Introduction

The kind of skepticism that interests me in this book is not the skepticism that asks whether or not I know that *this is my hand*, or that *you are not a zombie*. Instead, it is part of an approach to epistemology that thinks of questions about knowledge, belief, and truth as being immediately tied to normative and evaluative questions. Much of the inspiration for this kind of skepticism derives from Socrates, or rather, the Socrates of Plato's dialogues. In a famous line of the *Apology*, Socrates says that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being (38a5-6). Ancient skepticism inherits this spirit. It is centrally about stepping back from belief-formation and counteracting one's tendencies to be quick to judge. Closely related, it is concerned with the ways in which one can fail to understand one's own thoughts, and fail to examine thoughts because one likes or dislikes them, or because one prefers to hold a view as opposed to holding no view. These psychological phenomena are taken to differ importantly from processes of rationally guided belief-formation, where a cognizer is inclined to accept a thought after careful consideration of whether it is true.

The plan for this book is to think through a range of theories that share intuitions relevant to this kind of normative epistemology. A short way to describe the project is thus to say that I am interested in the Socratic side of ancient epistemology. Somewhat more specifically, I shall discuss Plato's engagement with central Socratic ideas about an examined life, as well as versions of what I call Socratic epistemology,

found in ancient skeptical philosophies and in Stoic epistemology.[1]

The Socratic side of Plato – and to some extent, even of Aristotle – has historically faced major obstacles.[2] With the onset of monotheistic preoccupations, such things as essences, souls, contemplation, and so on, received much appreciation in the history of thought. Such things as hypothetical investigation, questions left open, a mindset that considers several explanations possible, fared considerably worse. And yet, this Socratic side of ancient epistemology is a rather robust movement. Some of it even survives in Augustine, though most of it was cast aside as soon as theological premises came to frame philosophical questions. More than that, the Socratic side of ancient epistemology is closely related to many of our concerns and questions today. Philosophers in the Socratic tradition focus on the nature of belief, the value of truth, the role of concepts in thought, as well as the normative side of knowledge, belief, and ignorance. The ambition of this book, then, is to show that the theories discussed within the Socratic tradition contain sophisticated proposals on precisely these

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[1] A minimal historical orientation would begin with the initial successors of Plato (429-347 BCE), who focused on Platonic theories: Speusippus (347-339), Xenocrates (339-314), and Polemon (314- 269). The founder of Stoicism, Zeno (334-262) studied and philosophized in the Academy for a long time, perhaps as early as under Xenocrates' leadership, but certainly during Polemon's time as head of the school. Arcesilaus (316/5-241/0) belonged to the next generation. All in all, the first 'doctrinal' phase, later an inspiration for many thinkers, extended over roughly a period of 80 years. After that, Hellenistic philosophy, and that is, Socratically inspired philosophy, gains for a while the upper hand. (Cf. John Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato. A Study of the Old Academy (347-274BC)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Francesca Alesse, *La Stoa e la traditione Socratica*, (Naples: Bibliopolis 2000)). On the Socratic side of Academic skepticism, cf. John M. Cooper, "Arcesilaus: Socratic and Sceptic," in V. Karasmanis (ed.), *Year of Socrates 2001—Proceedings* (Athens: European Cultural Center of Delphi, 2004), 81-103. Reprinted in Cooper, *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[2] I am not pursuing the question of how to reconstruct Socratic as opposed to Platonic philosophy. My approach to Socrates in this book is closer to Paul Vander Waerdt's seminal collection of papers, *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

questions.[3]

Socratic commitment to investigation is well-recognized as a feature of certain Platonic dialogues.[4] And yet, many think of Plato as the proponent of a set of doctrines. Plato presumably put forward the Theory of Recollection, the Theory of the Forms, as well as ideas about body and soul that associate the body with perception and hold it in low esteem, while associating the soul with knowledge, Forms, and other lofty affairs. This conception of 'what Plato said' is partly already present in Aristotle, who sometimes writes as if Plato formulated one precise version of, say, the Theory of Recollection.[5] Moreover, it is greatly promoted through Neoplatonism, which develops intuitions relevant to the presumed Platonic doctrines. Early modern and modern thinkers who engage with Plato often fail to distinguish between Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, and the ideas that the tradition considers 'Platonic.'

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[3] After so many centuries of interpretation and adaptation of Plato, it would be naive to think that one can do justice to all arguments that have been raised from different sides. I'm self-consciously doing what I assume many in the Academy and elsewhere did – they 'did philosophy *with* Plato': that is, I take it, they considered Plato's dialogues extremely helpful starting points for thinking about philosophical questions that interested them; in the course of doing so, they came up with views about what Plato said, could have said, how his arguments could be developed further, and so on.

[4] Insofar as the sophists also stand for an attitude of calling into question people's views relevant to the leading of their lives, they belong to the group of philosophers that interest me in this book. Cf. Rachel Barney, "The Sophistic Movement," in Marie Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin, *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006, 77-100, 79; and Richard Bett, "Is there a Sophistic Ethics?" *Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002): 235-262. Socrates shares a number of characteristics with the sophists. Indeed, with respect to calling into question the gods of the city, he probably is guilty as charged. Cf. Myles Burnyeat, "The Impiety of Socrates," *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997): 1-12.

[5] As I see it, even Aristotle looks different if read with the skeptical tradition in mind. Aristotle's references to learning-as-recollection might appear to be ascriptions of doctrine to Plato. Read through the Socratic-skeptical lens, however, Aristotle might do what he likes to do, namely invoke and to some extent 'sharpen' theories formulated by predecessors, thereby setting out a range of theoretical options for his consideration. Aristotle is not doing history of philosophy.

