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Truth and value in Plato's *Republic**

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This paper is a reaction to a recent article by Raphael Woolf, the drift of which is that, according to the *Republic*, truth as such is not important.[1] I am not persuaded and in what follows I try to get clear about why.

Woolf puts his question this way: 'to what extent is possession of truth considered a good thing in the *Republic*?' After setting out some contrary passages, he proposes to reconcile them with the help of a rough partitioning of truths into 'philosophical' and 'non-philosophical'. Taking these in turn, he argues that non-philosophical truths are of *no* value in their own right; as for philosophical truths, he argues that though these *are* of value in their own right, this is (or by rights should be) only because their object, 'the fundamental nature of reality', turns out to be 'the ultimate possessor of value', whose value (it also turns out) we appropriate to ourselves through cognition, inasmuch as 'one who recognizes [the structure

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[1] Raphael Woolf, 'Truth as a Value in Plato's *Republic*', *Phronesis* **54** (2009), 9–39. Compare Raphael Woolf, 'Misology and Truth', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* **23** (2007), 1: '[The Socrates of the *Phaedo*] acknowledges, in effect, that he will fight to defend the thesis of the soul's immortality not out of a love of truth for its own sake but because of the value he places on the state of affairs that would obtain if the thesis were true. The truth is as it may be; and it may not coincide with the outcomes we are most invested in. In battling to make these two elements coincide, Socrates invites us to wonder where his deepest allegiance lies.'

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of reality] cannot help but become as much like it as possible'.[2] The result is that only some truths are worth possessing in their own right, and even these are worth possessing, not because they are true, but because they are about something good, whose goodness is imitated (and thereby appropriated) in cognition.[3] The final upshot: 'there may be less than one supposes to the view that truth, *of whatever stripe*, is a source of value in the *Republic*.'[4]

My own view is that this result is less a consequence of the passages marshaled in its support than of a certain way of thinking about truth, one that, intuitive though it may seem, is in fact different from and indeed contrary to that found in the *Republic*. Characteristic of this way of thinking is a focus, as on the primary object of investigation, on possessing particular truths. Implicit in this focus is the thought that the primitive idea is that of the individual truth, the scrap or snippet or particle of information, so that to ask about the value of truth 'as such' is to ask about the value of possessing one of those. To be sure, this approach does not preclude us from collecting truths into groups and asking about the value of possessing them: e.g. historical truths, mathematical truths, philosophical truths, or even (at the limit) all truths. However, the approach does encourage us in thinking that it is in the very nature of truth to come in units, individual, self-contained, complete little 'atoms', the particular truths, so that the very idea of '*the* truth' comes out posterior to and derivative from the idea of '*a* truth': *it* is *all of them*.[5]

[2] Op. cit. note 1, 35.

[3] Woolf does not claim that this is flat-out affirmed in the *Republic*, but argues that it is implied by what is said there (op. cit. note 1, 38). A similar view may be found in Richard Kraut, 'The Defense of Justice', in Richard Kraut, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 321: 'We can easily understand someone who says that one of the great privileges of his life is to have known a certain eminent and inspiring person. Even if one is not a close friend of such a person, one may have great love and admiration for him, and one may take pleasure in studying his life. That is the sort of relationship Plato thinks we should have with the Forms – not on the grounds that loving and studying are good activities, whatever their objects, but on the grounds that the Forms are the preeminent good and therefore our lives are vastly improved when we come to know, love, and imitate them.'

[4] Op. cit. note 1, 38 (emphasis added).

[5] Cp. Marian David, 'Truth as the Primary Epistemic Goal: A Working Hypothesis', in M. Steup and E. Sosa, *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 296–7: 'Let us consider what it means to talk of truth as a goal…"I want truth" is a bit

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This way of thinking may be contrasted with another, according to which the basic and primary thing is rather *the truth* (period). On this latter way of thinking, individual truths are not independent and complete self-contained wholes, but rather and fundamentally in the nature of pieces or parts, as it were fragments or shards, partial and incomplete representations of but aspects or parts of *the truth*, so that the very idea of them is in the end posterior to and derivative from the idea of it. I will argue, first that it is this latter way of thinking that is native to the *Republic*, and second that this matters for assessing the dialogue's attitude towards the value of truth as such.

1

I begin with some preliminaries. I have drawn a contrast between two ways of thinking about truth: on the first, it is in the nature of truth to come in units, the particular truths, so that the very idea of *the* truth is posterior to and derivative from the idea of *a* truth; on the second it is the other way around: individual truths are not independent, self-contained wholes, but rather aspects or parts or what have you of the truth, so that the idea of them is derivative from the idea of it. My first point is that the contrast I have in mind is not between different *theories* of truth, nor even between different uses of the word 'truth'. At issue is something vaguer – a 'way of thinking'. To be sure, such a way of thinking might be developed into a more or less full-fledged theory. But I am not claiming to find in the *Republic* this or that theory of truth, but rather a way of thinking in which the leading idea is simply this: that the idea of 'the truth' is not the

like "I want fruit". Like fruit, truth comes in pieces. We have separate words for the different sorts of pieces fruit comes in. The pieces truth comes in we can just call *truths*. Philosophers often call them true *propositions*… So, "I want truth" says that I want true propositions. "I want *the* truth", taken literally, says that I want exactly the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; that is, taken literally, it says that I want all the true propositions and only the true propositions, no false ones'. Or (apropos Bradley) Stewart Candlish, 'Resurrecting the Identity Theory of Truth', *Bradley Studies* **1** (1995), 119: 'But the crucial point is that, though all ordinary judgments will turn out to be more or less infected by falsehood, Bradley allows some sort of place for false judgment even if the place does not look much like what we, who probably absorbed a commitment to *the digital character of truth and falsehood* with our tutors' sherry if not quite our mothers' milk, might have imagined in advance' (emphasis added).

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idea of all and only the truths, but rather of something prior to and more basic than that.

