, the logical counterargument. Schwab's effort to prove the practical value of metaphysical ἐπιστήμη is commendable. But I think Socrates would have failed miserably if, despite the elaborate nature of the philosopher-rulers' education, all that they can do in ruling is to share an opinion in any sense. To be sure, I am not claiming in any way that there is nothing like an "expert opinion". Rather, I contend that the epistemic competence of the philosopher-rulers is irreducible to anything related to opinion, relative to their judgements of concrete perceptible matters. Now, unlike Fine and Smith, Schwab's expert opinion thesis relies not on his reading of the "is" in the various "set-overs", but on a supposed relation he thinks exists between δόξα and γνῶσις. Schwab ob-

³¹ SCHWAB 2016, 42, 56.

serves, and he is right, that “Socrates certainly thinks that all *epistēmē* counts as *gnōsis*”.³² And Socrates also thinks that *διάνοια* counts as *γνώσις*; hence, Socrates, by *modus ponens*, identifies *διάνοια* as *ἐπιστήμη*. Schwab observes, however, that Socrates also distinguishes *διάνοια* from *ἐπιστήμη* when he maintains that so long as mathematicians leave their principles undisturbed no mechanism could turn their cognition of mathematics into *ἐπιστήμη* (*Rep.* 511c2–d5). Hence, Socrates, according to Schwab, conceives of *διάνοια* and *ἐπιστήμη* as two distinct kinds of cognition, each of which he is willing to call *γνώσις*.

Schwab relies on this conclusion to gloss on passage *Rep.* 477a2–4, where Socrates maintains that “what is completely is completely knowable (*γνωστόν*), and what is in no way is in every way unknowable (*ἄγνωστον*).” Schwab then proposes that the contrast between completely *γνωστόν* and completely *ἄγνωστον* strongly suggests a third possibility, a *tertium quid*, namely, “in some way *γνωστόν* and in some way *ἄγνωστον*”. This *tertium quid* creates a conceptual space for opinion. Given this possibility, Schwab argues that “perceptibles could plausibly be thought of as *agnōston* in so far as they cannot be cognized in the way necessary for *epistēmē* but *gnōston* in so far as the opinions that someone with *epistēmē* forms about them have a special status.”³³ That is, whether cognition of perceptibles can count as *γνωστόν* or *ἄγνωστον* becomes a matter of perspective. From the viewpoint of lovers of sights and sounds, perceptibles are *ἄγνωστον*, whereas the philosophers’ opinion concerning concrete perceptibles can be identified as *γνώσις* because, Schwab claims, it is informed by *ἐπιστήμη* of intelligibles and has that special status.

My worry here, however, is that (a₁) the fact that Socrates often speaks about the three cognitive states and levels (ignorance, opinion, and knowledge) does not necessarily mean that these three states exhaust all other possible cognitive states and levels within the range of completely *γνωστόν* and completely *ἄγνωστον* if we understand such a range to be a vertical cognitive continuum (as the divided line simile shows). That is, the expression “in some way” is a degree modifier. And between completely *γνωστόν* and completely *ἄγνωστον*, there can be several other degree modifiers, including “nearly *γνωστόν*”, “almost *ἄγνωστον*”, “somewhat somehow *γνωστόν*”, and many others. If this holds, then it is questionable why we must accept that the philosophers’ judgements and determinations of/about concrete perceptible matters constitute opinion and

³² SCHWAB 2016, 80.

³³ SCHWAB 2016, 81.

not that which is, for instance, “nearly γνωστόν”. Moreover, (a₂) Schwab claims that the gnostic opinions of the philosophers enjoy the privileges of ἐπιστήμη, including the claim that “they are reliable, justified, and well-formed”.³⁴ But if ἐπιστήμη and δόξα are not themselves mental states but different cognitive faculties or powers which produce mental states, as Socrates says, why must the products of the philosopher’s epistemic cognitive power, like propositions about perceptible things, enjoy the privileges of ἐπιστήμη, including non-spatiotemporality, but still count as opinion in any sense?³⁵ In a paper he co-authored with Moss, Schwab asserts that “those with *doxa* about something lack knowledge of it; to gain knowledge is to leave *doxa* behind”.³⁶ If so, what does the philosopher have to do with opinion after gaining knowledge?

