

Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (*Theaetetus* 184-186)

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I

Plato's argument in the *Theaetetus* (184 b - 186 e) against the proposal that knowledge be defined as αἰσθησις¹ has, I think, not yet been fully understood or rightly appreciated. Existing interpretations fall into two groups. On the one hand, F. M. Cornford² and others think that Plato rejects the proposal on the ground that the objects which we perceive are not the sort of objects of which one could have knowledge: only the unchanging Forms can be known. On the other hand, there are those³ who think Plato's argument has nothing to do with Forms but instead turns on a distinction between sensation and judgment which has the consequence that the thinking we do *about* the deliverances of the senses, and not the mere *use* of the senses, is the source of our knowledge. The interpretation which I advance in this paper belongs to the second of these two broad classes, but differs from others in providing a more careful account of the distinctions which Plato seems to be making in this passage. Much of the interest of the argument lies, I think, in the analysis of the process of perception which Plato produces by distinguishing carefully the contribution of the senses from that of the mind; but this analysis has not been given the attention it deserves.

The complexities of the argument can be usefully indicated by a brief examination of Cornford's interpretation. According to Cornford Plato's argument proceeds in two stages. In the first (184 b - 186 a 1) Plato concludes that there is knowledge which is not a matter of per-

¹ An expression that might be translated by either "perception" or "sensation." I shall mostly say "perception", but the other sense should constantly be borne in mind; the ambiguity becomes important below, pp. 130 ff.

² In his *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 102-109. Subsequent references to Cornford's views are to this book.

³ Cf. G. Ryle, "Plato's *Parmenides*", *Mind* 48 (1939) p. 317, reprinted in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. R. E. Allen - hereafter abbreviated *SPM* - p.136; I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, II, p. 14.

ception, i.e., that “percepts cannot be the only objects of knowledge” (p. 106). In the second (186 a 1 - e 12), it is further concluded that the additional objects of knowledge referred to in the first stage are in fact the *only* objects of true or real knowledge.

In the first stage Plato appeals to the distinction between, on the one hand, the use of the faculty of sensing as such, i.e., the mere presentation of an object in sensation, and, on the other hand, the making of judgments. The point of this appeal is not, however, to suggest that since only judgments are true, judging does, but mere sensing does not, exhibit a sufficient order of logical complexity to count as knowing. Rather, this distinction is introduced in order to bring out the fact that there are other objects besides sense-objects with which we are “acquainted” (p. 106). In judgments we use such words as “is” and “similar”, and the thought that something we are sensing exists or is similar to something else is not an achievement of mere sensing; we must bring in, and apply, the notions of existence and similarity, as well as use our senses. From this it is inferred that even if the presentation of an object of sense in sensation is an instance of knowledge, our power of making judgments shows that there is another way of being presented with objects, namely the intuition of Forms, here instanced by Existence, Similarity and the other so-called *κοινά*. We could not apply the notion of existence to anything if we were not acquainted with Existence; and the knowledge of these (and other) Forms is not acquired by using the senses but by thinking – by an activity of the soul “all by herself” (185 e 1), without reliance on sensation.

The argument of Cornford’s second stage (186 a 2 - e 10) is apparently meant to run as follows. Existence (*οὐσία*) is one of the *κοινά* mentioned in stage one. Hence both our acquaintance with the Form Existence and our ability to formulate judgments with the help of this notion are functions of the mind independent of sensation. But it is only in attaining to existence that truth is reached; so that knowledge too first occurs at the level of the mind’s independent activity, and there is no knowledge in the use of the senses at all. Cornford admits that given the context the most natural way of understanding this last point would be that sensing does not involve the use of “is” and therefore does not amount to judging or asserting anything, so that since knowledge is necessarily knowledge of truths, sensing is in no case knowing. On this view Plato denies that to use the senses is to know anything by arguing that knowledge is the achievement of the

mind's capacity to formulate judgments, which is an activity which goes beyond sensing itself. But Cornford thinks that the real point being made here relies on the other "independent activity" of the mind referred to above – that by which it becomes *acquainted* with Forms. The Forms, taken as a group, constitute in Plato's metaphysics the realm of *οὐσία* and he elsewhere associates knowledge with these objects; so here too he must be making the point that since no object of the senses is a Form nothing the senses give us belongs to the realm of *οὐσία*. It follows that no activity of the senses, or of the mind through the medium of the senses, can amount to knowledge.

There are obvious difficulties with this interpretation. For example, *οὐσία* is interpreted in the first stage as naming just one Form among others, but in the second, without any textual warrant for the change,⁴ it becomes the collective name of all the Forms or of the metaphysical status of the Forms as a group. Again, although Cornford finds in the passage a distinction between judging and sensing, he represses this distinction at every turn in favor of the distinction between objects we are acquainted with in sensation and objects grasped by intuitive thought: with good reason, since as Cornford admits, the former distinction points towards the activity of judging as the area where knowledge is to be found, while the Forms-sensibles dichotomy leads to the quite different, indeed incompatible, suggestion that knowledge is not a matter of judging truly, but of intuitive awareness of a certain kind of object. Cornford's attempt to combine his distinction between sensation and judgment with a reaffirmation of the doctrine that only

⁴ No doubt Cornford thinks there is *some* warrant in the fact, as he thinks, that throughout this part of the dialogue Plato assumes that sense objects are in Heraclitean flux: Plato would seem, given this assumption, to invite the interpretation of *οὐσία* at 186 d 3 and e 5 as indicating the realm of Being as opposed to that of Becoming. But nothing of the kind is being assumed here about the objects of the senses: Heracliteanism is defined at 156 a ff. (cf. 157 b 1, τὸ δ' εἶναι πανταχόθεν ἐξαιρετέον) as involving the refusal to say of anything that it *exists*, but at 185 a precisely this *is* said by Socrates (and accepted by Theaetetus) about the objects of the senses. Cf. G. E. L. Owen, "The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues", *Class. Quart.* N. S. III (1953), p. 86 (= *SPM* p. 324). Cherniss' attempted rebuttal of this point in "The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues", *American Journal of Philology* 78 (1957) p. 244 n. 71 (= *SPM* p. 357 n. 1), shows that he has understood neither Owen nor Plato: in saying that Plato "goes on to ascribe *οὐσία* to objects of perception," Owen obviously meant that Plato says about objects of perception that they exist, and (as just noted) Plato certainly does say this.

the intuition of Forms deserves the name "knowledge" produces a confused and inadequate line of thought.

