3

Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V

It is often said that Plato distinguishes knowledge and belief by reference to their objects, so that one can have knowledge, but not beliefs, about forms, and beliefs, but not knowledge, about sensibles. If I know, I can know only a form; and if I have a belief, it must be directed to sensibles. Call this the Two Worlds Theory (TW).[1]

It is clear that Plato does not always subscribe to this view. Both at *Meno* 98 A and at *Theaetetus* 201 A–C he clearly allows knowledge and belief to be about the same objects; and he may also there allow knowledge of sensibles. Still, the theory of forms is not prominent in either of these dialogues, and so it might be argued that even if Plato did not always accept the Two Worlds Theory, he at least did so in the middle dialogues, especially in the *Republic*. Not even this claim is true as it stands: at *Republic* 520 C Plato says that the philosopher who redescends to the cave will have knowledge of the things there,[2] and at 506 C he claims to have beliefs, but not knowledge, about the form of the good. But although these are things Plato sometimes says, it might none the less be maintained that his explicit theory does not allow these claims, and that that theory commits him to

[1] TW is defended by J. Brentlinger, 'Particulars in Plato's Middle Dialogues', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 54 (1972), 116–52; F. M. Cornford, *The* Republic *of Plato*, translated with introduction and notes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 180–1; R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, *Plato's* Republic*: A Philosophical Commentary* (London: Macmillan, 1964), 164–5; R. E. Allen, 'The Argument from Opposites in *Republic* V', *Review of Metaphysics*, 15 (1961), 325–35 at 325; G. Vlastos, 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', in R. Bambrough (ed.), *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 1–20, repr. in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Platonic Studies*, 2nd edn. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 58–75; J. Hintikka, 'Knowledge and its Objects in Plato', in J. M. E. Moravcsik (ed.), *Patterns in Plato's Thought* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1973), 1–30; and by G. Santas, 'Hintikka on Knowledge and its Objects in Plato', in Moravcsik, *Patterns in Plato's Thought*, 31–51. By 'the Two Worlds Theory' I do not mean only the thesis that there are forms as well as sensibles (a thesis I do not dispute) but especially the epistemological claim that there is knowledge only of forms and belief only about sensibles (a claim I shall dispute). I use 'belief' merely as a counter for *doxa*; 'opinion' or 'judgement' are equally possible translations.

[2] Plato's claim is that the philosopher will 'know each of the images, what they are and of what'; *gnōsesthe* plus the *hatta* clause suggests he means 'know' and not merely 'recognize'.

the Two Worlds Theory, that there is no knowledge of sensibles and no belief about forms.

A crucial passage often adduced in support of this view occurs at the end of *Republic* V (473 C 11–480 A 13), Plato's only lengthy attempt to distinguish knowledge from belief, and it is that passage I shall discuss in what follows. I do not deny that the text can be read so as to support TW. But if it is, it not only contradicts Plato's explicit claims elsewhere, but also is a very bad argument. Plato might, of course, have offered us such an argument. But if we can find a better argument consistent with the text, we should prefer it, and I think such a better reading is available. The best argument consistent with the text, however, fails to support TW.

I shall argue 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 of all, 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. This also leaves open the possibility of having only beliefs, and not knowledge, about forms.

If this is right, *Republic* V does not commit Plato to TW. He might still be committed to it elsewhere, of course, and I do not dispute that claim here. But if this central passage does not commit Plato to TW, we should at least be more careful in ascribing it to him elsewhere.[3]

I

The general context is Plato's claim that only philosophers should rule, since only they have knowledge, and knowledge is necessary for good ruling. Only philosophers have knowledge, he argues, because only they know forms, a knowledge without which no other knowledge is possible. He argues this claim twice over—once, briefly, to Glaucon, on the assumption that the theory of forms is true,[4] and once, at greater length, to certain opponents

[3] *Phil.* 58 E–59 C (although see also *Phil.* 61 D 10–E 4, 62 A 2–D 7) and *Ti.* 28 A–29 C may support TW; but I do not think the *Republic* is committed to TW.

[4] One might think that the first argument, since it assumes the theory of forms at the outset, supports TW; but it does not. Plato argues only that the sightlovers, since they do not recognize forms, cannot achieve knowledge and so have only belief. This of course does not imply that no one can ever have knowledge of sensibles, or that every claim about a form is tantamount to knowledge of it (cf. 476 C 9–D 3 with 520 C). Plato argues only that there is no knowledge without knowledge of forms—that is, all knowledge begins with forms. So

called sightlovers (*philotheamones*, 475 D 2; cf. 476 A 10, B 4), who do not accept the theory of forms (476 C 2–7); they recognize that there are many beautiful things, but not that there is one form, the beautiful.[5]

In the second argument, Plato wants to persuade the sightlovers, on grounds acceptable to them (476 E 4–8, 478 E 7–479 B 2), that they do not have knowledge but only belief. If his argument is to rest on genuinely noncontroversial premisses, as he claims it does, it cannot assume the theory of forms, or any esoteric theory unacceptable to the sightlovers, at the outset. I shall ask later whether or not Plato satisfies this condition of noncontroversiality.[6]

Plato's general strategy is to correlate knowledge with what is (knowledge is *epi tō(i) onti*), belief with what is and is not (*epi tō(i) onti te kai mē*), and ignorance[7] with what is not (*epi tō(i) mē onti*). He then draws out various implications of these correlations, and concludes that only those who know forms have knowledge at all; the sightlovers, who are restricted to the world revealed by their senses, can at best have belief.

