

# SCEPTICISM, SOCRATES AND THE SOCRATIC VISION OF LIBERALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

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## Introduction

Why is the question of 'knowledge' central to Socrates and what does he intend to achieve through this engagement?<sup>1</sup> These two questions are the central concerns of this essay. Of course, the time-honoured answer to both these questions, imbricated as they are, necessarily invokes the sceptic's challenge. Conventionally it is argued that this challenge, if left unaddressed, renders the very endeavour towards any systematic representation of reality- that is the possibility of raising an edifice called "science"- an impossibility. But such an account, as it will be argued in this paper, fails to appreciate the ontological dimension, and the political entailment thereof, of the Socratic engagement with the question of knowledge, since it positions it solely within epistemological confines. The first part of the first section of the essay will address this claim in some details.

Now of course, it cannot be denied that the sceptic's challenge is indeed the horizon against which we ought to make sense of the Socratic enterprise concerning knowledge. Having accepted that, however, it would become all the more necessary, therefore, to first clarify what the term "scepticism" itself means, or to spell out who a "sceptic" is. It is precisely in understanding what scepticism could have possibly meant for Socrates, that we also come to understand why the Socratic response to scepticism cannot, therefore, be simply confined to the epistemological.

The essay will argue that the form of scepticism that Socrates encounters is peculiarly ontological in its orientation rather than being centred on concerns of "justification", as is predominantly understood. In reconstructing the sceptics' challenge that Socrates possibly faced, the essay will argue that this challenge was posited in terms of two distinct ontological commitments. One being the sceptics' assertion concerning the "indeterminate nature

of the world”, and the other concerning the nature of human “agentiality”. This task will be undertaken in the first two sections of the essay, respectively. It will be argued how the Socratic *elenchus*, is a methodological response to the first of these challenges, while the ontological sketch of the *psuchê/psykhê* (roughly translated as “soul”<sup>2</sup>) that Socrates draws for us constitutes his response to the second of these challenges. This essay will go on to argue how the peculiar picture of the *psuchê/psykhê* that Socrates manages to sketch is, in fact, a major constitutive part of his response to the sceptic’s challenge. The third section of the paper will then draw out the implications of the Socratic sketch of the *psykhê* for his formulation of a distinct picture of what the very notion of knowledge entails.

This possibility of reading the Socratic response to the sceptic’s challenge, primarily in terms of the *psykhê*, and thus in terms of human agency, consequently opens up the possibility of positioning the Socratic demarcation of the realm of the *intelligible* and *forms*, from the realm of the *sensible* or *appearances*, in a manner that allows us to suggest that the Socratic investment in the question of knowledge is far more ontological and political than it is credited with, and that it seeks to promote a vision of *liberalizing* knowledge. However, for such a reading to be possible, we must first clear the air and show that the sceptic’s challenge that Socrates faces is, in fact, an ontological one rather than an epistemological challenge concerning the nature of justification, as is popularly held, and that it concerns the nature of human agency. Towards this end, we would argue for the legitimacy of upholding the alternate view that holds that scepticism, as was systematized and advocated by Pyrrho<sup>3</sup>, in terms of the sceptical attitudes and stances of his predecessors,<sup>4</sup> like Democritus or Zeno amongst others,<sup>5</sup> is more of an ontological position and is distinct from the form of epistemological Pyrrhonism that comes to be later advocated by the likes of Sextus Empiricus. We will, therefore, take that the sceptical stances of figures that inform Pyrrho’s own position is what would be of concern to Socrates and hence, we shall be taking Pyrrho to be the most systematic voice for the form of scepticism that Socrates could possibly be addressing.

### I. The Thesis of Indeterminacy of the World and the Socratic Elenchus

Scholarship concerning ancient western philosophy in the past two decades has now made it more or less acceptable to assert that the term “scepticism” stands for more than one philosophical stance in

the western tradition. It is also clear that ancient forms of scepticism must be distinguished, notwithstanding certain similarities, from the modern variety of scepticism that limits itself to the domain of formal epistemological concerns. After all, ancient forms of scepticism did not merely entail an epistemological stance but had a much broader scope in that they necessarily accommodated a prescription for adopting a particular ‘way of life’, with a firm resolve on achieving *ataraxia* or tranquillity through the suspension of judgment.<sup>6</sup> This is of some importance to us here, since we would like to disentangle ancient scepticism from the concerns of modern day scepticism, which is largely informed by the epistemic model that takes questions of justification as being cardinal to the sceptics’ position. Moreover, for our purpose, this disentanglement is all the more necessary since, following Gettier’s *inaccurate* depiction of the “Justified-True-Belief” model (JTB) of knowledge as the “traditional” one offered by the Greeks, the renewed interest in scepticism following Gettier’s trigger-article does not, by and large, pause to demarcate the various shades and forms of scepticism operative in the ancient Greco-Roman world.<sup>7</sup> Thus, within the dominant trend, it appears that even ancient scepticism must have, just as its modern avatar, necessarily concerned itself with matters of justification. But we need to only remind ourselves that the JTB model, which Gettier (1963) traces to Plato’s *Theaetetus*, and then goes on to announce it as the “traditional” position on “knowledge”, is rejected by Socrates, ironically, in no less uncertain terms in the *Theaetetus* itself.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Gettier’s characterization falls into place, if and only if, we fail to distinguish early varieties of Pyrrhonism from modern-day sceptical concerns that are confined within the bounds of epistemology. But such a characterization, as we will see, does not really do justice to the variety of sceptical stances available to us during antiquity, and is certainly not the variety of scepticism to which Socrates is responding.

Furthermore, contemporary scholars of antiquity emphasize the need to be cognizant of differences in the positions advocated by various ancient figures themselves, who are generally clubbed under the generic label “Pyrrhonists” or “Sceptics”; and they further argue for the need to particularly distinguish scepticism developed *after* Pyrrho or post-Pyrrho Pyrrhonism from the scepticism which Pyrrho himself advocated.<sup>9</sup> Clearly then, the later forms of scepticism, which are more epistemological in their orientation, and formulated in the post-Pyrrho period by figures like Aenesidemus, Agrippa and Sextus could not have been of concern to Socrates, even from a purely chronological point of view.<sup>10</sup> Further, as Vogt suggests, the evidence

of differentiation between the earlier varieties of scepticism, as systematized by Pyrrho and as accordingly sketched out for us by Diogenes, and the ones that emerged after him, such as the one as expounded by Sextus Empiricus, is also indicated by Sextus' self-insistence on the uniqueness of the sceptical position that he outlines. Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* goes to great length to emphatically highlight that the sceptical position that he outlines for his readers differs from all other 'neighbouring philosophies' or schools of thought like those of Heraclitus [1.210], Democritus [1.213], Protagoras [1.216] or Cyrenaicism [1.215], Academic Philosophy [1.220] and the likes in so far as the sceptic position that he expounds, 'does not make any claims about *the way the world is*, while every other, seemingly similar philosophy, contains traces of dogmatism' (emphasis mine, Vogt, 2015: 9). This goes on to suggest that even in his own evaluation of the traditions and figures taken to be the precursors of Pyrrho, and scepticism prior to the one that he formulates, does have some affinity with the 'dogmatists', or philosophers whose positions necessarily have an ontological bearing.<sup>11</sup> What is also particularly interesting is that Sextus in his *Outlines of Scepticism* clearly holds any philosophical position that asserts 'that *things* cannot be apprehended' as a dogmatic one [1.3]. In fact, much in tune with this observation of Sextus, Diogenes' account of Pyrrhonism too seems to be suggestive of the fact that Pyrrho's sceptical position is much more in continuity in terms of its *spirit* with those of his precursors and contemporaries, rather than marking itself as a position that is indicative of a break or a departure from them. For instance, when tracing the lineage of Pyrrho's position, Diogenes records that Pyrrhonism finds its roots in,

