

University of Dayton Review

Volume 16
Number 1 *Proceedings of the 10th Annual
Philosophy Colloquium*

Article 14

December 1982

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Recommended Citation

Polansky, Ronald (1982) "Plato's *Theaetetus* as Dialectic," *University of Dayton Review*. Vol. 16: No. 1, Article 14.

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PLATO'S *THEAETETUS* AS DIALECTIC

By Ronald Polansky

Plato's *Theaetetus*, having *episteme* (knowledge or science) as its principal topic, attracts considerable interest. Two lines of interpretation dominate the literature. Each provides a way for explaining the two most prominent features of the dialogue — that it fails to define knowledge and that Socrates refrains from introducing the forms to help himself out. The majority of commentators, adhering to the standard view of Plato — that he has a doctrine of forms which he retains throughout his career, or once discovering never forsakes — think that the *Theaetetus*, since it does not appeal to the forms as the necessary objects of knowledge, shows their very necessity by its consequent failure to define knowledge. The *Theaetetus*, for them, offers an indirect proof that without the forms, Plato cannot give any account of what knowledge is. What this view sometimes assumes is that in other dialogues into which the forms enter, such as *Republic* or *Sophist*, there is a complete account. The *Theaetetus*, then, confirms the earlier treatments of knowledge, say in the *Republic*, or prepares for the answer coming in the *Sophist*.¹

The opponents of this approach think of Plato as mainly a critical philosopher, and even as becoming ever more suspicious of the forms. Hence they attribute to the *Theaetetus* principally a negative purpose. They argue, contrary to the common view, that: (a) the aporetic conclusion means Plato does not know what knowledge is and so he is not holding anything in reserve here or in any other dialogue that answers the question;² (b) the avoidance of forms in the dialogue stems from Plato's doubt about or rejection of them, rather than his keeping them in reserve;³ and (c) Plato recognizes that the introduction of the forms would not help at all with the effort to give an account of knowledge.⁴ They see Plato's philosophical honesty as driving him to an ever clearer appreciation of difficulties as regards knowledge. Furthermore, they understand him to be increasingly concerned to clarify concepts, for example: distinguishing perception and opinion from knowledge, rejecting the simplicity of the ultimate elements of knowledge, and introducing the notions of qualities and elements.

Both these general lines of interpretation have much to contribute to our appreciation of the *Theaetetus*; maybe, rather than embracing either one of these lines, we might find a way to do justice to both. A new comprehensive understanding of the dialogue, which incorporates the insights provided by the previous interpretations, arises from paying much more attention than usual to the fact that Socrates' interlocutors in this dialogue are mathematicians and from considering a previously unnoticed structural feature of the dialogue. When both these have received their due, it will become clear that the *Theaetetus* succeeds in presenting what Plato, or Socrates, thinks about knowledge.⁵

The dialogue will appear to provide a remarkable depiction of dialectic in a process of profound reflection on the sciences and on itself. Let us proceed by exploring each of the four major sections of the dialogue.

I

In the first section of the *Theaetetus* (up to 151d), Socrates raises the question about knowledge with the mathematicians, Theodorus and Theaetetus. These two men are proficient in the kinds of sciences that, along with the productive arts, always tend to be regarded as key examples of knowledge. It is especially appropriate, then, to raise the question about knowledge with mathematicians. When we consider Socrates' view of the mathematical sciences, we see even better why mathematicians need to enter such a discussion. From the standpoint of the philosopher, the mathematical sciences have a serious shortcoming as science. In the *Republic*, Socrates says (at 533c):

...geometry and the studies that accompany it — are, as we see, dreaming about being, but the clear waking vision of it is impossible for them as long as they leave the assumptions which they employ undisturbed and cannot give any account of them. For where the starting point is something that the reasoner does not know, and the conclusion and all that intervenes is a tissue of things not really known, what possibility is there that assent in such cases can ever be converted into true knowledge or science?
(trans. Shorey)

The mathematician remains in a “dream” so long as he is unaware that the hypotheses from which his science begins are obscure; it can be said that the mathematician lacks complete science. Thus, it is appropriate that mathematicians engage in the inquiry into knowledge, since they need to be awakened by it from their dreamy condition.⁶