The force of this argument in large part depends on the reading of 'is' ('*esti*'); but a decision here is not at all easy. Plato's opening moves illustrate the difficulty:

(1) Whoever knows knows something (*ti*) (476 E 7–9).
(2) Whoever knows knows something that is (*on ti*); for one could not know a thing that is not (*mē on ti*) (476 E 10–11).
(3) What completely is is completely knowable; what in no way is is in no way knowable (477 A 2–4).
(4) If anything is and is not, it lies between what really is and what in no way is (477 A 6–7).
(5) Knowledge is set over (*epi*) what is; ignorance (*agnōsia*) is set over what is not (477 A 9–10).
(6) Something between knowledge and ignorance is set over what is and is not (477 A 10–B 1).

(1) might mean:

read, the conclusion of the first argument exactly matches that of the second, although the arguments leading there are very different.

[5] For discussion of the sightlovers, see N. R. Murphy, *The Interpretation of Plato's* Republic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 100–5; J. C. B. Gosling, '*Republic* V: *Ta Polla Kala*, etc.', *Phronesis*, 5 (1960), 116–28 at 121–3. I discuss the sightlovers in § IV below.

[6] See J. C. B. Gosling, '*Doxa* and *Dunamis* in Plato's *Republic*', *Phronesis*, 13 (1968), 119–30 at 120–2; Murphy, *The Interpretation of Plato's* Republic, 105. It may be, of course, that Plato's conclusion is controversial; but his opening premisses should not be. Cf. n. 22.

[7] I use 'ignorance' to translate '*agnoia*'; see § III below.

(1a) Whoever knows knows some existent thing; or
(1b) Whoever knows has some content of his knowledge.

On (1a) Plato is correlating knowledge with features of the world. I shall call this reading an objects analysis. On (1b) Plato is only claiming that if one knows, there is an answer to the question 'What do you know?'; he is correlating knowledge with certain sorts of propositions, saying that there is some content of the cognitive condition. No conclusions about what objects these propositions are about need follow. I shall call this reading a contents analysis; in what follows I defend it.[8]

A decision between (1a) and (1b) depends on the readings endorsed for (2)–(6), where difficulties again emerge. As is well known, '*esti*' can be used in several ways.[9] Three of its standard uses, and the only ones we will consider here, are (*a*) the existential (*is-e*), (*b*) the predicative (*is-p*), and (*c*) the veridical (*is-v*). (2), for example, could thus read:

(2a) Whoever knows knows something that exists.
(2b) Whoever knows knows something that is (really) F.
(2c) Whoever knows knows something that is true.

Here (1a) goes naturally with (2a) or (2b), and (1b) goes naturally with (2c). On either of the first two alternatives, Plato simply repeats the claim made at (1a), that knowledge is correlated with objects. On the third reading, he claims not only that knowledge has content (1b) but also that that content is always true or, in other words, that knowledge entails truth.

Applying these three readings to the rest of the opening steps reveals the outlines of the interpretations I shall consider here. TW has focused on is-e and is-p, yielding a degrees-of-existence (DE) and a degrees-of-reality

[8] I use 'contents' where I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (2 vols.; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962–3), ii. 57, uses 'internal accusative' and where Gosling, '*Doxa* and *Dunamis* in Plato's *Republic*', uses 'formal object'. '*Epi*' can range over contents as well as objects, as Crombie recognizes (ii. 58). The point is missed by Allen, 'The Argument from Opposites in *Republic* V', 166, and by Cross and Woozley, *Plato's* Republic, who assume '*epi*' must range over objects. For a clear Platonic use of what I call contents, see *Phil.* 37 A. Cf. also *Phd.* 75 D 4, 76 A 4, 76 C 15, with D. Gallop, *Plato:* Phaedo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 230.

[9] For general discussion of '*esti*', see C. H. Kahn, *The Verb Be in Ancient Greek* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1973). G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on Not-Being', in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato*, i. *Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1971), 223–67 at 223–6, Vlastos, 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', 1–7, and M. Furth, 'Elements of Eleatic Ontology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 6 (1968), 111–32 at 114–16, argue that Plato uses, fuses, or confuses various uses of '*esti*' in this and other arguments. Although Plato does not explicitly discuss different uses of '*esti*' until the *Sophist*, this does not entail that he was confused about them earlier. In what follows, I try to see if we can ascribe to Plato an argument that does not require confusion; if such an argument is available, surely it is to be preferred.

(DR) interpretation.[10] For DE, the claim is that knowledge is of what exists, that belief is of what half exists or what both exists and does not exist, and that ignorance is of what does not exist or is not anything at all. For DR, 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.

Although they are possible readings of the text, both DE and DR provide inappropriate starting premisses, by violating the condition of noncontroversiality. DE sharply separates the objects of knowledge and belief, and consigns the objects of belief to the realm of 'half-existent'. Even though no specific objects are so construed at this stage, it would be inappropriate to assume that whatever the relevant objects turn out to be, they cannot be both known and believed, or that they merely half exist.

