

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT OF RELATIVISM IN THE THEAETETUS OF PLATO

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2023

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Self-Refutation of Protagoras in Plato's <i>Theaetetus</i> (169d-171d)	7
Chapter 2: Understanding the Human Intellectual Capacities and Why Knowledge Is Not Perception (184b-186e)	40
Chapter 3: Understanding the Puzzle of False Judgment Addressed in the <i>Theaetetus</i> (187c-200d)	85
Chapter 4: Understanding Why the Dream Theory (201d–202c) Is Objectionable	129
Chapter 5: In Conclusion	162
Works Cited	178

## **Acknowledgments**

I am incredibly grateful to the members of my committee, Gabriel Richardson Lear, Agnes Callard, and Jason Bridges for their continuous support over their years. Their extensive feedback on my intuitions and arguments has been invaluable to this dissertation but, more importantly, it has made me a better reader, a better writer, and a better thinker. I have really enjoyed working with them on my dissertation but I have also really enjoyed taking their classes and learning from them. I thank Gabriel, especially, because she pushed me more than anyone to set high standards and work consistently to achieve them.

I am grateful for the intellectual community of the Philosophy Department. I know that I have learned something from every person I have met during my time at UChicago and from every class and lecture I attended. I thank Jim Conant, Kevin Davey, Michael Kremer, Anubav Vasudevan, and Candace Vogler for their impact on my philosophical education, whether in conversations or in classroom and workshop discussions. I thank, especially, Anselm Mueller for many inspiring conversations and for being an example to me of what a teacher should be.

I thank everyone who has ever read and commented on my work, especially participants of the Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop. I thank Sarale Ben Asher, Arnold Brooks, Rory Hanlon, and Josh Trubowitz for being consistent interlocutors during my entire graduate career and I thank Liz Asmis whose wit and wisdom have made her the heart of the workshop. I thank John Proios for innumerable conversations about Plato, ranging from the smallest to the biggest, and for helping me to see more clearly the bigger picture.

I thank Voula Tsouna for her mentorship over the years. She has been a very valuable interlocutor to me and I have learned from her how to be a fair reader of both ancient and modern texts. I am also very grateful to my undergraduate education and I thank Chris Raymond

for his philosophical friendship and for keeping up with me over the years. I am most grateful to Mitch Miller who inspired my love for Plato as he has done for so many other Vassar students.

I thank my fellow grad students for their contribution to my philosophical development and for their friendship. Special mention goes to Melina Garibović, Michael Powell, Stephen Cunniff, Sam Segal, Rory Hanlon, John Muller, Maggie Sandholm, Greg Brown and Paskalina Bourbon. I also thank my Vassar friends Cara Hunt and Ishan Desai-Geller for their continued support.

Finally, I thank all my loved ones at home. My parents, Vasso and George, my brother, John, my grandparents, and my entire extended family for being a source of love, support, and inspiration. I thank my friends in Greece, without whom I do not know what I would be, and, of course, Adam Massachi for being with me through it all.

## Introduction

As is characteristic of Plato's works, the *Theaetetus* is an incredibly rich text. Attesting to that fact is the diversity of approaches scholars have taken in studying it. For example, the fact that the dialogue fails to supply an answer to its guiding question about the nature of knowledge has led scholars to ask whether the omission of the celebrated Theory of Forms was to blame. Others have wondered why it is that the primary interlocutor is a mathematician or why it is that the conversation between Socrates, Theaetetus, and Theodorus is presented in the form of a written text and recounted to two individuals, Euclides and Terpsion, whose intellectual pedigree would have them deny continuity over time and perhaps also falsehood. And others still have wondered about the significance of presenting the Socratic method on the analogy of the midwife.<sup>1</sup> The more one studies the *Theaetetus*, the more it is that these and many other questions show up, all of which are deserving of attention if one hopes to bring into view the complexity of Plato's thought in this text.

My work on the *Theaetetus* is motivated by a different question: Why is the text in which we expect to find Plato's mature epistemology centered around relativism and what is Plato's answer to it? It will be rightly noticed that the very posing of this question presupposes that relativism is the dialogue's primary topic. As I began to seriously engage with the *Theaetetus*, I found very urgent the question of the dialogue's unity. The body of the work is organized in three discrete parts, each of which discusses a proposed definition of knowledge: first, perception (151e), then true judgment (187b), and finally true judgment with an account (201c). Not only are these three definitions presented as if they were not related to one another at all, but each

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<sup>1</sup> This is just a short list of questions that have motivated monographs of the *Theaetetus*. Examples of those who consider the question of continuity with the Theory of Forms include Burnyeat (1990) and Cooper (1990), as well as Chappell (2004). The mathematical theme is pursued by Desjardins (1990). The issue of the outer frame of the dialogue motivates Stern (2008). The midwife is a central concern of Sedley (2004).

discrete part seems to have a focal point that seems, at first glance, only tangentially relevant to the primary narrative thread. First, an obscure Secret Doctrine (156a-157c) about the metaphysics of perception that arises out of a synthesis of the Heraclitean Flux Thesis – that everything is motion and nothing ever stays the same as itself – and the Protagorean Measure Thesis – that all judgments are true. Second, an extended and ultimately failed investigation into the possibility of falsehood (187c-200d). Third, an examination of a sophisticated epistemology, held by unnamed proponents, known as the Dream Theory (201d-202c). In my attempts to sort out Plato's interest in these apparently self-contained topics, I discovered that they were all concerned with the same thing: to undermine the possibility and value of knowledge. In other words, they all brought to the fore the threat of relativism, highlighting its pervasiveness. Hence, demonstrating that the text of the *Theaetetus* is unified by – and against – the theme of relativism is the primary task that I set myself in this dissertation.

The topic of relativism is broached in the first part of the *Theaetetus*, when Socrates suggests that Protagoras also affirmed, like Theaetetus, that knowledge is perception (152a). The term 'relativism' does not appear but the Protagorean position is outlined in considerable detail and it bears relativist characteristics: all judgments are true, there is no such thing as falsehood, disagreement is impossible, and everyone is self-sufficient when it comes to gaining a grasp of the truth. In short, the very idea of knowledge is incoherent and all activities that center around distinguishing true from false judgments, or the knower from the ignorant, are unintelligible. The Protagorean position is propped up by an account of perception, according to which perceptible reality is private to each perceiver and, indeed, to each perceptual episode. Generalized relativism follows on the assumption that all of our judgments are outcomes of such private

perceptual episodes. The perceptual underpinnings of relativism license the association of Protagoras with Theaetetus' definition.

Not only is the topic raised in the first part but it is also ostensibly disposed of there. Socrates issues at least two sets of refutations of the definition that knowledge is perception that are independent of Protagoras (163a-165d and 184b-186e), he issues a refutation of the definition that is not independent of Protagoras (177c-179b), he shows Protagoras' Measure Thesis (that "man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are and of those that are not that they are not" (152a)) self-refuting (169d-171d), he shows the Heraclitean metaphysics, which purportedly provides the justification for the Measure Thesis, incompatible with the possibility of judgment (181c-183c), and he also conveys an ethical warning that the life led by even moderate Protagoreans is miserable (172c-177c). Socrates' interlocutors and Plato's readers should come out of the first part of the dialogue certain of relativism's incoherence, appalled by its demands, and ready to engage in serious epistemological work.

I argue that, despite this sustained refutation in the first part, the dialogue is not finished with Protagoras. Specifically, I show that the failure to account for falsehood is due to the perseverance of Protagorean commitments about human psychology, namely, the assumption that we lack the capacity for thinking. This capacity, I argue, is the capacity for seeking to distinguish the true from the false. I also show that the Dream Theory constitutes a more modern and less mystical, as it were, retelling of the Protagorean position and is objectionable for that reason. I argue that it shares the starting point of Protagoreanism, namely, that perceptual acts are infallible, and that it conceives of them in the same way, that is, as revealing a reality that is only available within the perceptual act. Moreover, I argue that in order to make the recommended epistemology convincing, the Dream Theory has to do away with our capacity for thinking.

In observing the different ways that the relativist threat crops up in the text and concluding that relativism is the unifying thread of the *Theaetetus*, I was in a position to appreciate that my interpretation of the text suggested an answer to the problem of relativism: We have the capacity to distinguish between the true and the false and, therefore, we should not permit the relativist to make us oblivious to that fact. Consequently, I offer an answer to my motivating question. The dialogue in which we expect to find Plato's mature epistemology centers around relativism because relativism seeks to undermine the possibility of epistemology and it seeks to make us forget that we value knowledge. Plato's answer to relativism – I claim – is to remind us that we have the capacity for distinguishing truth from falsehood and that it is up to us to exercise it, thereby vindicating the coherence of knowledge.

Here is the program for what follows. In Chapter 1, I look at the argument I call the Self-Refutation of Protagoras (169d-171d), in which the Measure Thesis is shown self-undermining. In explaining precisely how the Measure Thesis is rendered absurd, my goal is to show that Protagorean relativism threatens a whole way of life. I argue that, just as the Measure Thesis may only maintain the appearance of coherence if we fail to examine it, it is up to us to stand up for our way of life.

In Chapter 2, I look at the argument I call the Final Refutation (184b-186e), in which Socrates presents an outline of our psychology and our epistemic capacities, for the sake of demonstrating that knowledge is not perception. I argue that the reason that knowledge is not perception is that knowledge presupposes a conscious concern to pursue the truth, which is proper to the soul's activity. The body lacks the capacity for teleologically organized activity in general, and thus also for one that is oriented to the truth. Furthermore, I illuminate the



relationship between relativism and perception, as I argue that relativism follows if the soul's capacity for teleological activity is put to the service of the body.

In Chapter 3, I look at the passage I call the False Judgment Digression (187c-200d), in which Socrates and Theaetetus make an earnest but failed attempt to explain how false judgment is possible. I explain that the particular question they seek to answer is this: How is it possible for a false judgment to be issued when it is always in principle possible for a true judgment to be issued instead? I argue that the very posing of this question presupposes an account of our epistemic psychology according to which our judgments are not the product of a conscious pursuit of the truth but rather the manifestation of pre-existing material in the head. I argue that this assumption is in conflict with the possibility of falsehood, which explains the discussion's failure. Moreover, I argue that this assumption is friendly to relativism, not only due to the fact that it renders falsehood impossible, but also due to its specific commitments about our psychology.

In Chapter 4, I look at the passage known as the Dream Theory (201d–202c), in which Socrates outlines an epistemology according to which the capacity to know some object is the capacity to name the elements that make it up. Focusing on the view's refutation, I argue that we are meant to see that the Dream Theory is an epistemology of perception. Moreover, I argue that the account of perception it presupposes is consistent with the Protagorean Secret Doctrine, insofar as it demands that the perceptual act makes available a reality that is unavailable outside it. Thus, I make a case for the conclusion that the Dream Theory comes dangerously close to relativism and it is rejected for that reason. In doing so, I argue against the common interpretation, according to which the text asks its readers to salvage the Dream Theory by modifying it to fit the model of *grammatikē*. I show that *grammatikē* does not actually survive

the refutation mounted against the Dream Theory and it will appear to be a viable option only on the assumption that we lack the capacity for teleologically organized thinking, which is an assumption shared by a proponent of the Dream Theory. Thus, I conclude that we are asked to reject, not revise, the Dream Theory.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I turn my attention to our capacity for thinking. Specifically, I argue that engaging in Socratic practice, as it is outlined in the Midwife Metaphor (148e-151d), constitutes the cultivation of this capacity and, thereby, the requisite education into knowledge. I argue that this education puts one in a position to be a knower and also helps to make them more just. Having argued for a conception of knowledge that puts our capacity for distinguishing truth and falsehood at its center, I conclude my investigation into the *Theaetetus* by offering some reflections as to where that leaves us. I suggest that we are meant to see that we are responsible for maintaining the distinction between truth and falsehood and, thus, that we are responsible for what our world looks like. I end with a brief discussion as to why an accusation of relativism would be inapt.

## 1. The Self-Refutation of Protagoras in Plato's *Theaetetus* (169d-171d)

The *Theaetetus* is Plato's only dialogue dedicated to the topic of knowledge. It fails to supply a definition that survives dialectical examination, which might suggest that the participants in the dialogue's conversation – Socrates, Theaetetus, and Theodorus – and the dialogue's readers are no more enlightened about knowledge at the end of the dialogue than they were at its start. But this assessment of the text's achievements is not quite right. In this chapter, I begin to make my case for, what I consider to be, the primary accomplishment of the *Theaetetus*: to remind us of the value of knowledge. In the course of the dissertation, I argue that to value knowledge is to value a conception of ourselves as capable of determining our own lives, our words and deeds, and as capable of bearing responsibility for our choices. This capacity of ours is one that makes us, at the same time, concerned to get it right – to make the right choices and to speak truly. The value of knowledge is the value of the distinction between truth and falsehood and knowledge is the capacity to speak the truth in conscious awareness of that distinction. In the present chapter, I argue that knowledge and the distinction between true and false occupies a central place in human life. I do so by showing that attempts to discredit the coherence of the idea of knowledge issues a threat to the human way of living.

The first and longest part of the dialogue constitutes a critique of Protagorean relativism. The topic of relativism is raised by Socrates, who identifies Theaetetus' first proposed definition – that knowledge is perception (151e) – with the Protagorean Measure Thesis: “Man is the measure of all things: of those that are that they are and of those that are not that they are not.” (152a).<sup>1</sup> The connection between the two is provided by Protagoras' alleged Heraclitean leanings, which see him articulate a Secret Doctrine (156a-157c) about the metaphysics of

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<sup>1</sup> “φησὶ γὰρ πού "πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον" ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, "τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν.” (152a2-4). Unless noted otherwise, all *Theaetetus* translations are by McDowell (1973).

perception: everything in the world is motion, and as such always in flux, and perception is a collision of two motions that results in a simultaneous generation of perceptions and perceptible properties. It is a consequence of this view of perception that every person has available to them a reality that is completely their own (*idion*, cf. 154a2, 166c4), inaccessible to other people and even to themselves at a different time. It follows from this view that every perceiver is authoritative about the contents of their perceptual experience. On account of the privacy that characterizes each person's perceptual experience, the true judgment that expresses that experience will be true only for the speaker whose experience it is. Thus, the predicate "true" is to be replaced by the predicate "true-for-me."<sup>2</sup> Protagoras' position, which Socrates says was pervasive and accepted even by Homer (cf. 152e), is a radical one, so much so that Socrates eventually says that a "new language" (183b) is called for even to formulate it.

Protagoras' position is a relativist one and the focus on relativism seems appropriate to a dialogue concerned to define knowledge. That is because relativism seeks to undermine the idea that knowledge is a genuine phenomenon. According to Protagoras, every possible judgment is true because it is a judgment that describes one's own private experience. Therefore, there is no falsehood to be encountered and any disagreement is only apparent. Denying the phenomenon of falsehood serves to deny the phenomenon of any epistemic variability. All possible judgments are rendered products of the same private perceptual process, which makes them all of a piece. Therefore, according to the Protagorean worldview, attributions of knowledge come to be

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the substitution of "true" for "true-for-X" is an artifact of scholarship. Protagoras' relativism does not advocate for this substitution specifically, but it does argue for a view in which things that may appear to one, like particular things, exist only for them: the white stone is-for-me. It is a result of this view that "the stone is white" is a truth only for me, from which we may conclude that the notion of truth has been significantly altered, such that "true" is to be replaced by "true-for-me". For a discussion that does not see any relation between the ontological and semantic relativism, cf. Fine (1994). For a discussion of Protagoras' theory as a relativism about "facts" (close to the ontological) from which it follows as an unforeseen and undesired consequence that truth is relative too, cf. M. Lee (2005). In my view, this is not an unforeseen consequence, but an explicit goal.

unintelligible, for such attributions presuppose epistemic variability. Therefore, relativism is not a genuine epistemology, it is rather the subversion of the possibility of any epistemology.

We can be confident that the Measure Thesis was genuine Protagorean doctrine<sup>3</sup> but it is almost certainly the case that the Secret Doctrine along with Protagoras' Heraclitean leanings were Plato's own invention for the purposes of this dialogue. This is important to note for two reasons. First, because it suggests that Plato wished to demonstrate the intimacy between relativism and perception. Second, because the Measure Thesis is the only aspect of that theory which has ever held any sway, given that it is the only genuine part of it. This is puzzling because, on the one hand, the majority of the dialogue is taken up in discussing the definition of knowledge as perception, while, on the other, there is a very quick and definitive argument against the Measure Thesis. I address the intimacy between perception and the subversion of knowledge in Chapter 2 (and, to a lesser extent, in Chapter 4). In the present chapter, I examine the argument against the Measure Thesis, which is usually – and fittingly – called the Self-Refutation of Protagoras (169d-171d). It is in this argument, in which the Measure Thesis is debated, that we get to see what the view amounts to and, thus, what the threat it poses is.

As I mentioned at the beginning, my goal is to show that the threat against the coherence of knowledge, which is posed by the Measure Thesis, is a threat against a way of life. Here is the program for what follows. In section 1, I go over the “exquisite argument” or “most subtle implication”<sup>4</sup> (*kompsoaton*, 171a6), which draws the charge of self-refutation. I discuss three sets of interpretations of the argument, which I call the Absurdity, the Contradiction, and the Failure approaches. I side with the Absurdity approach and, to do so effectively, I examine the passage that precedes the “subtle implication,” which, I argue, serves to contextualize Socrates'

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<sup>3</sup> Theaetetus confirms that he is familiar with the Measure Thesis and that he has read it (152a5).

<sup>4</sup> These are the Levett/Burnyeat (1990) and McDowell (1973) translations, respectively.

argument (170a-e). I do this in section 2. Jointly, sections 1 and 2, show that Protagoras does not merely formulate a theory that happens to be unorthodox but rather issues a serious threat against the way of life that is defined by the very opposition he seeks to undermine, namely, the opposition between truth and falsity. In section 3, I look at a brief passage (170e-171a) that sits between the *komsotaton* and the contextualizing part of the overall passage. In doing so, I show that democratic institutions pose the Protagorean threat that Plato identifies in the Protagorean philosophy but they can also provide the answer to it. Thus, I arrive at a position, on behalf of Plato, according to which it is up to us to nullify the threat of relativism.

### **Section 1 – The *Komsotaton* (171a-c)**

The “exquisite argument” or the *peritropē*, as it is often called because it turns the tables around, occurs in this passage (Socrates speaking to Theodorus):

“SOC: And, secondly, it involves this very subtle implication (*tout’ echei komsotaton*). Protagoras [asserts] that everyone has in his judgments the things which are. In doing that, he’s surely conceding that the opinion of those who make opposing judgments (*antidoxazontōn*) about his own opinion—that is, their opinion that what he thinks is false—is true.

THE: Certainly.

SOC: So if he admits (*homologeī*) that their opinion is true—that is, the opinion of those who believe that what he thinks is false—he would seem to be conceding that his own opinion is false?

THE: He must be.

SOC: But the others don’t concede that what they think is false?

THE: No.

SOC: And Protagoras, again, admits that that judgment of theirs is true, too, according to what he has written.

THE: Evidently.

SOC: So his theory will be disputed by everyone, beginning with Protagoras himself; or rather, Protagoras himself will agree (*homologēsetai*) that it's wrong.

When he concedes that someone who contradicts him (*tōi tanantia legonti*) is making a true judgment, he will himself be conceding that a dog, or an ordinary man, isn't the measure of so much as one thing that he hasn't come to know.

THE: Yes.

SOC: Well, then, since it's disputed by everyone, it would seem that Protagoras' *Truth* isn't true for anyone: not for anyone else and not for Protagoras himself."

(171a-c)<sup>5</sup>

The passage portrays Protagoras having a conversation, in which his own Measure Thesis is shown to commit him to confirming the truth of his opponents' judgment, thereby admitting that the Measure Thesis is false. The "exquisite" argument is simple and straightforward. I already mentioned three perspectives on it, Absurdity, Contradiction, and Failure. Unlike the Absurdity and Contradiction approaches, the Failure interpretation claims that Socrates' argument fails to refute Protagoras. Proponents of this interpretation (notably, Vlastos (1956)) find Socrates' argument to be either irrelevant or question-begging against the sophist. I take it that Socrates' argument succeeds but it will be helpful to consider the Failure interpretation first.

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<sup>5</sup> "Σ: Ἐπειτά γε τοῦτ' ἔχει κομψότατον: ἐκεῖνος μὲν περὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ οἰήσεως τὴν τῶν ἀντιδοξαζόντων οἴησιν, ἣ ἐκεῖνον ἡγοῦνται ψεύδεσθαι, συγχωρεῖ που ἀληθῆ εἶναι ὁμολογῶν τὰ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἅπαντας. Θ: Πάνυ μὲν οὖν. Σ: Οὐκοῦν τὴν αὐτοῦ ἂν ψευδῆ συγχωροῖ, εἰ τὴν τῶν ἡγουμένων αὐτὸν ψεύδεσθαι ὁμολογεῖ ἀληθῆ εἶναι; Θ: Ἀνάγκη. Σ: Οἱ δὲ γ' ἄλλοι οὐ συγχωροῦσιν ἑαυτοὺς ψεύδεσθαι; Θ: Οὐ γὰρ οὖν. Σ: Ὁ δὲ γ' αὐτὸ ὁμολογεῖ καὶ ταύτην ἀληθῆ τὴν δόξαν ἐξ ὧν γέγραφεν. Θ: Φαίνεται. Σ: Ἐξ ἁπάντων ἄρα ἀπὸ Πρωταγόρου ἀρξάμενων ἀμφισβητήσεται, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑπὸ γε ἐκείνου ὁμολογήσεται, ὅταν τῷ τάναντία λέγοντι συγχωρῆ ἀληθῆ αὐτὸν δοξάζειν, τότε καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρας αὐτὸς συγχωρήσεται μῆτε κῦνα μῆτε τὸν ἐπιτυχόντα ἄνθρωπον μέτρον εἶναι μηδὲ περὶ ἐνὸς οὐδ' ἂν μὴ μάθη." (171a6-171c3).

The Failure approach notices that Socrates' argument omits the relativist qualifiers (i.e. the "for me" indices) at crucial moments and concludes that it is available to Protagoras to respond that all Socrates has shown is that the Measure Thesis is false for the opponents. The crux of this interpretation is that it does not follow from the fact that the Measure Thesis is false-for-the-opponents that it is false *simpliciter*, as the straightforward version has it. Either (a) Socrates argues against a view that Protagoras did not hold, namely, one that recognizes absolute predicates like "true" and "false," in which case, Socrates did not refute him or (b) he wrongly supposes that he can foist those predicates and the relevant implication upon Protagoras, in which case Socrates' argument is unfair. The idea is that the Measure Thesis is still true for Protagoras himself and so, despite what Socrates, Plato, or any of Protagoras' interlocutors might think, no self-refutation has taken place and the position stands.

The Contradiction and Absurdity approaches are distinguished by their responses to this problem introduced by the Failure approach. The Contradiction approach finds the issue pressing and seeks to answer it; the Absurdity approach thinks that doing so would be to miss the point of the argument. In fact, the Absurdity approach's lack of interest in offering a proof of Socrates' argument, that is, a step-by-step analysis of how the Measure Thesis leads to its own negation, motivates the Contradiction approach. Burnyeat (1976b), whose account I treat as representative of the Contradiction approach,<sup>6</sup> endeavors to offer such a proof. His specific goal is to vindicate the "exquisite" argument against the Failure approach, showing precisely why it is that the opponents' disbelief in the Measure Thesis brings Protagoras to a catastrophic contradiction. In offering such a proof, Burnyeat takes himself to have defended Socrates from those who accuse

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<sup>6</sup> Fine has written at least three papers on this argument (1994, 1998a, 1998b), all of which should be taken to follow this approach. Mi-Kyoung Lee (2005) belongs in this group as does McDowell (1973), though not as strongly.



him of fallacious reasoning but also from those who do not attribute to him any systematic argument, not even one that is directed at the wrong position.

Burnyeat specifically names Edward Lee (1973) as his opponent in this latter sense. Lee is my representative of the Absurdity approach.<sup>7</sup> According to Lee, the passage in which we find the “exquisite” argument is a passage replete with ironic elements, in which Socrates reveals that Protagoras’ philosophy prevents him from saying anything that can be taken seriously. The passage, Lee says, is a comedy, which shows that Protagoras cannot play the game of giving and receiving claims (ibid., 249), i.e. have a conversation. Plato’s main target in putting forth this comedy, Lee argues, is to make plain an even “deeper” lesson (ibid., 248), namely, that Protagorean relativism ridicules the characteristically human tasks and the characteristically human potential. According to this approach, Plato’s goal in the passage is to make manifest those aspects of the Protagorean doctrine that were hidden behind the pompous Measure Thesis and the venerated persona of Protagoras. Burnyeat finds himself agreeing with most of what Lee has to say about the argument, but he is unhappy with the fact that Lee’s interpretation credits dramatic elements rather than “hard logic” (Burnyeat 1976b, 193n23) with overturning relativism. Thus, he takes it upon himself to produce an argument that will answer the Failure critics and which will, at the same time, complement an interpretation along Lee’s lines.

So, the two approaches agree, *contra* the Failure approach, that Socrates succeeds at refuting Protagoras. What they disagree about is how he does it. Notice that Lee uses words like “expose” and “reveal” when discussing what it is that Socrates does: he makes plain what the Protagorean position requires and what it amounts to. The position is an absurd one, and Socrates

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<sup>7</sup> Castagnoli (2004) should be taken to belong in this group, insofar as the particular argument is concerned. He is the only commentator I am aware of who shares with me the view that the same argument is repeated twice and the view that what is important about the *kompotaton* is that it occurs in a dialectical context (more on both of those points below). That being said, he does not consider the purpose and significance of the argument.

exposes it as such. Burnyeat, on the other hand, views Socrates as going through an examination of the view and finding, on his way, a contradiction. Hence, and as a result of that contradiction, the Protagorean position may be said to be incoherent. In Lee's version of the argument, the view does not amount to a serious proposal and, as such, needs no refutation that can be conveyed in a demonstration: its absurdity is on the surface and all we have to do is recognize it. In other words, from the perspective of the Absurdity approach, looking for a contradiction is to take the Protagorean theory more seriously than it deserves.

I begin with Burnyeat. On his view, Socrates' argument shall be vindicated if we can show that it follows from the fact that the opponents find the Measure Thesis false that it is false for Protagoras too, and from that, that it is false *simpliciter*. Burnyeat's argument centers around the thought that, in putting forth the Measure Thesis, Protagoras has sought to give a "theory of truth" (1976b, 190), specifically, one that sets up this biconditional: "it is true to x that p if and only if it seems to x that p." In other words, if someone believes that something is the case, then it is the case; and if something is the case, then it is necessarily believed by someone to be the case. The implications of this biconditional are, on the one hand, that there is nothing that is the case that does not seem to someone to be the case and, on the other, that there is nothing that seems to someone to be the case that is not the case. It is the job of the Secret Doctrine to prop up this biconditional and make palatable the consequence that, since people have (apparently) conflicting beliefs, (apparently) contradictory judgments shall be true. The way that the Secret Doctrine achieves this is by informing us that every "appearance" (thing perceived, cf. 152c) is one that is necessarily and by nature private, which means that everything that can be true shall be true in a private world; alternatively, true-for-the-person-who-has-the-appearance.

From the biconditional, Burnyeat draws the negative claim that “if it does not seem to x that p, then it is not true for x that p.” From this it follows not only that the Measure Thesis is false for the opponents who judge it false but, more importantly, that the Measure Thesis does not hold for the opponents who judge it false: they are not Protagorean measures and it is not true of them that if they believe something, then that alone suffices for their belief to be true. That is, by the Measure Thesis, relativism is not true in their worlds. That it is not true in their worlds is not simply something that follows from their not finding the Measure Thesis true, but it is something that Protagoras also confirms for them, as seen in Protagoras’ second concession in the quoted passage (171b7-8). In confirming their judgment a second time, Protagoras effectively says “right, the Measure Thesis does not hold for you.”

To complete the *peritropē* – the turning-around – a couple of more premises need to be put together. First, the premise already firmly established, which Burnyeat calls “empirical” (1976b, 176), that no one other than Protagoras thinks that the Measure Thesis holds – generally or of themselves (170d-e). This premise makes it so that Protagoras would be forced into an “exquisite” argument with each opponent and, thereby, he would be forced to admit that none of these people is a Protagorean measure. Second, the premise that if Protagoras himself did not believe his Measure Thesis, like everyone else, then his relativism would not be true for himself or anyone (170e). So, the sum of the individual iterations of the “exquisite” argument would make it the case that the Measure Thesis does not hold for anyone, which is something that Protagoras himself must affirm. But, in affirming that no one is a Protagorean measure, he affirms the opposite of the Measure Thesis, which says that everyone is. Thus, in affirming that no one is a Protagorean measure, he conveys that he does not believe in the Measure Thesis himself, which makes it the case that the theory is false.

This is Burnyeat's interpretation. In one sentence: if even one person refuses to be a Protagorean measure, then the whole view is false (for everyone) because Protagoras' view fails to be a "generally valid theory of truth" (1976b, 188) as it purports to. With the *peritropē*, Protagoras finds himself both affirming and denying that the Measure Thesis holds of everyone's worlds and, thus, finds himself at a contradiction of his own making.

Notice that all the work in the argument, as Burnyeat understands it, is done by two claims: the fact that what is under discussion between Protagoras and his interlocutors is the Measure Thesis itself – it is the "p" at issue – and the thought that the Measure Thesis is supposed to articulate a "generally valid theory of truth." The former claim is required to secure the load-bearing premise that "someone is not a Protagorean measure" and the latter to make the move from that to "no one is." These claims betray allegiance to the following assumption: that Protagoras had meant to put forth a coherent and well-thought out theory that advances meaningful claims, which he could go on to evangelize, and which other people could endorse. In other words, this interpretive approach assumes that Protagoras had something to say. Crucially, under that assumption, the self-contradiction that Socrates pinpoints in our passage is one that Protagoras would be embarrassed to find himself committing – embarrassed not merely because he got refuted but embarrassed because what he really wanted was a theory of truth that was free of contradiction.

On this interpretation, Protagoras has a fairly easy way out: stipulate that the Measure Thesis is exempt from debate, thus shielding himself from the *kompso-ton*. The theory should not be taken to apply to the statement that articulates it and the Measure Thesis may not be one of those judgments that have only relativist reach. Proponents of the Contradiction approach all

tend to mention this option and they all consider it viable.<sup>8</sup> Their stance on this matter sharply distinguishes their approach from the Absurdity interpretation.

The Absurdity approach rejects the thought that the Measure Thesis may be exempt from debate as a saving grace for Protagoras. For this camp, the fact that the Measure Thesis cannot be put up for debate just is what is wrong with it and it is that which Socrates exposes in the refutation of Protagorean relativism. Unlike, then, the Contradiction approach which takes Protagorean relativism to be a well-meaning theory that unfortunately does not stand up to scrutiny, the Absurdity approach takes the Protagorean position to be patently absurd and with no way out, precisely because it cannot even be submitted for scrutiny. The Absurdity approach does not think the view well-meaning at all, rather it thinks that Protagoras would hold on to it despite the refutation.<sup>9</sup> That he would do so indicates that Protagoras never meant to offer a theory of any sort but only to maintain an air of profundity about him so that he can preserve his status as the most sought-after litigant in town. Protagoras is not articulating a theory with a view to persuading others, by means of reasoned argument; he insists on propounding a thesis that fails to be propped up by argument.

Lee (1973), the representative of the Absurdity approach, thinks that the straightforward reading of Socrates' refutation – the reading denounced by the Failure approach – suffices to refute the sophist. In his view, if Protagoras tries to enlist the relativizing qualifiers, then he has essentially admitted defeat. Crucially, however, Lee's interpretation grants that the application of the qualifiers would save Protagoras from the charge of self-refutation, in much the same manner that the Failure approach recommends. Yet, Lee takes it that, if Protagoras were to do that, he

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Burnyeat (1976b, 188); Fine (1998b, 141); M. Lee (2005, 56).

<sup>9</sup> Socrates indicates that Protagoras would likely find ways to protest this argument (171d). Moreover, Polansky (1992, 132) rightly mentions Aristotle's discussion of the Protagorean position in *Metaphysics* Γ.5, as Aristotle notes that people may defend the Protagorean position merely for the sake of argument, in which case, we can assume that they will continue to insist on the qualifiers.

would be like a chess-player who “may move a man into position, but he will not remove his hand from it and hence, although he may in some sense have shown us what appears to him to be a good move, he has not actually made the move.” (1973, 247). In this interpretation, finding refuge in private worlds is not Protagoras’ salvation but his undoing, for it shows that he is not willing to face the consequences of his words. To see the idea of distributing truths to private worlds as an undoing rather than a path forward is the whole function of this argument.

Lee’s thought is that to appeal to the qualifiers is to refuse to accept that Socrates laid out a self-refutation argument. Such a refusal entails that when the interlocutors say “We disagree with you, we think that what you said was false” they are not actually disagreeing with him, despite what they take themselves to be doing. They are, rather, simply expressing what is true for them and they are not taking a stand on the truth of Protagoras’ judgment. In responding this way, Protagoras takes away his interlocutors’ right to have a conversation, to speak to him face to face. He effectively confines them to talking at him rather than to him. Protagoras’ refusal to accept that his position has been turned on its head implies a refusal to view the activity he is currently engaged in as a debate, that is, as an activity that seeks to investigate the truth by means of fair argument. The effect that his stance has is to make it the case that, despite the fact that the interlocutors take themselves to be aiming to speak the truth about the topic he has raised, all they have achieved is a report on their opinion, as if it did not matter to them at all whether their opinion agreed or disagreed with what Protagoras had to say. In adopting this stance, Protagoras maintains that what is true-for-the-interlocutors has no point of contact with, and no impact on, what is true for him. And yet, he demands at the same time that his words and what is true-for-him do reach all the way into his interlocutors’ worlds. Protagoras asks to play by special rules for the sake of shielding his position. If this request is granted, Protagoras’ position will have

effectively become irrefutable, invulnerable to debate. Thus, according to the Absurdity approach to the argument, if anyone begs the question here, it is Protagoras, who both puts his piece down and refuses to let it be captured; who both engages in reasoned debate and refuses to abide by its rules. His attempt to do both at once is what renders his statement self-refuting.

Looking back to the Contradiction approach now, notice that proponents of that camp do not share the thought that the distribution into private worlds betrays the relativist's inability to engage in conversation. They take it, instead, that the private worlds are a feature of the view, which has to be respected when the view is under discussion. Moreover, they suppose that if Protagoras manages to mend the inconsistencies that Socrates uncovers, then the philosophy associated with the Measure Thesis is allowed to stand. In other words, if Protagoras avoids contradiction, then the relativizing qualifiers will be applicable everywhere and all truths will be truths in private worlds. Recall further, that, on the Contradiction reading, all that Protagoras has to do to avoid contradiction is to make the Measure Thesis itself exempt from discussion. That is, the very move that the Absurdity approach takes to be the downfall of Protagoras is the move that the Contradiction approach recommends that he make.

What I hope to have shown thus far is that the Absurdity and Contradiction approaches I have outlined are sufficiently distinct, which means that Burnyeat is wrong to think his interpretation is complementary to Lee's. Even though they argue for the same conclusion, namely, that Socrates successfully runs a self-refutation against Protagoras, they do so under different conceptions of what Socrates is up against, which makes choosing between them not trivial. Thus, before I move on to the next section, in which I flesh out the Absurdity approach further, I wish to say a little more about the opposition between Socrates and Protagoras as it is perceived by the two interpretations.

The Contradiction camp takes Socrates to be approaching Protagoras as if the latter were laying out a serious epistemological proposal for the sake of putting it up for examination. The workings of that theory, what it says and the moves it wishes to make, are taken for granted and play a very active role in the mechanics of the refutation but only between the lines, as it were. The real or complete refutation occurs behind the scenes, where we should also expect to find the omitted relativizing qualifiers. Finally, save for Protagoras' natural embarrassment for having produced a faulty theory, the exposing of the contradiction should be a happy occasion for everyone and a feat on which Socrates and Protagoras could have worked together to achieve. After all, if Protagoras is willingly putting his theory up for examination, then it must be because he wants it to be the case that the theories he propounds are coherent and true.

In contrast, the Absurdity approach does not attribute any background theory to Protagoras, in fact, it does not attribute to him anything beyond the statement of the Measure Thesis as it appears in the imagined conversation quoted at the beginning. This approach takes Socrates, just as much as the imagined interlocutors, to be engaged in exploring what the Measure Thesis is trying to say, rather than assuming some determinate theory. Socrates approaches Protagoras wondering if there is anything behind the Measure Thesis, that is, anything beyond what he already sees on its face, namely, nonsense and a pretense to wisdom. And, indeed, what he finds is that the view has nothing to say. Thus, we can infer that Socrates treats Protagoras as if he were a charlatan capable of fooling most. Surely, then, the two of them are not on the same team and Protagoras has no intention of examining his theory or making sure that what he goes around offering to potential followers is true.

The kind of opposition that Socrates and Protagoras find themselves in is at the core of my interpretation of the argument. Recall that the Failure approach took it that Socrates was



begging the question against Protagoras and that I suggested, on behalf of the Absurdity approach, that it was Protagoras who was begging the question against Socrates, on account of his insistence on the qualifiers. The Contradiction approach strikes a middle path, in which neither side is doing so, since Protagoras is earnestly engaging in a dialectical examination with the imagined interlocutors. I take it that the Contradiction approach is wrong and that the Failure and Absurdity approaches are getting to the heart of the matter: both sides beg the question against the other insofar as either position's primary point – for Protagoras the qualifiers, for Socrates the absolute predicates – is one that the opposing side refuses to accept on the sole ground that it is deeply in conflict with what each puts forth. The first moment of the “exquisite” argument, in which the interlocutors say “we disagree with you, we think that what you said was false” can feel like a stalemate point, without a possible path forward.

But this assessment ought to be qualified. What is true about the suggestion that Socrates and Protagoras are at a stalemate, each begging the question against the other, is that each of their respective sides stands for an option. It stands for something that is up to us, the audience and the readers, to choose from. Each side works within its own terms – relativistic and absolute predicates respectively – which means that there is no way to bring them together such that a demonstration against either may be brought forth. Hence, if the opposition is to be resolved, it has to somehow be bypassed.

Yet, the reason why the stalemate interpretation ought to be qualified is the relative priority that Socrates' position enjoys over Protagoras.' Socrates' side not only stands for the default position but it is the side in which debates may take place. Debates not only presuppose that the conversational parties may share truths but they are also oriented towards discovering the truth as distinct from falsehood. Hence, simply by hoping to prove himself in a debate,

Protagoras concedes the priority of Socrates' position. This means that Protagoras has to play by the rules of the debate – if his piece is to be captured, he has to let it be captured. The thought that we do, after all, have merely a stalemate here is a thought that Protagoras wishes to cultivate, because it would allow him to maintain the appearance of having survived examination, without actually having done so. If that is right, then it is not quite correct to say that either side is begging the question: Protagoras seeks to force his destructive philosophy through and Socrates seeks to show that only his side is a genuine possibility if debate is to be possible.

Thus, the choice that is actually presented to us is a choice between seeing the *kompsoaton* as a self-refutation or allowing Protagoras to act as if he won an argument. The choice is between, on the one hand, the idea of shared truth and the value of reasoned argument and, on the other, the dismantling of the possibility of reasoned argument and, so, the value of force or something akin to it. In the following section, I return to the text to substantiate further the priority of Socrates' position. Recognizing this priority will let us appreciate the legitimacy of Socrates' argument as sketched by the Absurdity approach, which, in turn, will establish that Socrates' side constitutes the only viable option.

## **Section 2 – The Conversational Context of the *Kompsoaton* (170a-e)**

To see that the *kompsoaton* exposes Protagoras for trying to take advantage of his interlocutors' naivete about what he is in the business of doing, we have to locate it in its immediate context. The argumentative unit that we should be considering starts at 169d. The official conclusion of the *kompsoaton*, namely, that no one shall be a measure of something that “he hasn't come to know” (171c), is echoed in Socrates' announcement, at 169e, of what it is that he is about to argue. He says there that he will get Protagoras' “agreement” and, indeed, “not through others but from Protagoras' own words,”<sup>10</sup> that the epistemic invariability that is

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<sup>10</sup> “μη τοῖνον δι' ἄλλων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ ἐκείνου λόγου” (169e8).

characteristic to relativism cannot be right.<sup>11</sup> Between the programmatic announcement and corresponding conclusion lies Socrates' argument. As I read the text, it has two main parts, each of which contains an attempt at running the same argument. The first, which is my primary focus in this section, is at 170a-d. The *kompsoaton* belongs in the second part. The passage proceeds as follows: Socrates sets up the premises and draws the self-refutation. Theodorus asks for clarification of that move and Socrates begins to reformulate his point. Socrates draws two new interim conclusions (which I discuss in section 3 below), illustrates the self-refutation by running the *kompsoaton*, and ends the argument.

The self-refutation argument, in both its versions, has two premises. The first is the Measure Thesis. The second, which Burnyeat calls "empirical," says that other people will disagree with Protagoras and that his view will be met with opposition. Recall from the *kompsoaton* that there too all we had was the Measure Thesis and the interlocutors' opposition – there is no other premise. Hence, if the Measure Thesis is to lose the argument, it has to do so simply in virtue of encountering the opponents. Thus, if we can show that it is not accidental that the opponents disagree with Protagoras and that it could not have been otherwise, then we should recognize that the Measure Thesis is solely responsible for its own demise. And if that is the case, then it is surely wrong to think that Socrates failed to offer a coherent refutation and it is wrong to think that the position falls because of an accidental contradiction. Rather, the position will have fallen because it cannot even be put forth without undermining itself.

Let us look at the text. Socrates first sets up his premises, thus:

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<sup>11</sup> In the immediately preceding passage, Socrates had impersonated Protagoras in an effort to defend the relativist position because Theaetetus was struggling to do so. In the course of the Defense of Protagoras (166a-168c), as the passage is known, Socrates had conceded, on Protagoras' behalf, a modicum of epistemic variability. Now, it seems, Socrates is worried that he had wronged Protagoras by putting in his mouth the words that led to his downfall. Therefore, the point of the Self-Refutation passage is to draw a similar concession from the Measure Thesis itself.

“SOC: He says, doesn’t he, that what seems to anyone actually is for the person to whom it seems?”

THE: Yes.

SOC: Well now, Protagoras, we, too, are talking about the judgments of a man, or rather of all men (*pantōn anthrōpōn*), when we say that there isn’t anyone who doesn’t believe that he’s wiser than others in some respects, whereas others are wiser than him in other respects. In the greatest of dangers, when people are in trouble on campaigns, or in diseases, or at sea, they treat the leading men in each sphere like gods, expecting them to be their saviors, because they’re superior precisely in respect of knowledge (*ouk allōi tōi diapherontas ē tōi eidenai*). The whole of human life is surely full of people looking for teachers and leaders for themselves and other living things, and for what they do: and on the other hand, of people who think themselves capable of teaching and capable of leading. Now what can we say, in all these cases, except that men themselves (*autous tous anthrōpous*) believe that there is wisdom and ignorance in them (*para sphisin*)?

THE: Nothing else.

