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**Jessica Moss. 2021. Plato's Epistemology: Being and Seeming. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 272. Cloth. (ISBN 9780198867401) \$85.00.**

Jacques Bailly  
*University of Vermont*, jacques.bailly@uvm.edu

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## Book Reviews

Jessica Moss. 2021. *Plato's Epistemology: Being and Seeming*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 272. Cloth. (ISBN 9780198867401) \$85.00.

Epistemology nowadays usually holds that belief and knowledge apply to the same objects, but differ in other ways (e.g., belief is fallible, knowledge is infallible). A straightforward reading of Plato, however, holds that, for him, knowledge and belief are distinct because they apply to two different worlds, reality (Forms) and appearances (perceptibles, things that are becoming): hence the “Two Worlds View.” Gail Fine (Cambridge 1990), however, argued that Plato rejects Two Worlds and aligns better with modern epistemology (i.e., that knowledge and belief have overlapping objects), and much subsequent scholarship has followed suit. Fine’s analysis has great strengths: how, after all, can *Republic*’s philosophers use knowledge of Forms to rule if they rule over perceptibles, things that cannot be the object of knowledge.

Moss’ book, which works to be accessible to all, will find a mostly specialized audience. It revives the Two Worlds view: *epistēmē* (traditionally “knowledge”) is confined to Forms, and *doxa* (traditionally “belief”) is confined to appearances, because Plato’s metaphysics presents “Two Worlds,” one of appearances (inferior: unreal, untrue, unstable, likenesses), the other of being (superior: true, real, stable). Moss improves the foundations and defenses of that view and shows that in “Two Worlds” dialogues like *Republic*, *epistēmē* and *doxa* are not modern philosophical “knowledge” and “belief” and do not share the same concerns.

Chapter 1 shifts the burden of proof: *Republic* 477 (the “powers argument”: a central touchstone) says that doing different work or having different objects differentiates powers, and so *epistēmē* and *doxa* are distinct because their objects are distinct: that is Moss’ “natural, simple, straightforward” reading of that and other passages (*Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*). Hence, views claiming overlapping ranges for *doxa* and *epistēmē* should be preferred only if Moss’ distinct-objects reading fails. A survey of interpretations from antiquity to today shows history favoring Moss, which suggests that overlappers risk anachronism.

In chapter 2, Moss shows that Plato often individuates powers by their objects, cognitive powers specifically by their subject matters. Compare sight and hearing, essentially related to distinct, special, but not necessarily physically separate objects. There, objects define the powers, not vice versa. Moss claims Aristotle (*NE* 1139a6 ff, *i.a.*) has a similar objects-based account of cognition, whose underlying principle that *like is cognized by like* is shared by Plato. Many passages show that Forms and *epistēmē* are stable, clear, and precise (“clean”), whereas appearances and *doxa* are unstable, obscure, and imprecise (“messy”). Moreover, *Republic*’s Sun and Divided Line, *Philebus* 58 and *Timaeus* 29b-c show the cleanness of Forms makes our souls clean and the messiness of appearances makes souls messy.

Chapter 3 suggests that across all dialogues, the special object of *epistēmē* is the ontologically superior (marked by capitalization: Being, Is, etc.) whereas *doxa*’s object is the ontologically inferior. Superiority plays out in contrasts: 1) what Is (purity) v. what is-and-is-not, 2) Being (stability) v. becoming, 3) Being X (essentialness) v. X things, 4) Being (genuineness) v. being a likeness or image, 5) Being v. seeming, 6) a thing’s Being v. its affections, 7) X-ness’ Being v. X things, 8) X-ness’ Being v. perceptible X-ness. Rather than navigate and apply all these nuanced contrasts, Moss focuses on what they all share: superior v. inferior. She suggests Plato had an “under-theorized” notion of fundamentality: inferior depends on superior (cf. Aristotle’s primary substance). In sum, Plato takes it as obvious that *epistēmē* is of being, inflates being into ontologically superior Being, and specifies that Being defines *epistēmē* (112).

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Chapter 4 asks: does Moss' *epistêmê* do what Plato requires of *epistêmê*? Being infallible: Being is almost synonymous with truth in Plato. Being explanatory and "clean": clearly Forms are the cause of everything else and "clean," and so confining *epistêmê* to Forms is explanatory and clean. What about *epistêmê* applied to perceptibles? You cannot see sounds because there is nothing visible there. Likewise you cannot have *epistêmê* of perceptibles because there is no being there. But, some object, *Republic's* philosophers rule appearances. Note, however, that miscalculation derails *kallipolis*. Hence, philosophers are likely not using *epistêmê* directly to rule. Furthermore, appearances are images of Forms, philosophers are experts at distinguishing such things, and their work with perceptibles takes Forms as models and standards, and so they excel at ruling even without *epistêmê* of perceptibles.

Chapter 5: Moss' *epistêmê*, like "understanding" and *nous* in Heraclitus, Parmenides, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists, requires reaching underlying reality, which Plato pursues for fundamentally ethical reasons, whereas modern epistemology's "knowledge" is more independent of metaphysics and ethics.

