

SECTION 4

Images of the Cognitive Soul



The Ontological Background of the Wax Block Model in Plato's *Theaetetus*

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1

When Theaetetus proposes his second response to Socrates' question "what is *epistēmē*?", it is immediately clear that the issue at stake has changed its appearance. Claiming that *epistēmē* is *alēthēs doxa* involves cognition not being considered as an immediate and simple experience of the object (of the *cognoscendum*) and, consequently, different components of the cognitive process having to be taken into account: primarily, the difference between true and false belief, but also that between different aspects or moments of that process. Moreover, it is immediately clear that the test for the equivalence of *episteme* and *alēthēs doxa* will be the capacity to account for mistakes, i.e. the formation of false beliefs.

As is well known, the two interlocutors formulate five attempts to conciliate the hypothesis that knowing is *doxazein* and the fact that we fall into error when we opine. And all the attempts are destined to be unsuccessful.

Among them, the fourth and the fifth ones share a peculiarity, inasmuch as they each propose something like a model to describe the cognitive process. Perhaps the word "model" is an exaggeration, because what the Wax Block Model (WBM) and the Aviary present is a partial image of the presumed *epistēmē*. In fact, they focus fundamentally on the problem of false belief, rather than a comprehensive structural reconstruction of the cognitive process or a comprehensive description of how the human mind works. Therefore, it is preferable to call it a metaphor and we shall see later the notable consequences this metaphorical aspect has on the significance of the WBM.

The position of the WBM within the dramatic development of the dialogue is relevant for another reason. If we consider the preceding three attempts to justify false belief, we will easily see that they seek a solution to the problem by remaining in the domain of the *doxa*.¹ The WBM, on the contrary, reconsiders

¹ The first attempt (187e5–188c4) concerns the relation between *doxazein* and *eidenai*, explicitly excluding intermediate moments of the process (*manthanein kai epilanthanesthai*,

the role of perception in the cognitive process. It may appear a step backwards from the results gained in the analysis of Theaetetus' first response, which had concluded that *epistēmē* could not be *aisthēsis*. But in fact the reconsideration of *aisthēsis* corresponds to a progress in Socrates' argumentation: it aims to remedy to the inadequacies of the preceding three attempts. Although all concern relationships, each represents cognition in a static way, that is, as a possess of something by the mind or as a close and elementary relation between *cognoscens* and *cognoscendum*. The abandonment of a static description is precisely the point from which Socrates restarts after the failure of the preceding attempts:

[...] the fact is that we are caught in such a bind that it requires us to twist and test every line of argument till it squeaks. So see if this takes us forward. Is it possible for someone who didn't know something *before* to go on later to learn it (*mē eidota ti proteron hysteron mathein*)? [...] And then (αὐθις) another thing, and another?²

Theaet. 191c1–6

Immediately after Theaetetus' positive answer, Socrates continues by introducing the image of the wax block. It is clear that the novelty (or, better, one of the novelties) of the fourth attempt is the inclusion of the timeline into the consideration of (false) belief:³ the attention of the two interlocutors is now shifted towards the dynamics of the cognitive process. And this opens a breach towards the involvement of other faculties or components relevant to this process.

188a2–3) involving, for instance, a possible role of memory. The second one (188c5–189b9) takes into account *to einai kai me*: instead of working on an “internal” relation between two mental states or mental acts, it tries to base the argument on the relation between the mental state/act of *doxazein* and its external object, supposing it be a direct relation (cf. 188e11–189a9). The third attempt (189b10–190e4) consists in the famous figure of *allogoxia*, according to which false belief would be the result of a confusion between two mental contents.

2 Here and hereafter the translation of the passages of *Theaetetus* are by ROWE (2015) (italics mine).

3 It can be noticed that the act of learning (*manthanein*) is exactly what was excluded in the first attempt, followed in this respect by the next two. On the innovative aspect of WBM, FERRARI (2011), p. 101, writes: «indubbiamente il modello del “blocco di cera” introduce alcuni elementi innovativi, primo fra tutti la distinzione fra memoria e percezione immediata. In questo modo viene formalizzato un motivo che era forse implicito nelle spiegazioni precedenti, ossia la *profondità temporale* del soggetto».

The recourse to a metaphorical representation of the formation of *doxai* and the dynamic conception of this process are the aspects on which the following considerations about the WBM will be based on. Unavoidably, other important aspects of this page of the *Theaetetus* will have to be left aside.

Focusing on those aspects, anyway, will be of some help in pursuing one of the aims of this paper, which is to show from a new perspective why the WBM too, despite its apparent efficacy, ends inevitably in defeat.

Most of the literature on this topic converges on the idea that the WBM is considered by Plato as an adequate model for the description of that part of the cognitive process that regards the relation between *aisthēsis* and *diánoia* by means of *mnēmē*.⁴ According to this interpretation, the reason why the WBM is abandoned and the interlocutors try to face the problem of false belief by introducing the Aviary Model is that the WBM is not comprehensive, inasmuch as it fails to explain a circumscribed type of false beliefs, i.e. those beliefs that originate from relations between thoughts (*ennoiai*), “mental contents” not deriving from *aisthēsis*.⁵ This interpretation is apparently justified by certain passages where Socrates seems to show some satisfaction with the explanatory capacity of the WBM,⁶ and even the passage where Socrates confesses his dissatisfaction sounds like a confirmation: after having noticed that someone who knows the eleven and the twelve can say that five plus seven equals eleven, he concludes:

The person to whom this happens will be thinking that something he knows is something else he knows, which we said was impossible; and on that very basis we were forcing through the conclusion that there was no such thing as false belief, because otherwise the same person would be forced into knowing and not knowing the same things at the same time. [...] Then we must declare believing what is false to be anything but the misalignment of thought with perception; because if it were that, there would never be falsehood in our thought by themselves.

Theaet. 196b9–c7

4 So BURNYEAT (1990): «The Wax Block remains adequate for mistaken identifications where perception is involved; the only failing charged against it was that it does not explain mistaken identification where perception is not involved». Cf. also SEDLEY (2004), pp. 137–139, and ROWE (2015), p. 77 note 90, who, however, mitigates his stance by adding «presumably».

5 CORNFORD (1935), pp. 129–130; MCDOWELL (1973), pp. 218–219; BOSTOCK (1988), pp. 180–185; GIANNOPOULOU (2013), pp. 136–142. More cautious as regards the global evaluation of WBM efficacy are SAYRE (1969), p. 112, and POLANSKY (1992) p. 194.

6 Cf. *Theaet.* 194c1 and 195b2–8.

It seems that by these words Plato wants to ascribe the failure of the WBM exclusively to its inadequacy to justify «falsehood in our thought by themselves». Instead, we shall see that his mistrust of the WBM is more generally founded.⁷

Before focusing on the issues that I would like to highlight here, I think it appropriate to mention a few more features of the WBM. The perceptual process is described as a mechanical impact:

I want you to suppose, for the sake of argument (*logou heneka*), that our souls contain a waxen block. [...] we imprint (*apotypousthai*) on it whatever we wish to remember from among the things we see or hear or the thoughts we ourselves have, holding it under our perceptions and thoughts as if we were making impressions from signet rings.

Theaet. 191c8–d9

In all likelihood, this description is influenced by pre-Socratic reflections on perceptual (and, in particular, visual) experience. After the “extromissionist”⁸ ideas on visual perception, according to which the eyes emit fiery rays,⁹ and after Alcmeon’s and Anaxagoras’ conceptions of vision as reflection,¹⁰ Empedocles¹¹ and Democritus introduce an intromissionist theory of sight, based on the idea that effluences (for Empedocles) or air imprints (for Democritus) coming from outside reach the eyes and generate vision.¹² Particularly significant is that Democritus, according to Theophrastus’ testimony, compares the air imprints to the imprints obtained by applying pressure on a wax mould.¹³

7 That the failure of WBM is due to a general inadequacy is maintained by CHAPPELL (2005) and TEISSERENC (2013), for reasons other than what I am going to argue: the former rejects WBM because of its empiricism, without further justifications; the latter believes that «la raison profonde de l’inadéquation d’un tel modèle tient à ce que toute doctrine de la vérité ou de la fausseté entendue comme accord ou désaccord *entre* représentations implique le refus initial, ou l’ignorance, de la différence radicale entre représentation et chose représentée» (p. 207).

8 For this terminology and for further consideration about this topic, see RUDOLPH (2015).

9 This conception is typical of archaic Greek poetry; cf., for instance, Homer, *Iliad* I, 101; Hesiod, *Theogony* vv. 826–7.

10 More on this in RUDOLPH (2015), pp. 39–44.

11 Cf. Empedocles, B84 and B89 DK.

12 Most of our information on pre-Socratic theories of perception comes from Theophrastus’ *De sensibus* (in particular *De sens.* 7–24 on Empedocles [= A86 DK]; 27–37 [= A92 DK] on Anaxagoras; 50–54 [= A135 DK] on Democritus). On Empedocles see SEDLEY (1992); on Democritus NIGHTINGALE (1992), pp. 54–56; on Theophrastus’ *De sensibus* see BALTUSSEN (2000).

13 Theophr. *De sensibus*, 51.

It is clear that Plato's WBM is indebted to these predecessors: in fact, the ratio of this model is the adoption of the intromissionist explanation of the formation of *doxai*. But it is equally clear that Empedocles' and Democritus' aim was inspired by a naturalistic or materialistic conception of reality, including cognitive processes. So, from Democritus' point of view the image of the wax mould is to be accepted in a quasi-literal way, since he conceived perception as a mechanical process involving matter, movement, and pressure. Plato's aim is obviously different, inasmuch as he takes into account the domain of *doxai* and, generally, *hai dianoiai*. His use of his predecessors' descriptions is characterised by the shifting to a metaphorical use of the physical aspects. This creates from the beginning, albeit not explicitly, a sort of friction between the materiality of the metaphor and the immateriality of the metaphorised soul.

So, the starting question is: (A) what consequences for the description of false beliefs are implicated in the adoption of a metaphor in which the soul is equated with a material matter such as a block of wax?

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A first answer to (A) focuses on a (possible) positive aspect of choosing a material metaphor: the explanation of individual differences among souls. Indeed, there are two passages that could lead to the impression that this is the central point in the WBM. The first occurs at the very beginning of this part of Socrates' argument, when it is specified that the wax block «is larger in one person, small in another, of purer wax in one, filthier in another; in some it is too hard, in others too soft, while in still others it is as it should be».¹⁴ Later Socrates returns to this point and compares the individual souls using vivid images («shaggy heart», «rough heart with a stony element», «tiny little soul», etc.),¹⁵ to conclude that «all these people turn out to be liable to form false beliefs».¹⁶

Despite the fact that Socrates pays some attention to these details, I do not think that they are the core or the goal of the WBM. Even the second-mentioned passage, which is of a certain length, aims only to show that the human soul can fall into error, so much so that Socrates restarts his argumentation by asking «shall we say, then, that there are false beliefs in us?», and individual differences are no longer referred to. To sum up: on the one hand, the materiality of the WBM is particularly suitable for describing individual differences;

14 *Theaet.* 191c–9d2.

15 Cf. *Theaet.* 194e1–195a9.

16 *Theaet.* 195a5–6.

on the other hand, these differences concern the “phenomenology” of false beliefs and are of no help in describing the structure of the mind or in explaining the nature of false belief and its structural possibility. The quality of the wax is not the real cause of mistakes: the best quality of the soul cannot avoid the confusion of the eleven and twelve, which are supposed to be “known”, as seen.¹⁷ Therefore, the different qualities of the individual wax blocks are not the aspect to be investigated in order to understand the consequences of the adoption of a material metaphor.

To address this question, it is necessary to elucidate the real intent of the WBM. But the real intent of the introduction of the WBM as one of the attempts to verify Theaetetus’ second response to Socrates’ question about *epistēmē* can be discovered only if the reasons of its inadequacy are plainly understood, because we know that, as already mentioned, none of those attempts meet the expectations. I have already claimed that the prevalent explanation of the WBM inadequacy is not convincing: now is the moment to present an alternative proposal.¹⁸ In my opinion, it is essential here to distinguish two levels of reading of the *Theaetetus* (as well as of most of Plato’s dialogues). On a superficial level the introduction of the WBM (as well as of the other attempts) must play by the rules of the dramatic development of the dialogue. As this part of the *Theaetetus* is built as a sequence of attempts, the introduction of a new attempt needs to be justified in such a way that the concatenation is made visible and understandable. That Plato does not explicitly deny the explanatory capacity of the model as regards the relationship between *aisthesis* and *dianoia* and instead concludes the pages dedicated to the WBM by insisting on the inadequacy of the model in explaining false beliefs *en tais dianoiais* advances the investigation, because it has the effect of definitively shifting the axis of analysis towards the cognitive processes that take place entirely within the soul.

