



BRILL

PHRONESIS 60 (2015) 180-205

PHRONESIS

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Ranking Knowledge in the *Philebus*

Amber D. Carpenter

Department of Philosophy, University of York

Heslington, York YO10 5DD, UK

amber.carpenter@york.ac.uk

Abstract

Socrates' concise examination of intelligence in the *Philebus* is framed with the odd ambition to discover which knowledges are more closely related to knowledge. If we take Plato's epistemology here to be 'paradeigmatist', this and other oddities of the passage disappear; we can then read it as articulating that paradigm, setting procedural as well as objectual constraints on perfect knowledge. While all cognitive disciplines, however lowly, aim at this perfect knowledge, most necessarily fall short of this ideal. This explains Socrates' extraordinary inclusiveness and simultaneous ambivalence about the cognitive value and success of ordinary crafts, for the paradeigmatist can grant or withdraw knowledge-claims flexibly, but not arbitrarily, and without equivocation on 'knowing'. In the *Philebus*, this provides an understanding of everyday cognitive practices as beneficial and good, apart from their practical usefulness, and it illuminates one aspect of the *Philebus*' claim that pleasures are themselves truth-apt, and truth-aiming.

Keywords

Plato – *Philebus* – epistemology – paradigm – knowledge

1 Plato's Form of Knowledge

There are only three places in Plato's dialogues where we find a Form of Knowledge: *Cratylus* 440b, *Phaedrus* 247d, and *Parmenides* 134a4-e5. This is already surprising, since knowledge or wisdom is presumably a virtue, like justice or beauty, so that we might expect it to appear as regularly as other

virtues.¹ Moreover, each of these three passages has its oddities: the very status of the *Cratylus* argument is ambiguous—just how serious is Socrates throughout, and about what is he serious?² The *Phaedrus* passage is in the palinode, where Socrates is engaging in a rhetorical practice which is by his own lights dubious, as an antidote to an earlier rhetorical display.³ Only the *Parmenides* passage explicitly refers to a ‘Form of Knowledge’. At *Parmenides* 134a4–e5, Parmenides argues, in the context of the ‘separation’ objection, that ‘surely it is by the form of knowledge itself (ὕπ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶδους τοῦ τῆς ἐπιστήμης) that the kinds themselves, what each of them is, are known (γίγνωσκεται)?’—and then shortly thereafter, the same passage speaks of *god* knowing the forms.

But the oddest feature of all is the one they share: none of these three passages is explicitly *epistemological*—at least, none of these passages in which a Form of Knowledge is explicitly mentioned is concerned with discovering or describing what knowledge is. We do not gather together the various kinds or instances of knowledge and then ask what they all have in common, or in virtue of what they are all *knowledge*. We come closest to this in the *Theaetetus*—from which forms are tantalizingly absent—when Socrates tells Theaetetus: ‘for it is not wishing to count these that we asked, but to know (γινῶναι) what knowledge itself (ἐπιστήμη αὐτὸ) is’ (*Tht.* 146e9).

Plato no doubt had good reason for his reticence.⁴ Nevertheless, there are certain respects in which it is helpful, when thinking of Plato’s epistemology, to

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- 1 Monique Dixsaut offers an analysis of Plato’s normative use of cognitive vocabulary in her *Platon et la question de la pensée* (Paris, 2000); and Stephen Menn argues for νοῦς in particular as a virtue in his *Plato on God as Nous* (Carbondale, 1995).
 - 2 David Sedley takes up this question in a thoughtful way in *Plato’s Cratylus* (Cambridge, 2003). The discussion at the end of the *Cratylus* uses γίγνωσκειν-cognates when it refers to ‘that thing itself, knowledge (αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ἡ γνῶσις)’ which is ‘the form itself (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος)’ (440a8, a9–b1). Although ἐπιστήμη is discussed (first at 411a–412b, where γνῶμη, ‘judgement’, is also etymologized, and then at 437a), there is no reference to ‘forms’ in these places.
 - 3 The *Phaedrus*’ lucky charioteers see alongside ‘justice as it is (αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην)’ and σωφροσύνη ‘knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)—not [the knowledge] that is close to change, that becomes different as it knows the different things which we consider real down here, but that knowledge which is of what really is what it is (τὴν ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐστὶν ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὐσαν)’ (*Phdr.* 247d7–e2).
 - 4 Perhaps knowing is most properly an *activity* of soul, and not just a property of it; and it may well be doubted whether ‘knowledge’ operates the same way other forms do—if, indeed, there is some single way in which other forms do typically operate. Compresence of opposites, for instance, may look odd as a claim about imperfect knowing (should true judgement be a mixture of knowledge and ignorance?)—although perhaps no more odd than as a claim about imperfect justice.

bear in mind certain characteristics and roles attributed to 'forms', and implications of these. Knowledge, what it is or consists in, is for Plato something definite, intelligible, stable and unchanging.⁵ Moreover, this stable fact of the matter about what it is to be knowledge operates, I shall argue, as a standard: knowledge in the fullest or unqualified sense is that with respect to which we measure particular cognitive events as attempts at knowledge at all, and as more or less successful. This, at least, is what I shall try to show is happening in one passage of Plato's *Philebus*. Perfect knowledge, or what it is to be knowledge in the fullest or absolute sense, establishes what that cognitive perfection would be towards which we strive, even as we fall short of it, by trying to make our cognitive practice and state more closely conform to it.

Starting Platonic epistemology here, I think, is a useful and illuminating way to unify Platonic epistemology, whether or not his views on it develop, and to make sense of certain puzzles arising from Plato's discussions of knowledge, and Socrates' attributions of knowledge (or otherwise).⁶ For example, does Plato equivocate in his use of 'knowledge'? Is he having Socrates speak sometimes with the vulgar, sometimes with the initiated?⁷ Is Plato talking about our notion of 'understanding', when he describes *epistēmē*?⁸ Is knowledge, as Plato describes it even possible? The description of knowledge in *Republic* 5-7, for instance, or the paradoxes of the *Theaetetus* might cause us to doubt this. Even if technically possible, if knowledge is so remote from our experience, and virtually unattainable,⁹ why does Plato keep insisting on how important it

5 The *Cratylus* passage (439e-440c), for instance, argues knowledge must have these qualities.

6 Something like this may, indeed, be the appropriate way to approach many epistemological projects up to the early modern era, if Robert Pasnau is to be believed. His 'Epistemology Idealized' (*Mind* 122, 2013, 987-1021) suggests that interest in the ideal cognitive state, rather than the minimum conditions on knowing, animates the epistemological concerns of Plato, although he himself focuses on Aristotle and Descartes. Christopher Rowe takes a broadly similar approach to this same cluster of questions, in 'Plato on Knowing and Merely Believing' (in W. Detel, A. Becker and P. Scholz, eds., *Ideal and Culture of Knowledge in Plato*, Stuttgart 2003, 57-68), although details are different, and his focus is on the *Republic*.

7 As Vlastos argues, in 'Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge' (*Socratic Studies*, Cambridge 1994, 39-66).

8 See for discussion of the question Myles Burnyeat, 'Socrates and the Jury: Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction Between Knowledge and True Belief', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplement 54 (1980), 173-91; Gail Fine, 'Knowledge and True Belief in the Meno', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004), 41-81; also Alexander Nehamas, 'Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 3 (1985), 1-30.

9 *Timaeus* 51e5-6: 'And of true belief, it must be said, all men have a share, but of understanding (νοῦς), only the gods and a small group of people do' (although note that the distinction here is between νοῦς and δόξα ἀληθής; e.g. *Tim.* 51d3-4).

is? And finally, is knowledge of sensibles possible, or not? Does the man who walks the path know the road to Larissa? Taking knowledge as an ideal will help us to thread our way through some of these issues.

