What Does 'To Know Something' Mean?
Plato and Wittgenstein on the Grammar of Knowledge

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Abstract   This paper provides an attempt to read some important aspects of Plato's thought in the light of Wittgenstein's analyses of the grammar (i.e. the ordinary linguistic uses) of knowledge. It focuses mainly on the infallibility of knowledge. Far from being specifically Platonic or even philosophical, infallibility belongs to the language-game of knowledge. My aim is to show that Plato makes a subtle use of this linguistic resource to justify his own ethical, epistemological and ontological views. Finally, I briefly compare the way in which each of the two philosophers understands the grammar of knowledge.

Keywords   Plato. Wittgenstein. Grammar. Knowledge. Language. Ontology. Infallibility

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1   Introduction

From the 1930s onwards, Ludwig Wittgenstein renews his approach to philosophical problems and formulates a decisive criticism of any kind of essentialist and foundationalist undertaking in philosophy. Such a criticism affects both Plato and all contemporary forms of Platonism, including Wittgenstein's first work, the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, still influenced by the Platonism of Frege. On the ontological level, the concept of family resemblance (*Philosophical Investigations* [= *PI*], § 65 ff.) allows him to account for the unity of a concept without implying an immutable essence. On the epistemological one, instead, he rejects any attempt to ground knowledge on certainties that are entirely exempt from doubt. This is most apparent in his last work, *On Certainty* (= *OC*), where he discusses George Edward Moore's attempt to refute scepticism and idealism. He shows through a fine analysis of the grammar of knowledge (i.e. the concrete ordinary uses of verbs designating knowledge)[1] that a certainty of which I cannot doubt is not knowledge but the framework within which other statements can be questioned or confirmed.

Plato makes intelligible Forms the condition of infallible knowledge entirely free from error, and therefore seems to perfectly represent the two pitfalls denounced by Wittgenstein, as well as failure to pay sufficient attention to the ordinary uses of language.[2] Yet, if we take a closer look, Plato also gives great importance to the grammar of knowledge at key points of the dialogues. The aim of this paper is to show that the difference between Wittgenstein and Plato does not lie in the consideration or absence of consideration of the grammar of knowledge, but rather in a different understanding and use of ordinary ways of speaking.[3]

I shall mainly focus on one aspect of the Platonic conception of knowledge, namely its infallibility. This is indeed a very important property for understanding Plato's thought, and it is the one that Wittgenstein directly challenges in his reflections on knowledge. I will

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[1]   On the importance of grammar in Wittgenstein's thought see Garver 1996, who describes grammar as "distinctive uses of language, or language-games, with which key words are associated" (142). See also the famous claims of the *PI* §§ 371-3. In what follows, quotations of *PI* are from Anscombe 1986, and those of *OC* are from Anscombe, von Wright 1969.

[2]   The *Cratylus* seems paradigmatic in this respect: Socrates, far from sticking to the usual meaning of words, invents fanciful and contradictory etymologies (see 411d-412b and 437a-c on knowledge), and concludes that it is better to investigate things and learn about them through themselves than to do so through their names (439a-b).

[3]   Many comparisons between Plato and Wittgenstein have already been fruitfully explored in Perissinotto, Ramón Cámara 2013. For another (and more systematic) attempt to bridge the gap between Plato's thought and Wittgenstein's later philosophy, see Schneider 2002.

first argue that this idea is not specifically Platonic or even philosophical: it can be found in pre-Platonic literature, as well as in several characters of the dialogues who are not philosophers[4]. It is therefore a feature commonly associated with words designating knowledge in Greek, upon which Plato relies to elaborate his own views. This is particularly the case in a famous and disputed passage of *Republic* 5. To finish, I will compare Plato's and Wittgenstein's understanding and use of the grammar of knowledge.

