CHAPTER 1

Themes in the *Theaetetus*

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1

The *Theaetetus* is generally thought to have been written after the *Parmenides* but before the *Sophist*.[1] There are three interlocutors: Socrates (who famously, and only in this dialogue, compares himself to an intellectual midwife, giving birth to others' ideas), the young mathematician Theaetetus, and his teacher Theodorus. Like many Platonic dialogues, the *Theaetetus* focuses on a «What is F?» question, in this case «What is knowledge (*epistēmē*)?».[2] Three answers are considered:[3] that knowledge is perception (KP); that it is true belief (*doxa*) (KTB);[4] and that it is true belief with an account (*meta logou*) (KTBL). Each answer is rejected; and so the dialogue ends in *aporia*, though it is sometimes thought that Plato hints that he favors the final, or some further, answer. Let's look at each answer in turn, beginning with the first.

1 *Theaetetus* 183e7–184a1 is sometimes thought to allude to the *Parmenides*. The *Theaetetus* ends with Socrates suggesting that he and Theodorus meet again the next morning; the *Sophist* begins with Theodorus saying they (Theodorus and others, including Theaetetus) have come as agreed the previous day.

2 It's been argued that *epistēmē*, as Plato conceives of it, isn't knowledge as we conceive of it nowadays. I don't have the space to engage with this issue here. The reader can consider how Plato conceives of *epistēmē* in the *Theaetetus* and draw his or her own conclusion about whether it amounts to knowledge in a recognizable sense of the term. «Knowledge» is used in the two best English translations of the dialogue: that by MCDOWELL (1973), (which also contains full and illuminating notes) and that by M.J. Levett, rev. by M.F. Burnyeat (BURNYEAT 1990, which also contains an indispensable introduction by Burnyeat).

3 Actually, four: Theaetetus initially suggests that geometry, shoemaking, and the like are kinds of knowledge (*epistēmē*) (146c7–d3); but Socrates dismisses this as not being the right kind of answer for, among other things, it says what knowledge is of, whereas the correct answer should say what knowledge is: knowledge can't be defined in terms of its objects.

4 It's been argued that *doxa*, as Plato conceives of it, isn't belief as we conceive of it nowadays. The reader can consider how Plato conceives of *doxa* in the *Theaetetus*, and draw his or her own conclusion about whether it amounts to belief in a recognizable sense of the term. *Doxa* is sometimes translated as «judgment» rather than as «belief».

2

Rather than exploring KP on its own, Socrates links it to Protagoras' view that man is the measure of all things (P) and to Heraclitus' view that everything is in flux (H). One connection he considers, and the one I'll focus on, is that P provides an epistemology that supports KP, and H provides an ontology that supports P. It's not that Plato accepts P or H, or even thinks they imply KP; rather, they are its best hope. If they are false, or if the connections among the three theses that he describes don't in fact obtain, so much the worse for KP.[5]

KP seems implausible.[6] At least, it's often thought that there can be knowledge of things that can't be perceived – numbers, say, or god, or immaterial souls – in which case knowledge doesn't imply perception. Nor is it obvious that perception implies knowledge. For example, an infant who sees an X-ray doesn't know what it is. On the other hand, if someone sees that this is an X-ray, one might be tempted to infer that she thereby knows that it is. Evidently, then, the plausibility of KP depends on how perception is conceived: and also, of course, on how knowledge is conceived. The more demanding one's standards for knowledge are, the less plausible KP is. For example, if one can know that p is true only if one can explain why it is,[7] then merely seeing that the cat is on the mat isn't sufficient for knowing that it is.

3

At 152a, Socrates says that KP says the same thing as Protagoras, though «he put the same point in a different way»: that «a man is the measure of all things: of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not». Or, as Socrates rephrases this: «everything is for me the way it appears to me, and is for you the way it appears to you».[8] Socrates explains what this means

5 This is essentially Burnyeat's Reading B, in contrast to his Reading A, on which Plato thinks P and H give a correct account of perception and its objects: see BURNYEAT (1990). Reading B is also defended by DAY (1997), Reading A is defended by CORNFORD (1935)(=2003), though he too thinks that the discussion is dialectical (p. 30) and that Plato accepts P and H only «when they are guarded and limited with the necessary qualifications» (31). Reading B fits well with Socrates' characterization of himself as a midwife giving birth to others' ideas: 148e1–151d6, 210c–d; see also the references to birth at e.g. 160e–161a.