In particular, I will argue that appreciating the genuine ambivalence in the matter of the knowability of sensibles will at the same time bring out how it is that having a robust—even unattainable—conception of knowledge makes a practical difference. And this, I think, is best brought out by appreciating the paradigmatic structure of Platonic epistemology.

2 Paradigmatic Epistemology in the *Philebus*

Philebus 55c ff. finds Socrates uncharacteristically generous about what gets to count as knowledge—or so at least it at first appears. Natural sciences, excluded in *Republic* 7, and even applied sciences (building) are counted as knowledge; the unreliable vagaries of ancient medicine and navigation, and the knack of flute-playing get a look-in. Yet the same passage that takes in mundane crafts and skills under the heading of ‘knowledge and mind’ also denies that anything so fickle as a changing sensible world could be a fitting object of knowledge. Bringing Plato’s paradigmatic strategy in epistemology into sharper focus crystallizes and grounds this ambivalence, while illuminating how ideal knowledge orients the soul.

A contest between pleasure and reason is staged in the *Philebus*, each of them claiming to be more valuable than the other in a good human life. Each candidate is subjected to examination—into what each is, and what ‘kinds’ they come in. When the investigation turns to distinguishing kinds of knowledge, Socrates suggests beginning by noting that (55d1-2):

of knowledge concerned with disciplines [or ‘learned things’] (τῆς περὶ τὰ μαθήματα ἐπιστήμης), one part is productive (δημιουργικόν), the other concerned with education and nurture (περὶ παιδείαν καὶ τροφήν).¹⁰

10 One peculiarity which I will not be discussing is that Socrates does not ever return to this primary distinction in the discussion that follows. One might think, as Hackforth, that Plato is unfortunately in the grip of his own ‘method of division’, which is here sadly inappropriate for his purposes (*Plato’s Philebus*, Cambridge 1972, 114-15). But noting the curiosity that music will fall under the productive arts, or handicrafts (as *Politicus* 304b), we might suppose there is something altogether more careful and interesting going on here in Plato’s thinking about crafts and *paideia*, or what nourishes the soul. Verity Harte, for instance, argued in the second of her 2013 Whitehead Lectures on the *Philebus* that ‘all

Then within the ‘manual arts’ (χειροτεχνικαῖς, d5)—which, I take it, are supposed to be the productive arts—we should determine ‘whether some are more closely related to knowledge, the others less’ (εἰ τὸ μὲν ἐπιστήμης αὐτῶν μᾶλλον ἐχόμενον, τὸ δ’ ἦττον ἔνι, 55d5; literally, whether ‘some have more of a hold on knowledge, others less’).

Two features are here worth remarking. First, the more obvious, peculiarly Platonic curiosity is that ‘productive crafts’ should have got a look-in at all. True enough, Socrates in the *Apology* credits craftsmen alone with having any sort of knowledge (*Apology* 22d); but since then Plato has had Socrates assert in *Republic* 5 an absolute divide between non-perceptible knowable objects (476e-478d), and perceptible objects, and confirm in Book 7 that nothing sensible and changing is knowable (529b).¹¹ This is repeated in the *Timaeus*: Sensible things change; changing things cannot be known.¹² In this *Philebus* passage, is Plato recanting, reverting to an earlier—more generous, or less austere—conception of knowledge, such that changing sensible things can be known, after all? This would be in keeping perhaps with the *Theaetetus*, which has what looks like a striking retraction of the *Gorgias*’ disdain for ‘cookery’ as an expertise. Perhaps we should take it that Plato has moved on from his earlier, wild denials that sensible things could be known—particularly since the *Sophist* insists, against the Friends of the Forms, that nothing can be known if nothing changes. After all, Socrates here in the *Philebus* deliberately leaves us in no doubt that he really means to be including crafts, skills—and even flute-playing—in the discussion (56a-b).

And yet, while giving all the impression of giving them their due, Socrates never actually calls the lowest of these activities ‘knowledge’; he refers to them instead as ‘what many call crafts’ (ἅς πολλοὶ τέχνας ἐπονομάζουσι, 55e7-56a1). This ambivalence is deepened at the end of the discussion of knowledge, when

branches of knowledge in the hierarchy are of the demiurgic variety’, as part of a skilful subversion of expectations and replacement of them with more accurate views.

11 ‘If anyone attempts to learn something about sensibles, whether by gazing upward or squinting downward, I say—since there is no knowledge of such things—that he never learns anything’ (*Republic* 7, 529b5-c1). The interpretation is of course contested—see for instance Christopher Rowe, who translates ἐπιστήμην γὰρ οὐδὲν ἔχειν τῶν τοιούτων as ‘there is no knowledge in such things’ instead of ‘of such things’, and then notes that this need not be denying all knowledge of sensibles (*Plato, The Republic*, translated with introduction and notes, London 2012, *ad loc.*).

12 ‘What is *that which always is* and has no becoming, and what is *that which becomes* but never is? The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account (νοήσει μετὰ λόγου). It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense perception (δόξη μετ’ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου)’ (*Timaeus* 27d6-28a3, tr. Zeyl).

Socrates is made to introduce the additional claim, unnecessary to the argument, that ‘most of the *technai* and those who work at them are in the first place concerned with beliefs and vigorously inquire into belief’ (58e5-59a2). For (59a11-b2 + 59b7-8):

how could we speak clearly in most accurate truth about those things which have never nor ever will nor now do have any sameness? . . . [And so] there can be no reason or knowledge that attains the highest truth about these things.

Plato’s epistemological views may have developed; but it seems his reluctance to credit knowledge of sensibles persists, after all.

So what is Plato playing at? Are crafts knowledge or not? The whole discussion here is supposed to be an investigation into knowledge, so the fact that they are mentioned at all implies they must belong to that kind. And yet some of them Socrates cannot even straightforwardly designate *technai*—some, at least, are only ‘so-called’. Classifying them as handicrafts deliberately reminds us that these *technai* at least deal in things sensible; so what *is* Plato’s considered opinion about the knowability of the sensible world, here in the *Philebus*? And what consequences does this have for practical thinking in general, and for ethical rationalism—that is, for the commitment to reasoning as valuable, as it is in the *Philebus*,¹³ and reason as the appropriate mode for ethical engagement?

Considering the second remarkable feature of this passage that I want to point out might indicate a way to answer this question. This is the fact that the discussion begins at 55c by asserting that our domain of investigation is ‘reason and knowledge’ (νοῦ δὲ καὶ ἐπιστήμης, 55c5), glossed as τῆς περὶ τὰ μαθήματα ἐπιστήμης (knowledge concerned with disciplines, or learned things, 55d2). Then, within this domain, we are instructed to investigate whether some members are more, and others less closely related to knowledge (whether some have more of a hold on knowledge than others). But shouldn’t they all *be* knowledge, not *related to* knowledge at all, much less in different degrees? Does the ‘knowledge’ that we began by setting out to investigate mean something different from the ‘knowledge’ to which the different sorts of ‘knowledge’ are supposed to be related?

13 At 66b, νοῦν καὶ φρόνησιν are ranked third on the final list of good-makers, below the features in virtue of which anything is intelligible—proportion and measure—but above particular knowledges, and decisively above even the best pleasures.

We have a choice here: Either this is pure equivocation, and plain confusing; or Plato means it, and means something by it. We can take the latter line, and escape the charge of equivocation, by supposing that the underlying presumption is that knowledge functions ‘paradigmatically’. For in general, a paradigm—the purest case, and therefore definitive of a kind—defines a domain aristocratically, not democratically. Members of a biological species, for instance, all belong equally, to the same extent and for exactly the same reason, to their kind; biological species define their domains democratically. Paradigms, by contrast, determine their domains by resemblance, and since that can come in degrees, they govern those domains hierarchically.

