

Platonic Interpretation is Set in Wax, Not Stone:  
Some Evidence for a Developmentalist Reading of *Theaetetus* 151-187

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This thesis titled

Platonic Interpretation is Set in Wax, Not Stone:  
Evidence for a Developmentalist Reading of *Theaetetus* 151-187

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## ABSTRACT

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Platonic Interpretation is Set in Wax, Not Stone: Evidence for a Developmentalist

Reading of *Theaetetus* 151-187 (110 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Scott Carson

Interpreting Plato is a difficult, divisive affair. This is particularly apparent in the *Theaetetus* where there are two primary interpretations of the first definition of knowledge—Reading A and Reading B, Unitarian and Developmentalist interpretations respectively. Reading A claims Plato has accepted moderate versions of Heraclitean Flux (HF) and Protagoras' Measure Doctrine (MD). Reading B finds Plato rejecting both theories. This thesis provides a brief history of Platonic interpretation, an exposition of the first definition of knowledge, and evidence for Reading B. The evidence appeals to the two Readings' mutually exclusive interpretations. The thesis suggests essential features of moderate versions of HF and MD, relates them to modern empiricists' notion of sense-impressions, and then shows that Plato rejects sense-impressions later in the dialogue. Thus, showing that Plato does not accept moderate versions of HF and MD, and providing corroborating evidence that Reading B is correct.

## DEDICATION

*To my friends and family, especially Jessica*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- BT Myles Burnyeat, *The “Theaetetus” of Plato*, trans. M.J. Levett, rev. and intro. Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1990).
- BG Myles Burnyeat, “Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving,” *The Classical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1976): 29-51.
- CT Timothy Chappell, *Reading Plato’s “Theaetetus”* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004).
- KP The first definition of knowledge: “knowledge is perception”
- MD Protagoras’ Measure Doctrine
- HF Heraclitean Flux



## NOTES ON THE TEXT

References to Plato's works except for the *Theaetetus* are from John M. Cooper, and D. S. Hutchinson, eds. *Plato: Complete Works*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). References to the *Theaetetus* are from Myles Burnyeat, The "*Theaetetus*" of Plato, trans. M.J. Levett, rev. and intro. Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1990). References are cited by title and the Stephanus pagination except for the *Theaetetus* which is just cited by the Stephanus pages.

References to Aristotle are from Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (NY: Modern Library, 2001), and are cited by title and the Bekker numbers.

References to Locke are from John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, collated and annotated by Alexander Campbell Fraser, 2 Vol. (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), and will be cited by title, book, chapter, and section.

References to Hume are from David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and David Hume, *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy Vol. II: Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Associated Texts*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 328-394. The *Treatise* is cited by title, book, part, section, and paragraph. The *Inquiry* is cited by section and page number.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Many works of philosophy note Alfred North Whitehead's aphorism that all philosophy is but a series of footnotes on Plato. Although a cliché, I follow suit. Whitehead's comment—sometimes misunderstood as suggesting that all subsequent philosophy originates from or is merely an extension of Plato's thought—emphasizes the monumental influence Plato had on philosophy's birth and development. As Whitehead further explains, it is “the wealth of general ideas scattered throughout” Plato's corpus that continue to fascinate and confound his readers.<sup>1</sup> This bounty of philosophical ideas is usually readily accessible, but not always. Often, Plato makes us work for it.

Plato's ubiquity as the first encounter for introductory students of philosophy as well as the object of close scrutiny by scholars is warranted for many reasons, but it is, in part, due to the paradoxical nature of his work. His works are simultaneously accessible and obscure. Accessible in that many of them have, ostensibly, normal people talking about normal things such as justice or ethics. Nor does Plato resort to the excessive use of obscure jargon. Unlike those infamous for their obscurity—such as Immanuel Kant—Plato strives to be reasonably accessible. His works can be, however, also quite abstruse. Not only are they subject to the complexity and under-determination that results from being buried by the annals of history, but also many of Plato's works are further distorted by being both pieces of literature and of philosophy. Separating the two forms can be difficult. To make matters more arduous, Plato tackles and perhaps gives us the first thorough examinations or expressions of some of the most central and enduring problems in philosophy. Thus, not only is Plato sometimes hard to unpack, but we must do so while

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Kraut quoting Whitehead, “Introduction to the study of Plato,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 32n4.

also grappling with concepts and arguments that we have not always satisfactorily answered to this day. Plato's accessibility draws students in, but his complexity keeps them seated on the stoop of the Academy.

