

LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE *THEAETETUS*

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I WOULD LIKE TO PUT FORWARD the suggestion that the *Theaetetus* is a progressive development of the concept of knowledge. To this end, instead of focusing on one or two particular passages, I shall go through the dialogue as a whole in terms of what it has to say about the problem of knowledge. I hope that what is gained in a synoptic view of the dialogue will compensate for comparatively brief time spent on each passage.

I

At 145e Socrates asks Theaetetus whether knowledge and wisdom are the same thing. Theaetetus answers in the affirmative and there matters are allowed to rest.¹ Coming after *Republic* 4's analysis of wisdom as knowledge *together with self-mastery* (the subordination of appetite and competitiveness to reason), this easy identification of wisdom with knowledge is provocative and leads one to wonder whether theaporetic ending of the dialogue is in any way connected with this oversimplified beginning. Plato's readers would hardly have forgotten the doctrine of the tripartite soul so quickly, and there seems to be a deliberate reminder of it in that the names of the initial speakers in the dialogue, Eucleides ("renown") and Terpsion ("delight"), correspond to the two lower motivations of the soul, "love of honor" and "love of pleasure." Later, in the long central digression that recalls the *Republic*² and *Phaedo*, where So-

¹ Socrates' reply is noncommittal: "Now it is this very thing that perplexes me, and I am not sufficiently capable of grasping by myself what knowledge is." (Translations are my own except where noted.)

² Perhaps the opening of the *Theaetetus* is meant to recall the opening words of the *Republic* (and the image of the Cave). Joan Harrison notes that "Eucleides . . . was 'going down' (*katabainōn*) to the harbor when he

he replies, "No, by Zeus! Not by heart" (142e). But Socrates had recited it for him verbatim and refreshed his memory every time Euclides went to Athens, until by now Euclides has almost all of it written down (143a). Not only is Euclides' memory not impressive, but he has gone about this task in a lazy, piecemeal fashion. Terpsion's memory or energy is unreliable also, for he had "always intended" to ask Euclides to read it, but has not actually done so until now—whether out of forgetfulness or procrastination he does not say. He wants to hear it now, however, because he is tired and needs to rest (143a). Euclides, too, is tired and would like a rest, so he decides to have his slave read the conversation to them while they rest (143b). He also mentions that he put the conversation in the form of direct discourse rather than narrative because it would be too much trouble (*παρέχουεν πράγματα*) to put in Socrates' narrative asides, such as "And I said," between all the speeches (143c).

This combination of poor memory and lazy lack of spirit becomes immediately evident *within* the conversation in the person of Theodorus, who cannot remember who Theaetetus' father is (although Socrates, who has never met Theaetetus, knows his father and native city as soon as he sees him), and who fearfully resists every attempt to draw him into the discussion.⁵

The significance of memory, which Plato foreshadows by these dramaturgic means, will emerge in due course; but some preliminary remarks may be made about that of courage (which is here opposed both to laziness and fearfulness). Throughout the ensuing discussion the need for courage and boldness is continually emphasized.⁶ A clue to the reason for this may lie in a passage of the *Meno*, a dialogue which the *Theaetetus* recalls at almost every turn.⁷ There,

⁵ 146b, 162a-b, 165a-b, 169a-b, 177c, 183c-d.

⁶ E.g., 148d, 151d, 151d-e, 157d, 166a-b, 177d, 187b. Cf. 153b. See also *Sophist* 261b. "Courage" in this sense, however, does not necessarily imply all the attributes ascribed to it as one of the cardinal virtues in *Republic* 4 (442c).

⁷ For example: 1) At 146c-d Theaetetus is rebuked for giving a list of examples in answer to the question "What is knowledge?" as Meno had been for "What is virtue?" (72a). 2) At 148c Socrates offers a definitional example of clay as earth mixed with water, as he had offered Meno the example of shape defined as that which always accompanies color (75b). 3) The *Meno* took as its model the knowledge that the square root of an area of eight is not expressible as a whole number but may be expressed as a diagonal (82b-85b); the *Theaetetus* proceeds to take as an example of knowledge the distinction between areas whose roots are expressible as

after introducing the doctrine of recollection, Socrates concludes that this refutes Meno's paradox by showing that learning is possible

if one is *courageous* and does not desist from seeking; for seeking and learning is the whole of recollection. One must not be convinced by that contentious doctrine [Meno's paradox]; that doctrine will make us *lazy* and is pleasant for soft people to hear. This one, however, makes people energetic and searching. (81d, emphasis added)

Whether or not the *Theaetetus* has recollection in its background, it reaffirms the *Meno's* claim that, whatever theoretical knowledge may be, it is not something easily acquired. It requires the courage to persist amid difficulties and frustrations, and the boldness to pursue hypotheses that may fly in the face of common sense. According to the digression in the middle of the dialogue, what is called for ultimately is nothing less than the courage to change one's way of life. This is not the kind of knowledge which *Theaetetus* will take as his model, however.

whole numbers (squares) and those which are not (oblongs) (147d-148b). 4) Socrates' remark that people think he is only a strange person who reduces others to an impasse (149a) precisely echoes Meno's complaint at 79e-80b. 5) The *Theaetetus* (187b ff.), like the *Meno* (97a ff.), discusses knowledge by comparison with true opinion. 6) The *Theaetetus* more than once (198c-d; cf. 196d-e, 209e) alludes to Meno's paradox (80d). 7) The *Meno* ends with Socrates saying, "Convince your friend Anytus [who had warned Socrates at 94e that he may find himself in serious trouble for critical remarks he had just made] of these things of which you are now convinced, so that he may become more calm. If you convince him you will also benefit the Athenians"; the *Theaetetus* ends with Socrates going off to answer the indictment of Meletus, of which Anytus was co-author. As an eighth parallel one may add W.G. Runciman's observation that the conclusion of the *Theaetetus* is only apparently aporetic, like that of the *Meno* (*Plato's Later Epistemology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962], 7). Regarding example 3, Malcolm Brown remarks, "Already in antiquity this point of parallelism was made by the anonymous commentator on *Theaetetus* (eds. H. Diels and W. Schubart, *Berliner Klassikertexte* ii, 1905): 'the [side of the] two-foot square is also incommensurable . . . but he left it out, they say, because it is in the *Meno*'" ("*Theaetetus*: Knowledge as Continued Learning," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 4 [October 1969]: 360, n. 4).

A further suggestion by F. M. Cornford, who notes several of the above as well, is that Socrates' midwifery corresponds to the *Meno's* doctrine of recollection (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935], 27-8). This is often rejected on the grounds that the answers elicited by midwifery are frequently wrong (e.g., John McDowell, *Plato, Theaetetus* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973], 117); however, the same is true of the answers elicited by Socrates from Meno's slave (82e, 83e).