Below, or rather, behind the dramatic level it is possible to trace a deeper level: as is well known, in most cases Plato does not assign to the characters’ words the task of making his doctrine explicit. It is up to the interpreter to extrapolate theoretical contents from the dialogical exchanges. The very reason for the introduction of the WBM could not be found in its final refutation.

17 It is worth noting that on both occasions when the different qualities of the wax block are taken into account, it is not affirmed that poor quality is the cause of erroneous imprints in the wax: these are only more precarious and less sharp. The mistake is not due to the lack of clarity of the imprint, but to the erroneous successive attribution of a new input to the imprint, provided that, obviously, the low quality makes the erroneous attribution more probable.

18 This proposal is more widely argued for in ARONADIO (2016).

Indeed, it must not be looked for here, in my opinion. Precisely because of the importance of the concatenation between the attempts, the reason for the introduction of the WBM lies in the differences that distinguish it from the previous attempts. As anticipated, the specific character of the WBM is the attempt to describe the formation of false beliefs as a dynamic cognitive process that involves *aisthēsis*, *mnēmē* and *dianoia*, rather than as a static presence in the mind of mental images compared one to another.¹⁹

The advantage gained by the adoption of the metaphor of the wax block consists in thinking of *doxai* as the result of a dynamics of mediation that takes place over time.²⁰ If this is so, then it is on this ground that the inadequacy of the WBM must be measured. And this is what I shall try to show in the following pages. For the moment, I take as a working hypothesis that “mediacy” is the specific contribution given by the introduction of the WBM to the deep level of reading of the dialogue. If I can show convincingly that the inadequacy of the WBM depends on a misleading conception of the processual character of the formation of *doxai*, the hypothesis will be confirmed or at least not proved wrong.

Now, focusing on mediacy our starting question takes on a new form: (B) what consequences for the description of false beliefs *as the result of a process that takes place over time* are implicated in the adoption of a metaphor in which the soul is equated with a material matter such as a block of wax?

3

At this point, it is necessary to examine in a little more detail how the mind works according to the WBM. It may be useful to recall here the initial passage, mentioned in part above:

19 Many scholars point out that the WBM imports several “faculties” into the consideration of *doxai*, of course; but this does not imply that the importance of the dynamic aspect has been adequately noticed. For instance, BURNYEAT (1990), p. 91, maintains that the novelty of the WBM consists «in its vivid depiction of perceiving and memory-knowledge as two independent ways an item can come before the mind to be an object of judgement»: by saying so, Burnyeat focuses on the comparison between perception and thought, whereas the relevant aspect is, in my opinion, the processual aspect of doxastic activity of mind. On Burnyeat’s interpretative line are BOSTOCK (1988), p. 177, and POLANSKY (1992), p. 213 and pp. 216–217.

20 In addition to the aforementioned FERRARI (2011), p. 101, cf. also HARDY (2001), p. 177.

I want you to suppose, for the sake of argument (*logou heneka*), that our souls contain a waxen block. [...] Let's say that it is a gift from Memory, mother of the Muses, and that we imprint (*apotypousthai*) on it whatever we wish (*boulethōmen*) to remember (*mnēmoneusai*) from among the things we see or hear or the thoughts we ourselves have, holding it under (*hypechontas*) our perceptions and thoughts as if we were making impressions from signet rings; whatever is imprinted on the block, we remember and know (*mnēmoneuein kai epistasthai*) for as long as (*eos an*) its image is in the wax, while whatever is wiped off or proves incapable of being imprinted we have forgotten and do not know.

Theaet. 191c8–e1

There are some remarkable points here. Firstly, the wax is said to be a gift from Mnemosyne, which immediately highlights the role of memory in the WBM. Secondly, the coupled use of the verbs «remember» and «know» is worth noting: the model establishes that the imprint left by an input on the wax generates (or more and better *is*) knowledge.²¹ This point is clearly taken for granted in the whole subsequent argumentation. It is particularly important because it connects knowledge to the temporality of memory, pointed out after all in this passage by the conjunction *eos*. Thirdly, the mnestic trace is represented as an impression, i.e. something that undergoes the effects of an impact and keeps the consequent modifications for a certain amount of time. So, memory is intended as simple and passive retention.²²

But, as already said, memory is not the only element that plays a role in cognitive processes according to the WBM. The other elements emerge clearly from an example of formation of false beliefs:

I know you and Theodorus, and I have the imprints of you both, as if from signet rings, in the wax block of mine. But suppose then that I see you both at a distance, and sufficiently well: in my eagerness to refer the imprint belonging to each of you to the corresponding visual perception, and to make the latter fit its own traces, so that recognition (*ἀναγνώρισις*)

21 Cf. *Theaet.* 192a2: «[...] a person knows something, having acquired a record of it in his soul».

22 BURNYEAT (1990), p. 100, IOPPOLO (1999), p. 227 note 161, and CAMBIANO (2007), p. 11, believe that the WBM does not describe the acquisition of data by memory as purely passive. They base this consideration on what Socrates affirms when he says that on the wax block «we imprint whatever we wish (*boulethōmen*) to remember». However, I believe that this verb refers to the awareness of the *aisthesis* by the subject, but it does not affect the passive nature of the data acquisition in memory.

can take place, I fail in this, switching things like someone putting his shoes on the wrong feet, and applying my perception of each of you to the other.

Theaet. 193b9–c7

Here we find again the overlap of retention and knowledge, represented by the mnemonic trace. The cognitive process consists in matching a perception with a mnemonic trace in order to give rise to a recognition (ἀναγνώρισις). Some lines below Socrates says:

with things that we both know and are perceiving [...] belief twists and turns between false and true: true when it brings together the appropriate imprints and impressions directly and without deviation, false when it does the fitting in a skewed and sideways fashion.

Theaet. 194b3–6

These passages make clear that the WBM involves a definite sequence: *a*) an input (that in the presented example comes from outside through perception, but can come also from inside through thinking activity); *b*) the imprint in the wax block; *c*) retention of the imprint; *d*) new input (perception or thought); *e*) matching of the new input with the imprint left by the preceding input. The mediated nature of the formation of beliefs, as it is metaphorised in the WBM, is evident; equally evident is that in this mediated succession the crucial role is played by memory: in fact, memory is the touchstone for the other elements of the process, which otherwise would remain isolated.

Here one major consequence of the adoption of a material metaphor becomes manifest. It concerns the nature of the relationship between *aisthesis* (or *dianoia*) and *mnēmē*. Some interesting hints can be found in the above-mentioned passage: the wax block is said to be *held under* (*hypechontas*) our perceptions and thoughts. The verb *hypecho* means “hold under”, but also “undergo, suffer”; the metaphorical rendering of *aisthēsis* (or *dianoia*) with a signet ring enhances the idea that the mind undergoes a “mechanical” or “physical” *pathos*, producing as its effect a direct transfer of the shape of the input to the wax. The materiality of the metaphor suggests that immediateness and directness are the features of the relationship between *aisthēsis* (or *dianoia*) and *mnēmē* (phases *a* and *b*). There is no mediation between these cognitive acts and their retention in memory; no mediation creates a distance between the input and its retention in memory – the signet ring acts by direct contact and the trace it leaves in the wax perfectly corresponds to it (provided that, obviously, the wax is in perfect conditions; but this, as we have seen, is

a contingent factor). And this is why, according to the conceptual framework imposed by the WBM, what is memorized is immediately a piece of knowledge. Even the final refutation of the WBM can confirm that the peculiarity of the supposed relation between *dianoia* and memory excludes any mediation: when Socrates affirms about «five and seven by themselves» [*scilicet*: internal inputs] that «are memories stored in that block of wax [...] about which we're saying it is not possible to believe what is false», he evidently presupposes that the imprints left by these internal inputs are necessarily in perfect correspondence with their traces on wax.²³

Moreover, not only the relationship between *aisthēsis* (or *dianoia*) and *mnēmē*, but also that between the successive new input and memory (phases *d* and *e*) is, in a certain sense, characterised by directness, inasmuch as it is a one-to-one alignment, that is an alignment between a single unit (the new input, internal or external) and the single trace in the wax.

Therefore, in short, the WBM represents the thematized part of cognition – i.e. the formation of beliefs, and in particular of false beliefs – as a process whose mediated nature is articulated in a sequence of direct relationships; it is a process that takes place over time and develops as a one-to-one juxtaposition; this process originates from an internal or external input (a perception or a thought) that impacts memory; this impact gives rise immediately to a piece of knowledge.

4

In other words, we can say that the WBM is based on a specific kind of sequential process, on the equivalence of internal and external origin of the cognitive act, and on the identification of knowledge and memory. These aspects appear to be very close to the way the encyclopaedia of an oral culture is built. The similarity between what has been said about the features of the WBM and the process of formation of a shared cultural patrimony in orality could appear surprising; but I think it is not. Some quotations from Havelock's *Preface to Plato*,²⁴ which is now a classic, will in themselves be emblematic: «The images evoked in the verbs and in the nouns succeed each other paratactically; each

23 As known, the refutation argument is this: according to the WBM, mistakes are the effect of some kind of misalignment between a piece of information and its memorization; although a misalignment between an external input and the internal trace is conceivable, the same is impossible for an internal input; but mistakes related to thoughts occur; so, the WBM must be rejected, since it does not explain all the cases of mistake.

24 HAVELOCK (1963).

unit of meaning is self-subsistent».²⁵ An oral culture builds up its patrimony of knowledge by putting together a large number of these paratactical, one-to-one associations, which require the deployment of an enormous mnemonic capacity. «The epic therefore is [...] to be considered in the first instance not as an act of creation but as an act of reminder and recall. Its patron muse is indeed *Mnēmosune* in whom is symbolised not just the memory considered as a mental phenomenon but rather the total act of reminding, recalling, memorialising, and memorising».²⁶ The crucial role of memory for paratactically organized knowledge is necessarily accompanied by the lack of a critical approach and, in a word, by loss of self and loss of the object: «For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known».²⁷ The dimensions of the interiority and the exteriority are confused with each other: the actions and notions learned are thoughts, and thoughts are one with active participation in the sequence of events, whether narrated or real. Speaking of primary oral cultures, Ong affirms: «Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems. Mnemonic needs determine even syntax».²⁸

Identification of knowledge and memory, paratactical order, interchangeability of inside and outside are evidently common features of orality and the WBM (at the respective different levels, of course). These similarities could appear surprising, but they are not: they are closely related to a purely and rudimentarily empiricistic conception of the relationship between thought and experience.

As is well known, the question of Plato's attitude towards orality (both in a cultural sense and in a narrower "paideutic" sense) is very complicated and much debated, but one thing is indisputable: overall, Plato's pattern of thinking and the framework of his thought entail characteristics diametrically opposed to those which have appeared as the common denominator of the WBM and

25 HAVELOCK (1963), p. 184.

26 HAVELOCK (1963), p. 91.

27 ONG (2002), p. 45. Cf. HAVELOCK (1963), pp. 44–45: «How is such a feat of memory to be placed within the reach not only of the gifted but of the average member of the group, for all have to retain a minimal grasp of the tradition? Only [...] by exploiting psychological resources latent and available in the consciousness of every individual [...]. This psychological mechanism [...] can be summed up if we describe it as a state of total personal involvement and therefore of emotional identification with the substance of the posited statement that you are required to retain. [...] Such enormous powers of poetic memorisation could be purchased only at the cost of total loss of objectivity».

28 ONG (2002), p. 34.

orality.²⁹ But, apart from this general consideration, what is important here is a matter of formal configuration of the relationship between the flow of events and the way in which they come to constitute a patrimony of beliefs: from a Platonic point of view, a paratactic configuration unavoidably relegates thought to the empirical domain and to corporeality. In Havelock's words: «In short, this kind of knowledge that is built up in the tribal memory by the oral poetic process is subject precisely to the three limitations described by Plato as characteristic of "opinion" (*doxa*). It is a knowledge of "happenings" (*gignomena*) which are sharply experienced in separate units and so are pluralised (*polla*) rather than being integrated into systems of cause and effect. And these units of experience are visually concrete; they are "visibles" (*horata*)».³⁰ By introducing a material metaphor to describe the mind, the WBM proposes a description of the formation of beliefs that corresponds to these aspects contrasted by Plato: the materiality of the wax block induces a paratactic conception of the mediacy of cognitive processes and assigns the role of knowledge to the memorization and retention of non-interconnected data.

