

Plato's forgotten four pages of the Seventh Epistole

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Glenn Morrow refers to the Seventh Epistole as '...one of the most impressive of all his [Plato's] written compositions...'.¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to the notorious epistemological section that is the subject of this paper as 'four precious pages'.² What makes this composition one of Plato's most impressive written works? Why are these four pages precious? And is there a relevance to deriving value for philosophy today from Plato's suggestions in this passage?

Much of these four pages are caught up with examining what Gadamer refers to as the 'ridiculously simple' example of the knowledge of a circle. What Plato is attempting in this short compass is to illustrate that in knowing a circle, one is already in possession of the knowledge of the Form of a circle and thus even in such an elementary case of knowledge, there is knowledge of the Forms. In the Seventh Epistole, Plato is not only arguing for the existence of the Forms, he is stating that knowledge of the Forms is possible. The process by which one achieves the knowledge of the Form of a circle, that is, understands what a circle is, is the same process through which one arrives at all knowledge of Forms.

Before proceeding, it is important to take note of the scholarly position with regard to the claim of the Seventh Epistole being a legitimate part of the Platonic *corpus*. According to the great Plato scholar, A. E. Taylor, writing in 1926, there is no longer any question as to the authenticity of the Seventh Epistole, Taylor points out that tradition accepted the Seventh Epistole as authentic from ancient times up until the fifteenth century.³ Glenn Morrow

¹ Glenn R Morrow, *Plato's Epistles*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1962, p. 55.

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's Seventh Letter,' in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies in Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 96.

³ A. E. Taylor, *Plato, The Man and His Work*, London: Methuen, 1926, pp. 11-16.

puts forth the most detailed, lengthy and cogent account of the grounds for the authenticity of the Seventh Epistole. In addition to pointing to the body of opinion of twentieth century scholars that differs from the nineteenth century scholars who held that the Seventh Epistole was not authentic (nor, according to them, were the Parmenides, Sophist, Cratylus, and Philebus), Morrow adduces copious and compelling historical, philological and stylistic arguments for the authenticity of the Seventh Epistole. For example, Morrow cites the cases of Cicero and Plutarch who regard the Seventh Epistole as genuine. He also remarks upon the general unanimity of the present body of opinion on the most decisive criterion, that of style.⁴ To his list of arguments, one might add the argument that the long, digressive passage in which the theory of knowledge appears (in a letter devoted mostly to a discussion of Dionysius of Syracuse) is an authentic mark of the literary devices of Plato. F. M. Cornford's judgment as to the authenticity of the Seventh Epistole is more cautious as when he refers to the Seventh Epistole in a footnote, he begins by saying, 'If Epistole VII, 342A ff. be accepted as genuine...'⁵ While Kenneth Sayre marshals arguments to demonstrate that the Seventh Epistole is genuine and accepts the Seventh Epistole as genuine, and provides arguments to show why the arguments of those who reject Seventh Epistole are inferior to the arguments of those who accept it, in an interesting remark, he comments that, 'The fact that recent scholarship tends strongly to favor the authenticity of the Seventh Letter, needless to say, does not by itself put the issue to rest.'⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to the authenticity of the Seventh Epistole being "contested" and the epistemological passage "called into question recently", but does not indicate by whom.⁷ Gadamer nevertheless considers it worthwhile to write thirty pages about it. In any case, a proper understanding of the epistemological contents of the Seventh Epistole serves to illuminate other dialogues of Plato's, and also serves as a springboard of ideas which take one beyond the question of mere Platonic scholarship.

What then is Plato's account of knowledge that has stirred so much controversy and yet now is considered to form part of the authentic Platonic

⁴ Glenn R. Morrow, *Plato's Epistles*, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill, Co., 1962, pp. 3-21; 45, 60-80, et passim.

⁵ F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, Co., 1957, p. 9, n. 1.

⁶ Kenneth Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden*, Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, p. xix, pp. xviii-xxiii.

⁷ 'Dialectic and Sophism in Plato's Seventh Letter,' in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies in Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 96. Gadamer does himself state that he "presumes that the Seventh Epistole is authentic" in another essay in the same volume. Cf., 'Amicus Plato Magis Amica Veritas,' p. 200.

corpus? In the lengthy epistemological digression, Plato analyses the act of knowledge into five parts, all of which he considers to be necessary for knowledge to take place.⁸ The five elements are: the name, the definition, the image, the resultant knowledge itself and the proper object of knowledge, the Form.⁹ Knowledge itself is not strictly speaking a component since it is the resultant of the interaction of the other parts, but it is a separate *analysandum*.