6 At least, that's so if (as I think) perception is here sense perception rather than awareness more generally. But see e.g. DANCY (1987), pp. 62–63.

7 This is a condition on knowledge in *Meno* 98a.

8 The first remark is generally thought to be a quotation from Protagoras, the second Plato's rephrasing of it.

by introducing the problem of conflicting appearances:[9] the same wind might appear cold to you but not to me. What should we infer? One answer is that the wind is, in or by itself, cold or not cold (where these are exclusive options), and so one of us is just wrong about the wind. Protagoras favors a different answer: that the wind is cold to the one to whom it appears cold but not to the one to whom it doesn't so appear (or to whom it appears not cold). But what does that mean?

Different answers have been suggested. On one of them, P expresses relativism (PR): p is true for A if and only it appears to A that p – i.e. if and only if A believes that p – where that implies that there is no such thing as being flat-out true; there are only people's beliefs.[10] On an alternative that I favor, P expresses, not relativism, but infallibilism (PI): p is true if and only if someone believes that it is. Whereas PR denies that any beliefs are flat-out true, PI says that all beliefs are flat-out true.[11]

4

Suppose we assume P and take perception to be being appeared to:[12] for me to perceive the wind as cold is for the wind to appear cold to me. Then since, given P, all appearances are true (to those who have them), things are (to me) however I perceive them to be. In that case, perception is of what is and is free from falsehood: it satisfies "two marks" of knowledge.[13]

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9 For an interesting discussion of the problem of conflicting appearances, see BURNYEAT (1979).

10 But doesn't PR then say no more than that as I believe things are, so I believe they are, and isn't that a tautology? Yes, but the point is that that's all there is; we can't go on to ask «And are things as you believe they are?» – and that is not a tautology.

11 For a defense of PR, see BURNYEAT (1976), pp. 172–95. There are also other accounts of Protagoras' alleged relativism. I discuss Burnyeat, and defend PI, in FINE (1998a), (1998b). See also my FINE (1996), pp. 1–5, p. 33. These three papers are reprinted in my FINE (2003).

12 Plato explicitly rejects this account of perception in *Soph.* 264b; and, as we shall see, it is implicitly rejected in 184–6. He tries it out here as part of his dialectical effort to see what can be said on behalf of KP.

13 CORNFORD (1935)(= 2003), p. 32. It's not entirely clear how to interpret the two marks. «Is» can be used for, *inter alia*, truth, existence, reality, and predication. These different uses yield different interpretations of the first mark. As to the second mark, there are two ways of being free from falsehood: being true (or truth-entailing), and being neither true nor false. Even if perception satisfies both marks, one might object that doing so isn't sufficient for being knowledge. For example, true belief is truth-entailing, but it isn't sufficient for knowledge.

Here we should note that, though P is initially stated in general terms – *everything* is for one as it appears to one – Socrates says that appearing (or being appeared to) and perceiving are the same «in the case of what's hot and everything of that sort» (152c). This gives us *Broad Protagoreanism* (BP) and *Narrow Protagoreanism* (NP). According to BP, *all* appearances (i.e. beliefs) are true (to those who have them). According to NP, all *perceptual* appearances (i.e. beliefs) are true (to those who have them). It's NP that's used to support KP.[14]

If, as Socrates says, perception is free from falsehood, it's *incorrigible*. If being free from falsehood is being true,[15] perception is also *infallible*. That removes a threat to perception's claim to be knowledge: one might argue that it can't be knowledge because we can misperceive, but knowledge is always true. Socrates blocks this move by interpreting perception in Protagorean terms, so as to yield the conclusion that all perceptions – including those we have when dreaming, ill, or insane – are true.[16]

5

If all perceptual beliefs (appearances) are true, and if there are conflicting perceptual beliefs (appearances), P seems to violate PNC. But whether it does so depends on what the world is like. If, at t1, I believe the wind is cold and you believe it's not, and our beliefs are about the same (part of the same) wind, and both beliefs are true then, given PI, the wind is simultaneously cold and not cold in a way that violates PNC. If, however, we perceive either the same wind at different times or different winds (or different parts of the same wind), there is no contradiction: in the first case, we can say that the wind changed in the interval; in the second case, we aren't talking about the same thing.