SOC: And they believe that wisdom is true thinking and that ignorance is false judgment?

THE: Of course.” (170a-c)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Σ: Οὐτωςί: τὸ δοκοῦν ἐκάστῳ τοῦτο καὶ εἶναί φησί που ᾧ δοκεῖ; Θ: Φησί γὰρ οὖν. Σ: Οὐκοῦν, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνθρώπου, μᾶλλον δὲ πάντων ἀνθρώπων δόξας λέγομεν, καὶ φαμὲν οὐδένα ὄντινα οὐ τὰ μὲν αὐτὸν ἠγεῖσθαι τῶν ἄλλων σοφώτερον, τὰ δὲ ἄλλους ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ ἐν γε τοῖς μεγίστοις κινδύνοις, ὅταν ἐν στρατείαις ἢ νόσοις ἢ ἐν θαλάττῃ χειμάζωνται, ὥσπερ πρὸς θεοὺς ἔχειν τοὺς ἐν ἐκάστοις ἄρχοντας, σωτήρας σφῶν προσδοκῶντας, οὐκ ἄλλῳ τῷ διαφέροντας ἢ τῷ εἰδέναι: καὶ πάντα που μεστὰ τὰνθρώπινα ζητούντων διδασκάλους τε καὶ ἄρχοντας ἑαυτῶν τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων τῶν τε ἐργασιῶν, οἰομένων τε αὖ ἱκανῶν μὲν διδάσκειν, ἱκανῶν δὲ ἄρχειν εἶναι. καὶ ἐν τούτοις ἅπασι τί ἄλλο φήσομεν ἢ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἠγεῖσθαι σοφίαν καὶ ἀμαθίαν εἶναι παρὰ σφίσι; Θ: Οὐδὲν ἄλλο. Σ: Οὐκοῦν τὴν μὲν σοφίαν ἀληθῆ διάνοιαν ἠγοῦνται, τὴν δὲ ἀμαθίαν ψευδῆ δόξαν; Θ: Τί μήν;” (170a3-170c1).

The first premise is the Measure Thesis, whose statement here includes the relativizing qualifiers, presumably for the sake of being faithful to Protagoras' position. Every judgment is true in the world of the person who made the judgment. Then, we move on to other people, or "all men." What all human beings judge, and so what is true in their world, is that there is epistemic variability: some people are wise and some are not, some people make true judgments and some do not. Evidently, the opposition between truth and falsity supplies the basic dimension of epistemic variability. This judgment of "all men" is the second premise.

Let us take a closer look at the second premise. Notice that Socrates' point has more gravity to it than merely postulating that people will tend to disagree with Protagoras. What he describes here is a whole way of life that is organized around the principle of epistemic variability. There are teachers and students, knowers and non-knowers. The knowers command an immense amount of respect from their fellow citizens and they bear a significant amount of responsibility for which they are accountable. If they succeed, they are treated like gods; and if they fail, they are surely removed from positions of authority. The people observe and take pains to maintain this principle and to continue to live precisely in this way. After all, they would not entrust governance of a ship to someone who merely asserts that they can do it. It is urgent that only those who deserve to be in positions of power are in such positions and, we are told, it is the knowers who deserve to. Moreover, Socrates conveys in this paragraph that the principle of distinguishing truth from falsehood and knowledge from its opposite is one that all these people jointly uphold. There would be no sea voyages, at least no successful ones, if the people working the ship did not jointly agree to abide by the commands of the one that they all see as the rightful

commander.<sup>13</sup> Thus, we might say that all these people live in a shared world and that that shared world is one that is made possible by the very distinctions that Protagoras seeks to undermine.

Indeed, I suggest that we view the people's desire to have the knowers in positions of power as their desire to be bound by the truth. Besides noting the interlocutors' opposition and showing that it is derived from and explained by a whole context of living, Socrates turns our attention to the phenomenon of second-order judgments, that is, judgments that are about other judgments and, specifically, judgments that evaluate the truth of other judgments.<sup>14</sup> The people determine their shared world by ensuring that the person in charge of healing, for example, actually has medical knowledge. This is to say that they would willingly treat this person's judgments as authoritative and as wielding power over them. The individual people that make up this world know that people are not all "self-sufficient in point of wisdom"<sup>15</sup> (169d), as Protagoras claims. In fact, they know even of themselves that they do not have knowledge of matters on which they were not educated. Hence, this life that Socrates describes presupposes that people regularly talk to each other and assess each other's claims to knowledge, for the sake of finding the knowers and instituting them in power. The point that is made is that the form of life in which there is room for expertise is predicated on people's judgments being evaluable and, in fact, actually evaluated. The practice of evaluating people's judgments and the life organized around knowledge are mutually implicating. Thus, it is not accidental that the interlocutors will resist Protagoras' statement: their whole life depends on distinguishing truth from falsehood.

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<sup>13</sup> While reference to the *Republic's* Ship of State image (6.488a ff.) would be more than appropriate in this context, I mean to only draw attention to the fact that seafaring projects constitute a very obvious case of a plurality of people working together to achieve a shared goal.

<sup>14</sup> E. Lee mentions, but does not make much of, the focus on second-order judgments. He credits Kerferd (1949) for noticing their importance but deviates from his view (Lee 1973, 242n30 and 244n31), because Kerferd wants to permit Protagoras first-order judgments (more on that below). More recently, M. Lee (2005, 51 ff.) also notes the focus on second-order judgments, arguing that Protagoras is made to realize that second-order judgments force him to relativize truth too, that is, in addition to facts.

<sup>15</sup> "αὐτάρκη ἕκαστον εἰς φρόνησιν" (169d5-6).

After the statement of the premises comes the turning of the tables:

“SOC: Well then, how are we to deal with your theory (*ti chrēsometha tōi logōi*), Protagoras? Should we say that people always judge things which are true? Or that they sometimes judge things which are true and sometimes things which are false? Because from both alternatives it follows (*ex amphoterōn sumbainei*), I think, that they don’t always judge things which are true, but judge both truths and falsehoods. Ask yourself, Theodorus, whether you, or any of Protagoras’ followers, would be willing to contend that no one person ever believes of another that he’s stupid and makes false judgments.

THE: No, that’s incredible, Socrates.

SOC: Still, that’s what the theory that a man is the measure of all things is inevitably driven to.

THE: How?” (170c-d).<sup>16</sup>

Notice that Socrates does not mention the shared world that is explanatory of the people’s opposition to the Measure Thesis. Notice also that, unlike what we have in the *kompsoaton*, Protagoras does not face his opponents and, thus, he is not immediately put on the spot to convert to the other side. Rather, what happens here is that the Measure Thesis dwindles into indeterminacy. Socrates expresses puzzlement as to what the Measure Thesis is meant to say. It is as if he grants to Protagoras the Measure Thesis and now wants to know what it is that he granted. Was it that all judgments are true or that there is a distinction between knowledge and ignorance as the actual judgments claim? The Measure Thesis, he points out, does no more say

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<sup>16</sup> “Σ: Τί οὖν, ὃ Πρωταγόρα, χρῆσόμεθα τῷ λόγῳ; πότερον ἀληθῆ φῶμεν ἀεὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δοξάζειν, ἢ τοτὲ μὲν ἀληθῆ, τοτὲ δὲ ψευδῆ; ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων γάρ που συμβαίνει μὴ ἀεὶ ἀληθῆ ἀλλ’ ἀμφοτέρα αὐτοὺς δοξάζειν. σκόπει γάρ, ὃ Θεόδωρε, εἰ ἐθέλοι ἄν τις τῶν ἀμφὶ Πρωταγόραν ἢ σὺ αὐτὸς διαμάχεσθαι ὡς οὐδεὶς ἡγεῖται ἕτερος ἕτερον ἀμαθῆ τε εἶναι καὶ ψευδῆ δοξάζειν. Θ: Ἄλλ’ ἄπιστον, ὃ Σώκρατες. Σ: Καὶ μὴν εἰς τοῦτό γε ἀνάγκης ὁ λόγος ἦκει ὁ πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἀνθρώπων λέγων. Θ: Πῶς δὴ;” (170c2-d3).

one than the other. It says one thing in a context of isolation and another in a context of conversation. It loses any determinate meaning it had appeared to have, because in putting itself forth to be heard by others, it affirms its own contradictory. That Socrates marvels at the indeterminacy of the Measure Thesis indicates that he is not taking anything for granted, which, in turn, should serve to discredit the Contradiction approach. The only way for the Measure Thesis to survive, Socrates says, is for its proponent to deny against all plausibility that people live this way, that they examine each other's judgments, and that they do so because the distinction between truth and falsehood is important to them. Recall from our examination of the *kompotaton* that the Failure and Absurdity approaches both took it that Protagoras could shield himself from that argument by insisting on the use of the qualifiers and finding refuge in his private world. Here, in this earlier argument, Socrates explicitly offers that to Protagoras as a way out. You can hold on to your position – he indicates to him – if you never step into the conversational context and never face the opponents.

So, at this point, Socrates has laid out a dilemma. On the one side is people's ordinary practice with truth, falsehood, and judgment, which relies on people's evaluation of others in conversation and which has no room for the Measure Thesis. On the other is the Measure Thesis and nothing else: no evaluation of judgments and no conversation. On that horn of the dilemma, Protagoras is in his private world alone and all judgments that are available to him are first-order judgments. This is the horn of the dilemma that the Failure approach recommends that Protagoras takes. The Contradiction approach too, effectively, recommends this horn, since this is the horn in which the private worlds are operative. According to the Absurdity approach, by contrast, both horns are deadends for Protagoras. Theodorus seems to recognize that the dilemma is not favorable to Protagoras and asks Socrates to clarify why it is that his friend cannot



participate in a debate under the assumption of relativism. It is in response to that request that Socrates starts over, which means that it makes sense to interpret the second version of the argument as an illustration of why Protagoras cannot put his judgment forth for evaluation without falling into a self-refutation. The second version of the argument, I will argue, seeks to make plain why it is that Protagoras cannot engage in conversation.

In starting over, Socrates says:

“SOC: When you’ve decided something by yourself, and express a judgment about it to me, let’s grant that, as Protagoras’ theory has it, that’s true for you. But what about the rest of us? Is it impossible for us to get to make decisions about your decision? Or do we always decide that your judgments are true? Isn’t it rather the case that on every occasion there are countless people who make judgments opposed to yours and contend against you, in the belief that what you decide and think is false?

THE: Good heavens, yes, Socrates, countless thousands, as Homer puts it; they give me all the trouble in the world.

SOC: Well now, do you want us to say that what you judge on those occasions (*men*) is true for you but (*de*) false for those countless people?

THE: It looks as if we must, at any rate as far as the theory is concerned.

SOC: And (*de*) what about Protagoras himself?” (170d-e).<sup>17</sup>

Socrates begins his clarification of his previous argument by setting up his premises – the same premises – again. One is the Measure Thesis and one is the opposition of the ordinary

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<sup>17</sup> “Σ: Ὅταν σὺ κρίνας τι παρὰ σαυτῶ πρός με ἀποφαίνη περί τινος δόξαν, σοὶ μὲν δὴ τοῦτο κατὰ τὸν ἐκείνου λόγον ἀληθὲς ἔστω, ἡμῖν δὲ δὴ τοῖς ἄλλοις περὶ τῆς σῆς κρίσεως πότερον οὐκ ἔστιν κριταῖς γενέσθαι, ἢ ἀεὶ σὲ κρίνομεν ἀληθῆ δοξάζειν; ἢ μυριοὶ ἐκάστοτέ σοι μάχονται ἀντιδοξάζοντες, ἡγούμενοι ψευδῆ κρίνειν τε καὶ οἶεσθαι; Θ: Νῆ τὸν Δία, ὦ Σώκρατες, μάλα μυριοὶ δῆτα, φησὶν Ὅμηρος, οἳ γέ μοι τὰ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων πράγματα παρέχουσιν. Σ: Τί οὖν; βούλει λέγωμεν ὡς σὺ τότε σαυτῶ μὲν ἀληθῆ δοξάζεις, τοῖς δὲ μυρίουσιν ψευδῆ; Θ: Ἐοικεν ἕκ γε τοῦ λόγου ἀνάγκη εἶναι. Σ: Τί δὲ αὐτῶ Πρωταγόρα;” (170d4-170e7).

people. Moreover, and *contra* the Failure approach, the qualifiers are instituted to their full extent and rightly so, as it is their behavior that we seek to observe. The second argument's actual advance comes at the end: Socrates grants that a given  $p$  may be true for A and false for B. He now wants to know what the status of  $p$  is for Protagoras himself. With that last question, Socrates forces Protagoras into a conversation, for the sake of seeing how he and his Measure Thesis fare in it. He forces him, that is, into the horn of the dilemma in which the interlocutors are at home. That conversation into which the sophist is pushed is the conversation that makes up the *kompotaton*. In other words, the *kompotaton* shows us what happens when Protagoras is made to debate his position.

Let us pause here to imagine the situation. There are two people having a conversation, a disagreement in fact, and Protagoras comes along to tell them that they have nothing to worry about,  $p$  and  $\sim p$  are both true without contradiction. Normally, those two individuals would ask Protagoras to explain himself – what does he mean by that and how could he be right. At that point, he would have to bring up the Measure Thesis itself and explain that according to his philosophy, the two (apparently) contradictory judgments are to be distributed into private worlds, thus neutralizing the threat of contradiction. This would make it the case that Protagoras has to bring up the Measure Thesis, otherwise no one would think that he was serious when he said that both  $p$  and  $\sim p$  are true. Hence, the point being made here is that if Protagoras is compelled to debate any  $p$  with any person who has a stake in the truth of  $p$ , then he should expect not only opposition but pushback. He cannot expect that people will allow him to expound on the Measure Thesis, when he has told them not to worry about making the right choice between  $p$  and  $\sim p$ .<sup>18</sup> The way out that is imagined by the Contradiction interpreters does

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<sup>18</sup> I would venture the following: Protagoras needs a Secret Doctrine to be the background of his Measure Thesis, so that he can say to these interlocutors that he has a theory that will prove the Measure Thesis, though he may not tell them about it. That is why the Secret Doctrine has to be secret.

not hold much water, as exempting the Measure Thesis is unrealistic. If Protagoras did not try to defend with the Measure Thesis, A and B could simply disregard him and continue arguing.

Let us now consider more closely why it is that Protagoras' being forced into this conversation makes it so that the Measure Thesis undermines itself. In allowing himself to issue a verdict on A and B's disagreement and in putting forth the Measure Thesis as that verdict, Protagoras has effectively begun to act as if he also believed in the distinction between truth and falsehood, i.e. the very distinction that his philosophy supposedly opposes. By seeking to justify, he shows sensitivity to inferential and contradiction relations, since the very point of justification is to show why something is true and its negation false. In fact, the very distribution into private worlds suggests that Protagoras has thought about what it takes to dissolve disagreements, which constitutes further evidence that he accepts the standard understanding of inferential relations. Therefore, in entering the conversational context, Protagoras shows himself accepting that the interlocutors' counter-judgment is genuinely the negation of his own. This means that if the counter-judgment is true, then his judgment cannot be. And his judgment says that the opponents' judgment is true.

I will now argue that Protagoras has to accept that the interlocutors' judgment is the negation of his own. Let us begin by noting that anything that is said in a conversational context is said for the purpose of being understood and responded to. In order for that to be possible, it has to be formulated in a language intelligible to all parties involved. It follows from this that any judgment that is addressed to someone belongs equally to speaker and addressee, in the sense that both should be able to say what the judgment means. This feature of the conversational context prevents Protagoras from insisting that his interlocutors are wrong to think that what they say is not the negation of what he says. Protagoras cannot insist that his interlocutors do not

disagree with him because it is not up to him to say what the judgments mean.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the interlocutors are entitled to the straightforward reading of the Measure Thesis – namely, all judgments are true – as that is the reading they understand. In fact, given that these opponents are those who live in the world defined by the distinction between truth and falsehood, it must be the case that they also understand the Measure Thesis to deny precisely this distinction. It follows, therefore, that in issuing their counter-judgment, they judge the negation of the Measure Thesis. As we have seen, the interlocutors are subsequently licensed to the straightforward inference that their own, opposing judgment is confirmed to be true. Consequently, we might say that it is the fact of the ordinary, shared language that ultimately explains the turning of the tables against Protagoras. If that is so, every encounter with the Measure Thesis, even if outside the conversational context, is going to be one in which an audience is presupposed. And, as I have been arguing, it may be taken for granted that the audience will be hostile to the Measure Thesis. Thus, it should follow from this that the Measure Thesis is vulnerable to the self-refutation argument simply in virtue of being formulated in a publicly available language.

I take myself to have shown that the *kompsoaton* constitutes a legitimate argument against Protagoras and that the Measure Thesis has been shown self-refuting, simply on account of having been placed in the conversational context. Protagoras cannot formulate the Measure Thesis without having to immediately withdraw it. This should go some way towards showing that the Contradiction approach is not right, as that interpretation supposes that Protagoras is earnest about entering a dialectical examination of his position. To make it even more evident that exempting the Measure Thesis from discussion and retreating into private worlds is not a viable option either, I will now consider the other horn of the dilemma. In that horn, Protagoras

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<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that, in the version of the *peritropē* that we find in the *Euthydemus*, Socrates argues against the position that no false judgments are possible by pointing out that sentences mean something on their own, cf. 287c-288a.

does not engage in conversation and does not issue verdicts about others' conversations. He may only issue first-order judgments, that is, judgments that are not about other judgments.

The first-order judgments permitted to Protagoras here have to be inferentially solitary. I mean that they are not inferentially related to any other judgment. They do not speak in favor or against any other judgment and no other judgment does that for them. They do not follow from anything and nothing follows from them. If they were not inferentially solitary, then they would be such as to enter in conversation; they could be mobilized, that is, as justifications for or as evidence against some other judgment. For example, to offer judgment p as justification for judgment q would be to say that p is internally connected to q, a relation which can even be made explicit in judgment r, mentioning both p and q. Hence, r is not a sentence that is permitted to Protagoras. More interestingly, sentence p is not permitted either and for the same reason, namely, that it enjoys inferential relations with other judgments.

These first-order judgments may only be judgments that describe Protagoras' – or the given speaker's – experience: how things seem to him at the moment of utterance. Consider sentence r again. If that sentence were – somehow – permitted, its meaning would have to be completely divorced from both p and q for the sake of preserving inferential isolation. The only way to achieve that is to say that in judging r, it is not simply the case that Protagoras judges “r.” Rather, the judgment is “Protagoras judges that r.” In order to – somehow – pack meaning into the sentence while keeping it separate from others, a relativist has to say that the judgment is about the speaker and not about the world. When different subjects (or the same person at different times) make the same judgment or utter the same words, what it is that each of them actually judges is indexed to them and the moment in which they made the utterance. Every judgment is always new, as it were. The reason is that the solitariness requirement is enabled by

a uniqueness requirement, which means that no two judgments can ever be the same judgment nor can they overlap or make contact with each other. But in order for the uniqueness requirement to be met, judgments have to be uncombinable, without parts or articulation that would allow them to fit together with other judgments on the basis of what they put forth. And this is just to say that they are not judgments at all. Not because they resemble announcements at no one more than they do assertions to an interlocutor, but because they cannot be formulated at all – at least not in a language that anyone can understand or engage with.

In this section, I take myself to have shown that there is a first pass at the self-refutation argument, which sets up a dilemma for Protagoras. On one horn of the dilemma, is the conversation that makes up the *komsotaton*, which follows the terms championed by Socrates, the interlocutors, and the standard practice of truth. In that horn, the conversational context turns the tables. The Measure Thesis refutes itself by allowing itself to be formulated in a publicly available language and putting itself forward as true. The refutation occurs because in putting itself forward as true, the Measure Thesis confirms its contradictory. The only other option is for the Measure Thesis to withdraw itself as soon it is stated. On the other horn of the dilemma, in which the Measure Thesis has been withdrawn from the conversational context altogether, no judgment may be formulated at all, at least not in any shape that may allow it to be put forth as true. It seems to me quite implausible that a proponent of the Measure Thesis would be content in that second horn and so, I conclude that the Measure Thesis is entirely untenable and the Absurdity approach to the *komsotaton* correct.

It was important to my argument that the Measure Thesis is at odds with a whole way of life. This meant that Protagoras could not possibly avoid the Self-Refutation. Yet, if he came across people who for some reason did not explicitly disagree with him, and did not explicitly

bring him to task to defend himself, then the Self-Refutation would not have been drawn. We can imagine an audience that has too much respect for him or too little confidence in themselves. Perhaps they do not see that his statement threatens the principle that defines their life and that it falls to them to defend it. It is only if Protagoras gets his audience to think that there is nothing under threat, that he is not a threat, or that they are not capable of resisting his threat that his Measure Thesis can avoid the charge of self-refutation. Therefore, we might say that, with this argument, the *Theaetetus* asks us if we are willing to let the Measure Thesis stand. If we are willing, that is, to let go of the task of examining each other with reasoned argument and to stop valuing the truth. In the next section, I show that the Self-Refutation passage reminds us that, even if there is no mean-spirited sophist to directly threaten our way of life, the threat that he stands for is one that we have to always be on guard against.

### **Section 3 – The Democratic Context (170e-171a)**

In this section, I go over a brief passage, in which Socrates draws, what I called, interim conclusions regarding what it is that the Protagorean position seeks to establish. It occurs immediately after Socrates pushes Protagoras into the conversational context but immediately before he illustrates that conversation with the *kompsoaton*. I show that the Protagorean threat may be posed even if there is no Protagoras to explicitly propound the Measure Thesis.

Here is the text:

“SOC: And what about Protagoras himself? Isn't it necessarily the case that, if he didn't himself think a man is the measure, and if the masses (*hoi polloi*) don't either, as in fact they don't, then that *Truth*<sup>20</sup> which he wrote wasn't the truth for anyone? Whereas if he did think so himself, but the masses (*plēthos*) don't share

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<sup>20</sup> *Truth* was the title of Protagoras' book, about which we know very little. It appears that it began with a statement of the Measure Thesis.

his view, then, in the first place, it's more the case that it isn't the truth than that it is: more in the proportion by which those to whom it doesn't seem to be outnumber those to whom it does. (*osōi pleious hois mē dokei ē hois dokei, tosoutōi mallon ouk estin ē estin*).

THE: Yes, that must be so, if it's to depend on each individual judgment whether it is or isn't." (170e-171a)<sup>21</sup>

Socrates, here, puts forth a disjunction: Either Protagoras did not believe the Measure Thesis or he did.<sup>22</sup> If he did not, then there is no one to believe it and hence it is not true for anyone or at all. If he did believe it and put it forth, then two things follow: first, that the truth of the Measure Thesis shall depend on the number of its supporters and, second, that Protagoras will have to defend the Measure Thesis in conversation. That is, the second consequence is that the *kompotaton* is in order. The first implication, which is my focus here, is independent of the self-refutation. It is independent of the conversational context and it follows simply if anyone – in this case, Protagoras – believed in the truth of the Measure Thesis. That is, it is what follows if someone believes that the distinction between truth and falsehood is illusory.

The first thing to notice is that this implication addresses a characteristic, though somewhat extrinsic, feature of true judgments, namely, that it “wins” over false judgments. I say it is extrinsic because the point made here is not that true and false judgments (about the same issue) are contradictory, but that the true judgment prevails over the false judgment. Now, it is important that this is not actually extrinsic. After all, we saw in the preceding section, that the

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<sup>21</sup> “Σ: Τί δὲ αὐτῷ Πρωταγόρα; ἄρ' οὐχὶ ἀνάγκη, εἰ μὲν μηδὲ αὐτὸς ᾤετο μέτρον εἶναι ἄνθρωπον μηδὲ οἱ πολλοί, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ οἴονται, μηδενὶ δὴ εἶναι ταύτην τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἣν ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν; εἰ δὲ αὐτὸς μὲν ᾤετο, τὸ δὲ πλῆθος μὴ συνοίεται, οἴσθ' ὅτι πρῶτον μὲν ὅσῳ πλείους οἷς μὴ δοκεῖ ἢ οἷς δοκεῖ, τοσοῦτῳ μᾶλλον οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ ἔστιν. Θ: Ἀνάγκη, εἴπερ γε καθ' ἐκάστην δόξαν ἔσται καὶ οὐκ ἔσται.” (170e7-171a5).

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Burnyeat, who stresses the connection of the “exquisite” argument to these interim conclusions, as I call them, focuses almost exclusively on the first disjunct. M. Lee, in a very surprising move, says that Protagoras would actually resist the consequence in the second disjunct (2005, 53).



distinction between true and false is mutually implicated with the idea that the true judgment is the one that wins. In fact, the relative value of the true over the false is what motivates the distinction between them. Yet, I think it is fair to say that the victory of the true over the false is extrinsic, insofar as an undiscovered, or non-victorious, truth does not thereby cease to be a truth.

The implication describes a procedure for deciding which judgment is to “win,” when it is *ex hypothesi* the case that the reason it wins is not that it is true. The Measure Thesis asserts that all the available judgments are true, therefore, if we have to choose among the available judgments, we cannot do so by ruling out the false ones. That there is some such procedure reinforces the appearance that, even though relativism has rejected the ordinary understanding of truth, it can still account for the competition between “p” and “~p” implied in, and required by, the ordinary concept. The procedure outlined counts the number of followers. The idea is that the more individuals judge “p!”, “p!”, “p!” the more epistemic value is compounded onto the judgment, making the quantity of supporters the measure of success. Therefore, the judgment earns the laurels appropriate to true judgments, but not because of its truth. In fact, nothing about the content of the judgment is relevant at all. The victorious judgment is chosen simply by counting its supporters. This is not the procedure of reasoned argument but one that could be enacted with screams and torches.

This procedure captures the deliberative assembly in a democratic *polis*, in which political decisions are made on the basis of a vote. The constitution of democracy is one that gives equal weight to every person’s judgment regardless of its content, for the sole reason that the judgment was put forth by a citizen. Protagoras, similarly, claims that every judgment put forth by a human is true. Both paradigms take it that certain judgments have a right to be heard and taken seriously as expressions of knowledge simply because of their provenance. In both

contexts, it is the case that every possible judgment is presumed to be self-justifying: the fact that it was made is all we need to know to decide that it has the credentials required to be official policy. Each judgment is thought to be fully self-standing, as it were, a proof of itself in itself. As such, the judgments made in the assembly are also relativistic, in that they waffle between, on the one hand, putting something forth for debate and intersubjective adjudication and, on the other, simply expressing how things seem to a speaker with no further debate necessary.

Once we recognize that Protagorean relativism is comparable to democratic practices, we are in a position to appreciate another dimension of the *kompsoaton*: the Measure Thesis lost the vote. This means that Protagoras had the tables turned on him twice over. Once because his view denied the very condition for its own formulation and once because it was outvoted; once on the standards of his opponents and once on his own quasi-standards – or rather, the only possible standards permitted by his view. He loses the vote because once it is established that more people believe the opposite of the Measure Thesis, the Measure Thesis loses out. And if it loses out, then it earns the characteristics of falsehood and comes to be “false.” But if it is false in this sense, namely, for relativistic reasons, then it is also false for Protagoras. And if that is the case, then we may move over to the other disjunct, in which not even Protagoras believes the Measure Thesis. In that case, the view is just simply false because we are back at the original position, in which no one has issued a threat to the distinction between truth and falsehood.

The primary moral to draw from the analogy between relativism and democracy is that just as the former is incoherent, so is the latter. Plato’s thought is that the democratic constitution presents itself as a viable practical possibility, just like Protagoras presents his Measure Thesis as if it stands for a genuine theory. But just as the Protagorean view violates the very conditions that make its articulation possible, so – the analogy goes – the democratic constitution goes against

the very idea of genuine political organization, i.e. the generation and maintenance of a just society. The reason is that instead of having the members of the assembly make political decisions on the basis of reasoned debate on what justice demands, they make them on the basis of something entirely different, the number of votes, and, furthermore, on the basis of something that can easily be manipulated by someone who is adamant at having their way. The citizens of a democracy have forgotten that their way of life depends on keeping a close eye on the distinction between the true and the false, between knowers and those who simply express opinions.

Importantly, however, democracy is not quite so bleak and we can be confident that Plato knows as much. The primary reason as to why democracy is not doomed to relativism and its associated procedures is that there is nothing stopping the citizens of a democracy from actually examining each other. The only obstacle is their own idleness. Moreover, the democratic institutions actually provide the conditions required for such examinations and, in fact, promote those very conditions. After all, that is why the citizens meet one another at the assembly: not merely to be an audience to others' opinions but to deliberate with one another about how to organize their shared life and to hold one another accountable so that their shared life is a good one.<sup>23</sup> In order to silence the threat of relativism, the citizens simply have to be reminded that it is up to them to build a just society and that they have all the tools that they need to do so. All that the citizens have to do is take seriously the task of distinguishing those who speak the truth from those who do not.

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<sup>23</sup> My discussion of democracy here follows Monoson (2000). On this particular point about democracy holding within it the conditions for its own success at generating a just society, she cites Saxonhouse (1996), cf. Monoson (2000, 168).

## 2. Understanding the Human Intellectual Capacities and Why Knowledge Is Not Perception (184b-186e)

Protagoras' Measure Thesis was shown self-refuting in the *peritropē* argument (discussed in Chapter 1). The definition of knowledge that Socrates associates with him, namely that it is perception, is refuted in the Final Refutation Argument (184b-186e), which is my topic in this chapter. Upon concluding this argument, we ostensibly dispose of the Protagorean position altogether and relativism is not mentioned again. The argument proper is short and straightforward. Here it is:

1. *Epistēmē* requires attainment of *alētheia*. (186c9-10)
2. Attainment of *alētheia* presupposes grasp of *ousia*. (186c7)
3. Perception cannot grasp *ousia*. (186d2-5)
4. Therefore, perception is not *epistēmē*. (186e9-10)

The form that this argument takes is to lay out the features required by the concept of *epistēmē* and point out that they do not inhere in perception. It follows directly that perception cannot be one and the same as knowledge. The validity of this argument is not in question. Turning to its premises, Premise 1 seems uncontroversial. I think that both ancient and modern readers would accept it. Premise 2 seems largely uncontroversial too. We might wonder what *ousia*, or “being,” is in this context, and I will have more to say about it in what follows, but it seems that its conceptual kinship to the notion of truth makes the premise acceptable. Besides the issue of *ousia* and its relation to *alētheia*, it is Premise 3 that is doing the philosophically substantive work in this argument.

The remainder of the passage, leading up to the argument proper, serves to justify Premise 3. It does so by presenting an outline of human psychology, and, specifically, of our

epistemic capacities. This sketch of our epistemic psychology lays bare the limitations of perception and it also gives shape to our potential for knowledge. That knowledge is possible for us is what the Protagorean position had sought to undermine, which means that this particular refutation of the first definition is doubly triumphant: it shows both why the relativist position is without grounds and where genuine knowledge is to be found. As we will see below, knowledge is attributed to our soul's characteristic capacity, which is exercised independently of the body. Our soul's characteristic activity is one for seeking and discriminating the truth. This activity, we might recall from the preceding chapter, is the one that we need in order to eschew relativism.

I divide the passage into five parts: 1. Renouncing the Trojan Horse Model (184b-d); 2. Assessing the intellectual capacities of the body (184d-185e); 3. Elaborating on the independent activity of the soul (186a-b); 4. A note on education (186b-c); 5. Refuting the first definition (186c-e). We have already looked at the fifth part, which contains the argument proper. The other four parts jointly show that perception does not have access to *ousia* in the relevant sense. In what follows, I go over each of the parts closely, aiming not only to explain why perception is not knowledge, according to the *Theaetetus*, but also to clarify the dangerous and undesirable implications of that thought.

### **Section 1 – Renouncing the Trojan Horse Model (184b-d)**

In this portion of the text, Socrates urges Theaetetus to be precise in his talk about perception. We discover here that the perceptual organs, like eyes and ears, are what we perceive through or by means of (*dia*) and not that by which (dative) we perceive, properly speaking (184c).<sup>1</sup> As such, the perceptual organs are genuinely *organa*, they are tools or instruments (184d)<sup>2</sup> that are necessary for the perceptual acts to be effected but not themselves the subjects

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<sup>1</sup> “Look here, which answer is more correct: that eyes are what we see with (ὅτι ὁρῶμεν) or what we see by means of (δι’ οὗ)?” (184c5-7). All translations are from McDowell (1973) with the occasional modification.

<sup>2</sup> “... διὰ τούτων οἷον ὀργάνων ...” (184d4).

of those acts. Socrates offers a brief defense for the thesis that the perceptual organs are tools for perception: It would be preposterous if it came out that we were like Trojan horses. He says:

“It would surely be strange if we had several senses sitting in us, as in the Trojan Horse, and it wasn’t the case that all those things converged on some one kind of thing, a soul or whatever one ought to call it: something with which we perceive all the perceived things by means of the senses, as if by means of instruments.”

(184d1-5).<sup>3</sup>

The implication is that a view of perception in which the organs are not mere tools would be one that resembles the Trojan Horse. My goal in this section is to clarify what is renounced in the rejection of the Trojan Horse perceptual model so that we can begin to explicate the alternative that will emerge from the Tools Metaphor.

Famously, the Trojan Horse is an artifact that has the outward appearance of a horse but is hollow inside, concealing an army of human beings. So in what way would we resemble that horse if our perceptual capacities were not mere tools? One salient answer is that a given individual would really be five subjects (one for each sense)<sup>4</sup> conjoined together in analogy to the conjoined soldiers within the horse’s body. It would be an illusion that this individual is a single human being. Instead that putative person would be five perceivers and the only thing that would bring those independent perceivers together would be their spatial location or the fact that they are dependent on the same continuous body. A consequence of this contingent unity of the independent perceivers is that the individual person would not be sentient, properly speaking.

Rather the appearance of sentient unity, deriving from the human body shape, would be only a

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<sup>3</sup> “Δεινὸν γάρ που, ὃ παῖ, εἰ πολλαὶ τινες ἐν ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ἐν δουρείοις ἵπποις αἰσθήσεις ἐγκάθηνται, ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰς μίαν τινὰ ἰδέαν, εἴτε ψυχὴν εἴτε ὅτι δεῖ καλεῖν, πάντα ταῦτα συντείνει. ἢ διὰ τούτων οἷον ὀργάνων αἰσθανόμεθα ὅσα αἰσθητά.” (184d1-5).

<sup>4</sup> I correlate each warrior with a particular sense but there is nothing preventing each warrior from being correlated with each particular sensory organ, such that the eyes would constitute two soldiers. The infinity that would follow from touch is avoided if we take the proposed route.

vehicle for the actually sentient beings, which correlate to the senses. This is indeed a grotesque picture of the human being.

The alternative, Socrates says, is that there is a soul that unifies the perceptual capacities by being their tool-user. The implication is that, in the case of a soul making use of the senses, the comparison to the Trojan Horse is inapt. The unity of the perceptual capacities would not be the result of a conjunction, rather it would be a function of the presence of a soul. There would no longer be several self-sufficient perceivers that are in principle unrelated to one another; rather there would be one perceiver with five perceptual capabilities that are in principle tied to one another. The unity of these five we could summarily call the single capacity for perception.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the perceptual capacities are proximately located would now be incidental to their unity and not the sole thing keeping them together. In renouncing the Trojan Horse Model then, Socrates and Theaetetus affirm that the human being is unified: there is such a thing as a sentient human being that is over and above the alleged or apparent sentience of its component parts. It is a feature of this unity that the acts of perceptual capacities are properly speaking acts of soul – not of bodily organs – which is to say that the perceptual organs are sentient only insofar as they are the capacities that belong to a soul.

It should be noted at the outset that the Protagorean theory of the metaphysics of perception that Socrates had outlined under the heading of the Secret Doctrine (156a-157c) is one that fits the model of the Trojan Horse.<sup>6</sup> There was explicit note that the subject of visual

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<sup>5</sup> At the conclusion of the argument, Socrates and Theaetetus agree to call the five senses altogether (*sumpas*) perception (*aisthēsin*) (186d10e-3). I mention the unity of the five capabilities for the sake of underscoring their unification. More will be said to substantiate the point in the rest of the paper.

<sup>6</sup> Others have noted this too, e.g., Burnyeat (1990, 54-55) suggests that the only difference from the Heraclitean picture is that there is no flux through time. Others, such as Cornford (1951) and Chappell (2004), take it, on the one hand, that the reference to the Trojan Horse is a reference to the earlier account, but suppose, on the other, that Plato continues to endorse that view as far as perception is concerned. The achievement of the present argument, for them, is that it shows that we need a reflective soul to stop the flux. Their view also involves the soul's (quasi-perceptual) mental encounter with the Forms. As I will go on to show, the rejection of the Trojan Horse Model as well as the Tunnel Model, which I will present below, shows that neither flux is at play nor any mental perception.

perception was the eye. Though Socrates had omitted talk of soul altogether, he had emphasized that, in the act of perception, what occurs is that ‘the eye sees the white stone’ (cf. 156d-e). Similarly, we ought to infer, the ear hears, the tongue tastes, and so on. Importantly, there was no implication that a soul was present to unify the perceptions or put them together. Perception was conceived as starting and stopping at the organ.

In fact, in concluding the Secret Doctrine, Socrates had said that the subject and object of the perceptual act are tied together in an intimate correlative relationship and he had stressed that the intimacy of that relationship entailed that neither subject nor object of the perceptual act was tied to itself (160b). The implication is, on the one hand, that the perceptual organ-*qua*-subject enjoyed a metaphysically special and epistemically authoritative relationship to the perceptible item and, on the other, that this is all that there is about each perceptual capacity, namely, that it is contained in the moment of contact and actuality. This is to say that perception is not a standing capacity of a living person who persists through time and across perceptual experiences, but the description of an event regarding parts of a human body glomming onto parts of physical objects. Evidently, in such a view of human sentience, the five perceptual capacities are disconnected from one another, which renders them instances of soldiers within a Trojan horse, being only contingently related. Moreover, the fact that the perceptual capacities are intimately tied to the perceived object – and nothing else – provides the justification for perceptual infallibility, which in turn justifies Protagoras’ relativism. As we proceed with our investigation of perception, we will gain a better sense as to why it is that the Protagorean position has to adopt something like the Trojan Horse model.

I said earlier that the unity of the human being is a salient corollary of the rejection of the Trojan Horse Model. There is another consequence, pertaining to the perceived object. Socrates



says that it would be strange if the five perceptions (*aisthēseis*) did not converge into a single kind of thing (*mian tina idean*). He indicates that the soul could be that *mia idea*. The term *aisthēsis* is ambiguous, as it could stand either for each of the five perceptual capacities and its associated bodily organs, which is how I have been taking it thus far, or it could stand for the perceptual activity itself. I mean that it can stand for the contents of perception, the colors or sounds perceived. I will refer to this content, at times, as the perceptual messages. Taking *aisthēsis* to refer to the activity would imply that rejecting the Trojan Horse Model means rejecting that there are free-floating colors, sounds, etc. within (or on) our body that are not in conversation with one another. The fact that they converge into a single destination, so to speak, namely the soul, indicates that they are not completely independent of one another but rather are taken to be consistent, compatible, and commensurable; to belong in the same world, which is understood to be populated by items of all sensible modalities.

Importantly, the two interpretations of *aisthēsis* are compatible and we do not have to choose one over the other. The former, of capacities, might fit the text more naturally but the upshot of the latter interpretation, of messages, is a consequence of taking the former option too. The reason is that acknowledging a single subject for all five perceptual capacities indicates that their achievements are not cut off from one another. It is a direct consequence of the fact of the single soul that its world is a world in which colors and smells (and so on) coexist. A corollary of this point is that it is now possible for objects that exhibit features accessible by more than one perceptual organ to be experienced as unified, as themselves giving rise to a *mia idea* and not just a conjunction of properties. The Trojan Horse Model, by contrast, leaves no room for the possibility of experiencing a color and an odor as belonging to the same flower. In that model, the color and odor would necessarily be experienced as separate and a question regarding what

they inhere in would be impossible to broach, much less answer. The rejection of the Trojan Horse Model then amounts to an endorsement of the thought that the human perceiver is unified and that the same is true about the object of experience.<sup>7</sup>

I wish now to return to the characterization of the perceptual capacities as tools. We are not given any further detail as to how to understand the analogy between soul and body, on the one hand, and user and tool, on the other, except that it is meant to mark the difference between the proper subject of experience and what that subject needs in order to carry out the perceptual task. In light of the fact that our passage begins with the false suggestion that the perceptual organs are the subjects of perception, which is immediately corrected, it seems that the user-tools metaphor is primarily meant to highlight priority relations. The mistake of attributing responsibility for the accomplishment of an act to the tools one uses rather than to the agent purposefully making use of those tools for that very reason is an issue that recurs in Plato's work.

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<sup>7</sup> In saying that the unification of the object of experience is a consequence of the unification of the perceptual capacities, I mean to imply that what we have in view is a unified object and that this experience is faithful to the world. Wolfgang Mann (2000) has been influential in arguing that Plato subscribes to (what he calls) an Anaxagorean conception of objects as clusters of qualities. He seems to grant the unity of the perceptual experience, but insists that the unity of the object, independently of its being perceived, is not established (or at least not "obviously" (ibid., 167; ibid., 167n156). It is important to avoid commitment to Anaxagoreanism because that position is, for all intents and purposes, a version of Heracliteanism. Both views require that ordinary objects are inherently unstable and their actual features subject to extrinsic factors. It seems to me that the only substantive difference between the two views is that, on Heracliteanism, as it is outlined in the *Theaetetus*, perception of objects (or rather, qualities) is one such factor that effects a change in the constitution of that object (or rather, cluster), where that need not be the case with Anaxagoreanism. *Pace* Mann, however, it is explicitly said in the *Gorgias* that an Anaxagorean universe would follow only on the assumption that the soul is not at the helm of the body (465c-d). This strongly implies that the Tools Metaphor is meant to be a way to avoid precisely that consequence.

I do not discuss Mann any further but it seems to me that one inspired by his work could raise the skeptical worry that the object of experience does not necessarily reflect how things are in the world (cf. e.g., M. Lee (2000, 52) suggests, in a different context, that stability does not imply objectivity). In sections 3 and 4 below, I offer my interpretation of the soul's activity as conceived in the Tools Metaphor. I argue that it is conceived as being driven by a concern for truth: for getting its verdicts right as opposed to wrong. I am not sure what more is needed, beyond the possibility of distinguishing the true from the false and the reality from the appearance, to establish that we are not systematically deceived about the fact that tables and chairs are out there. Moreover, given that – according to this worry – all human beings would be systematically deceived in the same way and in a position to hold each other accountable for falsehood, it is not clear what justifies the demand for an even more robust account of reality. At any rate, I take it that this worry assumes that what we perceive is, in the first instance, an appearance but I do not think that this is the view presented in the passage.