In light of this, the response sought to our question (B) might sound like this: a soul conceived as a material stuff lends itself to a paratactic conception of temporality that, from a Platonic point of view, is a paradoxical internalization of the sequentiality typical of the dimension of events and of an archaic mode of memory. Moreover, a paratactic sequence is necessarily a connection between isolated units (perception or thoughts): in fact, according to the WBM each individual unit of information leaves a single trace in the wax. Therefore, what is memorised by a soul conceived as material is punctual and fragmented: as a result, memory is presented as a list or an inventory of information, where each unit is at most comparable with another single unit, but it does not appear to be designed to make interconnections between memorised elements of information.

5

The correspondences between WBM and orality have made it possible to highlight the co-presence and interrelation between materiality/corporeality,

29 In a schematic way (as it is not worth insisting on this point): to the psychological and conservative identification of knowledge and memory Plato counterposes the ontologically founded notion of a timeless *epistēmē*; to the paratactical order, a syntactic elaboration of experience; to the interchangeability of inside and outside, the polarities "*aisthēsis/dianoia*" and "*soma/psychē*".

30 HAVELOCK (1963), p. 180.

on the one hand, and parataxis, on the other; that is to say the link between reliance on the domain of immediate experience (which in *Gorgias* is called *empeiria*) and the elementary nature of the information contents and their concatenations, on the other hand. Due to the adoption of a material metaphor, the mediacy of the cognitive processes is configured as a mere cause-effect relationship between singular events. These considerations reinforce the idea that the inadequacy of the WBM has deeper roots than the dramatic development of dialogue suggests. Indeed, the fact that Socrates proves that the WBM does not work *en tais dianoiais* does not imply that this is the only flaw in the system; the possibility is open that, from Plato's point of view, the WBM presents other flaws on which Socrates the character does not insist, since it is functional for the purposes of the dramatic development of the dialogue to limit the refutation to the case of thought content only. In short, the possibility is open that the inadequacy of the WBM is more comprehensive. To this formal possibility good reasons have now been added by which we can see Plato's greater dissatisfaction with the WBM.

In my opinion, in fact, the WBM does not correspond, even in part, to the way in which Plato conceived the cognitive processes and their articulation in different phases: the mediacy of the WBM consists in a purely mechanical movement that cannot represent what cognitive activity is for Plato. The image of the block of wax presents a model of a soul that, like the body, is only passively dependent on the inputs coming from immediate experience. If the innovative contribution of the WBM compared to previous attempts consists in the introduction of a dynamic vision of cognitive processes, the dynamic that is presented through the WBM, being strongly conditioned by the chosen metaphor, is a dynamic too tied to the dimension of the empirical and too indebted to a conception of the subject-reality relationship that was typical of an archaic mentality – a mentality that Plato continually strives to leave behind (although, of course, in many respects he is still a participant in it).

There are two characteristics that are missing in the image of cognitive processes that arises from the wax block metaphor: the autonomous role of the *psyche* in its interaction with the *aisthēsis* and the ability to reprocess inputs. On the contrary, the WBM is based on the passivity of the mind (which, like a block of wax, is limited to accepting imprints) and on the punctual and fragmented contents of memory.³¹ In the section of the *Theaetetus* dedicated to *koina*³² these two characteristics had already been highlighted as essential for understanding the relationship between perceptions and soul activity.

31 See on this MAGRI (2015), pp. 47–49.

32 *Theaet.* 184b3–187a6.

That section of the dialogue closes the long part dedicated to Theaetetus' first answer to the question "what is *epistēmē*?: in showing the inadequacy of the thesis according to which *epistēmē* is *aisthēsis*, Plato introduces some positive doctrinal elements, which constitute a milestone in the argumentative path of dialogue. The subsequent attempts must therefore be commensurate with it: one of the reasons why they will prove to be insufficient may in fact be their discordance with the conceptual framework introduced in the section on *koina*.

In this framework the soul is conceived as *a*) capable of providing an autonomous contribution to the cognitive path, establishing a functional link between exteriority and interiority, and *b*) capable of acquiring a first but fundamental form of data already characterized by some complexity (for example, relationships of similarity and dissimilarity) and capable of making comparisons. That is to say that the soul is in such a position to provide to the *dianoia* data that already passed through a first processing phase and are ready to be not only stored in memory, but also reprocessed.³³ This emerges clearly from the way Socrates argues and from the terminology he uses. Three points of his argumentation are here relevant: 1) without the cognitive role played by the soul, the sensory data would give rise to a heterogeneous and ungovernable multiplicity.³⁴ 2) the specific role played by the soul in this phase of the cognitive process is efficaciously indicated by the verbs used by Socrates and consists in «going close up» (*epanioussa*, 186b8) to sensory data, «comparing them with each other» (*symballousa*, 186b8) and «reckoning up (*analogizomenē*) in itself past and present in comparison with future» (186a11–b1);³⁵ 3) by doing so, i.e. by spotting and comparing and memorizing, the soul, while remaining on the side of *aisthēsis*,³⁶ carries out an initial processing activity that prepares the judgement activity in the full sense. In light of this, memory is not a simple storage of individual and fragmentated data: the role of memory comes

33 As is well known, the section on the *koina* has been variously interpreted. I expounded my reading key in ARONADIO (2016), pp. 173–205. In short, I believe that the *koina* are related to the soul's ability to make comparisons; this ability does not yet (at least, not immediately) involve formulation of judgments; for the *koina* are still in close relationship with the domain of *aisthesis* or, more precisely, they are the result of a first, only comparative elaboration of sensory data.

34 Cf. *Theaet.* 184d1–5, where Plato presents the emblematic image of a multiplicity of data collected in us as in wooden horses.

35 This is the moment in which memory enters the scene. An interesting passage of the *Philebus* (32d2–34c3) introduces an important distinction between *mneme*, intended as «preservation of perceptions» (*soteria aisthēseos*), and *anamnēsis*, understood as the soul's recalling, by itself and apart from the body, the experiences it has had together with the body. More on this in ARONADIO (2016), pp. 186–188.

36 As it is acknowledged by SEDLEY (1992), p. 111, and FERRARI (2011), p. 412 note 254.

into play when the soul has already accomplished its *analogismata* (186c3); therefore, memory does not deal with isolated issues but with pre-elaborated data ready for further elaboration. I referred above to a sort of friction between the materiality of the metaphor and the immateriality of the metaphORIZED soul: what we have seen about the *koina* and the soul's ability explains the reasons for that friction. There is a great difference between the dynamics envisaged in the section on the *koina* and the mediacy implied by the WBM: it should be clear now that the materiality of the metaphor adopted in the WBM impoverishes the syntactic dynamics of cognitive processes, reducing it to one-to-one paratactical sequences.

6

Taking the section on the *koina* as the expression of Plato's own conception, the correct sequence of the considered part of cognitive processes is: *a*) input (that comes from outside through the perception); *b*) soul's activity, pointed towards *koina* and based on *analogismata* (which implies recognition of relationships among data); *c*) memorization (of already elaborated data); *d*) dianoetic thought. What differentiates this sequence from the one implied by the WBM is the role of memory: here memory does not precede, on the contrary it follows the soul's activity of comparison and (initial) elaboration.

There are three implications here. Firstly, these conclusions induce one to counterpose to the nexus parataxis-materiality another nexus, syntaxis-immateriality, that clearly is much more in line with Plato's thought. This is why I maintain that the inadequacy of the WBM has deeper roots than the dramatic level of the dialogue suggests. But, to remain at the circumscribed problem of false belief, that is at the origin both of the WBM and of the other attempts to solve this problem, the materiality of the metaphor of the WBM is an obstacle to the understanding of the possibility of mistakes because it obscures Plato's conviction that true *doxai* as well as false ones cannot but be the result of some kind of previous processing of information deriving from perception. If it is admitted that the active component of the cognitive process precedes storage, and that the data stored in memory can take on a complex (rather than elementary) and organic (rather than fragmented) aspect, then the memory turns out to be syntactic rather than paratactic, synthetic rather than sequential.³⁷

37 The passage of *Philebus* where Plato address the issue of memory by using the famous image of the scribe (*Phil.* 38e12–39a7) show that he does not consider memory as a simple

Secondly, this interpretation of Plato's conception of cognitive processes is ultimately symmetrical to his one-on-many conceptual scheme. As seen previously, the WBM presupposes a certain configuration of temporality, marked by the simple succession of events. On the contrary, the syntactic structure of memorized information and the autonomy of the interiority in the elaboration of external data predisposes to a conception of the object of knowledge as situated in an extra-temporal dimension (or, better, in the dimension of the *aei onta*, the everlasting Forms).

Thirdly, a less apparent, but philosophically relevant limit of the WBM is that it is unable to account for any progress in knowledge, which is instead necessary from a Platonic point of view. In the words of Rowett, «although we now get a richer account of what it is to see someone as Theaetetus, the idea of "Theaetetus" that is deployed in that recognition is no more generic, abstract or interpreted than the current encounter with him. The wax block does not develop any distinction between types and tokens, because the mental contents are also singular tokens that were once encountered directly in particular experiences with particular things».³⁸ This means that each new experience does not enrich in any way the knowledge of the knowing subject. In Plato's view only the existence of Forms and the soul's recollection guarantee the possibility of cognitive ascent. So, the ontological background of the WBM is an ontology confined to the domain of experience, an ontology without Forms.

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reproduction of an input in an imprint: rather, memory is a transcription, which implies that some activity is supposed to be performed between the perception and the storage in memory. Cf. DIXSAUT (2006), p. 19: «[...] ce n'est jamais une sensation pure que le scribe inscrit dans le livre, mais une sensation nommée, interprétée».

38 ROWETT (2012), p. 161. See also FERRARI (2011), p. 101.

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The Soul as an Aviary: A Metaphorical and Metaphysical Reading of *Theaetetus* 196c7–200d4

Emanuele Maffi

1 Introduction

The destiny of a metaphor is to be open to different interpretations. In the second definition of knowledge – *epistēmē* is true belief – Plato makes a large use of metaphors about the human soul in order to explain how a false opinion may arise in it; unfortunately, none of these analogies can clarify the riddle of false belief. Even if these metaphors missed their target, they remain very well-known in western philosophical tradition because of the crucial role they play in depicting the nature and the power of the soul. The two most famous analogies Socrates uses in his attempt to explain the existence and the possibility of false belief in the soul are the Wax Tablet image and the Aviary model. In the following pages I will focus my attention on the image of the Aviary, through which Plato depicts how the soul can possess knowledge, and how the false belief may occur in the soul process of acquiring knowledge. Despite the Aviary model's failure in explaining how false opinion arises in the soul, I argue that the Aviary plays another important role in this section of the dialogue. Hinted behind the collapse of the Aviary model we can find some clear references to the theory of Recollection explained in the *Meno*: through the failure of the Aviary, Plato invites his readers to recognize the link between this model and the *Meno* doctrine of anamnesis. In this way Plato provides essential information: in order to really appreciate the piece of doctrine that the final refutation of the second definition of *epistēmē* (the so-called “Jury argument” at 200d5–201c7) and the last part of *Theaetetus* (the analysis of the third definition of *epistēmē*) contribute to Plato's theory of knowledge, these parts must be put into the epistemological framework of the *Meno* and of the middle dialogues.

2 The Aviary and Its Inability to Explain False Belief

Socrates introduces the Aviary model in order to solve an *aporia* that the Wax Tablet model was unable to deal with. According to the Wax Block image, the

false belief occurs only when there is a mismatch between a thought and a perception, but not between two objects of thought. In the Wax Block, in fact, mistakes are possible in such cases where the subject of my *doxa*, whether or not it is something I know (i.e. for which I have an existing imprint in my mental wax), is something which I perceive but connect to a different and inappropriate imprint. It is through such a connection that the soul can sometimes falsely believe that what it knows is something else it knows, or else that what it knows is something else it doesn't even know (191e7–9). I can wrongly believe that the person walking towards me from a distance is Theaetetus, when he is in fact either Theodorus or even someone altogether unknown to me, because I can erroneously apply my impression of Theaetetus to the indistinct perception of the person walking towards me. Socrates thus compares the soul that judges falsely to a bad archer who misses his mark (194a3–4). But what Socrates is now looking for is a model which can cater for the successes and failures not just of empirical judgements but also of operations in pure thought. As we can read in the following passage of the dialogue, the Wax Tablet model fails because it reveals its inadequacy to explain that there are false beliefs about arithmetic:

But look, don't you think that anyone has ever considered five and seven? I don't mean: "has considered seven *men* and five *men* who are placed in front of him", or anything like that. I mean five and seven themselves, the things that according to us are memory-signs made on the wax block tablet, and about which we say there can be no false belief. Has no human to date ever considered *this* five and seven, or spoken to himself to ask how many they come to? Haven't some people said and thought that five and seven were *eleven*, while others said *twelve*? Or does *everyone* say and think that five and seven are twelve?¹

Theaet. 195e9–196a9

The image of the soul as a Wax Block apparatus has sufficed to illustrate one class of mistakes: the wrong fitting-together of old records and new impressions. But Socrates and Theaetetus have now realized that this formula will not cover the instance of mistaking of one memory record for another, and so it will not suffice as a general account of false judgement. Cornford rightly notes that «we cannot admit mistakes about numbers, unless we can find a sense in which we cannot know something we do know».² To accomplish this task, the machinery of the wax block must be enlarged by a new model. This enlarged

1 All translations of *Theaetetus* passages are taken from CHAPPELL (2004).

2 CORNFORD (1935), p. 130.

apparatus is described by Plato through the simile by which the soul is compared with an Aviary.

