

**Plato's Epistemology: a Coherent Account in *Meno*, *Phaedo*  
and *Theaetetus***

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This dissertation analyses the epistemology in Plato's *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*. It will explain how Plato constructs his thought on knowledge in those three dialogues into a coherent explanation. In the *Meno* and *Phaedo* Plato offers an outline of his epistemology. The *Meno* introduces Meno's paradox, the theory of recollection and the formula "knowledge is true opinion with an explanation of the reason why". In the *Phaedo*, Plato proposes recollection theory as a proof of immortality of soul and introduces the theory of Forms to make the epistemological outline complete. Although this outline of epistemology is systematic, it still has problems, such as knowledge is limited to a narrow sphere and the epistemological function of the body is denied.

*Theaetetus* is an attempt to rethink the definitions of knowledge and to supplement the epistemological outline in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* by presenting new theories. In *Theaetetus*, three definitions of knowledge are discussed, namely, knowledge is perception, knowledge is true opinion, and knowledge is true opinion with an account. During the investigation of the three definitions, Plato successively supplies the detailed explanations of the process of perceiving colours, the wax block analogy, the aviary example and the discussion of the meaning and nature of the concept of account.

In the progress of my study, I will also prove that not all of Socrates' arguments about knowledge are good and strong. Those poor or weak arguments are mainly caused by employing metaphors to illustrate philosophical thought.

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## Introduction

### **The aim of this research**

This study analyses the epistemology in Plato's *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*. It will explain how Plato constructs his thought on knowledge in those three dialogues into a coherent explanation. In the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, Plato employs the theory of recollection, the theory of Forms, the immortality of the soul and the concepts "true opinion/judgement" and "an explanation of the reason why" to illustrate a complete epistemological system. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato supplements the outline of his epistemology in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* by giving the detailed explanations of the process of seeing colours, the wax block analogy, the aviary example, the discussion of the meaning and nature of the concept of "account" and three definitions of knowledge. As well as explaining how Plato constructs an epistemological system in these dialogues, the thesis will discuss the unclearness and the difficulties in the arguments for those theories, and will show that Plato is in a dilemma in his thoughts on knowledge.

*Theaetetus* is the central dialogue among the three dialogues in this thesis. The *Theaetetus* seems to be an attempt to rethink the question of knowledge and to give theories for supplementing what is not mentioned in the epistemological system that is outlined in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Although the theories appear to be empiricist in

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the *Theaetetus*, the purpose of this thesis is to prove that in *Theaetetus* Plato firmly insists on his anti-empirical position, since all the theories discussed in the *Theaetetus* could be seen as a supplement to the epistemological system in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Indeed, all the theories mentioned in the *Theaetetus* are themselves a new systematic explanation of how the soul recollects knowledge in the sensible world.

This thesis will show that Plato faces a dilemma. On the one hand, Plato insists that the soul could only recollect rather than gain knowledge in the sensible world. Therefore, his epistemology is rooted in the ground of the region of the Forms. However, on the other hand, he has to explain the phenomenon of knowing and how the soul regains knowledge in the sensible world; otherwise knowledge would be useless. Plato needs theories of knowledge in the sensible world. For Plato, it is so difficult to offer convincing theories to explain what happens in the region of the Forms, since it is too abstract. Fortunately, Plato could give explanations of what happens in the process of knowing in the sensible world and then use the explanation in two ways: namely, the same explanation can be used both for what happens in the sensible world and in the region of the Forms. This thesis will show that Plato's endeavor is not entirely successful. The failure of his endeavor can be shown by the *aporia* at the end of the *Meno* and *Theaetetus*. Further, the failure can also be shown by the poor arguments of the theories in all three dialogues that will be revealed in the chapters of this thesis.



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## The process of gaining knowledge in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*

The *Meno* and *Phaedo* show that Plato insists on a position of innate knowledge. Therefore, knowledge unavoidably refers to its real objects, the Forms. Plato's Socrates does not say anything about the Forms in the *Meno*, but introduces the theory of Forms in the *Phaedo*. However, that does not mean that Plato did not have the theory of the Forms in his mind when he composed the *Meno*. As I will prove in chapter two, there is evidence to show the Plato holds the same position on epistemology in both *Meno* and *Phaedo*.

The outline of the epistemological system constructed in *Meno* and *Phaedo* can be summarized as follows:

(1) The soul “has seen (ἐώρακυῖα) all things on earth and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned” (*Meno* 81c).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in *Phaedo*, soul enters into a region of “noble and pure and invisible” and gains knowledge there (*Phaedo* 78d, 79b and 80d). The Forms are the objects of knowledge.

(2) There are two reasons why the soul in the sensible world cannot gain knowledge but only recollect it. Firstly, the soul is always influenced by the body (*Phaedo* 80b-d). Secondly, the objects of recognition in the sensible world are always in flux and “never in the same state” (78b). There are two criteria of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is always of what is and is always unerring (*Theaetetus* 152c, Αἴσθησις ἄρα τοῦ ὄντος ἀεὶ ἐστὶν καὶ ἀψευδὲς ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα. “Perception, then, is always of what it is, and unerring – as befits knowledge”). According to these criteria, the

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<sup>1</sup> All the English translations of Plato's dialogues in this dissertation come from *Plato: Complete Works* edited by John Cooper, unless otherwise indicated. For Greek texts, I have used *Oxford Classical Texts*.

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objects in the sensible world make knowledge impossible, for it is impossible to learn knowledge from an object that is always in flux.

(3) Hence, the soul can only recollect knowledge in the sensible world and “learning is recollection” (*Meno* 81c-86b, *Phaedo* 72e-73a). If so, someone who does not know about something has within himself true opinion about that thing that he does not know (*Meno* 85c). Then how could true opinion become knowledge? One answer from *Meno* is that “...He will have true opinions which, when stirred by questioning, become knowledge...” (*Meno* 86a)

(4) The questions will give the respondent an opportunity for recollecting an account of the true opinion about something. This recollection will finally make the true opinion become knowledge, according to the formula “knowledge is true opinion with an explanation of the reason why” that is introduced by Socrates in the *Meno* (98a).

(5) Socrates in the *Phaedo* offers another version of recollection theory. Someone could recollect the Forms as the objects of his knowing when he experiences things similar or not similar to the Forms and realizes that all these things are inferior to the Forms (*Phaedo* 74a-c).

The most important feature of this epistemological system is that it is rooted in the Forms. It unavoidably emphasizes the region beyond the sensible world, where the soul can gain knowledge. Based on this, Plato’s Socrates employs recollection for explaining how the phenomenon of knowing or recognition happens in the sensible world. Socrates offers two versions of recollection theories and tries to illustrate the

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process of recollection in detail. In the sensible world, the bodily elements from the body and the things in flux make knowledge impossible to gain. Socrates uses this to confirm that knowledge could only be gained in the region of Forms rather than in the sensible world.

From this system, we can deduce how a soul gains knowledge during the time of its existence. Firstly, the soul “has seen” (ἑώρακεῖα) all things in the region of Forms. This means that the soul learns everything there through “consorting with” the Forms. Then, for some souls, incarnation happens.

A soul combines with a body and becomes a human being which exists in the sensible world. At the moment of birth, the soul loses or forgets the knowledge it already had (*Phaedo* 73e, 75d and 76a). That explains why we still need to study in our human life, though “learning” or “knowing” to Plato’s Socrates means something completely different. For him, all learning is recollection, i.e. the soul recalls the knowledge that it already has.

As set out (4) and (5), there are two ways by which someone could recollect the knowledge. (4) is set in motion by questions about something. Socrates gives us a paradigm to show the process of recollection through questions in the *Meno*, where Socrates successfully makes a slave who has never learned geometry gain the correct answer to a geometrical question through Socrates’ questions (82b-85b).<sup>2</sup> Socrates does not mention whether someone could start the process of recollection through questions by himself. For example, whether someone could raise a question by being

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Kahn argues that “three acts of the intellect: (1) grasping concepts, (2) forming judgment, (3) following inferences” “are illustrated by the slave-boy’s answers to Socrates’ questions”. See Kahn (2009) p. 121.

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curious about something himself and then, by virtue of his own logical deduction and analysis, gain the right answer to the questions he has raised. It seems that we cannot deny such a possibility, since Socrates admits that the slave has opinions “within himself” (ἐνῆσαν δέ γε αὐτῷ αἱ δόξαι) (*Meno* 85c). That is why true opinion is a necessary component of knowledge in the formula “knowledge is true opinion with an explanation of the reason why” which appears in the *Meno*.

The second way, as (5) shows, by which someone could recollect knowledge is that recollection could be triggered directly by the sensible objects. When someone sees equal things, he could realize the existence of the Form of Equality that makes the equal things deficient compared to it. If all learning is recollection, then knowledge is impossible to gain in the sensible world for two reasons: firstly, the objects of recognition in the sensible world are always in flux; secondly, the body is always a hindrance to recollecting knowledge within the soul.

In order to purify the bodily elements and see the true realities, namely, the Forms, the soul in the sensible world must take care of itself and avoid the contamination of the body (*Phaedo* 81a-84b).

Socrates emphasizes that, after death, the soul could separate from the body and gain the knowledge from the real realities (*Phaedo* 80e, 83a). This does not mean that Socrates encourages suicide, for the soul in a reasoning state can gain knowledge from Forms. The right way for practising philosophy is to keep the soul pure and leave nothing bodily with the soul when death happens. That is what Socrates calls “training for death” (79e-81a). This kind of training is necessary for gaining

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knowledge directly from the Forms. The fact that knowledge *cannot be gained* in the sensible world does not mean that you cannot have knowledge in the sensible world. As Socrates illustrates when he mentions the training for death, a philosopher who loves wisdom could occasionally “gather his soul together” and avoid the influence from the body and therefore have or recollect knowledge. Nevertheless, a soul having knowledge in the sensible world cannot last for a long time for two reasons. Firstly, it is extremely difficult for soul to keep away from the influence of the bodily elements, even if it is a philosopher’s soul; otherwise, the training for death would be pointless. Secondly, the objects in the sensible world are in flux; so even though the soul grasps the knowledge on a specific object, this piece of knowledge on something could not be applied to the object in the next moment, since the specific object has changed by then. These two reasons also explain why *gaining* knowledge is impossible in the sensible world.

### **Problems in the process of gaining knowledge in *Meno* and *Phaedo***

Surely, Plato’s Socrates should supply more information to explain the whole system; otherwise, it appears problematic. How does the soul exist without combination with the body? How does the soul learn knowledge from the Forms? What is the relationship between soul, knowledge and the Forms? Do they co-exist? Alternatively, are the Forms like books which contain the knowledge, so that the soul gains the knowledge from the Forms as it sees or watches them? If the Forms are not like books, do they have a specific function or effect that makes the soul itself

produce knowledge? After the soul is combined with the body, in what way does knowledge exist in the soul? What is the procedure through which the soul recollects knowledge when it is stimulated by the sensible objects? Does the body really make no contribution in the process of knowing? Indeed, Plato in *Theaetetus* tries to face these difficulties<sup>3</sup> and offers ideas and theories to supplement the epistemological system, while insisting on the whole system.

### **Plato's strategy for pursuing the definition of knowledge in *Theaetetus***

*Theaetetus* seems to overthrow what has been said about knowledge in *Meno* and *Phaedo*, especially where Socrates rejects the formula “knowledge is true opinion plus an account” which is similar to the formula “knowledge is true opinion plus an explanation of the reason why” in the *Meno* (*Theaetetus*, 210a).<sup>4</sup> But, Plato does not give up his philosophical position on knowledge in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, since all the theories or ideas in the *Theaetetus* that seem to be empirical

<sup>3</sup> Reasonably, we could assume that Plato realized that the outline of his epistemological system is not so clear and persuasive when he composed *Theaetetus*. Maybe he has had discussion or research on epistemology with his pupils or he knew that the topics of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* are not specific about knowledge, and the epistemological system could not well be delivered in those dialogues. All these lead him to compose a dialogue on knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> The formula “knowledge is true opinions (αἱ δόξαι αἱ ἀληθεῖς) plus an explanation of the reason why (αἰτίας λογισμῶ)” in the *Meno* is not the same as the third definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, namely, “knowledge is true opinion plus an account” (τὴν μὲν μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι). Nevertheless, as E. S. Haring points out, “*Theaetetus*’s definition is very like the one sketched by Socrates in the *Meno*: true opinion tethered by ‘working out the reason’ or ‘reasoning out the ground [aitia]’. This resemblance may be an ambiguous clue; perhaps Plato is criticizing rather than reinforcing the *Meno* definition. However, the ties between the *Theaetetus* and *Meno* are so numerous as to indicate a positive regard for the earlier dialogue” (pp.510-511). He also argues that “Thus it seems also fair to say that Theodorus’s true opinion has been transformed by the addition of a ground...On such an interpretation ‘true opinion accompanied by logos’ can also be formulated as ‘grounded true opinion,’ in terms recalling *Meno* 97e-98a. The grounded true opinion is a definition. It is not the initial true opinion externally coupled with something which can be called the ground or logos or reason; the discovery of the ground requires the initial -- sometimes somewhat list-like -- judgment to be replaced (p.525). I agree with him, though I think that *Theaetetus*’ definition is a kind of supplement of the *Meno* definition. Moreover, Glenn R. Morrow also declares, “But when *Theaetetus* proposes that knowledge be defined as true belief accompanied by logos, we seem at last to be on Platonic ground. It at once recalls the statement in the *Meno* (98a) that true belief becomes knowledge when it has been fastened by reasoning. There is no obvious difference in meaning between saying that knowledge is belief ‘bound by reasoning (λογισμῶ)’ and saying that it is belief ‘accompanied by logos (μετὰ λόγου)’ See Haring (1982). pp. 510-511 and 525. See also Morrow (1970) p. 309.

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actually supplement the outline of epistemology in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Moreover, the theories and ideas solve the difficulties and clarify the outline of knowledge in some degree, although they themselves have problems. The philosophical investigation of knowledge in *Theaetetus* could be roughly divided into three parts that follow the three definitions. The three definitions are: (a) knowledge is perception; (b) knowledge is true judgement/opinion; (c) knowledge is true judgement/opinion with an account.

Plato's Socrates strategy for (a) is to reframe the possibility of Protagoras' "men are the measure of all things" as a reasonable assertion. During the process, he offers a detailed account of the process of seeing the colour white (*Theaetetus* 153d-154a, 156d-e, 159d-160c). The procedure refers to three things and two stages. At first, a motion between the eyes and the white object produces whiteness, then the seeing eyes and the whiteness makes the white colour come into being. If that is what happens, nothing has being, rather all are coming-into-being. This theory of perception indeed differs from Protagoras' thought and it also opens a door to see how Socrates understands perception. Socrates' comprehension of perception on the one hand supplements the epistemology by explaining the steps of the process of perceiving, which are not given in the discussion of perception in *Meno* and *Phaedo*. This new account of perception is surely a supplement to the theory of recollection. Moreover, it also demonstrates why the sensible objects have no being, but are coming-into-being; it emphasizes the fact the all sensible objects are in flux.

As the Socratic strategy for (a) "knowledge is perception" shows, Socrates

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never rebuts the three definitions of knowledge directly, rather he always tries to reject the definitions indirectly. In his criticism of (a), Protagoras' "human beings are the measure of all things" is shown ridiculous from many aspects. The same strategy is employed for (b) "knowledge is true judgement/opinion", since Socrates does not reject the definition, but talks about the possibility of false judgement. According to the investigation of false judgement, Socrates seemingly proves that false judgement is impossible. If so, every judgement is true. Even if someone actually makes a false judgement, this person would think it is a true one. Assuming that knowledge is true judgement, as Theaetetus insists, then as Socrates points out that, in practice, a juryman could possibly make a true judgement without knowledge under the influence of persuasion. Consequently, knowledge is not true opinion. Socrates claims the impossibility of the second definition of knowledge by giving a counterexample, which rebuts the definition "knowledge is true opinion" directly.

We should not be surprised when the strategy is repeated in (c) "knowledge is true opinion with an account". Theaetetus claims that this definition is what he heard from an unnamed informant. Socrates calls what Theaetetus heard a "dream" and suggests that he himself has heard the dream, but does not know whether it is the same version of the dream and so, he wishes to check it. Socrates, again, does not try to denounce the third definition and the dream directly. Rather, he firstly asks Theaetetus how to distinguish knowable things and unknowable things in the dream theory. After the arguments on three pairs of things, i.e. the elements and complexes, the letter and syllables and the sum and whole, Socrates overthrows the dream theory.



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In the next stage, Socrates tests three meanings of the concept “account”, namely, “account” is the image or reflection of thought (206d) or is “a matter of going through a thing element by element” (207c) or is the “statement of the distinguishing mark”<sup>5</sup> (208d). All the three meanings of “account” fail to produce the definition of knowledge.

### ***Theaetetus* supplements the outline of epistemology in the *Meno* and *Phaedo***

According to the rejections of the three definitions, knowledge is neither perception nor true judgement nor true judgement with an account. It seems that *Theaetetus* does not make any positive proposal for building the definition of knowledge. However, during the process of investigating the meaning and the nature of knowledge, Socrates gives us some philosophical thoughts that are an important supplement to the epistemological system in *Meno* and *Phaedo*. These valuable philosophical theories in the *Theaetetus* clarify some points and solve some difficulties in the outline of epistemology in *Meno* and *Phaedo*, although these further ideas and theories have problems in themselves. In the discussion of the first definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is perception, Socrates describes in detail how the eyes see the colour white. This description is significant in at least two aspects. It not only offers us a process of how perception happens in the sensible world, but by extension also helps us an opportunity to imagine how the soul gains knowledge from the Forms. The only difference when the procedure applies to the

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase “statement of distinguishing mark” comes from Sedley. See Sedley (2004) p. 174.

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soul and the Forms is that the object changes. The object is no longer a sensible object which could have other properties, rather it is a Form, which is pure and changeless. Therefore, the process of seeing the colour white is suitable as a parallel example for imagining how the soul gets knowledge from the Forms.<sup>6</sup> Further, Socrates uses the key metaphor of soul “seeing” the Forms (*Phaedo* 83b4) and the colour white example highlights the importance of the ability of seeing among the perceptual abilities. This is not just a coincidence, rather the choice of such an example invites or allows a comparison with the activity of soul.

Socrates employs two analogies in his arguments on the impossibility of false judgement. One analogy is the wax block and the other is the analogy of the aviary. At first sight, the wax block analogy seems to present an empiricist theory, but it is significant for Plato’s philosophy in three ways. Firstly, it points to the recollection theory. If the recollection theory is true, is false judgement impossible? A doubt on the recollection theory is: “If everyone’s soul is different, is it possible to judge falsely?”. That is why Socrates emphasizes that the wax block in each soul is different (191c-d, 194e). Amazingly, the result of the wax block still proves that false judgement is impossible (196c). Although the wax block analogy does not mention it explicitly, the discussion is actually about the recollection theory. Secondly, the wax block analogy admits that the body has a function in the process of knowing, though whether the product gained in the wax block analogy is knowledge still needs to be clarified. The wax block gives a clear analogy about how the soul operates in the

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<sup>6</sup> “That is not to say that the Theory of Forms” in *Theaetetus* “is not very different from the Theory of Forms as expounded in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*”, as W. G. Runciman argues. See Runciman (1962) p. 130.

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sensible world for gaining knowledge through the bodily organs. It is a strong supplement to Plato's epistemological system. Thirdly, it has the same effect as the description of the eyes seeing the colour white, namely, it could be treated as a theory of what happens when the soul "sees" the Forms. If the description of the eyes seeing the colour white supplies the details of what happens when the soul begins to perceive the Forms, then the wax block if applied to the Forms gives us a theory of what happens after the soul saw the Forms.

If the description of the eyes seeing the colour white is the first stage of knowing and the second stage is what happens according to the wax block analogy, then the analogy of aviary can be seen as the final stage. Here, I assume that all those three analogies can be applied to the knowing process both in the sensible world and in the region of the Forms. The aviary analogy offers explicitly a vivid description of how the soul operates when gaining knowledge which is already at hand and within itself. Nevertheless, the analogy also could help us to imagine how the soul recollects the knowledge after it gained the knowledge from the Forms.

Besides the description of the eyes seeing the colour white and the two analogies, in the discussion of the third definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, namely, knowledge is true judgement with an account, Socrates talks about the relationship between the element and the complex and about the three meanings of the notion "account". Although they are two issues, since the relationship between the element and the complex is relevant to understanding the meaning of "account", they could be seen as one. In the *Meno*, Socrates explains why knowledge is more

valuable than true opinion, though both of them could lead to the right behaviour, since true opinion is not stable. It can become knowledge only when it is tied down by an account/explanation of the reason why. Following this idea, it is significant to make clear what is the exact meaning of “account” when we begin to talk about knowledge. The meaning of “account” is not investigated in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, which makes their discussions about knowledge abstract and obscure.

### **Scholarly Rationale**

My research tries to prove that the philosophical thoughts on epistemology in the *Theaetetus* are coherent with what is said on knowledge in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, this conclusion has never had consensus among scholars. A majority of scholars stand on the opposite side to my conclusion, especially when they doubt whether there is even any connection at all between *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus* on epistemology.

The disconnection between the outline of Plato’s epistemology in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* and the philosophical thoughts in the *Theaetetus* can be divided for two reasons. The first reason is that the theories and ideas in the *Theaetetus* are irrelevant to the theory of Forms that is introduced in the *Phaedo*. The second reason is that the philosophy in the *Theaetetus* and the recollection theory that is mentioned both in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* are entirely separate.

The theory of Forms is the most important part of the outline of Plato’s epistemology. Nevertheless, the fact that Plato himself never mentions the theory of

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Forms in the *Theaetetus* leads a number of scholars to conclude that Plato either gives up or revises essentially the theory of Forms in his late dialogues. Those scholars explaining Plato's epistemology in this way construct a long academic tradition. The scholars in this tradition include J. L. Ackrill<sup>7</sup>, David Bostock<sup>8</sup>, Renford Bambrough<sup>9</sup>, G. E. L. Owen<sup>10</sup>, Gilbert Ryle<sup>11</sup> and Kenneth M. Sayre<sup>12</sup>. The opposite explanation of this issue begins with Vlastos who proposes that Plato never abandons the theory of Forms.<sup>13</sup> He is followed by Gokhan Adalier, Cornford, M. Brown and Dorter. Adalier supports Vlastos' view by arguing that the problems that appear in Socrates' discussion of the wax block and aviary models and on false judgement need the theory of Forms to be solved.<sup>14</sup> Another believer in the idea that the theory of Forms could solve difficulties of the theories and ideas in the *Theaetetus* is F. M. Cornford.<sup>15</sup> He not only connects the theory of Forms to the text of *Theaetetus*, but also links the theory of recollection to the *Theaetetus*. Cornford firmly believes that *Theaetetus* is connected to the theory of recollection in the *Meno*, especially when Socrates describes his midwifery. Malcolm Brown supports Cornford's view, by referring to the evidence of the anonymous commentator on *Theaetetus* in antiquity,

“...the [side of the] two-foot square is also incommensurable...but he left it out,

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<sup>7</sup> Ackrill (1955) pp. 199-218.

<sup>8</sup> Bostock (1988).

<sup>9</sup> Bambrough (1972) pp. 295- 307.

<sup>10</sup> Owen (1953) pp. 313-338.

<sup>11</sup> Ryle (1939) pp.97-147.

<sup>12</sup> Sayre (1969).

<sup>13</sup> Vlastos (1954) pp. 231-263.

<sup>14</sup> Adalier (2001) pp. 1-37.

<sup>15</sup> Cornford (1935).

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they say, because it is in the *Meno*".<sup>16</sup>

Kenneth Dorter reminds us, "The *Theaetetus* in fact recalls the *Meno* at almost every turn".<sup>17</sup> Hackforth believes that Cornford's idea is correct by examining Robinson's article which dissents Cornford's general interpretation of *Theaetetus*, namely, an acceptable definition of knowledge will not be reached, if the Forms are left out of account.<sup>18</sup> Hackforth offers two important conclusions: "(a) that it seems in general impossible to separate the question of the essence or nature of knowledge from the question of its object or objects"; "(b) that throughout the dialogue Plato is in fact concerned with both questions."<sup>19</sup> McDowell disagrees with Cornford and the scholars who support him, since Socratic midwifery belongs to Socrates rather than to Plato and it is only "a metaphorical description of a method". In contrast, for *Meno* and *Phaedo*, the recollection theory is a doctrine and belongs to Platonic philosophy.<sup>20</sup> Sedley also disbelieves that *Theaetetus* refers to recollection theory, by giving the evidence that

"Socrates makes explicit the opposite assumption, that our aviaries, far from being stocked with all species of knowledge-birds, are in fact empty in infancy (197e2-3)".<sup>21</sup>

Cornford realizes the importance of recollection theory and the theory of the Forms

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<sup>16</sup> Brown (1969) p.360, note 4.

<sup>17</sup> He also gives us eight examples to show the connection between the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno*. See, Dorter (1994) p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson (1950) pp. 3-30.

<sup>19</sup> Hackforth (1957) pp. 53 and 58.

<sup>20</sup> McDowell (1973) pp. 116-117.

<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Sedley suggests how recollection might be relevant to understanding *Theaetetus* in his book. Sedley (2004) p. 29-30.

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for understanding the philosophical contents in *Theaetetus*, I agree with Cornford's idea that, although *Theaetetus* does not mention the recollection and the Forms theory, there is still a connection between the theory of Forms, the theory of recollection and the theories and ideas in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>22</sup> When Cornford explains perception theory, the wax block analogy and the aviary example in *Theaetetus*, he does not apply these three issues to explain how the soul "consorts with" the Forms and thus gains knowledge. The theories and the ideas in the *Theaetetus* are connected to the recollection theory and the Forms theory. I hold that the theories and ideas of *Theaetetus* are supplement to the recollection and Forms theories mentioned in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*.

### **Reasons for the choice of *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus***

There are six key reasons (A-F) why *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus* are relevant to my research. The reasons are as follows:

(A) The most important theory in Plato's epistemology is the theory of Forms that is formally introduced in the *Phaedo*.

(B) If the theory of Forms is necessary in this research, then the recollection theory is another key theory that needs to be discussed, since the recollection theory is the bridge between the Forms and the knowledge that can be recollected by the soul through stimulation in the sensible world. Plato offers his readers a detailed account

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<sup>22</sup> R. Hackforth firmly agrees with Cornford's idea that "the main purpose" of *Theaetetus* "is to show that no acceptable definition of knowledge can be reached if the Forms are left out of account". See Hackforth (1957) p. 53.

of recollection theory in the *Meno*.

(C) Plato's Socrates supplies at the end of *Meno* a formula "knowledge is true opinion plus an explanation of the reason why", which is a very important attempt to state the nature and meaning of knowledge. Moreover, an extremely similar formula "knowledge is true opinion/judgement plus an account" is investigated in the *Theaetetus* as the third definition of knowledge, although it is rejected there.

(D) *Meno* also makes the distinction between true opinion and knowledge and proposes that knowledge is more valuable than true opinion. This distinction is also important in *Theaetetus*.

(E) The theory of Forms, the theory of recollection, the distinction between true opinion and knowledge, the formula "knowledge is true opinion plus an explanation of the reason why" and the discussion of the immortality of soul that appear in the *Meno* or *Phaedo* construct a basic outline of Plato's epistemology.

(F) *Theaetetus* is the only dialogue that investigates directly the meaning and nature of knowledge. This fact puts *Theaetetus* in a special position in relation to Plato's theory of knowledge. During the process of discussing the meaning and nature of knowledge through the three definitions of knowledge, Socrates offers a series of theories and ideas about epistemology, which serves as a supplement to the outline of knowledge theory in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*.

This thesis will argue that *Theaetetus* offers doctrines that are not only linked to the theory of Forms and recollection theory, but which also supplement the outline of the epistemology in *Meno* and *Phaedo*. In this sense, the ideas in the *Theaetetus* have



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positive significance. They are positive, since they lead Plato's readers to consider what Plato has said on knowledge through trying to clarify what is unclear and to solve the problems in the outline of knowledge. Further, they also have negative significance. They are negative, since all of them fail after scrutiny, which means all of them have difficulties in themselves. In this sense, I agree with Burnyeat and Sedley that *Theaetetus* is a kind of "dialectical exercise" which offers us a chance to re-consider what has been discussed on epistemology and gives us a "maieutic" method which is like a ladder to help Plato's readers to come as closely as possible to the real meaning and nature of knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I borrow the term "maieutic" from Sedley. See Burnyeat (1990) pp.7-10 and Sedley (2004) pp. 4-6.

## Chapter One: *Meno* on Knowledge, True Opinion and Recollection

### Introduction

*Meno* is a key dialogue on epistemology in Plato's dialogues. In it, Socrates tries to discuss whether virtue could be taught and what virtue is.<sup>24</sup> Then Socrates tries to use epistemology to solve these ethical questions. The appearance of Meno's paradox shows that Plato realizes that the solution to the epistemological question is the basis of the ethical questions. Then, the topic of *Meno* becomes an epistemological question "Is virtue knowledge?" from the ethical question "Is virtue teachable?".

The change to the approach of taking epistemology as the basis of ethics is prompted by Meno's paradox. This paradox is the starting-point of the discussion of a series questions about knowledge or knowing. Considering three scholars' arguments, I will argue that the main problem of Meno's paradox is that Meno only considers the situation of the cognitive blank, i.e. when someone is completely ignorant on something (section 1.1).

Socrates employs two theories to solve Meno's paradox, namely, the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection (learning is recollection). Focusing on the recollection theory in this chapter (section 1.2), I will argue that it does not apply to all kinds of knowledge and, therefore, confine knowledge to a

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<sup>24</sup> Irwin reminds us, Meno's first definition of virtue satisfies "a metaphysical demand", but "Socrates adds an epistemological demand". See Irwin (1999) pp. 146-147.

narrow sphere, as scholars have shown. Although having such a defect, the recollection theory shows that all knowledge or true opinion comes from the soul.

Having realized that apart from the soul there is no other possible teacher of the virtue, Socrates refuses the idea that virtue could be a kind of knowledge, since only knowledge could be taught. The solution to this problem is the introduction of “true opinion”. Socrates gives an example, the road to Larisa, to explain that both true opinion and knowledge could lead to the right behavior (section 1.3). The only difference between true opinion and knowledge is that true opinion is not stable and needs an account of the reason why to “tie it down”. I will emphasize that Socrates offers his version of gaining knowledge as a process. To illustrate this process Socrates asks one of Meno’s slaves geometrical questions to helping him to recollect the relevant geometrical knowledge. I will especially emphasize the Socratic idea that true opinion is an intercourse between perception and knowledge, even if his arguments will also raise two problems.

In the last section of this chapter (section 1.4), I will discuss why knowledge is more valuable than true opinion, if true opinion and knowledge have the same practical value, namely, both of them could lead to the right behavior.

### **1.1 Meno’s Paradox**

Meno’s paradox is a turning point of the dialogue, since the relationship between epistemology and ethics comes close after it, though there is an indistinct connection between them before it. Moreover, Meno’s paradox itself as a kind of

skepticism is an important query of epistemology. An analysis of Meno's paradox is necessary.

Meno's paradox begins at 80d and the text of it is as follows:

Καί τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο, ὃ μὴ οἶσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅ τι ἐστίν; ποῖον γὰρ ὧν οὐκ οἶσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ἢ εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ πῶς εἶση ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν, ὃ σὺ οὐκ ἤδησθα; (*Meno* 80d 5-8)

(How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?)

Scott divides this paradox into two parts,  $M^1$  and  $M^2$ , as he labels them.<sup>25</sup> There are three questions in the paradox, the first two questions belong to  $M^1$ ; the last question belongs to  $M^2$ . Scott also thinks that the name of Meno's paradox "has been used confusingly" (p. 75) and we should avoid using it.<sup>26</sup> "The weakness of  $M^1$  is clear" (p.76), since the premise of the paradox is that "one really were in a cognitive blank" (pp.76-77). Nevertheless, "this hardly represents the situation of either Meno or Socrates in the dialogue" (p.77). In other words, since they have discussed the unified form of virtue in the dialogue, both of them could not be in a cognitive blank. Then,  $M^1$  is obviously weak.

$M^2$  to Scott has two interpretations. Let us consider the first explanation only.<sup>27</sup>

It is as follows: "While  $M^1$  focuses on the beginning of an inquiry, this part of the

<sup>25</sup> Scott, D. 2006. *Plato's Meno*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 75-79.

<sup>26</sup> Meno's paradox is actually a confusing name in Scott's interpretation of it. Scott thinks that there are two stages in the paradox, namely, Meno's three questions and Socrates' paraphrase or response to these questions. However, in my argument, I shall not refer to Socrates' response to it and shall purely analyse Meno's paradox itself.

<sup>27</sup> I shall leave the second untouched, for it relates to Socrates' response of the paradox, according to Scott's idea. See also previous note above.

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challenge envisages a problem about ever completing it (even if one could, *per impossibile*, get started)” (p. 77). Then,  $M^2$  “is continuous with the problem raised in  $M^1$ : if you are in a cognitive blank about some object, you cannot make a discovery about it by means of inquiry” (p. 77). Nevertheless, Scott thinks this is “impossible” (p. 77), for “you may be able to grasp  $x$ , but since you have never had any specification of  $y$ , how can you make any sense of the statement ‘ $x$  is  $y$ ?’” (p.77). This is in fact the same as the rebuttal to  $M^1$ , namely, you could grasp some phenomena or some parts of something, but not hold the essence or knowledge of it. This gives us a new perspective: we could grasp some phenomena or some parts of something through inquiry or learning. This new perspective contradicts the conclusion of Meno’s paradox, i.e. we could discover nothing through learning or inquiry. Therefore,  $M^2$  is essentially as weak as  $M^1$ .

McCabe shares with Scott the same conclusion about Meno’s paradox, but she investigates the situation of “knowing completely” (an opposite phrase to “in a cognitive blank” in Scott’s terms) in detail.<sup>28</sup> According to her idea, the word “οἶσθα/know” that Meno employs in his paradox is vague, because we could understand “know” in two ways:

- (1) Either I know  $x$  completely or I am completely ignorant of it;
- (2) Either I have  $x$  in mind or I do not have  $x$  in mind.

The situation in (2) expresses the same idea as Scott. According to McCabe, Meno in his paradox considers only the situation (1) and does not think about the

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<sup>28</sup> See McCabe (1994) pp. 53-54.

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situation (2). In the situation (1), it is obviously right to say that one cannot even start an inquiry. However, this situation is extreme and rare. There are a vast number of cases between complete knowledge and complete ignorance. That is to say, there are three possibilities: complete knowledge, complete ignorance and insufficient knowledge (in the sense of having something in mind but not fully knowing/having not enough knowledge). Take France as an example to illustrate this. I have the notion of “France” or I know there is a country “France”, but I have no idea about its specific circumstances, such as its territory, its races or its politics. More interestingly, because of the notion “France” in my mind, I could learn something about it by means of learning from a textbook or asking someone or searching it through the internet. This example shows that Meno’s paradox could only apply in some limited situations, namely, when someone “is completely ignorant of” or is “in a cognitive blank” about or with regard to something.

Fine analyses Meno’s paradox or eristic paradox.<sup>29</sup> She believes that Socrates’ rephrase of the paradox is important for understanding Meno’s paradox. She recasts Socrates’ response as follows (pp. 205-206):<sup>30</sup>

1. For any  $x$ , one either knows, or does not know,  $x$ .
2. If one knows  $x$ , one cannot inquire into  $x$ .
3. If one does not know  $x$ , one cannot inquire into  $x$ .
4. Therefore, whether or not one knows  $x$ , one cannot inquire into  $x$ .

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<sup>29</sup> See Fine (1992) pp. 205-206.

<sup>30</sup> The quotation refers to Socrates’ response. However, in Fine’s article, there is no difference between Meno’s paradox and Socrates’ response, which is very distinctive from Scott’s idea. Therefore, I could employ it without difficulty.

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According to her own discussion, Fine points out that (1) and (4) are valid, but (2) and (3) are suspect, since the word “know” in them is not clear. In order to illustrate this, she offers an example, saying, “I might know who Meno is, but seek to know where he is; I might know something about physics, but seek to know more about it” (p. 206). The example has shown that “I might lack all knowledge about x, but have some (true) beliefs about it; and perhaps they are adequate for inquiry” (p. 206). In other words, so long as I hold some beliefs to start my inquiry, it is not important whether they are true or false.

It is apparent that Fine, McCabe and Scott all agree with each other. I also agree with them, but have to supplement what actually happens in Meno’s paradox. At *Meno* 71b, Socrates insists that if someone does not know what something is, then he could not know what qualities it possesses. It seems that the question “What is something?” is in Socrates’ mind a basic question compared to the question “What are the qualities of something?”. Meno points out that the real basic question should not be “What is something?” but rather “How is learning possible?” This shows that epistemology is the real and main problem in the dialogue. Socrates himself admits that he has “complete ignorance about virtue” (*Meno* 71b). Meno could judge that Socrates actually admits that he is “in a cognitive blank” about virtue. If so, then, it is valid for Meno to propose his paradox. All the three scholars above suspect that Meno’s paradox itself has some defects, but the defects are not the result of Meno’s mistake, but rather of Socrates’ mistake.

More importantly, Meno uses wrong words in his paradox. He should employ in

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his paradox words like “collecting information” or “how to understand a concept or notion when you have no concept in your soul/mind” rather than “learning/inquiry”. This is the real problem of Meno’s paradox --- Meno does not correctly set his question. This happens because Meno’s understanding of the concept “learning” is different from the three scholars’ understanding on that notion. As the three scholars show, any learning or inquiry for *Meno* means the inquirer has an intention or motivation for inquiring about something. This kind of intention suggests that the inquirer has had some information on the object of the inquiry before he starts inquiring. The idea of learning itself could avoid Meno’s paradox without any problem. Nevertheless, Meno’s paradox tries to highlight the question of how the inquiry happens. Before the inquiry, there is a pre-assumption or pre-procedure, i.e. we should have the concepts in the inquiry or should know how to collect or gain the concepts, even though the concepts are vague. The scholars have shown that this paradox could only happen in a “cognitive blank” situation. However, Meno would rebut them, saying that that is the very situation on he wishes to consider. The paradox tries to query how a person in a cognitive blank could understand anything. The analyses from those scholars illustrate what situation could lead to such a paradox, but these analyses do not offer any answer to the paradox. Socrates employs the immortality of soul and the theory of recollection to respond to this paradox. These two ideas show that a cognitive blank could not happen in human beings, because our souls have learnt everything we need before our birth. This is at least an answer, though it is not a good answer, for Meno could continue his doubt by asking



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“how could the soul learn when it knows nothing?” A possible answer that Socrates could offer is that because “the whole of nature is akin” (*Meno* 81d). Therefore, the soul could learn everything.<sup>31</sup>

## 1.2 Theory of Recollection

The theory of recollection is the answer that Socrates offers to solve Meno’s paradox and it provides important information about epistemology in *Meno*. Since G. Vlastos published *Anamnesis in the Meno*, many other scholars have tried to develop his idea about recollection in *Meno*. In this section, I introduce three analyses from G. Vlastos, J. Moravcsik and A. Nehamas on recollection and then present my own understanding.

In the *Meno*, in order to prove his theory of recollection, Socrates shows how a slave, who had never learnt geometry before, could gain a correct answer to a geometrical question for himself after being asked a set of questions. Vlastos<sup>32</sup> raises a doubt about this proof, since knowledge of geometry is different from other kinds of knowledge (such as the knowledge of history, of anatomy or of botany), it could be gained completely through “any advance in understanding which results from the perception of logical relationships” (p. 145).<sup>33</sup> Thus, he shows how the slave example could not apply to all kinds of knowledge, especially those that rely on experience or

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<sup>31</sup> A possible Stoic answer may be like this. Because the whole of nature has rationality, though different in degree. Therefore, the soul could learn everything.

<sup>32</sup> Vlastos (1994) pp. 101-102.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Kahn thinks Vlastos’ idea “is correct in principle, but too narrow. To cover what is going on in the geometry lesson, recollection must mean not only the perception of formal relationships but also the capacity to make judgments of truth and falsity, of equality and similarity.” See Kahn (2009) p. 120.

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recording data. If this is the case, how can Socrates prove the recollection theory (i.e. learning is recollection) through the slave example? In other words, since some kinds of knowledge, for instance, history, botany or anatomy, cannot be proved by the slave example. Vlastos' doubt shows that according to his understanding there are at least two kinds of knowledge. One is the knowledge from deduction, which can be gained logically through a correct assumption, premise or hypothesis. The other is the knowledge composed completely by experience or by recording data, such as history, botany or anatomy, which does not rely on a right premise or any other deduction. Socrates' slave example only proves that the theory of recollection applies to the first kind of knowledge rather than the second. We could call the first kind of knowledge "analytical knowledge" which does not need any experience, the second one "synthetic knowledge" which contains empirical materials.<sup>34</sup>

Vlastos distinguishes "the minimal sense of the theory of recollection" and the "full strength of the theory of recollection".<sup>35</sup> He thinks that "the minimal sense of the theory of recollection" could apply to the deductive knowledge that is independent of experience. The "full strength of the theory of recollection" not only implies that non-empirical knowledge exists, but also, unfortunately, implies that empirical knowledge does not exist. That is to say, all knowledge including analytical knowledge and synthetic knowledge is non-empirical, since the theory of recollection in full strength means that knowledge is found in the soul. Therefore, experience is irrelevant. Based on this explanation, Vlastos makes a connection between the theory

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<sup>34</sup> This distinction is made by Kant. Kant uses "analytic judgement" and "synthetic judgement" as terminology. See, Kant (1998) pp. 141-143.

<sup>35</sup> Vlastos (1996) p. 161 and p. 163.

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of recollection and the theory of Forms<sup>36</sup> and believes that incarnation is the premise of recollection.

Moravcsik concentrates on the meaning of logical terminology in the *Meno*. He thinks that Meno's paradox (namely, we could find nothing through learning or inquiry), could only apply to "learning by deliberate inquiry" rather than other kinds of learning. This actually excludes "learning by chance (luck) or as the results of external agency".<sup>37</sup> Like Vlastos, Moravcsik also thinks that Plato talks about non-empirical knowledge in the *Meno*. This kind of knowledge is in fact the prior knowledge or innate knowledge.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, there is a difference between Moravcsik's idea and Vlastos' idea. Moravcsik does not agree that recollected truth could be gained through deduction. Although he does not make his points clear, Moravcsik seems to imply that the knowledge that Plato mentions in the *Meno* is prior and that it points to the theory of Forms (which agrees with Vlastos again), since recollection itself has manifested "experience". Recollection must be the memory of something, or more exactly experience.<sup>39</sup>

Nehamas' article offers a new way to understand the meaning of the word "knowledge" (ἐπιστήμη) in the *Meno*.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the two scholars above, he does not understand "ἐπιστήμη" as "knowledge", a kind of entity, which is in the soul, and

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<sup>36</sup> Many scholars agree that Plato had a theory of Forms when he wrote *Meno*. Nevertheless, there is a dispute on whether the Forms in the *Meno* are the same as Socrates' forms (such as in *Euthydemus*). Ross thinks that they are the same. However, Guthrie and Vlastos do not think so. I agree with Guthrie and Vlastos. See Ross (1953) p. 18 and Guthrie (1969) volume III, p. 253 and Vlastos (1994) pp. 101-102.

<sup>37</sup> Moravcsik (1971) pp. 53-69.

<sup>38</sup> "Prior knowledge" has been employed and discussed by many philosophers. Kant is a representative among those philosophers. However, I do not intend to discuss the exact meaning of this term, but just use it interchangeably with "innate knowledge", i.e. born with knowledge.

<sup>39</sup> Moravcsik (1971) pp. 53-69.

<sup>40</sup> Nehamas (1985) pp. 1-30

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does not link the process of gaining knowledge to the theory of Forms and incarnation. Rather he treats “ἐπιστήμη” as “understanding” or “reasoning”. This explanation follows a long history of how to understand “ἐπιστήμη” in Plato’s philosophy and is one of three kinds of explanation models. One of the explanation models holds that, in Plato’s mind, “ἐπιστήμη” is always a process of “reasoning”. Moravcsik and Jon Moline hold this explanation.<sup>41</sup> The second model is that Plato’s usage of “ἐπιστήμη” has a development. At the beginning, Plato employs “ἐπιστήμη” as “knowledge”, i.e. a kind of entity, but gradually he treats it as “understanding” or “reasoning”, i.e. a process. Myles Burnyeat agrees with this development in Plato’s philosophy.<sup>42</sup> The last model tries to show that “ἐπιστήμη” is neither pure “knowledge” nor pure “understanding”, but “knowledge” with “understanding”. That is to say, knowledge is a kind of entity. However, in the process of gaining knowledge, there must be a process of recognition, understanding or reasoning. Jonathan Barnes thinks this third explanation is the right one.<sup>43</sup> Based on the dispute above, Nehamas questions why Socrates and Meno, who both claim that they know nothing about “virtue”, try to find a teacher of “virtue”. Moreover, agreeing with Meno, he doubts how could they begin their discussion about “what is virtue?”, if they do not know it at all. Nehamas suggests that unless Socrates has the answer to “what is virtue?”, or at least has the concept of “virtue”, they could not know even whether the object of their inquiry is “virtue”. Further, if someone could know what he does not know, he would have the ability to answer questions. If someone has

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<sup>41</sup> Moravcsik (1979) pp. 337-348 and Moline (1981) pp. 32-43.

<sup>42</sup> Burnyeat (1980) pp. 97-139.

<sup>43</sup> Burnyeat and Barnes (1980) pp. 173-206.

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such ability, he in fact has reached knowledge. In the *Meno*, if Meno could always respond to Socrates' question, he actually would reach the knowledge of "what is virtue?" in some degree.<sup>44</sup> According to Nehamas' line of thinking, Socrates, Meno and the slave reach the knowledge of virtue in the dialogue, because their "question-answer" approach to virtue constructs a discussion. According to Nehamas' conclusion, the solution that Socrates offers to Meno's paradox is dialectical, not logical.

All these scholars' analysis show that "ἐπιστήμη" refers only to non-empirical knowledge in the *Meno*. Moreover, both of Vlastos and Moravcsik gain this conclusion from the theory of recollection and reincarnation, which offers a profound and coherent understanding of the texts in the dialogue. I also agree with their doubt about the possibility of empirical knowledge. Especially Vlastos' argument that some disciplines, such as biology, history and anatomy, cannot gain the relevant knowledge through deduction is persuasive. The only thing that Vlastos and Moravcsik ignore is that recollection as memory actually means "experience", i.e. if someone recollects something, this has shown he must recollect some experience from the past, since if there is nothing in your soul, it is impossible to recollect something.

Nehamas' doubt about whether teachers of virtue exist is what actually happens in the texts of *Meno*. Socrates seriously discusses why there is no one who could be the teacher of virtue in the *Meno* (91a-96c). In such a long text, Socrates successively

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<sup>44</sup> Nehamas could gain this conclusion, because he treats "ἐπιστήμη" as "understanding", as explained above

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denies that sophists and gentlemen in the city could be teachers of virtue. Socrates employs this denial to shake the root of the proposition “virtue is teachable”, because, as he says, if there is no teacher nor student of virtue, it is impossible that virtue could be taught. Nevertheless, does Socrates really think that there is no teacher of virtue? If he insists that virtue is knowledge and knowledge is recollection, then we could reasonably say that the soul itself is the teacher of virtue. Everyone’s soul is his or her own teacher, because what you need to gain virtue is already in your soul.

Vlastos and Moravcsik correctly realize that the theory of recollection is highly important to Meno’s paradox, but they miss some aspects of this theory. Nehamas does not see the importance of recollection, since he thinks that we could know something through “ask-answer” discussion. This is obviously a misunderstanding of what Socrates says in the *Meno*. At 98a, Socrates uses a metaphor for the relationship between true opinion and knowledge: “For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man’s mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why.” In this metaphor, Socrates does not treat knowledge and true opinion as a process of recognition, understanding or reasoning, but as a kind of entity, as can be seen in the phrases “willing to”, “remain”, “escape” and “tie them down”. Since Socrates does not treat “ἐπιστήμη” here as a kind of process. Nehamas’ conclusion, that the solution that Socrates’ solution to Meno’s paradox is dialectical, not logical, is not right. Although Nehamas analyses the texts in a fragmentary way, he reminds us of a key question of how to understand both the

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position of recollection in the dialogue and the meaning of dialectic. On the latter, he offers an etymological explanation. Since dialectic derives from the Greek word “διαλέγω” which is constructed by two parts, i.e. “δια” and “λεγω”, with “δια” meaning “divide” and “λεγω” meaning “say, speak”, therefore, “διαλέγεσθαι” could be translated as “dialectic” or “dialogue”. Nehamas’ understanding is based on such a background and is relevant to Socrates’ arguments about true opinion and knowledge. For even if Socrates, Meno, Anytus and the slave have a discussion about virtue, true opinion or knowledge, they still do not reach true knowledge, but remain at the level of opinion only.

### 1.3 Example of “Larisa”: Knowledge and True Opinion

After Socrates refuses the principle “Virtue is Knowledge” (*Meno* 96c), because there is no teacher or student of virtue, he turns his attention to “true opinion”. Both Socrates and Meno have agreed that “good men are beneficent” (96e). Good men could offer “a good guide in our affairs” (96e-97a).

In order to illustrate this idea and to introduce the concept of “true opinion”, Socrates gives an example:

Socrates: ...A man who knew the way to Larisa, or anywhere else you like, and went there and guided others would surely lead them well and correctly?

Meno: Certainly.

Socrates: What if someone had had a correct opinion as to which was the way but had not gone there or indeed had knowledge of it, would he not also lead correctly?

Meno: Certainly. (*Meno* 97a-b)

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According to this example, the similarity between “knowledge” and “true opinion” is that both would lead to a good consequence or bring benefits.

Leading someone to Larisa is a question of “how-to”. A “how-to” question relates to whether someone has an ability to do something. This kind of ability is different from “know what” or, to borrow the terminology of Gilbert Ryle, “know that”.<sup>45</sup> According to the example, if someone has the ability to “lead himself or other people to Larisa” and in fact he really did it, then, he has knowledge of the “know-how” type and so he has specific knowledge on Larisa. If he only successfully led himself or someone else to Larisa without any ability of the “know-how” type, or he did that simply by chance or “sheer luck”, as R. W. Sharples says, then he only has true opinion on Larisa.<sup>46</sup>

Even if someone does not have any knowledge on Larisa but at least knows some facts, he at least has some other kind of knowledge about Larisa (“know-what”) in his mind. Otherwise, even in the case of succeeding by sheer luck, he hardly hits the aim. Take a mathematical question as an example. Let us suppose a child faces a mathematical question, “ $3+2=_$ ”. If he wrote down “5” in the place of the “\_”, then he answered this question correctly, even if he did it by chance. However, he must know, at least, what “\_” means, otherwise he would not know that “\_” is the right place to write the answer. Through this example, we can see that the ability of “know-how” is based on the “know-that” or “know-what” type of knowledge.

Based on the framework of Ryle, it seems that Plato also admits the distinction

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<sup>45</sup> Ryle divides all mental conduct or intelligence into “know how” and “know that”. Ryle (2000) pp. 28-32.

<sup>46</sup> Sharples (1991) p. 10.



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of “know how” and “know that” (or “know what”).<sup>47</sup> Following this distinction, the concept of true opinion in the quotation of 97a-b is close to know-how, though it has no knowledge at all and more or less relies on luck and chance.

It is useful to link the example of Larisa to the famous paragraph on the distinction of “true opinion and knowledge”. Let us start our analysis with the text:

For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man’s mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why. And that, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down. (*Meno*, 98a-b)

This paragraph tells that the only thing that knowledge has which true opinion does not have is “an account of the reason why” (98a). It offers a formula: knowledge = true opinion + an explanation of reason why.

Disregarding whether this formula is correct or not, let us consider the relationship between this formula and the “Larisa” example above. The “Larisa” example mainly refers to the similarity between knowledge and true opinion, while this formula emphasizes the difference between them. In order to become knowledge, true opinion must add an explanation of the reason why.

Nevertheless, there is a problem: the example of Larisa actually does not only

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<sup>47</sup> Diskin Clay emphasizes “the Socratic equation of virtue and knowledge”. He says, “All genuine craftsmen possess ‘virtue’ (ἀρετή *aretē*) because of their know-how (ἐπιστήμη, *epistēmē*). In Plato, this is not to be identified with intelligence, which represents a higher order of knowledge. when Socrates speaks of *epistēmē*, we should say skill, but a Greek would say ‘virtue’”. He also points out the equation of knowledge and know-how. (“...Greek *epistēmē* is not exactly ‘knowledge’, for it does not at first denote abstract or scientific knowledge; it means ‘know-how’”). See Clay (2000) pp. 191-193.

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refer to the similarity between knowledge and true opinion, it says more. At 97a-b Socrates says that if someone led the right way, “but had not gone there or indeed had knowledge of it”, then, he has a true opinion, since he maybe led the way by luck. Socrates thus seems to be suggesting that the difference between the man who has knowledge about Larisa and the man who only has true opinion about it depends on whether he had been to Larisa before. R. W. Sharples is correct in his assessment,

“the contrast between opinion and knowledge in terms of working out the explanation (below 98a) does not apply well to the present example (having travelled the road oneself hardly means that one now knows, whereas one did not before, why it is the right road.)”<sup>48</sup>

The problem is how Socrates could ensure that someone who went to Larisa will know the right road the next time. The road to somewhere is changing, one who went to a place cannot make sure the experience of the past will work the next time. Moreover, someone who wants to go to a place may have many choices, since there may be many ways to the same place. Why does Socrates in this example only use a single word “the road” (97a)? Maybe Socrates wishes to emphasize the concept “doing right” that we only need one right way to go to Larisa.

We, however, are still curious to know how the formula “knowledge = true opinion + an account/explanation of the reason why” is compatible to the implication of “went to Larisa” entails the knowledge of “how to go to Larisa”. For convenience, we can borrow Bertrand Russell’s terms “acquaintance” and “description” to

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<sup>48</sup> Sharples (1991) p. 183.

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illustrate the problem.<sup>49</sup> Russell explains: “acquaintance” as follows: “We shall say that we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truth”. On his use of the term “description”, he explains: “by a ‘description’ I mean any phrase of the form ‘a so-and-so’ or ‘the so-and-so’”. The experience of “went to Larisa” in the Socratic example is in accordance with Russell’s term “acquaintance”. But “know how to go to Larisa” is not similar to Russell’s term “description”. Russell’s “description” remains only theoretical, while Plato’s knowledge (both the knowledge of “how-to” and the knowledge of “know what/that”) is not only theoretical, but also practical. The problem can be switched into another question: how could the “acquaintance” with Larisa become the “description” of “how to go to Larisa”? How could a personal experience be generalized? According to the Socratic formula “knowledge is true opinion plus an account/explanation of the reason why”, the only difference between knowledge and true opinion is the “an account/explanation of the reason why”. Therefore, the way to generalize personal experience is to add “an account/explanation of the reason why”. Is it possible for someone who has been to Larisa to give a reasonable account of why the road he took is really a right way, even if he only went there once? It seems difficult, for someone may make a mistake and give a wrong guide to Larisa, especially if the road to Larisa is extremely complex.

Having considered the reasons above, we conclude that the example of Larisa

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<sup>49</sup> See Russell (2001) pp. 25-32. Cf. Matthews (1972) pp. 20-23.

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says nothing about the real difference between knowledge and true opinion in the *Meno*. Then what is the real difference between them? In the quotation of 98a-b and the formula for knowledge just mentioned, besides “know-how” and “know-what”, there is the third kind of knowledge, namely, “know-why”. Take a chess game as an example. A master of the chess game may face a question: “why do you move this way?” He may answer, “Because of some reasons, I move this way”. That means he generalizes his own thought, for another person could make the same move in any chess game, if they face the same situation.

This gives us a light on the question of Larisa: how can someone who went to Larisa once be sure that the experience of the past can be applied to the present? It is because his experience can be generalized if the situation is still the same as the past. That is to say, if everything is now as it was in the past, e.g. the road still exists as it did in the past, if the destination is still Larisa, and if the environment (the weather etc.) is still the same as in the past, then my experience could be applied to everyone who now wishes to go to Larisa. The result of this process is actually what Socrates himself thinks:

At the moment <the slave's> beliefs are newly aroused, as though in a dream. But if someone asks him these same questions over again on many occasions and in many ways, you know that in the end he will have knowledge as accurate as anyone's about them. (*Meno*, 85c-d)<sup>50</sup>

If the analysis above is correct, then Plato in the *Meno* does not think that the

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<sup>50</sup> Translation comes from Terence Irwin. See Irwin (1989) p. 88.