Socrates derides those who make such mistakes in a revealing passage from the *Republic*, which also makes explicit reference to the relationship between body and soul:

“Besides, doesn’t plundering corpses strike you as demeaning and mercenary? Isn’t it petty and womanish to go on regarding the body of the dead person as hostile once the enemy has flown, leaving behind that which he was fighting with? Can you see any difference at all between a person behaving like this and dogs which get angry with the stones they are hit by, but show no interest in the person throwing them?” (*Rep.* 5.469d-e)<sup>8</sup>

This dog, or the person resembling it, makes the mistake discussed in Socrates’ intellectual autobiography in the *Phaedo*: “Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause from that without which the cause would not be able to act as a cause.” (99b).<sup>9</sup> The matter is most directly thematized in general terms in the *Statesman*, in which the Eleatic Visitor distinguishes between “contributory causes” (*sunaitia*) and causes proper. The latter “bring the thing itself to completion” (they *apergazontai*), while the former supply tools, without which the task set by and belonging to the proper cause could not be accomplished (281e).<sup>10</sup>

The discussion in the *Statesman* makes clear that it is the task of the proper cause to organize and set a purpose to the activity of its contributory causes. The proper cause is the one

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<sup>8</sup> “Ἀνελεύθερον δὲ οὐ δοκεῖ καὶ φιλοκρήματον νεκρὸν συλᾶν, καὶ γυναικειᾶς τε καὶ σικκρᾶς διανοίας τὸ πολέμιον νομίζειν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ τεθνεῶτος ἀποπταμένου τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, λειοπίοτος δὲ ᾧ ἐπολέμει; ἢ οἶει τι διάφορον δρᾶν τοὺς τοῦτο ποιοῦντας τῶν κυνῶν, αἱ τοῖς λίθοις οἷς ἂν βληθῶσι χαλεπαίνουσι, τοῦ βάλλοντος οὐχ ἀπτόμεναι;” Slightly modified Griffith translation in Ferrari (2013). Though the text does not use the word *organon*, Griffith’s translation describes the body of the living person as an “instrument.”

<sup>9</sup> “τὸ γὰρ μὴ διελέσθαι οἷόν τ’ εἶναι ὅτι ἄλλο μὲν τί ἐστι τὸ αἴτιον τῶ ὄντι, ἄλλο δὲ ἐκεῖνο ἄνευ οὗ τὸ αἴτιον οὐκ ἂν ποτ’ εἴη αἴτιον” (99b2-4).

<sup>10</sup> *Statesman* translations are by Grube in Cooper (1990). See also 287c, where tool-making is referred to as a contributory cause of weaving and 281a, where the Stranger reminds his interlocutors that neither the woof or warp-makers, nor the carders are the actual weavers. One might worry that, since the contributory causes are themselves crafts, they have their own orienting principle. This worry may be granted without affecting the point that, insofar as these crafts are under the direction and supervision of another, master, craft, whose goals they serve, they are not proper causes but only contributory ones. One might also have the slightly different worry that tools are not causes at all and therefore the appeal to the *Statesman* is inapt. While I accept that tools are not proper causes since they cannot set their own agenda, I do not think that this is reason to deny that they are contributory causes.

that sets the agenda for the joint activity and directs its helpers, as it were, so that its overarching project may be realized. The implication is that there would be no direction in the activity of the warp-maker, for example, and therefore no possibility of contributing to the accomplishment of any final product, without the architectonic craft of weaving. It is most evident in the case of inanimate tools that contributory causes lack an objective of their own and this, I take it, is the primary point made in calling our senses *organa*: they are subservient to the soul which directs them.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, the *Statesman*'s concern with finding the genuine ruler (the *politikos*, or craftsman of politics) and distinguishing him from pretenders, who can at best be characterized as contributing to the generation of a political community rather than bearing responsibility for it, indicates that there is serious danger lurking if the tools are taken for the real thing.

The same distinction and a similar urge for caution is made in the *Timaeus* (46c-e).<sup>12</sup> At the heels of a brief discussion about the interactions between fire and our eyes, which enable us to see, Timaeus specifies that the mechanics of those interactions, which govern the material aspects of the perceptual acts, are mere *sunaitia*. He emphasizes, further, that “primary causes” (*aitias prōtas*) can only be “those that belong to intelligence” (*tēs emphronos phuseōs*, 46d8) and he identifies them with the workings of the soul. Importantly, he notes, when the contributory causes are left to their own devices, their activity is rendered “haphazard and disorderly” (*to tuchon atakton hekastote exergazontai*, 46e5-6).<sup>13</sup>

We can see then that the Tools Metaphor indicates two things. First, it marks a concern for the preservation of priority relations, which if neglected, will prove disastrous. I return to the particular dangers hiding behind the reversal of the soul-body priority relations in section 4

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<sup>11</sup> We can compare here Aristotle's remarks on the slave, who is characterized as the “tool of tools” (ὄργανον πρὸ ὀργάνων, *Politics* I.4 1253b33) because his defining objective is his master's wishes.

<sup>12</sup> *Timaeus* translations are from Zeyl in Cooper (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Another passage worth mentioning is *Laws* 10.896e-897b. A distinction between *prōtourgoi* and *deuterourgoi* movements is made, where it is said that the former can “take over” (*paralambanein*) the latter to produce its own results. Notably, the “prime” movements belong to the soul and the “secondary” to the body, mirroring our passage.

below. Second, the tools metaphor indicates that the tools need an organizing principle, a user. The *Timaeus* passage states that intelligence is needed for the possibility that *kala kai agatha* things may come into being (46e4), otherwise, the work of the secondary causes – the tools – is left at chance. In other words, the tools do not do, on their own, anything. They have to be picked up and put to work for some purpose. We might say that they lack any inherent direction and so, if left without the guidance of the one whose tools they are, they will be passive and adrift, at the mercy of other, extrinsic causes and purposes<sup>14</sup> or mere habit. I take up the issue of a body unhelmmed in more detail in the following section and we will continue to refine our understanding of the Tool Metaphor in pursuing the rest of the discussion. Here, I argued that the rejection of the Trojan Horse Model introduces the possibility of a unified seat of agency that has access to all five sense modalities, which is itself tantamount to the possibility of experiencing unified objects that may be manifest to multiple perceptual capacities.

## **Section 2 – Assessing the Intellectual Capacities of the Body (184d-185e)**

The second portion of the text begins with an explanation from Socrates regarding his insistence on verbal precision above. He wanted to know, he says, “if there’s something in us with which we get at not only white and black things, by means of the eyes, but also other things, by means of the other sense organs – doing it with the same thing in each case.”<sup>15</sup> (184d-e) Surely, Theaetetus’ earlier readiness to affirm the verbal correction suggests that there is, indeed, a single part of us that is responsible for all of the perceptual acts and that the rejection of the Trojan Horse Model attests to that. Socrates continues and states the question that is the focus of this portion of the passage: “If the question is put to you, will you be able to refer everything of

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<sup>14</sup> The sentiment that only the user and not the maker of something is the proper knower of that thing (expressed in *Crat.* 390b, *Euthyd.* 290b-d, *Rep.* 10.601d ff.) is similar, insofar as we can imagine that the flute-player is the user of both the flute and the flute-maker, insofar as the player uses the maker to bring a good flute into being.

<sup>15</sup> “Τοῦδέ τοι ἔνεκα αὐτά σοι διακριβοῦμαι, εἴ τι νι ἡμῶν αὐτῶν τῷ αὐτῷ διὰ μὲν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐφικνούμεθα λευκῶν τε καὶ μελάνων, διὰ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων ἐτέρων αὖ τινῶν” (184d7-e2)

that sort to the body?”<sup>16</sup> (186e). The question is whether that “single part of us” responsible for our perceptual acts can be meaningfully ascribed to the body. Socrates had provisionally called the *mia idea* that unifies the perceptual capacities and the perceptual messages the “soul,” but it is left open whether the soul *qua* the agent of unification is itself corporeal.

Commentators tend to jump over this question about the body, assuming rather quickly that the presence of soul is established in the rejection of the Trojan Horse Model.<sup>17</sup> As a result, one of the dominant interpretations of the passage ascribes to Plato the very view that, as I will argue, is expressly rejected in the present section. I associate that view with Burnyeat, who argues for an explicitly dualist (cf. 1976a, 51) picture of human psychology, according to which the job of the soul is to recognize and put into words the deliverances of perception.<sup>18</sup>

That being said, it is not obvious what this question seeks and the fact that Socrates stops his train of thought to invite Theaetetus to participate in the investigation does not help. In the remainder of this portion of the passage (184d-185e), Socrates and Theaetetus go through two arguments that interrogate the extent of the body’s perceptual capabilities, concluding – in broad strokes – that those ascribable to the body alone do not suffice to capture our perceptual activities. The conclusion of this section comes with an agreement that there is a soul with its own activity, independent of the body. The soul’s independent activity is investigated in more detail in the third bit of the passage (186a-b). Yet, the steps that led to the idea that a soul is in

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<sup>16</sup> “καὶ ἕξεις ἐρωτώμενος πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα εἰς τὸ σῶμα ἀναφέρειν;” (186e2-3)

<sup>17</sup> In fact, McDowell (1973, 188) says that, in the course of the passage, Socrates speaks “misleadingly” as if it might remain an open question whether a particular sense can be responsible for the acts that he and Theaetetus will eventually ascribe to the soul.

<sup>18</sup> See esp. Burnyeat (1976a) but the interpretation is not significantly altered in (1990). What I go on, below, to call the Tunnel Model is probably closest to Cornford’s (1951) interpretation and Burnyeat’s (1990) Reading A, which he considers viable but ultimately rejects. That being said, Burnyeat (1976a) accepts the spatial dimension of the “*dia*” idiom even though he does not wish to take it literally (*ibid.*, 43-44, 46), thinks that the passage is ambiguous as to whether the soul is active or passive in perception (though he seems to me to ultimately advocate for passivity) (*ibid.*, 42-43), thinks that the soul has to interpret what is given to it in perception (my terminology, cf. *ibid.*, 47), and ultimately does not assign to the soul any job besides recognizing what the senses present and turning it into discursive content. I say a bit more about Burnyeat in n. 31 and in n. 52. The reasons I offered here for thinking that his view resembles the Tunnel Model will be made more intelligible once we go through sections 2 and 3.

charge of the body's capacities and that it also has its own activity independently of its association with the body are left tacit. My goal in this section is to explain what is at stake in Socrates' question regarding the epistemic sufficiency of the body, so that we can see how the two arguments presented in this section lead to the acknowledgment of a non-corporeal soul.

I propose to do this by using another image, what I call the Tunnel Model. This is meant to be a model of perceptual cognition that does not include a soul and as such may refer perceptual cognition to the body. In that sense, it is similar to the Trojan Horse Model. Contrary to that already rejected model however, the bodily capacities treated in the Tunnel Model are unified. Yet, they are not unified by being the tools of a directing soul, rather they are unified by converging at the same point. Imagine, that is, that each perceptual organ sat at one end of a tunnel, on the other side of which was a spot where all the tunnels converged.<sup>19</sup> Let us call this point the center of consciousness. Along the tunnels that correspond to each sense travel the perceptual messages, as I have been calling them, i.e. the colors, sounds, etc., and they do so unchanged. That is, they are received or grasped by the sense organs and as such they travel to the central location. Since the Tunnel Model requires that something gets grasped by the organs and ushered towards the centralized location, perceptual activity takes the shape of individual messages. Once there, a given message is in principle speakable or judgable. That is, the person or body can speak out the message ("red" or "*eruthron*") and they can do so because the message

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<sup>19</sup> For simplicity's sake, let us assume that the two eyes correspond to one tunnel rather than two (and the same for the two ears, and nostrils) and let us ignore the threat of infinity that accompanies the sense of touch. At any rate, one could imagine one tunnel per nerve ending without altering the picture.

made it to that centralized location.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the messages do not change makes it the case that the individual can have in view the actual features of the environment.

As mentioned, a salient feature of the Tunnel Model in contradistinction to the Trojan Horse Model is that the perceptual capacities are unified. But what about the unity of the perceptual messages? In the previous section, I argued that the possibility of the messages' unification is a consequence of the capacities' unification. Using the Tunnel Model as case study, in this section, I will argue that the unity of the perceptual messages that we get if we attribute the unity of the capacities to bodily features, like a centralized location, does not permit the unification of the messages and so cannot allow for the perception of unified objects. It is for that reason, I argue, that the Tunnel Model must be rejected and the soul-user included. With the sketch of the Tunnel Model in mind, let us turn to the text.

The first argument (184e8-185b9) proceeds in the following manner. It is agreed that it is through the body that we perceive the sensible qualities of the world (e.g., *therma kai sklēra kai koupha kai glukea*, 184e5) and, moreover, that each of these sense modalities is correlated with a perceptual capacity, in the sense that the messages of vision cannot be apprehended by the capacity for hearing, and so on. We could say that the tunnels on which each sense modality's messages travel are distinct, such that a color cannot travel through the ears' tunnel. A corollary of this is the admission that, if we can have thoughts about the messages of two sense modalities

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<sup>20</sup> Let us not worry about the question of what it is that travels: airwaves, triangles, words. Some of the issues adjudicated by answering it will be addressed in going over the text. Others are not important. What matters to me about the presentation and investigation of the Tunnel Model here is to grant that, at the end of the process, words that correctly label the experience may come out and that those words will make up the judgment that describes the perceptual experience. At any rate, Socrates implies that what the organs grasp is labeled in being grasped. He says: "Take the things by means of which you perceive things which are hot, hard, light, and sweet. You classify each of them as belonging to the body, don't you?" (184e4-6). For a defense of the claim that perceptual cognition includes "immediate labeling" cf. Cooper (1970), esp. 133 ff. My own view is in line with Cooper, precisely because the soul is the proper subject of perception. Yet, it should be emphasized that what we are now considering is a conception of perception that will be rejected and so, the fact that, on the correct conception of perception, there is immediate recognition or labeling of what it is that is perceived, is independent of what happens in the Tunnel Model. Finally, cf. *Tim.* 64b-c, for evidence that Plato has considered a (more complicated) version of the Tunnel Model elsewhere.



(*peri amphoterōn dianoēi*, 185a4), it would not be the achievement of either *organon*, like the eye or ear or vision and hearing (185a4-6).<sup>21</sup> In other words, no particular tunnel suffices to yield a complex, multi-sensory cognition. At this point, we can see why there might be a need for something to join the soldiers within the Trojan Horse.

It is then affirmed that we do, indeed, have such thoughts that involve the messages of multiple modalities. For example, we can think that two messages both are (*hoti amphoterō eston*, 185a9), that they are different from each other and same as themselves (*hoti hekateron hekaterou men heteron, heautōi de tauton*, 185a11-12), that together they are two and each one (*hoti amphoterō duo, hekateron de hen*, 185b2), and consider whether they are like or unlike each other (*eite anomoiō eite homoiō allēloin*, 185b4-5). Socrates concludes that it could not have been through either of the perceptual capacities involved that we have these thoughts. Alternatively, that the perceptual organs and their associated capacities are not such as to receive what is common (*oute ... hoion te to koinon lambanein peri autōn*, 185b7-9) among the messages of diverse sense modalities.<sup>22</sup> To emphasize, then: if we wish to see how it is that we can have thoughts about colors and sounds together, we had better not examine our eyes and ears because no one organ or tunnel is able to furnish a complex cognition. Each correlates to a different sense modality and neither is in a position to bring about a cognition shared in common by messages of two sense modalities.<sup>23</sup> While not explicitly said, this is an argument that

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<sup>21</sup> I follow Cooper (1970, 129n9) and Burnyeat (1990, 54n68), among others, in thinking that Socrates treats as interchangeable, on the one hand, the senses or perceptual capacities (like vision and hearing) and, on the other, the perceptual organs (like eye and ear).

<sup>22</sup> I wish to underscore that we should not assume that, because Socrates uses the receptive verb *lambanein* here, that our capacity to have the *koina* in view is passive. This is precisely what is at issue here and in fact, argued against. A similar point should be made for Theaetetus' use of *episkopein* in 185e2. On this point, cf. Lott (2011, 355).

<sup>23</sup> Similarly to my note above, I wish to stress that we should not assume that *ta koina* are imperceptible items, to be perceived by the mind's eye, as it were. As we will see below, Socrates will precisely show that there is no organ for reception of *koina*, which entails that neither the *koina* are entities to be received nor is the soul's independent activity a quasi-perceptual one. That the *koina* are thing-like and so quasi-perceptible in this way is the view taken by those who see in the *koina* evidence of the Theory of Forms, like Cornford (1951) and Chappell (2004). D. Frede (1989, 22) finds in the *koina* reference to the *Sophist's* "greatest kinds" (cf. 254b ff.). For the conception of *ousia* as the *copula*, cf. n. 31 and n. 53 below.

establishes the need for something to unify the tunnels and to underwrite the possibility of complex cognitions.

The second argument (185b9-185e9), as I will explain, considers whether a center of consciousness can do that work. Socrates asks which capacity would one use to investigate whether a color and a sound are both salty, to which Theaetetus responds “the capacity that’s exercised by means of the tongue” (185c).<sup>24</sup> Let us paraphrase this exchange: “SOC: Assuming that there is a color-*cum*-flavor and a sound-*cum*-flavor, what would you use to investigate what they have in common? THE: Since what they have in common is a flavor, I would use the capacity for taste.” Once this has been established, Socrates asks Theaetetus a more general version of the same question: Which capacity would you use to investigate “that which is common (*koinon*) to everything” (185c4-5)? He explains that notions like being and not being, as well as sameness and difference, likeness and unlikeness, and numbers (i.e. notions mentioned previously as inaccessible to any given sense organ) are among these *koina*. It is then elaborated that what Socrates wants to know is this: by the capacity associated with which organ (*dia tinos dunamis*) is it that one can have cognitions about those *koina*?<sup>25</sup> Theaetetus replies that there is no organ, understood in analogy to the perceptual organs, that is dedicated (*idion*) to the reception of being and the rest (185d). Theaetetus adds that it seems to him that the soul does

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<sup>24</sup> “...ἢ γε διὰ τῆς γλώττης δύναμις” (185c3)

<sup>25</sup> The complete sentence: “ἢ δὲ δὴ διὰ τίνος δύναμις τό τ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι κοινὸν καὶ τὸ ἐπὶ τούτοις δηλοῖ σοι, ᾧ τὸ ‘ἔστιν’ ἐπονομάξεις καὶ τὸ ‘οὐκ ἔστι’ καὶ ἅ νυνδὴ ἠρωτῶμεν περὶ αὐτῶν; τούτοις πᾶσι ποῖα ἀποδώσεις ὄργανα δι’ ὧν αἰσθάνεται ἡμῶν τὸ αἰσθανόμενον ἕκαστα;” (185c4-8). A literal translation: “The capacity by means of what is the capacity that will reveal to you that which is common to everything and to these things, that which you call the ‘is’ and the ‘is not’ and those things about them that we are inquiring about? To all of these, which organs will you assign, by means of which perceives that in us which perceives everything?” The formulation is complicated but the question is simple: what is the organ for being and the other *koina*? That this is the question asked is not controversial (cf. Burnyeat 1976a, 49; and more recently, Rowett 2018, 211-212).

that work by means of itself (185e).<sup>26</sup> Socrates applauds Theaetetus for thinking so, as that saves him from going into a long argument (185e5-6). Thus concludes this section of the text.

Let us now consider what it is that is achieved in this compressed argument. First, we have to recognize that the two arguments in this section have the same target. Socrates says that the second is another piece of evidence for the same point,<sup>27</sup> which suggests that the issue regarding multi-sensory thoughts or cognitions (i.e. whether colors and sounds both are or are not, that they are two, and so on) is the same issue as the one regarding flavors common to two items that belong to diverse perceptual capabilities and that is again the same as the issue regarding whether there is an *organon* for being, sameness and so on. We may conclude that what unites these is our capacity for complex cognitions, where this complexity is, in the first instance, a matter of having messages of multiple sense modalities in view at once. But at the same time, this complexity is a matter of having cognitions that involve the *koina*, even when there is only a single perceptual message at issue, as in the example of saying that a color is the same as itself. It should be evident that the issue of complex cognitions is the issue of objectivity: how it is that we perceive stable and unified objects and not momentary qualities.

Looking at the passage of the second section as a whole lets us conclude that one thing that is achieved by the second argument of the section is to show that there is no particular organ, analogous to the sense organs, that is responsible either for the reception of *koina* or for the generation of complex cognitions. In other words, our capacity to have cognitions that involve the *koina* is not a receptive one, requiring a dedicated organ, and the *koina* are not themselves items that can be received, like colors can. For if they were, an organ would be called for.

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<sup>26</sup> “ἔγωγε οὐκ ἂν ἔχοιμι εἰπεῖν, πλὴν γ’ ὅτι μοι δοκεῖ τὴν ἀρχὴν οὐδ’ εἶναι τοιοῦτον οὐδὲν τούτοις ὄργανον ἴδιον ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνοις, ἀλλ’ αὐτὴ δι’ αὐτῆς ἡ ψυχὴ τὰ κοινὰ μοι φαίνεται περὶ πάντων ἐπισκοπεῖν.” (185d6-e2).

<sup>27</sup> “ἔτι δὲ καὶ τόδε τεκμήριον περὶ οὗ λέγομεν” (185b8).

To understand what this conclusion amounts to and why Theaetetus' hunch is right, let us take a closer look at the salty colors and sounds example by employing our Tunnel Model. This is a helpful example because it does not target *ousia* (as such) and the other *koina*, whose mystique might be distracting. Imagine then that we have a color linked with a flavor and a sound linked with a different flavor. Given the first argument, which separated the tunnels, we can say that the color message travels through the vision tunnel, the sound message travels through the hearing tunnel, and the two flavors travel through the taste tunnel. Finally, all four arrive at the centralized location. How does that center of consciousness generate the complex cognition? That is, how are the four messages organized such that the color and the sound are connected to their respective flavors?

It is not clear what the answer to this question is. Even less clear is how that center could avoid putting together the color with the sound, leaving the two flavors dangling unlinked or, worse, tied together. It does not seem that there is anything preventing such mistakes, which means that it is entirely mysterious how a centralized location, which merely serves to join the tunnels, can give rise to the complex cognition that will correctly describe the experienced item. In fact, it seems that all that such a center of consciousness can do is yell out each individual, simple message it encounters. Thus, if there are multiple, as in this case, all it can do is yell each of them out in succession (“red” “salty” “middle-C” “sweet”) exhibiting a disconnect not unlike the one found in the Trojan Horse. If all that this center is capable of is the successive expression of simple messages, then it is not capable of the complex cognition that puts together a simple message with a *koinon* either. Therefore, the center of consciousness is not entitled to unified complex statements such as “Salty red,” “Red and middle-C are two,” “Red is the same as itself”

or even “Red is.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, we may conclude that the physical unity of the perceptual capacities provided by the centralized location does not suffice to capture how we have complex perceptual cognitions of the world around us, whether they involve messages from many sense modalities or just one. Therefore, the Tunnel Model is an inappropriate gloss of our psychology.<sup>29</sup>

Looking back at the question that introduced this portion of the text (184d-185e) and the two arguments we just went through, it is important to explain how it is that the rejection of the Tunnel Model made manifest that it cannot be the body that is responsible for our cognitions. The Tunnel Model is a thoroughly materialist model and, on account of this, seeks to explain the process by which we arrive at the judgments that describe our perceptual experience by appeal to mechanical causal chains. The eyes (*mutatis mutandis* for the other senses) glom onto visible features of the environment, which they seize on and then usher towards the centralized location. There, the messages will be turned into something stateable. The accomplishment of this process depends on nothing other than a body that is by definition such as to facilitate this process. On the assumption of such a body, any time that the eye encounters visible features, those features will necessarily be received, sent over to the centralized location, and spoken out. Of course, this would happen at every second, which means that humans would constantly be exclaiming every feature of their environment and, moreover, that they would do so in a fragmentary manner. This consequence of the Tunnel Model rings obviously false and suggests that what is needed is a soul that is not merely more selective about what it speaks about but more robustly in charge of itself; what is needed is a soul that is genuinely an agent, which can put together and organize its own

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<sup>28</sup> “Red is” is a very awkward English sentence but the corresponding Greek “*Eruthron esti*” is not. It is worth making explicit that even though I have been calling sentences of this sort “complex” this is only to distinguish them from the simple exclamations such as “Red.” I do not mean to imply – and in fact I have argued against – the idea that “being” is another item to be received by the centralized soul alongside the colors. That the workings of soul are presupposed even in these quasi-simple perceptual judgments (i.e. “Red is”) is also emphasized by Gill (2003, 164).

<sup>29</sup> Lee (1999) argues that the primary achievement of the whole first part of the *Theaetetus* is to show that *doxa* is active or spontaneous and not passive. This is in contrast to all of Plato’s predecessors including his present opponents, Protagoras and Heraclitus. On this point, cf. also Lott (2011, 354).

complex judgments in a principled manner. This is precisely what the next section of the Final Refutation passage endeavors to sketch. But before I move on, I wish to highlight certain aspects of the Tunnel Model, which will serve to contextualize its discussion.

The first feature I wish to draw attention to is that, despite its apparent sophistication, the Tunnel Model is hardly an improvement on the Trojan Horse Model. Recall that the primary limitation of the Trojan Horse Model was that the perceptual capacities were necessarily disconnected from one another. It followed from this that the contents of their activities were insurmountably separate, which means that multisensory complex cognitions are ruled out. Our examination of the Tunnel Model yielded the same result: complex cognitions are not possible, except arbitrary ones made on the basis of no principle. Adopting the language of the *Timaeus*, they are “haphazard and disorderly,” if possible at all.

I had said in the preceding section that the Trojan Horse Model was the one presupposed by the Protagorean Secret Doctrine. We can now qualify that statement to include the Tunnel Model, since both are consistent with that theory. The Tunnel Model’s requirement that sense organs give rise to perceptual experience simply in virtue of the fact that theyglom onto and receive their respective sensible features is precisely the kind of requirement presupposed in the claim that the perceiving thing and the perceived object (sense organ and sensed quality) enjoy an intimate connection. And since the fact that the perceptual messages have to travel in order to be spoken out does not imply a substantive difference, it would not be far from the truth to say that perception happens at the organ, as in the Trojan Horse Model. My suggestion is that the relativist position requires a materialist model of perception that reduces all psychic activity to material events.

Another reason that the Tunnel Model is consistent with the relativist position is that it leaves no room for false judgments. This is the second feature I wanted to touch on. I introduced the assumption that whatever it is that travels through the tunnels will be faithful to the object it comes from and will travel to the centralized location unchanged. This assumption allows for the resulting linguistic expression to be likewise faithful. However, it not only allows for that but makes it necessarily the case. For, how could a non-faithful judgment result from a process that simply repackages a perceptual content into a linguistic one? It seems that something would have to go wrong in the material process; for example, that the message gets corrupted as it travels. But if something like this is possible, then true perceptual judgments are no longer secure. Moreover, the unprincipled, haphazard complex cognitions, which are the result of mis-coupling the simple perceptions, are not false judgments; they are nonsensical conjunctions of words. Recall that, if the Model permits that the flavor of the sound is switched with the flavor of the color to generate two false couples, then it also permits the coupling of the two flavors. The linguistic expression of that coupling would be a nonsensical string of words. Thus, falsehood is treated as no different from nonsense and, indeed, there is no explanation for either. That the Tunnel Model rules out falsehood is good evidence that it is compatible with relativism.

I turn now to the centralized location, which is the third aspect I wish to remark on. I have been calling this point of convergence the center of consciousness, in part because it seems to me that the notion of a center of consciousness, understood as a place where information is surveyed, requires something like the perceptual tunnels to supply the information. Yet the question of whether this centralized location can be viewed as conscious in any significant sense is precisely what is at stake in Socrates' question about the corporeality of the soul.

The version of the Tunnel Model that I have outlined does away with consciousness altogether. The perceptual messages along with the mechanical infrastructure of the perceptible system together suffice for the environmental features to be repackaged in linguistic garb. It is as if the perceptual messages were themselves already in linguistic guise as they were traversing the tunnels and all that happened at the centralized location was that they were conjoined with other messages and, thus, put into the same judgment. I already argued that the Tunnel Model is not actually entitled to the complex judgments. What I wish to point out presently is that the model does not change even if we assume that the messages only become linguistic upon arrival at the centralized location. Most sense-data theories of perception take this two-step route, according to which whatever it is that is given in perception<sup>30</sup> is measured against the person's conceptual scheme to yield an identifying label, like "red" or "maroon." However, a conceptual scheme is already existent within the person and the way that it will taxonomize perceptual content is predetermined. The task of matching a perceptual given to a conception, which is associated with a linguistic label, is still a task that occurs automatically. My point is that the fact that the person's infrastructure takes over an additional task does not suffice to introduce any more consciousness into the Tunnel Model. If the conception of soul defended in the Final Refutation Argument were one according to which its job in perception was simply to classify perceptual content in accordance with a conceptual scheme, then this would be a conception of soul as corporeal and perceptual activities could be referred to the body. As we will see even more clearly in the next section, this is not the conception of soul defended.

I end this section by stating once more our conclusions. We saw that individual perceptual tunnels cannot generate complex cognitions. We saw that individual tunnels plus a centralized location also cannot generate complex cognitions. We concluded from this that the

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<sup>30</sup> Famously, Wilfrid Sellars (1956) argued that the perceptual given is a myth.



activities that we would normally categorize as activities of an intelligent soul do not presuppose an *organon*, conceived on the analogy of the perceptual tunnels. Therefore, it appears that the idea of tunnels was not helpful in accounting for our intellectual activities in perception, much less our non-perceptual intellectual activities. It seems to me that it follows from this that we are meant to reject the receptive Tunnel Model completely and conceive of our epistemic activities differently.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, we should not assume that the Tools Metaphor describes a view of our epistemic psychology according to which the soul is a surveyor of messages that were given to it by the body. Instead, we should appreciate that we have been primed to anticipate a conception of soul as a genuine agent that is active rather than passive and which is responsible for organizational activities. Therefore, we might echo Ryle (2002, 232-233) and say the following:

“A person listening or looking is doing something which he would not do, if he were deaf or blind; or, what is quite different, if he were absent-minded, distracted or quite uninterested; or, what is quite different again, if he had not learned to use his ears and eyes. Observing is using one’s ears and eyes. But using one’s ears and eyes does not entail using, in a different sense, one’s visual and auditory sensations as clues. It makes no sense to speak of ‘using’ sensations.”

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<sup>31</sup> I already mentioned in n. 18 that Burnyeat’s influential (1976a) paper advocated a view consistent with the Tunnel Model, in which the soul surveyed the perceptual information given to it. The soul according to Burnyeat does the recognitional work of the conceptual scheme, which I tried to show is inadequate. That being said, he rightly bemoans that this view of our psychology is not recognizably alive (ibid., 51). Yet, it is likely that Burnyeat would protest my claim that the sole job he assigns to the soul is that of concept application. I say this because it is possible that he would think that the fact that he takes *ousia* to be an abstraction from the *copula* (cf. ibid., 44) means that the activity of the soul is more complicated. However, given that 1. he resists both the view according to which *ousia* is something to be perceived by the mind’s eye (Cornford’s) and the view according to which the *copula* serves to import objectivity or confirm reality (Cooper’s; I say more about this view in section 4 and n. 53 below) and given that 2. he does not believe that (what I have been calling) the perceptual messages come in the shape of judgeable content, it is not clear to me that cashing out *ousia* as the *copula* achieves – for him – anything beyond establishing that the soul conceptualizes perceptual messages and can thereby issue judgments about them.

### Section 3 – Elaborating on the Independent Activity of the Soul (186a-b)

Recalling that the investigation of our psychology is in service to the argument, outlined at the beginning of the chapter, that will definitively refute the proposed definition of knowledge as perception, we should observe that we have already encountered the notion of *ousia*, operative in Premises 2 and 3 (2: Attainment of *alētheia* presupposes grasp of *ousia*; 3: Perception cannot grasp *ousia*). *Ousia* was a component of those acts that was shown to not be attributable to the body and for which there is no corresponding bodily organ. In the immediately preceding section of the passage (184d-185e), we saw that this justifies the postulation of a soul, responsible for generating judgments and synthesizing complex cognitions in the manner of a user of tools. We also saw that the soul is responsible even for simple cognitions or judgments of perceptual experience. I had suggested previously that the abandonment of the Tunnel Model is tantamount to a rejection of the idea that our judgments are the predetermined products of material events. Genuine human beings put together their own judgments and are themselves responsible for them, which opens up the possibility that those judgments misrepresent reality and as such are false. It follows that truth in judgment is not a given shared by all but an achievement that has to be won. In this section of the passage, Socrates and Theaetetus focus on the independent activity of the soul to make some way towards clarifying its connection to *epistēmē*.

Having praised Theaetetus for forthcomingly asserting that there are intellectual tasks that the soul accomplishes without the body (186e), Socrates resumes the thread of the argument and engages Theaetetus in an exercise of classification. He will propose to him certain notions and ask him about each whether it is one of the things that the soul can navigate on its own (picking up on *ta men autē di' hautēs hē psuchē [phainetai] episkopein* just above, 185e6-7) or whether it is one for which the aid of the body is required (*ta de dia tōn tou somatōs dunameōn*,

185e7). He lists here *ousia*, likeness and unlikeness, same and different, beautiful and ugly, good and bad (186a), all of which Theaetetus classifies on the side of the soul's independent activity.

With these preliminary distinctions about the dependent and independent activities of the soul, Socrates invites Theaetetus to apply their insights on an example. We have access to “hardness” and “softness,” they agree, through the perceptual capacities (186b3). But, they go on, the soul does not rely on the body to consider “the being, that they both are, their opposition to each other, and the being of this opposition” (186b6-7).<sup>32</sup> Those would be classified on the side of the soul's independent activity.

There are a few things to notice in this brief case study. First, that there is a dual aspect in the soul's activity. It uses the body to access the sensible features of the environment – the hardness of the table, for example – and it carries out its own independent activity to consider the “being” of those features – what hardness is.<sup>33</sup> If we had not already rejected the purely receptive Tunnel Model, which casts the soul in the role of surveyor and facilitator, we might be inclined to say that what Socrates describes here is the movement of perceptual messages, like “hardness,” through the tactile tunnel towards the center of consciousness where the soul identifies them, by subsuming the perceptual message under the concept whose *ousia* describes it, finally issuing a perceptual judgment (or exclamation as the case may be): “Hard.”

But since we have rejected the Tunnel Model, we ought not to say so. Recalling that the soul is the user of the body, it is more appropriate to say that the soul and its characteristic independent activity is present throughout the body's acts of sensation. Like a competent user of an industrial drill, who can feel what sort of material is before them in manipulating the drill and

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<sup>32</sup> “Σ: Ἐχε δὴ ἄλλο τι τοῦ μὲν σκληροῦ τὴν σκληρότητα διὰ τῆς ἐπαφῆς αἰσθήσεται, καὶ τοῦ μαλακοῦ τὴν μαλακότητα ὡσαύτως; Θ: Ναί. Σ: Τὴν δέ γε οὐσίαν καὶ ὅτι ἐστὸν καὶ τὴν ἐναντιότητα πρὸς ἀλλήλω καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς ἐναντιότητος αὐτῆ ἢ ψυχῆ ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἄλληλα κρίνειν πειρᾶται ἡμῖν.” (186b2-9)

<sup>33</sup> Cooper (1970, 129) notes that our passage makes two distinctions. First, the contribution of the body vs. the soul in perceptual judgment and second, what the soul does in perception vs. what it does in its own activity. We see the second distinction here.

adjusting their movements and the drill's settings accordingly, the soul is aware of the colors in front of it as soon as the eye gains access to them. This is so because the soul has some prior understanding of what hardness is, like the laborer has a prior understanding of what it is like to work with different sorts of materials. I will have more to say about this understanding below. For now, notice that the Tools Metaphor makes it the case that the soul's dual activity in using the body and grasping *ousia* constitutes a single activity and not a two-step one: An understanding of what hardness is is what makes it the case that the soul perceives, through the body, the hardness of the surface. The soul is neither told by the body that it encounters hardness, as the Tunnel Model would have it, nor does it arbitrarily decide to label a sensation as one of hardness, as a completely dualist picture would require. Rather, the soul knows how to discern hardness and how to employ the body so as to be able to tell that hardness is before it.<sup>34</sup>

Let us now try to elaborate on the independent activity of the soul and what I have been calling its understanding, which permits it to be the body's director. As mentioned, characteristic to the soul's activity is its consideration of the *ousia* of notions like hardness, rather than its derivative capacity to encounter it through the body. In 186a2-3, Socrates had said that *ousia* belongs "preeminently" (*malista*) among the items proper to the soul (insofar as it is the preeminent *koinon*) and Theaetetus had included "beautiful and ugly and good and bad" among that preeminent group (*malista*, 186a9-10). Let us begin with *ousia* and specifically, with reflecting on Socrates' use of the noun rather than adjectival form – 'hardness' (*sklerotēs*, 186b2). It is worth remarking that Socrates uses the noun form both in characterizing what it is that the soul considers in its proper activity as well as what it perceives in its derivative activity, bolstering the thought that the soul's own activity directs the activity of perception. This is in

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<sup>34</sup> My suggestion is broadly in line with M. Frede's (1987), namely, that the soul is responsible for asking and answering two sets of questions, for (only) one of which it requires the employment of the body (6-7).

stark contrast to the Protagorean conception of perceptual activity outlined in the Secret Doctrine. In recounting it, Socrates had emphasized, but without explaining, that what is perceived is “not whiteness but white” (*ou leukotēs au alla leukon*, 156e6).<sup>35</sup> This difference in the two accounts of perception presented in the dialogue suggests that something important is being tracked by the verbal distinction, especially considering that, prior to the establishment of a non-corporeal soul, Socrates had used the adjectival form to refer to that which is grasped by the perceptual organs.<sup>36</sup>

Socrates appeals to a similar contrast between occupying oneself with adjectives and nouns in the Ethical Digression (172c-177b) passage, in which he juxtaposes the sophist and the philosopher. In describing the philosopher, Socrates says that:

“He’s oblivious not only of what [his neighbor] is doing, but almost of whether he’s a man (*ei anthrōpos estin*) or another creature. But as for the question what, exactly, a man is (*ti de pot’ estin anthrōpos*), and what it’s distinctively characteristic of such a nature to do or undergo (*poiein ē paschein*), that’s something he does ask and takes pains to inquire into.” (174b).<sup>37</sup>

The distinction here is not quite between that of grammatical categories but it functions as such. What the philosopher does not occupy himself with is mere application of predicates: how to correctly identify or label various things in the world. What he does occupy himself with is the

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<sup>35</sup> More accurately, it is the offspring generated by the contact of the two “parent” motions, corresponding to the eye and the stone, that is “not whiteness but white.” The same is said to hold of the other offspring, the eye comes to be “seeing” (*ou ti opis all’ ophthalmos horōn*, 156e4). I say that talk of offspring is more accurate than talk of items perceived because the Secret Doctrine understands perception as the fact of a relation brought about by causal events. As such, it is not genuinely an experience of an ensouled entity like a human being. I use the language of perception above because this is not the place to settle the issue of perception in the Secret Doctrine. Burnyeat (1976a, 43-44) also refers back to this line in the Secret Doctrine but takes the advance of the new locution to be only that the thing perceived is independent of the perceiver.

<sup>36</sup> “θερμὰ καὶ σκληρὰ καὶ κοῦφα καὶ γλυκέα δι’ ὧν αἰσθάνη, ἄρα οὐ τοῦ σώματος ἕκαστα τίθης;” (184e5-6).

<sup>37</sup> “τῷ γὰρ ὄντι τὸν τοιοῦτον ὁ μὲν πλησίον καὶ ὁ γείτων λέληθεν, οὐ μόνον ὅτι πράττει, ἀλλ’ ὀλίγου καὶ εἰ ἀνθρώπος ἐστὶν ἢ τι ἄλλο θρέμμα: τί δέ ποτ’ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος καὶ τί τῆ τοιαύτη φύσει προσήκει διάφορον τῶν ἄλλων ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν, ζητεῖ τε καὶ πράγματ’ ἔχει διερευνώμενος.” (174b1-6)

being or nature of the predicative categories: not whether someone is a human being but what a human being is. I take it that the difference in these questions tracks the difference between adjectives and nouns. Thus, we might say that the Protagorean account characterizes the perceiver as one who is in a position to predicate of a stone that it is white, whereas the Socratic account characterizes the perceiver as one who is in a position to make that predication because she has given some thought to what whiteness is.

A related passage from the Ethical Digression indicates that the sophist asks predicative questions of the sort “is the king happy?” whereas the philosopher asks substantive questions about happiness and its opposite. Socrates explains that asking those questions amounts to asking “what sort of thing each of the two is, and what way it’s fitting (*prosēkei*) for human nature to obtain the one and avoid the other.” (175c)<sup>38</sup> We can glean from these two passages that to investigate the *ousia* of something is to investigate what is “fitting” or appropriate to that thing’s essence, which is in turn cashed out as an investigation into what that thing can do and undergo. Alternatively, and looking back at the theme of complex cognitions, we can say that this investigation is about what linguistic terms the term that stands for that thing is such as to combine with on account of what it is. The unity, then, of the resulting complex judgment, say, about gold and humanity, is supposed to reflect the way that our essence combines, or unites, with the essence of gold. The judgment is true if it does reflect it and false if it does not. In either case, the judgment presupposes that it does reflect that unity and is made on that basis.

Contrasting the acts of predication that derive from consideration of essence with those that do not lets us see that the soul’s contemplation of *ousia* stands for the introduction of

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<sup>38</sup> Here is the extended passage (on the sophist’s attempting the philosophical activity): “ὅταν [...] ἐθελήσῃ τις αὐτῷ ἐκβῆναι ἐκ τοῦ [...] ‘εἰ βασιλεὺς εὐδαίμων,’ ‘κεκτημένος τ’ αὖ χρυσίον,’ βασιλείας περὶ καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης ὅλως εὐδαιμονίας καὶ ἀθλιότητος ἐπὶ σκέψιν, ποίῳ τέ τινε ἐστὸν καὶ τίνα τρόπον ἀνθρώπου φύσει προσήκει τὸ μὲν κτήσασθαι αὐτοῖν, τὸ δὲ ἀποφυγεῖν [...] πάλιν αὖ τὰ ἀντίστροφα ἀποδίδωσιν.” (175b8-d2)

standards for correctness, both in perception and not. It is not merely the case that the soul has a prior familiarity with hardness or whiteness, conceptions of which it then applies to the messages dispatched by the bodily organs. Rather, it applies predicates cognizant of the fact that that predicative act is subject to standards that will determine whether the predication is apt and that those standards are not up to the soul but set by the *ousiai* under consideration. Crucially, the fact that the soul, in its independent and characteristic activity, contemplates the *ousia* of the various predicative concepts indicates that the soul has set the task of satisfying those standards on itself. This is important to underscore because it shows that the soul's activity, both in perception and not, is self-conscious; the soul is aware of what it is doing and is concerned to do it correctly, where doing it correctly amounts to being faithful to independent standards.