We can roughly divide the Aviary model into two parts. In the first, which goes from 196d to 199a, Plato offers us some important and promising items not only to solve the riddle of false opinion, but also to answer the central question of the dialogue: “What is knowledge?”. In the second part, which goes from 199b to 200c, Plato rejects the Aviary as insufficient explanation of the existence of the false. This is due to the fact that the Aviary model cannot escape from the so-called “puzzle of false belief” introduced by Socrates in 188a–c. This puzzle can be summarized as follows. For all x and y , you can’t form the false belief that “ x is y ” either (a) where you know both x and y , or (b), where you know neither x nor y . For in (a) if you know both x and y , then you know that none of them is identical with the other; and (b) if neither of them is known to you, then you cannot think about it at all. But (a) e (b) are exhaustive alternatives. So false belief is impossible.³

As rightly noted by Ferrari, the impossibility of false belief in the “puzzle” occurs because Plato still maintains a strong paradigm for the notion of knowledge, grounded on a principle that some scholars call “all-or-nothing principle”⁴ according to which «A either knows X or does not know X: Knowledge is either *on* or *off*, 1 or 0».⁵

I will focus my attention mainly on the first part of the Aviary model, because I believe that Plato scatters in it some clues not only about the nature of knowledge, but also about the way in which Forms, as metaphysical entities, can be known.

As highlighted by Trabatttoni, the passage concerning the image of the Aviary starts with a very important question posed by Socrates to Theaetetus:⁶

So now either there is no false belief, or else it is possible for someone to be ignorant of the very things he knows. Which of these alternatives will you choose? I have no idea how to choose between them, Socrates.

Theaet. 196c7–9

For Theaetetus the choice is hard: while, on the one hand, the existence of the false is impossible to deny, on the other hand it seems to Theaetetus just as logically impossible to say that someone can, at the same time, know and not

3 I borrowed this summary of the puzzle from CHAPPELL (2008), p. 203.

4 See FERRARI (2011), p. 94.

5 ROOCHNIK (2002), p. 45.

6 See TRABATTONI (2018), n. 318, p. 235.

know the same thing. And it is not surprising, because by virtue of the idea of knowledge supported by Socrates and Theaetetus at 188a–c, to say that A knows the object X means saying that A knows everything about X, while to say that A does not know the object X means saying that A does not know anything at all about X.

To get out of the impasse, Socrates lays aside all shame and, even if he has not yet well-defined what knowledge is, he at least tries to describe what knowledge is like (196d5–6: *poion ti pot'estin to epistasthai*; and 197a4–5: *bouleï tolmēsō eipeîn hoîon esti to epistasthai*). So Socrates tells Theaetetus that nowadays people tend to describe *to epistasthai* as the holding (*hexis*) of knowledge; but he chooses to make a slight amendment and suggests that *to epistasthai* is the possessing (*ktêsis*) of knowledge.⁷ In this way Socrates displays a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: there is an active type that may be described as having knowledge in hand (*epistēmēs hexis*) and a latent type of knowledge, previously acquired, that is described as a knowledge that someone merely possesses without actually using it (*epistēmēs ktêsis*).

To provide a better clarification of the distinction proposed above, Socrates introduces the Aviary: it might be a model of the soul capable of explaining the role played by these two types in the process of building knowledge in the human being.

The holding-having (*hexis*) of knowledge is described as a power comparable to that of a man who possess birds in a cage (197c8ff.): just as such man has the power to seize at will one of the birds within his cage, so the man who possess knowledge has the power to seize any pieces of this knowledge within his soul. Instead, as we can see in the passage 197e2–6, the possessing (*ktêsis*) of knowledge occurs when a person acquires pieces of knowledge and shuts them up in his cage-soul: in this way we can affirm that «he has learned or discovered whatever it is that the knowledge itself is about, and that this is what knowledge is» (197e5–6). So for Socrates the true meaning of the action of knowing (*to epistasthai*) something is to capture its knowledge and lock it in the cage of one's soul; namely, for Socrates *to epistasthai* means to possess knowledge.

According to the Aviary model, the soul who possesses knowledge must have the power of hunting and catching the knowledge-birds as well as the power of keeping them in the cage to prevent them from escaping, while the soul who has the knowledge must have the power to seize them again at will once

7 To explain to Theaetetus the difference between holding and possessing a thing, Socrates presents him with the following example: «If someone buys a cloak he can do what he wants with it. But if he is not wearing it, we will still say that he possesses the cloak but he is not holding it» (197b8–9).

they are stored in the cage. That this is the right way to understand the different powers of the soul in its double activity of possessing and having knowledge, I think that it is confirmed few lines later when Plato compares the two sorts of knowledge with two kinds of hunting.

One sort of hunt happens before you possess the pigeon, and has coming to possess the pigeon as its object. The other sort of hunt happens when it is already a long time since you came to possess the pigeon, and aims at recapturing a pigeon and holding it in your hands. Just likewise, it may be a long time since a man came to learn a piece of knowledge, and first knew it. It's still possible for him to renew his knowledge of those same pieces of knowledge, each of which he came to possess long before, but did not have to handle in his thought. He can do it by laying his hands once more on the knowledge of each thing, and holding it tight.

Theaet. 198d2–9

The thesis I support here is that the two sorts of hunting may be interpreted not only as Socrates does in the next passage of the dialogues, more precisely from 199a6, but also in a metaphorical and metaphysical way. Let's start with the Socratic treatment of these two kinds of hunting. When Socrates establishes that it never happens that someone *does not know* what he knows, it is clear that he has never abandoned the strong idea of knowledge being grounded on the "all or nothing principle" as a guideline.⁸ But this principle is precisely what makes the existence of error impossible, because it claims that whoever knows anything about something must also know everything about it. Within the horizon of this principle there is no room for false belief, because inside the boundary of the "all/nothing principle" even the distinction between possessing and having is useless; as Gonzalez truthfully observes, «the specific problem lies in the nature of the "having knowledge"».⁹ In fact, if this type of knowledge must be set apart from the possession of knowledge, the *hexis* of knowledge «can apparently only mean being aware or conscious of this possessed knowledge, attending to it (as is suggested by the language at 198d8: *procheiron... tē dianoia*)».¹⁰ But, as Socrates quickly realizes, in this case the account of the occurrence of false belief is doomed to failure. If in adding five and seven I grasp my knowledge of eleven rather than my knowledge of twelve,

8 STERN (2008), p. 251.

9 GONZALEZ (2007), p. 4.

10 GONZALEZ (2007), p. 4. As correctly FERRARI (2011), p. 104 points out Socrates and Theaetetus cannot get out themselves from the *impasse* because they are still bounded to the idea that «la conoscenza sia un fenomeno immediato, aprocessuale e quasi visualistico, indirizzato verso oggetti costitutivamente semplici e irrelati».

I must immediately see that eleven is not what I was looking for. I might grab the wrong bird, but if this is a bird I “know”, I will immediately recognize it to be the wrong bird. Even if it is possible for me to seize eleven rather than twelve, once I have seized it there is no way I can confuse it for twelve (199d). So what the aviary model failed to explain is how we can know and not know at the same time. As Polansky rightly wrote:

yet quite incredibly, the aviary prohibits simultaneous possession and non-possession of knowledge only to permit simultaneous *having and not having* of knowledge. [...] The difficulty of knowing and not knowing has been eliminated on the level of possession only to emerge on the level of having.¹¹

What had been thrown out of the door (the impossibility of possessing and non-possessing, at the same time, the knowledge of a thing) now flies back through the window (on the level of having and not having, at the same time, the knowledge of a thing). If it is not possible for me to have and, at the same time, not have the knowledge of twelve, I can never grasp the eleven-bird instead of the twelve, because I cannot confuse something I know with something else that I also know! If it were the case, as Socrates states by his objection, the aviary analogy would lead us to a paradoxical conclusion: the knowledge of the numbers eleven and twelve would be the explanation of our not knowing that five and seven makes twelve (199d2–8). So because of the Aviary model’s failure to explain the false opinion, its existence still remains something incomprehensible. Even Socrates and Theaetetus are both forced to draw this conclusion at 200a10–b6:

So after all our long detours, here we are once more, face to face with the first puzzle! That prize contradictor we mentioned will just laugh at us, and say this: “Oh, you outstanding persons! So someone who knows both a knowledge-bird and an ignorance-bird – he thinks that one of them, which he knows, is the other of them, which he also knows? Or is it that he does not know either of them, and believes that the one which he doesn’t know is the other, which he also doesn’t know? Or is it that he knows one of them and not the other, and thinks that the one that he knows is the other that he doesn’t know, or that the one that he doesn’t know is the one that he does know?”

Theaet. 200a10–b6

11 POLANSKY (1992), pp. 198–199.

If the Aviary-soul model is not able to explain how the false opinion occurs, what is the role played by this metaphor in the dialogue? Or, more generally speaking, if the “Jury paradox” is an argument strong enough to refute the second definition of *epistēmē*, why does Plato choose to consecrate almost twelve Stephanus pages to a long discussion which not only is unable to clarify how false belief is possible, but is also worthless in refuting the second definition of knowledge? If this long discussion is not a refutation of the second definition proposed by Theaetetus, why is Plato so interested in it? I suggest that, in order to address these questions, the double hunting described in the Aviary must be interpreted in a different way than the one proposed by Socrates.

3 Adalier’s Reading of the Aviary Model

Before expressing my own proposal, I find helpful to focus the attention on Adalier’s reading of the Aviary soul model. Adalier rightly observes that the Wax Block and the Aviary are not Plato’s models in the sense that «they are models which are actually subscribed to by him».¹² The discussion of these models as solutions to the problem of false belief does not reflect Plato’s own original efforts to come to grips with this problem. Adalier suggests the idea «that the discussion may be dialectical in nature» and intends to reflect Plato’s «engagement with, and responses to, certain views that are not his own, which would open up the possibility that in the discussion Plato is not revealing his own difficulties but raising ones for the views of others».¹³ According to Adalier, the failure of the Aviary, as well as the one of the Wax Block, points out the failure of the materialistic ontology that underpins the Theaetetus definition of knowledge as true opinion: «Plato’s ontological provision for Theaetetus definition is essentially a world of radical material individuals, individuals devoid of property possession and of relations, with the corresponding judgements about them being those of identification, or naming, of these individuals».¹⁴ The materialistic nature of these models of the soul is the reason why problems stem from them: «the central problem faced in the Wax Block and the Aviary arises, in Plato’s view, as a result of ignoring participation in the Forms, a neglect inherent in the materialistic ontology at work».¹⁵ Adalier thinks that Plato would tackle the impasse at the end of the Aviary by introducing the

12 ADALIER (2001), p. 15.

13 ADALIER (2001), p. 15.

14 ADALIER (2001), p. 21.

15 ADALIER (2001), p. 21.

Forms into the discussion: the Forms, and the Platonic notion of part-whole relationship linked to them, would provide the theoretical and ontological items to solve the riddle of false opinion. By showing the failure in explaining the existence of false belief of the Block and the Aviary with their materialistic ontology, which consists solely of perceptibles and thoughts (imprints) and lacks any room for intelligible entities, the *Theaetetus* offers an indirect recommendation of the Forms.¹⁶ Theaetetus and Socrates commit two mistakes about the number: the young mathematician takes the number of things perceived to be the same thing as the perceived things themselves, while Socrates takes the knowledge or thought of the numbers to be the same as the numbers themselves. They commit these fouls because they adopt the restricted materialistic ontology inherent in the two soul-models: Theaetetus and Socrates place the numbers in one of the two ontological categories available in the Wax Block and in the Aviary (perceptibles and thoughts/imprints). But these are the wrong categories to put the numbers in, because the numbers belong for Plato to the realm of Forms. As Adalier writes: «on Plato analysis, 5 and 7 are parts that make up the whole that is 12, and parts are different from the whole of which they are parts because they participate in different Forms from the one that the whole participates in, the part-whole structure being thus constituted».¹⁷ So, the materialist, by neglecting the Forms, misinterprets the part-whole structure of things because he reduces wholes to the mere sum of parts. An instance of such misinterpretation is taking numbers as a mere plurality of units, a view according to which 12 is identical to 5 and 7. The correct use of the parts-whole relationship, added to the distinction between possessing and having knowledge, would offer a valuable way to explain the occurrence of false belief. In 198e7–199a2, in fact, Socrates claims that the distinction between possessing and having knowledge is able to overcome the paradox of the perfect mathematician or the perfect grammarian, who knows every number (letter) but, when he starts counting (writing), treats the result (words) and the numbers (letters) as if he did not know them. But the distinction between the two kinds of knowledge can solve this paradox only if it is admitted that the knowledge of the parts, letters or numbers (addends), is not the same as the knowledge of a word or of a number as a whole: the collection of its parts

16 As ADALIER (2001), pp. 3–4 openly recognizes he put himself on the hermeneutical reading of the dialogue inaugurated by Cornford. According to him the *Theaetetus* must be only an indirect confirmation of *Republic* and *Phaedo*, and specifically of those passages that claim that the only knowledge is knowledge of Forms. As CORNFORD (1935), p. 163 wrote, «the *Theaetetus* leads to this old conclusion by demonstrating the failure of all attempts to extract knowledge from sensible objects».

