

Σχολή Θετικών Επιστημών, Τμήμα Ιστορίας και Φιλοσοφίας της Επιστήμης,  
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Τίτλος εργασίας: *The Third Definition of Knowledge in Plato's Theaetetus – Why  
does it fall short?*

Όνομα: Δημοσθένης Πατραμάνης

Αριθμός Μητρώου: 016/15

Επιβλέπων Καθηγητής: Βασίλειος Καρασμάνης (Ομότιμος Καθηγητής)

Μέλη Επιτροπής: Αικατερίνη Ιεροδιακόνου (Καθηγήτρια), Παύλος Καλλιγάς  
(Ομότιμος Καθηγητής)

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# **The Third Definition of Knowledge in Plato's *Theaetetus***

Why does it fall short?

Demosthenes Patramanis

## Contents

Abstract .....	4
A Brief Overview of the Dialogue .....	6
1. Scholarly Views .....	8
Revisionists VS Unitarians .....	8
Cornford's Analysis .....	9
McDowell's Analysis .....	12
Bostock's Analysis .....	17
Comments .....	20
2. Analysis of the Arguments .....	23
Socrates' Dream Theory .....	23
Analysis of the Dream Theory .....	24
Three different accounts for 'logos' .....	27
First account (206c-e) .....	28
Second account (206e-208b) .....	29
Third account (208b-210b) .....	31
3. Why then does it fall short? .....	33
An Aristotelian approach from the Posterior Analytics to aid understanding .....	38
A short reference to <i>Meno</i> .....	40
Plato's effort .....	41

## **Abstract**

The *Theaetetus* belongs to Plato's later writing period. Besides being a monumental text, it is a great example of how to approach a subject through arguments and try to grasp its meaning. The subject in question is "What is Knowledge?" (ἐπιστήμη), where Socrates and Theaetetus discuss three possible definitions of it, without reaching a conclusion in the end.

I will attempt to give a short overview of the dialogue; namely the three definitions visited and then delve deeper into the last. This will involve three stages. First, an overview of selected scholars and what they have said on the matter. Second, an in depth analysis of each of the arguments Socrates uses to dispute the power of the definition. The last part is a summary of why the dialogue ends in an aporetic fashion, taking into consideration the main question of scholars: what type of knowledge is Socrates talking about? Therefore, in the last two parts will try to answer the subtitle of this thesis, "why does the third definition fall short?". The first of the two does so through Socrates' own words, where the second attempts to do so on a "meta-level", through an interpretation of the text.

## **Περίληψη**

Ο *Θεαίτητος* ανήκει στην ύστερη περίοδο γραφής του Πλάτωνα. Εκτός του ότι είναι ένα μνημειώδες έργο, μπορεί να χαρακτηριστεί ως υπόδειγμα για το πως προσεγγίζεται ένα θέμα μέσω επιχειρημάτων στην προσπάθεια να κατανοηθεί. Το εν λόγω θέμα είναι «Τι εστι Γνώση;» (ἐπιστήμη), όπου ο Σωκράτης και ο Θεαίτητος συζητούν τρεις πιθανούς ορισμούς, χωρίς τελικώς να καταλήξουν σε συμπέρασμα.

Θα προσπαθήσω να δώσω μια σύντομη εικόνα του διαλόγου, ανατρέχοντας τους τρεις ορισμούς και θα εστιάσω στον τελευταίο. Το εγχείρημα θα γίνει σε τρία στάδια. Πρώτα θα γίνει μια επισκόπηση επιλεγμένης βιβλιογραφίας. Εν συνεχεία, μια ενδελεχής ανάλυση κάθε επιχειρήματος που χρησιμοποιεί ο Σωκράτης ώστε να αμφισβητήσει την εγκυρότητα του ορισμού. Στο τελευταίο μέρος θα συνοψίσω γιατί ο διάλογος τελειώνει απορητικά, λαμβάνοντας υπόψιν την κύρια ερώτηση των μελετητών: για τι είδους Γνώση μιλάει ο Σωκράτης; Ως εκ τούτου, το δεύτερο και τρίτο μέρος της εργασίας είναι μια προσπάθεια να απαντηθεί ο υπότιτλος της επικεφαλίδας της, «γιατί ο τρίτος ορισμός δεν ικανοποιεί το στόχο του;» Στο πρώτο από τα δύο αυτό γίνεται μέσα από τα λόγια του ίδιου του Σωκράτη, ενώ στο τελευταίο επιχειρείται μια ερμηνεία του κειμένου σε ένα «μετά-επίπεδο».

**Keywords:** Plato, Socrates, Theaetetus, Knowledge Theory, Epistemology

**Λέξεις-Κλειδιά:** Πλάτων, Σωκράτης, Θεαίτητος, Γνωσιολογία, Επιστημολογία

### Some notes on translation:

It is generally accepted to translate *ἐπιστήμη* as *knowledge* and *αἴσθησις* as *perception*. The debate revolves mainly around the words *δόξα* and *λόγος*, where *belief/judgement* and *reason/argument/justification* are attributed accordingly. Bostock<sup>1</sup> offers a good overview on this matter and especially on the word *λόγος*. His own choice is to use the word *belief* and *account*. In an effort to avoid exhausting the discussion at the level of interpretation, but most importantly because the very definition of *λόγος* is a central issue in the text itself, I have chosen to use the words in their Greek form (*doxa* and *logos*) when not offering scholars' views.

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<sup>1</sup> Bostock (2005), p. 202-206

## **A Brief Overview of the Dialogue**

As a lead-in to the discussion of the three possible definitions, we are presented with the central question, “What is Knowledge?” (*[...] ἀπορῶ καὶ οὐ δύναμαι λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς παρ’ ἐμαυτῷ, ἐπιστήμη ὅτι ποτὲ τυγχάνει ὄν’*, 145e7-8) and Theaetetus’ initial reply is to offer examples of knowledge such as astronomy, arithmetic etc. At this point Socrates makes it clear that giving examples of knowledge does not suffice as a definition (*‘τὸ δέ γ’ ἐρωτηθέν, ὦ Θεαίτητε, οὐ τοῦτο ἦν, τίνων ἢ ἐπιστήμη, οὐδὲ ὁπόσαι τινές: οὐ γὰρ ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὰς βουλόμενοι ἠρόμεθα ἀλλὰ γινῶναι ἐπιστήμην αὐτὸ ὅτι ποτ’ ἐστίν. ἢ οὐδὲν λέγω;’*, 146e7-10). Theaetetus, admitting to this, goes on to offer his first possible definition.

### **Knowledge as Perception (151d-186e)**

Theaetetus begins the investigation by attempting to define Knowledge as Perception by the Senses (*‘δοκεῖ οὖν μοι ὁ ἐπιστάμενός τι αἰσθάνεσθαι τοῦτο ὃ ἐπίσταται, καὶ ὡς γε νυνὶ φαίνεται, οὐκ ἄλλο τί ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη ἢ αἴσθησις’*, 151e1-2). This is presented as a widely respected view of Protagorean and Heraclitean doctrine (or at least very similar) through which we get a first sample of how Socrates decomposes a statement by following its implications to absurd ends. The section results to refuting the idea that knowledge is perception (184b-186e), key point in the end being that knowledge must involve judgement made by the soul (*‘[...] ἡ ψυχὴ ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἄλληλα κρίνειν πειρᾶται ἡμῖν’*, 186b7-8). This serves as an underlying cornerstone for the rest of the dialogue and is not questioned.

### **Knowledge as True *Doxa* (187a-201c)**

Theaetetus’ second answer (*‘ἡ ἀληθὴς δόξα ἐπιστήμη εἶναι’*, 187b4-5) offers some very interesting viewpoints as to how the definition seems to be on a right path but remains incomplete. Here we are presented with some important thoughts. We see the possibility that one may very well be persuaded to reach a True *Doxa* without having knowledge of the truth (*‘οὐκοῦν ὅταν δικαίως πεισθῶσιν δικασταὶ περὶ ὧν ἰδόντι μόνον ἔστιν εἰδέναι, ἄλλως δὲ μή, ταῦτα τότε ἐξ ἀκοῆς κρίνοντες, ἀληθῆ δόξαν λαβόντες, ἄνευ ἐπιστήμης ἔκριναν, ὀρθὰ πεισθέντες, εἴπερ εὖ ἐδίδαξαν;’*, 201b8-c3). Furthermore, there is a long passage (187c-200d) where False *Doxa* is discussed. Although this part can be studied on its own, it fits in with the narration and produces a very important implication. Assuming one either has knowledge of something or does not (188a7-11), how can he have a false *Doxa* of it; for to know it, would mean he has a true *Doxa* of it. At an existential level, a false *Doxa* seems as if it is a *Doxa* of a non-being (188c-e), but eventually Socrates reaches the conclusion that having a false *Doxa* is different from having a *Doxa* of a non-being (*‘ἄλλο τι ἄρ’ ἐστὶ τὸ ψευδῆ*

δοξάζειν τοῦ τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζειν', 189b4-5). This is an issue that generally seems to be troubling Plato in his later years and has not reached some definite answer. The problem of false statements is broadly discussed in the *Sophist* (262e-263b), examining the statement '*Theaetetus flies*'. Different solutions have been proposed, from Cornford's correspondence theory<sup>2</sup>, to Owen's<sup>3</sup> and Brown's<sup>4</sup> scope approach and Davidson's<sup>5</sup> conclusion that the problem as stated in the *Sophist* does not have an answer (which seems to be the case here too). As part of the narration, the underlying assumption that one cannot have a false *Doxa*, may be seen as serving as an argument itself as to why the definition of Knowledge being True *Doxa* is insufficient, viz. it would result to the idea that every *Doxa* is true and therefore every *Doxa* is *Knowledge*.

### **Knowledge as True Doxa with Logos (201c-210a)**

This is the last definition visited ('...ἔφη δὲ τὴν μὲν μετὰ λόγου ἀληθεῖ δόξαν ἐπιστήμην εἶναι', 201c8-201d1), which eventually also falls short of being satisfactory. We are first introduced to the 'Dream Theory' (201c-206b), where we have complex and primary elements, for which we cannot have knowledge of the latter as *Logos* can only be given for complexes. From this theory we have two main implicit questions; first, whether or not the whole is identical to its parts (a matter broadly discussed also in the *Parmenides*), second, the (lacking of the) ability to know primary elements.

The last part (206c-210a), examines what *Logos* might actually mean, if we choose to hold on to the proposed definition. We have three alternative possibilities:

- a) Vocational expression
- b) Enumerating the constituent elements of something
- c) The ability to mark an object's difference from all other things

In the very final part of the dialogue (210a-d), we find Socrates and Theaetetus admitting that their investigation has not reached a conclusion and a definition of what Knowledge is.

What is to follow is an analysis of why the third definition is not adequate, although it seemed most promising and is considered to this day, a reference point for any attempt to define what Knowledge is.

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<sup>2</sup> Cornford (2003)

<sup>3</sup> Owen (1970)

<sup>4</sup> Brown (2008)

<sup>5</sup> Davidson (2005), p. 85-86

## 1. Scholarly Views

### Revisionists VS Unitarians

I have chosen to revisit the analyses of Cornford, McDowell and Bostock for the following reasons. They are, if not the most influential, certainly some of the most acclaimed investigations of the *Theaetetus*. Through them we are offered a general view of not only how thoughts around the dialogue evolved through time, but also the two main interpretations of the dialogue, from the viewpoint of Unitarians and of Revisionists. The latter reason is also why I have not analyzed more scholars that are no less influential or generally acclaimed less important, such as Burnyeat. My main aim of this section is to draw enough representing data from the Revisionist/Unitarian controversy to support my final views and not to make this a simple sum of scholar's views. As we shall see, Cornford belongs to the group of Unitarians while McDowell and Bostock to that of the Revisionists. The way one understands Socrates' arguments may be highly influenced, depending on the viewpoints these two groups offer. The main issue is how to interpret the aporetic character of the dialogue in a whole but also each of the suggested definitions of Knowledge presented.

On one hand, a Unitarian like Cornford, sees Plato's deliberate intention to reach dead ends, this way showing that confined in the material world, without the help of Forms, what he calls 'true knowledge'<sup>6</sup> cannot be sought after. Thus, one may also explain why Forms are not present in the *Theaetetus*. They are absent so to leave the reader without the necessary tools to solve the puzzle, in that way showing him why they are required and thus the answer to how Knowledge is reached is offered.