DR also separates the objects of knowledge and belief. But its characterization of the objects of belief might seem more promising. At least, as we shall see, the sightlovers agree that their objects of concern, the many beautifuls, for example, are beautiful and not beautiful. Moreover, a version of (2b) seems to occur at the close of the argument (479 E 10–480 A 4; cf. step (36)). But this is a conclusion Plato argues for, and so it should not be a starting premiss. Moreover, if we take (3) to mean that whoever knows knows only what is fully F, and not also what is F and not F, then it violates the condition of noncontroversiality. For why can I not know of a particular action, for example, that it is just and not just? There is no intuitive reason for the sightlovers to accept this claim. DR, like DE, provides Plato with inappropriate starting premisses.

Readings focusing on is-v are more promising. Plato's claim is then that knowledge is of what is true, that belief is of what is and is not true, and that ignorance is of what is false. This claim states familiar conditions on knowledge and belief that the sightlovers can be expected to agree to: knowledge, but not belief, implies truth. And unlike DE and DR, this claim does not force a separation of the objects of knowledge and belief, but only of their contents. But this claim does not imply TW: although knowledge and belief differ in their truth implications, the claims that are known or believed can be directed to the same objects.

The is-v reading allows two interpretations of belief. Plato might be claiming that each token belief is 'true and not true', in the sense of being partly true and partly false, or near the mark. Call this the degrees-of-

[10] For a defence of DE, see Brentlinger, 'Particulars in Plato's Middle Dialogues', 149 ff., and Cross and Woozley, *Plato's* Republic. For a defence of DR, see Vlastos, 'Degrees of Reality in Plato'; Gosling, '*Doxa* and *Dunamis* in Plato's *Republic*'.

truth reading (DT).[11] Alternatively, Plato might be characterizing the set of beliefs covered by the capacity, claiming that it contains true as well as false members: some of my beliefs are true, others false. Call this reading T.

For DT, 'belief' acquires a specialized sense, not elsewhere accorded it, as being 'near the mark'; false beliefs are not beliefs at all. Moreover, the contents of knowledge and belief will be irreducibly different: knowledge will range over truths, and belief over partial truths. T avoids these unintuitive results. It allows false as well as true beliefs (*Grg.* 454 D), and it allows that the same proposition can be the content of belief and of knowledge—at least not all propositions are such that they can be only believed or only known, for you might know a proposition about which I have only belief (*Meno* 97 A–98 B; *Tht.* 201 A–C).

T is the most intuitively plausible of the suggested readings, and in what follows I see how far Plato's argument fits it. I do not claim that T is ever required; but I do claim that it is a possible reading of the text, and that it provides Plato with a more plausible argument than do any of the proposed alternatives. But in providing Plato with a plausible argument, we also avoid TW. For Plato now distinguishes knowledge and belief not by reference to their objects, but by reference to the truth implications of their contents. This need not rule out every version of TW; Plato might claim that the contents of knowledge and belief are always about different objects. But the argument he presents here, as we shall see, neither requires nor suggests any version of TW.

II

Plato argues next that belief is the middle state between knowledge and ignorance; this entails, by (6), that it is set over what is and is not, but Plato does not reach this conclusion until much later.

His next steps simply state what is to be proved:

(7) Belief is a different capacity (*dunamis*) from knowledge (477 B 3–6).
(8) Therefore, belief and knowledge are set over different things, each according to its capacity (477 B 7–8).
(9) Knowledge is set over what is, to know how what is is (*gnōnai hōs esti to on*) (477 B 10–11).

(7) introduces belief explicitly for the first time; later stages of the argument

[11] For a defence of DT, see Gosling, '*Doxa* and *Dunamis* in Plato's *Republic*'; Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*.

look for an analogue to (9) for belief, in accordance with (8). (7) also shows that the capacities of knowledge and belief, and not necessarily every token act of knowing or believing, are being distinguished. Were token acts being considered, Plato might be pressed to DT; the emphasis on capacities at least allows T. Plato can now claim, not that every content of belief is only partially true, but that the set of beliefs collected by the capacity of belief contains both true and false members.

(10) Capacities are a kind of thing by which we are able (*dunametha*) to do what we are able to do, and by which everything else can do what it can do (477 C 1–4).
(11) Capacities are distinguished by (*a*) what they are set over (*epi*) and by (*b*) what work they accomplish. What is set over one thing and what accomplishes one thing is one capacity; those things which are set over different things and accomplish different things are different capacities (477 C 6–D 5).
(12) Knowledge is a capacity (477 D 7–9).
(13) Belief is a capacity, since it is that by which we are able to believe (477 E 1–3).
(14) Knowledge and belief are different capacities, since knowledge does not err (*anhamartēton*) but belief may err (477 E 6–7).
(15) Therefore each of them, being capable of something different, is set over something different (478 A 3–4).
(16) Knowledge is set over what is, to know how what is is (*to on gnōnai hōs echei*) (478 A 6).
(17) Belief believes (478 A 8).
(18) Since knowledge and belief are different capacities, and are set over different things, what is known (*gnōston*) and what is believed (*doxaston*) cannot be the same (478 A 12–B 2).
(19) Since what is known is what is, what is believed must be something other than what is (478 B 3–5).

(10) provides a general account of what a capacity is. (11) expands upon (10) by providing two conditions for capacity individuation. It follows from (10), in (12) and (13), that knowledge and belief are capacities. Applying (11), it then follows, in (14), that knowledge and belief are different capacities. (15) follows from (11) and (14). (16) then specifies (11a) and (11b) for knowledge; and this restates (9). (17) states (11b) for belief. It then remains, as (18) and (19) acknowledge, to find what belief is set over (the correlate of belief), in satisfaction of (11a), and this occupies Plato in the final stage of his argument.