Third, Schwab’s exposition on perceptibles seems far too simple. It is as though he takes all concrete perceptibles to be only *tangible* entities. For instance, the force of Schwab’s thesis relies on a passage in Book VII (he calls it a “star passage”) in which Socrates says that “If anyone attempts to learn something about sensible things, whether by gaping upward or squinting downward, I’d claim – since there’s no knowledge in such things – that he never learns anything...” (*Rep.* 529a9–c2). Actually, this passage is about astronomy. And the significant question is whether Socrates is here talking about the unreliability of the popular mode of apprehending astronomy (sense perception) or the astronomical embroideries themselves do not constitute ἐπιστήμη. The answer can be both.³⁷ However, while Socrates looks askance at sense perception as a mode of cognition, he does not shrug off the value of astronomic embroidery; it is mereologically part of the constitutive elements of astronomy. In fact, Socrates says that the embroideries should be used as models in the study of the true motions of astronomy,³⁸ which are graspable by reason and thought, and not by sight (*Rep.* 529d4–5). Socrates argues that other important aspects of astronomy are not directly given to the senses.

Similarly, some perceptibles, such as an instance of the Form Justice, are not readily given to the senses; hence, they cannot be “literally” seen in the same

³⁴ SCHWAB 2016, 81.

³⁵ For instance, Santas writes that Socrates’ argument in Book V “treats knowledge and opinion not as mental states but as faculties or powers which produce mental states” (SANTAS 2001, 170).

³⁶ MOSS – SCHWAB 2019, 5.

³⁷ On this see WHITE 1992.

³⁸ See *Rep.* 529c7–d8.

way as astronomic embroidery. Such intangible perceptibles can also be “seen” or grasped not by sight but by reason and thought. Thus, besides the “literal” seeing of some perceptibles, Socrates’ ocular language at *Rep.* 520c1–6 (and in many places in the dialogue) can be labelled as “metaphysical seeing”: “And because you’ve seen (ἑώρακένας) the truth about fine, just and good things, you’ll know (γνώσεσθε) each image for what it is and also that of which it is the image.” This confirms my claim that some perceptibles (like the participants of Forms) are not readily given to the senses as perceptibles and, therefore, determining their nature would involve studying sometimes complex situations or cases to see and know³⁹ what they actually are and the Forms which are their various manifestations or, in the words of Perl, “what display the identities” (i.e. instantiations, reflections, images).⁴⁰ Each of the manifestations appears as a sortal kind of the Form, but none can constitute the whole of which it is a part (*Rep.* 476a4–7). In essence, what Schwab, together with scholars who think like him, fails to realise is that some perceptibles are *objects of study* in the perceptible world.

Interestingly, and relative to ruling, metaphysically seeing the manifestations of the Forms will require ἐπιστήμη which is “experiential”. To illustrate with an example, let us return to the role of the philosopher-rulers as judges in Kalipolis. This role requires that they determine and judge concrete cases about what is just and unjust. Socrates says that their sole aim in delivering judgement will be that no citizen should have what belongs to another or be deprived of what is his own (*Rep.* 433e9–11). Hence, the test of their epistemic competencies will be evinced in their delivery of good judgement and determination of concrete perceptible matters, including complex and nuanced cases. We can take it for granted that practical wisdom is evinced in the deliberation to judge the cases, answering the question, “what is to be done” or “what is the best course of action” in a given situation. For the philosopher-rulers to succeed at judging, Socrates tells us that “a good judge must not be a young person but an old one, who has learned late in life what injustice is like and who has become aware of it not as something at home in his own soul, but as something alien and present in others, someone, who, after a long time, has recognised that injustice is bad by nature, not from his own experience of it, but through

³⁹ In glossing on *Rep.* 520c1–6, Fine rightly observes that here “Plato’s claim is that the philosophers will know each image, what they are and of what”; *gnōsesthe*, plus the *batta* clause, suggests he means “know” and not merely “recognise” (FINE 1978, 121).