On the other hand, Revisionists such as McDowell and especially Bostock, see that a distinction between material and immaterial is not really necessary. This means that the whole discussion (along with its corollaries) on Knowledge may be applied even to Forms themselves<sup>7</sup>, despite the fact that they believe Plato has abandoned his belief in them during the period he wrote the *Theaetetus*. This is supported by the popular distinction of how exactly Plato handles 'knowledge'; namely as *connaître/kennen* or *savoir/wissen* (in French/German accordingly), and also involves a separate discussion of knowledge of propositions or knowledge facts. In the *Theaetetus*, this comes up when trying to discern if we are talking of knowledge as regarding a specific thing or instance or rather an abstract notion that may include an interpretation of how Plato 'used to see' (according to the Revisionists) Forms. It is true, as the Revisionists note, that Socrates seems to be shifting from one meaning to the other freely throughout the dialogue, without hinting at a distinction. Then again Cornford, as a cornerstone in defense of his view, sees the phrase at 201e1-2, 'ourselves and everything else' as a clear indication that the discussion is contained within the material world.

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<sup>6</sup> Cornford (2003), p.162

<sup>7</sup> McDowell (1973), p.242-3, Bostock (2005), p.210



Regarding the distinction between Unitarians and Revisionists, a key factor is how Plato's dialogues are grouped chronologically, as the latter discern in what is now generally accepted as the later writing period, the absence or even denial of the theory of Forms. A dialogue that is widely used as a base point for arguing in favor of this view is the *Parmenides*, believed to be written either right before or right after the *Theaetetus*. There (throughout 126a – 135c) we see the young Socrates in a way trapping himself when he tries to support claims he made based on the theory of Forms. The second part of the dialogue (135c – 166c) is, by Revisionists, considered as a self-criticizing passage of Plato against his former beliefs 'through the mouth' of Parmenides. There is though a strong objection to this claim as Parmenides does not reject the theory of Forms and at 135d, he tells Socrates that what he needs to do in order to overcome the dead ends he reached, is train more in the method of *dialectike*. In fact, the whole second part of the dialogue is meant as a demonstrating example of *dialectike* by Parmenides.

In this thesis, I do not wish to solve the question of which of the two groups, Unitarians or Revisionists, has the correct view or rather has captured what more accurately describes Plato's own beliefs. I do however believe that having these different approaches under consideration will help not only in understanding the scholarly discussion on the dialogue but also Socrates' arguments themselves.

### **Cornford's Analysis**

In Cornford's opening paragraph, regarding the claim that knowledge is true belief accompanied by an account, he makes it clear<sup>8</sup> that none of the senses of 'account' discussed in this last part of the *Theaetetus* bears the same sense as that in *Meno* and *Timaeus* and we are told that this soon will become clear. As already mentioned above, Cornford believes that Forms are absent in order to show that we cannot have Knowledge without them. What he wants to do is show that immaterial knowledge, as discussed in *Meno* and *Timaeus* is here contrasted with Knowledge of the material world, which will prove to be unreachable.

#### The Dream Theory

Cornford starts by saying<sup>9</sup> that the theory was certainly not one held by Plato himself, but rather by some contemporary of his or Socrates'. He sees that it may be considered as regarding three different subjects.

First, based on the phrase 'ourselves'<sup>10</sup> and everything else' of 201e1-2, he sees that this must mean concrete, individual natural objects, and since these objects must be perceptible, immaterial things are excluded.

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<sup>8</sup> Cornford (2003), p.142

<sup>9</sup> Cornford (2003), p.142

<sup>10</sup> Translated as 'we' by Bostock

Second, regarding language, an element has only a name but not a *logos*. This means that we cannot make a statement for this element; we can only ascribe a word/name to it and no account consisting of several words can be given of it. Cornford also mentions<sup>11</sup> that an account of a complex, will here in the *Theaetetus*, be taken to consist of several names, where in *Sophist* we are introduced to the concept of predication<sup>12</sup>.

Third, as the theory distinguishes between perception, true notion and knowledge, we have a matter of cognition. For the element we simply have perception, for the complex we have at first a true notion without a *logos*. One comes to know it when later he is able to enumerate its constituent elements, as the theory proposes. Presumably, having a true notion means having *a complex unanalysed presentation of the whole object*<sup>13</sup>. Explaining his translation of ‘true notion’ (what we mainly see as *true belief* or *true judgement*), he says that perhaps ‘notion’ is what, according to Socrates, we have of a thing before we acquire an account of it<sup>14</sup>. Now as the theory only mentions true notions, it is perhaps insinuated that there are no false ones (as was suggested in the second definition of knowledge); if knowledge of the complex is based on the elements, which in turn have been perceived, perhaps it is meant that one’s perception can only be true, otherwise he would be perceiving something else or nothing at all.

Cornford continues to Socrates’ criticism of the theory. He believes it is essential to understand that the theory is materialistic. The first refutation of the theory is quite straightforward, where if *logos* means enumerating the simple elements of a complex, we have that these elements are not knowable. The weakness is exposed in the form of a dilemma; a syllable/complex must be the mere aggregate of the letters/elements or *a single entity which comes into being when the letters are combined and vanishes when they are separated*<sup>15</sup>. For the first case, if the syllable is the same as the letters, to know the syllable is to know the letters, for which it has been stated that they can only be perceived. In the latter case, if the syllable is something other than the aggregate of the letters, the argument is more complex. The mentioning of *whole* (τὸ ὅλον) at 204a8, is taken to mean something comprised of parts that if divided nothing would be lost, so if the syllable is something more than the letter, it cannot be the whole. Then we take it as a unitary thing which has no parts and as a letter/element, it is not knowable. The theory has been refuted on its own grounds but Socrates continues to explain that a whole consisting of parts is not just the ‘sum’ (τὸ πᾶν) of those parts or ‘all the parts’ (τὰ πάντα) but a single, distinct entity that arises from them. Cornford sees<sup>16</sup> that Socrates is justified in arguing that this resulting entity is an additional element which *supervenes* the *whole*, namely the putting together of the

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<sup>11</sup> Cornford (2003), p.145

<sup>12</sup> This will be further discussed below

<sup>13</sup> Cornford (2003), p.145

<sup>14</sup> Cornford (2003), p.145

<sup>15</sup> Cornford (2003), p.147

<sup>16</sup> Cornford (2003), p.149

parts. Socrates says (204a) that the *whole* is the same as the *sum* which in turn cannot be distinguished from *all the parts*. According to Cornford, *Plato is not denying that there are wholes which contain an additional element that arises when the parts are put together and disappears when they are separated[;] his point is that such an additional element is not what we mean by 'the whole'*<sup>17</sup>. He also remarks that Plato is just arguing within the limits of the theory he is criticizing; meaning that as we are talking of concrete, material things (always according to Cornford's interpretation), a complex is no more than the aggregate of enumerable elements. Socrates continues by returning to reaffirm that if the syllable is a unity, it is not a whole and can have no parts (205a-d) and ends the discussion about whether analyzing a complex into simple parts would suffice in order to have knowledge. It clearly does not.

### Three possible meanings of account

In the following discussion (from 206c and on), Plato talks about three possible meanings for *logos*, but according to Cornford, he is holding on to some assumptions from what is mentioned so far. First, that the only things to be known are concrete and individual; second, that knowledge must consist of giving some account of such things<sup>18</sup>. Again at this point, Cornford insists<sup>19</sup> that this is in line with the idea that the whole dialogue discusses knowledge of things that can be extracted from the world, without invoking any other factors (namely Forms).

The first candidate, verbal expression, is quickly disposed of, and Cornford moves to the second, enumeration of elementary parts. This is now considered on its own, apart from what was discussed earlier about elements being unknowable. This time he shows that enumerating may at best give us a true belief, but not knowledge, even if we dispose of the doctrine that 'elements are unknowable'. The examples of the wagon and the schoolboy resemble the case of the ignorant slave in the *Meno* who despite having reached the right solution, he does not have knowledge but only true belief. Even tracking back to axioms and definitions, at best we come up with a catalogue of true beliefs.

The third and last possibility for the meaning of *logos*, is being able to state a distinguishing mark for the thing in question. This mark will serve as something that will indicate/differentiate it from all other things. Inspired by his belief of Plato deliberately excluding immaterial things and therefore Forms from the discussion, Cornford answers those who assume Plato might be criticizing himself concerning the definition of species by 'genus' and 'specific difference'. The 'differentness' of the *Theaetetus*, is a perceptible individual peculiarity, such as 'this particular snubness which I have seen', distinguishing this individual person from other individuals, not a specific difference distinguishing a species from other species and common to all

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<sup>17</sup> Cornford (2003), p.151

<sup>18</sup> Cornford (2003), p.154

<sup>19</sup> Cornford (2003), p.154

*individuals of the species*<sup>20</sup>. Cornford ends his analysis, not talking about the circularity of the argument, that to have Knowledge, knowledge of the ‘differentness’ is required. He again sees what he believes supports his theory, that there is no question that descriptions such as ‘the brightest of the heavenly bodies’ must consist of attributes which may be shared by other subjects. But species are definable exactly because no two species are conceptually identical. Hence, we are still confined to the level the Dream Theory has set for the discussion, namely sensible things. The failure of all the attempts made in the Theaetetus, demonstrates that we cannot draw Knowledge from sensible objects. Forms must come into play, for they are unique, imperishable and unchangeable and therefore only they can be the objects of ‘true knowledge’<sup>21</sup>.

### McDowell’s Analysis

McDowell begins his comments on the third suggestion for defining Knowledge, by linking it to the second. Based on the argument at 200d-201c, *some judgements*<sup>22</sup>, *or, better beliefs, count as cases of knowledge and some do not*<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, he sees truth as a condition for a belief or judgement in order for it to amount to knowledge, but not a sufficient one. He mentions other dialogues we have seen Plato face the question of knowledge (*Symposium, Phaedo, Timaeus, Republic*) but the discussion in *Meno* (97d4 – 98a9) is very interesting as we see that it is instability that differentiates true judgement from knowledge but if we bind judgement to reasoning by answering the question ‘why?’ (the thing is what it is), we may turn judgement into knowledge. So McDowell sees that the *Theaetetus* may be on the same line, trying to answer the same question, ‘why?’. He admits though that surprisingly the question never appears in the *Theaetetus* and in any case if we treat *logos* as the answer to ‘why?’, we don’t get a definite meaning for *logos* in the *Theaetetus*.

Regarding *logos*, McDowell uses ‘account’ but explains that the verb *legein* may have a cognate sense of ‘enumerate’ and more commonly ‘say’ (what one utters when one says something).

McDowell starts his analysis of the Dream Theory, noting that first of all, at 201d4-5, we have the admission that there are things that cannot be known (τὰ δὲ δὴ ἐπιστητὰ ταῦτα καὶ μὴ πῇ διήρει, λέγε, εἰ ἄρα κατὰ ταῦτα σύ τε κἀγὼ ἀκηκόαμεν) and the theory is concerned with this distinction. This implies that there are things that have no

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<sup>20</sup> Cornford (2003), p.161

<sup>21</sup> Cornford (2003), p.162-3

<sup>22</sup> On McDowell’s choice (1973, p.193) to use judgement for doxa: *I have used the translation ‘judgement’, suggesting an act, rather than ‘belief’ or ‘opinion’, suggesting a state, because it seems to be required at 189e4-190a7. However, the Greek word (doxa) could equally well mean either; and in fact belief or opinion would be a better candidate to appear in a definition of knowledge than judgement. Plato shows no sign of having explicitly distinguished the act from the state.*

<sup>23</sup> McDowell (1973), p.228

account but the following criticism of the theory does not reject the initial suggestion (of Knowledge being a true belief/judgement with an account).

Based on what the theory proposes, *an account is composed of names of the thing's non-complex parts, woven together just as the parts are woven together to compose the thing*<sup>24</sup>. Therefore only complex things can be known and be judged in a true judgement. This may imply two things; first, that complex things may be judged when assessing for truth but this does not forbid simple things being judged also, or second, as true judgements are what Plato is concerned with, only complex things may be judged. Regardless of the interpretation we choose, McDowell proposes that *the sort of thing which can be known, and the sort of thing which can be judged, where the verb 'judge' is used in such a way as to contrast with 'have in one's judgement', are the same as the sort of thing which can be said; and the sort of thing in question has a complexity which is mirrored by the complexity which a form of words must, normally, have, if uttering it is to constitute saying something*<sup>25</sup>. This thought brings up some issues as to 'know' something, in a propositional construction would imply the equivalent of what we take in the French 'savoir', but the way Socrates often argues through his examples, we get something resembling the meaning of 'connaître'. Also the theory seems to distinguish between 'account of something' and 'naming something', mainly that account consists of names (plural) woven together. In the Sophist (261c6 – 262e2), Plato distinguishes saying something from mentioning/naming something, where to say something one not need only names but also a predicate. In the context though of the *Theaetetus*, it is not clear what Plato intends for us to understand by weaving of (just) names in order to state or to give an account of something.