These steps may well arouse our suspicions. (11) claims that if two purported capacities satisfy its two conditions in the same way, they are in fact one capacity; and if they satisfy them differently, they are two different capacities. This apparently leaves open two additional possibilities, however: (i) x and y do the same thing to different things, and (ii) x and y do different things to the same thing.

Now at (14) Plato seems to infer from the fact that knowledge and belief satisfy (11b) differently that they are different capacities; that is, he seems to assume that because knowledge and belief satisfy (11b) differently, they also satisfy (11a) differently and hence, by (11), are different capacities. But given (ii) above, Plato does not seem to be justified in assuming that knowledge and belief satisfy (11a) differently, just from the fact that they satisfy (11b) differently, even if he is justified in assuming that they are different capacities. For why should knowledge and belief not be different capacities with different work on the same things? Husbandry and butchery, for example, do different work, even if both are set over domestic animals, and so have the same objects or sphere of operation; a difference in their work does not imply a difference in their objects.

To see whether or not this suspicion of unfairness is warranted, we need to examine (11a) and (11b) more carefully. (11b) is explained, at least in part, by (14): knowledge, but not belief, does not err. That is to say, knowledge knows and belief believes (cf. (13) and (17)), and the result of this work is that knowledge will collect only truths, because only they can be known, whereas belief will collect both truths and falsehoods, since both can be believed. The result of the different work of knowledge and belief is that knowledge, but not belief, includes only truths, but belief contents include both truths and falsehoods.[12]

Our reading of (11a) depends on our interpretation of '*epi*'. For TW, '*epi*' ranges over objects. Plato is then assuming that different capacities (*dunameis*) must have different objects. Not only is this untrue in general, as the earlier example of husbandry and butchery makes clear, but if it is what Plato means here, then his argument is indeed invalid. For, as we have

[12] This interpretation of '*anhamartēton*' is adequate for the argument, whether or not it is all Plato has in mind. Truth is, of course, only a necessary, and not also a sufficient, condition on the content of knowledge. Plato elsewhere also endorses an explanation condition (see e.g. *Meno* 98 A); but that condition need not be invoked here, since the set of contents collected by the capacities of knowledge and belief can be distinguished by the truth condition alone. I follow Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, ii. 67, and Santas, 'Hintikka on Knowledge and its Objects in Plato', 45–6, in correlating '*anhamartēton*' with (11b).

seen, (11b) does not imply (11a), so interpreted. On the TW reading, then, this argument is invalid.[13]

The contents analysis, however, can avoid this result. As we have seen, '*epi*' can range over contents as well as objects, and was most plausibly so read in earlier stages. Retaining that reading here has the further advantage of rendering Plato's argument valid. For Plato now claims only that when one knows (11b) one knows a piece of knowledge (11a); and when one believes (11b) one believes a belief (11a). That is how (11b) determines (11a). So read, the argument simply elaborates earlier, and noncontroversial, claims; and the trivial move from (11b) to (11a) does not illicitly preclude (i) and (ii), as TW does. To say that knowledge is set over pieces of knowledge, and that belief is set over beliefs, does not restrict the objects these propositions are about; husbandry and butchery are concerned with different sorts of facts, but these different facts could equally well be about the same domestic animals. The objects of knowledge and belief need not be separated; indeed, they are not relevant to the argument at all. Ascribing to Plato a valid argument, then, goes hand in hand with rejecting TW.

Plato has not only allowed there to be knowledge and belief about the same objects ((ii) is left open); he has also left open the possibility that your token piece of knowledge could be my token belief. A given proposition is a belief when it is believed, and a piece of knowledge when it is known; that is how (11b) determines (11a).[14]

III

Plato has now specified both what knowledge is set over and what work it does (16). He has claimed that belief is a distinct capacity from knowledge (14), and he has specified what work it does (17). He must now specify what it is set over. First, however, he distinguishes belief from ignorance; this is in order, given (5) and (6).

(20) Whoever believes believes some one thing (478 B 9–10).
(21) What is not is not one thing, but nothing (478 B 12–C 1).

[13] This problem for TW is also noted by Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, ii. 57, and our alternative accounts of the argument are the same.

[14] This is of course consistent with (18). For (18) does not discuss *token* contents but only the *set* of belief contents and of knowledge contents. It says that the set of belief contents is not the same as the set of knowledge contents, since it has one different property: containing true and false members, and not only true members. This of course does not prevent your knowing that justice is psychic harmony while I only believe it.

(22) We assign ignorance to what is not, and knowledge to what is (478 c 3–4).

(23) Therefore, belief is not set either over what is or over what is not (478 c 6).

By (19) it has been shown that belief is not set over what is, and this conclusion is repeated at (23), along with the claim that it is not set over what is not, either. That claim evidently implies that belief is not the same capacity as ignorance, since ignorance is said to be set over what is not ((22), (5)).

Now we might expect this argument to be parallel to (14)–(19). There Plato claimed that belief is not set over what is because it does not imply truth as knowledge does. 'What is' is not an adequate account of the content of belief. Similarly here, Plato claims that neither is 'what is not' an adequate account of the content of belief, since belief does not imply falsity as ignorance does. Still, particular beliefs might be false just as, earlier, they could be true. The claim is only that belief implies neither truth nor falsity.