Nonetheless, Cornford's interpretation has met with approval in certain quarters just because it does yield the conclusion that perception cannot be knowledge because the objects of perception are not knowable. Thus H. F. Cherniss, so far as this general conclusion is concerned, enthusiastically adopts⁵ Cornford's interpretation, as supporting his view concerning the unity of Plato's thought. Cherniss, indeed, goes well beyond Cornford when he suggests⁶ that not merely the general conclusion of the passage, but even the *argument* supporting it, is borrowed from the *Republic*. In Cherniss' view *Republic* 523-525 is "parallel" to *Theaetetus* 184-186 in assigning to the senses the task of "stimulating" the mind to engage in pure thought by turning away from the sense-world toward that of the Forms. Later on I will comment briefly on the alleged parallelism of these two passages, but for the moment I want to concentrate on what Cornford's and Cherniss' interpretations have in common.

Both Cornford and Cherniss think (rightly) that the main point being argued is that knowledge is achieved by the mind operating somehow independently of the senses. But both interpreters think that the mind's independent activity, when it produces knowledge, consists in acquaintance with Forms. This latter point is however not to be found in Plato's text at all, as I shall show in the next section. The only independent activity of the mind discussed by Plato is that in which it applies the $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ to the objects of the senses, judging that some thing seen exists, is self-identical and so on. He never alludes to our mode of awareness of Existence, Sameness, and so on, and does not locate our knowledge in any such awareness. Cornford is right to emphasize the importance here of some distinction between sensation and judgment; he goes wrong when he brings in the intuition or contemplation of Forms in explicating what Plato says about "judgment".

II

The passage begins (184 b 4 - 185 a 3) with an account of what perception ($\alpha\lambda\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$) actually is and how it comes about. If Plato is to refute the claim that perception is knowledge he must first mark off

⁵ *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, p. 236 n. 141.

⁶ *AJP*. 1957, p. 244 n. 71 (= *SPM* p. 357 n. 1).

the activity of perception from other supposed "cognitive" activities, so that he can then enquire whether perception, so understood, amounts to knowledge. Earlier in the dialogue (156 a ff.) the process of sense-perception was represented as something occurring between the sense-organ and the external object perceived, and no account was taken of the fact that a person's *mind*, and not merely his bodily organs, is active in perception. So Plato points out (184 d 1-5) that our sensations (αἰσθησεις, d 2) are referred to the mind (ψυχή), and that it is not the sense organs (or the sense faculties) which perceive colors and sounds but the mind itself, operating *through* the organs, or, as he also says (e 8, 185 b 8, e 7), through the senses. The organs are parts of the *body* (184 e 5-6, 185 d 3), and the power of sight, touch and the rest are capacities of the *body* (185 e 7). It is quite incorrect to say, as Plato himself had said in the *Republic*,⁷ that the senses see this or that, or say or report this or that: it is the subject himself who perceives things *with his mind through* the organs and powers of the body, who says or thinks this or that on the basis of his sense-experience. In perception, then, the mind is active through the medium of the senses. Furthermore, though without arguing the point, Plato seems to limit perception to what may be called elementary sense-perception, i.e., the perception of the "proper objects" of the five senses: colors, sounds, tastes, smells and a supposed analogue for touch. He does not indicate how he regards seeing or otherwise perceiving a physical object, but presumably he would wish to say that this is not perception, strictly conceived, but already involves some of those higher reflective activities of mind to be introduced in a moment.

There are problems of interpretation here (particularly concerning how Plato understands the use of the mind in perception) but they are best put off until after the next section of the argument has been outlined. Here (185 a - 186 e) Plato contrasts with the perceptual use of the mind, in which it operates through the medium of the bodily senses, a further and higher use, in which the mind works independently of the body and its senses (αὐτῆ δι' αὐτῆς, 185 e 1, 6). Socrates shows that such an independent use exists by reminding Theaetetus that in some cases we have one and the same thought about the objects of several senses. Thus we can think that a color, a sound, and a taste are each of them the same as itself and different from the others; *what* we think about each of these things, namely *that it is the same as*

⁷ Cf. 523 c δηλοῖ, d 5 ἐσήμηνεν, e 4 ὁρᾷ, 524 a 3 παραγγέλλει, a 7 σημαίνει, a 8 λέγει.

itself and *that it is different from the others*, is the same in each case. What we are doing here is thinking something common to the objects of several senses, and Plato calls the predicates of such judgments κοινά, "common terms".⁸ Plato explicitly includes among the κοινά existence, identity, difference, similarity, dissimilarity, being one, odd and even, good and bad, beautiful and ugly; all of these are properties of the objects of several, perhaps all, of the senses. Plato argues that in applying common terms to the objects of the senses the mind is not perceiving but doing something else, which we may call reflecting and comparing (a term which is meant to cover what the mind does when it is ἀναλογιζομένη, 186 a 10, ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα, b 8, and συλλογιζομένη d 3). His reason for saying this is that acts of perception are always performed through one sense or another, and what can be perceived through one sense cannot be perceived through any other. Thus only colors can be seen, and no color can be heard or tasted. Hence we cannot be merely perceiving in thinking that a sound and a color exist: what we are then noticing about the objects, their existence, cannot be either an auditory or a visual property, since it belongs equally to the sound and to the color, and it is obvious that there is no further sense through which we could perceive such common properties. Judgments of this kind are made by the mind by itself and without the aid of any sense or organ of sense.

It is important to realize that in his discussion of the higher, reflective employment of the mind Plato is exclusively alluding to the activity of judging *that* something exists, is self-identical, etc.; he nowhere raises the question of how we become acquainted with

⁸ Cornford, at one place (p. 105), notices that the word κοινόν here is to be understood by contrast with what is peculiar to the objects of a single sense. Yet further down the page he says κοινόν is to be understood "in the sense in which a name is common to any number of individual things," and hence that the κοινά are "the meanings of common names," i.e. Forms. Κοινόν is fairly frequently used in this way in Aristotle (e.g. *EE* 1218 a 8, *Met.* Z 1040 b 25, *NE* 1180 b 15), where the contexts show that it is to be understood as meaning τὸ κοινῆ κατηγορούμενον or τὸ καθόλου. But it is obvious that this is not how Plato uses the word here: since the κοινά are predicates belonging to objects of more than one of the senses, such predicates as *white* or *hard* will not qualify as κοινά. Yet they are certainly κοινῆ κατηγορούμενα. I know of no place in Plato where κοινόν is used in this Aristotelian sense: strictly not *Thet.* 208 d 7-9 and 209 a 10-11, to which Cherniss (*ACP* p. 236 n.) refers. By κοινόν in our passage Plato certainly does not mean to refer to Forms generally. The κοινά may be Forms, though Plato does not say so; but they do not include any predicates except those which are common to objects of *several* senses.