At 208b-c, we fall upon a matter of “way of understanding”. McDowell explains that the theory can be taken from the perspective of the ‘knowing agent’<sup>26</sup>, who must be able to give an account and on the other side the ‘object’ which must have an account available. The agent needs this account along with a true judgement to result to knowledge. So a question might rise on what would it be for the agent to have a ‘true judgement without an account’, in a way described by the theory. McDowell offers an example of one being able to recognize someone without having an account of him, of the sort described. In this case he still has a true belief of who he is when he sees him.

Going on to the criticism of the theory, Socrates’ main point of critique is that complexes and elements are distinguishable in terms of knowability. Socrates uses his letters-syllables example, but at 202e3-4 these seem to be models<sup>27</sup> for the theory whereas from 206e6-7 and onward he seems to treat them as paradigmatic instances.

<sup>24</sup> McDowell (1973), p.231

<sup>25</sup> McDowell (1973), p.232

<sup>26</sup> This terminology is mine and not used by McDowell himself.

<sup>27</sup> The text reads: *ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁμήρου ἐχομεν τοῦ λόγου τὰ παραδείγματα οἷς χρώμενος εἶπε πάντα ταῦτα*, where McDowell translates *παραδείγματα* as models and not examples. Nevertheless, Socrates questioning at lines 6-7: *ἢ οἷε ἄλλοσέ ποι βλέποντα ταῦτα εἶπεῖν τὸν εἰπόντα ἃ λέγομεν*;, does imply what McDowell is pointing out.

McDowell has proposed that the theory discusses propositional statements and he points out that it might seem odd that syllables (or people) are used to capture the complexity of a statement. Concerning letters, McDowell says that perhaps, even in the theory's context, they might have an account if treated as phonemes (e.g. bilabial, voiced...), but this is not damaging to Socrates' following argument, as what he says may be taken as abstract without the need to cite any particular instances of complexes and elements; we just need to accept that the complex is analyzable into elements, whatever those may be<sup>28</sup>. As for the example itself, the syllable 'SO', two points seem implicit or missed; first, that the order of the letters needs to be specified ('SO' is different from 'OS') and second<sup>29</sup>, that the letters need to be concatenated<sup>30</sup>.

In 203c to 205e, Socrates unfolds his argument which states that *the distinction between complexes and elements in point of knowability cannot be maintained*<sup>31</sup>. In short, a complex is either identical with all its elements or it is not. If it is, then so are the elements. If it is not, since the elements are unknowable, then so is the complex. This first case, McDowell notes is based on what we today call Leibniz's Law: if a subject of predication *x* is identical with a subject of predication *y*, then whatever is true of *x* is true of *y*, and vice versa<sup>32</sup>. In the second case, we assume the principle that if something is true of all the *f*s, or both *f*s, then it is true of each *f*<sup>33</sup>. McDowell also notes that assuming a complex is identical to its element, may lead to absurd claims, such as if a particular complex is analyzable into two elements, then each element is also analyzable into two elements<sup>34</sup>. In any case, the *reductio ad absurdum* of the thesis does not depend on the arrangement of the elements. It is interesting to see that if 'SO' is identical to 'S' and 'O', then it would further be identical to 'OS', which has the same elements<sup>35</sup>, since as mentioned in the previous paragraph, Socrates makes no distinction(at this point) regarding letter ordering.

Concerning the hypothesis that 'anything which has parts', i.e. is a whole, is identical with all the parts, McDowell based also on the *Parmenides*<sup>36</sup> says that Plato may be very well aware that it is a false premise. Nevertheless, it is not unfair to use it as it does not contradict the Dream Theory's hypothesis.

Subsequently, McDowell makes a very important claim<sup>37</sup>, tied to his belief that the *Theaetetus* discusses also Platonic Forms, not just objects. Based on 205c1-2, he finds

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<sup>28</sup> This may have an implication, depending of McDowell's earlier remark (footnote 24). If we treat the syllable-letters pair as an instance and not just an example of complex-elements, giving an account of letters directly contradicts the theory's allegation.

<sup>29</sup> We shall see that Socrates does later address this.

<sup>30</sup> McDowell's example (1973,p. 241): *the syllable 'SO' differs from the occurrence of the same phonemes in the German phrase das Obst.*

<sup>31</sup> McDowell (1973), p.241

<sup>32</sup> McDowell (1973), p.242

<sup>33</sup> McDowell (1973), p.242

<sup>34</sup> This is a typical remark on the matter which we will also see Bostock mentioning.

<sup>35</sup> McDowell (1973), p.242-3

<sup>36</sup> McDowell (1973), p.243-4

<sup>37</sup> McDowell (1973), p.246-7

that the similar terminology in the *Timaeus* (35a1) and the *Phaedo* (78c6-d9 and 80b2), would allow to construct a ‘Dream Theory’ that would directly correspond to Forms which would serve as elements, therefore being incomposite, not possible of being given an account, or being able to support the thesis that the conception of an ‘account’ of something is correct. *In later dialogues Plato seems no longer to want to insist on non-multiplicity for the Forms or Kinds: see, e.g., Philebus 16c5-17a5*<sup>38</sup>. This later development should be seen as a response to the difficulties, discussed especially in the *Parmenides*, about the relation between a Form, considered as absolutely non-complex, and its multiple instances<sup>39</sup>.

So far, the Dream Theory has been refuted, but there is a further discussion on what ‘account’ may mean. The first suggestion of vocal expression is quickly refuted, as pretty much anyone can express their thought. Some remarks McDowell makes are that from 206d7-8 (‘more or less quickly’ - *θᾶπτον ἢ σχολαίτερον*), we cannot ascribe Plato the view that anyone who knows a language actually thinks in words. Also, although it seems that Socrates assumes that every thought can be put into words, it would not harm the argument if we accept that there are inexpressible thoughts<sup>40</sup>.

The second suggestion for ‘account’ is ‘enumeration of elements’. Going through a thing element by element is contrasted with going through it in terms of larger constituents, the latter being a characteristic of mere true judgement where articulation is done ‘less finely’. McDowell notes that again at this point, Plato is revolving around knowledge of a thing, not knowledge in general.

Regarding the reference to the Dream Theory (207b6) and how the view that only the complex may be known, McDowell suggests two possible reasons that the same issue is reopened. First, Plato is beginning to envisage the possibility of defining knowledge

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<sup>38</sup> McDowell (1973), p.247. A translation (my own) of this passage reads (Socrates speaking): *Given from gods to men, as it seems to me, tossed down from them through the agency of some Prometheus together with a gleaming fire; and the ancients, who were better than we and lived nearer to the gods, handed down the tradition that all the things which are ever said to exist are sprung from one and many and have inherent in them the finite and the infinite. Thus so, [16d] we must always assume that there is in every case one idea of everything and must look for it—for we shall find that it is there—and if we get a grasp of this, we must look next for two, if there be two, and if not, for three or some other number; and again we must treat each of those units in the same way, until we can see not only that the original unit is one and many and infinite, but just how many it is. And we must not apply the idea of infinite to plurality until we have a view of its whole number [16e] between infinity and one; then, and not before, we may let each unit of everything pass on unhindered into infinity. The gods, then, as I said, handed down to us this way of investigating, learning, and teaching one another; but from the men of today [17a] the wise, randomly make the one and the many too quickly or too slowly and they put infinity immediately after unity; they avoid all that lies between them, and this what distinguishes between the dialectic and the disputatious ways of discussing. This excerpt is part of a long discussion where Socrates unfolds his thoughts to Protarchus and Philebus and seems to be saying that there is a unity in each number, not only the number one which is traditionally considered as ‘the unit’. I am not certain that he is trying to attribute them with the predicate of ‘complexity’ in the way we see it in the *Theaetetus* when opposed to the simple/element.*

<sup>39</sup> McDowell (1973), p.247

<sup>40</sup> [the] distinction between knowledge and mere true judgements cannot be made by distinguishing expressible from inexpressible thoughts; for it is possible to make true judgements, without possessing knowledge, in cases where one can express the judgements in words (McDowell 1973, p.251).

in a piecemeal way; *[his] hope may be that a definition which does not fit knowledge of what is not complex will nevertheless prove adequate for knowledge of what is complex*<sup>41</sup>. The second possibility is that this serves as a nice introduction to the next suggestion for ‘account’. Concerning the criticism of the current suggestion, we may be tempted to suppose that the way Plato describes the incident of misspelling of ‘Theodorus’, although the child can spell ‘Theaetetus’, one could ascribe a very strict notion of knowledge where miss-spelling or a slip of the tongue would never occur. McDowell says this shouldn’t be the case. We should see the miss-spelling as evidence, perhaps accompanied by other evidence, that the child is still learning the letters. In any case, we can interpret this miss-spell in two ways. First, that it was mere chance that the child got it right and it may very well not in future attempts. Second, that it was not by chance that he got it right, nevertheless, that was not an indication of knowledge; the child was only able to reproduce the shapes of the appropriate letters. So this latter interpretation would require the ability to spell. Both cases though cannot count as Knowledge. *Whatever an account is, it will presumably be some favoured form of words. If the ability to produce some favoured form of words is to count as a mark of knowledge, then situations analogous to [the above] must be ruled out*<sup>42</sup>. McDowell suggest that Plato is perhaps trying to make us think that we must have *knowledge* of why the account we are giving is correct, therefore knowledge would require knowledge, and this is either circular or we must assume another definition of knowledge is required when it appears in the definiens.

The above interpretation, ties in with the last suggestion for ‘account’, being a ‘distinguishing formula’<sup>43</sup>, that is to produce a form of words that distinguishes it from everything else. At this point (209c4-9), Socrates expresses a view that in order for a judgement to be about Theaetetus, the maker of the judgement must have an imprinted memory trace of Theaetetus. This reminds us of the wax tablet discussion earlier (191a-195b) and it assumes that a person is a collection of qualities. The criticism of this last proposal involves two main dilemmas. The distinguishing mark is either a form of judgement or knowledge, expressed in words. In the first case, if we concede that (true) judgement does not amount to knowledge, we cannot concede that adding two judgements would. In the second case, in order to have knowledge, one must have knowledge of something else and the definition becomes circular (this is where McDowell’s latter notes on the previous interpretation tie in). McDowell here presents quite an important possibility:

*Note that the argument of this passage might well prompt the following thought: true judgement concerning a thing, and knowledge as to what it is, are not related in such a way that an addition to the first can convert it into the second. This suggests the*

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<sup>41</sup> McDowell (1973), p.253

<sup>42</sup> McDowell (1973), p.254

<sup>43</sup> McDowell (1973), p.255



*idea that true judgement concerning a thing already implies knowledge as to what it is[.]*<sup>44</sup>

## Bostock's Analysis

### The Dream Theory

Bostock begins his analysis of the Dream Theory by trying to interpret the word *logos* which he has *neutrally* translated as 'account'. The first option would be to take *logos* to mean a reason, argument or justification but as he mentions, the theory aims to contrast a *logos* with a *name*, as the claim is made that a simple element can have a name but not a *logos*, where the complex after the weaving together of the names of simple elements does have a *logos*. So two are the candidates we have for the meaning of *logos*; first to take it as *statement* (a combination of names) and second as a *description* of a thing (a *definition* or *analysis* of it), where only complex things may be defined. The ambiguity in the meaning of *logos*, is also correspondingly present in the verb *legein*.