II

That Plato should assign to a mathematician the role of defining knowledge as sense-perception (151e) is not surprising when one considers that for the Greeks, mathematics centered on geometry, the proofs of which were illustrated by diagrams. The *Meno*, however, reminded us that what one learns *only* by looking at the diagrams is not knowledge at all. Socrates says there about the slave:

At present these opinions, having just been stirred up in him, are like a dream. If, however, one were to ask him the same things many times and in many ways, you know that finally he would have knowledge of them that is no less accurate than anyone's. (85c-d)

In the *Theaetetus* Socrates pursues the opposite path. Rather than ascertaining whether Theaetetus might have mathematics in mind as the model of knowledge (as is so often the case in Plato), and then pushing him further in the direction of the intelligible, Socrates instead pushes him in the contrary direction, to the most phenomenalistic way of conceiving knowledge. The world *is* just as it seems to each observer. Plato begins the dialogue with the most elementary conception of knowledge, the lowest grade of information, mere sense experience. From this he will generate under the pressure of criticism progressively more complete models in accordance with the method of hypothesis.⁸

1. This first position, which is now to be attacked, is assimilated to Protagoras' doctrine that "Man is the measure of all things," a doctrine that Socrates interprets as the nonfalsifiability of sense impressions. Socrates' first refutation is that Protagoras might as well have said not that the measure of all things is man, but pig or baboon. Then he could laugh at us for thinking him as wise as a god when in fact he is no wiser than a tadpole. In that case there would be no sense in paying to be his student, or in the practice of Socratic midwifery, or dialectic, since truth is already to be found in mere perception (161c-e). Neither Theodorus nor Theaetetus

⁸ For this interpretation of the method of hypothesis, see Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 127-38. Kenneth Sayre points out that "the *Theaetetus* unquestionably is Plato's most ambitious and sustained attempt to apply the method of hypothesis in matters of philosophic argumentation" (*Plato's Analytic Method* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969], 232).

can find anything wrong with this refutation, but Socrates points out that it is an example of demagoguery (162d), and that Protagoras would accuse them of accepting appeals to mere likelihood (162e). We are not to be deterred by the *seeming* absurdity of saying that a pig or baboon is the measure of all things. On the basis of the foregoing theory of perception, which asserted that the object of perception is always relative to the perceiver, it is plausible and even necessary to conclude that pigs and baboons are the measures of all things (that is, all that they perceive).

But a residue of Socrates' objection survives this reply. His second point still stands. On Protagoras' account it makes no sense to consider one person to be wiser than another or for one person to presume to teach or criticize another. In fact, Protagoras charged for teaching, and Socrates' midwifery and dialectics were considered valuable by his students. Nevertheless this point does not invalidate Protagoras' claims because it is really talking about a different level of knowledge. It speaks of conceptual or interpretive knowledge rather than perceptual information. Accordingly, although this first argument seems at first inconsequential, on closer inspection it implies a distinction between two levels of knowledge, a distinction that will turn out to be important.

2. The next objection makes this distinction more explicit. What about hearing a foreign language, Socrates asks, or even seeing written words in our own language when we cannot read? How can it be maintained that perception is knowledge when we perceive these sounds and symbols but do not understand them? Theaetetus replies that

we know about them just that which we see and hear. In the one case we both see and know the shape and color, and in the other case we hear and at the same time know the higher and lower sounds. However, those things which the literate person and the interpreter teach about them are neither perceived by sight or hearing, nor known. (163b-c)

Socrates praises this answer but adds, "I had better not disagree with you about this, so that you will grow." Coming after the last objection the basis for such a disagreement is not hard to discern. Once again the two levels of knowledge are visible, sensory information and interpretation thereof, but here the latter is made evident. At the first level everyone's knowledge is coextensive with

the information supplied by their senses, and none is any better than any other. But at the second level it is undeniable that some people (the literate) know the *meaning* of these phenomena better than other people, and this second kind of knowledge is not coextensive with sense perception. Once again a portion of Socrates' objection remains untouched by the reply. There is an interpretive as well as a sensory kind of knowledge, and the former is not reducible to the latter.

3. The implications of the next objection point in the same direction, but with sharper focus still. On the hypothesis that knowledge is perception, if we see something we must know it. But if we close our eyes, then, even if we still remember the object, we must be said no longer to know it. This would be a "monstrous" conclusion (163c-164b).

No reply is made to this objection, but Socrates remarks that their conclusion was derived from a contentious rather than a philosophical style of argument (164c) and that if Protagoras were here he would have much to say in reply (164e). The fallacy of the argument may be expressed as a collapsing of the distinction between memory *of* knowledge and memory *as* knowledge. I can look at a book and say that I perceive and therefore know that a book is on my desk. I can then close my eyes and say that I remember perceiving and knowing that a book was on my desk. But it does not follow that I still know that there is a book on my desk. There is no contradiction or monstrous conclusion. Nevertheless memory is a kind of knowledge, although of a different order than perception. And as Aristotle mentions at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* (1.1.980b28), a plurality of memories constitutes experience, which is an important kind of knowing different from sense perception. Memory is in fact a necessary condition for interpretive knowledge, and the implications of this example therefore clarify the distinction between perceptual and interpretive knowledge adumbrated in the first two objections.

4. The final objection in this series, introduced indeed as "the most formidable," is that if we look at something with one eye closed, then we both see and do not see, and accordingly both know and do not know the object. This is said to reduce Theaetetus' hypothesis, that perceiving is knowing, to absurdity (165b-d). Theaetetus is clearly not persuaded by this line of argument, but lacks the weapons with which to fight it. With some encouragement he might have

hit upon the distinctions made in the definition of contradiction in the *Republic*,⁹ but Socrates gives him the opposite of encouragement.

What is the point of this “most formidable,” most transparently fallacious argument? Might the two different eyes, one open and one closed, be meant metaphorically? The previous three objections have reminded us of the difference between perceptual and interpretive knowledge, and the difference between perception and memory. In previous dialogues, beginning with the *Meno*, the dialogue most often alluded to in the *Theaetetus*, memory was used as a metaphor for a latent component to knowledge furnished not by the senses but by the mind itself, the analogue of Aristotle’s “active intellect.” Activated by perception, this latency may be “recollected,” making possible judgments of predication (“This is beautiful”) and interpretive knowledge (“Justice is the harmony of the tripartite soul”). In the dialogues after the *Meno* recollection is pictured as an intellectual “seeing” of the forms.¹⁰ And shortly hereafter in the *Theaetetus* we will be told that there are two kinds of seeing and two kinds of failure to see.¹¹ The philosopher sees what lies “above” although he may be blind to what lies at his feet or in front of his eyes (174a–c), while others see what is at their feet and before their eyes but cannot see the whole nor what is “above” them (174e–175d, 176e). The “higher” realm of the philosopher is that of divinity and goodness, while the other is that of the mortal and evil (176a).

Are these two kinds of seeing prefigured in the argument about the open and closed eye, an argument which is announced as “the most formidable” but which is a joke if taken literally?¹² We need not try to decide whether Plato intended this or not. The only im-

⁹ Book 4, 436b ff.: a real contradiction must refer to the same time, the same part of the subject, and the same object. In the present case we are speaking of different parts (eyes) of the subject and so there is no contradiction.

¹⁰ E.g., *Phaedrus* 247c ff., *Republic* 7.516a–b, *Parmenides* 132a.

¹¹ Cf. *Republic* 7.517d–518b; also Aristotle’s distinction between what is most clear to us and what is most clear in itself (*Metaphysics* 1.1.993b9–11, 7.3.1029b3–12).

¹² Socrates goes on to say that similar problems would arise if someone were to ask whether we can know the same thing sharply (*οξύ*) and dimly (*ἀμβλύ*), close at hand (*ἐγγύθεν*) but not at a distance (*πῶρρωθεν*), intensely (*σφόδρα*) and quietly (*ἤρέμα*) (165d). According to the doctrine of recollection, one might say that sensibles are perceived sharply, close at hand, and intensely, while intelligibles are perceived dimly, at a distance, and quietly.

portant question will be if the doctrine of recollection may usefully be brought to bear on the problems of the *Theaetetus*, and this will be considered in due course.

The distinction between perceptual and interpretive knowledge becomes all but explicit when "Protagoras," in order to defend his theory against the preceding refutations, distinguishes knowledge in the previous sense from wisdom. Speaking for Protagoras, Socrates reaffirms that each of us is the measure of all things because "what is" cannot mean anything other than what appears to a perceiver. But although in this sense everyone is equally knowledgeable, wisdom may be distinguished from such knowledge as the ability, "when bad things appear and are for someone, to implement a change and make good things appear and be to him" (166d). Thus interpretive or theoretical knowledge exists in addition to perceptual knowledge, but it is of a pragmatic rather than factual nature. It does not tell us what exists but only what is desirable and how to achieve it. It is in this sense that doctors, educators, and sophists are wiser than ordinary people. They replace the worse with the better, but not the false with the true. There is no such thing as falsity "because it is impossible to think [*δοξάσαι*] that which is not" (167a).