This is not the place to speculate about how Plato himself thought about biological species, if he thought about them much at all. An ordinary use of ‘dog’ grants that a dog that fails to live up to the norm is perhaps a worse dog, but not *less doggy*; a tree that loses its leaves before its time, or does not fruit, is not well-off, but it is not any less of a tree for that.¹⁴ Contrast that with ‘straight’, for instance: a line that fails to be perfectly straight is less straight, and less a straight line by its failure. This is not a mere grammatical difference, an accidental feature of differences in the ways substance-norms and adjective-norms work; for consider the *meikta* of the *Philebus*. At 25e-26b, Socrates introduces ‘mixtures’ of ‘limit’ (ratios like double and half) and ‘unlimitedness’ (opposing pairs such as faster and slower) as well formed wholes, which ‘put an end to the differences between opposites and makes them commensurate and harmonious by the introduction of number’ (25d11-e2), and so are able to function as norms for evaluation. As instances Socrates offers ‘health’ (25e10) and ‘temperate climate’ (26a7-9) and ‘music’ (26a2-5). Each of these, although a substance-word, also governs its respective domain hierarchically: whatever falls short of perfect health is not an instance of health that is in a bad way, but rather a lesser instance of health—and so likewise with temperate climate and music. Being bad musically is not ‘music that is in a bad way’—like our dog—but rather being *less musical*.

So, similarly, ‘knowledge’—like ‘justice’ and ‘beauty’—determines a domain for investigation. But members of that domain are entitled to differential

14 Aristotle, for instance, distinguishes and unifies species according to ‘more-and-less’—species of bird might be distinguished according to their longer or shorter necks, their narrower or broader tongues (see *PA* 4.12, discussed by James G. Lennox in ‘Form, Essence, and Explanation in Aristotle’s Biology’ in G. Anagnostopoulos, ed., *A Companion to Aristotle*, London 2009, 348-67); but such degrees in exemplification of a feature do not make a species more or less of a bird, nor make a particular instance more or less of an egret, say.

status with respect to one another according to how closely they resemble, or how completely they instantiate qualities definitive of the paradigm. And this, in fact, is essentially how the passage proceeds: the background assumption that knowledge is an ideal, with reference to which different cognitive achievements can be evaluated, governs the rest of the passage. For Socrates does not now offer a list of knowledges as a sort of empirical or descriptive study, aimed at letting a thousand flowers bloom. Nor does he distinguish supposedly incommensurable ways of knowing—as, for example, distinguishing between ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing that’. Socrates rather introduces criteria not just for *distinguishing*, but for *ranking* kinds with respect to one another. The criteria used to distinguish kinds of knowledge are not, in the first instance, the different objects of study, or fields of expertise. As in the opening of the *Theaetetus*, we are still not interested in what various branches of knowledge, crafts or fields of study there are out there. Instead, the distinction between kinds of knowledge more and less closely related to knowledge is immediately related to degrees of purity: ‘Should we consider the one (set) most pure (καθαρώτατα), and the others less pure (ἀκαθαρτότερα)?’ (55d7-8). Purity here is not an idle term of approbation. By this point in the dialogue, and especially in the closely preceding discussion of true pleasures, ‘purity’ has been carefully defined as ‘being truly or exactly the very thing that one is’ (53a5-7):

How for us would there be purity of white, and what would it be? Is it the largest and most plentiful (white), or the most unblemished, in which there is not the smallest portion of any other color?¹⁵

Later in the passage on knowledge, we find Socrates referring Protarchus back to the purity point of 53a.¹⁶

‘Purity’ marks the lack of any qualifying conditions, caveats or hedging when declaring something an exemplar of its kind, truly and entirely what it is. This comes out especially strongly in the close relation drawn between

15 See also the preceding discussion of true pleasures, 51b-53c; cf. καθαρόν at 51d7, 52c2, d6, e1, e2, e6, 53a5, b4, c1. ‘I say that, among the smooth and bright sounds, those that produce one pure (καθαρόν) note are not beautiful in relation to another but are so in and by themselves, and are accompanied by a pleasure which belongs to them by nature (συμφύτους)’ (51d6-9).

16 In reply to the claims ‘Gorgias’ might make on behalf of rhetoric, Socrates replies: ‘But as to the matter (πραγματεία) I am talking about now, this is most true (if not most beneficial), just like what was said earlier regarding white: even a small amount of it, should it be pure, is superior to a large amount that is not like this (pure)’ (58c7-d1).

'pure' pleasures and 'true' pleasures in the passage just preceding the analysis of knowledge (51b-53c, esp. 52c1-2 and 52d ff.), where a true pleasure is one which, whatever its intensity, is *only* pleasant and not also at the same time in some way unpleasant. So to look for the purer knowledges is to look for those that are more truly and completely knowledge, without qualification (particularly without qualification by its opposite). They will instantiate to a greater degree more of the characteristics definitive of knowledge, and will be comparatively free from whatever features make a state count as ignorant.¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, then, we are next offered examples of purer knowledges, which enable us to begin to see what those characteristics definitive of knowledge are. The 'leading' [sc. knowledges] (τὰς ἡγεμονικάς, 55d10) within each craft are distinguished. They count as 'leading', it seems, on the grounds that they are the practices which, by their presence, make those disciplines in which they are embedded worthwhile. 'If someone were to take away all counting, measuring, and weighing, from the arts and crafts, the rest might be said to be worthless' (55e1-3). It is in virtue of the measuring arts within any art that the whole achieves anything cognitively worthwhile. From these 'leading disciplines'—from what they are, and from the fact that their presence is responsible for any other skill counting as 'knowledge' at all—we generate a list of criteria. These criteria are those by having which something counts as 'closer

17 Are the impure knowledge-states, in the way the impure pleasure-states are, actually mixtures of knowledge and ignorance (as opposed to features associated with each)? Without some indication of how to think about ignorance (unlike in the *Republic*, we are given none in the *Philebus*), it is difficult to say, and indeed difficult to say what the difference would be. So John Cooper writes on this passage: 'pure forms of knowledge are those which do not combine knowledge with its opposite, ignorance, but present knowledge in an unadulterated form. The impure forms also provide us with knowledge, but only by mingling it with ignorance, or *what amounts to the same thing*, failure to know' ('Plato's Theory of the Human Good in the *Philebus*', *Journal of Philosophy* 74, 1977, 714-30 at 721, emphasis added); he later describes the lesser truth of these less pure knowledges as 'by their natures misleading and false' (724)—so perhaps the one with such knowledge is in a state mixed of knowledge and ignorance? There are, however, good reasons for supposing that knowledge's impurity will not amount to exactly the same thing as pleasure's within the terms of the *Philebus*—for pleasure is inherently unlimited, the sort of thing that bears a necessary relation to its opposite and acquires stable and (partial) definiteness or identity only through external determinations. Its impurity will involve actually containing its opposite. Knowledge is a different sort of thing—more likely a cause of order (see discussion of νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη at 28c-31a), not a mixture or an element of mixtures. Its 'impurity' may consist entirely in its failing to fully have all the powers distinctive of intelligence.

to knowledge' or as a 'purer' sort of knowledge; and these criteria play this role because they are characteristics partially constitutive of knowledge as such.

So, music-playing counts as the least sort of knowledge; if it is a kind of knowledge at all, it is as far away as something can be from knowledge and still be included in the kind. This is because 'there is a lot of unclarity mixed up in it and very little reliability' (τὸ μὴ σαφές, μικρὸν δὲ τὸ βέβαιον, 56a6). Clarity and reliability are, then, characteristic of knowledge; and these require some element of measuring. The very attempt to introduce measure is, in fact, why music-playing gets considered as knowledge at all: although they do it badly, musicians do at least try to find the measure, and they do aim at consistency and reliability in performance (56a3-5):

The harmonies are found not by measurement but trained guessing (μελέτης στοχαμῶ), and throughout flute-playing they hunt down the measure of each note, producing it by guesswork (στοχάζεσθαι).¹⁸

Socrates gives us here not only two criteria for knowing, but at the same time, an explanation of the source of the failure to exemplify them: lacking measurement explains the lack of reliability or constancy, and the lack of clarity. This preference for measurement is implicitly grounded in the contrast with the supposed alternative: guesswork.