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principle of Heraclitus, “People can’t step twice into the same river”, is possible in the sense world. For if the experience can be applied twice, then it must be in exactly the same situation, but that apparently contradicts Heraclitus’ principle.

The Larisa example can be used to consider the question: “Could someone who only has true opinion be a teacher?” In the *Meno*, both Socrates and Meno assume that virtue is knowledge (*Meno* 87c), but Socrates immediately proves in the following texts that there is no teacher of virtue and therefore, no student of virtue. The result is that Socrates refuses to admit that knowledge is virtue. Moreover, if virtue is not knowledge, and only knowledge is teachable, then virtue is not teachable. We are not concerned here with whether virtue is teachable or not, or whether there are teachers of virtue,<sup>51</sup> The question here is what is the standard of a teacher for Plato/Socrates? Is it necessary for a teacher to have relevant knowledge?

Return to the example of Larisa. Someone who has knowledge of how to go to Larisa is definitely a teacher in this matter, for he has the specific knowledge on it. Nevertheless, can someone who only has true opinion or even lacks knowledge also be a teacher in this matter? This question is equivalent to the question “Could someone who lacks knowledge or only has opinion arouse the knowledge which is in another’s mind or soul?” There seems a paradox here. If Plato denies that someone who has only true opinion or lacks knowledge can arouse knowledge in another, then it would contradict the proof of the theory of recollection. For Socrates successfully makes Meno’s slave recollect geometrical knowledge. Further, if we consider the

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<sup>51</sup> I have discussed the teacher of virtue problem in section 1.3. The question here is a relevant but other topic.

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midwifery in the *Theaetetus*, it also contradicts the task of Socrates as a midwife who himself knows nothing but helps other people to produce knowledge. If Plato admits that someone who has true opinion or lacks knowledge can arouse knowledge in another, then argument that “there is no teacher of virtue” is wrong.

Here we need to consider Nehamas’ article again. Nehamas does not directly deal with how to understand the “ἐπιστήμη” problem, but he treats the idea that “ἐπιστήμη” is reasoning or understanding as his background. He actually understands “ἐπιστήμη” as a kind of ability (δύναμις). This contradicts the texts in the dialogue. For at 98a, Socrates defines “ἐπιστήμη” as “true opinion” plus “an explanation of the reason why”, rather than as “understanding” or “reasoning”. Here, the other defect of Nehamas’ explanation appears, since this kind of explanation makes the boundary between true opinion and knowledge blurred. We could ask, under such an explanation of “ἐπιστήμη”, how could we distinguish knowledge from true opinion? Socrates only points out that knowledge is more stable than true opinion and needs an account/explanation. If we understand “ἐπιστήμη” as “understanding” or “reasoning”, we would not know any distinction between them in the *Meno*. Then how could we understand true opinion and knowledge correctly in the dialogue to try to answer these difficulties? We should consider the theory of recollection, the immortality of the soul, knowledge and true opinion together.

Vlastos thinks that there is no empirical knowledge in the theory of recollection, no matter whether in the sense of “the minimal sense of the theory of recollection” or the “full strength of the theory of recollection”. That means all knowledge is non-

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empirical. Moravcsik points out that deduction cannot be the only way for helping to gain the truth through recollection, as Vlastos believes. When someone recollects something from his memory, the thing should be an experience of the past. If we employ the terminology of the theory of recollection, say, when the soul recollects something that it has learnt before birth, then what it has learnt is actually an experience of the past. Therefore, deduction in one sense is independent of the experience or facts, but in another sense, it is just an experience.

Following my argument, we could avoid the difficulties in Nehamas' article and could absorb his idea. He thinks that someone who is ignorant could not answer questions and if someone could answer questions, he in fact reaches knowledge. Socrates uses dialectical not logical method to solve Meno's paradox. Nehamas is partly right. When the soul combines with the body, what it has learnt, namely, knowledge, becomes "prior" or "innate" knowledge from "experience" or "intuitive" knowledge. The change is caused by different conditions for the knowledge in the soul. The first difference is that knowledge will be disturbed by the body after the soul combined with the body. The second difference is that the object of knowledge is no longer the Forms, but rather the sensible things. The last difference is that the soul will no longer gain knowledge through the soul "has drawn near and consorted with" (πλησιάζας καὶ μυγεῖς) the Forms (*Republic* 490b), but will recollect knowledge through the stimulation of sensible things.<sup>52</sup> Then, knowledge is already in the soul, but it is just forgotten. The example of the slave finally getting the answer

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Phaedo* 79d, *Laws* 904d and *Timaeus* 90c2.

to a geometrical question, which Nehamas also uses, may make this point clearer. When the slave recollects the geometrical knowledge through Socrates' questions and the picture of a square (82b), the questions and the picture are the sensible things which stimulate the slave and help him recollect what he has learnt from the Forms and what is already in his soul. In this process, the prior knowledge has been reached by both Socrates and the slave, in contrast to Vlastos' idea that they gain the knowledge after many deductions. That is why Socrates asks his interlocutors to get rid of the influence of the body and to purify their soul as much as possible, especially in the *Phaedo*.<sup>53</sup>

Central to the epistemology of *Meno* is Socrates' explanation at 98a of why knowledge is more worthy than true opinion.<sup>54</sup> Here, Socrates says of true opinions: "they are not worth much until one ties them (true opinions) down by (giving) an account of the reason why". The idea is that "tying down" a true opinion in this way would convert it into being knowledge. Since the text is not so clear, we could borrow E. Gettier's reconstruction about what is knowledge in the *Meno*.<sup>55</sup> He re-defines knowledge at 98a as following:

- S knows that P IFF
- ( i ) P is true,
  - ( ii ) S believes that P,
  - ( iii ) S is justified in believing that P.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> I have no room to discuss "purification", though this is an important topic in Plato's philosophy. Socrates makes clear at 69c in the *Phaedo*, "wisdom itself is a kind of cleansing or purification." This tries to show that "the soul still exists after a man has died and that it still possesses some capability and intelligence" (70b). Rohde gives a good discussion about the meaning and functions of the soul in ancient Greek thought. See Rohde (1966) p. 471.

<sup>54</sup> *Theaetetus* has a similar text, see 201e.

<sup>55</sup> See Gettier (1963) p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> Edmund Gettier uses two counter-examples to prove that Socrates' definition about knowledge is wrong. The



This structure is actually a simple formula “ἐπιστήμη (knowledge) = ὀρθὴ δόξα (true opinion) + αἰτία λογισμὸς (an explanation of reason why)”<sup>57</sup>. In view of the theory of recollection, since an account seems to be the thing that is already in the soul, then what about true opinion? Socrates just mentions that true opinion is “in the soul” (85c). It is probable that true opinion which is in the soul comes from sensible objects and is the stimulation necessary for recollecting the relevant account or reason.<sup>58</sup> In order to make this argument clearer, we should consider two further points.

Firstly, true opinion, compared with knowledge, only lacks “an account of the reason why” (98a), i.e. it lacks stability. If we consider that the objects which are the sensible things in the sensible world are always in flux,<sup>59</sup> while the objects in the world of Forms are “εἶδη” (Forms)<sup>60</sup> which are changeless,<sup>61</sup> then we can easily understand why true opinion lacks stability, since the objects in the sensible world

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problem on the definition of knowledge is called “Gettier Problem”. In his article, he also cites Chisholm’s and Ayer’s reconstruction of the definition of knowledge at 98a, both of which have the same structure. Cf. Gettier (1963) pp. 121-123.

<sup>57</sup> Here, I do not consider the relevant discussion at *Theaetetus* which will be analyzed carefully in the later Chapter Four. Socrates himself repeats Meno’s paradox, though he employs different argument, at *Theaetetus* 188b and has a discussion of it. The key point is that Socrates thinks, “It is in cases where we both know things and are perceiving them that judgement is erratic and varies between truth and falsity” (194b). *Theaetetus* defines that “τὴν ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι/ knowledge is true judgement/opinion (200e)” which Socrates refuses to accept. Then *Theaetetus* uses Socrates’ own definition about knowledge in the *Meno*, i.e. true judgement with an account is knowledge (201d). Strangely, Socrates rebuts this idea in the dialogue. See *Theaetetus*, 158d, 167b, 170b, 188b, 194a-b, 198c, 200e-201b.

<sup>58</sup> Gulley would disagree with my argument. He argues that true opinion which is the same as knowledge in the *Meno* is also prior. The difference between true opinion and knowledge is that true opinion is a single and isolated truth and cannot be recognized as a whole system. Accordingly, knowledge is a system and all the elements inside this system could be explained. Based on this understanding, he thinks that true opinion is akin to “δῖανοια” (understanding) in the *Republic* and its object is the mathematical object. See, Gulley (1986) pp. 15-16.

<sup>59</sup> There is no knowledge in the sensible world, since sensible things are always in flux. This is generally accepted by Platonists. Of course, this is still in controversy. Irwin reminds us to consider the exact meaning of “flux” in Plato’s philosophy. He distinguishes “self-change” and “aspect-change” in Plato’s ideas and offers us some new ideas. Irwin (1977) pp.1-13. Cf. Colvin (2007) pp. 759-765.

<sup>60</sup> Form is not an innate idea, rather than a real entity. McCabe admits this idea through her analysis on the texts in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. See, McCabe (1999) pp. 75-83.

<sup>61</sup> The word “world” is actually “region” in Greek and it does not imply any ontological assertion, but should always be in the sense in epistemology, as Vlastos correctly points out. See Vlastos (1973) pp. 58-75.

are always unstable. If the objects are unstable, recollection would be in flux or changeable as well. Under such a situation, the person who is recollecting is perceiving the objects in the sensible world and gains true opinion according to what he is perceiving by his ability of reasoning. This process of reasoning always accompanies the process of recollection. There are two processes which correspond to two abilities in the soul: the process of reasoning corresponding to the ability of reasoning and the process of recollecting corresponding to the ability of recollecting. A whole process of recognition could be made clear as follows: someone perceives a sensible object in the sensible world and stimulated by the sensible object he produces a piece of true opinion by his ability of reasoning. After the stimulation and the appearance of the true opinion, he recollects something which is an account of the reason why for the relevant true opinion. The very thing that he recollects comes from what he has learnt before his birth through the ability of intuition or perception. When the two things, i.e. the true opinion and the account of the reason why, appear in the soul, they combine with each other and produce knowledge in the soul.

Secondly, when the combination of the account of the reason why and the true opinion about something is complete, i.e. the recollection is in its “full strength”, if we borrow Vlastos’ terminology, we could say that the soul is in its purest reasoning state and grasps the relevant knowledge. However, this is just a moment and could not last too long, simply because the objects in the sensible world are changeable. Even if the knowledge that the soul itself grasps is stable, the soul could not hold the knowledge stably. Moreover, the soul stimulated by the sensible objects always

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passively gains knowledge, in contrast with the situation where the soul always positively and actively gains knowledge in the world of the Forms. The soul in the sensible world needs true opinion as the necessary stimulator to help it recollect knowledge, though the state of the soul grasping knowledge lasts only a moment. That is why Plato does not think that a sensible object could supply any knowledge (*Meno* 86a). Further, this idea of the passive soul in the world of flux that could lead to the view that the sensible object could only supply the stimulation and that there is no real knowledge in the sensible world. Aristotle's point in *Metaphysics* supports this conclusion:

...For, having in his [Plato's] youth first become familiar with Cratylus and with the Heraclitean doctrines (that all sensible things are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them), these views he held even in later years. (*Metaphysics*, 987a32-b1)<sup>62</sup>.

Socrates' idea about knowledge and true opinion has two problems. The first problem is that Socrates excludes the function of perception in the process of gaining knowledge. Socrates would deny the possibility of knowledge in the sensible world, since the objects in the sensible world and the perceptions that are produced by the objects are not stable and need an account that the soul has learnt before the process of the recognition. The only function that Socrates has left to perception is the stimulation that could provide the true opinion. In the *Meno*, perception is not a necessary component of knowledge. But what the perception produces, i.e. true

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<sup>62</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 987a32-b1. Translation comes from Barnes ed. (1984) p. 1561.

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opinion, is a necessary part of knowledge. We could call perception an “unnecessary requisite” here.

The second problem is that Socrates could not explain how the soul gains knowledge before birth and how perception provides the stimulation that could make possible the match between true opinion and the relevant account. The only clue that we have in the *Meno* about how the soul gains knowledge is that Socrates points out,

“As the soul is immortal, has been born often, and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learnt...” (*Meno* 81c).

The word “seen” is the key point, because it suggests that, in Socrates’ mind, the soul gains true opinion (and then knowledge) through seeing things, rather than using its ability of reasoning.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Socrates admits that the soul sees things in the underworld which following *Phaedo*’s redefinition of Hades may imply that the soul “sees” Forms there.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, it does not explain how what is seen could become abstract knowledge and how the soul could grasp true opinion without understanding. By saying that the soul “sees” things, Socrates treats the soul as a person, or inner person when the soul combines with the body. This will definitely produce an infinite regress, namely, the soul needs another soul or whatever faculty could undertake the same function of the soul.

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<sup>63</sup> Diskin Clay offers a description about the relationship between seeing and knowledge in Plato’s philosophy: “‘to have seen,’ therefore, ‘to know’”. See Clay (2000) pp. 214-215.

<sup>64</sup> Kahn points out that in order to “offer a solution to Meno’s paradox, such prenatal seeing of all things must be radically different from the ordinary learning that is to be accounted for by recollection...So the *Meno* presupposes something like direct knowledge by acquaintance”. Kahn (2009) p. 122.

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## 1.4 Knowledge Is More Valuable Than True Opinion

In this section, I shall explain why knowledge is more valuable than true opinion. In the *Meno*, ethics and epistemology are mixed in some degree in the dialogue. Although the solution of the ethical questions is dependent on the solution of epistemological questions, this mix suggests that the discussion of ethical questions will help the investigation of the value problem between knowledge and true opinion. In the following paragraphs, two questions will be discussed. Firstly, why is knowledge always better than true opinion, which is a key component of the knowledge? Secondly, why and how can ethical discussions in the *Meno* help us to understand the relation between knowledge and true opinion?

At 97e-98a, Socrates gives us a clear idea about the relationship between knowledge and true opinion:

For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's soul, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why... After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down. (*Meno* 97e-98a)

There are many approaches to understand the meaning of this quotation. What I am concerned with is why Socrates says that "knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion", i.e. why is knowledge always more valuable than true opinion? From the quotation, it seems that the answer is clear: because true opinion is not stable, though true opinion and the knowledge have the same effect on behavior ---

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both of them make behaviors correct (or good) (*Meno* 97c). If we consider the text more deeply, however, then we will find that the meaning of what Socrates says is not clear.

What has been said in 98a is at most a relation between knowledge and true opinion. Knowledge is defined as true opinion with an account of the reason why (αιτίας λογισμός). However, the question “What is knowledge?” is not discussed systematically and Socrates does not offer any definition of knowledge -- he just treats the concept as unquestionable and clear enough to him and his interlocutor. A problem arises here: why does Socrates say that knowledge is always better than true opinion, even if both he and Meno have no idea what knowledge is?

There is one possible answer to these two questions. Socrates, although he does not offer a clear definition of knowledge, actually does give some explanations of what knowledge is. Socrates points out that knowledge = true opinion + an account of reason why. This seems to be an explanation of knowledge. This formula has been analyzed by one contemporary epistemology scholar as follows: (1) there is a true opinion; (2) there is a fact about the true opinion; (3) the true opinion is justified.<sup>65</sup> If these three conditions are fulfilled, then we can say a piece of opinion is knowledge. This is not helpful, for these three conditions are about the properties of knowledge, not knowledge itself.<sup>66</sup> The formula at most is that knowledge has three essential conditions or components. What knowledge itself is, which is not investigated in the *Meno*, is still unsolved. The reason why knowledge is always better than true opinion

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<sup>65</sup> These three components are attributed to Gettier. See Gettier (1963) pp. 121-123.

<sup>66</sup> The question “What is knowledge?” is still a basic question in epistemology. Williamson argues that knowledge cannot be defined or analyzed and could not be replaced by another notion. See Williamson (2000) pp. 2-5.

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is still unsolvable as well.

Although the question “What is knowledge?” is not discussed, it is actually a question in the *Meno* and it is investigated in *Theaetetus*. So, if the question “What are true opinion and an account?” does not give rise to an unlimited regress, Meno’s failure to answer this question shows that the solution of the value problem of knowledge and true opinion still relies on a clear definition of knowledge and true opinion.

That only leaves the last possibility. In the *Meno*, Socrates gives a new method to approach the question of “what is virtue?”, i.e. the method of “Hypothesis” (86e).<sup>67</sup> The method assumes that even if we do not know what virtue is or what properties virtue has, we still can inquire into the question of “could virtue be taught?” by assuming that virtue is knowledge. The same method could apply to the notion of knowledge, i.e., assume that knowledge always has the property or character “teachable”, whether knowledge is just a recollection or can be gained through teaching. If Meno tries to understand whether virtue is teachable, then he needs to consider whether virtue is a kind of knowledge. Through this means, Socrates links virtue, knowledge and true opinion together. Socrates gives an explanation about these two notions through the discussion of virtue.<sup>68</sup> The very notion “virtue” here does not refer to any definition of virtue, but to a core feature of virtue, namely, helping people to act well. Indeed, Socrates also illustrates that both knowledge and true opinion will help an agent to gain the rightness of action (97b). By taking a

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<sup>67</sup> According to C. C. W. Taylor’s elucidation, “hypothesis” in Plato’s philosophy has various meanings. See Taylor (1967) pp. 193-203.

<sup>68</sup> Meyer (2008) pp. 14-17.

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practical perspective, Socrates establishes a comparison between knowledge and true opinion and answers the question “Why is knowledge more valuable than true opinion?” The answer can be considered into two aspects.

Firstly, the absolute value of knowledge is better than true opinion, because, as Socrates says, knowledge is more stable than true opinion. Moreover, for Socrates the one who holds true opinion about something either does not have any experience of it or he lacks of knowledge of it (97b). Nevertheless, this does not mean that knowledge would always make behavior right, while true opinion sometimes would lead the agent to do the right thing but sometimes would fail to do that, as Meno thinks (97c). Socrates does not accept this point, simply because if the opinion about something is true, then it is impossible that an agent would do something wrong. For Socrates, knowledge is better than true opinion, because it is more stable. Knowledge is more stable than true opinion, because knowledge attaches an account or a reason why. The account or reason removes the factor of luck or guessing. Take “telling a lie” for an example. A doctor who holds knowledge on the principle of “do not tell lies” would know that he or she is never permitted to tell a lie to his patients, since he knows why he cannot tell a lie.<sup>69</sup> Another doctor who holds only a true opinion about the principle would think why by guessing, intuition or pure luck that it is wrong to tell a lie. Now, let us grant that he or she faces a patient who has cancer. Should he or she tell the patient that there is a cancer in his body? This is a choice: telling the

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<sup>69</sup> A reason for “do not tell a lie” comes from Kant. He asks an agent to do something that could make his behavior to be generalized --- “so act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a UNIVERSAL LAW OF NATURE”; therefore, if telling a lie is possible, it will necessarily lead to self-contradiction. Assume that people are all liars, then telling a lie as a phenomenon is destroyed. On this sense, telling a lie will finally lead to self-contradiction. Kant (2011) p. 71.



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patient the truth would possibly stimulate the patient's nerves and would lead to some disadvantages for his remedy; or telling a lie to the patient would contradict the principle of "telling a lie is a wrong-doing". How could the doctor make such a decision? Both of these two doctors would tell the truth for different motivations: one is for a reason; the other is based only on intuition without any idea of why he or she should do this. Obviously, in Socrates' mind, both doctors are doing right, but they are different. The former doctor is better than the latter one and the first doctor deserves more praise for his behavior.<sup>70</sup> In this sense, knowledge is more valuable than true opinion.

Secondly, knowledge is always better than true opinion, since there is "practical value" in knowledge. By practical value, knowledge not merely attains to the truth, but also helps an agent to gain something significant from the action. Significant here, refers to the value that is gained successfully in the action. This does not mean that a man who just holds true opinion will not gain anything significant in his action, but rather that what he gains is significant just in a negative way, namely, avoiding failure. Consider an example to illustrate this point. Someone has a gun and wishes to shoot an object. If he merely wants to shoot the object without any consciousness of what is meaningful or of the reason why he should shoot the object, then I define him as a man who has some true opinion about shooting, i.e. he knows how to shoot and does not fail to do that. Correspondingly, a man who is good at shooting with

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<sup>70</sup> Of course, in a concrete circumstance, as we could argue, most doctors may not choose to tell the truth to the patient directly, but to the relatives of the patient. This is really a difficult and complex question, fortunately, however, it does not affect both my argument and Socrates' arguments.

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knowledge of how to shoot, maybe knows clearly why he should shoot the object.<sup>71</sup>

If the analysis above is correct, then Ryle's insistence that there are two kinds of knowing in Plato's dialogues, i.e. "knowing what" and "Knowing how", is not sufficient for this analysis.<sup>72</sup>

Let us put absolute value and practical value together to see what the exact meaning of Socrates' saying is at 97e-98a. There are two kinds of value in the relationship between knowledge, true opinion and virtue. Since knowledge always guides an agent to act virtuously for a reason, while true opinion does so only by intuition, guessing or luck, knowledge leads significance to the virtuous actions. Although both true opinion and knowledge could reach the truth, they differ from each other in relation to considering these values. Then, we can see the clear relationship between knowledge and true opinion, although we still do not know what is knowledge and what is true opinion. Moreover, the relevance of virtue for epistemology in the *Meno* can be seen: the relationship and difference between knowledge and true opinion are made clear through their relationship with virtue.

## **Conclusion**

There are two problems in the version of epistemology given in the *Meno*. Firstly, if the theory of recollection is correct, then it will raise an infinite regress. Further, even the immortality of the soul does not solve the Meno's paradox, namely, how is it possible to learn under the situation of complete ignorance? Secondly, the

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<sup>71</sup> Sosa gives us a wonderful analysis of this example. See, Sosa (2010) pp. 35-66.

<sup>72</sup> See Ryle (2000) pp. 28-32.

reason that Socrates refuses to investigate the question “could the virtue be taught?” is that we need to know “what is virtue?” but this is not a good reason. Take water as an example, we could define “water” as “a transparent, odorless, tasteless liquid”, where “transparent”, “odorless”, “tasteless” and “liquid” are all the properties or attributions of the water. Actually, when we try to know or define something, we should know first the properties of the thing in question.

Many issues that are discussed in the *Meno* notably the theory of recollection will be discussed again in the *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*. *Theaetetus* also reconsiders the function of perception in the process of gaining knowledge. The nature of true opinion is a middle term between perception and knowledge in the *Meno*. *Theaetetus* will also divide the process of recognition into two parts and will employ three components to illustrate the whole process. Compared to the *Theaetetus*, *Phaedo* has a closer relationship with *Meno*. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates completely repeats the theory of recollection and introduces the theory of Forms. *Phaedo* is the same as *Meno* in two ways: it does not talk about the question “What is knowledge?” and uses knowledge in the strictest sense. Overall, *Phaedo* raises the same problems as the *Meno*.

## Chapter Two: *Phaedo* on Knowledge and How to Gain it

### Introduction

In the *Meno*, Plato offers us an outline of his epistemology, though it has difficulties. However, Plato is not inclined to improve this outline in the *Phaedo*; rather he tries to modify the theory of recollection and supplement the theory of Forms to make the outline clearer. Although the difficulties that appeared in the outline of epistemology in the *Meno* still exist, Plato still uses the basic principles of this outline to construct his epistemology in the *Phaedo*.

To summarize what Plato's outline of epistemology is in the *Phaedo*, we could give three stages of knowledge as follows. (1) When a soul is in a pure state, it gains knowledge by consorting with the Forms. (2) When a soul combines with a body, the soul forgets all knowledge at that time, though the soul could still regain the knowledge through the stimulation of sensible objects. Although the soul could regain knowledge, the soul is inevitably disturbed by the body, so that it is really hard to regain knowledge. (3) After death, the soul could fully get rid of the influence of the body, if a person endeavors to "practice death" in his lifetime. Separating fully from the body means the soul regains knowledge.

In these three stages of the blueprint, the problems of the outline of Plato's epistemology still remain, though the difficulties are solved to an extent. Firstly, the knowledge is still in a narrow sphere, for Plato still insists that knowledge could only be gained in the world of Forms. Socrates offers us a new version of the theory of

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recollection in the *Phaedo*. The change in the new recollection theory means that the difficulty of “cognitive blank” would not happen, for the accumulation of experience becomes a function of the theory of recollection. In the new version, recollection no longer helps the agent to regain knowledge directly, rather the agent considers sensible objects first, and next, after the accumulation consideration of the sensible objects, the agent would finally be led to the Forms.<sup>73</sup>

This new advance is not able to cover all the problems of Plato’s epistemological blueprint. Knowledge that derives from the Forms is still used in a narrow sense. The new version of recollection theory brings even more questions, while the old problems in it are still there. The imbalance between soul and body makes the bodily organs still have no positive contribution in a process of recognition in the *Phaedo*.

Indeed, the soul becomes crucial to the blueprint of Plato’s epistemology in the *Phaedo* for three reasons. Firstly, Form is the object of knowledge. Only the soul itself could reach the region of the Forms and gain the knowledge there. Secondly, the soul could be inside or with the body and outside or apart from the body, namely, it could be in contact with both the region of the Forms and the region of the sensible world. That is to say, the soul consorts with both the object of knowledge (the Forms) and the reminders of knowledge (the sensible things which participate in the Forms). Thirdly, in the sensible world, knowledge dwells in the soul.<sup>74</sup> The arguments in the

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<sup>73</sup> Lee Franklin calls an “approach to recollection in the *Phaedo* the ordinary interpretation”. This kind of recollection refers to “an ordinary kind of learning, typically related to the capacity for everyday speech and thought”. In contrast, “the *sophisticated interpretation* of recollection in the *Phaedo*”, as he calls, is “the view that recollection in the *Phaedo* is a kind of philosophical learning”. Franklin (2005) pp. 290-291.

<sup>74</sup> I will stop here and will not try to find out what exact meaning of “in the soul”, though this phrase is not clear.

*Phaedo* are complicated. On the one hand, on the literal level, the arguments about knowledge, such as the discussion on death, the theory of recollection and the theory of Forms, are used as the proof of the immortality of the soul. On the other hand, some properties of the soul (the soul can move, for example) are assumed to support the arguments about knowledge.

In this chapter, my discussion and criticisms will follow the three stages of the blueprint in the *Phaedo*. Firstly, I will talk about the theory of Forms and the Forms as the causes of knowledge (section 2.1-2.3). Secondly, how the soul under the state of combining with the body gains knowledge through recollection will be discussed (section 2.4-2.6). Thirdly, I will consider the imbalance between soul and body and how this influences epistemology in the *Phaedo*. After death, when a soul recovers its state of pure reason and how the soul gains knowledge will be emphasized (section 2.7-2.8).

## **2.1 Forms as the objects of knowledge**

Socrates first mentions Forms in the *Phaedo* at 65d, where he asks Simmias whether there are Justice itself, the Beauty and the Good. Simmias answers: “We do say so, by Zeus”. He confirms that the Forms cannot be seen by eyes or perceived by any other bodily organs. Socrates identifies the Forms as the reality of all things, “that which each of them essentially is” (*Phaedo* 65d). Further, Socrates links knowledge and the Forms. He claims that someone who wishes to come closest to the knowledge of the thing should grasp the thing itself, i.e. the Form of the thing he

wants to investigate (65e).

In order to approach the Forms, the soul needs to use reason alone and to get rid of the affections from the body as far as possible. Socrates emphasizes the separation between the soul and the body and highlights the function of the soul in the process of approaching the Forms and gaining knowledge. This idea also shows the important role of death, for after the soul has combined with the body only death could both let the soul free from the body in a great extent and let the soul go into another region, namely the region of the Forms.

How could the soul gain knowledge and approach the Forms? Socrates in the *Phaedo*, as in the *Meno*, tries to use the recollection theory as a bridge to connect the soul and the Forms. After a short discussion on the recollection theory, Socrates introduces the Form of Equal through the equal stones, equal sticks and any other kind of equal thing. He emphasizes that the equal things, such as the equal stones or equal sticks, are inferior to the Form of Equal, because they “appear to one to be equal and to another to be unequal” (74b). The Form of Equal itself, however, can never be unequal. Further, if it is, someone who recognizes that there is the Equal itself will grasp the knowledge of Equal and must have this knowledge before his birth, for he cannot grasp anything if there is nothing in his soul. Socrates extends the idea on the Equal to any other thing which could be marked with “the seal of ‘what it is’” (75d). However, what kinds of qualities do the Forms hold except the quality itself? Take the Form of Equal as an example: does the Equal itself, besides the quality of equal, have any other qualities? Socrates employs many words to define

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the Forms at 80a-b, “divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble” and “always the same as itself”.

In sum, Socrates in the *Phaedo* links knowledge and Forms together for the first time and explains why what we recollect is superior to the thing that provoked the recollection.

Socrates continues to illustrate his idea on the theory of the Forms by giving Simmias a number of examples to state how to get to the Form from particular items. Take the equal as an example. When you have seen many equal items, such a stick equal to a stick, stone equal to a stone, then you will find “something else beyond all these, the Equal itself” (*Phaedo* 74a). Moreover, at 100d, Socrates points out: “nothing makes it (the beautiful thing) beautiful except that Beautiful itself”, and the “Beautiful itself is beautiful”. As D. N. Sedley comments, Beautiful itself makes the beautiful thing beautiful, means that Beautiful itself or the Form of beauty is the cause of the beautiful thing being beautiful, or the beautiful thing is beautiful because of the Form of beauty. And he also gives us an account of what “because of” and the “cause” mean here: all these phrases mean “responsible for”.<sup>75</sup> I undoubtedly agree with Sedley. Nevertheless, why and how does Plato make sure that such Forms can produce knowledge in our soul?

In the texts of 74b and 75c, Socrates gives a list of the Forms, including the Equal itself, the Great itself, Small itself, Good itself, Beauty itself, Justice itself, Pious itself and “all those things which we mark with the seal of ‘what it is’”. In the

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<sup>75</sup> Sedley (1998) pp. 114-132.



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later text, he adds some other Forms, such as Large itself (or Largeness) (100e), Oneness (101c), Shortness (102b), Tallness (102b), Hotness (103d), Coldness (103d) Oddness (104a) and Evenness (104a). These Forms can not all be divided into one single category. Take Large and Small, Good and Bad, these two pairs of opposites are not the same. We could apply Large and Small to mathematical issues and to the affairs of common life to describe a fact, such as “3 is smaller than 4” and “Jim’s shoes are larger than Tom’s”. It seems that the Large and Small will always be used in a comparative case. Even if sometimes we use them to describe other situations, such as “The ball is big”, they are always in a vague sense -- we cannot really know how big the ball is until some more information is offered. Good and Bad, however, seems a different case from the Large and Small. The Good and Bad are not mainly used in a comparative sense and they are not used to describe the truth or facts. Rather they are used to evaluate something or express someone’s emotion, e.g. “The taste is good”, “It is a good thing to him”, “There is good weather today.” Further, Large and Small give us a kind of ability, if we know what they mean. For when I do a mathematical exercise, seeing “3\_4”, I have the ability to write down “is smaller” or “<”, while the Good and the Bad cannot develop such a kind of ability in our mind.

The discussion above is important, because the Forms in the *Phaedo* could produce knowledge as Socrates says at 74b and 74c. If the formula of knowledge in the *Meno*, i.e. knowledge = true opinion + an explanation of the reason why, is correct, then knowledge could be divided into two parts: “know-what” or “know-

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how” and “know-why”. If someone thinks about the Form of Largeness, then he has the knowledge of Large (he knows what Large is). Then he has a kind of ability to make the things or affairs right when the affairs refer to the larger, as the example “2\_3” shows. He knows how to tackle affairs referring to “large”. And obviously, he also knows why he writes down “<” in the place of “\_”, because he has a reasonable account, namely, he is using the Form of Largeness.

Nevertheless, when we consider Goodness and Badness, the situation will become difficult. For Goodness and Badness cannot give a definite kind of ability to determine what is good and what is bad. If someone faces the question: “Is it good or bad when someone kills another man in a battle?”, what kind of answer should he give? Some people would say that it is always evil to kill a man; others would think that it is good if our soldiers kill the enemies’ soldiers while it is bad if our soldiers are killed. It seems that when referring to moral values or sensations (such as hot and cold), the theory of knowledge in the *Meno* is no longer compatible with the theory of the Forms.

## **2.2 Knowledge in a narrow sense**

The other main problem about the theory of Forms is the limitation of knowledge. The *Phaedo* gives an impression that knowledge is a clear concept to both Socrates and his interlocutors, for there is only one place (76b) mentioning about the concept of knowledge through the dialogue. All the persons that appear in the *Phaedo* seem to have an agreement about what knowledge is. Is the concept of

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knowledge really a clear notion in the dialogue?

In order to answer this question, we have at least two options. The first choice is judging that the concept of knowledge is not well defined, so we need reconsider it. The second way is that we could assume that the concept of knowledge is a clear notion in the *Phaedo*, because Socrates has given its definition in the *Meno*, where knowledge is defined as the formula “knowledge = true opinion + an explanation of the reason why” (*Meno*, 98a). Since Socrates nearly repeats in the *Phaedo* two most important theories of the *Meno* (the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection), we have reason to believe that for both Socrates and his companions knowledge is still the same concept that appears in the *Meno*. Moreover, when Socrates mentions the theory of recollection, Cebes reminds us that he mentions this theory frequently (*Phaedo* 72e). We have more reason to believe that the definition of knowledge in the *Meno* is also mentioned frequently, so that no one would feel uncomfortable to use it again in the *Phaedo*. Having considered this, we have firstly to check whether the *Meno*’s definition is also used in the *Phaedo* and second whether it is used thoroughly and coherently in the dialogue.

I will employ a method, namely, quoting some small paragraphs from *Phaedo* on knowledge as examples to check whether they fit the definition of knowledge in the *Meno*.<sup>76</sup>

Example one: “Then what about the actual acquiring of knowledge? Is the body an obstacle when one associates with it in the search for knowledge?” (*Phaedo* 65a)

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<sup>76</sup> I will not quote any paragraphs about the verb “know”, for it makes my argument unnecessarily complex at this point.

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In the next sentence, Socrates continues to say that men cannot “find any truth” in any bodily abilities, such as seeing, hearing or any other sense. Here, the concept of knowledge could be replaced by the phrase “true opinion plus an explanation of the reason why”, for in this quotation Socrates treats knowledge as truth. The emphasis on the inaccuracy of bodily abilities in this quotation will not affect my argument. For firstly the only difference between true opinion and knowledge, as *Meno* tells us, is that knowledge is stable, while true opinion is not. Secondly, there is no proof in the *Meno* that true opinion is derived from bodily senses.<sup>77</sup>

Example two: “Whoever of us prepares himself best and most accurately to grasp (διανοηθῆναι) that thing itself which he is investigating will come closest to the knowledge (τοῦ γινῶναι) of it” (*Phaedo* 65e). This sentence shows that the Forms are the objects of knowledge. It is also compatible with the formula “knowledge = true opinion + an explanation of the reason why”. If we use the phrase “true opinion + an explanation of the reason why” instead of “knowledge”, then one issue appears. The meaning of the phrase “come closest to knowledge of it” becomes unintelligible. If someone has grasped the Forms, then why does Socrates still employ the phrase “come closest to”? Even if someone grasps the Forms, does he still not have but only come close to knowledge? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to understand knowledge as true opinion + an explanation of the reason why here. For Socrates has said that philosophers practice for death in order to gain the truth and to live with Gods (*Phaedo* 63b-c). Then, the meaning of the quotation only emphasizes

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<sup>77</sup> There is no pre-statement on the concept of true opinion, but suddenly Socrates throws this concept out at 85c-d in the *Meno*. Therefore, I have assumed that Socrates is just adding “true” to “opinion”.

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that true opinion is unstable. Take a pair of pencils as an example. Assume that the two pencils are equal in appearance. Through this pair of pencils, someone could or could not recollect the Form of Equal. Once someone recollects the Form of Equal, then he gains the knowledge of equality and will not be confused about whether these pencils are equal or about any other cases that refer to equality. Moreover, gaining Equality itself makes someone's judgements on equality more valuable. This case also shows that someone needs the empirical stimulations or reminders to recollect Forms. Nevertheless, even if someone does not successfully gain the Form of Equal through the pair of pencils, he still has many other opportunities to recollect it. In the process of recollecting Forms, knowledge depends on continuing contact with empirical examples, and so in this sense, we only "come close to" knowledge. Indeed, empirical reminders are like "ladders", someone should throw them away after they gain the Forms.<sup>78</sup> In every case such as "These two pencils are equal", someone still needs the help of the sensible objects in the particular example.

Example three: "(Cebes says) when men are interrogated in the right manner, they always give the right answer of their own accord, and they could not do this if they did not possess the knowledge and the right explanation inside them (εἰ μὴ ἐτύγγανεν αὐτοῖς ἐπιστήμη ἐνοῦσα καὶ ὀρθὸς λόγος)" (73a). This quotation is from Cebes, not Socrates, but it still works for examining whether the formula of knowledge fits the context of *Phaedo*, for Cebes here is repeating the explanation of the recollection theory that appeared in the *Meno*. The next sentence of this quotation

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<sup>78</sup> I borrow Ludwig Wittgenstein's analogy of ladder in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (6.54), where he says "(someone) must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it". See Wittgenstein (1961) p. 151.

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is “Then if one shows them a diagram or something else of that kind, this will show most clearly that such is the case” (73b). Grube points out, “Cf. *Meno* 81e ff., where Socrates does precisely that”.<sup>79</sup> I agree with Grube that Cebes is giving the audience a description of recollection and a brief version of the example that Socrates employs for proving the recollection theory. If we replace knowledge in the sentence by the formula “true opinion + an explanation of the reason why”, we could see the formula fits well except a little redundancy, especially since the sentence mentions the phrase “the right explanation (ὀρθὸς λόγος)”. Considering context of this sentence is the recollection theory, it is not strange that we could understand smoothly the quotation by the idea which appeared in the *Meno*.

Example four: “but it is definitely from the equal things, though they are different from that equal, that you have derived and grasped the knowledge of equality?” (74c). Socrates gives three kinds of things, the Equal, the equal things and the knowledge of equality. He points out that the knowledge of equality is from the equal things. The formula could be understood as follows, “knowledge of equality” = “the true opinion about the equal things” + “an explanation of the reason why of the Equal”. The formula operates well in the quotation.

Example five: “Do we think with our blood, or air, or fire or none of these, and does the brain provide our senses of hearing and sight and smell, from which come memory and opinion, and from memory and opinion which has become stable, comes knowledge (ἐπιστήμην)?” (*Phaedo* 96b). This quotation comes from

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<sup>79</sup> See Cooper (1997) p. 64.

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“Socrates’ account of his intellectual history”.<sup>80</sup> It seems that there are two types of explanations for it. The first version is that Socrates follows an explanation of a natural process of recognition. Human beings think about something with whatever, through our senses, generates opinion and memory, then when their opinion and memory becomes stable, they become knowledge. This seems to fit our common sense on how we gain knowledge in our life. The second version is that Socrates here is actually repeating his recollection theory. The opinion and memory that come from the stimulations of the senses help us to recollect what has existed in our soul. The things that have existed in our soul are the “account” part in the formula, which we could treat as general or specific principles. However, as Aristotle has mentioned,

“By universal knowledge then we see the particulars, but we do not know them by the kind of knowledge which is proper to them; consequently it is possible that we may make mistakes about them, but not that we should have the knowledge and error that at contrary to one another: rather we have universal knowledge but make a mistake in regard to the particular” (*Prior Analytics* 67a25-30).<sup>81</sup>

Once the combination of true opinion and the account of something is complete, a piece of knowledge comes into being. Both of the explanations are reasonable. Fortunately, these two explanations do not affect the examination of the usage of knowledge. When the formula, “true opinion plus an explanation of the reason why”, substitutes for “knowledge”, the whole sentence is comprehensible and meaningful.

In sum, in all five examples, the usage of the word “knowledge” could be

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<sup>80</sup> I borrow this phrase from David Gallop. See Gallop (1975) p.169.

<sup>81</sup> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, Book Two, Chapter 21. Translation comes from J. L. Ackrill. See Ackrill (1987) p. 37.

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replaced meaningfully and coherently by the formula “true opinion + an explanation of the reason why”, which is employed as a definition of knowledge in the *Meno* through our examination. The selected examples are representative, for they spread through the relevant main arguments in the *Phaedo*. Then, the concept of knowledge is well defined and is the same in the *Phaedo* as it is in the *Meno*.

Nevertheless, knowledge that is defined as “true opinion + an explanation of the reason why”, though it has been clarified to some extent by introducing the theory of Forms, still confines knowledge to a narrow sphere and does not fit various kinds of knowledge. In both dialogues, knowledge to Plato must be subject to the most rigid standards and various possible interpretations are completely eradicated in Plato’s concept of knowledge. Knowledge relates to the verb “know”, which means that when we use the verb “know”, we could refer to the content of the sentence “I know...” as knowledge.<sup>82</sup> What Plato attributes to his definition of knowledge is a type of true proposition and a kind of knowledge. It asks for the most strict criterion of “being unerring”, since Plato eliminates the factor of time in his knowledge and excludes other types of true propositions in his philosophy.

This kind of proposition reflects a fact or facts. For instance, “it is 11 pm.” is a true proposition if it is 11 pm now. It could not be knowledge under Plato’s terms, since Plato’s knowledge must be always of what is and correct forever, then it must be beyond the limitation of time and eternal. If this is right, then the scope of

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<sup>82</sup> I am enlightened by Heidegger in this idea. He points out that ἐνέργεια (reality, activity) in Aristotle’s philosophy comes from “ἔργον” (work) which must be understood in the sense of its verb form “be present”. He actually expresses an idea that the verb is prior to other forms in a language. See Heidegger (1995) and Heidegger (2000) p. 33, note 24. Heidegger’s understanding about *Theaetetus* can be seen in Stern (2008) pp. 210-214.



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knowledge in Plato's ideas (whether it is a kind of ability or a kind of abstract-entity) is very narrow and not all propositions that are true for us are necessarily "knowledge" in Plato's mind. Let us consider two examples. First, when someone asks, "What time is it?" another one replies, "six p.m.". The definition of knowledge discussed in contemporary epistemology<sup>83</sup> is that someone believes that P is true; P is true; P can be justified. According to this view, the statement "six p.m." is true, and is a kind of knowledge. But it is not knowledge in Plato's eyes, for it is just true in an instant or moment. Second, assume that the library is closed every Saturday night and someone says that "the library is closed" one Saturday night. The statement is not "knowledge" in Plato's eyes, for this situation depends on the time. For it could be wrong and not necessarily true, though it is true at the moment that the people in the example makes this statement.

There are four aspects to explain why Plato rejects the factor of instant time in his understanding of knowledge. (1) The substance and property are not divided clearly in his idea. The Forms themselves are a good example to illustrate this assertion. Take a quotation from *Phaedo* 102d-e as an example. Socrates says,

"Now it seems to me that not only Tallness itself is never willing to be tall or short at the same time, but also that the Tallness in us will never admit the short, but one of two things happens: either it flees and retreats whenever its opposite, the short, approaches, or it is destroyed by its approach." (*Phaedo* 102d-e)

This quotation shows two things: (A) the Form Tallness itself is both an entity and a

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<sup>83</sup> This definition is the target of Gettier's criticism and contemporary epistemologists are work on this definition, trying to consummate this definition in order to give out a definition of Knowledge. See Gettier (1963) pp. 121-123; Greco and Sosa ed (1999) and Williamson (2000).

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quality, because Tallness itself is tall; (B) “Tallness in us” is also something that is both a quality and an entity, since it either “flees” or “is destroyed by” its opposite. If knowledge as Plato defines it must be stable, it cannot tolerate change through time.

(2) If knowledge comes from the Forms, the time is incompatible with the knowledge, since time means change. (3) Since the soul is immortal, Plato rejects any influence of instant time in knowledge, because for him the knowledge is in the soul. If the soul is immortal, knowledge should be compatible with this quality (namely, knowledge should be unchangeable), for Plato treats the principle that opposite things cannot co-exist as true (when fire approaches snow, snow will either retreat or be destroyed) (*Phaedo* 104d). (4) Knowledge must “be always of what is and it must be unerring” (*Theaetetus* 152c), which has shown that it will not tolerate any change (i.e. time).

### **2.3 Soul gains knowledge from Forms**

Although the Forms are the objects of the knowledge, we are still unclear about the relationship between Forms and knowledge, especially on the question of how these two things connect. Are the Forms like a book that contains knowledge inside? Plato never makes this relationship clear in his dialogues. What we know is that the soul is the agent that gains knowledge from the Forms. Then why and how can the soul gain or grasp knowledge from the Forms? This is actually two questions. The first one is why does the soul have such a function that can link knowledge and the Forms? The second one is by what means does the soul reach knowledge of the

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Forms?

The answer of the first question is that the soul is akin to the Forms (79b). In order to prove this, Socrates begins his argument about the properties of the Forms. Socrates attributes to the Forms the qualities of being “non-composite” (78c), “always remaining the same” (78c), and being “changeless” (78d). In conclusion, Socrates says that each of the Forms is “uniform by itself, remains the same, and never in any way tolerates any change whatever” (78d). Moreover, Socrates proceeds to the difference between the two kinds of existences, visible and invisible. Specifically, Socrates and his companions agree that the difference between “visible” and “invisible” things (79b). Naturally, soul is invisible to human eyes, while body is visible to human eyes. Socrates does not say that the soul is the same thing as the Forms, rather he just emphasizes that the soul is “more like” (ὁμοιότερον) the invisible things (79b).

Soul, because of its kinship to the invisible things, namely, the Forms, is able to gain knowledge from these Forms. After death, the soul must purify and free itself from the influence of the body, i.e. the soul gets rid of “confusion, ignorance, fear, violent desires and the other human ills” (81a) and under such condition, the soul could have the ability to grasp knowledge. If the soul does not practice philosophy and is affected by the bodily elements, such as “carelessly practiced gluttony, violence and drunkenness” (81e), it will be punished and pay “the penalty for their previous upbringing” (81e). All those who are immersed in the bodily elements could be divided into two groups, according to Socrates, “money-lovers” and “honor-lovers”

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(82c), as distinct from the “lovers of learning” (82d).

From the negative aspect, the lover of learning knows that the soul is imprisoned in the body and is forced to examine things through the body that is like a cage. From the positive aspect, philosophy will help the soul free itself and avoid the deceptions from the bodily organs or senses. After the soul no longer “examines by other means, for this is different in different circumstances and is intelligible and invisible”, it will see what is intelligible and invisible (83b). Socrates admits that the body holds opinions as well (83d),<sup>84</sup> but the soul must not try to mix the bodily opinions with its own. He describes the process of investigation that the bodily elements are involved in as recognition mixed into violent emotions, such as violent pain or pleasure:

“That the soul of every man, when it feels violent pleasure or pain in connection with some objects, inevitably believes at the same time that what causes such feelings must be very clear and very true, which it is not” (*Phaedo* 83c). “The soul of the philosopher achieves a calm from such emotions; it follows reason and ever stays with it contemplating the true, the divine, which is not the object of opinion” (*Phaedo* 84a).

This quotation shows two things. One is that any process of gaining knowledge that is mixed with bodily elements will inevitably involve a kind of violent feeling or emotion, such as pleasure or pain or other kinds of desires. For Socrates points out that the worst feature of the bodily imprisonment in the soul is that it is due to desires (*Phaedo* 82e). The second is that the soul uses reason to grasp knowledge from the

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<sup>84</sup> The original sentence is, “As it (the soul) shares the beliefs and delights of the body...” (83d). This sentence is also shows that in Socrates’ mind, the soul also has emotions.

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Forms, which are not the objects of bodily opinions.

Once it has gained purification and freedom, the soul enters into an invisible region or realm where it “sees and understands” the Forms (83b).<sup>85</sup> Socrates here does not make the process of gaining knowledge clear. He just uses a metaphor, “see” the Forms, like a man in our world sees a book, understands the contents of that book and gains knowledge from it. However, it is completely unclear how the soul gains the knowledge, since it is unclear whether the soul gains knowledge exactly like we gain knowledge by reading a book.

One possible reason why Socrates does not explain the whole process of gaining knowledge in *Phaedo* is that it is not the right time to discuss this issue. The context in this dialogue is all about the relationship between body and soul and it is enough for Socrates to talk about how the bodily elements affect the soul in gaining knowledge, without any detail on the concrete cognitive process. After Socrates has given his history of his own intellectual development (96a-99d) and begins the so-called “second voyage” (99d), he tries to demonstrate the process of gaining knowledge in detail.

## **2.4 The theory of recollection**

Plato stands in a dangerous position when he emphasizes that knowledge comes from the region of the Forms, while he tries to explain how to gain knowledge and

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<sup>85</sup> Dorothea Frede understands Forms from a “function view” and therefore, argues that “Plato neither intended to dispose of sensory evidence altogether nor to locate the Forms in a separate realm of pure understanding. The Forms should rather be understood as the ideal principles determining the proper function of each entity”. See Frede (1999) p. 191.

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the phenomenon of learning in the sensible world. In order to achieve these two goals, Plato employs the theory of recollection. In the *Phaedo*, Cebes recalls the theory of recollection that is mentioned frequently by Socrates. Simmias, another interlocutor of Socrates in the dialogue, however, cannot remember the proof of the theory, asking Cebes to remind him. Cebes repeats what happens in the *Meno*, where Socrates successfully leads a slave boy who does not know geometry to give the correct answer to a geometrical question simply by questioning him. Cebes' reminder is not an argument or proof. Therefore, Socrates tries to prove his theory of recollection in another way.

Socrates' argument is as follows. If someone recollects something, he must have known it before. A man who perceives something knows this thing and could recollect a different thing at the same time. Recollection can be caused not only by a similar thing, but by dissimilar things as well (*Phaedo* 74a). For instance, someone could recall Cebes by seeing a picture of Simmias or he could also recollect Simmias by seeing a picture of Simmias.<sup>86</sup>

Socrates does not consider the situation where recollection is caused by different things, but focuses only on the recollections that are provoked by similar things.<sup>87</sup> According to his idea, when we consider the similarity between what we recollect and what causes the recollection, we must admit that what prompts the recollection is inferior to the object of the recollection (74a). The object of the

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Nehamas (1975) p. 183.

<sup>87</sup> Sedley carefully considers the situation "recolection through different things" and formulates it as "(a) On perceiving x you recognize x and think of something different, y (especially if you had forgotten y); (b) x and y are objects of different knowledge" (p.312). See Sedley (2006) pp. 312.

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recollection, however, has a change in its meaning, which Socrates uses but does not point out. Recollection should refer to the Forms, but here it also refers to sensible objects.<sup>88</sup> Socrates claims that recollection could be provoked by similar or dissimilar things (74a). Before reaching this conclusion, Socrates gives his interlocutors some examples. Two typical examples are: (a) a man who sees a picture of Simmias recollects Cebes; (b) a man who sees a picture of Simmias recollects Simmias himself (73e). Next, Socrates concludes that both similar and dissimilar things could cause recollection. Moreover, what prompt the recollection are inferior to “similar things”<sup>89</sup> or “the thing recollected” (74a).<sup>90</sup>

If recollection is produced by a similar thing, what we recall is superior to what we are perceiving. Take Equality as an example: we could recollect Equality from equal sticks or equal stones or any other equal things. All the equal things are inferior to Equality itself in respect of being equal, for all the equal things could “appear to one to be equal and to another to be unequal” (74b). That means, in the sensible world, Socrates seems to insist on what Protagoras has taught, namely, a quality may be different in different people, at a different time or in a different environment. A quality could have a slight difference in some degree. A bottle of water may be too cold to one person, but a little hotter to another person, according to Protagoras’

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<sup>88</sup> Kahn believes “Socrates is running together two claims that ought properly to be distinguished, one concerning recollection for philosophers and one concerning cognition for all human beings. Only philosophers know what they are doing when they recollect, because only philosophers can distinguish Forms from particulars and recognize the deficiency of the latter. But all human beings implicitly refer to the Forms in every perceptual judgment. Thus they unwittingly refer to the Equal itself in judging sticks and stones to be equal”. I agree with him, but my argument here is different from his argument. See Kahn (2009) pp. 123-124.

<sup>89</sup> The original sentence is, “And when someone recollects something from similar things...” (Ἀλλ’ ὅταν γε ἀπὸ τῶν ὁμοίων ἀναμνησκηταὶ τίς τι...)

<sup>90</sup> Burnet calls this idea as “an additional thought”, namely, besides what we recollect and the similar things that cause the recollection, there is an additional thought which is “the thought of the presence or absence of any deficient in the likeness of a and b to A and B.” See, Burnet (1911) p. 73.

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theory. In addition, if Socrates here at 74b, thinks that the equal things could appear to be equal for one man but unequal to another person, he, then, is partly following Protagorean doctrine, though Socrates limits its application in the sphere of phenomenal world.

Compared to the equal things, the form of Equality, is always equal for everyone and in any condition, simply because Equality can never be Inequality. More importantly, we could derive and grasp the knowledge of equality from the equal things (74c). Whether Equality itself is like or unlike the equal things makes no difference, because of the function of recollection.<sup>91</sup> As Socrates and his interlocutors have agreed (73c-e), recollection could be caused either by similar things or by different things. As long as the equal things provoke to recollect something in the souls, the condition of recollecting is fulfilled. If someone who is stimulated by the sensible things “recollects” something in his soul, then there must be a piece of prior knowledge in his soul or he must have knowledge of the thing he is recollecting. You cannot recollect something in your mind, if there is nothing in your mind. That is to say, we must possess knowledge of the Equal before we first recognize the equal things (74e).

“First” at 74e, does not only refer to time, rather it relates to knowledge. Let us take the equal sticks as an example. Socrates does not mean that a human being who first sees a pair of sticks will recollect the knowledge of equality. Nevertheless, after

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<sup>91</sup> I do not talk about the relationship between sensible things and Forms here. According to Nehamas, A. E. Taylor, Burnet, W. D. Ross, Paul Shorey and Hugh Tredennick understand the relationship by “the approximation view”. This view agrees: (1) “Sensible objects only approximate the intelligible objects which they represent in geometrical contexts” and (2) “Plato, either consciously or unconsciously, applied this sense of imperfection to objects belonging to ethical and aesthetic contexts”. Nehamas disagrees with “the approximation view”, since it “fails to make Plato’s theory of recollection coherent”. Nehamas (1975) pp. 172-175, p. 185 and p. 187.



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this person grows up and has met many equal things on many occasions, he finally recalls the knowledge of equality when he sees equal things one day, such as the equal sticks. Then, “first” as used at is just in the sense of a trigger time when a person (a man or a baby) gets knowledge from the sensible things. Recollection does not refer to earlier time when he met the equal things without any understanding or gaining knowledge. We could express this by a Greek word, “καιρός” (a chance/right time). Socrates explains this idea like this: “We must then possess knowledge of the Equal before that time when we first saw the equal objects and realized that all these objects strive to be like the Equal but are deficient in this.” (74e-75a) the key words in this quotation are “knowledge”, “time”, “first” and “realized”. Socrates uses these words to emphasize the connection between the knowledge (i.e. the knowledge of Forms) and recollection.<sup>92</sup> When Socrates spoke and argued his idea on this to his audience on the day of his death, the image of the human being in his mind does not refer to the human in general, but he has excluded babies, sleeping men, idiots or any other person who has mental illness or disorder.<sup>93</sup>

Even if what I have argued is correct, how do I explain the meaning of what Socrates says immediately following the quotation at 74e-75a? Socrates at 75b, says:

“Then before we began to see or hear or otherwise perceive, we must have possessed knowledge of the Equal itself if we were about to refer our sense perceptions of equal objects to it and, realized that all of them were eager to be like it, but were inferior.” (*Phaedo* 75b)

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<sup>92</sup> Ross points out that “We saw that in the *Meno* the theory of anamnesis is not connected with the knowledge of Ideas; in the *Phaedo* it is.”, See Ross (1953) p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Consider the culture at that time, maybe the women in general are also in this category.

This quotation at 75b is just suggesting a fact that is believed by Socrates, namely, the knowledge always exists in our soul even before we begin our perceiving and it does not mention at all what time we gain the knowledge. Moreover, in the quotation at 75b, the terms “knowledge” and “realized” appear again and the whole idea is consistent with what he says at 74e-75a.