Chapters 6-8 mirror chapters 3-5: 6) what *doxa* is of, 7) what *doxa* does, and 8) what *doxa* is, namely a cognition that is false or deficiently true, "unstable, unclear, imprecise, transmitted by shallow persuasion, and restricted to the perceptible realm" (196). Where generic "belief" is about anything and can become "knowledge," in the "Two Worlds dialogues" *doxa's* scope is confined to appearances and so never becomes *epistêmê*. Empirical cognition and dreaming better characterize *doxa*. In the Two Worlds dialogues, Plato discusses (objective) appearances presented to us and (subjective) appearances we form of them, but he moves without argument between the two, and they are always contrasted with being. That, combined with the restriction of *epistêmê* to Being, suggests that in those dialogues appearances define *doxa*. Consequently, Moss deflates occasional talk of "true" *doxai*: "the line between seemings as a whole and Being is much brighter than that between different kinds of seeming" (156-7): tellingly, when Plato contrasts *doxa* and *epistêmê*, he never speaks of "true" *doxa*. *Doxa* is both unstable, because appearances are, and subject to rhetoric, because appearances are rhetoric's subject matter. *Doxa* is confined to appearances because of Plato's like-is-cognized-by-like principle mentioned above: becoming seems, but Forms cannot seem. Moss once again focuses on superiority and inferiority: cave-dwellers have *doxa*, an inferior grasp of inferior objects, and they don't even know it. Humanity's default position is atheoretically acceptance via *eikasia* (imagination, conjecture) of what seems as being, distinguishing of images of appearances and appearances via *pistis* (trust, conviction, faith), and obliviousness to the *intellectual* work that appearances can summon (the "summoners passage" in *Republic* 521ff.). Plato's occasional talk of *doxa* of Form(s) is 1) speaking loosely, 2) Forms "appearing" via particulars, 3) what sometimes summons intellectual work that can break through to Forms, or 4) similar to saying that Thales' thought about water. People who lack *epistêmê* but have thoughts about Forms (e.g. most characters in the Two Worlds dialogues) have *dianoia* (the third stage on the divided line, inferior to *epistêmê*, but superior to *doxa*).

Chapters 9 and 10, briefly limns out Moss' views on *epistêmê* and *doxa* in "early dialogues" and *Theaetetus* respectively. With some problems, the views presented in the "early dialogues" either converge with the views in the Two Worlds dialogues or constitute a pathway leading to it. *Theaetetus* neglects Forms and their connections to *epistêmê*, but nonetheless in it 1) *epistêmê* is of Being and 2) cognition inherits qualities from its objects. By 1 and 2, "perception is *epistêmê*" (*Theaetetus's* first definition of *epistêmê*) readily leads to the Pythagorean thesis (seeming is being) and the Heraclitean thesis (being and becoming are not different), and Socrates' refutation of that first definition requires that *epistêmê* has a special superior realm. *Theaetetus's* second definition of *epistêmê* conceives *doxa* as generic belief, of which *epistêmê* is a special kind, and so differs from *doxa* of the

Two Worlds dialogues. The third definition (*epistêmê* is true *doxa* plus an explanatory account) may be a new epistemology. And yet, the definition's failure may show Plato rejecting Form-less epistemology, and emphasizing eye-witnessing in the jury passage (*Tht.* 201) may metaphorically emphasize contact with reality, and so *epistêmê* may still have its own exclusive object, Being.

Among this book's limitations: nothing about recollection or participation, and little attention paid to *Parmenides*. Overall, however, anyone interested in these issues must read Moss' excellent book, because it reacts to recent challenges to and provides shored-up better foundations for the historically prevalent interpretation.

Jacques Bailly  
University of Vermont  
[jacques.bailly@uvm.edu](mailto:jacques.bailly@uvm.edu)

Cyril Courier and Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, eds. 2022. *Ancient History from Below: Subaltern Experiences and Actions in Context*. London: Routledge. Pp. 320 14B/W Illustrations. Cloth. (ISBN 9780367424411) £120.00.

This trail-blazing volume appeared in September 2021 in the series Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies. Its title is enough to understand the mission of the editors, Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira and Cyril Courier, who mean to pose two crucial questions: is it possible to study the ancient world from *below*? If so, how? Because of the clarity with which these issues are addressed and the vigor that characterizes each contributor's theoretical approach, the volume offers an innovative bottom-up perspective on the Ancient World. While the answer to the first question—namely the “common conviction that another ancient history is possible” (1)—is announced by the editors in the introduction of the volume (1–31) and presented as both its political and epistemological principle (2), the ten chapters of *Ancient History from Below* analyze a wide variety of case studies, illustrating how to achieve such a change of perspective, which affects not only the common understanding of the past but also the most widespread methodologies used to manage ancient sources.

The publication of this volume cannot be considered a mere intellectual achievement, since it openly displays a *political* commitment. As Brent Shaw pinpoints in his foreword “What is this history to be?” (x–xxv), both the conditions of “history” and “pre-history”—far from being simplistic criteria of periodization—are determined by power and wealth (xv). Beyond being characterized by oppression and lack of hegemony, the condition of subaltern groups materializes as an absence of sources and the impossibility of leaving a trace in the world: a “crisis of the presence”, we could say, borrowing an anthropological category coined by De Martino (1977, 177–78); or a result of the “epistemic violence” conceptualized by Spivak (1985, 247–52) in her attempt to show how, throughout the history, archives have been a privileged place of crystallization of the power relations. History is not only the final judgment of the hegemonic group on the subaltern but also the narrative representation of their hegemony, as the editors underpin (4). Therefore, the methodological difficulty encountered by the contributors appears to be a sociological and anthropological problem, as well as an academic one (xiv).

The volume is built on a solid theoretical structure, the foundations of which lie in conception of historiography by Benjamin 1980, meant as the task to rescue the oppressed from the narrative shackles of the elites. Hence, to recover the memory of the subaltern groups, we must “brush history against the grain”. On the same page, if the definition of “subaltern groups” adopted in the volume is inspired by both Gramsci 1977 and the works of Guha 1983 and the Subaltern Studies Group, the notion of

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