But the argument seems to say rather more than this. (20) and (21) seem to claim not that all beliefs are false, but that the contents of belief contain no false beliefs. If false beliefs are now assigned to ignorance, belief will no longer be set over true and false beliefs. It then either collapses into knowledge, if it is simply set over what is—a collapse the previous argument had tried to avoid—or is correlated with partial truths, as DT suggests.

But neither does this seem to account for all that occurs here. For (20) and (21) also seem to shift away from is-v to is-e (what does not exist) or to a strong version of is-p (what is not anything); they mention the availability of content, not the truth or falsity of particular contents.

So read, (20) may seem plausible: it supplies an analogue to (1) for belief. Belief, like knowledge, has content; when one believes, there is some content of the mental condition. Considering (20) along with (21), however, leads to other problems. For Plato may now seem to be denying the possibility of false belief, along familiar lines; as Crombie suggests, he 'seems to argue from the premise that every belief must have content to the conclusion that the content of a belief cannot be a nonentity, or in other words a falsehood'.[15] Retaining is-v above seemed to restrict the content of belief to true beliefs; ignorance was set over false beliefs. Now, if Plato equivocates between is-v and is-p, he seems to deny that there are any false beliefs.

[15] Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, ii. 59.

Either way, belief will not be set over true and false beliefs as I claimed it would.

But the argument need not be read in either of these two ways. We can easily avoid the equivocation Crombie suggests by using only is-p here. Plato's claim in (20), as we have seen, is that belief has content; it does not happen that one believes and yet believes nothing. But then (21) may, instead of shifting illegitimately to is-v, simply draw out this consequence of (20). In assigning what is not to *agnoia*, Plato assigns not false beliefs but nothing to it. *Agnoia* is then something like blank ignorance, and there is no determinate content of the mental condition. True and false beliefs are still the correlate of belief, as we claimed; *agnoia* consists not of false beliefs but of ignorance or lack of awareness. If one is ignorant of p, one cognizes nothing true of p; there is no content of the mental condition.

The chief difficulty with this reading is that (22) is then strikingly unparallel to (5), despite their apparent similarity; for (5) uses is-v, whereas (22) uses is-p. Another reading is possible, however, and it will preserve the parallelism. Suppose I claim that justice is a vegetable. Plato might argue that my claim does not amount to a belief about justice at all; it displays total ignorance of justice. We might then read (21) with is-v, after all, while still avoiding the equivocation Crombie suggested. It claims that if what I say is not at all true of justice, it says nothing—that is, it says nothing true about justice. So read (22) and (5) both use is-v. Nor is this line of argument DT. Plato's claim is now only that totally false beliefs are assigned to ignorance, and not that all false beliefs are. If one has *agnoia*, one will have a totally false belief, or ignorance. But Plato has not asserted that every false belief is a content of ignorance. Although ignorance has as its contents only very false beliefs, not every false belief need be assigned to ignorance.

Plato has now proved that:

(24) Belief is neither knowledge nor ignorance (478 C 8).

This makes belief a candidate for being the middle state, set over what is and is not, and he next argues that it satisfies the conditions for being the middle state:

(25) Belief is neither clearer than knowledge nor more obscure than ignorance; it is more obscure than knowledge, but clearer than ignorance (478 C 10–14).
(26) Belief lies between knowledge and ignorance (478 D 1–4).
(27) We said before (in (6)) that what is and is not will be between what

> is and what is not, and will have some state between ignorance and knowledge set over it (478 D 5–9).

It follows that belief is set over what is and is not; (6) can now be filled in appropriately. If the argument we have sketched is Plato's, he has, as promised, distinguished knowledge and belief on noncontroversial grounds, acceptable to the sightlover. He has argued that knowledge, but not belief, implies truth; there may be false beliefs, but there is no false knowledge. We need not appeal to is-e or is-p to understand Plato's main claims; nor need we appeal to a peculiar 'degrees of truth' doctrine. The first two options were ruled out on grounds of general plausibility; the argument could be read without them, and was effective only without them. DT, although it may seem plausible initially, is less attractive once Plato makes it clear that he is discussing the set of beliefs covered by the capacity; he can then say, as we would like, that although any particular belief is determinately true or false, the set of beliefs contains some true and some false members.

But the argument is not yet complete. The sightlover could accept it so far, and still see no reason to conclude that he has only belief; but showing this was Plato's main aim. In the final stage of his argument he goes further, and argues that the particular claims of the sightlover are at best beliefs.

IV

The final stage of Plato's argument raises more severe problems for my interpretation T than any encountered so far. The first problem arises with the next step:

> (28) It remains, then, to find what partakes of what is and is not so that we may say it is believed (478 E 1–4).

(28) is problematic, for it seems to say that every token belief is true and not true, or only partially true, as DT, but not T, holds. Nor are the next steps of Plato's argument encouraging:

> (29) Each of the many Fs is no more F than not F (478 E 5–479 B 8).
> (30) Therefore, each of the many Fs is and is not (479 B 9–10).
> (31) The many Fs, therefore, are between being and not being (479 C 6–D 1).