⁴⁰ PERL 2014, 30.

knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)” (*Rep.* 409b4–9, the full context from 408c3).⁴¹ The sense of ἐπιστήμη in this context should not present any quandary: it is what can be referred to as “experiential knowledge”. That is, a good judge gains experience about injustice through consistent observation of it in others (the science of human and social psychology is crucial in the philosopher-rulers’ education).

So suppose there is a theft case and four suspects are arraigned to defend and exonerate themselves before philosopher-rulers, *qua* judges. Suppose further that each of the suspects has the competence to present facts and convince the jury by compelling arguments. In this case, the philosopher-rulers, *qua* judges, are to establish, in modern parlance, “the truth of the matter” after diligent study and good deliberation of each fact presented and the various arguments proffered. Recall that Socrates says the philosopher-rulers’ sole aim in delivering judgements will be that no citizen should have what belongs to another or be deprived of what is his own. I believe that the judgement that will follow from such study and assessment of arguments is nothing but “a manifestation” of Justice itself: the judgement is propositional truth grounded in metaphysical ἐπιστήμη, experience and practical wisdom. If this holds, then I think that Socrates’ metaphysics allows ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles of the Forms for the following reason: ἐπιστήμη of perceptibles is possible, but the only knowledge one can have of/about the perceptibles of the Forms is that they are what manifest or display their identity. Hence, I agree with the rejecters of the TWT in the *Republic*. However, seeing the perceptibles, especially the intangible ones, like that of Justice itself, may require an appeal to other means of epistemic competencies, including experience and practical wisdom, as I have demonstrated. As far as I know, this fact is missing in the accounts of Fine, Smith, Harte, and other rejecters of the TWT in the *Republic*.

But there is an objection. Schwab may inquire from us how facts about concrete perceptibles, which are not manifestations of the metaphysical entities, can obtain in the perceptible world. I suggest that in the perceptible world practical knowledge and experience are appropriate bases for grounding facts. In other words, and as I have shown, concrete perceptible matters are objects of study, and facts about them may obtain or be grounded in virtue of principles that are true of experience, practical knowledge, and (we can add) consistent training.

⁴¹ Also in Book IX, Socrates says that the philosopher “alone has gained his experience in the company of practical wisdom” (καὶ μὴν γε φρονήσεως μόνος ἔμπειρος γεγονώς ἔσται, *Rep.* 582d3).

4. The Value Question Revisited

So far I have argued that the dominant literature on the philosopher-rulers' epistemic competence is inadequate. The challenge is to offer a more comprehensive account. To do this, we need to revisit the value question. In the subsections that follow, I am guided by Socrates' justification by a comparative method to ascertain the cognitive superiority of the philosopher-rulers in the light of the value question.

4.1 Practical Wisdom and Experience

In Book VII, Socrates claims that his rulers are those who despise ruling, unlike those who love to rule; the lovers of ruling usually fight over it because they usually have material honours and wealth as their motive of personal gains (*Rep.* 520c9–d3). In contrast, Socrates concludes that his philosopher-rulers are “those who have the best understanding of what matters for good government (φρονιμώτατοι δι’ ὧν ἄριστα πόλις οἰκεῖται) and who have other honours than political ones, and a better life as well...” (*Rep.* 521b7–9). If metaphysical ἐπιστήμη is the only knowledge the philosopher-rulers are to acquire, what sense does Socrates want to make here by claiming that the rulers have the best understanding, by which he means practical wisdom?⁴² Recall that the philosopher-rulers are warriors in both the defensive and offensive senses and they must need practical wisdom and experience.