Before I begin discussion, I would like to make a lexical precision. As often pointed out, verbs designating knowledge in Greek are not easy to distinguish before and in Plato. Burnyeat 2011, drawing on the structural analyses of Lyons 1963, showed it is impossible to establish a one-to-one correlation between terms such as ἐπιστήμη, γνῶσις or τέχνη on the one hand, and different kinds of knowledge (such as knowing that, how or by acquaintance) on the other hand. This is why infallibility can be applied to different Greek words in Plato: ἐπιστήμη and σοφία mainly, but also δημιουργία, ἀρχή or νοῦς. Although these words can have different meanings, and shall be translated differently, my purpose is only to underline their common feature (infallibility). For these reasons, I will reduce to the minimum discussions on their respective meanings, and use 'knowledge' as the generic term that encompasses all of them.[5]

2 How to Talk Correctly About Experts? Non-Platonic Occurrences of the Infallibility of Knowledge

At the end of Book 5 of the *Republic*, Socrates demonstrates to Glaucon that the distinction between opinion and knowledge entails the distinction between particular things and Forms. The distinction between opinion and knowledge is itself established from their properties: knowledge is infallible, while opinion is fallible (477e). James Adam comments: "The infallibility of knowledge is a cardinal principle with Plato".[6] But is it specifically Platonic, or even theoretical? It is indeed important to note that this last argument is not Socrates', but Glaucon's. Even though Glaucon is Socrates' friend and has, compared to his brother Adeimantus, "the more philosophical outlook",[7]

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4 Thus by 'not philosophical' I mean that this idea is not grounded in any particular philosophical theory, nor is it justified by any demonstration or rational argument.

5 I do not assume here that knowledge is distinct from understanding or science. On this debate and its influence on Plato's commentators, see Schwab 2015. On the more general tendency among commentators to apply contemporary epistemological categories to Plato, see Moss 2021.

6 Adam 1938, 340. See also Ketchum 1987.

7 Burnyeat 1997, 13.

one should not assume he adopts here any philosophical point of view: as will be shown later in more details, he is answering in the name of the sight-lovers, i.e the non-philosophers who resist the distinction between Forms and perceptible things. Why then should it be so obvious to Glaucon and the sight-lovers that knowledge differs from opinion for this reason? My aim in this section is to demonstrate that it is one of the most ordinary ways of speaking about knowledge, or to say it differently, that it is part of the language-game of knowledge. The infallibility of knowledge is often used as an argument by Socrates' interlocutors, and the same principle can be found in pre-Platonic literature.

2.1 Pre-Platonic Literature

Near the end of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Hermes comes to Prometheus with a message from Zeus: he either reveals the secret about the marriage that threatens Zeus, or he will endure great punishment. In front of Prometheus' stubbornness, the Chorus advises him to follow Hermes and not disobeying Zeus (v. 1039): "Follow this advice: it is shameful for the wise to err (σοφῷ γὰρ αἰσχρὸν ἐξαμαρτάνειν)".[8] Griffith (1983, 269) rightly comments: "Once again, P. is criticised for 'failure' (ἐξαμαρτάνειν) to make effective use of his σοφία". Knowledge or wisdom entails – at least in principle – infallibility in taking good decisions. But as Prometheus refuses to take the right decision, he may not be called the wise man he is supposed to be. The Chorus highlights a tension between the way Prometheus is usually characterised and his attitude: in this context he should not be called wise.

One finds a similar reasoning in Gorgias' *Defence of Palamedes* (§§ 25-6). To dismiss Odysseus' accusation of betrayal, one of Palamedes' arguments is the following: Odysseus accuses him of two directly opposed things, knowledge (σοφία, for being artful, clever and resourceful) and madness (for having betrayed Greece). Does Odysseus think that wise and knowledgeable men are witless, or intelligent?

> If witless, your speech is novel, but not true; if intelligent, surely it is not right for intelligent men to make the worst mistakes and to prefer evils to present goods. If therefore I am wise, I have not erred; if I have erred, I am not wise (εἰ μὲν οὖν εἰμι σοφός, οὐχ ἥμαρτον· εἰ δ' ἥμαρτον, οὐ σοφός εἰμι). Thus in both cases you would be wrong.[9]

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[8] Transl. by Sommerstein 2009.
[9] Transl. by Kennedy in Sprague 1972.

The chiastic structure of Palamedes' conclusive formula perfectly illustrates the close association between knowledge and infallibility in Greek: if Palamedes really is a knowledgeable man, he cannot have made such a mistake. He argues that we would never call σοφός a man that makes or could make some mistake; in that case, he would have to be called otherwise, and this is why Odysseus is wrong.