We must gain knowledge before our birth, for we begin our perception after our birth. We do not lose our knowledge, after having acquired it, for “to know is to acquire knowledge, keep it and not lose it” (75d). We call “losing of knowledge ‘forgetting’” (75d). Socrates employs the concept of “forgetting” to explain why we do not realize our knowledge that always exists in our soul and why we still need to learn something if we already have knowledge. That is because we have lost or forgotten knowledge at the moment when we born and learning is a process of recovering our knowledge. There are two premises of this argument. The first one is that there are realities beyond sensible things. The second is that our souls exist before our birth and it gains knowledge from those realities. Those realities, beyond sensible things, are the Forms.

Socrates admits that people (such as philosophers) could gain knowledge in the sensible world. It is the most significant point in the recollection theory in the *Phaedo*. For, on the one hand, it insists that knowledge comes from the Forms and we cannot gain knowledge in sensible world, but on the other hand, it shows that knowledge could be regained in the sensible world by the philosopher who always tries to get rid of the influence from bodily elements as much as possible and keeps

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his soul in a pure reason state.

## 2.5 The example of “lovers” in the *Phaedo*

In this section, I will briefly consider the recollection theory itself through an investigation about the example of “lovers” in the *Phaedo*. The theory of recollection itself is definitely the most interesting but difficult argument in the *Phaedo*, as David Bostock says.<sup>94</sup> In order to remind Simmias what the theory of recollection is, Socrates gives a number of examples, trying to persuade him that the recollection theory and the immortality of the soul are true.

Among these examples, the example of “Lovers” is a typical and interesting example:

Well now, you know what happens to lovers, whenever they see a lyre or cloak or anything else their loves are accustomed to use: they recognize the lyre, and they get in their mind, don't they, the form of the boy whose lyre it is? And that is recollection. Likewise, someone seeing Simmias is often reminded of Cebes, and there'd surely be countless other such cases. (*Phaedo* 73d, Translated by D. Gallop)

The example is not the whole story, for it only points out that the lovers when they are seeing the belongings of their beloved will recollect a second thing other than the things they are perceiving. Socrates continues the example by saying:

Again now, is it possible, on seeing a horse depicted or a lyre depicted, to be reminded of a person; and on seeing Simmias depicted, to be reminded of Cebes?

Certainly.

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<sup>94</sup> Bostock (1986) p. 60.

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And also, on seeing Simmias depicted, to be reminded of Simmias himself?  
 Yes, that's possible. (*Phaedo* 73e, Translated by D. Gallop)

Through these examples, Socrates concludes that: "In all those cases, then, doesn't it turn out that there is recollection from similar things, but also from dissimilar things?"

Simmias gives him a confident answer: "It does". (*Phaedo* 74a, Trans. by Gallop)

These examples and the conclusion illustrated by Socrates seem not to be persuasive. We can consider and analyze it using ideas from Bostock and Gallop:

Firstly, Bostock correctly points out that these examples cannot be a kind of proof of "the pre-existence of the soul". Moreover, he suggests that Plato ignores another possibility: "perhaps we simply came into existence at birth with the knowledge already in us, so we have had it all the time that we have existed, but have not existed for ever, in fact have not existed before this life at all."<sup>95</sup> Bostock also give us an important example to demonstrates his worry on the Platonic/Socratic argument of recollection: "If I am James Watt, and I perceive (and recognize) a kettle boiling, I may be led to think of a steam-engine. It obviously does not follow that I knew a steam-engine before: this may be the invention of a steam-engine".<sup>96</sup> The main points of Bostock's arguments are: (1) We could gain knowledge before birth, according to Plato, but there are other possibilities besides Plato's thought. (2) How does Plato face the question of "invention" or "progress"?

Secondly, D. Gallop agrees that "recollection from the similar is... not parallel with recollection from dissimilar", simply because someone cannot think of a man by

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<sup>95</sup> Bostock (1986) p.61.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

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seeing his cloak, because the cloak is unlike the man.<sup>97</sup>

Socrates' statement about the concept of "recollection" needs to be considered. As 73d shows, Socrates admits that when the lovers are seeing the things from the beloved, they have the form of their lovers in mind, and "that is recollection". Everyone will admit what Socrates says is right and this is really a common use of the concept of "recollection". If, however, we consider the theory of recollection or the principle "learning is recollection" in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, then the problem appears: are the lovers who are seeing the items of their beloveds learning? Is the mental act of the lovers a process of learning?

It seems that if Plato or Socrates admits that the mental act of the lovers is recollection, then two kinds of recollection inevitably appear. The first kind of recollection or memory is the recollection of this life, namely, the memory of the experience after birth (when the soul has combined with the body, in Platonic/Socratic terms). The second kind of recollection is the recollection of the soul's experience before birth. Here, we should be careful to select our vocabulary of the second kind of recollection, for two reasons. (1) The theory of the Forms is unavailable until it is introduced at *Phaedo* 73d.<sup>98</sup> So what we can say now is that the soul has gained knowledge before birth, as was said in the *Meno*. (2) We cannot be sure that recollection will certainly lead the soul to regain knowledge that is in it. The last reason needs further consideration.

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<sup>97</sup> Gallop (1980) p.118.

<sup>98</sup> The place where the theory of the Forms is introduced have different opinions among scholars. As Panos Dimas argues, "If the forms were introduced by 70b, as the traditional interpretation maintains, why does not Socrates use their properties to demonstrate the continuing existence of the soul when Cebes asked for it the first time, instead of postponing it until 79dl-7? The answer, I propose, is that the forms are not yet introduced at 70b". (p. 185). See Dimas (2003) p. 185.

In the *Meno*, and even in the *Phaedo*, Socrates seems never to admit that recollection will necessarily lead the soul to regain knowledge, though we can conclude this by an indirect way. In the *Meno*, knowledge is teachable and learning links closely to what is teachable. If recollection is learning, then recollection, i.e. learning, will bring knowledge to the soul. This indirect way, however, is not necessary, since learning something is not equal to grasping knowledge or skill. Take pupils learning at school as an example. Pupils learn something through their teachers regardless of the subject (we do not need to consider the theory of recollection in this case). However, some of them will understand what the teacher teaches, while others will not understand the teaching properly. Therefore, the process of learning does not necessarily mean grasping knowledge.

Having considered the difficulties above, the example of “lovers” seems to be insufficient to illustrate what Socrates wishes to say in the *Phaedo*. For the example in fact cut off the direct relationship between the theory of recollection and knowledge. The example also cuts off the relationship between recollection and the theory of the Forms.

## **2.6 Problems in the theory of recollection**

Since any cognitive or emotional process (including the recollecting process) must have an agent or subject, the theory of recollection needs the factor of the soul. It seems that a controversy on epistemology is still not solved. The problem is “according to the recollection theory, in what degree is learning recollection?” This is

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actually asking how broadly or to what extent we can apply the principle “learning is recollection”.

There are two kinds of interpretation on this issue. The first is a controversy that what extent the recollection theory can apply. One approach thinks that in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* at least, all kinds of learning are recollection, while another approach insists that only some types of learning are recollection. Scott illustrates these two approaches in detail.<sup>99</sup> The first approach is called “K” (for Kant), which means that all types of knowledge are recollection; Scott calls the second approach “D” (for Demaratus), which means recollection is only applied to the situation which will produce higher knowledge. These two approaches refer to the consequence or products of the principle “learning is recollection”, namely, whether it produces knowledge “D” type.

The second controversy refers to which kinds of subjects could be involved in the principle “learning is recollection”. Vlastos has a suspicion about “learning is recollection”. Considering the slave episode of *Meno*, Vlastos points out that the knowledge of geometry is different from other kinds of knowledge. The knowledge of geometry itself can be gained through “any advance in understanding which results from the perception of logical relationships”.<sup>100</sup> Compared to it, other types of knowledge that rely on experience cannot be gotten by this way. How does Socrates assure that “learning is recollection” can be used in history, botany or medicine

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<sup>99</sup> Scott (1995) pp. 16-23.

<sup>100</sup> Vlastos (1965) p. 97.

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which need a huge quantity of experience to study?<sup>101</sup>

Moravcsik's article focuses on the meaning of logical terms in *Meno*. He thinks that Meno's Paradox is only valid for "learning by deliberate inquiry", but it excludes "learning by lucky or chance or as the result of external agency". Moravcsik believes that in recollection Plato is talking about non-experiential knowledge or *a priori* knowledge. Maybe recollection itself has contained experience.<sup>102</sup>

Nehamas asks, if Socrates rightly admits that he knows nothing about virtue, then why do he and Meno seek a teacher of virtue? How do they start their inquiry about virtue, if both are completely ignorant about virtue? Nehamas thinks that Plato has the answer of "what is virtue" beforehand. He also believes that the key point by which Socrates rebuts the Paradox is that "one can know what one does not know".<sup>103</sup>

The dispute essentially refers to the question of whether Plato admits "intellectual intuition" in the process of recollection. I use the word "intuition" to refer to an ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning. I do not intend to discuss these disputes in detail here, but only try to demonstrate how we understand them from a new perspective, if the factor of the soul is considered. We need to consider whether the soul has the ability of "intellectual intuition" (using the terminology of Kant).<sup>104</sup> The concept of "intellectual intuition" I use here means "a form of immediate intellectual knowledge

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<sup>101</sup> See my discussion in chapter one. See also Vlastos (1965) pp. 143-167.

<sup>102</sup> Moravcsik (1971) pp. 53-69.

<sup>103</sup> Nehamas (1985) pp. 1-30.

<sup>104</sup> Kant is not the first person who uses this term, but he is a typical one. See Kant (2005) B307, B313, B386.



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or contemplation” or “knowing immediately by understanding”. Plato uses a metaphor to illustrate how the lover of knowledge “consorts with” (πλησιάζει) the Forms and gains knowledge (*Republic* 490b).<sup>105</sup> This text shows that the soul has the ability of “intellectual intuition”, because there are reasons to say so. Firstly, when the soul “consorts with” the Forms, the soul is in intellect state, partly because Plato admits that the soul is “akin” (ὅμοιος) to the Forms in the *Phaedo*: “what about the soul? Is it visible or invisible?” “Invisible.”... “So the soul is more like (ὁμοιότερον) the invisible...” (79b). Before this argument, Socrates has explained “the invisible” things, i.e. they are “XX in itself”, namely, the Forms (78c-d). It is because of the kinship relationship between the soul and the Forms that only the soul in a state of pure reason can get in touch with the pure intellectual Forms. The process by which the soul grasps knowledge from the Forms is an intellectual process.

In this sense, the soul is intellect. The soul gains knowledge by intuition, because Plato uses the word “eyes” (or verbs like “see” or “gaze at”) <sup>106</sup> as a metaphor to describe how the soul gains knowledge from the Forms. If we consider the meaning of this metaphor, then we can say that the soul gains knowledge by intuition. According to the definition of “intuition”, intuition emphasizes grasping and understanding things directly. If we combine these two considerations, the recognition process is a process by which the soul gains the knowledge from the Forms by means of “intellectual intuition”. The phrase “intellectual intuition” emphasizes that the process by which the soul gains knowledge does not involve any

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Phaedo* 79d, *Laws* 904d6 and *Timaeus* 90c2.

<sup>106</sup> See the metaphor of cave in the *Republic* and *Symposium*, 210c-e. Cf. *Meno* 81c and *Phaedo* 83b4.

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reason or judgement. It also has a quality of “immediacy” which has a close relationship with “seeing” or “watching”.

Briefly, the soul gains knowledge by means of “intellectual intuition” in the region of the Forms, but where the theory of recollection only applies in the sensible world, soul cannot do this, for two reasons. (1) The object of such a process is no longer the Forms, but the sensible things which are always in flux. (2) The soul in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* is pure intellect or reason, whereas the incarnate soul is always disturbed by the body. Therefore, in the process of recollection in the sensible world, the soul must recall knowledge of the Forms which is already inside of itself to recognize what it perceives.

A further question arises from this problem, namely, is there any difference between the theory of recollection in the *Meno* and in the *Phaedo*, even when it is proved that the concept knowledge has the same usage in both dialogues?<sup>107</sup>

Many scholars have noticed that there are some differences between the theory of recollection in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* and treat recollection in these two dialogues as two different versions of the theory.<sup>108</sup> For convenience, in what follows, I call the arguments on “learning is recollection” in *Phaedo* as “LRP” and in *Meno* as “LRM”.

Socrates himself says in the *Phaedo* that the argument on recollection is different from before. For at 73b, Socrates says that “if this (i.e. the argument on “learning is recollection”) does not convince you, Simmias, see whether you agree if

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<sup>107</sup> See 2.2.

<sup>108</sup> See Ackrill (1974) pp. 177-95. See also, Anderson (1993); Bostock (1986) and Hackforth (1955). All these scholars believe that the argument of recollection in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* are different on the one hand, but compatible in the other hand. Bostock is representative. He says: “As Socrates indicates at 73b3-4, the version now to be presented is not meant to be the same as the *Meno*'s version”. But he also insists that the argument in the *Meno* is “an earlier version of this argument”.

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we examine it in some such way as this, for you doubt that what we call learning is recollection?” Here, Socrates indicates that the argument of “learning is recollection” is different from elsewhere (i.e. *Meno*).

The first difference between LRP and LRM is the scope of recollection’s application. In LRM, Socrates seems to suggest that the recollection theory can only apply to “any advance in understanding which results from the perception of logical relationships”, as Vlastos says.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, in LRP, the scope of the theory of recollection becomes much wider. Because of the wider application of the Form theory, recollection theory is not limited to the mathematical/logical area, but also extends to the value area and the theory of Forms. Socrates in the *Phaedo*, gives us many Forms, such as Goodness (αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ), Beauty (αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ), Justice (δικαίου) and Holiness (ὁσίου) (75d). Therefore, recollection theory in the *Phaedo*, compared to the *Meno*, has a wider application.

The second difference is the different status of the recollection theory in these two dialogues. In the *Meno*, the topic “what is virtue?” is finally led us to consider another question “what is knowledge?”. Therefore, LRM is actually a core theory in the *Meno*, though it seems just an interruption or interposition in the dialogue. And the status of LRP is different, because it is an argument which is used to prove the immortality of the soul, that is to say, its status is far lower than LRM.<sup>110</sup>

Although there are two differences between LRM and LRP, they are still similar

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<sup>109</sup> See Vlastos (1965) p. 97. Cf. Moravcsik (1971) Lpp. 53-69 and Nehamas (1985) pp. 1-30.

<sup>110</sup> Panos Dimas argues that “So Socrates’ reason for asserting what he does in the last sentence of his summation (i.e. that if these entities do not exist, our souls did not pre-exist our births, 76e7), as the remark about equal necessity at 76e5-6 clearly suggests, is that he understands the recollection argument as supporting the stronger claim that these entities exist if and only if our souls pre-existed our birth” (p. 177). See Dimas (2003) p. 177.

which are also very important to understand the theory of the recollection. Firstly, the recollection theory in LRP and LRM constructs a whole and comprehensive theory. Grasping only one of these versions will lead to an incomplete understanding of the recollection theory. Secondly, both of them aim to explain knowledge and the soul.

## **2.7 Gaining knowledge through the soul in a reasoning state after death**

Facing his death, Socrates feels pleasure,<sup>111</sup> for he is confident that “a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder” (63e). In contrast, his companions are immersed in deep sorrow about his destiny. Socrates feels happy when he is facing his death, since “the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death” (64a).

This is a strange idea about death until Socrates gives his explanation of it following the response from Simmias. Simmias “laughed and said: ‘By Zeus, Socrates, you made me laugh, though I was in no laughing mood just now... and our people in Thebes would thoroughly agree that philosophers are nearly dead and that the majority of men is well aware that they deserve to be...’” (64a-b). This is obviously sarcasm. Socrates seems not to mind Simmias’ joke or even irreverence, but solemnly points out that the majority “are not aware of the way true philosophers

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<sup>111</sup> As a human, Socrates feels not only pleasure, but also pain in front of his death, for these two things are like “two creatures with one head”, as he admits at 60b. Socrates, however, as the *Phaedo* describes, being a philosopher, emphasizes in his arguments his pleasure.

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are nearly dead, nor of the way they deserve to be, nor of the sort of death they deserve” (64b-c).

Why does Socrates have such an idea about death, i.e. why does he feel happy when he faces his death, while the majority of his followers in general fear it? Why does he not fear his death? What kind of “the great blessing” is it in Socrates’ view? After despising the common opinion about death, Socrates proposes, “let us talk among ourselves” (64c). That all the persons visiting Socrates more or less love philosophy, whether they are Socrates’ disciples or believe in Pythagoreanism, is a clear sign that Socrates wishes to talk about death at a philosophical level. If so, the answer to all those three questions above is almost reached. The answer is knowledge. As a philosopher, Socrates pursues knowledge all his life. Further, as he soberly realizes that philosophy is “love of wisdom” and a philosopher is “someone who loves wisdom”, which means that a philosopher himself properly has no wisdom at all on an ordinary understanding. If there is an event, namely, death, which could help him to gain true knowledge, we could imagine how pleased he is. Therefore, Socrates is really the person who “practices for dying and death” (64a) and welcomes his death.

Socrates, however, does not relate death and knowledge immediately in the dialogue. He asks his interlocutor, “Do we believe that there is such a thing as death?” (64c). After gaining a positive answer, Socrates gives us the definition of death, i.e. the separation between the soul and the body, or “the separation of the soul from the body” (64c). Socrates then asks his companions whether a true philosopher would be

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concerned with the pleasures that do service to the body, including “the pleasure of drinking and food”, “the pleasure of sex”, or “the acquisition of distinguished clothes and shoes and the other bodily ornaments” (*Phaedo* 64d). Everyone there agrees that the philosopher will despise those pleasures. It is not surprising that Socrates deprecates the body as whole and requires philosophers to free their soul from the body as much as possible. He speaks of the philosopher as “a man who finds no pleasure in such things and has no part in them is thought by the majority not to deserve to live and to be close to death; the man, that is, who does not care for pleasures of the body” (*Phaedo* 65a). Having said all the above, Socrates finally links the issue of gaining knowledge to the body and the soul, and then to death. Therefore, the whole argument could be divided into two parts. The first part of Socrates’ argument (65a-d) is:

(A) The body is an obstacle to searching for knowledge, simply because no sensations through our organs are clear and accurate;<sup>112</sup>

(B) The soul alone grasps the truth and when it does it, the body will surely deceive it;

(C) In thought or reasoning (*λογίζεσθαι*), reality becomes clear to the soul;

(D) When the soul is alone by itself, it reaches out (*ὀρέγεται*) toward reality (*τοῦ ὄντος*), taking leave of the body and having no contact or association with it.

From this argument, Socrates points out that the soul itself could reach reality and that the body will hinder the soul in gaining knowledge. Clearly, the functions of the body in the process of gaining knowledge are completely removed by Socrates in his

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<sup>112</sup> Socrates particularly emphasizes the superiority of seeing and hearing than other physical senses, but this not affects the paraphrase of Socrates’ argument here.

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argument and the whole project of acquiring knowledge is undertaken by the soul alone.

Socrates could therefore reasonably lead his interlocutors to think about what would help philosophers to get rid of the effects of the body and allow the soul alone to gain knowledge. The best answer seems to be death, for its definition is the separation of the soul from the body and that is exactly the answer that Socrates offers in the *Phaedo*. And this is the second part of Socrates' argument:

(A) If we have pure knowledge (καθαρῶς γνῶναι),<sup>113</sup> we should escape from the body and “observe the things in themselves with the soul by itself” (*Phaedo* 66e);<sup>114</sup>

(B) If it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of the two things are true: either we can never attain any pure knowledge or we can do so after death (*Phaedo* 66e-67a).

Socrates does not say which option is the right one in the dialogue. But, Socrates asks his audiences to purify their soul and to avoid the contamination of the body' infections (*Phaedo* 67a). Moreover, Socrates insists that if we are able to do so, we shall finally get knowledge (*Phaedo* 67a). Socrates has clearly demonstrated his idea about why death is a method of gaining knowledge for the purified soul of the philosopher. It is time for him to explain why he does not fear his death and what exactly the “greatest blessing” is. Because of the argument, Socrates has confidence that “there is good hope” (67b) or “he is full of good hope” (67c) that he will purify himself through his death. Every true philosopher always longs for this event in their

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<sup>113</sup> Sometimes, Plato uses “καθαρῶς τι” (66d) to refer the pure knowledge (καθαρῶς γνῶναι).

<sup>114</sup> “The things in themselves” (αὐτὰ τα πράγματα) refers to the Forms, though it is not so obvious in the English translation above, for Socrates has introduced the Forms before the quotation at 65d in the *Phaedo*.

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life, for all the things that they are yearning for are wisdom. Moreover, “a true lover of wisdom” who knows that he will find the knowledge nowhere but “Hades” should not fear dying but rather be glad to start his journey. Compared to the common people who think that death itself is a great evil, a true philosopher faces his death with pleasure, with courage and moderation. Socrates calls this kind of courage and moderation “true virtue” (ἀληθῆς ἀρετή), (69b), and points out that true virtue must be with wisdom, i.e. knowledge. For him, “wisdom itself is a kind of cleaning or purification” (69b-c).

What Socrates has discussed above is accepted by his audience, but it seems that everything he says is based on a premise, namely, the soul is immortal and will not be destroyed after death, as Cebes doubts in the dialogue. In order to respond to such doubts, Socrates begins to offer a series of arguments on the immortality of the soul. As relevant to the topic of knowledge, I will rephrase his argument about the theory of recollection in the next section.

## **2.8 Denial of body’s contribution on epistemology**

The soul and the body have an unequal status in the *Phaedo*. Only the soul itself could gain knowledge. The soul is described as “more alike or akin” to the invisible existence, namely, the Forms (79b), while the body is closer to visible things. Only the soul by itself can grasp knowledge or the Forms and the body is the prison or obstacle to the soul purifying itself or getting in touch with knowledge/the Forms. In sum, the soul has priority over the body in the dialogue’s epistemology. This outline



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also gives another principle of the relationship between the soul and the body. We can simply call this the “incompatibility principle”. This principle means that though the soul and the body together constitute a whole human being, the soul needs to repel the body as far as possible in order to gain knowledge. This incompatibility principle actually denies the function of body in gaining knowledge.

Why does the soul need to overcome the body in order to gain knowledge? Why does Plato need this incompatibility principle in epistemology? The body is a prison to the soul to Plato, since the bodily desires will hinder the soul from grasping reality. If the soul is influenced by bodily desires, then it will be “dizzied” by these bad elements and will not be able to consort with reality, which means that the soul will not gain knowledge. If the embodied soul cannot gain knowledge, there will be a problem in theory.

The phrase “true reality” reflects that Socrates divides all the things in his thought into three parts: reality (the Forms), the quasi-reality (the objects in the sensible world)<sup>115</sup> and some qualities that exist in the soul (knowledge or thoughts or ideas). True reality undoubtedly belongs to the Forms. The qualities are the things in the soul, i.e. the knowledge and the truths. The quasi-realities or the objects in our world will not give the soul knowledge, but will disturb the soul and only give it inaccurate ideas.

Certainly, this does not mean that sensible things are completely useless for the soul in grasping the Forms or knowledge. Rather sensible objects do help human

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<sup>115</sup> “Quasi-reality” is a term from T. M. Robinson. See Robinson (1970) p. 28.

beings to gain knowledge. According to Socrates, sensible things stimulate our soul to recollect the knowledge that already exists in our soul. This is a principle of the recollection theory. What needs to be noticed is that in the sensible world, the things or the objects give the soul some reminders that lead it to recollect similar knowledge that links to the stimulations. Take a chair as an example. A chair in the sensible world may not provoke the soul to recollect the knowledge or the Form of the Chair. Nevertheless, a chair may lead the soul to regain the knowledge of the Square, or even the knowledge of the Cat, if you still remember that there was always a cat in the chair when you were young. In sum, the similarity or dissimilarity between the Forms and the knowledge in our souls will make the soul recollect the knowledge that it has gained.

### **Conclusion**

Epistemology in the *Phaedo* inherits the basic principles that appeared in the *Meno*, but Plato introduces the theory of Forms and offers us a new version of recollection theory, which constructs more of an outline of his epistemology. All the new theories and ideas in some degree supplement what has been said in the *Meno* on knowledge and make the outline more polished and clearer than it is in the *Meno*.

Nevertheless, there are still problems. Plato in *Phaedo* still does not solve the difficulty that knowledge is used in a narrow sense. This kind of understanding of knowledge makes knowledge from experience impossible, even though it is possible to regain knowledge through recollection. Further, knowledge completely becomes

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innate knowledge, i.e. the soul is born with knowledge.<sup>116</sup> By the theory of recollection, however, some kinds of true propositions that should be knowledge do not belong to knowledge any more, since the recollection theory still cannot be applied to every branch of knowledge. Moreover, Socrates emphasizes that the soul needs to overcome the influence of the body to gain knowledge. This idea makes the body or the bodily organs useless in epistemology except for the function of stimulation.

All these difficulties arise from the arguments that Socrates offers in the *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, still more difficulties arise when we try to understand his idea more accurately. Take perception as an example. When someone is seeing a pair of equal sticks, according to Socrates' idea, he could recollect the Form of Equality from his own soul. How does the perception remind the soul? What is the process or procedure of gaining the knowledge, especially in relation to the sensible organs? During the process of gaining knowledge, how does the soul interact with the sensible objects? What is the process whether the soul recollects the knowledge that already exists within it? Socrates does not demonstrate these issues clearly, maybe simply because *Phaedo* is mainly about the immortality of the soul. The root of these difficulties is that the nature of knowledge is still not clear. The concept of knowledge or the formula "true opinion + an explanation of the reason why" will not be completely understood until there is an answer to the question "what is knowledge?". In *Meno* and *Phaedo*, knowledge could be replaced by the phrase "true

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Kahn (2009) p. 122.

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opinion + an explanation of the reason why". However, in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, Socrates does not present the arguments on why that formula is correct, rather he only uses analogies to illustrate the formula in the *Meno*. All these puzzles are left unanswered until the *Theaetetus*.

## Chapter Three: The Prologue of *Theaetetus* as an Allusion to Anti-empiricism?

### Introduction

Plato in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* gives us an outline of his epistemology but the outline itself is not clear. The knowledge is limited to a narrow sphere. The body's only function in the process of recognition is to help the agent to recall the knowledge that is already within the soul. Further, we have no idea how the soul "consorts with" knowledge for gaining knowledge. Plato does not offer his readers an example of how the body receives data from outside to construct perception or how perception reminds the soul for recollecting knowledge in detail.<sup>117</sup> All these difficulties are rooted in the unclear meaning of all elements of the formula "knowledge = true opinion + an explanation of the reason why" and in the need for an answer to the question "What is knowledge?". *Theaetetus* addresses this need by Plato investigating three definitions of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is perception; knowledge is true opinion; and knowledge is true opinion plus an account. There are three stages for this investigation in the dialogue. Firstly, Plato checks whether knowledge is perception; then he tries to figure out whether knowledge is true opinion; lastly, he tries to consider whether knowledge is true opinion plus an account. During these three stages, Plato supplies many new theories and ideas on

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<sup>117</sup> Socrates, at *Phaedo* 73d-75a, has a discussion of how we recollect things from perceptions when he re-states the recollection theory. However, as we will find that the discussion in the *Phaedo* is not philosophically sufficient, compare to the process of perceiving colour, the wax block analogy and the aviary example in the *Theaetetus*.

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epistemology.

Even where the new theories and ideas of *Theaetetus* are not so satisfactory, they are still helpful for understanding Plato's epistemology. Some of them offer solutions to the problems that appeared in the outline of the epistemology. Others finally provide details of some theories that are completely unclear when they are mentioned in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Specifically, Plato in the *Theaetetus* illustrates in detail the process of perceiving the colour white, which can be by extension treated also as an explanation of how the soul consorts with the Forms and gains knowledge from them.<sup>118</sup> Broadly speaking, all the theories or ideas that appear as empirical theories in the *Theaetetus* could be seen as parallel explanations of what happens to the soul in the world of Forms. Those theories and ideas in the *Theaetetus* supplement the outlines of epistemology in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*.

In this chapter, I will deal with the prologue of the *Theaetetus*, especially the persons who appear in the prologue. Plato as a wonderful dramatist reveals his skill in constructing the whole conversation, connecting one dialogue to others, choosing the cast, and particularly offering a brilliant prologue that not only supplies necessary information for understanding the whole dialogue, but also expresses the keynote of the *Theaetetus* through allusions. I will try to prove that Plato selects the persons who appear in the dialogue deliberately to make an allusion to anti-empiricism.<sup>119</sup> Some of the key persons in the dialogue hold the philosophical position on anti-empiricism; others are selected as a symbol of anti-empiricism.

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<sup>118</sup> C.f. *Timaeus* 45b-46c.

<sup>119</sup> Glenn R. Morrow has noticed this. See Morrow (1970) p. 314.

Since the information in the prologue is not sufficient to support my investigation, it is unavoidable to discuss the persons in their own history and their own philosophical position in history. With four of those characters, I will follow this method, except Socrates, since Socrates leaves no texts from which to discuss his philosophy and since the relationship between him and Plato is complex. Hence, when I consider the Socratic philosophical position in the dialogue, I will not only consider the philosophy of the historical Socrates, but of Plato's Socrates as well.

My investigation on the persons reaches beyond the prologue, for only four persons' names appear in the prologue, i.e. Euclides, Terpsion, Socrates and Theaetetus. I, however, will include Theodorus and discuss five persons in this chapter. The reason for this is not only because Theodorus is a main character in the dialogue, but also because his identity as a mathematician will help to identify Theaetetus' position in the dialogue. The reason why I will not discuss Protagoras as a person in this chapter is that even though Protagoras has an important role in the *Theaetetus*, he does not actually participate in the conversation in person. Hence, even though Protagoras was the "dead friend" of Theodorus (168e) and Theaetetus is treated as his defendant by Socrates, I will not consider him in the following discussion, simply because of the principle that I only discuss the persons who take part directly in the dialogue.

Euclides is the first person to be talked about. I will mainly discuss his connection to Eleatic tradition. Terpsion is the second and the discussion about him needs to be very brief, for there is insufficient information about him. Socrates, the

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most complicated person in this investigation is the third person. I will talk about the distinction between him and Plato, the chronology of the Platonic dialogues, and the universal definition of the historical Socrates. The next person is Theodorus. I will argue that he is selected as a symbol of anti-empiricism for his identity as a mathematician, though he himself as a person was open-minded on the question. Theaetetus is the last person. I will focus on the similarity between him and Socrates which is emphasized in the dialogue, since Plato describes their similarity in detail. Through this similarity, I will argue that Theaetetus is a symbol of anti-empiricism who has the same philosophical position as the other four persons in the dialogue.

### 3.1 Euclides: a follower of Eleatic tradition

The prologue of *Theaetetus* is a conversation between Euclides and Terpsion.<sup>120</sup> It probably happens in a street in Megara, since when Euclides mentions Theaetetus in the dialogue, Terpsion says that, "...But why did not he put up here at Megara?" It is not strange that these two persons had a chat in a street in Megara, since both Euclides and Terpsion were born at Megara.<sup>121</sup> Euclides, as philosopher, is known for his enthusiasm for logic.<sup>122</sup> His philosophy is a synthetical system of the ideas of Eleatic and Socratic, according to Cicero's and Diogenes' reports.<sup>123</sup>

The distinctive feature of the Eleatic tradition is monism and especially

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<sup>120</sup> Michel Narcy reminds us: "Part of the plot of Plato's *Theaetetus* is that it was written not by Plato, but by Euclides". See Narcy (2013) p. 150.

<sup>121</sup> C.f. Seth Benardete carefully analyses the setting of prologue of *Theaetetus*, especially the whole dialogue is actually Euclides' retranslation of Socrates' report, and he also shows how Plato makes a way of logos through this opening setting with the dialogues *Parmenides* and *Sophist*. See Benardete (1997) pp. 25-53.

<sup>122</sup> R. E. Wood notes: "Here the two interlocutors ran their philosophic school which was noted for its eristic procedure and carrying on in the lines of both Socrates and Parmenides". See Wood (1999) p. 810.

<sup>123</sup> See Nails (2002) pp.144-145. Nails in her book also offers some other information about Euclides of Megara. See also, Waterfield (1987) pp.135-136.



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emphasizes the function of logic and its denial of perception as a way of gaining knowledge. This can be seen clearly in Parmenides' philosophy. He is the first philosopher who seriously considers the question of "being". He says through the mouth of a Goddess:

"It is proper that you should learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true reliance." (KRS. 342)

Moreover, he points out that there are two paths of thinking:

"The one, that [it] is and that it is impossible for [it] not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for she attends upon Truth); the other — that [it] is not and that it is needful that [it] not be, that I declare to you is an altogether indiscernible track: for you could not know what is not — that cannot be done — nor indicate it." (KRS. 344)<sup>124</sup>

Here, I only cite the research from G. E. L. Owen and M. Furth. The reason why I only employ these two scholars' research is that both use the theory of reference to analyse Parmenides' fragments. The meaning or definition of this theory is that the expression of a language should pair with certain values which will finally lead to reality. The meaning of a word is the real object of this word. Under the situation of ancient philosophy, τὸ ὄν ("being/reality"), λόγος ("thinking/reasoning") and ἐπιστήμη ("knowledge") are strictly correlated with each other. Owen and Furth discuss the ideas of Parmenides' fragment above (KRS. 342 and 344),<sup>125</sup> and these

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<sup>124</sup> All the translations of Parmenides come from *The Presocratic Philosophers* (KRS.). See Kirk, G. et al. eds. (1983) pp. 243-247. See also Gallop (1991). Cf. Curd (2004) pp. 34-50 and pp. 64-93.

<sup>125</sup> The theory of reference is one a branch of the theory of meaning and itself is full of dispute. Willard Van

lines:

“ἡ μὲν ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν μὴ εἶναι, πειθοῦς ἔστι κέλευθος (Ἀληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ)” (The one, that (it) is and that it is impossible for (it) is not be, is the path of Persuasion (for she attends upon Truth) (KRS. 344)<sup>126</sup>

According to Owen and Futh, these lines show the absolutely truth or unconditional truth. The other path is the way of opinion and it is a wrong way, since that it is not and no reliable knowledge could be gained from it. And this is held by mortals (KRS. 353). When the mortals say that there is a golden mountain, they unmistakably attribute the property of “existence/is” to the “golden mountain”.<sup>127</sup> They speak as if the non-existent thing existed. If we borrow the terminology of semantics, this kind of opinion of the mortals makes the object without a reference become an object of reference. Based on such analysis, Owen reaches two conclusions: first, Parmenides holds to the theory of reference; second, what does not exist cannot be thought or spoken or what can be spoken or thought exists.<sup>128</sup>

Furth’s idea is more extreme than Owen’s. He firstly tries to prove that Greeks use “being” (τὸ ὄν), “knowledge” (τὸ γνωστόν) and “belief” (τὸ δοξαστόν) interchangeably. Then he tries to use his conclusion to analyse Parmenides’ fragments. He believes that Parmenides is a monist in the strictest sense and reports Parmenides’ position as “What is (everything that is), is, he says, and (very

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Orman Quine refutes to admit the existence of meaning. Of course, Plato could not imagine such philosophical theory; therefore, I need not to consider it. See Quine (2003) pp. 1-19

<sup>126</sup> Both Greek text and English translation come from *The Presocratic Philosophers*. See Kirk, G. et al. eds. (1983) p. 245.

<sup>127</sup> This is an example raised by Alexius Meinong. Bertrand Russell cites and analyses this example in his article *On Denoting*. Thereafter, most philosophers usually use this example when they discuss about the theory of meaning. The other common used example is “unicorn is existence”. See Russell (1905) pp. 479–493.

<sup>128</sup> See Owen (1960) pp. 84-102.

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emphatically) that's all (= nothing else!)".<sup>129</sup> Moreover, he argues that any proposition about what is not is impossible to Parmenides, i.e. diversity is impossible, which is distinctive from Owen who thinks that diversity is still possible in Parmenides' philosophy. Furth concludes, "given the is-not doctrine, Parmenides is in a position to claim that the statement that something is asserts the same as the statement that [ostensibly] something else is, because the attempted specification of the alleged difference is unintelligible."<sup>130</sup> Then everything is excluded and the only thing that is left is "what is" and the only thing that we could say is "What is, is".

Following Owen's and Furth's ideas, it is clear that in Parmenides' philosophy, perception is useless. Even in Furth's view, what we could say is just "what is, is". Coming back to the case of Euclides who is a follower of the Eleatic tradition, we cannot help thinking that by this choice of character Plato gives us an allusion to anti-empiricism. If my argument is not so strong so far, since we could not judge Plato's intention of using anti-empiricism as the keynote of the *Theaetetus* just by one name that is connected with Eleatic philosophers, then let us consider a little more.

### **3.2 Terpsion: a Socratic follower**

The other four names that appear in the beginning of the dialogue are Terpsion, Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus. According to Waterfield's introduction, Terpsion "looks like a minor member of the Megarian group of Socratic

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<sup>129</sup> See Furth (1968) p. 126; reprinted in Mourelatos ed. (1974) pp. 241-270.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p.129.

followers”.<sup>131</sup> We have no other information about who Terpsion is,<sup>132</sup> except his presence (alongside Euclides) in the *Phaedo* (59c). Therefore, I can make no definite judgement whether he could link to any anti-empiricism.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, a reasonable deduction could be made. Persons who presented the last day of Socrates are intimates of Socrates. They are familiar with or even accept Socratic philosophy. By “Socratic philosophy”, I do not refer to historical Socratic philosophy, rather Plato’s, for Socrates emphasizes in *Phaedo* that he has mentioned recollection many times. Hence, it is possible that Terpsion shares the same philosophical position with Socrates in both *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*.

### **3.3 Historical Socrates vs. Platonic Socrates: Universal Definition through experience**

Socrates is the most complicated among the persons in *Theaetetus*. When considering Socrates as a person, we immediately meet the issue of the “chronological problem”.<sup>134</sup> Socrates himself does not leave any works of his own, so all the information about Socrates comes from the secondary sources, mainly from Plato and Xenophon.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> See Waterfield (1987) p.135.

<sup>132</sup> See Nails (2002) p. 274.

<sup>133</sup> Although we do not know whether Terpsion believes in anti-empiricism or not, Kenneth Dorter makes a comparison between Terpsion, Euclides, Theaetetus, Theodorus and Socrates with their intellectual ability in *Theaetetus*. Then, Dorter argues “love of reason is distinct from love of honor, and that there are three types of persons rather than two”. The three types of person are “intelligent” person, “lazy or sluggish and forgetful” person and “love of honor or love of pleasure” person. Terpsion, Euclides belong to the category of “lazy or sluggish and forgetful”. See Dorter (1990) pp. 344-345.

<sup>134</sup> See my discussion on chronological problem in the Introduction.

<sup>135</sup> See Xenophon. 1923. *Memorabilia and Apology*. Marchant, E. C. and Todo, O. J. trans. Loeb Classical Library, pp. 1-360 and pp. 637-664. Besides Plato and Xenophon, there are still some materials about Socrates’ thought. Those materials are included in Ferguson (1970). A brief discussion about sources for Socrates can be found in Stokes (1995) pp. 4-7.

If the historical Socrates always claims that he knows nothing,<sup>136</sup> then we could not even know whether he is an anti-empiricist. Nevertheless, if Plato's Socrates no longer makes such a claim and tries to give some positive ideas, then he should have some philosophical position. Moreover, the historical Socrates does not have the theory of Forms. Further, Plato's Socrates is an anti-empiricist in the sense of having the theory of Forms. The dialogue *Theaetetus* is written in Plato's late period, so Socrates in this dialogue is Plato's Socrates who represents Plato's own ideas, rather than the historical Socrates' ideas. That is to say, Socrates in the *Theaetetus* is an anti-empiricist.

Nevertheless, this assertion is too simplistic. Let us consider testimony from Aristotle about Socratic philosophy. On the Socratic search for definitions, Aristotle says, "Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical matters, and fixed thought for the first time on definitions" (*Metaphysics* 987b1). In another place, Aristotle adds, "Socrates occupied himself with the excellences of character, and in connection with them became the first to raise the problem of universal definitions..." (*Metaphysics* 1078b17).<sup>137</sup> What is new in Aristotle's testimony compared to what Vlastos says, is the universal definition. The typical question format for a Socratic definition is "What is X?" or more exactly, "What is X itself?". The answer to such a question should be a definition that could cover every character of X. I do not want to use *Theaetetus* as an example of the method of definition, rather let us consider the

<sup>136</sup> Cf. *Apology* 21b, 22d

<sup>137</sup> All the quotations about Aristotle are translated by W. D. Ross. There is another place that Aristotle mentions Socrates' pursuit of definition in *Metaphysics* (1086b3). See Aristotle (1984).

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definition issue in the *Meno* that is an excellent one to show what Socrates asks for in a definition. The purpose of this discussion is to support my claim that Socrates is an anti-empiricist.

The investigation of “What is virtue?” begins at 71d in the *Meno*, where Socrates asks Meno for his answer to the question. Meno thinks that it is not a hard question and supplies various virtues for different persons. “Being able to manage public affairs and in doing so to benefit his friends and harm his enemies and to be careful that no harm comes to himself” are the virtues of men (71e). Taking care of children and managing home affairs are the virtues of women (71e). Meno can even identify the virtues for the elderly men, the free men and the slave. Socrates ironically says, “I seem to be in great luck, Meno; while I am looking for one virtue, I have found you to have a whole swarm...” (72a). Socrates takes the image of bee to illustrate his idea by saying, “if I were asking you what is the nature of bees, and you say that there are many and of all kinds...” (72b). Socrates does not think that this is the answer to what he asks. What he needs is the respect “in which they are all the same and do not differ from one another” (72c). Applying this principle to virtue, Socrates asks what definition of virtue could mark out all different kinds of virtue as virtues. In order to help Meno to offer a better answer to the question “What is virtue?”, Socrates provides an example of how to define “shape”. Socrates begins with the error of Meno, saying that “shape” is not roundness, for roundness is a shape not shape. Therefore, why Meno is wrong for supplying so many virtues in his answer is clear, since they are individually each a virtue and not virtue itself. What

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Socrates pursues is the thing (or feature or character) that makes them all the same as a virtue. Nevertheless, Meno still cannot understand Socrates' idea. Socrates gives his own definition of shape: "Shape is that which alone of existing things always follows colour."(75b)<sup>138</sup> However, Meno thinks this definition is stupid, since no one could be sure that everyone knows what colour is. Assuming someone does not know what colour is, then how does this definition work? Socrates praises this query and asks Meno whether he could understand the words "plane" and "solid". After gaining Meno's positive response, Socrates defines shape for a second time, "a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid" (76a). What about colour? Socrates defines colour as "an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived" (76d).

In sum, the universal definition that Socrates pursues should satisfy the following conditions: (a) The definition of X should reflect the characters or features that could make every item which could be called X an X. (b) An object could be defined in various ways, i.e. an object could have many definitions, as Socrates' two definitions of shape show. From these three conditions and the definitions that Socrates offers in the *Meno*, it seems that Socrates is an empiricist rather than an anti-empiricist. We could reach this conclusion by analysing three definitions above. Before we analyse those definitions, we should consider the definition of "empiricism" and "experience". "Empiricism" is the theory that all knowledge is derived from experience and observation. "Experience" could mean three things, 1)

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<sup>138</sup> This translation G. M. A. Grube is not so clear; especially the word "follows". R. S. Bluck translates it as "follows upon" or "accompanies" which is more helpful. See Bluck (1961) p.243.

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observation of facts and events; 2) skills, knowledge or theories that are gained through time and 3) emotions stimulated by an event.

Having made clear the definition of “empiricism” and “experience”, let us consider the three definitions.<sup>139</sup> The first definition is, “Shape is that which alone of existing things always follows colour” (75b). The definition shows that “anything that has shape must have some colour”.<sup>140</sup> This conclusion could be learned over time and through observation. When the definition uses the word “always”, it means that anyone who sees the shape of something repeatedly will observe that the shape has colour every time and then reach the conclusion that shape always accompanies a colour. The same procedure could be applied to the first characteristic. When someone tries to justify it, he or she could always observe something and see whether the object has a shape or not. Finally, after countless experience or justifications, someone can admit, “anything that has shape must have some colour”, as the definition says.

The second definition, namely, “a shape is that which limits a solid; in a word, a shape is the limit of a solid”, needs to be considered. The same procedure that applies to the first definition could again apply to the second definition. Someone could test every existing solid that he could find to observe whether it has a shape. The answer is obvious, since there is no case that is not like this. This experiment is based on experience over time and the definition could be gained through practice, as in the

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<sup>139</sup> Vlastos has discussed these three definitions from elenchus and mathematics direction. See Vlastos, G. 1991. *Elenchus and Mathematics*. In: Vlastos (1991) pp. 120-126.

<sup>140</sup> Sharples offers two possible interpretations of this definition: (1) “one cannot have a patch of colour which has no shape”; (2) “anything that has shape must have some colour”. I take the second interpretation here. See Sharples (1991) pp.131-132.



first definition.

The third and last definition is of colour and it defines colour as “an effluvium from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived”. Socrates clearly connects the word “effluvium” to Empedocles’ philosophy (76c). Since the definition of colour is an important issue in the *Theaetetus*, though it seems not so important in the *Meno*, let us analyse its definition carefully here. Generally speaking, as R .W. Sharples concludes,

“Empedocles, like other Presocratics, explained sense-perception in terms of the giving off of particles from physical objects; some of these are of such size that they affect our sight, others affect other organs of sense.”<sup>141</sup>

Theophrastus reports,

“Empedocles has the same theory about all the senses, maintaining that perception arises when something fits into the passages of any of the senses. This is why one sense cannot judge the objects of another, since the passages of some are too wide, of others too narrow for the object perceived, so that some things pass straight through without making contact while others cannot enter at all.”(DK 31A 86)<sup>142</sup>

Socrates in the *Meno* gives us three simple principles to describe Empedocles’ idea about perception: (1) “There are effluvia of things”; (2) “There are channels through which the effluvia make their way”; (3) “Some effluvia fit some of the channels, while others are too small or too big” (*Meno* 76c). There is no difference between what Theophrastus reports and what Socrates says. Empedocles tries to explain what

<sup>141</sup> Sharples (1991) p.135.

<sup>142</sup> The translation comes from *The Presocratic Philosophers*. See Kirk, G. et al. eds. (1983) pp.309-310.

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comes from a sensible thing as the object of what we perceive. Following this, the definition of colour could be understood, since the rest of the vocabulary is easy for Meno. “Shape” has been defined and Meno confirms that he knows that there is “sight” as Socrates asked (76d). If we generalize Empedocles’ idea, the definition tells how we perceive sensible objects. Firstly, there must be a sensible object outside of us, which could have the effluvia. Effluvia are actually of various sorts that could fit different types of channels of the organs, like the eyes, the nose or the ears. Then those channels of our organs receive the effluvia. At the moment of receiving the effluvia, we perceive the sensible object. Socrates does not refer to any types of knowledge or reflection in our soul, but only mentions the process of how we perceive. From the definition of colour, we could say that the definition itself comes from the experience of perceiving colours. Although the definition of colour seems more abstract than the first two definitions in the sense of relating to experience, it seems that the third definition is still an empirical definition.

After the investigation of these three definitions in the *Meno*, we gain a conclusion, i.e. Socratic “universal definition” in the dialogue bases on experience.<sup>143</sup> If we generalize what I have gained through the *Meno*, it seems that the historical Socrates is an empiricist when he is pursuing universal knowledge. Two conclusions follow.

The first conclusion is that the view of the historical Socrates as an empiricist seems to contradict my argument about Plato’s chronology, namely that he holds

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<sup>143</sup> I have no more room to discuss the definitions in other Socratic dialogues.

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neither empiricism nor anti-empiricism. Then there are four results from this contradiction. Either the historical Socrates is an anti-empiricist or he is an empiricist; or he is a complicated person who both is an anti-empiricist and an empiricist; or he is neither. How could Socrates hold both empiricism and anti-empiricism? One possibility could be that there is no such distinction between empiricism and anti-empiricism in Socrates' mind. What Socrates did was change his position to fit various situations. This is possible and is what I have argued above, i.e. it shows that Socrates himself does not hold a fixed position empiricism or anti-empiricism. The historical Socrates himself claims to know nothing and my argument is all about *Theaetetus* which represents the Platonic Socrates according to Vlastos' scheme.

There is a second conclusion. The texts about the universal definition are all from the *Meno*, so if Socrates in the *Meno* is Plato's Socrates, then, he is the mouthpiece of Plato's own idea. Then the conclusion about the definition, i.e. he is an empiricist, contradicts the conclusion above, i.e. that Plato's Socrates is an anti-empiricist. Nearly all the Socratic dialogues end in *aporia*. That means, nearly all the universal definitions that Socrates pursues are failures. Therefore, it is strange that Socrates successfully defines two things and supplies three definitions in the *Meno*. If we realize that the ideas in the *Meno* reflect Plato's own idea, this strangeness retreats, for Plato's Socrates tries to give some positive ideas, as Vlastos has pointed out.<sup>144</sup> If so, we have reason to connect the pursuit of the universal definition to the theory of recollection, simply because the process of gaining the universal definition

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<sup>144</sup> See Vlastos (1991) pp. 47-49.

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and the theory of recollection appear in the same dialogue, i.e. *Meno*. If we consider the theory of recollection and the process of gaining a universal definition together, then the latter would no longer be a process in the sensible world but rather in the other world, for the premise of recollection is that the soul has seen all things and has gained knowledge before birth. We do need to investigate which world Socrates refers to here. We do not need to know whether it is the world of the Forms that has got into the horizon of the *Meno*, or whether it is underworld or Hades, as the dialogue tells us. What we should know is that there is another world that is different from the sensible world, which will allow the soul to gain knowledge. Moreover, the *Meno* tells us that the soul “has seen all things here and in the underworld” (81c). Whether Socrates uses “has seen” in the sense of a metaphor or not, Plato actually treats the method or way of gaining knowledge the same as the process described by Socrates. Socrates is no longer an empiricist, since he does not believe that we could gain universal definitions through experience and over time. Of course, the process of gaining knowledge is still a kind of experience, but it is never an experience in the sensible world as we expect. The experience is gained in another world and would be brought by the soul into the sensible world. Then, it is not a kind of experience but rather a kind of recollection. In addition, knowledge that is gained in the process is no longer empirical knowledge, but innate knowledge, namely, it is gained before birth. Returning to the question of whether Socrates is an empiricist or an anti-empiricist: in the sense of being a pursuer of universal definition, Socrates is an anti-empiricist.

The conclusion from the arguments about the definition issue is that Socrates is probably an anti-empiricist in *Theaetetus* and Plato possibly gives his hint on the keynote of anti-empiricism of *Theaetetus* by using the name of Socrates,<sup>145</sup> which agrees with my analysis of Euclides.

### 3.4 Theodorus: the Function of Mathematics in *Theaetetus*

Theodorus<sup>146</sup> is the fourth person who needs to be discussed. He is a mathematician in Cyrene and was teaching mathematics in Athens just before the death of Socrates. Although his contribution to mathematics<sup>147</sup> has been questioned by some scholars,<sup>148</sup> it is unmistakable that Plato portrays Theodorus as an expert on mathematics.<sup>149</sup> Another point that should be noticed is that Socrates describes Protagoras as Theodorus' "dead friend" (168e) and jokes about him as the "measure" of "geometrical proofs" (168e), alluding to Protagoras' famous saying,

"Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not" (152a).<sup>150</sup>

Socrates asks Theodorus to defend Protagoras' idea,

"Do not go on imagining that it is my business to be straining every nerve to

<sup>145</sup> Socrates is not always the key speaker in all Plato's late period dialogues.

<sup>146</sup> Vlastos discusses some sources about the historical Theodorus and supplies information about him as a person from Diogenes Laertius. Vlastos (1991) pp. 274-275. I will not discuss anything about *Theaetetus* as a character in the dialogue *Sophist*.

<sup>147</sup> Theodorus' contribution is presented through the mouth of *Theaetetus* at 147d. It is the irrational number, according to Nails report. See Nails (2002) p.282.

<sup>148</sup> See Thesleff (1990) pp.489-513.

<sup>149</sup> Socrates does connect Theodorus to "astronomy and other sciences" as well at 169a.

<sup>150</sup> G. B. Kerferd carefully analyses Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things". See Kerferd (1981) pp. 84-93.

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defend your dead friend while you do nothing” (169a).

Protagoras who is an important figure in the dialogue does not appear in person, but the power of his idea is shown through Theaetetus and Theodorus. This strategy of casting puts Protagoras in the position of Plato in the sense that both have representatives in the text, though all the characters are actually controlled by the author of the dialogue, Plato. Protagoras himself is neither an anti-empiricist nor an empiricist, for he is a relativist, believing that everything perceived by an individual is true, as his famous saying shows. When we consider the character Theodorus, we have no idea what position Theodorus stands for. There is in fact a series of questions. Does Theodorus agree with Protagoras? Even if he does agree with Protagoras, what is the degree of agreement? Does he agree completely or just partly? If we grant that he agrees with Protagoras’ idea, how could we define his position on either empiricism or the opposite? As the dialogue shows, Socrates treats Theodorus as the representative of Protagoras, so whether Theodorus actually agrees with Protagoras’ idea is not important. There is some evidence, however, that Theodorus disagrees with Protagoras’ philosophy, or at least Protagoras’ idea on geometry. For Waterfield reminds us of a piece of testimony from Aristotle,

“...for no perceptible thing is straight or curved in this way; for a hoop touches a straight edge not at a point, but as Protagoras said it did, in his refutation of the geometers” (*Metaphysics*, 998a1-4).<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> See Waterfield (1987) pp. 193-194.

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Theodorus himself admits,

“It is not I, you know, Socrates, but Callias, the son of Hipponicus, who is the guardian of Protagoras’ relicts. As it happened, I very soon inclined away from abstract discussion to geometry” (164e-165a).

After Socrates offers his arguments to attack Protagoras’ idea on perception, Theodorus even admits, “...Protagoras’ statements are completely untrue” (179b).

The important issue is whether Theodorus is familiar with Protagoras’ philosophy or not, so that he is eligible to defend Protagoras’ philosophy as his representative. This seems beyond doubt. Socrates identifies Theodorus as the “dead friend” of Protagoras, so Socrates must think that Theodorus is good enough as the defender for Protagoras. This kind of ability contains two aspects: one is Theodorus’ familiarity with Protagoras’ idea; the other is Theodorus’ intelligence or cleverness as a defendant. Text at 170a and 178e shows that Theodorus is familiar with Protagoras’ idea. At 170a, Socrates says, “He (Protagoras) says, does he not, that things are for every man what they seem to him to be?” and Theodorus replies, “Yes, that is what he says”. At 178e, Theodorus admits, “And in fact, Socrates, this at any rate is a point on which Protagoras used to make strong claims to superiority over other people”. The examples for the second aspect are also easy to find, though most of the occasions when Theodorus speaks are like those of interlocutors in the Socratic dialogues, just muttering some sentences like “Yes, I agree.”, “Quite true.” or “Apparently.” However, at 179e-180b, Theodorus mentions and shows familiarity

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with the followers of Heraclitus which suggests that he is equipped for presenting philosophical ideas.<sup>152</sup>

Hence, Protagoras' position on either empiricism or anti-empiricism becomes less important than Theodorus' position on them. That is why Protagoras, whose philosophy occupies the dominant discussion of the perception section, does not appear in the framework or prologue of *Theaetetus*. Referring to the position on empiricism or its opposite that Theodorus holds, no sources prove it. There are four things relevant to Theodorus. Theodorus is a quite old man with long beard (168e). He introduces Theaetetus into the discussion (143e-144d). Therefore, he repeatedly prefers Theaetetus to answer Socrates' questions and arguments (165a-b; 168e; 183d). He mainly researches on geometry and other branches of philosophy, as Socrates says (145c-d), or more exactly, at 145a, both Socrates and Theaetetus think that Theodorus is not only a geometer, but "a master of astronomy and arithmetic and music" as well. He has an open mind about Protagoras' philosophy and wishes to keep away from abstract arguments (165a). It seems that Theodorus himself takes no position about the options between empiricism and anti-empiricism from his attitude to Protagoras' philosophy, i.e. he is concerned only with the concrete questions of geometry. This may be because he is too old to have energy to research other things. However, his identity as a researcher of geometry in the *Theaetetus* is interesting.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Colvin has explained what "followers of Heraclitus" or in his term, "the comrades of Heraclitus" means. He says, "It would be a mistake to think that this term refers to 'Heracliteans' in the same way that one might refer to 'Epicureans' or 'Stoics'. These men are the army of Heraclitus within the larger martial metaphor, not in the sense that Crito is the ἑταῖρος of Socrates (Crito 54D). What is more, they are an army that employs tactics appropriate to men who are crusading for flux" (p.764).