We should not suppose Plato is here so dismissive of musical performance that he thinks each time a musician picks up an instrument she simply casts about wildly, hoping that something harmonious emerges. There is a difference between flute-players and non-flute-players, between musicians and the rest. The guessing (στοχασμός) that the musician brings to the task is attentive or careful, and trained (μελέτη). The result is someone who can usually, presumably, hit the right measure—for we are not singling out the incompetent players, but discussing flute-playing generally, and we are considering it *as* a kind of *knowledge*.

Yet there is something unsatisfactory, cognitively—that is, considered as a kind of knowledge—in music-performance. In spite of their competence,

18 There is a terrible muddle here, where it looks as if Plato thought flutes were stringed instruments. Some translators ignore the flute-playing and go for strings (Dorothea Frede, *Plato: Philebus*, Indianapolis 1994), others accept the flute and suppose χορδή here just means musical note generally. *Philebus* 56a is the only instance LSJ cite for such a usage. Gosling (*Plato: Philebus*, translated with notes and commentary, Oxford 1975) and Hackforth (*Plato's Philebus*, n. 10 above) both add lyre-playing, following an older attempt to address the problem.

Socrates says such an activity has very little clarity and reliability. This might seem an odd claim if we are presuming our musicians are indeed competent. What should their lack of reliability consist in? The musician, Socrates complains, must hunt down the correct measure each time; she is among those who (at 55e6-9) to a great extent, must thoroughly drill (καταμελετᾶν) the perceptions by experience (ἐμπειρία) and routine (τριβή), using στοχαστικός—an ability to just hit upon the right measure.¹⁹ But what, we might ask, is wrong or deficient in that?

Consider the contrast Socrates immediately offers: building and similar crafts (56b5, 56c5)—ship-building, house-building, carpentry are specifically named (56b8-c2)—are ranked higher than practices that get whatever clarity and reliability they have from ‘training the senses’. For builders, unlike doctors, farmers, pilots, generals and musicians, can avail themselves of ‘measures and tools’ (μέτροις τε καὶ ὀργάνοις, 56b7), which give the former greater accuracy (ἀκριβείαν, 56b7). But (56b4-6):

building, I suppose, consults measures and instruments a great deal, bringing greater accuracy (ἀκριβείαν), that lend it greater skilfulness over other knowledges (τεχνικωτέραν τῶν πολλῶν ἐπιστημῶν).

How do measuring tools import greater accuracy or precision into a discipline? Because, I think, where there are measuring tools, we need not rely on ‘training the perceptions’. One does not need to eyeball each case, and respond with trained reflexes, for one can take out the measuring stick at once and determine precisely what the right measure is. Presuming our musicians’ perceptions are indeed *well-trained*, the difference lies not in *whether* they get it right, but rather in *how* they do so.

The builders, but not the musicians and physicians, get it right by having recourse to some independently verifiable and stable standard of correctness—the measuring stick, the compass. Perceptions, and the habitual training of them through repetitious practice, lack any sort of independent verifiability that could confirm that the measure that seems right will in fact be right. This lack of a shareable criterion is what makes perception, on which these skills so heavily rely, ἄλογος—not ‘irrational’, but ‘not liable to an account’. What is susceptible of account can be shared, articulated and justified. Lacking this, the lesser crafts of music and medicine lack clarity or perspicuousness. This criterion for ranking cognitive states appears not only here, but also runs

19 Although containing an element of ‘proceeding by guesswork’, στοχαστικός nevertheless also has a connotation of success—*actually able to hit* the target.

persistently through the increasingly refined ranking of cognitive states in *Republic* 5-7. The musicians' lack of reliability, then, is not statistical—that they might get it wrong every other time. Rather, where there is no account, and no independent measure, there can be no security that this is indeed the correct measure.

The stability characteristic of knowledge, then, is not that of the intransigent dogmatist who has happened upon a correct belief, any more than it is the 'reliability' of lucky chance or even the training of perceptions. The stability or reliability at issue is the well founded sort: stable *because* accurate, clear and—as the appeal to measuring instruments suggests—verifiable independently of any particular person's perceptions. The three criteria are thus difficult to characterize independently of each other. If clarity can be helpfully distinguished from accuracy at all, we might think the difference to be that while ἀκρίβεια has to do with precision, and so with exact specification that leaves no room for ambiguity, σαφήνεια (connected as it is here with reliability) has to do with completeness, full determination of objects in the sense of clearly seeing all aspects of what is known, without leaving anything out.²⁰

The whole process of contrasting and ranking ἐπιστήμαι as differentially entitled to that name, as more and less pure, has turned up three related axes of comparison: clarity, reliability and—with the introduction of tools and their related possibilities—accuracy or precision (ἀκρίβειαν, 56b5; ἀκριβείας, 56c5).²¹ Once it has been introduced, Socrates emphasizes the role of accuracy in distinguishing between knowledges. After attributing the greater accuracy

20 This might be regarded as an amplification and a specification of Cooper's suggestion that real knowing in this passage has to do with knowing the 'whole truth' or the 'whole nature' of its objects, or exhibiting the object 'as being fully determined' ('Plato's Theory of the Human Good', n. 17 above, 721-2).

21 Clarity and obscurity are familiar as the persistent metaphor tracking relative cognitive worth through the epistemology of *Republic* 5-7—from 478c10, where judgment does not 'exceed knowledge in clarity (σαφήνεια) nor ignorance in unclarity (ἀσαφεία)', through to 534d8 where a name is sought for what is 'more manifest (ἐναργεστέρου) than judgment, but more obscure (ἀμυδροτέρου) than knowledge (ἐπιστήμης)'; and in the *Republic* we find that precision or accuracy, too, is also introduced as the discussion progresses (e.g. *Rep.* 504e1-3; 529c8). And we might also recall here Parmenides' claim, in the passage referred to above, that it is with respect to accuracy (ἀκρίβεια) that god's knowledge would differ from ours: 'If there is in fact Knowledge—a kind itself—it is much more accurate (ἀκριβέστερον) than is knowledge that belongs to us... Well, whatever else partakes of knowledge itself (αὐτῆς ἐπιστήμης), wouldn't you say that god more than anyone else has this most accurate knowledge (ἀκριβεστάτην ἐπιστήμην)?' (*Parmenides* 134c6-11). The focus on precision continues: ἀκριβεστάτη, 134d9 and dio.

of the building arts to the use of measures and instruments (56b4-6), he reiterates: 'Let us divide what are called *technai* into those like music in which there is little accuracy, and the building sort, in which there is more' (56c4-6); and he confirms that 'we called "prior"²² those *technai* which are most accurate' (56c8-9). Socrates then repeats the procedure and grounds, distinguishing among knowledges by identifying, within the more precise arts, those practices and features which account for the accuracy and reliability of the whole. So, just as measuring is what, by its presence, makes handicrafts worthy of the designation knowledge to some degree—for it makes them accurate and reliable to some degree—so likewise within measuring practices, some display greater, others lesser accuracy (*ἀκριβέστερον*, 57c3), and whatever within the measuring is responsible for its accuracy will have a claim to be the superior knowledge. This, it turns out, is the 'philosopher's' sort of arithmetic and geometry—measuring which insists on dealing only in completely commensurable units. This more exacting form of measuring establishes the standard for what good measurement is, and thus underwrites the accuracy and clarity displayed in practical applications of measurement and counting.