Moreover, the rulers are going to decide concrete perceptible matters such as those that concern market business, including the private contracts people make with one another in the marketplace, for example, or contracts with manual labourers, cases of insult or injury, the bringing of lawsuits, the establishment of juries, and payment and assessment of whatever dues are necessary for markets and harbours, among others (*Rep.* 425c8–d5). There is every reason to believe that their epistemic competence entails practical wisdom and experience at the highest state of cognition in the sense pointed out above; they not only acquire the needed practical knowledge and experience, but also can transfer such epistemic competencies to others in the form of teaching. We can, therefore, be

⁴² It is noteworthy that the use of φρονιμώτατοι is non-accidental here. At *Rep.* 530b5–6, Socrates refers to the philosophic part as τὸ φύσει φρόνιμον (the naturally intelligent). In Book IX, he repeatedly refers to the person with knowledge as τὸ φρόνιμος (*Rep.* 567b10–11; 583a3–4; 583b3–4).

certain that the philosopher-rulers must know more than metaphysical ἐπιστήμη, reaffirming my position that Plato is committed to the NCT but not the SCT.

It deserves mention that Plato does not just assume that his rulers must have practical wisdom and experience; it is part of their training and education. I observe that their education is two-phased: the *anabatic* phase and the *katabatic* phase. The anabatic phase concerns all subjects that aid in the ascension to grasping the Good, the most prominent being dialectics. And the katabatic phase involves all subjects aimed at gaining practical knowledge and experience (in the cave). The most distinctive aspect of the katabatic phase is that the potential philosopher-rulers must spend fifteen years performing administrative service to acquire the necessary political administrative skills before they can be allowed to rule. Consider this passage:

T2: [Y]ou must make them go down (καταβιβαστέοι) into the cave again, and compel them to take command in matters of war and occupy the other offices suitable to young people, so that they won't be inferior to the others in experience (ἐμπειρία). But in this, too, they must be tested to see whether they'll remain steadfast when they're pulled this way or that or shift their ground (*Rep.* 539e).⁴³

This is confirmed few lines later:

T3: Then, at the age of fifty, those who've survived the tests and been successful both in practical matters and in the sciences (πάντα πάντη ἐν ἔργοις τε καὶ ἐπιστήμασι) 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 (*Rep.* 540a3–b4, also 543a1–5).

We are assured that the philosopher-rulers will be confronted with everyday practical problems which require practical reasoning – a kind of reasoning which takes the form of “what is to be done?” or “what is the best course of action?”

⁴³ In Book V, Socrates insists on gaining experience and practical knowledge through observation: “Men and women will campaign together. They'll take the sturdy children with them, so that, like the children of other craftsmen, they can see what they'll do when they grow up.” Glaucon says it would be completely ridiculous for “the craftsmen to take more care in training their children by appropriate experience and observation than the guardians” (*Rep.* 466e3–467a6).

kind of questions. In deciding the best course of action, in a given situation, the philosopher-rulers must, as stated earlier, deliberate on how to arrive at the truth of the matter. The *how*-question involves deliberation on the means to determine the desired end. Plausibly, the philosopher-rulers, through their education, become committed not only to substantive (metaphysical truth) but also truth in practical matters evinced in practical decision making. As I have demonstrated with the theft case scenario, determining the truth in practical matters involves seeing the manifestations of the Forms in concrete perceptible matters.

From this perspective, we can suggest the following reasons as to why Socrates thinks his true philosophers possess cognitive and moral superiority over those who love ruling. I enumerate three plausible reasons: (1) Socrates mentions repeatedly that the true philosopher considers all material pleasures and honours worthless, including those associated with ruling, as “compared to that of knowing where the truth lies, and always being in some rich condition while learning” (*Rep.* 581c3–e); (2) the philosophers’ love for all kinds of truth is a sustaining commitment that shapes their personality and informs all their habits, dispositions, and actions; their psychic harmony and the invariability of their character are what is needed to sustain the polis’ social harmony; and (3) they have the practical and experiential cognitive competence to decide concrete problems. Now, the fact that they despise material pleasures and honours, and the fact that they are educated to have no social and emotional attachments to the citizens they serve, suggest their cognitive and moral superiority over ordinary judges in deciding the best course of action, in a given situation: they can pass just verdicts because they cannot be emotionally or materially induced to do otherwise. They are most likely to arrive at judgements and determinations or deliberative solutions which take into account only sound principles and logic as well as practical efficiency. In essence, the philosopher-rulers are men and women of practical wisdom and experience.