<sup>153</sup> Dorter particularly mentions Theodorus' poor memory and lazy lack of spirit through the evidence that he "cannot remember who Theaetetus' father is". Dorter believes the fact of Theodorus' poor memory is important, since it links to the message delivered in the *Meno*. I agree that this fact alludes to the *Meno*. However, I disagree



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When Vlastos discusses *Meno*, he points out, “knowledge of geometry is taken as the paradigm of all knowledge, including moral knowledge”,<sup>154</sup> Hence, is there no special meaning about the identity of Theodorus as a geometer? When we consider geometry, even mathematics in a broad sense, three issues immediately appear. The first issue is about ideas of the Pythagoreans (including Pythagoras and his followers).<sup>155</sup> The second one is that this recalls the famous example of a slave learning geometry in *Meno*. The last thing is about mathematics itself in Greece. We may consider these three issues together.

Kahn points out on Pythagorean influence on Plato that “Aristotle claims that Plato’s philosophy was profoundly influenced by Pythagorean teaching.”<sup>156</sup> As Aristotle has reported,

“...Only the name ‘participation’ was new; for the Pythagoreans say that things exist by imitation of numbers, and Plato says that they exist by participation, changing the name” (*Metaphysics*, 987b10-12).

Aristotle believes that Plato

“agreed with the Pythagoreans in saying that the One is substance and not a predicate of something else; and in saying that the numbers are the causes of the

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with Dorter’s idea, for someone A could be very familiar with another one B, but it is possible that A suddenly could not even remember B’s name. In addition, the evidences that Theodorus could defend Protagoras and could explain Heraclitus’ philosophy (179e-180a) have proved Theodorus’ competence for philosophical discussion. See Dorter (1994) p. 70.

<sup>154</sup> Vlastos offers us a brilliant discussion about the relationship between Socratic elenchus and mathematics; however, it is not what I will do here. See Vlastos (1991) p. 120. Nevertheless, Dorter disagrees with Vlastos by saying, “The *Meno*, however, reminded us that what one learns only by looking at the diagrams is not knowledge at all... The slave’s opinion will not be transformed into knowledge until he frees himself from dependence on particular diagrams or formulations”. Dorter (1994) p. 72.

<sup>155</sup> I have no room to discuss the history of mathematical development in ancient Greece. Therefore, I choose Pythagoras and Pythagoreans as the representatives and as a typical example.

<sup>156</sup> Kahn (2001) p.11.

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substance of the other things, he also agreed with them...” (*Metaphysics*, 987b24-25).

He still believes that Plato diverges “from the Pythagoreans in making the One and the numbers separate from things...” (*Metaphysics*, 987b29-30). More importantly, Kahn, citing Whitehead’s idea, reminds us that Pythagoras is “the first thinker to appreciate the function of mathematical ideas in abstract thought”.<sup>157</sup> There are two topics about Pythagorean philosophy relevant to my arguments: one is the idea of reincarnation; the other is mathematics.

I do not intend to discuss in detail the Pythagoreans’ idea about reincarnation,<sup>158</sup> but I wish to note the relationship between reincarnation in the Pythagoreans and Plato’s thought. Both of them believe in reincarnation, though with some difference in detail. On my reading of the order of the dialogues, the first discussion of reincarnation in Plato is in the *Meno*, where Socrates introduces the idea of reincarnation by pretending that he heard it from some other wise men and women (81a) and defines this idea as a “divine matter” (81a), which he himself thinks to be “both true and beautiful” (81a). Importantly, Socrates treats reincarnation as the premise of the recollection theory. Then, in order to prove the reincarnation and the recollection theory, Socrates asks a slave boy questions on a geometrical problem and successfully leads the slave to gain the correct answer to the geometrical question by virtue of asking questions. Why does Plato choose geometry as the proof of the theory of recollection? The answer to the geometrical question that is treated

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<sup>157</sup> Kahn (2001) p.11.

<sup>158</sup> Kahn gives us a discussion on this topic fully. See Kahn (2001) pp. 19-21.

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as a piece of knowledge was seen by the soul of the slave and recollected or regained by the slave after a series of relevant questions from Socrates. This answer in fact links knowledge, the immortal soul and recollection together. In the *Phaedo*, when Socrates again mentions the immortality of the soul and the recollection theory, he uses the latter as a proof of the former. While he does not employ any proof from geometry, he introduces the theory of Forms this time. In *Republic*, Plato claims mathematics as the object of mathematical reasoning (διάνοια), which is only different from the Forms and intelligence or dialectic (νόησις) by the fact that mathematics still needs “visible figures” (*Republic*, 510d). In the *Republic*, mathematics that is akin to the Forms is about “what happens in geometry and related sciences” (511b). It would not be strange if geometry in the *Meno* has the same function in Socrates’ arguments as the Forms in the *Phaedo*. It is clear that geometry is a special discipline to Plato.

The most important and relevant question is the connection between mathematics and empiricism or its opposite. Plato deliberately sets Socrates’ interlocutor Theodorus as a mathematician, especially considering that Theodorus’ main interest is in geometry, which has a close relationship to a series of important theories that Plato holds about epistemology, including the theory of recollection, the theory of Forms and the immortality of soul. All these theories stand on the side of anti-empiricism. Further, mathematical proof is obtained from deductive reasoning and could not be gained through induction. Consider the texts at 147d-148b, where Theaetetus reports how Theodorus taught him the irrational numbers and the relevant

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mathematical notions:

“Theodorus here was demonstrating to us with the aid of diagrams a point about powers. He was showing us that the power of 3 square feet and the power of 5 square feet are not commensurable in length with the power of 1 square foot...since the powers were turning out to be unlimited in number. We might try to collect the powers in question under one term, which could apply to them all.” (147d-e). And “We divided all numbers into two classes. Any number which can be produced by the multiplication of equal numbers, we compared to a square in shape...” (147e).

Theaetetus also introduces the procedure of finding out the notion of “oblong number” and the term “length” (148a), which is the same procedure as at 147d-e. It is important to see that the basic method that Theodorus employs is to explain the notions and express the geometrical ideas by showing and applying a diagram, a square.<sup>159</sup>

It seems that the whole process of expressing the geometrical idea and introducing the notions of mathematics necessarily needs the experience or observation of the diagrams. Plato is correct to say that mathematics needs visible things in the *Republic* (510d). However, these visible things just help the learners to gain the idea of mathematics and make the abstract mathematical expressions or notions or mathematical proofs easier to the learners. That is to say, these sensible things do not have any essential influence on the mathematics itself. We could employ a diagram, say, a square, to explain the relevant concepts, but the idea expressed by the diagram could not be gained merely through observation. The diagram itself is a kind of abstract thing. Take as an example a diagram showing

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<sup>159</sup> I do not intend to discuss the concrete mathematical question in detail. For discussion about the mathematical question itself, see C. C. W. Taylor (1967) pp. 200-201, Thomas, I. rev. edn. (1991) p. 110 and Fowler (1999) pp. 378-379.

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“roundness”, we could not find any perfect roundness in the sensible world not even in a drawing of a round shape on paper. The roundness is an abstract thing, separate from the sensible things in the world. Roundness is like the abstract ideas. An abstract idea could be written by virtue of a human language in a book, an article, or even on the ground by using chalk and so could be delivered through the sensible world. However, the “ideas” expressed in various ways or methods are not the idea itself. They are just the copies of the idea. Roundness is the same for the same reason, since roundness could be copied in different ways and the mathematicians could employ it to explain the notions or even invent the notion for it, but the mathematical ideas relevant to roundness would not necessarily relate to a diagram of it. In this sense, we could say, mathematics, in Plato’s mind, when Plato was writing *Theaetetus*, represented a position on anti-empiricism.

Theodorus who is an important interlocutor of Socrates and one of the characters who appears in person in the *Theaetetus*, is a representative of anti-empiricism by virtue of his identity as a mathematician. Nevertheless, Theodorus’ performance, namely, his speaking, in the dialogue shows at least two things that go against this conclusion. Firstly, he is an old man who has no more energy to use on any other issue or argument except the concrete geometrical questions or teaching his pupils (*Theaetetus* 146b, 165a). Moreover, he is an open-minded person who is not concerned about the philosophical arguments and does not adhere to any philosophical school. Surely, Theodorus himself may personally hold no position on the side of either Socrates or Protagoras. However, the important thing is why Plato

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sets a mathematician as an interlocutor of Socrates and a character in the dialogue. Plato as a perfect dramatist has no reason to set the cast in his dialogue casually. Additionally, mathematics, especially geometry, is a special discipline to Plato. Therefore, there is no reason to think that the character Theodorus as the geometer is not a kind of symbol. Referring to which kind of symbol Theodorus represents, as the evidence has shown, he is a figure symbolizing anti-empiricism.

My arguments so far have shown how that Euclides, Socrates and Theodorus are the representatives of anti-empiricism in *Theaetetus*. It is now time to investigate the last character Theaetetus, after whom the dialogue is named, and what philosophical position he holds or what he represents.

### 3.5 Theaetetus: in what way similar to Socrates?

Theaetetus is a complicated character in Plato's dialogues. He appears not only in *Theaetetus*, but also in *Sophist* and *Statesman*.<sup>160</sup> The fact that he is the main interlocutor in the *Theaetetus* adds to the difficulty of identifying his philosophical position. The other difficulty comes from the distinction between the historical Theaetetus and Plato's Theaetetus. Debra Nails reminds us, "It is important to distinguish what Theaetetus actually says in the dialogue from the mathematical developments attributed to him by later source seeking the origins of what Euclid codified in *Elements*".<sup>161</sup> I will not discuss the historical Theaetetus, for two reasons.

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<sup>160</sup> As the same to Theodorus, I will not discuss anything about Theaetetus as a character in the dialogue *Sophist*.

<sup>161</sup> See Nails (2002) p.275. Nails also offers us an ample amount of historical facts and details about historical Theaetetus.

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Firstly, most information about the historical Theaetetus is relevant to mathematical issues that are not helpful for identifying Theaetetus' philosophical position in the dialogue. Secondly, we do not need to refer to any discussion on history, since the information about Theaetetus that Plato gives in the dialogue is sufficient.

Since we do not have sufficient evidence and information on Theodorus, his identity as a mathematician is important to define his philosophical position. But this does not apply to Theaetetus, for he is the main interlocutor in the *Theaetetus*. Moreover, the whole dialogue starts with his death and is named after him. Since this dialogue is a memorial for him,<sup>162</sup> it is appropriate that the dialogue gives us some more information about him.

Theaetetus as a person is interesting. Theodorus describes his appearance in the following way "he is not beautiful at all, but is rather like you, snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out" (143e). Maybe Theaetetus' appearance is not worth praising, but his disposition is quite good, according to Theodorus' introduction:

"I have never yet seen anyone so amazingly gifted. Along with a quickness beyond the capacity of most people, he has an unusually gentle temper; and, to crown it all, he is as manly a boy as any of his fellows. I never thought such a combination could exist...this boy approaches his studies in a smooth, sure, effective way, and with great good-temper..." (144a).

This quotation points out Theaetetus' two essential characters, namely, he has a quick mind with a good and gentle temper. His quickness refers to "retentive" quality (144a), compared to "minds that are sluggish, somehow -- freighted with a bad

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<sup>162</sup> See Nails (2002) p.275.

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memory” (144a). Surely, we have no evidence to say that Plato’s emphasis on good memory refers to the theory of recollection. Nevertheless, it could still be a clue alluding to the recollection theory. The fact that Theaetetus is set as a mathematician and geometer by Plato would lead Plato’s readers who are familiar with *Meno* to think about the theory of recollection, since here Plato uses an example of geometrical learning to prove the recollection theory.

After this description and the introduction about Theaetetus from Theodorus, Socrates supplements and summarizes:

“I want to see for myself what sort of a face I have. Theodorus says I am like you. But look. If you and I each had a lyre, and Theodorus had told us that they were both similarly tuned, should we have taken his word for it straight away? Or should we have tried to find out if he was speaking with any expert knowledge of music (μουσικός)?” Theaetetus replies, “Oh, we should have inquired into that.” Socrates continues, “And if we had found that he was a musician, we should have believed what he said; but if we found he had no such qualification, we should have put no faith in him.” (144e)

There is a turning point here, for two reasons. Firstly, Theaetetus’ appearance and his identity are summarized by Socrates, which is important for identifying Theaetetus’ philosophical position or what kind of symbol Theaetetus is. Secondly, this is a transition from a common conversation to a philosophical investigation of knowledge. I will discuss the nature of the transition in the next section. But for now will concentrate on the philosophical position of Theaetetus.

Socrates follows Theodorus’ description that Theaetetus has the same appearance as his, i.e. “not beautiful at all”, but “snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out”



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and makes a joke “I want to see for myself what sort of a face I have” (144d). At 144d-e above, Socrates employs a lyre analogy to describe the similarity between himself and Theaetetus.<sup>163</sup> This lyre analogy has two advantages. One is that since the analogy follows Theodorus’ conclusion that both Socrates and Theaetetus are similar, then it gives the impression that Socrates only uses it to refer to the similarity between Socrates and Theaetetus in appearance. The second advantage is that Socrates immediately turns the similarity between him and Theaetetus in appearance, as Theodorus suggests, to a spiritual similarity between them. Socrates employs this hypothetical analogy to posit a similarity between him and Theaetetus, imagining they each have a lyre which Theodorus has said are “similarly tuned” (144e). Whether the judgement about the lyres is true or not is to be determined by whether Theodorus is an expert of music (144e). Similarly, whether Theodorus’ view that Socrates is similar to Theaetetus in appearance is reliable is said to depend on whether Theodorus is an expert on drawing (144e-145a). But the similarity between Socrates and Theaetetus in appearance seems not true, for Theodorus is not an expert on drawing. However, in the following text, Theaetetus admits immediately that Theodorus is a geometer and an expert on “astronomy and arithmetic and music” in response to Socrates’ questions (145a). Again, Theaetetus confirms that he was learning geometry, astronomy, music and arithmetic from Theodorus (145c-d). These facts show that Theodorus is qualified as an expert on music as well as in mathematics. Therefore, if Theodorus compares the lyre of Socrates and the lyre of

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<sup>163</sup> C.f. Benardete (1997) pp. 29-30.

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Theaetetus, the lyre analogy could be true, for if Theodorus is an expert on music, we would be justified in believing him. Even if Theodorus only wishes to point out the similarity between Socrates and Theaetetus in appearance, Socrates wisely turns their physical similarity to spiritual similarity by virtue of Theodorus' description of Theaetetus. Socrates deliberately makes this move and the lyre analogy is only the first stage. The second stage of the move is mentioning "good and wise" at 145b, where Socrates again makes a hypothesis: "Suppose he (Theodorus) said one of us was good and wise..." (145b). Socrates needs the second hypothesis, for Theodorus not only introduces Theaetetus' appearance, but also praises Theaetetus' good qualities or personality, so the second hypothesis supplements the lyre analogy and completes it.

Socrates' strategy of making a move from a physical similarity to a spiritual similarity between him and Theaetetus is successful, since Theodorus is an expert on music, even though Socrates imposes this move on Theodorus. Nevertheless, is the similarity between Socrates and Theaetetus in appearance not true, only because Theodorus is not an expert on drawing? Theodorus never tries in the *Theaetetus* to link Socrates and Theaetetus together in regard to their the characters or personalities. All that Theodorus claims is the similarity in appearance between Socrates and Theaetetus. Theodorus only mentions the similarity at one place, when he introduces Theaetetus to Socrates for the very first time, where he says, "He is not beautiful at all, but is rather like you, snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out" (143e).

As the texts have shown, Theodorus does not employ the lyre analogy to

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describe the similarity, so Socrates' claim that Theodorus is unqualified to use the analogy is unfair. What Socrates could do is just doubt whether he himself is eligible to use the analogy, rather than Theodorus. We could not help to asking is whether Socrates' hesitation about the analogy is relevant to the similarity between him and Theaetetus in appearance. This question is important, because if the answer is a positive one, then Socrates may actually doubt the similarity of appearance between them. Or if the answer is a negative one, then Socrates' hesitation is not relevant to the similarity between him and Theaetetus. That is to say, he does think that both of them are physically similar. Socrates' hesitation about the "tune" analogy conveys Socratic doubt on whether Theodorus has any expert knowledge of music (144e). Theodorus does not use the analogy, but Socrates himself does. Further, if the analogy is not used by Theodorus and what Socrates wishes to find out is just whether "he was speaking with any expert knowledge of music" (144e), then his hesitation is irrelevant to the similarity, even if Theodorus is not an expert of music. Though he cannot speak with any expert knowledge of music, the similarity is still there. Hence, Socrates cleverly introduces a new topic from the analogy that he himself employs. If so, Socrates as he has admitted actually accepts the similarity between himself and Theaetetus. What makes Socrates hesitate to accept the analogy of the tune is the analogy itself, i.e. the analogy could not be applied to the similarity, for there is no expert of music among them. Therefore, the denial of the analogy does not make the similarity impossible.

In sum, Socrates does not deny that he is similar to Theaetetus in appearance

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and his “tune” analogy is not relevant to the physical similarity. This summary does not help to identify Theaetetus’ philosophical position or to confirm what philosophical symbol Plato wishes Theaetetus to be. However, two issues need to be further considered. Firstly, why does Plato choose Theaetetus who is physically similar to Socrates as the main interlocutor in the dialogue? Secondly, even though the “tune” analogy is not relevant to the similar appearance between Socrates and Theaetetus, is it meaningful in itself? Or, in other words, does the analogy itself deliver some information that could help us to identify Theaetetus’ philosophical position?

The first question definitely has an answer, but, unfortunately, we will never be sure about it, since we are not Plato. What we could do mostly is to make a deduction or a guess from the information or evidence we have. We need to consider two issues carefully, i.e. the death of Theaetetus and the physical similarity between him and Socrates.

At the beginning of the dialogue, Euclides says to Terpsion that he just came from the country (142a), where he met Theaetetus (142a) who is nearly dead (142b). Theaetetus, as Euclides reports, was “taken to Athens from the camp at Corinth” (142a). Moreover, Euclides mentions Theaetetus’ behavior in the battle which won other people’s praises (142b). The setting of the beginning of the dialogue gives its readers an impression that it is a memorial for Theaetetus. Why does Plato make such a setting? This kind of memorial setting for the beginning of a dialogue is rare in Plato’s dialogues. An important question is, “Is it a coincidence that Euclides

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praises Theaetetus' behavior in a battle just like Socrates' bravery described in other dialogues?" Laches reports on Socrates' action in the retreat from Delium:

"I have seen him elsewhere keeping up not only his father's reputation but that of his country. He marched with me in the retreat from Delium, and I can tell you that if the rest had been willing to behave in the same manner, our city would be safe and we could not then have suffered a disaster of that kind." (*Laches* 181b).

Alcibiades in *Symposium* supplies more details about Socrates' behavior in the same retreat:

"And if you would like to know what he was like in battle-- this is a tribute he really deserves...during the very battle, Socrates single-handedly saved my life!... (220d-e) You should also have seen him at our horrible retreat from Delium (221a)...Even from a great distance it was obvious that this was a brave man, who would put up a terrific fight if anyone approached him (*Symposium* 221b)."

The question of whether this parallel is a coincidence becomes more significant when Theodorus introduces Theaetetus to Socrates and emphasizes the similarity between them. From the information in the dialogue, Plato seems deliberately to emphasize the similarity between Socrates and Theaetetus. Socrates and Theaetetus are similar with each other in appearance and have the same behavior in the battle. If we now consider the meaning of the analogy of the tune which seems to refer to some abstract quality, then it seems that the analogy would lead its readers to think about the similarities between Socrates and Theaetetus, not only in appearance, but in characters or personalities as well.

Plato deliberately emphasizes the similarity between Socrates and Theaetetus

through the setting and opening conversation. This makes us consider whether Plato is implying that Theaetetus also shares the same philosophical position as Socrates or whether he is treated at least as a symbol of Socrates, namely, a representative of anti-empiricism. Further, Theaetetus as a geometer, or at least a student of geometry, may also be a symbol of anti-empiricism. If we combine these two considerations, we could say that Theaetetus is a symbol of anti-empiricism. He is deliberately chosen as the main interlocutor by Plato in the *Theaetetus*, this symbolism is important.

All the persons who appear in the dialogue are deliberately selected by Plato as characters to show that the keynote of the dialogue is anti-empiricism, rather than empiricism.

### **Conclusion**

All the five characters who appear and have the conversation in the dialogue either have their own philosophical position of anti-empiricism or are selected by Plato as symbols of anti-empiricism. All the information about their identity and their ideas in history constructs an allusion, namely, Plato suggests at the outset that the keynote of the whole dialogue is anti-empiricism. Commentators on this dialogue, such as Burnyeat, Sedley and McDowell, do not discuss this in their commentaries.

The arguments about anti-empiricism of the characters in the *Theaetetus* will still produce doubt, since it is possible that the selection of those characters is just a coincidence. Further, when Plato starts his first investigation of what knowledge is

by discussing whether knowledge is perception, it seems impossible to say all his theories and ideas in that discussion are anti-empirical. To resolve this apparent contradiction, it is time to consider Plato's examination of knowledge as perception.

## Chapter Four *Theaetetus* on Sense-perception

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will deal with the issue of perception in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>164</sup> In chapter three, I have suggested that the setting of *Theaetetus* alludes to anti-empiricism. Nevertheless, it is still possible to wonder why Plato creates such a setting for *Theaetetus*, especially when we start considering the first definition of knowledge in *Theaetetus*, i.e. knowledge is perception.<sup>165</sup> The discussion between Socrates and his interlocutors about knowledge as perception seems hardly to anti-empiricism. However, I will argue: (1) the failure of the definition of knowledge as perception shows that Plato's philosophical position could not be empiricism; and (2) the investigation of knowledge as perception could be a useful supplement for understanding the outline of Plato's anti-empirical epistemology in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*.

Socrates and his interlocutors, Theaetetus and Theodorus, discuss the possibility of knowledge as sense perception as their first attempt to define "knowledge". Although they finally realize that sense perception cannot be a part of the definition of knowledge, the whole discussion of knowledge as sense perception is still worth

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<sup>164</sup> "αἴσθησις" (perception) is ambiguous in Plato's philosophy. Allan Silverman believes "only in the *Timaeus* does Plato clearly say what kind of capacity aisthesis is... according to the *Timaeus*, aisthesis is a non-cognitive capacity of the irrational soul whose objects are limited to the so-called special sensibles, e.g. colours, tastes, sounds, etc". See Silverman (1990) p. 148.

<sup>165</sup> Theaetetus enumerates knowledge as geometry and cobbling at 146c-d. I do not consider it as Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge as some scholars think, since Theaetetus has not realized what kind of definition that Socrates wishes to pursue.



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analysing, since Socrates describes a process of how we could gain knowledge through sense perception.

The strategy in this chapter is to follow the progress of the conversation between Socrates and his interlocutors. In the first section 4.1, I will consider how Theaetetus enumerates various kinds of knowledge, and why Socrates refuses to accept Theaetetus' answer. Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things", and the Socratic criticism of it, which can be divided into three stages, will also be discussed. Protagoras' theory and Socrates' responses to it will be considered in the next three sections, namely, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. Particularly, Socrates in his criticism employs as an example how to see colour, which is important for understanding Socrates' ideas on sense perception. I will investigate in detail the process of perceiving colour. Although "man is the measure of all things" is closely relevant to and nearly the same as "knowledge is sense perception", Socrates realizes that both "man is the measure of all things" and "knowledge is sense perception" depend on how "motion" is understood.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, the criticism of both of these propositions is not sufficient unless he and his interlocutors consider Heraclitus' "All things are in motion".<sup>167</sup> That will be dealt with in section 4.5. In the last section of this chapter 4.6, I will briefly explain why perception cannot be a part of knowledge for Socrates.

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<sup>166</sup> As I have discussed in chapter three, the keynote of the *Theaetetus* is anti-empiricism. Therefore, in the next chapters on *Theaetetus*, I will assume that this is clear and will not emphasize or repeat this any longer. My interpretation comes from and is similar to Burnyeat's understanding. Burnyeat calls it "Reading B". See Burnyeat (1990) p.9. Holland confirms that Plato in *Theaetetus* attacks theories of empiricism by analysing the texts at 184b-186e. Holland (1973) pp. 97-116, especially section one.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Gerson (2009) p. 47.

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#### 4.1 Theaetetus' primary answer on the nature of knowledge and Socrates as midwife

At *Theaetetus* 144e, Socrates emphasizes the similarity between him and Theaetetus. The quotation on the expert in music at 144e is a natural transition from a common conversation to a philosophical investigation for knowledge.

Nevertheless, before diving into the texts at 144e, it is important to go back to the texts at 144c to consider the context. When Socrates asks Theodorus about Theaetetus' family, Theodorus says he does not remember it and bids Socrates, "... But look and see if you recognize (γινώσκεις) him." Socrates replies,

"Yes, I know (γινώσκω) him. He's son of Euphronius of Sunium -- very much the kind of person, my friend, that you tell me his son is... But I do not know (οἶδα) the boy's name" (144c).<sup>168</sup>

I am not interested in the history of Theaetetus' family, but the vocabulary in the quotation should be noticed. The concepts of "recognize" and "know" are used in a common way in this quoted text, for everyone would chat with each other like that in ordinary life. Socrates says that he knows the boy, namely Theaetetus, but does not know the boy's name at that moment. He did know some facts, i.e. Theaetetus is the son of Euphronius of Sunium and some other information about Theaetetus' father. So far, the conversation still stays in casual, ordinary terms and is not on the philosophical level. There is no reason to assume that Socrates or Plato wishes to use the word "know" as part of a developing philosophical investigation.

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<sup>168</sup> All the quotations of the text of *Theaetetus* are translated by M. J. Levett, revised by Myles Burnyeat. See, Burnyeat (1990) pp. 259-351. See also, Cooper (1997) pp. 158-234.

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After this description and the introduction about Theaetetus from Theodorus, Socrates replies,

“I want to see for myself what sort of a face I have. Theodorus says I am like you. But look. If you and I each had a lyre, and Theodorus had told us that they were both similarly tuned, should we have taken his word for it straight away? Or should we have tried to find out if he was speaking with any **expert knowledge of music** (μουσικός)?”

Theaetetus replies, “Oh, we should have enquired into that.” (144e)

After this, Socrates continues,

“And if we had found that he was a musician, we should have believed what he said; but if we found he had no such qualification, we should have put no faith in him” (144e).

As I have argued in chapter three,<sup>169</sup> the analogy of tuning here is irrelevant to the similarity between Socrates and Theaetetus in their physical nature and appearance, though it suggests that Theaetetus has the same characteristics or personality as Socrates or he is a philosophical symbol of anti-empiricism. Therefore, the analogy of music creates a smooth transition to a new topic, from a common conversation to a philosophical investigation. Two things need to be noticed in the quotation. Firstly, although Socrates does not use “γινώσκω” and “οἶδα” in the text of 144e, he uses the word “μουσικός” to refer to a person with expert knowledge of music. The term “μουσικός”, unlike the words “γινώσκω” and “οἶδα” at 144c which are used in a very vague way, is used in a very rigorous sense. The usage of the words “γινώσκω”

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<sup>169</sup> See Section 3.4, Chapter Three.

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and “οἶδα” at 144c could refer to any information or piece of knowledge that already exist in a soul or mind. For instance, I tell someone that I know the country of France, just knowing one fact about it, e.g. “France is a European country”, even if I have no idea about the fact that its language is French or have no other information about it. In an extreme example, I just know the name of “France” and know nothing else about it but when someone mentions France, I could still say, “Oh, I know that country”. But there is a third possibility between “I know ...” and “I do not know (I am ignorant) ...”. The rigorous usage of “know” or “knowledge” is not being used at 144e, since the terms are used in a looser sense. Nevertheless, does Plato or Socrates realize the third possibility in *Theaetetus*? For the moment, I put the question aside and concentrate on the passage that follow.

Following Socrates’ comment at 152c, expert knowledge must be not only unerring but changeless as well. In English, we use “know” in at least two ways, the broad sense and the narrow or rigorous sense. The former, broad sense, refers to any information, principle, or piece of knowledge a person has. This is the usage of “know” at 144c (and other places in the text, such as 145a and 145d<sup>170</sup>). In contrast, the latter, narrow sense, refers to some principle or knowledge that never changes, or, in other words, is beyond time and will be right forever. There are two kinds of usage of the word “know” (and “knowledge”) in the opening texts of *Theaetetus* as well. The broad sense which is used in common life and can refer to any information or principles in our mind or soul, and the narrow sense which specifically refers to some

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<sup>170</sup> At 145d-e, knowledge and wisdom is said to be identical. David Sedley offers an analysis on this text. See Sedley and Brown (1993) pp.125-149+151.

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“eternal” or changeless principles, such as mathematics, geometry or algebra.<sup>171</sup>

Since Theodorus and Theaetetus are concerned with the specialist expertise of geometry, Plato’s readers would find the transition of different usage of knowledge at 144e natural. Moreover, 144e is the first time in *Theaetetus* that Socrates begins to pursue the usage of knowledge as the knowledge of a skill. The idea at work here is that once a person has gained the knowledge of a skill, he or she will be unerring in their expertise or skill.

According to the texts, Theaetetus does not notice the trap that Socrates uses when he employs the analogy of the tune. Theaetetus like interlocutors in other dialogues, tries to enumerate various species of knowledge, when he is facing the Socratic question, “What do you think knowledge is?”. Thus, he responds,

“I think that the things Theodorus teaches are knowledge -- I mean geometry and the subjects you enumerated just now. Then again there are the crafts such as cobbling, whether you take them together or separately. They must be knowledge, surely.” (146c-d)

Socrates refuses to accept his answer,

“...I asked you for one thing and you have given me many; I wanted something simple, and I have got a variety.” (146d).

Socrates’ objection leads us to think about his objection to Meno,

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<sup>171</sup> The knowledge on these subjects is treated as changeless or right in antiquity, but wrong in modern times.

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“I am looking for one virtue, I have found you to have a whole swarm of them” (72a).<sup>172</sup>

Both Theaetetus and Meno try to count various kinds of something when they are asked to give a definition. It is a familiar response for those people who have no philosophical training and therefore do not understand the Socratic requirement of a universal definition. Additionally, Socrates changes the topic to a philosophical investigation suddenly and Theaetetus obviously is not ready for it. In such a situation, it is not strange that Theaetetus makes the same mistake as Meno.

The two usages of knowledge are mixed together in the texts until Socrates asks Theaetetus “what on earth is knowledge?” (145e). From this point onwards, knowledge in the narrow sense dominates the rest of the dialogue.

At first, Theaetetus still understands “knowledge” in the broad sense, so he gives Socrates his answer to what knowledge is (146d), “the cobbling”, mathematics, geometry and music all are knowledge. Ironically, Socrates claims that this answer is really a “generous” answer (146d) and then he refuses to accept it by using the following argument:

(1) Cobbling = knowledge of making shoes (146d)

(2) Carpentering = knowledge of making wooden furniture (146e)

(3) This is not the answer to the question “what is knowledge?”, but the answer

to “how many are the branches of knowledge?” (146e)<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Cornford has noticed this, by saying “It is significant that this introductory conversation runs closely parallel with the first part of an earlier dialogue, the *Meno*.” See Cornford (1935) p.27.

<sup>173</sup> P. T. Geach thinks that Socrates in such a case is asking a general criterion for a thing. He argues that this method has problems and calls it “the Socratic fallacy”. Cf. Geach (1966) pp. 33-34. M. F. Burnyeat has a discussion about “the Socratic fallacy” in *Theaetetus* 146c-147c. See Burnyeat (1977) pp. 381-393.

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Socrates here, however, not only shows that Theaetetus' answer is not the right answer to his question, but also reminds his readers that he is currently discussing knowledge in the philosophical sense, namely the narrow sense.

Socrates immediately points out that if someone does not know what knowledge is, he will not know the knowledge of a skill either. In order to make his points meaningful to Theaetetus, Socrates gives him an example, just as he offers Meno three definitions in the dialogue *Meno*. At 147a-b, Socrates raises the question "What is clay?" and observes that it would be absurd to imagine that

"...the person who asked the question would understand anything from our answer when we say 'clay', whether we add that it is dollmakers' clay or any other craftsman's. Or do you think that anyone can understand the name of a thing when he does not know what the thing is?"

The same principle can be applied to cobbling and any other subject that Theaetetus has mentioned in his answer. After this claim, Socrates offers an example of the answer to "what is clay?" to show the standard or criterion of the answer of the question "what is knowledge?" that he wants. Socrates says: clay "is earth mixed with liquid" (147c). This definition is not fitting to the formula "knowledge = true opinion + an account of the reason why" which is discussed at *Meno*, since clay "is earth mixed with liquid" does not show which part of it belongs to true opinion and which part of it is the account of the reason why. Rather it is closer to the definition of Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge, "knowledge is perception". Everyone could conclude that clay "is earth mixed with liquid" by perception. Maybe, as

Socrates has claimed a little earlier, his definition of clay is just “a short and commonplace answer” (147c). Then the definition of the clay may be used only to let Theaetetus gain his own “short and commonplace answer” about “what is knowledge?”<sup>174</sup>

Enlightened by Socrates, Theaetetus himself now describes his discovery about two kinds of powers: one is “a square” or “equilateral number”; the other is “oblong number” (148a). Socrates praises this and points out that he wants Theaetetus “in the same way to give **one single account** (ἐνὶ λόγῳ προσειπεῖν) of the many branches of knowledge” (148d). Indeed, Socrates’ usage of “knowledge” is so rigorous that Theaetetus admits he “never hear(s) anyone else state the matter in the way that you (Socrates) require” (148e).

After the first attempt at the definition of knowledge, Socrates does not immediately ask Theaetetus for his second answer. Rather he interrupts the topic and gives us an interlude on his method or skill of midwifery (149a-151d). Comparing this with the structure of the dialogue *Meno* shows that both dialogues have the same compositional structure. For after *Meno* offers a list of virtues, the dialogue *Meno* is also interrupted in the same way – in that case by the so-called *Meno’s* paradox. After supplying an explanation of Socratic midwifery, *Theaetetus* turns its direction to the three definitions of knowledge which are the main body of the dialogue. Similarly, after *Meno’s* paradox, *Meno* completely turns into the discussion of epistemology. However, there is also a difference in structure between these two

<sup>174</sup> Lesley Brown thinks that the texts of Socrates rebuts *Meno’s* definition of virtue at *Meno* 79 and Theaetetus’ definition of knowledge at *Theaetetus* 146-147 reflects the priority of whole over parts when Socrates pursues definitions. See Brown (1994) pp. 232-234.



dialogues. Before Meno's paradox, Meno not only enumerates different kinds of virtue but also offers other definitions of virtue. But after the paradox, he has no opportunity to define virtue any longer. *Theaetetus* is different. Theaetetus offers his three definitions after the interlude of midwifery and the whole dialogue thereafter relates to those three definitions.

The interruption of midwifery has the same structural position as Meno's paradox and is a turning point in *Theaetetus*. Since Socratic midwifery is a complicated issue,<sup>175</sup> I intend to quote and discuss only those sentences that are necessarily and relevant to my arguments here.

Socrates introduces his midwifery as following:

"...Then do you mean to say you have never heard about my being the son of a good hefty midwife, Phaenarete?"... "You know, I suppose, that women never practise as midwives while they are still conceiving and bearing children themselves. It is only those who are past child-bearing who take this up"... "She [Artemis] did not, it is true, entrust the duties of midwifery to barren women, because human nature is too weak to acquire skill where it has no experience"... "[T]here is not in midwifery the further complication, that the patients are sometimes delivered of phantoms and sometimes of realities, and that the two are hard to distinguish. If there were, then the midwife's greatest and noblest function would be to distinguish the true from the false offspring..." (149a- 150b)

Another difference that Socrates observes is that:

"I attend men and not women, and that I watch over the labour of their souls, not of their bodies..." (150b)

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<sup>175</sup> Sedley reminds us to notice the distinction between "a Socratic surface" and "Platonic undercurrent". Further, he summarises ten facts about Socratic midwifery. See Sedley (2004) pp. 30-37. The midwifery also relates to other issues in Platonic and Socratic philosophy. One of them, for example, is the relationship between this skill and Socratic claims to know nothing. Irwin and Vlastos have important discussions on this topic. See, Irwin (1995) pp. 17-19 and pp. 27-30. Vlastos (1994) pp. 39-66.

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The passage (149a-151d)<sup>176</sup> is famous as Socrates' midwifery. It is an important interlude in *Theaetetus*, for it shows that gaining knowledge is no longer the task of a single agent relating to an object of knowledge. Rather, the process of gaining knowledge needs the third factor, namely, the midwife. This third element will help us to understand Socrates' discussion on knowledge as perception in *Theaetetus*, especially the process of how eyes perceive the colour white. This third element also helps us to understand the example of Meno's slave gaining the answer to a geometrical question in *Meno*. *Meno* does not present Socrates as midwife, but he actually is and we now understand that the process of recollection also needs a midwife for helping the agent to recollect.

To Socrates' himself, he is barren of wisdom, meaning that he has no knowledge. For Socrates treats wisdom as knowledge: "So knowledge and wisdom will be the same thing" (145e). The midwifery passage seems to supply a framework for how we get knowledge. The framework is summarized as follows:

Step one: there is an agent and a midwife.

Step two: the agent produces opinions about something by means of the help from the midwife.

Step three: the midwife and the agent together check the production of the agent, i.e. the agent's opinion about something.

Step four: if the production is a "wind-egg", then they return to the step one. If the production is a good and reasonable one, then they continue to the next step.

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<sup>176</sup> Here, its significance of historical Socrates and the problems about the some difficult sentences could be ignored.

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Step five: if the production is checked and agreed on by both the agent and midwife, it means the agent gains knowledge of something.<sup>177</sup>

There are two functions of the midwife in the process of gaining knowledge: the midwife needs to lead the agent to produce the agent's own opinion on something and the midwife needs to check whether the agent's production is a real piece of knowledge or just a "wind-egg".

#### **4.2 Knowledge as sense-perception and Socrates' first response to Protagoras' theory**

After the interlude of midwifery, Theaetetus offers his first definition.

Theaetetus claims,

"It seems to me that a man who knows something perceives what he knows, and the way it appears at present, at any rate, is that knowledge is simply perception." (151e)

Socrates thinks that this is "a good straight answer" (151e) and asks, "You hold that knowledge is perception?" Theaetetus confirms confidently, "Yes" (151e). Socrates connects Theaetetus' first definition to Protagoras' famous saying, namely, "Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not" (152a).<sup>178</sup> Socrates immediately adds a discussion

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<sup>177</sup> The relationship between midwifery and the theory of recollection is not dealt with here. Sedley offers us a wonderful explanation on it. See Sedley (2004) pp.28-30.

<sup>178</sup> Socrates presents Protagoras' idea as a kind of epistemological relativism. However, it is a question whether Protagoras himself in history holds the theory of relativism. Lee Yoon Cheol in his PhD dissertation tries to reconstruct Protagoras' ideas in history as "objectivism". He tries to prove that "Even when Protagoras utilises

about the exact meaning of Protagoras' saying "man is the measure of all things" and to explain it gives us an example of the same wind making different persons experience various feelings (152a-c). Thereafter, Socrates summarizes, "Perception, then, is always of what is, and unerring --- as befits knowledge" ("Αἴσθησις ἄρα τοῦ ὄντος ἀεί ἐστὶν καὶ ἀψευδὲς ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα.").<sup>179</sup> Theaetetus agrees, "So it appears" (152c).

This statement on knowledge is very important. As Myles Burnyeat says:

"Plato himself accepts the theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus, subject to certain qualifications: in particular the theories must be restricted (as their authors did not take care to restrict them) to perception and the world of sensible things. Sensible things are, Plato agrees, in a perpetual flux of becoming, and in perception each of us has 'measure', i.e. an incorrigible awareness, of the sensible qualities whose coming and going constitute that flux. But Plato will then argue that this

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rhetorical sophistry, he appeals to the objectivist use of human logos, universally given to all human beings who have a capacity to speak (the *ouk estin antilegein* doctrine). In this regard, Protagoras is not vulnerable to the accusation of self-contradiction, but advocates a certain type of objectivism, namely 'Protagorean objectivism', holding a coherent 'epistemological' - 'political and ethical' - 'linguistic' position according to which his political and ethical ideas are supported by objectivist views of epistemology and the naturalism of language." See Lee (2012) p. 14.

<sup>179</sup> F. C. White argues that the phrase "ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα" in this sentence should be deleted. The outline of the argument of 151 e - 152 c in his mind is like:

- A. Theaetetus holds that perception is knowledge.
- B. Protagoras said the same thing but in a somewhat different fashion.  
His form of it was "man is the measure of all things, etc."
- C. Since it is not prima facie evident that what Theaetetus and Protagoras held was in substance the same, an analysis is now given of what Protagoras' saying amounted to. It amounted to the double claim that
  - i. Perception is "of what is."
  - ii. Perception is infallible.
- D. So in Protagoras' view too perception is knowledge.
- E. Therefore Theaetetus and Protagoras both held the same view. (p.221)

If "ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα" is kept, then "it would make Step C of the passage go as follows":

- i. Protagoras' saying amounts to the claim that perception is "of what is."
- ii. Since perception is knowledge, perception is infallible. (p. 222)

Therefore, steps D and E "become odd to say the least, for you cannot seriously conclude lamely that since inter alia perception is knowledge (C ii) then it is knowledge for Protagoras (D), and so Theaetetus and Protagoras held the same view (E). The general line of argument in the passage goes to pieces" (p. 222). Then, his "objection all along has been to "ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα" as a *premiss* from which the infallibility of perception is deduced. Further, in so far as there is no plausible way of translating it which does not make it such a premiss, I argue that it should be frankly deleted." (p. 224)

I cannot agree with his argument, since "ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα" refers to both "is always of what is" and "unerring", not solely refers to "unerring". Moreover, knowledge in the argument of 151 e - 152 c "is always of what is, and unerring", which does not come from the thought of Theaetetus' "knowledge is perception" and Protagoras' "man is the measure of all things", but these two characteristics are assumed without premiss.

See White (1972) pp. 221-222 and 224.

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awareness, incorrigible though it be, is not knowledge, precisely because its objects belong to the realm of becoming, not being.<sup>180</sup> It has been agreed from the start (152c) that any candidate for knowledge must pass two tests: it must be always of what is and it must be unerring.”<sup>181</sup>

Although Burnyeat uses the word “tests”, the qualities of being “always of what is” and “always unerring” are actually the standards of knowledge. Or maybe we can say that these two standards give us a ruler to test whether the object of the test is knowledge or not. Further, the word “always” implies that knowledge cannot be in the region or realm of becoming. Since in the realm of becoming everything is in flux, nothing can always keep itself, which cannot ensure that knowledge is always what is. If knowledge is always what is, then the object of knowledge should also be always what is.<sup>182</sup> The word “unerring” gives a determination of thought, namely, the thought must unmistakably grasp the concept of the object. Therefore, we cannot hold knowledge about something in vague way. That is why Socrates says in the text that we need to abolish words such as: “‘something’, ‘of something’, or ‘mine’, ‘this’ or ‘that’, or any other name that makes things stand still” (157b).

On this account, there is a gap between truth and knowledge. What is true is not necessarily knowledge but what is knowledge is always true. What is a fact or an affair? When we consider a fact (or affair) and an object, there is a difference between them. Take a tree as an example. Let us suppose, there is a tree in the yard and there is always a tree in the yard -- this is a fact. Whatever the tree itself becomes

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<sup>180</sup> The distinction between “becoming” and “being” is complex in Plato’s philosophy. Robert Bolton gives us a good explanation on this issue. See Bolton (1975) pp. 66-95.

<sup>181</sup> Burnyeat (1990) p.8.

<sup>182</sup> That is why Plato needs the theory of Forms which ensures that the objects of knowledge, namely, the Forms, are changeless.

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in the various seasons (flourishing in the summer while fading away in the winter) and whatever the yard becomes in different times (the yard is dirty or clean etc.), we can still say that there is a fact, i.e. “there is a tree in the yard”. For Plato, even if we use the right concepts “there is”, “a tree”, “in the yard” to describe the fact, we still cannot say that we have here a piece of actual knowledge. For even though the statement “there is a tree in the yard” is true, the tree and the environment are changing. Next, let us focus on an object that knowledge may refer to. Take tree as an example again. Let us suppose, the tree is always in the yard, but in this case, the tree and the yard remain the same forever (of course, it is impossible in the sensible world). Again, we grasp this by saying “there is a tree in the yard”. Then we have a piece of knowledge, for in the later case, “there is a tree in the yard” refers to an object which always keep itself, for it uses the correct concepts to describe the object which exists always.

According to the statement of knowledge at 152c, Plato completely removes the factors of time and becoming in the domain of knowledge and so actually eliminates the factors of moving and change in knowledge. In the *Theaetetus*, this principle is applied as an unshakable principle in Plato’s epistemology. Therefore, in the phrases “always of what is” and “always unerring”, the word “always” means forever, eternal and changeless. The meaning of “always” matches the nature of Forms well. The Forms are always one and changeless, as described in the *Phaedo* (78d, 80a-b). A proposition, description or any type of expression becomes knowledge if and only if it refers to the Forms. I think these are the real subtexts or unspoken words of what

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Socrates says in the text of 152c.<sup>183</sup>

Now that the criteria of knowledge for Socrates are clear, let us return to the definition “Knowledge is perception”. What does the definition really mean? Does Socrates treat what Theaetetus says fairly?

Socrates thinks that “Knowledge is perception” is a theory from Protagoras (152a).<sup>184</sup>

“Because he says, you remember, that a man is the measure of all things: of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not... And he means something on these lines: everything is, for me, the way it appears to me, and is, for you, the way it appears to you; and you and I are, each of us, a man?” (152a). (Translated by McDowell)

When Theaetetus agrees all these points, Socrates continues with an example:

“It sometimes happens, doesn’t it, that when the same wind is blowing one of us feels cold and the other not? Or that one feels slightly cold and other very? ...Now on those occasions, shall we say that the wind itself, taken by itself, is cold or not cold? Or shall we accept it from Protagoras that it is cold for the one who feel cold and not for the one who does not?” (152b) (translated by McDowell)

Theaetetus agrees what Socrates says. Then Socrates points out that “appear” is equal to “perception” and Theaetetus thinks this is right again (152b).

Does Socrates understand the key point in Protagoras’ idea here? I do not think so, since the quotation, “So perception is always of what is, and free from falsehood,

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<sup>183</sup> Burnyeat and Sedley do not notice this in their commentaries on *Theaetetus*. See Burnyeat (1990) p.10-15 and Sedley (2004) pp. 38-49.

<sup>184</sup> Ugo Zilioli argues that Plato’s Socrates criticises “Protagoras’ relativism and the various epistemological theories formulated, more or less completely, by Aristippus, Euclides and Antisthenes, who were the supposed founders of Socratic ‘schools’: the Cyrenaics, the Megarians and the Cynics, respectively”, because “they present knowledge as based exclusively on perception”. Zilioli (2013) p. 168.

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as if it's knowledge." (152c), could have two different understandings, if we realize that it could be applied to different spheres. It could be applied only to the agent or could be applied to both an agent and an object. Consider the example of the wind in the quotation above. When someone feels a gust of wind, then he is really perceiving a wind. This is a fact. Further, feeling or perceiving a wind is actually a process. In the winter, if someone goes out from his house and faces a cold wind for nearly one hour, at first, he feels slightly cold, but feels very cold in the end. Disregarding whether it appears to him very cold or just slightly cold at this moment, the fact is that the perception of perceiving the wind is a process, because his feeling changes during the time. Let us mark the time that he feels the wind slightly cold as  $t_1$  and the time he feels very cold as  $t_2$ . When at  $t_1$  he feels slightly cold, this is true, not false, i.e. it is a fact to him. Here the definition of 'cold' is not the key point. However, the line of Socratic thought in the texts seems to be that because someone who feels slightly cold at  $t_1$  is true to himself. Following Protagoras' thought, if the wind is slightly cold to someone, 'the wind is slightly cold' becomes a piece of knowledge, since it is a fact. Then the wind shall always keep itself, namely, the wind is always slightly cold. In Socrates' refutation of Protagoras' 'man is the measure of all things', the fact 'the wind is slightly to someone at specific time' becomes 'the wind is slightly to everyone all the time'.

This is not the whole example. It is now the right time to consider the concept of "cold". When someone perceives the wind that makes him feel slightly cold at a particular time, this is a fact. But where does the feeling of cold come from? There



are different ideas among philosophers. John Locke attributes “cold” to the secondary quality<sup>185</sup> which is produced by the “mind” (or “soul” in antiquity). To Protagoras the quality of “cold” obviously belongs to the thing itself.<sup>186</sup> In the case of the wind, someone perceives the wind, but what he really perceives is a wind and the wind in reality is neither cold nor hot. It is definitely true that I think the wind is cold while you think the wind is hot or slightly cold or whatever, for cold or hot are subjective.<sup>187</sup>

Socrates tries to test Protagoras’s theory “man is the measure of all things” to see whether this theory will lead to a conclusion of “the wind is cold and is not cold” (152b). Protagoras wishes to emphasize that whether the wind is cold or not depends on one’s own feeling not other people’s feeling. He emphasizes the important position of the human being in any perceiving process. It is hard to imagine that Protagoras would admit, “X is k and is not k” (the wind is cold and is not cold).<sup>188</sup> Take weight as an example. I lift a bag, and feel it is very heavy. It is true to me that it is heavy, that is a fact, but maybe someone who has more strength than me may think the bag is very light, which is also a fact. It is not that the bag itself is heavy or not, rather that the bag has weight that would cause different feelings about the

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<sup>185</sup> See Locke (1975) Book 4, chapter 3, § 12, pp. 544.

<sup>186</sup> Whether their theory belongs to idealism or not is not a question here. See Burnyeat (1982) pp. 3-40.

<sup>187</sup> Cornford makes a distinction between “the sense-object and the physical object” for analysing the wind example. This distinction is actually useless, for Protagoras does not refer to the physical object at all as “man is the measure of all things” shows. Further, warm or cold of wind could only be judged by someone himself, not others. Therefore, what Cornford believes, namely, Protagoras holds that “the wind in itself is both warm and cold”, is wrong and impossible. See Cornford (1935) p.33-36.

<sup>188</sup> Surely, as Burnyeat notes, that “to assert anything is to assert it as a truth”, he asks “isn’t there something inherently paradoxical about someone asserting (or believing) that all truth is relative?”. Protagoras cannot avoid this dilemma, even if he limits his theory within relativism. See Burnyeat (1990) p. 30 and Cf. Long (2004) pp. 24-40.

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heaviness or lightness to different people.<sup>189</sup>

The conclusion is that Socrates does not treat Protagoras' theory well and his argument on the perception theory has defects, although he correctly understands Protagoras' intention. Protagoras intends to apply "man is the measure of all things" only to the individual, and not to the whole world. However, Socrates deliberately extends the application sphere of Protagoras' theory. In Socrates' rephrasing of "man is the measure of all things", Socrates extends the application sphere to the whole world, including agents and physical objects. His two criteria of knowledge ("always of what is" and "always unerring") are in fact one. The single criterion is removing the factor of time, and so eliminating movement, change and process. These two criteria of knowledge will definitely contradict the sensible world which is always in flux.

Nevertheless, why does Plato or Socrates mistreat Protagoras' theory?<sup>190</sup> Socrates points out at 152e that things that exist are "in process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one other". This idea is clearer when he borrows Socrates' interpretation of Homer's idea, "all things (are) the offspring of flux and motion", to conclude Protagoras' theory. This brief conclusion is the root or reason why Socrates misunderstands or misrepresents Protagoras' idea. If Protagoras is right, then everything is in motion. If everything is in motion, then there is no knowledge at all. This is Socrates' first response to Protagoras' man is the

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<sup>189</sup> E. P. Arthur offers us a similar example: "if I believe that the world is flat then that belief is true for me and, so far as anyone can prove, true absolutely. If, on the other hand, someone else believes the world is not flat, his belief is likewise absolutely true. For a Protagorean both beliefs are equally true (and true to that Protagorean)". He claims that this idea shows "an essential feature of the Protagorean system". See Arthur (1982) p. 336.

<sup>190</sup> T. D. J. Chappell thinks that "Plato fails to convict Protagoras of self-contradiction, he does prove a different charge against Protagoras: self-defeat". See Chappell (2006) p. 111.

measure of all things.

It is complicated when we consider this issue in the sensible world. Socrates' discussion on flux world will help us to understand how we gain knowledge in the sensible world and it also leads us to the theory of Forms. Socrates' discussion on flux world will be considered in the section 4.3.

#### **4.3 Socratic second response of Protagoras' "man is the measure of all things"**

Now I want to pay attention to how the idea of flux is extended between 153d–156e. At 153d-e, Socrates says,

“Then, my friend, you must understand our theory in this way. In the sphere of vision, to begin with, what you would naturally call a white colour is not itself a distinct entity, either outside your eyes or in your eyes. You must not assign it any particular place; for then, of course it would be standing at its post; it would not be in process of becoming.”

This short quotation is the second response to Protagoras' theory. This short text refers to the problem of colour, but Socrates is really talking about the qualities of the objects in a very broad sense. Therefore, let us put the issue of colour aside at the moment and focus on the problem at the broad level.

At 153d-e, Socrates begins to talk about colour which he thinks is neither in the observer's eyes nor in the thing or the object observed. This is a profound philosophical question, for this approach does not account for abstract objects or experience-independent objects. Regarding the objects of knowledge, we can divide

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them roughly into two groups: one is the things in experience; the other is the things which are experience-independent or abstract objects. The first group is simple: everything that could be observed, such as a chair or a pen or a computer, is in this group. The second group is more complex, for the objects themselves are not involved in the process of perception. Things that are experience-independent and not themselves entities include colour or numbers or any other abstract things (including goodness and beauty). Socrates' first response (152a-e) to 'man is the measure of all things' is to point out that knowledge is impossible in the sphere of "the things in experience". His second response (153d-156e) refers to the region of "abstract things". Protagoras' idea could not be applied to abstract things. The reason why Socrates employs the description on how to perceive colour is to show how perception can relate to abstract things and Forms.

However, Socrates' first refutation to "man is the measure of all things" cannot be applied to the abstract things. For abstract things and Forms neither belong to the objects observed nor belong to the observers (154b). They even do not belong to the perceptual process. Knowledge on this theory will be limited to a very small range, since Protagoras' theory does not include knowledge about abstract things.

So far, Socrates' idea on Protagoras' theory seems clear. However, the "colour" example, which he gives to help Theaetetus understand what he means, is more difficult to grasp. Socrates does not give us a clear answer about what kind of entity colour is. He just says that colour is "not itself a distinct entity" (153e), i.e. he makes a negative statement about colour. Therefore, Socrates is just making clear that

colour belongs to the region of Becoming (153e). Surely, Socrates discusses colour in the process of perceiving and confirms that “we naturally call a particular colour is neither that which impinges nor that which is impinged upon, but something which has come into being between the two, and which is private to the individual percipient” (153e-154a). We should notice that Socrates in this text only refers to “a particular colour” not colour itself. Further, He also clearly says that the particular colour is private.

Two key paragraphs refer to the process of perceiving a colour. The first paragraph is at 156a, where Socrates makes a distinction between two motions. Motion is an important issue for understanding the process of perception. The reason for this is that the whole process of perceiving is a motion and therefore, there would be no perception without motion. Socrates’ understanding of motion is a key issue for the understanding of perception.

“...everything is really motion, and there is nothing but motion. Motion has two forms, each an infinite multitude, but distinguished by their powers, the one being active and the other passive. And through the intercourse and the mutual friction of these two there comes to be an offspring infinite in multitude but always twin birth, on the one hand what is perceived, on the other, the perception of it, the perception in every case being generated together with what is perceived and emerging along with it...” (156a)

The second paragraph is at 156d-e, where Socrates describes the process of perceiving colour to Theaetetus:

“In this event, motions arise in the intervening space, sight from the side of the

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eye and whiteness from the side of that which cooperates in the production of the colour. The eye is filled with sight; at that moment it sees, and there come into being, not indeed sight, but a seeing eye; while its partner in the process of producing colour is filled with whiteness, and there comes into being not whiteness, but white... This account of course may be generally applied; it applies to all that we perceive, hard or hot or anything else.” (156d-e)

In these texts, the colour is said to be the product of the eyes and the object.<sup>191</sup>

Moreover and more importantly, the colour white is not whiteness itself, but just a particular white colour.<sup>192</sup> Further, the colour you see is not the colour itself, but only a particular colour. If you close your eyes, then you would certainly not see the colour any longer, (or, in other words, the colour is eliminated from your sight), but this process is not a process of eliminating the colour itself. Take the brown table as an example again. If you turn around and do not see the table any more, then you do not see the brown colour either. But this is not to say that either the colour brown of the table disappears or the brown itself is eliminated. You can easily see the brown table again by turning around or see another brown stuff nearby.