Second, in ascribing such a view to the Socrates of the *Republic,* I do not mean to leave open that this way of thinking is an artifact of his idiosyncratic views about the ultimate nature of reality. For in that case my contention would be irrelevant to the question at issue, which is not about the value of truth *given that* the truth turns out to be thus-and-so, but rather about the value of truth as such – that is to say, no matter what it turns out to be. Thus in order for the way of thinking about truth I claim to find in the *Republic* to be relevant to the question at hand, it must not be simply the consequence of a highly idiosyncratic view about what, as a matter of fact, the truth turns out to be. Rather it must be part and parcel of the very idea of truth – part (so to speak) of the very 'logic' or 'grammar' of truth (and likewise of its near correlate or equivalent, 'reality' or 'being' (τὸ ὄν)).

Third, this aspect of the thesis makes the central books of the *Republic* poor sources of evidence, for the obvious reason that, on most reckonings, these books do articulate a distinctive vision of reality – of what the truth in fact *is*. Even if it could be argued that this vision, highly marked though it may seem at first, is in fact derivable from the very idea of reality or truth, such an argument would be so intricate and so controversial as to be worthless for my purposes here. Better, then, are comparatively easy and harmless passages, ones in which the way of thinking I have in mind can be detected, but which lack the distinctive elements of a high Platonic metaphysics (e.g. as embodied in the figures of Sun, Line, and Cave). I will try to limit myself to such passages: in particular, I will try to avoid passages that deal with reality or truth directly. Instead I will focus on some passages that deal, in a basic and not-particularly-controversial way, with their acknowledged psychological correlates, namely, philosophy, knowledge, and wisdom.

2.1

I start with a remark in Book V, with which Socrates takes his first step in defining 'real' or 'true' philosophers (the kind he says must rule). His point is that true philosophers, being lovers of learning or wisdom, must be lovers of *all* wisdom (σοφία…πᾶσα) (475b8–9).

How are we to understand this? Heard one way, Socrates is talking about some single thing, wisdom, and 'all' wisdom is that thing, *in its entirety* – not just a smattering, nor command of a branch, but a full and complete mastery of some entire subject (whatever it is). Heard

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another way, he is talking instead about a kind of aggregate of many things – the very limit (so to speak) of polymathy, embracing every kind of knowledge or expertise (e.g. music, medicine, arithmetic, metallurgy, etc.).

The first interpretation is obviously the correct one; for Plato the latter could only be matter for caricature (cp. *Hipp. Mi.* 368b–d). It is true that Socrates says things to encourage the second interpretation: consider, for example, his illustrations in terms of lovers of boys, lovers of wine, and lovers of honor, or his description of the (true) lover of learning as one 'who feels no distaste in sampling every study, and who attacks his task of learning gladly and cannot get enough of it' (475c).[6] However, the larger context makes clear that in so doing he is deliberately courting misunderstanding. Thus he begins by teasing Glaucon ('you of all people should know how lovers of *boys'* etc. (474d)); and he continues in this vein, emphasizing the philosopher's insatiableness for learning, until he provokes Glaucon to protest: 'You will then be giving the name ["philosopher"] to a numerous and strange band,' namely, lovers of sights and lovers of sounds, etc. (475d–e). Finally, having succeeded in eliciting this misunderstanding, he promptly corrects it: 'Not at all,' he replies, 'though they are like philosophers' (475e). Further elaboration occupies the rest of Book V.

Now, there are many morals we might draw from this, there being many misunderstandings in the thought that lovers of sights are philosophers. For example, there is the point that such folk have no appetite for discussion (475d), or that 'the truth' is not 'the spectacle of which they are enamored' (τῆς ἀληθείας…φιλοθεάμονας) (475e), or that their 'thought' (διάνοια) is incapable of seeing and delighting in the nature of beauty itself (476b), or that they live as it were in a dream, believing that what is similar to something is, not similar to it, but the thing itself (476c–d), or that their 'thought' is not knowledge but opinion (476d), or that the matters that occupy them roll around midway between being and non-being (479c-d), which circumstance qualifies them as lovers of something else, not wisdom, but 'opinion' or 'seeming' (δόξα) (480a).

Still, among the morals to draw here, and the one I want to insist on, is that the object of a philosopher's love – learning or knowledge or wisdom – is an integrated whole.[7] That is, the 'all' philosophers

[6] Here and throughout translations are by Shorey, sometimes modified.

[7] That this is a mistake Socrates means to single out here is shown by his use of the point that philosophers love 'all' wisdom in the sequel, first in sketching their moral character, and then setting out a program for their

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long for is not the sum of each and every habit of mind with a claim to the name 'wisdom', but rather some other, single thing, in its entirety. True philosophers are not jacks-of-all-trades, but some independently specifiable something else or other; and we may expect that the unity of the state of mind that they strive to attain will be matched by that of its objective correlate, sc. 'reality' (τὸ ὄν) or 'truth' (ἀλήθεια).

2.2

So far I have argued just that Socrates thinks of 'all wisdom' – and so correlatively of 'all truth' – as a single thing (in its entirety), as opposed to as an aggregate of a great many things (all of them). Though this much is hardly controversial, it might be objected that he thinks this way on account of certain further views he has about what 'the nature of reality' ultimately turns out to be. But this is not so.

I want to start with two points of detail. The first is that Socrates *derives* the point that philosophers love 'all' wisdom from a perfectly general thesis about what it is for someone to really be a lover of anything (474c, 475b). The second is that he introduces this general thesis as something established earlier in the *Republic*: '*Must I remind you*, *then*,' he says, '*or do you remember*, that when we affirm that a man is a lover of something, it must be apparent that he is fond of all of it?' (474c). Thus we may infer that in his view, at any rate, the idea that philosophers love all wisdom rests on the sorts of considerations relied on earlier to establish the more general thesis. If that is right, then it is to that earlier discussion that we should turn for his reasons.