Existence and the other terms we apply to sense-objects in so judging. For the moment I will take this for granted, leaving the proof until later.

In the first part of our passage, then, Plato draws two distinctions. He distinguishes between the role played by the mind in perception and that played by the senses, and he contrasts this use of the mind with a higher reflective use in which it works independently of the body and its sense-faculties and judges that the objects of the senses exist and that they possess other *κοινά*. Several points call for comment.

First, it should be noticed that in distinguishing between the senses (*αἰσθήσεις*) as powers of the bodily organs and the mind as that which⁹ perceives (*αἰσθάνεται*) Plato is in effect using the notion of *αἴσθησις* in two ways. For the perceptual acts of the mind – the acts of seeing, hearing, smelling, etc. – can be called *αἰσθήσεις* (cf. 186 d 10 - e 2), as can the powers of the body which Plato says make these acts possible. *Αἴσθησις* as act is located in the mind, but *αἴσθησις* as power in the body. Now there is an awkwardness in saying that the *mind* sees, hears and so on, (*ὄρᾶν, ἀκούειν*, 184 c 6-7, etc.) while locating the *power* of hearing, sight, etc. (*ἀκοή, ὄψις*, 185 a 2, c 1-2) in the body and its organs: if the mind sees and hears, and not any bodily part, then surely the mind and not any part of the body is the possessor of the power of sight and hearing. But the awkwardness is particularly acute because the thesis which Plato hopes to refute by the analysis of perception being carried out here is put as the identification of *αἴσθησις* and *ἐπιστήμη* (184 b 5). Since *αἴσθησις*, in the analysis, can refer either to a power of the body or to an action of the mind, there is an initial doubt as to what Plato is going to deny in denying that *αἴσθησις* is knowledge. It might be suggested, for example, that by emphasizing that the senses are powers of the body Plato means to be saying that the *senses* do not contain knowledge: they do no more than provide material for the mind to act upon. It is the mind that does the knowing, and the senses are altogether dumb and devoid of thinking: in using the senses we are not, *per se*, even thinking anything, much less knowing anything. If this is going to be his argument, Plato will only be denying that knowledge lies in the sensory powers of the body; he will not be saying that perceptual acts of the mind are themselves not acts of knowledge. Yet, one might object, this last is precisely what

⁹ Plato finds it natural to shift from saying that the person perceives through the sensory powers of the bodily organs (184 b 9, c 6-7, 8, etc.) to saying (185 c 8, e 6-7, 186 b 3) that the mind perceives through the senses.

ought to be proved. But owing to the vagueness of Theaetetus' original definition and to the use of the word *αἰσθησις* to stand for the body's powers of sensory affection, Plato might fairly claim to have shown that on one plausible interpretation of the thesis it is false. This possibility should certainly be borne in mind, although I think that in the end it is reasonably clear that Plato means to reject even the claim that perceptual acts of the mind are acts of knowledge.¹⁰

The second remark to be made at this point concerns the nature of perceptual acts, as Plato conceives them, and the distinction between these and the higher acts of reflective judgment. Perception, as something the mind does through the senses, is contrasted both with the sensory affection of the bodily organs and with the higher reflective use of the mind. On close examination of the text, however, it appears that the perceptual use of the mind is conceived of rather differently in the two contrasts. Plato does not seem to have made a clean decision whether by perception he means mere sensory awareness, which does not involve any application of concepts to the data of sense, or sensory awareness plus the restricted use of concepts which is involved in labelling the colors, sounds, etc., presented in sensation with their names – “red”, “hard”, “sweet”, “loud”, and so on. This indecision on his part is of the greatest importance for the interpretation of the argument, if, as I just remarked, Plato intends to reject the claim of perceptual acts to be instances of knowing. To the extent that Plato is unclear what he includes under the notion of perceptual acts, both what he is denying and perhaps also why he is denying it will remain unclear. What he says about perceptual acts must therefore be very closely scrutinized.

In drawing the contrast between bodily affection and perception Plato is naturally interpreted as understanding by “perception” sensory awareness by itself. Though he limits the objects of awareness to the proper objects of the five senses, saying that we perceive warm, hard, light and sweet things (184 e 4-5), and even the hardness of a hard thing (186 b 2), through our senses, this need not imply that perception involves the awareness *that* these things are hard, light, and so on. And at one place he seems very clearly to be thinking of perceptual acts as acts of awareness only; he says they are common to

¹⁰ This seems to follow, for example, from 186 d 2, where knowledge is said not to reside *ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν*, which, as 186 c 1-2 shows, is to be understood as a reference to perceptual acts of the mind.

men and beasts and can be performed already at birth (186 b 11 - c 2).¹¹ Presumably he does not imagine that beasts and day-old babies are capable of using concepts. Now if "perception" is here sensory awareness, then one would expect the higher, independent activity of the mind to be the application of concepts to what we perceive. The line between "perception" and reflection would then separate simple sensory awareness from the thinking, of whatever complexity, that one does *about* whatever one is presented with in sensation. On this view, the application of the concept *red* to a perceived color would require some independent action of the mind quite as much as the application of the concept *existence*. In fact, the concepts of existence, identity and so on (the *κοινά*) would be in no way specially associated with the mind's independent activity¹²; the *κοινά* would have to be interpreted as mere examples, whose place could be taken by any other terms of any other class or category.

The fact remains, however, that the independent use of the mind is illustrated *exclusively* by the application of concepts which are applicable to the objects of more than one sense. This suggests that the independent use does not include judgments applying concepts peculiar to the objects of a single sense. And in fact, in contrasting perception and the higher use of the mind Plato does seem to contrast the application of the *κοινά* to objects of sensory awareness, not with sensory awareness itself but with the application of *other* concepts, namely the concepts required for the labelling of the data of sense. Not only does he not illustrate the reflective-judgmental use of the mind by the application of a concept which, like *red*, belongs to only one type of sense-object; he very clearly indicates that thinking with such concepts is not a matter of reflective judgment at all. He says (185 b 4-5)

¹¹ Cf. also 186 d 2-3: *παθήματα* here too is naturally interpreted to mean acts of (passive) awareness.