Xenophanes and Zeno of Elea and Democritus [amongst other]... Take, for example, the passage in which Xenophanes says, "No man has seen that which is clear, nor will there be anyone who knows it." Zeno does away with movement, saying, "The thing that is moved is neither in the place in which it moves nor is it in the place where it is not". Democritus tosses out qualities, when he says, "By convention cold, by convention hot; but in reality, atoms and void")... And Empedocles is credited with saying: "Thus these things are <neither> visible nor audible for men, nor can they be apprehended with the mind." [9.72-73]

It could then be meaningfully argued that Pyrrho is advocating a position that is squarely placed within a framework that directly concerns his contemporaries and his sceptic precursors. And given the bent of the cosmologically oriented Presocratic philosophers, amidst whom Diogenes locates Pyrrho's precursors and influences,

scepticism of Pyrrho's variety, and with which Socrates must be concerned, then surely revolves around ontological questions concerning the nature of reality. Interesting, as it can be seen, Diogenes seems to trace Pyrrho's lineage to figures who surely have something to say about how the world, in fact, *is*. That is to say, contrary to Sextus' characterization of scepticism as a position that is marked by the absence of any ontological commitments, Pyrrho and his precursors surely adopt some definitive cognitive attitudes that entail a commitment to some definitive ontological stance about the nature of reality. Though the goal of *ataraxia* stands as the common thread throughout the various forms of ancient Pyrrhonism, including that of Sextus, it is, however, evident from Diogenes's account that it is precisely the ontological thesis of *indeterminate nature of reality* that leads Pyrrho and his sceptical precursors to accept the thesis of *indeterminacy of judgments* and pronounce the dictum, '*Make a commitment, delusion is nearby*' [9.71], as the kernel of their sceptical stance. Furthermore, as Vogt (2015) underscores, this very dictum entails that 'commitments are a symptom or cause of a distorted state of mind,' and would thus qualify as being a 'dogmatic' stance (p.10), in so far as it would nevertheless be a concrete judgment about the nature of mind that is being asserted as true. Such an ontologically flavoured judgment would surely not be tenable within the frames of Pyrrhonism as advocated by either Sextus, or the modern-day frames of scepticism, without the threat of self-referentiality, given that they are solely confined within the epistemological thesis of indeterminacy of judgments, without any ontological commitment to the thesis of indeterminacy of the world. As Diogenes records,

Pyrrho appears to have practiced philosophy in the noblest fashion, introducing (as Ascanius of Abdera says) the approach of non-cognition and suspending judgment. Pyrrho, you see, used to claim that nothing is fine or shameful, or just or unjust, and that similarly – in the case of all things – nothing is in truth (this or that), but that men do all things by custom and habit. *For, he claimed, each thing is no more this than that.* [Emphasis mine, 9. 61]

That is, Pyrrho's epistemological thesis of indeterminacy is ultimately rooted in his ontological commitment, and it is this ontological commitment that presumably leads Diogenes to place Pyrrho in the same continuum as Democritus and Heraclitus, amongst others. After all, to assert that 'each thing is no more this than that', is surely a judgment about the nature of the world and is thus a position with an evident ontological import.

Even though, as we shall shortly argue, the sceptics' commitment to

the thesis of *indeterminacy of the world* does not exhaust her ontological commitment in its entirety, it nevertheless does constitute an important aspect of her sceptical stance. In stark contrast to this, later versions of Pyrrhonism, as the one advocated by Sextus, negates this very possibility and denies the possibility of any judgment formation with an ontological import whatsoever, including Pyrrho's judgment about the "indeterminacy of the world". Thus, though the proponents of the later variety of Pyrrhonism, including Sextus, unhesitatingly trace their grounds to Pyrrho, notwithstanding this acknowledged lineage, they, in contrast, hold that the goal of scepticism lies in an "absolute" and "wholesale" suspension of *any* judgment about the world. The mark of a true sceptic, as Sextus Empiricus emphasizes in his *Outlines of Scepticism*, is thus the absence of any form of judgment about the nature of reality. Anything to the contrary, is what Sextus labels as 'dogmatism' [1.3]. This entails that Pyrrho's scepticism, in both Diogenes' as well as Sextus' accounts, appears to be a position that embraces an ontological commitment in so far as it *minimally* asserts that the ontological thesis of *indeterminacy of the world* is a definitive one. It is on the basis of such an ontological commitment that it then comes to assert the epistemological impossibility of definitive judgments concerning the world.

Such an initial positioning of scepticism helps us to interpret the important role played by the Socratic *elenchus* as a measured methodological response to scepticism, given that the Socratic *elenchus* intends to invariably lead us to a state of *aporia* or an impasse concerning a judgment that is initially taken as certain. Simply put, Socrates appears to take a sceptical stance as a response to the sceptics' challenge that he faces, precisely in Sextus' parlance. We must note that one of the modes in which Diogenes characterizes scepticism is that

...it was suspensive, or ephectic, because of what they experienced after their searches... and it was perplexing, or aporetic, because they brought both those who put forward doctrines and themselves to a state of perplexity. [9.70]

Thus seen, we must accept the position, even if problematically, that a part of the Socratic response to the scepticism of his times, is precisely by being a sceptic in this sense of the term. In a way the Socratic response to the sceptic foreshadows the form of scepticism that Sextus appears to have refined to lead one to embrace the epistemic inadequacy of a judgment that is regarded as definitive and true, wholesale.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, it could be argued that Socrates' initial response to the sceptics challenge lies precisely in his showing the inconclusiveness of the sceptic's own conclusion about the impossibility of any judgment formulation on the nature of reality, by challenging their unassailable and resolute faith on the ontological belief in the nature of reality as being fundamentally indeterminate. The Socratic challenge to the truth of the sceptics' thesis of *indeterminacy of reality*, and upon which their maxim of one's need to suspend one's judgments rests, thus in turn, breaths life to the quest for truth once again given the Socratic elenchus is a mode that renders our judgment about the nature of the world as uncertain, and thereby opens it to inquiry, once again.

Seen thus, it is clear that if Pyrrhonism of Pyrrho forecloses any future attempts to form positive judgments about the world, the Socratic response, demonstrated through the elenchus, seeks to minimally re-open this very possibility of inquiring into it, even if it does not successfully establish any certain truths about its nature.<sup>13</sup> We could grant the Socratic elenchus as managing to overthrow the definitiveness of the sceptics "indeterminacy thesis" and consequent re-opening the possibility of inquiring into the truths concerning the world. However, since the thesis of the indeterminacy of the world does not, as was mentioned in passing earlier, exhaust the entirety of the sceptic's ontological commitment, and thereby cannot be taken to be the entirety of the sceptics challenge, the Socratic elenchus as a methodological response to scepticism consequently does not constitute the entirety of the Socratic response to scepticism. It is to this other half of the sceptic's challenge, and the corresponding Socratic response to it, that we shall now turn our attention to.

## II. The Socratic *Psyché* and Human Agentiality

The elenchus, we could say, constitutes the defensive aspect of the Socratic response. And as I shall now argue, the Socratic portrayal of the *psyché* is a response to the other half of the sceptic's ontological commitment, which directly concerns the ontology of human agency.