Bostock bases his analysis on passage 201d8-202b7, and says that if *legein* means to state a thing, we see that a simple element can be perceived but not known or believed and cannot be attributed with a truth-value. A complex is expressed by a statement that after the weaving<sup>45</sup> together of names does take a truth-value. Knowledge is only of complexes and there seems to be a difficulty here as we can only perceive but not know the elements which make up these complexes. The theory is refuted at the claim that *what can be known must always be something that is stated, and what can be stated must be complex*<sup>46</sup>. Based on this, Bostock believes *statement* is not a proper interpretation for *logos*, for three main reasons. First, the phrase 'we and everything else' in 201e1-2 lets us presume that a person is a complex. But a person (as also syllables – the following example Plato uses) can be named and not stated in a way unique to them alone, unless *defining* statements are used. Second, based on the following discussion where Socrates talks about the other possible interpretations of *logos*, the second one is tied to that of the Dream Theory<sup>47</sup> and talks about *enumerating* which is much more than simply stating. Third, accepting the fact that the third suggestion that knowledge is to be considered as a true belief (the second proposed definition) plus a *logos*, it would seem meaningless to discuss if *logos*

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<sup>44</sup> McDowell (), p.257

<sup>45</sup> A question that arises is, what exactly is this 'weaving'? An interpretation would be that it is the simple aggregation of names. This obviously would not suffice as we need to attribute these names with some sort of unity. We know that in the *Sophist* (261c-263d), Plato has gone a step further and explains that weaving is more than just putting names together; a statement is produced by the weaving of a name and a predicate.

<sup>46</sup> Bostock (2005), p.206

<sup>47</sup> This is a view that I also support, as I believe, as Bostock mentions, that the phrase *ὅπερ καὶ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθετον ἐρρήθη* (207b6-8) is a direct reference to the discussion of the Dream Theory.

would simply mean *statement*, therefore all one would have to do is make a statement of a true belief. Therefore, Bostock concludes that *logos* must mean *definition* or *analysis*.

Accepting the above, Bostock must also accept that *the topic under discussion is not knowledge of truths (or facts) in general, but knowledge of things, and the idea is that knowledge of a thing requires the ability to give an account of that thing. [...] The theory of the dream then specifies exactly what knowledge is to count as the knowledge of what a thing is: it is the ability to spell out the elementary constituents of the thing in question. When one has this ability one counts as knowing the thing, but without it one can at best have a true belief of the thing*<sup>48</sup>. Bostock goes on defending this view and a main point to note is that a definition is peculiar to the item defined. This interpretation is not without problems. At 207a, Socrates discusses the parts comprising a wagon and is evidently not concerned with a particular wagon<sup>49</sup>. Similarly in the following example of the syllable ‘SO’, where Bostock accurately mentions that we are not discussing some particular *token* of the syllable or of its constituent letters ‘S’ and ‘O’ but rather it is the syllable as a *type* that is under consideration. Nevertheless, Bostock believes that no matter what the Dream Theory sees as possible objects of knowledge, in general terms it may be applied to knowing most diverse things, even Platonic Forms<sup>50</sup>. The end point he draws from the theory is that *[it] appears that if we do wish to say that analyzing a complex thing into its constituents is a way of coming to know it, then we cannot also say that this is the only way of coming to know a thing, for if we do it must follow that the elementary constituents cannot be known [...] and it is this consequence that Socrates fastens upon as untenable*<sup>51</sup>.

Moving on to the refutation of the theory, Bostock describes Socrates’ first argument (202e – 205e) as theoretical and the second (206a-b) as empirical. So in the first, Socrates *proceeds to argue that [the] syllable will be no more and no less knowable than its letters*<sup>52</sup>, but Bostock believes that both branches of this argument are not satisfactory. In the first branch we see that if the syllable is its letters, its letters cannot be known and neither can the syllable. He considers it absurd that *if the syllable just is both the letters, then to divide the syllable into two letters is just the same as to divide both the letters into two letters, which is to divide each of the letters into two letters*<sup>53</sup>. For the second branch we see that if the syllable is not its letters, its letters cannot be known. Bostock is not convinced that even Plato was very satisfied by the argument of sum and whole and the suggestion that wholes are essentially plural items and calls

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<sup>48</sup> Bostock (2005), p.208

<sup>49</sup> It must be noted here that the observation Bostock uses concerning the wagon discussion, even though not in favor of his interpretation, is part of the second of three interpretations of *logos* that follow. Although a link has been acknowledged (see footnote 3) with the Dream Theory presently discussed, I do not see why it is used in this context.

<sup>50</sup> Bostock (2005), p.210

<sup>51</sup> Bostock (2005), p.211

<sup>52</sup> Bostock (2005), p.212

<sup>53</sup> Bostock (2005), p.212

upon the *Parmenides* to support this claim<sup>54</sup>. Apart from this, he points that we cannot see the sum simply as a collection or set of its parts. If we take ‘SO’, its parts are ‘S’ and ‘O’ which can also make up ‘OS’ which is a different syllable. Therefore if we want to call a syllable a whole, we must say it is a *structured* whole, not a mere sum. At this point, Bostock mentions Fine’s suggestion<sup>55</sup>, that Plato is allowed to argue on the line that a complex thing just is all its elements because that is all the theory itself claims, but Bostock does not seem convinced. Regarding the second (empirical) argument, assuming the premises of the theory, Socrates claims that it is possible to know letters. The first observation here is that Socrates may be talking of a different kind of ‘knowing’ regarding letters, from what the theory propounds; one which involves the skill of being able to tell apart and not be confused when letters are parts of arrangement. This would allow for knowledge of complex things, without the knowledge of elements, as we are able to discern words and syllables before learning how to spell. The second point Bostock makes is that there is no suggestion that one who has this ‘knowledge’, is in a position to give an account of the things he knows. This last remark, which seems like a sound objection to the Dream Theory, is also a very good objection against the whole hypothesis of knowledge involving the ability to give an account. Nevertheless, Plato goes on to discuss three possible definitions for *logos*. Why so?

The first suggestion is that the Dream Theory was inserted in the dialogue after Plato had completed its final pages. The second suggestion is that Plato has noticed that he has already disproven the entire hypothesis of giving an account but wishes to say more about it. The third is that he simply didn’t see it. But perhaps this oversight is because he is looking for another kind of Knowledge. Although the examples he uses serve their purpose, he may not be interested in the kind of knowledge an eyewitness of a crime has or knowledge of letters we acquire when learning how to spell. Perhaps he was examining the principle that ‘knowledge must be based upon knowledge’<sup>56</sup>, where if the simple notions cannot be known, how could definitions confer knowledge?

### Three Definitions of ‘Account’

Moving on to the three definitions of ‘account’, the first, which is to simply produce one’s thought in speech, is quite easily and directly refuted so Bostock moves on to the second. This, as already mentioned, resembles the Dream Theory: to know what a thing is, is to be able to go through all its elements. Socrates’ objection is that one may (having a true belief) correctly enumerate the elements of a thing while still lacking knowledge. The main example is of a child able to spell Theaetetus but lacks the knowledge of the first syllable ‘THE’ as it spells it wrong when writing other words. Here Socrates seems to imply that we cannot know the whole word if we do not know its every syllable and perhaps this is influenced by the Dream Theory. The

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<sup>54</sup> Bostock (2005), p.214

<sup>55</sup> Fine (1979b), p.382-4

<sup>56</sup> Bostock (2005), p.221

final suggestion for ‘account’ is ‘being able to state some mark by which the thing one is asked for differs from everything else’ (208c7-8)<sup>57</sup>. This is refuted as *to require a distinguishing mark in addition to true belief is not actually to require anything extra at all [and] if we try to avoid this difficulty by saying that what is required is not just a true belief of how the thing in question differs from all others, but knowledge of this difference, then the account has collapsed into circularity*<sup>58</sup>. Bostock is not satisfied with this argument either. His main idea is that Socrates is wrong in supposing that if I am able to think of a thing I must already have some distinguishing mark for it (I might be able to think of it because of some causal connection to it<sup>59</sup>). His next objection is that even if I have a distinguishing mark for something at one time, there is no reason to suppose I will recognize it at a later stage or in a different context. His last objection on this is that I may have a distinguishing mark for something yet not be able to state it.

Bostock’s last comments on this section discuss the final circularity argument. Socrates presents the argument in the form of a dilemma (‘εἰ μὲν’, 209d5). We either add a true belief of some distinguishing mark to attain knowledge, or knowledge is attained by adding knowledge of a distinguishing mark. Although Bostock mentions that Plato may not have been aware of this<sup>60</sup>, the last branch may serve as an argument<sup>61</sup> against any type of account in the form that to give an account, I must have knowledge of it.

## Comments

It is quite evident what Cornford is trying to say; Plato has not given up on Forms. The denial of yet the third definition and in turn the aporetic ending of the dialogue, is in a way an answer to the question, “can we have knowledge without the Forms?”. The answer is of course “no” for Cornford and in turn he interprets the whole dialogue under this scope. An interesting question here is, supposing Cornford is right and we do need to bring in Forms; would the third definition, or any of the three for that matter, suffice or would we need a completely new suggestion? To make things more clear, Cornford believes Plato is only using ‘knowledge’ in a sense that knowing that a thing is ‘so and so’. If Plato were to use knowledge in a more general sense, would any of the definitions be appropriate? The first definition involves perception and it would seem that it can be ruled out, as trying to say that Forms may be reached through it would not make sense. We saw that, account or *logos* is not an appropriate addition to true belief. Hence, we either take a step back and accept true belief with a

<sup>57</sup> Bostock (2005, p.225) here remarks that this suggestion can be viewed as a generalization of the previous one, for enumerating the elements of a thing was a way of distinguishing it, as it was assumed that nothing else would have exactly the same elements.

<sup>58</sup> Bostock (2005), p.226

<sup>59</sup> Though he does admit that this is a modern perspective (2005, p.233)

<sup>60</sup> Bostock (2005), p.240

<sup>61</sup> Bostock makes it clear that he is not very convinced by the form of the argument itself, especially when the type of knowledge Plato discusses moves from *connaître/kennen* to *savoir/wissen*.

proper addition, or discard true belief altogether. As the last branch of this dilemma leaves us without much to talk about, let us visit the other option that will bring us back to the third definition. At this point we are accepting, as McDowell<sup>62</sup>, that true belief is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for knowledge (and in the case of McDowell, this is true both for the material and the immaterial world); the set of available options needs to be narrowed down. There can be two reasons *logos* was not a good enough addition. It means that it is either not good enough for the material world and in the case of Forms it should work, or that *logos* simply will not do in both cases. In the first case, we accept that Plato did not exhaust the discussion on the third definition, resulting in that one may draw upon a meaning for *logos* which is different from those proposed in the dialogue and is appropriate for Forms. This would mean that true belief/judgement with a *logos*, can be used in a way to correspond to knowledge as *savoir* and that McDowell and Bostock are right according to Cornford, just not for the reasons they think; right meaning that there is way to interpret *logos* both for the material and immaterial world. Of course McDowell and Bostock have no need of any added hypotheses, as their arguments are drawn directly from the text. Now if we accept that Plato has exhausted all options for *logos* and the third definition is wrong, Cornford does tell us that we need to introduce the Forms but he does not tell us how Knowledge is to be defined if we do.

As just mentioned, McDowell takes it that the last definition may apply to Forms also. He thus provides us with a partial answer the previous question; we are to take the Dream Theory as it is and treat the Forms as the described elements. To elaborate a bit further, this would mean that we are to ‘weave’ the Forms in order to reach a complex object of knowledge. I will not hypothesize further on McDowell’s suggestion, but I will note two things. First, that we are to take the Dream Theory unaltered and apply it to Forms, second, that with this option the question is transferred to “how does one come to know the Forms?”, for even in this case, Socrates’ arguments seem to hold.