Surely, the mathematicians in the *Theaetetus*, need to be awakened. Theaetetus' first answer to the question about knowledge, that it is “the things one might learn from Theodorus — geometry and such subjects — and also the arts of the shoemaker and the other craftsmen” (146c-d), displays his confidence that genuine knowledge lies in the established sciences. Socrates' teasing complaint, that Theaetetus has merely *enumerated* the various arts and sciences rather than stated precisely what knowledge is (146e), relates to the philosopher's reservation about the mathematician's typical method of counting up units of which he is ignorant. Theaetetus apparently thought he could count up the sciences without giving any consideration to the unit that is counted, namely, knowledge.⁷

Theodorus also stands in need of Socrates' questioning. He seems preoccupied with the mathematician's dream. He repeatedly declines to enter into the dialogue and, at one point, even proclaims that he has long ago turned away from such “bare arguments” (165a). In this light, would it be altogether impossible to see in Theodorus something of a “guardian” of Protagoras, who fathers the conviction in young minds that “Man is the measure of all things?” (see 164e) After all, when Theodorus refuses to enter the conversation to examine

the grounds of his geometry and calls philosophical argumentation empty, he as much as states that there is nothing outside of mathematics but insubstantial opinion. Ironically, to the extent that the so-called “exact” science of mathematics discourages interest in dialectic, it fosters a relativistic view of everything nonmathematical. We see, then, the motivation for Socrates’ scrutiny of the mathematicians.

By asking mathematicians “What is knowledge?” Socrates leads them from their science into more dialectical philosophy. Dialectic proceeds upward to clarify any hypotheses that have been made. One of Socrates’ primary purposes in the conversation is to get the young Theaetetus, who has been said to resemble him so much in bodily appearance (143e), to take on a greater resemblance in soul by joining in Socrates’ dialectical activity. Socrates forces the young man, who has heretofore believed mathematics the supreme science, to ask himself just what goes on in mathematics, in order to answer the question about knowledge. We find Theaetetus arrives dialectically at three different accounts of knowledge: perception, true opinion, and true opinion with an account.

II

Following Socrates’ criticism of his initial assertion that knowledge simply consists in all the various kinds of knowledge, Theaetetus still retains his conviction that mathematics is the exemplary form of knowledge. This is clear from the discussion of his work with mathematical powers (*dunameis*) (147c-148d). Through Socrates’ efforts to encourage him by likening himself to a midwife, Theaetetus is emboldened to reflect upon his mathematical activity to discover what characterizes it as knowledge. When Theaetetus asserts that knowledge is “perception” (*aisthesis*) (151a), he most likely does not mean sense-perception, as nearly all commentators have supposed, but rather the kind of intuition or insight at work in his own mathematical activity with the powers.⁸ Why should we think that such a promising young mathematician would believe knowledge to be sense-perception? In the context, “perception” is hardly an implausible answer for him to give. Being young and inexperienced in philosophy, Theaetetus grasps for some term to describe the sort of immediate insight the mathematician has into the certainty of his fundamental assumptions and the clear vision he has of the lucidity of his subsequent chains of reasoning. He hits upon “perception”. In his inexperience, Theaetetus can think of no other way to describe how, in his work with powers, he has discerned that the two kinds of numbers, square and oblong, can be projected into squares respectively having lengths and powers for their sides. Theaetetus does not exclude sense-perception from his term “perception” since he as yet cannot distinguish mathematics from sense-perception — he has never been called upon to make this explicit — and because he fails to recognize how mathematical objects differ from changeable objects perceptible to the senses.⁹

Due to Theaetetus’ obscurity in his understanding of *aisthesis*, Socrates is able, through his midwifery, to deliver the conception as a Protagorean and Heraclitean child. Socrates gets them to treat *aisthesis* as sense-perception and to view its objects as constantly in flux and relative to the individual. Three