"Protagoras" closes with a Socratic appeal for fairness and seriousness in argument so that

your partners will blame themselves for their confusion and aporia, rather than blaming you, and they will follow and love you, and hate and flee from themselves to philosophy in order that, by becoming different, they may be liberated from their former selves. (168a)

The sentiment is Socratic rather than Protagorean, and points out the difference between them, which will soon be elaborated in Socrates' "digression." For Protagoras, wisdom means the ability to get rid of unpleasant perceptions in favor of pleasant ones; for Socrates, it means getting rid of one kind of life in favor of another.

III

The first set of four objections was aimed at the Protagorean doctrine understood as perceptual knowledge, and forced the distinction between perceptual and interpretive knowledge. The next

set, also of four objections, will be in terms of interpretive knowledge alone.

1. The first refutation of this series is the famous palintrope or self-refutation argument. "Shall we say that people's beliefs are always true, or sometimes true and sometimes false? On either alternative it follows that they don't always believe what is true but both" (170c). The conclusion obviously follows from the second alternative, of which it is a restatement. The subsequent argument is designed to show that it must follow from the first as well. The argument may initially be simplified as follows. The minor premise is that people generally disagree with Protagoras' claim that each person is the only judge of what is true for him. They think that different people have different degrees of wisdom about different things, and that wisdom is true thought and that ignorance is false belief (170c; cf. 170a-b). The major premise is that Protagoras claims that what people believe is true (171c). The conclusion follows that Protagoras must concede the general belief to be true, that not everything we believe is true. Since this contradicts his own position the latter must be false.

The actual course of the argument is more complicated because of Protagoras' insistence that truth is always relative to some believer. A belief is not true simply, but true *for* someone. Accordingly, the way the argument puts it is that Protagoras' theory may be true for him but false for tens of thousands of others (170e). It further follows that, if the theory were right, then if no one believed it it would *ex hypothesi* be false for everyone and therefore false. And if no one believed it but Protagoras, then:

First, by as much as those who believe it outnumber those who do not, it is that much more not true than true. . . . Second comes a most elegant point: he accepts that the opinion of those who disagree with him about his own opinion—in that they believe it is false—must somehow be true, since he agrees that what anyone believes really is. (171a)

The validity of this argument has been much debated.¹³ It is sometimes felt that the reasoning depends on an illicit transition from "true for someone" to "true" simply: Protagoras would accept

¹³ Cf. Sayre, 88-92; Myles Burnyeat, "Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's 'Theaetetus,'" *Philosophical Review* 85, no. 2 (April 1976): 172-95; and Jay Newman, "The Recoil Argument," *Apeiron* 16 (1982): 47-52.

that his theory is not true for most people but it would still be true for him and no contradiction would arise. But such a defense would be disingenuous. Protagoras wants to persuade us that his theory is true for everyone, otherwise his arguing for it, publishing it, and teaching it would be inexplicable. It would be damaging for Protagoras to be forced to admit that his theory is true *only* for himself (and perhaps a few others), but false for everyone else. Moreover, having admitted that, it would be difficult for him to deny that the theory is false *in general*.¹⁴

What this argument demands of Protagoras is that he acknowledge that *at the level of interpretation* not all judgments are equally valid. He was willing to acknowledge that at this level we can distinguish beliefs that are pragmatically superior from those that are pragmatically inferior, but not beliefs that are true from those that are false. The present argument makes the point that, on the contrary, Protagoras does regard his interpretations as truer than those of nonrelativists, and that unless he acknowledges that his perceptual relativism ceases to be relativistic at the level of theory or interpretation, he cannot help but undermine his entire position. He must concede that no one "is the measure of any single thing that he does not understand [$\mu\acute{\alpha}\theta\eta$]" (171c). Perception may be relativized, but understanding may not.

2. This is followed by a refutation which is interrupted by Socrates' digression. Socrates begins by recapitulating the claim made earlier in Protagoras' defense: although sensible qualities are just as they appear to each of us, one person may be wiser than another in pragmatic pursuits such as medicine (171e). The same dichotomy now appears in the larger context of the state. According to the theory, values are relative to the state, as *sensa* are to the individual:

Regarding what is noble and shameful,¹⁵ just and unjust, pious and not, however each state legislates these in accordance with its beliefs, that is how they in truth *are* for it. And in these matters no one is

¹⁴ If Protagoras were to rise from the ground up to his neck, Socrates says, he would accuse us of talking nonsense before sinking back and running off (171d). This is sometimes taken to be an admission by Plato that the argument is flawed, but, as Burnyeat points out (p. 191), the fact that Protagoras would run away after repudiating the conclusion suggests that his reasons would not be good ones.

¹⁵ This translation of $\kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{\alpha}$ and $\alpha\iota\sigma\chi\rho\acute{\alpha}$ fits the context better than "beautiful and ugly."

wiser—neither one individual than another, nor one state than another. . . . None of these has by nature an essence [*οὐσίαν*] of its own, but rather the common belief becomes true when it is believed, and for as long a time as it is believed. (172a,b)

But when it comes to what is *advantageous or disadvantageous* to the state, Protagoras would not deny that one adviser differs from another, and one state from another, with respect to truth. He would not dare to say that whatever a state believes to be in its advantage necessarily is so (172a-b). The earlier distinction between perception and interpretation is here extended by analogy into a distinction between facts and values.

It is significant that the long digression (172c-177c) begins just at the point where values are ascribed to convention rather than nature. One of the functions of the digression is to repudiate the claim that justice and piety are arbitrary values without essence in nature. Rather, they are precisely the natural essences that the philosopher strives to know (175c, 176b). It is acquisition of this kind of knowledge that requires the “courage” spoken of in the dialogue’s opening passages. Knowledge of this kind would be different both from perceptual and interpretive knowledge of the corporeal world, as distinguished above. The latter two correspond to the lowest levels of the divided line, *eikasia* and *pistis*. *Eikasia*, as portrayed in the Cave, is simply the uncritical awareness of passing perceptions. *Pistis*, which is the highest awareness of the corporeal world, must then be our interpretation of the former experiences.¹⁶ In the terminology of the Divided Line, the kind of knowledge referred to in the digression would be *noēsis*. The remaining kind of knowledge, *dianoia*, the drawing out of the implications of one’s initial postulates, has been illustrated throughout the dialogue by the method of hypothesis.

The digression is reminiscent of the middle books of the *Republic* (especially the Divided Line and the allegory of the Cave) because it deals with the difference between a life devoted to corporeal, mortal values, and one devoted to intelligible, divine values. The re-

¹⁶ Judging from *Republic* 7.516c-d, *eikasia* would seem to correspond not only to sense perception but also to what Aristotle, at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* (980b28-981b10), calls “experience” (*ἐμπειρία*) in contrast to “art” (*τέχνη*) and “science” (*ἐπιστήμη*): i.e., an aggregate of memories not yet reduced to rules and principles. Such reduction, when it does not go beyond the sensible world, would correspond to *pistis*.

semblance between the two sections extends not only to their content but also to their placement: the *Theaetetus* digression, like the middle books of the *Republic*, occurs in the very center of the dialogue and breaks into the beginning of the discussion of a political question, which is subsequently resumed as if the digression had never taken place.

After the digression Socrates reiterates the beginning of the previous argument: People like Protagoras may claim that *justice* is only a matter of what is legislated by the state, but no one would say that whatever a state thinks is *good* or “advantageous to itself, really is so” (177d). Whether it is so or not can only be determined in the future. But Protagoras can hardly maintain that each of us is the measure of what is going to happen. Rather, the ability to make predictions is what sets experts apart from ordinary people in matters such as medicine, food, and music, and what sets Protagoras apart in matters of law (178a–e). It follows that some of us are wiser than others, and that it is they who are the measure,¹⁷ not ordinary people (179b).