What is of special interest for present purposes, is not the Fifth which is the part of Plato's doctrine that has received the most attention, but the Fourth. Since Anglo-American philosophy has been preoccupied with the analysis of logic and language and has been skeptical for the greater part of the twentieth century with regard to the question of whether universal or permanent knowledge is possible, in these respects, the background of the twentieth century is not so dissimilar to that of Plato's own time. Plato's philosophical antagonists were the sophists, who were especially well known for the relativistic theories of ethics which they taught. The sophists captivated the youth of time via their skillful use of language, their logical and linguistic tricks and the power of their rhetoric. Philosophy today finds itself in the same plight as did philosophy in the time of Plato.

If Plato's five elements are examined from the standpoint of contemporary linguistically oriented epistemology, there is no question concerning the first three of Plato's elements. In fact, for the most part, it would appear as if the contemporary linguistic approach to the description of what is necessary for knowledge would stop with the Second, namely, the definition. In a broad sense, according to contemporary epistemology, once the definition of the *cognoscendum* is posited, the meaning of the *cognoscendum* is understood. There would be no necessary "knowledge" beyond this, and certainly no Form to know. The only possible reference for the consideration of "knowledge", or, the Fourth, might be for cognitive psychology. Since philosophy has presumably no interest in the actual physiological processes that occur, (Locke's, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding appears as an exception in this regard), this element of what Plato is describing presumably could be relegated to the province of the cognitive psychologist. The Fifth, needless to

⁸ Seventh Epistole, 341-345.

⁹ Whilst the words 'Form' or 'Idea' (Eidos) do not appear in the passage analysed, the concept is implied by the 'Fifth'. That it is not directly utilized (nor is the term 'dialectic') might be an argument that Plato was moving away from the emphasis on this dimension of his theory. One must keep in mind that this is a work of the later Plato and may not be completely consistent with the theory of Ideas expounded in Plato's earlier maturity.

say, would be purely a product of Plato's fancy and would possess even less of a basis for a thoroughgoing consideration.

It is critical for the purposes of philosophical rectification, and in Chinese terms, for the philosophical rectification of names, (*cheng ming*) to draw present attention to the 'Fourth'.¹⁰ In so doing, it should at once be pointed out that by the 'Fourth', one is not referring to the aspect of physiological processes or psychological processes, and it is not to be believed that Plato had any such intention. By the 'Fourth' Plato had in mind the final cognitive experience which, he calls 'knowledge'. It may be that it is the current skeptical predilection that is the reason why this dimension of Plato's epistemology receives so little attention. Perhaps this is the influence of logical positivism. Perhaps it is the fear of being forced to subscribe to Plato's world of 'Forms' which has created an unwillingness to take Plato seriously today.

In the epistemological passage under question, Plato carefully examines the misleadingly simplistic appearing example of a circle. Plato was fond of examples from geometry and it is reported that above the doors of his Academy it was written, 'Let No One Enter Here Who Does Not Know Geometry'. The point of this was that Plato realized that if one could grasp how one knew geometrical truths, one could better understand how one could grasp philosophical ones. Plato's seemingly trivial example of how one comprehends what a circle is an illustration in a microcosm of how one achieves knowledge of any philosophical truth. It is not then knowledge of a 'circle' that is under question; it is knowledge itself.

How does Plato attempt to show that knowledge is possible, which is not reducible to semantics or conventional definitions? Plato argues that 'names' cannot be sufficient for knowledge since a name can be altered. In the example taken of the circle, the name 'circle' can be used for 'square' and vice-versa. The realities considered, however, would remain unchanged. Therefore, the name by which something is called is not sufficient to explain knowledge. The empirical image is also not sufficient to account for knowledge. In the case of a circle, for example, a small circle and a large circle are equally circles. Hence, no one image is adequate to satisfy the idea of a circle. In addition, as is well known, no circle is truly circular and thus no empirical circle fulfils the definition of a circle. The circle on the blackboard can be erased, but this erasure does not result in the disappearance of the circle. It should be pondered why Plato did