Socrates, as I try to interpretatively argue, brings forth his offensive ploy against the sceptic's claim of indeterminacy of judgments by foregrounding a distinctive picture of the *psyché*, which is now primarily projected in terms of its function as a "knower". In other words, Socrates intends to re-fashion epistemology, and thereby inaugurate, the possibility of determinate judgments by recasting the relation that obtains between the *psyché* and the world of the

objects of knowledge by providing a more cardinal role to the *psykhê* in this epistemic venture. Put in a different way, Socrates intends to provide a more cardinal role to the *psykhê*, and in a way creatively inaugurates the “inward turn” in philosophy. Of course, such a claim need not voice the position put forth by John Burnet (1916), who in his influential lecture, *The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul*, argues (p.19) that the Socratic soul is a completely new invention in the Greek world, and that it makes an absolute departure from the notions of *psykhê* that were available to the Greek world then. Though Burnet’s assessment is, by and large, taken to be a definitive one, recent voices have emerged that argue that Burnet’s assessment is misplaced in its excessive and undue highlighting of the uniqueness of the Socratic *psykhê* as a Socratic invention. This debate, though important, is not cardinal to our discussion here, for what even these dissenting scholars nevertheless broadly agree upon with Burnet, and which is of importance to us here, is that certain critical changes were taking place in Greek thought concerning the *psykhê*, during the time Socrates was active. This change is primarily seen in terms of the theorization that begins to emerge during the latter part of the fifth century BC, which clearly seeks to attribute agentiality to the *psykhê*, and is thus seen as a sharp departure from the Homeric idea of the *psykhê*. The Homeric notion of the *psykhê* or *psuchê*, as Furley assesses, simply envisaged it in terms of the ‘life-breath’; something that is lost at death which then goes to the underworld, but is never portrayed as the locus of our agentiality or as an epistemic site. In fact, Plato’s dialogues like, *Apology* [40c], or even *Phaedo*, themselves provide, through Socrates’ interlocutors, a distinct voice to the view that the *psykhê* is simply something that is lost along with the body in death, ‘dispersed like smoke or air and in her flight vanishing away into nothingness’ [*Phaedo*, 70a]. Similar views are also expressed in the *Republic* [387a-c], which is clearly suggestive of the fact that such an alternative view of the *psykhê* could have been a commonly held position, and something that was available during the period.

Now, whether this ascription of agentiality is truly a Socratic invention, as Burnet claims, or something that is available to Socrates within the then contemporary philosophical *geist*, is not of cardinal interest to the purpose that we have in hand. For us, the important question is, precisely how does Socrates position and operate with this notion of *psykhê*? It is clear that the Homeric *psykhê*, which though was taken to be a distinctive mark of a living human being, was nevertheless never construed as the locus of agentiality *per se* (See Furley, 1956). The connotative dimension of the term “*psykhê*”



clearly transforms, at least within the Socratic framework, from its narrow Homeric origins to become the locus of agentiality, both in terms of the cognitive as well as the affective. It is this re-formulated notion of the *psykhê* that thereby inaugurates the possibility of a clear demarcation between the body and the *psykhê*, a demarcation that is cardinal to the Socratic response to scepticism, and that which anticipates the Cartesian dualism in its intent.<sup>14</sup> To access how this distinction is fundamental to the Socratic enterprise, one only needs to recall Socrates's characterization of philosophy as the art of tending to the 'soul' in *Apology*, and more explicitly in the *Theaetetus*, where the contrast between his art of midwifery and those practiced by others is given precisely in terms of the 'soul'-body distinction. Once again, irrespective of whether the ascription of such an agentiality is truly a Socratic invention or not, what must be accepted, however, is that Socrates does provide us with the first theoretical sketch of this notion and that it plays a central role in his overall philosophical venture, and importantly in our case, directly informs his response to scepticism. Vogt (2015) provides us an interesting, and a plausible, suggestion concerning the relation between the Socratic investment in the *psykhê* and the sceptical challenge that he faces. She, following Diogenes' claim that scepticism, in fact, began with Homer himself, and that Pyrrho himself was fond of the poet, proposes that perhaps the mark of early sceptical positions further lie in their ontological commitment to the non-distinctiveness of human existence in comparison with other beings that populate the world. As Vogt (2015) puts it, in contrast to modern sceptical concerns that are squarely epistemic in nature, 'the instinct of the early skeptical scenario that emerges via Pyrrho's approval of Homeric ideas... is deflationary. Its challenge is not how a human cognizer can be in touch with the physical world at all. Its challenge is whether a human cognizer is at all different from it' (pp.12-13). There is credence to Vogt's suggestion. After all, Diogenes does record, that Pyrrho 'admired Homer... because he likened men to wasps and flies and birds' [9.67], suggesting that the sceptical stance does not uphold a hierarch within the realm of beings that populate the world. We may call this the *non-differentiation* thesis. What the *non-differentiation* thesis primarily entails is an absence of the kind of rational agentiality characterizing human beings in terms of making informed *rational* choices- the kind of agentiality, which we today cannot imagine ourselves without. It follows from the *non-differentiation* thesis that the sceptic is committed to the view that our actions are thus not matters of informed and deliberate choices

based on self-regulated and rational beliefs, but rather are at par with the actions of animals, which in contrast to ours, we differentially see as instinctual or habitual. As Diogenes informs us,

Pyrrho, you see, used to claim that nothing is fine or shameful, or just or unjust, and that similarly – in the case of all things – nothing is in truth (this or that), but that men do all things by custom and habit. [9.61]

Vogt thus argues for the possibility that early sceptical stance grounded itself on the view that ‘human beings do not acquire their views through active belief-formation, coming to think that something is so-and-so based on consideration of evidence or reasons. Instead, [they held that] beliefs grow on us, [and that we] come to think of the world in ways that are non-transparent to us, caused by non-rational means such as conventions and custom ... or prompted by the attractions of the rare...’ [2015: 13]. This is suggestive of the fact that apart from the ontological commitment to the thesis of *indeterminacy of the world*, scepticism as Socrates encounters it, further upholds an ontological commitment to the *non-differentiation* thesis. That is, the other half of the sceptic’s ontological commitment lies precisely in her assertion of a *qualitative indistinctiveness* of our being from the gamut of other beings that populate the realm of reality. Thus, apart from the indeterminate nature of the world, the sceptics’ position further denies any form of rational or reason-driven agentiality. Though such a view might appear unpalatable and counterfactual to us today, the sceptics’ position would not be such a radical one for the Greek world then, which was still under the shadows of Homeric views.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the early variety of ancient scepticism, and with which Socrates would be concerned, seems to primarily suggest that the actions that we undertake are not undertaken by virtue of the force of our choice *per se*. That is precisely the claim of negating any attribution of agentiality to the *psykhḗ*, much in alliance with the Homeric construal of the *psykhḗ*. What early Pyrrhonism, therefore, denies is the necessary relation between our actions, beliefs, and reason since it seems to hold the view that what we consider as beliefs formed through a conscious rational mechanism are, in fact, not a product of an evidence or justification based rational process, but are rather simply available around our epistemic environment for our uptake in the forms of our everyday customs and conventions. Simply put, we seem to adopt these beliefs unconsciously. Furthermore, we must mark that this ontological commitment of the sceptics’ position is not merely a denial of a rational agentiality to the *psykhḗ*, but also entails the corollary assertion of a non-causal

relation between our beliefs and our actions. So unlike the later variety of scepticism that comes to us through the works of Sextus Empiricus, particularly through his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, the early variety of scepticism of Pyrrho and his precursors, and the one that Socrates would have been engaged with, does not primarily involve itself with pure epistemological concerns. More than concerns of “justification”, it is thus this formidable challenge of claiming a form of rational agentiality that scepticism poses for Socrates. What this entails for our interpretative venture, therefore, is the fact that the Socratic response to the sceptic must then necessarily translate into some ontological commitment that counters the one grounding the sceptics’ stance concerning our agentiality and its relations to our beliefs. And this, as it will be shown, is precisely what Socrates does in so far as his philosophical sketch of the counter structure of the *psykhé* is concerned, which clearly argues for a causal relation between our actions and our beliefs; and then goes on to sketch for us the mode in which our belief formation is itself possible precisely through a rational undertaking of the *dialectic*.<sup>16</sup> Seen thus, we could restate the *offensive* aspect of the Socratic response to the sceptic in terms of his construal of knowledge as being necessarily normative, much along the lines of, what in contemporary parlance, has come to acquire the label of “virtue epistemology”. Towards this end, consider the following lines from *Protagoras*;