As a more general remark on McDowell’s analysis, I want to mention that he does not hesitate to bring in modern philosophy<sup>63</sup>, despite the fact he may be accused of anachronisms. Namely, he includes<sup>64</sup> extensive passages on Wittgenstein (McDowell, p.233-34), discussing *elementary propositions* from the *Tractatus*. I have not mentioned these excerpts in my analysis, as I did not also mention Bostock’s reference to Russell, Strawson and Kripke (Bostock, 2005, p.231 onward). Nevertheless, I find the content of some of these remarks relevant and useful for understanding the text itself. What I do have hesitations about, is what seems as an underlying anachronism from McDowell’s side. The excerpt from McDowell (1973), p.232 previously quoted, allowed me to use the term ‘agent’. McDowell seems to

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<sup>62</sup> McDowell (1973), p.228

<sup>63</sup> As many have done, especially in an effort to interpret the Theaetetus through Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (see Burnyeat, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> This is not uncommon practice regarding the Theaetetus. But where Burnyeat (1990) does so to analyzes other scholar’s views, McDowell does so in order to assist his own interpretation.

have inserted the concept of ‘one who judges’ and ‘the thing being judged’, where judgement appears to be a necessary factor for knowledge. So far these can be taken as an acceptable interpretation of the text. But it seems McDowell has taken a step further, continuing from the previous quote of page 232, *[T]his approximates to a formulation of the point that the verbs ‘know’ (in one of its uses), ‘judge’, and ‘say’ have the same grammar, in that each takes a propositional construction; together with the idea that to a propositional construction there corresponds a non-linguistic entity with a complexity which is mirrored by the complexity of the construction.* This ties in nicely with his mentioning of the *elementary propositions* of the *Tractatus* and looks like he accepts an elegant theory that might be viewed in (at least) two ways; one, as a representational theory of the kind we find in the *Tractatus* where names correspond to objects, two, as a theory of idealism, where things are judged but also possess an account themselves. This is not so clear in the above passage, but can be seen on page 237, when discussing what Aristotle has ascribed to Antisthenes at *Metaphysics* 1024b26-1025a1 and based on the translation he has given of 202a7 of the *Theaetetus* (*οἰκεῖον αὐτοῦ λόγον*), as ‘account proper to itself’. Hence my use of the word ‘agent’ previously, to separate from the object being judged; we then have an agent that makes *judgements* about objects in the world (what Kant called *urteile*) and the objects themselves possessing their account. I admit that I fail to see clear indications of either approach in the text. This also links to McDowell’s earlier remark on 201d4-5 (*τὰ δὲ δὴ ἐπιστητὰ ταῦτα καὶ μὴ πῇ διήρει, λέγε, εἰ ἄρα κατὰ ταῦτα σύ τε κἀγὼ ἀκηκόαμεν*<sup>65</sup>). We cannot discern from the passage, whether the reason these things have no account is because one cannot be given of them or because they themselves do not possess one. This is a question Socrates does not seem concerned with.

There is no trace of this kind of thought in Bostock’s analysis. He starts by trying to give some sort of definition of what *logos* is, despite the fact that this is essentially a major topic of the text itself. It helps though to understand why Socrates takes *logos* as *definition* or *analysis* and not *statement*. In analyzing the arguments, Bostock keeps expressing his hesitation to accept them as they are.

The main remark I want to stand on is the last he makes concerning the Dream Theory. He makes a distinction between one having Knowledge and one being able to give an account of it. He bases his distinction on another distinction of knowledge and the ‘knowledge’ Socrates proposes one may have of letters. On this Bostock says, *knowing a thing, then, is here being construed as having the ability to recognize it, in the various contexts in which it occurs, and to discriminate it from other similar things*<sup>66</sup>. His assumption depends greatly on whether or not this different type of ‘knowledge’ that is proposed here as being able to ‘finger point’ when asked, is a type

<sup>65</sup> Translation (mine): *Tell us, how did he distinguish between the knowable and unknowable, so we may see if what we have each heard is the same.* This is Socrates’ answer to Theaetetus who when describing the theory says that the unknowable things have no explanation where those that are knowable do.

<sup>66</sup> Bostock (2005), p.219

of knowledge similar to what the Logical Positivists had in mind, where statements that were verifiable by empirical observation had meaning<sup>67</sup>.

## 2. Analysis of the Arguments

### Socrates' Dream Theory

Socrates begins by telling us that he has heard someone<sup>68</sup> saying that the prime elements can have no *Logos*; we may only name them and not add anything to them, neither attribute existence or non-existence to them (201e). We may weave their names together though and this weaving is the essence of *Logos* ('ὀνομάτων γὰρ συμπλοκὴν εἶναι λόγου οὐσίαν', 202b4). Therefore, although the elements are not knowable, they are perceivable and furthermore syllables can be objects of true *Doxa*. The original text (202b4-202c5) goes:

οὕτω δὴ τὰ μὲν στοιχεῖα ἄλογα καὶ ἄγνωστα εἶναι, αἰσθητὰ δέ: τὰς δὲ συλλαβὰς γνωστάς τε καὶ ῥητὰς καὶ ἀληθεῖ δόξῃ δοξαστάς. ὅταν μὲν οὖν ἄνευ λόγου τὴν ἀληθῆ δόξαν τινός τις λάβῃ, ἀληθεύειν μὲν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν περὶ αὐτό, γινώσκειν δ' οὐ: τὸν γὰρ μὴ δυνάμενον δοῦναί τε καὶ δέξασθαι λόγον ἀνεπιστήμονα εἶναι περὶ τούτου: προσλαβόντα δὲ λόγον δυνατόν τε ταῦτα πάντα γεγονέναι καὶ τελείως πρὸς ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν.

So Socrates concludes this point in saying that when one's soul has a true *Doxa* of something the soul is right about it, but without *Logos*, it does not have Knowledge of it.

In Bostock's analysis (2005, p. 203), we see that *logos* can correspond to a *statement* or *definition/analysis* of a thing. This ambiguity, leads to interpreting *legein* as to *state* or to *define*. He goes on to explain that in the case of statement, a simple element can be perceived but cannot be known or believed, as only the complex can. It must also be able to be expressed by a whole statement (of names woven together) and have a truth-value as a name itself does not state anything. Bostock believes this is the case Socrates supports. The reason for rejection, where he gives Ryle's interpretation, lies in the 'weaving'. It here seems that the weaving 'must somehow combine the names into a genuine unity, and not leave them a mere plurality', for we seem to end up with the product of weaving which is equally simple and unanalysable as the elements. This is solved in the *Sophist*, where 'a statement is made by putting together two expressions of *different* categories, for one of them is a name but the other is not a

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<sup>67</sup> See 'verifiability criterion', *Tractatus*

<sup>68</sup> As Cornford notes, both Socrates (210c) and Theaetetus (202e) refer to the person who talked of this theory in the singular (τον εἰπόντα). There is a discussion on whether or not they are referring to Antisthenes, based mainly on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but it has been more or less rejected by quite a few scholars (Burnyeat 1970, Hicken 1958)

name but a predicate'. At this point, Bostock admits that this interpretation might be a long way from the text and actually Socrates invokes the notion of knowing. The argument is that it cannot be right to say that a complex is knowable but elements are not.

### **Analysis of the Dream Theory**

Socrates begins his refutation of the Dream Theory: ('ὁ καὶ δοκεῖ λέγεσθαι κομπότατα, ὥς τὰ μὲν στοιχεῖα ἄγνωστα, τὸ δὲ τῶν συλλαβῶν γένος γνωστόν', 202d10-202e1):

So let this be:

**Hypothesis A.1:** *Elements are unknowable but whatever is complex (syllables) can be known*

Here we have already taken as granted, a direct correspondence on one hand between syllables and complex and between letters and elements on the other. This will not be questioned again after a short question and answer at the end of 202e.

In order to refute Hypothesis A.1, Socrates poses a second question at 203a2-3 ('ἄρ' αἱ μὲν συλλαβαὶ λόγον ἔχουσι, τὰ δὲ στοιχεῖα ἄλογα;'). In essence this is, in pure question form, Hypothesis A.1 (*Is it true that an account can be given of syllables<sup>69</sup> but not of letters?*)

Following this question, Socrates uses his name as an example and asks if the first syllable 'SO' can have an account, where Theaetetus answers that it can, as it can be analyzed in 'S' and 'O'. Following that though, Theaetetus reaches:

**Conclusion AC.1:** *Letters/elements are just sounds, unanalysable and no account can be given of them*

At this point we are asked to accept that in order to know something, we must analyze it into parts that cannot be known but only perceived. So far then, AC.1 supports A.1. Socrates goes on to ask ('φέρε δὴ, τὴν συλλαβὴν πότερον λέγομεν τὰ ἀμφοτέρω στοιχεῖα, καὶ ἐὰν πλείω ἢ ἢ δύο, τὰ πάντα, ἢ μίαν τινὰ ἰδέαν γεγонуῖαν συντεθέντων αὐτῶν;', 203c4-6). This gives birth to two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis A.1.1:** *A syllable/complex is the sum of the letters comprising it (therefore if we know a syllable, we know its parts<sup>70</sup>)*

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<sup>69</sup> This hypothesis allows us to assume that there is an underlying sub-hypothesis. Based on what is said in whole, it is that "for every known thing, it is possible to give an account". This is a central idea in the text, as Socrates rules out an answer of the sort "...I just know" and is looking for an answer "I know because...".

<sup>70</sup> Further discussed in Hypothesis A.2



**Hypothesis A.1.2:** *A syllable/complex is something (a whole which has no parts<sup>71</sup>) that comes into existence when the letters are put together*

In 203c-d we have the first refutation of Hypothesis A.1:

**Premise:** Hypothesis A.1.1  
**Premise:** We know the syllable ‘SO’  
**Conclusion:** We know ‘S’ and we know ‘O’

**Refutation 1 of Hypothesis A.1**

The conclusion we draw, directly contradicts A.1, as we are clearly told we cannot know letters, in this case ‘S’ and ‘O’. Cornford here remarks<sup>72</sup> that, the theory regarded knowledge as superior to perception. In this case it seems to be implied that knowledge (of ‘SO’) is the sum of two perceptions (‘S’ and ‘O’). We are therefore inclined to examine Hypothesis A.1.2 in 203e. Here we have:

**Premise:** Hypothesis A.1.2  
**Premise:** We know the syllable ‘SO’  
**Conclusion:** ‘SO’ is not analysable

**Refutation 2 of Hypothesis A.1**

In this case, our conclusion again contradicts A.1, because not being able to analyze ‘SO’ implies that we are not able to know it as if it were an element, when we clearly take it to be a syllable.

At this point, Socrates has refuted Hypothesis A.1 and therefore the Dream Theory, but seems to want to go deeper and examine whether a whole really is the sum of its parts or something else. So in 204a-b we have first (‘ἐχέτω δὴ ὡς νῦν φαμεν, μία ἰδέα ἐξ ἐκάστων τῶν συναρμοττόντων στοιχείων γιγνομένη ἢ συλλαβή, ὁμοίως ἔν τε γράμμασι καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν’, 204a1-3)

**Hypothesis A.2:** *A syllable is something that arises from a set of letters put together (the same goes for any complex)*

And further on (‘ἢ καὶ τὸ ὅλον ἐκ τῶν μερῶν λέγεις γεγονὸς ἐν τι εἶδος ἕτερον τῶν πάντων μερῶν;’, 204a8-9):

**Hypothesis A.3:** *A whole arises out of the parts and is different from the sum<sup>73</sup> of the parts*

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<sup>71</sup> Further supported at 204a5

<sup>72</sup> Cornford (2003, p. 148)

<sup>73</sup> In order to avoid confusion, let it be noted that I have translated *πᾶν* as ‘sum’, instead of ‘all’ because I believe it better reflects Socrates’ line of thought when he speaks of the ‘distance’ or the ways of making up ‘the number six’ (204d). He is trying to show how we put things together or ‘sum them up’ to grasp all of something, giving a sense of complexity. Nevertheless, keep in mind that

And from there (‘-τὸ δὲ δὴ πᾶν καὶ τὸ ὅλον πότερον ταῦτόν καλεῖς ἢ ἕτερον ἑκάτερον; - [...] λέγω ὅτι ἕτερον - οὐκοῦν διαφέρει ἀν τὸ ὅλον τοῦ παντός, ὥς ὁ νῦν λόγος; - ναί’, 204a11-204b3):

**Hypothesis A.3.1:** *The sum is different from the whole*

Socrates starts by refuting Hypothesis A.3 first. We have a long discussion down to 205a as follows:

- 1 - Hypothesis A.3.1
- 2 - The total number is the same as the sum (204d10-11)
- 3 - Each number (unit) is a part (204e1)
- 4 - Anything that has parts, consists of parts (204e3)
- 5 - The sum consists of all the parts (204e5-6)
- 6 - The part is part of the whole (204e11-12)
- 7 - The sum is that from which nothing is missing (205a1-3)
- 8 - The whole is that from which nothing is missing (205a4-7)

This argument is more complex than the previous ones. The main body consists of:

<p><b>Premise:</b> 7</p> <p><b>Premise:</b> 8</p> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> The sum is the same as the whole</p>
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**Refutation of Hypothesis A.3.1**

The above conclusion directly refutes Hypothesis A.3.1 and in turn refutes Hypothesis A.3 (*A whole [...] is different from the sum of the parts*). Premises 3 to 7 serve as an auxiliary example for numbers used to solidify the argument, where discussing numbers as parts of sets (4) (πλέθρον, στρατόπεδον), we see that each number belongs to its set (5,6,7) and the all consists of the sum of numbers (3).

Cornford here remarks<sup>74</sup> that Plato is not denying that there might be an additional element that arises when parts are put together (it is just not what we mean when using the word ‘whole’); he is rather arguing within the limits of the theory itself.