(29)–(31) seem to shift away from DT no less than from T, towards one or another version of TW; for it is clear that here 'is' cannot be 'is-v', but must

be 'is-e' or 'is-p'. Moreover, (28) claims quite generally that whatever is between being and not being is what is believed; (31) asserts that the many Fs are between being and not being. The conclusion seems clear: belief is set over the many Fs. And this implication is in fact explicitly drawn in the last step:

(32) We have found, then, that the many *nomima* of the many about the beautiful and the rest roll about between what is not and what fully is (479 D 3–5).
(33) We agreed that if any such thing appeared it would be assigned to the intermediate capacity and be something believed and not known (479 D 7–9).
(34) Therefore, those who look only on the many Fs have belief, not knowledge (479 E 1–5).
(35) Those who look on the Fs which always stay the same have knowledge (479 D 7–8).
(36) Knowledge is set over forms; belief is set over the many Fs (479 D 10–480 A 4).

But it now looks as if Plato has specified forms and sensibles as the correlates of knowledge and belief; he seems to be concerned with objects and not, as we thought, with contents. This leaves us with two options: either Plato consistently intended one or another version of the objects analysis, so that T is just irrelevant; or else Plato began with the noncontroversial assumptions we have elicited, and now shifts, legitimately or not, to a claim about objects.[16]

I argue first that if we use DE or DR here, Plato's argument is either fallacious or unfair. I then argue that although (29)–(31) shift away from is-v, they explain, and do not controvert, T.

(29) clearly uses is-p; the predicate term is in fact explicitly specified ('is no more F than not F'). The claim is the familiar Platonic one, pressed in the first argument addressed to Glaucon, as well as elsewhere, that any observable property adduced to explain what makes something beautiful, for example, is no more beautiful than ugly.[17] In some cases, bright colouring explains something's beauty; in other cases, an appeal to bright colouring explains something's ugliness. But then bright colouring is no more beautiful than ugly. Any observable property F is both F and not F, since it

[16] It is of course possible that Plato just confuses these various uses so that 'shift' is inappropriate; but I do not think this assumption is necessary. Cf. n. 9.

[17] See e.g. *Phd.* 66 A, 74 B, 100 B; *H. Ma.* 289 C–D; *Rep.* 623–4. For discussion, see Gosling, '*Republic* V', and T. H. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracleiteanism', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1977), 1–13.

collects F as well as not-F cases. The sightlovers can be expected to agree, and so (29) does not violate the condition of noncontroversiality: no one explanation of beauty, phrased in terms of sensibles, will account for all cases of beauty; and it is for just this reason that the sightlovers insist on many accounts. No one account will do.

Now (30) and (31) differ from (29) in omitting the predicate 'is no more F than not F'. For DE this indicates that Plato has moved from 'is no more F than not F' to 'does and does not exist'. But the move is of course fallacious, since is-p does not carry existential import in this way. One cannot infer from the fact that x is not F that x does not (fully) exist. The paper on which I am now writing is not green; none the less, it exists. Yet DE seems to rest largely on the supposition that Plato is guilty of this crude error.[18]

This does not imply, of course, that Plato does not endorse DE. But if we can find a more plausible interpretation, we should prefer it; and it is not difficult to find one. (30) and (31) are easily taken as ellipses of (29); (29) licenses us to read (30) and (31) correspondingly. Is-p is then the only use of '*esti*' we need see here.[19]

But now one may wish to argue that, since is-p is relevant here, all preceding unsupplemented uses of '*esti*' be read correspondingly, and that DR therefore best represents Plato's argument. Plato's claim is then that one can know only what is really and fully F, or the forms; one can at best have beliefs about sensibles, which, as (29) explains, are F and not F. As Gosling writes, 'Socrates is going to argue that the offerings of the *philotheamones* are and yet are not just, beautiful, etc. and so must be *doxasta*.'[20]

This line of argument, however, either violates the condition of noncontroversiality, or is invalid. We might agree to read (2) as (2b), so that (2), taken together with (3), claims that I can know only what is fully F, and not also what is F and not F. So read, Plato's argument is valid, but in beginning with this assumption, he violates his condition of noncontroversiality. For why should I not be able to know, for example, that sensibles are F and not F? Surely by itself the claim that sensibles are and are not just provides no reason for precluding knowledge of them. Of course, I can know that x is fully F only if x is fully F. But, similarly, I can know that x is F and not F only if x is F and not F. Read this way, Plato's argument is invalid: it begins with the plausible (2c) reading of (2), that knowledge implies truth, but then

[18] At least, Cross and Woozley, *Plato's* Republic, 145 and 162, cite no other evidence in favour of DE (aside from the undefended assumption that Plato systematically confuses is-e and is-p).

[19] Cf. Gosling, '*Republic* V', 123–4; Vlastos, 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', 6 n. 4.

[20] Gosling, '*Doxa* and *Dunamis* in Plato's *Republic*', 126. Vlastos, 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', also defends this view.

draws an illegitimate conclusion about the unknowability of sensibles. The underlying reasoning seems to go something like this:

(i) Necessarily (if A knows that x is F, then x is F).
(ii) If x is a sensible, x is F and not F.
(iii) There are sensibles, and therefore things that are F and not F.
(iv) One cannot know that x is F, if x is a sensible, since, by (iii), x is (also) not F.

'Is F and not F' is, however, a perfectly good substitution instance, in (i), for 'is F'; and since sensibles are F and not F, Plato has not shown why one cannot know that they are. This line of defence, then, leaves Plato with an invalid argument. Of course, one might wish to buttress the argument with additional premisses that yield the desired conclusion validly. But the fact remains that no such premisses are specified here. Again, if a more plausible argument can be found, it is to be preferred.