2.2 Non-Platonic Occurrences in Plato's Dialogues

At *Meno* 97c6-8, Meno makes the following distinction between true opinion and knowledge:

> the man who has knowledge (ὁ μὲν τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχων) will always succeed (ἀεὶ ἂν ἐπιτυγχάνοι), whereas he who has true opinion (ὁ δὲ τὴν ὀρθὴν δόξαν) will only succeed at times.[10]

He is immediately corrected by Socrates: he who has a right opinion will always succeed, as long as his opinion is right.[11] Meno has thus confused opinion (which can be true or false, and can therefore fail) with right opinion (which, as long as it is right, cannot fail). Yet the passage clearly shows that the words 'opinion' and 'knowledge' are to be used under different circumstances and cannot be confused: 'knowledge' should only be used to designate an infallible man; if not, it should rather be called (true) 'opinion'.[12] As we shall later, the difference between knowledge and opinion is crucial in Plato's own thought.

In the beginning of the *Republic*, the sophist Thrasymachus also associates the words designing knowledge and expertise with infallibility:

> no craftsman, expert, or ruler makes an error (δημιουργὸς ἢ σοφὸς ἢ ἄρχων οὐδεὶς ἁμαρτάνει) at the moment when he is ruling, even though everyone will say that a physician or a ruler makes errors. (340e4-5)

He does so in order to challenge Socrates' objection that rulers sometimes order what is bad for themselves, so that the just is not always

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[10] Translations of Plato are from Cooper 1997.

[11] See also *Theaetetus* 200e.

[12] In a similar vein, see Isocrates' *Antidosis* (271): human nature cannot attain a knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) by having which we can know perfectly what should be said or done, and all we can do is to have the best possible opinions to hit on what is best for the most part.

the advantage of the stronger. Thrasymachus' basic idea is that the man who possesses knowledge, like a doctor, an accountant or a grammarian,

> insofar as he is what we call him, never errs (καθ' ὅσον τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὃ προσαγορεύομεν αὐτόν, οὐδέποτε ἁμαρτάνει), so that, according to the precise account (κατὰ τὸν ἀκριβῆ λόγον) [...], no craftsman (οὐδεὶς τῶν δημιουργῶν) ever errs. (340d8-e3)

The expert and knowledgeable man, *qua* expert and knowledgeable, is infallible. When he makes an error, as it sometimes happens, it is because "knowledge fails him" (340e3 ἐπιλειπούσης γὰρ ἐπιστήμης), and in regard to that error he is no expert. But the one who possesses knowledge never fails. At first sight, one could think that Thrasymachus intends to correct our ordinary ways of speaking (when we say for instance that a doctor, or whatever expert, has made an error) in the name of logic (it is a conceptual truth that an expert is infallible, because success is analytically included in the concept of expertise). However, it is very important to note his appeal to our ways of speaking. He first asks Socrates if he calls (340d3 καλεῖς) a doctor someone who makes an error in the treatment of patients. Then he argues from the way we name (340e1 προσαγορεύομεν) certain people: if we use specific names to designate their knowledge and mastery of a particular field, it should be clear that these names are not to be associated with other words designating failure and error. He then opposes two ways of *talking* about experts, and distinguishes them according to their accuracy: his argument relies on language rather than logic.[13] More precisely, he relies on the common way of speaking about wise and knowledgeable men previously analysed.

One can add the beginning of the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates refers to the infallibility of knowledge in order to justify a theory of knowledge that is contrary to his views. Infallibility indeed allows Socrates to assimilate Theaetetus' definition of knowledge (knowledge is perception) with Protagoras' famous thesis ("man is the measure of all things") and to justify them both. If, according to Protagoras, things are for each individual as he perceives them, then perception "is always of what is (τοῦ ὄντος ἀεί ἐστιν), and unerring – as befits knowledge (ἀψευδὲς ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὖσα)" (152c5-6). In a Protagorean perspective, what appears to each individual through perception is

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13 It is important to remind that Thrasymachus is also well-known as a master of rhetoric, in which he might have been an innovator. See *Phaedrus* 267c. The correctness of names and words is a well-known and important part of sophistic thought, which explains why Thrasymachus pays so much attention to language and names in particular. On language in the sophistic movement, see Kerferd 1981, chs. 7-8.

strictly relative and irreducible to what appears to other individuals, and nothing exists beyond what appears to each of them. This is why perception is always of what is and cannot be false. This unique feature (infallibility, being always true) allows Socrates to justify Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception, which proves that it is the most obvious characteristic of what is called knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).[14]