Acknowledging this point enhances our understanding of the Tools Metaphor, for just like the skilled user of tools seeks to meet certain standards for carrying out their activity correctly, the soul aims to get it right about the perceptible environment. Hence, a feature of the Tools Metaphor that I have left thus far tacit is brought to the fore: the user's activity is teleologically organized. The soul's activity is structured by its self-imposed aims and is not determined by extrinsic factors; it is not adrift to be tossed around, but sets its own agenda.<sup>39</sup>

That the activity of the soul is not left at chance is attested also by the verbs that Socrates and Theaetetus use to characterize it. Socrates says that the soul "tries to discriminate" or decide (*krinein peiratai*, 186b8-9) the being of the concepts it uses. Similarly, Theaetetus had said that

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<sup>39</sup> While a number of commentators (e.g., M. Frede 1987 and Kanayama 1987) emphasize that it is characteristic to the soul's activity to ask questions and try to answer them, they do not characterize this activity as teleological. Kanayama has talked about *ousia* as an aim but, in a telling footnote (ibid., 62n56), notes that Burnyeat suggested to him an alternative option, namely, that the soul acts simply "in accordance with" *ousia*. Burnyeat's endorsement of a version of the Tunnel Model is surely what prevents him from countenancing teleology here. Lott (2011, 360) comes closest to my own view, as he argues that the point of the passage is to show that belief-formation is a goal-directed activity "directed at grasping objectively obtaining facts," i.e. how things are. Yet, he fails to thematize the future, as I do below, and thus cashes out belief-formation (and ultimately the task of knowledge) as a grasp of reality. As I see the matter, this does not sufficiently distinguish him from an advocate of the Tunnel Model. That being said, he rightly argues that the goal of truth is intrinsic to the soul (ibid., 359).

the soul “strives after” (*eporegetai*, 186a4-5) being. In contrast to the language of passive reception (e.g., *lambanein*, 185b8) that was operative in the preceding section, we are here told that, in being active, the soul is concerned to accomplish something, to do something well or correctly. Thus, the soul manages to issue correct judgments, because it has considered the *ousia* of the notions it makes use of in judgment and that, in turn, because it has imposed standards for its own activity. Contemplation of *ousia*, then, stands for the soul's conscious acknowledgement that there are standards of correctness. Thus, we may characterize the soul's activity as a pursuit of truth, where the success of that pursuit is not given but has to be earned.

Before we investigate further the goals that structure the soul's teleological activity, let us consider in more detail the task of that activity, that is, what the soul does in order to achieve its goals. I have been using placeholder verbs like ‘consider’ and ‘contemplate’ but Socrates and Theaetetus use these: *skopeisthai* (186a11), *analogizesthai* (186a11), *epanienai* (186b8), *sumballein* (186b8). There are a few notable aspects to those verbs. First, *skopeō* in the middle voice indicates deliberate contemplation,<sup>40</sup> which supports the thought that the soul is not passively contemplating but actively investigating. Second, *epanienai* indicates that the soul's activity is a repeated one, such that the soul continuously revisits and reviews its understanding of the *ousia* of things. Finally and most importantly, *analogizesthai* and *sumballein* specify that what the soul does to achieve its goals is to carry out comparisons by putting things together.<sup>41</sup> More specifically, it is stated explicitly that what the soul does is to “calculate in itself (*analogizomenē*) things past and present in relation to things in the future.” (186a11-b1).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> cf. LSJ A.II

<sup>41</sup> The mathematical associations of *analogizesthai* might suggest that the goal of the soul is to effect, in judgment, something akin to harmonic unity. Indeed, if we revert back to our example of flavorful colors and sounds, we might say that the soul is occupied to find the right proportion of the four items involved. But this is speculation.

<sup>42</sup> “καὶ τούτων [καλὸν καὶ αἰσχροὺν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακόν] μοι δοκεῖ ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα πρὸς ἄλληλα σκοπεῖσθαι τὴν οὐσίαν, ἀναλογιζομένη ἐν αὐτῇ τὰ γεγονότα καὶ τὰ παρόντα πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα.” (186a10-b1)



In order to gain a better grasp of what those tasks involve, we should first recall that, when the soul considers the *ousia* of something, it does not consider it in isolation. Socrates and Theaetetus both suggest that the soul's contemplation of the being of hardness, for example, is at the same time a case of contemplating the being of softness. Theaetetus says that beautiful and ugly are considered in relation to each other (186a)<sup>43</sup> and Socrates emphasizes that implicit in the soul's investigation into the *ousia* of a contrary is the recognition that it has a contrary (186b).<sup>44</sup> The suggestion, I take it, is that each contrary is to be understood with reference to the other, which implies that their opposition is constitutive of what each of them is: to be hard is to not be soft; when it is true to say of something that it is hard, it is false to say of the same thing that it is soft. *Qua* constitutive of the concept, that opposition is also constitutive of the standards for correctness for the use of the concept.

More generally, it seems that the soul enriches its understanding of particular concepts, like beauty, and how to apply them by placing them in a context of other concepts, like ugliness or goodness. We may conclude that when the soul engages in comparisons, it clarifies its overall conceptual scheme by ensuring that all the conceptual categories whose being it recognizes are represented. I mean, for example, that the soul will make sure not to identify beauty with goodness or it will have trouble separating ugliness from other kinds of badness. Another case: the soul notes the dissimilarity between hard wax and hard walls, such that it can say that the hard wax is soft in comparison to the hard walls and yet is still hard. The organization of concepts makes it the case that the soul is aware of what it denies with each of its assertions and how its statements are inferentially related to other possible ones.

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<sup>43</sup> cf. immediately preceding n. 42.

<sup>44</sup> “τὴν δὲ γε οὐσίαν καὶ ὅτι ἐστὸν καὶ τὴν ἐναντιότητα πρὸς ἀλλήλω καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς ἐναντιότητος αὐτῆ ἢ ψυχῇ ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἄλληλα κρίνειν πειρᾶται ἡμῖν.” (186b6-9)

Consistently engaging in such practice ensures that the soul's conceptual scheme will be coherent. But, as I hope to show, it is crucial that a well-organized system is not the soul's goal but only a corollary. To put the same point differently: a conceptual scheme is not the proper cause of a given judgment but only a contributory cause. Theaetetus says that the soul compares past and present, on the one hand, with the future, on the other. The idea seems to be that the soul matches the present instance of what it perceives with an item from its already curated conceptual scheme, thus using its past experience to label the present impression. Yet, that takes care of only one side of the comparison, the past and present, and leaves out the future.

To appreciate that mention of the future is not trivial, it is worth remarking that the Tunnel Model has neither room nor use for the future. Perception, in that materialist picture, meant that the perceptual message is pushed through to the centralized location where it is subsumed under a concept. We might characterize the subsumption as a case of comparing the past (the scheme) with the present (the message). In that picture then, a perceptual judgment was constituted by an application of the conceptual scheme – a match of present to past – which means that the future is completely outside the scope of the psychic activity. In the picture suggested by the Tools Metaphor, by contrast, the subsumption of perceptual messages to ready-made concepts is simply what it is for the body to be subservient to the soul. It explains the fact that it is possible for us to be immediately and effortlessly able to describe our perceptual experience. Yet, there is no constraint in the Tools Metaphor that the soul's activity is confined to checking and classifying the messages picked up by the body, which means that it is possible for the future to have a place in the soul's specific contribution to acts of judgment. This should go some way towards showing that a coherent conceptual scheme, no matter how neat or fine-grained, will not suffice to establish the soul's activity.

To better understand the role of the future in the soul's independent activity we should consider the role it has played in the dialogue thus far. The Tools Metaphor, Socrates' verb choice in describing the soul's activity, and the notion of standards of correctness have already given us reason to think that the acts of soul are teleologically structured, that they have a point, which they aim to achieve. Importantly, the idea of the future itself has been linked to the satisfaction of teleological norms in one of Socrates' most definitive arguments<sup>45</sup> against the Protagorean position.<sup>46</sup> In the Future Argument (177c-179b), as I call it, Socrates claims that the idea of the useful or beneficial (*to óphelimon*) is "surely something to do with the future" (178a)<sup>47</sup> and he explains this by noting that we do various things, for example, lay down laws, for the sake of a future benefit. Surely, this is not enough to establish that the future marks, in all cases, teleology. But the fact that this comes in response to Protagoras' contention that justice is a matter of convention supports the thought that at least in our dialogue,<sup>48</sup> it is the case. For, Socrates gets Protagoras' stand-in Theodorus to concede that a conventional law will have failed to establish justice if it does not benefit the city (177e), thereby getting him to agree that conventions are objects of evaluation and indeed, with respect to whether they achieve their goal. This means, on the one hand, that justice cannot simply be a matter of entrenched legislation and,

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<sup>45</sup> Theodorus says that the Future Argument (along with the Self-Refutation of Protagoras (169d-171d)) is the most decisive argument against the Protagorean position (179b). Much like the Tunnel Model, Protagoras has no way of accounting for the future and thus has to concede that not everyone's judgments about it are equally authoritative.

<sup>46</sup> Both Kanayama (1987, 70) and Lott (2011, 356) refer back to the Future Argument but they do not do so for the sake of adducing evidence for teleology in the dialogue, but rather evidence for the fact that what is given in present perception is insufficient for making predictions about future events (because it only gives the present instance). In my view, the Future Argument does not merely establish that expertise is required for successful predictions, as they do, but rather that each expertise is oriented to its respective good, which is what permits it to be authoritative about the future.

<sup>47</sup> "εἰ περὶ παντός τις τοῦ εἶδους ἐρωτῶη ἐν ᾧ καὶ τὸ ὠφέλιμον τυγχάνει ὄν: ἔστι δέ που καὶ περὶ τὸν μέλλοντα χρόνον." (178a6-8).

<sup>48</sup> Not only in this dialogue. In the *Charmides*, where the possibility of a happy super-seer of sorts is considered, i.e. someone who has perfect knowledge of all past, present, and future events and is happy, it is concluded that such a person is happy on account of his knowledge of good and evil. Importantly, and as I read the passage, a grasp of good and evil belongs to every science as such and it is what allows it to be oriented towards its respective good (173e-174d, esp. 174c). Thus, the super-seer is not made happy on account of his predictive capabilities but rather on account of what he shares in common with all knowers: the architectonic structure of benefits in their craft's purview – what the good is and how to bring it about.

on the other, that the possibility of assessment according to standards of correctness requires a teleological structure.

What the future stands for, I conclude, is the idea of accomplishment, of doing something with an eye to satisfying certain standards. I do not think that a teleological structure requires extension over time, but I recognize that presenting it that way makes more evident the idea that success at doing something (putting together a legislative item or a meaningful judgment) does not suffice, on its own, to satisfy a norm (justice or truth). Yet, I think the presentation of teleology in temporal terms obscures the fact that the future goal defines the present attempts to satisfy it. I mean that successes are not only preceded by attempts but create them. Descriptions of the world, for example, are transformed into something that may be evaluated in terms of truth precisely because being true is what they aim to accomplish.<sup>49</sup> That being said, I take it that this retroactive transformation is precisely what mention of the future means to capture in the Final Refutation Argument: all of the soul's activities, in perception and not, are driven by the concern to satisfy the norm of correctness and they are such as to be evaluable by that norm precisely because they are made for the sake of satisfying it. In short, the soul goes through the trouble of applying predicative labels in pursuit of speaking the truth.

We can now appreciate that a genuinely unifying soul, like the one outlined in the Tools Metaphor, makes it the case that the object of perception is itself a unity and, indeed, that this is a consequence of the fact that the soul is itself oriented towards understanding unity and getting it right. If it is the case that the soul's activity, in all cases, is driven by truth, then we can say that, in coming into contact with the world, the soul seeks the unity of the perceptual messages. Importantly, what happens is not that the soul receives self-standing messages, which it proceeds to conjoin, as the Tunnel Model would have it. Rather, the messages received by the soul are

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<sup>49</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the idea of truth as norm, cf. Anscombe (2011).

already in a shape so as to be unified in a complex cognition, or judgment. They come in that shape because the soul looks for them as such, that is, as components of unified cognitions. In the Tunnel Model, the soul was an armchair soul, as it were. Perceptible qualities would knock on its door and it would have to figure out how to put them together. In the Tools Metaphor, the soul embarks on perceptual expeditions. It wishes to know how hard the table is or whether the bird on the beach is a plover. Thus, it seems appropriate to say that, in perception, the soul makes use of its understanding of the capacities that things like tables and plovers have to make themselves available to our perceptual capacities. This is to say, at the same time, that the soul has an understanding of its own body's capacities. And this is precisely the sense in which the perceptual capacities are tools of the soul and not some other kind of contributory cause: the soul knows how to use them in order to achieve its goals.

One thing to note explicitly is that this goal of unity is a formal one. That is, it is not the sort of goal that one might choose for oneself. Just as one cannot choose to have a soul, so it is not up to a person to choose to be oriented towards cognitive unity. That is why no one has to strain their eyes to see a table as something more than the conjunction of brown and hard. It is simply what it is for us to have human intellectual capacities, for it is what permits us to have complex cognitions that are genuinely descriptive of the world, whether successfully or not. And yet, I wish to argue, Plato's preferred epistemology in the *Theaetetus*, hinges on the possibility that that goal may also be chosen. In the remainder of this section and as segue for the next one, I argue for this claim by bringing the Midwife Metaphor (148e-151b) to bear on our passage.

Let us begin with the following observations. First, that the *mia idea* Socrates appeals to, in the first section (184d3), stands at the same time both for the soul and for the complex cognition it has put together. Second, that the complex cognitions characteristic of the human

being are the outcome of each soul's capacity for unity. Together, they indicate that a given person's individuality is revealed in the judgments they make. That is because what they pay attention to and the judgments they are inclined to make are indicative of what they care about. This intimacy between person and judgment justifies Socrates' practice of midwifery insofar as it explains how it can be that someone's judgment may rightly be called their offspring.

In light of everything that has to go on in order for a judgment to be generated, we are also in a position to explain why it is that only some people and not others are pregnant in the Socratic sense. It makes sense, that is, to say that the more *sumballein* and *analogizesthai* underlie a judgment, the more that judgment resembles the kind that Socrates would be interested in delivering. Relatedly, we can also explain why a particular offspring may be "reared" or why it can potentially "miscarry" (150e) later in life. It is because past judgments must be continuously negotiated and remain up for revision (*epanienai*) in light of new facts and because past insights contribute to the standard of correctness for future judgments.

What is of particular interest about the Midwife Metaphor to my purposes here is that Socrates specifically says that what distinguishes a genuine offspring from a windegg is truth and falsity (150c). A corollary of the entire theme of midwifery is that those with viable offspring are better positioned with respect to knowledge than those whose offspring are proven to be windeggs and that both of those are better positioned than those who never engage in Socratic midwifery, whether that is because they refuse to or because they were never pregnant.<sup>50</sup> So, if those at the top of that hierarchy are those whose beliefs and judgments are generally true and if being in that condition presupposes perpetual *analogizesthai*, then it seems that those who are best positioned to be knowers are those whose intellectual activity is oriented towards the truth

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<sup>50</sup> Evidence that the one carrying a windegg is higher up on the hierarchy than the one who is not pregnant is that they have undertaken the task that would result in a genuine pregnancy: they have aimed for the truth. For more on why a genuinely false judgment is itself an achievement, cf. Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

and who manage to get it right. Yet, given that our intellectual capacities are by nature oriented towards the truth, in order for those distinctions among individuals to be drawn, it must be the case that to “experience the pains of labor” (148e) is to self-consciously engage in the activities marked by *analogizesthai*, *sumballein*, *skopeisthai*, and *epanienai*. In other words, it must be possible for someone to purposefully – and not merely formally – strive for the truth and it seems that it is that person that Plato would be willing to call a knower.

The significance of the fact that it is possible for one to make truth their own chosen goal will be made clearer in the following section. But we are presently in a position to see why attainment of *alētheia* presupposes grasp of *ousia*, which is Premise 2 of the Final Refutation Argument. I argued in this section that the activity of our soul is defined by a teleologically organized striving for truth. This striving task takes the form of understanding *ousia* and issuing judgments that reflect that understanding. According to my interpretation, *alētheia* presupposes *ousia* because pursuit of *ousia* is how the goal of *alētheia* is attained. And as we saw, this pursuit in turn presupposes that the soul is at the helm of the body and the perceptual capacities. The body on its own cannot pursue *ousia*, both because it lacks an *organon* for that and because it lacks inherent orientation. And if it is the case that the body contributes in some way to the pursuit of *ousia*, that is precisely because it is subservient to the soul. It would be at least misleading, if not entirely inappropriate, to suggest that, for that reason, perception grasps *ousia*. I say a bit more about where the Tools Metaphor leaves the capabilities of the body below.

#### **Section 4 – A Note on Education (186b-c)**

There is a sense in which we have everything we need in order to refute the definition of knowledge as perception. Contemplation of *ousia* is the characteristic and independent activity of the soul and it is by succeeding in that activity that we may rightly be said to have gained a

grasp of the truth. As Socrates says in setting out the argument proper, knowledge is to be found in our reasoning (*sullogismōi*, 186d3). The last bit of our passage does not add anything to Socrates' argument but it juxtaposes the independent activity with that for perception, which should serve to complete the account. Here is the passage:

“So there are some things which both men and animals are able by nature to perceive from the moment they're born: namely, the experiences which reach the soul through the body (*hosa dia tou sōmatos pathēmata epi tēn psuchēn teinei*). But as for calculations (*analogismata*) about those things, with respect to being and benefit (*pros te ousian kai ōpheleian*), they're acquired, by those who do acquire them, with difficulty and over a long period of time, by means of a great deal of troublesome education.” (186b-c)<sup>51</sup>

Besides an explicit distinction between the two capacities, this brief passage introduces two new pieces of information. First, that our capacity for perception, but not our capacity for teleological pursuit of the truth, is shared by animals. Second, that our capacity for perception comes into being as soon as we are born. By contrast, the capacity for *analogizesthai* or reflection requires extensive education to develop. In what follows, I elucidate these two points.

Let us begin by noting that the idea of education introduces a dimension of difference among humans. That is, it offers an avenue of explanation for how it can be that people succeed in their natural intellectual task to varying degrees. I am eager to make a note of this because the fact that Socrates takes care to at least mention a scale against which humans' capacity for knowledge may be measured should rule out the two major interpretive tracks on this passage, both of which suppose that Socrates has been painting a portrait of human psychology that is

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<sup>51</sup> “Οὐκοῦν τὰ μὲν εὐθὺς γενομένοις πάρεστι φύσει αἰσθάνεσθαι ἀνθρώποις τε καὶ θηρίοις, ὅσα διὰ τοῦ σώματος παθήματα ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τείνει· τὰ δὲ περὶ τούτων ἀναλογίσματα πρὸς τε οὐσίαν καὶ ὠφέλειαν μόγις καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ διὰ πολλῶν πραγμάτων καὶ παιδείας παραγίγνεται οἷς ἂν καὶ παραγίγνηται.” (186b11-c5)



equally applicable to all human beings. According to the reading I have been setting out, by contrast, while Socrates' remarks do elucidate human nature, they are made so that a portrait (or at least outline) of the knower may emerge, i.e. a sketch of the individual who has made truth their self-consciously chosen goal and succeeds in that task. But for the outline to emerge, there needs to be room for variation. After all, the knower differs from others (cf. *diapherei*, 169d7).

According to one of the major interpretations, Socrates is engaged in a quasi-Kantian project, in that he distinguishes between the capacity for perception or intuition, on the one hand, and the capacity for judgment, on the other. The projects are similar because they present the capacities we have in virtue of our psychology. More specifically, Socrates' independent activity of the soul and Kant's capacity for judgment are similar insofar as they are at the helm of the capacity for perception and insofar as both are responsible for the issuance of articulate, discursive judgments. Yet, it is a problem for this family of views that Socrates insists that that capacity is not in fact shared by all human beings. Thus, it cannot be the case that what Socrates has been describing as our independent activity is simply our capacity to speak. This interpretation is particularly worthy of resistance when its proponent advocates for the claim that *ousia* stands for the *copula*, for it would now seem that most people cannot make judgments.<sup>52</sup>

According to the second major interpretation, the difference between the two activities is a difference between subjective and objective judgments or cognitions. Subjective cognitions are understood in the manner of seemings that could potentially exist in a completely idealist world

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<sup>52</sup> The main representative of this propositionalist approach is Burnyeat (1990), who thinks that Plato's primary achievement here is an achievement against his earlier self: namely, to strip perception of the capacity for judgment (cf. esp. Reading B on *ibid.*, 59). I consider Burnyeat's discussion of the *copula* in n. 31 above. McDowell (1973) is also in this camp, but he takes it that Plato's confusions regarding the nature of judgment (specifically, atomism) prevent him from making the point clearly (cf. esp. *ibid.*, 192-193). For his attempt to explain away the reference to education, cf. 191. I would also include Silverman (1990) and Gill (2003) in this group. Note that commentators of this camp who take *ousia* to be shorthand for the *copula* and argue that, for that reason, *ousia* may not be found in the work of perception, fail to follow Kant in thinking that the capacity for judgment directs the capacity for intuition (or *aisthēsis*). For a discussion of intuition and judgment in Kant, cf. Engstrom (2006).

and the objective cognitions as affirmations that these seemings faithfully represent reality. As in the previous interpretation, this view requires that the overall passage treats all human beings alike. I find this interpretation more attractive than the previous one, however, I do not think that there is evidence for a two-step view about perceptual judgment. Moreover, given our brief passage here, this view would claim that all animals and most humans are trapped in a subjective world. Again, I do not think there is evidence for this in the text and I do not find plausible the idea that uneducated individuals fail to be participants of the shared world.<sup>53</sup>

It seems clear that in the passage under discussion, Socrates issues an injunction to Theaetetus and his audience to develop their soul's capacity for independent activity. Moreover, given that developing this capacity amounts to choosing for oneself the teleological principle that formally defines us, it appears that Socrates' injunction is for us to live up to our natures and cease living like animals. Indeed, doing so is the only way to become a knower. But despite how evident this general point is, some elements of the picture remain obscure.

Specifically, could it really be the case, as the concluding paragraph suggests, that most people lack access to the truth because they are unreflective? Or that they are incapable of issuing true judgments about the objective world? Are we really meant to think that it is not possible for an uneducated person to describe their experience correctly? I have two answers to these questions. The first has to do with the nature of perception as it is thematized in the dialogue and the second has to do with some reflections on truth. I take these in turn.

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<sup>53</sup> Cooper (1970) and Kanayama (1987) are representatives of this approach, according to which the job of the independent activity is to assess the objectivity of the subjective impressions. For both (and others, such as M. Frede 1987 and Gerson 2006) it is important that the term *ousia* "straddles" (Cooper 1970, 140) the distinction between existence and *copula*, such that the objectivity in judgment, which they attribute to the characteristic activity of the soul, depends on a consideration of conceptual combination. In this, they follow Kahn (1966). Thus, where they primarily differ from the other dominant interpretation is on whether *aisthēsis* suffices on its own for perceptual acts or perceptual judgments. This camp, but not the other, takes it that even perceptual judgments are conceptual, given that they are helmed by the soul. Kanayama's eagerness to permit such (non-linguistic) conceptualization to animals (1987, 43-44) undermines the plausibility of the interpretation.

To explain what it is that Socrates finds fault with in most human beings, we ought to appeal back to the Tools Metaphor. We are meant to imagine an individual who has not developed the capacity for reflection, for the cognitive activity that makes no use of the body. Nonetheless, such a person surely has a soul or they would not be alive. Therefore, it seems that we are asked to imagine an individual whose soul is active only when the body is. In such a case, perception would be the only activity that the soul occupies itself with, which suggests that the body has usurped the helmsmanship of the human being, thereby flipping the priority relations that are meant to hold between body and soul. In the first section, I suggested that Plato often cautions his readers to maintain the priority relations between user and tools, or primary and contributory causes. It seems that the same is true here, for Socrates warns that a person who lets their body take over their soul is more like an animal than a human being.<sup>54</sup>

Recalling that it follows from the Tools Metaphor that what is properly speaking a tool does not have the resources to direct its own activity, we can infer that characteristic to the sort of soul that is subservient to the body is that it permits the body to be tossed around by external forces. I mean that the job of the soul is no longer to guide the body in accordance with its own teleological activity. Yet, given that the body lacks a guiding principle in itself for the subservient soul to follow, it must be the case that the soul simply lets the body be influenced by external sources of guidance, like other people.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, it is possible that the body develops a guiding principle of sorts on its own by force of habit. For example, in the case of someone who really enjoys candy, we can imagine that the pleasure they get from indulging in sweets is so great that

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<sup>54</sup> In *Rep.* 9.586a-b, Socrates says that it is characteristic of cattle to always look down and the people whose lives are governed by rampant pleasures resemble them in always occupying themselves with immediate and bodily pleasures. In the *Ethical Digression*, Socrates says of Thales (a representative of the philosophical life) that he failed to look at what was at his feet and fell into a well. The implication that emerges from putting these passages together is that it is characteristic of the philosopher, who maintains the correct priority relations, to not be confined to what he immediately encounters, either out in the world or from his bodily desires.

<sup>55</sup> Socrates references being liable to be influenced negatively by others, as one of the natural consequences of leaving Socrates and his midwifery prematurely (150e).

they become accustomed to seeking it out. After all there is nothing to prevent it from doing so nor a competing goal to overtake it. We can imagine, that is, that the soul sets the procurement of candy as its goal, thereby taking over a guiding principle from the body and setting on to satisfy it.<sup>56</sup> Surely, such a subservient soul is a stunted one and such an individual, lacking the possibility of self-determination, is one who cannot do much beyond following their desires.

But besides the fact that such a person does a disservice to themselves, Socrates' warning has an epistemological dimension, which we will be able to grasp if we consider what perception is like for the subservient soul. Recall our discussion of the theme of the future in the preceding section. Socrates described the soul's attempts at achieving its goal of truth as a comparison of past and present, on the one hand, with future, on the other. I had insisted that it is only mention of the future that marks the soul's teleological activity and that past and present are meant to refer to the soul in its role as user of the body, specifically, in its capacity to identify the contents of perceptual experience in accordance with the conceptual scheme it has at its disposal. I suggest that the stunted, subservient soul is one that can do no more than label the elements of the perceptual experience, no more than identify which adjective its past experiences recommend for each perceptual message. Presumably, the fact that the Tunnel Model is rejected in favor of the Tools Metaphor *tout court* means that the soul, no matter how stunted, remains the proper subject of perception. Thus, just as in the case of the genuine, educated soul, this process of perceptual labeling is immediate and occurs unreflectively. Yet, unlike the case of the paradigmatically human soul, the stunted soul operates unreflectively even when not reporting on perceptual experience. It is there that the real danger with flipping the priority relations lies.

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<sup>56</sup> This individual should remind a reader of the *Republic* or *Phaedrus* of the one who is at the mercy of their desires. For seeing this dethroning of reason as instrumentalization to the *epithēmūtikōn* part soul, cf. Szaif (2003, 28).

Consider, for example, what such a person would do when asked about topics related to justice. If they did not remain silent, then they would simply blurt out the first thing that came to their mind and, unless they had a naturally easy-going disposition, they would likely insist on their unreasoned opinion, regardless of what their interlocutor might say in response. Indeed, if such a person had social power or an army of friends, it is not difficult to imagine the destructive lengths they would go to in order to avoid ridicule. This is the political danger lying behind uneducated individuals. To see the epistemological danger, let us consider the case in which this person is asked whether they thought that a particular action was just or unjust. The same process that defined perception would be operative here: this person would automatically and unreflectively match that particular action to their concepts of justice and injustice, which would yield an answer for them. Again, it would not be possible to reason with such a person, for their soul lacks the capacity for *sullogizesthai*. Thus, that person would simply announce an opinion, which would be impossible for them to either renounce or revise. If that were the case with the majority of people, as Socrates fears, then it appears that it would not be possible for anyone to get to the bottom of things, because no one would be able to engage in dialectical investigation. Instead, there would simply be a cacophonous mass of opinions, each of which could be defended with nothing but a claim of the sort: “Well, at least for me, that act is just.”

A claim such as this should remind us immediately of Protagoras. His philosophy, in our dialogue, amounted to a defense of locutions of this sort, which index the truth to a given individual and eventually dismantle the notion of a shared, objective world. Recognizing that the people that Socrates, in our present passage, identifies as stunted and uneducated are the people whose cognitive behavior is picked up and promoted by the Protagorean philosophy should explain why it is that Socrates associates Theaetetus’ definition that knowledge is perception

with Protagoras: if it were the case that everyone's soul was subservient to the body, then Protagorean relativism would reign, for there would be no room for those activities that give substance to the thought that knowledge is a genuine phenomenon. Therefore, the only way to fight against a Protagorean epistemology is to show that it is proper to human nature to go well beyond reactive, perception-like activities.

Having said this, it might still seem that Socrates is making an overly strong point in the concluding paragraph. Granted, we might say, that uneducated humans resemble animals in their inability to be reflective and in their compulsion to do what the body wants; and granted that both politics and epistemology would be compromised if everyone were in this condition. But even so, is it really the case that such people cannot say what color the flowers in front of them are or whether the table they are sitting on is hard or soft? Is it really the case that they cannot attain *alētheia* at all? One way to respond to this question is to refer back to the treatment of Protagoras in the dialogue and specifically, on the conclusion that relative truth (of the sort "true for me") is not a coherent suggestion.<sup>57</sup> I discuss this in Chapter 1 of the dissertation. Here, I attempt to make Socrates' position more palatable by stepping outside the text.

Socrates' position in our passage seems to be that no judgment can be true (or false) unless it is the result of an attempt to get at the truth. A true statement marks the success of a teleologically organized activity and cannot exist otherwise. Even if a statement of the sort "the flower is yellow" reflects reality but does not come from the comparative activity characteristic of a purposive soul, it is not a true statement in the strict sense.<sup>58</sup> The 20th ce. philosopher W. A.

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<sup>57</sup> The Self-Refutation of Protagoras (169d-171d) and the Refutation of Heracleitus (181c-183c) both make this point, albeit in slightly different ways.

<sup>58</sup> Kanayama (1987, 78) also argues that a statement cannot be true or false in the complete sense if it has not been preceded by the consideration of questions. However, he does not seek to explain this point (besides showing that it is a consequence) and so it ends up reading as a stipulation. Lott (2011) attributes the need for education to learning how to make inferences and presumably also on the need for experience in order to include potential future instances (cf. *ibid.*, 359-360).

Hart held a similar view and argued for it against those who do not acknowledge that teleological activity ought to underlie all genuinely true (or false) judgments.<sup>59</sup>

According to Hart (1979), statements like “my shirt has cufflinks” (ibid., 6) can only be called true insofar as they resemble paradigmatic cases of truth-telling. He does not offer a list of examples but paradigmatic cases for him are cases in which truth is both interesting and hard. Prosaic cases like “the cat is on the mat” (or worse, “the flower is yellow”) have been wrongly taken by philosophers to constitute the basic case for truth-telling, which has made them complacent about the genuine phenomenon of truth, which is to be found in human beings’ experience with the difficulty for truth. In Hart’s view, paradigmatic cases of truth-telling are such as stating what is wrong with one’s marriage, for which one would have to reflect on what oneself believes and how to express it. These are also cases in which one tries to discover what they believe by thinking about what they ought to believe (ibid., 12), as these are cases in which truth “isn’t anything cut and dried, and where it matters most to get it right” (ibid., 7). Hart summarizes the human experience with the truth thus: “You aren’t, in the fullest sense, speaking the truth, unless you are rediscovering what it is for you to be speaking the truth, in the very act of doing it.” (ibid., 10). Finally, he says that those philosophers who take the easy cases to constitute the primary case fail to consider the possibility that – as he puts it – “they might be unequal to the task of speaking the truth” (ibid., 2).

I find Hart’s view helpful in understanding the position that Socrates puts forth here and I think that the similarities are not difficult to see. Truth is, for both, an achievement and indeed, one that has been set by the subject herself. Importantly, the choice of truth as goal is not merely a formal or dispositional one but rather it is one that is meant to be reaffirmed in every instance of judgment. Every case of judgment, if it is to be genuinely true (or false), presupposes

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<sup>59</sup> That being said, Hart himself did not use “teleology” and its cognates in this context.

conscious awareness of the goal aimed at and thus it presupposes, also, an earnest attempt to reach that goal, namely, to speak the truth.

If the similarity to Hart is accepted, then we can say that the person whose soul is stunted is someone who is unequal to the task of truth. They do not reflect on their past experiences and the things that they understand nor do they exhibit a concern to be good at issuing judgments. Therefore, they do not do what truth-telling requires. They are only equal to the task of describing their immediate environment, saying the first thing that comes into their mind, and satisfying their immediate desires. No education is needed for this task. It is a trivial task, not only because it is easy, but primarily because it is so unimportant. It is because truth is difficult, impactful, and worthwhile that knowledge should be shielded from Protagorean relativism. And it is because it ought to be so shielded that it cannot be a matter of perception.

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I explained that we are only ever in a position to grasp *ousia* when we allow our souls to engage in the activity that characterizes them when not instrumentalized to the body. But since perceptual activity is also properly speaking psychic activity, it is possible for us to grasp *ousia* in perception and attain truth in our perceptual judgments. Importantly, it is still the soul, and not the body, that is the proper cause of that achievement. In this section, I offered a more determinate proposal of the soul's task in pursuing the truth. I argued that the paradigmatic act of grasping *ousia* – of knowledge, that is – is difficult and impactful. Its difficulty lies in the person's being earnest about achieving the goal of truth. For example, the truth teller has to interrogate her wishes and biases and make sure that they do not stop her from judging the truth; she has to consider all the facts; and she has to articulate her verdicts clearly. In sincerely carrying out this task, she reaffirms that she values the truth. In doing so, she shows that she has assigned to herself the task of standing up for the truth.



### 3. Understanding the Puzzle of False Judgment Addressed in the *Theaetetus* (187c-200d)

This chapter is concerned with the famous puzzle of false judgment, which purports to show that false judgment is impossible. I say it is famous but it is not always clear what the problem is and there are at least three candidates that come to mind. One, let us call the epistemological worry: How can I ever know that my judgment is false? All of my judgments seem to me true, otherwise I would not be making them, for they express my beliefs. Therefore, from my perspective, all of my judgments are true. Second is the description worry: “John’s house is pink” I say, though my friend’s house is blue. Yet, there is some John who lives in a pink house and so my judgment is true of that other person, hence all judgments are true in some sense. Finally, and perhaps most famously, is the nonsense worry: In judging, I judge what is the case. In judging falsely, I judge what is not the case. That which is not the case is nothing. Thus, in judging falsely, I do not judge at all and false judgment is not a coherent category of judgment. These are some ways that the phenomenon of false judgment has brought puzzlement. But none of these ways of being puzzled by false judgment is the one discussed in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, the *locus classicus* of this problem. As I will argue, the question addressed in the dialogue is this: How can one make a false judgment when it is in principle available to them to make a true one?

My aim is to clarify and defend this interpretation of the problem of falsehood as the one that is addressed in the *Theaetetus*. Characterizing the puzzle that is treated in the dialogue is difficult. Its discussion constitutes a self-contained “digression,”<sup>1</sup> which, though, spans about a fifth of the dialogue’s length and is certainly one of its focal points. The Digression<sup>2</sup> has five parts but there is no consensus on their relationship, which hinders attempts at a clear view of the

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<sup>1</sup> Socrates introduces the passage as such. He says it is a topic that has puzzled him many times before and of which he is reminded at the moment (cf. 187c-e).

<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, whenever I use the term “the Digression,” I refer to the False Judgment Digression and not the Ethical Digression (172c-177b).

passage's aims. Moreover, the discussants fail to give a satisfactory account of the phenomenon, concluding that it was wrong of them to "leave knowledge on one side and look for false judgment first,"<sup>3</sup> leaving all the claims made in the Digression in a strange limbo. Worse still, the dialogue's guiding question – to formulate a definition of knowledge – proves just as unfruitful with all three suggested definitions being struck down. Finally, the fact that there is a self-contained passage, like our Digression, in each of the three parts of the dialogue makes the unity of the work a question in its own right. It is crucial, then, to the task of interpreting the puzzle to give it a place in the dialogue, especially considering that puzzles about falsehood, in some guise or other, are present in the *Euthydemus*, the *Cratylus*, the *Meno*, and most importantly the *Sophist*, the sequel dialogue, where the issue is conclusively answered.

In addition to clarifying the text's central puzzle, then, this chapter seeks to situate the Digression in the larger context of the dialogue. I make a case that Plato's purpose in exploring this puzzle is in service to the fight against Protagoras and his relativism, which is the primary theme of the work. Specifically, I argue that the very approach taken by Socrates and Theaetetus in their attempts to explain falsehood, i.e. the very question they ask in specifying the problem, indicates a failure to extricate themselves from an essentially Protagorean conception of judgment and fails for that reason. On this reading, the fact that the discussants fail to come up with an adequate account of falsehood is a consequence of having chosen this approach. If this is right, then the upshot of the discussion in the False Judgment Digression is that Socrates and Theaetetus, despite their immediately preceding triumph over the definition of knowledge as perception, have reverted back to Protagorean assumptions about the workings of the human

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<sup>3</sup> “καλῶς ὁ λόγος ἐπιπλήττει καὶ ἐνδείκνυται ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθῶς ψευδῆ δόξαν προτέραν ζητοῦμεν ἐπιστήμης, ἐκείνην ἀφέντες” (200c7-d1). All translations are from McDowell (1973) unless otherwise noted.

mind, about judgment, and about knowledge. I defend my interpretation through a careful study of the various parts of the digression, with a special focus on explaining how they fit together.

The discussion of falsehood is a digression insofar as it is tangential to the topic at hand, which is to examine the newly proposed candidate definition of knowledge as true judgment. This definition was just suggested by Theaetetus (187b-c) upon the conclusion of the Final Refutation Argument (discussed in Chapter 2) and it is only taken up again in the Jury Argument (200d-201c), after Socrates and Theaetetus have admitted defeat in grappling with falsehood. Yet, getting clear on the phenomenon of falsehood is central to the fight against Protagoras and so, this Digression is anything but. It is a crucial feature of the Protagorean position that it denies the possibility of falsehood, which means that any serious opponent of Protagoras must have an account of falsehood. The fact that Socrates and Theaetetus fail in this task undermines their progress thus far. Moreover, as we saw in discussing the Self-Refutation Argument in Chapter 1, Socrates leaned heavily on falsehood, and on the fact that our lives depend on its being a real and coherent phenomenon, in order to render the Measure Thesis absurd. Thus, failure in the Digression threatens the success against the sophist. Though the Self-Refutation Argument is a good one against Protagoras, we will not be entitled to it without an account of falsehood.

As I will argue here, Socrates and Theaetetus are not clear headed about why the Protagorean position is wrong and they are also not clear headed about where the Final Refutation leaves them. Recall that that argument was pitched at quite a high level of abstraction and relied, primarily, on negative conclusions, such that perception had no grasp of *ousia* and that judgment and other capacities of the soul did not depend on the body. I offered an interpretation of the alternative that emerged from the refutation, namely, that judgment – both true and false – is the result of genuine attempts to hit upon the truth rather than the result of

mechanical processes, but that alternative was nowhere spelled out in the text. It is precisely this implicit, unsaid insight about what judgment is and how it comes into being that is missing from the False Judgment Digression and it is this absence that explains the discussion's failure. As I will show, Socrates' and Theaetetus' failure to hold on to their own insight that judgment is an end-oriented activity leads them to assume that it requires a source in the mind, a starting place from which to flow forth.

Here is the program for what follows. In section 1, I give an overview of the Digression and offer an outline of its basic structure. I argue that the Digression considers two specifications of the problem and opts to pursue one of them.<sup>4</sup> I call the one chosen the Knowledge Approach, which corresponds to the first part of the Digression. I call the other one the Being Approach, which corresponds to the second one. In section 2, I discuss the Being Approach, which I argue is the one that should be taken in order to dispel confusions about falsehood. I do this not only to show what the right answer is, as it were, but also to make salient the difference between the two approaches that I identify. This discussion has methodological advantages as well, because it can serve as an example of what it takes to opt for an approach and follow through with it. In section 3, I turn my attention to the Knowledge Approach to discuss in detail its commitments and presuppositions. In section 4, I look at the "other-judging" proposal (189b-191a) and show that it is an attempt to pursue the Knowledge Approach. In section 5, I look at the two models of the mind considered, i.e. the Wax Tablet (191a-195b) and the Aviary (197a-200c). My aim is to show that they are specifications of the "other-judging" proposal. Finally, in section 6, I explain why the discussion in the Digression indicates that Socrates and Theaetetus have not shed their Protagorean influences.

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<sup>4</sup> In section 3 below, I examine the dominant interpretation, which supposes that the passage only considers one approach. The scholar whose reading of the structure of the passage is closest to my own is Chappell (esp. 2001). Others, such as Adalier (2001) and Crivelli (2003), take it that there is one proposal with four candidate responses.

## Section 1 – The Preamble and the Two Paradoxes

Upon the conclusion of the Final Refutation Argument, Socrates asks Theaetetus to “start again from the beginning” (187b) and try to define knowledge once more. Theaetetus, having just inferred that the activity of the soul when “it’s busying itself, by itself, about the things which are” is called judging (187a), suggests that knowledge might be true judgment. It cannot be judgment more generally, he reasons, for there is also false judgment (187b). The distinction between true and false judgment prompts Socrates to raise an issue that has long been puzzling him, namely “what, exactly, this experience [i.e. “judging something false” (187d6)] is with us, and how it comes into being in us” (187d3-4). Theaetetus’ willingness to pursue with Socrates this tangential investigation into the phenomenon of false judgment introduces the topic.

At that point, Socrates asks this: “how shall we set about it?” (*pōs oun*, 187e). This question is worth stressing because it emphasizes that the topic of the Digression is vague and under-determined. Recall that, in the beginning of the chapter, I listed three completely different variants of “the” problem of false judgment. One could ask “how could I ever know my own judgments to be false?” An investigation into this question would presumably require contrasting a subject’s relationship to their own judgments with their relationship to others’ judgments. One could ask: “if a judgment is false about someone but true about someone else, is it really false?” This question would require inquiring into conditions that would determine the meaning of sentences. One could ask “is an absurd sequence of words a false sentence? Is there any difference between what is false and what is absurd?” This investigation would have to introduce conditions to distinguish absurdity from falsehood. My aim in canvassing these possibilities is to show that we do not have a determinate problem to solve, unless a particular question is asked,

because that question will determine not only what it is that we want to know about falsehood but also how to go about finding out. Call these determinations of the problem approaches to it.

The first phase of the Digression, I argue, is occupied by a deliberation of sorts as to which approach to take on the matter and, consequently, how to conceive of the issue. I have already mentioned that, as I will present the passage, Socrates considers two approaches, each of which is presented in the form of a paradox. The first, which I will argue is the one pursued in the remainder of the Digression, is the Knowledge Paradox and the second, which I contend is set aside in our dialogue, is the Being Paradox. For some preliminary evidence that the two paradoxes stand for two distinct approaches to the question, consider that after setting out the Knowledge Paradox and being stumped by it, Socrates says “Well then, ought we to consider what we’re investigating in a different way, proceeding, not by way of knowing and not knowing, but by way of being and not being?”<sup>5</sup> At that point, he presents the Being Paradox. That these two approaches exhaust the ones considered will be shown in section 4.

Socrates, then, introduces the two approaches with two paradoxes. Each of the two paradoxes makes an argument as to why falsehood is impossible. But since we all know that falsehood is indeed possible, these arguments cannot be right.<sup>6</sup> Responding to either paradox, and thus taking on the approach it specifies, requires showing how the particular impossibility it has allegedly identified is actually not impossible. Let us look at them in turn.