This is where H comes in: Socrates describes a Heraclitean theory of perception according to which for a stone to be white, for example, is for it to come into contact with an eye; this gives birth to a token occasion of seeing and a whiteness-token (156a–c; cf. 153d–154a), each of which exists only for

14 Plato also distinguishes BP from NP at 171e and 178b5.

15 According to PR, all beliefs are free from falsehood because no beliefs are flat-out true or false. According to PI, all beliefs are free from falsehood because they're all flat-out true.

16 For the objection that we misperceive when we dream or are ill or mad, see 157e–158e. Ancient sceptics, as well as Descartes in Meditation 1, appeal to dreams and disease to induce a certain level of scepticism: since appearances are, or seem to be, equally balanced, we should, or do, suspend judgment either way. Plato, on Protagoras' behalf, suggests instead that since we can't tell whether we're awake or asleep (or ill or well, or mad or sane), we should accept all our appearances as true.

the duration of that particular perceptual encounter; and each of which exists only in relation to the other. As the theory is developed, it becomes clear that no two perceivers can ever perceive the same thing; nor can the same perceiver perceive the same thing twice. Eventually perceivers and objects are collapsed into collections of perception-tokens and quality-tokens; hence neither perceivers nor objects persist over time.[17]

Once the details are fully spelled out, we are left with Extreme Heracliteanism (EH): every object, at every moment, changes in every respect. Since the same thing can't be perceived twice or by more than one person, perception is incorrigible. And since for an object to be e.g. white is just for it to be perceived to be so, perception is also infallible – and it is so without violating PNC.

This supports PI: H – more precisely, EH[18] – explains how all perceptual beliefs can be flat out true without violating PNC. By contrast, it's not clear what H's role is if PR is in play. For according to PR, there is no way the world is; you and I don't contradict one another when you say the wind is cold and I say it isn't, because neither claim is flat-out true. Relativism doesn't need (and indeed can't allow) an ontology (if an ontology specifies how the world is). A further problem for PR, and a further count in favour of PI, is that the qualifier 'to one' is often omitted: Socrates often speaks of something's being F, rather than saying it is F to someone. This is legitimate on PI but not on PR. However, it might seem to be a problem for PI that the qualifier is sometimes included. But that can be explained in terms of privacy: when the wind appears cold to me, it is cold – but since only I can perceive just that coldness-token, it's cold just to me in the sense that no one else has access to it.

6

By 160e, Socrates has completed his defense of KP. He then turns to the offensive, refuting each of P, H, and KP in turn.[19] The objection to P that has attracted

17 Here I agree with BOSTOCK (1998), p. 70; BURNYEAT (1990), pp. 18–19; and SEDLEY (2004), pp. 46–47. Contrast CAMPBELL (1883), p. 62, n. 11; and BROWN (1993): they think the collections mentioned in 157b9 are (not individuals such as this man and that one, but) kinds of things (such as man).

18 Plato describes a variety of Heraclitean doctrines, arguing that only EH is strong enough to provide the needed support for P and so for KP.

19 Before presenting his final refutation, he makes some preliminary objections to KP (161b–164c) which, however, he dismisses as being "logic chopping" (164c) – though they are in fact stronger than he gives them credit for being. He also has Protagoras defend himself against an objection (166a–168c).

the most attention is the so-called "self-refutation" argument (169e–171d), which is actually a series of three connected arguments.[20] One of them goes as follows: Suppose P is true, but someone believes it is false. In that case, it is false: for P says that all beliefs are true; hence the belief that P is false is true. So P, coupled with the premise that someone believes that P is false, implies that P is false.

