

Knowledge of the Whole

Edward C. Halper

University of Georgia

Aiming to find the virtue of wisdom in his newly constructed city, Socrates gets Glaucon to see that the city is not wise and well-counseled in respect of carpentry, farming, or any other knowledge of a particular subject but in respect of knowledge of the whole (428b-c). By having Glaucon immediately conclude that the ruler has this knowledge (428d), Plato avoids the question that Socrates typically raises about architectonic sciences: how could there be knowledge of the whole if every part of the whole is already known by a particular science? (*Charm.* 170a-171c; *Ion* 540b-c). My first contention is that Socrates suggests an answer at the beginning of bk. 4 when he claims that the state is one and designs kinship relations so that all citizens will feel pleasure and pain in respect of the same things. That is to say, the architectonic science has an oblique subject matter: it knows and, thereby, governs all things by knowing the state, and it knows the state by knowing the soul. Soul and state are each one insofar as their parts function together. Plato shows that there is such a science of the whole by displaying it at work in Socrates' construction of the state in bks. 2-4. However, the tripartite account that makes soul a whole and one, also undermines soul's unity. Famously, Socrates presents a different view of the ruling knowledge in bks. 5-7; where he declares, the philosopher, that is, the person who knows the forms, fit to rule. Dividing the cognitive faculties of soul (and taking soul as *knower* rather than *object* of knowledge), Socrates, again, leaves no place for a knowledge of the whole soul. The second part of my paper explores the *Republic's* own implicit challenges and alternative to a knowledge of the whole. Ultimately, however, someone who would rule must know not only the forms but also the whole (soul and state), and Plato must explain how someone who knows the forms will also know the whole. In the paper's third part, I propose that Plato is able to virtually identify the two types of knowledge by making the forms, or the faculty for knowing them, the principal part of the whole and devaluing the other parts. Thus, the ruler knows the other parts of the state by recognizing that their purpose is to meet needs that would

otherwise obstruct the pursuit of philosophical knowledge. This move forces us to reinterpret the knowledge of the whole presented in book 4: the proper functioning of the parts is dictated by the subordination of the parts.