A Socratically-inspired reader will be inclined to push back. She will argue that, though the dialogues differ in many important and interesting ways from each other, and though Plato formulates a number of theories for his and the reader's consideration, he remains committed to ongoing investigation.[6] Plato's dialogues are not treatises in disguise.[7] It is far more compelling to assume that Plato has philosophical reasons for writing dialogues, reasons that relate to Socratic caution: one should not claim or imply that one has knowledge if in fact one does not. In some of the early dialogues, confident and sometimes quite conceited interlocutors are shown to lack the expertise they claim to have. In observing their failure, one should not assume that they are on display for the amusement of readers safe from such embarrassment. Arguably, it would be pointless to write these dialogues if one thought that only others would fail in the relevant ways, while oneself was obviously in a different situation. Instead, if one takes seriously how difficult the questions under discussion are, and how deeply the views one is likely to have on them are interwoven with one's upbringing, culture, and way of life, it should be clear that anyone might fail.[8] Socratic caution involves a deliberate attempt to come up with counterarguments

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[6] Cf. Michael Frede, who argues that, even in a dialogue like the *Sophist*, the form of the dialogue captures a distinctively Socratic intuition – the idea that to hold forth on something presupposes a privileged position of authority. "The only person entitled to do this is one who has sorted things out in such a way that there is no confusion whatever connected in any way whatever with the question at issue." Frede takes it that Plato does not think of himself as inhabiting such a position. Accordingly, even his more positive dialogues retain the spirit of not setting oneself up as 'the one who knows.' ("The Literary Form of the *Sophist*," in Ch. Gill and M. M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 135-152, p.140.)

[7] I am borrowing the phrase "treatises in disguise" from Michael Frede, who makes a similar point in "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* sup. vol. (1992): 201-219, 219.

[8] This is a point Frede makes in (1992), 214-7.

to views one might otherwise be inclined to hold.[9]

Notably, not setting oneself up as an expert is entirely compatible with having certain ideas about the way things could be explained; with viewing certain proposals as worthy of repeated investigation; with thinking that one has formulated a theory that is likely to get some central points right; or with assuming that one has thought carefully through some proposals and found them to be lacking. As a result, the impression naturally arises that Plato, say, is rather strongly inclined to think that there are Forms – perhaps even that he would not give up on this view though he might be aware of major difficulties in spelling it out. And yet, another impression arises too, namely that Plato is acutely aware of such difficulties, difficulties that, though at times bracketed off, might motivate extended discussions in another dialogue.[10] That is, even where Plato appears most dogmatic – say, talking about the Forms – he is not laying out a theory.[11] In writing dialogues that return to a set of inter-related questions he keeps tackling questions left open, or questions that arise

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[9] [Add reference: cf. AL, forthcoming]

[10] To take one example: in *Rp*. V, a book that is considered part of the more 'doctrinal' middle period, Plato says that ignorance is concerned with 'what is not' (477a10-b1). This claim remains unaccounted for. As I see it, this doesn't mean that Plato is unaware of its difficulty; rather, he is bracketing it for the time being, as something that deserves separate discussion. Much of the *Sophist* is concerned with asking "what is not-being?" and the relationship of not-being and false belief. Such features of the dialogues suggest that, even where Plato appears most doctrinal, he is aware of questions left open.

[11] Ironically, I think that Plato is most dogmatic in his theology, though this is not a topic that today counts as a major part of his 'theorizing.' Plato argues rather consistently and with much fervor against the multitude of morally unconcerned Greek divinities, and for the theological claim that god is good. It is easy for us to find Euthyphro, enthusiast for traditional religion, a pompous person with confused views. And yet, as Burnyeat (1997) points out, it is Plato's commitment to a different theology – a theology where divinity is good and single-minded – that motivates some of the moves *he* is often criticized for, such as censorship of poetry in the *Republic*, or the *Laws*' view that those who cannot be cured from impiety, violating 'our' piety, are to suffer the death penalty (10.909a).

when a certain topic is looked at from another angle.

Plato thus has much to offer for later philosophers with skeptical inclinations.[12] It is likely that those leading figures in the Academy who became the first skeptics and those who formulated Stoic philosophy read Plato with a focus on these ideas.[13] Notably, the Stoics firmly belong into the group of the skeptically inclined.[14] One need not end up embracing skepticism in order to appreciate the force of skeptical concerns, and the Stoics' emphasis on epistemic caution is second to none. They think a state of mind is attainable where one would indeed only assent as and when one should. But this state of mind is rather hard to achieve.

As far as we know, early skeptics and Stoics thought their way through a given

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[12] Julia Annas argues that, to "show that Plato is a skeptic one would have to show that he never puts forward doctrines," which she takes to be an "implausible position." ("Plato the Skeptic," in Paul A. Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, 309-340, 334.) As we say, it is not clear why this should be implausible. Annas also interprets her question – "is Plato a skeptic?" – as the question of whether Arcesilaus puts forward a reading of Plato that can convince us today. However, it is unlikely that anyone today will recognize the philosophy of any philosopher in the Platonic tradition as, entirely, *her* take on Plato. By finding doctrines in Plato, I assume that Annas does not take herself to be committed to endorse the philosophy of any particular 'doctrinal Platonist' from antiquity. At an earlier point in her paper, Annas applies a range of criteria when asking whether Plato might be read as a skeptic, criteria such as whether Socrates always argues *ad hominem*; whether Plato always argues for two sides of an issue; and so on. It is a widely accepted method today to read the dialogues individually and find different arguments, methods, etc., in them. Accordingly, any such criterion is bound to produce a negative answer.

[13] Of course, this is compatible with the Stoics taking Plato to 'stand for' particular theories, such as the Theory of Forms. For an influential account of how the Stoics might have engaged with what they saw as Socratic ethical views in Plato's dialogues, cf. Gisela Striker, "Plato's Socrates and the Stoics," in Paul Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 241-271.

[14] Cf. Michael Frede, "The sceptic's two kinds of assent and the question of the possibility of knowledge," in R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 255-78; and his "Stoics and Sceptics on clear and distinct impressions," in Myles Burnyeat (ed.), *The Sceptical Tradition*, (Berkeley, New York, London: University of California Press, 1983), 65–94.