Now the rest of the world are of opinion that knowledge is a principle not of strength, or of rule, or of command: their notion is that a man may have knowledge, and yet that the knowledge which is in him may be overmastered by anger, or pleasure, or pain, or love, or perhaps by fear;—just as if knowledge were a slave, and might be dragged about anyhow.  
[352b-c]

Seen thus, the nature of the importance of the Socratic dictum ‘virtue is knowledge’ accrues a very different and distinct shade, and can now be seen as a concise response to the sceptics’ assertive dissociation of our beliefs from our actions, precisely by stressing on the force that our beliefs can execute over our actions. That is, the dictum ‘virtue is knowledge’, can be read as Socrates’ response to the sceptics’ charge of causal inefficacy of beliefs upon our actions. Of course, if this is granted to Socrates, then Socrates can now lay a claim of our beliefs as bearing a specific relation to rationality, in so far as our beliefs can be formed, or they originate, and bear the mark of truth precisely by virtue of the nature of our *psykhé* which is capable of undertaking the dialectical function. But for such a construal, we need to interpretatively treat the dictum as an

assertion concerning the *notions* of belief and action *as such* and the relationship that obtains between them at a conceptual plane, rather than the commonly held view, which construes the dictum to be merely asserting the necessary relation between my knowledge of virtue and my performance of virtuous actions in accordance with it. Put differently, the dictum ‘virtue is knowledge’ appears to have a broader connotative scope than the traditionally accepted narrower one that limits it to the realm of moral actions alone. Scholars such as Vlastos (1994), had stressed the problematic nature of taking the dictum in this manner, at its face value. Similarly, Guthrie (1971) suggests that the dictum pertains to all of our ‘involuntary actions’.<sup>17</sup> If we entertain the plausibility of such a reading of the dictum, we can now begin to see the peculiar mark of the Socratic *psykhé* as the locus of our beliefs and the relation that therefore, comes to be established between the *psykhé* and the body. The body now comes to be construed as the executor of the actions that is causally determined by our beliefs that originate precisely through the rational capacity of the *psykhé*.

This enables us to now appreciate the emphasis that Socrates puts on the notion of *psykhé*, for after all, as we can now see, the force of the Socratic response to the challenge posed by early Pyrrhonism is clearly dependent upon the elaboration of the nature of the *psykhé* and its inalienable relation to our belief formation, knowledge acquisition and as the sanction-provider of our actions. Such an interpretative position also sheds light on the fact, and it is therefore not surprising to find, that it is precisely Plato’s dialogues that inaugurates philosophy’s concern with the nature of the *psykhé*. *Phaedo* in its entirety, and the *Republic* [436ff.], which as we know is the site of the often discussed *tripartite* aspectual division of the *psykhé*, offer us the Socratic construction of the *psykhé*, apart from the mythical reconstruction of the origin of the ‘soul’ offered in *Timaeus* [41d-44d].<sup>18</sup> We must recall that within the Socratic framework, as elucidated in the *Timaeus*, the *psykhé* is construed, first and foremost, as a principle of order and motion [30a-b]. More importantly, in tune with our interpretative stance, we can now understand why the central problematic concerning the *psykhé* in these dialogues is the philosophical charting of the relation between the *psykhé* and our actions. As Hendrik Lorenz (2011) argues, the task set to be accomplished through *Phaedo* is to accommodate the view where the *psykhé* comes to be constructed as the regulative site of the cognitive, as well as affective functions of the body, including its function of accessing the *eidōs*, and thereby the function of accessing

truth. This Socratic attempt, as Lorenz argues, is finally completed in the *Republic*, where the tripartite aspectual division of the soul manages to construct the *psykhé* as the sole legislator of all our bodily functions, precisely by accommodating all of those functions which were left out of the scope of the *psykhé* and subsequently accorded to the “body” in the *Phaedo*, within the newly construed additional divisions of *spirit* and *appetite* of the *psykhé* in the *Republic*. Thus, the Socratic division of the *psykhé* in the *Republic* does not merely provide us with a robust image of the *psykhé*, but more importantly, manages to firmly establish the *psykhé* as the seat of all cognitive and affective functions, which till the Socratic formulation, had been problematically assigned to the body, or in some divine ploy, in the Greek world.<sup>19</sup>

The Socratic offensive move against the sceptic’s claim is thereby now complete given that the *psykhé* has now been shown to be, not merely as that which demarcates the animate from the inanimate, a view broadly accepted by all in the ancient Greek world, but more importantly and contrary to the claim of early Pyrrhonism, as the legitimate locus of agentiality, along with the assertive position that the rational aspect of the *psykhé* is, in fact, the seat of our belief formation. After all, one of the major contribution of the *Republic* is precisely the foregrounding of a natural relation<sup>20</sup> that obtains between the rational aspect of the *psykhé* and the *intelligible* realm of the divine and that of *eidos* or the forms. Already in the *Phaedo* Socrates argues for a *natural affinity* of the *psykhé* with the realm of the intelligible seeking to distance the *psykhé* from the realm of *appearances*, and thereby, from the ambit of material bodies [79a-80b]. Similarly, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates has the namesake agree, that ‘knowledge does not consist in impressions of sense, but in reasoning about them; [and that] in that alone, and not in the mere impression, truth and being can be attained’ [186d]. It is this Socratic framing of knowledge solely in terms of the realm of the intelligible and the *psykhé* that helps us understand as to why Socrates considers ‘true philosophers’ as essentially ‘occupied in the practice of dying’ [*Phaedo*, 67d] for it is only after death that ‘the soul will be parted from the body and exist in herself alone’ [67a]. A philosopher, as Socrates pronounces, ‘is entirely concerned with the soul’ and that ‘he would like, as far as he can, to get away from the body and turn to the soul’ [64e]. This demarcation of the *psykhé* from the body is premised by Socrates on the observation that the *psykhé* too is unchanging and imperceptible given that it is in affinity with the unchanging realm of the intelligible and the

divine, and consequently that the *psykhē* has a natural alignment with truth and knowledge by its very nature, and is, therefore, to be deemed and declared as the legitimate arbitrator of our choices and actions in the light of its partaking in the divine.

### III. The Realm of the Divine, the Socratic *Psykhē* and Liberalization of Truth

Given the Socratic response to the challenge posed by early Pyrrhonism, what then does this ontology of the *psykhē* entail for epistemology? It is to this that we will now turn our attention. We may remark that the Socratic response to the sceptics' challenge is marked by two broad characteristics. The first is the acceptance of the realm of the intelligible, which we are made to understand, is a realm that is populated by the *forms* or *eidos* and all that is *divine* [*Phaedo*, 81a]. Second, and more importantly here, we may want to notice the Socratic faith on the ability of the *psykhē*, or the nature of our rational capacity to access the realm of *eidos* and grasp truth, which, of course, for Socrates is made possible by virtue of the "affinity" of reason to the realm of the intelligible. Socrates pronounces, that these forms or *eidos*, just as the divine with whom they cohabit the realm of the intelligible, 'in their very likeness of the divine' are 'immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable...' [*Phaedo*, 80b]. It is precisely these forms that the rational aspect of the *psykhē* is to grasp, through *recollection*, employing the *dialectic*. We must note that the theory of recollection that Socrates lays out more explicitly in his *Phaedo*, treats the dialectic as a process of recollection wherein the essences are accessed by the *psykhē* [75d-77a]. In this sense, the act of recollection through the art of dialectic is, as Socrates informs us, the art of having a conversation with oneself, or as he puts it, 'the conversation which the soul holds with herself in considering of anything' [*Theaetetus*, 189e-190a].

