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Episteme and Techne in Plato's Republic

Understanding the ways in which Plato uses the Greek epistemological vocabulary—terms like *episteme*, *techne*, and *gnosis*—has proven to be a significant challenge for commentators. In the Anglo-American analytic tradition of Plato scholarship, the most significant work tackling this problem, John Lyons's *Structural Semantics: An Analysis of Part of the Vocabulary of Plato* has dominated the discussion, although its results and method are often poorly understood (1963). The most important result from this work was Lyons's conclusion that *techne* and *episteme* are used interchangeably, which has been approvingly cited over the last fifty years (Nussbaum 1986; Roochnik 1996).

In my presentation, I will argue for a different view of the relationship between *techne* and *episteme* by examining how these terms are used in the *Republic*. My presentation will not address Lyons's work directly but will argue against this conclusion by demonstrating that the terms simply are not used interchangeably in this dialogue. Instead, as I will show, we should think of these terms as not interchangeable but analogous. Both *techne* and *episteme* are rational practices that can be opposed to a lower-powered practice that lacks reason (*empeiria* in the case of *techne*; *doxa* in the case of *episteme*). But, although they share one quality—rationality—they differ in other ways, most obviously what they are contrasted with (again, *empeiria* or *doxa*). In addition to this, *techne* is marked by a certain earthiness that *episteme* lacks.

This analysis comes out of looking at where and how Plato uses these terms. Plato does sometimes use both *techne* and *episteme* together, such as in observing in Book Seven that all the *technai* and *epistemai* use number and calculation (7.522c). This supports the idea that *episteme* and *techne* have shared qualities and, given that mathematics is a rational practice *par excellence*, identifying what they share as rationality seems reasonable.

In turn, there are arguments where only one term is used, suggesting that the terms are not interchangeable in such contexts. For example, *episteme* is used, but not *techne*, in the division of faculties (7.476b-480a). Since this passage is contrasting *episteme* with *doxa*, this directly supports my analysis that *episteme* is importantly related to *doxa*. Finally, *techne* is used, and never *episteme*, in certain pejorative contexts. For instance, Plato, when discussing what should be included in the program of education for the guardians, dismisses the possibility that the *technai* should be included, claiming that “ αἱ τε γὰρ τέχναι βάνανσοί που ἅπασαι ἔδοξαν εἶναι ” (“all the *technai* are somehow base,” 7.522b), presumably partly reflecting the common elitist bias against people who have to work to make a living. This ties in with the ‘earthiness’ I mentioned above: *techne*, and not *episteme*, for Plato, is ultimately something that all sorts of people in Kallipolis will have, but *episteme* is the exclusive province of the guardians.

Plato's knowledge vocabulary, then, is a rich field for study; in my presentation, I will give a taste of how I see him structuring this linguistic field, and thus analyzing the varieties of knowledge that one can find in the Kallipolis or even his contemporary Athenian society.