I agree, then, that (29)–(31) use is-p; but I resist interpreting the preceding argument to suit. Instead, I think Plato uses is-v in preceding stages, and shifts to is-p here. If this is so, we face a problem of a different sort: does Plato simply confuse is-v and is-p? Or is there a plausible connecting link between the two uses of '*esti*'? I think a link between is-v and is-p can be found, and it preserves the veridical reading.

Note first that (32) says not that the many Fs, the concern of (29)–(31), are between being and not being, but that *nomima* about the many Fs are between being and not being. (33), correspondingly, implies that *nomima* are among the correlates of belief. What are these *nomima*? '*Nomimon*' is a general word for anything one can *nomizein*; it also conveys a notion of generality, and of custom or convention. It can be complemented with is-p or is-v, depending on whether we take it to mean 'customary rules' or 'customary beliefs'. Although '*nomimon*' can in general be complemented with is-p, the present context suggests is-v. It is the beliefs of the many about justice and the like—that justice is paying one's debts, for example (*Rep.* 331 c)—that are being criticized; since the sightlovers restrict themselves to sensible properties in attempting to say what justice is, they are led to various claims that will be unsatisfactory. Plato's claim is that the sightlovers' beliefs about beauty, justice, and the like are among the correlates of belief; (32) then uses is-v.[21]

[21] Many translators use is-v for translating '*nomima*' here: 'beliefs' (Bloom), 'conventional opinions' (H. D. P. Lee, G. M. A. Grube), 'conventional notions' (F. M. Cornford). J. Adam, *The* Republic *of Plato*, ed. with critical notes, commentary and appendices, 2nd edn., intr. D. A. Rees (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), ii. 167 (cf. i. 343),

Now to say that (32) assigns only certain beliefs to belief does not yet answer all our worries. For it is still true that (29)–(31) use is-p, and that (36) assigns the many Fs to belief; even if *nomima* are among the correlates specified for belief, Plato's claim seems to go beyond this. Also, we have not yet answered an earlier question, raised about (28), of whether the present use of is-v better fits DT or T. Both problems can, I think, be answered in favour of T.

The sightlovers do not acknowledge forms; all their accounts or explanations of beauty, justice, and the like, are phrased in terms of sensibles. They define beauty, for example, as the brightly coloured; their accounts refer to and are based on such observable properties. But we know from earlier steps, and from elsewhere, that such properties are F and not F; some cases of bright colouring are beautiful, others are not. But if 'bright colouring' picks out cases of ugliness no less than of beauty, no belief like 'the beautiful is the brightly coloured' can amount to knowledge—or, in general, no belief based on observable properties can amount to knowledge. The connection between is-p and is-v is then this: reliance on observable properties that are F and not F (is-p) issues in the unsatisfactory *nomima* (is-v); the *nomima* are based on observable properties, and that basis prevents them from being knowledgeable accounts.

This connection also explains (34)–(36). The sightlovers, since they look only to the many Fs, can at best have belief; no account phrased in terms of sensibles can yield knowledge, and so in that sense belief is set over the many Fs. Now this leaves open two possibilities: either there is no knowledge, since there are no entities beyond the many Fs by reference to which one could acquire knowledgeable accounts; or else there is knowledge and, hence, there are other entities beyond the many Fs, that make this knowledge possible. In first explicitly mentioning forms in these concluding steps, Plato endorses the second option.[22]

says that '*nomima*' refers to 'popular canons or opinions'. This reading seems suggested by the sense of the argument, although the syntax does not, of course, require it. For other occurrences of '*nomima*', see *Rep.* 484 D 2, 589 A 7, *Grg.* 488 D 9, A 4, *H. Ma.* 294 C 4. I should make it clear that my interpretation of *nomima* is not also an interpretation of *ta polla kala*, which I take to be sensible properties, as I explain above. As I read the argument, Plato talks about certain sorts of opinions as well as about certain sorts of objects. Although these concerns are connected in the way I explain above, they are distinct concerns.

[22] It may seem that he is not justified in doing so, however, given the first possibility, so that his argument becomes invalid at this stage. I think this is a plausible line to take. But the strategy is a familiar one in Plato (see e.g. *Prm.* 135 A–C, *Ti.* 51 D, where Plato also infers that forms must exist if knowledge does) and so does not affect my interpretation. In any case this line of argument need not violate the principle of noncontroversiality; if the sightlovers will agree that there is knowledge, they will now accept the existence of forms. Plato will

This reference to forms and sensibles does not play into the hands of TW. Plato is not claiming that all knowledge concerns only forms, or that all beliefs concern only sensibles. He does claim that all knowledge requires knowledge of forms. But this leaves open the possibility that one could be aware of forms in less than a knowledgeable way; and it also leaves open the possibility that once one has knowledge of forms, it can be extended beyond forms to sensibles. All knowledge begins with knowledge of forms, but it need not end with them, too; nor need every grasp of a form amount to knowledge of it. To understand Plato's claims, the appropriate restrictive clauses must be assumed: restricted to the many Fs, the most one can attain is belief; for knowledge, one needs an account in terms of forms. But the content of this account need not be restricted to forms, nor need every claim about a form constitute knowledge.