It's sometimes thought that the argument aims to refute PR but fails to do so, since it omits the crucial qualifier "to one"; once it is included, as it must be to avoid begging the question, we can see that the argument shows, not that PR is false, period, but just that it's false to someone, i.e. that someone doesn't believe it – which doesn't refute PR. At least three replies are possible: (a) though the argument aims to refute PR but fails to do so, it succeeds in raising difficulties for it that fall short of strict refutation;[21] (b) the argument aims to refute PR and succeeds in doing so;[22] (c) it aims to refute PI and succeeds in doing so; PR isn't at issue here or elsewhere in discussing P.[23]

The "self-refutation" argument challenges BP, the claim that *all* beliefs or appearances are true. At 171e, Socrates says that NP has not yet been refuted, adding that many would accept P in the case of what's just or unjust[24] and in religious matters.[25] But, he claims, many would reject P in the case of questions about who's healthy or unhealthy, and in the case of what's beneficial or advantageous; here people rely on experts. If, for example, at t1 the doctor and I disagree about whether I'll be well at t2, it's not that I'll be both well and ill at t2; rather, at t2 one of us will be shown to have had a false belief at t1 about how I'll be at t2. Though the self-refutation argument has gotten more attention, Theordorus places more weight on the argument from expertise, though he thinks the self-refutation argument is also effective (179b).[26]

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20 In addition to the articles cited in n. 11, see WATERLOW (1977); and CASTAGNOLI 2010, and CASTAGNOLI 2004.

21 MCDOWELL (1973), p. 171; BOSTOCK (1988), pp. 84–99.

22 This is a central argument in BURNYEAT (1976).

23 FINE (1998a).

24 See 172 which, however, says that *states* determine what's just for themselves, whereas earlier it was each *individual* who determines how things are (for him or herself).

25 It's not clear whether justice and religious issues fall within the scope of NP. Though there is no formal argument against P's holding in these cases, the "digression" advocates a view that is incompatible with P's giving a correct account of them. See next note.

26 In between the self-refutation argument and the argument from expertise is a passage Plato calls a digression (177b; the passage as a whole occupies 172a1–177c4). However, it's relevant to the matters at hand. For example, it assumes that there is objectivity, which is incompatible with P. The passage is well discussed by SEDLEY (2004), pp. 64–86.

7

Plato next turns to EH (181–3). There's dispute about what the argument's conclusion is. On one view, it's that *nothing*, including sensibles, can be in EH.[27] On another view, it's that *not everything* can be in EH. Proponents of the second view differ about what escapes EH: forms and/or the meanings of terms?[28] Quality tokens?[29] On a third view, the conclusion is that if anything were in EH, we couldn't know that it was.[30] In favor of the view that the argument's conclusion is that nothing, not even sensibles (e.g. stones), can be in EH is the fact that, in the rest of the dialogue, it's assumed that sensibles persist through time and retain some of their characteristics.[31]

It's sometimes thought that Socrates defends this view by arguing that EH implies the collapse of language and so undermines itself.[32] I incline instead to the view that the passage argues that sensibles can't be in EH because something can change in some respects only if it is stable in other respects, yet EH precludes all stability, both at and over time. Indeed, EH precludes sensibles from even having properties; for something can have a property only if it's stable, at least for a moment. Hence EH precludes change in properties; but all change is change in properties, so EH turns out to be incompatible with change.

At 182e Socrates says that if EH were true, we wouldn't be able to speak of anything as a case of seeing (F) any more than as a case of not seeing (F) or, more generally, of anything as a case of perceiving (F) than as a case of not perceiving (F).[33] For, as we've seen, it turns out that, on EH, nothing is F any more than it is not F. Hence 'when we were asked what knowledge is, we gave as our answer [= KP] something that is no more knowledge than not

27 See e.g. OWEN (1986), pp. 72–73, which begins by saying: «What he plainly points out is that if *anything* (and anything in this world, not the next) were perpetually changing in all respects, so that at no time could it be described as being so-and-so, then nothing could be said of it at all – and *inter alia*, it could not be said to be changing». See also BURNYEAT (1990), pp. 42–52.