The discussion in question is found in *Republic* IV, 437–8. Here Socrates is making a preliminary point about hunger, thirst, and other desires, with a view to forestalling an objection to an argument he is preparing to make, to the effect that the soul is tripartite

education: their souls, he says, 'ever…seek integrity and wholeness in all things human and divine' (τοῦ ὅλου καὶ παντὸς…θείου τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνου, 486a); their object is 'the contemplation of all time and existence' (θεωρία παντὸς μὲν χρόνου, πάσης δὲ οὐσίας, 486a); they will be required 'to gather the studies which they disconnectedly pursued as children in their former education into a comprehensive survey (σύνοψιν) of their affinities with one another and with the nature of things (τῆς τοῦ ὄντος φύσεως)' (537b–c).

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(437d–e). His point is easier to understand than to formulate, but as a first approximation we might put it this way, that particular kinds of desire are for particular kinds of object, e.g. hunger for food, thirst for drink, and so on. This formulation will suffice, provided that we understand it in such a way that in the case where we are (e.g.) hungry, not just for food (period), but for something more specific – e.g. hot food, or salty food, or a lot of food – then just as the object of our desire is not just food (period), but something more specific, so too our desire is not just hunger (period), but something correspondingly more specific. As Socrates puts it later, now not just about desire and its objects, but as a more general point about correlatives of any kind: 'of relative terms, those that are somehow qualified are related to a qualified correlate, those that are severally just themselves to a correlate just itself' (438a–b).

The first point I want to make then is simply this: it is this perfectly general way of thinking – indeed, not just about 'love' or 'desire', but about all correlatives – that informs Socrates' initial characterization of the philosopher as a lover of all wisdom.

My second point is that, applying this way of thinking about correlatives to the case of wisdom in particular, we may expect that wisdom – i.e. what we might call 'wisdom itself', or wisdom *sans phrase*, or just plain, unvarnished *wisdom* – will itself be the particular object of a particular desire. Not only that, but we may expect *this* desire (and likewise its object) to be conceptually independent of, and indeed prior to, its more particular and qualified forms, i.e. various other, more particular desires for wisdom about various other, more particular things (e.g. carpentry or medicine). This is because we may expect Socrates to think of these other, more particular desires in just the way he thinks about various forms of hunger and thirst: namely, as but qualified forms of the plain, unvarnished desire for plain, unvarnished wisdom.

This expectation is borne out in another place in our passage, where Socrates uses the case of 'knowledge' or 'science' (ἐπιστήμη) to illustrate his general point about correlatives:

> 'But what of the sciences? Is not the way of it the same? Science which is just that (ἐπιστήμη αὐτή), is of knowledge which is just that (μαθήματος αὐτοῦ), or is of whatsoever we must assume the correlate of science to be. But a particular science of a particular kind (ἐπιστήμη τις καὶ ποιά) is of some particular thing of a particular kind (ποιοῦ τινος καὶ τινός). I mean something like this: As there was a science of making a house it differed from other sciences so as to be named architecture.' 'Certainly.' 'Was not

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> this by reason of its being of a certain kind such as no other of all the rest?' 'Yes.' 'And was it not by reason of its being of something of a certain kind, that it itself became a certain kind of science? And similarly of the other arts and sciences?' 'That is so.' 'This then,' said I, 'if haply you now understand, is what you must say I then meant, by the statement that of all things that are such as to be of something, those that are just themselves only are of things just themselves only, but things of a certain kind are of things of a kind. And I don't at all mean that they are of the same kind as the things of which they are, so that we are to suppose that the science of health and disease is a healthy and diseased science and that of evil and good, evil and good. I only mean that as science became the science not of just the thing of which science is but of some particular kind of thing, namely, of health and disease, the result was that it itself became some kind of science and this caused it to be no longer called simply science (μηκέτι ἐπιστήμην ἁπλῶς καλεῖσθαι) but with the addition of the particular kind (τοῦ ποιοῦ τινος προσγενομένου), medical science.' 'I understand,' he said, 'and agree that it is so.' (438c–e).

Here Socrates talks about 'science itself' (ἐπιστήμη αὐτή), or what is called plain old *science* (ἐπιστήμην ἁπλῶς καλεῖσθαι), in just the way he spoke earlier of plain old hunger and thirst (437d–e). There he spoke as if hunger and thirst were desires in their own right, with their own proprietary objects; here he speaks of 'science' as if *it* were a science in its own right, on the same footing as each of the particular sciences, with its own, independently specifiable, proprietary object, just as each of them has. Or rather, he speaks as if *it* and *its* object were independently specifiable in a way that they and theirs are not; for he speaks of them and their objects as but particular and qualified forms of it and its: 'science which is just that, is of knowledge which is just that, or is of whatsoever we must assume the correlate of science to be, but a particular science of a particular kind is of some particular thing of a particular kind.' Note too that he finds it perfectly natural to speak this way, quite independently of any substantive commitments as to what the object of 'science itself' in fact is.[8]

[8] He could hardly have picked a blander word for it than μάθημα, and even then he adds 'or of whatever we must assume the correlate of science to be' (ἢ ὅτου δὴ δεῖ θεῖναι τὴν ἐπιστήμην).

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Though this is perhaps an aside, we may also notice the peculiar way in which Socrates speaks about the invention or discovery of particular sciences. He does not use the language of increase or addition – as if the invention or discovery of particular sciences made a change to science (period) by enlarging its territory or expanding its frontiers. He speaks instead as if the change were in the direction of further determinateness or specificity: as if what we used to call just *science* (period), or perhaps better some hitherto undifferentiated portion of what we used to call science, we now call by a more determinate name, e.g. *medical* science, inasmuch as its object is *a particular sort of* the whatever-it-was that was (and is) the object of plain, unvarnished science all along. Though it is natural enough, I suppose, for us to talk of hunger (period) as evolving into a more particular craving ('I'm no longer hungry, I'm starving'), it is not so usual to talk in a similar way about the progress of knowledge or science: that is, as the progressive articulation of a hitherto undifferentiated but nevertheless closed and determinate space[9] – as opposed to a further step into the fathomless reaches of the unlimited.