“Protagoras” had already agreed, in Socrates’ defense of him, that some people are wiser than others in that they are able to replace unpleasant sensations with pleasant ones, but he denied that this had anything to do with truth or falsity (166d). Socrates here opposes that denial by pointing out that the ability to make such replacements successfully is the ability to predict what will happen, and predictions are indeed qualifiable as true or false.

At this point Socrates makes fully explicit the difference between the (infallible) perceptual and (fallible) interpretive levels of knowledge that has been implicit throughout the earlier discussions:

There are also many other ways to establish that not all of everyone’s beliefs are true. However, with regard to the passing impressions from which our sense perceptions and corresponding beliefs arise, it is harder to confirm that they are not true. . . . It may be that they are unassailable, and that those who say they are fully clear and instances of knowledge are perhaps right. (179c)

3. Socrates next turns to the flux ontology underlying the theory that perception is knowledge. The connection between the two the-

¹⁷ μέτρον. Perhaps Plato’s choice of terminology in the *Statesman’s* doctrine of “due measure” (πρὸς τὸ μέτρον) hearkens back to this discussion. In any case there, as here, the doctrine is justified in terms of the arts (*Statesman* 284a).

ories is presumably that, because everything is in flux, all that exists is the "passing impressions" (this was the point of the theory of perception developed earlier [156a-157c] and repeated here [182a-b]), and there can be no other knowledge than this. The flux theory is that everything is in motion, not only in the sense of movement in space, but also in the sense of alteration (181c-e). It follows from this that the sensuous qualities which we perceive are changing at the very moment that we perceive them, and the act of perception itself is always changing into nonperception. Moreover, since perception is knowledge, knowledge also ultimately collapses into an identity with nonknowledge (182c-e). Consequently, "if everything is in motion, every answer about anything one is asked will be equally right" and language itself will break down (183a-b).

In the *Parmenides* Parmenides says to Socrates,

if anyone does not admit the existence of forms of things or mark off a form under which each individual thing is classed, he will not have anything on which to fix his thoughts, as long as he does not admit that the idea of each thing is always the same, and in this way he will utterly destroy the power of discourse. (135b-c)

Is the present argument meant to remind us of this warning, and thereby of the theory of forms? If so it would explain the puzzling fact that Parmenides is mentioned immediately before and after the present passage but to no obvious purpose. Beforehand Socrates says that he "nearly forgot that others declare the opposite" of the flux theory. These others are Melissus and Parmenides, whose views Socrates proposes to examine after they examine the proponents of flux (180d-181a). Afterwards Theaetetus reminds Socrates of this next task but Socrates declines to pursue it, on the grounds that they could not do justice to Parmenides' views except at great length (183c-184a). Socrates' remark, "I met him when I was quite young and he quite old" (183e), is clearly meant to remind us of that dialogue.

4. If this was an indirect reminder of the theory of forms, the next section is a direct reminder of it. Socrates raises the question whether there is some one part (*μίαν τινὰ ἰδέαν*) within us with which we perceive whatever each of the senses perceives only separately—something that perceives sounds *and* sights, and so forth, each of which is proper to a specific sense (184d-e). The test is whether there is anything we can think about that involves more than one

sense. If there is, this common factor cannot be reduced to what the senses give us.

In fact there are several such common qualities. We can think that the objects of seeing and hearing both *exist*, and that each is *different* from the other and the *same* as itself (185a). Socrates thus generates three of the five "greatest kinds" of the *Sophist*, existence, sameness, and difference (the other two, motion and rest, are implicit in the opposition between the Heracliteans and the Eleatics). He further establishes that the mind will discern that each of these objects is one, and both together are two, and can also ask whether they are similar or dissimilar (185b). To these qualities Theaetetus adds odd and even (185d), two of the traditional Platonic forms. And Socrates, remarking that Theaetetus has shown himself to be not ugly, as Theodorus had claimed, but beautiful and good, proceeds to add to the list the forms beautiful and ugly, and good and bad (186a). What all these qualities have in common is that the soul somehow perceives them through itself rather than through the body's sensory faculties (185e).

Now, conceptions about being (*οὐσία*) and value (*ὠφέλειαν*) can be attained, if at all, only through a long and difficult education, and truth and knowledge are inaccessible unless one can discern being. Accordingly, knowledge can be found only through the qualities that the soul finds by itself, rather than those that it received from the bodily senses. Knowledge cannot therefore be the same as sense-perception (186c-e).

Are these qualities in fact the Platonic forms? Like the forms of the *Republic*, they are apprehended only as the result of a long and difficult education,¹⁸ but whether they may be regarded as "separate" forms or not cannot be answered on the strength of this passage. At the very least they correspond to the forms' aspect as "universals," although even this is not explicit. Unlike the characterization of forms in *Republic* 10, they are not said to be posited for "each multiplicity to which we give the same name" (596a). Instead we have a plurality of senses (sight, hearing, and so on) to which we can apply the same interpretative categories. But it comes

¹⁸ In the *Republic*, six stages are specified: 1) arithmetic: 525a-b; 2) plane geometry: 526c; 3) solid geometry: 528b; 4) astronomy: 528e; 5) harmony: 530d; 6) dialectics: 531d. Theaetetus has studied the first five of these with Theodorus (145c-d).

to the same thing. To say that we both see and hear something beautiful is to say that "beautiful" is not a unique name but is rather one which can be applied to a plurality of sensory experiences, that is, it is a universal. The present passage affirms the need for universals, and further affirms that these universals are not reducible to sensory information, "but rather the soul, itself by itself, discerns what is common to all" (185d-e).

IV

The above discussions show, Socrates says, "that we should not seek [knowledge] in perception at all, but in whatever the name is, when the soul, itself by itself, is engaged with what is real" (187a). Theaetetus revises his definition of knowledge to "true opinion" (or true "judgment" [δόξα]), but Socrates wonders how an opinion could ever be false (b-d). In an attempt to answer this he develops six models of knowledge, which, like the earlier refutations, may be construed as progressively more adequate hypotheses.

1. The first model is the simplest, abstracting from learning and forgetting, and concentrating only on knowing and not knowing. On this model false opinion can mean only that we think that 1) something we know is either a) something else that we know or b) something that we don't know; or else that 2) something we do not know is either a) something else that we do not know or b) something that we know. All these are interpreted as judgments of identity, as if we said, "Socrates, whom I know, is Theaetetus, whom I also know," or "Socrates, whom I know, is someone whom I do not know." Consequently they are dismissed as implausible accounts (188a-d).

2. The second model substitutes "being" for "knowing," so that to have a false opinion means to judge "what is not" about something (188d). Here the "is" of judging is interpreted as existential rather than identificatory, but to no avail. Earlier Protagoras had insisted that there is no such thing as falsity "because it is impossible to think that which is not" (167a). And here too Socrates concludes that "thinking what is not" = "thinking nothing" = "not thinking" (189a).

3. In the next model Socrates combines the first two. Now false opinion is "interchanged opinion" (ἀλλοδοξία), which means that we "always have an opinion about something that is, but of

one thing instead of another" (189b-c). The first clause is existential, the second identificatory. Theaetetus approves of this model, "for when someone thinks beautiful instead of ugly, or ugly instead of beautiful, then, most truly, his opinion is false" (189c).¹⁹ But Socrates demurs, saying that we would never say that "the beautiful is ugly" or "the unjust is just" or "the odd is even" (190b).