Platonic dialogue or sections thereof, in order to see whether a given theoretical route might work, or whether one would have to modify it to make sense of a given intuition.[15] Perhaps they did pretty much what we do today, when, say, in a seminar on the *Theaetetus*, we ask such questions as "what is compelling about the Cold Wind Example?" As a group of interlocutors, these philosophers took different perspectives. Some of them pushed the open-mindedness in Plato further, cultivating methods of argument that keep one from assent to any given claim.[16] These are the Academic skeptics. Others thought it important to insist that knowledge, though hard to achieve, is possible. In conversation with the skeptics, these philosophers – the early Stoics – tried to formulate ever more sophisticated criteria, criteria that would make sure that a given truth-claim indeed qualified as knowledge. Yet others, such as the early Pyrrhonian Aenesidemus, leave the Academy, aiming to formulate a version of skepticism that draws not only on Socratic commitment to investigation, but also on Pre-Socratic discussions about appearances. The following chapters take their content and their method from the debates between these groups of philosophers. They are a series of attempts to think through, and then to re-think, a set of Socratic intuitions. The upshot is of a skeptical nature: I shall leave open which, if any, of the various

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[15] As David Sedley argues, it is likely that these ancient thinkers had favorite dialogues – ones they saw as expressing ideas about knowledge that they themselves considered central – and then read other dialogues from that point of view. "Three ancient interpretations of the *Theaetetus,*" in Ch. Gill and M.M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 79-104, p. 86.

[16] In engaging with Plato and Plato's Socrates, ancient readers might have attempted a distinction between the historical Socrates and Plato's Socrates. In thinking in terms of "Plato's Socrates," one recognizes that, though the Socrates of some dialogues might be closer to the historical Socrates than the Socrates of other dialogues, the dialogues are at every point Plato's philosophical work. This point is made, for example, by Charles H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Kahn aims to revive a version of the so-called unitarian reading of Plato, a view that I do not share, but that I shall not address.

approaches 'wins.'[17]

In other words, I shall discuss epistemological questions that are particularly salient for those ancient philosophers who devote themselves to ongoing investigation. What is their attitude towards belief? Do they take themselves to attain truths? How do they see the distinction between belief and knowledge? What kind of thought is involved in investigation? And so on. The central intuition is that the kind of truth-claim we ordinarily make is prone to be deficient: it is too quick, too strongly attached to what we would like to be the case, too much subject to a desire to be right, too changeable, and so on. This kind of truth-claim is called *doxa*.

Doxa, then, is a deficient cognitive attitude. This idea is to be found in Plato, but also in ancient skepticism and in Stoic epistemology, both of which pick up on the proposals in Plato that interest me here. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 engage immediately with the *Apology*, *Ion*, and *Philebus*, discussing Socratic views on ignorance; with the *Republic* on belief and investigation; and with the *Theaetetus* on the distinction between true and false beliefs. Chapter 4 stays with the *Theaetetus*, aiming to explain how skeptical responses to conflicting appearances improve upon metaphysical responses. Chapter 5 addresses the question whether Pyrrhonian investigation is genuine investigation, and that is, whether it is adequately responsive to the value of truth. Chapter 6 discusses what I take to be the greatest threat to Pyrrhonian

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[17] I do not mean to imply that there is a consistent Socrates character throughout the dialogues; on the contrary, the skeptical bent of my interpretation means that I do not imply that there is *one* Socratic epistemology. Instead, I am interested in epistemological discussions that develop, in different ways, some core Socratic intuitions.

skepticism: the objection that, without forming beliefs the skeptic cannot even *think*. In siding with the skeptical project, I take it that I need a response on the skeptic's behalf to this potentially fatal objection.[18] Chapter 7 returns to the question of whether beliefs are adequately characterized as true of false. The Stoics take the bleakest view of *doxa*: it is such a lowly state that it does not even merit evaluation as true. In my Concluding Remarks, I return to the starting-point of this book, restating why the lines of thought that motivate skepticism – as conceived of by ancient thinkers – deserve to be taken seriously today.

Many of the ideas about belief that are the topic of this book are hidden and easily overlooked, because the Greek term for belief, *doxa*, is often translated as opinion. This translation, though tempting because it captures the derogative sense of *doxa*, is misleading. It suggests that there is a broader category, belief, of which opinions are a sub-class. Other sub-classes, presumably, would not share the deficiencies of mere opinion. But there is no such broader category. In the range of theories I refer to as Socratic epistemology, there is no terminological noun for belief other than *doxa*.[19]

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[18] I am not discussing Academic skepticism separately, though many discussions throughout the book touch on issues relevant to Academic skepticism. This choice reflects my assessment that the questions crucial to my project – how a skeptic can think and investigate – are more explicitly the subject of Pyrrhonian philosophy. Throughout the book, I am speaking of "the skeptics" when I refer to different kinds of ancient skeptics, *or* when I discuss exclusively Pyrrhonian skepticism, dropping "Pyrrhonian" after first introducing the topic of a given chapter. Otherwise I'm speaking of Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics.

[19] It is partly due to Plato's discussion of belief in *Republic* V, arguably the best known ancient text on these matters, that *doxa* is the core terminological notion. Plato distinguishes between two kinds of belief, beliefs about material objects, and beliefs about the images and reflections of these objects. Plato might have coined three terms: *doxa*, *pistis* and *eikasia*. But the latter are treated as kinds of *doxa*, and *Republic* V's epistemological discussion is generally concerned with *doxa*. *Pistis* is sometimes translated as faith, a translation that is utterly misleading. Plato has nothing of a religious nature in mind. Further, the English 'belief,' if used outside of epistemology, often refers to religious beliefs. *Doxa* does not share this over-tone.