To resume and conclude: we find in Book IV a way of thinking about sciences and their objects. On this way of thinking, there is science itself (period), and its object, and there are particular sciences, and their objects. The idea of science itself is not derived or built up from the idea of the particular sciences: *it* is not *all of them* (and ditto *mutatis mutandis* for their correlative objects). On the contrary, it is the other way around: from a conceptual point of view, it is the idea of science itself (period) that is the original and primitive idea; the idea of a special or particular science is the idea of some partial or qualified version of science itself, one that takes as its proprietary object some partial or qualified version of the object of plain, unvarnished science. It is true that, in Book V, this way of thinking about science is the launching-off point for Socrates' account of philosophy, and along with that, of his idiosyncratic views about the true nature of its object. But these views are not visible in Book IV. This suggests that Socrates' belief in the integrity of 'wisdom itself' – and correspondingly, his belief in the integrity of its correlative object, 'reality' (τὸ ὄν) or 'truth' (ἀλήθεια) – is in fact antecedent to and independent of those idiosyncratic views. It stems from a way of thinking implicit in the very idea of science

[9] On this topic see Arthur Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect: A Study of Newman's Educational Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 173–88.

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and of its object. I conclude that this outlook is regarded by Socrates, not as a consequence of his distinctive metaphysical vision, but rather as simply part and parcel of the very idea of science or wisdom and their correlative objects – as part of the very 'grammar' or 'logic' of the terms in this field.

2.3

I have argued that, in the *Republic*, Socrates treats 'learning', 'knowledge', 'wisdom', 'being', 'truth', and the like as though they were conceptually prior to the various specific parts or forms in which we commonly encounter them. For example, rather than speaking of 'all knowledge' or 'knowledge itself' as though it were a kind of amalgam of particular departments of knowledge, he instead speaks as though particular departments of knowledge are themselves so many parts or pieces or (rather, and perhaps better) qualified forms of knowledge itself. Similarly for their conceptual relatives: learning, wisdom, being, truth, etc. – these all work together and march in step. So far my argument has rested on a reading of two passages, one from Book V and one from Book IV. Before turning to consider the consequences for how we think about the *value* of truth, I want to consider one more passage, which is like the others in (apparently) having nothing to do with Socrates' distinctive metaphysics.

This passage, which is also taken from Book IV, concerns the wisdom of cities (428a–429a). Having finished (as he thinks) the construction of his city in speech, Socrates turns to identify its virtues, starting with wisdom. He begins with the points that the city he has constructed is 'well-advised' (εὔβουλος) and that good judgment (εὐβουλία) is a science (ἐπιστήμη τίς) (428b). The sciences found in this city being many and various, he then asks in virtue of which the city itself is wise (428b); after considering a number of wrong answers, eventually they agree that the city is wise in virtue of 'the science of government' (ἡ φυλακική), and further that of all the sciences to be found in his city, this one alone deserves to be called wisdom (428d, 429a). Though this passage deals with the wisdom of cities, not of individual human beings, it exhibits the same way of thinking about knowledge or science as found in the passage we were just considering.

First a preliminary point: the particular sciences Socrates considers and sets aside, as not being the science he is seeking, are representative examples of 'the other sciences' (τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν), i.e. the other

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ones found in a city, in addition to the science of government. The sense in which these sciences are 'found in a city' (ἐν τῇ πόλει) is not merely that one may run into them there, as one may run into shadows or commotions, but rather that they belong in a city; as Socrates says earlier of various craftsmen, they make up 'the very types that constitute a city' ([τὰ σχήματα] ἐξ ὧν πόλις γίγνεται) (421a).[10] I will mark this fact by referring to such sciences as 'civic sciences'.

Now, each of the other civic sciences – carpentry, metalworking, farming, and so on – is 'a particular science' (ἐπιστήμη τίς), and this in two senses: first, it is *a* science, one among many, and second, its focus is partial or limited, being concerned with one particular aspect of the city (428c–d). This fact distinguishes these sciences from the science of government: the latter, though obviously particular in the first sense, is not particular in the second, being concerned with the city as a whole (ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ὅλης) – as opposed, that is, to just one of the many things found in a city, but also as opposed to just *all of them*. That is to say, while every civic science is concerned with the city's affairs, it is only in the case of one of them that we may just leave it that; in the case of carpentry and the rest, the correct specification of the science's proprietary concerns requires further qualification – some addition that will make plain that they are not concerned with the city's affairs, full-stop, but just with some part or aspect of its affairs (τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει τινός) (428c–d).

We might expect these points about the proprietary concerns of the civic sciences to be reflected in analogous points about those sciences themselves. That is, just as the concern of the science of government is with the city itself as a whole, while the concerns of the other civic sciences are only particular and qualified (428c11–d3), so too, while none of the other civic sciences may simply be called civic science (period), by contrast the science of government, and it alone of the civic sciences, *is* called civic science (*sans phrase*). And in fact this expectation is confirmed elsewhere in the passage, by what is said, not about what the civic sciences themselves are appropriately called, but about what the cities in which they are found are called, on account of their being found in them: *not* 'well-advised and

[10] Cp. *Statesman* 279a ff., where we find the idea that the other sciences contend for the title πολιτική, and in fact are συναίτια in its work. (On this stretch of the *Statesman* see especially John Cooper, 'Plato's *Statesman* and Politics', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* **13** (1997), 71–103 (reprinted in his *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 165–91).