This is the Knowledge Paradox:

1. With respect to each thing, a judge may either know it or not know it<sup>7</sup> (188a1-2).

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<sup>5</sup> “ἄρ’ οὖν οὐ ταύτη σκεπτέον ὃ ζητοῦμεν, κατὰ τὸ εἶδέναι καὶ μὴ εἶδέναι ἰόντας, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ εἶναι καὶ μὴ;” (188c10-d1).

<sup>6</sup> As Burnyeat (1990) notes, for example, the discussants have already made and identified false judgments, like the suggestion that knowledge is perception, and so they should expect falsehood to be a genuine possibility (66).

<sup>7</sup> Socrates specifies that intermediate stages like learning and forgetting are not relevant (188a2-4).

2. What is in a judger’s judgment is either something they know or something they do not know (188a7-8).
  3. If one knows a thing, it is impossible for that same person not to know that same thing (188a10-b1).
  4. If one does not know a thing, it is impossible for that same person to know that thing. (ibid.)
  5. To make a false judgment, one would have to either:
    - (a) “think that the things he knows are not those things but other things he knows” (188b3-4);
    - (b) both know and not know both sets of things (188b4-5);
    - (c) “believe that things he doesn’t know are other things he doesn’t know” (188b7-8);
    - (d) think that “things he knows are things he doesn’t know” (188c2-3); or
    - (e) think that “things he doesn’t know are things he knows” (188c3).<sup>8</sup>
  6. All (a)-(e) options are impossible and they are in contradiction to the principles in 3 and 4.
- C. Therefore, false judgment is impossible.

The form of this paradox is to outline a condition that would have to be met in order for false judgment to be possible, which it goes on to subvert as it shows it, ultimately incompatible with false judgment. This condition is knowledge. Premises 1 and 2 say that knowledge and its opposite are the only two possible descriptions for what could end up in a judgment maker’s judgment and Premises 3 and 4 say that these two options exclude each other. Given these two options, Socrates outlines five permutations of knowledge and not knowledge that could potentially give rise to false judgment. Yet, he rejects all of them because each of them makes an impossible, because absurd, suggestion. The absurdity can be summarized thus: One cannot possibly fail to know what they know, so they cannot make false judgments about that. At the

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<sup>8</sup> (a) and (b): “ἄρ’ οὖν ὁ τὰ ψευδῆ δοξάζων, ἃ οἶδε, ταῦτα οἶεται οὐ ταῦτα εἶναι ἀλλὰ ἕτερα ἅττα ὧν οἶδε, καὶ ἀμφοτέρω εἰδὼς ἀγνοεῖ αὐτὸ ἀμφοτέρω;”; (c): “ἃ μὴ οἶδεν, ἠγεῖται αὐτὰ εἶναι ἕτερα ἅττα ὧν μὴ οἶδε”; (d) and (e): “ἃ γέ τις οἶδεν, οἶεται ποῦ ἃ μὴ οἶδεν αὐτὰ εἶναι, οὐδ’ αὖτ’ ἃ μὴ οἶδεν, ἃ οἶδεν.”

same time, one cannot make false judgments about things they do not know. The reason is that one cannot make any judgment about things they have no knowledge of. As Socrates puts it: “Is this possible: that someone who knows neither Theaetetus nor Socrates should get it into his thoughts that Socrates is Theaetetus or Theaetetus is Socrates?”<sup>9</sup> Evidently, this question rules out not only false but also true judgments about things one does not know.

Therefore, we may reformulate Socrates’ argument here thus: Either you know *x* or you do not know *x*. If you do not know *x*, then you cannot make any judgments about it, true or false. If you do know *x*, then you can make judgments about it, true and false. But – actually – if you know *x*, then you should only be able to make true judgments about it. Hence, there is no space left over for false judgments and so they must be impossible.

One more thing worth noting about the Knowledge Paradox before we move on is Premise 6. Cases 5.(a)-(e) are dismissed by Socrates and Theaetetus because they all require something impossible. Yet, they all directly contradict the principle stated in Premises 3 and 4, which is that one cannot both know and not know the same thing. This contradiction is what generates the paradox: our options are constrained by our principles but those very options have to go against those very principles. Yet, this paradox is not like those paradoxes in which the audience is happy to go along with everything until they realize at the end that a contradiction has been drawn. Theaetetus is not happy with the 5.(a)-(e) options.<sup>10</sup> They are themselves incoherent. This is to say that Theaetetus and Socrates really do not see how a false judgment could be possible. It is not merely that they are facing a tricky argument but that all the options they can come up with lead to deadends. So, we might say that what is paradoxical here is not only the counter-intuitive conclusion but the persuasive presupposition that knowledge is a

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<sup>9</sup> “ἀλλ’ ἄρα, ἃ μὴ οἶδεν, ἠγεῖται αὐτὰ εἶναι ἕτερα ἅττα ὧν μὴ οἶδε, καὶ τοῦτ’ ἔστι τῷ μῆτε Θεαίτητον μῆτε Σωκράτη εἰδότει εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν λαβεῖν ὡς ὁ Σωκράτης Θεαίτητος ἢ ὁ Θεαίτητος Σωκράτης;” (188b7-10)

<sup>10</sup> Note some of Theaetetus’ exclamations: “impossible” (*adunaton*, 188b6), “monstrous” (*teras*, 188c4).



condition for falsehood. By running this paradox, Socrates rouses these questions in his audience: Can it be the case that not only is knowledge not infallible, but it is responsible for and explanatory of falsity? How can knowledge lead both to truth and to falsehood? What is knowledge if it cannot shield us from false judgments?

With this in mind, let us look at the Being Paradox. Here it is:

1. False judgment is judging what is not (188d3-5).<sup>11</sup>
  2. Judging what is not is like seeing what is not (188e4-6).<sup>12</sup>
  3. Seeing is only of what is (188e8).<sup>13</sup>
  4. Judging is of something (189a6) and judging something is judging something that is (189a8).<sup>14</sup>
  5. If someone has what is not in his judgment, he has nothing in his judgment (189a10).<sup>15</sup>
  6. "If one has nothing in one's judgment, one isn't judging at all." (189a12-13)<sup>16</sup>
- C. It's impossible to judge what is not.

The form of this paradox is to define false judgment in a certain way and then show that that way is not a genuine possibility. It defines judging a falsehood as judging non-being, which does not distinguish between judging falsely and not judging at all, that is, between issuing a potentially true, but actually false, judgment and issuing a string of words that fail to compose a meaningful statement. This is the paradox that gives rise to the “nonsense worry,” as I have been calling it and it is, arguably, the most famous formulation of the problem, with a long history starting from Parmenides and reaching to Wittgenstein. According to this paradox, judging falsely is the same thing as not judging at all – the same as staying silent, singing out loud, or

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<sup>11</sup> “μὴ ἀπλοῦν ἢ ὅτι ὁ τὰ μὴ ὄντα περὶ ὅτουσιν δοξάζων οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὡς οὐ ψευδῆ δοξάσει, κἂν ὁπωσοῦν ἄλλως τὰ τῆς διανοίας ἔχη.”

<sup>12</sup> “Well now, is there this sort of thing in any other case? ... that someone sees something, but there’s no one thing which he sees (εἴ τις ὁρᾷ μὲν τι, ὁρᾷ δὲ οὐδέν)” (188e4-6).

<sup>13</sup> “εἰ ἐν γέ τι ὁρᾷ, τῶν ὄντων τι ὁρᾷ” (188e8).

<sup>14</sup> “ὁ δὲ δὴ δοξάζων οὐχ ἐν γέ τι δοξάζει, ... ὁ δ’ ἐν τι δοξάζων οὐκ ὄν τι,” (189a6-8).

<sup>15</sup> “ὁ ἄρα μὴ ὄν δοξάζων οὐδὲν δοξάζει.” (189a10).

<sup>16</sup> “ἀλλὰ μὴν ὅ γε μὴδὲν δοξάζων τὸ παράπαν οὐδὲ δοξάζει.” (189a12-13).

uttering gibberish: it is the same as nonsense. This means that false judgment is not a coherent category in its own right. We may notice, again, that at the heart of the paradox is the analogy to perception, which precludes false judgment, as it is difficult to make sense of false seeing as distinct from not seeing. Yet, again, Theaetetus and Socrates are not simply taken by a tricky argument and misleading analogy. The very assumption that a false judgment is a judgment about non-being makes it immediately the case that falsehood is assimilated to “nothing” or nonsense and is itself confused.

However, the analogy to perception is illuminating, as it shows us that Socrates and Theaetetus are persuaded by it. That is, it seems right to both of them to say that seeing (189a11), hearing (189a1), and touching (189a3-4) are all of real things, things which are. On account of perception having access to beings, all perceptual activities or judgments are true. This understanding of perception supposes that to perceive is to have, in the mind or in the judgment, a faithful reproduction of the real thing. On such a model of perception, one would need to be confronted with non-things in order to have false perceptions. Presumably, such non-perceptions would be dreams, hallucinations, and so on. In that case, the perceiver would rightly perceive what they encounter, except that what they encounter is not real, therefore their perception comes to be not real too. Notice that this is precisely the way that Protagoras defends against the *prima facie* objections against the Measure Thesis that are raised by hallucinations and dreams (157e-160d): they are not really false at all! Analogously then, a false judgment states something not real, an impossible state of affairs as it were, and it states it rightly, i.e. as it is.

Yet, as I already mentioned, the analogy to perception is not required to draw out what is confusing about falsehood as the topic is broached in this paradox. Rather, the focus is on what a judgment is. The terms of the Being Paradox suppose that a judgment is a reproduction in a

different medium of a particular object, inheriting “being” (and so truth) from the “being” (or reality) of the object described. But on that assumption, judging falsely is judging a non-real thing, which is judging nothing, which is no different from not judging. Therefore, judging falsely is a kind of judging no more than putting together random words is.

Socrates resigns to this paradox concluding thus: “So making a false judgment is something other than having in one’s judgment the things which are not.” (189b4-5). That is, he realizes that it cannot be the case that judging falsely is the same as not judging, or that falsehood is the same as nonsense, which indicates that this approach to the issue is a deadend too.<sup>17</sup>

In this section, I began to make my case that these two paradoxes introduce two different questions to the puzzle of false judgment. The Knowledge Paradox finds it impossible that a false judgment may come into being and demands an account of how one’s knowledge may give rise to false, rather than true, judgments. The Being Paradox, by contrast, finds it impossible that there is such a thing as false judgment at all and demands an account of the kind of being that a false judgment has that will show it different from non-judgment. Yet the Digression continues and, as I will argue, it continues by revisiting the Knowledge Paradox. Before I explain how this is so, I will say another word about the Being Approach, which will be helpful, not only in clarifying the problem confronted there, but also in understanding what it takes to revisit either of these paradoxes.

## **Section 2 – The Being Approach: The Problem and the Solution**

I mentioned earlier that the Being Approach has a long history that stretches to the 20th century. In a relatively recent paper, Hans-Johann Glock (2013) cites the *Theaetetus* and argues that this very problem was one to which Russell’s logical theory was vulnerable, a fact that

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<sup>17</sup> Socrates concludes: “neither on these lines, nor on those we were considering a little while ago, is it established that there is false judgment for us” (189b7-8).

significantly influenced Wittgenstein's considerations of unity in judgment, i.e. what a judgment is, in his *Tractatus*.

Russell's Dual Relation theory, Glock argues on behalf of Wittgenstein, is one that does not distinguish between judging falsely and not judging at all, for a false judgment would have to be a relation between a subject and a non-fact, in other words, nothing. As Glock notes, Russell's own tweaking of his theory, from Dual to Multiple Relations, in grappling with the proximity of nonsense to falsehood was unsuccessful. In the newer version, a judgment required that the person issuing it was severally related to all the parts of the sentence, namely, the subject term, the predicate term or object term, and the copula or verb term, and the judgment was the result of putting these terms together in a certain way.

It is worth making explicit that the Multiple Relations theory requires logical atomism. It requires, that is, that the parts of a sentence that the judgment maker is related to are atoms, or integers of meaning. It is those atoms, or meanings, that are put together in configurations and it is that fact that renders false judgments no different from nonsensical strings of words, for there is no other criterion to distinguish them. Hence, Wittgenstein's task is to radically break from Russell's constructivist approach to the unity of judgment – to how a judgment makes determinate sense – a feat which he faced by conceiving of a new notation that would aid in making said unity perspicuous.

Characteristic to the so-called "picture theory" presented in the *Tractatus*, is the priority of sense over truth-value in what makes a judgment. The reader is put in a position to recognize that genuine judgments – meaningful statements – display a determinate sense: they clearly display the conditions under which the judgment would be true, which, in turn, requires that the judgment present a possible combination of objects. Furthermore, the associated notation

presents in a clear manner the relations among those objects. To put it rather crudely, it is revealed in the *Tractatus* that a false judgment is a judgment that shares everything with the true judgment except the truth value. The true and false judgments picture the same fact, while a sequence of words that does not present a determinate state of affairs pictures no fact. This push of false judgment closer to the true one and farther from nonsense is achieved via an elucidation of negation and the role of the “not” operator, to show that “ $p$ ” and “ $\sim p$ ” picture the same fact but with opposite truth conditions.

We can say, then, that the Tractarian approach to falsehood is a logical approach, that is, it is an approach rooted in the philosophy of language and motivated by the thought that, *contra* the paradox of the Being Approach, falsehood is not reducible to nonsense. Similarly, Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Gamma, defines falsehood through the Principle of Non-Contradiction, that is, as the contradictory to the true judgment about the same fact ( $\Gamma.7$  1011b25-28). Thinking of the puzzle of falsehood in logico-linguistic terms should yield an account that shows the false judgment just as genuine of a judgment as the true one. To be motivated by a logical approach is to conceive of the problem of falsehood as the problem outlined in the paradox of the Being Approach. Thus, I conclude that presenting a logical account of the phenomenon entails being undeterred by that paradox and endeavoring to find a way out.

Precisely such a response to the problem is presented by Plato himself in the *Sophist* (260b-264b) and, indeed, in terms directly reminiscent of the Being Approach paradox of the *Theaetetus*. In that dialogue, the direct sequel, the Eleatic Stranger gives an account of false judgment according to which falsehood is the judgment of non-being – per the first premise of the Being Approach paradox – without, though, having to reduce falsehood to nonsense, or judging falsely to not judging. Non-being, in the *Sophist*, is shown to be a way of being and, so,

judging falsely is judging, though it is not judging truly. The way that this is accomplished is by an account of unity in judgment, outlined in contradistinction to nonsensical strings of words: a genuine judgment in the *Sophist* is defined as a configuration of words that manages to “accomplish something” (*perainei ti*) and not “only to name” (*onomazei monon*).<sup>18</sup> The Stranger then, like Wittgenstein, prioritizes sense over truth-value as explanatory of the whole category of judgment. Moreover, and again like Wittgenstein, he frames the problem of falsehood as the problem of negation and suggests a view according to which the true and the false judgments point to the same fact.<sup>19</sup> The result is a view not unlike the one we find in *Met. Gamma*, where the false judgment is simply the negation of the true judgment and what unites the two of them is that they mean something. In Aristotle’s words, they signify something.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to distinguish the solution to the paradox from one that might look a lot like it. The *Sophist*’s solution is a response to the Being Paradox because it finds a way for non-being to count as being, thereby transforming both being and non-being, which is to say that it transforms Premise 4 of the paradox (Judging is of something and judging something is judging something that is). In doing so, it identifies the confused premise and rejects it. Here is an alternative response to the Being Paradox: find the non-beings that false judgments are set over. That is, look around, set all the beings aside, and isolate the non-beings. Find the false facts, as it were. This response buys into the paradox and does not solve it. It accepts its terms wholeheartedly, it finds them useful, and sets forth on a surely hopeless search.

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<sup>18</sup> “οὐκ ὀνομάζει μόνον ἀλλὰ τι περαίνει” (262d3-4). This is the White translation from Cooper (1997).

<sup>19</sup> E. Lee (1972) should be mentioned here. He argues for the resemblance between the logical theories of the *Sophist* and the *Tractatus* with respect to the true and false judgment pair. That being said, I do not mean to take a stand on whether Wittgenstein would accept Plato’s solution in the *Sophist*, namely, that what makes a judgment is the licit “blending” of a subject term and a predicate expression. There is reason to think that he would not. All that matters for my purposes here is that both philosophers attend to the intimate connection between true and false judgments.

<sup>20</sup> “σημαίνειν τι” (*Met. Γ.7* 1012a22-23).

I hope that the *excursus* into the 20th century shows what it takes to overcome the paradox of the Being Approach, while nonetheless taking the dialectical route that led to it. That is, the Being Approach to the problem of falsehood is the approach that transforms it into the problem of negation and settles the associated confusions via considerations of sense and unity in judgment. As I already mentioned, the interpretation of the Digression that I defend is one that does not follow the Being Approach. If I am right that the focal point in the *Theaetetus* is the Knowledge Approach, then we already have reason to think that the approach taken in this text is one designed to fail.<sup>21</sup> The reason is that failure in the *Theaetetus* paves the way for success in the *Sophist*, because it is by trying and failing through one approach that the discussants are licensed to re-examine the other. In light of this, let us turn to the Knowledge Approach.

### **Section 3 – The Knowledge Approach: The Problem**

As discussed above, the Knowledge Approach establishes a paradox about false judgment by putting forth a condition for its possibility, which it then goes on to subvert as inherently incompatible with false judgment. Further, that condition is not one about the judgment, say that it not be nonsensical, but about the person: something must be true of the judgment-maker in order for her to judge falsely, namely that she has knowledge of the things her judgment is about. This fact, along with the fact that the second half of the Digression presents models of the mind in an effort to render false judgment intelligible, has led scholars to describe the problem addressed in the *Theaetetus* as “psychological”.<sup>22</sup> My primary aim in this section is to show that this is correct. But to do so effectively, I contend with the dominant interpretation of the Digression, which undermines this characterization by offering a logical solution.

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<sup>21</sup> I would like to mention here Polansky (1985), who notes in an aside that Theaetetus is, in the *Theaetetus*, confused about “being” and “non-being” and especially about the fact that grasping one entails grasping both. It is in the *Sophist* that clarity about this matter emerges (cf. pp. 98-99).

<sup>22</sup> For example, cf. Shorey (1903, 55).

While commentators might accept the description of the problem as psychological, they tend to think that this is not a substantive point, in fact they take Socrates' explicit distinction of the approaches to be a red herring. Fine (1979, 79n4), for example, writes that the two approaches are "essentially the same." The reason is that scholars interpret the Knowledge Approach and the Being Approach as two sides of the same coin, a coin that is definitively disposed of in the *Sophist*. That is, the standard interpretation of the Digression takes it to address the very same question addressed in the sequel, albeit from a perspective that focuses on the generation question. In other words: the Digression seeks to account for non-being, though focusing on the "how does that happen" aspect of the question.

Cooper (1990, 145) puts it like this: "But while it is no doubt correct to say that two problems are involved, and even that one of them is in some sense psychological, the other ontological and semantical, it is a mistake to think of them as independent questions requiring separate treatment and solution." He adds that a theory of meaning has consequences for a theory of thinking (ibid., 146). Cooper's view is that what we get in the *Theaetetus* is one episode in Plato's exposition of why a theory of meaning prevalent in earlier dialogues is to be abandoned in favor of a new theory of meaning that will rely on functional parts of speech and the Principle of Non-Contradiction. The earlier theory of meaning is one akin to the logical atomism of Russell's Multiple Relations theory. McDowell's (1998) position is similar, except he thinks that Plato – like Russell – is just plain confused about falsehood and what we witness here is the consequences of trying to grapple with an atomistic account of judgment.<sup>23</sup>

According to the McDowell/Cooper treatment of the problem, the Digression has as its topic the Knowledge Approach but only as a strained re-formulation of the Being Approach.

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<sup>23</sup> In the 1973 commentary, McDowell acknowledges that the paradoxes point to different problems and says that the *Theaetetus* pursues (what I call) the Knowledge Approach, while the *Sophist* the Being Approach. He nonetheless discusses the issues of the Knowledge Approach in terms of atomism and so my point stands.



This dominant interpretation focuses on the quasi-Russellian logical atomism that is presupposed by the Knowledge Paradox, as we have it, and seeks to explain why this theory blinds Socrates (or Plato) to an adequate account of falsehood. I noted in the preceding section that the nonsense worry, exemplified in Russell's Multiple Relations theory, was made salient or conspicuous by the introduction of logical atomism. The Dual Relation theory, which also faced the nonsense worry, does not require atomism, in fact, it works naturally with an understanding of sentences as themselves integral or atom-like, as self-standing entities that one could be related to.<sup>24</sup> The fact that Socrates presents the Knowledge Paradox in atomistic language, that is, as if each judgment was made up of multiple terms, each of which the subject bears the relationship of "knowing" to, has led commentators to assume that this paradox too is concerned with a logical problem. That is, this interpretation treats the problem of the *Theaetetus* as a problem in the philosophy of language, thereby making it hard to see what it is that is deemed "psychological" in the approach it sets out. Moreover, this interpretation takes the passage to be a *bona fide* digression, indeed, one that is more at home in the *Sophist* than it is in its actual context. Hence, not only do its proponents deprive the discussion of a meaningful place in the *Theaetetus*, but they also make the relationship between the two dialogues and their respective treatments of the problem somewhat contingent. I find that this interpretation does not do justice to what is of philosophical interest in the passage.

Having said that, it is worth engaging with the Cooper/McDowell interpretation to show why it might be only adjacent to the main point and to show that the "psychological" approach is not merely an occasion to discuss unity in judgment. My position is that, though the problem of falsehood and the question of propositional unity are certainly related, we will fail to face the

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<sup>24</sup> This strategy is compatible with Protagorean relativism too. Socrates employs it on behalf of Protagoras when discussing the sophist's response to dreams and hallucinations (cf. 159b in particular).

problem that the *Theaetetus*' Digression actually confronts if we fixate on the unfortunate presentational choice to spell out the Knowledge Paradox in atomistic terms. The point of the Digression and the treatment of falsehood therein, I claim, is that a psychological approach to the problem is not going to work, because it will bring us back to a Protagorean conception of human psychology and judgment-making. It is plausible that Plato did hold a quasi-atomistic theory of judgment, insofar as the parts of a sentence he acknowledges in the *Sophist* have the characteristics of logical atoms, and it is plausible that logical atomism requires a psychologistic approach to the unity of judgment.<sup>25</sup> But it does not follow from either of these that the problem of falsehood that Plato seeks to isolate in the Digression requires logical atomism, for that problem is not strictly a logical one. It is instead a problem about how we, given what it is like for us to issue judgments, can end up judging something false. It is a problem about our epistemic psychology. In the remainder of this section, I seek to clarify the problem posed by the Knowledge Paradox by demonstrating that the logical approach to its solution leaves it intact.

The atomism-centric interpretation begins by asking why it is that the Knowledge Paradox assumes that the only conceivable false judgments are judgments of misidentification – “x is y” – to which the only response is that Socrates must think that all judgments are attempts at naming objects. In other words, that all true judgments are self-intimating tautologies that say of some individual that it is itself (cf. McDowell 1990, 163), which would make the issuing of

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<sup>25</sup> In his *Foundations of Arithmetic* (1960), Frege seems to make this very point. In discussing his Context Principle (“never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition”), he says: “If [this] principle is not observed, one is almost forced to take as the meanings of words mental pictures or acts of the individual mind, and so to offend against the first principle as well.” (ibid., xxii). The “first principle” is this: “always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective.” (ibid.). The sequence of thoughts here is this: violation of the Context Principle amounts to atomism and atomism leads to psychologism about meaning. In a later passage, he elaborates: “An idea in the subjective sense is what is governed by the psychological laws of association; it is of a sensible pictorial character. An idea in the objective sense belongs to logic and is in principle non-sensible, although the word which means an objective idea is often accompanied by a subjective idea, which nevertheless is not its meaning. Subjective ideas are often demonstrably different in different men, objective ideas are the same for all.” (ibid. 37n1). In this later passage, Frege gives expression to the thought that, if psychologism about meaning is correct, then rampant relativism follows. For more discussion on how psychologism arises out of a violation of the Context Principle, cf. Diamond (1995).

false judgments unintelligible, for they should be obviously false. Burnyeat (1990), whose interpretation of the paradoxes and the setting up of the problem is in line with the McDowell/Cooper account, asserts that Plato deliberately focuses on issues of misidentification in the *Theaetetus*, wishing to treat separately mistakes of misdescription in the *Sophist* (cf. *ibid.*, 90). I think that this interpretation misses the point of the solution in the *Sophist*, which is one that is supposed to cover both misdescription and misidentification since misidentification should not be seen as a self-standing portion of judgments worthy of its own solution.<sup>26</sup>

According to the interpretation of the puzzle defended by the three commentators, the atomistic account presupposed by the Knowledge Paradox rests on two mistakes: a. the assumption that all words are names, i.e. their sole function is to secure a reference, and b. the failure to acknowledge the notion of opaque contexts in the manner of the Fregean sense/reference distinction. The first mistake is primary and is due to conflating knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description: what a judgment refers to and what it says, what exists and what is the case (cf. Cooper 1990, 152; McDowell 1998, 164). Only atom-like items are known in the binary manner of acquaintance, which is not a relation we can bear to an articulate sentence that manages to say something. But if the meaning of a sentence is constructed by summing together the meanings of its parts, then it seems that knowledge by description is left idle. The second mistake – the response to which they all credit as resolving the paradox (e.g. Burnyeat (1990, 85-86)) – enters the story once we try to account for falsehood given the constraints of atomism. Their thought is that, even in cases of genuine misidentification, we need the sense/reference distinction to make sense of a judgment that can

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<sup>26</sup> On a similar note, Ackrill (1965) suggests that Plato is presenting us with an “analysis” of judgments – both of misidentification and misdescription (cf. 392 and 401) – such that they say of the terms that feature in the judgment that they are parties to a relationship. Ackrill tries to make sense of this thought, effectively defending logical atomism, but, again, I think that this interpretation fails to see why a quasi-Russellian account of unity in judgment is a bad one.

be non-self-intimately true and since Socrates (or Plato) does not seem to appreciate that,<sup>27</sup> he is prone to confuse himself with the Knowledge Paradox.

The general formulation of this argument seems to me right. After all, and as I have already granted, the Knowledge Paradox is set out in atomistic terms. Consider Premise 3, for example: If one knows a thing, it is impossible for that same person not to know that same thing. Knowledge of something here is conceived in binary terms exactly like Russell's acquaintance: Once a certain threshold has been reached, then you have knowledge, period; you have gained something that you did not have before and, specifically, something that allows you to produce certain judgments. While we do not get an account here of what that threshold might be (e.g. causal connection), it seems that all that it takes to "know x" is to have registered x's name and be able to include it in judgments; that is, to have x's name in one's vocabulary or repertoire of available words. We can see that this is so by observing the options laid out for false judgment in 5.(a)-(e). They all require that the judgment maker has access to the names, that she can judge with them. Indeed, that she can judge with those names is evidence that she knows the things. For that is precisely how the paradox is drawn: if she speaks their names out, she knows them; but if she knows them, she cannot make false judgments with their names. I conclude then that to "know" something in the Knowledge Paradox is to be able to use its name in judgment. Importantly, this "knowledge" is not one for using the words in service to saying something, as that would require clarity about the Being Paradox, but only license to utter them.

The question to ask at this point is if the Frege-inspired solution, which simply supplies another avenue for reference and opens up some room for falsehood in the atomistic world,

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<sup>27</sup> I find this a strange assumption to make about Plato given that, within the first three pages of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates and Theodorus employ three different senses to secure the reference to Theaetetus: 1. "he's the middle one of those boys who are coming towards us now" (144c); 2. "he's the son of Euphronius" (144c); 3. "his name is Theaetetus." 3 was transparent to Theodorus but opaque to Socrates, 2 was transparent to Socrates but opaque to Theodorus. Further, Plato seems to be very much aware of the sense/reference distinction in part 3 of the dialogue (cf. especially 204b-c). I discuss this passage in more detail in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

suffices to resolve the paradox. I think that it does not. If I am right, then the criticism mounted by the three commentators will have been shown inapt. Consider again what it is that Socrates finds impossible in the cases under premise 5. He is not worried only about the fact that the cases which his principles circumscribe are in tension with those same principles; he is not merely stumped by a paradox. Rather, he is concerned about what these cases demand in themselves, because what they demand is that one says, of two people that she knows, that one is the other, which is an impossible demand. Competent speakers, who are proficient in the language and in control of themselves, simply do not issue such judgments except as jokes or in other special circumstances. Having a name in one's repertoire means that one knows whom or what the word names and moreover, it means that the name is used to name that very thing. Names for other individuals simply cannot be used indiscriminately, as wildcard names as it were. That is, I cannot name Theaetetus hoping to refer to Socrates. If I make such an assertion and my sentence is repeated back to me, I will simply retract my judgment and assume that it was the result of a slip. As Russell himself put it, in what McDowell calls a "plausible principle": "It seems scarcely possible to believe that we can make a judgment or entertain a supposition without knowing what it is that we are judging or supposing about."<sup>28</sup> Even if we turn to the more pointed case of the Morning Star and Evening Star, the situation does not change. If I do not know that these refer to the same celestial body, I simply do not use "Evening Star" to refer to what I take to be the Morning Star.

If that is right, then that is because the subject is assumed to be the author of their judgment and, as such, her understanding of what she means to say and what there is to say informs what it is that she actually says. She has control over her judgment and does not find

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted by McDowell (1998, 164) from Russell's (1910-1911) "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description." According to McDowell, Russell abused the principle to support knowledge-by-acquaintance and atomism, i.e. in order to defend the notion that "what it is" always secures a reference, in Russell's case, meanings.

herself with judgments that she does not understand, does not believe, or cannot endorse. Hence, the question that is raised in the paradox becomes: If I know what I am talking about, how can I get it wrong? Alternatively: if I have knowledge, why is it not being expressed as knowledge? That Plato's problem here in this paradox has to do with issuing false judgments made up of the words I know, about things I know, and in the way I know them should be evident when one considers why cases 5.(c) and (e) are ruled out: I cannot mistake something I do not know either with something I know or with something (else) I do not know. The reason is that I lack the words! I lack, that is, the capacity to make true judgments about them.

The target of the Knowledge Paradox is that getting things wrong presupposes knowledge. In this conception of the problem, the Fregean intervention misses the target and does so in two ways. The Frege-inspired approach explains that false judgments involving failure to identify the Morning Star and the Evening Star are false because these are co-referring expressions with different senses. This is the first way in which it misses the target of the paradox, for this explanation has nothing to say about the person making the judgment – it is a logical explanation. If it did have to say something about the person, it would say that she made the judgment in an opaque context, because she did not know that the two stars were really one planet. This explanation, then, credits the judgment maker's ignorance and not her knowledge for falsehood, thus bypassing the paradox altogether. Moreover, it credits a different sort of ignorance than the one the Knowledge Paradox concerns itself with. It credits ignorance about the facts of the world and not the sort of ignorance which precludes utterance. I conclude that the solution endorsed by most commentators serves only to make atomism more palatable as a logical theory and fails to address the problem posed, which is this: Given that the judgment is produced by knowledge, then why does it not reflect knowledge? Why is it not true?

My suggestion is that Plato's question in this puzzle does not need atomism to be posed and for that reason does not need the Frege-inspired solution. Let us imagine that we have Russell's "plausible principle" that describes the sane subject who is in charge of her judgment, that we have a quasi-Russellian atomism, and that we allow for opaque contexts of judgment, per the Fregean solution. Is it not still open to Plato to ask this: Since there is something that you know and your judgment is in your control, how come what you judged was not itself a piece of knowledge? I think this question is still open, which demonstrates that the prevalent interpretation misfires. Notice also that there is nothing particularly atomistic about this set of questions, for all they ask is this: What happened to the true judgments you have available?

The paradox notices that if we are ever licensed to make some judgment, then we are always and primarily in a position to make a true judgment and that, in turn, because all we can do is judge on the basis of what we know or, rather, to formulate in a judgment the contents of our knowledge. This is not simply due to the conceptual intimacy between knowledge and truth; it is also corollary to the idea that if I am using a word, it must be the case that there are true statements I am aware of that I can make with it. It is not clear how I could have picked up the name otherwise.<sup>29</sup> The tension Plato brings out with this paradox is one between falsehood and the presumption of truth required by our epistemic psychology as it is spelled out in the paradox. Hence, in making a false judgment – Plato nudges – the subject missed her chance to make a true one, failing to act as she ought. Inexplicably, her knowledge did not make it into the judgment.

Now that we have the puzzle in view, we ought to reflect on whether its question is well-posed and, further, if it is a question that will be helpful towards accounting for false judgment. We ought to consider, that is, whether considerations as to why a given person might have missed their chance for knowledge expression can furnish an explanatory account of

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<sup>29</sup> For a more dedicated discussion as to why that might be so, cf. Mueller (1976), especially pages 193-195.

falsehood. For, if pursuing this question is ultimately shown futile – as it is – we ought to reflect on the fact that it would not grip us without an accompanying paradox, since being wrong is certainly compatible with our psychology. I argue that we should be able to see that pursuing the phenomenon of missed chances is not going to be a pursuit of the phenomenon of false judgment, but of something akin to intellectual vice. Casting false judgment as missing the chance to convey one’s knowledge presupposes – as I have been suggesting – that one has always available to them to make a true judgment. But this gives rise to the subsequent thought that one should simply stick to the knowledge that is easy for them to put into judgment. Plausibly, this means that a judgment-maker should only make judgments about things of which they are absolutely certain. But if the question on the nature of falsehood is specified as “why did you judge about things of which you are not certain?”, then the answer could only be “because I am impetuous” and that is far from satisfactory.

For our purposes in the *Theaetetus*, this is an unacceptable answer because it analyzes falsehood as rashness or some such character flaw. This answer capitulates to the paradox, which insists that all normal judgments, made in normal circumstances, where everything is working normally, are true and falsehood is the product of interference with the normal course of events. Quite apart from being anticlimactic, this answer is Protagorean. It is Protagorean because it grants the underlying assumption that the normal or “good case” scenario is that all possible judgments are true and attributes that to our psychological constitution. This is the same route that Protagoras takes in introducing the Secret Doctrine (156a-157c) as justification for the Measure Thesis: All of our judgments are true because of how our judgments get made, namely, in perception. Similarly, this is the answer that he opts for in his Defense (166a-168c): All possible judgments are true. Some may be “better but in no wise truer”<sup>30</sup> than others but the ones

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<sup>30</sup> “βελτίω μὲν τὰ ἕτερα τῶν ἐτέρων, ἀληθέστερα δὲ οὐδέν” (167b3-4).



that are worse are such because of the ill condition that the judgment maker is in. Evidently, taking a psychological approach to the problem of falsehood turns falsehood into a psychological phenomenon. And turning it into a psychological phenomenon means no longer seeing it as a logical one. That is, if falsehood simply calls to mind the sub-optimal condition of the speaker, then it is divorced from truth, which is its natural counterpart. If the false is not seen, first and foremost, as the contradictory of the true, then it is not really seen as the false at all. It is seen, instead, as something that reflects what brought it into being; as something that reveals its provenance. This surely leads one to believe that all judgments are of the same kind, and thus true. Hence, any purported solution to the problem that is grounded on the condition of the judgment-maker will not be an explanation of falsehood as such.

I hope to have shown in this section that, contrary to the dominant interpretation, the two approaches that correspond to the two paradoxes are not two sides of the same coin; they are different coins in competition with each other to account for the single phenomenon of falsehood. They conceive of the problem differently and they point towards different solutions: The Being Paradox concludes that all genuine judgments are true, while the Knowledge Paradox concludes that all judgments that could possibly be made are necessarily true. The Being Approach asks for a logical solution, the Knowledge Approach for a psychological one. I also argued that the Knowledge Approach understands falsehood as the judgment of the inferior people, which should prove its own inadequacy as it severs the link between true and false judgments.<sup>31</sup> This solution is self-undermining because the point of contrast is now located

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<sup>31</sup> The Being Paradox does not sever that link quite as forcefully. It says that everything that is not a true judgment is not a judgment. In that sense, there is no room for falsehood at all in the Being Paradox. But more importantly, it is possible for the Being Approach to cash out its beings and non-beings in such a way that they are connected. In that case, the link between truth and falsehood would not be severed, though it would be radically altered.

between good and bad judgment-makers and not between truth and falsity. I further substantiate my interpretation of the Knowledge Approach in the remainder of the chapter.

I wish to close this section by contrasting two responses to the Knowledge Paradox, as I did in examining the Being Paradox. One is to identify the problem-causing assumption and reject it by getting clear as to why it is misguided. The relevant assumption is that our judgments express the source from which they sprang. Since that source is knowledge and knowledge is true, our judgments carry a presumption of truth. To reject this assumption, one could deny that knowledge takes the shape of a source by indicating that thinking so would be to commit a category mistake of sorts.<sup>32</sup> I find this proposal plausible but it does not help with the problem at issue, which is to explain how a false judgment can come to be. Thus, I suggest that to overcome the Knowledge Paradox, one ought to reject the idea that judgments come from a source, that they are the external manifestation of something internal, or the internal made external.

Removing that assumption would leave the road clear for us to pick back up the insight gained in the Final Refutation Argument: human judgment is a striving for truth. It is not to be defined as a recognition, or as a reaction mediated by something in the head like a conceptual scheme or “knowledge.” Judgment should not be viewed, in the first instance, as something that comes from somewhere, but rather as something that aims to reach something, namely truth.

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<sup>32</sup> This is perhaps what commentators, such as Gonzalez, mean when they say that knowledge is not a possession. In two papers, Gonzalez suggests that knowledge should be understood as a disposition to engage in the activity of dialectic. I find this to be on the right track but I am not persuaded by his thought that this amounts to a “performative contradiction” (Gonzalez 2020, 181). He thinks this – it seems to me – on account of thinking of dialectic primarily as a testing activity with no *terminus*. He says: “In general, experts who claim to be the measure of what counts for knowledge can justify their claim only by submitting to a discussion of what knowledge is, but in so doing they cease to be the measure they claim to be.” (Gonzalez 2009, 10). He concludes that the question on knowledge “must always remain open” (ibid., 21). I disagree with his thought that engaging in dialectic *ipso facto* strips the knower of their credentials, even performatively, and I disagree with what seems to me to be a corollary of his position, namely that knowledge or expertise is never to be had. This corollary seems to be in place in the 2020 paper as well, for there is an implication that knowledge requires demonstrative proof (cf. Gonzalez, (2020, 180): knowledge is exhibited in dialectic but, in dialectic, no one has knowledge). In that paper, he arrives at a position, according to which knowledge describes the interpersonal dialectical activity, rather than the disposition. It is not clear to me what it would mean for knowledge to belong jointly to two people or to an activity rather than individuals and Gonzalez does not elaborate.

With that insight held firmly, it is natural to define false judgment as the judgment that fails in the striving task after having attempted it. Notice that this presupposes recognition of the logical aspect of the problem, i.e. that true and false judgments are contradictories and that they are such because they point to, or picture, the same fact: they are both “of something that is” and indeed of the same being. It is only after having secured the intimacy between true and false judgments that one can see that false judgment is the corresponding failure to the success achieved by the true judgment, i.e. it is a striving falling short. Thus, a psychological approach to the problem of false judgment requires clarity about the logical issues. That is because, without the logical insights, one taking the psychological path can easily be led to think that our judgments are solely a function of our stored knowledge. This is precisely the hidden premise that gives rise to the paradox and it is the hidden premise that should be rejected.

Yet, that premise is nowhere rejected in the Digression, which means that Socrates and Theaetetus make two consecutive mistakes. First, they take the Knowledge Approach without having solved the Being Paradox. Second, they take the Knowledge Approach while failing to solve the Knowledge Paradox. I said in the previous section that one could take the Being Approach and go on a search for non-beings, thus submitting to the paradox rather than solving it. As I go on to show, Socrates and Theaetetus take the analogous path. They accept the assumption that a judgment expresses the source that brought it into being, which is understood to be knowledge, and they go on to look for a way that this source can give rise to a false judgment. It is because they have followed this investigative path that their discussion fails.

#### **Section 4 – “Other-Judging”: The Inadequate Solution**

In this section, I begin to argue that the remainder of the Digression is dedicated to the concept of “other-judging” (*allodoxia*). Specifically, I show that other-judging constitutes an

attempt to make the knowledge-sources yield false, rather than true, judgments and is, as such, an attempt to vindicate or justify the *desiderata* introduced by the Knowledge Paradox. Thus, I show that other-judging is neither a new, independent approach to the problem of falsehood nor an attempt to go back to the Being Approach.

Recall the progression of the Digression thus far. First, we have a question about what approach to take to the problem (“how should we set about it?” (188a5)). Second, we have the Knowledge Paradox and admission of defeat. Third, we have the Being Paradox and admission of defeat. At that point, other-judging comes in. Socrates introduces it with this question: “Does what we call false judgment come to be in this way?”<sup>33</sup> and goes on to give our central text:

“We say that there is such a thing as a false judgment, which is a sort of other-judging; it occurs when someone makes an interchange (*antallaxamenos*) in his thinking and affirms that one of the things which are is another of the things which are. Because that way what he has in his judgment is always a thing which is, but he has one thing in his judgment instead of another, and, in that he misses what he was aiming at, he can properly be said to be making a false judgment.”  
(189b12-c4)<sup>34</sup>

In this general description, we should make the following observations. First, that other-judging seeks to answer the question about how a false judgment comes to be. Already, this puts it closer to the Knowledge Approach rather than the Being Approach. Second, that the answer it offers looks to the person making the judgment rather than the judgment itself. This very

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<sup>33</sup> Translation my own. “ἀλλ’ ἄρα ὧδε γιγνόμενον τοῦτο προσαγορεύομεν;” (189b10).

<sup>34</sup> “ἀλλοδοξίαν τινὰ οὖσαν ψευδῆ φαμεν εἶναι δόξαν, ὅταν τις τι τῶν ὄντων ἄλλο αὖ τῶν ὄντων ἀνταλλαζάμενος τῆ διανοίᾳ φῆ εἶναι. οὕτω γὰρ ὄν μὲν ἀεὶ δοξάζει, ἕτερον δὲ ἀνθ’ ἑτέρου, καὶ ἀμαρτάνων οὐ ἐσκόπει δικαίως ἀν καλοῖτο ψευδῆ δοξάζων.”

strongly suggests that it takes the Knowledge Approach. Third, that mention of beings, or “things which are”, does not suffice as demonstration that other-judging takes the Being Approach.<sup>35</sup>

To see why that is so, let us consider again the two paths one might take in following up on the Being Paradox: either resolve it by showing that a false sentence is the negation of a true one about the same fact or surrender to the paradox by seeking non-beings. I do not think that there is evidence for either of these paths in the *allodoxia* passage. There are no non-beings mentioned here, there is no mention of negation, and in fact, there is no mention of truth either. Instead, the focus is on what is going on with the judgment-maker at the moment of judgment.