4.2 Metaphysical ἐπιστήμη and Epistemic Absolutism

I explore the nature of metaphysical ἐπιστήμη in this subsection. I acknowledge that a discussion of metaphysical ἐπιστήμη is involving, and I cannot explore all that it entails in just a subsection. I, therefore, find it strategically useful to limit the discussion to Socrates’ value question. Now, I have shown the problem with Fine’s veridical and propositional suggestion, grounded in her non-controversiality thesis. I have suggested that crucial attention needs to be paid to Plato’s notion of substantive truth if we are to understand the cognitive superiority of the philosopher-rulers over the sightlovers and crank philosophers.

It is this claim I turn to advance here. In his attempt to convince the sightlover to accept his intellectual inadequacy, Socrates advances an epistemological thesis based on the following basic argument (*Rep.* 476e):

- (A) The person who knows does know something, say X.
 - (B) It is impossible for something that is not to be known.
-
- (C) One can only know something that is.

For instance, to know X is to know that X exists and X is something. The corollary is that if one knows that X is, then one can intelligibly predicate something as signifying X, for instance, “X is *f*”. And if X is *f*, then to assert that X is *f* and not *q* is to specify, in an instance, the truth value of the proposition “X is *f*” that it is true. As I have already mentioned, Socrates’ exposition trades on an ambiguous reading of “εἶναι”: existential, predicative, and veridical readings, and all of these readings are possible candidates. However, in the absence of Socrates’ initial premise at *Rep.* 475e2–4, which assumes the theory of Forms, his subsequent argument formalised here as “to know X is to know that X exists and X is something” will warrant semantic analysis, as Fine’s non-controversiality thesis seeks to do. But I have said that the semantic approach does less to account for the philosopher-rulers’ metaphysical cognitive superiority. Recall that Socrates uses the disposition to genuinely love non-semantic truth not only to distinguish his true philosophers from the sightlovers but also the crank and vicious philosophers. How can asserting semantic truth be a major reason why the true philosophers are special in comparison with the vicious and crank ones? As an alternative to the other *is*-readings, I defend an *is*-absolute reading as what significantly decides the distinction between Socrates’ true philosophers and the lovers of sights and sounds as well as the crank and vicious philosophers. To do this, I return to the passage in which Schwab inferred his expert opinion thesis. Socrates follows up the conclusion (C) in his basic argument above with the following claim (*Rep.* 477a2–4):

- T4: No matter how many ways we examine it, what is completely (παντελῶς ὄν) is completely knowable (παντελῶς γνωστόν) and what is in no way (μὴ ὄν δὲ μηδαμῆ) is in every way unknowable (παντελῶς ἄγνωστον).

Two points are noteworthy in this passage. First, if X is completely, I suggest that the “is” in “X is” establishes, ontologically, the absoluteness or completeness of X. One implication of this reading is that X is complete in and of itself such that its completeness is independent of our cognition of/about it. That

is, if X is complete in itself, then it follows that our cognition of/about it does nothing to confer any value on it. For instance, if the gods are ontologically complete in and of themselves, it is questionable to claim that offering sacrifices to them is an act of piety; the sacrifice surely adds nothing to their completeness. Given this possible reading, we may be curious to find out why Socrates describes “what is” with the modifier “completely”. Taking “what is” to signify any Form, there are Forms, such as justice and beauty, which “manifest (φανταζόμενα) themselves everywhere in association with actions, bodies, and one another, each of them appears to be many” (*Rep.* 475e9–476a8). Hence, I suggest that the “completely” which describes the ontological sufficiency of any Form, say, Justice, is a distinctive marker to distinguish it from all its manifestations. Socrates needs to point this out because one can have cognitive access to the manifestations of the Forms and think that they are their complete beings, as the lovers of sights and sounds claim. Second, Socrates is saying that “what is completely” is an object of knowledge and (we can add, study) such that it can be fully studied and known (*Rep.* 508d9–e1). Hence, if one knows that X is, then one knows that X *is* completely, precisely because X can be studied to be known completely. The “completely” in this context, I suggest, is a degree modifier signifying the highest cognitive level that distinguishes the philosophers from the sightlovers (whose cognitive level guarantees only true beliefs about “what is”).