It is not only that Socrates' description of how eyes perceive colour could be applied to every process when the soul gains knowledge, but also that this way of thinking about colour could be applied to everything we perceive. Socrates applies the same explanation of colour to “all that we perceive, hard or hot or anything else” (156e). This means that all the things we perceive could be explained in the same way as the colour example. Is it possible to generalize this explanation to everything we perceive? Before considering this question, let us first see what Socrates thinks

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<sup>191</sup> Ayer calls this kind of discussions as “the argument from illusion”. He gives us an excellent philosophical investigation on this issue. See Ayer (1940) pp. 3-11.

<sup>192</sup> C.f. *Timaeus* 67e-68a, “white is what dilates the ray of sight, and black is what does the opposite” (67e).

about colour.

At 153e – 154a, Socrates gives us a description on what he thinks about colour:

“...black or white or any other colour will turn out to have come into being through the impact of the eyes upon the appropriate motion; and what we naturally call a particular colour is neither that which impinges nor that which is impinged upon, but something which has come into being between the two, and which is private to the individual percipient...”

He explains that there are four features or characters of colour:

- (1) The colour is not at any particular place;
- (2) It is neither the sight nor the object;
- (3) It is produced by the eyes in the appropriate motion;
- (4) It is private to each individual.

#### **4.4 Socrates’ third response to “man is the measure of all things”**

The strategy that Socrates employs in responding to Theaetetus’ definition “knowledge is sense-perception” is firstly to address Protagoras’ saying “man is the measure of all things” which Theaetetus’ definition derives from and closely relates to. Having denounced Protagoras’ saying twice, Socrates begins to respond for the third time,<sup>193</sup> to consider whether “man is the measure of all things” is correct or not.

This time Socrates focuses on the saying itself. Socrates declares:

“...I was astonished that he (Protagoras) did not state at the beginning of the *Truth* that ‘Pig is the measure of all things’ or ‘Baboon’ or some yet more out-of-the-

<sup>193</sup> I use “third time” to refer to a series of arguments from Socrates to criticize Protagoras “Man is the measure of all things”. The texts of this series of arguments come from 161c to 166c in the *Theaetetus*.

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way creature with the power of perception. That would have made a most imposing and disdainful opening. It would have made it clear to us at once that, while we were standing astounded at his wisdom as though he were God, he was in reality no better authority than a tadpole -- let alone any other man.” (161c-d)

In this quotation, Socrates ironically uses pig instead of man in the famous saying, which would give anyone who supports this saying an impression of indignity.

Moving on from his interpretation of Protagoras' saying at 152a, Socrates at 161d uses a shorter statement to repeat Protagoras' principle, “only the individual himself can judge of his own world, and what he judges is always true and correct” (161d). As Socrates points out, if Protagoras is right, namely, if man is the measure of all things, then, there are three catastrophic consequences. First, everyone would be equal in wisdom and knowledge, which would mean that man, animal and even God would have no difference in their level of wisdom, because everyone would be correct on his own perception. As long as they have the ability of perception, whether they are a man, God or animal, their perceptions are always correct to them. From “knowledge is perception”, wisdom as a high level understanding is impossible. Secondly, if wisdom is actually impossible, then Protagoras, who claims to be a teacher of wisdom, has no reason to teach his pupils wisdom. If he has no wisdom to teach, then he does not deserve fees from his students. Thirdly, the combination of “knowledge is perception” and “man is the measure of all things” will destroy philosophy. As Socrates says, “the whole business of philosophical discussion” is “to examine and try to refute each other's appearance and judgements” (161e). From the first consequence, if wisdom is in fact impossible from the ideas of “knowledge is



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perception” and “a man is the measure of all things”, then everyone is correct and wise already, and so philosophical discussion becomes nonsense.

All these three consequences are actually one thing: if Protagoras is correct, there would be no authority of judgements and truth beyond the individual. When there is a controversy on something between people, they try to find an external authority to persuade each other. The men in conversation or discussion must approve the further authority, which could be an irrefutable fact, an order from Gods, for instance. Now, from Theaetetus’ and Protagoras’ ideas, there will be no external authority at all. Rather everyone himself is the authority of everything. Further, Protagoras admits that everyone’s perception is equally true and Theaetetus even says that all these perceptions are knowledge.

To assess Protagoras’s view that all perception is equally true, let us consider an example of a table. Someone who sees this table gets a series of perceptions. Assuming he sees this table at two different times,  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , the table appears brown to him due to the wood at  $t_1$ , but yellow due to the sunshine at  $t_2$ .<sup>194</sup> Both these perceptions are equally true for Protagoras, according to Socrates’ presentation of Plato’s view, which distorts it in some degree. According to Socrates, this is solipsism. For it disregards the real colour of the table, while emphasizing the truth of the appearance to the watcher. How does the watcher answer the question “What colour is the table?” In Socrates’ eyes, Protagoras may say for the watcher that the table is both brown and yellow. This is a contradiction, for a table cannot be both

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. Ryle (1990) p. 23.

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brown and yellow in reality. The same explanation could be applied to an example of two people who see the same table at the same time, but see it as different colours.

Socrates does not treat Protagoras' idea fairly. Protagoras only emphasizes that what an individual person perceives is always true to himself, and he is not concerned with what the things in reality are. Consider the table example again. The table appears to be yellow at  $t_2$ , so this perception is true to the watcher, for he sees a yellow table, not a brown one, though he maybe realizes that the table is in fact brown. This fact of the watcher's experience at  $t_2$  shows that there is a big gap between sensation and reason. Socrates realizes this gap. At 163e, after he repeats Theaetetus' idea of "knowledge is perception", Socrates says that "...a man who has seen something has come to know that which he saw, according to the statement you made just now". He then uses the example of "memory" to rebut Theaetetus' idea "knowledge is perception" which mixes knowledge and perception. Obviously, Socrates does not believe that there is no difference between "what you know" and "what you see". He tries to use the distinction between knowledge and perception to refute Theaetetus' definition of knowledge, namely, that knowledge is perception. Now, what Protagoras emphasizes is clear, he just tries to discuss the sphere of perception rather than the whole area of epistemology, i.e. the sphere of both sensation and reason.

The result of applying Protagoras' idea to some concrete event would produce difficulties. Socrates now gives us two examples to make the absurdity in Protagoras' saying clear:

“Well, now, are we going to agree that when we perceive things by seeing or hearing them, we always at the same time know them? Take, for example, the case of hearing people speaking a foreign language which we have not yet learned. Are we going to say that we do not hear the sound of their voice when they speak? Or that we both hear it and know what they are saying? Again, supposing we do not know our letters, are we going to insist that we do not see them when we look at them? Or shall we maintain that, if we see them, we know them? ” (163b)

The examples are employed for embodying and revealing the absurdity of the saying by highlighting the evident gap between perceiving and understanding.

Socrates explains to Theaetetus that his criticism “should take a different line” (163a) following the criticism that there would be no truth or wisdom, if “man is the measure of all things” (162c-163a). It seems that there are two differences between the criticism from 162c-163a and the two examples at 163b-c.<sup>195</sup> Firstly, the criticism from 162c-163a refers to the human being, Gods or even animals, which would be equal in wisdom following Protagoras’ “a man is the measure of all things” and Theaetetus’ “knowledge is perception”. This actually announces that wisdom is impossible. Therefore, the criticism from 162c-163a emphasizes the unacceptable consequences of Protagoras’ and Theaetetus’ ideas. The two examples from 163b-c, however, try to weaken their arguments because they are in fact counter-examples to Theaetetus’ definition.

Secondly, the examples mainly attack Theaetetus’ definition of knowledge.

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<sup>195</sup> From the argument at 163b, Kenneth Dorter discovers that there are “two levels of knowledge”: “sensory information and interpretation thereof” in *Theaetetus*. He calls these two kinds of knowledge as “perceptual and interpretive knowledge” latter in his article. The first kind of knowledge is “coextensive” with the information supplied by senses. The “second kind of knowledge is not coextensive with sense perception”. See Dorter (1990) pp. 348-349 and p. 351.

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Therefore although Theaetetus' formula stems from Protagoras, Protagoras' idea is not Socrates' main target. The example of foreign language and the example of the letters at 163b only show that "what you perceive" is not the same as "what you know". Between the criticism from 162c-163a and the two examples at 163b, Socrates defends Protagoras' idea on his behalf (162d-e). In this defence, he refers to Protagoras' famous sentence, and says, "...you drag in gods, whose existence or nonexistence I exclude from all discussion, written or spoken" (162e). Socrates also adds that,

"...you keep on saying whatever is likely to be acceptable to the mob, telling them that it would be a shocking thing if no one were wiser than any cow in the field; but of proof or necessity not a word. You just rely on plausibility." (162e)

This defence is actually not a defence at all, for it avoids the attack of the first criticism.<sup>196</sup> It just emphasizes that we must keep silent on whether Gods exist or not and contributes "no one is wiser than any cow" to merely opinion of the "mob". It says the mob would find this view shocking. This defence in fact implies two things. The first thing is that Protagoras tries to drag Socrates into a narrower sphere to discuss his idea, for he tries to concentrate on what really happens to the individual. Protagoras only wishes to focus on the authenticity of "what someone sees is always true to himself" rather than to consider what the things themselves really are. Protagoras is not concerned with whether a human being or even an animal is equal to the Gods in wisdom. "No one is wiser than any cow" this is why he does not

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<sup>196</sup> There is a reply to this defence at 167a-b.

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explain why the idea “man is the measure of all things” will not lead to this ridiculous conclusion that “no one is wiser than any cow”.

If the defence which Socrates uses on the behalf of Protagoras is not actually a defence of Protagoras’ idea, why does Socrates hold this to be a defence and promise to give his criticism “a different line” (163a)? Socrates gives us a clue: “You just rely on plausibility...So you and Theodorus had better consider whether, in matters of such importance, you are going to accept arguments which are merely persuasive or plausible” (162e-163a). Unfortunately, this kind of clue is not clear, but only gives us a vague meaning. In order to understand why Socrates’ criticism is only persuasive or plausible, we need to analyze Socrates’ criticism from 162c-163a again.

The criticism at 162c-163a is brief, Socrates doubts that if Protagoras’ idea “a man is the measure of all things” is correct, then it will naturally lead to a conclusion “you are the equal in wisdom of any man or even a god”. (162c) So far, the defence is not helpful, but this is not the whole argument, Socrates adds immediately, “Or do you think the Protagorean measure isn’t meant to be applied to gods as much as to men?” (162c). This is the key sentence that we need to notice. If, in Socrates mind, Protagoras does not admit the existence of gods, then the former sentence, namely, “you are the equal in wisdom of any man or even a god”, will not be a problem anymore. This actually refers to the problem of the sphere or region that Protagoras’ idea could be applied to. It also shows that Socrates has realized that “a man is the measure of all things” could only be applied to human beings, not all things that have the ability to perceive. More strictly speaking, what Protagoras says could only be

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applied to the sensible aspect of human recognition, not to the whole epistemological region. Socrates himself points out the problem of the limited range of Protagoras' idea, and the defence is to show that this problem is actually not a problem at all in Protagoras' mind.

Although the defence at 162c-163a is not clear, at least in Protagoras' mind, it is not to say that this criticism is not valid. Socrates could use the same argument to refute Protagoras' idea, not using human beings and the gods, but using human beings and animals. Socrates could say that "you are the equal in wisdom of any cow" rather than "you are the equal in wisdom of any man or even a god". Maybe Protagoras can deny or doubt the existence of the gods that cannot be observed by perception, but he cannot deny the existence of animals that also have the ability of perception. Even Protagoras, in Socrates' mind, would have realized this problem, for when Socrates speaks for Protagoras, he observes how the idea that "no man is wiser than any cow in the field" would be shocking (162e).

Again, the plausibility question comes back. Why does Socrates' Protagoras think the defence that Socrates makes for him is only plausible or persuasive? This reaction forces Socrates to make another argument to refute Protagoras' idea. What does the word "plausibility" mean in the sentence "You just rely on plausibility" (162e)? Let us follow the line of Socrates' argument to analyze it. Socrates' argument is as follows:

(1) Knowledge is perception.

(2) If knowledge is perception, then what you perceive is what you know.

(3) You will be always correct or true on what you know.

(4) Hence, what you perceive will be always correct or true to you.

(5) The same idea could be applied to another person as you.

(6) Then, another person would be always true on what he perceives.

(7) With an object X, since both you and other person are correct on what X appears to you, you and other person both have knowledge of X.

(8) If you have knowledge of X, then it means you have wisdom on X, for Socrates and Theaetetus agree that wisdom means knowledge.

(9) If both you and other people have wisdom on X, then you and other people are equal in wisdom on X.

(10) The same argument could be applied to all the objects that you can perceive.

(11) You are equal to any other man in wisdom.

(12) “Perception” in the formula “knowledge is perception” could be applied to any perceiving subject.

(13) Then, anything that has the ability to perceive could be the perceiving subject.

(14) Gods and animals have the ability of perception.

(15) According to (11), gods and animals are equal to any man in wisdom.

Socrates’ argument completely relies on deduction and the whole argument originates from Theaetetus’ definition of knowledge. It seems, then, that the sentence “You just rely on plausibility” said by Protagoras in his imagined defence is baffling, unless we assume that Protagoras does not follow logic. This is possible. In

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*Theaetetus*, Socrates in many different paragraphs tries to prove that Protagoras does not follow logic or reason. Texts at 152c are a typical example. Here Socrates claims,

“Well then, in that case are we going to say that the wind itself, by itself, is cold or not cold? Or shall we listen to Protagoras, and say it is cold for the one who feels cold, and for the other, not cold?”

These questions show that in Socrates’ mind, Protagoras in fact admits that the wind is both cold and not cold. But Protagoras does not admit that, he only approves that the wind is cold to one person and not cold to the other one. Further, he keeps silent on whether the wind itself is cold or not cold, because he thinks that both of the men are always correct to judge how the wind appears to them. Protagoras always limits his idea to the sphere of sensation, namely, what happens to individuals in the sensory world. He is not concerned with the things in themselves that lie beyond the individual’s experience or perception. He does not regard the theoretical consequences of his idea. This is the main difference between him and Socrates.

The defence that Socrates uses on behalf of Protagoras seems to show that a criticism from logic or deduction is not enough to persuade Protagoras and *Theaetetus*. Another criticism is needed that refutes Protagoras’ idea directly. Socrates offers two examples (163b-c), as counter-examples, to show that “knowledge is perception” is wrong. These are the examples of foreign language and of the letters. These two examples are actually the same, for both of them distinguish reason or understanding from sensation or perception.



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Let us move into a discussion on recollected knowledge. To Theaetetus, knowledge is perception, because it seems to him “that a man who knows something perceives what he knows, and the way it appears at present, at any rate, is that knowledge is simply perception” (151e). It seems that there could be two interpretations of the quotation. The first interpretation is what Socrates says in the dialogue, namely, what you perceive is what you know. But it could be rephrased as follows: a man, who has knowledge of X, is perceiving X which is the object of the knowledge he knows.

The second interpretation could be as follows: a man who has knowledge of X is recollecting the knowledge of X, where X is the object he has already known when he realizes that he has the knowledge of X or remembers the knowledge of X. If this second interpretation could be established, then in Theaetetus’ mind, “perception” does not necessarily mean something like “perceive something from outside”, it could mean also “realize” or “remember”. The second interpretation is possible. On the first interpretation, Theaetetus could just say, “it seems to me that a man who knows something perceives something”. Why does he use the phrase “what he knows” (τοῦτο ὃ ἐπίσταται)? If the second interpretation is a possible explanation of the sentence, then the two examples from 163b-c will no longer be counter-examples. In the second interpretation, Theaetetus emphasizes what happens in someone’s mind, and he does not refer to the act of perceiving, such as seeing, hearing or touching, but just refers to reflection, remembering or memorizing, activities that happen in someone’s mind.

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The second interpretation, though it is possible, may seem risky, because the background of this sentence is that Theaetetus tries to give Socrates his own definition of knowledge. Consider this example. A asks another person B: “what is knowledge?” and B answers: “Knowledge is the knowledge that I am realizing and remembering.” Here person A will think B says nothing but nonsense, for B does not answer his question and simply gives him a tautology. This means that according to the second explanation of knowledge as perception, Theaetetus actually says nothing. Nevertheless, the risk of the second one is not serious. To explain why the second interpretation is not dangerous, let us consider again the first interpretation. “What you know is what you perceive” only shows the relationship between knowledge and perception, namely, knowledge is perception, i.e. they are equal or the same thing. The second interpretation also shows a relationship, this time between knowledge and what you have known. This relationship is odd, for it seems to emphasize only that knowledge is the recognition or consciousness when you realize what you have known, i.e. knowledge is your “perception” of what you have known. Take the foreign language as an example. Following the first interpretation, Socrates could say that when an Englishman who does not know Chinese, hears someone speaking Chinese, he is certainly hearing the voice of the person who speaks Chinese, but he does not know the meaning of the Chinese that the person says. Theaetetus could respond to Socrates like this: “Dear Socrates, the example you used just now shows that you did not understand my actual idea correctly. Let us correct your example to illustrate my idea. An Englishman who knows Chinese understands the meaning of

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Chinese when he hears someone speaking Chinese. The knowledge of Chinese to him is his recognition or consciousness of the meaning of Chinese that has already been in his mind. This is what I mean when I give you my definition of knowledge, namely, knowledge is perception.” These two interpretations are different on how to understand the meaning of “perception”. From the first interpretation, *perception* means, “seeing, hearing or becoming aware of something from outside”, but under the second interpretation, *perception* means “a way of understanding”.

In the two examples at 163b, Socrates tries to prove that perceiving something is different from understanding something. Even if you have heard the sound or voice of a foreign language that you do not know, you still do not know the meaning of it. The example of seeing the letters that we do not recognize is the same. If you are illiterate, then you will not know the meaning of a word, a sentence, a paragraph, an article or a book, which are all constructed in words. Even if you see something written by words, you would not know the meaning of it. According to this, Socrates’ argument is right.

Nevertheless, Theaetetus’ response to Socrates’ argument is interesting. He points out that in the situation of hearing a foreign language or seeing the letters that we cannot understand, we could still actually know *something*, since

“...we both see and know the shape and the colour of the letters; and with the spoken words we both hear and know the rise and fall of the voice.” (163c)

Socrates praises Theaetetus’ response as “very good indeed”. However, he notes,

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“there is another difficulty coming upon us” (163d). Socrates now explains the problem:

“Supposing you were asked, ‘If a man has once come to know a certain thing, and continues to preserve the memory of it, is it possible that, at the moment when he remembers it, he does not know this thing that he is remembering?’ ... What I am trying to ask is, ‘Can a man who has learnt something not know it when he is remembering it?’” (163d)

The difficulty that Socrates raises shows two things. Firstly, Socrates does not treat Theaetetus’ response seriously. Secondly, the idea expressed in this difficulty is hard for Theaetetus to understand.

Why does the difficulty itself show that Socrates does not treat Theaetetus’ response seriously? It is because his difficulty is simply irrelevant to Theaetetus’ response. The difficulty is about memory, but Theaetetus’ response is about perceiving. Actually, Theaetetus’ response is not helpful for understanding the relationship between knowing and perceiving, though he indeed adds some new and interesting information. Theaetetus denies that we do not know anything when we hear a foreign language or see the unrecognizable letters, since we indeed see or hear something. On his view, “we know just that in them which we see and hear” (163b). Take the letters as an example, Theaetetus means that when we see the unrecognizable letters, we “both see and know the shape and the colour of the letters” (163b). Nevertheless, the word “know” that Theaetetus uses here could not refer to “knowing” or knowledge” in Socrates’ mind. The understanding that “the letters are

red (or black or whatever colour they are)” could not be a piece of knowledge, since it does not follow the two criteria of knowledge that Socrates has made clear at the beginning of the dialogue, namely, knowledge “must be always of what is and it must be unerring” (152c), as Burnyeat rephrases.<sup>197</sup> However, Theaetetus could say that “the letters are red” is not what he means by knowledge. Rather he could explain that what he means is that we could always “know” what we are perceiving. Socrates has rebutted this point earlier at 154a, “it does not always appear the same even to yourself because you never remain the same as yourself” (154a). That is to say, everyone himself is also in flux. Therefore, the proposition that you “know” what you are perceiving is also impossible.<sup>198</sup> That is why Socrates ignores Theaetetus’ response and moves into a new difficulty of flux.

The idea about memory illustrated by Socrates is difficult for Theaetetus to understand. Since Theaetetus seems not to understand the meaning of the question, Socrates has to explain what he means. The argument that Socrates gives in the texts of 163d-164b can be shown as follows:

- (1) Seeing is perceiving and sight is perception.
- (2) A man who sees something knows what he sees, for knowledge is perception.
- (3) There is such a thing as memory or in other words, memory exists.
- (4) Memory must be the memory of something; that is to say, memory must

have content.

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<sup>197</sup> Burnyeat (1990) p. 8.

<sup>198</sup> Naly Thaler offers a new reading of the theory of flux in *Theaetetus*. He tries to deny “that the flux theory is in fact restricted to particulars, and argue that claims which it makes, such as ‘nothing is itself one thing’ (152D 2-3) or ‘everything is change’ (156A 5), ultimately include abstract properties as well”. See Thaler (2013) p. 2.

(5) A man who has seen something could preserve the memory of it.

(6) If he has preserved something in his memory, he could recall it from time to time.

(7) He could recall something even if he does not perceive the thing at the same moment.

(8) From the definition “knowledge is perception”, a man who does not perceive something does not know something.

(9) As a result, “a man who has come to know something and still remembers it does not know it because he does not see it” (164b).

This is one of the criticisms of “knowledge is perception”. From this line of argument, knowledge is perception will lead to a ridiculous conclusion, i.e. “we were enquiring into the possibility that a man should not know something that he has learnt and remembers” (164d). Further, this ridiculous conclusion will produce a contradiction, i.e. is it possible for “a man who knows something not to know this thing which he knows” (165b)? We could imagine that Protagoras would certainly not admit these two conclusions and he will defend his idea while attacking Socrates’ argument. Hence, an analysis of Socrates’ argument at 163d-164b is necessary.

The criticism of “knowledge is perception” at 163d-164b emphasizes that the process of learning or knowing also refers to more things besides perception. This approach is different from the criticism from 162c-163a which emphasizes the disastrous consequences of the definition and the two examples at 163b-c, which show that there are counter-examples of the definition. Memory is one of the things

that needs to be noticed besides perception. In this argument, Socrates simply points out that a person can recall what he has perceived even if the person does not perceive at the moment of recalling the thing in his memory.

Consider the ridiculous conclusions again, “Is it possible for a man who knows something not to know this thing which he knows?” (165b). Protagoras in Socrates’ mind would answer “no” to this question, for at 165b-c, Socrates on behalf of Protagoras says “no” to the question by giving us a vivid and interesting example. Socrates asks Theaetetus to consider a situation where a man puts his hands over one of Theaetetus’ eyes.

Socrates: “...For what are you going to do when some intrepid fellow has you ‘trapped in the well-shaft’, as they say, with a question that leaves you no way out: clapping his hand over one of your eyes, he asks you whether you see his cloak with the eye that is covered -- how will you cope with that?”

Theaetetus: “I shall say that I do not see it with this one, but I do with the other.”

Socrates: “So you both see and do not see the same thing at the same time?”

Theaetetus: “Well, yes, in that sort of way I do.” (165b-c)

This example is a typical kind of sophistry. If someone covers one of your eyes and asks you whether you could see his cloak with the eye covered, you will surely answer: “No, I cannot see your cloak with the eye covered”. Then how does this man conclude that you could both see his cloak and not see it at the same time? It seems that this conclusion comes from Theaetetus’ answer, “I shall say that I do not see it with this one, but I do with the other”. However, Theaetetus’ answer is just a little beyond what the man asks. The man asks whether you could see his cloak *with the*

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*eye covered*, he does not ask whether you could see his cloak. If he asks the latter question, anyone will reply, “Yes, I can see your cloak”, even though you or anyone else just uses one eye to see his cloak. Nevertheless, he may be dissatisfied with your answer and may continue to ask, “I do not care about in what way it happened. I wish only to know ‘Whether you both see and do not see my cloak’.” In the dialogue, both Theaetetus and Socrates agree that they both see and do not see the cloak. However, this question is just word play. When we say that we see something with our eyes, we always treat the eyes as a whole or a unit. Then, once we can see something, whether we see it with one eye or two eyes, we are still seeing something. Even in the special case, using only one eye to see, the saying “I can see something with one eye, but cannot see it with other eye” is not itself a contradiction. It will not lead to the ridiculous conclusion “I both see and do not see something” for two reasons. Firstly, “I can see something with one eye, but cannot see it with other eye” does not lead to the contradiction “I both see and do not see something”. The former sentence describes the situation of my eyes and it is a description of a fact. In contrast, the latter sentence is illogical, because it is impossible that my eyes both see and not see. Secondly, the former sentence speaks under conditions. It emphasizes that one of my eyes can see something, while the other eye cannot see it. I actually treat my eyes separately and describe them respectively, so that even if my eyes are in opposite states or have opposite properties, they still have no conflict. The latter sentence, however, treats the eyes as a unit and attributes opposite properties or states to them. If this analysis is correct, then it is odd that both Socrates and Theaetetus admit the



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argument in the example of cloak as a valid one.

If we grant that the argument in the example of cloak is valid, how does the same argument apply to knowledge? Or, in other words, how does the principle of “you see what you do not see” apply to the principle of “you do not know what you know”? In the dialogue, this transition seems simple, because if “you see what you do not see” and if “knowing is seeing” (from “knowledge is perception”), then “you know what you do not know”. Nevertheless, seeing something is completely different from knowing something. In the case of seeing, we can say that I either see something or do not see something. There is no third option, i.e. we cannot say that I both see and do not see something. But with knowing, the situation is different. The difference between seeing and knowing is that seeing is a single activity, but knowing is a plural activity. That is to say, knowing something has differences in degree. In the case of knowledge of English, both a pupil who knows a little English and an expert who researches on English know English, but their knowledge of English is different in degree. Take a map as an example for seeing: we may see a map clearly or not clearly. But this difference in degree of seeing is not the same as knowing, for in the activity of seeing, once you see the map, whether you see it clearly or not, you have finished the activity of seeing. Nevertheless, in the activity of knowing, you cannot say that once you learn something, the process of knowing about this thing has finished. After all, the process of knowing or recognition is more complex than the process of seeing. Therefore, it is clear that the argument of seeing cannot be applied to the argument of knowing.

According to my analysis, the example of the cloak and the argument of seeing are problematic. Since both the cloak example and the seeing argument are presented by Socrates against Protagoras, we have to doubt that Socrates makes his arguments as kinds of sophistry and gives his readers a vague example. Because of the fallacies in Socrates' argument and example, it is easy to imagine that Protagoras could strike back.

That is what happens in the next texts. Socrates again tries to defend Protagoras' ideas,

“Now, to begin with, do you expect someone to grant you that a man's present memory of something which he has experienced in the past but is no longer experiencing is the same sort of experience as he then had? That is very far from being true. Again, do you suppose he will hesitate to admit that it is possible for the same man to know and not know the same thing? Or -- if he has misgivings about this -- do you expect him to concede to you that the man, who is in process of becoming unlike, is the same as he was before the process began? Do you expect him even to speak of 'the man' rather than of 'the men'...?” (166b)<sup>199</sup>

In this paragraph, there are three arguments. ( i ) The experience of something in the past that a person is no longer experiencing is different from the present experience from memory. ( ii ) No one will admit that a man cannot know and not know the same thing. (iii) The man as the subject of experience is himself in flux.

These three arguments do not weaken Socrates' seeing argument and the cloak

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<sup>199</sup> Different translations of this text can lead different understandings. C. J. Rowe, M. Welbourne and C. J. F. Williams suggest that the actual sense of the text is as follows: “For in the first place do you think that anyone will agree that anyone has a memory of the things he was experiencing it, (the memory) being the same sort of experience as he had when he had (the original) experience, if he is no longer having an experience (unless he is still having an experience?”. Therefore, “Instead of failing to account for the connection between the memory and the original experience. Protagoras is represented as directly appealing to it, in order to suggest that the man remembering a thing perceived is not only still somehow perceiving it, but even still undergoing the same sort of perceptual experience as he did when he directly perceived the thing”. I agree with this idea. See Rowe (1982) p. 305.

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example directly, but just remind him that there are more things that need to be considered. From the argument ( i ), an experience you recall from your memory is obviously different from what you were experiencing or perceiving in the past. Here, the first argument treats remembering or recollection as a kind of perception. Then two propositions, i.e. propositions (7) and (8) above are wrong. Socrates cannot say, (A) “He could recall something even if he does not perceive the thing at the moment”,<sup>200</sup> for the reason that recalling or remembering something from memory is also a kind of experience or perception. (B) “From the definition ‘knowledge is perception’,<sup>201</sup> “a man does not perceive something” means “he does not know something”, is also incorrect, because someone still knows something when he recalls something from memory if recalling something is a kind of experience. If propositions (7) and (8) are both refuted, then the contradiction, “a man who has come to know something and still remembers it does not know it because he does not see it”, is also refuted through the first argument.

In argument ( ii ), Protagoras, according to Socrates’s defence, actually tries to show that he insists on logic and thinks that everyone will treat the contradiction of knowing and not knowing as possible. This in fact rebuts Socrates’ criticism of the illogicality of his idea.

In argument (iii), the subject of perception himself is in flux. As a result, the series of perceptions are experienced by a series of men, not by the same man at all. This is a little similar to the first argument that also emphasizes that every element

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<sup>200</sup> This is the proposition (7) in the argument at 163d-164b above.

<sup>201</sup> This is the proposition (8) in the argument at 163d-164b above.

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that is involved in the process of knowing is changing. Although, as McDowell argues, “it is plainly irrelevant” to the criticism of 165a-d, this argument (iii) attacks Socrates’ third response to “man is the measure of all things” as a whole (163c-164c), for it shows that Socrates’ criticism is too simple to stand as a criticism.<sup>202</sup>

After these three arguments, Socrates adds another argument that is still on behalf of Protagoras:

“‘Show a little more spirit, my good man,’ he will say, ‘and attack my actual statement itself, and refute it, if you can, by showing that each man’s perceptions are not his own private events; or that, if they are his own private events, it does not follow that the thing which appears ‘becomes’ or, if we may speak of being, ‘is’ only for the man to whom it appears.’” (166c)

In this quotation, Socrates proposes that Perceptions are private. Logically, the perception is always true to a perceiver, if “Perceptions are private” is correct. To someone who experiences something, what he is experiencing or perceiving belongs to him and it can only be known by himself, since no one else will know what he perceives. Further, the thing perceived by the man always appears to him as what it is. In other words, perception is always true to the man who is perceiving, according to “man is the measure of all things”. Maybe this is too odd to understand. Let us take a physical phenomenon as an example. A stick in water may appear to be bent, but it is actually not. Although the stick itself is not bent, the perception that the stick in the water is bent is true to the perceiver. That is to say, the sensation could be false according to the fact, but in itself it is always true to the man who has the sensation.

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<sup>202</sup> McDowell (1973) p.165.

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The issue comes back to the question of the sphere of Protagoras' idea. What Protagoras emphasizes is in fact limited to perception and does not refer to reason or understanding. Protagoras himself also admits that everyone will consider that both knowing and not knowing something is possible (166b). Therefore, Socrates' criticism of "man is the measure of all things" is in fact another issue and is irrelevant to what Protagoras' thought.

Socrates offers us a series of arguments to attack Protagoras' theory in his third response to Protagoras' idea that "man is the measure of all things". The series is: (1) no external authority at 161c-d; (2) the two examples at 163b; (3) the cloak example at 165b-c; (4) three arguments at 166b. Unfortunately, none of these arguments is perfect. The arguments either distort or are irrelevant to what Protagoras' thought. Socrates finally realizes at the end of these arguments that he cannot rebut "man is the measure of all things", unless he rebuts "all things are in motion" to which Protagoras' thought closely relates.

#### **4.5 Investigation on "all things are in motion"**

After Socrates defends Protagoras on his behalf, Socrates and his interlocutors, Theaetetus and Theodorus, gradually realize the importance of motion. Therefore, the motion issue reminds them to think about the doctrines of Heraclitus and Parmenides. Heraclitus insists, "All things are in motion";<sup>203</sup> Parmenides "Unmoved is the universe". Socrates proposes that they must now examine these doctrines (181b)

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<sup>203</sup> Cornford reminds us that "to Plato sensible objects are not 'all things'". I think he is right and this point is important to understand Socratic arguments here. See Cornford (1935) p.36.

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to show why they are wrong. He begins (181c-d) by considering what motion is and identifies two forms of motion.

Socrates "...Now it seems to me that the proper starting-point of our criticism is the nature of motion; what is this thing that they are talking about when they say that all things are in motion? I mean, for example, are they referring to one form of motion only, or, as I think, to two, [181c]...Tell me, do you call it 'motion' when a thing changes from one place to another or turns round in the same place?" [181d]

Theodorus: "I do, yes."

Socrates: "Here then is one form of motion. Then supposing a thing remains in the same place, but grows old, or becomes black instead of white, or hard instead of soft, or undergoes any other alternation; isn't it right to say that here we have motion in another form?"

Theodorus: "Unquestionably." (181c-d)

Why is the nature of motion a proper starting-point of the criticism of Heraclitus and Parmenides?

In order to answer these questions, going back to the text 178b-c is needed, Socrates, there, gives us a criticism of "man is the measure of all things", by referring to prediction.<sup>204</sup> Socrates makes a distinction of two kinds of predictions, one is from an ordinary man; the other is from an expert who is an authority in a special field. Taking heat as an example, as Socrates says in the context, a man without any knowledge on heat predicts that he will get a fever; but a doctor predicts that he will not. The event in the future, in Socrates' mind, will confirm that the doctor's prediction is right. Further, predictions are also different among the experts. "In any question of what will be in tune or out of tune" (178d), the judgement of a musician is superior to that of a teacher of gymnastics. Then Socrates points out that

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<sup>204</sup> At 153d-160e, Socrates also discusses those questions at length, which I have discussed in the section 4.4.

these two kinds of predictions are actually “about what was going to be and seem to be in the future” (179a). Obviously, a prediction from an ordinary man or an expert in his unfamiliar field is the latter, a matter of what seems, while a prediction from an expert is the former one, a matter of reality. If there are two kinds of predictions, then “man” cannot be the measure of all things. Rather an expert who has specific knowledge in his field is the measure of the things in question in a specific discipline. Further, as Socrates defends on behalf of Protagoras, “only the individual himself can judge of his own world, and what he judges is always true and correct”. In other words, “man is the measure of all things” ensures or is the premise for “knowledge is perception” (161d). Now, the former one is problematic and the latter one seems to be as well.

In Socrates’ argument of prediction, prediction is in fact something referring to the future. Therefore, it involves time. In antiquity, time is always a close friend to motion. Aristotle defines time as a “feature of change that makes number applicable to it” (*Physics*, 219b2)<sup>205</sup> and “a number of change in respect of before and after” (*Physics*, 220a24). Change is undoubtedly the most important feature of motion. It is reasonable for Socrates to see the nature of motion as a proper starting-point of his investigation of the theories of Heraclitus and Parmenides.<sup>206</sup>

There are two difficulties in Socrates’ arguments on the nature of motion. The first difficulty is about the predictions between two experts in the same field. Let us

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<sup>205</sup> All Aristotle’s translations are from Barnes (1995) *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>206</sup> At 160d5-e2, Socrates concludes that “all things flow like streams”, “man is the measure of all things” and “knowledge proves to be perception” “have converged to the same things”, which shows the importance of the nature of motion as a starting-point.

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assume that there are two doctors facing a patient and they hold opposite predictions of what will happen to this patient. When Socrates faces this situation, what will he say? Socrates would say that one of the doctors is wrong and he is wrong because either he does not have the knowledge or he does not apply his knowledge correctly. This explanation is unacceptable. For according to Socrates' own idea, a man could be called as a doctor only if he has knowledge of medicine, i.e. all the knowledge of medicine. If Socrates denies that one doctor has knowledge in the case, he in fact denies that one of the doctors is a doctor at all. Moreover, knowledge in *Theaetetus*, has two criteria, namely, "always of what is" and "unerring" (152c). These two standards, especially the latter one, ensure that once a man has knowledge, he will never make mistakes. How is this possible? Even if I have knowledge in a specific field, it is still possible for me to make mistakes when I apply the knowledge to a particular item or event. As Aristotle says,

"By universal knowledge then we see the particulars, but we do not know them by the kind of knowledge which is proper to them; consequently it is possible that we make mistakes about them, but not that we should have the knowledge and error that are contrary to one another: rather we have universal knowledge but make a mistake in regard to the particular." (*Prior Analytics*, Book two, Chapter 21, 67a25-30).

Borrowing Ryle's terminology, the knowledge of "know what" is different from knowledge of "know how". Socrates does not have such a distinction between knowledge of "know what" and of "know how" and thinks that as long as you have



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knowledge of “know what” you could perfectly know how to apply it.<sup>207</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems that Socrates has no reason to insist on this and there is no explanation of the distinction in *Theaetetus*.

The second difficulty of Socrates’ argument is more complicated. It links to Protagoras’ philosophy. In Socrates’ argument, a man without specific knowledge is not authoritative in a particular field of knowledge. Consequently, “not every man’s judgement is true” (179c). Protagoras who is under such a criticism, however, would insist on his theory by saying that his theory does not refer to anyone except the percipient himself. Protagoras’ point is that everything that the percipient perceives is true for himself and the judgements the percipient makes are true for himself as well. In other words, Protagoras’ theory is true in the relationship between what the percipient perceives and what judgement he makes from his perception. Moreover, “man is the measure of all things” does not refer to the future, since every judgement refers to what is happening to himself. “All things” in “man is the measure of all things” cannot mean everything, but has tense limitation. It is irrelevant to prediction.

In Protagoras’ mind, every judgement is only valid once, i.e. the judgement is always true that a percipient makes on what he perceives now for himself. If it is, then how would Protagoras account for the prediction that is a common phenomenon in life? He would acutely point out that there is no prediction at all, or, in other words, everyone could make a prediction without any specific knowledge. In his eyes, prediction which is a statement refers to events in the future and so is an expression

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<sup>207</sup> Ryle (1949.) chapter two, p. 28-31.

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of emotion. We could easily find examples in language that have the same grammar. In English, there is no future tense. That is why we employ “will” to construct a future tense in English. Maybe we could label Protagoras’ ideas as “fragmentation”. Let us consider the text of 152a-c, where Socrates offers a summary of Protagoras’ thought. At the beginning of the summary, Protagoras is said to think that “Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not” (152a). Socrates gives a further explanation of “man is the measure of all things”: “as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you” (152a). Then, Socrates uses the wind as an example to illustrate the meaning of Protagoras’ thought. Finally, Socrates links “appear” to “perceive” (152b). If Socrates’ interpretation of Protagoras’ thought is correct, then “perception” is the key point, since perceiving cannot happen in the past or in the future, but only can happen at present.

Disregarding the difficulties in Socrates’ criticism, the reason he gives is just a part of the story. In a long explanation of Heraclitean’ theory (179e-180d), Socrates mentions Parmenides’ philosophy that “all things are one, and that this One stands still, itself within itself, having no place in which to move” (180e). Here, both of these two extremely opposite theories are dealing with motion and the main divergence between them is the question “Does motion exist?”. Therefore, investigation on the nature of motion becomes a key issue to examine the correctness of these two theories, namely, “all things are in motion” and “man is the measure of all things”.

Although the nature of motion is a proper starting-point, i.e. for criticizing these theories, the relationship between motion and “knowledge is perception” is still not clear. Socrates just mentions in the text, that “we shall have to consider and test this moving Being, and find whether it rings true or sounds as if it had some flaw in it” (179d). One possible answer is, as Sedley says, “universal flux was introduced in the first place as the necessary condition of perception’s infallibility”.<sup>208</sup> Protagoras insists that every judgement is only valid once, i.e. the judgement is always true that a percipient makes on what he perceives now. This is actually cutting off perception in time into fragments and admitting that the thing perceived in time<sub>1</sub> is different from itself in time<sub>2</sub>. Socrates finds it is necessary to investigate the nature of motion, so that we could test Protagoras’ philosophy more effectively.

At 181c, Socrates presents two kinds of motion, alteration and spatial movement. After the distinction of the two forms of motion, Socrates immediately turns to using motion to explain how we get perception (QA).

“As we were saying, they [the people who allege that all things are in motion, 181d] hold that the genesis of things such as warmth and whiteness occurs when each of them is moving, together with a perception, in the space between the active and passive factors: the passive factor thereby becoming percipient, but not a perception, while the active factor becomes such or such, but not a quality...” (182a)

This quotation (QA) is too abstract to understand, though the terms, such as “the active factor”, “the passive factor” and “space” have appeared earlier in *Theaetetus* (cf. 156a, 156e. 159d); therefore, let us analyse the specific example given by

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<sup>208</sup> Sedley (2004) p. 89.

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Socrates (QB):

“So I will talk about particular cases. What I mean is that the active factor becomes not warmth or whiteness, but warm and white; and so on... [182b] It is by the association of the two with one another that they generate perceptions and the things perceived; and in so doing, the active factor becomes such and such, while the passive factor becomes percipient.” (182a-b)

Socrates says that he “will talk about particular cases”. These so-called “particular cases” of warmth and whiteness are not helpful for understanding Socrates’ idea on how a percipient (the passive factor) gains a perception from the motion that happens between the passive factor and the active factor. Let us come back to 156a where Socrates gives a difficult explanation on “everything is in motion”.

At this point, Socrates explains three elements of motion, i.e. the active factor, the passive factor and the offspring of them, which are distinguished by their powers

(QC):

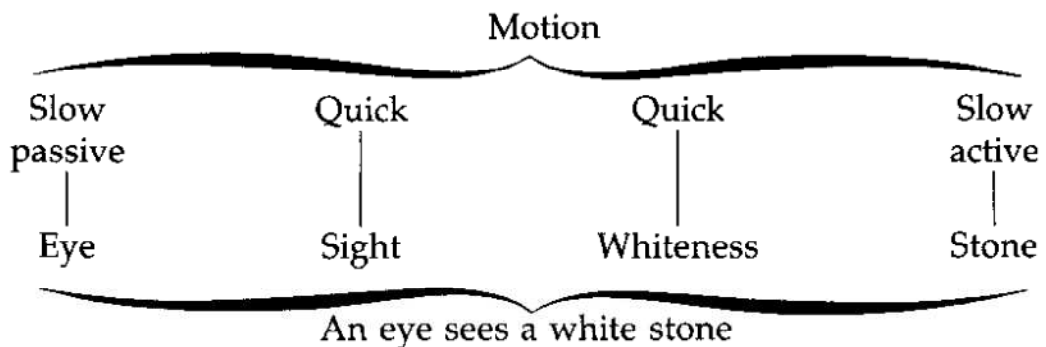
“...everything is really motion, and there is nothing but motion. Motion has two forms, each an infinite multitude, but distinguished by their powers, the one being active and the other passive. And through the intercourse and mutual friction of these two there comes to be an offspring [156b] infinite in multitude but always twin births, on the one hand what is perceived, on the other, the perception of it, the perception in every case being generated together with what is perceived and emerging with it.” (156a-b)

In order to help Theaetetus understand this idea, Socrates gives him an example of colour (QD):

“Thus the eye and some other thing --- one of the things commensurate with the eye --- which has come into its neighbourhood, generate both whiteness and the perception which is by nature united with it (things which would never have come to be if it had been anything else that eye or object approached). In this event, motions [156e] arise in the intervening space, sight from the side of the eye and whiteness from the side of that which cooperates in the production of the colour. The eye is filled with sight; at that moment it sees, and there comes into being, not indeed sight, but a seeing eye; while its partner in the process of producing colour is filled with whiteness, and there comes into being not whiteness, but white...” (156d-e)<sup>209</sup>

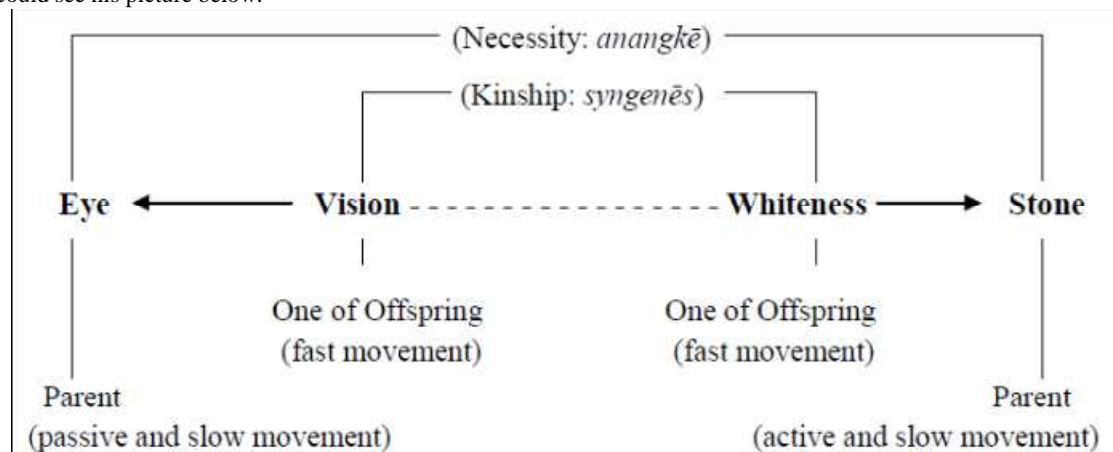
(QD) mentions a larger number of things in the process of how the eyes perceive whiteness from an object: eyes, whiteness, perception, object, motion, intervening space, sight, colour and white. Socrates leaves “some other thing” and “one of the things” unexplained, but these two terms are easily understood. When you are watching something, you are seeing many things at the same time, though you pay your attention to the object you want to watch. Therefore, Socrates says that the eyes and some other thing generate perception, but, particularly, one of the things and the eyes produce the whiteness. Therefore, we could paraphrase (QD) as follows: when you are watching something, you are actually seeing many things at the same time; your eyes and this thing produce a perception; especially, the object you are watching and your eyes generate both a perception and the whiteness. How do your eyes and

<sup>209</sup> The schema that Socrates gives us on how to perceive whiteness is a little abstract. Burnyeat supplies a picture of the whole process as following:



the thing produce the perception and the whiteness? The perception and the whiteness are generated by a motion between the eyes and the thing, which happens in the intervening space. More exactly, the motion that makes your eyes full of white is generated by the sight of your eyes and the whiteness. The whole perceiving process could be divided into two parts. Firstly, your eyes meet the thing you are watching, which produces a perception and the whiteness -- “Whiteness”, here, as McDowell points out, cannot refer to “whiteness in general”, for if it is, then the “whiteness can be seen only once”. That is to say, it must be “taken to refer to a particular instance of whiteness”<sup>210</sup>. Secondly, after the whiteness has been produced, it produces white colour by making a motion with your sight. Sight, here, should be understood as a capacity of the eyes. Therefore, it is not sight that becomes white, rather the seen object, e.g. the stone, becomes white, for your sight is just a capacity, not an entity. Further, your eyes become white or your eyes are full of white, not whiteness, because whiteness just exists in the intervening space between your eyes and the object. Let us jump out of the whiteness case and generalize this particular

See Burnyeat (1990) p. 16. Lee also offers us a picture of his own example of a eye seeing a white stone. We could see his picture below:



Cf. Lee (2012) p. 179.

<sup>210</sup> McDowell (1973) p. 138.

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case. We could find immediately that the whiteness in the specific case is actually “a particular instance of whiteness”.

Two kinds of perceptions emerge. When you as a percipient perceive something and pay attention to a specific thing, these things, the particular item perceived and you generate together some perceptions that we could call “perception<sub>1</sub>”. Further, you and the perceptions produced in “perception<sub>1</sub>” produce some other perceptions that could be labeled as “perception<sub>2</sub>”. There are two differences between these two kinds of perception. (1) The “perception<sub>1</sub>” refers to a quality as general, although it is a particular image of the general quality in question. In contrast the “perception<sub>2</sub>” refers only to a quality produced in a specific occurrence. Briefly speaking, the “perception<sub>1</sub>” could refer to a quality in general, but the “perception<sub>2</sub>” could only refer to “being such and such”. (2) The “perception<sub>1</sub>” has the ability with the percipient to generate other perceptions, namely, the “perception<sub>2</sub>”, while “perception<sub>2</sub>” has no such ability. Moreover, “perception<sub>1</sub>” and “perception<sub>2</sub>” are not unrelated. Rather “perception<sub>2</sub>” makes the percipient get such and such of a quality in question which is in the “perception<sub>1</sub>”. Consider the whiteness case again. A motion between your eyes and the objects produces some perceptions (“perception<sub>1</sub>”) that are “a particular instance of a quality in general (such as hardness, greatness or beauty)” and the whiteness in which you are interested. Next, your eyes along with the whiteness together generate white (a particular image of the “perception<sub>2</sub>”) which, consequently, makes your eyes full of sight (153e3).

Is the quality “whiteness”, the whiteness itself, i.e. a Form? It is impossible, for

two reasons. (1) The quality in general is just “a particular instance” of the quality, not the quality itself. (2) Forms, as described in *Phaedo* (87a) and other dialogues, must be changeless (always what it is), one, and divine. Therefore, Forms could not be generated in every process of perceiving. At most, we could say that the quality in the process of perception participates in the Forms. Then, based on these two reasons, the quality in question could not be a Form in any way. Therefore, “white” would be a better term than whiteness.<sup>211</sup>

Having considered thoroughly (QD), next, let me analyse (QC): “Everything is really motion, and there is nothing but motion.” This quotation is too abstract to understand, but now, with the help of (QD), it should be easier to grasp. (QC) or the quotation that follows is the proposition that Socrates is investigating: “Motion has two forms, each an infinite multitude, but distinguished by their powers, the one being active and the other passive” (δύναμιν δὲ τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν ἔχον, τὸ δὲ πάσχειν) (156a). Socrates divides motion “by their powers”, one being active and the other being passive. Nevertheless, what does the phrase “distinguished by their powers, the one being active and the other passive” actually mean? Does it mean, as McDowell proposes, “the point of talking about changes, rather, than, say, changing things is probably that the latter would imply”?<sup>212</sup> What does the word “latter” mean? “Latter” refers to “changing things”. According to McDowell’s understanding of the sentence, he translates “δύναμιν δὲ τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν ἔχον, τὸ δὲ πάσχειν” into “the one having the

<sup>211</sup> I do not intend to say that “whiteness” is a Form. When Plato uses “largeness” in the *Phaedo* 102d6-9, “largeness” is not a Form.

<sup>212</sup> McDowell (1973) p.137.



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power of acting and the other the power of being acted on”.<sup>213</sup> Cornford would agree with McDowell, for his translation is “but they differ in that the one kind has the power of acting, the other of being acted on”.<sup>214</sup> The key element in this sentence is “τὸ ἔχον”. “τὸ” and the ending “-ον” shows that the person of these two words is neuter. If it is neuter, it could not refer to “motion”, for “ἡ κίνησις” (motion) is feminine. Thus, “the one having the power of acting” must refer to the percipient “that has ability to perceive” and “the other the power of being acted on” must refer to the object.

Next, let us consider the “offspring” of the active and passive factors in (QC): “And through the intercourse and mutual friction of these two there comes to be an offspring infinite in multitude but always twin births, on the one hand what is perceived, on the other, the perception of it, the perception in every case being generated together with what is perceived and emerging with it.” The intercourse between the percipient and the object has an offspring that is infinite in number but always twins, i.e. perceptions and qualities.

With these explanations in place, (QB) and (QA) are easy to understand. When Socrates says at (QB): “So I will talk about particular cases. What I mean is that the active factor becomes not warmth or whiteness, but warm and white; and so on...” He is explaining that the object comes to be warm and white, rather than whiteness and warmth, for whiteness and warmth could only appear in the motion that happens in the intervening space between the percipient and the object. When he goes on to

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<sup>213</sup> McDowell (1973) p. 22.

<sup>214</sup> Cornford (1935) p.46.

say in (QB), his point is:

“It is by the association of the two with one another that they generate perceptions and the things perceived; and in so doing, the active factor becomes such and such, while the passive factor becomes percipient.”

This statement, namely (QB), is a repeat of what (QD) and (QC) have said. The only thing still to explain is the phrase “such and such”. This phrase means, in full, “being of such and such a quality”, namely, being in a state of having a quality, such as being white or hard or soft or so on.

The final explanation is now that of (QA). The text says:

“As we were saying, they hold that the genesis of things such as warmth and whiteness occurs when each of them is moving, together with a perception, in the space between the active and passive factors: the passive factor thereby becoming percipient, but not a perception, while the active factor becomes such or such, but not a quality...”

This quotation is consistent with the three quotations above. “The passive factor” is the percipient. The passive percipient is not itself a perception, but rather is full of perception of a quality, as (QD) has mentioned.

In sum, all these four quotations (QA-QD) are about how a percipient perceives an object in the sensible world. There are actually two processes in this event of perception. The first step is a motion, which is generated by a percipient and an object. This process produces perceptions, which I call “perception<sub>1</sub>” and qualities. The second step is another motion, which is a result of the percipient and the

qualities. This second process creates another kind of perception, which is called “perception<sub>2</sub>”. At this point, “perception<sub>1</sub>” seems problematic, because it is not essential, not even necessary, to the whole process. If the motion in the first step produces qualities, then the “perception<sub>1</sub>” becomes redundant. Socrates who particularly picks out “whiteness” and other qualities from perceptions (“perception<sub>1</sub>”) intends to emphasize that they are not Forms. Qualities, not in general, but a special instance of the qualities themselves, are the “perceptions<sub>1</sub>”.

After an investigation of the three elements of motion which are “distinguished by their powers” (156a). A second discussion about “All things are in motion” appears at 182c-182d. This time, because of “All things are in motion”, nothing is durable. The “whiteness” in the discussion of (QA)-(QB) is also changing.

Socrates: “...We must ask them this question: ‘According to you,<sup>215</sup> all things move and flow; is not that so?’”

Theodorus: “Yes.”

Socrates: “...They both move and alter?”

Theodorus: “That must be so...”

Socrates: “Now if they were only moving through space and not altering, we should presumably be able to say *what* the moving things flow?...”

Theodorus: “That’s all right.” (182c)

Socrates: “But since not even this abides, that what flows flows white; but rather it is in process of change, so that there is flux of this very thing also, the whiteness, and it is passing over into another colour...since that is so, is it possible to give any name to a colour which will properly apply to it?”

Theodorus: “I do not see how one could, Socrates.” (182d)

A good interpretation of this quotation comes from T. Irwin’s analysis of change

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<sup>215</sup> “You” does not refer to Theodorus, but “the people who allege that all things are in motion” (181d). The word “them” also refers to those believes “all things are in motion”.

in Plato's philosophy. He makes a distinction between self-change and aspect-change.

First, he identifies what self-change is. He claims:

“The *Theaetetus* presents one view of flux; everything undergoes constant local movement and qualitative alteration (181b8-182c8), constantly gaining properties it previously lacked and losing properties it previously had. Let us call this kind of change self-change (s-change):  $x$  s-changes iff at time  $t_1$   $x$  is  $F$  and at time  $t_2$   $x$  is not- $F$ , and  $x$  itself is not in the same condition at  $t_2$  as it was at  $t_1$  (e.g., at  $t_1$  it is hot, and at  $t_2$  it has become not-hot, by becoming colder than it was).”

Irwin also identifies another kind of change, i.e. aspect-change in Plato's philosophy,

“things with compresent opposite properties --- the road up and down, the straight and crooked writing, the food which is good (for some people) and bad (for others) (Heracleitus, B59-61). Let us call this aspect-change (a-change):  $x$  a-changes iff  $x$  is  $F$  in one aspect, not- $F$  in another, and  $x$  is in the same condition when it is  $F$  and when it is not- $F$  (e.g.,  $x$  is big in comparison with  $y$ , small in comparison with  $z$ ).”<sup>216</sup>

Under Irwin's distinction, we could discover that both spatial movement (i.e. mechanical movement) and alteration, according to the text of 182c-d, are “self-change”, while “aspect-change” does not appear in the quotation of 182c-d.