There are related attitudes where no truth-claim is made, such as hypotheses, suppositions, or assumptions. But *doxa* is the technical term for 'belief.'[20] *Doxai* (the plural of *doxa*) are not in every way like beliefs in today's sense. Instead, they are truth-claims or acceptances of content that fall short of knowledge.[21]

This shortcoming – that *doxai* fall short of knowledge – is the most general reason for the derogative sense of the notion. It marks a difference between Socratic and contemporary ideas about belief. According to the former, belief and knowledge are two *kinds* of attitudes that involve a truth-claim. The truth-claim of belief, however, is inferior and in various ways (depending on the particular theory under consideration) different from the truth-claim of knowledge. The attitude of knowledge thus does not involve the attitude of belief, or rather, it does not involve belief in the sense in which today it is standardly assumed that a cognizer who knows that p also believes that p. The relevant ideas are not wholly foreign to contemporary epistemology. And yet, even epistemologists who explore the idea that one should only assert something if one knows it, tend to phrase this as the norm that one should not *believe without knowing*.[22] That is, they assume that knowing involves holding a belief. Contrary to

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[20] In the simile of the Line in Rp. VI, Plato refers to a sub-class of *doxa* as *pistis*; these are, in the *Republic*, beliefs about matters in the domain of shadows and reflections (the most image-like sphere of reality). Still, *pistis* is a kind of *doxa*, and shares the general characteristics of *doxa*.

[21] The idea that knowledge is better than true belief is of course not absent from contemporary discussions. For critical discussion, cf. Ernest Sosa, "Value Matters in Epistemology," *Journal of Philosophy* 107.4 (2010): 167-90. However, the idea that knowledge is better than true belief is different from the idea that beliefs are generally deficient by falling short of knowledge.

[22] Timothy Williamson writes about the relevant ideas: "It is plausible, nevertheless, that occurrently believing p stands to asserting p as the inner stands to the outer. If so, the knowledge rule for assertion corresponds to the norm that one should believe p only if one knows p. Given that norm, it is not reasonable to believe p when one knows that one does not know p." (*Knowledge and its Limits*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 255–56).

this assumption, Socratic epistemology explores the idea that, in coming to know something, knowledge that p *transforms* and *replaces* belief that p.

For the reminder of this Introduction, I shall sketch some of the relevant intuitions about *doxa*, in the hopes of making comprehensible the proposal that *doxa* is inherently deficient. To begin with, it is helpful to recall the closeness of the Greek *doxa* with notions of seeming, appearance, and reputation. The verb *dokein* means 'to appear,' and *doxa* thus often denotes something in the domain of appearances. *Doxa* can refer to appearances in a non-philosophical sense: one's reputation among other people. For example, Socrates says in the *Euthyphro* that shame comes with fearing the reputation – *doxa* – of badness (12b9-c1). Similarly, the well-known discussion in *Republic* I, on whether it is enough to *appear* just or whether one should *be* just, is phrased in terms of *doxa*. To have the *doxa* of justice is to have a reputation for justice. Later on in the *Republic*, *doxa* is discussed in epistemological and metaphysical terms: as a cognitive attitude that has its own kind of object.[23] If the *Republic* is read in Greek rather than translation, Book I is strikingly continuous with the metaphysics of the middle books: *doxa* is associated with the domain of appearance and perception, and contrasted with the domain of being.[24]

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[23] As Sedley points out, the idea that *doxa* and *epistêmê* each have their own kind of objects is mentioned in as early a dialogue as the *Charmides* (168a3-9), where the object of knowledge is a *mathêma*, a field of learning or a discipline. D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism. Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 178.

[24] The metaphysical dimension of *doxa*'s inferiority does not survive in Hellenistic epistemology. Skeptics and Stoics do not adopt it – the skeptics, because they do not adopt any theories, and the Stoics, because they basically disagree with Platonic metaphysics. Where Plato thinks that *doxa* is inferior insofar as it deals with the world of becoming, the Stoics consider *doxa* as a state that, itself, is in change: the person with mere *doxa* is the person who is likely to change her mind.

Consider the following range of formulations. Someone might say "*dokei moi* that p"; "it seems to me that p." In some cases (though perhaps not all cases), this cognizer might be said to have engaged in the cognitive activity that the verb *doxazein* picks out: to form a belief, make a judgment, or perhaps, to think of something in a certain way, with thinking envisaged as inner assertoric speech.[25] And now she might be said to have a *doxa*. Does this final formulation still carry the implication of seeming or mere appearance? The answer must be "it depends": the word is used differently in different contexts, and philosophers theorize *doxa* in different ways. For current purposes it is important that, notwithstanding these differences, the ancient philosophers have the connotations of seeming-ness and appearance in mind, even if only in the back of their minds, when they discuss *doxa*.[26]

Indeed, *doxa* can be seen in such a negative light that it clearly falls into the domain of ignorance. In some sense, today's philosophers might share the intuition that, where one does not have knowledge, one is ignorant. The early Greek association of *doxa* and ignorance runs deeper. For example, in Parmenides' poem there are but two

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[25] This is an conception of thought famously developed in Plato's *Theaetetus* 189e, and of great influence in ancient epistemology. Thinking is "speech which the mind itself goes through with itself about whatever it's considering. (…) when the mind is thinking, it's simply carrying on a discussion, asking itself questions and answering them, and making assertions and denials. And when it has come to a decision, either slowly or in a sudden rush, and it's no longer divided, but says one single thing, we call this its *doxa*. So what I call *doxazein* is speaking (*legein*) and what I call *doxa* is speech (*logos*); but speech spoken, not aloud to someone else, but silently to oneself."

[26] When I speak of 'ancient philosophers' here, I mean to include the majority of philosophers between, say, Parmenides, and the Stoics. The history of skepticism is rather disjoint: Sextus Empiricus, an important figure, writes much later than his predecessors, and we know little about his context. I'm including him, but as an outlier. I also mean to include Aristotle, though not much will be said in this book about Aristotle. Some core ideas – *doxa* dealing with the domain of 'what can be otherwise' and *doxa* as a weak state in *akrasia* – are discussed in Chapter 3.

spheres: the sphere of knowledge on the one hand, and the sphere of belief-or-ignorance on the other. Indeed, in early Platonic dialogues it appears that there are only these two conditions: knowledge or ignorance.[27] The badness of *doxa* is thus, at least in some ways and in some contexts, the badness of ignorance.