Socrates has perverted Theaetetus' meaning. Theaetetus clearly meant the copula to be one of predication: my opinion is false if I believe that a beautiful thing is ugly (something unfamiliar may seem ugly to me at first, but beautiful on further acquaintance). But Socrates misinterprets the copula as one of identity, as in the first model. Plato gives with one hand and takes back with the other. He has Theaetetus remind us that the function of the copula may be predication (which would go a long way toward solving the present aporia), but he then has Socrates suppress the concept. Perhaps his intention is to remind us of the participation of things in forms (the ontological basis of predication), but without making the theory of forms explicit in the *Theaetetus*.²⁰ In fact this is the

¹⁹ Socrates' rebuke of Theaetetus for saying that something can "truly" be "false" seems to be a reference to self-predication and the *Phaedo's* doctrine of opposites. The aporiai at 154c-155c recall the similar aporiai of the *Phaedo* (96e-97b, 100e-102b) that led Socrates to the theory of forms. In a similar context in the *Sophist* (263d), the Eleatic stranger uses a parallel phrase. In the present passage Theaetetus had said, "truly thinks what is false" (ἀληθῶς δοξάζει ψευδῆ), while the stranger will say, "truly there is a false statement" (ἀληθῶς γίγνεσθαι λόγος ψευδῆς).

²⁰ This would so far tend to corroborate Cornford's suggestion that, "The Forms are excluded in order that we may see how we can get on without them; and the negative conclusion of the whole discussion means that, as Plato had taught ever since the discovery of the Forms, without them there is no knowledge at all" (p. 28). Cornford interprets the many allusions to earlier dialogues in which the theories of forms and recollection were presented as hints that those doctrines should be brought to bear on the present discussions. McDowell, on the contrary, thinks that such allusions "can be read as an implicit criticism of the Theory of Forms and the Theory of Recollection" (p. 219); and that "it is hard to see how Plato could have supposed, as Cornford's thesis would imply, that a restatement of the Theory of Forms would solve all these problems at a stroke" (p. 258)—a view that he shares with Glenn Morrow ("Plato and the Mathematicians: An Interpretation of Socrates' Dream in the *Theaetetus* [201e-206c]," *Philosophical Review* 79 [July 1970]: 309-33; p. 312). Others, such as Sayre (pp. 58 n.2, 135) and Jürgen Sprute ("Über den Erkenntnisbegriff in Platons *Theaitet*," *Phronesis* 13 (1968): 47-67; pp. 52, 67), are closer to Cornford's position. I shall argue that the theories of forms and recollection can, in fact, largely overcome the aporiai of the *Theaetetus*.

closest that the *Theaetetus* ever comes to exploring predication, even though it is clear from the earlier (and later) dialogues that that is where the models for true and false belief must be sought.

4. At this point learning and memory are added to the model (191c-d), after having been expressly excluded since the beginning. Learning is compared to the impression made by a shape in a block of wax, and memory is the retention of that shape. Socrates now goes through an odd, selectively exhaustive²¹ list of types of judgment in order to discover cases where false opinion is possible (192a-c). It is not possible in the following cases (1a translates as, "Things which one knows and remembers but does not perceive, are other things which one knows and remembers but does not perceive"; 3a as, "Things which one knows and perceives and has the [wax] impression corresponding to the perception are other things which etc."):

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1a. $(KM \sim P)_1$ is $(KM \sim P)_2$ | 2a. P_1 is P_2 |
| b. K is $\sim K \sim M$ | b. P is $\sim P$ |
| c. $\sim K_1$ is $\sim K_2$ | c. $\sim P_1$ is $\sim P_2$ |
| d. $\sim K$ is K | d. $\sim P$ is P |
| 3a. $(KPC)_1$ is $(KPC)_2$ | 4a. $(\sim K \sim P)_1$ is $(\sim K \sim P)_2$ |
| b. $(KPC)_1$ is $K_2[\sim P]$ | b. $(\sim K \sim P)_1$ is $\sim K_2[P]$ |
| c. $(KPC)_1$ is $P_2[\sim K]$ | c. $(\sim K \sim P)_1$ is $\sim P_2[K]$ |

5. "It remains in the following cases, if indeed anywhere, that [false opinion] will come about" (192c-d):

- a. K_1 is $(KP)_2$
- b. K_1 is $(\sim KP)_2$
- c. $(KP)_1$ is $(KP)_2$

6. "False opinion remains in the following case[s]":

- a. $(KP \sim C)_1$ is $(KP \sim C)_2$ (193b-c, 194a)
- b. $KP \sim C$ is $K \sim P \sim C$ (193d)

I would like to concentrate on one oddity in this elaborate classification, that is, what happens to the category of memory (M).

²¹ Jacob Klein makes the intriguing observation that just as "Theodorus . . . distinguished *fourteen* oblong rectangles from the *three* equilateral ones; . . . Socrates also distinguishes *fourteen* cases in which false opinion is precluded from the *three* cases which admit it" (*Plato's Trilogy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977], 128).

Although memory is presented as the distinctive feature of the wax model (191d, 194d-e), it is mentioned in almost none of the cases specified. It is present on both sides of 1a, then only on one side of 1b, and then not at all in the rest of the classification. Moreover, when 1a, 1b, and 1c are restated between steps 5 and 6, M is left out altogether even though P is now specified more explicitly (193a-b). It is left out again when Socrates reduces all the examples to a general statement: "I could never have false opinions about you and Theodorus either when I know both of you or when I know one but not the other; and the same applies to perceiving, if you follow me" (193b). And it is left out of the two summaries as well: at 194a-b Socrates says that false opinion turned out to be impossible about things that we do not know and have never perceived, but possible about things which we both know and perceive; at 195c-d he summarizes their findings as, "false opinion exists neither in the relation of perceptions to one another nor in thoughts [*διανοίαις*] but in the fitting together of perception with thought." Similarly, in case 6a we were told that the reason for the mismatch is that the perception is indistinct (193b-c), but nothing was said about the possibility that one's *memory* might be indistinct, although the possibility is explicitly built into the model (194e).

The reason that memory disappears from consideration seems to be that it is conceived in a way that equates it with active knowledge. This can be seen from the fact that, in the three places where it does appear, its truth value is identical with that of knowledge. On this model, to know is to remember and to remember is to know. The conspicuous omission of memory after 1b calls our attention to the fact that what is distinctive about memory, the fact that it may become partially but not wholly lost, is not being considered in this model. That will be remedied by the "having/possessing" distinction made in the next model. If all of this is meant to make us aware of the inadequacy of the present model of memory, the elaborateness of the device would seem to be an indication of the importance of memory to the dialogue's concerns.

The wax model is successful in accounting for error in at least some cases of sense-perception, but it fails when applied to intelligible rather than visible things, for in that case one can no longer speak of error as having to do with "the fitting together of perception with thought." For example, when one mentally adds five and seven and thinks the answer is eleven, one then thinks that eleven, which

one knows, is twelve, which one also knows. But this possibility was ruled out in the preceding classification (1a), so the model fails (196a-b). This hypothesis, too, has now been discredited, and a fifth one is proposed.

5. The fact that memory can be latent rather than actualized is illustrated at the very beginning of the aviary model. Socrates asks Theaetetus, "Have you heard what people now say that knowing is?" and Theaetetus replies, "Perhaps, but I do not remember at present" (197a). Appropriately, Socrates goes on to distinguish "having" knowledge, which implies awareness, from "possessing" it, which does not. When we learn something we possess it, but if like Theaetetus we cannot recall it, then we cannot be said to have it at that moment. It is as if our mind were an aviary,²² empty at birth, and the knowledge that we acquire through learning were birds that we captured for the aviary. When we first catch one and imprison it we may be said to possess it, but we do not actually have it until we catch hold of it again (197c-e).

The model has the advantage over the wax model that it can account for knowledge that is latent rather than actual. But it has the disadvantage that it is no longer possible to match knowledge with perception—the birds do not seem to refer to anything outside the aviary. This does not seem at first to be a disadvantage, however, for Socrates' examples are no longer concerned with perceptual knowledge but only with mathematics. It is as if we have now moved beyond *pistis* to *dianoia* on the Divided Line. But the model cannot be assimilated to the doctrine of recollection because it posits a mind empty at birth and filled entirely by empirical means. In fact the suggestion that one learns mathematics by having it handed over from teacher to student (198a-b) flies in the face of the *Meno*.