28 CORNFORD 1935 (=2003), pp. 95–101; SILVERMAN (2000).

29 MCDOWELL (1973), note on 182c9–183b6.

30 COOPER (1975). This view leaves open the possibility that EH is true.

31 Of course, the mere fact that sensibles (e.g. stones) aren't in EH doesn't imply that nothing is. But the crucial issue is whether sensibles are exempt from EH.

32 BURNYEAT (1990), pp. 42–52. For criticism, see BROWN (1993); SEDLEY (2003); and SEDLEY (2004), pp. 97–99. (However, he thinks that, though Plato doesn't explicitly say so, his argument implies the collapse of language.)

33 I follow MCDOWELL (1973), note *ad loc.*, in taking the point to be, not that e.g. seeing turns into or is replaced by hearing, or is no more seeing than hearing but, rather, that we are no more seeing e.g. whiteness than not seeing it.

knowledge' (183c). H was initially introduced to support P which, in turn, was introduced to support KP. It turns out, however, that H – more precisely, EH – undermines KP.[34]

In addition to refuting EH, 181–3 also completes the refutation of NP. Earlier passages show that without NP, not all perceptual appearances are guaranteed to be true: we might e.g. misperceive when we are ill. But if we support KP with NP, we also need EH; otherwise, PNC will be violated. Yet on EH, objects don't have properties we can be right or wrong about: in which case not all perceptual appearances are guaranteed to be true. So whether or not EH is true, not all perceptual appearances are guaranteed to be true.

8

In 184–6[35] Socrates gives his final refutation of KP, on the assumption that P and H (i.e. EH) are false.[36] First he says that we perceive *with* the mind (or soul: *psuchē*), *through* the senses. That is, the mind (185e), or person (184d), does the perceiving, using the senses as instruments. The senses don't perceive any more than telescopes do; rather, they enable us to perceive. This emphasizes the unity of consciousness.[37]

Next Socrates distinguishes proper sensibles (properties accessible to just a single sense, such as colours and sounds) from *koina* (properties common to more than one sense, such as being, same, and different, but also one, odd and even, beautiful and ugly). There's dispute about whether the text says, or whether the argument requires, the claim that (a) each sense has access only to its proper sensibles (so that e.g. we can see only colors) or just that (b) there are some proper sensibles. Be that as it may, Socrates proceeds to argue that whereas we can see e.g. a whiteness token, we can't see, or otherwise perceive, any of the *koina*. Hence, we may infer, if they can be known, not all knowledge is perception.

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34 Refuting EH doesn't refute the milder forms of Heracliteanism that the dialogue also considers (e.g. that some things change, and that every sensible is always changing in at least one respect). But these milder forms of Heracliteanism don't support P or KP.

35 On this much-discussed passage see, among many others, FREDE (1987), reprinted in FINE (1999); BURNYEAT (1976b); COOPER (1970); LORENZ (2006), pp. 76–93; HOLLAND (1973).

36 In doing so, he assumes that perception isn't identical to being appeared to: that way of defending KP has been refuted, and so they turn to another one.

37 This is well discussed by BURNYEAT (1976b). He also argues convincingly that 184–6 is incompatible with the theory of perception described earlier in the dialogue. Contrast CORNFORD (1935) (= 2003), p. 105.

Socrates then argues as follows:[38]

1. One can't have knowledge unless one grasps truth.[39]
2. One can't grasp truth unless one grasps being.
3. Being can't be perceived.
4. Hence perception is never knowledge.