It is worth noting that there is a small difference between alteration and spatial movement. A thing which is in spatial movement is at the same time in the motion of alteration, since all things are in motion and then the thing itself in spatial movement is also changing. Nevertheless, a thing that alters itself is not necessarily in a spatial

<sup>216</sup> Irwin (1977) p.4. Irwin's thought about change in Plato's philosophy has difficulties. Matthew Colvin argues, “The difficulty with Irwin's explanation is two-fold: first, mere compresence of opposites does not seem to be ‘flux’; second, Plato's concern to guard his forms from diachronic qualitative change is different from his concern about the synchronic compresence of opposite qualities. His diction makes this difference clear. The two problems are not the same in Plato's mind; though both may meet their solution in immaterial forms, that is no proof that unity of opposites is a species of flux”. See Colvin (2007) p. 761.

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movement. So we could conclude that all things are involved in the motion of alteration while not everything is in mechanical movement. Socrates introduces this property at 181d, such as “grows old, becoming black instead of white, or hard instead of soft, or undergoes any other alteration”.

If all things are always in alteration, according to the doctrine “everything is in motion”, why does Socrates only consider the situation where things “were only moving through space and not altering”? On passage 182c-183b, McDowell points out,

“...the neatest way of interpreting the argument of this passage is, I think, to regard it as answering a question which might be expected to have occurred to the reader about the change which is engaged in by the offspring mentioned in the theory of perception, i.e. by qualities and kinds of perception”.<sup>217</sup>

McDowell’s point is that when Socrates discusses the “offspring” of the percipient and the object, i.e. of the perception and the qualities, (namely perception<sub>1</sub>, perception<sub>2</sub> and qualities), he obviously treats the qualities and the perceptions as things that stand still.

The agreement of Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus can only be consistent, if the qualities and the perceptions as things that stand still. Inconsistency, however, can be avoided, because, on the one hand, the necessary condition for a percipient to gain perceptions from objects is that there is something that stands still. But on the other hand, it is impossible for anything to stand still or keep itself still, according to the

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<sup>217</sup> McDowell (1973) p. 181.

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theory “everything is in motion, there is nothing but motion”. Take whiteness as an example, when a motion generated by a percipient and an object produces qualities, particularly whiteness, the whiteness itself (though whiteness here is not whiteness in general) is in flux and “passing over into another colour” (182d). It is impossible “to give any name to a colour which will properly apply to it” (182d). In other words, “everything is in motion” actually makes everything mix together, which consequently makes everything one undifferentiated thing.

Another consequence of the idea that “everything is in motion”, is that it also abolishes knowledge and language, if we believe both “everything is in motion” and “knowledge is perception”. Socrates makes this point clear at 183a:

“If all things are in motion, every answer, on whatever subject, is equally correct, both ‘it is thus’ and ‘it is not thus’ --- or if you like ‘become’, as we do not want to use any expressions which will bring our friends to a stand–still.” (183a)

In the following discussion, I will try to defend the doctrine “everything is in motion” or correct this doctrine in order to make it more acceptable on behalf of Heraclitus or Homer or whoever. To keep things simple, I shall only discuss the whiteness case. The core point in Socrates’ argument is that the whiteness itself is also in flux, so that whiteness is “passing over” into another colour. It is this claim that will make the whole process of perception impossible. We have at least three refutations to offer against this claim. First, the word “whiteness” that Socrates employs is a vague word. As we all know, there are different kinds of whiteness from the aspect of brightness.

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Pure white, ivory and grayish-white are all usually called “white” in a vague way, though in the strictest scientific sense, white is colourless. Hence, even if the whiteness itself is in flux in the process of perception (for instance, it increases or reduces its brightness and becomes pure white or grayish-white), we could still perceive whiteness. We still need to consider the eyes of the percipient and the object. People have different powers of sight. How could Socrates ensure that everyone has the same vision? Even if we disregard the diseases of eyes and other particular cases, such as illusion and vision in the dream, everyone is still different in their power of sight. Therefore, even if the whiteness itself does not alter, the appearance of whiteness could still differ for different people. Moreover, the colour is in fact light. Therefore, the appearance of a colour is influenced by the light. In the same circumstance, but in a different perspective or in a different condition of the light, the object would emerge as a different colour. In a word, even if “everything is in motion” is a wrong theory, Socrates’ criticism is not a good one.

Second, if “everything is in motion”, how could Socrates make a clear distinction between one colour and another colour? Let us consider the process of our perception. The whole process is uninterrupted. In the process of white becoming gray then black, it seems that there is no absolute boundary of white, gray and black. What “everything is in motion” does is to make every moment of our perception become definite. If a percipient perceives white at  $t_1$ , those who advocate “everything is in motion” will claim that the percipient absolutely gains a perception of white at  $t_1$ , though they may insist that the perception itself is also in motion. How is this

possible? The issue will become extremely complicated and even insoluble in the next step, for it refers to mathematics and the problem of time (similar to Zeno's arrow paradox). Briefly speaking, both the advocates of permanent flux and Socrates might admit that change, whether it is a spatial movement or an alternation, needs time.

The last refutation refers to the question "is there whiteness?" Socrates and Plato will admit the existence of whiteness, but Heraclitus or other philosophers may not. Heraclitus could avoid Socrates' criticism by denying the existence of whiteness.

In this section, in order to investigate the meaning of "all things are in motion", Socrates discusses the nature of motion and the relationship between the nature of motion and "knowledge is perception" through the process of how we gain perception. Nevertheless, if everything is in flux, i.e. nothing stands still, then the previous discussion on the nature of motion becomes unreliable.

#### **4.6 Perception has no share of knowledge**

After the investigation of "all things are in motion", Socrates now tries to expel perception from the region of knowledge.<sup>218</sup> If Socrates' attacks on Protagoras' "man is the measure of all things" and Heraclitus' "all things are in motion" only rebut "knowledge is perception" indirectly, then "perception has no share of knowledge" is

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<sup>218</sup> C.f. *Timaeus* 27d-29a, where Plato makes a distinction between "what is that which always is" and "what is that which becomes but never is" (τί τὸ ὄν ἀεὶ, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεὶ, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε). Plato clearly points out: "The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account. It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense perception..." (τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσεται μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτά ὄν, τὸ δ' αὖ δόξῃ μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν) (27d-28a). Plato repeats and emphasizes latter, "...perceptible things are grasped by opinion, which involves sense perception" (τὰ δ' αἰσθητά, δόξῃ περιληπτά μετ' αἰσθήσεως) (28c).



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the final and direct attack Theaetetus' "knowledge is perception". In Socrates' view, "man is the measure of all things" is just a rephrase of "knowledge is perception". At 152c Socrates asserts that knowledge should be always of what is and always unerring. Therefore, if knowledge is perception, then perception should also be always of what is and always unerring. Further, if "man is the measure of all things", then "everything is in motion", because if something could appear as something A to one person, while the same thing could appear as something B to another person, then everything would be in the process of becoming. According to Socrates' arguments, "everything is in motion" and "man is the measure of all things" are wrong. Therefore, he agrees that perception is not a part of knowledge.

Socrates admits the existence of being and truth. As both Socrates and Theodorus agree, being is the thing "which the soul itself reaches out after itself" (186a)<sup>219</sup> and it is impossible "for someone who does not even get at being to get at truth" (186c). To understand this idea, we should return to the text at 185c-d. In this section, Socrates leads Theaetetus to the region of judgment which is beyond the region of sensation and is relevant to language.

Soc. ...Now through what does that power function which reveals to you what is common in the case both of all things and of these two --- I mean that which you express by the words "is" and "is not" and the other terms used in our question about them just now? What kind of instruments will you assign for all these? Through what does that which is percipient in us perceive all of them?

Theaet. You mean being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, same and

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<sup>219</sup> Burnyeat asks, "Do we perceive with the several sense organs or with just one thing, the soul?" or "What is the proper subject of our various perceptions, the individual organs involved or always one and the same soul?". He denies the possibility of "wooden horse" model at 184d and believes that Socrates uses the soul as a unity in the *Theaetetus* rather than it in the *Republic*. See Burnyeat (1976) pp. 29-51.

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different; also one and any other number applied to them. [185d] And obviously too your question is about odd and even, and all that is involved with these attributes; and you want to know through what bodily instruments we perceive all these with the soul. (185c-d)

Socrates wants to know through what kinds of function, “being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, same and different, one and any other number, odd and even”, could be avoid to us. Does the soul gain them through the “bodily powers” or does it “consider [them] alone and through itself” (185e).<sup>220</sup> Both Socrates and Theaetetus admit that things such as being, likeness and the same are all things which “the soul itself reaches out after by itself”, i.e. the reflective use of the mind (186a).

In contrast, Socrates mentions the natural ability of human beings, namely the perception ability. He says:

“And thus there are some things which all creatures, men and animals alike, are naturally able to perceive as soon as they are born; I mean, the experiences which reach the soul through the body.” (186b-c)

These are the perceptual uses of the mind. The next step brings the two uses together:

“But calculations regarding their being and their advantageousness come, when they do, only as the result of a long and arduous development, involving a good deal of trouble and education.” (186c)

In this quotation, Socrates emphasizes that both animals and human beings have perception ability, while the reasoning or calculation ability needs to be developed

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<sup>220</sup> Cooper calls this distinction “the contrast between the perceptual and the reflective uses of the mind”. He tries to prove that Cornford, who thinks that sensible objects are not knowable, is wrong and there is no evidence to say that they refer to the Forms when Socrates mentions “being”, “likeness” and “sameness”. See Cooper (1970) p.132.

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over a long time. After this, Socrates immediately points out that it is impossible to get knowledge without reaching the truth as well (186c). Socrates seems not to consider human beings who have no reasoning ability as human beings at all. For there is a time difference between a human being born and reaching the truth, if a human being needs his reasoning ability to get the truth.

Based on the reasons above, Socrates concludes that it is impossible to gain truth from experience:

“Then knowledge is to be found not in the experience but in the process of reasoning about them; it is here, seemingly, not in the experience, that it is possible to grasp being and truth.” (186d)

If this is true, then perception “has no share in the grasping of truth, since it has none in the grasping of being”. Therefore, perception “has no share in knowledge either” and “perception and knowledge could never be the same thing” (186e).<sup>221</sup> Socrates admits this is “a little progress”. His conclusion therefore is that

“...we shall not now look for knowledge in sense-perception at all, but in whatever we call that activity of the soul when it is busy by itself about the things which are”. (187a)

Socrates’ expression in this argument is not clear, because it would mislead its readers to think that truth or knowledge does not gain any information from perception. If someone were to ask Socrates, “Is this statement a piece of knowledge:

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<sup>221</sup> William Bondeson notes, “This passage rather plainly states that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) resides in reasoning about our sensations (παθήματα) and not in the sensations themselves”. I think his idea is correct and I will develop this idea in my argument. See Bondeson (1969) p. 113.

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‘a bachelor is an unmarried man’?” Socrates will properly admit that it is a piece of knowledge. But knowing the meaning of “bachelor”, as a premise of such a piece of knowledge, is actually based on perception of this specific phenomenon. Moreover, some information or just facts that would be admitted as knowledge are constructed completely by perception, e.g. “There was a football match last Sunday night”.

Socrates in this argument is emphasizing that truth and knowledge could not be a product of perception, but rather are the product of the activity of reasoning alone. Socrates tries to have a better understanding of what the implications of perception are, though perception has no share of knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

As the whole chapter shows, Theaetetus’ first attempt to define knowledge as sense perception fails. This result of failure matches the conclusion in chapter three, namely, the keynote of the *Theaetetus* is anti-empiricism. Protagoras’ “man is the measure of all things” is not in the category of empiricism, since it belongs to relativism.<sup>222</sup> Nevertheless, Protagoras’ principle approves the function of perception in gaining knowledge and even treats “knowledge” and “perception” as the same thing, which Socrates cannot tolerate. Additionally, Protagoras’ idea states that sense perception is infallible. If Socrates insists on the two standards of knowledge at 152c, he must reject Protagoras’ “man is the measure of all things”.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> See Burnyeat (1976) p. 172.

<sup>223</sup> Cornford believes that “we shall find that perception, although with due qualifications it may be called infallible, has not the real for its object.” Generally I agree with him, however, in *Theaetetus*, I cannot agree with this idea. See Cornford (1935) p.29.

Socrates' two criteria of knowledge, namely, knowledge should always be of what is and should be unerring, have made perception as a part of knowledge impossible. Nevertheless, as part of this investigation, Socrates describes the process of how to gain perception in detail and the description gives us a hint of how to understand "knowledge" finally when we connect it to the relevant theories about epistemology, such as the theory of recollection. The description of the perceiving process reveals that Socrates tries to describe the process of perception using scientific explanation instead of the method of myth, analogy, simile or story.

From a negative perspective, Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is perception, fails because of Socrates' strict standards of knowledge and his anti-empiricist philosophical position. Nevertheless, from a positive perspective, Socrates' arguments in his discussion of "knowledge is perception" strongly supplement the epistemological outline in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. That is especially true of Socrates' description of how eyes perceive colour, which could be applied to explain how we perceive things in sensible world. The process of perceiving colour also help us to imagine how the soul "consorts with" Forms in the realm of Forms. The conclusion of the whole discussion about perception in *Theaetetus*, namely, perception cannot be a part of knowledge, enhances Socrates' philosophical position of anti-empiricism.<sup>224</sup> The conclusion also leads both Theaetetus and us to turn our

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<sup>224</sup> R. S. Bluck correctly points out that "the Greek word δόξα is not necessarily to be associated with propositions. It may refer simply to what a thing 'seems like'. In the *Meno* δόξα about a thing may be converted into ἐπιστήμη of it, and in the *Republic* one may be led on (or upwards) from δόξα to ἐπιστήμη--and in the *Republic*, at least, ἐπιστήμη is certainly a matter of 'knowledge by acquaintance' with Forms" (p.259). He not only insists a connection between *Meno* and *Theaetetus*, but also emphasizes that δόξα has a strong link to perception. This seems to give an explanation of why "knowledge is perception" is discussed at the beginning of *Theaetetus*. See Bluck (1963) p. 259.

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attention to the region of reasoning. This area of judgement and reasoning is the context for Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge, "knowledge is true opinion", the topic of chapter five.

## Chapter Five Knowledge as True Judgement in *Theaetetus*

### Introduction

In chapter four, we saw how Socrates rebuts Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge, namely, knowledge is perception. Socrates concludes at the end of his discussion about perception that perception could not be a part of knowledge. Theaetetus then turns his eyes from the sensible region to the region of abstract reasoning. Theaetetus proposes that knowledge is not perception but true opinion. Although both Socrates and Theaetetus attempt to seek knowledge without perception, they will find out soon that the question of whether judgement is true or false has a relationship to sense perception. Socrates introduces the wax block analogy and the aviary example. The wax block analogy claims that there is a block of wax in everyone's soul and the things that "we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves" are all imprinted on the block. What we know comes from the things that can be seen as imprinted on the block. The aviary example offers Plato's readers a picture of how the soul operates when it makes a judgement, whether this judgement is true or false. The soul is then later described as an aviary with different kinds of "birds". Socrates does not make clear where those "birds" come from but emphasizes that the aviary is empty when each person is a child. I will argue that the aviary example needs perception and it connects to the recollection theory. If both the wax

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block analogy and the aviary example need perception, are they therefore empirical theories?

Although the wax block analogy and aviary theory need perception, they could be a supplement to Plato's epistemological outline in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, and therefore they have a two-fold function. On the one hand, they are employed to illustrate how the soul operates to make a judgement in the sensible world. On the other hand, they can be seen as demonstrating how the soul operates to gain knowledge when it "consorts with" Forms. The discussion about Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is true judgement, fails in the end.

What needs to be noticed is that the wax block analogy and the aviary example are introduced under the discussion of the question, "How is false judgement possible?".<sup>225</sup> Indeed, as in the discussion of the first definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is perception, where Socrates concentrates on refuting Protagoras' "man is the measure of all things", rather than the definition itself, Socrates in his discussion of "knowledge is true judgement" does not consider the definition immediately, but tries to understand how false judgement is possible. If we consider the relationship between "know" and "not know", especially when we consider that knowledge is unerring, the existence of false judgement seems impossible. Therefore, Socrates turns to the relationship between being and non-being in order to locate false judgement. The result of this argument is that false judgement is "other judging"

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<sup>225</sup> Socrates' discussion of "knowledge is true judgement", as Terry Penner argues, "is mostly taken up with a question that may seem irrelevant to the rest of the dialogue: the question how False Belief is possible". He summarises and divides the discussion of false judgement into "five principal arguments": the Argument from Knowing and Not-knowing, the Argument from Being and Not-being, the Argument from Interchange (*allodoxia*), the Wax Tablet model, and the Aviary model. See Penner (2013) p. 187.



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(189c-191a). Nevertheless, false judgement as “other judging” is also unreliable, since knowledge cannot be wrong. In order to consider how false judgement is possible, Socrates introduces the “wax block” analogy. He emphasizes that every soul has a wax block inside and the imprints on the block that are produced by sense perceptions or thoughts are knowable to us, though every block is different. The introduction of the wax block analogy changes the direction of the arguments. False judgement no longer arises from the wrong correspondence between sense perceptions and thoughts, but rather from the wrong exchanges between different sense perceptions and between different thoughts. Nevertheless, this could not explain why some false judgements are about something that only exists between notions, such as when someone mistakenly thinks “ $7+5=11$ ” (196a).<sup>226</sup> Further, if someone knows both 5 and 7, how could he falsely judge “ $7+5=11$ ”?<sup>227</sup> Socrates realizes that they will never gain the answer until they know what knowing is. This is the starting-point of the aviary example (196a-b). The example is employed to explain how false judgement happens when someone has knowledge, since Socrates makes a distinction between having knowledge and possessing knowledge. False judgement happens when someone tries to use knowledge rather than when he only possesses knowledge. Then, false judgement becomes something of an interchange between pieces of knowledge and happens in the behavior of applying knowledge. But what follows this conclusion destroys the conclusion itself, for the existence of

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<sup>226</sup> R. S. Bluck rejects the idea that “knowledge cannot be a matter of ‘acquaintance’ of any kind, being necessarily propositional” in *Theaetetus*, because “the Greek word  $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$  is not necessarily to be associated with propositions”. See Bluck (1963) p. 259.

<sup>227</sup> It is still possible that someone who knows “7”, “+”, “5” and “=”, but he still does not know  $7+5=12$  or he gains  $7+5=12$  by “truly guess”. Cf. Ryle (1990) p. 24.

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false judgement is produced by having knowledge rather than from want of knowledge, i.e. it is knowledge that makes the soul judge falsely, or that makes the soul ignorant.

The interlocutor, i.e. Theaetetus, fails to explain how false judgement is possible. Therefore, he proposes to consider directly knowledge as true judgement. Socrates rejects this definition by employing the counter-example of the art of orators and lawyers. This art could make people judge truly without knowledge, and if this phenomenon is possible, then true judgement is not knowledge.

In this chapter, I will first discuss knowledge, perception and the wax block analogy (section 5.1), because the wax block analogy connects knowledge, perception and judgement. My key question will be whether the block receives knowledge and perception themselves or only their images. However, Socrates discusses the wax block analogy in two different places in *Theaetetus* (191c-e, 194b-195a). In order to make my argument coherent, I have to depart from the order of Plato's texts and illustrate both discussions of the wax block analogy together in this chapter. Section 5.2 will deal with the aviary example which is another key theory to my whole project, for both it and the wax block analogy can be read as supplementing what happens when a soul "consorts with" the Forms to gain knowledge and how the soul operates a system within itself to make regaining knowledge possible. When Plato supplies his epistemological outline in *Meno* and *Phaedo*, he does not explain these two processes clearly. The *Theaetetus* material adds important information. In section 5.3, "how is false judgement possible?" will

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be discussed. This question is important, since it helps us to understand how true judgement is possible, especially when we realize that the wax block analogy and the aviary example are introduced through the discussion of how false judgement is possible.

### **5.1 Are knowledge and perceptions or their images on the wax block?**

After the failure of Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge, "knowledge is perception", Socrates insists on seeking what knowledge is rather what knowledge is not. He therefore turns his eyes away from sense perception: "We shall not now look for knowledge in sense-perception at all, but in whatever we call that activity of the soul when it is busy by itself about the things which are" (187a). In response to Socrates' comment Theaetetus calls that activity "judgement". The next text is as follows:

Socrates: "...Now look back to the beginning, Wipe out all that we have said hitherto, and see if you can see any better from where you have now progressed to. Tell me again, what is knowledge?"

Theaetetus: "Well, Socrates, one can't say that it is judgement in general, because there is also false judgement --- but true judgement may well be knowledge. So let that be my answer. If the same thing happens again, and we find, as we go on, that it turns out not to be so, we'll try something else." (187a-b)

This quotation shows the second definition of knowledge that Theaetetus offers, namely, knowledge is true judgement. However, there is a huge gap between Theaetetus' first definition of knowledge ("knowledge is perception") and the second

(“knowledge is true judgement”), for perception belongs to the region of sensation, while judgement belongs to the region of reasoning. This gap seems odd. In order to understand this oddness, let us come back to the text of 184c:

Socrates: “Is it more correct to say that the eyes are that *with* which we see, or that *through* which we see? Do you hear *with* the ears or *through* the ears?”

Theaetetus: “Well, I should think, Socrates, that it is ‘*through* which’ we perceive in each case, rather than ‘*with* which’.”

Socrates: “Yes, my son. It would be a very strange thing, I must say, if there were a number of senses (αἰσθήσεις) sitting (ἐγκάθηνται) inside us as if we were Wooden Horses, and there were not some single form, soul or whatever one ought to call it, to which all these converge -- something *with* which, *through* the senses, as if they were instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible.”

Both Sedley and McDowell comment on this short text. McDowell claims:

“But if we say that it is our eyes which see and our ears which hear, we seem to preclude ourselves from saying that there is some one thing which both sees and hears: something which, as it were, collates the information yielded by the exercise of the different senses. And, as Socrates says, it would be strange to be precluded from saying that”.<sup>228</sup>

Sedley follows the same view:

“A large part of the passage<sup>229</sup> is devoted to establishing the precise relation between the senses, considered as that *via* which we perceive... and the soul, viewed as the subject of all judgements”.<sup>230</sup>

Both of these interpretations are correct, though they are vague and explain the text

<sup>228</sup> McDowell (1973) pp. 185-186.

<sup>229</sup> 184b3-187a3.

<sup>230</sup> Sedley (2004) p. 105.

in a broad framework. In order to understand them more deeply, we need to consider, “Why does Socrates speak like that? Why does Socrates object to the idea of a number of senses ‘sitting inside us as if we were Wooden Horses’?”.<sup>231</sup> Two questions arise from the expression “if there were a number of senses sitting inside us as if we were Wooden Horses”. First, what is the meaning of the word “us” and second does the word “us” refer to the soul or to the body? These two questions could be considered as a single question, “What things are in the soul?”

These questions cannot be answered until we begin to consider the wax block analogy. When Socrates introduces the wax block analogy, he points out that there is a wax block in everyone’s soul and therefore “the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves” are “imprinted on the wax block” (εἰς τοῦτο ἀποτυποῦσθαι, 191d). We immediately realize that the question “What things are in your soul?” becomes another question “What things are imprinted upon the wax block?” Socrates indeed speaks in the wax block analogy of “a thing you know” (ὁ μὲν τις οἶδεν, 192a) as something where “you possess the record of it in your soul” (μνημεῖον ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, 192a). Socrates employs the phrase “in your soul”, for what you remember and know (ὁ μὲν μνημονεύειν τε καὶ ἐπίστασθαι) are the things on the wax block. Further, Socrates claims in the aviary example, “...there are pieces of knowledge covering all numbers in his soul” (198b). Socrates also uses terminology of items “in his soul” when he claims that someone “knows so long as he possesses them though he may not have them ready at hand in his soul” (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, 200c). Moreover, when

<sup>231</sup> Burnyeat has given his answer to this question. See Burnyeat (1976) pp. 29-51.

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Socrates describes the soul as an aviary, Theaetetus uses the same language when he observes that “perhaps we ought to have supposed that there are pieces of ignorance also flying about in the soul” (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, 199e). The phrase “in the soul” in these quotations in the aviary example should be understood as “in the aviary”, since according to the analogy, only what is in the “aviary” could be known. Socrates in the aviary example always claims only that what we know are in the aviary, in contrast to the wax block analogy where he points out that both perceptions and thoughts are imprinted upon the block (191d).

Socrates’ application of the wax block analogy in the region of knowledge or reasoning only seems straightforward, because this analogy is introduced to explain how it is possible “to learn something you did not know before” (191c) and why false judgement appears. If these are the functions of the analogy, then it could only be valid in the discussion of judgement, knowledge or reasoning. However, what Socrates says about the wax block does not match his purpose. Socrates asks Theaetetus whether it is possible for someone to learn something that they did not know before. Theaetetus answers him without any hesitation: “Surely it is” (191c). Socrates wishes him to suppose, “We have in our soul a block of wax”. Later, at 194d and 194e, Socrates borrows Homer’s term and calls this wax block the “heart of the soul”. Socrates also points out that different people have different types of wax blocks. The blocks, he says, are,

“...larger in one person, smaller in another, and of purer wax in one case, dirtier in another; in some men rather hard, in others rather soft, while in some it is of the proper consistency” (191c-d).

The function of this wax block, or the “heart” of our soul, is described as follows:

“We make impressions upon this of everything we wish to remember among the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves; we hold the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and take a stamp from them, in the way in which we take the imprints of signet rings.” (191d)

In this quotation, Socrates claims that the imprint of “perceptions and the thoughts” would appear on the wax block. Two things need to be noticed. First, there are things imprinted upon the wax block, namely, there is something in our soul. Second, the stamps or imprints of what “we have seen or heard or thought” and wish to remember are all on the block. The only difference between people is that the imprints may be different in degree. Nevertheless, how could the imprints of perceptions be on the wax block? This question is important, since nothing is perceptible or sensible in the process of recollection, according to the outline of epistemology in *Meno* and *Phaedo* and Socrates rejects that perception is a part of knowledge at the end of his discussion about knowledge as perception in *Theaetetus* (187a).<sup>232</sup> If imprints of perceptions are on the wax block, then is perception knowledge? What puzzles me here is not that thought is imprinted but that perception is imprinted.

As the quotation at 191d shows, what Socrates says is contradictory. On the one

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<sup>232</sup> According to David Sedley’s report, “Anon. [the Anonymous commentator] regards the *Meno* as the key text for understanding Plato’s theory of knowledge, including that presented in the *Theaetetus*, and he has little difficulty in, for example, interpreting Socratic midwifery in the latter dialogue as the dialectical encouragement of others’ recollection of innate knowledge”. See Sedley (1993) p. 129.

hand, Socrates tries to limit the imprints that appear on the wax to the region of knowledge and memory (“whatever is impressed upon the wax, we remember and know as long as the image remains in the wax”) (καὶ ὁ μὲν ἂν ἐκμαγῆ, μνημονεύειν τε καὶ ἐπίστασθαι ἕως ἂν ἐνῆ τὸ εἶδωλον αὐτοῦ). On the other hand, Socrates himself claims that the imprints of the perceptions and thoughts would be on the wax.<sup>233</sup> Think about the analogy of the “signet rings” (191d). Socrates tries to make his interlocutor understand by using the analogy of taking the imprints of signet rings. How do we put an imprint on a ring? The craftsman needs to know what would appear on the ring, i.e. a piece of paper or whatever which has the picture or sentences or whatever that the ring owner requires. Then the craftsman carves an imprint on the ring according to the reference. Then the ring owner imprints the ring on the wax. What will appear on the wax block is not “perceptions and thoughts” as Socrates has said, but just an image or imprint of them. There is something on the wax block, but it is not the perceptions or the thoughts, rather the image of them. The perceptions and the thoughts themselves are always in other regions (somewhere, but not in your soul), even if no one perceives or knows them. They could be perceived or known by God, as Berkeley would say.<sup>234</sup> Again, they are not on the wax block,

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<sup>233</sup> Burnyeat points out, “What Locke has and Plato lacks is the notion, so important in the modern philosophical tradition, of a *sense-impression*”. Raphael Woolf agrees with this idea and thinks the lack of the notion “(whether deliberate or accidental) does important work for Plato in enabling him to explain falsity”. I agree with Burnyeat that Plato has no notion of sense-impression (that is why I will use “images of perceptions” in the following text -- sense-impression still belongs to perception, but images of perceptions and thought belong to knowledge according to wax block analogy). However, I will argue that the wax block analogy is partly an empirical theory in *Theaetetus*, though it could be used for explaining how the soul operates to gain knowledge by consorting with Forms, which is why it could be a kind of anti-empiricism as well. See Burnyeat (1990) pp. 100-101 and Woolf (2004) p. 588.

<sup>234</sup> Berkeley believes, “You will perhaps say that matter, though it is not perceived by us, is nevertheless perceived by God, to whom it is the occasion of exciting ideas in our minds”. See Berkeley (1996) pp. 55-56.



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but stay somewhere else, maybe in another world, as Popper would insist.<sup>235</sup>

This reading is clarified further at 191d-e. After Socrates employs the analogy to help his interlocutor to understand, he continues:

“Whatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget and do not know.” (191d-e).

“You see,” someone might say, “Socrates, here, emphasizes the image again, that is to say, only images would appear on the wax block, not the perceptions and the knowledge.”<sup>236</sup>

This is an interesting account of how memory relates to perception. Socrates emphasizes what would be imprinted upon the wax block is the imprints of perception and thought. He also says,

“We may look upon it (the wax block), then, as a gift of Memory (τῆς Μνημοσύνης), the mother of the Muses.” (191d).

Socrates also uses the word “remember” (μνημονεῦσαι, μνημονεύειν) twice in the text of 191d-e. Beginning at 163e, Socrates and Theaetetus talk about memory at length:

Socrates: “But you do say—don’t you?—that there is such a thing as memory?”

Theaetetus: “Yes.”

“Memory of nothing? Or of something?”

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<sup>235</sup> I refer to his theory of three worlds. See Simkin (1993) p. 47.

<sup>236</sup> Bostock mentions “image presented by perception”, but does not discuss about it. See Bostock (1998) p. 178.

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“Of something, surely.”

“That is to say, of things which one has learnt, that is, perceived – that kind of ‘something’?”

“Of course.”

“And what a man has once seen, he recalls, I take it, from time to time?”

“He does.” (163e)

Socrates confirms three issues on memory with Theaetetus in the quotation. (1) You cannot memorize nothing, so you must remember something, namely, your memory needs contents. (2) The content of your memory is the kind of thing you have learnt or perceived. If the kind of thing you have learnt or perceived is the content of your memory, what you have learnt or perceived should be “in your soul”, otherwise, it seems that the process is no longer a process of memorizing. This refers to the third issue. (3) As Socrates has said, once a man has perceived or learnt something, he recalls these things “from time to time”. This means that if a man has memory of what he has learnt or perceived, even if a man does not learn or perceive those things any longer, he could still recollect these things from time to time, i.e. a number of times.

In order to make these three issues clear, let us consider a concrete example. Imagine you are seeing a red apple on a desk. According to Socrates’ idea at 182a-b, your eyes and the red apple produce a motion that makes an image of redness. Then there is another motion produced between redness and your eyes. Finally, your eyes are full of red, because of the second motion. This is the process of how to gain a perception. As you gain the perception of red, according to the wax block analogy at 191c-e, you make an impression or imprint of the red on the wax block. The problem

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is: what exactly is imprinted upon the wax block? It is the image of the perception of the red imprinted on the wax block. Having noted the perception of the red, you turn around or shut your eyes and do not see the red apple any more. You now try to recall the memory of the red apple. Because you have made an impression of the red apple on the wax block, you could easily regain it. The key point here is that what you regain is just the image of the perception on the wax block, not the perception itself, because you do not see the red apple, then you do not have the perception of the red apple anymore. What you have now is only the impression of the apple on the wax block. As Socrates claims at 194d:

“Men with such souls learn easily and remember what they learn; they do not get the signs out of line with the perceptions, but judge truly”.

The things on the wax block, including what you remember and learn, belong to the region of reasoning.

This explanation seems reasonable and knowledge is said to be the imprints of perceptions and thoughts, i.e. knowledge is the image. However, there is still a problem here. How could knowledge be the images of perceptions and thoughts? Take the moon as an example. The moon in the sky has many reflections in different lakes, i.e. there are many images of the moon, but only one real moon. If the moon is replaced by the knowledge and lakes are replaced by the souls in the example, then knowledge cannot be the images of the perceptions and thoughts.<sup>237</sup> Because

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<sup>237</sup> Sedley understands that only knowledge which is the images of perceptions and thoughts is on the wax block. He does not make a distinction between the images of knowledge and knowledge itself. I do not agree with him.

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knowledge itself cannot be participated in different souls, otherwise, knowledge cannot keep itself complete. Let us take another example to illustrate this argument. The number “one” could exist everywhere, on a blackboard or in a book, but it is only image of number one itself. In other words, all these number one participate in number one itself. The relationship between sensible things and the Forms is presented. Sensible things participate in Forms, but Forms cannot be in every sensible thing.<sup>238</sup> To the same reason, knowledge cannot be in different souls, but only images of knowledge are in the souls.

Consider the problem in the wax block analogy. All the things on the wax block are the images of the perceptions and thought. Let us consider a short quotation at 186a-b:

Socrates: “Now in which class do you put being? For that, above all, is something that accompanies everything.”

Theaetetus: “I should put it among the things which the soul itself reaches out after by itself.”

Socrates: “Also like and unlike, same and different?”

Theaetetus: “Yes.”

Socrates: “What about beautiful and ugly, good and bad?”

Theaetetus: “Yes, these too; ....”

Socrates: “Not so fast, now. Would not you say that it is through touch that the soul perceives the hardness of what is hard, and similarly the softness of what is soft?”

Theaetetus: “Yes.”

In this quotation, Socrates distinguishes two kinds of judgements that the soul could

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See Sedley (2004) pp. 135-136.

<sup>238</sup> Plato makes this argument at *Parmenides* 131b. But this argument raises another problem, at *Parmenides* 134b, where Plato says “we neither have forms themselves nor can they belong to us” and then we do not have knowledge. If my argument that only the images of knowledge are in the souls is correct, then it could be a part of Socrates’ defence of his theory of Forms.

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reach. One is the judgements that soul could make by itself, such as those about being, like, unlike, beautiful, ugly, good and bad. The other is the judgements that the soul could make by working with body, such as hardness and softness. A judgement “Socrates is ugly” could be made by the soul itself, for this judgement of the perception is not a property of something, since the view is a reflection, a judgement about the person. “Socrates is ugly” is a subjective judgement, in contrast, “The chair is hard” is an objective judgement about the chair’s property, which cannot be reached by the soul itself, but the soul needs to gain the judgement by lifting or moving the chair working with the body. In these two kinds of judgements, the concepts, “being”, “like”, “unlike”, “beautiful”, “ugly”, “good”, “bad”, could not come from perceptions. Rather they are already in an individual’s soul when this person makes a judgement. This fact leads us to consider the recollection theory and the theory of Forms.<sup>239</sup> An image of the Forms comes from the Forms. Perceptions are only stimulations or reminders for recollecting Forms again. Moreover, the imprint of perceptions and thoughts on the wax block are not knowledge, but only images of knowledge in an individual’s soul. If knowledge itself is in an agent’s soul, then knowledge will vanish when this person dies. That is impossible. Moreover, if knowledge is in an agent’ soul, then it is affected by the nature of that soul and can be distorted by it.

Nevertheless, even if only images of knowledge are on the block, Socrates never says that the soul knows directly from the things on the wax block. Socrates

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<sup>239</sup> Richard Robinson would not agree with my conclusion here. He rejects the idea that the recollection theory and the Forms theory have any connection with *Theaetetus* by rebutting Cornford’s interpretation which holds that we need recollection theory and the Forms to understand what *Theaetetus* says. See Robinson (1950) pp.3-30.

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admits:

“Whatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget and do not know” (191d).

However, how could the soul know the things imprinted upon the wax block?

Another element should be added to explain why the soul could “read” or “see” the things on the wax block. Socrates does not mention what this element is in

*Theaetetus*. Nevertheless, Socrates mentions that the soul “sees” everything in our world and the underworld in *Meno* (81c) and he also uses the phrase “soul’s eyes” in

*Republic* (508a) and *Parmenides* (132a). Moreover, in the aviary example in *Theaetetus*, there is “someone” to grasp “birds”. Whatever the additional element is,

there is an element. The soul does not know the things on the wax block directly.

Perceptions are not directly relevant to what the soul knows, even the perceptions that have been imprinted on the wax block. Further, the perceptions imprinted on the

wax block cannot be known at all, for perception is not knowable. Consider the example “Socrates is beautiful”. The perception of Socrates’ appearance cannot tell

an agent whether Socrates is beautiful or not. The perception of Socrates’ appearance can only give you a picture or image. When the agent makes a judgement, “Socrates

is beautiful”, this judgement goes beyond the perception of Socrates’ appearance, i.e.

all cannot come from perception. The perception of Socrates only stimulates the soul to produce the “beautiful” imprint in the soul, but cannot produce the imprint, since

“beautiful” is not in the perception of Socrates.

In addition, perceptions cannot be on the wax block, even if “...the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves” on the block (191d). After this sentence, Socrates immediately adds, “...we hold the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and take a stamp from them” (191d). Then, to return to 184d, where is the perceptions “sitting inside us”? The answer is alluded to by Socrates at 186b-c:

Socrates: And thus there are some things which all creatures, men and animals alike, are naturally able to perceive as soon as they are born; I mean, the experiences which reach the soul through the body (ὅσα διὰ τοῦ σώματος παθήματα ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τείνει).

Socrates admits that all creatures, i.e. human beings and animals, naturally have the ability of perception from birth. Moreover, Socrates identifies the “παθήματα” (experiences) which “stretch” or “extend” to the soul through the body as “perception”.<sup>240</sup> Socrates seems to suggest that the perceptions are stretching through the body to reach the soul. At 184d-e, Socrates asks Theaetetus:

“I want to know if it is with one and the same part of ourselves that we reach, through our eyes to white and black, and through the other means to yet further things; and whether, if asked, you will be able to refer all these to the body... Tell me: the instruments through which you perceive hot, hard, light, sweet -- do you consider that they all belong to the body? Or can they be referred elsewhere?”

Theaetetus: “No, they all belong to the body.”

This paragraph shows that Socrates leads Theaetetus to agree that the functions of the

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<sup>240</sup> The *pathemata* are active. They are stretching.

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body is to perceive perceptible things. Accordingly, as the argument at 185c-186b shows, the soul makes the judgements on “being”, “like” and “ugly” by itself, namely, the soul has the ability of reasoning. Then, the functions of the soul and of the body are different. So far, it has been proved that the body has the ability of perception. Nevertheless, how could the perceptions/senses be “sitting inside” (184d) in the soul through the body? Consider the process of gaining perception that Socrates describes at 156b, 156d-e and 182a-b.

At 156a-b, Socrates gives us three kinds of perceptions.

“Motion has two forms, each an infinite multitude, but distinguished by their powers, the one being active and the other passive. And through the intercourse and mutual friction of these two there comes to be an offspring infinite in multitude but always twin births, on the one hand what is perceived, on the other, the perception of it, the perception in every case being generated together with what is perceived and emerging along with it. For the perceptions we have such names as sight, hearing, smelling, feeling cold and feeling hot; also what are called pleasures and pains, desires and fears; and there are others besides, a great number which have names, an infinite number which have not.”

The first kind of perception comes from outside and relates to the properties of objects, e.g. sight, hearing, smelling, feeling cold and feeling hot. The second kind of perception comes from inside which are the feelings, e.g. pleasures and pains, desires and fears. The first and the second categories of perceptions fit the definition of perception that Socrates gives at 186b-c, namely, “the experiences which reach the soul through the body”. Of course, it would be odd to us to regard fear and desire as a kind of perception, but if we treat them as things produced by the environment



through the body, it seems that we could understand it perfectly well. What needs to be noticed is sight, exemplified in the first category, for Socrates immediately uses it as an example in the text of 156d-e:

“Thus the eye and some other thing -- one of the things commensurate with the eye -- which has come into its neighbourhood, generate both whiteness and the perception which is by nature united with it... In this event, motions arise in the intervening space, sight from the side of the eye and whiteness from the side of that which cooperates in the production of the colour. The eye is filled with sight; at that moment it sees, and there comes into being, not indeed sight, but a seeing eye; while its partner in the process of producing colour is filled with whiteness, and there comes into being not whiteness, but white...”

It is the motion that is produced by the eyes and the whiteness that makes the eye see the colour white. This shows that the colour of white (not whiteness) exists in your eyes, or more broadly in the body. If we follow up this line of argument, we could say that all the perceptions are in the body, though they belong to and sit inside different bodily organs. I could give some texts as evidence for this conclusion. At 184e, Socrates leads Theaetetus to give this answer, that “the instruments through which you perceive hot, hard, light, sweet” “all belong to the body”. At 184e-185a, Socrates leads Theaetetus to admit that “what you perceive through one power, you cannot perceive through another”.<sup>241</sup> That is to say, eyes, ears, tongue and such organs all belong to the body and, further, the senses of sight, hearing, and taste belong to the body as well. Although the perceptions need the body, the word “body” here is still vague. This word is just an abstract word to cover everything that relates

<sup>241</sup> D. K. Modrak thinks this argument is a weak one, since “since the existence of some objects that are not perceived by more than one sense is compatible with the existence of other objects which are perceived by more than one sense”. See Modrak (1981) p. 36.

to the body. The things that relate to the body could be divided into three categories. The organs are the first category; the senses or the functions of the organs are the second; and the perceptions are the third.

Following what Socrates says, I have clarified that only images of knowledge and perceptions are on the wax block. According to Socrates, what someone remembers and knows are the things that appear imprinted on the wax block. Socrates emphasizes the imprints that are on the wax block and that the soul could make a judgement through these things, i.e. perceptions and thought. Nevertheless, we have only discussed what the imprints on the wax block are and the wax block analogy itself has not yet been considered.

The wax block analogy starts with a question, “Is it possible to learn something you did not know before?” (191c). This question immediately refers us back to Meno’s paradox, i.e. that learning or inquiry is impossible. Differently from the theory of recollection, Socrates wants Theaetetus to suppose that there is a wax block in everyone’s soul and wax blocks are different:

“Now I want you to suppose, for the sake of the argument, that we have in our souls a block of wax, larger in one person, smaller in another, and of purer wax in one case, dirtier in another; in some men rather hard, in others rather soft, while in some it is of the proper consistency” (191c-d).

Socrates reveals three things in his analogy of the wax block. (1) The soul is not a block of wax, rather there is a block of wax inside the soul. (2) We do not know what exactly the words, “larger”, “smaller”, “purer”, “dirtier”, “hard” and “softer”, refer to.

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However, the vocabulary does show that different souls have different kinds of wax blocks. The block of wax is different in different souls. Hence, because of the difference between the wax blocks, the souls are different. The souls in *Theaetetus* where souls are said various because of the different wax blocks in different souls are no longer the same as the souls in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* where soul is assumed to be completely reasonable and every soul is same in such sense.<sup>242</sup> (3) Socrates does not give up the theory of recollection, since when someone collect what has been on the wax block, he has recollected the things, for the things are already there. Consider an example, when someone perceives a tree and realizes that it is a tree. The concept “tree” must have been in his soul or must have known to him. The situation that happens in the wax block analogy is the same as the idea in the example. Moreover, the only thing on the wax block is the images of knowledge and all these images are passively controlled by the perceptions and the thoughts -- if the things on the wax block are the imprints of the perceptions and thoughts, then those things or the imprints can only wait for the perceptions and the thoughts to come. Interestingly, after he introduces the idea that “we have in our souls a block of wax” (191c), Socrates immediately mentions “Memory, the mother of the Muses” (191d). He claims the wax block is a gift of Memory. When we learn something new, we accept something new and this is a passive process. After we have learnt something and it is has become a piece of our knowledge, then it also becomes part of our memory.

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<sup>242</sup> Plato does not offer a comprehensive theory about soul in both *Meno* and *Phaedo*. In the *Meno*, every word about soul relates to epistemology (Meno 81b-d and 86a). In the *Phaedo*, though soul is tried to prove to be immortal, but Plato does not mention the tripartite theory of the soul as in the *Republic* (435e-438b), rather he mentions how the soul recollect knowledge and tries to persuade his interlocutors to keep away from the bodily elements which disturb the soul to gain knowledge, when epistemology is discussed in the *Phaedo* (73b-76d and 79c-d).

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When we try to use this piece of knowledge, we are trying to recollect it from our memory. Memory is a necessary part of the analysis of knowledge.

The point on memory stands whether the wax block analogy is an empiricist theory or not. Nevertheless, what does the wax block analogy signify for empiricism in this text? Wax block analogy is presented as partly empirical. Socrates admits that the perceptions are the sources of imprints of the wax block, namely, perceptions are the sources of knowledge, according to the wax block analogy:

“We make impression upon this of everything we wish to remember among the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves; we hold the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and take a stamp from them, in the way in which we take the imprints of signet rings” (191d).

A wax block that receives the images of perceptions is inside my soul. This is the first part of the wax block analogy and this part is empirical, because it relates to perceptions received via the body. But there is another part of the theory which is anti-empirical. Something of the soul (the added element) is as it were watching the block. Uninterruptedly, everything that is on the wax block is accessible to me. All the “imprints” come from either my perceptions or my thoughts. Socrates makes it clear that our perceptions derive from what “we have seen or heard”.<sup>243</sup> Further, Socrates points out “Whatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget and do not know” (191d-e). Socrates obviously admits that all the things

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<sup>243</sup> Hume repeats nearly the same idea in his book two thousand years later. See Hume (1975) pp. 17-24.

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on the wax block are knowledge. All the things that cannot be accessed through the block have either been forgotten or are unknowable. It is in fact a description of how the images of perceptions become knowledge. The things that we have seen or heard are imprinted on the wax block in our soul; once the imprints are on the block, they become knowledge. Let us consider the phrase “what we have seen or heard”. Does this phrase refer to the Forms? Or does it purely refer to the images of sensible things? If the things we know on the wax block are images of knowledge, they come from the Forms and are recollected through memory. If they refer to Forms, then they are the images of knowledge about the perceptions.

This proves again that the things on the wax block cannot be perceptions themselves or knowledge itself (but the imprint of the perceptions and the images of knowledge), for souls could not “hear” the Forms or really see them either. Indeed, Socrates mentions in the *Meno* that souls “see” and then learn everything either here or in Hades (81c). Socrates describes this learning only by the metaphor “see” and not by metaphors of other faculties of organs involved.<sup>244</sup> Further, in the *Phaedo*, the soul when it works alone is presented as passing “into the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging” (79d), though Socrates does not mention how exactly the soul gains knowledge or wisdom in this realm. In the *Parmenides*, Parmenides uses “the soul’s eye” to describe how the soul consorts with the large itself. (132a)<sup>245</sup> In the *Republic*, Socrates claims, “When the soul’s eye is fixed on objects illuminated by truth and reality, it understands and knows them, and its

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<sup>244</sup> He uses “touch” the Forms or “grasp” them in various places, but to me, “seeing” can be a kind of activity of “touching” or “grasping”, i.e. touching/grasping to me are ways of speaking about seeing.

<sup>245</sup> Parmenides indeed links the soul’s eyes to “the large itself and the other large things” (132a).

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possession of intelligence is evident” (508d)<sup>246</sup> All these texts have shown that the soul only uses its faculty of seeing or sight to gain the knowledge from the Forms.

The design of the wax block analogy contains a negative factor that could destroy the theory itself. First, the whole theory makes the soul too inactive. It seems that the soul only passively accepts the images from perceptions, but making judgement needs the soul to be active. Second, the second part of the theory actually alludes that the soul needs an element to “see” or gain by whatever means the things on the wax block, though the text of *Theaetetus* does not tell us what that element is. Further, Socrates also does not make clear in the wax block analogy how this element works or how the soul makes judgements on the things on the wax block, no matter whether the judgements are true or false. It is because of this gap that Socrates introduces the aviary example. Socrates in the aviary example answers in some degree the problem of how the soul knows the things on the block. This answer is produced or made possible by the switch of metaphors between the wax block and the aviary.

## 5.2 The aviary example

The second way that Socrates tries to explain how the soul operates to gain knowledge is the aviary example. The aviary example also illustrates the distinction between having knowledge and possessing knowledge, as part of the explanation of

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<sup>246</sup> The translation comes from Desmond Lee. I change the “mind’s eye” into “soul’s eye” in my translation. The Greek text does not use “soul’s eye”, but according to the context, “soul’s eye” is not a wrong translation. See Lee (2007) p. 234.

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knowledge. The soul in this alternative example has an aviary. Now, knowledge and perception no longer create imprints on the block of wax, but every piece of knowledge becomes one of the various kinds of “birds” in the aviary. Socrates explains:

“Now let us make in each soul a sort of aviary of all kinds of birds...Then we must say that when we are children this receptacle is empty; and by the birds we must understand pieces of knowledge” (197d-e).

A question arises. Since Socrates admits that when we are children, the aviary is empty, does he disconnect the theory of recollection from this example? Cornford thinks that this example does connect to the theory of recollection, even if Socrates claims that the receptacle is empty when we are children.<sup>247</sup> Sedley treats the example of aviary an idea about what kind of thing knowledge is, rather than what knowledge is.<sup>248</sup> Actually, to suppose his position, he argues that there is a distinction between potentiality and actuality and that Socrates tries to apply this distinction to knowledge for the first time.<sup>249</sup> Under Sedley’s interpretation, knowledge becomes potentiality as it is in Aristotle’s philosophy.

Before I examine whether the aviary example has connection with recollection theory, I want first to confirm that I agree with Sedley’s idea, but also to explain why Sedley’s interpretation of the aviary example by the distinction between potentiality and actuality is not necessary for many reasons. First, let us consider the concept of

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<sup>247</sup> Cornford (1935) pp. 135-136.

<sup>248</sup> Sedley (2004) p. 29.

<sup>249</sup> Sedley (2004) p. 140.

potentiality and actuality in Aristotle's philosophy.

“For ( i ) each thing is called whatever it is, when it is the thing actually more than potentially [the wood or the seed, the matter, is not a table or a lettuce --- though it may have the potentiality of being one --- until it has actually been put together or has actually germinated and grown]. Further, ( ii ) men come to be from men, but not beds from beds. That is precisely why people say that the nature of a bed is not the shape but the wood...” (Physics, II , 1. 193b7-10)<sup>250</sup>

Aristotle makes it clear that a thing in itself is actual, not potential, though it could potentially be something else. The nature of an actual thing determines what other thing it could become. Take a human being as an example, a baby as an actual thing is potentially an adult human being, which is determinate by its nature. Aristotle employs the notions of potentiality and actuality to describe the process of change.<sup>251</sup>

Then, let us consider the aviary example, compared to Aristotle's concepts of potentiality and actuality. Pieces of knowledge in the aviary example are analogized as birds in the aviary, or the soul's eyes or whatever the added element is by which the soul catches the “birds”, for Socrates does not make it clear when he repeatedly uses no subject in the Greek texts (the translation necessarily adds “he” for the completeness of the texts). The only difference between you having the birds and possessing them is whether you “take” one of the birds or let it go.<sup>252</sup> According to

<sup>250</sup> Translation comes from J. L. Ackrill. See Ackrill (1981) pp. 35-36. Aristotle surely has a different understanding about potentiality and actuality in *De anima* 2.1 (412a21-28) and 2.5 (417a21-29), but this fact has shown that using terminology “potentiality” and “actuality” to interpret the aviary example will lead ambiguous.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Lear (1988) pp. 60-83.

<sup>252</sup> Zina Giannopoulou argues: “The Waxen Tablet and the Aviary suggest that the knower must stand in a first-hand relation toward what he knows, a necessary condition for knowledge that Socrates tackles in the Jury passage of *Apology*”. Although I am not interested in the connection between *Apology* and *Theaetetus* in this thesis, Zina Giannopoulou reminds us that knowledge should be actual to knower according to the wax block analogy and the aviary example. See Giannopoulou (2013) pp. 17-18.



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Aristotle, the potentiality should finally become actuality,<sup>253</sup> we cannot say that having knowledge is a process of becoming actuality, since a thing X which is potentiality of something Y should not be Y itself, otherwise X is actually Y itself and this is irrelevant to the potentiality and actuality. Lastly, a thing, in Aristotle's mind, if it is in the process of change, should be both a potentiality and an actuality. A baby is the actuality of an infancy and is the potentiality of an adulthood. Compared to the birds in the example of aviary, birds are only the actuality of themselves not the potentiality of other things. The idea of potentiality and actuality could not be applied to the birds in the aviary example. All these four points have shown that the distinction of potentiality and actuality could not be applied to explain the aviary example. We cannot say that I actualize the birds into birds or make the birds into actuality when I catch the birds. Hence, Sedley's interpretation of the aviary example by using potentiality and actuality should be avoided, since actuality has various meanings in Aristotle's philosophy.

Now the question whether there is a connection between the aviary example and recollection needs to be considered. There is a connection between the aviary example and the theory of recollection, as Cornford believes. Socrates admits that the aviary in us is empty when we are infancy and this has shown that the aviary example relates to the recollection theory, for according to the recollection, we lose or forget all we learnt when we were born.

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<sup>253</sup> Cf. *On the Soul*, 2.1, 412<sup>a</sup>22-23: "...there are two kinds of actuality, corresponding to knowledge and to reflecting (θεωρεῖν)".

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“When anyone takes possession of a piece of knowledge and shuts it up in the pen, we should say that he has learned or has found out the thing of which this is the knowledge; and knowing, we should say, is this” (197e).

Indeed, this definition of knowledge or knowing is a repeat of the definition of knowing at 197b, namely knowledge is “the possession of knowledge”.

For clarity, Socrates makes his argument for the definition of knowing by giving Theaetetus a puzzle of arithmetic, since Theaetetus is a mathematical learner. Socrates says he wants Theaetetus to think of this as arithmetic: “a hunt for pieces of knowledge concerning everything odd and even” (198a). Theaetetus agrees to think in this way. Next, Socrates explains “teaching” as “when a man hands them over [pieces of knowledge concerning everything odd and even] to others” (198b) and “learning” as “when he gets them handed over to him” (198b). Further, Socrates calls “knowing” the experience of “when he ‘has’ them through possessing them in this aviary of ours” (198b)<sup>254</sup>. To “Possess” something is different from to “have” it, as Socrates argues at 197b-d. The main difference between “possessing” and “having” is application. Someone possesses a coat, which does not mean he has the coat. If he puts the coat on, namely, when he applies what he possesses, he has the coat. That is to say, “Having” is “possession” plus application. Socrates changes the explanation of knowing from “the possession of knowledge” (which he posits at 197b and 197e) to “the having of knowledge” which is claimed at 197b to be held by some other people. This change becomes clearer when Socrates applies at 198b those

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<sup>254</sup> The translation comes from Levett and Burnyeat; however, it here seems not precise, for it should be “in his/thats aviary” rather than “in this aviary of ours”, according to the Greek text.

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explanations to the arithmetical puzzle. In McDowell's mind,

“The puzzle is that this description of the person in question [i.e. the arithmetician] makes it look as if his undertaking is the evidently pointless one of trying to discover something which he already knows”.<sup>255</sup>

After introducing the example of the mathematician who knows all numbers, Socrates continues, “Then, it looks as if this man were considering something which he knows as if he did not know it” (198c). Socrates' argument at 198c is strange and unpersuasive. Firstly, how and why does Socrates conclude that this man is “considering something which he knows as if he did not know it”, even though he claims this by implication? Even if this man as an arithmetician knows everything about odd numbers and even numbers, this does not ensure that he has the knowledge of counting. Assume there are five cups on a table, even if the man knows the number “five” and would immediately and correctly apply “five” to everything that is “five”, he does not know the number of those cups on the table until he sees them. The fact that he knows the number “five” is irrelevant to his knowing the number of the cups on the table. That means, it is not the case that a man considers something which he knows as if he did not know it. Rather, he is considering something X which he knows and the X could correctly be applied to or could be the answer to a question Y he does not yet know.

Further, Socrates at 198c emphasizes the application of knowledge. He actually treats knowing as “the having of knowledge”, not as “the possession of knowledge”,

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<sup>255</sup> McDowell (1973) p. 221.