By distinguishing between possessing (latent) and having (active) knowledge, this model enables us to avoid the paradoxical conclusion that false opinion is simply not knowing what one knows

²² The fact that it contains "all kinds of birds, some in flocks apart from the others, others in small groups, and some alone flying in any way among them all" (197d), may be a reference to the method of collection. The single birds might be knowledges that have not been related to others, the small groups may represent various knowledges that have been discerned as embraced within a single "kind," and the flocks may represent kinds that have been synoptically perceived within a more general kind.

(199c). We can now say that it may be not having what one possesses. But two other difficulties arise. If false opinion is the mistaking of one bird for another—grasping the knowledge of eleven, for example, when one ought to be grasping that of twelve—then we make a mistake precisely by grasping a knowledge. Thus,

First, for a person having knowledge of something, to be ignorant of this very thing, not through his ignorance but through his knowledge; second, to have the opinion that this is something else and something else is this; how can it not be very absurd for the soul, when knowledge has come to it, to know nothing and be ignorant of everything? (199d)

Theaetetus suggests circumventing this problem by supposing that the aviary contains ignorances as well as knowledges (199e), but Socrates replies that in that case the problem that the aviary was meant to solve—“How can we mistake one thing for another”—reappears within it. We must ask how we can mistake an ignorance for a knowledge, and any attempt to answer the question would involve either an *aporia* or an infinite regress (200a-c).

But in a sense Theaetetus is right and we do have ignorance within the aviary: that was precisely the point of distinguishing between possessing knowledge (latently) and having it (actively). When we cannot grasp a knowledge that we possess, we are at that moment not in a state of knowing. Possessing, as distinguished from having, is a mixture of knowledge and ignorance. Let us consider the model more closely.

Socrates says that mistaking eleven for twelve would be like mistaking a pigeon for a dove (199b). The analogy becomes clearer when later, in a different context, Socrates says that we have the same number in mind “when we say one, two, three, four, five, six; or twice three; or three times two; or four plus two; or three plus two plus one” (204b-c). This means, if we apply it to the other case, that our knowledge of eleven must include $6 + 5$ and $7 + 4$, while our knowledge of twelve would include $5 + 7$, which sufficiently resembles the others that it can readily be mistaken for them,²³ as a pigeon is for a dove. When we make such a mistake we place into our aviary an “ignorance,” that $7 + 5 = 11$, which we may continue to find there.

²³ Cf. R. Hackforth, “The Aviary Theory in the *Theaetetus*,” *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1938): 27-9; p. 28.

How then would we answer Socrates' question as to how we can think that something we know is something we do not know? On the wax model such false opinions were explained as a mismatching of perception to knowledge because of its indistinctness. But the aviary model cannot provide such an explanation because the birds, unlike the wax impressions, do not *refer* to anything beyond themselves. It often happens in Platonic dialectic that if two hypotheses are rejected, a third is proposed that combines the positive features of each while avoiding their weaknesses, as model 3 in this section combined models 1 and 2. No sixth model is proposed here to follow the wax and aviary hypotheses, but if we try to imagine what such a model would have to be like, it would be one which combined the "recognition" factor of the wax model with the "latency" factor of the aviary model.²⁴ In view of the emphasis on memory both in the present sections and in the dramatic byplay of the opening of the dialogue, and in view of the frequent allusions to the *Meno*, it is significant that the doctrine of recollection does in fact incorporate both the features of latency and recognition.

That we are meant to come away with something positive from these discussions is suggested by the fact that Socrates could have refuted the "knowledge is true opinion" definition at the very outset if he chose to. After the aviary model is dismissed Theaetetus reiterates this as still the best definition he can devise, and Socrates replies that true opinion cannot be the same as knowledge because jurors can be persuaded to have a true opinion about something they have not witnessed, whereas only eyewitnesses have knowledge (201b-c). Since Socrates did not offer this simple but crushing refutation at the outset, but chose to develop the abortive models in detail, it is worth trying to see the value of their implications.

Socrates' remark, that we can only know what we have seen

²⁴ John Ackrill points out that "at the very beginning (191d5), Socrates says: 'whatever we want to remember, of the things we see or hear or *think* of we imprint on the block'. Nothing is made of this last case within the wax tablet section. But at the transition to the aviary it is clearly implied that items thought of and imprinted on the block are (or include) abstract or universal ideas. . . . Thus the account of misidentification in terms of the misconnecting of two items. . . can be widened to cover misdescription and misclassification" ("Plato on False Belief: *Theaetetus* 187-200," *Monist* 50 (1966): 383-402; p. 394). To put it differently, we are prepared in advance for the fact that the wax model can be made to converge with the aviary model.

(201b), is reminiscent (at a different level) of the claim which lies at the basis of the doctrine of recollection. As the *Meno* puts it, knowledge is possible because in some sense we have already “seen” reality.²⁵ We might extend the aviary model in this direction. In some sense we have latent knowledge of reality *a priori*, but because it is only latent we cannot always grasp it, like the birds of the aviary. When we perceive something (whether with the senses or the mind) it reminds us of one of these birds, and if we can grasp the correct bird we then have knowledge of the thing perceived. But because many of the birds resemble one another, and because they are (as latent) indistinct,²⁶ we can mismatch a perception with a latent knowledge. This model (even in cases that do not require an *a priori* factor) avoids the paradoxes of the other one because when we make a mistake we are not in active possession of knowledge. Knowledge arises only from the correct match (recognition) between latent knowledge and perception.

V

Even this model would, however, leave us with another problem: how can we tell when we are matching correctly? How can we distinguish in practice between the true matching of $5 + 7 = 12$ and the false matching of $5 + 7 = 11$, or, less straightforwardly, between “Justice is an arbitrary convention” and “Justice is a natural value?” Proponents of a correspondence theory of truth tend to make use of a coherence model for validation of such correspondence, since no other validation is possible, and that seems to be the role played by logos, both here and in the *Meno* (98a).²⁷

In response to Socrates’ counterexample about juries, Theaetetus suddenly recalls something that he had forgotten:²⁸ he once

²⁵ 81c. Cf. *Phaedrus* 249e–250a.

²⁶ Cf. note 12, above.

²⁷ Amelie Rorty puts it too strongly when she writes, “Plato saw what Socrates either did not see or did not explicitly discuss: that there is a conflict between treating knowledge as a direct witnessing of the forms *ἀντὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ*, and treating it as the ability to give valid reasons and explanations” (“A Speculative Note on Some Dramatic Elements in the *Theaetetus*,” *Phronesis* 17 (1972): 227–38; p. 236). There is certainly a *difference* between them, but not necessarily a conflict.

²⁸ At 148e he said that he has never heard a definition of knowledge.

heard someone say that knowledge is true opinion with logos (201c). He does not think that he can explicate this claim himself, but thinks that he could follow someone else who did. Socrates replies, "Listen, then, to a dream in exchange for a dream, [which] I seemed to hear from certain people." The puzzling description of this theory as a dream has given rise to several explanations.²⁹ The one that I would like to propose has to do with the use of the term in a previously cited passage of the *Meno*:

At present these opinions, having just been stirred up in him, are like a dream. If, however, one were to ask him the same things many times and in many ways, you know that finally he would have knowledge of them that is no less accurate than anyone's. (85c-d)

Perhaps the use of this term here in the *Theaetetus* is to suggest that the following theory is one that we should be able to recognize as true, but only indistinctly, as Meno's slave recognized the truth of the mathematical demonstration. It is a not yet adequate recollection of the nature of knowledge. But because of its lack of distinctness, Theaetetus, who like the slave can follow it but not exhibit it himself,³⁰ will never successfully formulate it in this dialogue.