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truly wise' (σοφὴ καὶ εὔβουλος), full-stop, but more particular names – 'mistress of the arts of building' (τεκτονική) or 'agricultural' (γεωργική) or what have you as the case may be (428b–c). The expectation is further confirmed by what is said, first about cities in which the science of government is found, on account of its being found in them, namely, that they are called *wise* (full-stop), and second about that science itself, that it (and it alone) deserves to be called *wisdom* (period).[11]

It is true that here Socrates is not talking about the wisdom we ascribe to individual human beings – the wisdom yearned for by philosophers. He is talking instead, at least officially, about the 'wisdom' we ascribe to cities, on the basis of which we call *them* wise. Still the point remains that he does not treat the latter (and its correlative object) as an aggregate of the rest (and their correlative objects); on the contrary, they are conceptually posterior to it. (That is, their concerns are defined in terms of its: while it is concerned with the city as a whole, each of them is concerned with some part or aspect of the city's affairs (τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει τινὸς), 428c11–d3.) Moreover, it is natural to expect that this way of thinking about the wisdom of cities, in its relation to the other civic sciences, will inform Socrates' thinking about the wisdom of individuals. And so in fact we find, e.g. when Socrates links the wisdom of the rational part of the soul to its concern with the *entire* soul, arguing on these grounds that this part of the soul is fit to rule (441e4–5).[12]

To conclude, here again we find a way of thinking about (civic) science and its object on which one science is set apart from the rest in a very particular way. Though the rest are all forms (so to speak) of wisdom – that is, they are all forms of 'good judgment' (εὔβουλια), called in for advice about 'what would be best' (ὡς ἂν ἔχοι βέλτιστα) – it is only the science of government that is properly called 'wisdom' (*sans phrase*). Moreover, not only are the concerns of the other sciences regarded as only partial or 'particular' when compared with the concern of the science of government, but the

[11] To this it might be objected that the reason that the science of government is called 'wisdom' is not that its concern with the city itself is not particular or qualified, but rather that it alone is a form of good judgment (εὐβουλία) (which (after all) Socrates earlier more or less identifies with wisdom). But this is a mistake: the passage makes clear that the distinguishing mark of the science of government is not that it alone is a form of good judgment – that it alone is in the business of giving counsel – but rather that it alone is in the business of giving counsel *on behalf of the city itself as a whole*. This is the reason that it alone deserves to be called wisdom.

[12] See too 442c5–8, 443e5–444a2.

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larger concern is treated as conceptually prior to the more particular ones: it is not the sum of them, but they are pieces or aspects of it. In this way the passage exhibits the way of thinking about science and its object that I have been trying to document, according to which 'science itself' is not an assemblage of special sciences, but rather each of the special sciences is a partial or in-some-other-way-qualified version of science itself. And this in a context in which, again, the dialogue's substantive metaphysics is not yet in view.

3.1

I have argued that the Socrates of the *Republic* thinks about reality (τὸ ὄν) and truth (ἀλήθεια) as conceptually independent of and even prior to various particular beings and truths, or perhaps kinds or forms of being and truth, with which we are more familiar. My argument is that he thinks in the same way about their subjective correlatives, namely, learning, knowledge, science, wisdom, and so on. Along the way I have emphasized that there are passages that exhibit this way of thinking which are such as to suggest that it is antecedent to, rather than a consequence of, his distinctive metaphysics. I now try to put together the consequences of this for how to think about the value he places on truth. In this section I will be arguing relatively *a priori*; in the next I offer passages in support of this reasoning.

A first consequence concerns the proper framing of the question. In recent literature, questions about the value of truth are framed as about the value of possessing *a* truth – any truth, no matter how trivial, or how integrated with other truths, etc.[13] This is because these latter considerations are regarded as muddying the waters, by focusing our attention, not on truth itself, but on (so to speak) 'truth *plus*' – e.g. on integrated, or systematic, or unified, or explanatory, or complete, or important, or in-some-other-way-qualified-bodies-of truth. The result is to make it uncertain whether the value of such truths – call them 'significant' truths – stems from their truth or from their significance. But now contrast the situation in the *Republic*. There our question is properly framed as about the value of possessing, not *a* truth (any truth, no matter which), but *the* truth – what we might call 'the truth about reality'. In the *Republic*, so framing the question does *not* focus our attention on

[13] For a brief survey of this literature see Duncan Pritchard, 'Recent Work on Epistemic Value', *American Philosophical Quarterly* **44** (2007), 101–103.

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truth-plus-some-addition, e.g. comprehensiveness or connectedness or generality or completeness; on the contrary, so framing the question *just is* focusing our attention on truth as such. This is because, in the *Republic*, the primitive idea is precisely the idea of 'truth itself'; it is the idea of a particular truth that is derived from this, by the addition of some limiting qualification. In the language of Book IV, it is the idea of the truth in its entirety that is 'truth all by itself' (ἀληθεία μονή); the idea of a particular truth is the idea of *a qualified form of* truth itself – it is the idea of 'a particular truth of a particular kind' (ἀλήθειά τις καὶ ποιά).[14]

A second consequence is this: we are focused now, not on possession of *a* truth – what we might call 'right opinion' (ὀρθὴ δόξα) – but on possession of *the* truth. This too has a name in Plato, namely, 'wisdom' (σοφία). It follows then that our original question about the value of possessing the truth is really about the value of that: about the value of wisdom. (This is not changing the topic, it is specifying it properly.)

Third, since wisdom is acknowledged by all parties to be (an) excellence (ἀρετή) in human beings, the question of its value – that is, the question whether it as such is of any value at all – does not properly speaking arise. It is true that we may ask about the utility of wisdom, or about its value as compared with other things. We may even ask, given particular conceptions of what it consists in, e.g. cleverness in argument or speech (δεινότης λέγειν), whether *that* really is a perfection or excellence in human beings. But this would in effect be to ask whether *that* really is wisdom. For once it is granted, as it is, that wisdom is (a) human excellence, it just is granted that it is of value, and of value as such. For in so granting we are granting wisdom a standing comparable to that of strength, health, or beauty. Strength, health, and beauty are all forms goodness takes in human beings. Similarly with wisdom: it is a form of goodness in human beings, a perfection or excellence of the human psyche.[15]

[14] Here it may be useful to compare the idea of substance as treated in Descartes' Third Meditation; for Descartes, the idea of *infinite* substance is not the idea of substance plus some qualification, e.g. the absence of limitation. Rather it is the other way around: it is the idea of *finite* substance that it is the posterior idea – it is the idea of substance plus limitation. My point in the text above is that as Descartes thinks of substance, so the Socrates of the *Republic* thinks of truth.