I have argued so far that the shift to is-p does not upset, but rather explains, T. But we are still left with another problem: (32) assigns only *nomima* to belief. This supports an is-v reading, but it may seem to support DT rather than T. A *nomimon*, such as that the beautiful is the brightly coloured, is, presumably, simply false. *Nomima*, although false, are not, however, contents of ignorance, since they are not totally false; but since they are not true, neither can they be contents of knowledge. But once it is spelt out this way, it looks as if we have supported DT: *nomima* are the contents of belief, since they are only partially true.

I do not think we need to read Plato in this way. There are at least two alternatives. First, although any *nomimon* is simply false, it collects other beliefs, some of which are true, others of which are false. For example, the *nomimon* that courage is endurance leads to the true belief that Socrates is courageous and to the false belief that lions are (cf. *La.* 196 E). 'Is and is not' then applies disjunctively to members of a set of beliefs collected by a *nomimon*; but every member of the set is determinately true or false.

Second, it may be that '*nomima*' need not be restricted to the general accounts offered by the sightlovers, but applies as well to the beliefs such accounts collect; that is, not only 'courage is endurance' but also 'Socrates is courageous' may count as a *nomimon*. In that case, we still consider sets of beliefs clustered about a general account, and 'is and is not' still applies disjunctively; but since each member of the set is a *nomimon*, (32) and (33) are not elliptical, as they are on the first reading.

If we do not take 'is and is not' disjunctively in either of these suggested ways, but instead take it to apply conjunctively to each *nomimon*, then

then have committed them to the existence of forms on grounds they have accepted. His argument then follows the standard elenctic procedure.

Plato's description of *nomima* does indeed seem close to DT. For he then seems to say that although any *nomimon* is just false, none is false enough to count as a content of ignorance (since, for example, each leads to some true beliefs). But although *nomima*, interpreted this way, do fit DT's specifications for beliefs, we need not interpret the preceding argument to suit. Instead, what Plato does at (32), I think, is to restrict the scope of his argument. His claim there is not that all beliefs are like *nomima*, but only that *nomima* are at best beliefs. That is, being a *nomimon* is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for being a content of belief.

Plato prepares us for the shift. His avowed strategy is to show that, given a general and noncontroversial account of belief, the sightlovers can at best have belief. To show this, of course, he must provide not only the general account but also a description of sightlovers' beliefs. It is not surprising that the specialized account is narrower: it attempts to classify only one sort of claim. Other claims might count as beliefs for other reasons; but what is of immediate concern is *nomima*.

Plato's claim, then, is that *nomima* are not contents of knowledge, since they are not true and knowledge implies truth; but although false, they are not contents of ignorance either, for they are not totally false. If we want to consider other beliefs, the explanation of their status might differ; not all beliefs are like *nomima*. All Plato has argued here is that *nomima* (*inter alia*) are contents of belief. But the final narrowing of his argument need not infect preceding stages.[23]

VI

On the traditional two-worlds interpretation of Plato's argument in *Republic* V, knowledge and belief are distinguished by reference to their special objects: knowledge is only of forms, and belief is only of sensibles. One

[23] This alternative is not wholly satisfactory, however. For on it, Plato does equivocate on 'is and is not'. Until (32) it seemed to apply disjunctively to contents collected by the capacity of belief, so that any belief was determinately true or false; but at (32) and (33) 'is and is not' seems to apply conjunctively to a particular *nomimon*. I do not know if Plato does equivocate in this way, or consistently advocates DT, or endorses one of the two more satisfying explanations I suggest above. Any of these alternatives is possible; I prefer the third largely on grounds of plausibility, and because it fits well with the earlier argument, where Plato seems clearly to be considering sets of beliefs collected by the general capacity of belief. Even if we are pressed to DT or to the equivocation interpretation, however, we still avoid TW. For Plato still at most claims that any partially true content is a content of belief; but such contents could be about sensibles or forms. Nor has Plato said that every claim about a sensible is at best partially true.

cannot know sensibles or have beliefs about forms. If this is Plato's argument, it violates his starting condition of noncontroversiality, by requiring strong and implausible premisses that his opponents cannot be expected to agree to. Moreover, Plato misuses his criteria for capacity-individuation, and, on at least some of the current interpretations, equivocates on uses of '*esti*'.

I suggested that Plato's argument could be interpreted in another way, so that it is free of controversial premisses, involves no equivocation on '*esti*', and is valid. On this interpretation, knowledge and belief are distinguished not by their different sets of objects, but by their truth implications. Knowledge, but not belief, implies truth. The argument resulting from this claim is valid; but it does not support the Two Worlds Theory. On our reading, Plato has precluded neither knowledge of sensibles nor beliefs about forms. He does argue, at the close of the passage, that whoever knows will know forms, since it is only by reference to them that correct accounts are forthcoming; if, like the sightlovers, one is restricted to sensibles, the most one can attain is belief. But though all knowledge begins with forms, it need not end with them and one may fail to acquire knowledge of forms, and have only beliefs about them.

The price of ascribing to Plato a valid argument whose premisses are noncontroversial is the loss of the Two Worlds Theory. It is a price I am quite willing to pay.[24]

[24] I am especially indebted to T. H. Irwin for many helpful criticisms of several drafts of this chapter. Earlier versions have also been read and helpfully criticized by J. L. Ackrill, J. C. B. Gosling, A. Nehamas, N. Kretzmann, and G. E. L. Owen.