In general, the crux of Socrates’ argument is that where a concept, such as justice, involves cognition, there is an implication of degrees of cognition and their relatedness to truth, knowledge, and understanding. That is, concepts such as beauty, justice, piety, and temperance are cognitive in kind such that human cognition about them can be developed to optimal levels. If so, what does Socrates mean when he says that his philosophers *know*? Consistently with the absolutist reading of εἶναι, I suggest that to *know*, metaphysically speaking, is to have a complete conceptual grasp of that which does not admit degree, i.e. what is completely in and of itself, i.e. the Good and the Forms. This is what I want to call epistemic absolutism.⁴⁴ The idea is that to know X is to have a complete conceptual grasp of the Form X. Szaif interprets Plato’s epistemology similarly. Apart from him, the *locus classicus* to understand Plato’s epistemic absolutism is Heidegger’s exegesis of the cave simile, which has sadly been neglected in scholarship. Heidegger imputes the following essentialist conception

⁴⁴ For a semantic, propositional notion of epistemic absolutism, see LAI 2021.

of truth to Socrates: truth (*ἀλήθεια*) is *unhiddenness* of being as it unveils itself to an apprehending consciousness: something true is unhidden.⁴⁵ Heidegger strikes a distinction between the essence of truth as unhiddenness and the correspondence theory of truth (which has *self-evidence* as its essence). The sight-lovers are correspondent-truth-holders in this sense because truth is to them what is self-evidently evinced in locutions such as “I see the beautiful girl”, etc. However, beyond what is self-evident, argues Heidegger, most realities largely remain hidden from sense perception. If we are to accept Heidegger’s essentialist notion of truth, and I think we should, to know, then, is to become fully aware of “the totality of being” as it becomes completely unhidden to an apprehending consciousness. In this context, we can take Socrates’ assertion that his true philosophers are “those who love the sight of truth” to mean that they are those who aim to grasp the totality of being.

What is the superior value of possessing knowledge and substantive truth, as construed? I suggest that the ultimate cognitive success of the metaphysical epistemic journey is “understanding” (*νοῦς*). To grasp this, let us consider the distinction Socrates strikes between his true philosophers and the crank and vicious philosophers. Socrates says in Book VI that the true philosopher is to

T5: be guided by truth and always pursue it in every way, or else he’d really be a boaster, with no share at all in true philosophy. [For] it is the nature of the real lover of learning to struggle toward what is, not to remain with any of the many things that are believed to be, that is, 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 what really is and having intercourse with it and having begotten understanding and truth (*γεννήσας νοῦν καὶ ἀλήθειαν*), he knows, truly lives, is nourished, and – at the point, but not before, is relieved from the pains of giving birth... (*Rep.* 490a1-b7; for confirmation, see 508d4-6; cf. 506c6-10).

Metaphysical *ἐπιστήμη* is the highest cognitive level in grasping reality on the cognitive continuum. If attaining this highest cognition begets understanding and truth, it presupposes that metaphysical *ἐπιστήμη* is a precondition for understanding and truth, metaphysically speaking. If this holds, then I propose

⁴⁵ HEIDEGGER 2002, 9.