To recap this first section, the infallibility of knowledge is not a specific Platonic feature: it appears before Plato, both in tragedy and rhetoric speeches, and is sometimes used in Plato's dialogue to develop un-Platonic views[15]. What's more, these texts insist on the way we use words under certain circumstances, arguing that one cannot (or should not) call 'wise' or 'knowledgeable' someone who can make mistakes. Infallibility is therefore one of the most salient aspects of the language-game of knowledge: it determines the contexts in which someone can be called a wise or knowledgeable man. When Plato makes use of this same principle to elaborate his own views, he is thus part of a tradition that is not specifically philosophical or even theoretical[16]. He rather makes, as I shall argue, grammatical points (in Wittgenstein's wording): he underlines what it means and implies to use specific words designating knowledge in certain contexts.

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[14] Socrates clarifies this point in the *Gorgias*: conviction has to be distinguished from knowledge on the ground that there is "such a thing as true and false conviction (πίστις ψευδὴς καὶ ἀληθής)", whereas there is not "such a thing as true and false knowledge (ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ψευδὴς καὶ ἀληθής)" (454d5-7). The linguistic distinction between knowledge and conviction (or opinion) is rooted in the way it can be associated or not with other words such as 'true' and 'false' in sentences that make sense.

[15] One could add Parmenides' fr. 1 (v. 27ff) and fr. 8 (v. 50), but it is already a philosophical version of the infallibility. It should also be noticed that the first example of σοφία in literature (*Iliad* 15.412) is very close to the idea of infallibility: it is the comparison of lines formed by the Achaeans and the Trojans with the perfect line drawn by a carpenter "who knows well all wisdom" (πάσης εὖ εἰδῇ σοφίης) through the promptings of Athens. The very idea of perfection and the reference to mastery of "all wisdom" recalls infallibility. On this passage (as not being restricted to skill in the crafts), see Kerferd 1976.

[16] Hintikka 1967, 7 draws a similar conclusion from his analysis of Aristotle's statements about ἐπιστήμη. See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b19-22 and *Posterior analytics* 89a6-8: Aristotle argues from what we all suppose about knowledge and claims that knowledge and opinion must be distinguished on the grounds that knowledge is always of what cannot be otherwise, whereas no one says that he opines when he thinks that it is impossible for it to be otherwise.

3 Plato on the Infallibility of Knowledge: "A Whole Cloud of Philosophy Condensed into a Drop of Grammar" (*PI* II xi, 222)

The aim of this section is to show that Plato's use of the grammar of knowledge is key to understanding very important arguments of the dialogues. This is the reason why I suggest applying Wittgenstein's well-known formula in the *Philosophical Investigations* to Plato. Plato indeed argues from the grammar of knowledge in order to prove some of his most important theses on happiness or ontology. Moreover, reading these controversial passages as relying on the grammar of knowledge ought to help clarify how they work.

3.1 Good Fortune and Wisdom in the *Euthydemus*

In the *Euthydemus*, the infallibility of knowledge is a key premise of Socrates' exhortation to philosophy. After having enumerated what most people regard as good, he aims to show Clinias that success or good fortune (εὐτυχία) is not a separate good, inasmuch as it is included in wisdom (σοφία) (279c-d). The young man is amazed, and Socrates clarifies what he means with examples: in music, as well as writing, reading, sailing or war, success is ensured by wise men, not by the ignorant ones (279e-280a). From those examples he draws a general conclusion:

> So wisdom makes men fortunate in every case, since I don't suppose she would ever make any sort of mistake (οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἁμαρτάνοι γ' ἄν ποτέ τι σοφία) but must necessarily do right and be lucky (ἀλλ' ἀνάγκη ὀρθῶς πράττειν καὶ τυγχάνειν) – otherwise she would no longer be wisdom (ἢ γὰρ ἂν οὐκέτι σοφία εἴη). (280a6-8)

Clinias spontaneously distinguishes knowledge from good fortune. But when Socrates reminds him that wisdom is essential to good fortune, since wisdom excludes error, the young man readily agrees to recognise that good fortune is not a good *per se* and that it is nothing more than wisdom.[17] According to some scholars, Socrates elaborates here a very rationalist conception of happiness.[18] However, in the light of the previous analyses, it would be more accurate to say

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[17] In the following lines, Socrates goes further and argues that wisdom is the only true good (280b-281e). Although more implicitly, he still relies on the association between knowledge and success, especially when he demonstrates that science (ἐπιστήμη) is the condition of the right use of all goods (281a-b). This passage also confirms that Plato uses different words such as ἐπιστήμη and σοφία (he adds φρονήσις at 281b6) to name one and the same thing, i.e. a superior cognitive condition.