¹⁰ Cf. Hsón-Tzu, Book XXII, 3. 'Should a King arise, he would certainly follow the ancient terms and reform the new terms. Then he could not but investigate the reason for having terms, together with the means through which similarities and differences are found, and the fundamental principles in applying terms to things.' In this paper, an attempt is made to restore the term 'knowledge' to its ancient (Platonic) and true meaning

not consider the Second, or, definition, an adequate account for knowledge, since it would appear to most linguistic philosophers, that, if one knew the definition of whatever were under discussion, then one would have adequate knowledge, that is sufficient for one's purposes, of whatever one wanted to know. The reason that for Plato, a definition of a circle is not enough to account for knowledge of a circle is that for Plato, the words in a definition can change, so that one definition is not verbally or linguistically identical with another. In Book I of Euclid's Elements, a circle is defined as 'a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal to one another'. A circle can also be defined as 'a figure in which a locus of points on its circumference is equidistant from a fixed center point'. Or, a circle can be defined as 'the figure in which everywhere on the periphery is equidistant from the center'. Or, a circle can be defined as 'the figure whose extremities are everywhere equally distant from its center'. The point is even more obvious when it is considered that the same definition can be put into different languages. Current linguistic philosophers could then say that what is being understood in different languages was a common meaning of the definition. All that would be necessary would be to understand the meaning behind the definition. When this point is considered, one might well wonder why Plato did not apparently consider 'meaning' as one of the elements in an act of knowledge. This is because, for Plato, what is being referred to by the definition was the true Form or the 'Fifth'. This was what took the place of the 'meaning' element of today's linguistic philosophers. For Plato, the meaning of the circle could not be an idea in someone's mind. It is unfortunate but understandable that Plato is often wrongly referred to as an idealist. For Plato, the circle must possess a permanent status which provides unity to thought and is the object of all definitions. In that event, knowledge of the definition, of what in Aristotelian language is the formula that states the essence, is insufficient. It must be known that this is the definition of a circle and for that the definition cannot be simply verbally self-referential. It is not the definition of the 'word' circle. Plato has already disposed of that possibility. It is not the definition of the image circle. For which image can satisfy the definition? Any circle that one draws on a blackboard or whiteboard or prints with the assistance of a computer's word processing program will perforce consist of points on the outside of the circumference which are not at the same distance from the center as a point taken from the inside of the circumference. The definition cannot be of a 'concept' of a circle since any concept of a circle depends upon someone's thinking of it. But what is known when a circle is known is not dependent upon any particular person's concept of a circle. Concepts come and go even within

the same thinker's cogitations. But what one knows when one knows a circle does not disappear from existence from time to time.¹¹

For Plato, to acquire knowledge of the circle required a process of cogitation that continually thought about the different elements until it became clear that the knowledge of a circle could not be reduced to one of its elements. To know properly that the definition is but a string of words that is only signifying a circle one must at the same time know that words are not sufficient for knowledge and definitions are but made up of words. When one understands the meaning of a circle one understands something which is eternal and available to everyone. The act of knowing the circle is not so simple as being able to recite its definition. It is the understanding that there is something which can be so defined. This knowledge as Plato goes on to say cannot be put into words. But it is suggested by the words that one uses. When one understands the meaning of a circle one understands something which is not reducible to a name, a linguistic definition, or an image. One's understanding includes, for example, that a circle is not an empirical image. And this understanding is part of the understanding of the circle. The definition by itself does not serve to render up this meaning. To understand the meaning of a circle, one already understands more than the definition. For Plato, the circle is what makes it possible that there can be a definition of circle in the first place. In truth, it is not possible to understand a "definition" of a circle; such a description of an act of knowledge is incomplete: it is parasitic upon always understanding more than the definition can provide on its own.

It is impossible to discuss the Fourth, the knowledge of a circle, apart from the Fifth. At the moment of the apprehension of the 'meaning' or Form, with the help of name, definition, and image, knowledge can take place. And, by this reference to 'knowledge', Plato did not mean a psychological event. Plato could have added a Sixth, namely the necessary occurrence of a certain brain process, but this would have led to an infinite series of posits or at least a very long list which would have included a living body, a body with a functional brain, and so on. For philosophical purposes, there is no need to mention all of these necessary conditions for knowledge as Plato is taking these conditions for granted, and is discussing only what is of relevance for the act of reflective understanding, once a functional and functioning brain (and body supporting that brain and so on) are assumed. Thus, there is no need for Plato to consider