In the *Meno*, and more explicitly in the *Republic*, Plato begins to work with a tripartite distinction between ignorance, *doxa*, and knowledge. Though it is still true that some of *doxa*'s deficiency lies in the fact that it falls short of knowledge, more needs to be said. In particular, *doxa* needs to be looked at more closely because, if one wants to achieve knowledge, one must start somewhere. And where else to start than from ideas one already has? If one were to endorse one's ideas as truth-claims, one would hold *doxai*. If, on the other hand, one were to hypothesize them, one could use them in investigation without tainting one's state of mind with an inferior kind of cognitive attitude. Before one begins to investigate, however, one is likely to hold beliefs. Acquisition of knowledge, then, would seem to involve that one moves from having beliefs – states to be gotten rid of – to having knowledge.

In order to see more clearly the idea that knowledge *replaces* belief, recall a well-known passage from the *Meno*. Socrates teaches a young slave, who had no previous training, some geometry; eventually the boy arrives at the right answer to a geometrical problem. As Socrates puts it, the slave boy now formulated a correct belief. For the belief to become a piece of knowledge, he would have to repeat this

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[27] I am not here going into the question of how to think about knowledge in early Platonic dialogues, questions about *technê*, etc.

and similar exercises. Eventually, the belief would settle down in his mind. It would become a piece of knowledge. That is, contrary to the long-standing idea that something must be *added* to true belief for it to become knowledge – say, a justification – this line of thought suggests that, once the true belief has become stable (which might involve that the relevant reasoning is in place), a piece of knowledge *replaces* what was earlier a true belief.[28] This stable attitude, so the proposal goes, is genuinely different. And that is, it is not the case that *one* attitude changed a property, becoming stable. Through stabilization, a new attitude – knowledge – is generated.

The passage in the *Meno* is short, and its interpretation is controversial. For present purposes, it suffices that the passage can be interpreted in this fashion. It is possible to read the text as suggesting that the formerly-held belief comes to be *replaced* by a piece of knowledge. This idea is central to the tradition of Socratic epistemology: belief is an inherently deficient attitude. In moving from belief to knowledge, one does not add something to an attitude that one otherwise keeps in place – no, one comes to have a different attitude altogether.

The traditional, Neoplatonically inspired story about Plato focuses elsewhere in the *Meno*. Plato, it is argued, holds the Theory of Recollection. Investigation and learning are possible, it is said, because knowledge is latently present in the soul. The soul

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[28] Cf. David Sedley, who argues that the *Meno* does not compel us to consider knowledge a species of *doxa*: *doxa* 'becoming' *epistêmê* could mean 'being replaced by' – a child becomes an adult, but an adult is not a species of a child. Sedley points out, in my view rightly, that the Cave image of the *Republic* describes just this kind of progression from *doxa* to *epistêmê* (1996, p. 93). For objections to this line of argument, cf. Gail Fine, "Knowledge and True Belief in the *Meno*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004): 41-81. Few commentators pursue the idea that belief is weak and knowledge firm. For brief discussion, cf. Gail Fine "Nozick's Socrates," *Phronesis* (1996): 233-244.

'saw all things' prior to its birth in a human body. The slave boy can formulate the correct answer because knowledge is already present in his soul. Learning is recollecting: it can be hard to access latent knowledge, because it is buried under false conceptions, which first need to be cleared away. This is a forceful story, and it merits being re-told. Notably, however – and this is what any skeptical or Stoic reader would emphasize – it is not presented as a theory, supported by arguments. It is something priests and priestesses say. Presumably, if people who are close to divinity put forward an idea, we should take it seriously. But it is one thing to take it seriously, and another thing for it to be literally true.[29] Like the *Republic*'s similes, reference to the views of priests is a cousin of hypothetical investigation: a certain view can be considered, and yet it is not claimed that it can be accounted for and presented as knowledge.

In the *Meno*, three solutions to the puzzle of how investigation is possible are on offer. First, recollection: it is possible to investigate a matter because we know and do not know it at the same time when we begin to investigate; we know it latently, but not overtly (81a-d). Second comes a distinctively Socratic idea, namely that, even though we do not know whether recollection is true, we should continue to investigate, because otherwise we would become lazy people (81d-e). Third, and after the geometry example (81e-85b), comes the proposal that we need a distinction between

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[29] David Sedley and Alex Long divide the text up such that only 81a-c are attributed to priests and priestesses, and 81c-e appears as "epistemological doctrine" put forward in Socrates' own voice (*Plato. Meno and Phaedo*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, xvii). From the perspective of the skeptic reading I put forward, there is no such transition; 81c-e continues to talk about Hades, the soul, and so forth. Indeed, Sedley and Long immediately go on to admit that "the only conclusion Socrates will absolutely insist on" is that one should seek because, to give up on it based on the Meno Problem is to be lazy.

true belief and knowledge. It is possible to investigate because the dichotomy of either knowing or not knowing something, which was a premise of the Meno Problem, is compatible with a tripartite distinction between ignorance, belief, and knowledge. It is possible to have beliefs about things that one does not know.

In fairness to those interpreters who focus on Recollection rather than this last move, it must be admitted that the threefold distinction between ignorance, *doxa*, and knowledge, is not explicitly argued for. Instead, *doxa* sneaks in via the route I sketched above – through formulations that employ the verb *dokein*. In a famous line, Socrates formulates a principle for question and answer: say what you think. You, Socrates says to the slave boy, should respond by saying what seems to you (*soi dokoun*) (83d4). He goes on to tell Meno that he will only want to hear the boy's *doxai* (84d3) and eventually states that the boy formulated no *doxa* that was not his own (85b12). The *doxai* he came up with were in him (c4). The person who is ignorant still has correct *doxai* (c6-7). For current purposes, we can break off here. The point has been made that, though someone is ignorant of something, she is not entirely ignorant in such a way as to have no views on the matter. And that was the initial assumption in the Meno Problem, that one either is ignorant in such a way as to have no starting-point for thinking about something, or one already has knowledge. The problem, it turns out, was formulated in a misleading way. The ignorant person has something at her disposal that allows her to start thinking about things.