The natural affiliation between the *psykhē* and the realm of the intelligible, or what is generally called the 'affinity argument', as laid out in the *Phaedo*, is clearly premised on the latent assumption of the *givenness* of the 'object of knowledge' or the *forms*.<sup>21</sup> It is this affinity that accounts for the fact that, within the Socratic framework, our knowledge of the intelligible is marked by *immediacy* in contrast to the 'opinion' that we can gather about the realm of the perceptible, which is necessarily mediated by of our sense organs [*Republic*, 507b].<sup>22</sup> It is on this accepted 'givenness of the objects of knowledge' that the notion of *eidos*, as the defining mark of truth and thereby,

of knowledge itself, comes to be inaugurated. This aspect of the Socratic schema is well-known.

It thus appears, given our interpretative stance, that the offensive or positive aspect of the Socratic response to the early variety of Pyrrhonism is in terms of sketching out an ontology of the *psykhé* such that it comes to be the causal ground of our actions that are mediated by our beliefs. This, as we see, is accomplished by establishing the *givenness* of the *eidos*, or the ‘givenness’ of the ‘objects of knowledge’ and the natural potentiality of the *psykhé* to access it. In the *Timaeus*, it is laid out in no uncertain terms that the realm of the intelligible is inaccessible to anything ‘devoid of a soul’ [30b]. Thus, the sceptics’ thesis of ‘indeterminacy of judgments’, from the Socratic perspective, is grounded on a gross misinformation about the ontology of our very ‘being’. The sceptic, as Socrates has it, fails to realize the distinctive affinity that human existence, by virtue of the *psykhé*, has with the realm of the *divine* and the intelligible, and consequently fails to see that this affinity itself guarantees us the possibility of ‘knowledge’ that is both determinate and absolute. Further, the Socratic response implicates the sceptic’s position of inappropriately limiting knowledge to the realm of ‘appearances’ and thereby circumscribing it to the realm of change. For Socrates, it is this flawed view of the sceptic that consequently leads her to erroneously hold the thesis of *indeterminacy of judgments*. As Socrates seeks to show, such a narrow vision concerning knowledge precludes us from realizing the givenness of the realm of the intelligible, and consequently blinds us to the fact that ‘knowledge’, in the true sense of the term, concerns the realm of the intelligible and the *psykhé*, rather than the realm of *appearances* and the body.

Given the Socratic construal of knowledge solely in terms of *eidos* and the *psykhé*, the insistence on the thesis of *primacy of definition* in matters concerning knowledge is, therefore, not surprising. Nor is it unanticipated that the Socratic construal of knowledge comes to picture knowledge exclusively in terms of “being”, or grammatically speaking, in terms of nouns (names/*onoma*). Ascertaining the relation between truth and “being” as necessary, and as the only definitional mark of truth, Socrates in the *Timaeus* asserts that truth, which is exclusively apprehended by reason, consists in the grasping of the *eidos*, or the intelligible, which ‘is always in the same state’, while in contrast, our senses provide us with mere ‘opinions’ concerning the realm of *appearances* that ‘is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is’ [27d-28a]. It is this primacy of “being” in relation to truth that comes to be asserted once again in the

*Republic* where Socrates equates the ‘pursuit of knowledge’ with the ‘pursuit of being’ [490a]; or in the *Cratylus*, where it translates into the Socratic view that knowledge demands, in its most fundamental nature, a knowledge of ‘names’, which as we are instructed by Socrates, presents to us the ‘fundamental’ nature of things, its *eidōs* [385a-390b]. Further, as we might expect, much in tune with our interpretative stance, this would necessarily demand that we have an insight into the ‘nature’ of the thing to be named before an *onoma* or a ‘name’ can be appropriately assigned to it. This demand is what is fulfilled by the philosopher, or as Socrates asserts in the *Cratylus*, by the *dialectician* [390c-d]. Thus, we have Socrates pronouncing in the *Theaetetus*, that the failure to attain *being* necessarily translates into the failure to attain truth [186c]. It is precisely the dialectician’s ability to use the rational capacity of the *psykhē*, which, by virtue of its *natural affinity* with the realm of the intelligible, makes it possible to grasp the essential nature of a thing or its *eidōs*.

Interestingly, the Socratic picture seems to be tacitly proposing a truly revolutionary idea concerning knowledge, namely that the idea of discrimination is alien to the objects of knowledge, or the realm of the intelligible. Perhaps, such an interpretative reading, that foregrounds the Socratic emphasis on the non-discriminatory nature of the realm of the intelligible, is further corroborated by the Socratic insistence that there is nothing peculiar to the realm of knowledge that entails the foreclosure of imparting of education to women. In the *Republic*, Socrates while charting out the features of the political and the educational structures of his meritocratic republic, pronounces in no less explicit terms, that the women in his ideal republic would be provided the same ‘nurture and education’ given that their *psykhēs* share the same potentiality for realizing truths as men [451e-452a]. Though Socrates does not deny the physical and biological differences between genders [454e], he nevertheless argues that, ‘men and women alike possess the qualities’ of accessing the realm of *eidōs* [456a], and therefore, that ‘only in the distribution of labours the lighter are to be assigned to the women, who are the weaker natures, but in other respects their duties are to be the same’ [457a]. This brings to prominence the fact that Socrates clearly demarcates biological or physical differences of an individual, which may be gender dependent, from the essentially shared nature of one’s *psykhē* in terms of its affinity with the intelligible realm [454b-e]. It is this essentially shared nature of the *psykhē* that, therefore, leads Socrates to assert that the ‘original nature’ of all individuals, irrespective of one’s gender, ‘is the same’ [456c-d]. Furthermore,



that the Socratic thesis of gender neutrality is, in fact, one of the central theses proposed in the *Republic* is evident from the fact that it comes to be reasserted as a characteristic mark of the ideal republic once again in the *Timaeus* when the salient features of the Socratic republic is being summarized [18c]. Clearly this is indicative of the Socratic importunity that the realm of knowledge, which is the realm that concerns the guardians of his proposed republic, is non-discriminatory in its essential nature, thereby corroborating the interpretation that the Socratic construal of knowledge seeks to liberalize it.

But here, if one may be inclined to argue that though this does cut across gender lines, it is clearly silent on the theme of universal accessibility of the realm of the intelligible that cuts across the established *class* demarcations, then we must only remind ourselves that it is, perhaps, to tacitly emphasize this non-discriminatory nature of the realm of the intelligible, and thereby of knowledge, that Socrates calls for a slave boy in *Meno* who, though a slave, is still presented as possessing the ability to access truth through the mode of dialectical reasoning. After all, Socrates does argue in the *Republic* that the realm of truth does not accommodate any 'secret corners of illiberality' [486a]. Furthermore, Socrates, even while presenting his story of the genesis in the *Timaeus* takes utmost care to present to us the picture of the *demiurge* creating all the *psykhés* from the 'same cup' and in accordance to the principle so 'that no one should suffer a disadvantage at his hands' [41d-e]. In fact, that the Socratic vision of universal accessibility to the realm of truth for all those who are genuinely concerned with it, is a radical departure for his times is evident from the fact that Socrates himself admits to Glaucon in the *Republic*, that his thesis of non-discriminatory access to knowledge and its acquisition, and what it consequently entails, might be considered 'ridiculous' by his fellow Athenians [452a]. But he assures Glaucon that such ridicule is but the manifestation of one's ignorance about the true nature of the realm of the intelligible [457b].