that understanding and substantive truth are the crowning cognitive successes, the final epistemic values, of grasping the Good.⁴⁶ I have said that if one holds substantive truth about say, Justice, one possesses a full grasp of the Justice: its totality. What then does it mean “to understand”? I propose that “understanding” is a cognitive state wherein the philosophers acquire “authoritative certainty” about reality and an efficient executive skill to carry out mental activities associated with such cognitive certainty. Socrates mentions in T5 that the knower will have the ability to know (semantically), truly live, and become intellectually nourished. These are all cognitive benefits that are generated from understanding and possessing non-semantic truth.⁴⁷ Elsewhere, Socrates says that “one can feel both secure and confident when one knows the truth about the dearest and most important things and speak about them among those who are themselves wise and dear friends” (*Rep.* 450d6–e1). It is this authoritative certainty, superior executive skills, and confidence that the sightlovers and vicious philosophers claim, even though they are less committed to grasping being in its totality.⁴⁸

I conclude this subsection with the following reflections. Broadie states the aim of theoretical intellectual activity, for Aristotle, is *ἐπιστήμη*, scientific knowledge, which involves grasping things on the basis of their causes and principles; that we have *ἐπιστήμη* in relation to *p* only if we understand why *p* is the case, i.e. only if we see it as grounded on something more fundamental: its cause and principle.⁴⁹ Schwab has shown that this view is prior to Aristotle’s thought. But our account has also shown that Schwab’s view is just one of the many cogni-

⁴⁶ Some confirmation of this claim is provided by this text in which Socrates concludes the divided line simile with the following claim: “there are four conditions in the soul, corresponding to the four subsections of our line: understanding for the highest, thought for the second, belief for the third, and imaging for the last. Arrange them in a ration, and consider that each shares in clarity to the degree that the subsection it is set over shares in truth” (*Rep.* 511d6–e2).

⁴⁷ On the moral benefits of grasping the Good, see MACKIE 1977, COOPER 1977, and VASILIOU 2015.

⁴⁸ Recall that Socrates says the sightlovers are unable or unwilling to follow anyone who could lead them to know (*Rep.* 476c2–4). Nevertheless, they claim to know and begrudge anyone who argues otherwise (*Rep.* 476e4–8), just like Euthyphro, who boastfully claims that “I should be of no use, Socrates, and Euthyphro would not be superior to the majority of men, if I did not have accurate knowledge of all such things” (*Euthphr.* 4e8–5a2). The danger seems to be that they are likely to deploy insufficient or deficient principles in decision making. Their principles are close to what Michael Green calls “unfounded claims of authoritative certainty” that typically divide and separate people into antagonistic camps, causing animosity and hostilities to flare up, rather than bringing them together in a shared understanding, as presumably, any “true wisdom” might (I took Michael Green’s statement from a philosophical group discussion).

⁴⁹ BROADIE 2020, 253.

tive benefits that the philosophers derive from understanding and truth. Schwab avoids a discussion of “understanding” in the dialogue, and consequently makes his account of ἐπιστήμη too idiosyncratic: the philosophers can grasp chains of facts linked by their grounding relation. In this sense, they can only be better than Euthyphro to answer Socrates’ “What is X” question more accurately.

What is crucially missing in Schwab’s account is the following. Broadie adds that “*epistēmē* in a field is a disposition for understanding and explaining things in that field. *A*, who has discovered that *p* is grounded in *q*, can teach this to *B*, i.e., bring *B* to see *p* as grounded in the more fundamental *q*, and hence to understand *p*... Thus, the ultimate objective of theoretical inquiry and teaching is the act of understanding.”⁵⁰ In connection with this, I strongly believe that metaphysical ἐπιστήμη guarantees the philosopher-rulers the ability to objectively ground their judgement and determinations about perceptible matters. Moreover, metaphysical ἐπιστήμη also grants them the “authoritative certainty” to teach others, i.e., the future generation of philosopher-rulers. Socrates says that the philosopher-ruler will depart for the Isles of the Blessed “having educated others like himself to take his place as guardians of the city” (*Rep.* 540b4–6). But it deserves emphasis that if the matured philosopher-ruler can teach others like himself, it is precisely because he possesses not only metaphysical ἐπιστήμη but also superior understanding of practical matters in the perceptible world.