reasons emerge for this peculiar handling of Theaetetus' conception. First, Theaetetus appears exceptionally promising to Socrates. The youth has already begun to move in the direction of philosophy by starting to reflect on his mathematics; Socrates must deepen this self-reflection. He can do this best by having Theaetetus consider the whole cognitive realm. Hence, Socrates initially leads them to take up sense-perception and then advance to true opinion and true opinion with an account. They thereby complete a dialectically sophisticated and comprehensive investigation of all the likely cognitive possibilities for knowledge. Second, by going through the level of sense-perception and its objects, Socrates helps Theaetetus to appreciate that the "perception" involved in mathematics is not sense-perception and that the intelligible objects of mathematics have a different ontological status from the objects of sense. Third, if the confidence of the hard-headed scientist leads him to be adverse to open-ended philosophizing, as we have pointed out in the case of Theodorus, then, for pedagogical purposes, Socrates may well envision a defense of philosophy that begins by considering a position that is as anti-philosophical as possible. It is precisely the Protagorean-Heraclitean offspring that constitutes this anti-dialectical position, and which is developed by Socrates in a threatening way that exaggerates the dangers to which Theodorus exposes Theaetetus. What could be more opposed to Socrates' whole enterprise than conceiving every man to be the measure of his own wisdom, so that philosophical midwifery becomes foolishness (161e); and what could be more antagonistic to philosophy than having things constantly changing, so that intelligent speech becomes impossible (182e-183b)? The critical examination and exposé of the various parts of this offspring turns out to be a defense of philosophy; this becomes most clear in the so-called "digression," which is Socrates' *apologia* for philosophy (172c-177c) countering Protagoras' *apologia* for sophistry (165e-168c).

These three reasons for diverting the conversation through the Protagorean-Heraclitean position converge to support the standard view of the dialogue — that it indirectly upholds the necessity of the forms. Focusing as it does on the drastic consequences of removing all unity from the world (see 152d), this section of the dialogue clearly reaffirms the need for unity at the foundation of things. The true reason why the topic of forms does not enter more explicitly into the discussion is simply because the interlocutor is a mathematician; all that needs to be pointed out to him is that mathematical objects are not shifting sensible things in order for him to appreciate that they are some sort of unchanging intelligible things. Mathematicians are eminently prepared to allow that there are intelligible entities separate from the perceptible things around us. Of course, they, just like all men, encounter extraordinary difficulty in trying to explain precisely what these entities are. While it is correct, therefore, to interpret the dialogue as defending the necessity of the forms, we may not simply leave it at that. There are profound difficulties, after all, in understanding the forms; and, as the opposing interpretation of the *Theaetetus* persuasively argues, the mere supposition of the existence of the forms does little to resolve the multifarious difficulties involved in providing an account of knowledge.¹⁰

In fact, the remainder of the dialogue (after 186e), especially in its constant return to the issue of wholes and parts, does much to clarify the *nature* of the

forms, rather than simply emphasizing their necessity. Hence, while a large section of the dialogue does indirectly defend the positing of forms, the entire dialogue has a broader purpose.

In this connection, it should be noted how all parts of the discussion conform to the requirements of an investigation into knowledge. For knowledge to be known, two things must be apprehended: (1) its peculiar kind of object and (2) the special manner of its relationship to this object. Each art or science has a subject matter which it relates to in a specific way; to know an art or science, therefore, is to gain clarity about these two aspects of it.¹¹ Knowledge of knowledge could never come merely from fixing attention upon the forms, the proper objects of science, while ignoring the nature of the cognitive activity that attends to these forms. The *Theaetetus* deals with both. The lengthy section on knowledge as perception clearly deals with both the activity of perceiving and the proper object of perception. Similarly the rest of the dialogue continues this dual focus.

III

Socrates finishes his demonstration that knowledge cannot be perception by determining that thought, rather than sense-perception, gets to truth and being (186d-e). *Theaetetus*, aided by this and again reflecting on his mathematics, advances the suggestion that knowledge lies in thought, and is true opinion (187b). With the shift from perception to thought and opinion, they certainly approach the domain of the arts and sciences — and dialectic. If *Theaetetus*' opinion that knowledge is true opinion were true, he would have conquered the whole domain, because he would possess true opinion about knowledge and thus have knowledge of knowledge. Socrates does not directly attack *Theaetetus*' new suggestion. Rather, he raises the difficulty about explaining how false opinion can occur.