[18] Canto 1989, 66.

that Socrates relies on what it (commonly) means to talk about wisdom and wise men in order to ground his philosophical view about the good. I assume that Plato does not see himself as being overly rational. In his view, our ordinary ways of speaking rather entail a rationalist conception of happiness, for if we really mean what we say when we talk of wisdom, then happiness is above all a matter of knowledge.

The linguistic background of Socrates' argument should also prevent us from concluding that the argument is fallacious. Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014, 19-20) argues that Socrates' generalisation from particular expertise to wisdom in general is flawed, so that it is not possible to reduce good-fortune to wisdom. But from the previous analyses we know that infallibility is very commonly associated with perfect wisdom, and that what is fallible cannot be called wisdom in any way. Therefore, Socrates only makes explicit under what circumstances we talk about wisdom. And far from making an abusive generalisation, he justifies his previous particular examples by showing that they perfectly fit with the meaning of 'wisdom'.

3.2   Knowledge, Opinion and Forms in the *Republic*: Grammar or Ontology?

We have seen Plato using the infallibility commonly associated with knowledge in order to justify his own views. But what is such knowledge about? Plato's answer is famous: intelligible Forms which are distinct from perceptible realities. For many readers, no thesis is more distinctively Platonic than this one. And this is true. Yet I would like to stress that in Plato's view, the distinction between two kinds of beings stems from the very point of grammar we have been analysing so far.

The end of *Republic* 5 aims at justifying Socrates' claim that philosophers should be kings or kings philosophers (473d-e). What is a philosopher? Not a lover of any kind of knowledge, but a lover of the perfect truth belonging to Forms. Socrates' demonstration is twofold. In the first place, he argues from ontological premises well known by Glaucon, i.e. from the distinction between particular things (like beautiful things) and Forms (like Beauty itself) (475e-476d). However, this first stage of the argument requires recognising – as Glaucon does, because he is familiar with Socrates – the existence of intelligible Forms beyond appearances, which is precisely what the sight-lovers deny. Another argument is needed, whose premises can be shared by the sight-lovers, i.e. by popular opinion.

The first argument goes from ontology to epistemology. The second argument (476e-478e) works in the opposite direction: it starts from what it means to know something and deduces that being (Forms) is different from what merely appears. This latter argument is as fa-

mous as he is controversial. Without claiming to resolve all the issues raised by this passage, I shall only focus on the key role played by the infallibility of knowledge, which proves that Plato intends to demonstrate the necessity of setting up intelligible Forms from the ordinary way of speaking about knowledge: accepting Socrates' thesis should require nothing more than the ability to speak Greek consequently. Or, to put it otherwise: sticking to the grammar of knowledge should help us in recognising intelligible realities.

3.2.1 Knowledge Is Set Over 'What Is'

As noticed by some scholars, Socrates' way of arguing with the sight-lovers is very close to that of the above mentioned passage of the *Theaetetus*: in both dialogues one finds these two key premises: knowledge is set over 'what is', and it is infallible.[19] Most scholars tend to give more weight to the ontological premise (about being), and to read the argument in the *Republic* as mainly ontological.[20] As a consequence, debates have focused on the meaning of 'what is', with four main options: an existential sense, a veridical sense, a predicative sense, or whatever combination of them.[21] It is not my purpose here to determine whether Plato presupposes a specific ontology in this argument, and which one it is, but rather to show that the demonstration is not achieved until it is secured by the grammatical point on the distinction between opinion and knowledge, itself justified by the infallibility of knowledge.