A deflationary reading of the *Meno* focuses on this: investigation is possible because we have beliefs about the things that we do not know. As unendorsed hypotheses,

these attitudes are respectable starting-points for investigation. This is how skeptics, who want to investigate without *doxai*, are likely to read the *Meno*.[30] Right after discussion of the Meno Problem, Socrates introduces a so-called hypothetical method. And that is, he introduces something of enormous interest to skeptics: an attitude that falls short of truth-claims and that nevertheless allows an investigator to engage with her thoughts and the thoughts of others.

And yet, one may want to defend Recollection. Recollection aims to capture, apart from explaining how investigation is possible, the following phenomenon: a learner might, in a certain sense, already have available to herself the content that she is in the process of learning.[31] As part of the deflationary reading, this phenomenon gets re-explained, without reference to an earlier life of the mind. As Hellenistic philosophers suggest, a reasoner has content available through the concepts that were acquired early on in *this* life. The having of these concepts, called pre-conceptions, actually *makes* her a reasoner. Hellenistic readers of the *Meno* are likely to point out that Socrates asks first of all whether the slave-boy knows Greek. As a knower of Greek, the slave boy has some kind of understanding of what Socrates says when he says "let's draw a square." In the terms of Hellenistic philosophers, he has a preconception – some preliminary idea of what squares are. Preconceptions need to be made explicit in investigation, and they need to be developed further. Still, there is a sense in which

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[30] This suggestion was first made by Gisela Striker, "Sceptical Strategies," in M. Schofield, M. Burnyeat, and J. Barnes (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 54–83. Reprinted in Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 92–115, 112.

[31] This point has greatly interested modern readers, who compare it to talk about *a priori* knowledge.

coming to understand something involves realizing that the answer fits the preconception one already had. A knowledge-belief distinction on the one hand, and the theory of preconceptions on the other, thus aim to address the questions that the *Meno* raises.

Doxa, so far, appears as a lowly cognitive attitude related to ignorance, mere appearance, and so forth. It can be utilized in investigation only by being turned into a different attitude: hypothesis. Otherwise it is such that the Socratically inspired thinker aims to stay away from it. This – though it is a mere sketch that would need much filling in – is a set of ideas that skeptically inclined Hellenistic philosophers engage with. Against them, one might argue that they neglect the difference between true and false beliefs. They evaluate all *doxa* as deficient. Doing so, do they not miss out on something important, namely that true belief is better than false belief? This idea is expressed in the *Symposium* (202a): "what is unreasoned" cannot count as knowledge, and "what hits the truth" cannot be ignorance. Hence, true belief might be its own category, situated between knowledge and ignorance.

One might push even further. Why should a true belief not count as the best kind of judgment, and thus as knowledge?[32] Part II of the *Theaetetus* explores precisely this, that knowledge is true belief. In my view, Plato takes this proposal rather seriously. If truth is what we are after, then true belief should qualify as knowledge. If, on the

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[32] These questions are rarely discussed in Plato scholarship. An interesting exception if Robert Nozick, "Socratic Puzzles," *Phronesis* (1995): 143-155. Nozick recognizes the problem, and thinks through the following potential solution: someone who forms a true belief might not 'have' the truth, because beliefs lack stability. Beliefs do not 'stick.' The cognizer is likely to change her mind again. This is remarkably close to the Stoic proposal.

other hand, this proposal fails, and knowledge is not well-explained as true belief, then it seems that truth is not all we seek. And this suggests that, perhaps, *doxai* are not to be divided into 'good' (namely true) *doxai* and 'bad' (namely false) false ones.

Consider more generally the question of how *doxa* relates to the truth. According to standard theories in contemporary epistemology, belief-formation aims at the truth. As others have noted, this claim could mean several things.[33] Taken descriptively, it might mean that, for a cognizer to believe something is for her to hold it to be true. In this interpretation, the claim provides something like a definition of the attitude we today call belief, or alternatively, the attitude we call judgment. Judgment, here, is a term for a truth-claim, or for the acceptance of something (content, an impression, a proposition, a thought, etc., depending on the specifics of a given theory) as true.[34] The term describes a mental act without thereby evaluating it in any way, or characterizing it further in ways that would lend themselves to normative concerns.

Arguably, it is an achievement of Plato's *Theaetetus* to first discuss these matters. Every truth-claim has the same structure: some content is accepted as true. This applies, no matter whether the resulting attitude is a piece of knowledge, or whether it

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[33] Cf. Pascal Engel, "Truth and the Aim of Belief," in D. Gillies (ed.), *Laws and Models in Science* (London: King's College, 2005), 77-79. In an influential paper, Bernard Williams says the dictum means that (i) beliefs are accessible as true and false; (ii) to believe that p is to believe that p is true; (iii) to say "I believe that p" is a claim that p is true. "Deciding to Believe," in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-72* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 136-7.

[34] Notably, 'acceptance as true' is here meant to be full acceptance; that is, the partial acceptance involved in, say, assumptions, does not fall into the same class. For a different notion of acceptance as true, cf. Nishi Shah and David Velleman, "Doxastic Deliberation," *The Philosophical Review* Vol 114, n. 4 (2005): 497-534. Shah and Velleman refer to believing that *p*, assuming that *p*, and imagining that *p* as accepting that *p*.

has the lesser status of ignorance or belief. Insofar as the *Theaetetus* takes seriously the option that *doxa* might simply be judgment, rather than a deficient kind of truth-claim, it discusses ideas that are close to today's notion of belief.[35] This idea from the *Theaetetus* is an ancestor of the framework of Stoic philosophy of mind, according to which every cognitive activity involves acceptance of (rejection of, or suspension of judgment with respect to) a given impression. The normative question of how these acceptances fare, and whether they qualify as knowledge, is considered a separate question, one that is turned to after the basic structure of cognitive operations has been described.