This turn in the conversation, perhaps surprising, has its justification. First, with the specifically human dignity of thought comes also the indignity of falsehood, in which men frequently wallow. False opinion is just that which Socrates aims to eliminate through his maieutic testing of opinion. Perhaps dialectic must familiarize itself with its enemy and its origin. Second, if Socrates is to lead *Theaetetus* progressively and dialectically up through the levels of cognition, it is appropriate to proceed from perception to false opinion and then to true opinion. The entire realm of opinion must be explored. Third, investigating false opinion reinforces and deepens their already attained understanding of the soul (especially of 184-186) and leads them to reflect on the nature of wholes and parts. In order to reveal how one might be led to embrace a false opinion and to believe that things are different than they really are, Socrates sets forth illustrations of the soul in the images of a waxen block and aviary, and shows how the wholes and parts of their contents get misassigned to each other. Ultimately, however, Socrates and *Theaetetus* end up as incapable of comprehending how the soul can be deceived about what is in it (ignorance) as they are of comprehending what knowledge is. Fourth, since they are unable on their current understanding of knowledge as true opinion to explain its opposite, false opinion, discredit is obliquely cast on that conception. We would expect any knowledge, if genuine, to understand its contrary.

True opinion, Socrates finally shows (201a-c), falls short of knowledge, since it may arise solely from rhetorical persuasion, as in court, even where the genuine evidence is lacking to the person with the opinion. What might provide the evidence is some sort of account.

IV

Theaetetus finally achieves a good appreciation of what goes on in his mathematics when he recognizes that he supplements (or supports) his mathematical thinking with accounts. Knowledge might well then be true opinion with an account (*logos*) (201c-d). But just what might be meant by account, both in mathematics and here in the dialogue? In order to understand how an account could elevate thought to the level of knowledge, and to conform with their own hypothesis, they must develop an account of account. If they successfully produce such an account of account, then they achieve knowledge of mathematical knowledge and of knowledge itself.

By recalling the previous route of the dialogue, and how Theaetetus has constantly focused his attention on his mathematics, we may best comprehend this final section of the dialogue. We have seen Theaetetus put forward *four* answers to the question about knowledge. Successively, he has said that knowledge is (1) all the kinds of knowledge Theodorus teaches and the arts, (2) perception, (3) true opinion, and (4) true opinion with an account. Beginning in a condition of naive confidence in the scientific character of the established sciences, Theaetetus has been provoked by Socrates to reflect on what occurs in mathematics in an effort to disclose just what knowledge is. Obviously, his most compelling account of knowledge is his final one, true opinion with an account. Socrates must at this point elaborate for Theaetetus the various possible accounts of account. These turn out to be: (1) the “dream,” (2) vocalizing, (3) saying all the elements, and (4) saying the mark by which something differs from other things. That there are precisely *four* of these can be made intelligible. We may recognize that the four accounts are in a one-to-one correspondence with Theaetetus’ answers about knowledge. Let us explore this remarkable structural feature of the dialogue by proceeding through each part of the last section in turn.

Is the “dream” (201c-206c) not a reflection upon the state of mind of someone holding that the existing arts and sciences are all there is of knowledge? When Theaetetus first asserted that knowledge consists in the various kinds of knowledge taught by Theodorus, as we recall, he expressed his confidence in mathematical science. The mathematician is content to reason from unexamined assumptions. In subsequently trying to characterize this mode of thought, Theaetetus called it “perception.” When we examine the so-called “dream” that Socrates presents, we find that it captures the dreamy frame of mind of mathematicians confident that they alone have the proper approach to knowledge. The dream view is that the elements of which everything is composed are unknowable, but only *perceptible*, while the compounds composed of the elements are somehow knowable. While this view of knowable compounds constructed of unknowable, but perceptible, elements certainly applies to more than mathematics — it would seem to apply to any kind of atomism — nevertheless it por-

trays the thought of the mathematician especially nicely.¹² The mathematician is satisfied simply to “perceive” his starting points and from them deduce his “knowable” results. This may well be called “dreaming,” since it means taking the assumptions of the science for things known — and what is dreaming except mistaking resemblances for known realities (see *Republic* 476c and 533b)? Thus, we see the connection between the “dream” and Theaetetus’ initial condition of complete confidence in the mathematics taught by Theodorus.

The account of account as the mere vocalization of the true opinions provides the most literal sense of *logos*. Such an account, since it could be delivered without effort by anyone who can speak, could hardly constitute knowledge (206d-e). The very ease of such accounting, its immediacy and availability to everyone, recalls the claim of the Protagorean-Heraclitean offspring that every man is the measure of his own wisdom. If the account that produced knowledge were just speaking, then whatever anyone said would be true, and everyone would be wise. Again, we note a correspondence, this time between vocalization and the perverted understanding of Theaetetus’ conception of knowledge as perception as the Protagorean-Heraclitean view.