[15] Contrast in this regard true belief. Let it be that, given that one has an opinion on some particular question, then other things equal, it is better if one's opinion is true (and better too if it is justified (vel sim.), and better still if it is both, and best of all it is something one downright knows). Let

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Drawing these points together: hand in hand with thinking about *the* truth (rather than *a* truth) as what's primary conceptually goes a certain way of thinking about the possession of truth – it too is conceptually primitive, and the name for it, 'wisdom', is the name for an acknowledged perfection or excellence in human beings. But once we think of the possession of truth in this way, as simply a form goodness takes in human beings, on a par with strength, health, beauty, etc., the question of whether it is of any value – I don't mean as compared with other things, but at all, and not for its consequences, but as such – does not properly speaking arise, any more than it does for health or strength and the rest. This, I submit, is the situation as we find it in Plato's *Republic*.

3.2

The elements of the argument I have been making are essentially three: first, that along with a certain way of thinking about truth goes a certain way of thinking about its possession; second, that the name for this possession is 'wisdom' (σοφία); and third, that wisdom is an acknowledged perfection or 'excellence' (ἀρετή) – that it names a form goodness takes in human beings, which places the idea that it is good in a human being to be wise beyond question. Though I think this line of argument is basically correct in its representation of how to think about the value of truth in the *Republic*, there is a complication. In this section I present some evidence for its correctness; in the next I consider the complication. And as evidence for the first point has in effect already been presented in §2.2, I here consider the second two, taking them in turn.

So first, that the name – or rather *a* name – for possessing the truth is 'wisdom'. Here I offer two passages. The first, taken from Book V,

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it be that true, justified, known are forms goodness takes in beliefs or opinions. The idea that, in human beings, excellence increases with the number of questions on which one has an opinion – no matter what about, so long as the opinions are true and/or justified and/or formed-in-a-particular-way or what have you – so that, resources permitting and other things equal, it would be good to accumulate a hoard, the more the better, seems just stupid on its face, both to us and to Plato. Plato: witness the caricatures of πάσσοφοι, e.g. at 398a1–8, 596c–d, 598c–d, perhaps also 409c4–7. Us: witness the recent growing literature on the value of truth (for a brief survey, see Pritchard, op. cit. note 13, 101–103).

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we have already considered. Having reminded Glaucon that when people are properly said to love something – e.g. boys, wine, honor – they love all of it, Socrates draws the moral for our understanding of true philosophers: 'then the lover of wisdom, too, we shall affirm, desires all wisdom' (475b8–9). Taken together with the remark that true philosophers are in love with the sight of the truth (475e3–4), this passage establishes 'wisdom' as *a* name for the possession of truth: namely, for that vision of truth which is the aspiration of philosophy. The second passage, taken from Book I, consists in an offhand remark that presupposes, and thus establishes, quite independently of Socrates' own ideas about philosophy, the close conceptual connection between wisdom and truth. Wrapping up his discussion of the idea that justice is returning to each what he is owed, Socrates says: 'If…anyone affirms that it is just to render to each his due and he means by this, that injury and harm is what is due to his enemies from the just man and benefits to his friends, he was no truly wise man who said it. *For what he said was not true* (οὐκ ἦν σοφὸς ὁ ταῦτα εἰπών. οὐ γὰρ ἀληθῆ ἔλεγεν)' (335e4).[16] That is to say: the wise are in possession of truth.

Second, that wisdom is an acknowledged excellence or virtue – two sets of considerations. First, again in Book I, the question arises whether injustice is 'wisdom and virtue' (σοφία, ἀρετή) or rather 'ignorance and vice' (ἀμαθία, κακία) (348e ff.). The question arises because, to Socrates' professed surprise, Thrasymachus calls injustice 'good judgment' (εὐβουλία) and maintains that the unjust are wise and good (φρόνιμοι, ἀγαθοί) (348d). Throughout the ensuing exchange, 'wisdom and virtue' are regarded as a natural pair, possibly even equivalent, but in any case both manifestly good things, on all fours with other manifestly good things.[17] That is, though it is not at all clear what wisdom actually consists in – on the contrary, it is left open that it might turn out to be *injustice* – it is taken as read by both Socrates and Thrasymachus that, like beauty and strength, wisdom is good in a human being, an acknowledged perfection or

[16] The point is reinforced by the ironic remark that follows, which presupposes that the *dicta* of sages are true: '"We will take up arms against him, then," said I, "you and I together, if anyone affirms that either Simonides or Bias or Pittacus or any other of the wise and blessed (σοφῶν τε καὶ μακαρίων) said such a thing"' (335e7–9). Here note too the collocation of 'wise and blessed', which is suggestive of the point considered next in the text below.

[17] So e.g. 348e–349a: 'But, as it is, you obviously are going to affirm that [injustice] is beautiful (καλὸν) and strong (ἰσχυρὸν) and you will attach to it all the other qualities that we were assigning to the just, since you don't shrink from putting it in the category of virtue and wisdom'.

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excellence. Second, later in the *Republic* Socrates makes clear that he thinks of wisdom as an excellence, namely, that of the rational part of the soul. For example, in one passage he just calls the quality of mind produced by the 'ascent' he identifies with philosophy 'the excellence of thought' (ἡ τοῦ φρονῆσαι [ἀρετή], 518e2). Again, commenting on the true meaning of Thrasymachus's position vis a vis the profit of injustice, Socrates asks:

> Or is it not true that he who evades detection becomes a still worse man, while in the one who is discovered and chastened the brutish part is lulled and tamed and the gentle part liberated, and the entire soul, returning to its nature at the best, attains to a much more precious condition in acquiring sobriety and righteousness together with wisdom (φρόνησις), than the body does when it gains strength and beauty conjoined with health, even as the soul is more precious than the body? (591b1–7).

