

Analysis of the Objects: Plato's Epistemology in *Republic V*

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the argument in *Republic V*, 476e–480a. This part of the argument has provoked a great deal of controversy because of some grave difficulties: (1) the concept of knowledge and belief itself, (2) the confusion between existential and predicative uses of the verb “to be,” (3) the treatment of knowledge and belief as different faculties set over (*epi*) different objects, (4) the implication of the “two worlds theory,” according to which no one can have knowledge of particulars and belief about Forms.

Recently, Francisco J. Gonzalez discussed these problems in great detail and regarding (1), he clearly demonstrated that the knowledge and belief that Plato conceives are not propositional but bear direct cognitive relations to objects, being analogous to perception (“Propositions or Objects? A Critique of Gail Fine on Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*” *Phronesis* 41 [1996]). Besides, he rightly indicated that (2) can be resolved by observing that Plato does not distinguish the substance of an object from its properties (F) or its existence from its essence. However, I cannot accept his view about (3) and (4), which ultimately seems to make his interpretation a little ambiguous on the whole.

The point of Gonzalez' interpretation is as follows. According to him, the type of knowledge and belief in question here is not the recognition and judgment that an object is F, but the perception of what F is, which is the *basis* for all such kinds of true or false statements. Though Plato asserts that the faculty of knowledge is exclusively set over Forms, and likewise, the faculty of belief over particulars, the faculties are set over not the objects of recognition and judgment, but their basis. Therefore we can understand particulars on the basis of nonpropositional knowledge of what F is through acquaintance with Forms, and can hold beliefs about Forms on the basis of a nonpropositional belief of what F is through acquaintance with particulars, as a

consequence of which the two worlds theory does not apply to Plato.

Three objections can be raised against his claim. First, though Gonzalez observes that knowledge and belief are analogous to perception, it is not easy to regard what the faculty of perception is set over as the basis for various sensory recognition processes and judgments (e.g. that a thing is red). This is because what it perceives through direct acquaintance with what it is set over (the red thing) is not what red is but that the object is red. Second, according to Gonzalez, what the faculties of knowledge and belief understand through acquaintance with what they are set over is a nonpropositional cognition of what F is. However, if the cognition is nonpropositional, it makes no distinction between truth and falsehood, which as a consequence contradicts Plato's distinction between infallibility and fallibility of the works of these faculties. Third, the word, opinions (*nomima*), which the faculty of belief embraces through acquaintance with what it is set over, signifies propositional cognition, which is concerned with truth and falsehood.

In contrast, my point is that what the faculties of knowledge and belief are set over are not Forms and particulars but properties themselves (e.g. beauty, justice, etc.): What is (*to on*) and what both is and is not (*to on kai me on*) do not extensionally signify Forms and particulars (Plato seems to distinguish what is, which contains the world around us as well as Forms, from what *completely* is, which only signifies Forms). However, irrespective of their degree of reality, the faculty of knowledge is set over what is F and the faculty of belief is set over what both is F is not F. The former can identify an object as F, and the latter can only believe that something both is F and is not F. (Note that the kind of cognitions here do not constitute predication in general but identification.) In this manner, what the faculties are set over is intensionally determined in response to their works. Based on this view, the 'two worlds theory' is disproved, because it is possible to hold a belief about Forms by perceiving them as both F and non-F, and to have knowledge of particulars by recognizing them as F. In that case, the cognitive states of the knowledge of and the belief about the same thing (Form or particular) are different (cf. 523e–524c), just as the sensations of sight and hearing of the same bell are different.

Turning now to (2), Gonzalez focuses on the existence of Forms and particulars, but their existence is essentially irrelevant to the argument in question. As long as the properties themselves are focused on, it is quite likely that 'F exists' and 'is F' are the same. Therefore, we need not make an assumption peculiar to Plato about 'to be'. Further, there is another question concerned with (3): the relationship between the two criteria (objects and functions) for sameness or difference in faculties. My intensional interpretation of the objects mentioned above clarifies that while the two criteria have a mutual relation, like colour and seeing concerning sight, they are different mutually; in other words, one can never be reduced to the other.

Finally, though issues concerning the similes of Line and Cave are not my present concern, I would like to take a brief look at them based on the analysis of the objects here.