In Plato, the notion of belief-as-truth-claim competes with the Socratic intuition that beliefs are a particular kind of truth-claim, namely deficient truth-claims. This competing conception immediately includes a normative perspective. Arguably, it is the nature of belief that, when we form a belief, we aim to accept as true what really is true.[36] A cognizer might fail, and accept something as true that is not true. Moreover, and this is a point of particular relevance for Socratic epistemology, cognizers can fail to properly *aim* at the truth in forming beliefs.[37] They might 'jump to conclusions,' or in some other way accept something as true without having considered it carefully.

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[35] Levett, Burnyeat, and McDowell translate *doxa* in the *Theaetetus* as 'judgment,' thus capturing this point (*The Theaetetus of Plato*. Introduction and revision of M. J. Levett's translation by Myles F. Burnyeat (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990); *Theaetetus*. Translated with notes by John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

[36] Cf. for example David Velleman, "On the Aim of Belief," in Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 244-81.

[37] For an explicitly normative formulation of this idea, cf. Christopher Peacocke, *The Realm of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 15: "A mental relation to a content *p* is the judgement that *p* only if the thinker aims to make this the case: that he stands in that relation to *p* only if it is the case that *p*."

The proposal is not that cognizers can 'decide to believe' or 'believe at will.'[38] In a suggestive formulation, one could say that, though cognizers cannot believe at will, they often believe as they please. Not adhering as closely as they should to norms of belief-formation, they may accept as true a nasty story about someone they do not like, or a positive one about their friend, without pausing to consider whether their interlocutor just repeats gossip.[39] In cases like these, cognizers fail to aim at the truth because they do not make enough of an effort to distinguish between what seems true and what they would like to be true.

According to this proposal, beliefs aim to represent the world as it is, even if 'believers' fail to aim at the truth.[40] This distinction is important. In recent discussions, the idea that beliefs aim at the truth has been ridiculed, as if it implied that we think of beliefs as little archers, aiming to hit a target.[41] With a view to how strange an idea this seems to be, it has been suggested that the dictum must be about cognizers, not about beliefs: cognizers aim, or should aim, at the truth in forming beliefs. This move is too quick. One can think of beliefs as having their own kind of

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[38] For some recent discussions of this issue, cf. Jeff Kasser and Nishi Shah, "The Metaethics of Belief: An Expressivist Reading of 'The Will to Believe'," *Social Epistemology* Vol 20, n. 1 (2006): 1-17. Nishi Shah, "How Truth Governs Belief," *The Philosophical Review* Vol 112, n.4 (2003): 447-482; Shah and Velleman (2005).

[39] Philosophers interested in friendship have recently started to explore these epistemological questions. They proceed on the above observation: we are rather strongly inclined to believe positive stories about our friends. Cf. Sarah Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship," *Ethics* 116 (2006): 498-524.

[40] Accordingly, this kind of perspective disputes an idea that Williams formulates at the beginning of his discussion, that a cognizer who realizes that her belief is false gives up on her belief (Williams (1974), 137); often, cognizers divert there attention, or do something else that makes it possible for them not to give up on views that are – perhaps just momentarily – recognized as false.

[41] Cf. Ralph Wedgwood, "The Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Perspectives* 16 (2002): 267-297.

directionality without imagining them as mini-agents. Beliefs, then, are the kind of attitude that aims to represent the world as it is. A cognizer might fail in aiming for the truth, accepting, for example, a view that feels good to her, and yet by thus forming a belief have an attitude that aims at the truth. One might say that precisely this is the problem: cognizers who fail to aim at the truth still end up with truth-claims.

The interlocutors who populate early Socratic dialogues exemplify how far things can come apart. They make unmitigated truth-claims; and they fall awfully short from adhering to norms of belief-formation. Somewhat polemically, one might say that their beliefs represent things as they would like them to be. First of all, their beliefs represent them, the speakers, as smart and authoritative. Second, their beliefs represent other matters in ways that fit this self-image. Third, their belief-formation avoids intellectual work: they prefer to accept something as true if this acceptance does not call for the revision of other beliefs. Fourth, they are inclined to accept as true what in one way or another feels good. Fifth, they tend not to be aware of the fact that they might not be acquainted with relevant concepts, thus buying into ideas that they hardly comprehend. Sixth, they display a propensity for belief-formation as opposed to abstention from belief-formation.

Consider an example, the priest Euthyphro, Socrates' interlocutor in the dialogue *Euthyphro*. Euthyphro is presented as someone who sees himself (and is seen by the city) as an expert in matters of piety and justice. As a consequence, he is brazenly confident in his own legal judgment, though it concerns a complicated case – a case that could either be intentional murder or mere negligence (2a-5d). The thought that

he might misjudge the facts does not cross his mind; instead, he compares himself to Zeus (6a). When Socrates calls his views into question, and he no longer knows how to defend them, he leaves (15d-e). Clearly, he is not going to revise any of his judgments in the light of arguments. In the course of the conversation, Euthyphro accepts a number of premises without having given them due consideration. In particular, he accepts ideas that sound good to him, for example, ideas that vaguely fit his notion that the gods are amazing and incomprehensible (6b-c). Throughout the conversation, Euthyphro never says "I don't know" or "I don't understand," even when Socrates formulates ideas that are obviously beyond him, and that involve semi-technical vocabulary. For example, in a famous passage, Socrates asks Euthyphro whether everything that is pious has the same *idea* (5d, 6d-e) and is pious through the same *eidos* (6d), using the Greek terms that eventually become central to Plato's thought about the Forms.[42] Euthyphro quickly says "yes." A more careful interlocutor would have said that she neither knows how to understand the locution 'through' in Socrates' proposal, nor what *idea* and *eidos*, both words with wide-ranging non-technical uses, precisely mean here. Euthyphro is unaware of such issues, and he prefers to take a stance.