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nevertheless, Socrates certainly does not think that knowing is the having of knowledge, since under such a definition, false judgement would surely be produced, as the argument at 199a-b shows, here Socrates admits,

“it is possible for him to ‘have’, not the knowledge of this thing, but another piece of knowledge instead.”

Hence following 197b-197e, knowing should be “the possession of knowledge” which means that knowledge is ready to use at any time, though it is not actual being applied.

Lastly, we should consider what “knowledge” (198a-b) concerning everything odd and even means. “Everything” seems to say that the knowledge of arithmetic includes the knowledge of the numbers themselves. If so, then we could ask an arithmetician, “What is one itself?” However, it definitely is not a question that an arithmetician could answer, but rather a philosophical question. This is important, for it links to the question, “Does Socrates allude to the Forms in his argument by employing the phrase?” Actually, Socrates has no such an intention. An arithmetician who “has completely mastered arithmetic” “knows all numbers” in Socrates’ mind (198b). Even if this is the case, we should continually ask, “How could an arithmetician gain the knowledge of odd and even, if nothing is beyond experience?” Arithmetical knowledge, or knowledge of mathematics, is different from the knowledge of history or literature. We cannot find the general principles of mathematics through experience or observation; therefore, it must refer to something

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beyond experience. Even though Socrates does not insist the definition of knowing as having knowledge, how does an arithmetician gain the knowledge of arithmetic? The answer is that Socrates does not offer an answer to solve this question, rather he uses it only to raise the puzzle and criticize the aviary example. A second question arises: how could “knowing” be having knowledge through possessing knowledge in the aviary example? Let us consider the simple answer only. For the second question, as I have argued, Socrates does not hold this definition of knowing but rather the opposite.

In the aviary example, all the birds in the cage are pieces of knowledge; therefore, false judgement cannot be anything other than an interchange of pieces of knowledge. If false judgement is a matter of a wrongly interchange of pieces of knowledge (199c), two things follow. Firstly, it is not want of knowledge but knowledge itself that would lead to false judgement; secondly, “he judges that this is something else and that the other thing is it.” (199d) It is impossible and “utterly unreasonable”, however, to think of false judgement as a matter of an interchange of pieces of knowledge. The reason for the impossibility is,

“...it means that the soul, when knowledge becomes present to it, knows nothing and is wholly ignorant. According to this argument, there is no reason why an accession of ignorance should not make one know something, or of blindness make one see something, if knowledge is ever going to make a man ignorant” (199d).

Theaetetus responds to this difficulty by proposing “there are pieces of ignorance also flying about in the soul” (199e) and the ignorance makes someone judge falsely

if he catches a piece of ignorance. However, Theaetetus' solution cannot be a real answer to the difficulty, since someone who "grasps" a piece of ignorance would not think he is judging falsely (200a). Theaetetus' proposal becomes again the argument that making false judgement only happens in the aviary of the soul, as Socrates has discussed at 196b-196c.<sup>256</sup> McDowell thinks that Theaetetus' proposal is "obscure", for there are two interpretations of the phrase "a piece of ignorance". It could be a false belief and it also could be a confused concept.<sup>257</sup> Although I agree with him, McDowell does not grasp the key point. Theaetetus' proposal makes ignorance into a kind of entity or reality. Socrates could certainly make pieces of knowledge into entities, because there is really something that is knowledge. Nevertheless, how could ignorance be a kind of entity? Ignorance is only a state of want of knowledge; therefore, it could not be a true state in any way. Actually, ignorance in Theaetetus' proposal is like the concept "non-being" in *Sophist*, where non-being, i.e. that which is not, is not something "contrary to that which is, but only something different from it" (*Sophist* 257b).<sup>258</sup> Ignorance in Theaetetus' proposal is not something contrary to knowledge, but something different from knowledge. Ignorance is no longer a state for Theaetetus, but it becomes a kind of entity -- ignorance and errors are now birds in the aviary.

Theaetetus' proposal fails in the end, since his proposal will lead to the very

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<sup>256</sup> McDowell thinks that the mistake of this argument is "the possibility of taking anything to be something other than what it is in doubt." However, the argument at 187e-188c only refers to the mistake that happens between perception and knowledge, but the argument at 187e-188c refers to the mistake that happens between notions inside the soul. McDowell (1973) p. 225.

<sup>257</sup> McDowell (1973) p. 225.

<sup>258</sup> At the *Republic* 477a, Plato mentions that "knowledge is set over what is, while ignorance is of necessity set over what is not", which is coherent with what is said in the *Sophist*.

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problem that the wax block analogy and the aviary example were introduced to solve, i.e. how someone knows something that he does not know (200b).

As the discussion about the wax block analogy and the aviary example shows, the long investigation of how false judgement is possible fails. It is now time to consider how false judgement is possible as a whole, since this question will help us to understand how true opinion is possible. Especially, true opinion is defined as knowledge in Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge and is one of the two parts that constructs Theaetetus' third definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is true opinion with an account in the rest of the *Theaetetus*.

### 5.3 Investigation on “What is False Judgement?” and “How is it possible?”

Let us consider the false judgement issue by analysing what Socrates says at 195c-d. This will help us to consider how a false judgment is possible. The text says:

“I am afraid of what I may say if someone asks me: ‘So, Socrates, you’ve discovered false judgement, have you? You have found that it arises not in the relation of perceptions to one another, or of thoughts to one another, but in the connecting of perception with thought?’ I believe I am very likely to say ‘Yes’, with an air of flattering myself upon our having made some beautiful discovery. (195c-d)

The whole passage is actually the question “*How* is false judgement possible?”

Before we enter into the discussion of this question, it is better to make a distinction between different kinds of knowledge. Socrates denies that perception can

be a part of knowledge.<sup>259</sup> At the end of the discussion about knowledge as perception, he concludes,

“We shall not now look for knowledge in sense-perception at all, but in whatever we call that activity of the soul when it is busy by itself about the things which are.” (187a)

Knowledge in Socrates’ mind is something regarding what is, which the soul reaches by itself. When Socrates refers to the things that the soul reaches by itself, he actually uses the words, “is” and “is not” (185c), “being” and “non-being”, “likeness and unlikeness”, “same and different”, “one and any other number applied to them” and “odd and even” (185c-d, also 186a), further, “beautiful and ugly”, “good and bad” (186a). Therefore, Socrates actually gives us three regions that knowledge covers: knowledge in the region of value, knowledge in the region of comparison and knowledge in the region of being. We should pay attention to the difference between knowledge in the region of comparison and a comparative judgement that refers to the region of perception. Take a table as an example to explain this. Someone says, “This table is heavier than that one”. This is a comparative judgement that refers to a property of the subject of the sentence. Another man says, “This table is more beautiful than that one”. Surprisingly, Socrates considers this sentence as a piece of knowledge in the region of comparison and value. This is because the “heavier”

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<sup>259</sup> That does not mean there is no relationship between knowledge and perception. In the wax block analogy, knowledge (the images of knowledge, as my argument shows above) is said to be the imprints of perceptions and thoughts. At *Theaetetus* 186b-c, Socrates mentions “some things” “which both men and animals are able by nature to perceive from the moment they are born: namely, all the things which direct experiences to the mind by means of the body” (translated by McDowell).



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example is comparative but relates to perception. Then, we observe that not all judgements in the three regions constitute knowledge. Further, a piece of knowledge could cover one, two or all these three regions, because the “more beautiful” example covers comparison and value. Moreover, grant the sentence “This table is heavier than that one” is true, i.e., it is a true judgement. Then, not all true judgements are knowledge according to Socrates’ argument about the things that the soul reaches by itself. In sum, if not all true judgements are knowledge, judgement is not knowledge.

If judgement is not knowledge and only a part of true judgements is knowledge, and if Theaetetus agrees with all of Socrates’ arguments, as the text shows, then it seems odd that Theaetetus as a mathematician still defines knowledge as true judgement (187b). He defines knowledge as true judgement even after the argument about the things that refer to the soul working by itself (185c-186b) and Socrates’ argument that we should not seek knowledge in perception (187a). Why does Theaetetus agree with what Socrates says, especially considering that Theaetetus is a learner of mathematics which requires an ability to reason at a high level? We will never know why, but maybe Theaetetus follows what Socrates has said before Socrates asks him to offer the second definition of knowledge. Before Theaetetus proposes his second definition, Socrates denies that knowledge has any relationship with perception. Then, Theaetetus turns to the region of reasoning to seek the definition of knowledge. In addition, he realizes that “there is also false judgement” (187b), and so he claims that knowledge is true judgement. Obviously, Theaetetus ignores the distinction between the things that the soul reaches by itself and the

things that the soul reaches through the body.

Socrates does not discuss “knowledge as true opinion” directly, but he firstly considers the question “Is there false judgement?” or “Is false judgement possible?” Both Socrates and Theaetetus agree that false judgement does exist. When Theaetetus gives his second definition of knowledge (187b), “false judgement” appears for the first time in the dialogue. Although this phrase is mentioned by Theaetetus, Socrates does not deny its existence. Socrates claims,

“There are two forms of judgement, true and false; and your definition is that true judgement is knowledge?” (187c).

Socrates continues at 188a:

Socrates: “Now isn’t it true about all things, together or individually, that we must either know them or not know them? I am ignoring for the moment the intermediate conditions of learning and forgetting, as they do not affect the argument here.”

Theaetetus: “Of course, Socrates, in that case there is no alternative. With each thing we either know it or we do not.”

Socrates: “Then when a man judges, the objects of his judgement are necessarily either things which he knows or things which he does not know?”

Theaetetus: “Yes, that must be so.”

Socrates: “Yet if he knows a thing, it is impossible that he should not know it; or if he does not know it, he cannot know it.”

Theaetetus: “Yes, of course.” (188a-b)

In this short quotation, Socrates and Theaetetus discuss three things -- judgement, object and ability. Socrates leads Theaetetus to agree that there are true judgements and false judgements. Then, accordingly, someone either knows or does not know the

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object that his judgement judges. Further, if someone knows an object, it is impossible that he does not know it; if he does not know, it is impossible that he does know it.

The key point here is whether someone knows or does not know an object. The problem, however, is whether the cases of learning or of forgetting (which, as Socrates has said, are the two situations between knowing and not-knowing) are exceptions to the principle “with a thing we either know it or we do not”. This question is a little complicated. Socrates gives us three regions that knowledge covers -- region of being, of comparison and of value. The other strong principle is that knowledge has no relationship with perception. But there is one question left unanswered, since the region of being seems problematic -- “is”, “is not”, “being” or “not being” (185c-d). The question is not clear, so let us clarify it by unfolding it. Take the table as an example again. “This is a table” is a judgement about the being of the table. “This is a table” is different from the judgement “The table is heavier than that one” or the judgement “This table is more beautiful than another one”, both of which we have discussed above.<sup>260</sup> The difference between the former judgement and the last two judgements is that the first judgement is a judgement that the soul reaches through using the body, but at the same time, it refers to the region of being that the soul reaches on its own, namely, it is a piece of knowledge. However, as we have shown, that is impossible, since knowledge has no relationship with perception. Then, we need to consider when Theaetetus agrees that the soul reaches ‘being’ and

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<sup>260</sup> John McDowell discusses 188a-c through an analysis of “Russell’s doctrine that all true sentences of the form ‘x is y’, where ‘x’ and ‘y’ hold places for names, are tautological”. See McDowell (1969-1970) p. 183.

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‘not-being’ by itself (185d-e), what the sentence means. If ‘being’ and ‘not-being’ here have no relationship with perception, then they cannot refer to anything in our sensible world, otherwise, they must relate to perception.

However, how can a judgement that contains “is” or “is-not”, “being” or “not-being” not have a relationship with perception? We should consider two different cases here. One case is numbers and the second is the Forms. In the case of numbers, it is hard to say where they “are”. Surely, the distinction between the numbers themselves (the forms of the numbers) and the images of the numbers is still important here. The images of the numbers, such as the symbol “one” in a flag, is certainly not the one itself or the oneness, i.e. the Form of One. Hence, when we say that “this is one”, we need extra information for judging whether this sentence is a piece of knowledge about one. “Extra information” refers to the concrete situation from which the speaker makes such a judgement -- when the speaker is seeing a symbol of “one”, in another sense, this judgement is not a piece of knowledge, because the soul does not reach the judgement by itself. But rather the soul makes this judgement through sight. In another situation, when a logician thinks the law of identity or tautology, “one is one”, then it is definitely a piece of knowledge, for the soul gains it by itself, not by virtue of any perception. Let us consider another more complex example. Someone is seeing two boards both of which have the symbol “one” imprinted. Assume a man speaks a sentence, “This one is the same as that one”, as he points to the symbols on the two boards. Then, is this sentence an expression of a piece of knowledge? Firstly, we should know the object to which the word “one” in

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the sentence refers. If the “one” refers to the board, then it is not a piece of knowledge. However, if it refers to the oneness, we should consider two different kinds of oneness, i.e. the Oneness or the form of One and the impression or symbol of Oneness. In the former situation, the statement is a piece of knowledge, but in the latter situation, it is not. This is not the whole story. Maybe the man is thinking about the law of identity, by means of the symbols on the two boards? If that is the case, on the one hand, “The ‘one’ in one board is the same as the ‘one’ in the other board” which can be simplified as “A=A”. “A=A” is a piece of knowledge, because it is the law of identity and this law itself is not dependent on perceptions.<sup>261</sup> On the other hand, the statement is not a piece of knowledge, because, as Socrates has said, the speaker makes this sentence or judgement by his perceptions of those symbols on the two boards, no matter whether the speaker realizes that what he says is actually the law of identity. In this situation, it seems difficult to judge whether the sentence “This one is the same as that one” belongs to knowledge or not.

Further, consider another case. Let us grant that there is a mountain called Anti-Olympia in Greece. If an old Greek told his descendants, “The earthquake will not happen if there is not a deep hole at the top of Anti-Olympia.” Grant that, the relationship between the hole and the earthquake is true. Moreover, let us assume that Anti-Olympia is a high mountain and much too high for the descendents to climb. Further, assume that the earthquake did happen. It is reasonable for the

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<sup>261</sup> C. J. F. Williams points out that “Plato wants to insist that every false belief is a belief that something which is not A is A” (p. 291). Then, “every case of false belief as being describable by statements of the form ‘x believes that something which is not A is A’” (p. 292). I think, Plato believes that all false judgments have the mistake “not A is A” through his discussion about the false judgement. See Williams (1972) pp. 291-292.

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descendants to make a judgement, saying, “There is a deep hole on the top of the Anti–Olympia, because the earthquake happened”. The problem is that no one could give any evidence to prove that there is a hole. The sentence “There is a deep hole at the top of Anti–Olympia” is a necessary condition for explaining the earthquake, but it is not a piece of knowledge, for a piece of knowledge cannot be claimed without any supportive evidence. When Socrates claims, “Everything is either what we know or what we do not know” (188c), that is not correct, for there are unlimited judgements that could not be labeled simply “know” or “not know” when the facts or evidences lack.<sup>262</sup> Moreover, if knowledge is completely irrelevant to perceptions, it is difficult to imagine any evidence to support or prove the piece of knowledge.

Socrates supplies the definition of “false judgement” at 189b-c,

“We say that there is false judgement, a kind of ‘other-judging’, when a man, in place of one of the things that are, has substituted in his thought another of the things that are and asserts that it is.”

Although Socrates does not make it clear, according to the absurd verbalization of false judgement that he discusses in the text, there are two kinds of false judgement. One kind refers to the object, such as “A cow must be a horse” (190c); the other does not refer to an object, but only makes a mistake within the soul and its reflection, such as “Two must be one” (190c) or “The ugly is beautiful” (190d).

Consider the cow and horse example carefully. There are only four possible situations in the example. (1) I know what a cow is and I know what a horse is; (2) I

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<sup>262</sup> David Barton has the same conclusion. See Barton (1999) pp. 166-167.

only know what a cow is; (3) I only know what a horse is; (4) I neither know what a cow is nor know what a horse is. According to Socrates, the first situation cannot produce false judgement, for “if he knows a thing, it is impossible that he should not know it” (188a-b). Further, the situation (4) cannot produce false judgement, since “if he does not know it, he cannot know it” (188b). If someone does not know what a cow is and what a horse is, how can he make a judgement about a cow and a horse, even though he is facing a cow or a horse? Obviously, it is impossible; therefore, he naturally cannot make a false judgement on a cow and a horse. Both Socrates and Theaetetus agree, it is impossible that

“...a man who knows neither Theaetetus nor Socrates should take it into his head that Socrates is Theaetetus or Theaetetus Socrates” (188b).<sup>263</sup>

The situations (2) and (3) are nearly but not exactly the same as situations (1) and (4).

Assume that I know either what a cow is or what a horse is. A false judgement cannot be produced, because if I do not know either what a cow is or a horse is, how can I even make a false judgement about either a cow or a horse?<sup>264</sup>

It seems from analysing the four situations that false judgement is impossible.

How is this possible? Socrates realizes that they need to “take up a different line of enquiry” (188c). From “knowing and not-knowing” (188c-d), they turn to “being and

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<sup>263</sup> C. J. F. Williams carefully analyses the general form of the example “Socrates is Theaetetus” in this quotation, namely, “every false belief is a belief that something which is not A is A” by using Quine’s idea of “referential opacity” and Hume’s idea of identity. See Williams (1972) pp. 289-302.

<sup>264</sup> This question refers to mismatch. George Rudebusch disagrees with the idea that “Plato there comes close to but just misses finding a successful explanation of false belief”. He notes: “It seems to me indisputable that Plato did understand the general form of Frege’s solution and, understanding it, rejected it. I shall argue that the general form of Frege’s solution is to explain a mistake as a mismatch, but that Plato rejects this form of solution on the grounds that mismatching is as mysterious as mistaking”. See Rudebusch (1985) p. 526.

not-being” (188d). Socrates comments on the judgement of which is not,

“Perhaps the simple fact is this: it is when a man judges about anything things which are not, that he is inevitably judging falsely, no matter what may be the nature of his thought in other respects” (188d).

However, this line of thought is impossible, for it is not possible to judge something which is not. Judgement means you are certainly judging something and this something could not be non-being, since “a man who is judging something which is not is judging nothing” (189a) and “a man who is judging nothing is not judging at all” (189a). Nevertheless, we need to consider what “something which is not” means. In Socrates’ view, something which is not equals nothing, for “a man who is judging something which is not is judging nothing” (189a). This idea is strange. Consider a famous example, the Golden Mountain.<sup>265</sup> When someone is judging something about the Golden Mountain, he is judging something and the Golden Mountain is “something which is not”. More exactly, the Golden Mountain does not exist and something which is not could be understood in two senses. It could refer to absolute non-existence and could also refer to something that does not exist in reality but could be the object of a judgement, a proposal, an idea or a piece of knowledge,

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Russell (1905) pp. 479–493. In Terry Penner’s view, modern philosophers have a distinction between names and objects, but Plato has no such a distinction. He notes:

“Where moderns insist on a difference of logical type between what is said and what is named, Plato seems (sufficiently) true statements quite as much taking us to existing state of affairs in the real world as adequate (sufficiently true) name take us to real things in the real world. And where moderns treat empty names by fiat, and false statements in terms of postulated ‘intentional’ entities called propositions, Plato treats both empty names and false statements as instances calling on us to ‘change the subject’ – but only to other things that exist antecedently to any ‘intentional’ entities. Similarly, where moderns introduce a special logic for psychological contexts and tell us that existence is not a predicate in the course of its introducing a plethora of new ‘intentional’ entities such as propositions and meanings to be what is referred to – instead of real objects and states of affairs – in psychological contexts, and when doing extensional logic, Socratic-Platonic Ultra-Realism will say that the problems lie not in psychological contexts, but with that single fault we call, alternatively, ‘falsity’ or non-being – whether in extensional contexts *or* in psychological contexts”. See Penner (2013) pp. 219-220.



namely, it could exist in the region of thought. Socrates obviously ignores the second possible meaning of the phrase “something which is not”<sup>266</sup> and directly considers the equality of something which is not and nothing. In addition, we should consider the question how there could be a judgement about something which is absolutely non-existent. “Absolute non-existence” has shown that this kind of thing could not even be the object of a judgement, because it does not exist at all and has no way to become the object of a judgement. Hence, how could the situation of “a man who is judging nothing” (189a) be possible? Further, how could the phrase “something which is not” be possible? If something is something, it could not be nothing and could not be something which is not. It is not strange when Socrates says, “it is not possible to judge what is not, either about the things which are or just by itself” (189b). Socrates asks in conclusion, “False judgement, then, is something different from judging things which are not” (189b) and Theaetetus gives an unconvincing.

McDowell tries to explain this conclusion by attributing “is not” to the negative of a judgement.<sup>267</sup> Take Socrates as an example to illustrate what McDowell means. A judgement “Socrates is beautiful”<sup>268</sup> is not true, because the property “beauty” does not belong to Socrates. McDowell’s interpretation is not helpful, since the whole argument is under the discussion about “being and non-being”. Socrates’ discussion is about the range or sphere of judgement, namely, the object of judgement, but McDowell’s explanation is irrelevant to that, since it considers the relationship

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<sup>266</sup> Indeed, though Plato does not consider in the *Theaetetus* the second situation of “something which is not”, he does have a brilliant discussion of it in the *Sophist*. “It seems that when we say that which is not, we do not say something contrary to that which is, but only something different from it.” (*Sophist*, 257b) See *Sophist* 237c-241d and 256d-260d.

<sup>267</sup> McDowell (1973) pp. 200-202.

<sup>268</sup> This example imitates an example from McDowell. See McDowell (1973) pp. 198.

between judgement and fact.

If it is impossible to make a judgement about something which is not, it has been shown that false judgement could not be judgement on something which is not. Therefore, this actually manifests the failure of the approach of “being and not-being” for seeking how false judgement is possible. Contrary to the result of this approach, false judgement does exist. So how is false judgement possible? Socrates and Theaetetus start another attempt to answer this question and Socrates points out false judgement is a kind of “other-judging”. He explains:

“We say that there is false judgement, a kind of ‘other-judging’, when a man, in place of one of the things that are, has substituted in his thought another of the things that are and asserts that it is. In this way, he is always judging something which is, but judges one thing in place of another; and having missed the thing which was the object of his consideration, he might fairly be called one who judges falsely” (189c).

Additionally, Socrates explains his “picture” of the soul thinking – it is that in thinking the soul “talks with itself about the objects under its consideration” (189e).

So this idea leads him to his view on false judgement:

“...in my view, to judge is to make a statement, and a judgement is a statement which is not addressed to another person or spoken aloud, but silently addressed to oneself... So that when a man judges one thing to be another, what he is doing, apparently, is to say to himself that the one thing is the other” (190a).

Someone who makes a judgement can make a judgement of “one thing is the other”, for Socrates repeatedly uses phrases like “to himself” and “to oneself” in the

expression. The reason for this is that Socrates has turned to another approach for seeking how false judgement is possible. The new approach is to explore the possibility of the false judgement that is a kind of error that occurs between ideas. Theaetetus' response to this approach is to observe that "when a man judges 'ugly' instead of 'beautiful', or 'beautiful' instead of 'ugly', then he is truly judging what is false" (189c). Socrates pretends that he is not able to absorb Theaetetus' "truly false" idea and cleverly changes Theaetetus' "beautiful instead of ugly" into "the beautiful is ugly" (190b). However, as Socrates points out, "No one judges 'The ugly is beautiful' or makes any other such judgement" (190d-e), since "'other-judging' is not possible for anyone either when he has both things present to him in judgement or when he has only one" (190d-e). The explanation for this is simply that if both of the things are present to you, you know these two notions and they are different, so you could never make a judgement "the beautiful is ugly". Or, if only one of them is present to you, you could only know one of them, and so could not make a judgement on both of them.<sup>269</sup>

Two issues in this argument need to be noticed. Firstly, we need to make a distinction between Socrates' idea and Theaetetus' idea. In order to explain the difference, let us consider the example "Socrates is beautiful". Theaetetus only expresses that "beautiful" instead of "ugly" is the mistake of this sentence. Nevertheless, what Socrates claims is different. He actually employs a reformulation of the same example "beautiful is ugly" and so expresses a completely new idea. The

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<sup>269</sup> Cf. *Sophist*, 263b7-13. McDowell's explanation misses the point of Socrates' argument here. He explains how the false judgement was produced through "beautiful instead of ugly". McDowell (1973) pp. 202-204.

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difference between them is that Theaetetus' idea refers to the relationship between the fact "Socrates is ugly" and the sentence "Socrates is beautiful"; while Socrates' idea refers to the relationship between notions. "Socrates is beautiful" is a false judgement, for the judgement contradicts the fact; while "ugly is beautiful" is a false judgement, since the two notions are not the same. From another perspective, we could say that Theaetetus' sentence refers to the fact, the sphere outside of the sentence, but Socrates' sentence does not refer to the outside world of perception and only describes the relationship between two notions in internal judgement. Further, the difference really exists, for Socrates does not only give us one example, but many other examples: "The unjust is certainly just", "No doubt the odd is even" (190b), "A cow must be a horse" and "Two must be one" (190c).

Secondly, how can "other-judging" be impossible? According to Socrates, "other-judging" is impossible in only two situations, namely, both things are present to the judge, or only one of them. If both of the things are present to someone, that person could not make a false judgement about them, for they are different. If one of them appears, the false judgement is also impossible, for the other thing does not even appear, so how could someone make a judgement about it? The reason seems plausible. Nevertheless, both of the situations seem doubtful, since we could ask Socrates, "How does the soul operate, when you set up two such situations?" We should ask Socrates, "Is this the operation of the soul as you understand it?" Since Socrates has not yet introduced the theory of wax block, this kind of operation of the soul is still possible. Nevertheless, an old question arises, how could you know

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something but not realize that you know it? This question is valid to Socrates, because he admits,

“if he has only one of them before his mind in judging, and the other is not present to him at all, he will never judge that one is the other” (190d).<sup>270</sup>

This sentence shows that you would never realize a notion, if it does not appear to you or your soul. Hence, the operation of the soul becomes strange. It seems that what you know is all in a black room which is invisible to yourself and you could only know what you know when it appears to you. The important thing is that waiting is the only option for your soul. The whole process is random and you would never know what would present itself to you. If my understanding is correct, then in such a situation, what you know is no longer what you know, since knowledge is no longer accessible to yourself and you cannot use what you know actively, but only passively. That means, knowledge is out of your own control: if so, it is not knowledge any longer, but like a kind of oracle from God.

Whatever the errors in Socrates' argument, his inquiry on false judgement as “other judging” ends. My discussion only tries to investigate how false judgement is possible from a negative aspect, for the conclusion of this discussion is, “It is impossible for a man to be in error through judging that things he knows are the things he does not know” (191a-b), which was posited by Socrates and Theaetetus at 188b-c. This conclusion is valid, since “it made us not know, when we do know,

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<sup>270</sup> The translation is a little misapplication. The Greek text does not have a word that corresponds to the phrase “before his mind”. Maybe Burnyeat or Levett, the translators, add this just for the fluency of the English. The same situation happens elsewhere at 190d.

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things which we know” (191b). Indeed, how could you know something while making a false judgement about something you do know? Nevertheless, at this time, Socrates now proposes, “do not let us put the case in that way; let us try another way” (191b).

The other way that Socrates mentions about false judgement as “other judgement” is the wax block analogy. At 191e-192d, Socrates lists fourteen impossibilities of thinking which would not lead to false judgements and he gives us another three possibilities which would make false judgements possible. Socrates makes these kinds of judgements clear and McDowell has listed all the cases in which false judgement is impossible and all the cases in which false judgement is possible,<sup>271</sup> so there is no reason to repeat it. The conclusion about how false judgement is possible in the wax block analogy is as follows:

“I am afraid of what I may say if someone asks me: ‘So, Socrates, you’ve discovered false judgement, have you? You have found that it arises not in the relation of perceptions to one another, or of thoughts to one another, but in the connecting of perception with thought?’ I believe I am very likely to say ‘Yes’, with an air of flattering myself upon our having made some beautiful discovery.” (195c-d)

Socrates soon finds another situation that could produce false judgement after this conclusion. The false judgement still could arise within the thoughts themselves, rather than being “a misapplication of thought to perception” (196c). Socrates on behalf of one critic takes “five” and “seven” as an example. Assume that “five” and “seven” do not refer to any qualified perceptions, such as five or seven people. As

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<sup>271</sup> McDowell (1973) pp. 210-211.

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“five” and “seven” are all on the wax block, both of them are knowable and accessible to someone himself. It seems impossible that someone could make a false judgement on “five” and “seven”, even though they do not refer to any other thing, but only themselves. That is to say, it is impossible that “one thing he knows is another thing he knows” (196b). If that is not the case, then we actually admit that “the same man must, at one and the same time, both know and not know the same objects” (196b-c). Nevertheless, it is still possible that someone is thinking “five” but “seven” on the wax block, i.e. someone “may not know what he knows” (196c). We should ask Socrates “Where do the ‘five’ and ‘seven’ come from?” It is obvious that they cannot come from perceptions, because you can never find “five” and “seven” themselves in the sensible world. What you could find is just five persons, five apples or five laptops; however, you could never find the “five” itself in the sensible world. If that is so, then the wax block analogy fails to explain where those numbers come from. If we generalize this consideration, then we should consider how all the things or impressions that come from “what we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves” are possibly imprinted on wax the block.

How could it be possible that someone knows something but does not know he knows something? An answer from Socrates may be, “We need to know what ‘know’ or ‘knowing’ means” (196d-e). Further, if we do not even know what “knowing” means, how could we use vocabulary like “we know”, “we do not know” or “to be ignorant of” (196e)? Theaetetus wisely responds to this question by saying “But how are you going to carry on the discussion at all, Socrates, if you keep off these words?”

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(196e).

Socrates this time does not avoid the difficulty and tries to tell Theaetetus what knowing is like (197a). “Knowing”, as Socrates defines it, is “the possession of knowledge”, which is different from other people’s definition of knowing as “the having of knowledge”. Theaetetus does not understand the distinction between these two definitions; therefore, Socrates introduces the example of a coat. In Socrates’ mind, “having a coat” means that you not only own the coat, but you wear the coat as well, by contrast with “possess a coat” which means that the coat only belongs to you, but is not worn by you (197b). In a word, the difference between “having” something and “possessing” something is whether something is put into practice. Following the distinction between having knowledge and possessing knowledge, Socrates introduces the aviary example as the extension of the wax block analogy. In the aviary example, “false judgement is going to become a matter of an interchange of pieces of knowledge” (199c). However, as has been discussed in section 5.2, if false judgement is just the interchange of pieces of knowledge, then this situation cannot happen, since if someone knows something, he would not make a mistake about it. Here, the two criteria of knowledge, namely, knowledge is always of what is and is always unerring, come back (152c). These two criteria ensure the impossibility of the explanation about how false judgement is possible in the aviary example.

The failure of the search for the possibility of false judgement in the aviary example makes all the endeavor to find how false judgements are possible go back to the beginning. Theaetetus proposes again that they could directly consider



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knowledge as true judgement, for “judging truly is at least something free of mistakes, I take it, and everything that results from it is admirable and good” (200e). Socrates does not think so. For objecting to Theaetetus’ suggestion, Socrates elaborates an objection about orators and lawyers who have “the art of the greatest representatives of wisdom” (201a). However, Socrates does not think that the orators and lawyers can teach people, because they do not have any knowledge; rather they persuade people. Both Socrates and Theaetetus agree that “persuading” people means “causing them to judge” (201b). The art of orators and lawyers makes people form a true judgement without knowledge. The strategy that Socrates employs is to use a counter-example. If there is an art that can persuade other people without any knowledge, then, because of the existence of such an art, it is possible to judge truly without knowledge. If it is possible, then true judgement is certainly not knowledge; they are different things. If true judgement and knowledge are not the same thing, knowledge is not true judgement, as Theaetetus suggests.

### **Conclusion**

Socrates in the *Theaetetus* gives a blueprint of epistemology. In particular, he describes the whole process of knowing, including how we gain perceptions (by the two motions) and how the soul gains perceptions and knowledge (the wax block analogy). In this account, Socrates links psychology and epistemology together and puts them in a close relationship.

It is easy to see that “the bulk of Part II (187d-200c) is devoted to a discussion of

the question whether false judgement is possible”.<sup>272</sup> “But why does Plato devote all of this space to this discussion?” This is a question that Plato’s readers cannot help asking. McDowell gives two reasons. Firstly, “the main difficulty about false judgement discussed in what follows is raised by an argument, set out at 187e-188c, one of whose key notions is that of knowledge.” Secondly, “it is plausible that in order to be able to understand Theaetetus’ new account of knowledge as being true judgement, we must be able to make the sense of the notion of false judgement as well”.<sup>273</sup> Socrates discusses the role of false judgement, according to Burnyeat, for two reasons. Firstly, the failure of the attempts to explain false judgement reminds us that there were some errors in the assumptions of those inquiries. Secondly, the failure to explain the undoubted fact that false judgements exist:

“would constitute a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of Theaetetus’ second definition, to be followed by the direct refutation...”.<sup>274</sup>

I agree with these explanations of why Socrates discusses false judgement at length. Besides these explanations, I would add that Socrates immediately meets a puzzle when Theaetetus suggests knowledge as true judgement, namely, false judgement seems impossible. If the puzzle stands, then all judgements are true judgement. This could be the direct reason why Socrates emphasizes the importance of seeking how

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<sup>272</sup> Burnyeat (1990) p. 65.

<sup>273</sup> McDowell (1973) p. 194. Paolo Crivelli calls the argument at 187e5-188c8 “the ‘Argument from Knowing and Not Knowing’ and creates a counter-example to show this argument is false, though I will not discuss this argument in detail. See Crivelli (1996) pp. 177-178. Gail Fine points out that the discussion of false judgement “is an integral part of Plato’s attack” on the definition “knowledge is true judgement” by analysing “otherjudging” at 188a-c in *Theaetetus* which “rests on a strong acquaintance view”. See Fine (1979) pp. 70-78.

<sup>274</sup> Burnyeat (1990) p. 66.

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false judgement is possible.

Among those attempts above, the wax block analogy and the aviary example are the most important theories. Both of them fail in the end. In the process of investigation of those two approaches, Socrates has given us a relatively complete account about how we could gain or learn something in the sensible world. Nevertheless, the analogy of the aviary does not explain how those “birds” come into the aviary, rather it only refers to how the soul operates in making a judgement. But this operation could be seen as a further explanation of the wax block analogy. For in the wax block analogy Socrates does not make clear how the soul grasps or recollects the knowledge on the wax block. The wax block analogy only refers to the perception and thoughts within the soul that are imprinted upon the wax block when we wish to remember. Indeed, in the process of the investigation in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates gradually offers us a complete explanation or theory of knowledge in the sensible world. Knowledge here would be the wrong word, but Socrates does not believe we can find actual knowledge in the sensible world, a disbelief revealed in the series of failed attempts to discover what knowledge and knowing are.

The failures to define knowledge continually prompt us to come back to the theory of Forms, the theory of recollection and any other theory that is relevant to epistemology and is beyond empiricism. Cornford’s view is correct. Surely, many paragraphs in the *Theaetetus* are similar to the *Meno*. At the beginning of the *Theaetetus* (146d), Socrates rebuts Theaetetus’ enumeration of knowledge that is similar to the situation in the *Meno*, where Meno gives also a list of virtues (72d). At

191c, Socrates nearly repeats Meno's paradox, "Is it possible to learn something you did not know before?" In addition, when Socrates and Theaetetus discuss why knowledge is not true judgement, Socrates uses the phenomenon of people making a true judgement without knowledge as a result of persuasion to refute "knowledge is true opinion". This refutation reminds us immediately that when Socrates and Meno talk about whether virtue is a kind of knowledge (87c), Socrates rejects it on the grounds that neither the good men in the city nor the sophists can be teachers of virtue, i.e. there is no teachers of virtue. If virtue is knowledge, then virtue should be teachable and there must be teacher of virtue. If we cannot find at least one teacher of virtue, then virtue cannot be a kind of knowledge.

The story of the close relationship between *Theaetetus* and *Meno* has not finished. Theaetetus' last definition of knowledge, namely, knowledge is true judgement with an account, will show further similarity between *Meno* and *Theaetetus*. In the *Meno* (98a), knowledge is described as true opinion/judgement (ἡ δόξα ἢ ἀληθής/ἢ ὀρθὴ δόξα) plus an explanation of the reason why. In the *Theaetetus*, though the definition of knowledge as true opinion will be rejected finally, the third definition of knowledge is as true opinion/judgement plus an account (τὴν μὲν μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι) (201d). Nevertheless, even if the close relationship between *Meno* and *Theaetetus* is certain, it is still not clear whether Socrates insists that his epistemological theories are beyond empiricism. In order to understand Socrates' commitment to anti-empiricism, it is time to consider the final definition of knowledge, knowledge as true opinion with an account.

## Chapter Six *Theaetetus* on True Judgement with an Account

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will deal with Theaetetus' third definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. After the two unsuccessful attempts of defining knowledge, Theaetetus offers his last definition of knowledge, namely, knowledge as true opinion/judgement with an account (201d). This third definition of knowledge in *Theaetetus* has a strong connection with the the formula of knowledge in the *Meno*, i.e. knowledge is true opinion plus an explanation of reason why, but this formula is left without explanation. The explanation of that formula will help us to understand Plato's epistemological outline, which will be a supplement to illustrate Plato's epistemology as a whole.

Theaetetus admits in the dialogue that he heard the third definition, namely, "knowledge is true judgement with an account",<sup>275</sup> from an anonymous informant. What Theaetetus heard from that informant Socrates calls as a "dream" (201d). The difference between the second definition and the third one is the addition of "account", hence, it makes sense that Socrates wishes to make clear what "account" means. In the "dream" theory, as Socrates reports, the names of the unknowable but perceivable elements are woven together and then become a kind of account of the

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<sup>275</sup> Matthews points out, "If knowledge is to be defined in terms of true belief together with an account, not only must it be possible to have true belief without an account, it must also be possible to define belief without introducing the notion of knowledge". Matthews (1972) p. 20.

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knowable complexes (202b). In order to understand the “dream” theory, Socrates turns to a premise of the dream theory, i.e. the premise of letters and syllables (202e). In this premise, a problem arises. If the syllables are knowable, how could the letters which compose the syllables be unknowable? To avoid this difficulty, Socrates makes a distinction between sum<sup>276</sup> and whole (204b-205a). That is to say, syllables or complexes have their own single form (204a), rather than all the letters or elements. Then, we have two options, either both of the letters/elements and syllables/complexes are knowable or both of them are unknowable (205e). Whichever of the two options is correct, what has been said in the “dream” theory is wrong.

The failure of the “dream” theory stimulates Socrates to present three meanings of “account” for testing whether the third definition of knowledge is correct. The three meanings of account could be labeled as “statement” (206d), “going through a thing element by element” (207a-c) and “offering a unique feature or differentiation” (208c).

I will follow Socrates’ arguments about “account” in *Theaetetus*. In 6.1, I will consider the “dream” that both Socrates and Theaetetus have, especially the difficulties in what has been said in the dream theory. In 6.2, the model of letters and syllables will be discussed and I will also investigate the relationship between whole and sum, which is relevant to the model. In 6.3, I will focus on the three meanings of account and the problems in Socrates’ arguments. Overall, the chapter will show

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<sup>276</sup> Nicholas Denyer translates “sum” as “all of it”. Harte agrees and adopts this translation, since she believes this translation could have “the advantage of avoiding the misleading implications of the Burnyeat-Levett translation ‘sum’ ...” For coherence, I will continue to use “sum” in this thesis. See Harte (2002) p. 40, note 75.

none of the three fits to the formula that knowledge is true opinion with an account. Socrates' arguments on account are strictly limited to experience and do not refer to anything beyond that limitation.

### 6.1 A Dream Socrates and Theaetetus have

The failure of Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge, namely, knowledge is true judgement, stimulates Theaetetus to recollect a piece of hearsay. Theaetetus said that someone told him something that Socrates had just suggested. Theaetetus reports the viewpoint as follows:

“He said that...it is true judgement with an account that is knowledge (τὴν μὲν μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι);<sup>277</sup> true judgement without an account falls outside of knowledge... the things of which there is no account are not knowable (yes, he actually called them that), while those which have an account are knowable.” (201d)

Socrates is curious about how that man distinguishes these things which are knowable and unknowable. Moreover, Socrates claims that he wishes to check whether he himself heard the same version of the hearsay as Theaetetus (201d). This implies that both Socrates and Theaetetus have heard this definition from someone,

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<sup>277</sup> Sedley argues that “λόγος” in the discussion of knowledge as true judgement with an account means “definitional account” while insisting on the broad meaning of its traditional usages. Sedley (2004) pp. 153-154. See also McDowell (1973) pp. 230-231, where he emphasizes the usage of “*legein*” in the texts. Burnyeat enumerates the meanings of “*logos*” to point out the complexity of this word. Burnyeat (1990) p. 134

but from different people, otherwise, Socrates would not wish to check the hearsay. Theaetetus is not confident of recollecting the hearsay and so Socrates says, “Listen then to a dream in return for a dream” (201d). Then, Socrates immediately gives us what he heard.

Socrates in his dream was listening to people saying,

“...that the primary elements (στοιχεῖα), as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account (λόγον οὐκ ἔχουσι). Each of them, in itself, can only be named; it is not possible to say anything else of it, either that it is or that it is not. That would mean that we were adding being or not-being to it; whereas we must not attach anything, if we are to speak of that thing itself alone.” (201e-202a)

My first point is to make sure whether what Socrates says is relevant to the third definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is true judgement with an account.<sup>278</sup>

Socrates’ dream follows Theaetetus’ dream. In Theaetetus’ dream, true judgement with an account is knowledge and if there is only true judgement, namely, without an account, it falls outside of knowledge. Theaetetus makes clear the idea “true judgement only falls outside of knowledge” by explaining that things with no account are not knowable, while “those which have an account are knowable” (201d).

Theaetetus seems to feel a little surprised by this, since he says “yes, he actually called them that” (201d). Burnyeat adds a note on this sentence, “The translation in the text expresses surprise about the claim that some things are not knowable at

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<sup>278</sup> I agree with a conclusion which is drawn by W. G. Runciman: “...true opinion is not really relevant to the ‘dream’ at all. The ‘dream’ states how true opinion as well as knowledge becomes possible by logos”. See Runciman (1962) p. 46.



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all.”<sup>279</sup> We need to consider Burnyeat’s note.

Theaetetus is surprised by the idea that he heard from someone, where a distinction is made between knowable or unknowable by a criterion of account. What does “unknowable” mean? Does it mean “not knowable at all”? Not being a piece of knowledge means at least two things to Plato: being absolutely unknowable and being opinions/judgement<sup>280</sup> or including true opinions/judgement. In the *Republic*, the object of opinion is defined as something that “is such as to be and also not to be” and is “intermediate between what purely is and what in no way is” (477a). Naturally, both Socrates and Glaucon agree, “opinion is clearly different from knowledge” (478a). As Burnyeat’s translation of the text has alluded (though he would not exclude the possibility of “opinion”), there is only a distinction between knowable and not knowable at all (201d). Nevertheless, there is the third possibility of opinions/judgements (*Republic* 477a). With this third possibility, Theaetetus’ dream becomes clear. What he says is that knowledge is true judgement with an account and that true judgement itself is unknowable, namely, true judgement itself is not knowledge. We need to keep in our mind that the investigation of the third definition of knowledge is following the discussion of the second one, i.e. knowledge is true judgement. What is new in the third definition is “an account”. It is reasonable to ask what “account” means. That is what Socrates does in his response to Theaetetus’ third definition. He does not ask it directly but rather asks how to distinguish the things that are knowable and unknowable, since “account” is the standard of being

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<sup>279</sup> Burnyeat (1990) p. 338.

<sup>280</sup> The Greek word “δόξα” is translated “opinion” or “judgement” in different dialogues.

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knowable and unknowable, or in other words, accountability equals being knowable.

Theaetetus' response to Socrates' question makes us upset, for he could follow if someone explained the distinction between unknowable and knowable (201d). Burnyeat describes him as "like a juryman"<sup>281</sup> and doubts in what degree we could rely on the theory that he and Socrates will introduce. Burnyeat's remark makes us think about what happens when Socrates and Theaetetus discuss the proposition that "knowledge is true judgement", where Socrates thinks that a juryman could make a true judgement without any knowledge through being persuaded (201b-c).

From these points, it is clear that Socrates' dream is relevant to Theaetetus' dream, for in Socrates' dream, he tries to make clear what "account" is by discussing the distinction between the things that are knowable and unknowable. Burnyeat believes that "as the theory develops, it becomes increasingly clear that it is couched in terms of knowing objects."<sup>282</sup> It is necessary to consider what "objects" mean in Burnyeat's interpretation. Nevertheless, Burnyeat does not focus on what "objects" mean, but on what "knowing" means, since for him, objects refer to "any object, concrete or abstract". What Burnyeat is mainly concerned with is that "knowing" has four meanings:

(1) Def. K<sub>o</sub> Knowing *o* is having true judgement concerning *o* with an account of *o*;

(2) Def. K<sub>p</sub> Knowing that *p* is having true judgement that *p* with an account of

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<sup>281</sup> Burnyeat (1990) p. 130.

<sup>282</sup> Burnyeat (1990) p. 132.

the proposition  $p$ .

(3) Def.  $K_{P(e)}$  Knowing that  $p$  is having true judgement that  $p$  with an explanation of why it is the case that  $p$ .

(4) Def.  $K_{P(j)}$  Knowing that  $p$  is having true judgement that  $p$  with adequate justification for the judgement that  $p$ .<sup>283</sup>

Burnyeat admits that it is better not to assume knowing should be understood as any one of the four, since it is just the beginning of Socrates' discussion, though we should keep those four meanings in mind. I agree with him, for once we find out the meaning of "knowing", we actually find out the answer of the question of the whole dialogue, "What is knowledge?"

Socrates does not discuss directly what "account" is, but investigates a pair of things, namely, element and complex, which are unknowable and knowable, respectively.<sup>284</sup> That is to say, element and complex are employed by Socrates as an example for explaining how to make a distinction between knowable and unknowable things, i.e. what "account" means.<sup>285</sup> However, why does Socrates choose element and complex as the example? Socrates has explained the reason in his description of the dream, because the elements "have no account" (201e) and

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<sup>283</sup> Burnyeat (1990) pp. 130-131.

<sup>284</sup> The distinction between unknowable elements and knowable syllables is called as "the Asymmetry Thesis" by Verity Harte who believes the epistemological asymmetry is the "central to the dream". Further, there are two difficulties presented in this asymmetry thesis as Harte argues. See Harte (2002) pp. 33-34.

<sup>285</sup> Burnyeat has a different understanding from me. He does not think that element and complex are just used as an example, but a metaphysical distinction for explaining "knowledge is true opinion with an account" by correlating "there actually are some objects of which there is no account, and others that have an account." (p. 132). See Burnyeat (1990) p. 134.

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“can only be named” (201e).<sup>286</sup> It is impossible “to say anything else of it, either that it is or that it is not” (201e). Further, unlike the elements, the complexes that are composed of elements have an account of their names, since the names of the elements can be “woven together” and then an account can be given of the names of the complexes (202b).

My next approach to the thoughts in Socrates’ and Theaetetus’ dreams is to summarize them through twelve main points:

(1) Socrates says he had a dream where he heard that primary elements had no account. Theaetetus had heard a similar dream, however, he could not find out its contents until he had been reminded (201c, 201d).

(2) Knowledge is defined as true opinion with an account. Having an account is the criterion of knowledge (201d).

(3) Elements have no account; therefore they are unknowable. They only have names. Everything, including us, is composed of elements (201e).

(4) Being or not-being could not be applied or added to the elements (201e).

(5) Words like “itself”, “that” “each”, “alone”, “this” or any other words of this kind also could not be applied to elements (202a).

(6) The reason why the vocabulary in (5) is forbidden is because they could be applied to “all things alike” (202a).

(7) The names of the elements are woven together, for the elements are woven together (202b).

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<sup>286</sup> Robinson reminds us to notice that the if “the primary elements have no logos”, then “on this hypothesis the question What is X? would have no true answer when X was a primary element”. See Robinson (1971) p. 121.

(8) The names that are woven together become a kind of account of the names of the complex. (202b)

(9) The elements are unaccountable, and unknowable, but perceivable. (202b)

(10) The complex is knowable and expressible; it can be the object of true judgement. (202b)

(11) Someone who gains only a true judgement about something does not know the thing, though his soul is in a state of truth. That is to say, he is still ignorant about something. (202b-c)

(12) If someone could gain a true judgement with an account, he has knowledge (202c).<sup>287</sup>

The distinction between element and complex is the most obscure part of the whole dream, especially when we meet the question, “What is ‘element’ in Socrates’ dream?” According to Socrates’ description, the elements could be discussed on two levels, the ontological level and the linguistic or cognitive level.<sup>288</sup> Ontologically, elements compose the complex and are perceivable. These two properties are understandable and give us a philosophical idea of ontological hierarchy: the elements are the base of the pyramid of reality while the complex which is composed of elements is the rest of the pyramid. Socrates also assigns the property “perceivable”

<sup>287</sup> J. H. Leshner reminds us the distinction between “ἐπιστήμη” (knowledge that something is the case) and “γνώσις” (knowledge by acquaintance) in the “dream” theory. Leshner (1969) pp. 72-74.

<sup>288</sup> Cornford has a similar explanatory structure. He divides the theory in Socrates’ dream into three “heads”: “Things”, “Language” and “Cognition”. See Cornford (1935) pp. 144-146. Morrow offers the picture below. See Morrow (1970) p. 327.

	Physical	Lexical	Grammatical	Mathematical
Compounds “Firsts”	Things Parts	Words Letters	Statements Words (names)	Demonstrations Premises

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to the elements (202b) and emphasizes that “the elements are woven together” (202b). Then, ontologically, it seems plausible that “the account” which is composed of elements is something, on Sedley’s account, “far from being one which ascends to the generic components of the definiendum, on the contrary descends into its material components”, which Sedley himself calls a “materialist interpretation”.<sup>289</sup> Indeed, an element is a component which could be perceivable and could compose a complex thing. However, how could we understand that the element should not be described by “being” or “not-being”? Let us take “hand” as an example for answering this question. Although a hand is not an element on Socrates’ meaning of element, since it could be divided into a palm with five fingers, let us nevertheless assume that a hand is an element in Socrates’ dream. A hand could not be described as “being” or “not-being”, because it is itself a hand, when it belongs to a body or a person. When a hand is cut off from the body, it is not a hand at all, though we could recognize that it was a hand of somebody from its shape and flesh or whatever else. It is not a hand any longer, for it does not have the function of a hand any longer. Consider a similar case, a leg of a table, when a leg of a table is cut off from the table, it is no longer a leg of the table, but just a piece of wood or steel or whatever materials it is made of, since it does not support the table any more and loses its function as a table leg. Sedley who has a different understanding of “the element is perceivable” believes that the idea has a strong connection to the discussion on perception in the first definition (184b3-187a3), which I do not agree with for four

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<sup>289</sup> Sedley (2004) pp. 157-158.

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reasons.<sup>290</sup> Firstly, if an element is what someone perceives, then it is no longer a material thing which will certainly contradict with Sedley's own approach as a whole which he calls a "materialist interpretation". Once an element is what is perceived, the element becomes something inside the soul, then it certainly cannot be a material thing.<sup>291</sup> Secondly, the colour red, as Sedley discusses at length as an example of perception, could not compose a complex thing by itself or with something else. Red is probably not to be considered as a part or a component of a complex thing. Red belongs to the body or bodily instruments without being a property of things or objects themselves. Hence, colour could not be a component of a complex thing. Thirdly, Socrates prohibits describing the element by "this", "that", or any words that could be used universally. Nevertheless, when Socrates talks at 156d-157b about perception by describing how the eyes see the white colour, he gives us exactly an opposite explanation. The eyes that fill with sight come into being as seeing eyes; while white comes into being from the other side (156e). Socrates believes that this account could be generally applied (156) and claims that everything is in motion, namely, all things are coming into being relatively to something (157a-b). He proposes that "The verb 'to be' must be totally abolished" and we are not allowed to use the words like "something", "this" or "that" (157b). Socrates asks for abolishing terminology "to be", "this" or "that" which could also be applied to the element. However, the result of his discussion of perception is that everything loses its own

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<sup>290</sup> Sedley (2004) p. 159.

<sup>291</sup> Burnyeat notices Socrates' emphasis on the distinction between the element and the element "in itself" (*αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ*) at 201e2-3 (p. 119), but seemingly does not apply this distinction when he discusses about "an element is perceptible" (p.121). See Burnyeat (1970) p. 119 and 121.

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being and everything is becoming. In contrast, when he considers the element, he considers element as absolutely individual and isolated from other things to such an extent that every element cannot be said to have being or not-being. The discussion of element and perception are exactly opposite, though they lead to the same result, namely, losing the property of being or not-being. Lastly, the background of the discussion on perception is the first definition of knowledge, namely, knowledge is perception. When Socrates presents his argument on how the eyes perceive, he tries to give us a theory on knowledge, though the theory finally is rebutted. Comparing it to the elements, elements are unknowable and therefore Socrates cannot be trying to introduce a theory of knowledge when he discusses elements.

It seems incorrect to make a strong connection between the discussion of the element and of perception. The understanding of perception would not help us to understand the element better. Hence, we should stick to the materialist interpretation to understand the elements as parts or components of complex things.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, the story has not yet finished, for Socrates also describes the elements on the linguistic or cognitive level and the whole discussion of the elements employs the example of letters and syllables. Then, we should ask why Socrates employs the example in language to explain the element, if the element is a component of a complex thing?

In order to answer the question, let us consider the linguistic or cognitive level

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<sup>292</sup> This approach to the texts is originally from Aristotle who explains "elements" as having four meanings, i.e. (1) alphabetic letters; (2) mathematical elements; (3) earth, fire and other elements which appear in physics; (4) the component parts of any complex object. These four meanings are summarized by Sedley. See Sedley (2004) pp. 155-156. Cornford has a similar understanding, see Cornford (1935) p. 144.



of the element. According to Socrates' expression, the elements only have names and cannot be expressed in an account. Therefore, they are unknowable. When Socrates claims that the elements have no names, he uses the words "ὀνομάσαι" (201e), "ὀνομάζεσθαι" (202b) and "ὄνομα ἔχειν" (202b) to indicate the word "name". All the three expressions use the infinitive, a basic form of the verb. The use of the infinitive means that Socrates does not make clear who gives the elements their names. Further, we could always ask the person who gives the names, "Why do you give something such a name?" and expect the man to give an explanation or an account on this question. Even if he just gives the names at random, he could always say, "I just arbitrarily assign the names", and this would also be an account.<sup>293</sup> If so, even if they only have names, then this result contradicts the view that "the elements have no account". Even worse, Socrates insists that we could not even say either it is or it is not (201e-202a). Additionally, he explains,

"indeed we ought not to apply to it even such words as 'itself' or 'that', 'each', 'alone', or 'this', or any other of the many words of this kind; for these go the round and are applied to all things alike, being other than the things to which they are added" (202a).

Socrates again mentions this idea at 205c, where he claims regarding the element/primacy:

"it would be incorrect to apply even the term 'being' to it when we spoke of it or the term 'this', because these terms signify different and alien things".

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<sup>293</sup> I put aside Socrates' discussion on "account" which has three meanings here, since the exact meaning of an account does not affect my argument.

Hence, “if it were possible to express the element itself and it had its own “proprietary account”, it would have to be expressed without any other things” (202a). Socrates endows the elements with an attribution, which we could call “absolute individuality”, namely, each of the elements is an absolute individual and is isolated from other things. Then, we could not employ any word or term to describe the elements that signifies a universal. Sedley gives us an explanation of this. According to his argument, when we say “red”, we are reporting “something irreducibly primitive”, but when we say, “Only this is red”, we unavoidably connect the primitive datum to another thing or add some more information to the primitive datum.<sup>294</sup>

The greatest puzzle about the element and complex is, “How is it possible that the names of the elements become an account of the complex, when the names of the elements are woven together just as the elements are woven together?” According to Socrates’ expression, the elements themselves have no accounts and only have names. Therefore, they are unknowable. It seems that the name of an element could not be an account of the element. For otherwise, the named element has an account and is knowable. Since the elements are parts or components of complex things, then it is understandable when Socrates says that the elements could be woven together.

Nevertheless, how could the names of the elements be woven together? The only information that Socrates offers is that the names of the elements are woven

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<sup>294</sup> Sedley (2004) p 160.