²⁹ A. E. Taylor suggests that calling the theory a "dream" may be "because the person who is responsible for it had only produced it after the death of Socrates" (*Plato: the Man and his Work* [New York: Humanities Press, 1952], 346); cf. Cornford (p. 144). Runciman believes, "That the 'dream' did in fact derive from some other philosopher or school seems virtually certain" (p. 43). Burnyeat points out that "telling someone his own dream" was a proverbial expression for telling him something he already knows only too well from his own experience (cf. LSJ s.v. *ὄναρ*) ("The Material and Sources of Plato's Dream," *Phronesis* 15 [1970]: 101-22; pp. 105-6). For Rorty, "his dream is that a certain theory about recollection is true: the theory required to support his confidence that he will be able to recognize a view he cannot formulate exactly, one that he has heard only by hearsay, without having worked it out himself" (p. 230). Stanley Rosen argues that, in opposition to the dialogue's previous emphasis on analysis, "dreaming produces the unity of the whole, or better, contributes to making that unity visible" ("Socrates' dream," *Theoria* 42 [1976]: 161-88; p. 183).

³⁰ "This confidence in recognition can be interpreted as a demythologized, secularized version of the theory of *ἀνάμνησις*, with which some interpretations of the dream of elements is associated" (Rorty, p. 230). Rosen's interpretation of the dream metaphor as a reference to an intuition of the whole, and Burnyeat's as a reference to something familiar to us from our experience, are compatible with this, if only implicitly. Rosemary

With Socrates as his midwife Theaetetus produces three versions of the theory, the third of which itself has three divisions. The theory is "that the primary elements from which we and everything else are composed, have no logos." They can only be named; one cannot even say that an element is or is not, or one would be adding being or not being to it. But one can give a logos of composite things by naming the elements of which they are composed (201e–202c). Theaetetus recognizes this as the theory he has heard. The paradigms that this theory has in mind, Socrates says, are "the elemental letters and composite syllables of writing. Or do you think that the one who said the things we have mentioned was looking somewhere else?" (202e). Theaetetus answers in the negative, but others have not always been so sure.³¹

1. Socrates first points out that it makes no sense to say that the syllable can be known on the basis of its elements, its component

Desjardins, who also makes the connection between Theaetetus' dream and that of Meno's slave, further cites the *Statesman* (277d): "it would seem that each of us knows everything that he knows as if in a dream" ("The Horns of Dilemma: Dreaming and Waking Vision in the *Theaetetus*," *Ancient Philosophy* 1 [1981]: 109–26; p. 114).

Earlier, Socrates described the soul's thinking as "nothing other than a dialogue with itself, in which it asks itself questions and answers them, and affirms and denies" (189e–190a). According to Meno's paradox, if we need to ask the questions in the first place, how can we answer them by ourselves? Conversely, if we can answer them, why did we need to ask them? On the theory of recollection this kind of dialogue is possible because we know the answers latently but not overtly, and our self-questioning is designed to bring the "dream" into clearer focus. The same is true of Socrates' maieutic questioning. Socrates says that he is like a midwife in that he is sterile (with regard to wisdom), and that he has always been so (150b). But he had previously said that although midwives must be past child-bearing, they must previously have given birth, "because human nature is too weak to acquire an art concerning things with which it is not experienced" (149b–c). If Socrates then can be a midwife to wisdom he must have something *like* a "memory" of wisdom even if he never had wisdom.

³¹ E.g., Winifred Hicken, "Knowledge and Forms in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957): 48–53, pp. 234–5; Morrow, p. 328; Paul Friedländer, *Plato*, vol. 3, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 186. It is generally recognized that certain aspects of the dream theory are reminiscent of the theory of forms. Whether the refutation of the dream theory is thereby also a refutation of the theory of forms is, however, a matter of dispute. Rorty (p. 235) and Kunio Watanabe ("The 'Theaetetus' on Letters and Knowledge," *Phronesis* 32 [1987]: 143–165; p. 163) think that it does refute it, while Hicken (pp. 50–1) and McDowell (pp. 243–4) argue that it does not.

letters, if the letters themselves are unknowable because as elements no logos of them is possible (203a-d).

2. Socrates then distinguishes a “whole” (ὅλον) from an “all” (πᾶν):

Perhaps we should have proposed, not that the syllable is its elements, but that from these a single form [ἐν εἶδος] arises, which itself has a single Idea [ἰδέαν μίαν] of its own, different from the elements. . . . Let it be then as we just said, the syllable is a single Idea [μία ἰδέα] arising from the several conjoined elements. . . . It must be without parts. . . [because] the whole that arises from the parts must be some single form [ἐν εἶδος] that is different from all the parts.” (203e, 204a)

Socrates attacks this new hypothesis with a dilemma, the first horn of which immediately collapses the new distinction between whole and all. “A whole is . . . that from which nothing is missing, and that from which something is missing is neither a whole nor an all, which together become the same for the same reason” (205a). This begs the question by assuming that no account of a “whole” can be given that would satisfy the original stipulation that it is “without parts” and “different from the parts.”³² Can such an account be given? If a whole is without parts, how can one speak of it in terms of “the parts” at all? It is this oddity that makes Socrates’ refutation plausible. The answer would seem to lie in establishing that a whole is *correlated* to an all, so that one can speak of the parts of the all *in relation to* the whole, but not as *parts of* the whole.³³ How the first and second hypotheses may be integrated to achieve this will be implicit in the third hypothesis, below.

The second horn of the dilemma is that if the syllable is a whole

³² Also see McDowell: “at *Parmenides* 157c4-e2 Plato sets out an argument, exploiting the same principles as the above *reductio ad absurdum*, in order to show that what a part is a part of, i.e. a whole, is not an entity designated by the standard use of the expression ‘all the parts’ . . . Plato deliberately, and pointedly, uses against the dream theory a premise which he knows to be false” (pp. 243-4).

³³ Friedländer draws the interesting parallel that, “Just as, at the end of the dialogue’s first part, the ‘one single Form of the soul’ (μίαν τιᾶ ἰδέαν, 184D3) emerged, the soul as a whole that is more than the sum of its perceptions . . . (187A5), so there emerges here on the side of things the ‘one Form’ that can no more than the soul be envisaged as an aggregate of elements” (p. 186). Also see Desjardin’s suggestion that the dilemma be read as a *reductio* to which the proper response is the affirmation of both horns, so that the complex must be *both* the same as and different from its elements (p. 115ff.).

which is not composed of parts, then it is as irreducible as the letters, and equally unknowable (by logos): “The syllable falls into the same form [*εἶδος*] [as the elements] if it has no parts and is a single Idea [*μία ἰδέα*]” (205d).

Socrates adds a more general objection to the “dream” theory. Our experience in learning writing and music has taught us that it is easier to know the elements than the composites, which is the opposite of what the theory claims (206a–b). He adds that this can be demonstrated in other ways as well (206c). In view of the way that the language in the above quotations irresistibly reminds us of the theory of forms, it would not be surprising if the primacy of knowing “uniform” forms over multiform individuals may be what is meant.³⁴

3a. Socrates leaves aside the all/part/whole question and turns to the question of what is meant by logos. The first hypothesis is that it means the mirroring in words of one’s opinions. The hypothesis is dismissed because logos in this sense is natural to all normal people, so nothing would be gained by adding “with logos” to the definition of knowledge as right opinion (206d–e).

b. The second hypothesis is that logos means an account of something in terms of its elements, such as listing the parts of a wagon (207a). This is refuted by the observation that one may be able to enumerate elements without having knowledge in the normal sense. Someone might say, for example, that the first syllable of “Theaetetus” is spelled “The” (Θ + ε), but incorrectly think that the first syllable of “Theodorus” is spelled “Te” (Τ + ε). In this case he does not *know* how to spell the syllable, but gets it right in the first case by right opinion. Therefore, on this understanding of logos, one can satisfy the definition without having knowledge (207d–208b).