17 ADALIER (2001), p. 36.

is a way to describe a whole, but is not identical to its perfect knowledge.¹⁸ As it is known, however, Socrates does not take this path because in the materialist ontology of the Aviary model the knowledge of the parts coincides with the knowledge of the whole, and the identification of the two makes the distinction between having and possessing knowledge useless. In addition, this is also what leads this model to failure: if, as happens in the Aviary account, the whole is merely the sum of its parts and knowing the whole is equal to knowing its parts, there is no room for the existence of false belief.

4 Some Remarks on Adalier's Reading of the Aviary

While I do share some points of Adalier's reading, I happen to not share some others, but I think it is still useful to reflect upon his proposal.

First, I agree with the idea that in some ways Plato, in his criticism of the Aviary, hints indirectly at the part-whole relationship as a good analogy to make an indirect allusion to the Forms. In a previous study I tried to provide a metaphysical reading of the part-whole relationship in the so-called Dream Theory, according to which the wholes play the role of Forms and the parts the role of the qualitative items (or *poiotēta*), which belong to the Form but are not identical to it.¹⁹ On the ground of this metaphysical reading I have shown that, in the holistic system proposed by Plato in the Dream Theory, while the *logos* is able to acquire some information and some relations among the items that compose the holistic structure (the Form) it has to know, yet it cannot attain complete knowledge of the structure (*ousia*) as a whole. The rationale adumbrated by Adalier as a solution for the Aviary failure seems to me similar to the one at work in Socrates' version of the Dream theory; just as the number twelve is in itself a whole that is something other than the mere sum of its parts (5 and 7 or 4 and 8), so the Form is a whole that is something more complete than the addition of its *poiotēta* or parts: "pleasant through sight and hearing" is a part of the Beautiful but is not identical to Forms of Beauty, because Beauty as

18 I argued for a similar thesis in MAFFI (2014), pp. 210–211. In *Metaph.* v, 1020 b 6–7 Aristotle says that the *ousia* of a thing is what it is once, «as for instance what six is, not two or three times, but once; for six is once six». Therefore the *ousia* of twelve, or twelve as a whole, is what twelve is once. This means that mathematical operations like "7 + 5" or "8 + 4" are not identical with twelve as a *holon*, but they are parts of the whole and, consequently, they are ways of describing a whole (twelve) that is not in itself the mere sum of its parts. By analogy, if the *ousia* of a Form (a Form as a whole) is something more than the sum of its *poiotēta*, then the knowledge of a Form is not identical with the knowledge of its parts.

19 See MAFFI (2007), pp. 11–21, and MAFFI (2014), pp. 259–278.

a *holon* (like the wagon in *Theaet.* 207b8–c4) cannot be reduced to the simple addition of its parts. This means that knowing the parts of the wagon is not the same as knowing the *ousia* of wagon (Form) or the wagon (Form) as a whole.

Moreover, we can find some references to the Forms also in the previous parts of the dialogue. There are at least two passages of the *Theaetetus* which seem to make clear hints to the Forms, or introduce items that play the role of the Forms.

The first occurrence concerns the so-called Digression (172c1–177b8) on the philosopher's way of life: here Plato uses phrases like *an monon tychōsi tou ontos* (172 d9: «provided only they get at what is»), *ti de pot'estin anthrōpos* (174b3: «what man himself is») and *autēs dikaiosynēs te kai adikias* (175c2: «of justice and injustice themselves»). Like Chappell, who rightly recognizes that «no one disputes that these phrases are part of the Middle-Period language for Forms»,²⁰ I firmly believe, as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, that such allusions are in themselves hints to the Forms, because of the close similarity between the *Theaetetus* Digression and two passages, respectively in the *Phaedo* (69a 6–c2) and in the *Republic* (500b9–d2).²¹ Given that no one disputes that in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* passages Plato is indeed referring to the Forms, it seems to me very plausible for him to be intentionally referring to the Forms also in the Digression.

The second hint to the Forms can be found in a passage placed into the final refutation of the first definition of *epistēmē* (183c3–187a 9). At *Theaet.* 186a, Plato makes a list of *koina*, items common to all perceptions and perceived only by the soul in itself. Among the scholars of this dialogue there is an ongoing discussion about the ontological status of the *koina*, but, as I have tried to demonstrate in my previous work, I believe it is hard to give them an ontological status other than that of the Platonic Forms, because in *Theaetetus* they play the same role that the Forms play in the *Phaedo*: they mark the passage from perceptual knowledge to intellectual knowledge.²²

So, I agree with Adalier's idea that some hints or allusion to the Forms can be found in this dialogue (and in the Aviary passage), in particular we can find concepts, metaphors or models which can replace the role and the functions of the Forms. And I also agree with him when he says that the Wax Block and the Aviary are not Plato's own explanations of the false belief and that, even if Plato is indeed the creator of these metaphors of the soul, he merely assigns them a dialectical function. However, my disagreement with Adalier's proposal

20 CHAPPELL (2004), p. 127.

21 See MAFFI (2019), pp. 147–155.

22 See MAFFI (2014), pp. 171–176.

concerns the reason Plato would make such indirect allusions to Forms, and the purpose for the dialectical function of the two models. Adalier claims that the pages about the failure in explaining the false opinion offer a glimpse of the general meaning of the *Theaetetus*. Since the cause of the collapse of the Aviary is the neglect of Forms, the *Theaetetus* would serve as an indirect recommendation of the theory of Forms: without the introduction of Forms it proves impossible not only to explain how the false belief occurs, but also to find a correct definition to describe what kind of phenomenon knowledge is.²³ Furthermore, the collapse of the Wax Block and of the Aviary shows the impossibility of a materialistic account of knowledge and its object: the materialistic ontology of these two models engenders difficulties which are not solvable within the boundaries marked by the models themselves. So the target of the dialectical discussion about the false would be the materialist account of knowledge.²⁴

I believe, like Adalier, that there are many items in the dialogue than can be read as hints to Forms and, consequently, I also think that Plato, when he writes the *Theaetetus*, is far from displaying dissatisfaction with the Forms and is still adhering to the Two World Theory. But all this does not lead to conclude that the introduction of the Forms would solve the problem of the nature of human knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. I argue instead that Plato's allusions to Forms may be interpreted at the opposite: through these hints to the Forms Plato warns the readers that not even the introduction of Forms can offer the solution to the problem of the nature of *epistēmē*.²⁵ If Plato has at his disposal the factor (Forms) which can provide the correct response to the question 'what is knowledge', why does he not explicitly use it? Adalier's (and Cornford's) thesis is that Plato in *Theaetetus* intends to show the impossibility of attaining knowledge of the sensible world without evoking the intelligible world. However, to accomplish this task the first part of the dialogue would be enough. And two questions remain: what do the other two parts of the dialogue mean? Is a long and complex dialogue like the *Theaetetus* really only an indirect confirmation of doctrines we have already learned from other dialogues? For instance, we already know from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* that the world of appearance has not in itself its *raison d'être* and that material causes are not the real causes of the sensible world. My hypothesis is that

23 ADALIER (2001), pp. 34–36.

24 An interesting defense of the thesis that the dialectical target of the *Theaetetus* is a materialistic ontology strongly linked to an empiricist epistemology is offered by CHAPPELL (2004). For a discussion of Chappell's proposal I refer to MAFFI (2006), pp. 459–465.

25 About how the introduction of the Forms is unable to solve the riddle of the *Theaetetus* see also TRABATTONI (2018), pp. VII–XXII.

the *Theaetetus* contributes something new to Plato's philosophy, but this new piece of doctrine does not consist, by refuting the Forms, in a theoretical rupture with the onto-epistemological horizon sketched in the middle-period dialogues, because the novelty introduced in the *Theaetetus* presupposes this horizon. By placing in some relevant passages of the dialogue items that can be read as hints of Forms (because they play a role very similar to the one played by the Forms themselves), Plato aims to highlight that with the *Theaetetus* we are still in the onto-epistemological landscape outlined in his middle-period dialogues. In this way, it is possible to see that the new epistemological ideas that Plato introduces in the second and the third parts of the *Theaetetus* must also be included in the onto-epistemological horizon sketched in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The outstanding novelty of the *Theaetetus* is that, once these ideas are inserted into this horizon, they inexorably modify it and, consequently, Plato's theory of knowledge as well.

I will display in the last paragraph of the present work what in my opinion the novelty of the *Theaetetus* consists in; but first I have to deal briefly with my second point of disagreement with Adalier's reading.

It may be true that the Wax Block and the Aviary are models through which Plato attacks the materialistic and empiricist approach to the problem of knowledge. I argue, though, that the dialectical function of these models points our attention towards something else; that is, that there is another possible way to read the image of the two kinds of hunts. I would suggest that the distinction between possessing and having knowledge, with its corresponding double type of hunting depicted in the Aviary, aims at calling the careful reader's attention back to the doctrine of Recollection exposed in the *Meno*. My hypothesis is that the problems and some features of the Aviary-soul model have the dialectical task to link the Aviary passage with the doctrine of Recollection in the *Meno*. One of the merits of Adalier's interpretative hypothesis lies in the fact that it makes it plausible to read the Wax Block and the Aviary metaphors in a dialectical way, namely as means that point the attention towards other Platonic tenets not explicitly exposed (but presupposed) in the *Theaetetus*. This has the merit of being compatible with what Plato wrote elsewhere about the soul activity in knowing something. But Adalier is not the only scholar to suggest a dialectical reading of this dialogue. David Sedley proposes «an interpretation of the dialogue according to which Socrates [...] although not himself a Platonist, was, so to speak, the midwife of Platonism».²⁶ By developing this implicit portrayal of Socrates as the 'midwife of Platonism', Plato «aims to demonstrate, if not the identity, at any rate the profound continuity, between,

26 SEDLEY (2004), p. 8.

on the one hand, his revered master's historic contribution and, on the other, the Platonist truth». ²⁷ Consequently, seasoned readers of Plato can see the platonic subtext lying hidden under the Socratic text. The platonically informed readers can appreciate in the *Theaetetus* all the Socratic insights which paved the way to Plato's mature thought. This 'external midwifery', that, according to Sedley, Plato has «practiced on us the readers», implies that the dialogue must be interpreted as a text full of allusions to the other dialogues of Plato, and therefore as a text that structurally needs to be read in continuity with the dialogues of the middle period. Despite my disagreement with the general meaning of Sedley's reading of the *Theaetetus*, I think that this stands also in the case of the Aviary soul-model: to read it in the light of another main tenet of Platonic thought may be very useful to provide a plausible hermeneutical hypothesis of the function of the Aviary metaphor. To synthesize: I agree with Adalier that the metaphors of the Wax block and of the Aviary are not the best tools for Plato to solve the riddle of false opinion, and therefore like him I believe that the two metaphors have a dialectical function. However, I affirm that Plato's dialectical intent is not limited to a critique of the materialistic account of knowledge. Rather, it seems to me that Plato's dialectical intent is to help the reader realize that behind the model of the Aviary one can see the shadow of the *Meno* and its doctrine of Recollection, which constitutes a plausible solution to the issues that underlie the model of the Aviary.