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together. It is nonsense or at least uninformative. Imagine the situation where a craftsman is composing a table by joining the parts or components of the table, and in the process nothing is actually added. The only difference between a table and its parts is the function. Say a table could support a person or some other things on it but the parts of a table could not. The table has such a function because of its structure. Then consider the names of the elements. They are language. Language must follow grammar which will ensure communication and understanding between language speakers. This means that names, notions or concepts could not alone compose a language, since they also need verbs at least. Further, a language needs adverbs, adjectives or pronouns. Although a name, a notion, or a concept itself could construct a sentence<sup>295</sup> or a judgement or even a piece of knowledge in a special way, only names could not construct a sentence. Let us consider an example. You enter into a supermarket where you see a bag of apples. Someone points to the apples and asks, "What are they?". You answer, "Apples." In this case, the word "apples" not only constructs a sentence, but also a judgement, since you are actually judging what things are in the bag and you judge them apples from their shape or smell or whatever characteristic that make you realize that they are apples. Further, they are apples in the bag and you really make a true judgement, even a piece of knowledge, for you could always check the things in the bag to justify the judgement that they are apples. This example proves that a one-word sentence, i.e. a name, could be a

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<sup>295</sup> A sentence that only has one word is called "one-word sentence" by Willard Quine. Although Quine does not have a systematical explanation on this concept, but we could understand it through the famous example "Gavagai!". See Quine (1964) pp. 29-32.

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piece of knowledge, though in few kinds of cases.<sup>296</sup>

Then could a name become a kind of account? This question is more important than the question “Could a name become a piece of knowledge?”, since it is directly relevant to what Socrates argues in the text. Consider such a situation: when a criminal is sentenced to death, someone asks one juror, “Why does this criminal deserve to die?” The juror could reply, “Justice.” Or “Law” or whatever is a relevant answer in one word. Although the answer is not so satisfactory or is vague, it seems that it is still a kind of account. Then, could names, i.e. two or more names, become a kind of account? It seems not. Consider the law case again, how could the juror answer the question only using two names? The juror could answer the question by “Justice and law” or other similar answers, but he must also employ other parts of speech or other kinds of words in language. Even the phrase “justice and law” shows that the word “and” is necessary to the sentence for understanding and correction. Grant that the juror says, “Justice, law”. In an extreme situation, this can be seen as correct and understandable, since the questioner could understand the sentence “Justice, law” as a kind of enumeration of the accounts. But there are two reasons to refuse this kind of sentence as a natural language. (A) This response could only apply to two words and could not include more than three words. (B) This response could be valid as a kind of account in a few extreme cases but obviously could not be applied generally as a kind of account. Further, in the law case above, the sentences “Justice” or “Justice, law” have another problem which is not

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<sup>296</sup> This does not mean that Plato realizes a one-word sentence could be a piece of knowledge. As Gail Fine points out, “...Plato does not treat all words as simple names. This does not imply that Plato is clear about the difference between names and sentences”. See Fine (1977) p. 290.

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compatible with Socrates' names of elements. The problem is that the words "justice" and "law" could not be the names of elements. As Socrates has clearly expressed, the elements are perceivable. Therefore, they could not be abstract things, like "justice" or "law", for the simple reason that justice or law are not perceivable. Hence, following Socrates' lines of thinking, it seems that abstract things are outside the region of knowledge, for they are neither elements nor complex. If that is correct, then it seems that pure names of the elements could not become a valid account.

Let us consider another possibility. Someone could doubt the argument above by saying, "What you have argued is just one possibility, for you only consider the possibility of physical composition, as I could call it. The other possibility could be called chemical composition. In this kind of composition, the parts or the components of a complex thing would not be composed mechanically or physically." He could further explain "chemical composition" in this way: "All the parts or components merge with each other and produce a completely new substance. This is unlike the example of the composition of a table, as you have given, where nothing new is created except a new function of the table. The new table supports something on it, but all the parts remain themselves, the wood is still wood, the iron is still iron. The new function of the table is produced by the new physical structure of the parts. What I claim here is that after the composition, if this word is still useful to describe the process, all the parts disappear and only one new complex thing remains or stays and you can no longer see any components. It is just like when red liquid is added to blue liquid: only purple liquid is left and the red or blue completely disappear."

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Surely, this response provides another possibility for interpreting the way that the names of the elements are woven together. For Socrates does not eloquently persuade us that the composition of the names of the elements is like the composition of a table, which seems impossible as I have argued. Could the chemical composition analogy save Socrates' argument? As Socrates says, the way that the names of the elements are composed is like the way that the elements themselves are composed. Following the line of the chemical composition analogy, it seems that the names on the linguistic level should also disappear along with the notions or the concepts. How is this possible? Consider the example of the liquid from the skeptic: let us assume the red liquid and the blue liquid are the elements,<sup>297</sup> then it seems that the purple liquid is another element, rather than a complex thing which is composed by the red and blue liquid together. The reason for this is that there is no difference between the red liquid, blue liquid or purple liquid. Even if the purple liquid is a complex thing composed by the liquid of red and of blue, it still seems impossible to give an account of the purple liquid by purely the two names of the red and blue liquids. When he meets the question "Why or in what way does the purple liquid appear?", someone could answer, "It is because of the mixture of the red liquid and the blue liquid". The answer is definitely an account for the phenomenon of the appearance of the purple liquid. However, again, the answer itself is not purely constructed by just the names of the red and blue liquids. Therefore, the answer is not satisfactory for explaining what Socrates maintains regarding the names becoming a kind of account

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<sup>297</sup> We do not need to consider whether they are Socrates' elements or not, for it is irrelevant to argument

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in the *Theaetetus*. Assuming that “red liquid” and “blue liquid” are the names of the elements, in an extreme situation, the answer could be briefly like this: “Red liquid, blue liquid.” For an expert or someone who holds knowledge on colour, this kind of account is sufficient and satisfactory, though it would lead the questioner into perplexity. Just as I rebut the answer “Justice, law” in the law case above, this answer should also be refuted for the same reasons. Further, let us speculate how the chemical reaction could appear on the linguistic level. There are two bottles of liquid: one is red; the other one is blue. We could point to them and say, “Red liquid, blue liquid”. After the mixture of the two liquids, there is a bottle of purple liquid. The words we need to describe the bottle of purple are “Purple liquid”. It seems that there is no room and no need to mention the red liquid and blue liquid. How could “red liquid, blue liquid” become a kind of account of the purple liquid? It seems impossible and unreasonable. If that is correct, chemical composition does not save Socrates’ argument on the composition of the names of the elements.<sup>298</sup>

As my arguments show, there is no way to understand how the names of the elements are composed together and become a kind of account of complex things. Therefore, we should doubt the validity of the idea that “the complexes are both knowable and expressible.” (202b)

The next puzzle, as Socrates believes, is that complex things “can be the objects of true judgement” (202b).<sup>299</sup> The complex things are knowable, for they are

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<sup>298</sup> C.f. *Theaetetus* 203c5-6.

<sup>299</sup> Cornford’s translation is more close to the Greek text, he translates the phrase as “you can have a true opinion of them”. However, the difference between various translations does not influence my following argument. See Cornford (1935) p. 143.

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composed of the elements whose names become a kind of account through being woven together. Then why are the complexes the objects of true judgement? An intuitive answer to this question could be because knowledge is defined by Theaetetus as true judgement with an account (201d), which is to say, the objects of true judgement are the same as those of knowledge, namely, the complex things. The only difference between knowledge and true opinion is whether there is an account. If that is correct, then let us consider the consequence of such an interpretation. As we know, true judgement is different from knowledge, for it has no account. If the objects of true judgement and the objects of knowledge are the same, i.e. the complex things, then Socrates actually admits that knowledge could be gained from complex things in the sensible world. It is the account part in knowledge that makes knowledge knowable. Hence, all the ideas that Socrates presents on the element and the complex seem to be a kind of empirical theory. In fact, Socrates admits that a man's soul gains truth when he only has a true judgement. For Socrates says: "when a man gets a true judgement about something without an account, his soul is in a state of truth as regards that thing" (202b-c), though the man does not know the thing in question. Further, he adds that someone "who cannot give and take an account of a thing is ignorant about it" (202c). Socrates thinks that someone who has true opinion on X has gained the truth on X, even if he cannot give an account on X. Socrates also thinks that if someone cannot give an account on X, he is ignorant on X. However, does this mean that someone who only has a true opinion on X, and thus has truth on X in this way alone, is also ignorant on something? In such a situation, when



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someone gains a true opinion of X, then he gains the truth of X. But, he is still ignorant about X, for he does not have an account of X. Moreover, even if the factor of the account is the only standard of whether something is knowable or not, a complex thing could not be the object of true opinion, as Socrates says. For if a complex thing is the object of true opinion, then the complex is not knowable, for true opinion is unknowable because of having no account. However, Socrates holds that the complex thing is knowable through the names of the elements, which could become a kind of account.

According to my analysis of the texts about the element and the complex, we find that the element is a little easier to understand than the complex.<sup>300</sup> The elements should be understood as parts or components of a complex thing. But when we consider a complex thing, it seems that the attributions to a complex thing, as Socrates explains, are contradictory with each other. Therefore, the complexes are in the dark so far. It is time to consider the example of the complexes that Socrates gives. Socrates indeed gives examples of the primary elements by saying, “we and everything else are composed” (201e). “Everything else” in the sentence refers to anything that is composed by the elements except “we” and the elements. This is not actually helpful for understanding what the primary elements are. Fortunately, we still have an example: “we”. The word “we” refers to us human beings. As the primary elements are the parts or components of a complex thing, we could reasonably consider things such as “hand” or “foot” or “head” in the example as the

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<sup>300</sup> Burnyeat thinks the opposite. To him, Socrates’ description on the element is the “most mysterious feature”, but “as regards complexes, this is helpful, for it tells us that ‘we and everything else’ are complexes.” See Burnyeat (1990) p. 135.

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elements of the complex thing, a human being. Flesh should not be considered as an element of human being, since flesh which leaves the human body is still flesh which could still be divided into smaller parts or components. Body could not be an element of a human being for the same reason. Although it itself is a kind of abstract thing, it could still be divided into smaller components. However, the hand or the head or the foot are different from flesh and body, for once they leave or separate from the human being, they become other things, as I have argued above. A further point we need to consider is that, theoretically, the hand, the foot and the head are composed of smaller components. Take the hand as an example, theoretically, it is composed of bones, the palm, the nails, the nerves, the blood, the flesh and the fingers. Some of these components are obviously not elements and some of them seemingly could be categorized as elements. If we strictly follow the attributions of the elements that Socrates presents, then we will be in perplexity. Surely, when Socrates says that the elements are perceivable, it is reasonable to assume that he does not refer to the blood, the bones or the nerves which are normally inside the hand, rather he refers to fingers, palm and nails which are the components of a hand, just like a foot of a table or a table top of a table. It is clear that the fingers or a palm or a piece of nail would not be themselves when they separate from the hand. Therefore, we could call them the elements of a hand.

Through such a method, namely, the method of division, we build up a pyramid and a hierarchy. A human being could be divided into hands, head, feet and so on, and any part of a human being could still further be divided into smaller parts. A

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hand could be further divided into the fingers, the palm and the nails. This kind of method is similar to that in *Sophist*, where Plato uses a familiar method of division for seeking definitions.<sup>301</sup> We do not need to discuss the division method in *Sophist*, for the division method there is not the same as it in the *Theaetetus*. In the *Sophist*, division does not require something that is like the element in the *Theaetetus* as the bottom of the pyramid. Therefore, the division method in the *Sophist* does not reach the bottom of a complex thing; it just stops at some point. Hence, division in the *Theaetetus* is not the same as in the *Sophist*.

Although the pyramid and the division method characterize what the elements and the complexes are, we still cannot understand why and how the names of the elements construct a kind of account which is essential to the name of a complex thing. The reason why there are difficulties in describing the elements and the complex things is maybe that this theory, or more exactly the theory of the dream, probably is not held by Socrates, for, as he says, everything in the dream is heard from other unknown people. Socrates never treats the “dream” theory seriously and instead links the dream with something terrible. In an earlier part of the discussion, after Socrates has discussed perception, he admits,

“What we have not yet discussed is the question of dreams, and of insanity, and other diseases; also what is called mishearing or misseeing or other cases of misperceiving.” (157e)

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<sup>301</sup> McDowell gives an analysis of the connection of the method of division between *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. He tries to analyse the method by Wittgenstein’s ideas. See McDowell (1973) pp. 233-237.

Although Socrates does not talk afterwards about the questions in the quotation, he actually has a discussion about the cases of false perception:

“For in these conditions, we surely have false perception. Here it is far from being true that all things which appear to the individual also are. On the contrary, no one of the things which appear to him really is.” (158a)

Apparently, Socrates does not think that in a dream condition, someone could gain the truth or that everything could be really as it is perceived by an individual.<sup>302</sup>

Further, Socrates makes a distinction between being asleep and being awake when he considers the question of whether “we are asleep and dreaming all our thoughts” or “awake and talking to each other in real life” (158b-c). Although Theaetetus admits, “there is an extraordinary likeness between the two experiences” (158c) -- i.e. of dreaming and being awake, Socrates thinks they are wholly different (158e). This again shows that Socrates believes what happens or what is thought in a dream is hugely different from what happens or what is thought in real life. Therefore, he could not treat seriously what happens in a dream or what he had heard from someone in a dream.<sup>303</sup>

In order to prove the argument above, let us return to the beginning of the dream

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<sup>302</sup> Interestingly, Socrates describes, “these opinions have now just been stirred up like a dream” after he questioned Meno’s slave for gaining the answer of a geometrical questions (*Meno* 85c).

<sup>303</sup> Burnyeat offers a convincing discussion about the dream metaphor in Plato’s philosophy. He tries to “locate the Dream section firmly within Plato’s own philosophic concerns instead of seeking to account for it wholly or partly in terms of alien sources” and rebuts the possibility that the dream theory comes from Antisthenes. See Burnyeat (1970) pp.101-122. Kunio Watanabe summarises two motivations of the dream theory in the *Theaetetus* : (A) that knowledge is true belief with λόγος and (B) that what lacks λόγος is unknowable and what has it is knowable” (p.145). He believes that on Burnyeat’s and other scholars’ reading, “...the Dream Theory, being the result of the elucidation on Socrates’ part, must concern not (A), but only (B)” (p.145), which he disagrees. Watanabe thinks that the purposes of the dream theory are both (A) and (B). See Watanabe (1987) pp. 143-165.

section (201d). Strictly speaking, Theaetetus does not mention that what he says, i.e. someone told him that knowledge is true judgement with an account, is a dream. It is actually Socrates who mentions the dream, when he finds that Theaetetus could not explain his third definition of knowledge. Therefore, there are two issues that need to be mentioned. Firstly, although it seems that Theaetetus proposes his third definition of knowledge seriously and does not mention that he heard the definition in a dream, Socrates tries to check Theaetetus' dream with his own dream. Hence, Socrates presents what Theaetetus said about his third definition of knowledge as told by someone in a dream. Secondly, Theaetetus cannot explain or make any defence for his definition but just follows someone's explanation of the definition. That means that Theaetetus could not in fact offer any more information except the definition itself and could not explain account as the criterion of what is knowable or not, unless someone reminded him of the explanation of the definition. Hence, if Theaetetus is alone or if he is with someone who is not capable of explaining the definition, then it is inevitable that his investigation of knowledge will fail.<sup>304</sup> If the failure of Theaetetus' investigation is inevitable, it is reasonable of Socrates to call it a "dream".<sup>305</sup>

## 6.2 Letters and Syllables

Although Socrates wishes to solve the question, "How could the complex things

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<sup>304</sup> Gail Fine does not believe that Socrates' whole discussion of the third definition of knowledge fails. She argues, "I shall argue instead, however, that Plato retains at least a modified version of the thesis that knowledge is true belief with an account, a view advanced not only in the *Meno* but also throughout the middle dialogues (see, for example, *Phd.* 76b, 78d, *Rep.* 534b)". See Fine (1979) p. 369.

<sup>305</sup> Cf. Burnyeat (1970) pp. 101-122.

be knowable?”, he does not raise this question directly but rather points out that “there is one of the things said which I do not like.” (202d) The thing that Socrates does not find satisfactory is “the elements are unknowable and the complexes knowable” (202d-e) which is called “the subtlest point of all” (202d). As usual in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates does not try to investigate directly the point, but rather claims that both he and Theaetetus have “hostages for the theory” which are “the original models<sup>306</sup> that were used when all these statements were made” (202e). They have hostages that could be the models of the dream which Socrates and Theaetetus heard. When Theaetetus curiously asks him which model he refers to, Socrates answers, “Letters -- the elements of language -- and syllables (Τὰ τῶν γραμμάτων στοιχεῖά τε καὶ συλλαβάς)” (202e).<sup>307</sup> Socrates here plays a word-game, for the Greek words “στοιχεῖον” and “συλλαβή” may be translated respectively, as “element” and “complex”, but when the terms refer to language (γράμματα) generally, they should be translated as “letter” and “syllable”. Socrates could attribute what he will discuss as the prototype of what has been said in the dream, since “element” and “complex” are the most important notions in the content of the dream. If Socrates thinks that the “letter” and the “syllable” are the original model of the “element” and “complex”, then it seems that he puts language in a prior position than reality. This is the first plausible interpretation or possibility.

However, there is a second possibility. Socrates could refer in these Greek terms

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<sup>306</sup> “The models” (τὰ παραδείγματα) can also mean “the examples”.

<sup>307</sup> The translation is used by both Cornford and Burnyeat, which I follow for consistency, though I prefer McDowell’s translation, “Elements and complexes of letters.” See Cornford (1935) p. 146, Burnyeat (1990) p. 340 and McDowell (1973) p. 96.

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to the names of the elements and complexes. The second possibility is more reasonable than the first for the following reasons. Firstly, how could language be prior to reality? It seems unreasonable to imagine that someone creates a name for nothing. Secondly, Socrates and Theaetetus are discussing the question “What is knowledge?”, which does not refer to reality directly, even if the elements are components or parts and the complexes are the composed things, according to Socrates’ description of them, which means both of them are in reality. As Socrates describes, the names of the elements which are woven together become a kind of account which is essential to the names of the complexes (202b). Socrates limits his argument or investigation only to names. Hence, Socrates now considers issues only on the linguistic level, rather than on any other level, including the level of reality. That is to say, that the model of “letters” and “syllables” is the prototype of the model “elements” and “complexes”, based on the sense that “letters” and “syllables” are more subtle or fundamental than “elements” and “complexes”, which are themselves names in a language.

When Socrates expresses the ideas on the elements and complexes, he does not give any explanation about them. Therefore, Socrates assumes that a basic principle of the elements and the complexes, namely, “one can give an account of the syllables but not of the letters” (203a), is clear and correct. In order to discuss this principle, Socrates uses his own name as example. The first syllable of his name is “SO”.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Gilbert Ryle reminds that “Plato is certainly talking phonetics and not graphology” when Plato discusses *letter* and *syllable* in the *Theaetetus*. Ryle concludes: “Plato could confuse knowing what phonetic element a given letter name designates with knowing what written character symbolizes a given phonetic element. The ambiguity of ‘letter’ was not fully realized by him” (p. 437). See Ryle (1960) pp. 436-437.

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According to the basic principle, the syllable “SO” has an account or an answer, “It is S and O”, when it meets a question like, “What is SO?”. According to this approach, the letters “S” and “O” obviously have no account, since they are not composed of other letters. Socrates says, “...we have established a point about knowledge”, which seemingly confirms that whereas the elements have no account, the complexes do have accounts. If someone uses the reply, as the answer to the question “What is SO?”, “It is S and O.”, then a problem arises. The problem is that this sort of answer indicates that “anyone who is ever to know a syllable must first get to know the letters” (203d). The answer “It is S and O.” assumes that the respondent already knows the letters of “S” and “O”, otherwise, how could he recognise the letter “S” and “O” in the word? The answer has shown that the respondent not only knows the letters “S” and “O”, but also knows the usage of the letters.<sup>309</sup>

Through this example Socrates actually illustrates how the names of the elements could construct a kind of account of the complexes. The complex “SO” is composed by “S” and “O”. When someone asks, “What is ‘SO’?” the answer is “It is ‘S’ and ‘O’.” The account of “SO” is composed by the pure names of the elements, which is emphasized by Socrates in his description of the dream (202b). As I have argued above, an account could not be purely names of the elements, since those names could just be woven together as the elements are woven together. Now, in the example, the account of the syllable “SO” inevitably uses words such as “it”, “is”

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<sup>309</sup> For Harte, The problem which arises here is “One cannot infer from the fact that some pair of things has some property that any one member of that pair has the same property.” Her argument is obviously right. See Harte (2002) p. 36.



and “and”, which are also forbidden to be used on the elements (202a).

The example of “SO” has revealed the failure of what has been said in the dream.<sup>310</sup> The failure is rooted in the assumption that the syllable is simply the composition of the letters. When Socrates discusses the example of “SO”, he tries to ask Theaetetus, “What do we mean by ‘the syllable’?” (203c). He offers two options: “The two letters (or if there are more, all the letters)? Or do we mean some single form produced by their combination?” Theaetetus replies, “I think we mean all the letters” (203c). Theaetetus’ response is a natural result from the ideas in the dream, if the complex is simply composed of elements that are woven together. Nevertheless, a table which is composed of wood must have some further feature that makes it a table, a feature distinct from the wood. It is a pity that Socrates and Theaetetus do not mention this point at all in the dream.

This point on the one hand determines the failure of the ideas in the dream but, on the other hand, it is a new starting-point for a further argument on the relationship between the part and the whole. If a syllable is no longer the composition of the letters, then it itself must have “some single form” and thereafter have “its own single nature -- something different from the letters” (203e). Hence, the syllable is no more like a picture or a graphic pattern composed by matches or any other similar things, but a completely new thing which is distinct from the letters. Referring to the pattern, let us grant that the pattern has no single form. We could ask whether this kind of nature, i.e. something that makes the matches as a pattern, exists or not.

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<sup>310</sup> “In the dream” refers to what has been said in the dream that both Socrates and Theaetetus heard from someone. This phrase does not say that Socrates and Theaetetus are in a dream when they discuss the elements and the syllables.

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Alternatively, we could ask whether it is a pattern or has its own nature endowed by itself or human beings, for it may be just a pile of matches at random. These two questions are both problematic. These two questions could be applied not only to the pattern but also to the syllable. Is there anything that makes the syllable? If the answer is “some single form”, then what is it? Further, is “some single form” endowed by someone or by itself? In the syllable example, this question could be asked, “Who grants that a syllable has a single form? Is it Socrates or Theaetetus or both of them?” Surely, this question to Socrates would seem somewhat over-stated, since Socrates does not believe the syllable has some single form. Nevertheless, the question is still open to possibilities until we make sense of the phrase “some single form”, which is discussed in the next argument on “part” and “whole”.

Based on the new approach, Socrates claims,

“Well then, Let’s suppose it’s as we’re saying now: a complex is one kind of thing which comes into being out of each set of elements that fit together, and that goes for letters and everything else alike” (204a). (Translated by McDowell)

This idea inherits what has been said in the dream, where, according to Socrates’ description, the names of the elements are woven together in the same way as the elements are woven together (202b). Socrates mentions the composition of a complex.

Three things can be found in the example of the “element and complex”:  
language, reality and thought. The gap between reality and thought could be easily

bridged through language. These three things could be treated as the same thing.<sup>311</sup> This idea dates back to Parmenides. In one fragment of Parmenides' poem.<sup>312</sup> he claims, "τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἔστιν τε καὶ εἶναι." (For the same thing is there both to be thought of and to be) (KRS 292).<sup>313</sup> In fragment 6 Parmenides continues, "ἄρῃ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐὸν ἔμμεναι· ἔστι γὰρ εἶναι, μηδὲν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν." (What is there to be said and thought must needs be: for it is there for being, but nothing is not.) The former quotation denies the difference between thought and reality and destroys the gap between them. The latter one considers whether the object of the thought or saying exists or is in reality; it further gives us the connection between saying and thought and therefore the connection between language, thought and reality. Parmenides' idea is inherited by Socrates in his argument on the model of elements and complexes and the model of letters and syllables, since the latter model is the prototype of the former one.

Another point in Socrates' quotation on the complexes at 204a is about the object of thought. As Socrates says, the complex is composed by the elements when they are woven together. If this could operate on both the level of language and the level of reality, then not only does reality become the object of thought, but also language is a kind of object of thought. That would mean that both language and reality are the objects of thought. However, if Socrates treats language, thought, and reality as the same thing, how could language and reality be the objects of thought?

<sup>311</sup> Gerson has a similar idea. See Gerson (2009) p. 58.

<sup>312</sup> It is Parmenides' fragment 3, Clement *Strom.* VI, 23; Plotinus v, 1, 8. All the quotations from Parmenides here are from Kirk, G. S., Raven, J. E. and Schofield (1983) pp. 246-247.

<sup>313</sup> The translation is still in dispute. KRS offers another translation, "Thought and being are the same."

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If this were possible, would thought consider itself as a kind of object? In order to answer, let us firstly consider the idea that thought in some sense could be divided into two categories.<sup>314</sup> One category relates to the idea on reality, namely using language to reflect reality so that we could know and grasp the essence of reality. The other category is relevant to the ideas (through language) present inside the soul.<sup>315</sup> The latter category concludes the reflection on language itself. In the model of complex and element, we could question, on the level of language, how the name of a complex thing which is composed by the names of the elements could have a new single form. If language is just like what happens in reality, then we need to consider the conclusion, “Let the complex be a single form resulting from the combination of the several elements when they fit together...” (204a)

Socrates in the next stage of the discussion denies the existence of the parts in a complex, since “when a thing has parts, the whole is necessarily all the parts” (204a). This argument is not persuasive. Take the table as the example again. The fact that a table has its own single form as a table does not mean the table is not composed by all its parts. The problem in this argument is that Socrates uses “whole” instead of “complex” or “thing”. Or more exactly, Socrates understands “a single form” as “whole”. There is a gap between the complex thing itself or the single form of the complex and the whole of the thing. Indeed, if the complex has its own single form, then, the whole should not have parts; otherwise, it is all the parts. However, the relationship between whole and parts is only one of the relationships of a complex

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<sup>314</sup> John Locke argues, “Knowledge, as has been said, lying in the perception of the Agreement, or Disagreement, of any our Ideas...” Here, I follow him and try to divide the “Ideas” into two categories. See Locke (1975) p. 538.

<sup>315</sup> “Soul” could be substituted by “mind” here.

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thing. We could have various ways to consider a complex thing, including that the complex thing is composed by all its parts. That is to say, the fact that a complex thing has its own single form would not cover or deny the fact that the complex has parts. The root of the problem in the argument becomes the question, “How does Socrates understand the word ‘whole’ in his argument?” or “Is the whole the same thing as a single form?”<sup>316</sup>

As expected, after he claims a complex has no parts, Socrates immediately adds, “Or do you mean by ‘the whole’ also a single form arising out of the parts, yet different from all the parts?”. Theaetetus prefers the second option, but Socrates points out that the second option refers to “sum”, not “whole” and that they are different (204a-b). After giving an mathematical example, Socrates defines “sum”: “all the parts are the sum, seeing that the total number is to be the sum” (204e). Therefore, it seems that “the whole does not consist of parts” (204e). If the argument is correct, then the parts constitute the sum not the whole, which means that the sum of something and the whole of something are both lacking something. However, if something is absent, then it could not be either a sum or a whole, since it contradicts the definitions of the sum and of the whole. Theaetetus realizes that there is no difference between whole and sum (205a), since both of them are all the parts (205a).

A problem arises when Socrates builds the definition of the sum, namely, that the sum is all the parts. Let us consider the word “part”. A part could be applied to

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<sup>316</sup> Harte gives me a new approach to the problem in the relationship between sum and whole. She argues, “Socrates’ argument is an argument to the effect that composition is identity” when Socrates insists that sum which has its parts is whole at 204b-e. It actually proves the falsity of Socrates’ argument. See Harte (2002) pp. 41-42.

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something on various levels. A body has many parts, apparently. A part of the body could be a hand on some level; it could also be a finger on other level. However, a finger could also be a part of a hand. That is to say, a part itself could be a sum, even though Socrates here seems simply to use a part as an element or a letter which could not be a sum at any way. Hence, a sum could be applied to different levels. It could refer not only to a sum in a part, but also refer to a sum in a whole. The sum could not be the whole unless the whole could be found in a part, which is impossible, since in this case, there would be no difference between a complex and an element. Socrates could avoid this difficulty by insisting that any part is at any rate an element and that a part could not be a sum at the same time. Then Socrates would not admit that a hand is a part of the body.

That whole and sum have no difference means that a single form is no longer a whole or sum -- it must have something else. Socrates turns to the relationship between the letter and the syllable:

“Supposing the syllable is not just its letters,<sup>317</sup> doesn’t it follow that it cannot contain the letters as parts of itself? Alternatively, if it is the same as the letters, it must be equally knowable with them?”

Theaetetus replies, “That is so” (205B).

A syllable/complex has no parts but only has a single form; otherwise, the parts, i.e. the letters/elements would be as knowable as the syllable/complex, which is impossible according to what has been said in the dream. If the syllable/complex has

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<sup>317</sup> McDowell translates “letter” as “element”, and “syllable” as “complex” in this sentence. There is no difference between the two translations, for they are just different in different models or levels. McDowell (1973) p. 100.

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no parts, then “a syllable is an absolutely single form, indivisible into parts” (205c). Socrates reminds Theaetetus that, according to the dream, elements/letters have no account and are indivisible and now the syllable/complex is also indivisible and has only a single form. Therefore, it seems that there is no difference between element/letter and syllable/complex, namely, “the complex [has] now fallen into the same class” as the element (205d).

Socrates and Theaetetus, therefore, face two options, though both are contradict to what has been said in the dream a moment ago. The first option is this: if a complex is both composed by the elements and has a single form, then both the complex and the elements would be knowable and expressible, “since all the parts turned out to be the same thing as the whole.” (205d) The second option is this: if the complex has only a single form without any parts, then the complex would fall into the same class as the elements and both of them would be unknowable and unaccountable (205e). In the dream, as Socrates reported, the complexes are knowable, while the elements are unknowable. However, as the arguments progress, either both the complexes and the elements are knowable or both are unknowable; the situation that complexes are knowable and the elements are not knowable is impossible. Moreover, Socrates adds that

“would not you more easily believe somebody who made the contrary statement, because of what you know of your own experience in learning to read and write...?” (206a)

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This contrary statement is,

“the elements are much more clearly known, and the knowledge of them is more decisive for the mastery of any branch of study than knowledge of the complex.” (206b)

Hence, the discussion about the dream has completely finished. As the arguments have proved, the fundamental principles in the dream, i.e. that the elements are unknowable and the complexes are knowable, are incredible on both the language level and the reality level. If what has been said in the dream is false, then the third definition of knowledge, namely, knowledge is true judgement with an account (201c-d), is also in doubt, since Theaetetus claims he heard this definition from someone and Socrates presents this hearsay as something heard in a dream (201d). The fundamental principle “in the dream” refers to the distinction between “knowables and unknowables” (201d), which actually refers to the meaning of account, for the only difference between the knowable complexes and the unknowable elements is that the complexes have accounts, whereas the elements do not. Moreover, in the *Theaetetus* the only difference between the second definition of knowledge (knowledge is true judgement) and the third definition of knowledge (knowledge is true judgement with an account) is that the third one uses “account” in the definition. Hence, to understand the difference between the second and third definitions (or the difference inside the discussion on the third definition), the first and foremost task is to make clear what “account” in the third definition means.



### 6.3 Three Meanings of “Account”

At the beginning of his investigation Socrates confirms that “account” has three meanings: “I think it must be one of three meanings (τριῶν γὰρ ἓν τί μοι δοκεῖ λέγειν)” (206c).<sup>318</sup> Sedley has a different translation of this sentence: “It seems to me that he means one of three things.” Further, he explains who the “he” is:

“The reference is to the ‘someone’ of 201c7, Theaetetus’ informant, and the meaning in question is therefore speaker’s meaning. Of the eight translations I have consulted, Valgimigli alone recognizes this. All the others, apart from Levett, adopt formulations which make it sound as if Socrates were stating a fact of lexicography.”<sup>319</sup>

The difference between the translations, as Sedley has revealed, is about such a question, namely, “Whether these three meanings of ‘account’ are held by Socrates or by Theaetetus’ informant”. Just from the Greek, we could not find any hint that leads us to consider the three meanings of “account” are not held by Socrates.<sup>320</sup> Hence, I agree with Burnyeat’s translation of this sentence. Nevertheless, after a quick rebuttal of the first possible meaning of “account”, Socrates says,

“Well then, we mustn’t be too ready to condemn the author of the definition of

<sup>318</sup> The translation comes from Burnyeat. See Burnyeat (1990) p. 345. Glenn R. Morrow reminds, “The word *logos* has a signification more varied than that of almost any other term in Greek philosophy. Even in Plato’s own dialogues there are examples of its use in many meanings other than the three mentioned here. It sometimes means definition; sometimes proposition, or statement; sometimes theory; sometimes argument, or dialogue; sometimes thinking, or inner dialogue; and sometimes mathematical proportion”. See Morrow (1970) p. 310.

<sup>319</sup> Sedley (2004) p 169, note 27.

<sup>320</sup> The Greek sentence is “Φέρε δὴ, τί ποτε βούλεται τὸν λόγον ἡμῖν σημαίνειν; τριῶν γὰρ ἓν τί μοι δοκεῖ λέγειν” (206c7-8). Although the subject of “βούλεται” refers to the informant of the dream, but Socrates clearly emphasizes, “To me (μοι), it must be one of three meanings”. In another place, at 206e6, Socrates seemingly attributes the second meaning of “account” to the informant of the dream, but he just attributes the third definition of knowledge to the informant.

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knowledge now before us for talking nonsense. Perhaps he didn't mean this; perhaps he meant being able, when questioned about what a thing is, to give an answer by reference to its elements." (206e-207a).

We should ask why Socrates mentions the author of the third definition here. If Socrates believes the three meanings of the account, why does he mention the author here? Let us analyse the quotation 206e-207a.

Socrates seemingly only makes a defence on behalf of the author and tries to show that there are other possibilities for interpreting what the third definition means. Indeed, Socrates does not say the first meaning of account comes from the author; he just has a little doubt on the third definition of knowledge as a whole. However, when Socrates says, "Perhaps he didn't mean this; perhaps he meant being able, when questioned about what a thing is, to give an answer by reference to its elements", what does he mean? Apparently, Socrates in this sentence is talking about the meaning of "account" and he clearly mentions the connection between the meaning of account and the author. Actually, "perhaps" (ἴσως) shows that Socrates is not certain which of the three meanings of account is the exact meaning that the informant used in the third definition. If the informant holds the three meanings of account, why did Socrates not ask what the meaning of account is when he heard the dream theory? It seems unreasonable that the informant offers three meanings of account and leaves them to his audiences to guess. Therefore, we could reasonably assume either that the three meanings of account come from Socrates or they are the meanings of "account" as given in a lexicon.

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Socrates tests each of the three meanings in turn to find out which exact meaning of account the informant used in the third definition of knowledge. Further, at *Meno* 98a, Socrates himself defines knowledge as true opinion/judgement plus a reason why. This gives a bridge to link the informant or the author of the dream theory and Socrates himself. It is proper and interesting to assume that Socrates himself is the author of the dream theory. Because it is first time that Socrates has met Theaetetus, Theaetetus cannot have heard the “dream” theory from Socrates. If he had, then he would have directly attributed the theory to Socrates. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that Theaetetus heard the “dream” theory from his teacher, Theodorus or from other people who are familiar with Socrates’ definition on knowledge as presented in the *Meno*.

Let us now consider Socrates’ examination of the three meanings of “account”, beginning with the first. As Socrates explains,

“The first would be, making one’s thought apparent vocally by means of words and verbal expressions---when a man impresses an image of his judgement upon the stream of speech, like reflections upon water or in a mirror.” (206d)

Socrates actually treats an “account” as a kind of reflection of thought. The relationship between thought and account is like an object and its reflection in a mirror or water. Therefore, an “account” actually becomes a statement. On this meaning, everyone could offer an account and such a result would lead us into the error of Protagoras’ “human being is the measure of all things”. Moreover, “account”

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would mix up with true judgement and there would be no distinction between them.

Socrates confirms this point when he says,

“And that being so, anyone at all who makes a correct judgement will turn out to have it ‘together with an account’; correct judgement without knowledge will no longer be found anywhere.” (206d-e)

The first attempt of the meaning of “account” fails, which brings the second.

Here Socrates considers,

“perhaps he meant being able, when questioned about what a thing is, to give an answer by reference to its elements.” (206e-207a)

In other words, “an account is a matter of going through a thing element by element” (207c). Socrates explains this to Theaetetus by giving him the example of a wagon.

When someone asks, “What is a wagon?” Socrates following the second meaning of account would answer in this way, “Wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke.”(207a) This answer obviously and strictly follows the principle of the dream theory, namely, the names of the elements combine together to become a kind of account of the complex thing. There are two problems that are produced by the example. One will be mentioned by Socrates to rebut this second meaning of account. The other one, Socrates does not mention and probably does not realize in the *Theaetetus*. Let us consider the second problem first.

When someone asks, “What is a wagon?” he is actually asking “Do you know what a wagon is?” He is asking for a piece of information and a piece of knowledge,

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since “what is a wagon?” requires the definition of wagon as its answer. When Socrates replies, “Wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke” (207a), as the answer to the question, “What is a wagon?”, he is offering a piece of knowledge, not just a kind of account, because “Wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke” is the answer to the question for pursuing knowledge about wagon. If so, account, which is defined as “to give an answer by reference to its elements” (207a), goes beyond the sphere of being an account, since the second meaning of “account” is actually producing knowledge. We do not see any other necessary part for replying to the question, “What is X?” besides the answer that enumerates every element of X. If we follow the procedure of “going right through the thing element by element” (207b), then, it seems unnecessary for every piece of knowledge to be composed of “true judgement with an account”. It is so, because an account is enough to be a piece of knowledge, according to the second meaning of account.

The first problem is pointed out by Socrates in the text. If giving an account is rightly enumerating a thing element by element, then it seems sufficient for constructing a piece of knowledge of X that someone lists all the elements of X. However, that is not so in all cases. In some situations, enumerating all the elements are enough, but in some other situations, it is not sufficient. Take the name of Theaetetus as an example. Even if someone knows every syllable of the name Theaetetus, he will not have knowledge of the name if he has not idea of the right order of those syllables, even if he could spell the name Theaetetus by luck. Moreover, someone who knows the first syllable of the name Theaetetus, i.e. “THE”,

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does not necessarily know the syllable, for “THE” could be the first syllable of another name, say, Theodorus. It is surely an open question whether someone knows the syllable “THE” in such a situation, as McDowell has pointed out.<sup>321</sup> However, Socrates employs this point to rebut the second meaning of “account” that could make the third definition of knowledge possible. On the one hand, someone indeed has correct judgement together with an account when he correctly writes the name “Theaetetus”; on the other hand, he does not really know each element of the name.

There is only the third choice left. Socrates tries to consider the third meaning of account. Before this, Theaetetus summarises the first two meanings of account as follows:

“The first was a kind of vocal image of thought; the one we have just discussed was the way to the whole through the elements.” (208c)

He adds, “Now what’s your third suggestion?” (208c) Socrates replies,

“What the majority of people would say---namely, being able to tell some mark by which the object you are asked about differs from all other things” (208c).

In order to respond to Theaetetus’ requirement, Socrates takes the sun as an example and says, “it is the brightest of the bodies that move round the earth in the heavens” (208d). Socrates further illustrates the third meaning of “account” as “if you get hold of the difference that distinguishes a thing from everything else, then, so some people

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<sup>321</sup> McDowell (1973) p. 253.

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say, you will have got an account of it” (208d). Socrates asks for the character or feature which could distinguish something completely from everything else. He actually calls for a unique character of something. The statement of the unique feature<sup>322</sup> should directly refer to something and never be vague. In such a situation,

“Then if a man with correct judgement about any one of the things that are grasps in addition its difference from the rest, he has become a knower of the thing he was a judger of before” (208e).

If we consider the sun example again, we do not need to consider whether the feature “brightest of the bodies” is the essential/unique or inessential/non-unique feature of the sun.<sup>323</sup> Rather we should consider how we could identify the unique feature of something. Why is “the sun is the heaviest of the bodies that move round the earth in the heavens” not the unique differentiation? In other words, what is the criterion of the unique character? Moreover, why does every piece of knowledge need to establish the unique feature of something? An account in a concrete case should be relevant to the true judgement, not to a differentiation.

With these questions in mind, let us consider Socrates’ second example. This is about Theaetetus in person. Socrates claims that, when he makes a correct judgement on Theaetetus, there are two situations. The first situation is “merely judging” (209a), namely, making a true judgement on Theaetetus without an account; while the second one is knowing Theaetetus, if Socrates has an account for his true judgement.

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<sup>322</sup> In the texts, Socrates calls it “some common feature” (208d).

<sup>323</sup> Sedley has discussed this issue. Sedley (2004) p 175.

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In the former situation, i.e. merely judging, Socrates only had a correct judgement on Theaetetus and his thought “failed to grasp any point of difference between you and the rest of mankind” (209a). This immediately brings Socrates into a dilemma: either he did not make a true judgement on Theaetetus or he has a true judgement with an account of Theaetetus. If he makes a true judgement on Theaetetus, then how does Socrates not grasp any point that could distinguish Theaetetus from another person? At least Socrates knows that he is Theaetetus, which makes him distinct from all other people. The problem of the third meaning of “account” is that the true judgement itself has included a kind of account in the sense of identifying the unique feature -- there is no need to give an extra account for distinguishing something from the rest. As Socrates summarizes,

“We already have a correct judgement about the way a thing differs from other things” and it would be wrong that under such conditions, “we are then directed to add a correct judgement about the way it differs from other things” (209d).<sup>324</sup>

Moreover, account as presenting the unique feature of something has assumed that the unique feature is already known. Therefore, the third definition of knowledge, namely, “knowledge is true judgement with an account” (201d), will be “correct judgement accompanied by knowledge of the differentness”, for as Socrates says “this is what we are asked to understand by the ‘addition of an account’” (210a).

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<sup>324</sup> The text of 209d-e has a translation problem, though I will not discuss the text in detail. See Cornford (1930) p.114.



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## Conclusion

The difference between the second definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is true judgement, and the third, i.e. knowledge is true opinion with an account, is that the third one adds an account. Therefore, the core question in this chapter is “What is an account?” or “What does ‘account’ mean?”

As Socrates’ report about the dream theory shows, Socrates tries to gain the answer to the core question from the difference between the unknowable elements/letters and the knowable complexes/syllables. The failure of this attempt makes Socrates consider the three meanings of account directly in order to test whether the third definition is correct. Nevertheless, this strategy is dead at the end. Therefore, what lessons could be learnt from such failure? The first reflection is to ask whether “Knowledge could be analyzed”. A further question is whether knowledge could be defined by terms of belief.<sup>325</sup> Nevertheless, in this case, how could we understand the meaning of account? Are the three meanings of “account” that Socrates offers us sufficient? These difficult questions are beyond the topic of my theme in this chapter.

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<sup>325</sup> Timothy Williamson argues that knowledge is “unanalysable” and should not be defined by term of belief rather belief should be defined by term of knowledge. Williamson (2002) pp. 2-5, 27-41.

## **Conclusion: Plato's epistemology in the *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus* as a coherent account**

Having scrutinised the texts of three of Plato's dialogues, *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*, my research on Plato's epistemology as a coherent account in those three dialogues is approaching the end. In this thesis, I try to show that Plato held a coherent understanding of epistemology and constructed a system in those three dialogues, though this conclusion is not obvious. Plato offers us an outline of his ideas and theories on knowledge with problems and unclearness in *Meno* and *Phaedo*, but he faces those difficulties and realizes that all of the problems and the unclearness are caused by the unclear meaning and nature of the notion "knowledge". Then, Plato gives his readers new ideas and theories during his investigation in *Theaetetus* on the question "What is knowledge?". Although Plato tries to find out the exact meaning and nature of the concept "knowledge" and supplies new theories and ideas during this investigation, there are still problems and unclearness in his arguments on epistemology. First, I will consider the contribution of *Meno* and *Phaedo*, and the remaining problems. Secondly, I will consider the contribution of *Theaetetus*.

### **Epistemology of *Meno* and *Phaedo* and the problems remaining**

The outline of epistemology in *Meno* and *Phaedo* can be divided into three

sections corresponding to different states of the soul: (1) soul in its original state is full of pure reason and it is in the region of the Forms (*Phaedo* 80d-81a). When the soul is in the realm of the Forms, it “has drawn near and consorted with” (πλησιάζας καὶ μυγεῖς) the Forms and gains knowledge from them (*Republic* 490b)<sup>326</sup>. Plato claims that the soul “has seen” (έωρακυῖα) everything and has learned everything in the region of the Forms in *Meno* (81c)<sup>327</sup>.

(2) When a soul combines with a body, i.e. when someone is born as a person, the soul loses all the knowledge that it gets from the regions of the Forms (*Phaedo* 73e, 75d, 76a), though, fortunately, the soul could regain the knowledge that is already “in the soul”<sup>328</sup> (*Phaedo* 73a, ἐπιστήμη ἐνοῦσα “knowledge being inside”)<sup>329</sup> through recollection by the stimulation from the sensible objects or via questioning (*Meno* 85c). In the second stage, Plato tries to solve Meno’s paradox by explaining how learning or gaining knowledge is possible in the sensible world through his famous theory of recollection. Actually, Plato offers two versions of recollection theory in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, respectively. In *Meno*, recollection is restricted to recollecting what the soul “has seen” in the other world or region, i.e. knowledge (section 1.3). Plato does not introduce his theory of Forms in *Meno*, rather he does this in *Phaedo* where recollection is not only for recollecting knowledge related to the Forms, but also for recalling the sensible objects (section 2.4). The new version of recollection in the *Phaedo* actually solves Meno’s paradox on the impossibility of

<sup>326</sup> Cf. *Phaedo* 79d, *Laws* 904d and *Timaeus* 90c2.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. *Phaedo* 83b.

<sup>328</sup> Knowledge is in the person (lover of knowledge) according to the texts of *Phaedo*, but considering the soul in person alone gains knowledge, so it is right to say, knowledge is in the soul.

<sup>329</sup> Cf. *Meno* 85c.

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learning, since the soul will not directly recollect the knowledge, but recollects the sensible objects first and then the soul would never be in the state of “cognitive blank”.

(3) At the time that the soul separates from the body again, the soul could get rid of the influence from the bodily elements in some degree, depending on how a person takes care of his own soul when he is living. Getting rid of the influence from the body means that the soul has another opportunity to consort with the Forms.

What needs to be noticed is that Plato never makes the first stage clear. He also does not tell us in what way the soul “consorts with” the Forms and gains knowledge from the Forms. Further, we have no sources from *Meno* and *Phaedo* to find out what the relationship between knowledge and the Forms is, including the questions such as, “Is the knowledge produced by the Forms or by the soul?” and “Could we understand the relationship between knowledge and the Forms as the content of a book and the book?” All these questions cannot be answered solely by reading *Meno* and *Phaedo*.

In the second stage, during human life, my understanding is that the soul cannot access the Forms directly, but can access the images of the Forms. If recollection will finally lead the agent to recollect the images of Forms that his soul has “consorted with” in the region of the Forms, then knowledge is limited within a narrow sphere, or in other words, “knowledge” is used and understood in a narrow sphere. That means, some kinds of knowledge are denied as knowledge in the outline of epistemology presented in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Especially, knowledge that refers

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to the factor of time is expelled out of the range of knowledge, since all the Forms are changeless. Because of the limitation of the features of the Forms, the application of recollection is limited, namely, recollection theory can only be applied to the objects that could finally lead to the Forms. Further, the argument that Plato employs for proving the validity of recollection seems not so persuasive. In *Meno*, Plato's Socrates makes a slave who has never studied geometry before successfully answer a geometrical question. During this process, Socrates did not teach the slave about geometry, but only prompted the slave by questions. The problem is that geometry as a discipline is special. Anyone who does not have knowledge about geometry could seek the answer of a geometrical question by deductive reasoning. But other disciplines, such as history, medicine or biology, which need experiential data through experiments or observations, could not so easily fit with recollection. The other difficulty is that, according to Plato's arguments on recollection, the process of how the recollection system operates remains unclear. Plato does not demonstrate in any detail how the soul through bodily organs make contact with the sensible object, how the perceptions are produced in the process, or how the perceptions stimulate the soul to recollect the Forms and gain knowledge.

These problems of the second stage remain within the third stage. The main problem of the third stage is the unequal position between the soul and the body in the process of learning. Socrates emphasizes that only death could give the opportunity for getting rid of the bodily influence altogether and pursuing reality and knowledge without hindrance. This emphasis actually puts the body in an inferior

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position to the soul in epistemology and expels the epistemological function of the body. The problem here is that removing the body from epistemology would mean that empirical knowledge would not be classed as a kind of knowledge which would leave Platonic knowledge as excessively narrow.

Besides all these problems and lack of clarity in epistemology mentioned above in *Meno* and *Phaedo*, Plato's writing style adds difficulty to understanding his outline of epistemology. Plato prefers to employ metaphors, analogies, stories and similes to illustrate his theories and ideas. Specifically, three metaphors need be briefly mentioned here. In *Phaedo*, the language used is of journeying to the other region, but it is also said about how soul makes contact with the Forms (*Phaedo* 79d). For this idea, the language used in the *Republic* is that the lover of knowledge "consorts with" the Forms when the soul stays within the region of the Forms (*Republic* 490b). An alternative metaphor is that the soul "has seen" everything there (*Meno* 81c) and it sees what is invisible (*Phaedo* 83b). As a result of this association or seeing knowledge comes to be "in the soul" (*Phaedo* 73a, ἐπιστήμη ἐνοῦσα, "knowledge being inside"). The phrases "consort with", "see" and "in the soul" are metaphors. The first two metaphors give Plato's readers a rough explanation of how soul gains knowledge and offers a solution to Meno's paradox. The third metaphor tries to tell us about the relationship between knowledge and soul.

Unfortunately, all these three metaphors are unclear for their purposes. Referring to the first metaphor, we wonder how the soul "consorts with" the Forms. Since it cannot make contact physically with the Forms, what is mental contact?

Plato says the soul stays with the Forms in the plural (περὶ ἐκεῖνα “about those objects”, *Phaedo* 79d), but is it possible that the soul “consorts with” many Forms at one time, or could the soul only “consort with” one Form at one time?

Consider the second metaphor. It partly solves our confusions about the first metaphor, since Plato emphasizes that the soul “has seen” everything in the region of the Forms. How could the soul “see” the Forms? Does the soul “see” all the Forms at one time or only a part of the Forms?

Now consider the third metaphor, i.e. knowledge is “in the soul”. Is the knowledge in the soul like the goods in a warehouse? If it is, is the process of pursuing knowledge like seeking goods in a store? Then knowledge is not some abstract thing that needs language, rather knowledge is something like a bed or a desk, according to Plato’s understanding of knowledge. Then does knowledge not need the soul, rather the soul only needs to find knowledge? In addition, where is knowledge when it is “in the soul”?

Those three metaphors seem to tell us something, but actually leave us with confusions. All the questions that relate either to the three metaphors or to the three stages of the outline of epistemology are left unanswered within the *Meno* and *Phaedo*. *Theaetetus* supplies answers to parts of those questions, problems and unclearness.

### ***Theaetetus* as a supplement to the epistemology of *Meno* and *Phaedo***

*Theaetetus* is a dialogue pursuing the answer to the question “What is

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knowledge?” and this enquiry supplements the epistemology of *Meno* and *Phaedo*. After a careful investigation of the five characters (Euclides, Terpsion, Socrates, Theaetetus and Theodorus), I discover that all of them hold a philosophical position of anti-empiricism, either because of their own philosophy or because their identity could be seen as a symbol of anti-empiricism. The consideration of the characters’ philosophical standpoint is important to understanding Plato’s project of the meaning and the nature of knowledge in *Theaetetus*, since all the characters weave a framework for the whole dialogue that limits the development of the arguments in the dialogue. This is like a glass bottle that contains water; no matter whether the bottle is full or half-full, the shape of the water is limited and is therefore decided by the shape of the glass bottle. Only with this realization, we can find the true significance of the theories in *Theaetetus* that seem to be empirical.

There are three approaches in *Theaetetus* that seem to be empirical. The first one is the theory about perceiving colour. Plato presents in detail the process of how eyes perceive the colour white. The whole process could be divided into three stages. The first stage is that there is a kind of motion produced by the contact between eyes and the object that is white; the second stage is that the white is produced by a motion. The last stage is that eyes could see the colour white in the process that is produced by another motion between white and eyes (section 4.5). The second approach is the wax block analogy. Plato offers us in the wax block analogy the process of how soul receives data from sensible objects and how these data become perception (section 5.1). But if we follow this analogy for the origin of perception, it



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leads to the impossibility of false judgement (section 5.3). The third approach is the aviary example (section 5.2). This example tries to show how false judgement is possible, based on the wax block analogy. However, the aviary example also faces a difficulty, since if it is right then it actually admits that someone would make a false judgement on what he already knows.

All these three attempts for exploring the meaning and nature of knowledge fail in the end, but it does not mean that they are meaningless. We link them to the outline of Plato's epistemology in *Meno* and *Phaedo*. At first glance, these three approaches in *Theaetetus* are empirical and all of them may give us an impression that Plato develops his epistemology from the anti-empiricist position that appeared in the outline in *Meno* and *Phaedo* to empiricism in *Theaetetus*. However, actually, he does not. For these three theories are a supplement to the outline of the epistemology in *Meno* and *Phaedo*. The aviary example focuses on explaining how the soul operates when it recollects knowledge that is "in the soul", i.e. how the soul actively grasps and uses knowledge that it already has. More importantly, the other two could be treated both as empirical theories and as theories that could help us to imagine what happens in the region of the Forms and how the soul gains knowledge of the Forms. The process of perceiving colour and the wax block analogy could be seen as explaining both how soul "consorts with" the Forms and how soul gains knowledge from the Forms in more detail, namely, there is something within the soul which receives an impression of the Forms. These three approaches have partly answered the questions and unclearness of the outline of epistemology and make

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Plato's project on epistemology more systematic.

The three approaches are not the whole story of Plato's investigation of the meaning and the nature of knowledge. For instance, when Theaetetus proposes his first definition of knowledge, i.e. knowledge is perception, Socrates reframes Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things" by considering Heraclitus' "All things are in motion" in his objection to this definition. There are many problems and unclarity in his objection, but Plato simply takes for granted his philosophical position of anti-empiricism. In the second definition of knowledge, "knowledge is true judgement", Plato's Socrates figures out the possible types of false judgement that could produce a logical system that is very similar to the work that Aristotle does in his logical books. The discussions on the possibility and the types of false judgement enhance Plato's solid position of anti-empiricism. When the third and the last definition, that knowledge is true opinion with an account, is considered, Plato comes back to the discussion of knowledge in the *Meno*, since the formula, "knowledge is true opinion with an explanation of the reason why" is seriously discussed in *Meno*. Nevertheless, in *Meno*, Plato does not make the meaning of the phrase "an explanation of the reason why" clear.<sup>330</sup> Therefore, the whole formula in *Meno* is in fact not definitive. In *Theaetetus*, Plato starts considering the exact meanings of the notion "account". Three meanings of account, namely, "statement", "going through a thing element by element" and "offering unique features or

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<sup>330</sup> I will not specifically discuss the difference between "true opinion" in the *Meno* and in the *Theaetetus*, as Burnyeat observed. He points out, "[Plato] took over from the *Meno* a point originally made on behalf of a restricted class of true beliefs and he presented it in the *Theaetetus* as a favourable characteristic of true belief quite generally" (p. 176). See Burnyeat (1980) pp. 173-176.

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differentiation” are investigated. Although all three fail to fit the formula, nevertheless, Plato’s readers can still gain a better understanding of the formula through these discussions.

My arguments in this thesis try to show that Plato does not change his philosophical position as an anti-empiricist on epistemology in *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*. In *Meno* and *Phaedo*, Plato offers a rough outline of an epistemology that leaves difficulties and unclearness. In *Theaetetus*, Plato directly considers the question “What is knowledge?” and supplies three contributions to his epistemology. *Theaetetus* supplements with the following three contributions: (A) how the soul may operate in the region of the Forms; (B) what processes are involved when the soul actively uses knowledge it already has; (C) three possible meanings of the term “account” are discussed in detail. All the theories and ideas about knowledge in *Meno*, *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus* are coherent, since *Theaetetus* does not contradict *Meno* and *Phaedo* and adds three contributions to the epistemological system constructed in *Meno* and *Phaedo*, thereby extending or developing it.

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