1 makes the familiar point that knowledge is truth entailing. 2 says that a necessary condition for grasping truth is grasping being which, we've been told, is a *koinon*. But what is it to grasp being? On one view, it is to grasp the essence of something, what it really is. On another view, it is to grasp that something really, objectively exists in the external world. On a third view, it is to grasp that something is something or other: «is», or being, is incomplete.[40] It counts against the first two views that grasping being in those ways isn't necessary for grasping truth. On the third view, however, grasping being is necessary for grasping truth, for on it the point is that unless one grasps something as being something or other, one can't grasp any truths about it. If perception can't grasp anything as being something or other, or that anything is thus and so, it is non-conceptual and non-propositional, and so it can't amount to knowledge, or even belief.[41]

It might seem to count against this interpretation that at 186c Socrates says that animals, and infants when they are born, perceive, whereas «calculations about those things, with respect to being and usefulness, are acquired, by those who acquire them, with difficulty and over a long time, by means of a great deal of troublesome education». Yet surely everyone normal acquires concepts and beliefs, and does so, moreover, without difficulty and without needing a long and troublesome education? Two replies are possible. First, one might argue

38 More precisely, he eventually argues as follows. I skate over important parts of the argument.

39 More precisely, he says that one can't have knowledge of something unless one grasps the truth of that thing (thanks here to Lesley Brown). One might think this implies or suggests that the relevant sort of truth isn't propositional, but a sort that attaches to objects (e.g. being genuine or real). However, I think "the truth of something" here means "the truth about something", where that is propositional: for that fits best both with the overall argument and with the use of alethic terms in the dialogue as a whole. For example, having rejected KP, they consider whether knowledge is true belief; here truth is propositional truth.

40 The first view is defended by Cornford; the second by Cooper; the third by Frede, Burnyeat, and Lorenz. See also my FINE (2017), at pp. 67–77.

41 Hence, perception, properly understood, doesn't satisfy either of the two marks of knowledge: it's not free from falsehood in the way knowledge must be (which requires it to be truth entailing); nor does it grasp being in the way knowledge (and belief) must do. Contrast CORNFORD (1935)(= 2003), p. 108.

that it's more difficult and time-consuming than one might think to acquire concepts and beliefs.[42] Secondly, one might argue that in *this* passage Socrates isn't contrasting perception with concept or belief acquisition, but with knowledge in particular. Not everyone acquires knowledge; and those who do, do so only after a long and difficult education. Then, in 186c–d, he argues that not only is perception not knowledge but, also, it can't even grasp being and so doesn't even get as far as belief. It counts in favor of this interpretation that, at 187a, they take the capacity that considers being to be belief; hence it's not surprising that they next ask whether knowledge might be true belief.[43]

9

Before discussing KTB directly, they discuss, but fail to explain, the possibility of false belief. Why is false belief discussed at such length? On one view, the point is just that we can't understand true belief unless we also understand false belief.[44] On another view, KTB makes false belief impossible.[45] On this view, the discussion is an indirect refutation of KTB: KTB implies the impossibility of false belief; since false belief is possible, KTB is false.

Plato begins his discussion of false belief by describing two arguments, each of which concludes that false belief is impossible. The first begins with the seemingly innocuous claim that, for any x, one either does or doesn't know x. The second begins with the seemingly innocuous claim that, for any x, x either is or is not. If these initial premises are innocuous then, in order to yield the false conclusion that false belief is impossible, each of the arguments must involve either another premise that is false, or an invalid inference.

According to the first argument, one needs knowledge for belief, and one can't make any mistakes about what one knows. Both claims seem false. Why should *knowledge* be needed for *belief*? It also seems possible to make mistakes about things we know: I might know Jones, or who he is, but falsely believe that he has two sisters. One can also make mistakes about propositions one knows at least in the sense that one might know that p, but falsely believe that it implies q.[46]

42 So Frede and Lorenz.

43 I suggest this interpretation in FINE (2017).

44 MCDOWELL (1973), pp. 194 and 226.

45 See my FINE (1979); BURNYEAT (1990), p. 66; BENSON (1992).

46 At least, that's so if one can know that p without knowing what all its implications are. However, that might not be possible if knowledge is defined as true belief. See FINE (1979).