The introduction of tools into the building arts—not counting alone—was responsible for their greater accuracy. But what measuring-tools introduce into crafts is precisely the commensurable units which distinguish pure mathematics and geometry from the practical applications of the general who counts in 'battalions', disregarding differences in size or strength, or the farmer who counts in 'oxen', regardless of differences in health or age (56e). Where there are instruments for measuring, we rely no longer on the literal feet and hands, variable in each case, of those doing the measuring. The measuring stick introduces fully commensurable units, the same in every case; it is thus able to act as the measure of the variability of those more approximate 'measures' adequate for everyday use, but perhaps not especially reliable for getting the roof to fit and remain in place.

The builder need not think of his units *as* pure, fully commensurable units, nor reflect on the fact that use of a measuring-stick works because it introduces abstract, fully commensurable units to be the measure in each case. Presumably he does not. He simply uses the tools, and because this use is of commensurable, repeatable measures, this enables his work to be more reliable, more clearly and precisely articulated. This commensurability in the

22 *πρώτας*. They were in fact called *ἡγεμονικάς* before (55d1), not *πρώτας*. Still, *πρώτας* must be taken here in its sense of 'going before', for to take it with *εἶπομεν* as 'which we mentioned first' would have Socrates naming music etc. as the most accurate, which is clearly not intended.

units is, however, limited within the practice of building—there are aspects of the craft which do not permit of their application (the quality of the timber, say), and there are limits on the degree of fineness of precision that is possible and necessary in the building of houses, ships and so on. We cannot be measuring to the nanometer, even if timber permitted such fine distinctions, if we want to have the roof up at the end of the day; and to suppose it necessary or desirable to do so would misunderstand what house-building is.

The arithmetic and geometry of the ‘philosopher’ (56d6), by contrast, is not liable to such constraints. It deals strictly in those elements of the building arts which were responsible for importing its clarity and accuracy: counting and measuring in repeatable, commensurable units.²³ Dealing only in the measures themselves, and their relations, the philosopher can insist on the absolute commensurability of her units and angles, and enjoy the greater clarity and precision thereby attained.

As in the case of the musician, we should not suppose that the builder, in failing to be so precise as the mathematician, is *building* less well than he could or should—any more than we should expect the musician to play better music by stopping at every note to pull out a ruler and measure the exact length of string required here. Absolutely commensurable units throughout all parts of the practice do not make for better building; rather, it makes for a cognitive discipline superior to building. The activity of the builder may be very good *building*—but it will remain comparatively less good *knowing*.²⁴ Where the musician fails to engage in practices of disciplining the judgement according to a clear, precise and independent standard, the builder’s thinking must accommodate and tolerate the unclarity unavoidable when dealing in sensible things.

With ‘philosophical’ mathematics we return to the question of purity with which we started. The non-applied measuring arts, being admittedly more precise and clearer (more distinct, perspicuous or manifest) are for that reason judged purer and superior (57a11-b2 + b5-7):

23 By ‘repeatable’, I do not wish to bring up suggestions of contemporary scientific practice. I think rather of the more Platonic interest in that which remains the same through several diverse cases, and the explanation of that sameness in diversity.

24 Cooper implicitly recognizes this paradigmatic function of knowledge in this passage, and the limits on some cognitive disciplines imposed by the subject matter which defines them as that discipline: ‘knowledge, as such, aspires to obtain a clear grasp of the truth about some subject matter, and to represent that truth precisely and accurately . . . empirical disciplines necessarily fail to achieve this ideal’, given the nature of their subject matters (‘Plato’s Theory of Human Good’, n. 17 above, 721).

... looking for whether a (kind of) knowledge is purer (*καθαρωτέρω*) than a knowledge, as a pleasure was (purer) than a pleasure ... And in what came before, did we not discover that one *technē* might be more or less perspicuous (*σαφεστέραν και ἀσαφεστέραν*) than another?²⁵

Protarchus is quickly persuaded (57c9-d2):

Indeed! And say that while those just considered are greatly superior to the other *technai*, those with the impulse of the real philosopher are, with respect to accuracy and truth, even more superior by their use of measure and number.

The return to purity reminds us that we are still engaged in the same enterprise of discovering those knowledges that are 'more closely related to knowledge'. Socrates' reminder of the pleasure parallel affirms the specific sort of purity at issue: we have come near the conclusion of our project of distilling what is absolutely, or in every way, knowledge from less pure variants. (We will shortly be reminded again, at 58d, of the point about purity in whiteness, originally made regarding pleasures.) Socrates here draws the discussion together by drawing together the relevant criteria, confirming that the 'art of the philosophers' exceeds its non-philosophical brethren in clarity, purity and greater precision (57c1-3).

We thus have an arc of increasingly 'superior' cognitive accomplishments, through which the very same choiceworthy features run in differing degrees. Ranked according to their degree of accuracy, reliability and clarity, the disciplines investigated are increasingly close approximations to pure or perfect knowledge.²⁶ The reference to purity of *pleasure* reminds us not just of the specific sense of 'purity' as 'unqualifiedly of its kind', but also of the general

25 And the two together: 'clarity and purity', τὸ σαφές και τὸ καθαρὸν, at 57c1.

26 Hackforth notices that the relation between knowledges here is 'one of greater or less approximation to truth (*ἀλήθεια*) or precision (*ἀκριβεια*)' (*Plato's Philebus*, n. 10 above, 114); but it is a passing observation, made in the context of a criticism of the 'method of division' of a genus into species that he supposes to be governing the superficial exposition here. So he does not pursue the suggestion, nor notice how careful Plato is with his use of *ἀκριβεια*, nor recognize that truth is actually only introduced into consideration rather later (on which, more below). Cooper sees that Socrates here 'links purity of knowledge with clarity and accuracy ... and with truth itself' as an articulation of 'knowledge, as such' ('Plato's Theory of the Human Good', n. 17 above, 721), but he does not speak of approximation, or draw out the implications of the similarities knowledges share in spite of all their deficiencies.

ethical context in which the discussion arises. Knowledges are being ranked with respect to one another, and with respect to what perfect knowing consists in, because this should somehow inform us about the good life, and the good in life.

3 Forms and Particulars, Theory and Practice

This connection between ethics and epistemology only begins to become clear in the next stage of the discussion. Having discovered the disciplines that are *most* precise (*ἀκριβείς μάλιστα*, 57e3), we have not yet arrived at the summit of our investigation, true knowledge itself. We reach this summit, and make the transition to an altogether purer knowledge, through turning attention explicitly from the way in which we go about knowing towards the things we thereby know. Thus, it is only after Socrates has brought out the fully commensurable units used in ‘philosophical’ mathematics, and its special precision, that its superiority is cast by Protarchus in terms of truth (*ἀληθεία*, 57d2—hitherto notably absent from the discussion). The really philosophical mathematics is superior in accuracy *and truth* (57c10-d2).

The introduction of *ἀληθεία* just here suggests that philosophers’ mathematics is *able to be* superior to the other kind—able to be more accurate, for example, and clear—because it deals only in abstract, and so wholly commensurable, fully determinate units. And it is in virtue of this that it attains a kind of clarity and consistency lacking in the productive arts, and the measuring done within them. Applied mathematics *could not* have the clarity and accuracy of the philosophers’ sort, and still be applied—for applied just means dealing in sensible units, between which there might be any number of variations, unpredictably relevant or irrelevant. That is, it is in virtue of their respective objects and objectives that theoretical mathematics can be more precise than applied mathematics; and it is in virtue of this sort of constraint or otherwise on precision and clarity that measuring arts can be differentially *true*.