Here Socrates uses φρόνησις, not σοφία, as his name for the excellence (ἀρετή) of the rational part of the soul; but it is clear that he regards it as (part of) the good condition of soul (ἡ βελτίστη φύσις), the exact analog of (say) strength, beauty, and health in the body (only more valuable than them, as and because the soul is more valuable than the body). And while the place of *justice* in these ranks is (at least officially) the main question of the *Republic*, the place of wisdom (σοφία or φρόνησις) is not at issue – not ever.

Such passages exhibit where 'wisdom' (σοφία, φρόνησις) sits in Socrates' conceptual economy: σοφία and φρόνησις – he uses these interchangeably, with an exception noted below – name a kind of virtue or excellence, an excellence of soul, in particular that part of the soul 'in which thinking arises' (ἐν ᾧ τὸ φρονεῖν ἐγγίγνεται, 572a6), the analog of strength, beauty, and health in the body, the absolute value of which is never in question, and the comparative value of which follows that of the aspect or part of a human being of which it is the perfection or excellence.

3.3

There is one complication. Though 'wisdom' (σοφία) is *a* name for the possession of truth (period), when Socrates uses the words 'wisdom' (σοφία) and 'wise' (σοφός) in the *Republic*, he is virtually never speaking of (so to speak) 'finished' or 'perfected' philosophers, or of the corresponding accomplishment of mind. Often he is

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speaking ironically, in connection with folk he evidently thinks are anything but wise (e.g. Simonides (331e6), Thrasymachus (337a8), Herodicus (406b8), Euripides (568a8)).[18] Often (and relatedly) he is speaking of what passes for wisdom (or of men who pass for wise) in the eyes of those who don't know better.[19] Sometimes he is speaking very generally, e.g. of wisdom (σοφία) as a recognized virtue, quite apart from any particular views about who has it, what it consists in, how it is acquired, etc..[20]

Indeed, apart from 475b (noted above §3.2), I have found but two exceptions: first, in *Republic* VI, as a middle step in establishing, as a facet of a true philosopher's character, his 'spirit of truthfulness, reluctance to admit falsehood in any form, the hatred of it and the love of truth', Socrates appeals to the affinity of 'wisdom' and 'truth' – which reasoning only makes sense if we suppose that the name for the philosopher's aspiration is 'wisdom' (σοφία) (485c–d). Second, in *Republic* VIII he has the Muses say, 'but the laws of prosperous birth or infertility for your race, the men you have educated

[18] A revealing exception (Hesiod), where Socrates signals explicitly that he is not speaking ironically: 'But further, we may fairly repeat what I was saying then also, that if the guardian shall strive for a kind of happiness that will unmake him as a guardian and shall not be content with the way of life that is moderate and secure and, as we affirm, the best, but if some senseless and childish opinion about happiness shall beset him and impel him to use his power to appropriate everything in the city for himself, then he will find out that Hesiod was indeed wise (τῷ ὄντι ἦν σοφὸς), who said that "the half was in some sort more than the whole"' (466b–c).

[19] E.g. 409c4–d4: 'But that cunning fellow quick to suspect evil, and who has himself done many unjust acts and who thinks himself a smart trickster (πανοῦργός τε καὶ σοφός), when he associates with his like does appear to be clever (δεινός), being on his guard and fixing his eyes on the patterns within himself. But when the time comes for him to mingle with the good and his elders, then on the contrary he appears stupid ((ἀβέλτερος)). He is unseasonably distrustful and he cannot recognize a sound character because he has no such pattern in himself. But since he more often meets with the bad than the good, he seems to himself and to others to be rather wise than foolish (σοφώτερος ἢ ἀμαθέστερος)'. Or again, in connection with 'the man who thinks that it is wisdom (σοφία) to have learned to know the moods and the pleasures of the motley multitude in their assembly' (493d), or of what passes for wisdom in the cave (516c5), or of 'the so–called wicked but wise' (τῶν λεγομένων πονηρῶν μέν, σοφῶν δέ, 519a2).

[20] In these passages σοφία often has practical connotations, of a kind associated with φρόνησις in Aristotle. In fact Socrates appears to use σοφία and φρόνησις more or less interchangeably, except that when he wants to poke fun he uses σοφία/σοφός. So too Burnet 1925, 126.

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(ἐπαιδεύσασθε) to be your rulers will not for all their wisdom (καίπερ ὄντες σοφοί) ascertain by reasoning combined with sensation, but they will escape them, and there will be a time when they will beget children out of season' (546a7–b3). I have worked hard to find these exceptions and they prove the rule.

The words Socrates more often uses, when he does speak of the 'finished' philosopher's accomplishment of mind, are 'knowledge' (γνῶσις, γνώμη, ἐπιστήμη, e.g. 476c2, d5, 477b5) and 'understanding' (νοῦς, νοῆσις, e.g. 490b5, 511d). But far and away the thing he talks about most often is not the accomplishment itself, but the pursuit of it: not 'wisdom' (σοφία), but 'philosophy' (φιλοσοφία). Indeed, his preferred name, not only for those who pursue it, but also for those who have (so to speak) arrived, is 'philosophers'. One explanation for this is that control over the vocabulary of philosophy and its cognates is important for Plato, as control over 'wise' and 'wisdom' (σοφός/σοφία) is not.[21] Another, perhaps, is that Socrates thinks of wisdom – the full realization of the philosopher's aspirations – as more on the order of a regulative ideal, not ever finally attained in this life. Still another may be that Socrates' avowed interest in the *Republic* is in clarifying the nature of philosophy and of its practitioners; he shows no special interest in establishing its conceptual connections with 'excellence' (ἀρετή), no doubt among other reasons because its seems to lack such connections: unlike 'wisdom' (σοφία) and 'wise' (σοφός), whose descriptive content is after all very unclear (wisdom names that quality, whatever it is, characteristic of the wise) – 'philosophy' and 'philosopher' are not (or are hardly) evaluative terms at all.[22] Indeed, 'philosophy' does not name a quality of mind at all, but rather a pursuit (ἐπιτήδευμα); 'philosophers' are those who make that that pursuit their occupation.

