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Plato's Republic has Socrates give an argument that in the ideal city (aka. Kaliopolis) philosophers should rule as they have knowledge. In this essay, I will focus on an argument stemming from an attempt to distinguish philosophers from sight-lovers in so far as sight-lovers have mere opinion, and not knowledge. Socrates first argues sight-lovers cannot know beauty completely, and then knowledge is set over what is completely knowable, and opinion is set over an intermediary between the completely knowable and completely unknowable. Finally, he concludes sight-lovers must then have opinion, as they do not have complete knowledge about the beautiful, but have partial knowledge and this is the definition of opinion. After giving Socrates' argument, I will focus on Gail Fines criticism of this argument which invokes Socrates argument for the dialectical requirement made the earlier Socratic dialogue, Meno. I will highlight Gail's criticism Socrates seems to give premise which would likely be rejected on their own by sight-loves. I will conclude by arguing that Socrates' argument would not be likely to convince the sight-lovers that they have mere opinion on it's own. However, using previous Socratic dialogues which argue for these offending premises, one may be convinced of the theory of forms, and thus Socrates argument, are sound.



Socrates' argument is based upon the assumption of Plato's theory of forms which is built over previous Socratic dialogues. When we call things, people, or actions beautiful, we are recognising a part of an ideal in that thing. Therefore, we have the implicit assumption of an ideal which he calls a Form (in this case the Form of the beautiful). Each form is distinct and has an opposite, and so from the beautiful we get the ugly, and from knowledge we get ignorance. As each form is distinct, each form focuses around a unique feature which is described as what the form is 'set over' and opposite forms must be set over opposite features.


From the theory of forms, in Republic 5, Socrates first gives an argument for why sight-lovers have only partial knowledge Beauty. The basic argument is as follows:

- 1) The beautiful is the opposite of the ugly
- 2) Each form is distinct, but appears as many as we associate them with actions, bodies, and relationship to one another in the world we experience.

- 3) One cannot know something completely through the things which share a part of it.
 - 4) Lovers of sight only believe and see the particulars which share a part of beauty (beautiful colors, shapes), and believe these things are beauty itself.
 - 5) Philosophers believe in the beautiful itself, and can see it and the things that participate in it, but do not believe the participants are beauty itself.
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- 6) Therefore, lovers of sight cannot have complete knowledge on the beautiful. While philosophers can know the beautiful completely 


Socrates argues that what the sight-lovers call beautiful particulars in the world share a part of the beautiful, but we do not consider any one such particular to be beauty itself. He argues that we cannot understand the form itself from these parts because to be able to specify exactly what aspect of the beautiful each particular shares in would require complete knowledge of the beauty itself . He makes clear that sight-lovers do know something, as they are recognising the beauty – they are just unable to have ~~complete knowledge~~ . On the other hand, philosophers are those who believe in the form, and with the assumption that one can, through some method (i.e. the dialectic), know fully what the beautiful is, and can see it, as well as the particulars that share a part of it ².

After establishing that sight-lovers can only have partial knowledge and philosophers can have complete knowledge, Socrates argues why this partial knowledge is mere opinion. To do this, he defines knowledge and then attempts to come to a definition of opinion. Before he can do this, he first establishes the difference between ~~knowledge~~  and opinion as infallible and fallible abilities. This sub-argument is as follows:


- 1) Powers are a class of things that enable us to do whatever we are capable of doing

¹ Plato: "Republic" (475e-476a)

² Plato: "Republic" (476c-477a)

- 2) What is set over the same thing and does the same thing is the same power, and ~~so~~  that is set over something different and does a different thing are different powers.
 - 3) A fallible power is a different to an infallible power, as they enable us to do different things.
 - 4) Knowledge enables us to know infallibly, whereas opinion enables us to know fallibly which is to opine.
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- 5) Therefore, knowledge and opinion are different powers which are set over different things

Socrates proposes powers as a class of forms which gives people and things the ability to do certain things. Due to the theory of forms, each form must be 'set over' a particular feature, and so each power is distinct in what it's set over and the ability it gives us – no power can be set over the same thing and thus give us the same ability ³. He proposes that a power which never fails to be accurate must be a different power to that which gives us the ability to do the same thing, yet fallibly. This gives us the distinction of the powers of knowledge and opinion: knowledge enables us to know infallibly, whereas opinion enables us to know  fallibly ⁴. Socrates uses this to come to a definition of opinion:

- 1) Knowledge and opinion are different powers which are set over different things
 - 2) Knowledge is set over what "is" completely and ignorance is set over what is not completely.
 - 3) What "is" completely is completely knowable, and what "is not" is completely unknowable.
 - 4) Opinion is set over an intermediate between what "is" completely and what "is not" completely.
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³ Plato: "Republic" (477c)

⁴ Plato: "Republic" (477e)

- 5) Therefore, knowledge allows us to have complete knowledge, and opinion allows us to have an intermediate between complete knowledge and complete ignorance.