Moreover, in order to see this passage as an intervention on the Being Paradox, we would need to be able to see the judgments that result from other-judging as false. But that is not possible. The other-judging judgments are false not on account of being set over non-being but on account of the fact that they are the result of an exchange made by the person issuing the judgment. Once the judgments have been released, as it were, from the custody of the speaker, they are about beings and as such true. We might call to mind here what I called early on the “description worry” (a judgment might be false of some being but true of another) or the problem that plagued Russell’s Dual Relations view, that a false judgment would be another real thing to relate to, exactly on par with the true judgment. In the proposal of *allodoxia*, falsehood is located in the prior stage: when it is still in the custody of the judgment-maker, when she is still putting it together. In other words, talk of “being” here does not do the work that it would have done if the Being Approach were taken up. The “beings” seem to have been moved inside the speaker’s head and now stand for the knowledge-sources. They stand, that is, for whatever it is that licenses one to use names in judgment. They are not what a judgment is set over, rather they are parts of the judgment, or names, that are available to the speaker. This is what makes other-

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<sup>35</sup> This is *pace* Cooper (1990, 200-201), who takes mention of beings to indicate the fusion of the two approaches.

judging an interchange and it is what steers the conversation away from the realm of non-being and into an exploration of the name-object pair that was so central to the Knowledge Approach. I conclude that other-judging is not an attempt to solve the Being Paradox.

I suggest that it constitutes an attempt to solve the Knowledge Paradox. *Allodoxia* explains false judgment as the utterance of a name that goes with an object different from the one intended and that due to the judgment-maker having flipped the names, or bits of knowledge, in her mind. The name used by the person does not name the object intended but a different one. In this way, the knowledge-source continues to be knowledge, insofar as it names something and would normally yield true judgments, but it is not the right knowledge for the occasion, insofar as what it names is something else. Therefore, I claim that the general characterization of *allodoxia* may be seen as an attempt to make knowledge yield falsehood while preserving the assumption that, *qua* source, it can only give rise to true judgments. This is precisely what I argued is the way to intervene in the Knowledge Paradox while accepting all of its terms.

Now, once Socrates gives the general characterization quoted above, Theaetetus immediately cashes out the interchange as one between contraries, that is, uttering ‘beautiful’ instead of ‘ugly’ (189c). Then, Socrates establishes that according to the *allodoxia* line of thinking “it’s possible to put something in one’s thoughts as being something else, not the thing it is”<sup>36</sup> and that, in doing so, the subject thinks about – or has available – both of those things either simultaneously or in immediate succession.<sup>37</sup> At that point, Socrates makes the same move that we saw underlying the Knowledge Paradox, albeit not about two individuals like Theodorus and Theaetetus, but about contraries:

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<sup>36</sup> “ἔστιν ἄρα κατὰ τὴν σὴν δόξαν ἕτερόν τι ὡς ἕτερον καὶ μὴ ὡς ἐκεῖνο τῇ διανοίᾳ τίθεσθαι.” (189d7-8)

<sup>37</sup> “Σ: ὅταν οὖν τοῦθ’ ἢ διάνοιά του δρᾶ, οὐ καὶ ἀνάγκη αὐτὴν ἦτοι ἀμφοτέρω ἢ τὸ ἕτερον διανοεῖσθαι; Θ: ἀνάγκη μὲν οὖν: ἦτοι ἅμα γε ἢ ἐν μέρει.” (189e1-3).

“To put it generally, ask yourself whether you’ve ever set out to persuade yourself that one of two things is certainly the other, or – quite the contrary – you’ve never, even in your sleep, had the face to say to yourself that odd is in fact even or anything else of that kind.” (190b4-8).<sup>38</sup>

Evidently, *allodoxia* encounters the exact same problem as the Knowledge Paradox: how to make it the case that a sane person may wrongly use two words that they understand and with which they should be able to make true judgments. Socrates repeats the same point regarding an interchange between concepts that are not proper names or contraries, exclaiming that no one “sane or mad” would “in all seriousness”, having “a grasp of both in his mind”, say that “ox is necessarily horse or two [is] one” (190c). This point should be recognizable as the one at the heart of the Knowledge Paradox: sane subjects judge in accordance with, and not in opposition to, their knowledge. Demanding of them to judge contrary to their understanding is incoherent.

Let us observe that the obstacle that *allodoxia* faces, which is the same as the one that the Knowledge Paradox faces, is that human beings are self-conscious agents of judgment: they make the judgment they intend to make. Socrates thinks that to say of an x that it is y, when that is not the case and when the speaker knows that it is not the case, is completely absurd because all thinking that precedes judgment is self-conscious. “When the mind is thinking” he says, it is “asking itself questions and answering them” (189e). We are meant to appreciate that judgments never escape the notice of their maker, which is what explains the unintelligibility of consciously judging that x is y. Therefore, in order for *allodoxia* to work, it would have to be the case that the interchange escapes the notice of the person.<sup>39</sup> I will argue that this is precisely what the Wax

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<sup>38</sup> “ἢ καί, τὸ πάντων κεφάλαιον, σκόπει εἴ ποτ’ ἐπεχείρησας σεαυτὸν πείθειν ὡς παντὸς μᾶλλον τὸ ἕτερον ἕτερόν ἐστιν, ἢ πᾶν τὸναντίον οὐδ’ ἐν ὕπνῳ πρόποτε ἐτόλμησας εἰπεῖν πρὸς σεαυτὸν ὡς παντάπασιν ἄρα τὰ περιττὰ ἄρτια ἐστιν ἢ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον.” (190b4-8).

<sup>39</sup> Chappell (2004, 168-169) recognizes that the Wax Tablet and Aviary seek to overcome the challenge posed by “other-judging” by an appeal to “inadvertency.” Chappell reads the structure of the False Judgment Digression in much the same way that I do. Yet, Chappell thinks the passage is, primarily, a critique of empiricist conceptions of

Tablet and Aviary models have been tasked with providing: an account of a non-self-conscious interchange of knowledge-sources.

In what follows, I will argue that the Wax Tablet and the Aviary are both specifications of other-judging. But given Socrates' introduction, it seems that they are meant to resume the thread of the Knowledge Paradox. Socrates ushers in the Wax Tablet and the Aviary thus: "I'll say we were wrong when we agreed that it's impossible to get into falsehood by judging that things one knows are things one doesn't know."<sup>40</sup> This statement addresses the cases under Premise 5.(d)-(e)<sup>41</sup> thereby signaling that he has found a way that could make sense of them. But in fact, in canvassing the cases of falsehood that the Wax Tablet permits, he includes cases under 5.(a) too, i.e. the cases where the judgment maker thinks that "the things he knows are not those things but other things he knows."<sup>42</sup> Now, these are the very cases ruled out in the discussion of *allodoxia* – no intelligible judgment-maker would make them – but they are also the judgments examined in both the Wax Tablet and the Aviary. Therefore, the two models of the mind seek to make cases 5.(d)-(e) workable but in so doing, they make case 5.(a) workable, thereby reviving *allodoxia* and its associated confusions. Thus, the two images confirm that *allodoxia* constitutes an attempt to accept the challenge set out by the Knowledge Paradox. As I will show, while they elude the absurdity identified in the *allodoxia* section, they face others.

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judgment-making, which require mental images. While I broadly agree that such a view is under attack here, I disagree with the subsequent thought that if those mental images were replaced with Forms, then the conception of judgment would be all right. Specifically, it is not clear to me that the introduction of the Forms would make any more room for thinking. Relatedly, Crivelli (2003) also recognizes the intimate connection between the Knowledge Paradox, "other-judging," and the two models, but his discussion suggests that Plato accepts them. The reason, again, seems to be that both models manage to make room for opaque contexts.

<sup>40</sup> "οὐ φήσω ἡμᾶς ὀρθῶς ὁμολογήσαι, ἠνίκα ὠμολογήσαμεν ἃ τις οἶδεν, ἀδύνατον δοξάζσαι ἃ μὴ οἶδεν εἶναι αὐτὰ καὶ ψευθεῖναι" (191a8-b1).

<sup>41</sup> 5. To make a false judgment, one would have to ... (d) think that "things he knows are things he doesn't know" (188c2-3); or (e) think that "things he doesn't know are things he knows" (188c3).

<sup>42</sup> After a lengthy yet compact survey of the impossible cases (192a-c), Socrates lists the newly permitted ones: "In the case of things one knows, one can think that they're other things which one knows and perceives, or that they're things one doesn't know, but perceives; or one can think that things one knows and perceives are other things one knows and perceives." ("ἐν οἷς οἶδεν, οἰηθῆναι αὐτὰ ἕτερον ἄλλα εἶναι ὧν οἶδε καὶ αἰσθάνεται: ἢ ὧν μὴ οἶδεν, αἰσθάνεται δέ: ἢ ὧν οἶδε καὶ αἰσθάνεται, ὧν οἶδεν αὖ καὶ αἰσθάνεται.", 192c9-d1).



## Section 5 – The Models of the Mind: Wax Tablet and Aviary

Thus far, I have argued that the Being Paradox and the Knowledge Paradox ask different questions and as such delineate different approaches to the phenomenon of falsehood. I have argued that *allogoxia* constitutes an attempt to take the Knowledge Approach, that is, it constitutes an attempt to show how knowledge in the head may, after all, yield falsehood in judgment. Finally, I have been suggesting that the Wax Tablet and Aviary models of the mind constitute efforts to make other-judging, *qua* a proposal on the Knowledge Approach path, work. If either image succeeds – which neither does – then that which will have been achieved is this: a vindication of the Knowledge Approach *qua* the right way to define the phenomenon of falsehood, a specification of that definition as *allogoxia*, and a demonstration of what actually goes on in our heads when we judge. It must be emphasized that what this sequence amounts to is a justification of the underlying premise of the Knowledge Paradox, namely, that judgments are the direct results and manifestations of a source material, in this case identified as a piece of “knowledge.” In the following section, I will elaborate on why that very assumption leads to relativism. Here, I look at the Wax Tablet and Aviary images to clarify precisely the proposal each makes about what is going on when a human being judges.

Let us begin with a general description of the two images. The Wax Tablet proposal supposes that “there’s an imprint-receiving piece of wax in our soul: bigger in some, smaller in others; of cleaner wax in some, of dirtier in others; of harder wax in some, of softer in others, but in some made of wax of a proper consistency.”<sup>43</sup> The Aviary proposal supposes that “every soul [is] a sort of aviary for birds of every kind: some in flocks, apart from the others, some in groups

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<sup>43</sup> “θὲς δὴ μοι λόγου ἔνεκα ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν ἐνὸν κήρινον ἐκμαγεῖον, τῷ μὲν μεῖζον, τῷ δ’ ἔλαττον, καὶ τῷ μὲν καθαρωτέρου κηροῦ, τῷ δὲ κοπωδεστέρου, καὶ σκληροτέρου, ἐνίοις δὲ ὑγροτέρου, ἔστι δ’ οἷς μετρίως ἔχοντος.” (191c8-d2).

of a few, and some alone, flying about just anywhere among them all.”<sup>44</sup> In both cases, the device is blank or empty when we are born and is populated, with imprints or birds, whenever we come to know something (cf. 191c and 197e, respectively). The imprints on the wax and the birds in the aviary stand for the knowledge-sources, as I have been calling them, and it is the content that they encode that is transmitted and reflected into the resulting judgment.

Now, what both of these images do to intervene in the Knowledge Paradox is to introduce distinctions (*diorizomenous*, 192a1) into the monolithic, up to this point, categories of “knowing” and “not knowing.” Let us start with the Wax Tablet, which introduces the third category of “perceiving.” Things perceived may be either known or not known and things known and not known may or may not be perceived.<sup>45</sup> What perception does is to offer a new path for things to figure in one’s judgment without violating the assumption that knowledge-sources yield only true judgments. In doing so, perception becomes the key for cases 5.(d) and (e), making it now possible to judge that something I know is something I do not know – because I perceive it – or to judge that something I do not know – but perceive – is something that I know.<sup>46</sup>

The explanation of falsehood that is offered in the Wax Tablet proposal is that the wrong imprint is matched to the perception. This makes it the case that a false judgment is produced while ensuring that the knowledge-source still yields what it is supposed to yield, i.e. the name known. This explanation relies on qualities of character, like impetuousness or eagerness (cf.

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<sup>44</sup> “νῦν αὖ ἐν ἐκάστη ψυχῇ ποιήσωμεν περισσερεῶνά τινα παντοδαπῶν ὀρνίθων, τὰς μὲν κατ’ ἀγέλας οὔσας χωρὶς τῶν ἄλλων, τὰς δὲ κατ’ ὀλίγας, ἐνίας δὲ μόνας διὰ πασῶν ὅπῃ ἂν τύχωσι πετομένας.” (197d6-10)

<sup>45</sup> “This is the first point I want to make clear to you: it’s possible not to perceive things one knows, and it’s possible to perceive them. [...] And things one doesn’t know, too: it’s possible that on some occasions one doesn’t perceive them either, and that on some occasions one does perceive them.” (192e).

<sup>46</sup> On this, cf. 192c-d and n. 42 above. The full list of cases permitted there is this: (i). I know both X and Y. I only perceive Y. I judge that X is that person I perceive. (ii). I know both X and Y. I only perceive X. I judge that that person I perceive is Y. (iii). I know X but don’t perceive him. I perceive Y but I don’t know him. I judge that X is that person I perceive. (iv). I perceive X but I don’t know him. I know Y but I don’t perceive him. I judge that that person I perceive is Y. (v). I know both X and Y and I perceive both X and Y. I judge that the person I perceive, who is X, is Y and that the other person, who is Y, is X.

193c), to explain why the non-apt imprint is brought to bear in judgment and, in turn, credits the consistency of the wax and the size of the tablet for those qualities of character that are responsible for the issuing of a falsehood. This should remind us of my claim, made in section 2 above, that the question posed by the Knowledge Approach will necessarily lead to explanations of falsehood via character traits, in which case the account is no longer one about falsehood as such, i.e. as a logical phenomenon. The Wax Tablet puts itself at an even worse position because it explains falsehood by appeal to material considerations. It says, effectively, that the quality of one's wax determines how prone the person is to issuing false judgments.<sup>47</sup> And while it might be easy to say that talk of tablets and wax is strictly analogical, it is clear that the specifications of the tablet are supposed to stand for the person's natural features and the predispositions that they are born with. Even if that is not strictly speaking a case of materialism, it is still an explanation of falsehood that appeals to inborn, and evidently predetermined, tendencies.

One thing that follows from conceiving of our capacity for judgment as the realization of entrenched tendencies in this way is that room is now opened up for the 5.(a) cases, that is, the cases where I make false judgments about two individuals or things that I know, regardless of whether or not I perceive them. The reason is that, due to the relevant natural characteristics, the wrong imprint might be activated to figure in judgment at any point. There is always a risk that impetuosity and over-eagerness will interfere with the normal course of things. Indeed, Socrates states clearly and without special mention that, in the Wax Tablet model, one can be in a position in which they know two people and they perceive those two people and still get both of their names wrong.<sup>48</sup> Socrates calls that a "transposition" (*parallaxis* at 194d1) and a case of "different-judging" (*heterodoxia*, 193d1), thus conspicuously alluding to the *allodoxia* section.

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<sup>47</sup> This point is made in 194c-195a.

<sup>48</sup> Again, cf. 192c-d and n. 42 above.

The crucial difference between *alldoxia* as it was originally introduced and as it is conceived in the Wax Tablet is that, in the former, the proposal was ruled out as incoherent on account of requiring of a judgment maker that they fail to make the judgment that they intended. The Wax Tablet version of *alldoxia* avoids this problem but at the cost of trivializing the epistemic capacities of the judgment maker: she cannot put together her own judgment. It is her wax tablet that decides which imprints are put to work and not her intentions or understanding. I think it is fair to say that the result of the Wax Tablet image is that the mind of the person disappears. They are no longer the authors of their own judgments.

Similarly, the Aviary distinguishes two senses of knowing: having (*hexis*) and possessing (*ktēsis*) knowledge. As Socrates himself puts it, to possess knowledge without having it is to be understood on the analogy of possessing a coat without wearing it (197b). He cashes out possessing as the capacity (*dunamin*, 197c7) for having and explains that possession of a bird, or piece of knowledge, gives one the capacity to “get hold of and have whenever one likes”<sup>49</sup> that piece of knowledge. The bird that is had and not merely possessed, is the piece of knowledge that is used in judgment, it is the source that gets utilized. The proposal of the Aviary addresses directly the cases under 5.(a), namely, those in which I have all the relevant knowledge available for judgment and yet still make a mistake.<sup>50</sup> Much like the Wax Tablet, the Aviary explains falsehood as the result of “interchange” (*metallagē*, 199c10): out of all the possessed birds, or pieces of knowledge, the wrong one is caught and had in hand. This yields a false judgment, while continuing to maintain that a true judgment is supposed to come out of the knowledge-source, as well as that knowledge-sources are required for a judgment to come into being.

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<sup>49</sup> “λαβεῖν καὶ σχεῖν ἐπειδὴν βούληται” (197c9-d1).

<sup>50</sup> On this, cf. 198e-199b. It is worth mentioning that the Aviary was introduced precisely to account for 5.(a) cases when there is no interference from perception. For that reason, it cannot actually account for the 5.(d) and (e) cases that mention not-knowledge. Yet, we should not take this to mean that the two images are compatible or that they may jointly be true. For one, the Aviary can easily be generalized to account for perception too and for the (d)-(e) cases. But more importantly, if we were to put the two images together, the problems would compound.

I said above that the Wax Tablet has to appeal to materialist considerations, or inborn tendencies, to explain how *allodoxia* comes to be. The Aviary does not offer materialist explanations or appeals to predetermined natural characteristics. But it does not offer any explanation as to why the interchange might occur at all. The possibility of falsehood is left mysterious. The Wax Tablet's appeal to natural predispositions made it the case that the agency of the sane, self-conscious subject was superfluous, playing no significant role in the generation of the judgment. The Aviary reaches the same conclusion despite making no equivalent appeal to predispositions. The subject is lost here because their understanding does not have the efficacy it is supposed to have. We can see that this is so if we focus on Socrates' arithmetical example. An individual may be an expert arithmetician in that they possess all the relevant birds they should possess. So, how are we supposed to understand the thought that such a person would get a calculation of the sort  $5 + 7$  (which is our example) wrong? How are we supposed to understand, that is, that they ended up with the 11 bird in hand, though they were specifically after the 12 bird? Their expertise is evidently not working as expected, for it is not helping the person judge truly. The piece of knowledge simply exists in their mind's aviary but it feels as if it did not really belong to them, as if the person did not know that knowledge.

But it is not simply the case that the birds in the aviary are potentially unattainable pieces of knowledge. The problem with the Aviary is that the birds can themselves avoid capture. I mean to imply that, much like the Wax Tablet reduces mindedness to matter and thus subtracts a mind, the Aviary introduces an extra source of mindedness, which serves to add a second, competing mind within the same person. The person making the judgment has to struggle with her own aviary, her own mind, in order to issue the intended judgment. But this is not a cooperative or reciprocal struggle, as if the judgment-maker were trying to figure out the right

thing to say. It is a one-sided struggle. The birds do not speak to the subject or help her to make the right judgment. They have their own, independent source of motion and have to be overpowered for the intended judgment to be eventually issued. Yet, it seems that they are in principle not tameable. After all, it is their independence that explains falsehood. This means that, once again, the subject is not the author of her judgment. It is not up to her which judgment she will issue and it escapes her control which piece of knowledge will in fact be activated.

I conclude that both the Wax Tablet and the Aviary constitute inadequate models of the mind. That they fail implies that *allogoxia* is not a viable path for explaining false judgment. The initial *allogoxia* proposal was ruled out because it rendered judgment-makers unintelligible. The version championed by the two images fails because it strips the human subject of the ability to put together a judgment that they understand. Neither proposal succeeds at vindicating the Knowledge Paradox, which suggests that taking the Knowledge Approach is misguided. Without a solution to the Being Paradox, falsehood is cashed out either as a consequence of pre-existing mechanisms or as a mysterious occurrence. There are no resources in the Knowledge Approach for saying that a false judgment is a failed attempt in aiming at truth.

## **Section 6 – Knowledge as Source: Understanding the Failure**

In this concluding section, I want to make good on my diagnosis that the root of the problems plaguing the Knowledge Approach is the assumption that judgment requires a source, which it manifests. In addition to being the root of the Knowledge Paradox and the reason that the Knowledge Approach fails, I will argue that it leads to relativism.

The assumption that judgment requires a source material, which it repackages and manifests, is most evident in the final attempt to salvage the Aviary. Theaetetus proposes to introduce into the aviary birds of “unknowing” (199e) in addition to those that contain

knowledge. On this proposal, the issuing of false judgments would be explained as the having of ignorance-birds. This proposal can address cases (c) and (e), which start from “things [the judgment-maker] doesn’t know” but it is surely a ridiculous proposal, as Socrates himself emphasizes. Since ignorance-birds are conceived as no different from their knowledge-bird counterparts, they appear as known to the subject (200a-c). Indeed, they are no more under the subject’s control than the regular ones. The only thing that distinguishes them is that they give rise to false judgments. I conclude from this that Theaetetus finds compelling, and is committed to, the idea that judgment comes from something pre-existing and is therefore moved to stipulate a contrived knowledge-source for falsehood, that is, an ignorance-source.

It is important that Theaetetus makes that proposal immediately after Socrates finds himself deeply dissatisfied with the Aviary image. He is concerned that the conversation led them to admit “that someone who has knowledge of something should be ignorant of that very thing, not through ignorance but because of his own knowledge.”<sup>51</sup> One response to this lamentation is to strain ignorance into something that can be responsible for false judgments. This is the route Theaetetus takes. But a better response, I venture, would be to reflect on what it is about reaching this point in the conversation that is unacceptable. As I have been trying to bring out and as Socrates’ response to the ignorance-birds solution points to, our knowledge should not be conceived as alien to us but as that with which we operate in all our psychic activities. It is what we make our judgments with and what informs our decisions and verdicts. It is the principle of our psychic activity itself. As such, it should be transparent to us. When Socrates insists in response to Theaetetus that we should be able to tell whether a bird is one of knowledge or of ignorance, the point he makes is that it should be clear to us what it is that we know and what the reasons for our judgments are. That is, we should be able to understand that

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<sup>51</sup> “τό τινος ἔχοντα ἐπιστήμην τοῦτο αὐτὸ ἀγνοεῖν, μὴ ἀγνωμοσύνη ἀλλὰ τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιστήμῃ” (199d1-2).

to which we consciously appeal in making our judgments. This transparency demand does not claim that we should be able to have in view our deep-seated fears and unconscious desires. Rather, it sets the reasonable and arguably tautologous requirement that whatever it is that is salient to us in judgment and decision-making is readily available and not something that might elude us at any moment. Appeal to such a transparency requirement does not imply that our mind is an object different from the thinking activity. Rather, it stresses that our understanding is the principle of our psychic activity as it is what we operate with.

This is, again, the point made in the description of thinking: when the soul asks itself questions and answers them, it seeks to understand its resources and its reasons for coming to a verdict. Neither the Wax Tablet nor the Aviary leaves any room for this activity of thinking.<sup>52</sup> By insisting that judgment must reflect a static source, the two images make this thinking activity either redundant – as in the case of the Wax Tablet – or ineffectual – as in the Aviary. The fact that the thinking activity is absent means that something else has to be identified as that which is responsible for the production of judgments, which leads to the idea of a source in the head. This idea, in turn, gives rise to the paradox, because a source that is designed simply to manifest itself in judgment will never yield something other than a repackaged version of a real thing; in other words, something true.

Having shown that this assumption is at the root of the Knowledge Paradox, I will now argue that it is relativist. Surely, Protagoras would be happy to admit any premise that renders falsehood impossible but the idea that judgment comes from a source is especially congenial to relativism. Opting for the Knowledge Approach means that truth and falsehood have been turned into psychological phenomena. While cashing out falsehood as *allodoxia* might be plausible,

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<sup>52</sup> For similar concerns regarding the incompatibility of the Wax Tablet and Aviary, on the one hand, with the thinking activity, on the other, cf. Gonzalez (2007) and (2020).



insofar as we are vulnerable to Freudian slips and other such glitches, it cannot be that what makes a judgment a true one is that it was the product of the normal course of events. For in that case, it loses many of its other characteristics, for instance that it is the goal of our thinking and dialectical procedures and that it is an evaluative norm for our judgments. These are the features that are at the core of philosophical activities as well as most characteristically human activities. By turning truth and falsehood into psychological phenomena, the Knowledge Approach makes investigative activities superfluous.

In addition to corrupting the notion of truth, it also distorts our actual psychology. In examining the Wax Tablet and Aviary models, we saw that the psychologization of truth and falsehood has the immediate consequence that there is no psychic apparatus for activities that go beyond the vocalization of the source material. In order to make the idea of a knowledge-source work, all other psychic capabilities had to be diminished. Therefore, not only are philosophical activities rendered pointless, but there is no longer a corresponding psychic capacity for those activities and so they are also impossible.

This is a bleak conclusion to reach for a number of reasons but I would like to focus on two consequences. First, in the event of a disagreement, whether real or apparent,<sup>53</sup> epistemically impoverished subjects like the ones required by the Knowledge Approach lack the resources to resolve it. It is not possible for them to investigate the truth of the matter and, indeed, doubly so. It is the case both that they lack the capability and that the activity has become unintelligible. Therefore, the disagreement would have to be resolved on external grounds. We might imagine

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<sup>53</sup> I make this distinction because, on a fully relativist understanding, there is no such thing as disagreement, for everyone has a different world available to them and their judgments necessarily mean different things even if they use the same words. I discussed this in Chapter 1. Yet, even then, we can imagine a situation in which two people (mistakenly) believe that they disagree with each other, that one of them said no to the other's yes. It would have to be shown or revealed to them that their judgments are about different things and, as such, not in competition. Without that revelation, it would seem to them that they are in a genuine disagreement. Further, we can imagine a real disagreement in which both people intend to make a claim about the same fact, with the same knowledge-source in the head (i.e. name), but one of them falls prey to other-judging and ends up making the false judgment.

this as the epistemic equivalent to the Thrasymachean claim: just as justice is the will of the stronger, so truth is the judgment of the loudest, or the one with the most friends, or the one with the more esteemed ancestors, etc. – however we decide to specify those grounds.<sup>54</sup> In such a world, whoever has made it their mission to satisfy or manipulate those extrinsic grounds is supreme. That person is surely the sophist.

Therefore, despite insisting on the Measure Thesis and the thought that all possible human judgments are true, a Protagorean philosopher should be happy to define falsehood as *allodoxia* in the manner of the Wax Tablet or Aviary.<sup>55</sup> For in doing so, he would effectively be telling his audience that they are incapable of truth, which means that they need someone like him to put knowledge in their heads and help them avoid *allodoxia*.<sup>56</sup> While accepting *allodoxia* as an account of falsehood would compromise the letter of the Measure Thesis, which stipulates that everyone’s judgments are true, it does not compromise its spirit. It would still be the case that all judgments are of the exact same sort and therefore true in the normal case. It seems to me a very minor concession, on behalf of Protagoras, to admit that there is a small portion of judgments that are the results of glitches and, for that reason, may be labeled false. After all, this would hardly be to admit falsehood; rather, it would be to admit inferior characters.

This brings me to the second consequence. If the foregoing is correct, then we can see that Socrates and Theaetetus have failed to do justice to the very insights they appealed to in

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<sup>54</sup> It is surely not accidental that Thrasymachus himself opts for the Knowledge Approach in an attempt to explain falsehood: “People who make mistakes make them because their knowledge fails them, at which point they are not exercising their skill.” Translation is by Griffith in Ferrari (2013). Greek text: “ἐπλειπούσης γὰρ ἐπιστήμης ὁ ἀμαρτάνων ἀμαρτάνει, ἐν ᾧ οὐκ ἔστι δημιουργός.” (*Republic* 1.340e3-4)

<sup>55</sup> Chappell (2001, 109) also notes that the discussion of false judgment in the Digression “would naturally appeal to the Protagoreans.” Though Chappell shares with me the view that the Knowledge Approach is the focus of the text, Chappell’s reading says that Plato’s target is empiricist conceptions of thinking. I think this is broadly right but I do not think that Chappell’s discussion goes to the heart of the matter which is that judgment should not reflect a source material (cf. here my comment on Chappell’s later book in n. 39 above).

<sup>56</sup> When describing the person who engages in “logic-chopping” argumentation (*antilogikōs*, 164c8), Socrates says this: “... he’d keep on refuting you, without letting go, until you were full of admiration for his enviable wisdom and he’d got you all tangled up. Then he’d take you prisoner and tie you up, and from then on hold you for ransom, at whatever price you and he agreed.” (165d-e).

refuting the definition of knowledge as perception, namely, the idea that the human being's soul is defined by teleological activity that is genuinely its own and oriented at the truth. This very activity has been eroded by the Wax Tablet and Aviary images, both because truth is no longer a goal for us, but only a source, and because the form of our psychology is no longer conceived teleologically. Without the activity of thinking, we have to revert to something akin to what I called the Tunnel Model in the preceding chapter: all psychic activity is receptive, judgments are attributed to the body, and judgments reproduce a source material. These sources may either be out in the world or they may be in the head, in the manner of a conceptual scheme or in the manner of the two images of the mind laid out in the Digression. On such an account of judgment, one can reasonably claim that knowledge is perception.

Having reached this conclusion, we can see that, depending on one's understanding of what judgment is and how it comes into being, the definition of knowledge as true judgment can collapse into the definition of knowledge as perception. This certainly happens if we opt for the Wax Tablet model of the mind. While the Aviary cannot in any straightforward sense be enlisted in defense of knowledge as perception, its positioning in the Knowledge Approach makes it so that it can still be enlisted in defense of relativism. Both images directly support relativism because they do away with thinking and truth-oriented activities, on account of insisting on the assumption that an internal source is needed to explain external judgments. If knowledge is identified as that source, then knowledge is called on to explain all mental activity, including false or bad judgments. In that case, and as Socrates has been protesting throughout, that makes a mockery of knowledge, as it is no longer recognizable as such. This result is surely welcome to someone who wants to deny that true judgments are inherently better than false ones and that their being true suffices to establish their value.

For that reason, a proponent of the Knowledge Approach is a proponent of relativism even if they do not know it. Yet, I hope to have given reasons to think that the Knowledge Approach is a bad one to take even if we set aside the context of the *Theaetetus*. That is, even if the sources were not identified as knowledge-sources but as something else, it would still be the case that there would be no room for thinking, or any other truth-oriented activity, whether in the head or out in the world. And if there is no truth-oriented activity, then there is no possibility for putting up a fight against relativism.

#### 4. Understanding Why the Dream Theory (201d–202c) Is Objectionable

The third and last candidate definition of knowledge entertained in the *Theaetetus* is a familiar one: knowledge is true judgment with an account (*alethēs doxa meta logou*, 201c-d). This is surely a promising definition, not only because it is one that Plato seems to endorse elsewhere (for example, in *Meno* and *Republic*), but also because, as Socrates puts it here, “what knowledge could there be without an account and a correct judgment?” (202d).<sup>1</sup> Despite its promise, the definition is rejected in the *Theaetetus* and, despite its familiarity, it is presented as if it stood for a very specific and quite sophisticated epistemology, which seems completely alien from what the definition was meant to capture in the other dialogues. This view is commonly called the Dream Theory. In contrast to the *Meno*’s stable true judgments or the *Republic*’s dialectical method, the Dream Theory claims that knowledge is true judgment with an account because to know something is to be able to specify the elements that make it up. The peculiarities of the Dream Theory’s presentation, along with the fact that its discussion appears to be entirely self-contained and ostensibly independent from the rest of the dialogue, have puzzled scholars. My primary goal in this chapter is to show that the discussion of the Dream Theory is intimately connected to the rest of the dialogue. Specifically, I argue that the purpose of examining the view is that it constitutes a more modern retelling of the Protagorean Secret Doctrine (156a-157c), and is for that reason a relativist epistemology. Hence, as I will show, examination of the Dream Theory demonstrates to the reader that relativism is pervasive and a perennial threat against which any serious investigation into knowledge should always be on guard.

Yet, contrary to the position that I will defend, the most widely held interpretation is that Plato endorses a view much like the Dream Theory, insofar as its refutation is not quite a rejection of it but a call for revision. On this prevalent reading, the reader is invited to salvage the

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<sup>1</sup> “τίς γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἔτι ἐπιστήμη εἴη χωρὶς τοῦ λόγου τε καὶ ὀρθῆς δόξης;” (202d6-7)

Dream Theory by revising it in the model of *grammatikē*, the science of grammar (or spelling). The Dream Theory resembles *grammatikē* in its decompositionalist character but deviates from it in its stipulation that elements are unknowable. Scholars (e.g., Fine (1979), Burnyeat (1990), Sedley (2004), Chappell (2004), Thaler (2011))<sup>2</sup> argue that Socrates' refutation of the Dream Theory, in which he assimilates structured wholes to unstructured heaps, is blatantly dubious precisely because the readers are meant to see that the Dream Theory must be tweaked to fit the model of *grammatikē*. The motivating thought is that *grammatikē*, whose elements are knowable, is able to accommodate structure. This interpretation also appeals to Socrates' brief discussion of *grammatikē* at the conclusion of his refutation (206a-b). In this chapter, I challenge this widespread interpretation of the dialectic of the text by showing, not only that the Dream Theory is genuinely objectionable, but also that *grammatikē* does not fare much better than the Dream Theory against Socrates' refutation.

The chapter is organized in four parts. After an introductory look at the Dream Theory, I first go over Socrates' refutation to clarify that the charge mounted against the view is meant to address what I identify as the Dream Theory's core epistemological commitment, namely that knowledge is a matter of reference. In the second section, I show why Socrates is right to accuse the view of such a referential epistemology, which permits me to lay bare the Dream Theory's kinship to Protagorean relativism. In the third section, I consider the possibility of revising the Dream Theory into the image of *grammatikē* and argue that doing so would be fruitless. Finally, I make my own proposal regarding what the way forward is.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the commentators listed do not all have the same view. Fine, Burnyeat, and Chappell have overall similar interpretations. Sedley's understanding of what knowledge of *grammatikē* amounts to is somewhat different than the rest (insofar as he thinks that only elements are knowable therein, which he endorses on behalf of Plato). Thaler has a revisionist understanding of the passage (particularly, he thinks that the two horns of Socrates' dilemma are not exhaustive but complementary), yet he arrives at the same position as Fine *et al.* Other scholars with a similar view are Polansky (1992), Modrak (2012), Becker (2006), Lee (2011), Miller (1992), Annas (1982).

## Section 1 – Knowledge of Wholes and the Individuation Principle

Let us begin with our text:

“(1) In my dream, I seemed to hear people saying that the primary elements, as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account. (2) For, each of them itself, by itself, can only be named, and one can’t go on to say anything else, neither that it is nor that it isn’t; because in that case, one would be attaching being or not being to it, whereas one oughtn’t to add anything if one is going to express that thing, itself, alone. In fact one shouldn’t even add ‘itself’, or ‘that’, or ‘each’, or ‘alone’, or ‘this’, or any of several other things of that kind; because those things run about and get added to everything, being different from the things they’re attached to, whereas if the thing itself could be expressed in an account and had an account proper to itself, it would have to be expressed apart from everything else. As things are, it’s impossible that any of the primary things should be expressed in an account; because the only thing that’s possible for it is to be named, because a name is the only thing it has. (3) But as for the things composed of them, just as the things themselves are woven together, so their names, woven together, come to be an account. (4) In that way, the elements have no account and are unknowable, but they’re perceivable; and the complexes are knowable and expressible in an account and judgeable in a true judgment. (5) Now when someone gets hold of the true judgment of something without an account, his soul is in a state of truth about it but doesn’t know it; because someone who can’t give and receive an account of something isn’t knowledgeable about that thing. But if he gets hold of an account as well, then it’s possible not

only for all that to happen, but also for him to be in a perfect condition in respect of knowledge.” (201d-202c)<sup>3</sup>

The Dream Theory is introduced as a specification of the final definition of knowledge examined in the dialogue, namely that knowledge is true judgment with an account (*alethēs doxa meta logou*). In summary, the theory says that things in the world are either simple entities or complex entities made out of the simple ones.<sup>4</sup> Only the complex ones have an account and are, as such, knowable. The simple things lack an account, in fact they can only be named, but they are that through which the complex things are known, since the account of a complex consists of

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<sup>3</sup> Translation is from McDowell (1973), numbering my own. Here is the original: “(1) ἐγὼ γὰρ αὖ ἐδόκουν ἀκούειν τινῶν ὅτι τὰ μὲν πρῶτα οἰονπερεὶ στοιχεῖα, ἐξ ὧν ἡμεῖς τε συγκείμεθα καὶ τᾶλλα, λόγον οὐκ ἔχοι. (2) αὐτὸ γὰρ καθ’ αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὀνομάσαι μόνον εἴη, προσειπεῖν δὲ οὐδὲν ἄλλο δυνατόν, οὔθ’ ὡς ἔστιν, οὔθ’ ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν: ἤδη γὰρ ἂν οὐσίαν ἢ μὴ οὐσίαν αὐτῷ προστίθεσθαι, δεῖν δὲ οὐδὲν προσφέρειν, εἴπερ αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο μόνον τις ἐρεῖ. ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ τὸ ‘αὐτὸ’ οὐδὲ τὸ ‘ἐκεῖνο’ οὐδὲ τὸ ‘ἕκαστον’ οὐδὲ τὸ ‘μόνον’ οὐδὲ ‘τοῦτο’ προσοιστέον οὐδ’ ἄλλα πολλὰ τοιαῦτα: ταῦτα μὲν γὰρ περιτρέχοντα πᾶσι προσφέρεσθαι, ἕτερα ὄντα ἐκείνων οἷς προστίθεται, δεῖν δέ, εἴπερ ἦν δυνατόν αὐτὸ λέγεσθαι καὶ εἶχεν οἰκείον αὐτοῦ λόγον, ἄνευ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων λέγεσθαι. νῦν δὲ ἀδύνατον εἶναι ὅτιον τῶν πρῶτων ῥηθῆναι λόγῳ: οὐ γὰρ εἶναι αὐτῷ ἄλλ’ ἢ ὀνομάζεσθαι μόνον—ὄνομα γὰρ μόνον ἔχειν— (3) τὰ δὲ ἐκ τούτων ἤδη συγκείμενα, ὥσπερ αὐτὰ πέπλεκται, οὕτω καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα αὐτῶν συμπλεκέντα λόγον γεγονέναι: ὀνομάτων γὰρ συμπλοκὴν εἶναι λόγου οὐσίαν. (4) οὕτω δὴ τὰ μὲν στοιχεῖα ἄλογα καὶ ἄγνωστα εἶναι, αἰσθητὰ δέ: τὰς δὲ συλλαβὰς γνωστάς τε καὶ ῥητὰς καὶ ἀληθεῖ δόξῃ δοξαστάς. (5) ὅταν μὲν οὖν ἄνευ λόγου τὴν ἀληθεῖ δόξαν τινός τις λάβῃ, ἀληθεύειν μὲν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν περὶ αὐτό, γινώσκειν δ’ οὐ: τὸν γὰρ μὴ δυνάμενον δοῦναι τε καὶ δεῖξασθαι λόγον ἀνεπιστήμονα εἶναι περὶ τούτου: προσλαβόντα δὲ λόγον δυνατόν τε ταῦτα πάντα γεγονέναι καὶ τελείως πρὸς ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν.”

<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I take for granted that the Rylean (1990) interpretation of the Dream Theory, according to which the object of knowledge is a fact and not a thing, is incorrect. On Ryle’s reading, Plato is grappling with the same questions that 20th ce. Logical Atomists were, namely the composition and construction of statements that manage to say something true or false. On that reading, the object of knowledge is propositionally structured and the *logos* presents the constituents that permit the sentence pointing to the knowable fact to say what it is meant to say. Ryle’s account argues persuasively that the *logos* outlined in the Dream Theory is not entitled to propositional unity and therefore, fails as a logical theory. I take the more traditional interpretive path, according to which the objects of knowledge are genuinely things and the elements the constituents of those things. Nonetheless, issues pertaining to logical atomism, including the problem of the unity of the proposition, are relevant to a rich understanding of the goals and failures of the Dream Theory. Indeed, Ryle is right in his assessment that the Dream Theory has nothing to say about true judgments or, more generally, about sentences that can point to facts. As I go on to argue below, it is for this reason that the Dream Theory is an epistemology that is inappropriate to human beings who have a capacity for truth. Despite Ryle’s insights, it is important to notice that the Dream Theorist, unlike Russell and the early Wittgenstein, means to provide a theory of knowledge, not a logical theory of what renders a construction of words a sentence. Further, it is crucial to the epistemology of the Dream Theory that its goal is to distinguish knowledge from mere true judgment. Ryle’s reading cannot accommodate that distinction (or even the motivation to do justice to it), nor can it accommodate Socrates’ claim that “we” are among the objects of knowledge. It also cannot accommodate the claim, found in (4), that elements are perceptible. As I will argue below, this is a crucial feature of the Dream Theory. Scholars who are sympathetic, at least to an extent, to the Rylean reading include McDowell (1973) and Burnyeat (1990). A scholar who rejects the Rylean reading of the Dream Theory but thinks that issues of propositional unity are in Plato’s mind is Cooper (1990). Chappell (2004, 207) supposes that the Rylean and traditional readings can be made compatible by taking things to include facts.



the names of the complex's elements. Moreover, the arrangement of the element names in the *logos* is meant to reflect the arrangement of the elements in the complex. We know that “we and everything else” are instances of complexes but we do not have examples of elements. The only thing we know about them is that they can only be named and perceived. Finally, the account of element names furnishes the distinction between knowledge and mere true judgment.

With this brief summary in mind, let us jump directly to the refutation (202d-205e). Socrates refutes the Dream Theory by showing that it cannot consistently maintain epistemic asymmetry for elements and complexes. He draws this conclusion by posing a dilemma regarding the sort of composition envisaged by the Dream Theory. The hypothesis of the dilemma's first horn is that the complex is one and the same as all the elements that make it up. Let us call this kind of complex a Total. If the knowable complex is nothing but its elements, then the elements must be knowable too and, indeed, the elements become the primary object of knowledge. He says:

“Consider a case where there are two [elements] [...]. If someone knows [the complex], he knows the two of them. [...] But can it be that he's ignorant of each one, and knows the two of them without knowing either? [No] But if it's necessary to know each one in order to know the two of them, then it's absolutely necessary that anyone who is ever going to know a syllable should first know (*progignōskein*) its letters.” (203c-d)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The passage in full: “Σ: Ὅρα δὴ ἐπὶ δυοῖν, σῆγμα καὶ ὦ. ἀμφοτέρᾳ ἐστὶν ἡ πρώτη συλλαβὴ τοῦ ἐμοῦ ὀνόματος. ἄλλο τι ὃ γινώσκων αὐτὴν τὰ ἀμφοτέρᾳ γινώσκει; Θ: Τί μὴν; Σ: Τὸ σῆγμα καὶ τὸ ὦ ἄρα γινώσκει. Θ: Ναί. Σ: Τί δ'; ἐκάτερον ἄρ' ἀγνοεῖ καὶ οὐδέτερον εἰδώς ἀμφοτέρᾳ γινώσκει; Θ: Ἀλλὰ δεινὸν καὶ ἄλογον, ὦ Σώκρατες. Σ: Ἀλλὰ μέντοι εἴ γε ἀνάγκη ἐκάτερον γινώσκειν, εἴπερ ἀμφοτέρᾳ τις γινώσεται, προγιγνώσκειν τὰ στοιχεῖα ἅπανα ἀνάγκη τῷ μέλλοντί ποτε γινώσεσθαι συλλαβὴν, καὶ οὕτως ἡμῖν ὁ καλὸς λόγος ἀποδεδρακῶς οἰχῆσεται.” It should also be noted that, throughout the Dream Theory passage, the word *sullabē* stands both for the general category of complexes and for the specific category of (grammatical) syllables. In the first horn of the dilemma, Socrates takes as his example the grammatical syllable.