The second argument takes belief to be analogous to seeing: just as one can't see what is not, so one can't believe what is not. It's true that both seeing and believing are of what is, in the sense that they both have content: I can't see and see nothing; I can't believe and believe nothing. But it doesn't follow that the content of belief must be true. There seems to be an equivocation on "is not": being nothing as opposed to being false.[47]

Both arguments are flawed, then. The reader must decide whether Plato is confused, or whether he is suggesting that the proponent of KTB can't avoid them.

Socrates next considers two models of the mind[48] – as a wax tablet and as an aviary – to see whether they can accommodate false belief; he argues that neither can do so. Hence the attempt to explain the possibility of false belief fails. Perhaps, Socrates suggests, that's because one can't explain false belief without knowing what knowledge is (200d). This suggests that their failure is due to KTB. Hence it's not surprising that Socrates next turns more explicitly to it.

KTB is now quickly rejected by means of a counter-example (200d–201c): members of a jury might have a mere true belief about who committed a crime without knowing who committed it; hence true belief isn't sufficient for knowledge. The claim is quite plausible. But Plato has been thought to give two incompatible explanations of it: first, that there's not enough time for the jurors to be taught who committed it (which suggests it could be taught and that teaching can confer knowledge); secondly, that who committed it can be known only by an eye-witness (which suggests it can't be taught).[49]

10

Theaetetus next offers his final suggestion: that knowledge is true belief with an account (*logos*) (KTBL; 201d). Before discussing it directly, Socrates records a dream he says he's had, according to which things are divided into complexes and their constituent elements. Complexes have accounts (that is, definitions in the sense of correct answers to 'What is F?' questions) in terms of their elements; they are knowable, and one can have true beliefs about them. Elements

47 In *Sophist* 263–4 Plato offers an account of false statement and of false belief that avoids this equivocation.

48 Before doing so, they ask whether false belief consists in «other-judging» (*allodoxia*), i.e. judging one thing in place of another: 189c–191a.

49 For discussion, see BURNYEAT (1980), and the reply by Barnes (BARNES 1980).

can't be known, precisely because they have no accounts; but they can be named and perceived.[50] The Dream Theory involves several striking claims: that knowledge requires a *logos* (KL); that there is an asymmetry in *logos* as between complexes and elements (AL); that there is therefore an asymmetry in knowledge as between complexes and elements (AK); and that accounts consist in enumeration of elements (EE).[51] The view that complexes are known in terms of their elements which are themselves unknowable contrasts with a familiar version of epistemological foundationalism according to which complexes are known in terms of basic elements that are even more knowable.[52]

Socrates levels two arguments against the Dream Theory. One is a dilemma: wholes (complexes) are either just their parts (elements) or some one thing that emerges from them. In either case, wholes and parts (complexes and elements) are equally knowable or equally unknowable; either way, AK is false.[53] The other is an empirical argument (206): in learning language, we focus on letters (not whole words); and in learning music, we learn to distinguish individual notes. Hence, elements are knowable.[54]

Since both arguments reject AK, Socrates must reject either KL or AL. If he rejects KL (and so KTBL), he must countenance a way of knowing that doesn't require giving an account. If he rejects AL, he presumably retains KL and must argue that elements no less than complexes have accounts. The fact that Socrates next considers KTBL suggests that, whatever happens next, at least the two criticisms of the Dream Theory don't reject KL.

11

Plato next considers three accounts of the sort of *logos* that might convert true belief into knowledge: (i) «making one's thought plain by means of speech»

50 The claim that elements are perceivable has been thought to restrict their range and that of the complexes they compose. But perhaps Socrates focuses on just one sort of element, using it as a model for a more general claim, without meaning to imply that all elements are perceivable.

51 I borrow this terminology from BURNYEAT (1970).

52 For a very different interpretation, see RYLE (1990). For discussion, see my FINE (1979b), reprinted in my FINE (2003).

53 For discussion, see esp. HARTE (2002).

54 It's sometimes thought that Socrates suggests that elements are not just knowable, but are better known than complexes, which yields a version of foundationalism (though quite a different one from the one advocated in the Dream). However, even if elements are prior in learning, it doesn't follow that they are prior in justification or explanation, which is the crucial issue so far as foundationalism is concerned.