Further, here, we may want to recall, that prior to the Socratic sketch of the *psykhé*, the notion of knowledge or *sophia* in the Greek world was primarily vested upon a select few who were deemed to be chosen by the muses- the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory.<sup>23</sup> Thus, what seems to be tacitly held, prior to the Socratic view, is the belief that one's efforts in the quest for truth, might not reap any dividends without the grace of the divine and the muses. After all, knowledge or wisdom, in the pre-Socratic view

appears not as the fruit of a conscious arduous quest, but rather as a matter of gift of some divine grace.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the Socratic sketch of the *psykhé* and its natural affinity<sup>25</sup> to the realm of the intelligible enables a liberalization of access to the realm of the intelligible, since it liberates truth from its dependency on divine providence and grace by placing it squarely within the domain of a deliberate choice to seek it. It is in characterizing the arduous nature of such a choice, first in terms of the discomfort that accompanies it, and then in the demand of care towards one's *psykhé*, that the Socratic quest for truth departs from the pre-Socratic notion of knowledge as divinely *bestowed* 'wisdom'. I will return to the demand of care for the *psykhé* towards the end of the essay, but for now, I wish to underscore the often neglected element of pain that is central, though unspoken, to the imagery of parturition invoked by Socrates while likening the art of the dialectician to the craft of the midwife. And as Socrates announces in the *Theaetetus*, given that discomfort and pain are inalienable elements of a state of pregnancy, one of the primary skills of the midwife is precisely the ability to induce or sooth the pain that accompanies such a state [149d]. Analogically, these elements of discomfort, anxiety and pain too are accompaniments in the pursuit of truth, suggesting that knowledge is the result of forbearance rather than mere chance. More importantly, this pursuit for truth, as much as the delivering of a child is, is a voluntary undertaking and a conscious choice. Socrates' own life, and ironically his end, seems to be a testimony to this fact. Seen thus, for Socrates the attaining of truth, and thereby knowledge, cannot be a matter of accident and pure chance, such that it is dependent upon factors that are well beyond one's control. This provides a distinct meaning to the Ciceronian verdict that it is Socrates who brought philosophy, or the love of wisdom, down from the heavens to earth, which also seems to suggest knowledge was thus made a matter of earthly enterprise rather than a matter of divine providence.<sup>26</sup> We must also remember that the Socratic thesis of the *givenness* of the realm of the intelligible and its natural affinity with the *psykhé*, in a way, opens up the realm of the intelligible and the *divine* and to all and sundry. Further, this project of liberalization of knowledge, that Socrates undertakes in *Theaetetus*, demands that the objects of knowledge, or *eidos*, be precisely what they are to one and all; that is, *indiscriminately uniform* and thereby unchanging, unchanging thereby perfect, perfect and thereby absolute, absolute and thereby, *necessary*. These characteristic marks are, as Socrates argues in the *Republic*, the shared marks of all that cohabit the realm of the intelligible and the *divine* [382a-383a].

Likewise, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates has Cebes concede that *eidōs* are ‘unchanging forms not admitting of variation at all, or in any way, or at any time’ [78d] precisely on the very ground that he invokes in the *Republic* to establish the impossibility for gods to undergo change given the perfect nature of their being [380d-381d].<sup>27</sup> Given that the realm of *eidōs* and that of the divine are coextensive within the Socratic framework, the Socratic sketch of the *psykhē* and its articulated natural relation to *sōphía* or wisdom is, in fact, a breach on the maintenance of exclusivity with regards to the space of the intelligible, and thereby the *divine*, precisely by opening it up to all and anyone who might be genuinely concerned with truth. Hence, the charge of impiety that is levied by Meletus, against Socrates, as brought to light in Plato’s *Apology* [23e-24a], makes a deeper sense here.<sup>28</sup> Further, given that the “poets” were considered amongst the chosen few to be graced by the muses, it is, therefore, not a surprise when Socrates informs us that the charge of impiety that is levied against him by Meletus is a charge that is raised by Meletus on ‘behalf of the poets’ [23e].<sup>29</sup> Besides, recall that in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates’ presentation of the *psykhē* in terms of the functional analogy of a ‘block of wax’ construes the *psykhē* as a gift of *Mnemosyne*, the goddess of memory herself. This analogy further lends credence to our view that Socrates intends to liberalize knowledge, since in the *Theaetetus*, *Mnemosyne*’s *gift* is declared by Socrates to be a ‘universal gift’ bestowed to all humans, which stands in contrast to the pre-Socratic insistence on the exclusivity of the bestowal of such a gift to a handful of “poets” and “sages”, who are chosen by the muses [191c-d].

In fact, the Socratic thesis of the availability of truth to all those who *genuinely* pursue it is, strictly speaking, is an assertion that is absolute and unqualified. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the Socratic framework puts aside all social hierarchies in relation to the quest for truth, as is suggested by both the common spaces preferred by Socrates for his philosophical pursuit, such as the market place, and is also reflected by his indifference to the social status of his interlocutors and companions. That is, for Socrates, the *givenness* of *eidōs* and its accessibility is unconditional and independent of any external force or circumstances excepting the *earnestness* of one’s quest for truth. Simply put, within the Socratic vision of liberalized knowledge, objects of knowledge cannot be discriminatory, nor can they fail to reveal what they truly are, provided one is ready to witness this disclosure in all seriousness.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, within the Socratic vision, the quest for truth brings with it an inherent demand to care

for truth, which then translates into a *care* for the *psykhê* given the ontology of the intricate and interwoven nature of truth and *psykhê*. Correspondingly, one's ignorance or error in judgments translate, within the Socratic framework, into a lack of dedication and intent in one's quest for truth, and thus manifests itself as one's indifference to the state of one's *psykhê*. In the *Theaetetus*, invoking the analogy of the *psykhê* as a 'block of wax', Socrates construes the process of dialectical recovery and witnessing of truth as akin to receiving an impression or an imprint on a block of wax [191d-e]. For Socrates, the degree to which our *psykhê* can approximate truth *via* reason comes to depend, in a manner of speaking, upon the quality and the firmness of the wax on which the imprint is to be received. Thus, the *Theaetetus* clearly places the cause of error, and of one's ignorance, firmly in terms of the state of one's *psykhê*, and the degree of care one caters to it. This clearly suggests, that the final onus of both error as well as one's ignorance lie in the state of our *psykhê* rather than in the indeterminacy of the object of knowledge *per se*, as the sceptic seems to hold.<sup>31</sup> Thus, within the Socratic framework, the quest for truth needs to necessarily translate into an effort on working upon the *psykhê*, in improving the quality of one's block of wax, in a manner of speaking. One's lack of wisdom or knowledge is thus no longer, within the Socratic framework, a matter of divine providence but a matter of a conscious choice to remain ignorant. Thus, within the Socratic framework, for all those who genuinely seek, the realm of the intelligible is open if they genuinely care for truth, which as we come to understand through the *Theaetetus*, translates into genuinely caring for one's *psykhê*.

Thus, as a way of conclusion, we may now come to see, as to why the Socratic dictum 'know thyself', is much more than a call for ethical introspection. It could be construed as a response to the sceptics' challenge, and more importantly as a slogan promising a liberation of truth and knowledge. Thus, the constant urging of Socrates, even on his way to death, to take care of our 'souls' [*Apology*, 29e], comes to acquire a new emphasis and suggests a much broader concern that is not limited to the ethical. We could thus well argue that the Socratic response to the sceptics' challenge, in its grandeur, does not merely provide us with an ontological sketch of the *psykhê*, and an intricate work on our epistemic structure, but also highlights Socrates' visionary stroke that liberalizes truth and the domain of knowledge.