¹² It might be suggested that *οὐσία*, at any rate, does occupy a special position. For, one might say, it is the one concept that is employed on every occasion on which any other concept is applied: every judgment is of the form "A is (or is not) B". One might attempt to argue that all application of concepts involves the use of the other *κοινά* as well: this is plausible for identity, difference, similarity and dissimilarity. But it is not plausible for "two", "good" and "beautiful". In fact, however, the principle of selection for the *κοινά* is not their implication in all judgments, but their applicability to objects of different senses. So the supposed special position of at least some of them as regards the power of judgment is not Plato's reason for illustrating the independent activity of the mind by judgments involving them.

that we are capable of investigating (ἐπισκέψασθαι) and deciding (cf. κρίνειν, 186 b 8) whether a color and a sound are similar or not, and that we do so with our minds independently of any bodily power. The same point is put (185 c 4-7) by saying that the mind does not operate through any sense in applying the words (ἐπὶ νομάζεις, c 6) “exists” and “does not exist” to things. By contrast, Plato says (185 b 9 - c 3), we investigate whether a couple of things are bitter by means of a bodily power, namely the sense of taste. This clearly means that in operating through the senses the mind applies the words “bitter”, “red”, “hard”, etc. to sense-objects: “investigation about existence” involves the applying of the words “exists” and “does not exist”, so “investigation about bitterness” involves the application of the words “bitter” or “not bitter”. That this is so is made certain by the remark with which Socrates concludes his exposition of the contrast between the perceptual and the reflective uses of the mind: φαίνεται σοι τὰ μὲν αὐτῇ δι’ αὐτῆς ἢ ψυχῇ ἐπισκοπεῖν, τὰ δὲ διὰ τῶν τοῦ σώματος δυνάμεων (185 e 6-7). In order to decide whether something exists, is similar to something else, etc., one has to reflect; in order to decide whether something is red one does not need to reflect, but to use the mind at the perceptual level only.

There is thus good evidence for each of two different views as to what Plato thinks is involved in what I have called the perceptual use of the mind. He sometimes seems to have in mind sensory awareness without the application of concepts to what is perceived, but in contrasting the perceptual and the reflective uses he seems to think of the labelling of the data of sense with elementary color, taste, etc., descriptions as itself taking place at the perceptual and not the reflective level. I do not think the evidence on either side can be explained away; the most one can do is to try to render the inconsistency palatable. The difficulty arises because Plato tries to combine two rather different distinctions, and this can be made understandable by considering how closely these distinctions are related to one another. We may begin by asking why Plato thinks that different powers of the mind are called on in deciding whether a κοινόν such as self-identity belongs to a sensed color, than are exercised in deciding whether the sensed color is, say, red. The latter operation, the classification or labelling of the data of sense, does not indeed involve the application of a concept which belongs to objects of different senses, but why should that make any difference? In labelling a color, surely, one is, implicitly at least, engaged in reflecting, remembering and comparing – activities which

Plato represents as distinctive of the “independent” use of the mind (186 a 9 - b 1, b 6-9). Indeed, it might be said that labelling the seen color calls upon the power to apply some of the *κοινά* themselves: to recognize the color as red one has to remember past colors, both red and non-red, and think this one *similar* to some and *dissimilar* from others. How can Plato have thought that the application of the elementary perceptual concepts could proceed without this sort of associative activity? And even if this can be managed without the use of the *κοινά*, why did Plato think it involves quite a different power of the mind from that exercised in thinking about existence, similarity, and so on?

A partial answer can be found, I think, in the view of thinking (*διανοεῖσθαι*) which Plato puts forward just a few pages later in the *Theaetetus*. Here (189 e 4 ff.) Plato defines the process of thinking as discourse carried on by the mind with itself.¹³ On this model one might think of perceptual thought as a matter of saying to oneself, as one experiences various sensations, “red”, “warm”, “sweet”, and so on. And employing the *κοινά* in thought will be represented as saying to oneself “That (i.e., that color just labelled ‘red’) exists”, or “that color is the same as itself and different from this one”, and so on. Now even if recognizing a color as red requires comparison and involves the *implicit* use of various of the *κοινά*, it is clear that one need not *explicitly* say to oneself “This color is like such and such other colors I’ve seen and unlike such and such others, so it’s red”. Anyone who possesses the color concepts is (normally) able to apply them without any explicit process of reasoning at all. But it is an essential feature of Plato’s model of what thinking is that only things which one explicitly says to oneself are counted as things that one thinks. Hence all such implicit mental activities must go unnoticed and unaccounted for so long as one retains this model. The contrast Plato draws is between labelling sense data and *explicitly* thinking that, e.g., some given color exists, is the same as itself, different from something else, like or unlike it, beautiful or ugly, and so forth. The point seems to be that the color of a thing can simply be, as it were, read off it once one has the color concept in question; whereas noticing the similarity of one thing to another requires explicit thinking about the other thing and overt

¹³ The same account appears in *Soph.* 264 a-b, and the different image of writing in a mental book, which appears in the *Philebus* (38 e - 39 a) along side the idiom of discourse with oneself (38 d 1-2, 6, e 1-4), is not significantly different from the present point of view.

comparison, just as in Plato's view judging that something is good requires sifting past and present against the probable future (186 a 1 ff.). These judgments, and all judgments involving *κοινά*, require that one engage in more or less elaborate *explicit* reflection.¹⁴ It is the immediacy of the labelling function that seems to have impressed Plato, and to have distinguished it in his mind from thought employing the *κοινά*.

But even if Plato can by some such reasoning as this be justified in his separation of labelling and reflective judgment, what can be said in defense of his assimilation of the labelling power to simple sensory awareness? To begin with, it should be noted that the immediacy of the labelling operation is a consequence of the fact that, as it seems, one has in sensory awareness itself all the evidence one needs to justify the application of the appropriate label: I know that the color I see is red just because I can see it. On the other hand, in order to judge that it is beautiful, just seeing it is not enough; as Plato implies, I need in addition to call to mind other objects seen on other occasions and conduct a comparison to see if this color measures up to the appropriate standard of beauty. This means that the exercise of the labelling capacity, though of course it is different from sensory awareness, is very closely related to it. By labelling the data, it is natural to think, one merely makes explicit what was already contained in sensation. But in judgments of existence, usefulness, and so on, one goes beyond the data of sense themselves to consider their relations to one another, their probable consequences and so on. From this point of view, then, the labelling function goes together with sensory awareness and is reasonably grouped together with it in contrast with reflective judgment. And when one adds that one crucially important step in the advance of knowledge is that from the labelling of sense-contents to explicit comparative reflection about them, one sees even more clearly why Plato, with his interest in knowledge, should tend to assimilate or confuse with one another sensory awareness and the labelling of its objects.

¹⁴ Is this true of judgments of existence and self-identity? The case of existence is hard to decide because of the obscurity of Plato's examples. If "this color exists" means "this is the real color of something", then I suppose explicit reflection is required. The thought that something is identical with itself is such an unnatural thought that I have no confidence in any conjecture as to what Plato conceived was involved in thinking it: perhaps he is guided here by the thought that self-identity is not a feature of a thing that can simply be read off it in the way colors can.