The hypothesis of the second horn is that the complex is not a Total, rather it is something over and above its elements (203e). Let us call this a Whole. Socrates argues that if the Whole is really beyond the sum of its elements, then it is not really a complex at all. Instead, it is “partless” and “indivisible” (205c-e), exactly like an element. Thus, if elements are to be unknowable, then these pseudo-complexes are to be unknowable too (205e). He says:

“Let’s suppose [that] a complex is one kind of thing which comes into being out of each set of elements that fit together [...] In that case, it mustn’t have parts [...] because with anything which has parts, it’s necessarily the case that the whole is all the parts.” (204a) ... And now the complex has fallen into the same class as the element.” (205d).<sup>6</sup>

To substantiate the thought that all complexes are Totals, Socrates draws an unconvincing *reductio* against the thesis that a Whole and a Total are distinct. In doing so, he shows that both horns of the dilemma constitute a dead end for the Dream Theory: on the first horn, both elements and complexes end up knowable and, on the second, both end up unknowable. Officially then, Socrates’ refutation accuses the Dream Theory of being internally inconsistent.

The heart of Socrates’ argument is in the second horn and, as is often noted, something is off about the reasoning there. At the end of it and despite Theaetetus’ earnest resistance (cf. 204e), Socrates has assimilated the entire category of complexes to that of Totals without giving genuine consideration to the possibility that a Whole might be a structured arrangement of elements,<sup>7</sup> and as such neither identical to their sum nor completely separate from them. He

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<sup>6</sup> The whole first passage: “Σ: Ἐχέτω δὴ ὡς νῦν φαμεν, μία ἰδέα ἐξ ἐκάστων τῶν συναρμοττόνων στοιχείων γιγνομένη ἢ συλλαβή, ὁμοίως ἐν τε γράμμασι καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν. Θ: Πάνου μὲν οὖν. Σ: Οὐκοῦν μέρη αὐτῆς οὐ δεῖ εἶναι. Θ: Τί δὴ; Σ: Ὅτι οὐ ἂν ἦ μέρη, τὸ ὅλον ἀνάγκη τὰ πάντα μέρη εἶναι. ἢ καὶ τὸ ὅλον ἐκ τῶν μερῶν λέγεις γεγονὸς ἐν τι εἶδος ἕτερον τῶν πάντων μερῶν; Θ: Ἐγωγε.” (204a). And: “Οὐκοῦν εἰς ταῦτόν ἐμπέπτωκεν ἢ συλλαβὴ εἶδος ἐκείνω, εἴπερ μέρη τε μὴ ἔχει καὶ μία ἐστὶν ἰδέα;” (205d)

<sup>7</sup> Socrates originally described the complexes characteristic to the second horn as having come into being due to their elements being fitted together (ἐξ ἐκάστων τῶν συναρμοττόνων στοιχείων γιγνομένη ἢ συλλαβή, 204a1-2). The idea of being fitted together is not elaborated on.

achieves this by first, identifying a Total (*to pan*) with the totality of things (*ta panta*)<sup>8</sup> that make up that Total (204a-d); second, by inferring that anything that has parts (*ek merōn*) follows this template appropriate to Totals (204e); and third, by persuading Theaetetus that there is nothing to distinguish a Whole from a Total (205a).

Though the entirety of this conversation falls under the second horn, we may observe that the first step just outlined simply describes what Totals are like. In that sense, this is an elaboration on the first horn of the dilemma, which says that a Total is identical to its elements. We may also observe that the second step simply draws the desired conclusion about complexes – that they are all Totals. At that point, Theaetetus attempts to block the inference, which is when Socrates marvels that the youth is “putting up a brave fight.”<sup>9</sup> The third step, which convinces Theaetetus to assimilate complexes to Totals, constitutes a separate argument. Yet, the principle that convinces Theaetetus in the third step, which I call the Identification Principle, is the same one that Socrates seeks to bring out in the first two. Let us take a moment to see that this is so.

That a Total (*to pan*) and the totality (*ta panta*) are the same thing is exemplified in the Number Example:

“Is a Total (*to pan*) at all different from the totality (*ta panta*)? For instance, when we say ‘one, two, three, four, five, six’, or ‘twice three’, or ‘three times two’, or ‘four plus two’, or ‘three plus two plus one’, are we talking about the same thing in all these cases, or something different?” (204b-c)<sup>10</sup>

In this brief passage, Socrates makes a case for the identification of all of these expressions on the basis of the fact that they all refer to the same thing: a totality of six items. As he explains,

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<sup>8</sup> This identification is likely rendered more persuasive by the fact that *ta panta* is the plural form of *to pan*.

<sup>9</sup> “ἀνδρικῶς γε, ὃ Θεαίτητε, μάχη.” (205a1).

<sup>10</sup> “τὰ πάντα καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἕσθ’ ὅτι διαφέρει; οἷον ἐπειδὴν λέγωμεν ἕν, δύο, τρία, τέτταρα, πέντε, ἕξ, καὶ ἐὰν δις τρία ἢ τρὶς δύο ἢ τέτταρά τε καὶ δύο ἢ τρία καὶ δύο καὶ ἕν, πότερον ἕν πᾶσι τούτοις τὸ αὐτὸ ἢ ἕτερον λέγομεν;” (204b10-c2)

“in each utterance (*lexeōs*) we’ve spoken of six in totality (*panta hex*)” and in speaking of that totality, we at the same time speak about a Total (*to pan*), which is, again, the six (*ta hex*) (204c). Evidently, Socrates’ argument here is that, since the referring expression that lists one element after the other points to the exact same group of elements as the expressions that put the elements in groups, then it follows that there is no difference among them and, thus, a Total is the same as the totality of its elements. In other words, the identification is licensed by the fact that the expressions are co-referring.

Socrates then suggests that the same point holds for “anything which consists of a number of things” (*hosa ex arithmou esti*, 204d1). He substantiates this generalization through a series of increasingly implausible cases of complexes, at which point he requests, unsuccessfully, Theaetetus’ acceptance of the assimilation of all complexes to Totals. The cases he considers are these: a mile (*plethron*), a running track (*stadion*), and an army (*stratopedon*).<sup>11</sup>

It is important to reflect on the Number Example and whether these three cases fit with it. The mathematical context makes it relatively easy to swallow the Number Example, insofar as mathematics is about quantities and the quantitative expressions we are given all point to the same quantity. Yet, even then, the identification only works for arithmetic, for, in the geometrical context, the dissolution of six into three couplets or two triplets would make a world of difference, as factorization choices would affect relations of commensurability. Though Theaetetus himself grew to become an expert in matters of commensurability, and though we observed some of his early steps into that field at the beginning of the dialogue (147d-148b), he does not protest the Number Example. Thus, let us view it arithmetically and grant its coherence.

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<sup>11</sup> I have chosen to translate *plethron* as ‘mile’ as opposed to ‘acre’ and *stadion* as ‘running track’ as opposed to ‘mile’. Nothing hangs on these translation choices. However, I wanted to present *plethron* as a unit of length (rather than area) in order to highlight that a *stadion*, the standard unit of measurement, was made up of six *plethra*. I find it hard to believe that putting together a *stadion* and the *plethron* (perhaps even the focus on the number six) was accidental. Yet, in light of the fact that a *stadion* is shorter than a mile, the translations are not ideal. I was alerted to the fact that a *stadion* is made up of *plethra* by Stern (2008, 270-271).

Yet, things are not as simple when it comes to the three subsequent cases. The mile and the *stadion* seem promising insofar as they are both units of measurement. It seems that, as such, their “number,” or how much they measure, exhausts what they are and they can be meaningfully said to reduce to their constituent elements. However, as soon as we notice that a running track is a lot more besides, we should become a bit more skeptical of Socrates’ examples. That a *stadion*, for example, is the length of the running track in Olympia is not captured in the fact that a *stadion* measures six *plethra*. Conversely, a length of six hundred feet does not show itself as the standard length for races in the Olympic Games, at least not in the straightforward sense that a sextet shows itself as the six. The point is most obvious in the case of the army. While the totality of the soldiers makes up the Total of the army, the army itself does not reduce to its individual soldiers. On the one hand, that is because an army, again, is a lot more besides its soldiers, for example, it is a city’s military force and it defines (at least in part) a city’s relationships with its external neighbors. On the other hand, an army is not merely its soldiers because the military capacity of a given army depends in large part on the way that its soldiers are organized in their various roles, for example as foot soldiers or horse riders.

That being said, Theaetetus is willing to accept that the mile, the running track, and the army all conform to the Number Example. But he does not, at that point, accept that it follows from the fact that Totals are the totality of their elements that Wholes are such Totals. He accepts that identification when Socrates introduces the Individuation Principle: “A total [is] precisely what you have when there’s nothing missing [and] a whole is that same thing, that from which nothing is missing [since] that from which something is missing is neither a total nor a whole, since what comes to be from the same is the same.” (205a).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>“Ὀλον δὲ οὐ ταῦτόν τοῦτο ἔσται, οὐδ’ ἂν μηδαμῆ μηδὲν ἀποστατῆ; οὐδ’ ἂν ἀποστατῆ, οὔτε ὅλον οὔτε πᾶν, ἅμα γενόμενον ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ τὸ αὐτό;” I have modified McDowell’s translation. It is worth comparing this statement with Aristotle’s *Met.* Δ 26 on the category of Whole (ὅλον). Aristotle begins by a virtually identical formulation:

The Individuation Principle drives the assimilation of Wholes to Totals because it says that structural complexity is in no way different from conjunction because what determines what something is – and thus what it takes to know it – is a matter of its conditions of reference or individuation. The thought is that Wholes and Totals are one and the same because they are coextensive – they come to be and pass away at the same time and at the same place. Therefore, if what we care about is referring to the complex, then there is no reason to introduce a metaphysical distinction. Hence, we may say that an epistemology that commits itself to the Individuation Principle is an epistemology that seeks to define knowledge in terms of reliable reference and, for that reason, has no interest in the structure of the object of knowledge.

By getting Theaetetus to agree to the Individuation Principle, Socrates completes his refutation of the Dream Theory. He establishes that Wholes are either Totals, in which case they are either reducible to their elements and so to know them is to know their elements, or they are not really complexes at all, in which case they are as unknowable as the elements.

I tried to show above that the examples that Socrates adduces are quite tendentious and one could reasonably argue that his argumentative strategy is question-begging. However, as I mentioned already, Theaetetus' acceptance of the Individuation Principle does not depend on acceptance of the examples. More importantly and as other commentators<sup>13</sup> have suggested too, Socrates' argumentation, and thus his choice of examples, is constrained by the commitments of the Dream Theory. The implication of his refutation then is that the Dream Theory lacks the resources to distinguish between Totals and Wholes. Consequently, the accusation mounted by Socrates' refutation is that the Dream Theory's knowable complexes are Totals, which entails

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“Something is said to be a whole if none of the parts of which it is said to be a whole by nature is absent from it” (1023b26-27: “ὅλον λέγεται οὐ̄τε μηθὲν ἄπεστι μέρος ἐξ ὧν λέγεται ὅλον φύσει”). But eventually he makes a distinction between a total (πᾶν) and a whole (ὅλον): “those to which the position (ἡ θέσις) of the parts makes no difference are said to be totals, and those to which it does, wholes.” Aristotle translations are from Reeve (2016).

<sup>13</sup> For example, Fine (1979), Harte (2002), Sedley (2004).

that if they are to be knowable, their elements must be too. More strongly indeed, since Totals just are their elements, knowing these complexes is knowing their elements. Evidently, this contradicts the Dream Theory's central thesis and so the view is rendered internally incoherent.

However, if we look at the Dream Theory's Isomorphism Claim in (3), it appears that the view does not take itself to be committed to the assimilation of Wholes to Totals. Its talk of "weaving" suggests that the complexes at issue have a particular structure, which is reflected in the arrangement of the element names in the corresponding account.<sup>14</sup> So if Socrates' accusation is appropriate, then we are meant to infer that the Isomorphism Claim is only there to pay lip service to the notion of structure and is not put to any use. While Socrates does not spell out why it is that the Isomorphism Claim is idle, I think that the fact that his refutation bottoms out at the Individuation Principle explains why: as Socrates sees it, the Dream Theory is an epistemology of reference and such epistemologies do not distinguish between Wholes and Totals. Therefore, according to Socrates, the Dream Theory either says that Totals are knowable, in which case only elements are, or it says that elements are unknowable and there is no possibility for knowledge, because the only things that there are are, in the relevant sense, elements.

Before we go on to examine the Dream Theory itself, let us observe that there is ostensibly a quick way out of this refutation: bite the bullet and amend the view to say that grasping the names of the elements counts as knowing them, thus avoiding both the charge of inconsistency and the absurd consequence that no knowledge is possible. Yet, taking that approach would be to admit that the Dream Theory's complexes are Totals and the Isomorphism Claim superfluous. We ought to wonder if that would be satisfactory. Is Socrates' concern merely

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<sup>14</sup> Thaler (2011, 218-219, 224n46) takes this line to constitute definitive evidence that the Dream Theory can capture order. Yet, as Burnyeat (1990, 197) suggests, if Socrates' refutation is apt, then the talk of weaving should be read "as merely a phrase which is not put to work in a philosophically productive way." His own position on this point is quite ambivalent, as he says that "it is better not to" read the text that way (ibid., 199).

a terminological one? I think it would be a mistake to think so.<sup>15</sup> Rather, Socrates' worry is that, in assimilating Wholes to Totals, the Dream Theory reduces complexes to their elements, which means that knowledge amounts to grasp of the elements. In that case, knowledge ends up being a matter of successful reference or reliable individuation of the elements. I propose that it is such a conception of knowledge as individuation that is the primary target of Socrates' refutation and not merely the incoherence of positing knowable complexes but unknowable elements. Similarly, Socrates protests the metaphysical error he ascribes to the Dream Theory because it betrays commitment to such an epistemology of reference. The Individuation Principle is the root of all of the Dream Theory's problems.<sup>16</sup>

## Section 2 – The Pervasiveness of the Uniqueness Requirement

We saw that Socrates' refutation charges that the Isomorphism Claim (3) is idle but we do not know why. In this section, I argue that the Isomorphism Claim is displaced by, what I call, the Uniqueness Requirement, found in (2).<sup>17</sup> Here it is again:

“For (*gar*), each of [the elements] itself by itself can only be named, and one can't go on to say anything else, neither that it is nor that it isn't; because (*gar*) in that case, one would be attaching being or not being to it, whereas one oughtn't to add

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<sup>15</sup> Sedley (2004, 173) expresses what I take to be a similar thought in saying that “The question remains, even without cognitive asymmetry, whether such resolution into elements is the route to *knowing* the compound bodies. Socrates can see that it is not and what the *Theaetetus* sets out to exhibit is why.” However, I disagree with his own positive view, which is a form of definitional reliabilism, in which the elements are the primary object of knowledge.

<sup>16</sup> It is notable that Burnyeat (1990) is explicit, albeit in a footnote (ibid., 222n106), that, given the equivalence and double entailment, for Plato, between the expressions ‘knowing x’ and ‘knowing what x is’, the act of supplying a “uniquely individuating description” constitutes the act of knowledge, for Plato. Burnyeat, generally, endorses an epistemology of recognition for the *Theaetetus*. Similarly, Sedley (2004, 178-179) takes it that reliable recognition constitutes Plato's preferred epistemology, a claim which he justifies with the thought that the point of a true judgment is to pick out an object and the goal of *logos* is to define that referred object. Yet, Sedley does not think that mere decomposition suffices for definition, though he does think that *grammatikē* supplies the right model for, what he calls, a taxonomical definition. In contrast, Sayre (1969), rightly in my opinion, suggests that the epistemological proposal regarding “awareness of regularities,” which underlies reliabilism, is characteristically materialist and, further, echoes the guise that knowledge takes within the Cave (ibid., 129).

<sup>17</sup> Fine (1979, 382-385) – though my primary opponent in this paper – also thinks that the Uniqueness Requirement is to blame for the Dream Theory's assimilation of Wholes to Totals. Indeed, she also believes that the Requirement ought to be read in its “strong” form. I take it that she does not read it strongly enough!



anything if one is going to express that thing, itself, alone. In fact one shouldn't even add 'itself', or 'that', or 'each', or 'alone', or 'this', or any of several other things of that kind; because (*gar*) those things run about and get added to everything, being different from the things they're attached to, whereas if the thing itself could be expressed in an account (*auto legesthai*) and had an account proper to itself (*oikeion hautou logon*), it would have to be expressed apart from everything else. As things are, it's impossible that any of the primary things should be expressed in an account; because (*gar*) the only thing that's possible for it is to be named, because (*gar*) a name is the only thing it has." (201e3-202b3)

In the exposition of the Dream Theory, the Uniqueness Requirement comes to explain why it is that only complexes are knowable. The reason is that the only thing that is possible to do with an element is name it. Socrates contrasts naming an element with saying of it that it is or is not. He then immediately goes on to explain that the reason that that is not possible is that doing so would be to "add being" to the element. This is inappropriate, he explains, because the goal is to have the element in view on its own, in isolation from anything else, which is a feat that only the element's name can achieve. He further elaborates that no words may be added to the element name if its corresponding element is to be kept in view alone. Even words that usually serve as intensifiers of isolation actually detract from that task, precisely because they are applicable to everything and, as such, not bound to the element we might seek to circumscribe. Only the element names are able to attach exclusively to their corresponding element and pick it out. We should observe that there is an assumed goal of isolation or individuation regarding the grasp of elements, which is taken completely for granted.

That there is such a goal is underscored in what seems to be an attempt at justification that, if we wish to speak or express something on its own (*auto legesthai*, 202a6) and offer its proprietary account (*oikeion logon*, 202a6-7), we must not mention anything that does not exclusively pick out the thing at issue. The justification for insisting on isolating elements is that it is required by the ultimate goal of arriving at proprietary accounts. One might be moved to resist this point by wondering how it is that we can justify a requirement for element names – that they be directly corresponding – by an appeal to accounts, which *ex hypothesi* the elements lack. Socrates must have foreseen this, for we can see that he immediately dispels the possibility of confusion by clarifying that, properly speaking, an element cannot be *legesthai* but only named, and yet the general point stands. Thus, we may conclude that the Uniqueness Requirement applies to both elements and complexes and entails that an element name is to an element as an account is to a complex, i.e. directly corresponding.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth emphasizing this result: just as it is only the element's name that will do the work of uniquely picking it out, so the complex's account will also uniquely pick out its corresponding complex. There is one account per knowable complex. We can straightforwardly glean that the accounts recommended by the Dream Theory are perfectly suited for the task of individuation, of picking out the complex they correspond to. If Socrates' refutation is right, then individuation would be the account's sole possible task.

I will now show that meeting the Uniqueness Requirement comes at the cost of neutralizing the Isomorphism Claim.

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<sup>18</sup> Other scholars who appreciate the centrality of uniqueness include D. Frede (1989), Apicella (2021) and scholars like Sedley (2004) and Giannopoulou (2013) who lay emphasis on the goal of definition.

Let us assume, since we do not know what the elements are, that they are like those recognized by pre-Socratic natural philosophers<sup>19</sup> in that they come from a finite set, whose names repeat in the various accounts in which they appear. The familiar set earth, air, fire, and water is such a set. Notice that a theory, like Thales' which takes everything to reduce to water, is ruled out because it would render all accounts identical: "water." By contrast, accounts made up of the traditional four elements might look like this: 'water fire air water earth' and 'water air fire water earth' and their difference would lie in the ordering of the element names.

But one must ask: Are the elements making up a complex like Socrates lined up in a row in the manner of the element names in the accounts just listed? This question might appear naive or simpleminded but it is appropriate because the only way that the element names can mirror the arrangement of the elements is by being positioned in the same way relative to one another. The converse question is whether the account can actually depict the arrangement of the elements in the complex. It seems that it cannot, for the referring expressions it is made out of are – as it turns out – not arranged in accordance with the arrangement of the elements they point to. After all, Socrates' shape is not a horizontal line, as in the case of the written account, nor does each element of his disappear before the next can come into being, as in the case of the oral account.

Insofar as the arrangement of the element names does not conform to the arrangement of the elements, it is an arbitrary arrangement. This means that the unity of the *logos* cannot be characterized by anything other than apposition or conjunction of element names. And so, if we wished to read the structure of the complex off of the account, as the Isomorphism Claim promises, we would be finding an unstructured conjunction of elements, in other words, a Total. We can see, therefore, that the Uniqueness Requirement renders the Isomorphism Claim moot

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of how the Dream Theory might be viewed as a version of such a pre-Socratic theory, cf. Sedley (2004, 158 ff.) and also Burnyeat (1990, 138-145).

and powerless, which suggests that the Dream Theory ought to choose one over the other. In light of Socrates' refutation, it appears that he thinks that the Dream Theory is committed to the Uniqueness Requirement. It is worth going over where that leaves the Dream Theory, for it will make manifest what Socrates takes to be the view's underlying epistemological commitments.

Let us consider how the Uniqueness Requirement might be satisfied, given that the *logoi* have been shown to be unstructured collections of element names, contrary to my hypothesis. In order for each account to be unique, it seems that it must contain at least one element name that does not appear in any other account – a *hapax legomenon* name as it were. The presence of such a highly unique name renders the *logos* unique in the way required. Yet, this means that all element names are similarly hyper-unique, which conflicts with the hypothesis that the element names are finite and repeatable. The hyper-uniqueness of element names shows the Dream Theory considerably more radical than the natural philosophies it appears to resemble.<sup>20</sup>

The hyper-uniqueness also raises and makes pressing the question of how the element names can come to be grasped. For, it is not clear how one can come into a condition of grasping *hapax* names from a condition of not grasping them. It seems that the names would only be available in the context of complete accounts. But in that case, there is a presumption of knowledge (for the complex) and of grasp (for the elements) which means that the question remains unanswered. Moreover, a situation in which a potential knower is in a position to speak the element name because they overheard it should not count as a situation in which that person has grasp of that name, for there ought to be understanding or recognition of which element is named by that name. It appears that the Dream Theory's answer as to how one can come to be in the requisite position with respect to the element names comes in (4), in which it is said

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<sup>20</sup> White (1976) makes brief mention of the thought that the purpose of the Dream Theory is to test the Cratylean theory of "natural" names. For more on how the *Theaetetus* as a whole might be read as a response to that conception, cf. Cooper (1990).

seemingly in passing that the elements are grasped in perception: “In that way, the elements have no account and are unknowable, but they’re perceivable” (202b6-7).

The perceptibility of the elements should be striking to us, for it entails that perception lies at the foundation of the Dream Theory’s epistemological program. It is not merely a way for us to access the elements, it is the only way.<sup>21</sup> The thought seems to be that perception of elements will reveal the element names and, indeed, that perceiving the elements is at one and the same time an act of grasping their names. This tight connection between perception and grasp explains Socrates’ nonchalance in mentioning perception in (4). For, recall that he had repeatedly emphasized in (2) that the only possible thing we might do with an element is name it, yet we find out in (4) that it is also possible to perceive it. Making perception and naming two sides of the same act removes the appearance of inconsistency but it introduces a new set of problems. Specifically, it is entailed in this claim that to come into perceptual contact with an element is at the same time to come to be in possession of an identifying name.

Importantly, the claim is not that, in perception, human beings bring conceptual capacities to bear, which themselves have a linguistic garb, such that we are able to articulate the content of our experience. Rather, it is the more radical claim that perceptual contact supplies previously unheard of discursive content; we do not bring our already held conceptual capacities to bear, the world tells us what to say, regardless of what it is that we might already know or be capable of saying.

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<sup>21</sup>According to Burnyeat (1990, 182), the only reason that the perceptibility of the elements is included here is to assuage any fears we might have about the inaccessibility of the elements, given that they are unknowable. Otherwise, it is not an important feature of the view whatsoever. Fine (1979, 376) makes a similar point. As I understand the view, the perceptibility of the elements is a central feature. Thaler (2011) does not discuss the perceptibility of the elements and it is not clear how his interpretation of the passage accommodates this feature. Burnyeat (1990, 141) is influenced by his principle that any interpretation of the Dream Theory entailing that no progress has been made since the first and/or second part of the dialogue is a false interpretation. I do not find this principle compelling.

Thus, we might rephrase the Dream Theory's main claim in this way: Knowledge bottoms out in perception because perception is the sort of act that reveals unique names. Yet, given the fact that all complexes are Totals, it appears that perception of elements is not merely the foundation of knowledge but its sole act. Since perception of elements is at the same time a grasp of their names, the act of articulating the account is itself an act of perception and indeed, one whose achievement is unique individuation.

A reader of the *Theaetetus* ought to wonder what the metaphysics of perception have to be like in order for this thesis to hold. It seems that the Protagorean-*cum*-Heraclitean account of perception introduced under the banner of Protagoras' Secret Doctrine (156a-157c), examination of which occupied the majority of the dialogue, is an account of perception that a proponent of the Dream Theory could endorse.<sup>22</sup> Doing so would ensure that the perceiver grasps the element name, i.e. that they grasp the correct identifying expression for that perceptible item.

According to the Secret Doctrine, a perceiver is infallible about their perceptual experience because the content of that experience – the perceptible item – exists only as long as the moment of perceptual contact and is available only to the perceiver with whom it is in contact. The intimacy of the perceptual moment, for the Secret Doctrine, is supposed to entail that the perceived item is self-revealing: that the perceiver can correctly label that item automatically, simply in virtue of having been in perceptual contact with it. Crediting the metaphysics of perceptual contact for precisely this sort of self-intimating experience is what a proponent of the Dream Theory needs. Yet, we, the readers of the *Theaetetus*, know that taking the Secret Doctrine route leads to an unacceptable position, in which perceptible items are

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<sup>22</sup> Sayre (1969, 126) notes that “the parallels between the two theories are considerable” primarily due to their treatment of elements. He ultimately thinks that, though there is “a close association in Plato’s mind” (ibid., 130) between them, the fact that the elements of the Dream Theory cannot even be said to become, should disprove that the Dream Theory is meant to purposefully call back to the Secret Doctrine (ibid., 126-127). He does not consider the possibility that the Secret Doctrine cannot actually accommodate its own suggestion regarding the proper way to talk about things of the world (cf. here Socrates’ refutation of the Flux Doctrine in 181c-183b).

necessarily private to their perceivers such that the identifying name that is grasped becomes so hyper-unique that it is necessarily unintelligible to anyone else. For, in order for mistakes to be ruled out as demanded by the Secret Doctrine, it has to be the case that the identifying name describes only the perceiver's private experience and could not be used to describe anything else. For if it could, that is, if it were a word like 'white,' then that would imply a publicly available object and objective criteria for the attribution of that name, which would undermine the presumption of infallibility. Thus, I take it that the Secret Doctrine is a non-starter.

The Dream Theory, on the other hand, while it does require the perceptible object to be self-revealing and is for that reason consistent with the Secret Doctrine, does not seem to entail the extreme privacy found in that earlier view. Yet, it is not clear that it has any other option available to it, given that perception has to yield *hapax* names, that is, names that are not knowable outside of the perceptual experience.

Now, even if we grant that something along the lines of the Secret Doctrine's intimacy but without the resulting privacy can be appealed to to justify the Dream Theory's demands on perception, an undesirable consequence still lurks: The act of grasping a previously unknown name is not really an act at all, but is rather a result of a mechanistic, causally determined process that leaves the person's intellectual characteristics entirely out of the picture. In other words, the kind of perceiver envisaged by the Dream Theory is one whose soul is occupied solely with cataloging the features of their environment. It is a receptive and reactive soul that can reach the highest epistemic position – namely, knowledge of complexes – simply by accomplishing the minimum intellectual task – namely, perception of elements. The absence or superfluity of a more sophisticated soul is also consistent with the Secret Doctrine, which takes the body to be the subject of perception.<sup>23</sup> The relevant problem with a restricted soul of this sort is that it would

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<sup>23</sup> cf. 156d-e in which it is said that what occurs in the act of perception is that "the eye sees the white stone."

not be capable of any act other than the receptive act of registering. In that case, we would be back at the Protagorean position insofar as all of our cognitive acts would be infallible ones that are contained within, and determined by, perceptual experience. Now, if we think that the soul is capable of more than mere perceptual recognition (and we should, after the Final Refutation Argument (184b-186e) discussed in Chapter 2), then we have all the more reason to resist both the Dream Theory and the overarching Individuation Principle.

I leave the comparison to the Secret Doctrine here, but I wish to make explicit what follows if I am right about the close connection between the two views. Socrates finds the Dream Theory objectionable because he takes it to be a retelling of Protagorean relativism. His reason stems from the hyper-uniqueness of element names which is a consequence of the assimilation of Wholes to Totals. This is in turn credited to the guiding principle of Individuation. In order to stop the fall into Protagoreanism, a proponent of the Dream Theory ought to lift the Uniqueness Requirement. Doing so takes the Isomorphism Claim out of retirement, so to speak, which suggests that the complexes acknowledged by the Dream Theory are genuine Wholes. One would expect that, in that case, knowledge would amount to something more than mere reference or recognition – that it would yield knowledge of Wholes as such. Let us see, then, if opting for the Isomorphism Claim suffices to dislodge the Individuation Principle.

### **Section 3 – Considering *Grammatikē***

The most immediate consequence of discarding the Uniqueness Requirement is that the object of knowledge changes. If *logoi* may repeat, then the complexes they describe can no longer be unique particulars like Socrates and Theaetetus, they have to be rather more like grammatical syllables, i.e. essentially repeatable items with essentially repeatable constituent elements, like the letters of the alphabet. If element names are meant to repeat, then we only need



a finite number of them and there is no trouble with learning them. We might even be willing to say that they are, for that reason, knowable, thus blocking the charge of inconsistency too.

Let us take the case of *grammatikē* as a model for that option. In fact, Socrates brings up the study of *grammatikē* (along with *mousikē*) immediately after concluding his dilemma, as counterexample to the Dream Theory's contention that complexes are knowable but elements not. That Socrates brings *grammatikē* up himself is part of the evidence that commentators appeal to in arguing that we, the readers, are meant to revise the Dream Theory rather than discard it. In my interpretation, Socrates introduces *grammatikē* in order to show that any such attempt at revision would be futile. Thus, in investigating *grammatikē*, our primary goal is to examine whether it can supply knowledge of structure, of Wholes as such. If it cannot, then we have no reason to salvage the Dream Theory in its guise. As I will argue in this section, *grammatikē* cannot supply insight into Wholes, because its epistemological shape is one that is captured in the first horn of Socrates' dilemma: complexes reduce to their elements, and so knowledge is knowledge of elements.

Here is what Socrates says about *grammatikē*.

“SOC: So if anyone says that a complex is knowable and expressible in an account, and an element the opposite, let's not accept it.

THE: No, not if we're convinced by this argument.

SOC: Moreover, wouldn't you be more inclined to accept a statement of the opposite position, because of what you noticed in yourself, in the course of your learning of your letters?

THE: What sort of thing?

SOC: That when you were learning, you spent your time doing nothing but trying to tell the letters apart, each one just by itself, both when it was a matter of seeing them and when it was a matter of hearing them, in order that you wouldn't be confused by their being spoken or written.

THE: Yes, that's quite true.

SOC: And at the music teacher's, to have learnt perfectly was nothing but being able to follow each note and say which sort of string it belonged to; and everyone would agree that notes are the elements of music?

THE: Yes.

SOC: So, if we may argue from the elements and complexes that we're familiar with ourselves to the rest, we'll say that the class of elements admits of knowledge that is far clearer, and more important for the perfect grasp of every branch of learning, than the complex; and if anyone says it's in the nature of a complex to be knowable and of an element to be unknowable, we'll take him to be making a joke, whether on purpose or not.

THE: Definitely.<sup>24</sup> (206a-b)

I wish to begin by noting that Socrates' description of the knowledge afforded by *grammatikē* has nothing to say about knowing complexes. Rather, his discussion is dedicated to showcasing what knowledge of elements is like. Specifically, he says that knowledge of elements

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<sup>24</sup> “Σ: Τοῦτο μὲν ἄρα μὴ ἀποδεχόμεθα, ὅς ἂν λέγη συλλαβὴν μὲν γνωστὸν καὶ ῥητόν, στοιχεῖον δὲ τοῦναντίον. Θ: Μὴ γάρ, εἴπερ τῷ λόγῳ πειθόμεθα. Σ: Τί δ' αὖ; τοῦναντίον λέγοντος ἄρ' οὐ μᾶλλον ἂν ἀποδέξαιο ἐξ ὧν αὐτὸς σύνοισθα σαυτῷ ἐν τῇ τῶν γραμμάτων μαθήσει; Θ: Τὸ ποῖον; Σ: Ὡς οὐδὲν ἄλλο μανθάνων διετέλεσας ἢ τὰ στοιχεῖα ἐν τε τῇ ὄψει διαγιγνώσκειν πειρώμενος καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀκοῇ αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ ἕκαστον, ἵνα μὴ ἢ θέσις σε ταραττοὶ λεγομένων τε καὶ γραφομένων. Θ: Ἀληθέστατα λέγεις. Σ: Ἐν δὲ κιθαριστοῦ τελέως μεμαθηκέναι μὴ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ τῷ φθόγγῳ ἐκάστῳ δύνασθαι ἐπακολουθεῖν, ποίας χορδῆς εἶη: ἃ δὴ στοιχεῖα πᾶς ἂν ὁμολογήσειε μουσικῆς λέγεσθαι; Θ: Οὐδὲν ἄλλο. Σ: Ὡν μὲν ἄρ' αὐτοὶ ἔμπειροὶ ἐσμεν στοιχείων καὶ συλλαβῶν, εἰ δεῖ ἀπὸ τούτων τεκμαίρεσθαι καὶ εἰς τὰ ἄλλα, πολὺ τὸ τῶν στοιχείων γένος ἐναργεστέραν τε τὴν γνῶσιν ἔχειν φήσομεν καὶ κυριωτέραν τῆς συλλαβῆς πρὸς τὸ λαβεῖν τελέως ἕκαστον μάθημα, καὶ ἐάν τις φῆ συλλαβὴν μὲν γνωστὸν, ἄγνωστον δὲ πεφυκέναι στοιχεῖον, ἐκόντα ἢ ἄκοντα παίζειν ἠγησόμεθ' αὐτόν. Θ: Κομιδῇ μὲν οὖν.”

is a perceptual skill of recognition. To know elements is to be able to identify them, to say their names, when seeing or hearing them. In other words, knowledge of grammatical elements is exercised in perception.<sup>25</sup> Surely, the fact that elements and element names are not hyper-unique but repeatable offsets the thought that the act of identifying the elements is itself a perceptual act, as was the case in the Dream Theory. Nonetheless, the two views are similar in that they take grasp of elements to be nothing but a capacity to recognize them, perhaps in a reliable manner.

Complexes are only mentioned indirectly, when Socrates indicates that an element's position in a new configuration might be confusing to the student. Yet, it is evident from what Socrates says that knowledge of an element is the same whether that element is placed within a complex or not. In fact, it would be the same in every instance, even when placed in different complexes. The goal is always to isolate each element and say which one it is. That the character of knowledge of Sigma, say, is the same in  $\Sigma\Omega$  and  $\Omega\Sigma$  and indeed that it is the same as in an isolated  $\Sigma$  is evidence that grammatical complexes are Totals rather than Wholes. It is characteristic to parts of Totals, in contradistinction to parts of Wholes, that they themselves do not change whatsoever in being conjoined with other things. Elements of Totals simply are what they are on their own and they continue to be that when placed in configurations. That is why Totals are characterized by a mere conjunction of self-standing elements. Elements of Wholes, on the other hand, change when joined together. To take an example: A rock is only a threshold when put in a certain position with other rocks in the context of a doorway. And if the same rock is put above the rocks it was previously supporting, then it is no longer a threshold. Thus, if one wished to isolate and recognize the threshold, they would have to isolate a different rock each

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<sup>25</sup> Sayre (1969, 125n61) suggests that "there is no necessity" for the perceptibility of the elements here, given that Socrates could have chosen a different example (e.g. one involving numbers) that would preclude such focus on perception. As I see it, Sayre fails to recognize the intimate connection between perception and the possibility of giving the account (for the Dream Theory), since he thinks that it is possible to have perception of the elements without grasping their names (ibid.). On account of this, he cannot appreciate the perseverance of the language of perceptibility. Moreover, it is not clear to me what the arithmetical equivalent to *grammatikē* would be.

time. And they would not be able to find a threshold at all when the rocks are lying about in a field. Thus, we might say that identifying an element by the name it would have outside the context of the Whole is not to identify it in its capacity as an element in a complex.

I conclude that *grammatikē* is not described as knowledge that provides insight into Wholes. In fact, the only difference between *grammatikē* and the Dream Theory that we can glean from this passage is that there is no reason to call the elements unknowable if they are repeatable.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the knowability of the elements in the case of *grammatikē* makes it such that it is only the elements that are knowable, since Totals are simply collections of elements. Thus, even if the Isomorphism Claim is chosen over the Uniqueness Requirement, the conception of what it is to know the elements remains firmly within the paradigm of the Individuation Principle. In fact, understanding of structure is relegated to a position of mere instrumental value, for such understanding would be required only to avert possible confusion before the real work of knowledge can begin, which is nothing but the recognition of the elements.

Granting that the text does not support the idea that *grammatikē* is knowledge of Wholes as such, let us step outside it to consider whether the fact that grammatical elements form a system might help. Specifically, let us consider the fact that the collections of grammatical elements are governed by syntactic rules that preclude certain combinations. I have in mind formation rules of the sort “every syllable must have at least one vowel,” “there cannot be more than three consonants in a row,” “i before e except after c,” etc. Commentators who take *grammatikē* to be the solution to the refutation of the Dream Theory often suppose that the

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<sup>26</sup> Recognizing this point should serve to strengthen my reading of the Dream Theory in the preceding section because my interpretation offers a reason as to why *grammatikē* might be better than the Dream Theory, namely, that its elements are repeatable and thus knowable. Those who deny that the Dream Theory is committed to hyper-unique names, which is to say everyone that I am aware of, will have trouble explaining what the advantage of *grammatikē* is over the Dream Theory. As I discuss below, they would have to step outside the text. Without doing so, they would be simply insisting on a trivial revision, namely, to amend the view to say that grasp of element names counts as knowing the elements. I already suggested in section 1 that this is unsatisfactory.

existence of such formation rules suffices to show that *grammatikē* is knowledge of Wholes.<sup>27</sup> I offer two reasons against this thought.

First: Formation rules of this sort specify only possible combinations of elements. It is not clear how they might be helpful in the case of actual ones. That is, how could the appeal to those combination rules show that the syllable at issue enjoys the unity of a Whole? It seems that the only answer is that these are the unities permitted or recognized by the system, which is an answer by stipulation. No insight into that unity is thereby given, only an assumption of it. In fact, the combination that is actually instantiated, i.e. the arrangement of the elements that actually obtains in a given case, is grasped in perception. As we saw, elements are recognized in perceptual activities and there is no presupposition that the combination rules must be known in advance for the perceptual recognition to be successful, except heuristically. And as we know, mere perception of self-standing elements offers no insight into their unity.

Moreover, it seems that this stipulative answer is weaker than we might expect. For, once we begin to consider the combinations of syllables into words, we notice that the rules of the system permit combinations that do not result in meaningful words but in syllable-salads, as it were: Totals of syllables, like “abracadabra.” The fact that the syntactic rules of the system cannot distinguish between word-Wholes and word-Totals further suggests that the syllables it permits may be Wholes only by stipulation. As such, those rules cannot be of help in gaining insight into the kind of conjunction that constitutes a genuine unity.

Appreciating the point that combination rules cannot themselves account for unity should shed new light on the Dream Theory’s Isomorphism Claim. Consider the case of a jar that has

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<sup>27</sup> Fine (1979, 386) is a representative of this position as are those who follow her (e.g. Chappell 2004). Burnyeat (1990, 210-211) also claims that combination rules are “tacitly” involved. Thaler (2011, 215) and Harte (2002, 147-148) share my reading that the insistence on the “nothing but” point entails that no grasp of order is included in the act of recognition, as it is presented here. Yet, Harte often implies that a coherent syntax is sufficient to capture unity (cf. *ibid.*, 130, 133, 155, 171, 178), or at least the right kind of syntax is (*ibid.*, 209).

gems in it. Let us assume that the assortment is not accidental, in that it follows some combination rules, and let us assume that we know those rules. We can name all the stones, we can provide the ratios of rubies and emeralds, say, and we can map out their spatial structure; in short, we can provide the isomorphic *logos*. The question to ask is whether that heap of gems would be any more unified because of it and the answer seems that it would not. In short, heaps, piles, and other Totals may have a structure, insofar as they are made up of conjoined elements, without that thereby making it the case that they are unified, structured Wholes. Hence, the Isomorphism Claim, much like the syntactic rules defining the combination of grammatical elements, does not distinguish between Wholes and Totals. It is for that reason, I suggest, that Socrates assumes that the Dream Theory is more committed to the Uniqueness Requirement than it is to the Isomorphism Claim. For even if the Isomorphism Claim were chosen instead, that would not help with isolating Wholes or elucidating their structure.

Second: Even if we assume that formation rules can distinguish between Wholes and Totals and that they only permit the formation of Wholes, we find ourselves facing a familiar dilemma. For, as long as we hold on to the idea that our goal is to train a capacity for element recognition, which is manifested in the exact same way in all of its exercises, these rules are epistemically superfluous. At best, they have heuristic value, insofar as knowing them helps to offset confusion. But they cannot offer insight into the unity of Wholes because that unity is not an epistemic *desideratum*.<sup>28</sup>

I conclude that *grammatikē*, just as much as the Dream Theory, cannot supply knowledge of Wholes due to its commitment to the Individuation Principle, which requires it to be an

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<sup>28</sup> Sedley (2004, 166-167) is sensitive to the point that once order is introduced as an epistemological goal, it is not clear why a theorist would go for an epistemology of analysis. Burnyeat (1990, 190) and Fine (1979, 383) both make the related point that once order is introduced, unique correspondence by way of elements has to go, primarily because a number of other things would now be presumed known or knowable in formulating the *logos*.

epistemology of recognition. While the Dream Theory pursued the Individuation Principle via the Uniqueness Requirement, to disastrous Protagorean consequences, *grammatikē* did so on account of its commitment to the idea that knowing an element in isolation is the same as knowing it in complexes. It seems to me that any epistemology that seeks to decompose its objects into simple constituent parts, repeatable or not, will not be an epistemology of Wholes. Thus, instead of revising the Dream Theory to fit *grammatikē*, I suggest that we are meant to completely overhaul its epistemological program.<sup>29</sup>

In the next section, I offer my own proposal as to what knowledge of Wholes might be like. I wish to end this section by saying a final word about the danger of Protagoreanism. I argued that the Dream Theory is a more modern version of it. While *grammatikē* is not in any straightforward sense yet another version of it, it subscribes to the same general principle about what knowledge must be like: reliable recognition. I mentioned previously that such an epistemology does not require what we might call a genuinely human soul and is prone to relativism because all that it requires of the knower is to speak out that which the environment compels her to. While this might ensure truth, or some version thereof, for all perceivers, it does so at the cost of privacy and thereby the impossibility of agreement and disagreement, that is genuinely human activities. I think the same overarching point can be made for *grammatikē*. The only psychic demand it makes is that the soul be trainable to recognize the elements, rather than assume that the world's metaphysics guarantee that recognition. But once the soul has been so trained, then there is nothing left for it to do. Its sole epistemic goal is to go on recognizing. And

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<sup>29</sup> Thaler (2011) agrees with me that, once the task of decomposition into elements is taken up, then the Whole will necessarily become a Total. Importantly, he thinks this is a feature and not a bug of the epistemological proposal. Sedley (2004, 171-173) mentions the notion of functional parts, but it is not clear how he conceives of the difference with elemental parts, especially in light of the fact that he takes *grammatikē*, as it is presented here, to capture much of Plato's preferred epistemology. Finally, cf. *Phaedrus* 270c-d for the suggestion that knowledge of simples and knowledge of complexes takes the same shape, which supports my suggestion that there is nothing particularly interesting, as far as epistemology goes, in the metaphysical distinction.

as soon as it is in a position to recognize, that is, as soon as it has internalized those teachings, then it is in a position in which it can be infallible about the objects of recognition, as if the world was just telling her again “Sigma, Omega, Kappa ...”. Activities of agreeing, disagreeing, or arguing for the sake of articulating the truth would be unintelligible, pointless, and irrelevant, which is exactly what the relativist Protagoras wants.