Although this hypothesis does not further the investigation directly, the examples used have implications that further it indirectly. After the example of listing the parts of a wagon, Socrates adds that it would not, on this definition, count as knowing the wagon if one could name the wheels, axle, body, rails, and yoke but not the “hundred pieces of wood” from which they are built (207a); nor as knowing the name “Theaetetus” if one could list the syllables but

³⁴ Cf. *μονοειδές* at 205d with *Phaedo* 80b.

not the letters (207b). The reference to knowing the name by knowing the syllables reminds us that the previous discussion of whole and parts had altogether abstracted from the word as a whole, and asked only about the relationship between letter and syllable. But the meaning of the syllable comes from two directions: the letters which furnish its materials, and the word itself which gives the syllables their purpose and meaning. Similarly, the basic parts of the wagon can be explicated either in terms of the hundred pieces of wood from which they are constructed, or in terms of the unity of the wagon, which is their reason for being. The hundred pieces of wood are not a wagon until they are properly unified.³⁵

Implicit in the previous discussion was a conception of a "whole" that is not reducible to its parts. Implicit in this one is the conception of a unifying form that can explain the parts of an "all" from above instead of from below. The sixth of the fifteen aporiai that Aristotle raises in book 3 of the *Metaphysics* is

whether it is the genera that should be taken as elements and principles, or rather the primary constituents of a thing. . . . To judge from these arguments, then, the principles of things would not be the genera; but if we know each thing by its definition, and the genera are the principles or starting-points of definitions, the genera must also be the principles of definable things. . . . And some also of those who say unity or being, or the great and the small, are elements of things, seem to treat them as genera.³⁶

Essentially the same question underlies the present discussion of the *Theaetetus*. Plato, like Aristotle, turns to the nature of definition—a course subsequently pursued more intensively in the *Sophist*.

c. The final hypothesis is what *hoi polloi* would say, that logos is the ability to name the sign by which one thing is distinguished from everything else (208c), that is, the definition. But this hypothesis too must fail, because one must already know the difference between one thing and another in order to have an opinion about it in the first place, and so nothing new is gained by the addition (209a). This definition of knowledge will be either absurd or circular, de-

³⁵ This has not gone unnoticed. Cf. Rorty, p. 237; McDowell, p. 245; Rosen, pp. 185–6; and Burnyeat, "Socrates and the Jury: Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction Between Knowledge and True Belief," Supp. Vol. 54 of the Aristotelian Society (1980): 173–192, pp. 187–8.

³⁶ 3.3.998a21–b11, Ross's translation.

pending on whether the logos about distinctness is itself regarded as opinion or knowledge. If it is an opinion, then we are told to add an opinion (logos) to the right opinion we already have, and “to command us to acquire the very things which we have, so that we may learn the things that we already judge to be so, greatly resembles someone completely in the dark” (209e). If it is knowledge, then knowledge is defined in terms of itself and the definition is circular (210a).

In the evaluation of this hypothesis the only example considered is the definition of “Theaetetus” (209a-c). Consequently, definition is conceived only in terms of an individual thing rather than a form or kind. But as a preliminary model Socrates had defined the sun as “the brightest of the heavenly bodies that revolve around the earth” (208d). This example is ambiguous. Although the sun is, like Theaetetus, an individual, it is a unique individual of its kind and therefore, like universals, admits of a definition by species and differentia. It is not made clear here whether a definition of an individual within a many-membered infima species is possible at all (209b-c), but it is made clear that it is at least much easier to define a universal (208d). Moreover, the sun tends to be associated in Plato with the theory of forms.³⁷

How are we able to define the sun in spite of Socrates’ *reductio*? The *reductio* is a restatement of Meno’s paradox, but there is no question in this case of recollection since we are asking about a visible object. Nevertheless the answer is analogous: the explicit definition can be sought and recognized because we already know it implicitly. We have all the information necessary to conclude that the sun is the brightest heavenly object, even if that conclusion has never explicitly occurred to us. If we ask in turn how definitions are possible of the common properties that Socrates speaks of at 208d (unity, goodness, and so on), we will be led to an analogous conception of latency, this time regarding nonempirical knowledge. Such a conception is to be found in the theory of recollection.

³⁷ E.g., *Republic* 507a-517c, *Phaedo* 99d. Cf. Sayre, p. 135. The sun is referred to not only here in the very last argument of the dialogue, but also in the very first argument (153c-d, the *Iliad*’s “golden rope”), and indirectly in the central digression (174a) where Thales is represented as the paradigmatic philosopher who is concerned with the heavenly bodies (of which the sun is defined at 208d as the brightest).

VI

We have seen that the *Theaetetus*' examination of knowledge goes through a progression of several different kinds of knowledge, a progression which reflects in a general way that of the Divided Line. It passes from perceptual to interpretive to mathematical knowledge, before grinding to aporia in a discussion which constantly evokes (but never invokes) the theory of forms and doctrine of recollection. The next step would be to return to the suggestions made by Socrates in the digression (and previously suggested by the dramatic byplay at the beginning of the dialogue), but never incorporated into the dialogue proper. In particular, the suggestion that the pursuit of wisdom is not ultimately satisfied even by adequate definitions, but eventually entails a change from one kind of life to another, like the "turning around of the soul" in the allegory of the Cave.³⁸

To our ears it seems strange that one's way of life should have anything to do with our intellectual ability to know things. There seems no reason why a thoroughgoing hedonist, who pursues philosophy as a profession because he is clever and can make money at it, should not be able to have a purely intellectual grasp of the nature of things without reforming his values and way of life. Even Plato's own doctrine of the tripartite soul seems to countenance this view, insofar as we need not be guided by reason, or, therefore, by the truths known by reason.

Although this is true of ordinary knowledge, at the highest level it may no longer be true. Here, what we know and what we are coincide. The consummation of the Divided Line coincides with the consummation of the tripartite soul. This is the doctrine of "purification" which Plato advances in the language of the mysteries.³⁹ The highest, "moral" forms can only be adequately grasped to the extent that we are capable of experiencing moral truth within ourselves, and we will only be capable of this to the extent that we are free of attachment to the pleasures of appetite and ambition. Perhaps the clearest evidence for this is to be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where we find that no adequate conceptual definition of goodness is possible, although we can define it merely

³⁸ *Republic* 7.518c.

³⁹ E.g., *Symposium* 210a-d, *Phaedo* 82d-83e, *Republic* 7.519a-b.

formally as “that at which all things aim” or the “mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency.” Only the good person himself can give content to these formulas; only he infallibly recognizes goodness in concrete situations. The wisdom of the good person is not propositional, but is closer to what we might call “understanding.” This is Plato’s point as well, that knowledge of the highest things requires an inner recognition that is inseparable from our devotion to those things.⁴⁰

The theory of forms of the middle dialogues was introduced and maintained only as a hypothesis by which certain philosophical problems could be resolved or avoided.⁴¹ In the *Parmenides* Plato has shown that this hypothesis does not rest on a solid foundation but rather on a fabric of analogies and metaphors. What I believe Plato is doing in the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* is attempting to reconstruct the theory of forms on a more solid foundation by showing how the need for such a hypothesis arises from a demonstration of the inadequacy of less radical hypotheses. The forms remain entirely in the background of the *Theaetetus*, but their aspect as universal kinds re-emerges explicitly in the *Sophist*’s doctrine of kinds, although this too continues to abstract from the valuational aspect of the forms (cf. 227a–b). That aspect will be restored as well, in the final dialogue of the trilogy, the *Statesman*, with the doctrine of “due measure.”⁴² It subsequently becomes the thematic center of the *Philebus*.

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⁴⁰ Cf. Pascal’s remark: “whereas in speaking of human things we say they must be known before they can be loved, . . . the saints on the contrary say in speaking of divine things that they must be loved in order to be known” (“On Geometrical Demonstration,” trans. Richard Scofield, in *Pascal: The Provincial Letters, Pensées, Scientific Treatises*, vol. 33 of Great Books of the Western World [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952], p. 440).

⁴¹ E.g., *Phaedo* 100b.

⁴² Cf. Dorter, “Justice and Method in the *Statesman*,” in *Justice, Law and Method in Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Spiro Panagiotou (Edmonton: Academic Publishing, 1987), 105–22.