Now Plato's ambivalence in his characterization of perception complicates the interpretation of the remainder of the passage. The reason he gives for making knowledge the outcome of acts of reflective judgment but not acts of perception turns out to lend itself to different interpretations depending on which view of perception is assumed.

But before showing how this is so, I must justify the assumption made in the preceding discussion that in discussing the higher reflective employment of the mind Plato has in view only the power of formulating judgments involving the *κοινά* and not also or instead the contemplation of the objects Existence, Identity and so on. To do this will require a close analysis of the passage in which the reflective employment of the mind is contrasted with the perceptual.

The relevant section opens at 185 b 7 with the question, "Through what do you think all these [i.e., the common terms] about them [viz., about sound and color]?" As Socrates explains, he has in mind that if you perceive that something is red, or sweet-flavored, you perceive these things through the medium of a sense and a sense-organ; and he wants to know whether one perceives something's existence or self-identity or unity through any analogous organ. At c 7-8, having given this explanation of his question he repeats it: *τούτοις πᾶσι ποῖα ἀποδώσεις ὄργανα δι' ὧν αἰσθάνεται ἡμῶν τὸ αἰσθανόμενον ἕκαστα;* ("What sort of organs do you assign for all of these, through which our sense-perceptory part perceives them?") Here commentators begin to translate and comment as if what is in question were, "How do we become acquainted with the entities Existence, Identity, Unity, etc.?" But it is evident that the question in Plato's text merely restates the question at b 7 and that therefore nothing is said about our becoming acquainted with Existence; the question concerns rather our perceiving or judging that a thing exists. This is overlooked only because the restatement omits the phrase *περὶ αὐτῶν* from the earlier statement, (b 8) which would make it clear that it is not a question of becoming acquainted with the meanings of these common terms,¹⁵ but rather one of perceiving or judging *that* they do or do not apply to something.

That the *περὶ* phrase is to be understood with the restatement at c 7-8 is made certain by Theaetetus' reply. He adds in his answer the *περὶ αὐτῶν* (d 1) which was only implicit in the question: "You mean *their* existence and non-existence, similarity and dissimilarity, sameness and difference, unity and other number." But he then goes on to

¹⁵ So Cornford, p. 105.

omit the phrase, in the same idiomatic way, later in his reply when he in turn reformulates the question: διὰ τίνος ποτὲ τῶν τοῦ σώματος τῆ ψυχῆ αἰσθανόμεθα [αὐτῶν]; (d 3-4) (“Through what bodily part do we perceive these with our minds?”) And here again translators unaccountably omit the περί phrase and misunderstand Theaetetus to be asking himself whether we become acquainted with Existence and the rest, in themselves, through any agency of the body. Cornford compounds this error by misconstruing in Theaetetus’ next answer (d 7 - e 2) the force of the phrase περί πάντων which he again reimports. Theaetetus says, “The mind itself through itself, as it appears to me, examines (ἐπισκοπεῖν)¹⁶ for every object [whether it possesses] these common attributes” (αὐτὴ δι’ αὐτῆς ἢ ψυχῆ τὰ κοινὰ μοι φαίνεται περί πάντων ἐπισκοπεῖν). But Cornford takes περί πάντων with τὰ κοινὰ, and translates “the common terms that apply to everything”, presumably thinking the phrase a variation of τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσι κοινόν above (c 4-5); but even if this is possible Greek it is obvious that περί πάντων ἐπισκοπεῖν is parallel to περί αὐτοῦν διανοῆ in the original statement of the question (b 7), so that we have once again the same question about the application of these words to things and not a new question about how we become acquainted with their meanings. Other translators (e.g., Diès) take περί πάντων here with the verb, as its position surely dictates, but they have not, I think, seen the consequence of so doing. The consequence, to repeat, is that Theaetetus says nothing about how we become acquainted with Existence and Sameness, but rather tells us that judgments of the existence and identity of a sense quality are not made by the mind through the agency of any sense but rather by the mind independently.

It is, then, quite clear that περί αὐτοῦν (185 b 7) is to be supplied right through to 185 e whenever there is mention of grasping, thinking or investigating κοινά. Plato himself repeats it (or a variant) as often as he decently can: the commentators’ shift from the question whether we use a bodily organ in applying the κοινά to things, to the question how we become acquainted with Forms, is sheer invention.

Nor does Plato subsequently raise this other question. In what follows (186 a-c) he consolidates his position by running through the

¹⁶ Ἐπισκοπεῖν need not mean “contemplate” (so Cornford, cf. Cherniss *SPM* p. 6 and W. G. Runciman, *Plato’s Later Epistemology*, p. 15): cf. ἐπισκέψασθαι, which is the aorist used to meet the defect in ἐπισκοπεῖν, just above, 185 b 5. Cf. also 161 d 5, e 7, where both ἐπισκέψασθαι and ἐπισκοπεῖν appear and neither means “contemplate.”

list of κοινά, adding some new ones and obtaining Theaetetus' agreement that these are all applied to things by the mind independently of perception. Here again translators confuse the issue by taking Plato to be discussing how we arrive at our acquaintance with these common entities; and again there are very clear signs that nothing of the sort is in question.¹⁷ Thus when Socrates inquires whether καλὸν καὶ αἰσχρὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακόν are among the κοινά about the οὐσία (existence)¹⁸ of which the mind judges all by itself, Theaetetus replies in the affirmative (186 a 9 - b 1). But he goes on to add that when the mind judges about these matters it calculates within itself past and present against the future. Now this is a pretty good brief account of how one judges whether a particular person or action or situation is good or bad or honorable or disgraceful: one does have to weigh past experience and present circumstances in order to get a reasonable judgment as to a person's future behavior or the consequences of an action, and so on. But it is precisely the *wrong* sort of thing to do in order to become acquainted with the existence and nature of a Platonic Form. Consideration of phenomena and phenomenal events is notoriously the main *obstacle* to becoming acquainted with these. It seems clear, therefore, that Socrates and Theaetetus are not discussing the question how we arrive at our knowledge of the Forms Honorableness, Disgracefulness and the like; they are, rather, inquiring how one goes about making particular judgments about the goodness or badness, etc. of particular things.