If we take Whitehead's suggestion seriously (and I think we should), then it is to our benefit to understand Plato as thoroughly and as accurately as possible so as to best understand his work in its historical context, his influence on important thinkers, and to gain insight into our own current philosophical problems. This task, however, is a tall order. Until the advent of modern scholarship, our knowledge of Plato and his works was highly reliant on doxography: fragments, partial accounts, off-the-cuff remarks, and interpretations of interpretations of his near-contemporaries and subsequent commentators. Our understanding was largely dependent on this evidence and often taken at face value.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that these accounts are erroneous and useless, although some may be, it is merely that they were our sole avenue of understanding Plato and were accepted as accurate.<sup>3</sup> Stylometry, the study of linguistic style, radically changed this tradition. Pioneered by Lewis Campbell, stylometry used statistical analysis of word frequency, idioms, and other textual clues such as hiatus<sup>4</sup> to group the dialogues into the now familiar, even standard, organization—Plato's Early, Middle, and Late Period.

This now famous (or perhaps infamous) invention engendered a serious interpretative debate concerning the "unity" or "development" of Plato's philosophical

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<sup>2</sup> The philosophy of Plotinus and Origen are good examples of this as it was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it was realized that their philosophy was not a mere extension of Plato's and was given the name "NeoPlatonism" to differentiate them from him [Barry Gross, ed., *Great Thinkers on Plato* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1969), xix].

<sup>3</sup> See §2.1 for further discussion of ancient viewpoints.

<sup>4</sup> Hiatus (or diaeresis) refers to two vowel sounds next to adjacent syllables without an interrupting consonant.

corpus.<sup>5</sup> Originally, all of Plato's works were seen as comprising a relatively consistent, unified message or form. Stylometry provided evidence for the concept that Plato's ideas evolved and were revised over time. For example, the ideas presented in the Early Period were the genesis for the more mature or corrected ideas presented in the Later Period. This fundamental disagreement, that of seeing unity or development in Plato's work, revolves around several interrelated issues: the chronology of Plato's works, the use of the Socratic dialogue genre, the "Socratic Problem," and debates concerning a variety of philosophical doctrines, particularly, the theory of Forms. Plato's theory of Forms is often considered one of the key "motors of the debate."<sup>6</sup> The theory's role or lack thereof in the *Theaetetus*, makes it one of the more controversial dialogues that provides fuel for the dispute between Unitarians and Developmentalists; each side of the debate offering different interpretative strategies and goals for the dialogue, and specifically for the role of the Forms.

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<sup>5</sup> John M. Cooper, *Plato's "Theaetetus,"* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 3, summarizes the two trends nicely: "On the one hand, there are scholars who, though differing widely from one another in other respects, agree in finding the arguments and conclusions of the dialectical dialogues at variance in important respects with the central metaphysical and epistemological doctrines of the *Republic* and other Middle Period writings. When such interpreters speak of the critical character of these works they at least partly mean that they contain critical reevaluations of the doctrines of Middle Period Platonism. On the other side stand those who think that, in the main, the philosophical conclusions of the *Republic* and allied dialogues are to be regarded as constituting the permanent core of Plato's philosophy which, once he adopted it, he firmly retained throughout the remainder of his philosophical career. These interpreters allow the *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus* and their successors to contain elaborations and defenses, and in some cases developments, but never revisions or rejections of the earlier doctrines."

<sup>6</sup> Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 30, see especially note 50. See also: Verity Harte, "Plato's Metaphysics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 193-195, and Henry Teloh, *The Development of Plato's Metaphysics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), 1, 171-209.