5. The Philosopher-Rulers as Painters

The philosopher-rulers can rule because they have the best practical understanding (φρονιμώτατοι), noetic understanding (νοῦς), and superior experience with what matters for good governance. I have demonstrated how these kinds of cognitive competence coalesce in the philosopher-rulers’ judgement of concrete perceptible matters. In this last section, I show how they coincide in ruling the polis, in general. To do this, I return to the distinction Socrates draws between his true philosophers and the intellectually blind. Relative to these categories of people, Socrates claims that his true philosophers have a clear pattern in their souls (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἔχοντες παράδειγμα) to mould the polis into perfection after the ideal because of their acquaintance with that which is always the same, the Good. Therefore, they can – in the manner of painters – look at (ἀποβλέποντες) what is most true, make constant reference to it, and study it as exactly as possible.

⁵⁰ BROADIE 2020, 253.

Accordingly, the philosopher-rulers can establish here on earth conventions about what is fine or just or good, when they need to be established, or guard or preserve them once they have been established (*Rep.* 484c6-d3). In this way, I suggest that Socrates presents knowledge of the Good as relevant for politics in the sense of providing a normative guide (let us call this the normative guidance thesis, the NGT). In Book VII, we are told that the Good is the cause of whatever is right and valuable in anything and, as we saw above, it is also the source of truth and understanding such that anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private must have a sight of it (*Rep.* 517b8-c4). Hence, a person will not be a useful guardian of what is right and valuable if he does not know what constitutes their goodness. Another piece of supporting evidence for the NGT is the following passage, where Socrates, again, compares the guardians to painters to emphasise their deliberative capacity:

T6: ... No city will ever find happiness until its outline is sketched by painters who use the divine model ... [after they wiped clean the city and the characters of men] they would sketch the outline of the constitution ... And I suppose that, as they work, they would look often in each direction, towards the natures of justice, the fine, moderation, and the like, on the one hand, and towards those they are trying to put into human beings, on the other. And in this way, they would mix and blend the various ways of life in the city until they produced a human image based on what Homer too called “the divine form and image” ... And they would erase one thing, I suppose, and draw in another until they had made characters for human beings that the gods would love as much as possible (*Rep.* 500b-501c3).

Notions of the philosopher-rulers “trying”, “sketching”, and “erasing” suggest trial and error in their practical deliberation of the moulding of a happy polis. It involves the question “what is the best course of action” in a particular moment, wherein practical knowledge and experience become crucial. It is for this reason I take issue with Fine’s conclusion that the philosopher-rulers will assert *only* true propositions. The expression “to sketch and erase” implies the detection of errors in one’s prior thought. This means that the rulers can make mistakes in their deliberations (in asserting propositions about a given concrete perceptible matter), despite their possession of the highest cognitive competences in the three modes of cognition. But the consolation is that Socrates believes their epistemic competencies, evinced in their metaphysical abilities, practical and experiential wisdom, are superior to the four categories of individuals, given his value question. Or so I have argued.

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Summary

It is widely accepted that ruling is the sole prerogative of Plato's philosopher-rulers because they alone possess knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*). This knowledge is knowledge of the Good, taken to be the only knowledge there is in Kallipolis. Let us call this the sufficiency condition thesis (the SCT). In this paper, I challenge this consensus. I cast doubt on the adequacy of the SCT, arguing that part of the training and education of the philosopher-rulers involves their gaining practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*) and experience (*ἐμπειρία*). To succeed in this, I have two main aims. First, I argue that the philosopher-rulers must attain optimum cognitive success in these three modes of cognition to function efficiently in ruling. This involves showing that Plato, for his political project, appeals to other senses of cognitive successes besides his strictly metaphysical epistemology. Second, I attempt to demonstrate how these three modes of cognition coalesce or coincide in ruling the perceptible world, especially in the judgement and determination of concrete perceptible matters.

Keywords: epistemic; Plato; competence; understanding; metaphysical; knowledge

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