The general point is reaffirmed once more with complete clarity in the immediately following lines (186 b 2-10). You perceive the hardness of a hard thing, Socrates says, through the sense of touch, and likewise the softness of a soft thing. But the existence of this hardness and this softness (or perhaps of hardness and softness in general), and their opposition to one another, and the existence if this opposition, are not discoverable by the use of the senses. For these, the mind compares things together and keeps going back over them within itself to answer its questions. Once again it is obvious that what

¹⁷ Only 186 a 4 even remotely imports an interest in how we become acquainted with the κοινά; and its immediate sequel is quite evidently concerned not with this but with how to employ them in making judgments about αἰσθητά.

¹⁸ Throughout the passage οὐσία seems to mean (something like) the existence of this or that: cf. 186 b 6 where καὶ ὅτι ἔστων is epexegetical of τὴν οὐσίαν. At any rate, it never means the *nature* of a thing. (See below pp. 140 f. for a needed qualification).

interests Plato is the contrast between two operations of the mind, perceiving through the senses, and reflection, comparison, prediction and in general the interpretation of the *significance* of what one perceives. Neither here nor elsewhere does he raise the question how the mind acquires its knowledge of the common terms which it employs in its interpretative activity.

Thus the difficulty noticed above (p. 125) in the first stage of the argument as Cornford interprets it is eliminated. There is no longer a conflict between the obvious implication of the sensing-judging distinction to which he appeals and the contrast between the perception of sense-objects and the contemplation of thought-objects: the latter contrast is not drawn in the argument at all. The contrast, as I have argued above, is that between elementary sensory awareness together with the labelling of its objects, on the one hand, and the supposedly more sophisticated level of thought attained in thinking that sense-objects exist, are different from one another, and so on.

III

So far, then, I have argued that Plato draws two distinctions, that between the role of the senses and the role of the mind in perception, and that between the use of the mind in perception and its use in reflective judgment involving the notions of existence, identity, and so on. The material thus provided is the basis on which Plato relies in rejecting the definition of knowledge as $\alpha\lambda\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$.

The refutation Plato produces (186 c 6 - e 10) is characteristically brief and cryptic. He points out that one cannot be knowing anything when he does not grasp $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ (being, existence?) and truth, and then relies on the preceding analysis to show that in $\alpha\lambda\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ one does not grasp $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ and truth. We have already seen that Cornford interprets this as meaning that it is not through the use of the senses that one becomes acquainted with the Forms, the only truly real and knowable entities. But since, as I have shown above, there is no reference in what precedes to Forms,¹⁹ or to the process of becoming acquainted with Forms, there is absolutely no excuse for any interpretation of this kind. What Plato means by "grasping being and truth" must be

¹⁹ Even if the $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ are Forms Plato does not say they are, and for the very good reason that it nowhere matters to his argument what their metaphysical status is. See note 8 above.

gathered from the account he has just given of perception and the employment of the *κοινά* in thought.

Clearly, Plato means to argue that the mind in perception does not acquire or evince knowledge, on the ground that knowledge is attained only when *οὐσία* is grasped, and that it is only in reflective judgment that the power to judge about the *οὐσία* of anything is evinced. But, because of the uncertainty about what Plato understands by "perception", two different lines of thought, both, I think, plausible and interesting, may be proposed as interpretations of his argument here.

Let us assume first that "perception" means sensory awareness, without conceptualization. Then it is natural to interpret Plato as pointing out that knowing involves, at least, thinking *that* so-and-so is the case. Knowledge therefore involves the applying of concepts and since sensory awareness is a mental power not involving conceptualization it must be wrong to equate knowledge with sensory awareness.

There are several points in favor of such an interpretation. Foremost is the fact that Plato says that knowledge involves "grasping truth". This is very naturally interpreted as meaning that there is no knowledge where there is no formulation of truths, i.e. where there is no thinking *that*, no conceptualization. Secondly, Socrates in stating the conclusion of the argument seems to suggest just this contrast between sensory awareness and thinking that so-and-so is the case: he says, "So there is no knowledge in the experiences we undergo (*παθήμασιν*), but rather in the reasoning (*συλλογισμῶν*) we do concerning them" (186 d 2-3). Here nothing indicates that the reasoning envisaged is restricted to any particular subject matter (not, for example, to questions about the application of *κοινά*); there seems to be a blank contrast between bare seeing, hearing, etc., and thoughts, of whatever sort, about what one is seeing, hearing, and so on.

But if Plato means to say that *αἴσθησις* occurs without the formulation of judgments, this point must somehow be found in his assertion that in perception we do not "grasp *οὐσία*". What has the failure to grasp *οὐσία* to do with the non-judgmental character of perception? Throughout the argument so far *οὐσία* seems to have meant existence:²⁰ at its first introduction in the context (185 c 9, cf. a 9 and c 5-6) it seems to mean this and it does not appear to alter in meaning thereafter. Perception's failure to grasp *οὐσία* should therefore mean that

²⁰ So Lewis Campbell (*The Theaetetus of Plato*) insists: cf. his note *ad* 186 c 3, and p. liv n. Cf. also my note 18 above.

the thought that something exists is not an act of perception. This is no doubt true, but how does this failure imply that perception is altogether non-judgmental? Judgments of existence are just one class of judgments. Does Plato mean to suggest that somehow we must always be making existential judgments whenever we make judgments of any other type? Or does he mean that before we can make judgments of other types we must be able to make existential judgments? Neither of these alternatives is at all attractive; but the mention of οὐσία here certainly seems not to be an arbitrarily chosen example illustrating a thesis which any other concept would have illustrated equally well.

Is it however correct to insist that grasping οὐσία must mean thinking that something exists? Even although οὐσία (and its cognates) in its earlier appearances in the passage is naturally *translated* "existence", "exists", etc. (as in 185 a 9, ὅτι ἀμφοτέρω ἔστίον), it does not follow that this is what the word *means* there or elsewhere in the passage. English sharply distinguishes the "is" of existence from the copula, but Greek does not; and it is arguable, and has been argued,²¹ that the Greek verb εἶναι does not have "senses" corresponding to this distinction. It represents rather an undifferentiated concept straddling this particular distinction. If this is so, one can easily see how Plato might have thought that thinking with the concept οὐσία has a position of priority vis-à-vis all other conceptual thinking, and that to fail to grasp οὐσία is to fail to formulate judgments altogether. To grasp the οὐσία of something is not necessarily to think that it *exists*, but may be no more than to think that it *is* F for some predicate F.²² In that case to be deprived of the use of εἶναι would mean that one was incapable of predicating anything of anything else, since the copula, which is indispensable to predication, would be unavailable. Hence, without the use of εἶναι one could not have the power of judgment, and therefore one could not have the use of any concepts at all.