In response to Theaetetus’ conception of knowledge as true opinion, Socrates turned, we saw, to explore the nature of false opinion. By doing this, as I have pointed out, Socrates enabled himself to deepen their understanding of the soul and of the role of wholes and parts in true and false knowledge. We find that the account of account that proposes enumerating all the elements (206e-208b) reviews precisely this terrain. By emphasizing that accounts must give all the elements, it considers the relation between wholes and parts. By indicating that true opinion may err, in spite of possessing such an account, for example, as when we learn to spell a name by rote, this account dwells upon the vulnerability of opinion to falsehood. Hence, this account of account also contributes to and supports our understanding of a particular, parallel account of knowledge by recalling its central features.

The final account of account prescribes the saying of the mark by which something differs from other things (208c). This account captures just what they have been attempting to do in the entire last section of the dialogue. They have been trying to locate some sense of account to serve as the mark differentiating genuine knowledge from mere opinion that happens to be true. Their failure to determine precisely how an account differs from a true opinion spells defeat not only for this final account of account, but in a parallel fashion for the whole attempt to distinguish true opinion from knowledge by an account.

Is there any reason, at this point, why we should expect, as most commentators do, Socrates to have available an additional account of knowledge or of account? Surely not. Early in the dialogue, Socrates provided Theaetetus with a simple example of what he meant by giving an account. Clay, he said, is “earth mixed with moisture” (147c). In the final account of knowledge offered in the dialogue (knowledge as true opinion with an account), I suggest that Socrates and Theaetetus have finally managed to come up with this kind of account. Thus, the way in which “true opinion with an account” images “earth mixed with moisture” indicates that they have gone as far into the matter as Socrates con-

ceives possible. Furthermore, if I am correct about the mutual mirroring between the four major accounts of knowledge and the four accounts of account, then this manner of finally reappropriating everything that has preceded intimates the completeness and comprehensiveness of the dialogue. They have exhausted all the possibilities for both accounts of knowledge and accounts of account. Socrates has nothing left up his sleeve.

Yet, though there is nothing more to be said at the end, we would be remiss if we failed to appreciate the profound degree to which they have succeeded in exhibiting knowledge of knowledge. That their accounts of account parallel their accounts of knowledge makes it evident that in giving accounts of account they circle back to attempt bringing to *logos* (to word or account) their previous *ergon* (deed) of elaborating accounts of knowledge. If they have approached the giving of accounts of knowledge in a proper way, then no better access to the understanding of account could be expected than a reflection upon their former activity. And most certainly their activity was of great value, because Socrates skillfully directed Theaetetus through a complete and systematic examination of the candidates for human knowledge. Beginning with Theaetetus' infatuation with his science, Socrates proceeded through sense-perception, and opinion, to true opinion with an account. What other possibilities for knowledge could there be besides these? Perhaps we could even call these the "elements" of human knowledge. If these are genuine elements of knowledge and if they have been comprehensive in their treatment of accounts of knowledge, then they will be equally comprehensive in gathering all accounts of account by reviewing their treatment of knowledge. Moreover, since they work through all the accounts of knowledge without forgetting to return to consider their own activity of working through them, their activity is differentiated from unknowing enumeration of elements by the fact that they have (or at least Socrates has) proceeded self-consciously. This reflective attitude and procedure marks the difference between their sort of dialectical inquiry and what occurs in the positive sciences. We are prepared to answer the final perplexity Socrates raises about how adding an account which is merely another opinion to the initial true opinion could elevate it to knowledge (209d). When someone has searched out the grounds or foundations for a true opinion he does not necessarily simply add another opinion to his previous one. If he achieves clarity in his own hypotheses or starting points, then he obtains complete dialectical knowledge.

Perhaps by again invoking Theaetetus' mathematics we may appreciate this possibility. Theaetetus, we recall, worked with magnitudes incommensurable until squared (147d ff.). Might not true opinion be similarly incommensurable with knowledge? Only when the possessor of opinion has so reflected upon its elements that he understands the principles can we say that he raises it to commensurability with knowledge. The mere *addition* of an opinion does not convert an original opinion into knowledge; but the "squaring" of an opinion through multiplying it by reflective inquiry into its elements does lead thought toward dialectical completion and knowledge.