At this point, Socrates returns to Hypothesis A.2. The argument goes:

- 1 - The whole or sum is the same as all the parts (as just proven) (205a8-10)
- 2 - A syllable cannot have letters as parts (205a11-205b1-4)

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Socrates is discussing the sum of all things comprising some specific thing, not any random sum, therefore the notion of ‘all’ should not be forgotten and is especially evident and essential in premise 7.

<sup>74</sup> Cornford (2003, p. 151)

3 - A syllable is different from letters (205a11-205b1-4)

4 - A syllable cannot consist of anything other than letters (205b7-11)

5 - A syllable is indivisible (ἀμέριστος) (205c1-2, 205d1-6)

Here, using 1 and Hypothesis A.1.1 (πολλὰ στοιχεῖα ἢ συλλαβὴ ἐστὶν καὶ ὅλον τι, μέρη δ' αὐτῆς ταῦτα, 205d7-8), we have that:

6- Syllables and letters are equally knowable (205d8-10).

<p><b>Premise:</b> 1 <b>Premise:</b> Hypothesis A.1.1 <b>Conclusion:</b> Syllables and letters are equally knowable</p>
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And from 6, we have that since letters are unknowable, syllables are also unknowable (205e6-8).

<p><b>Premise:</b> 6 <b>Premise:</b> Letters are unknowable <b>Conclusion:</b> Syllables are unknowable</p>
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Therefore we saw that all hypotheses stemming from A.1 cannot hold their ground, leaving the initial Hypothesis A.1 moot. Socrates summarizes and concludes this section at 206b8-9 ('ἐάν τις φῇ συλλαβὴν μὲν γνωστόν, ἄγνωστον δὲ πεφυκέναι στοιχεῖον, ἐκόντα ἢ ἄκοντα παίζειν ἡγησόμεθ' αὐτόν'), basically saying that if someone supports Hypothesis A.1 he is playing with us, whether he knows it or not. The whole point he makes at 206b is that contrary to what the Dream Theory proposes, elements actually yield clearer ('ἐναργεστέραν', 206b6) knowledge than syllables.

### Three different accounts for 'logos'

Starting at 206c, we find Socrates willing to further investigate the third definition of knowledge. Although the Dream Theory has been refuted, perhaps the definition itself may prove adequate, given a proper meaning to the word *logos*. It is Cornford's view<sup>75</sup> that the discussion from here on, excludes Plato's view on the matter. Cornford sees it that the refutation of the Dream Theory limits us to extracting knowledge, only from concrete things and not higher cognitive concepts.

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<sup>75</sup> Cornford (2003, p. 154)

### First account (206c-e)

206d1-4: Τὸ μὲν πρῶτον εἶη ἂν τὸ τὴν αὐτοῦ διάνοιαν ἐμφανῆ ποιεῖν διὰ φωνῆς μετὰ ῥημάτων τε καὶ ὀνομάτων, ὥσπερ εἰς κάτοπτρον ἢ ὕδωρ τὴν δόξαν ἐκτυπούμενον εἰς τὴν διὰ τοῦ στόματος ῥοήν.

We see here that this first account is, for one to make his thoughts apparent through voice via verbs and names, depicting his *doxa* through the flow from his mouth as if reflecting it on a mirror or water.

The refutation of this account is quite straightforward. Let us simply state the above as:

**Hypothesis B.1:** Logos is taken as *Vocal Expression of One's Thought*

As Socrates points out at 206d6-206e2, anyone not born deaf or dumb, is able to speak out what he thinks on a subject. This would not allow us to distinguish from correct *doxa* and knowledge (οὐκοῦν αὖ τοῦτό γε πᾶς ποιεῖν δυνατὸς θᾶπτον ἢ σχολαίτερον, τὸ ἐνδείξασθαι τί δοκεῖ περὶ ἐκάστου αὐτῷ, ὁ μὴ ἐνεὸς ἢ κωφὸς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς: καὶ οὕτως ὅσοι τι ὀρθὸν δοξάζουσι, πάντες αὐτὸ μετὰ λόγου φανοῦνται ἔχοντες, καὶ οὐδαμοῦ ἔτι ὀρθὴ δόξα<sup>76</sup> χωρὶς ἐπιστήμης γενήσεται). Therefore we have:

**Premise:** Anyone not dumb who can speak can give a vocal expression of his thought

From these we have:

<b>Hypothesis B.1</b> <b>Premise</b> <b>Modus Ponens</b> <b>Conclusion:</b> Every vocal expression of one's correct thought is knowledge	$V \rightarrow L$ (Every vocal expression implies Knowledge) $V$ (We have a vocal expression) - - - (Modus Ponens) $L$ (We have Knowledge)
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There are two ways of seeing this argument. On one hand we may take it as a Reductio Ad Absurdum, where the conclusion is a self-evident absurd claim, or on the other hand, we may accept Hypothesis B.1 as true and therefore our conclusion. In the last case, the whole discussion could end here, accepting that the proposed account of *Logos* is correct. This of course would be pointless, not only with regards to the current conclusion, but also, based on the premise that a correct *doxa* would suffice for knowledge (since pretty much anyone can speak), but this is the second definition which has been refuted (187a-c, 200d-201c).

<sup>76</sup> Note that here he uses *orthi doxa* and not *alithi doxa*

## Second account (206e-208b)

This account at first glance resembles the Dream Theory, as it mentions enumerating elementary parts.

ἴσως γὰρ ὁ λέγων οὐ τοῦτο ἔλεγεν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐρωτηθέντα τί ἕκαστον δυνατόν εἶναι τὴν ἀπόκρισιν διὰ τῶν στοιχείων ἀποδοῦναι τῷ ἐρομένῳ (206e5-207a1).

Here Theaetetus asks Socrates to explain, and the latter gives an example mentioned by Hesiod. In short, one could not name every single piece of wood a wagon consists of, but would be satisfied in saying it consists of wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke. In 207b, Socrates continues saying that this is as silly as being asked and replying about a name with syllables. And if someone did not already make the connection, he says at 207b5: ὅπερ καὶ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθε που ἐρρήθη, where Theaetetus agrees with him, leaving no doubt he has corresponded to the Dream Theory.

So far, Socrates hasn't offered new arguments against this account and has relied on the previous refutation of the Dream Theory. At 207c5-d1, he is willing to examine the matter further, as there may be a difference in enumerating parts of an object to describing the syllables of a word. From here, he argues using counterexamples. In 207d3-5 he says that one may very likely think something is part of one thing and later think it is part of another, or for the very same thing to think one thing and then another. He gives an example of when learning to read and write, how one can confuse letters as belonging to a syllable or putting them in the wrong syllable. It is agreed that in that case, one is not in a state of knowledge. Nevertheless, one can write a name correctly being in that state. In this last case, he has a right belief (the text says ἔχων γράψει 'Θεαίτητον' μετὰ ὀρθῆς δόξης [208a9-10], and not ἀληθῆ δόξαν<sup>77</sup>, giving a sense of 'correct opinion' rather than 'true belief') and Socrates concludes ἔστιν ἄρα, ὃ ἐταῖρε, μετὰ λόγου ὀρθὴ δόξα, ἣν οὐπω δεῖ ἐπιστήμην καλεῖν (208b7-8). This right belief or correct opinion, seems to be expressed by the ability to place the elements/syllables in the right order (διὰ στοιχείου διέξοδον ἔχων γράψει 'Θεαίτητον' [208a9-10], τὴν γὰρ διὰ τοῦ στοιχείου ὁδὸν ἔχων ἔγραφεν [208b4-5]).

Analyzing the argument we have:

**Hypothesis C.1:** Logos is taken as *Enumerating of Elementary Parts*

Until 207c, we hold to the refutation of Hypothesis A.1 (*Elements are unknowable but whatever is complex (syllables) can be known*). Taking the wagon to be a complex and its parts to be elements, we may correspond to the analysis of the Dream Theory:

**Hypothesis A'.1:** *The wagon can be known*

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<sup>77</sup> Again, as seen in previous footnote

**Hypothesis A'.1.1:** *The wagon is the sum of the parts comprising it (therefore if we know the wagon, we know its parts)*

**Hypothesis A'.1.2:** *The wagon is a whole that comes into existence when its parts are put together*

**Hypothesis A'.2:** *The wagon is something that arises from a set of parts put together*

**Hypothesis A'.3:** *A wagon as a whole arises out of its parts and is different from the sum of the parts*

**Hypothesis A'.3.1:** *The sum (of the wagon's parts) is different from the whole (wagon)*

With the help of the previous analysis, we have:

For **Hypothesis A'.1:** The wagon cannot be known.

For **Hypothesis A'.1.1:** As seen, assuming we know the wagon we cannot know every part of it.

For **Hypothesis A'.1.2:** If we treat the wagon as a whole, we contradict ourselves when accepting it has parts and enumerating them.

For **Hypothesis A'.2:** This, we previously saw, would lead us to parts and wagon being equally knowable and since we cannot know the parts, we cannot know the wagon.

For **Hypothesis A'.3** and **Hypothesis A'.3.1:** As was demonstrated, the sum and the whole are the same.

Returning to 207c, we can now visit Socrates' new arguments. To do so, we must also observe that 'enumerating' does not simply mean giving an account of the parts, but also knowing where they are placed. For instance, knowing that the 'S' goes before the 'O' in 'SOCRATES', and that the wheels of a wagon go under and not over its body. We then have:

**Premise 1:** One may think  $a \in A$  and  $a \in B$  (ὅταν τὸ αὐτὸ τοτὲ μὲν τοῦ αὐτοῦ δοκῇ αὐτῷ εἶναι, τοτὲ δὲ ἑτέρου, 207d4-5)

**Premise 2:** One may think  $a \in A$  and  $b \in A$  (ὅταν τοῦ αὐτοῦ τοτὲ μὲν ἕτερον, τοτὲ δὲ ἕτερον δοξάζῃ, 207d5)

Looking at these two premises, we are led to assume that for Premise 1, A and B are mutually exclusive (if  $a \in A$  then  $a \notin B$  and vice versa) and for Premise 2, a and b cannot be parts of the same set (if  $a \in A$  then  $b \notin A$  and vice versa). For Premise 1, we may say 'wooden plank a' belongs to 'wagon A' (or to 'wagon B') and for Premise 2, 'front right wheel a' belongs to 'wagon A' and then 'front right wheel b' belongs to 'wagon A' (a wagon cannot have two different front right wheels). This

analysis leads to Cornford's view mentioned earlier, that Plato here is discussing concrete/material objects as entities of knowledge. But then Socrates goes back to discussing syllables (207d-208a) and says that one may try to write "THEAETETUS" and write the first syllable 'THE' (correctly) and then try to write 'THEODORUS' and write the first syllable 'TE' (wrongly), therefore showing he does not know the syllable. The example is similar to Premises 1 and 2 but does not describe exactly the same thing, unless we take the 'ἐτέρου/ἕτερον' to be abstract and not some other specific set. Then we would have:

**Premise 1'**: One may think  $a \in A$  and  $a \notin A$  (a may or may not be part of any other set)

**Premise 2'**: One may think  $\{a, b\} \subset A$  and  $\{a\} \subset A$  (A consists of a and b only or A consists of a only)

It seems that if we must consider interpreting as we did in Premises 1 and 2 we cannot follow Socrates' line of reason, as this case cannot be applied to the letters-syllables example. So we keep to the latter interpretation and have that both Premises 1' and 2' are logical contradictions (they defy the Principle of Non-Contradiction  $a \wedge \neg a$  and Plato seems to be aware that this is a basic logical axiom).

For **Premise 1'**:

$a \in A$  and  $a \notin A$  cannot happen

For **Premise 2'**:

A cannot consist only of  $\{a, b\}$  and only of  $\{a\}$

Therefore Hypothesis C.1 is directly refuted, as one may very well enumerate parts and also show lack of knowledge.

### Third account (208b-210b)

Having refuted everything so far, Socrates is still willing to look further in finding a sufficient account for Logos. So at 208c7-8 we have: ὅπερ ἂν οἱ πολλοὶ εἴποιεν, τὸ ἔχειν τι σημεῖον εἰπεῖν ὅτι τῶν πάντων διαφέρει τὸ ἐρωτηθέν. We are then going to examine if *Logos* can mean signifying a difference of the thing in question from everything else. The example Socrates begins with is the sun, being the brightest of all heavenly bodies going around the earth. He explains that such an attribute distinguishes the thing from all others, but there are also attributes that things share.