## Notes

1. We concern ourselves here solely with the figure by that name in Plato's dialogues, irrespective of the status of the historical Socrates. All references to Plato's dialogues are from Benjamin Jowett's translation of the works of Plato (1892, third edition).
2. The term "soul" over the ages, however, has come to carry many theological shades that the Greek "*psuchê/ psychê*" is devoid of. Therefore, I preferentially use the term *psykhê* throughout the essay, partly in order to avoid this overburdening, and partly in order to remind ourselves that a novel conception of the "soul" is being inaugurated during this period. On the other hand, the alternative terms such as "mind" or "self" are not preferable since they are much narrower in their connotative scope than the Greek "*psuchê/ psychê*", which has a clear reference to an "other-world".
3. Pyrrho, it is estimated, was active during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. It is claimed that, like Socrates, he wrote nothing, but even if he did, none of his works survives. Fortunately, we do have a lengthy exposition of Pyrrho and Pyrrhonism in Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Though, Robert D. Hicks' 1925 translation of the work into English is perhaps the most popularly read translation, however, all translations of Diogenes' account of Pyrrhonism cited in this essay are from Vogt's (2005) translation offered in her edited volume, *Pyrrhonism in Diogenes Laërtius*. Vogt's translation of the account of Pyrrhonism as found in Diogenes' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* is extensively annotated.
4. In fact, Diogenes' account records that 'Theodosius argues, Pyrrho was not the first to discover skepticism, or to embrace no doctrine. But someone like him in character might be called "Pyrrhonian"' [9.70].
5. Though the accuracy of the genealogical tracing of scepticism in the hands of Diogenes Laërtius has been treated with some suspicion, but it can nevertheless be safely asserted that Pyrrhonism had its precursors before the emergence of Pyrrho of Elis. For a detailed discussion on the precursors of Pyrrho, see James Warren (2015).
6. That Pyrrhonism or scepticism was seen as a position concerning a "way of life", and concerned itself with an art of living is clear from the fact that one of the namesake of the position during the era of Philosophy's modernity, Hume, clearly questions Pyrrhonism precisely in terms of the consequences that such a position would have on human agency in contrast to stoicism or epicureanism, suggesting that it was quite common during the modern period of philosophy to view scepticism as a way of life. See, Hume (2007: Sec. XII, pp.116-17). Even in antiquity, one of the persistent charges against Pyrrhonism, as Diogenes Laërtius' account has it, is precisely in terms of its unacceptability as a practically adoptable position.
7. For an analysis of Gettier's claim of JTB as the traditional doctrine of knowledge, see Dutant (2015).
8. Consider the concluding portion of the *Theaetetus*:  
 Socrates: 'And so, Theaetetus, knowledge is neither sensation nor true opinion, nor yet definition and explanation accompanying and added to true opinion?  
 Theaetetus: I suppose not...  
 Socrates: And does not my art show that you have brought forth wind, and that the offspring of your brain are not worth bringing up?

Theaetetus: Very true. [210b]

9. For a thorough exposition of Diogenes' account of Pyrrho and Pyrrhonism, see Vogt (2015); for a need to distinguish between various versions of ancient Pyrrhonism, see Bett (1997); Bett (2000). Bett (1997) in his "Introduction" and "Commentary" to his translation of Sextus Empiricus', *Against the Ethicists*, argues for the view that we need to minimally distinguish three distinct versions of scepticism in relation to scepticism in antiquity. He holds these three versions as distinct developmental stages of scepticism, beginning with Pyrrho, followed by the scepticism of Aenesidemus, and then the most comprehensive position of them all, as advocated by Sextus Empiricus.
10. Though the later varieties of scepticism, commonly labelled as "epistemological" or "epistemic" scepticism, is what influences and informs modern-day sceptical concerns, it however, could have hardly concerned Socrates as it is considered to be a development much after the death of Socrates. In fact, it has even been claimed that even during its heydays, it was hardly taken to be a serious philosophical position. It is generally believed that until the appearance of Henri Etienne's Latin translation of the works of Sextus in 1562, Sextus Empiricus, who was active sometime during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD could hardly have been considered an important figure. It was Etienne's translation that made Sextus a popular figure in the philosophical scene. In so far as the philosophical arena during antiquity is concerned, as Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes put it, 'Sextus seems to have made no splash [and that] there are few ancient references to him and few ancient traces of his works' [2000: xi]. For a positioning of Sextus Empiricus within the broader picture of Pyrrhonism, see Bett (2015).
11. Explaining the meaning of the term Sextus (2000) writes, 'Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth— for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others' [1.3]. The use of the term "dogmatism" in Sextus' parlance to mean someone who holds certain ontological commitments was later made more fashionable by Kant, who in his works would come to use the term to denote the traditional ontological positions held by philosophers concerning the nature of reality, the soul and God, precisely in the concurrence with Empiricus' own usage of the term.
12. After all, among the various modes in which Diogenes characterizes scepticism, one is that '...their philosophy was searching, or *zetetic*, because they constantly searched for the truth; it was investigative, or skeptic, because they were always investigating but never discovered anything.' [9.70]
13. After all, the Socratic *elenchus*, as Vlastos (1994) insists, 'is not an end in itself' (p.4) and is rather used in Plato's middle dialogues in a 'purely negative manner' in order to 'correct mistakes' and not to 'discover' or 'prove' certain truths (p.5). Further, Vlastos contends that we must be careful to distinguish the Socratic *elenchus* from mere 'eristic contests', in so far as the former, for Socrates, is a genuine attempt to arrive at truths (p.136). This distinction is central to Socrates, in my considered opinion, to move away from the tag of 'Sophist', who is not really concerned with truth *per se* but rather the "art of persuading" that something is true. After all, Socrates does make an explicit distinction between the two, holding that a philosopher is not an eristic [*Theaetetus*, 164c-d] since the former is not at all interested in proving the other wrong merely to 'score a point' and 'make fun' of the other, but is rather

involved in genuinely correcting the fault of the other, so as to attain truth [*Theaetetus*, 167e]. In fact, in the *Republic*, we have Thrasymachus precisely accusing Socrates of engaging in eristic plays rather than being truly concerned with the discovery of the nature of justice and injustice. He reminds Socrates that ‘...if you want really to know what justice is, you should not only ask but answer, and you should not seek honour to yourself from the refutation of an opponent, but have your own answer; for there is many a one who can ask and cannot answer’ [336c]. Socrates, to his defence, explicitly denies the charge and assures Thrasymachus that he and his fellow interlocutor, Polemarchus, were ‘most willing and anxious’ in their search for the true nature of justice and that they were not merely “knocking under to one another;’ and so losing [their] chance of finding it’. In fact, Socrates assures Thrasymachus that in contrast to an eristic engagement, they were not indulging in a ‘weakly yielding to one another’ and were doing their ‘utmost to get at the truth’ [336e]. Also see *Republic* [454a] where Socrates makes a similar point to Glaucon where he emphasizes that ‘reasoning’ is ‘not merely verbal opposition in the spirit of contention’.

14. Descartes primary intent in his *Meditations* (1998) is likewise to position the “self” in a place of cardinality within the epistemic domain, which he accomplishes precisely by establishing the peculiar ontology of the self as being distinct from that of the body. After all, Descartes explicitly declares in his ‘Letter of Dedication’, which serves as a prelude to his *Meditations*, that his primary task is to establish, beyond doubt, the existence and the immortality of the soul, and the existence of the *divine*. Further, the Socratic dualism clearly foreshadows the Cartesian dualism in terms of its emphasis on the non-reducibility of the body to the “soul” or that of the “soul” to the body. See, Descartes (1922: 47-50).
15. After all, it is common in Homeric poems to ascribe the cause of an action to the realm of the divine rather than depict it in terms of a function of one’s will or one’s choices.
16. “Dialectic”, as Socrates informs is the art of having a conversation with oneself, or as he puts it, ‘the conversation which the soul holds with herself in considering of anything... the soul when thinking appears to me to be just talking- asking questions of herself and answering them, affirming and denying...’ [*Theaetetus*, 189e-190a], suggesting that the dialectic is more of a rational analysis of one’s beliefs rather than undertaking an eristic enterprise.
17. See, Guthrie (1971: 130ff). Though in his elaboration of the dictum, Guthrie invariably restricts himself to moral actions. However, the other way of seeing this is to treat the term ‘moral’ in a much broader sense to include all involuntary actions under its connotative scope as Plato’s dialogues, as well as Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, seems to suggest.
18. This is followed up by Aristotle, who has an entire treatise, *De Anima* (On the Soul) devoted to the theme.
19. See, Hendrik Lorenz (2011), Also see, Hendrik Lorenz, “Ancient Theories of Soul”, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
20. The naturalness of this relation between the *psykhé* and the realm of the intelligible is sought to be established in the *Phaedo* through what is generally labelled as the ‘affinity argument’ [See *Phaedo*, 79a-80b]. The ‘affinity argument’ is then invoked by Socrates not merely to show that the nature of the soul is such that it is imperishable, but also that given this affinity to the realm of the

intelligible, and therefore the *divine*, its natural *telos* is to *govern*. The reading we provide is in contrast to the reading of the ‘affinity argument’ as proposed by Matthew Elton. See, Elton (1997).