In the next two paragraphs I will try to ground this hypothesis in order to justify the parallelism between the Aviary passage and the *Recollection* in the *Meno*.

5 Arguments Supporting a Parallelism between the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno*

In his study on *Theaetetus* McDowell proposes to read the Aviary as an implicit critique of the doctrine of Recollection. He compares the puzzle of 198a4–c10 to the eristic paradox of *Meno* 80d–e («If you already know what virtue is, you don't need to look for it; if you don't already know, you won't know when you have found it»). In the *Meno* this paradox is solved by invoking the theory of Recollection. So, McDowell finds that there is a «parallelism» between on one hand the *Meno*'s puzzle and its solution, and on the other the 198a4–c10 puzzle and its solution found in the Aviary distinction between possessing knowledge and having it. While I agree with McDowell when he suggests that there is a

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

parallelism between the *Meno's* puzzle and the *Theaetetus'* 198a4–c10, I have to disagree when he affirms that its aim is to suggest the criticism of the Aviary is implicitly also a criticism to the use of the Theory of Recollection to work out the *Meno* puzzle.²⁸ I think that Plato's aim here is quite the opposite: the parallelism points out that the absence in the *Theaetetus* of a doctrine like the Recollection is the reason why it seems impossible to find an explanation of how the false belief occurs. The Recollection satisfies the compulsory requirement which makes the existence of false opinion explicable: I can know and, at the same time, not know the object X.²⁹ Let's suppose, according to the Recollection, that when my soul was in hyperuranion, it saw the Form of Beauty and then, upon entering the body, my soul forgot the most part of the Form's content, retaining only some traces of the Form. This body of traces constitutes my partial knowledge of Beauty, by virtue of which I can affirm that Beauty is "pleasant through sight and hearing". Based on this partial knowledge I can rightly say that a Beethoven symphony is beautiful, but I can also wrongly say that a good action is not beautiful because my soul has forgotten the moral value of the Form of Beauty and has not yet recollected it. In this way the existence of false belief finds its explanation.

If this were the case, another question would rise to our attention: why did Plato decide not to use the theory of Recollection as means to solve his riddle, but instead limits himself only to concealing this theory behind the collapse of the Aviary model? An answer to this question is needed in order to address the following objection: if Plato wanted to explain knowledge and false belief through the Recollection, he could have done so. But, since he did not, it must be concluded that it is useless to read the *Theaetetus* within the network of other platonic dialogues because it is a dialogue already complete in itself. As a first partial response it must be said that, as shown above, the *Theaetetus* invites the scholars to interpret it in relation with other dialogues: by means of images, metaphors and concepts there are in it hints and allusions to some important platonic tenets. It is not unsound to assume that Plato deliberately intends to hint or allude to some of his philosophical ideas without evoking them directly because he deems enough to call them back to his readers in the form of a suitable reminder such as an image, a simile, or a brief excursus; and

28 MCDOWELL (1973), pp. 221–223.

29 This is exactly the possibility that *Theaetetus* does not dare to choose at 196 c7–d4. The false opinion remains without explanation until it is admitted that there is a way according to which "it is possible for someone to be ignorant of the very things he knows" (196 c7–8). The Recollection is the explanation of such way.

a good reminder must contain only such items that make the reader able to recall what Plato wants him to remember.

Before completing the answer to this question, I will have to provide additional information about the aforementioned parallelism.

This parallelism is not so obvious *prima facie*, because in 197e2–3 Socrates states that «[...] when we are children, this enclosure [*scil.* the mental aviary] is empty». According to some scholars, this detail is strong enough to close off any attempt to read the theory of Recollection into the Aviary.³⁰

McDowell limits himself to asserting that this difference does not damage the parallelism he alleges; but Chappell notices that «he does not say why he thinks the difference unimportant nor does he explain why Plato might have added this difference».³¹ Socrates' statement is a very inept addition if we intend to read the puzzle of 198a4–c10 as a parallel of the paradox of *Meno* 80d–e.

To smooth this inept addition Sedley attributes to the historical Socrates the idea that our aviaries are empty in infancy, because the historical Socrates cannot have held the theory that learning is recollection. But, even if we cannot properly speak of Recollection, in the passage 198d4–8 we can find some allusions to the mature Platonic doctrine of the anamnesis and to the thesis supported in the *Meno* that “all learning is recollection”.³²

Despite the historical Socrates' denial of our innate knowledge, the reader who knows Plato's philosophy will appreciate that the Socratic description of learning in the Aviary has some important items which pave the way to the Platonic theory of Recollection.

As already stated earlier, I disagree with Sedley's hermeneutical reading of the dialogue because I think it simplistic to lay the blame of the aporetic conclusion of the *Theaetetus* on the historical Socrates, but this is not the appropriate place for a general and critical discussion of Sedley's whole interpretation of the *Theaetetus*. Here I shall merely offer an explanation for this inept addition that doesn't require a multi-level (Socratic-Platonic) reading of the entire dialogue.

Trying to throw light on the Platonic addition of 197e2–3 we can imagine that the child's empty soul status is the same as the one the *Meno* slave finds himself in when Socrates starts to interrogate him about a problem of geometry.

What is the epistemic status of the slave during the whole anamnestic experiment? *Meno* introduces his slave as someone who is completely ignorant in

30 CORNFORD (1935), p. 136; BOSTOCK (1988), pp. 190–191; and CHAPPELL (2004), pp. 190–192.

31 CHAPPELL (2004), p. 192.

32 See SEDLEY (2004), pp. 29–30.

geometry – in the Aviary vocabulary, as someone whose aviary/soul is empty concerning geometry, because, having never studied geometry, he doesn't possess any geometrical birds in his cage. Regarding the knowledge of geometry, the slave is in a state of soul-emptiness, as it has been remarked by Socrates in 85c1 when he says that at the beginning of the experiment the slave doesn't possess any knowledge in geometry; but this is the same situation in which a child may be found when he starts learning the contents of geometry. Not by chance, in the immediately following line Socrates equates the birds with the contents of knowledge (in this case the already-formalized contents of arithmetic). This means that Plato here is talking about a standard situation that someone who starts learning a subject like geometry or arithmetic may find himself in. It is important to keep in mind the context in which Socrates is speaking: he is using a metaphor to clarify a certain phenomenon, namely how false belief occurs in the soul. He has just asked Theaetetus the effort to imagine the soul which possesses *epistēmē* as an aviary full of birds/knowledge. So, in order to encourage Theaetetus to a better understanding of the metaphor, Socrates describes the soul starting the process of learning a field of knowledge like geometry as a place empty of contents of geometry, namely as a soul which ignores the formalized contents of geometry (axioms, theorems ...). If it is plausible to read the emptiness of the child soul as emptiness of the contents of geometry, this implies that the child soul is not necessarily empty *in absolutum*. From the Aviary metaphor we can not take out valuable factors to determine whether the soul is absolutely empty or not; all we can say is that in the Aviary the soul is 'empty' in the sense that it lacks any formalized contents of geometry: the focus of the Aviary is not, in fact, on describing the process of learning but on pointing out how false belief may occur in the human soul. I think therefore that there is no need to overload the statement in 197e2–3 with a metaphysical meaning so strong to rule out the parallelism between the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus*: the child soul in the Aviary is empty of the contents/birds of geometry in the same way as the slave soul in the maieutic experiment in the *Meno* is empty of the contents of geometry.

However, in the *Meno*, as Ferrari rightly recognizes, despite the slave being introduced by Meno as completely ignorant in geometry, «non si può veramente sostenere che egli si presenti a Socrate completamente privo di sapere, come una *tabula rasa*».³³ Along the whole anamnestic experiment the slave reveals himself as able not only to understand the question posed to him by Socrates but also to make some logical connections: «si direbbe anzi – as Ferrari writes – che il nucleo dell'esperimento anamnastico consista esattamente

33 FERRARI (2017), p. 350.

nella soluzione di un problema effettuata per mezzo dell'attivazione delle disposizioni logico-razionali dello schiavo, ossia della sua capacità di stabilire nessi, vagliare opzioni, operare scelte a partire da determinati contenuti». ³⁴

Therefore, the fact that the soul is empty of the contents of a particular knowledge when the child begins his learning process does not mean that the soul is *absolutely* empty, because it possesses an innate, natural and logical endowment which is independent from the kind of education one may have received. The child in his aviary must possess the very same innate, natural and logical endowment that the slave possess in the maieutical experiment in the *Meno*, otherwise he would never be able to fill his empty soul with contents of geometry. The status of the slave in the *Meno* is therefore largely comparable with the one of the child who starts his learning process in the Aviary simile: even more so if we consider the fact that the slave, as well as the child, is just starting his process of learning. With the statement at 197e2–3 Socrates does not intend to rule out the basis of the anamnesis theory: to do so he would have needed a lot more philosophical arguments than a quick remark at the beginning of the description of the soul as an Aviary. With the statement at 197e2–3 Plato simply suggests that the child soul is empty of the specific and already-formalized contents of the geometry. This is also confirmed by the fact that the metaphor of the Aviary is introduced by Socrates to explain the error at the level of the exchange of thoughts; and this case is immediately represented by a mathematical example. The context itself therefore seems to suggest that the emptiness of the aviary concerns only the contents of the knowledge to be learned. If this is the case, then what Socrates said in 197e2 does not make the Aviary soul model incompatible with the condition of the slave in the *Meno*: in both cases the child and the slave learn something they do not know (the formalized contents of geometry) because their souls are empty of bits of geometry but are not empty *in absolutum*; their souls possess some innate *a priori* laws and universal notions which are a necessary requirement for learning any form of knowledge.

If my argument is plausible, then the objection against the parallelism between the *Meno* anamnesis and the Aviary is overcome. ³⁵ On the contrary,

34 FERRARI (2017), p. 350.

35 There is another way to overcome the objection and it is expressed by BRISSON (2008), p. 53: the thesis that our aviary of knowledge-birds is empty in infancy is a thesis included in the Aviary-model explanation of false belief; if the Aviary model is to be rejected, so also the thesis that our aviary of knowledge birds is empty in infancy is to be rejected. Brisson's aim is proving that the midwifery in the *Theaetetus* is compatible with the metaphysical background (including the doctrine of the Recollection) of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. For this reason he intends to show that the soul cannot be completely

the similarity between the condition of the soul of the *Meno* slave and the condition of the child's soul in the Aviary confirms the closeness between the two dialogues.

6 Further Arguments in Favor of the Parallelism between *Theaetetus* and *Meno*

There is something else that makes this parallelism plausible. Besides the allusions, already noted by McDowell, of *Theaetetus* 198a4–c10 to the *Meno* paradox of inquiry, there are other hints to the *Meno* doctrine of Recollection. To escape the paradox of the perfect mathematician who knows every number but, when he starts counting, treats the result and the numbers as if he didn't know them, Socrates describes the Aviary model (198d4–8) with the following words:

Just likewise, it may be a long time since a man came to learn a piece of knowledge, and first knew it. It's still possible for him to renew his knowledge (*katamanthanein*) of those same pieces of knowledge, each of which he came to possess long before (*analambanonta ten epistēmēn*), but did not have to hold in his thought. He can do it by laying his hands once more on the knowledge of each thing, and holding it tight.

Theaet. 198d4–8

Here a consistent echo of the *Meno* is immediately recognizable. As appropriately highlighted by Sedley, there are two noteworthy items: 1) Socrates uses the word *katamanthanein* with the meaning of «renewing the knowledge»; 2) the Greek phrase for «recovering the knowledge» is *analambanein ten epistēmēn* but this is the identical expression that it is twice used in the *Meno* (85d3–8) for “Recollection”.³⁶ It is hard to believe that in using this phrase Plato was completely unaware of the link he was building between *Meno* and *Theaetetus*. Moreover, if we consider that the initial situation of the child in the Aviary is similar to that of the slave boy in the *Meno*, and that the puzzle of the perfect arithmetician leaves his process of inquiry unexplained in the same way the *Meno* eristic argument does, it is difficult to deny that Plato makes us

and absolutely empty. I agree with that idea and, for this reason, I argue that the child soul is empty of the formalized contents of a science but is not empty in *absolutum*.

aware that the anamnesis theory of the *Meno* lies behind the Aviary model. At least, within this framework, nothing prevents us from providing a reading of the two epistemic conditions stated in the Aviary in the light of the doctrine of Recollection. The Aviary, being a metaphor of the condition of the soul when it knows or doesn't know something (and then when it has or hasn't true and false belief), may be open to different levels of interpretation.