Bostock here offers an interesting remark<sup>78</sup>. He says that enumerating elements, as previously proposed, would be a distinguishing mark of a thing, as it was assumed

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<sup>78</sup> Bostock (2005, p. 225)

that nothing else would have exactly the same elements, and in the same order, as Socrates elaborated earlier beyond the Dream Theory.

At 209a he explains further: suppose someone has a *doxa* concerning someone but until the things that differentiates that someone is found, we do not have knowledge. So at 209a5 he states the hypothesis: λόγος δέ γε ἦν ἡ τῆς σῆς διαφορότητος ἐρμηνεία.

**Hypothesis D.1:** Logos is taken as *Accounting one's differentness*<sup>79</sup>

So if Socrates could form only a *doxa* of who Theaetetus is, he would think of a man with nose, eyes, mouth, etc., all being attributes many men have in common. This would hold even if he thought of someone with a snub nose and prominent eyes, again being attributes common to many. So unless he thinks of Theaetetus' specific snubness and his other specific characteristics, he may be thinking of someone else (209b-c). Therefore a true *doxa* of a thing would include its differentness. So in order to reach knowledge, one must already possess knowledge of its differentness from all other things. This is of course a vicious circle (καὶ οὕτως ἡ μὲν σκυτάλης ἢ ὑπέρου ἢ ὅτου δὴ λέγεται περιτροπὴ πρὸς ταύτην τὴν ἐπίταξιν οὐδὲν ἂν λέγοι, 209d9-e1). Therefore Hypothesis D.1 is refuted and the circle may be demonstrated as:

Let p be a thing's differentness.

Let q be the state one has knowledge.

Using Modus Ponens, we have:

$p \rightarrow q$

p

then q

But at the same time, one must have knowledge of the differentness in order to account for it, so we have:

$q \rightarrow p$

q

then p.

There is a distinction that may seem trivial but must be pointed out here. The differentness in each case is something specific. The definition we are searching for knowledge must be universal, applicable to every thing. Each differentness is one (specific) of all things.

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<sup>79</sup> Cornford explains that Plato deliberately uses the word differentness (διαφορότης) and not difference (διαφορά) (see note 1935, p. 159)



Returning to Bostock, we can find some objections<sup>80</sup> he poses against Socrates' argument in this case:

- a) It is wrong to suppose that thinking of something must mean I already have a 'distinguishing mark' for it. A modern view on the subject suggests a causal link to the thing creating the memory, for instance meeting Theaetetus in person, or even as Kripke suggests<sup>81</sup>, 'inheriting' a proper name without a direct causal contact. It seems Socrates uses an 'amalgamation' of these two regarding memory, for he states that he must have a description of the thing that identifies it uniquely but also supposes (direct) causal contact with the thing in question in order to remember it (in his example, Theaetetus).
- b) Being able to think of a thing under one aspect, does not ensure one will be able to distinguish it under another aspect.
- c) Granted that thinking of something requires that one must have a 'distinguishing mark' for it, does not necessarily imply that he is able to state/give an account of that mark.

In any case though, Bostock admits that although the example Socrates' offers, and his line of thought, might not be entirely correct, the conclusion they reach are. He explains that a circular account for knowledge might not necessarily be wrong. In this case though it is, for in order to know something, we must first know something else and so on. As Bostock puts it, in this case it would seem that knowledge could never get started.

### **3. Why then does it fall short?**

Throughout the entire dialogue, the reader can understand Plato's struggle to reach an answer to his question and each time, after a tedious effort of examining multifaceted aspects of the proposed definition, he reaches a dead end. The aporetic closure is not only such for the third definition, which is the main concern of this thesis, but it of course regards the subject of what Knowledge is as a whole. My effort from here on will be to tie the previous two parts to a conclusion and answer the question of why the third definition does not suffice and I will try to do that by answering the main questions posed by most scholars, mainly:

- a) What type of Knowledge is Socrates debating about, earthly/concrete things or abstract Forms?
- b) Does this Knowledge involve truths/facts or things?

Of course these questions are similar and entwined and we shall see how.

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<sup>80</sup> Bostock(2005, p. 226-2)

<sup>81</sup> Kripke (1980)

I will begin with the two first definitions. The first “Knowledge as Perception” (151d-186e), attempts to ground Knowledge on the material world, with examples such as the temperature of the wind one feels (152b1-3), the well-being of the body (153b5-7), color (153e4-154a3), size (155a3-5), etc.. The second “Knowledge as True Doxa” (187a-201c), turns inward and the effort is to ground Knowledge in *truth* and *doxa*, notions that are immaterial. Where we found the first one fail, the second may serve as a necessary but not sufficient condition, or at least we can say that truth is a condition for a belief to amount to knowledge, but it does not do so necessarily<sup>82</sup>. The third definition seems to draw upon both material and immaterial to reach an answer; it is the second with request for *Logos*. The question though, whether “Knowledge as True Doxa with Logos” (201c-210a) is purely immaterial or it includes a material aspect, is not self-evident and as we have seen; it is of utter importance to understand what this *Logos* attached to *True Doxa* is, even in the context of the question at hand. For if *Logos*, is something purely immaterial, we can at least agree on the idea that having excluded Perception (the material), Socrates is looking for an answer in the realm of the immaterial, since all three aspects, namely *Truth*, *Doxa* and *Logos* belong to it. And even if he does not find the answer, he has not excluded that it may lay there. If on the other hand, *Logos* involves the material in any manner, we may then understand that Socrates has excluded Perception (the material alone), he is not satisfied with Truth and Doxa (the immaterial alone), so in the end he tries to draw upon both to look for an answer. Let us take a few steps back before examining these options.

In a short recapitulation, what we have seen is that Unitarians consider Plato as still abiding to his Theory of Forms, even in his later writing period, where Revisionists do not. We have also seen that scholars like Bostock and McDowell believe Plato is discussing Knowledge in terms that it could involve any type of thing, material, immaterial and even Forms, where Cornford holds that Plato is strictly talking of concrete material things, purposely reaching a dead end in order to show us that we cannot do without Forms. Reading this, one may get confused and be led to believe that I am proposing more sub-groups to the Revisionist/Unitarian pair. There may very well be a number of ways to distinguish or group viewpoints, but in this case I am not trying to achieve this. My effort is to highlight that what may initially seem as a paradox, is actually not and is essential in each groups’ line of reasoning. Namely, the Revisionists, believing that Plato has abandoned his Theory of Forms, believe he is still including them in his general search for knowledge but treating them as any other object of discussion for which knowledge is concerned. In the Unitarians’ view, Cornford’s approach is crucial; otherwise the Theory of Forms is in danger of being proven wrong. For if we allow for the possibility that Socrates is referring also to Forms, given the dialogue ends aporetically, we may very well assume the Theory does not work. By removing the Forms for the “game” in the *Theaetetus*, Unitarians

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<sup>82</sup> See McDowell’s analysis

allow themselves to actually keep them in the “game” in a whole, thus leading to the aforementioned seeming paradox, where we have Revisionists speaking of Forms and Unitarians abolishing them (from the dialogue). This is also evident when we find both Cornford and Bostock agreeing that Plato is talking about *things*<sup>83</sup>, the difference as mentioned being whether these *things* are material, immaterial or both. In Bostock’s case (as also McDowell’s), accepting these *things* can be both. Further conversation rises in terms of *statements* and *propositions* and rightly so. What can one make of all this, if not get confused at the least? Before I offer my view, let us return to the text.

Socrates does drift from *connaître* to *savoir* and material to immaterial examples. This can allow us either to believe he is not aware of the first distinction (it is very hard to imagine he is not aware of the second), or that he is not concerned with either of them, as what he is looking for is a definition of Knowledge that can stand independent of context. These questions are hard to answer and I will not attempt to do so decisively as my overall conclusion will stand regardless. We have two very solid cornerstones in the text though, we may depend on. One concerns a prerequisite for Knowledge, whatever type it may be and the other concerns the elements discussed in the third definition.

#### The soul as a prerequisite for Knowledge

‘[...] ἡ ψυχὴ ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἄλληλα κρίνειν πειρᾶται ἡμῖν’, 186b7-8

([...] the soul itself (alone) tries to judge as it returns and compares one to the other, translation mine)

In this passage we see the contribution of the soul to judgement.

- ‘ποτέρων οὖν τίθης τὴν οὐσίαν; τοῦτο γὰρ μάλιστα ἐπὶ πάντων παρέπεται.’

- ‘ἐγὼ μὲν ὦν αὐτὴ ἡ ψυχὴ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐπορέγεται.’, 186a2-4

(- In which then of the two do you place the essence; as this is what actually accompanies everything. - In those which the soul itself grasps., translation mine)

Here we see the soul grasping directly to *οὐσίαν*, namely what all things that are possess.

We can understand that the soul plays a crucial role, regardless of the context; whether we want to make a judgement (notice that in this case judgment does not translate *δόξαν* but *κρίνειν*) or grasp anything that ‘is’. So we may say that Plato sees the soul as an indispensable part of what we are looking for.

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<sup>83</sup> See page 7 for Cornford, page 15 for Bostock.

Again one may raise a question of soul here. On page 11, I mention McDowell's view as portraying an agent necessary to perform the action of 'judging', or at least 'believing' in a wider context. When Socrates mentions the soul in the passages above, it is not clear if he intends for the reader to understand the 'soul of each agent' or what may be seen as a common general consensus any soul would reach. The aforementioned examples used for the first definition, play exactly on that line and how material examples show that personal opinion (on what is cold, hot, bitter, blue, red, etc.) would not suffice. This view of personal opinion may be misleading whether it is based on the material world of definition one, or the purely immaterial of definition two. It is very important to make a distinction at this point; we may speak of a distinction between material/immaterial as regards the agent and as regards the object for which we have or do not have *Logos*. I will repeat that I do not see Socrates supporting the first distinction in the text, save for using it as a counter example to prove that relying on an 'agent' would add no aid. Therefore, taking the above into account, I clearly set the discussion outside any modern context of Idealism and this would be in line with my claim that in this dialogue Plato is discussing a definition for Knowledge outside any context.

#### Elements are perceived and offer clearer knowledge than the complex

‘ὧν 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 γνώσιν ἔχειν φήσομεν καὶ κυριωτέραν τῆς συλλαβῆς πρὸς τὸ λαβεῖν τελέως ἕκαστον μάθημα, καὶ ἐάν τις φῇ συλλαβὴν μὲν γνωστόν, ἄγνωστον δὲ πεφυκέναι στοιχεῖον, ἐκόντα ἢ ἄκοντα παίζειν ἡγησόμεθ’ αὐτόν.’, 206b4-9

*(From what we then know by experience for the elements and syllables, if from these we have to conclude for the others, we will say that gene (genos) of the elements presents a much clearer and more important knowledge for one to have a proper notion for each thing rather than the syllable, and if one says that the syllable is something that is known, while the element is unknown, we would say that willingly or unwillingly he is playing with us (he is kidding), translation mine)*

Socrates here cannot be clearer in expressing his opinion on the matter (the comment that “he is playing with us” at the end makes us feel sure). The elements, which we know are perceivable, offer an ἐναργεστέραν type of knowledge.

So how do the above two theses stand together in Plato's mind? I ask you to turn back to Bostock:

*His attention was focused on a different kind of knowledge, for which it did seem plausible to say that it required the ability to give an account. Should we perhaps say the same about 206a-b? The idea will be that what Plato is actually interested in is neither the*

*kind of knowledge that a witness has of who pocketed the silver teaspoon nor the kind of knowledge of letters that we all acquire when we learn how to spell. So although our knowledge of letters and syllables may provide a convenient way of illustrating the problems that Plato is really concerned with, still it is of no interest to him in itself, and that is why he overlooks the implications of his empirical argument against the dream. But a consequence of this suggestion must be that the empirical argument does not give his real reasons for being dissatisfied with the dream; it is a mere afterthought, of no real importance to him. In that case, what is his reason for rejecting the dream? Does he really trust in his more theoretical argument, which seems so very unconvincing to us? Or is there something else at work?*

*Well, it seems overwhelmingly probable that there is something else at work, namely the principle that 'knowledge must be based upon knowledge'. If the ultimately simple notions, in terms of which others are defined, are themselves unknown, how could the definitions confer knowledge? As the Republic says, 'Where the starting-point is not known, and the conclusion and the intervening steps are woven together from what is not known, how could such agreement ever become knowledge?' (533c3-5). It appears to be very plausible to claim that anything that is to count as a basis or starting-point for knowledge must itself be known, for otherwise what is built from it will be without any secure foundation. But that is exactly what the dream theory denies. This is evidently such a very good reason for being dissatisfied with the theory that it is difficult to believe that it was not Plato's reason. But at the same time one has to admit that the arguments that he actually brings against the dream simply do not mention this point. It is really rather surprising.<sup>84</sup>*

Plato is not specifying what type of Knowledge he is talking about, nor does he feel obliged to use examples that belong to a specific group of material or immaterial sort. He is trying to find a definition of Knowledge/Science/ 'Επιστήμη, based on an axiomatic system. He is basing the complex upon elements which he admits are reachable through perception but themselves cannot account for Knowledge, however serve as axioms. It is what Aristotle came to offer as his solution by introducing the *First Principles* (πρῶται ἀρχαί) which are *first and unable to prove/be proven*

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<sup>84</sup> Bostock, pages 221-222. Underlining mine. Also see that last two paragraphs on McDowell, supporting the underlined hypothesis.