Socrates starts from a very general claim: knowledge is always set over something that is, for what is absolutely not cannot be known.[22] From this he draws the conclusion that what is completely (or purely) is completely knowledgeable, whereas what lies between being and non-being must correspond to opinion (477a-b). But Socrates' reasoning is purely hypothetical: *if* (477a6, 477b1 εἰ) there is something in between what is and what is not, then in that case it must correspond to opinion, whereas what is purely corresponds to knowledge. So far, Socrates has only shown that if such an ontological distinction existed, it should correspond to the one between opinion and knowledge.

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19 Cornford 1935, 29; Burnyeat 1990, 8.

20 See especially Moss 2021.

21 See among many others the summaries in Annas 1981, 195-200 and Moss 2021, 93-5. Moss defends a very general reading of 'being' as 'ontological superiority', compatible with many other interpretations.

22 This feature is not specific to knowledge. At *Parmenides* 132b-c it is also the case with thought (νόημα), and at *Sophist* 262e it turns out to be a basic requirement for all speech (λόγος). See also *Sophist* 237d, where it is made explicit why knowing *something* (τι) implies knowing something that *is* (ὄν).

But the ontological distinction has not been justified, and at this stage the sight-lovers are not convinced: they can agree that knowledge is of 'what is completely', and consists in knowing it as it is, but in their view a particular thing is already completely what it is. They could object that the distinction between 'what is intermediate between being and non-being' and 'what is completely' is spurious.

This is why, from 477c onwards, Socrates makes a detour and focuses on powers: this is the only way to get the sight-lovers on his side by pointing out that their own way of speaking about knowledge entails the ontological distinction.

3.2.2 Opinion, Knowledge and Infallibility: A Decisive Grammatical Point

Two powers are distinguished both by their effect (what they accomplish) and their object.[23] Knowledge and opinion are both powers, but they accomplish different things, as Glaucon explains:

> How could a person with any understanding think that a fallible power is the same as an infallible one (τό γε ἀναμάρτητον τῷ μὴ ἀναμαρτήτῳ ταὐτόν)? (477e7-8)

Knowledge is infallible, whereas opinion is fallible: these two words (knowledge and opinion) cannot be used in the same contexts or to name the same cognitive states, and this is enough to discriminate them from one another. As a consequence, knowledge and opinion must have two distinct objects and cannot overlap: knowledge is about 'what is' (being), opinion is about what lies between being and non-being, also named "the opinable" (478e3 δοξαστόν).[24] This last conclusion is established by the combination of the above two arguments: on the one hand opinion, like knowledge, is also set over something that is, for it is impossible to opine what is not (478b5-10); but on the other hand and given the distinction between opinion and knowledge, opinion and knowledge cannot have the same object. And since opinion accomplishes something intermediate between knowledge and ignorance, it must be set over something "intermediate between what purely is and what in every way is not" (478c-d). Socrates

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23 For instance, sight is the power of perceiving color, hearing the power of perceiving sound, touch the power of perceiving hardness (477c, 507a-c, 524a). Stokes 1992, 118-23 rightly emphasises the importance of sight and hearing to convince the sight-lovers from premises they can admit.

24 A well-known difficulty is that, if knowledge and opinion have separate objects, the political role played by the philosopher is very hard to understand. However, these difficulties can be overcome, as argued by Moss 2021.

can now justify the previous shift from 'what is' to 'what is complete-ly': it stems from what even the sight-lovers must agree, i.e. the sharp distinction between opinion and knowledge.

The distinction between opinion and knowledge is therefore at the core of the overall argument, and it is justified by the grammar of knowledge (in this case, that one cannot name two cognitive abil-ities with such different effects in the same way). This point is not specifically philosophical, as confirmed by the fact that it is put in Glaucon's mouth. We can now better understand why Plato thinks the sight-lovers should be convinced: Plato's demonstration of the distinc-tion between Forms and particular things intends to be drawn from our ordinary ways of speaking about knowledge.[25]

4 Plato and Wittgenstein on the Grammar of Knowledge

I hope to have shown that in *Republic* 5 and elsewhere Plato is far from neglecting ordinary language when he establishes his most provocative theses. But in that case, how can it be explained that he draws conclusions diametrically opposed to those of Wittgenstein?