Hence, the whole dialogue displays, in spite of its appearance of failure, just what knowledge is *par excellence*: it is dialectic — it is going through all the

elements in a self-reflexive way, precisely in the manner exemplified in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates manages to raise to perfection that sort of self-reflection which Theaetetus undertook in this dialogue. Theaetetus, in providing his accounts of knowledge, was constantly scrutinizing mathematics, and thus he was philosophizing; Socrates, in providing accounts of account, was reflecting on what was involved in that very philosophical activity, and thus achieving dialectical self-clarity.

However, though Socrates succeeds in displaying in deed (*ergon*) what dialectic is, it is doubtful whether he could ever put this into a straightforward account (*logos*). The negative conclusion to the dialogue is, then, in a sense, perfectly appropriate. It shows no change of mind on Plato's part, but rather the inescapable recognition that one always falls short of exhaustive knowledge of what knowledge is. Socrates' midwifery can only bring about a barrenness in his interlocutors similar to his own — a philosophical modesty stemming from the recognition that even proceeding systematically through the real possibilities for human knowing does not finally bestow on us an expertise like that which we have in the sciences. At the end of the *Theaetetus*, Theaetetus sees that he, like everyone else, is ignorant of knowledge. Yet, as he considers what he has undergone, he well says, "by Zeus, Socrates, with your help I have already said more than there was in me" (210b). Socrates has given him the opportunity of experiencing the reward of dialectic, the highest science: self-clarification.

I believe that our attention to the fact that Socrates' interlocutors in the *Theaetetus* are mathematicians and to the dialogue's parallel structure, has allowed us to comprehend just that positivity and negativity characteristic of the Platonic conception of knowledge.¹³

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NOTES

- ¹Authors expressing themselves as differently as the following may all be placed under this general line of interpretation: F. Schleiermacher, *Introduction to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 189-204; C. Ritter, *Essence of Plato's Philosophy*, trans. A. Alles (London: Allen & Unwin, 1933), pp. 140 and 142; T. Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers*, trans. G.G. Berry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), III, p. 160; B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), III, pp. 194 and 200; H.N. Fowler, *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), p. 4; Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), pp. 269 and 285-6; G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London: Methuen, 1935), pp. 36-8; F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935), pp. 7 and 28; H.F. Cherniss, "Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas," reprinted in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. Reginald E. Allen (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), p. 7; W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 101 and 103; Norman Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 103-7; Egil Wyller, "The Architectonic of Plato's Later Dialogues," *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 27 (1966), p. 111; K. von Fritz, "The Philosophical Passage in the Seventh Letter and the Problem of Plato's 'Esoteric' Philosophy," *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. J.P. Anton and G.L. Kustas (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1971), p. 435; John Findlay, *The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), pp. 219-229; Robert Hackforth, "Platonic Forms in the *Theaetetus*," *Classical Quarterly*, 51, (1957), p. 53; May Yoh, "On the Third Attempted Definition of Knowledge, *Theaetetus* 201c-210b," *Dialogue*, 14 (1975), pp. 420-442; J.A. Doull, "A Commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Dionysius*, 1(1977), p. 5; Jacob Klein, *Plato's Trilogy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 144-5; W.K.C. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), V, pp. 65-66 and 120-122.
- ²George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates* (London: John Murray, 1888), II, p. 391, strongly proclaimed this point. He said: "the perplexities in the *Theaetetus*, as they are not solved in this dialogue, so they are not solved in any other dialogue. The view taken by Schleiermacher and other critics according to which Plato lays out the difficulties in one anterior dialogue in order to furnish the solution in another posterior is not borne out by the facts." Further, he applauded Bonitz, who "disputes altogether the assumption of other Platonic critics, that a purely negative result is unworthy of Plato; and that the negative apparatus is an artifice to recommend, and a veil to conceal, some great affirmative truth, which accurate expositors can detect and enunciate plainly." (p. 395 note)
- ³On this see: G. Ryle, "Plato's *Parmenides*," *Mind*, 48 (1939), p. 315; R. Robinson, "Forms and Error in Plato's *Theaetetus*," reprinted in *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 58-9; and W. Hicken, "Knowledge and Forms in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, pp. 187-8 and 198.
- ⁴See for this argument: Robinson, pp. 56-7; and John McDowell, *Plato Theaetetus* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 177 and 257-9.
- ⁵Quite recently a few commentators have begun to perceive a third possible interpretation of the *Theaetetus*, that it successfully lays out the Platonic position on knowledge. Others tending toward the direction I am proposing include: Gail Fine, "Knowledge and Logos in the *Theaetetus*," *Philosophical Review*, 88 (1979), pp. 366-97; Rosemary Desjar-