21. Within the Socratic framework material objects that populate the world of *appearances*, of course, do not qualify as “objects of knowledge” as they are sense-dependent and consequently our belief concerning them are necessarily *representational* in character. Strictly speaking, the Socratic idea of knowledge is non-representational, akin to what we may find as being more in consonance with our present day usage of the term “understanding”. It is for this reason, once again, that the JTB framework of “knowledge” just does not capture the Socratic idea of knowledge. Further, notwithstanding the non-representational nature of “knowledge”, it is this assumed “givenness” of objects of knowledge, or what Derrida would later creatively characterize as a position that is thoroughly informed by a “metaphysics of presence”, that comes, in a fundamental manner, to define the contours of Greek epistemology itself.

Further, within the Socratic framework, it is precisely this supposed givenness of our objects of knowledge, or the realm of the intelligible, that enables us to discern the necessity of the *psykhē* as something certain and unassailable. For if the objects of knowledge are marked by *intelligibility*, then it is evident that it demands something that is of an isomorphic nature of the intelligible to access it. However, the body being marked by corporeality, and hence, now as a member of the realm of the *perceptible*, and thereby, of the realm of *appearances* and change, cannot by itself account for accessing truths *per se*, since truths are unchanging. This is precisely the Socratic argument offered to Cebes in *Phaedo* (79a-80c). Thus, for Socrates the existence of the *psykhē* as distinct from the body is clearly an immediately intuited truth. It is not surprising, therefore, that Socrates does not seem to offer us much in terms of a “proof” for the existence of the *psykhē* given that its existence, for him, is evidently intuitive. Of course, as we have already noted, Plato does offer us a theoretical sketch of the soul, and its immortality, but there are no arguments offered to establish its existence *as such*. Proof for the existence of the *psykhē*, of course refurbished now in terms of the *cogito*, would have to wait till the 17<sup>th</sup> century for Descartes.

22. This is one of the reasons, why the JTB approach to knowledge just does not fit in the context of the Socratic framework of “knowledge” given the Socratic insistence on the ‘givenness’, and the relation of *immediacy* between the *psykhē* and the objects of knowledge. Given this immediacy, the question of justification along the positivistic understanding of ‘accounting for’ or ‘proof’ or ‘basis’ simply does not arise here.
23. The Greek society, as is well known, was entrenched in social hierarchies and it was one’s position in this hierarchy that defined one’s rights. Divinity itself was related to this hierarchy, wherein the closest natural proximity to the gods were reserved for the ruling class. In fact, one could say, following Guthrie, that Homeric religion was ‘of course the religion of the chieftains and heroes’ (1950, 118).

More importantly, the Greek divinities were not pictured as beings informed in their actions by moral notions of ‘justice’ or ‘good’ but rather, more often than not, motivated by spirited emotions like ‘hatred’, and ‘jealousy’. For instance, we have Herodotus, who makes Solon say: “I know that deity is full of envy and unstableness”, and the words carry no suggestion of impiety’, as it would today (Guthrie, 1950: 121). As Guthrie (1950) underscores, the Homeric



god, just as the ‘irresponsible aristocrat’, undertakes actions not because they were right, rather ‘they were right because he does them’ (p.123). It is this notion of unprincipled course of action as moral that is challenged by Socrates in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, wherein he corners Euthyphro to accept the view that the actions of gods are informed by an *a priori* knowledge of the “good” [10a]. The primary difference between human beings and gods, as was generally held in the Homeric world, which was also the key principle of morality, was that the latter were immortal. Thus the dictum, ‘know thyself’ as a moral principle, prior to its Socratic inversion, was simply a reminder of one’s mortal nature.

In fact, Socrates considers the poets’ depiction of the divine as ‘fictions at best’, and a ‘straight lie’ at its worst. Socrates vehemently opposes the poets’, including Homer’s and Aeschylus’, depiction of divinity as capable of falsehood and deception, and as beings who can partake in vices such as anger, envy and jealousy. As Socrates argues, the divine is incapable of evil and is the cause for the good alone. [*Republic*, 379c]

24. Thus in the strict sense of the term, there is no *philo-sophia* prior to the Socratic framework but merely *sophia*. The term ‘philosophy’, or the notion of ‘love’ for ‘wisdom’, is something that the Socratic framework truly inaugurates and is suggestive of the demand that a philosopher, truly worth the name, must love this quest for wisdom. This is clearly indicated by the fact that, in the *Republic*, Socrates defines ‘philosophy’ not merely as the ‘love for wisdom’ but rather as ‘the love of learning the love of wisdom’ [376b]. The question of quest simply does not emerge in the case where wisdom is divinely bestowed as a gift to a select few.
25. There is a difference of opinion amongst scholars as to what this likeness entails; whether it places the *psykhḗ* squarely within the realm of the intelligible or if it positions the *psykhḗ* as an intermediator between the realms of *perceptible* and the intelligible.
26. This reading, as we are well aware, is in contrast to the standard view which takes the “remark” as suggestive of the shift that Socrates brings in Philosophy from the broader “cosmological” questions, as was the primary engagement of the Presocratics, to concerns of more worldly and practical matters. It is dominantly seen as crediting Socrates with the “ethical turn” in Philosophy.
27. Also see *Republic* [500c] where the forms are described as ‘fixed and immutable’; and as ‘eternal’ [485a].
28. And before we may consider distinguishing, as we do today, between ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’, we must only recollect that the *Theaetetus* begins with the Socratic insistence that ‘wisdom’ and ‘knowledge’ are synonyms [145e].
29. In fact, the Socratic construal of the creator or the “demiurge”, as he lays it out explicitly in Book II of the *Republic*, can be seen as a prototype of the later Christian concept of God with the attribute of perfection as being central to it. In fact, one can clearly trace the broad contours of the prototype even more clearly in the *Timaeus*, where the very nature of the creator and the task of creation necessitates the created to be in the likeness of the “good” [29a-30b].
30. This aspect of seriousness or genuineness of one’s concern for truth within the Socratic framework has been much emphasized by Vlastos (1994) through his formulation of what he calls, the “‘say what you believe’ requirement”, of the Socratic method (p.7).
31. Socrates, in the *Theaetetus*, metaphorically surmises, ‘there exists in the mind of man a block of wax, which is of different sizes in different men; harder,

moister, and having more or less of purity in one than another, and in some an intermediate quality' [191c-d]. Now this might seem to run counter to our reading of Socrates as the first liberator of truth, since this could also be taken to equally suggest that human beings have, so to speak, different grades of wax—that is to hold that the human capacity to access knowledge differs from person to person. However, there is nothing in the *Theaetetus* that seems to suggest that this ability cannot be improved by working upon it. Thus, variations of aptitude to orient oneself towards the intelligible need not in itself be taken as absolute. In fact, Socrates' choice of a slave boy to demonstrate a mathematical truth in *Meno* is suggestive of the fact that under the right guidance and care, the *psykhé* can access the realm of the intelligible, irrespective of the state in which it finds itself at the beginning of the quest for truth.

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