In this way, assuming that by "perception" Plato means just sensory awareness, a good and interesting argument can be found

²¹ Cf., e.g., C. H. Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'To Be' and the Concept of Being", *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 245-265. Cf. also G. E. L. Owen, "Aristotle on the Snares of Ontology", *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (ed. R. Bambrough, London 1965), p. 71 n., for salutary remarks on Plato's use of the notion of τὸ εἶναι in the *Sophist*.

²² At 186 a 10, to consider the οὐσία of καλόν, etc. quite clearly means to consider whether some given thing *is* beautiful, good, etc. Here the being of a predicate is its attachment to a subject; likewise the being of a subject is (in part at least) its bearing of a predicate.

behind his assertion that since perception does not grasp οὐσία, it does not arrive at truth, and therefore cannot constitute knowledge. But although, as I have indicated, such an argument fits the text quite well in several respects, doubt must remain whether it expresses Plato's meaning. For, as I have argued in the preceding section, the neat distinction, on which this interpretation depends, between perception as sensory awareness and the higher conceptualizing power of the mind, is not everywhere in the context adhered to by Plato himself. The higher power of the mind is restricted to the application of only certain concepts, namely the κοινά (which includes, besides those mentioned, also all others which belong to objects of different senses, or involve reference to objects of different senses); perception, then, includes sensory awareness and the minimum interpretation of its objects which is involved in labelling them "red", "sweet", and so on. The labelling process certainly amounts to using certain concepts, namely what might be called minimal perceptual concepts; and since this is envisaged as taking place without the use of εἶναι, which only comes in with the addition of the higher power of the mind, Plato cannot mean to suggest that all use of concepts requires the use of εἶναι. So one must look further to find an interpretation that will fit this way of understanding the distinction between perception and reflection.

If, then, "perception" means sensory awareness plus the supposedly immediate classification of its objects, what reason can Plato be understood to be giving against the claim of perception to be knowledge? On this view, what would it be to grasp οὐσία, and why would the failure to do this entail that perception is not knowledge? The refutation of Protagoras earlier in the dialogue seems to offer a clue. Plato argues (177 c - 179 c) against Protagoras that thinking a thing does not make it so, at least whenever prediction is involved, because in such cases the truth or falsity of the thought depends on the event; and even if each man is his own infallible judge of how the event turns out, when it occurs, the prediction, once made, is true or not depending on how things turn out (or seem to have turned out) (cf. 178 d 4-6). In making predictions, then, there is room for mistakes; not everyone can claim to have *knowledge* of how things *will* turn out (or even how things *will seem* to himself to have turned out). It is the expert physician who knows whether I will come down with a fever tomorrow (178 c); the expert musician, and not just any layman, knows whether a lyre will be put in tune by loosening its strings (178 d); and in general when

one man can claim to *know* better than others how things will turn out, this claim must be based on his possession of an expertise which makes him wiser and more skilled than others in his particular subject area (179 a 10 - b 5). His prediction is not then a mere guess, as the layman's would have to be; it is founded on objectively valid principles of science or art and constitutes knowledge precisely because it is supported by such principles.²³

This argument against Protagoras is recalled in our passage when Socrates adds *καλὸν καὶ αἰσχρὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν* to the list of subject matters about which perception is incompetent to judge (186 a 8 - b 1). Judging here involves prediction, Socrates says; and in so saying he clearly refers back to what was said against Protagoras. In the argument against Protagoras, special emphasis was placed on the fact that questions of *ὠφέλεια* involve prediction, so that some *πόλεις* are wiser and more expert than others (172 a, 179 a 5 ff., etc.); and in our passage Socrates joins *ὠφέλεια* with *οὐσία* as the two most significant matters in thinking about which we employ the higher reflective power of the mind – those of us, at any rate, who are capable of having thoughts on such subjects at all (186 c 2-5). **The suggestion is that Plato bases his rejection of perception's claim to be knowledge on the ground that knowledge implies expertise and the appeal to objectively valid principles and standards; while perception does not go beyond subjective reports of the contents of sensory experience and therefore makes no judgments to which such standards and principles are relevant.** There are no experts at perception; no one can claim that his perceptual reports, as such, are more true than anyone else's; no one subjects his own or anyone else's reports to criticism by appeal to the sort of standards Plato implies are operative in the doctor's prediction of fever and the pastry-cook's of pleasure to the palate. Precisely because perception is purely subjective, because it is not open to criticism or correction (cf. *ἀνάλωτοι*, 179 c 5), perception cannot claim to be knowledge. Knowledge is always the result of directing one's thoughts in accordance with principles and standards; hence any claim to knowledge must be open to criticism by appeal to the appropriate standards. Because in perception there is no room for such criticism, perception cannot constitute knowledge.

On this interpretation the failure of perception to grasp the *οὐσία*

²³ Compare Socrates' refutation of Thrasymachus' claim that *δικαία* – and not *δικαιοσύνη* – is a virtue and a sign of intelligence, *Rep.* 350 a-c.

of its objects would be taken to mean that in perception one notices only the color (etc.) a thing appears to have and says nothing about what its real color is. As I remarked above, *οὐσία* is an undifferentiated concept of being; but it seems naturally interpreted in this passage (at e.g. 185 a 9) as expressing existence. To judge that a color exists one must engage in the kind of calculation of past and present perceptions with a view to the future which Theaetetus mentions in connection with judgments of value; and just as Plato insists that judgments of value imply the existence of objective standards which experts constantly use to guide their thought, so one must be guided by objective standards in saying how things in the world *are*. This is the work not of perception but of reflective judgment.

But if perception fails to attain to objectivity it also fails to “hit the truth” (186 c 9). A thought is pronounced true or false by appeal to the standards valid for the subject matter. Hence perception, as something altogether subjective and unguided by standards, yields neither truths nor falsehoods. Knowledge, then, must lie elsewhere; in fact, it is to be looked for in reflective judgment, where the notions of existence, identity, similarity and so on, with their associated objective standards, enter for the first time.

I think this interpretation has much in its favor. The fact that it reads quite a lot into Plato’s remark that perception fails to grasp *οὐσία*, and therefore misses truth too, is no objection against it; any interpretation must do the same. What matters is how one brings the context to bear on the interpretation of this final argument. In appealing to the notions of expertise and objective standards this interpretation makes good use of undoubtedly Platonic doctrines undoubtedly expressed in the context; and in understanding perception to include the classification of the contents of sensory experience it adopts what appears to be the correct interpretation of the contrast between *αἰσθησις* and the independent employment of the mind. And in bringing these two views together it provides a reasonable sense for the final argument.