Although ‘most precise’, philosophical mathematics is only relatively more true than its applied counterpart. The crown of Purest of the Sciences goes to dialectic, not only in virtue of its precision and clarity in dealing with its subject-matter, but in virtue of the nature of that subject-matter itself. Dialectic is both ‘the most accurate of knowledges’ (57e3), and ‘concerned with being and with what is really and forever in every way eternally self-same’ (58a2-3), and so most true. The connection is clear in the negative claim with which the passage concludes, that where the object of knowledge is unstable an *ἐπιστήμη* *cannot* attain the most truth (59b7-8). Whatever this ‘dialectic’ consists

in—and I shall return to this below—Socrates is claiming here that there can be no higher knowledge, since dialectic is ‘most likely to possess the pure [sc. sort] of intellect and of *phronēsis*’ (τὸ καθαρόν νοῦ τε καὶ φρονήσεως, 58d6-7), and it is ‘closer to the truth’. ‘It would be difficult,’ Protarchus acknowledges, ‘to encounter some other knowledge or craft cleaving more to truth than this one’ (58e1-3).

This comparative language allows Plato to embrace a vast field within ‘knowledge’, and to do so without equivocation. The features distinctive of knowledge—‘precision’, ‘clarity’, for instance—are features that can be manifested in varying degrees. So when these criteria are invoked to distinguish kinds of knowledge, the candidates considered will fall into a rank-ordering, according to the degree to which they manifest the features characteristic of ‘pure’ knowledge—or knowledge as such. Thus we have a notion of pure or real knowledge operating as a standard which imperfect instances of that class of thing approximate. This same pure or perfect knowledge delineates the relevant class: anything counts as a member of the class, and liable to the standard of evaluation, by having those characteristics which, if they were perfected, would make that thing knowledge. By approximating knowledge—that is, by having partially the characteristics definitive of complete knowledge—various cognitive activities win a claim to be considered ‘knowledge’ themselves.²⁷ But they earn this title differentially, and provisionally: a cognitive activity counts more or less as knowledge according to its proximity to perfect knowledge. The shape of Plato’s epistemology as set out here in the *Philebus* is fundamentally ‘paradeigmatist’, in the sense that knowledge is conceived of as a perfection and a single, unchanging standard by which to measure our cognitive success.²⁸

27 There are two different forms of partial instantiation: having the relevant characteristics to a lesser degree, and having only some of the relevant characteristics. About the latter, one might wonder whether there are not some characteristics which are necessary to have in some degree, in order for something to come into the domain ruled by knowledge. I suspect that, at least concerning the characteristics constitutive of knowledge discussed here, there is no question of having any amount of one of them without having any amount of the others; and so the presence of all of them in some form would be required. But I have not argued for that here—and it would require, for instance, an understanding of falsity as ‘comparatively less true’, rather than the complete absence of truth.

28 Rowe similarly treats Plato’s epistemology broadly as concerned with approximations to perfect knowledge (‘Plato on Knowing and Merely Believing’, n. 6 above, 57-68). The details are different—he takes belief, for instance, to be the complement to ‘knowledge’, covering whatever cognition should be indicated as failing to be perfect knowledge—and his focus is mostly on the *Republic*.

The features of the *Philebus*' discussion of knowledge which lead to this result closely track the epistemology of the *Republic*, and of Book 7 (522a-534e) in particular. Not only are clarity, precision and stability criteria for evaluating the adequacy of knowledge, but the procedure for discriminating perfect knowledge from imperfect sorts is quite similar. Asking Glaucon what the philosophers-in-training will learn, Socrates first dismisses music and the other *technai* as too *banauatoi* (522b5) to be what they seek, before recalling them into consideration, but in a different way: 'Well, if we cannot grasp something outside of these, then let us grasp that which extends through them all' (*Rep.* 522b7-8).

This distillation of the *real* cognitive practices of interest from within those simultaneously dismissed as lowly is familiar to us from the *Philebus*' treatment of knowledges. And, as in the *Philebus*, the *Republic* passage then goes on, first, to distinguish practices of counting and calculating from within the crafts generally (522d-e), and secondly to distinguish proper counting from the common sort (523a, 526a).

And then, dismissing practical considerations for taking an interest in geometry, there is a similar turn from considerations of the activities to consideration of their objects. Socrates says the philosophers-in-training must be persuaded 'to turn to calculation and take it up, not amateurishly, but staying with it until they reach the study of the natures of the numbers by means of understanding itself' (ἐπι λογιστικὴν ἰέναι καὶ ἀνθάπτεσθαι αὐτῆς μὴ ἰδιωτικῶς, ἀλλ' ἕως ἂν ἐπὶ θέαν τῆς τῶν ἀριθμῶν φύσεως ἀφίκωνται τῇ νοήσει αὐτῆ, *Rep.* 525c1-3). This Socrates characterizes as pursuing an activity for the sake of knowledge (γνώριζεν), not trade (525d2; cf. γνώσεως ἕνεκα, 527b1). So practiced, 'the greater and more advanced part of it tends to make it easier to see the form of the good... it compels the soul to turn itself around' (*Rep.* 526d8-e3), so that it gives its accounts for the sake of knowing 'what always is' (*Rep.* 527b5). Where the *Republic* passage emphasizes the difference made by 'that for the sake of which' we pursue our endeavors—favoring inquiry for the sake of truth over other goals—our discussion in the *Philebus* invokes the figure of Gorgias and his 'useful' art of rhetoric in order to insist that (58b9-c4):

I am not, Protarchus, seeking now some craft or knowledge which is superior to all by being larger and best and most beneficial to us, but rather whatever has clarity, accuracy and the most truth (τὸ σαφές καὶ τὰκριβές καὶ τὸ ἀληθέστατον), even if it is small and of small profit—this is what we now seek.

And Socrates goes on for another dozen lines, spelling out this point in painful detail. The non-practical aim for the sake of which we inquire is not one that Plato wants us to miss.

Seeing this close parallel, in structure and in intent, with the *Republic* 7 passage makes some sense of the rather abrupt appearance of *dialectic* at the end of the *Philebus*' discussion of knowledges.²⁹ For one thing, its introduction breaks the steady practice of discerning sources and grounds for increasing precision and clarity within the knowledges so far under discussion; it is held together with the preceding passage through the appeal to truth, which appears only suddenly and in the summary of philosophical mathematics' superiority. For another, Protarchus is baffled by its introduction: 'But what is [the knowledge] you are speaking of now?' he asks (57e8). Socrates' reply, that 'clearly anyone could recognize the one I mean' (58a1), seems baldly disingenuous, since the *Philebus*' only mention of *dialectic* up to now was in passing, and early on in the discussion (17a).³⁰ But the *Republic* passage which the *Philebus* here tracks so precisely and concisely offers at this point much more detail, making explicit the role of explanation in distinguishing intelligence from perceptions—and how it is with respect to this criterion that *dialectic* emerges as superior to even the purest mathematics. At *Republic* 532a-b, Socrates concludes the ascent from mere crafts to knowledge strictly speaking by drawing the lines between the precise sort of 'turning of the soul' engendered by the properly motivated study of mathematical disciplines on the one hand, and the activity of dialectic as 'grasping the account of the being of each thing' (*Rep.* 534b3-4) and

29 Although he notices a general *Republic* 7 connection to this passage of the *Philebus*, Hackforth thinks the abruptness of the appearance of dialectic here is due to the fact that 'dialectic (is) sui generis in Plato's mind, as it is in fact' (*Plato's Philebus*, n. 10 above, 115). This is why, in his view, 'the *fundamentum divisionis* hitherto employed—the possession of greater or less ἀκριβεία due to the presence or absence of mathematical procedure—is here inapplicable'. I have tried to show that, first, ἀκριβεία is not working alone, but is one of at least three co-ordinate criteria for ranking knowledges; and secondly that the connection between the principles of ranking at the lowest level and those at the highest is to be found in the turn from consideration of what makes for most accurate *procedure* to what is necessary in the material known in order for complete clarity and accuracy to be attained. It would, it seems to me, be most odd for Plato, while ranking *dialectic* as the highest sort of knowledge, to suppose that it nevertheless lacked precision, or even that precision should somehow suddenly be an irrelevant consideration.