In any case, it is true that, unlike 'wisdom' (σοφία), the value of philosophy *is* in question: not, however, because 'come to think of

[21] On philosophy, see Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); on wisdom, Richard Martin, 'The Seven Sages as Performers of Wisdom', in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke, *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[22] 'or are hardly': the issue is delicate. See e.g. the attitude of Callicles in the *Gorgias*, according to which philosophy is acknowledged as patently good for something – just not for grown-ups. It is true that there is the witness given by Adimantus in *Rep.* VI as to the attitudes of 'the many', but one must bear in mind that its target is limited: 'those who turn to philosophy, not merely touching upon it to complete their education and dropping it while still young, but lingering too long in the study of it' (487c–d).

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it, and consequences apart, what could be the value in *that*?', but rather because it is felt to be too slight a thing to occupy the serious energies of a grown man, or because we see that the best of its professors are useless, while the rest and the majority are charlatans and cranks. *These* are the concerns that occupy the *Republic*, and its strategy for putting them to rest is to clarify philosophy's true nature, with special emphasis on the demands it makes on the character of its true practitioners (*Rep*. VI, *passim*). But these concerns about the nature and value of *philosophy* – and this is my point – are not focused in the first instance on whether the possession of truth as such is of any value *at all*. Rather they are focused on the *comparative* value of philosophy, considered as the serious, full-time pursuit of grown-ups who aspire to excellence.

The *Republic* does not, then, answer our original question – is there value in possessing the truth? – in the way I have proposed: namely, by appeal to the conceptual connections between truth, wisdom, and virtue. However, the reason for this is that the question never comes up, and the reason for *that* is that 'possessing the truth' just is 'wisdom' (σοφία), which just is (a) virtue or excellence (ἀρετή). That is, the connections I have appealed to, by way of explaining the value of possessing the truth, do not so much answer our original question as forestall its arising in the first place. They make the idea that there is value in possessing the truth come out a truism – which on the way of thinking about truth I have been considering, I suppose it is.[23]

Conclusion

I began from a recent article by Raphael Woolf, to the effect that the premium that the *Republic* manifestly does put on truth, at least on 'philosophical' truth, does *not* stem from a view of the importance of truth-for-truth's-sake, but rather from a partisan allegiance to a very particular view as to what the truth about reality ultimately turns out to be. I have tried to argue that this is a mistake, albeit one that arises very naturally from a certain way of thinking about truth, one that though natural to us is in fact alien to the *Republic*. On that way of thinking, questions about 'the value of truth' are questions about the value of possessing *a* truth (no matter what about); by

[23] For a well–known statement of the case see John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), Discourse V. (My thinking in §§2.1–3 is also indebted to Newman, as will be obvious to readers familiar with his work.)

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contrast, on the way of thinking we find in the *Republic*, questions about the value of truth are questions about the value of wisdom, which is just a form goodness takes in human beings.

Despite beginning as I have done, I have not dealt with the specific passages Woolf considers in his article – passages that seem to put the value of truth in question. My reason is that while these passages may raise doubts about the value of possessing certain particular truths, it is a consequence of my argument that, as regards the value of truth as such, the value of possessing *any* particular truth will derive from its relation to wisdom. The result is that the fact that learning some particular truth is worthless, or even downright bad, does not by itself say anything about the value of truth as such. For example, let it be that Socrates holds that learning e.g. about the castration of Uranus, or enmities among citizens, or the shallowness of conventional values, is downright bad – particularly when such things are learned at a tender age. It is possible that his reason is precisely that such learning, far from constituting an increase in wisdom, is just the reverse, a sure step in the direction of ignorance and error and folly. This might be because (as he supposes) it is not just anyone who can learn such things without also coming to think certain other, *false* things: e.g. that 'in doing the utmost wrong [one] would do nothing to surprise anybody', or that it is not 'the pitch of ugliness' and 'an impiety' for citizens 'lightly to fall out with one another', or that the things enjoined by conventional morality are 'no more honorable than base' (cf. 377e–d, 538c–e). More generally, given that the value of particular truths derives from the value of wisdom, and given too Socrates' views about the relationship between wisdom and the other virtues, his view that certain truths should not be told lightly to just anyone, and even that some truths are so horrible that 'the best way would be to bury them in silence, and if there were some necessity for relating them, that only a very small audience should be admitted, under pledge of secrecy and after sacrificing, not a pig, but some huge and unprocurable victim, to the end that as few as possible should have heard [them]' (378a) – all this need not say anything about his regard for truth as such (a regard established independently and beyond question by his singular exaltation of the preeminent value of wisdom).[24]

[24] I have not mentioned the lies he would have the rulers in his city tell their subjects. As Woolf notes, these lies are conceptualized as a kind of 'drug' (φάρμακον). This suggests that, considered in their own right, i.e. apart from the circumstances that make them necessary, they are an evil to

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None of this is to deny that there are ways things might have turned out, such that, according to the *Republic*, the possession of truth would *not* be of value – would not be good in creatures like us. To take just one example, suppose it turned out that truth was in the eye of the beholder, that 'man were the measure of all things,' so that everyone was equal in possessing the 'truth', i.e. in 'wisdom'; in such a case the possession of truth i.e. wisdom would be no virtue at all. That said, however, it is likely that, according to the *Republic*, the circumstances in which the truth as such is of no value are just the ones in which there would be no such things as wisdom or truth (nor again, perhaps, as 'creatures like us').

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be avoided. (Cp. Robert Heinaman, 'Plato's Division of Goods in the *Republic*', *Phronesis* **47** (2002), 311–5.)

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