After this long detour it is finally the moment to offer my reading of the double hunting described in the Aviary. If the status of the child in the Aviary may be equated to the one of the slave in the *Meno*, thus the double hunting – the first one to acquire and then possess knowledge and the second to hold the knowledge we have already possessed – may be compared to the two forms of knowing involved in the Recollection theory. And the link with the Recollection is justified by the parallelism between the status of the child in the Aviary and the one of the slave in the *Meno*.

Thus, in the light of the Recollection, we can compare the possessing (*ktêsis*) of knowledge to the knowledge that the soul has acquired when existing in the world of Forms before her embodiment: as can be gathered from the passage 197e2–6, the possessing (*ktêsis*) of knowledge occurs when a person acquires pieces of knowledge and shuts them up in their cage/soul: in this way we can affirm that «they have learned or discovered whatever it is that the knowledge itself is about, and that this is what knowledge is» (197e5–6). Consequently, the true meaning of the action of knowing (*to epistasthai*) something is for Socrates to capture the knowledge and lock it up in the cage of one's soul; namely, for Socrates *to epistasthai* means to possess knowledge. This is true also in other Platonic dialogues as, for instance, the *Phaedo*: in *Phaedo* 66 d–e Plato not only affirms that the real *epistēmē/sophia* consists in a perfect and complete grasp of the Forms performed by the eyes of the mind, but also claims that this status of *theōria* can be reached by the soul when it is disconnected and detaches from the body (*Phaedo* 67a). Consequently, also in the *Phaedo* *to epistasthai* means to possess in the soul/aviary every bird/Form because we have learnt them, in this case, by grasping their noetic content.

If the possessing (*ktêsis*) of knowledge can be equated to the knowledge that the soul has acquired in its prenatal status, then we can compare the holding (*hexis*) of knowledge to the knowledge that the humans, in their lifetime, have at their disposal: this kind of knowledge consists in the soul's effort, through the dialectic method, to re-seize the birds that it had previously acquired. In this perspective, the *hexis* of knowledge may be read as something similar to the *deuteros ploûs* metaphor in the *Phaedo*, according to which the human beings try to know the Forms not directly, by grasping them through a mental

insight, but through the practice of *logos* in the dialectical method.³⁷ To further the parallelism established here with the *Meno*, it is possible to compare the *hexis* of knowledge presented in the Aviary with the dialectical exercise carried out by the slave of Meno to solve the geometry problem that has been assigned to him.

As we know, Socrates rejects this option because he understands the *hexis* of knowledge not as a knowledge in progress – and therefore as partial and susceptible to errors – but as a full knowledge, as complete as the *ktêsis* of knowledge. As seen earlier, this is the reason why the Aviary model as an explanation of false belief is doomed to fail: if the *hexis* is a kind of knowledge as exhaustive as the *ktêsis* kind, there is no room for false beliefs in the interchange of items of knowledge, even if it were an interchange between an item of the *hexis* and an item of the *ktêsis* of knowledge. Behind the failure of the Aviary in explaining the existence of false opinion, the seasoned reader of Plato's dialogues can easily find another interpretation for the two kinds of hunting by reading them as the two kinds of knowledge involved in the Recollection. I argue that this is how Plato invites his readers of the *Theaetetus* not to forget what was said in the *Meno* concerning the nature of human knowledge, and what condition makes this knowledge possible.³⁸

But if this is true, why does Plato seem to allude to some important tenets of the *Meno* but decides not to use them in the *Theaetetus*? This may sound strange: why doesn't Plato mention the Recollection doctrine in a dialogue where not only has he already separated the possessing of knowledge from

37 For a detailed analysis of the meaning of the *Phaedo* in Plato's philosophy I refer to some important works by TRABATTONI: see, for instance TRABATTONI (2020), pp. 65–68 and TRABATTONI (2012), pp. LXVIII–LXXII. On the metaphor of the second voyage see also MARTINELLI TEMPESTA (2003), pp. 104–121. In brief, I shall summarize the content of the *Phaedo* as follows: true *epistēmē* cannot be attained until the soul has left the body, because the body is an insurmountable obstacle against attaining complete *sophia*: as long as we have a body we have *philo-sophia*, the only kind of knowledge and purification possible for the human being. We know that philosophy is the second best method for knowledge thanks to both the metaphor of the second voyage (99d2) and the simile that describes the *logos* as a raft we embark on to cross the sea of life. These images recall the fact that philosophy is an indirect kind of *epistēmē* because it can provide the best and least refutable of humane doctrines, but it cannot attain the absolute certainty that could instead be provided by a divine doctrine or by a direct vision of the Forms such as the soul had in its prenatal existence.

38 For a reading of the Recollection not as a method of knowledge, but as the only doctrine able to provide the metaphysical ground for human beings to learn, search, have false opinions and know anything see TRABATTONI (2020), pp. 137–143. I also argued for this kind of reading in MAFFI (2014), pp. 266–270.

the holding of knowledge, but also described the *katamanthanein* in terms of recovering the knowledge? Also, why doesn't Plato introduce the theory of anamnesis, a theory that is able to explain the occurrence of false belief, in a context where the topic discussed is precisely the occurrence of false opinion? It seems to me that in the *Theaetetus* Plato intends to remain a step behind the *Meno*. In the next paragraph I will clarify the meaning of the phrase "to remain a step behind the *Meno*" and I will explain my hypothesis about the reason Plato chooses to do so.

7 The Positive Contribution of the Aviary in the *Theaetetus*

It is obvious that Plato's silence about Recollection cannot be ascribed to the theory not having been elaborated at the time *Theaetetus* was composed: it's certain that the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* were written before the *Theaetetus*. Therefore, I believe that the absence of the Recollection in a context so rich of references as the Aviary must be read as intentional, and purposeful. It may be useful here to recall the four main references to the *Meno* found in the Aviary: 1) the strong similarity between the initial situation of the soul of the child in the Aviary and that of the soul of the slave boy in the *Meno*; 2) the fact, noted by McDowell, that the puzzle of the perfect arithmetician leaves his process of inquiry unexplained in the same way the *Meno* eristic argument does. It's noteworthy here that at 198e3–4 Socrates poses this question: «Should we say that in a case like this, the mathematician or the literate sets himself to learn from himself what he knows, even though he knows it already?», and this is exactly the issue the Recollection in the *Meno* offers a solution to; 3) in *Theaetetus* 198d4–8 Socrates uses the Greek phrase *analambanein ten epistēmēn* for «recovering the knowledge» and this is the identical expression that is twice used in the *Meno* (85d3–8) for «recollection»; 4) the possibility to read the two kinds of hunting in the Aviary (the κτήσις and the ἔξις of knowledge) as the two kinds of knowledge involved in the Recollection.

I argue that through these hints Plato's purpose is to make his readers able to realize that the doctrine of Recollection of the *Meno* lies behind the Aviary as its dialectical fulfilment, because the Recollection seems to be the possible solutions to the difficulties arisen in the Aviary; as Franco Trabattoni rightly observes, the Recollection is the Stone guest hovering behind the Aviary model and the Jury Paradox.³⁹ In this sense I argued that Plato puts the *Theaetetus* a step behind the *Meno*, because the *Theaetetus* is only a step away from the

39 See TRABATTONI (2018), pp. CXXII–CXXIV.

solution but Plato deliberately avoids taking this step. Why does Plato choose to do so? My hypothesis is obviously not that Plato no longer believes in philosophical tenets such as the Recollection or the Forms. My hypothesis is that Plato wants his readers not to forget that those tenets are still active and that what will be said in the continuation of the dialogue must be understood within the onto-epistemic framework those tenets take shape in.

The clear references to the Recollection, therefore, may be interpreted as signals Plato sends out in order to throw the *Theaetetus* in the onto-epistemological landscape outlined in the *Meno* and, in general, in his middle-period dialogue. I am convinced that the Aviary model also plays a very similar role to the one I assign elsewhere to the Digression about the life of the philosopher (*Theaet.* 172a1–177c4).⁴⁰ In a previous work on *Theaetetus* Digression I tried to demonstrate that all the main ideas the Digression displays have already been explained elsewhere: 1) the freedom of the philosopher, as opposed to the slavery of the orator, is a topic of the *Gorgias*; 2) the philosopher's care for the soul rather than the body and the thesis that there is no virtue without wisdom are claimed in the *Phaedo* as well in the *Republic*; 3) that "wisdom" is the knowledge of Forms and that it is a kind of purification and, as far as possible, assimilation to god is argued in the *Phaedo* and in the *Republic*. From these parallelisms the conclusion I feel inclined to draw is that the importance of the Digression consists exactly in the fact that it does not add anything new to Plato's philosophy, and in this way it actually shows that the onto-epistemological background of the *Theaetetus* (in particular the second and the third part of the *Theaetetus*) is the same background of the *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. As Plato, through the Digression, states that the epistemological issues of the *Theaetetus* must be located in the onto-epistemological framework of his middle dialogues, so, through the Aviary, he warns his readers that the Jury argument and the third part of the *Theaetetus* must be read in continuity not only with the *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus* but also with the *Meno*. All this may clarify why Plato should engage in a long discussion of false belief even if it proves useless not only to refute the second definition of *epistēmē*, but also to explain how false opinion occurs. Through his analysis of the Wax Block and the Aviary soul model, Plato aims not only at criticizing a materialist account of knowledge, but also at linking the remaining part of the *Theaetetus* within the horizon sketched by the Recollection in the *Meno*.

Someone might object that there is no need to detect the theory of Recollection in the background of the Aviary in order to see a link between the *Meno* and the last part of the *Theaetetus*, and that such link is already plainly

40 See MAFFI (2019), pp. 154–158.

stated: the third definition of *epistēmē* offered by Socrates («knowledge is *alēthēs doxa meta logou*») is very close to the famous passage at *Men.* 98a1–4 in which he proposes that the *alēthēs doxa* becomes *epistēmē* when one «binds» it by «calculation (*logismos*) of the cause (*aitia*)».

To this objection I reply as follows: in the next few lines (98a 4–5), Socrates identifies *aitias logismos* with *anamnēsis*. Consequently, the final hypothesis of the *Meno* is that someone can reach the perfect knowledge when the *aitias logismos* has completed the anamnestic procedure: at the end of the process the soul can contemplate, by a noetic insight, the content of the Forms and thus possess the real *epistēmē*.

Why does this definition of knowledge remain a mere hypothesis in the *Meno*? As mentioned earlier, at 98a1–8 Socrates states that knowledge is something more valuable than true belief, and that knowledge differs from true belief because of the binding, which gives the former a stability the latter lacks. But shortly after Socrates says:

And yet I myself am speaking not as one who knows, but as one who is guessing (*eikazōn*). What I don't think is pure guesswork is that the correct judgement and knowledge are different. If there's anything else that I would claim to know – and there are precious few things of which I would claim that – this is one thing that I would add to the list of those that I know.

Men. 98b1–5, transl. SEDLEY 2004, pp. 176–177

What is Socrates guessing? He is neither guessing that knowledge and true belief are two different epistemic states, nor that the binding (*desmos*) is the factor that makes knowledge more stable and therefore more valuable than true belief. What Socrates is guessing is that the binding must coincide with the *aitias logismos*. This is the guesswork that must be verified: whether the *aitias logismos* is really the *desmos* through which the *alēthēs doxa* becomes *epistēmē*.⁴¹ As we know, Socrates considers the *aitias logismos* an adequate

41 It may be objected that the *alla eikazon* at 98b2 can be translated not as «guessing» but as «representing by image» because the verb *eikazo* may also mean “represent by an image”. If this were the case, the hypothetical nature of what Socrates says at 98b1–5 would crumble. There are two reasons to choose to translate as «guessing» instead of «representing by an image». In the previous part of the dialogue 89e1–3 there are two occurrences (89e2–3: *eikazontes* and *eikazoimen*) of the verb *eikazein* that must be correctly translated with “guessing” because, as BENSON (2015), pp. 166–175 showed, the context of this passage is dialectical and hypothetical. This means that *eikazomai* in the sense of “to guess” is already used by Plato in the *Meno* and, consequently, it is plausible that Plato uses this

candidate to transform true belief into knowledge, because he has previously identified it with the *anamnesis*. Once the *logismos* has completed the anamnestic procedure towards the cause, and once this calculation of the real cause is added to true belief, we finally possess knowledge. Unfortunately, a proof to this guesswork is not provided in the *Meno*. My idea is that the proof to this guesswork can be found in the *Theaetetus*.⁴²

In the last ten Stephanus pages of the *Theaetetus* (including the final refutation of the second definition of knowledge) Plato will test whether the hypothesis of the *Meno* (that the addition of *aitias logismos* to a true belief can make it into a knowledge) is right or wrong.