¹¹ Sir Roger Penrose, the Oxford mathematician, considers that mathematical ideas have an existence of their own in the sense of the Platonic mathematical world. Cf., *Shadows of the Mind, A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 65; 428,429. (For the purposes of this paper, there is no need to distinguish between the existence of a separate realm of ideas for mathematical ideas and other ideas).

physiology at this point, and his category of the 'Fourth' cannot be a simple reference to a brain process. Indeed, if Plato's reference to the 'Fourth' were to the realm favoured by cognitive psychology, it would not be very plausible why Plato would consider Forms and definitions to be crucial to the stimulation of a brain process, since such a process could presumably be stimulated by less reflective thought, such as the appetites which Plato realizes do exist or in today's world, by direct stimulation of the brain by electrodes.

Plato must have considered that the Fourth represented a very important realm of consideration indeed, second only in his view, to the importance of the Fifth. While there has been a great deal of discussion of Plato's Fifth (the Form), there has been comparatively little discussion of his Fourth. It could even be argued that the Fourth is the most important "element" although it is not strictly speaking a component but the actual moment of knowing which is the sum-total of all the other elements. The Fifth serves as only one component of four which constitute the Fourth and it is the Fourth (which is the resultant of the interaction of all five elements) that Plato is analysing. That the Fourth is actually knowledge of the Fifth is incidental in this regard since it is the Fourth which is the ultimate *analysandum*. In any case, it is with the knowledge of the Fifth that the philosopher is concerned, not with the Fifth itself.

In the present paper, the Fourth stands for the act of understanding which incorporates and in some measure even transcends the object of understanding, and is at once the ultimate *analysandum* and the ultimate objective of the philosopher. The Fourth consists of the union of meaning, and the consciousness or understanding of that meaning that is the knowledge of the *Eidos*. A definition by itself is not adequate to knowledge of the *Eidos*, as has been suggested above, since a definition is only a string of words that signifies a meaning. But meaning has no 'meaning' by itself any more than beauty exists in the oil painting on the wall of the museum, apart from its experience in the mind of the subject appreciator. The 'meaning' must be apprehended by the philosopher, and it is the very apprehension of the meaning that constitutes the knowledge experience for the philosopher. The apprehension to referred to above is not the psychological event, as this is of only minor and secondary philosophical interest. The apprehension is the moment of understanding or insight, which is the only locus of philosophical truth.¹² Whether or not truth exists apart from this is a matter of the Fifth. It is only if the subject knower were to be granted the philosophical capacity for possessing knowledge

¹² It is best to avoid the use of the term 'intuition' both because what is understood or known is something rational, though it is non-empirical, and not something mystical and because what is known is not known via some form of extra-sensory perception.

of the *Eidos* that the notion of philosophical truth can be understood. The 'Fourth', then, which Plato thought of as the act of knowledge, is the precise moment when name, definition, image, and meaning/Form are assimilated and transmogrified such that an understanding of truth is the result. When what is true is understood, an experience has been undergone which transcends the words, the image, the definition, and even the meaning or true object of understanding. Knowledge is possible in and only in that moment in which the four other aspects are mere players in the overall performance of the dramatic moment of knowledge, or the Fourth. This overall performance is what is understood in that instantaneous cognition, which is that moment of philosophical insight, to which, for Plato, all philosophers aspire as the ultimate goal of philosophical endeavor.

All of the components are necessary, but what results is not reducible to any of its component parts. The Fourth, properly speaking, is not an ontologically separate part: it is the result of the marriage of the parts. It is however, a part in the sense that it can be logically analysed as a separate part from the other aspects. In another way, it may be said that all of the "parts" are only logical abstractions from that momentary act of knowledge, and do not really possess separate existence on their own. In this sense, even knowledge is an abstracted part. However, it is with this abstracted part that the philosopher must take the greatest concern as it is this part which has to do with the experiencing of that which is true. It may not be empirically or epistemologically divisible from its other components, except in that moment of transcendental reflection, but it may be logically isolated and analyzed for its unique epistemological value and for its very existence as an *analysandum*.

In another sense, all of the elements of which Plato is speaking are ontic impostors. No part is knowable by itself. Each part is itself a combination of all five elements. Strictly speaking, from an epistemological standpoint, there are never any parts existing by themselves; e.g., in order to possess an image, one must assume the presence and the interaction of all of the other elements. No element ever exists as an ontologically independent element with regard to the occurrence of the knowledge event.