4.1 Wittgenstein on Knowledge and Certainty

According to Wittgenstein, philosophers tend to cut language from its natural roots, i.e. from its use in various contexts,[26] and Moore's common sense philosophy is no exception. In Moore's view, we know with certainty a number of empirical propositions we cannot prove, such as the present existence of our body, the fact that earth had ex-isted for many years before us, the birth and death of other human beings, and a series of truisms of this kind. Against both skeptics and idealists, Moore holds that these truisms are not mere beliefs, but knowledge of the most perfect kind.[27]

Wittgenstein objects that Moore's self-evident propositions do not correspond to the grammar of knowledge, but to that of certainty.[28]

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25 Even though they do not state it so explicitly, Cornford 1935, 176 and Dixsaut 2003, 73 are close to my own reading when they read the *Republic* argument on knowl-edge in the light of the above mentioned passage of the *Gorgias* on the impossibility of false knowledge.

26 *PI* § 116.

27 Moore 1959.

28 In doing so, Wittgenstein rejects Moore's psychological approach to certainty. It is indeed important to note that Moore's notion of certainty is psychological, whereas Wittgenstein's one is not: for the latter, certainty comes from the particular function the propositions play in a given language.

This is the reason why, even though I cannot doubt that "there is one hand" when I raise my hand (this is Moore's premise of his proof of the external world) I cannot say that I *know* it without making a strange and unusual – a philosophical – use of 'I know' (*OC* § 481). We say that we know something when 1) we can say how we know it (§§ 40; 91; 243; 484) and 2) when it remains the possibility of a doubt (§§ 21; 58).[29] This last point is clarified when Wittgenstein distinguishes the grammar of knowledge from the grammar of certainty (§ 308): Moore should not have said that he *knows* his propositions, but that these propositions are solid for us (§ 112), that it stands fast for us (§§ 116; 151), or that it is an irreversible belief (§ 245). What is certain beyond doubt (§ 194) is not knowledge but certainty: a knowledge-claim is always subject to doubt and confirmation, whereas certainty provides the foundation for all our statements about what we know without being itself true or false (§§ 403; 411; 446).[30]

One finds a similar conclusion in the *Philosophical Investigations* (§ 246): it does not make sense to say of me that I know (with perfect certainty) I am in pain, for in that case it would have to make sense to say that I don't know it, that I doubt about it, or that I have learned my sensations (which we never say).[31] As Hacker well formulates, "such a proposition [expressing knowledge] and its negation constitute a logical space: the sense of one stands or falls with the other".[32] This is why it is wrong, or nonsensical, to say that I know my sensations, whereas (for the same reasons) it makes sense for others to say they know I am in pain under certain circumstances.

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29 Marrou 2006, 26-33. In parallel with *OC* § 58, see *Blue Book* (= *BB*) § 54: where 'I don't know' does not make sense, 'I know' cannot make sense either. In Wittgenstein's view, truth can only be said of propositions, and knowledge can only be said of bipolar propositions (capable of being either true or false). More broadly, a "proposition makes sense if and only if its negation makes sense" (Garver 1996, 148-9; but see the discussion of this view in Coliva 2013).

30 On the analogy with 'hinges' Wittgenstein uses to describe this phenomenon (*OC* §§ 341-3), see Coliva 2010, ch. 4 and Coliva 2013. This is closely related to what Wittgenstein calls a world-picture (*OC* §§ 93-5 162-7, 233). Each world-picture may be historically and culturally relative (§ 256), so that our beliefs are groundless (§ 166), but they are nonetheless firmly fixed in us (§ 248). In certain contexts, what counts as certainty can also be turned into knowledge (§§ 4, 622). On world-picture, see Hamilton 2014, 129-49.

31 See also *PI* II xi, 221-2.

32 Hacker 1997, 66. See also Chauviré 2009, 167, and in parallel with this passage *OC* §§ 41 and 178.

4.2 Plato and Wittgenstein: Expert Knowledge vs Ordinary Knowledge

Thus according to Wittgenstein, a proposition that I cannot in any way conceive as false is not knowledge, but certainty. In Plato's view, on the contrary, knowledge can never be false in any way: knowledge is infallible, and what can be either true or false is opinion.[33] Yet, as I have argued, both rely on the grammar of knowledge. In my view, the difference can be explained by the following reason: Plato relies on the grammar of the 'knowledgeable' or 'wise' man, whereas Wittgenstein analyses the grammar of knowledge in a more trivial and ordinary sense ('to know that x', or 'to know something').[34] This clearly appears from the samples of correct use of the grammar of knowledge Wittgenstein gives: "I know where you touched my arm" (§ 41); "the story of Napoleon" (§ 163); "that water boils when it is put over a fire", "that I had breakfast this morning" and "that he is in pain" (§ 555). A proposition I can ground is something I can say I know.