(206d); (ii) being able to enumerate a thing's elements (206e);[55] (iii) «being able to state a mark by which the thing one is asked about differs from everything else» (208c7–8).

Against (i) he argues that everyone normal satisfies it, but not everyone normal has knowledge.

Against (ii) he argues that one could have the true belief that "T", for example, is the first letter of Theaetetus' name, and spell the name correctly (thereby enumerating its elements), yet use "T" incorrectly in spelling another word. In that case, one doesn't know how to spell "Theaetetus" correctly, even though one succeeded in doing so; for one can know one complex only if one knows others to which it is related. Hence correctly enumerating something's elements isn't sufficient for knowing it. Nor is enumerating something's elements necessary for having an account. For elements have accounts. We know the letter "T", for example, when we know that it's a consonant, and when we can use it to spell a variety of words correctly. This is what I have elsewhere called the *inter-relation model of knowledge*.[56] It essentially involves a coherence theory of justification (though *not* of truth): to know a complex, one must not only know its elements but also its relations to other related complexes; and to know an element, one must know its place in the systems of which they are parts, which involves knowing the complexes they constitute in a variety of cases.

In considering (iii), Socrates asks whether we can have a mere true belief about, or must know, the distinguishing mark. Having a mere true belief isn't sufficient for having knowledge, since knowledge must be based on knowledge. But if we must know the distinguishing mark, the definition is circular, for it then says that to know x is to have a true belief about x and to know its distinguishing mark (209e6–210a9). However, if we consider the initial account of KTBL along with Socrates' inter-relation model of knowledge, we can see that we can rewrite the definition so that it is not circular: "Knowledge of x is true belief about x with the ability, when asked, to explain how x differs from other things by explaining its place in the systems of which it is a part". It has been objected that merely being able to say how x is related to other things isn't sufficient for converting true belief about x into knowledge of it, for one could memorize an account without having knowledge.[57] However, KTBL, as just spelled out, doesn't say that just mentioning a *logos* will do. It says

55 This is EE (= Enumeration of Elements).

56 FINE (1979b).

57 BOSTOCK (1988), pp. 243–50; BARNEY (2001), pp. 172–174. See also NEHAMAS (1984); BROADIE (2016).

that one must have the *ability* to mention a distinguishing mark *when asked*. This requires being able to respond to objections and being sensitive to new evidence; if one can do that, one has knowledge.[58]

12

With the ostensible failure of the third account of *logos*, the dialogue comes to an end. On one view, the *aporia* is genuine: though Plato thinks there is an answer to the question «What is knowledge?», he doesn't think he's found it. On an alternative, he thinks there is no answer, because he's come to think that knowledge is unanalyzable.[59] On yet another view, he hints at a positive answer. On one version of this view, the solution is to mention forms.[60] However, earlier in the dialogue, Socrates sharply distinguishes the issue of what knowledge is of from the issue of what knowledge is;[61] his concern is the latter. Another possibility is that he hints that the third account of *logos*, properly understood in terms of the inter-relation model of knowledge, explains what must be added to true belief so as to yield knowledge. It counts in favor of this suggestion that Plato favors it elsewhere, both before and after the *Theaetetus*.[62]

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58 See the Introduction to my FINE (2003); and SHIELDS (1999).

59 BROWN (2014), p. xxiv mentions this possibility, noting its similarity with WILLIAMSON (2000).

60 CORNFORD (1935)(=2003), pp. 162–163.

61 See n. 2.

62 Before: *Resp.* 533, 534c; *Phaedr.* 265d–266c. After: *Phil.* 16b–18d; *Soph.* 219a–232a, 264b–268d; *Pol.* 258b–268d, 279a–311c. (the *Phil.* describes the model; the *Soph.* and *Pol.* illustrate it.) Some agree that this is his view in dialogues after the *Theaetetus*, but deny that it is his view in the *Theaetetus* or in dialogues that precede it. Some think that accepting the inter-relation model of knowledge involves rejecting KTBL.

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