In the Seventh Epistole, Plato is engaged in the self-described impossible task of attempting to put what cannot be put into words into words. This paper consists of more words attempting to explain why Plato said that what he meant could not be put into words. Another way of putting what has been said above is that it is through the agency of language, definitions, empirical images and meanings that one is able achieve that philosophical understanding to which the name 'truth' is given. Just as the proper object of the art appreciator may be the feeling of 'beauty', one can say that the proper object of the philosopher is

the experience which is at the same time the understanding of 'truth'. It is *through* and not *by* language, definitions, images and meanings that the philosopher comes to the truth that she or he understands, that transcends all of the other elements as something separate from all of these, that makes up the cognitive experience to which the philosopher aspires, just as the art appreciator through the experience of oils and canvas can arrive at the experience of beauty which is the *sine qua non* of the appreciator.¹³ In Peter Shaffer's play, *Amadeus*, Salieri, when staring at Mozart's original score of the opening of the Twenty-ninth Symphony, in A Major, exclaims, 'I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink strokes at an Absolute Beauty.'¹⁴ There is no reason why philosophy should not have its own intrinsic subject matter as well.

Whilst Plato was lavishing so much attention on the Fifth, he had bequeathed subsequent philosophers, the Fourth. In the virtual exclusive obsession Platonic scholars including the profoundly historically misleading example of Aristotle have had with Plato's Fifth (or his Ideas or Forms), both the Fourth and the importance of the Fourth and its unique appearance and its unique role in the world of the philosopher have been neglected.¹⁵ By concentrating on the Fifth as Plato's main contribution to philosophy, Plato has been remembered as the creator of the theory of Forms.

For Gadamer, the Fourth is not so ultimate. He points out that any act of knowledge is ephemeral and thus knowledge suffers from weaknesses as an

¹³ In this discussion of Plato, one must bear Plato's view of art in mind that he presents in Symposium rather than the view he takes, for different purposes in the Republic. In Symposium, it must be remembered, it is stated in Diotema's speech that the experience of the Beautiful in itself is what makes life worth living. It could be argued that an appreciation of avant-garde art is not based upon an appreciation of beauty and further that the art products or music products of certain cultures do not necessarily strike those from other cultures as beautiful. In answer to such arguments, one may say that with respect to certain products of avant-garde art it may well be that a new criteria such as humour may be more relevant to the appreciation of the art than beauty. The argument as developed above would then have to be applied *mutatis mutandi* to the experience of comic delight, for example, rather than beauty. With respect to those from different cultures, it may certainly require the cultivation and the acquisition of a particular taste before the artistic products of one culture can be appreciated by an audience comprised of those from another culture. This process of cultivation is, however, merely a condition for the possibility of appreciating a different manifestation of what can be experienced as beautiful.

¹⁴ Peter Shaffer, *Amadeus*, Act One, Scene XII., Salieri's salon.

¹⁵ One must be grateful for the misunderstandings of philosophers. If Aristotle had not misunderstood Plato, there would have been no philosophy of Aristotle. In the words of Niels Bohr, when referring to Pauli, 'he misunderstood me very well'.

instrument.¹⁶ Plato does at times even use the words 'right opinion' instead of knowledge when referring to the Fourth. Even Plato nods. These lapses of Plato's do not seem to cohere with the lofty descriptions of knowledge that he himself renders in other places. It must be recalled that some of Plato's loftiest dialectic concerns itself with the possibility of the knowledge of the Forms and not solely or even primarily with proving their status to be at the top of the dialectical hierarchy, as in Republic VI and in Symposium and of course in the Seventh Epistole. And, whether or not it is a Form which is known (in the sense that either Plato meant or was taken to mean by Form), Plato's account of knowledge merits special attention, nevertheless. The account of knowledge that is relevant here may not be the same as the account that Plato renders in Philebus and Theatetus in which he seems to be concerned with showing the differences between opinion and knowledge and with explaining the nature of perception. The account of knowledge more relevant here is that account in which he is attempting to point to the unique kind of knowledge which is possessed by the philosopher and the process by which the philosopher comes to understanding (in the vocabulary of the present age and not in the Kantian sense) which in the sense in which it is meant by Plato and in the sense in which this present paper gives to it, is the same as what is meant by philosophical knowledge.¹⁷ It is this account of Plato's and this concern of

¹⁶ As a result, Gadamer considers that the '...so-called theory of knowledge in the Seventh Letter refers to the community which exists among people speaking to one another. Cf., *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies in Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 113. But Gadamer's "community of speech" would also suffer from the same weakness of ephemerality that Gadamer considers Plato to indirectly ascribe to knowledge.