30 The favored form of inquiry makes all the difference, at 17a, between being dialectical and being eristical. Of course, one could reflect on this occurrence, and retrospectively consider that perhaps we are meant to take the whole 'road of the gods' discussion as an exposition of dialectic; but this is hardly obvious or clear.

‘the ability to give an account’ (*Rep.* 534b4-5) which ‘survives all interrogation’ (*Rep.* 534c1-2) on the other. Pure mathematics turns the soul to giving the right sort of accounts of the right sort of things; but only *dialectic* actually promises to consistently pursue these aims to their conclusion.³¹ Thus it is in both cases in virtue of its aims, of prioritizing truth above all else, that dialectic appears as the truest form of knowledge, and this is what other forms of cognition only partially capture—for they cannot, if they are to remain the respective disciplines, skills and arts that they are, grant full priority to truth itself.

On the picture sketched in the *Philebus*, which is picking up these features present also in *Republic* 7, knowledge can mean the same thing every time—even though the same thing might sometimes earn, and sometimes lose, that title. Like beauty, goodness, justice and so on, knowledge can be instantiated to different degrees, in different ways. Some of these instances may dazzle us with how much more closely they approximate ideal knowledge than any case we usually encounter; but, on the other hand, some of the approximations might be so faint that we are genuinely uncertain whether it is more misleading than otherwise to acknowledge their relationship to knowledge by dignifying them with the name. Is flute-playing a kind of knowledge? It is not wholly irrational in its attempts to achieve the aims internal to the practice—it is not *just* inspiration. There are measures that one attempts to get right reliably each time, and these can be indicated and corrected. But one’s understanding, if any,

31 Thomas Johansen finds a similar structure in the *Timaeus*: ‘Third, in describing the world soul’s thinking of the perceptible (*to aisthēton*) he says that the world soul has ‘firm and true beliefs and convictions’ (*doxai kai pisteis bebaioi kai alētheis*, 37b9) ... At 51b5-7, Timaeus argues that if, as some think, true belief does not differ from knowledge (*nous*), then we should take perceptible matters to be the most certain (*bebaiotata*). Timaeus may be implying here that there is a scale of certainty along which he assigns different places to knowledge and true belief, even if other people do not. Such a claim might be compared with the image of the line in the *Republic* according to which the four subsections are distinguished in terms of degrees of clarity (*saphēneia*) on the side of the soul, and in degrees of truth on the side of the subject matters (*Rep.* vi 511d6-e4). *Timaeus* 51d5-7 may also be suggesting that there are degrees of certainty that different subject matters allow and which different, kindred soul states therefore have. This might allow him more generally to say that beliefs and convictions about perceptible matters can have some degree of truth and certainty, whilst still contrasting the status of such beliefs with the optimal, unqualified truth and certainty that we can only have when thinking about being. It would therefore be possible for Timaeus to contrast conviction with truth *simpliciter* at 29c3 not because he holds that convictions cannot be true, but because he thinks they can only be true in some qualified way (29b7-c1 suggests that refutability comes in degrees (*kath’ hoson*, etc.) and accounts of the paradigm should have the highest degree possible)’ (Johansen, *Plato’s Natural Philosophy*, Cambridge 2004, 50-1).

is not of what makes each move the correct one, but only of what move will (likely) hit the correct note. Much of one's success depends upon spontaneous adaptation to the varying conditions in which one plays, and the physical habituation of the body to certain movements. The material with which one must necessarily work, if it is to be flute-playing and not musical theory one is doing, requires physical habituation (a habituation which is itself vulnerable to the vicissitudes of a changing body, in changing conditions), and responsive, flexible attention. Fixed rules can only imperfectly fit variable situations. We might want to compare this with *Statesman* 294a-b, where:

Law could never accurately embrace what is best and most just for all at the same time, and so prescribe what is best. For the dissimilarities between human beings and their actions, and the fact that practically nothing in human affairs ever remains stable, prevent any sort of *technē* whatsoever from making any simple decision in any sphere that covers all cases and will last for all time.³²

This is not a special problem to do with legislating; this is a problem affecting human action as such, in any sphere, due to the unpredictability of complex conjunctions of changing affairs. In such a case, staying true to the object—one of the requirements of knowledge—actually demands giving up on rational and complete explanation, or clarity. With sensibles, it is internal to the nature of its objects that knowledge can only ever be compromised.³³

Nevertheless, in the end, it is *as kinds of knowledge* that Socrates and Protarchus consider whether to admit practical crafts into the good life. Imperfect though they are, that is the type they belong to, the standard by which they are measured. Once the respective rankings of pleasure and knowledge have been completed, the task Socrates gives to Protarchus is to determine which of each sort might have a place within a well-lived human life. Unsurprisingly, not all pleasures have a place; mildly surprisingly, perhaps, all forms of cognition—of truth-oriented activity—however lowly, might be part of the good life. Not only are the lesser, imprecise sciences permissible in a good human life; it turns out they are necessary, in the first place 'if any one of us ever wants to find his own way home' (62b8-9); and, in the case of arts,

32 Translation by C.J. Rowe in John Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 1997)—except that Rowe has 'expertise' for τέχνην.

33 I discuss this in greater detail, with respect to the *Republic*, in my 'Judging Strives to be Knowing' in L. Brisson and N. Notomi (eds.), *Plato's Republic (Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium Platonicum)* (Sankt Augustin, 2013), 262-6.

'if in fact our life is supposed to be at least some sort of life' (62c3-4).³⁴ Abstract science alone does not contain the sort of physical training and habituation required to adapt to unpredictable, changing situations; and musical theory on its own cannot make contact with, and so train the idiosyncratic emotions and desires of individual human beings. Music however can, because both playing and hearing music engages the soul in the sort of attentiveness to its object proper to knowledge, but in a responsive way appropriate to a changing reality.

Already in the *Republic* Plato had, for all his idealizing, recognized that there are elements and capacities within us not directly responsive to pure reason, and yet conformable to reason. Seeing the continuity between the most refined sorts of reasoning and skills such as flute-playing gives some content to the claim that it is, even here, *reason* to which the soul is being responsive, and not just any old mechanical habituation that is prescribed as useful by and for reason. For good music-playing, if it is skilful, displays the accuracy and precision characteristic of knowledge, as well as a striving to be true to its changing and unstable material conditions. To engage in it is to practice, in some minimal ways, the cognitive virtues; to appreciate it is to appreciate something whose achievement is a kind of cognitive success.

Seeing ordinary skills and crafts, and non-philosophical calculating in general, as imperfect approximations to knowledge thus provides a particular understanding of ourselves and of our everyday activities and everyday lives. Although real knowledge may seem impossibly remote, in fact all of our discriminating faculties are, in a way, infused by it—even when the objects of our attention are sensible, and our purposes practical. The Platonic word is 'partake'. The sense that can be given to the metaphor of partaking in this case is that our mundane everyday activities are varieties of partially implementing the cognitive virtues constitutive of knowing, of striving to become as

34 These are Protarchus' reasons—although not offered by Socrates, he accepts them as sufficient grounds for including a wider range of cognitive activities in the good human life. This follows the dialogue's pattern of using Protarchus as a judge (20c-22c) in determining what could count as *desirable* for a human being. If Plato means to suggest that Socrates does not quite endorse these reasons for broad acceptance of cognitive practices, we are not directly offered other reasons why Socrates might nevertheless accept the inclusion. If, however, the hierarchical relation between knowledges outlined here is correct, then all cognitive practices will have the same kind of goodness as the highest forms of knowledge, although to a lesser degree. They would contribute, in that respect then, goodness rather than its opposite to a person's soul, and so to the pleasures and affects proper to that soul. More on the goodness knowing brings to a soul can be found in my 'Perfect Knowledge and its Affects' (J. Jirsa and S. Špinka eds., *Plato's Philebus*, Prague *forthcoming*).

knowledge-like as the situation and object allow. It is this similar aim and standard for evaluating changes in our cognitive states as improvements or defects that relates various aspects of our lives—from enjoying music to finding our way home after the concert. Implicitly, aiming at knowledge orients our practical lives, and integrates the multifarious capacities and activities of the soul.