Euthyphro is exemplary in displaying tendencies of the mind that Socrates battles against. A willingness to gloss over what one does not comprehend; an inclination to accept as true what one is in no position to judge; inflated confidence in one's judgment, nourished by self-aggrandizing claims; and a preference for ideas that feel

[42] Given the difficulties of establishing a precise relative chronology, as well as the difficulties of saying anything specific about the development of Plato's thought about Forms, it is best to abstain from precise claims about the role of this passage.

lovely ("the gods are amazing!") as opposed to less pleasurable, but more realistic ideas ("I have no idea what the gods are"). In sum, the Socratic proposal is that it is not a fact about human faculties that in forming beliefs cognizers aim at representing the world as it is. Instead, they often aim at feel-good beliefs and at seeing themselves in a positive light.[43] Aiming at the truth, accordingly, is a hard task. It is difficult to comply with the fundamental norm of belief-formation, namely, to aim to form beliefs that represent the world as it is. Depending on how this norm is interpreted, adhering to it might imply that one holds back from forming beliefs pretty much all the time. Alternatively, adherence to this norm might imply that one takes seriously criteria of truth – criteria that are taken to indicate that a given thought indeed represents things as they are. One way or another, it is clear that, as compared to widespread habits of belief-formation, the Socratic perspective is likely to call for less judgment, slowed-down judgment, and more cautious judgment.

Against this Socratic perspective, one could argue that it is often better to form a belief as opposed to not forming a belief. This kind of objection can be raised from

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[43] In the language of contemporary discussions, the behavior of Socrates' interlocutors could be described as 'data' that are to be explained, data that are relevantly similar to the findings of some recent empirical research. For example, studies about 'moral dumbfounding' look at the ways in which people who find themselves unable to support their moral views in the face of critical argument nevertheless hold on to their views. Cf. Haidt, Murphy, Bjorklund, (2000) "Moral Dumbfounding: when intuitions find no reasons" (2000) Unpublished, available online (as of November 2010): http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/articles/manuscripts/ haidt.bjorklund.working-paper.when%20intuition%20finds%20no%20reason.pub603.doc.

several perspectives.[44] For example, one might think that, in many situations, one is better off holding a belief, even if the risk that it might be false cannot be ruled out.[45] Moreover, certain situations might call on agents to take a stand, so that abstaining out of cautiousness involves a moral failure. Relatedly, one might think there is some virtue in holding on to an intuition, even if one cannot find proof. Presumably, this tension is made vivid in Plato's *Phaedo*, where it seems that Socrates is unwilling to give up on his view that the soul is immortal, even though it remains unclear whether any of the arguments to that effect is conclusive.[46] Similar points are raised within the ancient Socratic tradition, in particular, against the Pyrrhonian skeptics, who are perceived as arguing for extreme epistemic norms, favoring the avoidance of deficient judgment over any other epistemic aim. These objections fuel a famous anti-skeptical argument, the so-called Apraxia Charge. The charge comes in a number of versions, including one according to which the skeptics cannot survive, one according to which they cannot act in any robust sense of 'action,' and one according to which they cannot adhere to any kind of ethical values.[47] As I hope to show throughout the book,

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[44] The pragmatist tradition engages with similar issues. Peirce argues that doubt, understood as a state in which one neither believes a given proposition nor its negation, is unpleasant; it motivates investigation; belief generates relief. In a sense, Socratic epistemology agrees, though these phenomena receive a different evaluation. Being comfortable with less than (full) belief might be an acquired taste, but one that one *should* acquire. Peirce' diagnosis hangs partly on a presumed relationship between belief and action; cf. Richard Holton, "Partial Belief, Partial Intention," forthcoming *Mind*; and Eric Schwitzgebel, "Acting Contrary to Our Professed Beliefs or The Gulf Between Occurrent Judgments and Dispositional Belief," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 91 (2010): 531-553.

[45] For a position of this sort, cf. Ernest Sosa, "Value Matters in Epistemology," *Journal of Philosophy* 107.4 (2010), 167-90.

[46] Cf. Raphael Woolf, "Misology and Truth," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, eds. John J. Cleary and Gary M. Gurtler, vol. 23 (2007): 1-16.

[47] Cf. Vogt, "Scepticism and Action," in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 165-180; Richard Bett, "Scepticism and Ethics," in Bett, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*, 181-94.

the intuitions on the side of Socratic caution are strong. This does not mean that critics who point to the role of belief in action, or to the moral importance of taking a stance, refer to issues of little significance. On the contrary, much of the argument that Socratically inspired epistemologists must provide is that more or less distant relatives of belief – hypotheses, 'seemings,' assumptions, and the like – can fulfill the functions that are greatly relevant. Notably, the skeptics and Stoics do not speak loosely of belief, as if assumptions or suppositions were kinds of belief. It is important to them to draw a distinction between the attitude of belief on the one hand, and attitudes that involve some distancing or open-mindedness.[48]

The Pyrrhonian skeptics – the skeptics to whom I shall refer as skeptics, because their philosophy is central to this book – develop sophisticated methods of staying away from beliefs. In particular, they employ so-called modes of arguments when they investigate philosophical questions. Contemporary scholars have complained that someone who employs such modes, thereby regularly arriving at suspension of judgment, cannot seriously call herself an 'investigator' (*skeptikos*), as the skeptics do. The skeptics, they argue, aim at suspension of judgment, not at truth. This charge was not raised among the contemporary critics of the skeptics, who were otherwise vocal and imaginative critics of skeptical philosophy, able to detect many potential weaknesses. As I suspect, it was not raised because prominent interlocutors of the ancient skeptics shared with them Socratic premises about a life devoted to

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[48] This intuition is not wholly foreign to contemporary epistemology. For example, Bas C. van Fraasen argues that belief involves a certain degree of commitment (he invokes a passage in Augustine that employs Stoic vocabulary of assent, but that, via Augustine's preoccupations, leads toward voluntarist intuitions, and thus away from Socratic epistemology). "Belief and the Will," *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984): 235-256.

investigation. The value of truth has two sides: it is valuable to attain truths, and valuable to avoid the acceptance of falsehoods. The value of truth can thus be responded to in several ways, depending on how one construes the relationship between these two aims. If one shares the Socratic intuition that it is paramount to avoid the acceptance of falsehoods, and that it is preferable to make no truth-claims as opposed to false ones, then skeptical investigation might be the most convincing response.