¹⁷ Cornford, in his translation of *Republic VI*, translates *noesis* as intelligence, or, rational intuition. The interesting choice of the phrase 'rational intuition' is probably too mystical sounding and mind bogging for a contemporary, intellectual audience which, ironically enough, is strongly rationalist in temperament and taste whilst insistently empiricist in its preoccupations. (The irony of the double mindedness of the contemporary intellectual is not a self-conscious one). Plato himself does not employ a fixed terminology as is evidenced by this letter which is another reason on behalf of its authenticity. Perhaps one of the reasons for his use of several words to convey the same idea is a combination of his dialectical strategy, to move the mind ever upwards and his conviction that one must not identify knowledge with the knowledge of words. It is also the case that when Plato is attempting to describe realities which transcend the phenomena, rather than electing to employ a technical vocabulary, he chooses, for the most part, to employ everyday language. As a result, vocabulary must perforce be used inconsistently since the language of common use, when utilized to describe the non-phenomenal, must take on a different sense. Thus, for example, in *Sophist*, *doxa* is used to mean 'judgment' and not opinion because opinion would have a different class of objects from those of knowledge of the Forms and their relations. Cf., Cornford's discussion in *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., p. 318. (Kant, who attempts to introduce a more technical vocabulary, while more fixed than Plato in the use of

Plato's that is described in the Seventh Epistole as the core and the goal of the practise of the discipline of philosophy:

There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself.¹⁸

Because of Western philosophers' two and one half millennia's distraction with Plato's Fifth, Western philosophers have come to be regarded and classified in terms of the theories they have invented or the systems they have constructed rather than in terms of the truths which they have discovered. In the same fashion, one can look at the entire collection of works Paganini or Scarlatti or Beethoven has created and consider these to be the products of Beethoven, Paganini or Scarlatti. But, one's proper appreciation of any of these composers cannot (save in memory) be based on an appreciation of all of their works. Beethoven's greatness is experienced and appreciated precisely in and only in the moment of enjoying one of his great compositions. Or, to be more precise, it is in a special moment of the resolution of many musical

his terminology was also inconsistent. Heidegger represents a philosopher who has elected to employ a special technical vocabulary and even employs neologisms. The price of technical precision and univocity is a lack of general accessibility.) Episteme (usually translated as knowledge and wherefrom the term 'epistemology' is derived) is the term most commonly used by Plato. The only difficulty, it seems to me, in using it without occasionally also using allied terms such as 'understanding' or 'insight' is that the term 'knowledge' in today's world is frequently associated with scientific knowledge which is not what Plato meant by knowledge since according to Republic VI, what is considered 'scientific knowledge' today would not be considered knowledge at all by Plato, but would rather fall under what he called *pistis*, or the higher form of opinion or *doxa*. The Plato of the Theatetus does seem to attempt to look for knowledge in the world of appearances although he does not find it, but one wonders why he was looking for it there in the first place. If one excepted the problem that today's science was of phenomena, one could conjecture that the scientific knowledge of today might by Plato be classified as true belief together with an account. For Plato true belief was different from knowledge since a jury could hold the correct opinion about who had committed a crime without actually knowing that their opinion was correct. This might in very rough terms be the equivalent of what scientists today might mean when it is said that something is known to be statistically true with a high degree of probability. For Plato, on the other hand, knowledge is of what is real and is infallible. (The problem of vocabulary becomes even more compounded when one considers that when Aristotle refers to scientific knowledge, he means what today one calls syllogism.) It seems that, insofar as Plato's doctrine can be put into words at all, the words which best render Plato's meaning today are 'understanding' and 'knowledge'. Despite occasional lapses into the teaching that knowledge is an instrument, the core of the doctrine taught here is that it is knowledge, or the Fourth, which is the ultimate objective and concern of the philosopher, and of course, the knowledge with which the philosopher is concerned is knowledge of the Fifth.