To see the detail of this, one would have to rehearse the finer points of the moral psychology presented in the *Philebus* through the analysis of pleasure. But the moral of that analysis—one moral—is that pleasures and pains, as we experience them, generally have content: they are pleasures or pains *in, at or of* something or other in particular. Only thus do they become the particular pleasures and pains they are, rather than just general, indiscriminate sensations. But these affects do not have their content in virtue of what they are themselves; it is not intrinsic to pleasure or pain that it have this or that object as its content. It is rather our perceptual, judging and memory capacities which provide the content for potential pleasures and pains, and the psychological preconditions for desire.³⁵ It is not without judgement that I come to perceive something *as* this or that; and it is not without memory, discrimination and relating these to one another that 'seeing *as*' can be made meaningful, so that we grasp something *as* desirable and worth having.³⁶ But how we see something as desirable is what gives distinctive content to our pleasures and pains, which content alone gives each the distinctive character it has. Pleasures and pains are vicarious on the overall psychological context in which they arise for their determinate identities.

What the paradigmatic epistemology grounds is the further claim that, this being a *cognitive* context, it is therefore a *knowledge-aiming* context. We do not just have concepts that could be evaluated as adequate or inadequate—we aim at truth, and indeed at *knowledge*, in our cognitive activities that stray beyond mere perception.³⁷ The quality of our mental lives thus can be rightly

35 See my 'Pleasure as *Genesis*', *Ancient Philosophy* 31 (2011), 73-94, for explanation and defense of the simultaneous normative and identity-dependence of pleasures generally on cognition generally; John Garner, in *The Good that Comes to Be: The Truth of Pleasure and the Experience of Learning in Plato's Philebus* (diss., Villanova University 2014), ch. 3, challenges the link between the normative and the ontological.

36 For discussion of 'seeing as', as this is related to character and valuing truth in the *Philebus*, see my 'Hedonistic Persons: The Good Man Argument in Plato's *Philebus*', *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14 (2006), 5-26.

37 Compare Gail Fine's appeal to Bonjour's suggestion that everyday so-called instances of knowledge 'are only loose approximations to an epistemic ideal which is seldom if ever achieved' ('Knowledge and True Belief in the *Meno*', n. 8 above, 71).

evaluated not only according to truth-aptness, but also according to the other virtues of knowledge (accuracy, reliability, clarity). If even the approximate and adaptable calculations that go into knowing one's way round the city are attempts—suitably qualified to their object—at proper knowledge, then pleasures and pains, arising dependently upon such everyday 'seeing as', are affects proper to success or failure at aiming at truth, or approximating knowledge. They become what succeeding or failing to approximate knowledge in its various forms can feel like. And it is by integrating our 'sensitive' nature in this way that Plato is able both to recognize and reconcile the split in our nature that initially seems to present us with two radically antagonistic goals: truth and pleasure.

4 Conclusion

Granting Plato a paradigmatic epistemology means that, without equivocating on what knowledge is, Plato can (1) call different things knowledge in different contexts, and (2) both claim and deny that the same thing is knowledge, depending on context—as implied, for instance, by including flute-playing in what is announced as an investigation into intelligence and knowledge, but then within that discussion saying they are 'what many call skills'. Since any attribution of knowledge is grounded by reference to the same ideal, context-sensitive judgements are no more arbitrary or equivocal than attributions of beauty or justice to ordinary cases around us. Plato can even happily deny we have knowledge without becoming a skeptic, in the traditional sense of it—and without supposing we have instead some different thing, knowledge_S (or Knowledge_E, as Vlastos has it). We can have knowledge, but only imperfectly; or else we cannot have knowledge, but we can have finer and finer approximations to it. Moreover, and most importantly, not all impossibly high standards of knowledge are sophistical tricks for encouraging us to throw up our arms in despair. An ambitious, unchanging conception of knowledge can offer clear criteria for us to measure the variable qualities of our cognitive efforts, and a clear guide—as well as a goad—towards improvement, and a perspective from which to assess the cognitive achievement of discrete skills and disciplines.

Using a robust conception of knowledge as a paradigm which embraces all cognition within its domain offers a continuity and connection between these various object-appropriate ways of approximating knowledge, without collapsing them all into the very same thing. This is captured in Socrates' curious and striking description of dialectic as 'by its nature a capacity in our soul

to love the truth and to do everything for its sake' (58d4-5). The various lesser disciplines and skills have subject-specific aims, without which they would not be the differentiated disciplines they are. While each must, so far as it is a cognitive activity at all, value truth, none but dialectic takes truth itself as the ultimate aim around which all other aims and values are organized. It is, in this way, the paradigm of valuing truth which is necessarily only partially present in any particular skill. Characterizing this as the *love* of truth indicates the extent to which Socrates feels confident that he has reconciled the affective and cognitive aspects of our experience through granting authority to the cognitive.³⁸ Love of truth is not just a logical structure, but an affective thread running through the whole of knowledge and all its forms, tying them together not only by a 'common property', but by a sort of mutual respect—the love of truth that appreciates skill, and values ordinary calculation is already, if implicitly, a respect for those same virtues more clearly and unambiguously expressed in philosophical knowledge.³⁹

According to this perspective on Platonic epistemology, perfect knowledge—although remote and rare—is not just a pipe-dream that Plato uses meanly to deny us knowledge of sensibles. Knowledge is an ideal that our various activities aim at, in virtue of which aiming they count as rational, or as *cognitive* activities at all. We can use this ideal, as Plato does in the *Philebus*, both to delineate the space of cognition and to evaluate and rank activities within that domain according to their cognitive worth. Such evaluations recognize and measure the same characteristics in all cases; but whether we dignify something with the title 'knowledge' on that account may vary according to how strictly we ought to acknowledge the standard of complete knowledge and our distance from it. Such occasional honor is not mere hyperbole; for the presence of these same characteristics, and the fact that they are the same characteristics as those in the highest sorts of knowledge, suggests why even the faintest resemblances to knowledge can be a genuine improvement in our

38 The difference 'that for the sake of which' we inquire makes on the effects of our inquiry on the inquirer is well amplified in the *Republic* 7 passage the *Philebus* here tracks. The *Philebus* offers, what the *Republic* did not, an account of what pleasure is that its quality should be tied to the quality of our characters, as this is determined by our ways of valuing.

39 Exactly how we should understand the respect for truth present in different but related ways in the various cognitive disciplines is discussed in my 'Perfect Knowledge' (n. 34 above).

souls—provided we agree (what has not been argued here) that knowing is indeed good for the soul.⁴⁰

40 This paper has been through too much for me to adequately thank the various parties whose constructive criticism has improved it. Many of the thoughts in this paper first saw the light of day as a *Symposium Platonicum 2007* contribution, in Dublin; longer versions were presented at Monash, to the Yorkshire Ancient Philosophy Network, and to the Yale Working Group in Ancient Philosophy. I am grateful to those audiences for their questions and comments, and also to Verity Harte and to Gail Fine who offered helpful written comments on the whole.