(*Posterior Analytics* 71b27). We also see these *First Principles* in *Topics*<sup>85</sup> (Book 1 II 6).

Plato has given us a glimpse of this at 185e2-7: '[...]καλὸς γὰρ εἶ, ὃ Θεαίτητε, καὶ οὐχ, ὥς ἔλεγε Θεόδωρος, αἰσχρὸς: ὁ γὰρ καλῶς λέγων καλὸς τε καὶ ἀγαθός. πρὸς δὲ τῷ καλῷ εὖ ἐποίησάς με μάλα συχνοῦ λόγου ἀπαλλάξας, εἰ φαίνεται σοι τὰ μὲν αὐτῇ δι' αὐτῆς ἢ ψυχῇ ἐπισκοπεῖν, τὰ δὲ διὰ τῶν τοῦ σώματος δυνάμεων. τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν ὃ καὶ αὐτῷ μοι ἐδόκει, ἐβουλόμην δὲ καὶ σοὶ δόξαι.'

(Why, you are beautiful, Theaetetus, and not, as Theodorus said, ugly; for he who speaks beautifully is beautiful and good. But besides being beautiful, you have done me a favor by relieving me from a long discussion, if you think that the soul views some things by itself directly and others through the power/abilities of the body; for that was my own opinion, and I wanted it to be yours too., translation mine).

Socrates here tells us that he clearly is of the opinion that there are things the soul views directly and some through the bodily faculties. We later see that the Elements are perceived (the word 'perceived' here carries the *use of the senses*, not a sense of simple cognition).

The key in this line of thought is that Socrates is not satisfied with leaving the Elements that serve as axioms as given facts. He is trying to "Know" them, thus trying to base Knowledge upon Knowledge, as Bostock describes above and as McDowell did also.

### **An Aristotelian approach from the Posterior Analytics to aid understanding**

I will attempt to make things clearer by very briefly<sup>86</sup> presenting Aristotle's view. In his own search for Scientific Knowledge, we saw that he introduced the *First Principles* and these are 'true and first and immediate and more known than and prior to and causes of the conclusion' (71b19-25). These Principles involve relations between Universals, since for a Universal to hold, *f* must be true for every *x* of *X*. For instance, let *X* be the Universal 'dog', *f* the property 'has four legs' which all *x* (instances of 'dog') belonging to *X* possess. Every *x* one may come upon therefore has four legs as it falls under the universal 'dog'<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> 'It has a further use in relation to the ultimate bases of the principles used in the several sciences. For it is impossible to discuss them at all from the principles proper to the particular science in hand, seeing that the principles are the prius of everything else: it is through the opinions generally held on the particular points that these have to be discussed, and this task belongs properly, or most appropriately, to dialectic: for dialectic is a process of criticism wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries.' (Translation: W. A. Pickard-Cambridge)

<sup>86</sup> Please excuse any omissions. My attempt is to use sections that will help in the understanding of the thesis, not to present a solid description of Aristotle's view on Knowledge and Logic, nevertheless I aim to do so *without loss of generality*.

<sup>87</sup> Please not that this is an example and does not stand as an argument as we shall soon see.

Now for Aristotle, Knowledge is tied to cause and in order for him to reach it we ask the question ‘why is something so and so<sup>88</sup>’ and we must receive the answer in the form of a deductive (explanatory) syllogism. For example:

(A)

- The air is warm
- During summer, the air is warm
- Therefore it is summer

(B)

- It is summer
- During summer, the air is warm
- Therefore the air is warm

These two examples look very similar, but in fact they are very different. The first answers a question of the sort ‘why would one believe summer is upon us?’. We have an instance, the ‘warm air’, a middle term which explains that the air is warm during summer and a conclusion which in this case, the example being quite simple, is evidently not necessarily true (as the middle term does not exclude the possibility that we may have a warm day in winter<sup>89</sup>). In example B however, things are very straight forward. The question at hand would be ‘why is the air warm?’. Our instance is now ‘it is summer’, our middle term the same as before and we reach a satisfying answer to why the air is warm. This *causal* explanation is what Aristotle seeks for as Knowledge<sup>90</sup>. Universals are what serve as middle terms in such arguments. But how would one make the leap from instances (Particulars) to Universals? This is the age-long *Problem of Induction* and Aristotle tried to exclude explanations of innate prior knowledge<sup>91</sup>. His ‘induction’ is the process of producing a belief about a universal<sup>92</sup> (without certainty) and the way through which *First Principles* come to be known<sup>93</sup>.

We can see that there is no *episteme* regarding the *First Principles* and we do not find Aristotle explaining how many instances are enough to conclude upon a Universal. In essence we will either have to experience every instance to form a universal or accept a level of uncertainty. Note that often the notions of *Induction* and *Perception by the*

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<sup>88</sup> As described in the opening paragraph on McDowell’s Analysis, this is the underlying ‘why’, not expressed in the text.

<sup>89</sup> Also the example does not examine the belief expressed in the question but the truth or not of ‘it being summer’.

<sup>90</sup> Along with other demands such as *asymmetry* (see 78a 35-38, discussing his example on the non-twinkling of planets)

<sup>91</sup> See page below on Plato’s *Anamnesis*

<sup>92</sup> Posterior Analytics I 18

<sup>93</sup> 100b3-5. For this and previous footnote, see also Biondi, P., *Aristotle Posterior Analytics II.19*, 2004, page 57

*Senses* and taken as being virtually the same thing<sup>94</sup>. Towards the end of II 19 we see the introduction of *nous* as a *hexis*/state one is in when he knows the First Principles.

To summarize the main points of the chain described above, we get to know First Principles through Induction/Experience (the Senses), we are in a state of *nous* when we know these Principles, from knowing these Principles we may go on to Universal and deductive Syllogisms and infer (Scientific) Knowledge.

### **A short reference to *Meno***

As we saw mostly in the passage concerning McDowell, the *Theaetetus* is not the only dialogue in which Plato is concerned about Knowledge. He has gone through the subject extensively in the *Meno* and has actually managed to do a very good job of putting things in order. There we have a very specific context, where<sup>95</sup>:

- a) We are discussing ideas
- b) Knowledge refers to truths (meaning theorems, not definitions)
- c) Logos is ‘defining the cause’ (meaning a proof)

The above may seem very familiar, as it pretty much describes a very orderly context that we would call ‘mathematical’ today. Knowledge is concerned with the truth of ideas and in a specific context we come to prove the truth of these ideas.

Why then is Plato reopening the subject of Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*? In my opinion, because he wants to go beyond the context of the *Meno*, beyond trying to prove the truth of ideas and is trying to see if we can have knowledge of things. This as we saw is something agreed upon by both Unitarians and Revisionists (that the *Theaetetus* discusses knowledge of things). Essentially ‘account’ must mean some kind of ‘definition’, not just ‘proof’<sup>96</sup>. Therefore, in regards to what we saw McDowell pose as the question “why<sup>97</sup>”, when answering “I know because...”, what completes the phrase is not a (mathematical) proof, but a definition of the thing in question, hence “I know because **a** is *so and so*”<sup>98</sup>.

This supports my final interpretation, that Plato is discussing Knowledge outside context (which as mentioned, exists in the *Meno*), but also may be supported by *Theaetetus* himself. Let me in this short passage offer a viewpoint and ask a second question: Why has Plato set the dialogue between Socrates and Theaetetus, one of the most renowned mathematicians of his time? (And Socrates, when not addressing to Theaetetus he is mostly talking with his teacher Theodorus, also a mathematician). It is perhaps an indication that one proficient in the context presented in the *Meno*, cannot provide an answer when removed from that context. The choice of conversing

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<sup>94</sup> De Rijk, L.M., *Aristotle: Semantics and Ontology, Volume I*, 2002, page 142

<sup>95</sup> Karasmanis (2006, chapter 8)

<sup>96</sup> See section on Bostock, page 16

<sup>97</sup> See bottom of page 10

<sup>98</sup> This also agrees with Cornford, see page 19



with Theaetetus might then be a very important one, as it serves as an indication that someone as smart and proficient in mathematics as he is, is unable to provide adequate answers when talking in the most abstract setting outside (mathematical or any other) context.

### Plato's effort

With the previous short section on Aristotle in mind, I claim that Plato's concern is placing the question where there is an obvious gap; namely how do we transcend from Particulars to Universals. In terms of Aristotle's *nous*, the question may form as "are we in a *hexis*/state of knowing that we know something?".

Plato has clearly introduced First Principles (Elements), has stated that they are perceived, he has shown that from them we can infer knowledge of the complex we are examining, but if we really want to reach the bottom line, we cannot (either because there is none or because we are not capable of doing so – he does not specify). That is the reason for the aporetic ending of this dialogue. Plato did not choose to draw an *ad hoc line* talking about a 'reached state of mind' or simply characterizing these elements as undisputed axioms, even if he essentially admits that they serve as such in naming them elements and describing them as the fundamentals of complexes. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato wished to drill as deep as possible, without any restraints and he reached a 'no-find' end, hence the dialogue is aporetic.

It examines the notion Bostock (an McDowell) proposed of 'Knowledge upon Knowledge', in an effort to reach a geometrical pattern where every theory will eventually (possibly through intermediate theories) reach (an) axiom(s) but shows that he was not satisfied at stopping at axioms. There is scholarly debate on whether or not Socrates visited all aspects of the problem or whether he could have proposed some other definition. The truth of the matter is that to this day, the third definition of Knowledge of the *Theaetetus* is a base point for any other, mostly by adding extra conditions to it<sup>99</sup>.

It is therefore inaccurate to simply attribute Plato with the theory of *Anamnesis* as seen in *Meno* and *Phaedo*, when it comes to Knowledge. It would be a convenient answer which Plato has proposed. But if we take the generally accepted chronological order of Plato's corpus, it is evident that Plato himself was still troubled. This could of course lead to one of the earlier questions and the debate between Revisionists and Unitarians and whether Plato still believes in his earlier theories or not. I choose to view the later Plato as a skeptic, even towards his own theories. I will not side either with the first group or the latter, meaning I will not assume Plato has given up on Forms, nor conclude that the aporetic ending of the *Theaetetus* is a *de facto* indication

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<sup>99</sup> See Goldman (1967), Nozick (1981). Goldman added a 4<sup>th</sup> criterion to Truth, Belief and *Logos* and that was 'the fact that p, causes X's belief that p'. Nozick removes *Logos* and adds: 'if it was not true that p, X would not believe that p' and 'if it is true that p, but circumstances were somewhat different, then X would still believe that p'.

of the failure of their absence. The analysis of arguments in the second part of this thesis and the examining of the proposed different types of Knowledge Socrates might be speaking of, hopefully show that my belief is that:

- a) The dialogue discusses Knowledge in the most abstract way, outside any context. That is why there is such confusion on interpreting the word ‘Knowledge’ here and that is why Socrates has such ease moving from examples of wording, thinking, feeling, talking of concrete things such wagons or abstract notions such as numbers.
- b) The aporetic ending is not some secret way of Plato telling us “I fooled you – without Forms there is no answer to the problem”. It is because he is dealing with the genuinely philosophical problem of Knowledge/Science/ *Ἐπιστήμη* and therefore does not have a conclusive scientific ending. It involves, as demonstrated, the problems of induction and ultimately regress and he does not choose to offer a simple proposal or an answer that is not deep seated (as he possibly believed *Anamnesis* was not either). He chose Socrates’ maieutic method in order to make the reader think and remain unbiased, thus admitting that in the end, he does not offer an answer to the question ‘*ἐπιστήμη [...] ποτὲ τυγχάνει ὄν*’.

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