¹⁸ Seventh Epistole, 341 C (trans. Glenn Morrow)

themes, which have perhaps been heard for the thirtieth time over in just so many years, that the very greatest appreciation is stirred in the musical imagination. Such a level of musical appreciation may even be restored in memory by the production of a single bar of music such as a familiar bar of one of Paganini's caprices or as in the famous opening bar of Beethoven's Fifth.¹⁹ It is not so much the composer's prodigious output that is the source of a hearer's appreciation (that may inspire admiration for his productivity, but it is not the source of musical delight), but it is those moments when in experiencing his music, that one is able to experience the same profound depths and heights and resolutions as he did in composing it that is the origin of the listener's aesthetic satisfaction. What makes Beethoven great is that he has been able to conduct his musical audience to the same great heights of the experience of musical grandeur and ecstasy that he himself was capable of experiencing. This is, in Platonic terms, the experience of the Form of Beauty. At the moment of the pure experience of Beethoven's Fifth, is one really attending to the sound of the notes?

In the same way, with Plato, or with Hegel or with any of the great philosophers, while they may be justly admired for the systems that they have created or for their enormous productivity, philosophical wonder and that unique philosophical experience, the experience of truth, is awakened only in the actual moment of reflecting upon, or reading certain passages in their works, or in the discussions of them with colleagues or students. Too much concentration on the Fifth, which, symbolically here can represent the doctrine or the dogma of a philosopher, has led students of philosophy to lose sight of the unique joys and the overarching status of the Fourth. For, while many may disagree with the total systems of different philosophers, these same dissenters can still experience and enjoy the truth of certain of the special insights of the great philosophers. One need not be a Hegelian, for example, to savour and to marvel at such statements as 'Nothing great is accomplished without passion' or

¹⁹ The capacity to bring an entire musical work to mind with the hearing of a single bar is not dissimilar to the capacity of the memory to reconstruct an entire experience on the basis of a single sensory element such as Proust's famous account of memory springing from a taste of madeleine and/or tea (Proust is not altogether precise, though it appears to be due to a bit of both): 'And suddenly the memory returns...The taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before church time), when I went to say good day to her in her bedroom, my aunt Leonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of real or lime-flower tea...And once I had recognized the taste...the whole of Combray and of its surroundings, taking on their proper shapes and growing solid, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.' Cf., Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954, trans. by C.K. Moncrieff, as *Swann's Way*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1, New York: Random house, 1934, p. 36.

‘The owl of Minerva flies only at twilight’. If the criteria of philosophical importance or truth were the systems as a whole of different philosophers, there would be no philosophical truth as all of these systems contain numerous and frequently self-invalidating flaws. Apart from distinguished exceptions such as the Oxford mathematician Roger Penrose, few today subscribe to the real existence of Plato’s Forms. Hegel’s Absolute Spirit would probably find even fewer adherents. If such a subscription were to be the measure of philosophical truth, it would be a serious disincentive to the reading of these philosophers from the past. Or, if the doctrines and the systems of philosophers, and not their insights, were to be taken as the main motive for reading their works, the history of philosophy would become a course in the history of error.

What still remains true today is that in reading these great works from the past, one can partake of certain moments of shared understanding wherein one can glimpse the self-same truths which were seen by these past philosophers just as the past philosophers saw them, the entire experience of which is made possible just because of the fact that the past philosophers did see them. It is in these experienced moments of truth that the real content and value of philosophy lives. As one re-enacts the certainty of the Cartesian reflective consciousness or the Mencian ethical consciousness, one becomes aware of the nature of philosophical truth. One task of the philosopher today is to become more and more finely aware of the nature of philosophical truth so that philosophical truth can be distinguished sharply and appreciated separately from philosophical systems. In so doing, philosophical truths from the past can be appropriated and maintained, whether in their past form or reconstituted into present phenomenological descriptions, and preparations can be made to usher into existence new philosophical truths based upon a correct understanding of the nature of philosophical truth.

If, as some kind of historical empirical scientists, students of philosophy regard philosophical systems as a whole, the systems of past philosophers will naturally be rejected as all of them are filled with falsehoods, conjecture and contradictions. But, if students of philosophy are encouraged to experience and rediscover great moments of philosophical insight, a better understanding of the purpose of philosophical inquiry and a greater admiration for the work of past philosophers can be gained. At the same time, a new path can be paved and a substantial direction can be posited for the discovery of new philosophical truths which will be the task of all philosophers of the future.