#### **Section 4 – A Proposal for the Way Forward**

In the preceding sections, I argued that the extended Dream Theory passage issues a directive for a genuine epistemology of Wholes. In this I agree with most commentators. But contrary to the majority, I argued that *grammatikē* is not that epistemology because syntactic rules, along with self-standing elements, cannot grant insight into genuine unity.

The *Theaetetus* does not discuss the metaphysics and ontology of Wholes but we can safely assume that whatever the principle of unity is, the knower will know it, though that knowledge will not take the shape of recognition. That is, it will not be the case that what characterizes the knower is a capacity to reliably individuate sources of unity. Examples of this would be the following. If the source of unity is an Aristotelian nature, for example, then it will not suffice for the knower to simply point to Socrates and exclaim “human.” Similarly, if the source of unity is a ratio, then it will not suffice for the knower to simply express that ratio. Again, these are the sorts of things that can be memorized and do not require much beyond a receptive and reactive soul. Therefore, I propose that we set aside the metaphysical question about the principle of unity and focus only on the fact that a unified collection of elements gives rise to what Socrates called “some one kind of thing” (*mian tina idean*, 203c6), with a character or activity that is over and above the totality of each individual element’s character or activity. The job of the knower is to gain a grasp of that shared activity.



Since that grasp cannot amount to mere recognition or identification of that shared activity, I propose that what characterizes genuine knowledge of Wholes is an understanding of what it is for a given Whole to be benefited. My thought is that, given that the elements of a Whole contribute to the generation of something new, with a character or activity of its own, then it is that activity that defines the Whole. In the event that one of the elements is removed from the configuration, the Whole will disappear. If it does not disappear altogether, then its activity will surely be impeded and it will be rendered defective. Thus, if the Whole is to continue to be what it is, then its parts must be maintained in a good condition, i.e. in the condition that will permit the activity of the Whole to be carried out as it should. To maintain the elements in that condition, I infer, is to benefit the Whole. Notice that this is a minimal sort of benefit. The requirement is not that the Whole improve, or become the best version of itself, as it were; it is simply the sort of benefit that allows it to be at all.<sup>30</sup> Since the good or beneficial condition of the Whole just is the condition of being that Whole, then it seems appropriate to conclude that to know a Whole in the relevant sense is to know what is characteristic for it to do or undergo and what it is that its parts have to do or undergo in order for that characteristic activity to continue. If this proposal is right, then the knower's capacity for recognition or naming will be derivative of their concern for goodness.

In developing this proposal, I have found helpful the work of Jyl Gentzler (2004) on the *Republic*. She takes seriously the idea that, for Plato, the One and the Good are the same thing and argues that “x counts as good for y qua F ... if and only if x contributes to y's oneness as an F, that is, its unity and completeness as an F” (ibid., 359). Her thought is that it is characteristic of a good F that “all of its parts function harmoniously” (ibid., 360).

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<sup>30</sup> Surely, these are intimately related but I want to set aside questions of improvement (or becoming best) because they will unnecessarily complicate the point I wish to bring into focus.

Gentzler's focus in the *Republic* is on parts of soul. One of her central texts is from Book 10: "The bad is what destroys (*apolluon*) and corrupts, and the good is what preserves (*sōizon*) and benefits (*ōpheloun*)." (10.608e).<sup>31</sup> The same point and indeed in similar language is made in the *Theaetetus*, though in a strange context. After a very brief introduction of the Protagorean position (152d), Socrates sets out to show that "what's good is change, in both mind and body, and what's bad is the opposite" (153c).<sup>32</sup> The reason is that he wishes to motivate the Protagorean position and offer to Theaetetus some reasons as to why he might endorse it despite its implausibility. Important for my purposes here is that Socrates derives the conclusion about change being good from the premise that change is that which preserves (*sōzein* cognates in: 153b7, 153b9, 153c9) and inactivity that which destroys (multiple *apollunai* and *diollunai* cognates). Evidently, Socrates believes in the *Theaetetus*, just as much as he does in the *Republic*, that whatever preserves is good and whatever destroys is bad.

It is true that Socrates does not mention or emphasize unity in this short passage, yet it is clear that his suggestion is that change is good because it keeps the thing being what it is. Socrates does not give details regarding the sorts of changes he imagines or the character of that preservation but it seems that he relies on the assumptions that Theaetetus will make. Namely, that the changes that result in preservation are like gymnastic practice which results in the preservation of the body's health and thus its characteristic activity. In other words, they are the sort of changes that prevent the thing from being dissolved and unable to be the thing that it is. If Socrates were not relying on Theaetetus' making this assumption, and indeed if he were not right about that, then it is hard to see how this argument would go through given that there are all sorts

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<sup>31</sup> "τὸ μὲν ἀπολλύον καὶ διαφθεῖρον πᾶν τὸ κακὸν εἶναι, τὸ δὲ σῶζον καὶ ὠφελοῦν τὸ ἀγαθόν." Quoted above is the Grube translation, revised by Reeve, in Cooper (1997).

<sup>32</sup> "τὸ μὲν ἄρα ἀγαθὸν κίνησις κατὰ τε ψυχὴν καὶ κατὰ σῶμα, τὸ δὲ τοῦναντίον;" (153c4-5).

of changes that actually lead to dissolution and destruction.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, we may conclude that the principle Gentzler identifies in the *Republic*, namely that to benefit something is to maintain the harmonious activity of its parts, is operative in the *Theaetetus*.

Besides being plausibly Platonic, the proposal to cash out knowledge of Wholes as knowledge of benefit in the manner outlined is consistent with, and can potentially elucidate, certain moments earlier on in the dialogue. Recall that, in the Final Refutation Argument (184b-186e), it was argued that knowledge is to be found in the activity that is characteristic to the soul insofar as it is independent of the body. That activity is preeminently concerned with “being and benefit” (186c3). In discussing that argument in Chapter 2, we had not been able to say much about benefit besides taking its mention as further evidence for the soul’s own teleological activity oriented at truth. But if the proposal I have been outlining here is broadly on the right track, then we can see why benefit can be mentioned in the same breath as being and, indeed, why the two together are the paradigmatic objects of knowledge: they are that which the knower most concerns himself with, what he thinks about, and what he tries to get right. Being and benefit motivate the genuine knower’s psychic activity.<sup>34</sup>

In my discussion of the Final Refutation Argument in Chapter 2, I appealed to the Ethical Digression (172c-177b) to argue, further, that the knower’s characteristic psychic activity is occupied with considerations pertaining to what it is that the object at issue characteristically “does or undergoes” (*poiein ē paschein*, 174b5). Again, assuming that my proposal to cash out knowledge of Wholes as knowledge of benefit in the way outlined bears out, then this earlier contention gains further support. The knower approaches the question of what is good for a given

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<sup>33</sup> Chappell (2004) adduces various commentators, including McDowell and Burnyeat, to note that this passage is quite obviously a Platonic joke and these arguments are not meant seriously.

<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the soul in the Final Refutation Argument was called a *mian tina idean* (184d3), just like the Whole here (203c6). I argued, in Chapter 2, that that soul was a genuinely unifying soul, such that the objects of its experience were genuinely unified. I find the possibility of coincidence implausible.

object, or what its good condition is, by an investigation into the characteristic features of the object's activity. More specifically, it seems, the knower's intellectual activity is oriented towards grasping how those characteristic capacities, and perhaps even liabilities, function so as to reach or maintain the good condition. This investigation into what the good condition is and how it can come into being will surely involve some sort of compartmentalization of the object's activity. For example, in the case of the investigation that is Gentzler's focus in the *Republic*, namely, the activity of human souls, we observe the partition of the soul in three components, each of which has characteristic desires and weak spots, as well as characteristic ways of contributing to the well being of the entire human being. But it is important to recognize that this investigation into component parts is not separable from the investigation into the being and benefit of the Whole they comprise, for understanding the activity of the parts is both motivated by and in service to understanding the good condition of the Whole. Thus, one's understanding of how the component parts can contribute to, or detract from, the good condition of the Whole cannot take the shape of individuation and naming, for it is hard to see how that understanding can fit the mould of recognition. This is to say that even if it is the case that knowledge of constituent parts is central to what knowledge is, such knowledge will not take the shape of *grammatikē*.

One corollary of the rejection of individuation epistemologies that I think is important to appreciate is that there is no particular act of knowledge. An epistemology that follows the model of *grammatikē* will pinpoint recognition and naming as the act of knowledge. An extension of this very conception of knowledge can be observed in some epistemologies that may be grouped under the heading of Justified True Belief and, in particular, in those theories of knowledge that require a specific form of justification. The Dream Theory can be seen as one such epistemology, especially if we abstract from its kinship with the Protagorean Secret Doctrine, for it lays down a

demand for a very particular *logos* to elevate a true judgment into knowledge: it has to name all the elements and its constitution has to be isomorphic to that of the complex it is about. Again, it seems wrong to suggest that the knower's grasp of being and benefit can be distilled into one particular act, one particularly shaped *logos*.

With this corollary in mind, I make my last suggestion about where the discussion and refutation of the Dream Theory leaves us. If it is right to say that there is no one single *logos* or act of knowledge, then knowledge of humanity, for instance, cannot be encapsulated in a definition. This is true independently of whether the definition serves only the goal of reliable individuation – as “featherless biped” does – or whether it is explanatory – as “rational animal” is. This is not to say that definitions are rendered useless, that they are all alike, or that they have no place in the intellectual activity of the knower. But it is nonetheless to deny that supplying a definition exhausts the task of knowledge. If the intellectual activity of knowledge presupposes concern for goodness and benefit, then it seems that it will be acts that are indicative of that concern which will be paradigmatic. On the reasonable assumption that justice is the good of the human being,<sup>35</sup> it seems that it will be characteristic to the knower to praise a just man for their justice or to convince someone that injustice is not to their benefit. It will also be characteristic to the knower to take measures towards preserving justice in their city, as doing so will preserve the justice of citizens. Any act, in short, that shows forth grasp of benefit in the manner outlined will be an act of knowledge, even if it does not come in some predetermined shape.

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<sup>35</sup> Besides Gentzler (2004), I follow Korsgaard (1999) in thinking that the good human being is the just human being. Both focus on the *Republic*, but in the *Theaetetus* too, the happy person is specified as the just person (176e-177a).

## 5. In Conclusion

The discussion and refutation of the Dream Theory is the last thematic unit of the *Theaetetus*. Having found no adequate senses of *logos* that can transform a mere true judgment to a true judgment of knowledge, Socrates and Theaetetus abandon the familiar definition of knowledge as “true judgment with an account” and end their conversation for the day. Theaetetus’ failure to give birth to a viable offspring suggests that the concept of knowledge remains elusive. Yet, despite the dialogue’s apparent failure to answer its guiding question, there have been many successes along the way. The primary success of the *Theaetetus* lies in its critique of Protagorean relativism, which sought to undermine the coherence of the idea of knowledge. As I have argued in the course of this dissertation, relativism is exposed as self-refuting (Chapter 1) but it is also shown to be pervasive (Chapters 3 and 4). This means that relativism remains a live threat, despite its incoherence. Therefore, one thing we learn from studying the *Theaetetus* is that we ought to stay vigilant, in case we end up affirming positions that will lead us back to Protagoreanism and the dismantling of knowledge. Importantly, the *Theaetetus* has shown us how to remain vigilant: we ought to maintain our soul’s independence from the body by exercising our soul’s characteristic capacity to seek the truth.

We saw in Chapter 1 that relativism seeks to threaten, not only the concept of knowledge, but also the way of life that is organized around that concept. This is the way of life that we all, surely, recognize as our own, namely, the life in which facts are to be distinguished from fictions, truth from falsehood, and knowledge from ignorance. We also saw, in that chapter, that this threat will prevail only if we allow it to. Thus, it is up to us to safeguard that way of life and doing so requires continuous affirmation, in word and deed, of the fact that we value the distinction that the relativist seeks to undermine. In Chapter 2, I argued that the Protagorean definition of

knowledge as perception will be avoided only if we realize that our capacity for speaking the truth is not a perceptual capacity. To purposefully exercise this capacity, which characterizes our soul's activity independently of the body, is to affirm that we value truth and that we wish our lives to be bound by truth and not falsehood (or anything else). In Chapter 3, we saw that, unless we conceive of our soul's independent activity as teleologically organized with an aim to truth, we will not be able to make sense of falsehood and so, we will not be able to value the truth as something distinct from falsehood. Finally, in Chapter 4, I showed that the sorts of epistemologies that do not leave room for, or do not make use of, our capacity for teleological psychic activity are epistemologies that devolve into Protagoreanism and, as such, fail to showcase the value of knowledge. Therefore, our independent psychic capacity has been central to the fight against relativism. It is the capacity by which we distinguish the true and the false and it is also the capacity by which we speak the truth – it is our capacity for knowledge.

In this final chapter, I turn my attention to this capacity and, specifically, its cultivation. I will argue that Socratic midwifery provides the requisite education for the development of this capacity. If that is right, then it will be correct to say that, even though Theaetetus does not know what knowledge is, he is on his way to becoming a knower himself. I end the chapter with some reflections as to why it is that we can be confident that relativism is no longer a threat.

It will be recalled, from Chapter 2, that “a great deal of troublesome education” (186c) is required for the development of the soul's capacity for independent activity. In Chapter 4, we examined the science of *grammatikē* in order to see if it presented the right model for us and concluded that it amounted to a return to Protagoreanism. If *grammatikē* is not knowledge of the kind we seek, then education into *grammatikē* is not the relevant education either. More generally, education into no scientific system will constitute that educational program, because

no scientific system can capture what knowledge is. Thus, a puzzle arises regarding that education and, indeed, one that is pressing to solve.

Besides the Final Refutation Argument, the only other place in which Socrates gives us insight into the activity of the soul is in a brief passage within the False Judgment Digression. Socrates defines thinking (*dianoesthai*) as “speech (*logon*) which the soul goes through with itself about whatever it’s considering.” (189e6-7).<sup>1</sup> He then goes on to explain:

“[The soul] is simply carrying on a discussion (*dialegesthai*), asking itself questions and answering them, and making assertions and denials. And when it has come to a decision (*horisasa*), either slowly or in a sudden rush, and it’s no longer divided, but says one single thing (*to auto*), we call that its judgment (*doxan*). So I call ‘judging’ (*to doxazein*) speaking (*legein*), and I call ‘judgment’ speech spoken (*logon eirēmenon*), though not aloud and not to someone else, but silently and to oneself.” (189e-190a)<sup>2</sup>

Socrates clearly states here that there is no difference between thinking and engaging in dialectic, except that the addressee is also the speaker and that the conversation is done in silence. Contrary to how this passage is sometimes read, it is inner speech that is modeled after outer speech and not the reverse. This should be evident simply from the fact that it is inner speech that is being defined. More importantly for my purposes here, the kind of outer speech that inner speech resembles is a dialectical discussion that seeks agreement on a verdict and which proceeds through question and answer. So, if it is in these inner, thinking activities that knowledge is to be found, then it seems safe to infer that it is training in precisely these activities

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<sup>1</sup> “Λόγον ὄν αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἢ ψυχὴ διεξέρχεται περὶ ὧν ἂν σκοπεῖ.”

<sup>2</sup> “τοῦτο γὰρ μοι ἰνδάλλεται διανοουμένη οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ διαλέγεσθαι, αὐτὴ ἑαυτὴν ἐρωτῶσα καὶ ἀποκρινομένη, καὶ φάσκουσα καὶ οὐ φάσκουσα. ὅταν δὲ ὀρίσασα, εἴτε βραδύτερον εἴτε καὶ ὀξύτερον ἐπάξασα, τὸ αὐτὸ ἤδη φῆ καὶ μὴ διστάζει, δόξαν ταύτην τίθεμεν αὐτῆς. ὥστ’ ἔγωγε τὸ δοξάζειν λέγειν καλῶ καὶ τὴν δόξαν λόγον εἰρημένον, οὐ μέντοι πρὸς ἄλλον οὐδὲ φωνῆ, ἀλλὰ σιγῆ πρὸς αὐτόν.” Above is the McDowell (1973) translation slightly modified.



that is required. Surely, training in the sort of conversation that seeks to come up with a verdict on an issue can be earned by engaging with Socrates and his customary practice.

Socratic practice takes in our dialogue a very particular shape: it is the art of midwifery (148e-151d). It is hard to say if the *elenchus* familiar from the so-called Socratic dialogues and the practice of midwifery constitute the same activity or if there are substantive differences between the two. One difference that I find salient is that, in the earlier dialogues, Socrates tends to engage in conversation with people who might be assumed to have knowledge, on the conceit that he can learn from them. Euthyphro, Gorgias, and Protagoras in the dialogues that bear their names are good examples of this. Socrates elicits and examines a thesis from them, examination of which usually conveys to the reader that the speakers lacked the knowledge they were presumed to have. The midwife's art has a very different starting point. While there might be an assumption of an intellectual pregnancy, there is no assumption of knowledge. Indeed, the parent does not even take himself to have something to say. That is at least the case with Theaetetus. Socrates does not seek to learn from his interlocutors, rather the task he sets himself is to help them bear out their intellectual offspring and examine whether it is worth keeping.

One thing we may glean from this difference is that Socrates, in his role as a midwife, does not examine the thesis elicited for his own sake, that is, so that he himself learns something from his interlocutor. Instead, it is the parent that is the primary beneficiary of the art. Socrates' interlocutor undergoes something, a treatment of sorts, in which he might "discover many admirable things in himself" (150d7-8)<sup>3</sup> and because of which he might "make progress to an extraordinary extent" (150d5).<sup>4</sup> Socrates stresses that he, in his capacity as a midwife, does not teach anything. The young men he associates with do not learn from him (*par' emou pōpote*

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<sup>3</sup> "αὐτοὶ παρ' αὐτῶν πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ εὐρόντες τε καὶ τεκόντες"

<sup>4</sup> "θαυμαστὸν ὅσον ἐπιδιδόντες"

*mathontes*, 150d6-7), as they are the source of the thesis under examination. The objective of the midwife's work then, is to deliver the thesis and the result is that the interlocutor benefits from having a thesis elicited from him, regardless of whether it proves viable. The act of laboring towards producing the thesis makes the interlocutor better.

In describing his art of midwifery, Socrates lays out two tasks: to aid the interlocutor in delivering the offspring (150d-e) and to examine the offspring for viability (150b-c). Let us take these in turn.

To gain a better sense of the first task, that of the delivery, let us begin by considering what counts as a delivered offspring: what is the offspring that Theaetetus gives birth to? One possibility is that an offspring comes into being as soon as the parent says how things seem to him regarding the topic at issue. That seems plausible insofar as Theaetetus does preface his judgments with "it seems to me" locutions (*dokei moi*, 151e1; *moi phainetai*, 187c6) and insofar as Socrates suggests that an offspring, ready to be examined, has come into being upon the judgment's very pronouncement (e.g. 151e). Yet, Socrates proclaims that "the birth is over" (160e) only after an extensive exposition of the Protagorean position, which includes the Secret Doctrine (156a-157c) as well as the Protagorean response to the *prima facie* obvious objections against it, namely falsehood as evidenced in dreams, disease, and madness (158b-160e). This suggests that a thesis does not count as having come into being unless a sufficiently detailed picture of it has been painted. I mean that the offspring is born not when it is pronounced, but when we have a sense of what it is that its pronouncement amounts to.

It is important that Socrates is the one who introduces Protagoras into the conversation, saying that his Measure Thesis is akin to Theaetetus' definition. Socrates also is the one who goes over the Secret Doctrine and offers the defense against the obvious objections. The midwife

does not simply ask the parent to utter the offspring but is rather actively engaged in generating it. This distinction, presumably, is what Socrates' midwifery-patients sometimes fail to acknowledge, in thinking that they were solely responsible for the coming to be of their insights.<sup>5</sup> The midwife helps give determinate shape to the parent's intuitions and judgments. If Theaetetus and Socrates are both agents of the offspring's birth, then we can fruitfully say that their conversation is the dialogue on which the soul's silent deliberation is modeled after. What they do together, in bringing the offspring to light, is to get it out into the world – pronounce it – while gaining a sense of what this offspring is – what would be the case if it were true, how it fits with other facts, and so on.

If this is right, that is, if Socrates' and Theaetetus' discussion is the relevant *viva voce* dialogue, then we can infer that one of the tasks that the genuine thinker must engage in is the task of understanding what it is that they are inclined to say or judge. This is the primary task of the second voice. The interlocutor, or first voice, gains a sense of what his judgment amounts to and he is, thereby, in a position to consider whether he is still willing to make that judgment and issue it as his own final verdict. Let us take as illustration Theaetetus and the definition of knowledge as perception. Theaetetus pronounces the definition and Socrates suggests that the Protagorean philosophy can be captured in the same expression. He then elaborates on what the Protagorean philosophy is: its primary claim is the Measure Thesis; it is motivated by cases of conflicting appearances in perception; it is supported by a Secret Doctrine about the metaphysics of perception; and it has a program about how to answer obvious objections. With the Protagorean position laid out, Socrates is in a position to ask Theaetetus if it captures what he

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<sup>5</sup> “There have been many people who [...] held themselves responsible while thinking nothing of me; and, either of their own accord or because they have been persuaded by others, they have gone away sooner than they should have. And once they have gone away, they have miscarried the rest of their offspring because of the bad company they kept.” (150e).

meant to propose in expressing the definition of knowledge as perception. As Socrates describes it: “I’m singing incantations, and offering you bits to taste from the products of each group of wise men, until I can help to bring what you think out to light.” (157c-d).<sup>6</sup>

In asking Theaetetus to consider whether the Protagorean position is his own, Socrates effectively asks him to reflect on what it is that is motivating his proposal. In figuring out what the offspring is, Socrates helps Theaetetus to figure out what his own reasons are for thinking that knowledge is perception. Now, it is likely that Socrates’ interlocutor does not have reasons or is not in a position to articulate them. This is plausibly the case with the definition of knowledge as perception, for Theaetetus does not at any point offer any reasons to recommend the thought. We still do not know what, if anything, he had in mind in asserting it. He surely did not have the Protagorean Secret Doctrine in mind, for he knew nothing about it until Socrates brought it up,<sup>7</sup> and there is no denying that his definition is a very strange one.<sup>8</sup> While philosophers might be able to muster up reasons for it, e.g. a trial of empiricism,<sup>9</sup> it remains the case that Theaetetus himself gives none. Therefore, Theaetetus is in need of some thinking (*dianoesthai*), that is, of the inner dialogue modeled on the external one, in order to understand what it is that he himself wants to say. Understanding one’s own reasons then, is one of the feats achieved under the care of the midwife and it is an objective of the procedures of thinking.

Now, one might think that the fact that Theaetetus does not know his own reasons for suggesting that knowledge is perception indicates that he has been unreflective in pronouncing the definition. In other words, one might think that the definition has not been the product of the soul’s characteristic activity. If that is right, then the following puzzle arises: Why was Socrates

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<sup>6</sup> “σὲ δὲ μαιεύομαι καὶ τούτου ἔνεκα ἐπάδω τε καὶ παρατίθημι ἐκάστων τῶν σοφῶν ἀπογεύεσθαι, ἕως ἄν εἰς φῶς τὸ σὸν δόγμα συνεξαγάγω” (157c9-d2).

<sup>7</sup> He knew the Measure Thesis but was not aware of the perceptual story.

<sup>8</sup> Anecdotally, non-academics find the definition of knowledge as perception very puzzling and opaque.

<sup>9</sup> Chappell (2004) is an example.

so sure that Theaetetus had something worthwhile to say about knowledge? What justifies him in thinking that he was intellectually pregnant?

While it is true that Theaetetus does not seem to have reasons for this definition, he has demonstrated that he is capable of the thinking activity. Immediately prior to the presentation of the art of midwifery, Theaetetus recounted to Socrates that he had formulated his own definition of “square” and “oblong” lengths (147e-148b) on the basis of Theodorus’ demonstration of “something about powers” (147d).<sup>10</sup> Theaetetus can justify the distinction between the two sorts of lengths and he can give his reasons for distinguishing them. Oblong numbers cannot be produced by multiplying a number with itself. That quantity which would produce that oblong number when multiplied with itself – its square root, in modern parlance – is arithmetically incommensurable.<sup>11</sup> This achievement attests to the fact that Theaetetus is capable of thinking, even though he failed to think adequately in producing the first definition.<sup>12</sup> I propose that what Theaetetus proved to Socrates is that he is capable of the sort of intellectual activity that is conscious of standards of correctness. While it is he himself who came up with the distinction between square and oblong numbers (at least as the passage presents the situation), his activity was not arbitrary or indiscriminate but sought to maintain consistency. Theaetetus’ classification of quantities was done with a concern to get it right. It would be fair to say that he was consciously aware of the difference between truth and falsehood.

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<sup>10</sup> “περὶ δυνάμεών τι” (147d4).

<sup>11</sup> There is considerable debate in the literature about various facets of the Mathematical Example passage, cf. Burnyeat (1978) and especially Echterling (2019) for discussion of both the text and the literature. That being said, there seems to be consensus that Theodorus drew the so-called Spiral of Theodorus.

<sup>12</sup> Immediately after the Mathematical Example passage and before the Midwife Metaphor passage, Theaetetus says that he will not be able to do with knowledge what he did with powers. At that point, Socrates says this: “Suppose [Theodorus] had praised you for running, and said he’d never come across a young man who was so good at it; and then you’d run a race and been beaten by the fastest starter, a man in his prime. Do you think his praise would have been any less true?” (148c). This seems to me to support the thought that Socrates is convinced of Theaetetus’ capacity for thinking, regardless of how successful he will be in the present inquiry.

If this mathematical achievement is evidence that Theaetetus is capable of the thinking activity that characterizes the knower and which Socrates is in the business of training, then we can see that the demand to have reasons for one's judgment is not simply a demand to be aware of one's intellectual motivations but a demand to be motivated by the truth: to have reasons that explain why the resulting judgment is true. The attempt to understand one's own inclinations cannot be divorced from the project of evaluating them and it also cannot be divorced from the project of evaluating the resulting judgment. After all, it is those reasons that bring it about that this particular judgment, in a given case, is the one made.

As I already mentioned, the evaluation of the resulting judgment in terms of truth is the second – and “greatest” (150b9) – task of the Socratic midwife. But if it is right to say, on the one hand, that the task of delivering the offspring amounts to an investigation into the parent's reasons for thinking what they do and, on the other, that this is an investigation into truth, then the midwife's two tasks are quite intimately connected. Indeed, it seems that the evaluative task is the primary one as it can capture much of what is entailed in the delivery task. In light of the identification of thinking with the midwife's conversation, it would be fair to say that the midwife models for the parent how to examine a thesis or an inclination in terms of truth, so that they can do it on their own in the future.

Let us turn now directly to the evaluative task, the midwife's “greatest.” *Basanizein* is the word used for the activity of examination<sup>13</sup> and its literal meaning is to test for authenticity. It derives from *basanos* which is the name for a particular kind of stone, which was used to test whether a specimen was gold by rubbing it against the touchstone and observing the marks. When it comes to checking for gold, the *basanos* is the most reliable measure. Yet, there is no

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<sup>13</sup> “And the greatest thing in my art is this: to be able to test (*basanizein*), by every means, whether it's an imitation and a falsehood (*eidōlon kai pseudos*) that the young man's intellect (*dianoia*) is giving birth to, or something genuine and true (*gonimon te kai alēthes*)” (150b9-150c3).

equivalent to a *basanos* when it comes to truth and falsity of a particular statement. There is no such absolute standard and there is no such straightforward test for truth. Socrates does not appeal to anything of the sort in examining Theaetetus' definition. It is he, Socrates in his capacity as a midwife, that is the *basanos*.<sup>14</sup> And since the task of the midwife is one that the knower can do to himself, we can infer that anyone can be a *basanos* in the relevant sense, as long as they are earnestly examining a thesis for truth, whether their own or another's.

Can we characterize the *basanizein* activity in more determinate terms? It seems to me that there is nothing specific that defines the examination for truth. Consider that, once the Protagorean position has been set out, all that Socrates does is mount objections against it, indeed of various sorts. As he put it at the beginning of the examination, he looks at the offspring from all sides (160e).<sup>15</sup> In short, all he does is probe the thesis, looking for flaws and blindspots, which is to say that he is looking for falsehood.

This should not be surprising, given that the conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus is an instance of the thinking activity that is oriented at the truth. Aiming for the truth is at the same aiming to avoid falsehood. This duality in aiming at the truth is a direct consequence of the fact that to hit upon the truth requires aiming at all. If it were not possible to fail to attain truth, then truth would be everywhere, it would be arbitrary, and the relativist position would follow. In looking for falsehood in Theaetetus' proposal, Socrates indicates to him that thinking effectively means taking active measures to avoid falsehood. But, again, there is no single test for truth and falsehood. For example, Socrates approaches the Protagorean

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<sup>14</sup> Compare here the *Gorgias*: "If there's any point in our discussions on which you agree with me, then that point will have been adequately put to the test (*bebasanismenon ... hikanōs*) by you and me, and it will not be necessary to put it to any other test (*ouketi auto deēsei ep' allēn basanon anapherein*), for you'd never have conceded the point through lack of wisdom or excess of shame, and you wouldn't do so by lying to me, either. You are my friend, as you yourself say too." (487e). Translation is by Zeyl, in Cooper (1997).

<sup>15</sup> "And now that the birth is over, we must hold its inspection ceremony, literally circling all around in argument (*ta amphidromia autou hōs alēthōs en kuklōi perithrekteon tōi logōi*), and looking to see if what we've produced isn't worth bringing up, but a falsehood, the result of a false pregnancy, the fact doesn't escape us." (160e7-161a1).

position from a number of angles. He notices that the denial of falsehood implies that Protagoras himself is no better than anyone else at litigating (e.g. 178e), which suggests that there is something wrong with the view. He also considers whether the metaphysics of perception assumed in the Secret Doctrine are consistent with the idea that humans may describe their perceptual experience in judgment (181c-183a). He concludes that the view renders that impossible, which undermines its plausibility. He also introduces case studies, like the topic of the future (177c-179b), to see if the view can account for them. In short, Socrates does his best, and tries everything he can think of, to prove that Theaetetus' proposal is false. We might say that he is serious about not letting anything slide.

Yet, Socrates does not only present challenges to the position but also defenses. As already mentioned, he answers the obvious objections against the Secret Doctrine (156a-157c). He also embarks on a lengthy impersonation of Protagoras (166a-168c) to make sure that the position gets the best possible defense. In other words, it seems that Socrates is committed to being a charitable examiner. As he puts it in describing himself as a midwife, he has goodwill (*eunoiai*, 151c8) towards his interlocutors.<sup>16</sup> Socrates is not trying to denigrate the interlocutor, prove them wrong, or confuse them out of a perfectly good thesis; he is simply trying to let truth show up and make sure that the interlocutor believes something that is indeed true. Goodwill unaccompanied by a commitment to look for falsehood is not useful; it is akin to relativism, insofar as indiscriminate goodwill would be demanded in a relativist universe. I think it is appropriate to see the double-edged goodwill that Socrates exhibits as a commitment to fairness.

Importantly, since the midwife's task is one that the young man should eventually be able to carry out for himself, this attitude of fairness is one that the interlocutor must take on too. Thus, if the knower is one who can carry out for himself the midwife's task, then the knower will

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<sup>16</sup> The importance of goodwill – in fact mutual goodwill – is underscored in the *Gorgias* as well (487a ff.).



be a just individual. I mention this because Socrates makes a point of saying that genuine wisdom lies in justice (176b-c).<sup>17</sup> Yet, he makes this comment in the Ethical Digression, which is already at a certain remove from the main narrative of the dialogue, and in fact, makes it almost in passing, without spelling out what he means by it. But the puzzle dissolves once we appreciate that the very activity that makes one a knower, namely, the activity of thinking and being serious about seeking the truth, is an activity that is indicative of a just disposition.<sup>18</sup>

It appears then, that as long as the interlocutors enter the conversation with goodwill (151c), and they sincerely investigate whether a thesis is viable, then they can be said to engage in *basanizein* in the relevant sense. It follows that viability, or survival in dialectical examination, is the primary criterion of truth.<sup>19</sup> However, the requirement of fairness surely constrains the kind

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<sup>17</sup> “We can state the truth (*to alēthes*) like this. A god is by no means and in no way unjust, but as just as it’s possible to be, and there’s nothing more like a god than one of us who has become as just as possible. It’s in relation to this point that we find a man’s true cleverness (*hē hōs alēthōs deinotēs*), or else his worthlessness and unmanliness. Because knowledge of this point is true wisdom and virtue (*hē men gar toutou gnōsis sophia kai aretē alēthinē*), whereas ignorance of it is patent stupidity and vice. Anything else that passes for cleverness and wisdom is cheap, if it occurs in the exercise of political power, or mechanical, if it occurs in the exercise of crafts.” (176b7-c7)

<sup>18</sup> I thank Gabriel Lear for helping me see that nothing further is required to establish the justice of the knower. I am eager to mention that there is no puzzle, after all, about the justice of the knower because Socrates’ brief comment has led to a debate in the literature, regarding the genuine knower’s capacity for justice. The debate originates with Rue (1993), who argues that the knower is presented in the Ethical Digression as too otherworldly of a figure for him to believably have the characteristically human virtue of justice. There are compelling elements to this interpretation but I believe it rests on two mistakes. First, it assumes that the portrait of the knower (or rather, the paradigmatic philosopher, as the figure is framed in the Ethical Digression) is presented as no better than the mere sophist. On this point, I side with Bradshaw (1998), who persuasively argues that the sophist is presented as a self-refuting figure. Second, Rue’s interpretation assumes that in order for someone to be just, they have to enact political reform (cf. 1993, 87; 91-92). I do not think there is evidence in the Digression for this assumption. Rue seems to rely on the thought that the sophist has mastery of the world of particulars, while the philosopher of the world of Forms or universals, and a genuinely just individual would have both. This thought contributes to the development of the first assumption, insofar as it is indicative of the philosopher’s otherworldliness and the parity of the two characters. It contributes also to her eventual proposal that what is needed is someone who has knowledge both of Forms and worldly affairs. I do not think that the sophist is distinguished from the philosopher in those terms and so, I do not think that there is any need for an account of the knower’s justice that is indicative of his knowledge of Forms and particulars as such. Hence, I find the request for reform unmotivated and, ultimately, too strong.

<sup>19</sup> A passage from the beginning of the dialogue is relevant: “Which one of us is going to be the first to speak? If he goes wrong, and if anyone goes wrong when it’s his turn, he’ll sit down [...]; but if anyone survives without going wrong, he’ll be our king (*hos d’ an perigenētai anamartētos, basileusei hēmōn*), and set us to answer any question he likes.” (146a). On a related but different note, DeVries and Triplett (2000, 91) suggest that “making a claim, defending (or justifying) a claim, questioning a claim, rejecting a claim, withholding a claim, and the like” are moves in the “knowledge game” and knowledge attributions indicate a “functional role” in that game, presumably success in it. This is how they gloss the Sellarsian notion that knowledge episodes or states are located in “the logical space of reasons” (Sellars 1956, 298-299).

of argumentation that is admitted. Indeed, Socrates is moved to impersonate Protagoras in an effort to defend him against a series of “logic-chopping” arguments (*antilogikōs*, 164c8), which seem to leave Theaetetus confused about how to proceed. Such arguments, I will go on to suggest, are not serious arguments as they do not aim to get at the truth.<sup>20</sup>

Take, for example, the One Eye Closed Argument (165b-c) from the logic-chopping group. According to this argument, knowledge cannot be perception because if a perceiver had only one eye open, then they would both know and not know the same thing at the same time. The problem with this argument is that it does not try to get to the heart of the matter. What is knowledge like such that it could possibly be perception? This is a question that the logic-chopping argument does not ask, though, arguably, it helps bring its urgency to light. The proof offered by a logic-chopping argument lacks legitimate authority, not because the argument might be invalid, unsound, or purposefully confusing, but because it is not the sort of argument that seeks to gain an understanding of the truth about the matter at hand. It is reminiscent of arguments about the “name” (*onoma*) rather than the “thing at issue” (*pragma*)” (177d), that is, trivialities. It gloms onto surface features of the thesis to draw an inconsistency, but one that does not reach to the substance of the issue. All we can gain from the One Eye Closed Argument is the realization that we have not learned anything in going through it and that, perhaps, if we were cyclopes, the definition of knowledge as perception would be all right.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth mentioning here, Socrates’ admonition at the end of the logic-chopping stretch of arguments: “... [the person employing such arguments] would launch an attack on hearing and smelling and other perceptions of that kind, and he’d keep on refuting you, without letting go, until you were full of admiration for his enviable wisdom and he’d got you all tangled up. Then he’d take you prisoner and tie you up, and from then on hold you for ransom, at whatever price you and he agreed.” (165d-e).

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that the *peritropē* against the Measure Thesis, discussed in Chapter 1, while plausibly equally logic-chopping, does not rely solely on surface features but rather seeks to contextualize the Protagorean claim within actual conversational practices. It is those actual practices that spell the downfall of the Measure Thesis, that explicate why the Measure Thesis is fundamentally inappropriate, and that urge us to turn a reflective eye to our actual practices.

Logic-chopping arguments are all-purpose arguments; they are one-size-fits-all, both all topics and all speakers. They could come from a “bag of arguments” (161a8) – something that Socrates explicitly denies of himself – and they do not show off anything of who the person employing them is. They do not indicate serious engagement with the topic’s particular nuances or with what is at stake in discovering the truth about it. They also do not show why the person setting them out is interested in the topic, what is at stake for them personally, or how they think about it. They are faceless arguments and they are not of the sort that would be employed by a person seriously concerned with finding out the truth (or at least they would not be such a person’s only or primary tool). Consider, for example, Socrates’ refusal to examine Parmenides’ Monism after mounting an arguably logic-chopping argument against Heraclitean Flux: the superficiality of a quick demonstration would be inappropriate to Parmenides’ “depth” (184a1), a man that Socrates deeply respects (183e). This refusal suggests that Socrates does not think there is much to be gained by such argumentation alone.

Seeing why certain argumentative strategies might lack legitimate authority gives us a better sense of the dialectical investigation appropriate to the knower. The people who engage in this sort of investigation, whether they do so alone and in silence or out loud with others, do it for the sake of, not only discovering, but also understanding the truth. For example, both the logic-chopping arguments and the Final Refutation Argument prove that knowledge is not perception, but only the latter shows why. In fact, the Final Refutation Argument offers insights both about perception and about knowledge. Appreciation of those insights would allow Theaetetus to be a more effective conversational partner when the discussion turns to the issue of falsehood or to the Dream Theory. It just so happened that Theaetetus had not digested those

insights in time. But this serves only to strengthen the point that knowledge requires serious, methodical, and consistent investigation – a “long and arduous education” indeed.

Surely, however, this education is not only an education in dialectical techniques but an education in valuing the truth: seeking it, using it, standing up for it. Socrates’ midwife models for Theaetetus how to properly love the truth. Seeing that love of truth is presupposed by serious engagement in dialectic illuminates the point of dialectic, namely, to be bound by the truth. Serious investigators do not simply want to be aware of the truth or to be able to say what the true judgments are. They value themselves as individuals who can determine their own lives and do so well, that is, with reasons, rather than being left at the mercy of others or their own worst instincts. They value the life in which themselves and others are accountable to the truth and to each other. The genuine knower values precisely that which the relativist seeks to undermine.

I wish to end this chapter by responding to one final effort by the relativist to impose his perspective. He might say the following. Given that the only standard of truth is other people and given that the judgment that is taken to be the true one is the one that survives examination, is it not the case that all that we have managed to do is replace “true for me” locutions with the plural “true for us”?

To answer this question, we ought to be reminded that these true judgments are verdicts of serious investigations; they are not outcomes of incidental processes, as the model of perception would have it. Thus, when the person to whom we attribute knowledge informs us of his verdicts, he does not simply make an announcement, as I have been calling the statements made in the Protagorean vein. Rather, he calls on us to share in the world which he sees. Cavell (1976, 87) says of the paradigmatic critic – an analogue to the knower – that what makes his opinions more valuable than others’ is “his ability to produce for himself the thong and key [i.e.

the definitive and vindicating evidence] of his response; and his vindication comes not from his pointing out that it is or was in the barrel [i.e. showing the evidence], but in getting us to taste it there.” Cavell explains that the critic “accounts for his own feelings, and then [...] shows them to whomever he wants to know them, the best way he can” (ibid., 93). He sorts out, that is, what he thinks and puts it into words. The critic puts forth and applies standards of truth to himself and then speaks them out loud to others. He offers justifications, motivating reasons, and other considerations that will show forth why his verdict is a good one. The point of doing so is to invite the interlocutor to assess for himself the facts, as presented by the speaker, and to see them as facts that are plain to them too. The audience is invited to join the world described, though not as a foreign world but as one which they recognize as their own. Joining that world entails that the speaker’s arguments are illuminating and useful to the interlocutor; and it amounts to an acceptance of the speaker’s standards for truth.

Hence, even if the knower’s judgment expresses, in some broad sense, how the world seems to him or what he is inclined to say, it remains the case that his judgment is nonetheless one that is purposefully meant to get others to join in that inclination, to consider and think through if it suits them. The knower’s expression of his beliefs is not an expression of an inclination but a call to partake in the world as he describes it. Thus, it seems right to me to say that, in seeking or accepting the verdict of the knower, one does not simply accept a description of the world, but affirms their own capacity to discriminate good from bad arguments, appearances from realities. In doing so, they commit to being an active participant of a world in which truth and reasons matter and, therefore, verdicts are always up for examination and invitations up for acceptance.

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