The ideal/form of knowledge of knowledge is to know something completely. From previous Socratic dialogues, it is argued that we cannot have any knowledge about things which doesn't at all exist, and so the form knowledge (the ideal) is to know something completely (i.e. to have knowledge of a thing). Therefore, the form knowledge must be set-over what completely exists "i.e. what 'is' completely". He contrasts this to ignorance – the opposite of knowledge. Due to the theory of opposites, ignorance must then be set over the opposite of complete knowledge, and so ignorance is a complete lack of knowledge, and so is set over what "is" in no way. In other words, ignorance is set over what completely "is not". With these opposites. On the other hand, opinion is not ignorance, as Socrates has already argued that opinion allows us to have fallible knowledge. However, as it is fallible, we know that it cannot be knowledge itself. He concludes that as partial knowledge is an intermediate between complete ignorance and complete knowledge, and knowledge is set over what "is" and ignorance what "is not", opinion must be set over an intermediate between what "is" and "is not" ⁵. As what "is" has been defined as completely knowable, and what "is not" is completely unknowable (as we cannot have knowledge on what "is not"), we must then derive that the ability opinion gives us is to have an intermediate between completely knowledge and a complete lack of knowledge (aka. complete ignorance) ⁶.

Finally, with these arguments made, we come to the final argument for why sight-lovers have mere opinion and knowledge. Relying on the fact that sight-lovers cannot have complete knowledge of the beauty from the particulars which share a part of it, they must have an intermediate between knowledge and ignorance which is what Socrates has defined as opinion. This is given in this final argument form:

- 1) Lovers of sight cannot have complete knowledge on the beautiful. While philosophers can know the beautiful completely.

⁵ Plato: "Republic" (477e-478e)

⁶ Plato: "Republic" (479c-d)

- 2) Knowledge allows us to have complete knowledge, and opinion allows us to have an intermediate between complete knowledge and complete ignorance
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- 3) Therefore, sight-lovers have mere opinion, and not knowledge, whilst philosophers have true knowledge.

A critique of Socrates' conclusion comes from Gail Fine, who notes ambiguity in the meaning of the Greek "to be" which is used to describe what knowledge and belief/opinion are set over. Fine proposes that there are two contrasting interpretations that come from the different meanings that "to be" could have - the two worlds view or the content analysis view. If we take an existential reading, then knowledge is set over what exists, and opinion is set over what exists, and does not exist. If we take a predicative reading, then knowledge is set over what is F, and opinion is set over what is F and is not-F – where F is an attribute which allows one to have knowledge of it. Both of these readings proposes that what *is* and *is not* are objects, which gives us a world of objects which exist, or are F, and a world of objects which don't exist, or are not-F – this is what is known as the two worlds view. Alternatively, a veridical reading means that knowledge is set over what is true, and opinion is set over what is true and not-true ⁷. As the veridical reading focuses on the truth-value of the things and not on a feature of the object, this is a contents analysis.

Fine argues that the two worlds view conflicts with the dialectical requirement (DR) which is given in the Meno. The DR is given as an argument that one cannot make arguments using premises which are not believed to be true, and thus not likely accepted by the person you are trying to convince ⁸. Fine explains the two worlds view leads us to an assumption that the objects knowledge is set over are different from the objects belief is set over, and so the things belief is set over can never be known full (eg. the beautiful things in the world) whilst one can never have opinions on the the things knowledge is set over ⁹. This assumption violates the DR as sight-lovers may feel they can have knowledge on the beautiful things Socrates assumes

⁷ Fine: "Plato: Vol. 1: Metaphysics and epistemology" (p. 217-218)

⁸ Fine: "Plato: Vol. 1: Metaphysics and epistemology" (p. 217)

⁹ Fine: "Plato: Vol. 1: Metaphysics and epistemology" (p. 221)

are just a part of the form beauty. Moreover, Fine argues the content analysis interpretation which is given also breaks the DR. Fine notes Socrates has assumed that because belief and knowledge give us different abilities – to opine and to know, they must be set over different things. However, no other reasoning is given for why powers cannot be set over the same thing, except using the theory of forms, which breaks the DR. These criticism appears to give a strong argument for why Socrates' would not convince the sight-lovers they have mere opinion and not knowledge. As they are not given an argument for the theory of forms or other premises which are assumed, sight-lovers cannot be expected to, given Socrates own argument from Meno, accept his argument.



I believe that Socrates argument given in Republic 5 cannot be used alone to convince sight-lovers they have mere opinion. It is tautological to form arguments with assumptions not then argued for which validate the conclusions Socrates is drawing and so must be rejected. However, given a full explanation and argument for the theory of forms using the Meno and Phaedo, Socrates may be able to convince the sight-lovers of these premises which break the DR and come to convince them to seek the form of the beautiful instead of the various particulars in the world of sensibles.

Bibliography

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