Plato and the Greeks for their part mean by knowledge or wisdom (ἐπιστήμη and σοφία) something like the complete mastery of a domain, or at least a higher knowledge than that of ordinary men.[35] This is corroborated by Burnyeat's investigation on Greek verbs naming knowledge in Plato, according to which "of the three Greek verbs for knowing, ἐπίστασθαι is the one which is standardly used to claim or ascribe mastery of a body of knowledge" (Burnyeat 2011, 19).[36] Burnyeat does not take into account σοφία, but the above analyses confirm that it rather designates superior, expert or even perfect knowledge, not the mere fact of knowing one thing in particular.[37]

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[33] This is precisely the reason why in Plato's view knowledge can only set over Forms, i.e. entities that always are what they are and never change. If we deny the existence of such realities, we are condemned to Gorgias' conclusion: for human beings, knowledge is unreachable and all we have is persuasion (*On Being and Non-Being*; *Defence of Palamedes* § 35).

[34] The triviality of Wittgenstein's examples is explained by the controversy with Moore's self-evident propositions. But in *OC* § 651, he indicates that mathematics is not fundamentally different from the actions of the rest of our lives: what one could hold as expert knowledge is not in his eyes fundamentally different from ordinary knowledge.

[35] See Schwab 2015, 5-7, drawing on a passage from Thucydides.

[36] As argued by Burnyeat, such knowledge is not reducible to 'knowing-how' as opposed to 'knowing-that', for at least two reasons: firstly, the very distinction between these two categories is disputable; secondly, the knowledge referred to by the verb ἐπίστασθαι designates something different from 'knowing-how', namely the knowledge we have from teaching (Burnyeat 2011, 25). As a consequence the distinction between expert or perfect knowledge on the one hand, and ordinary knowledge on the other hand, cannot be equated with knowing-how and knowing-that. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this point.

[37] Silva 2017, 33-124, demonstrates that although the variety of meanings of σοφία in pre-Platonic literature, it is always closely associated with authority and superiori-

5 Conclusion: What Philosophical Use Should be Made of the Grammar of Knowledge?

When elaborating his own philosophy, Plato pays close attention to ordinary language about (expert) knowledge, and in particular to the distinction between knowledge and opinion. It may well be that for Plato the figure of the expert knowledgeable man is not, or not always, appropriate to characterise the philosopher.[38] But this is at least a useful and efficient way to convince non-philosophers: if knowledge really must be infallible, in accordance with this language-game, then it can only deal with intelligible Forms that always remain identical to themselves. Genuine knowledge cannot therefore be directed towards empirical realities, and only philosophers can reach it.

Here appears a major discrepancy between Plato and Wittgenstein: in Plato the analysis of the grammar of knowledge is mainly a tool to convince non-philosophers, or to confirm results reached by other means, whereas in Wittgenstein grammatical investigations are the most part of the philosophical work. This is why in *Republic* 5 only the second argument with the sight-lovers is based on the grammar of knowledge, whereas the first one with Glaucon pays far less attention to language.[39] Moreover, the erotic ascent of the *Symposium* and the educational *cursus* of the philosophers in the *Republic* suggest that truth can only be reached through a turning of the whole soul towards the intelligible realm, and as the *Cratylus* claims, we cannot reach the truth through names, or even through the sole analysis of our ordinary ways of speaking. From this point of view, Plato is far from the ordinary language philosophy that developed after Wittgenstein. Nevertheless, he does not pay less attention to the grammar of knowledge than Wittgenstein.

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ty, and that the notion of expert knowledge is at the heart of Plato's σοφία. This is confirmed by the competitions for the title of σοφία in Greece (Lloyd 1987, 103).

38   See Dixsaut 2001, chs. 1-2. The most obvious case is Socrates' disavowal of knowledge as the highest form of wisdom (*Apology* 23a-b).

39   See also *Timaeus* 51c-e: the distinction between understanding (νοῦς) and true opinion, which recalls the *Republic* 5 argument, is only the shorter way to reach the truth about Forms.

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