In the third part of the dialogue, in fact, Plato proceeds to explain why there is no sense of *logos* that can get human knowledge beyond the boundaries of *doxa*.⁴³ All the *logos* can do is make the *doxai* better and better, and more informative, but it can't transform them into *epistēmai*. There is no time or space in the present work to explain why and how this is, as I have done elsewhere.⁴⁴ In brief, though, in my earlier works on the *Theaetetus* I have shown that in the holistic system proposed by Plato in the third part of the dialogue (the so-called Dream Theory) the *logos* is able to acquire some information and some relations among the items that compose the holistic structure (Form) it has to know, but it cannot attain complete knowledge of the structure as a whole. To do that it would be necessary to achieve a direct kind of knowledge,

verb with this same meaning some pages later. The second reason offers an argument for choosing “guessing” over “representing by an image”. Those who argue for the latter (see PETRUCCI 2011, pp. 258–259 and FERRARI 2016, p. 288, n. 237) support their claim with the fact that at 972–98a1 (few lines before 98b2) Plato uses the image of the statues of Daedalus to introduce the clear difference between *epistēmē* and *alēthēs doxa*. That is true, but I think he does so to clarify the difference between knowledge and true belief, and in particular the *desmos* as what makes knowledge more valuable than true opinion. Socrates, however, is certain of the difference between those two epistemic states, as we know from *Men.* 98b1–5. What Socrates doesn't yet know is the element that plays the role of the *desmos* and for this reason he is speaking not as someone who knows, but as someone who is guessing. So, what Socrates is guessing is that the binding (*desmos*) must coincide with the *aitias logismos*. So, what needs to be verified is whether the *aitias logismos* is really the *desmos* through which the *alēthes doxa* becomes *epistēmē*.

42 Recently EL MURR (2013), pp. 166–171, and FERRARI (2016), pp. 84–86 had the merit not only to recognize the similarity between the third definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno* passage (98a1–4), but they even argued for the theoretical reasons why the last part of the *Theaetetus* must be read in continuity with the passage of the *Meno*. Despite my reaching a different conclusion from theirs, they offer an important contribution to appreciate the necessity to read the *Theaetetus* in relation with the *Meno*.

43 For a detailed analysis of this point see TRABATTONI (2018), pp. CXXX–CXXXVIII; and MAFFI (2014), pp. 249–278.

44 See MAFFI (2014), ch. IV.

a noetic insight that is impossible for the human *logos* during its earthly life.⁴⁵ Therefore, the *Theaetetus* tries to convey the theoretical reasons why philosophical knowledge cannot be a comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge, neither in the form of a direct mental grasp of the Forms performed by the eyes of the mind nor in the form of definitional knowledge achieved by an incessant use of dialectical methods, that should be able to provide complete definitions of Forms.⁴⁶ From the failure of the *Theaetetus* we realize that the hypothesis of the *Meno* is wrong: there is no sense of *logos* (included the *aitias logismos*) able to transform the *aletheis doxai* in *epistēmai*, because no meaning of *logos* can restore the same direct vision of Forms the soul had in its disembodied dimension. Through the failure of the last section of the *Theaetetus* we can understand the theoretical grounds explaining why human knowledge is second-hand knowledge, or knowledge insofar as it is possible for a man.

8 Conclusion

To warn the readers that the last section of the *Theaetetus* must be read in continuity with the *Meno* Plato chooses two hints. The first, as we have seen, is the clear resemblance between the third definition of knowledge proposed by Theaetetus and the hypothesis of the *Meno* that there is a factor (the *aitias logismos*) which produces the differences between true opinion and knowledge. The second insight is given through the references to the theory of the Recollection in the *Meno* found in the Aviary model.

Why is it so important to include the *Theaetetus* in the ontological and epistemological landscape of the middle period dialogues included the *Meno*? Because it is essential to really appreciate the contribution of the *Theaetetus* to Plato's epistemology: as argued earlier, we cannot appreciate the novelty introduced by this dialogue in Plato's philosophy if we place the arguments of the *Theaetetus* outside the boundaries sketched in the *Meno*, *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. It should now be explained what this novelty consists in.

Let's start with the second hint that links the *Theaetetus* with the *Meno*: the references to the theory of the Recollection of the *Meno* found in the Aviary model. This hint is not a marginal detail, because it is located in a strategic position. Just after the failure of the Aviary to explain the existence of false belief, Socrates definitively refutes the second definition of *epistēmē* through

45 See MAFFI (2007), pp. 10–21; and MAFFI (2014), pp. 249–259.

46 For this reading of the general meaning of the dialogue I am deeply indebted to TRABATTONI (2020), pp. 164–174; and TRABATTONI (2018), pp. CXXXVIII–CXLVIII.

an argument that is known as the “jury argument” (*Theaet.* 200d5–201c7). With this argument he offers a counter-example to the thesis that knowledge is true belief. A skilled lawyer can lead jurymen to a state of true belief without leading them to a state of knowledge; it is therefore evident that knowledge and true belief are different states. At 201b9–c2 Plato states that the jurymen don’t know because they didn’t see the crime. Only the eye-witness possesses knowledge, because he saw the crime directly. So the jurymen have a second-hand knowledge, the true belief, while only the eye-witness has the first-hand knowledge, the *epistēmē*. Trabattoni suggested a metaphysical and metaphorical reading of the Jury passage and I have also adopted this reading in my previous works.⁴⁷

Trabattoni compares the condition of the eye-witness who saw the crime directly with the condition of the disembodied soul who grasps the Forms by a noetic insight: in many passages of the dialogues Plato describes the *epistēmē* or *sophia* as a perfect grasping of the Forms effected by the eyes of the mind.⁴⁸ If, following Trabattoni’s reading of the “jury argument”, the condition of the eye-witness is comparable with the condition of the disembodied soul who grasps the Forms, then the condition of the jurors is comparable instead with the one of the humans in their mortal life because they possess a second-hand knowledge, namely, the true judgement (*doxa*): they don’t have the mental insight of the Form at their disposal, but they know it, as far as it is possible in the earthly life, through the dialectical method.

According to Trabattoni, therefore, the Jury passage – which rejects the second definition of knowledge – is a metaphor that presupposes the theory of Recollection because it is an indirect way to describe the same situation outlined in the Recollection doctrine.⁴⁹

I think that it is not by chance that Plato placed the Jury passage just immediately after the discussion about the Aviary model. Through references and hints to the doctrine of the anamnesis in the *Meno*, the Aviary metaphor has the form of a suitable reminder which allows readers to recall to their mind the theory of Recollection. This is an essential reminder for two reasons. Firstly, the Aviary offers an argument supporting the metaphorical and metaphysical reading of the Jury passage. It is true that this interpretation of the passage finds its theoretical ground in the theory of Recollection, but we don’t necessarily

47 See TRABATTONI (2008), pp. 254–270; TRABATTONI (2018), pp. CXXV–CXXVIII and TRABATTONI chapter in this volume; and also MAFFI (2014), pp. 216–222.

48 See, for instance, *Phaedo* 66d–e. However the most clues that the *epistēmē* consists in a direct vision of the Forms are to be found in *Resp.* 476b4–11, 486c4–d2, 500b8–c7, 501b1–7, 519c10, 524c6–8, 536e1.

49 See TRABATTONI (2020), pp. 171–172.

need to go back to *Meno* or *Phaedo* to provide a justification of this reading: we can find it in the *Theaetetus* itself. The Aviary model, which is immediately followed by the Jury, has already warned the readers to keep in mind the theory of Recollection as dialectical fulfilment of the Aviary model, because this doctrine represents what the Aviary lacks to explain the genesis of false belief. An example which marks the continuity between the Jury argument, the Aviary and the Recollection can be provided. In the Jury the eye-witness is not only comparable to the disembodied soul who saw the Forms, but is also the person who, because they saw the crime directly, possesses knowledge or, according to the Aviary vocabulary, stored the birds in the cage. In the Aviary, in fact, the possessing (*ktêsis*) of knowledge occurs when a person acquires pieces of knowledge/bird and shuts them up in their cage/soul; but, as I showed earlier, because the possessing (*ktêsis*) of knowledge can be equated to the knowledge that the soul has acquired in its prenatal status as stated in the Recollection, we may conclude that the choice of reading the Jury argument in a metaphorical and metaphysical way in the light of the Recollection finds its validity on the basis of the references to the *Meno* available in the Aviary.⁵⁰ According to my hypothesis, the Aviary offers a glimpse of the Recollection so that the careful reader of Plato's dialogues is also invited to interpret the Jury passage in analogy with the Recollection doctrine.

Furthermore, and this is the second reason, if in the Aviary as well as in the Jury passage there are many references or allusions to the *Meno* and to the Recollection, it is not so surprising that the third part of the *Theaetetus* may be read as a discussion of the hypothesis left unverified in the *Meno*: whether or not the addition of a complete *logos* is the factor that can transform the *alêthês doxa* into *epistêmê*. However, to determine the third part of the *Theaetetus* as a reliable test to check whether the hypothesis left unverified in the *Meno* is correct or not, it is necessary to assume that the main philosophical cores of the middle-period dialogues (the Recollection, the Two-World theory, the second voyage as a dialectical method and the idea that the full knowledge of a Form is its noetic and direct insight) are also valid in the *Theaetetus*. Some scholars rightly claim that we cannot read the *Theaetetus* outside the context

50 It goes without saying that we can apply the same pattern to the condition of the jurors in the court. The jurors are not only comparable with humans in their mortal life because they possess a second-hand knowledge, but they are also comparable to those who try to re-seize the birds that they have previously acquired: in the Aviary this kind of hunting/knowledge is called the *hexis* of knowledge. As in the Aviary the person has to re-catch the knowledge they had previously acquired and stored in their soul/cage, so the in the Recollection the human soul has to recollect the knowledge acquired in its disembodied dimension. Analogously, the jurors in the court try to recompose the scene of the crime through the interrogation of the eyewitnesses.

sketched in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*, but they experience difficulties in finding direct evidence of such context in the dialogue. They also conclude that it can just be implicitly assumed that the context of the middle dialogues is tacitly implied in *Theaetetus*. Ferrari, for instance, correctly claims that we must interpret the *Theaetetus* in the light of middle-period works, but, because he cannot find hints of them in the text, he argues as follows: if we hope to avoid importing the epistemological framework of the *Theaetetus* from Mars, we must assume that it comes by way of the middle dialogues.⁵¹ Far from being a guess, the onto-epistemological horizon of the middle dialogues is explicitly stated in *Theaetetus* through the Digression, the Aviary and the Jury paradox. And it is vitally important to place the *Theaetetus* in the ontological and epistemological landscape of the middle period dialogues to really appreciate its contribution to Plato's epistemology. What does this contribution consist in? As already stated in the previous paragraph, it is my opinion that the *Theaetetus* tries to convey the theoretical reasons for the impossibility of philosophical knowledge to be a comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge either in the form of a direct mental grasp of the Forms effected by the eyes of the mind or in the form of definitional knowledge, achieved by an incessant use of dialectical methods, able to provide complete definitions of Forms. Therefore, the *Theaetetus* clarifies why, from an epistemological point of view, the knowledge of the philosopher is always accompanied by an expression of prudence and limitation, the same expression of prudence and limitation that follows the attempts to become *sophos* like god in the *Phaedo* (69d) and the *Republic* (500c9–d2). And in this way, as I said earlier, the *Theaetetus* is a refutation of the hypothesis left unverified in the *Meno*.

In conclusion, what I have tried to offer here is a metaphysical and metaphorical reading of the Aviary model in order to show how it plays also a positive role in the dialogue. Even if the Aviary fails to explain the existence of the false, it has the merit of providing key items for a complete reading of the last part of the *Theaetetus*. As a warning signal, the Aviary sends an important message to the Platonic readers: in order to really appreciate the novelty the *Theaetetus* brings to Plato's theory of knowledge, it must be placed into the epistemological framework of the middle dialogues and, in particular, into a strong relation with the definition of knowledge described in *Meno*.⁵²

51 See FERRARI (2011), p. 140.

52 This means that the *Theaetetus* is not, as some scholars believe – see BURNYEAT (1990), pp. 117–118 and 238–240 – a break with the *Republic* and Plato's middle dialogues, because it should open a third epistemic route that goes beyond the earlier epistemology and ontology sketched in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.

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