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dins, "The Horns of Dilemma: Dreaming and Waking Vision in the *Theaetetus*," *Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1981), pp. 109-26; E.S. Haring, "The *Theaetetus* Ends Well," *Review of Metaphysics*, 35 (1982), pp. 509-28.

⁶Note the comment by A. Koyré, *Discovering Plato*, trans. L.C. Rosenfield (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1945), p. 35: "the observation still holds today, that science and philosophy are two separate things; that one may be an excellent scientist without having the least idea of what is really doing. It is almost always thus."

⁷Perhaps the passage in the *Theaetetus* most strongly expressing the view of the *Republic*, that the ultimate principles must themselves be known for anything to be deduced from them with complete knowledge, is 206b. That this passage should occur at the end of the dialogue can be understood in the light of what we reveal in the last section.

⁸That *Theaetetus* is especially thinking about his work with the powers is gathered from the fact that *Theaetetus* himself believed his answer about the powers to be just the sort Socrates wanted with regard to knowledge (148b) and that the whole midwife image is presented in order to encourage him to model an answer upon his mathematics (148d-e).

⁹The strongest evidence that *aisthesis* may here be used in regard to mathematics emerges in the "dream" at the end of the *Theaetetus*. This becomes clear below.

Cf. H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. and ed. by G. Barden and J. Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 468-469: "The true Platonic context (of the speaking of *aisthesis*) is that of a mathematical theory of evidence that is not yet quite clear about the intelligible mode of being of mathematics."

Professor R.S. Brumbaugh has called to my attention Malcolm Brown's article, "Plato Disapproves of the Slave-Boy's Answer," *Review of Metaphysics*, 21 (1967 -1968), 57-93, in which there is a discussion of the historical motivation of Plato's fears about mathematicians confusing their work with sense-perception. Brown refers to Plutarch's *Quaestionum Convivialium* VIII, 2, where we find: "...but geometry especially... leads the understanding upward and turns it in a new direction, as it undergoes, so to speak, a complete purification and gradual deliverance from sense-perception. It was for this reason that Plato himself reproached Eudoxus and Archytus and Menaechmus for setting out to remove the problem of doubling the cube into the realm of instruments and mechanical devices, as if they were trying to find two mean proportionals not by the use of reason but in whatever way would work. In this way, he thought, the advantage of geometry was dissipated and destroyed, since it slipped back into the realm of sense-perception instead of soaring upward and laying hold of the eternal and immaterial images in the presence of which God is always God." (Loeb translation)

¹⁰Of course, Robinson, pp. 56-7, makes a ridiculous comparison when he claims the object of knowledge is as unconnected with it as a target is to a gun. Hackforth, p. 58, and W.G. Runciman, *Plato's Later Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 10, appropriately criticize his comparison. Yet Robinson's basic argument against Cornford, that it is not enough simply to shout "forms" to answer all questions about what knowledge is, is correct. We will not know knowledge until we know *what* the forms are and not simply *that* there are such things.

¹¹That knowing a science demands grasping its subject matter and method seems clearly displayed in the divisions in the first part of the *Sophist*. The stranger shifts back and forth between these in his divisions of the arts. For example, angling has a peculiar object, fish, as opposed to land animals, and it gets the fish by means of baited hooks rather than spearing.

¹²See Glen Morrow, "Plato and the Mathematicians: An Interpretation of Socrates' Dream in the *Theaetetus* (201e-206c)," *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970), pp. 309-333; Amelie O. Rorty, "A Speculative Note on Some Dramatic Elements in the *Theaetetus*," *Phronesis*, 17 (1972), pp. 227-238.

¹³I wish to thank Professors John P. Anton, Rosamond Kent Sprague, and Robert S. Brumbaugh, as well as Philip Blosser and Alan C. Bowen, for suggestions on improving this paper.