Crombie²⁴ appears to reject an interpretation rather close to this one on the ground that it cannot accommodate the examples Plato gives of judgments involving *κοινά* other than *οὐσία*. Crombie thinks that on this view the “contribution which the mind makes” consists in “referring our sense-data to the external world”; and the difficulty then arises that one contribution of the mind mentioned by Plato is to

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

notice that a color and a sound are different, a contribution not plausibly interpreted as consisting in the referral of “sense-data” to the external world. On the view I have been expounding, however, the contribution of the mind is not limited in this way. Its contribution is the appeal to objective standards, and it is only in connection with the existence of the objects of sensory awareness that the appropriate objective standards involve the referral of “sense-data” to the external world. In other cases, e.g. those of self-identity and unity and the difference of a sound from a color, it would seem to be a law of logic that the mind invokes, and the fact that it is *applied* to objects of sensory awareness does not make it any the less something objectively valid. One cannot (let us suppose) dispute a man’s report that what he sees in his visual field is a red color and what he hears is a bang. But if he goes on to say about the color and the noise that they are the same thing he’s enunciating a falsehood; what he says at this level is subject to criticism.

Thus the upshot of the argument, on this second interpretation, is that knowledge brings with it objectivity and appeal to the sort of standards which experts employ. “Perception” fails to be knowledge because one need not be an expert in any sense or have the use of objective standards of any kind in order to be as good at perceiving as anyone else. On this reading, Plato arrives, by way of his assimilation of knowledge to expertise, at a position which gives to empirical knowledge the honorific title of *ἐπιστήμη*; and the emphasis which he places in this connection on objectivity has the very interesting consequence that Plato’s conception of empirical knowledge has a definite Kantian flavor.

Plato, therefore, rejects the claim of “perception” (*αἰσθησις*) to constitute knowledge on one of two grounds, depending on which of two understandings of “perception” is adopted. If “perception” means mere sensory awareness, then it cannot be knowledge because knowledge involves discursive thought while “perception” is at a lower level of logical complexity. If “perception” means awareness of “sense-contents”, explicitly labelled, then it fails to be knowledge because it makes no claims to objective validity. As I have already indicated each of these interpretations is plausible, and neither, I think, can be definitely ruled out. But on the whole I prefer the second interpretation, because it accounts better for Plato’s emphasis on thought about *κοινά* in particular as marking an advance beyond “perceptual” thinking and into the area where we can first speak of knowledge.

IV

But whichever of these interpretations is correct, the *Theaetetus* turns out to contain points of great originality – points completely ignored by interpretations which, like Cornford's and Cherniss', attempt to make the *Theaetetus* merely repeat things already said in the *Republic*. The distinction between the senses as bodily powers and **perception as a power of the mind**, and the identification of what is known with some sub-class of judgments, constitute noteworthy philosophical achievements. They also mark distinct advances over Plato's way of thinking about perception and knowledge in the *Republic*. Cherniss' claim that *Republic* 522-525 is parallel in argument to *Theaetetus* 184-186 can now be seen to be an entirely superficial view. The *Republic* passage is so far from being parallel that it actually makes mistakes which the *Theaetetus*' analysis is intended to show up. These are: (1) The *Republic* passage constantly speaks of the *senses* as saying this or that, whereas (as noted above) the *Theaetetus* scotches this misleading inaccuracy. (2) The *Republic* allows as judgments of perception things which the *Theaetetus*, in distinguishing perception from the mind's power of independent thought, insists belong to a level of intellectual activity entirely beyond perception. Thus at 523 a 3 Plato speaks of the perception that the same thing is both hard and soft, which seems to involve a judgment of identity and so cannot be a matter of perception in the *Theaetetus*' scheme. Cf. also 523 c 11 ff. (perceiving a finger), 524 d 9 - e 6 (perceiving something as a unit). Further important differences between the two passages include: (3) The *Republic* counts both the question whether something is hard or soft, light or heavy (524 a), and the question whether it is one (524 b), as forcing the mind up to its highest level of operation: on either subject the senses are untrustworthy witnesses (523 b 3-4). But the *Theaetetus* distinguishes between the two cases, and actually allows that the mind operating through the senses does judge without recourse as to hard and soft, light and heavy and the other elementary perceptual properties (185 b 9 ff.; 186 b). It is only with respect to *other* questions than these that the mind's higher capacities are called into play. Hence (4) there is no resemblance at all between the function of the senses as stimulative of thought (*Republic*) and the *Theaetetus*' distinction between perception and the higher functions of the mind. Finally, of course, (5) these higher functions of the mind have nothing to do with the contemplation of Forms, as *νόησις* in the *Republic* does.

Furthermore, and importantly, the *Theaetetus* avoids altogether the *Republic's* misleading analysis of knowledge by reference to the objects to which it is directed; the objects about which Plato assumes we have knowledge in the *Theaetetus* include αἰσθητά,²⁵ and knowledge is distinguished from other states of mind not by its objects but by how the knower is related to them. Plato's views on perception and knowledge in the *Theaetetus* are fortunately much more sophisticated than traditional interpretations make them appear. Scholars do Plato no service by trying to read into the *Theaetetus* epistemological doctrines they think they find in the *Republic*.²⁶

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²⁵ This assumption is not abandoned subsequently in the *Theaetetus*; it is very clearly reaffirmed in 201 a-c (cf. Runciman, *op. cit.* p. 37).

²⁶ The novelty of the *Theaetetus* is made to seem greater than it probably is by those who, like Cornford and Cherniss, think that Plato in the *Republic* and other middle period dialogues firmly denies that one can *know* anything about anything in this imperfect world. It is true that certain arguments and ways of speaking of the *Republic* imply that the things we perceive or have beliefs about are different things from those we can have knowledge about. But Plato certainly thinks that after undergoing the education he outlines his rulers will be able to govern with knowledge, and this surely means that they will *know*, e.g., that a proposed course of action is right or wrong. The difference between the man who has δόξα and the man of ἐπιστήμη must, despite appearances, not entail a total difference of objects thought about. A more plausible view is that the ἐπιστήμων, because of his acquaintance with the Forms, is in a position to know things about the same objects about which the man of δόξα, because of his ignorance of the Forms, can only have beliefs. This view is in accord with the distinction between ἐπιστήμη and ἀληθῆς δόξα in *Meno* 98 a, and has much else to be said for it. If this is the substance of Plato's position in the *Republic* then the *Theaetetus* in allowing knowledge of αἰσθητά does not subvert anything but unwanted implications of misleading arguments in the *Republic*; the *Theaetetus* can then be seen as offering a corrected and more adequate attempt to say some of the things Plato wished to say in the *Republic*.