### 1.1 Statement of the Question

In a crucial section of the *Theaetetus* (151-187), one that is both the “heart of the dialogue”<sup>7</sup> and also one of the most contentious, Socrates and his interlocutors consider whether the thesis “knowledge is perception” (KP) is an appropriate answer to their question “what is knowledge?” This proposition fails, as Socrates provides a variety of refutations to KP. Unitarians see this failure as evidence that Plato is pointing out the necessity of Forms as the object of knowledge. Developmentalists, on the other hand, see Plato moving away from Forms as the object of the knowledge.<sup>8</sup> The inadequacy of KP is seen as evidence for and against Forms depending upon the preferred interpretation. Following Myles Burnyeat’s terminology, we can call these different interpretations “Reading A” and “Reading B” with the prior corresponding with a Unitarian view and the latter with a Developmentalist stance.<sup>9</sup>

Is there a way to determine which reading is correct or more reasonable given the evidence? The preference for either reading is often dependent on one’s proclivities towards Plato’s work as a whole. But because this is such an important section of the *Theaetetus*, and the different interpretations are, more or less, mutually exclusive, if we can find evidence later within the dialogue favoring one interpretation over the other,

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<sup>7</sup> CT, 48.

<sup>8</sup> See §2.2 for a more detailed discussion of Unitarianism and Developmentalism.

<sup>9</sup> BT, 8-9; CT, 48-49. Developmentalism is sometimes referred to as Revisionism, which is the more standard label, but this term can be “potentially misleading” as it is used primarily in reference to Plato’s late dialogues [R. M. Dancy, *Plato’s Introduction to Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1]. Even though we are discussing a late dialogue, the concepts characteristic of Developmentalism are not limited to late dialogues, so I will continue to use Developmentalism, to keep focus on this broader notion. It is also important to note that these positions do not have a one-to-one correspondence. One can be a Unitarian and find Reading B compelling, for example. And of course, there is room for other readings. Reading A and Reading B, however, are perhaps the most common and illuminating as they force the reader to make certain interpretative decisions. For a summary of alternative interpretations of the *Theaetetus* with references see TC, 22-4. David Sedley’s *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato’s “Theaetetus”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) offers a “maieutic” interpretation where the tensions between various interpretations is part of Plato’s intention to help “give birth to” his reader’s own philosophical insights.

then we may have a convincing reason to prefer that reading as this would help maintain the dialogue's internal consistency.

## 1.2 Possible Solution

Both Readings A and B agree that KP fails, but the manner in which it does differs in the two readings. According to Reading A, the account of perception given in 151-187 that undergirds KP is one that Plato himself accepts as true to a limited extent; even so it does not “yield knowledge” because it does not meet the requirements for knowledge—stability and infallibility.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the account of perception, although limitedly true, is not knowledge. For that, one must turn to the Forms. Reading B, on the other hand, finds that Plato rejects, in its totality, the account of perception supporting KP finding it too absurd, thus showing that perception cannot be knowledge, as its underpinning theories entail absurdity.<sup>11</sup> Hence, we have two interpretations of the proper way to read this section of the dialogue—one that says Plato accepts the account of perception if it is restricted and the other that says he does not accept it at all.

Later in the *Theaetetus*, 187-201, Plato considers true judgment as a possible definition for knowledge. Instead of focusing on this, however, he digresses, wondering whether false judgment is possible. He provides several potential scenarios or puzzles attempting to explain how false judgment is possible ultimately finding fault with all. However, his attempt may still provide a solution for our problem. His fourth attempt, the wax example, is a model of how the mind and perception interact. If we can show that the account of perception given here is one that Plato himself accepts and then compare it

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<sup>10</sup> BT, 8. Specifically, it fails stability.

<sup>11</sup> See §3.2 for a more detailed look at their differences.

with the account of perception given earlier at 151-187, we may be able to provide corroborating evidence for one reading or the other. If the account of perception in the wax example is congruent with that provided in 151-187, then it is likely Reading A is correct—Plato accepts the restricted theory of perception as described in 151-187 and continues to use it later in the dialogue. If, on the other hand, the wax example’s description of perception does not resonate with the one mentioned in 151-187, then we have evidence that Reading B is more appropriate—Plato does not agree with the theory of perception at all given in 151-187 explaining why the later account of perception is different from the earlier.

### 1.3 Procedure

We will begin, in Chapter 2, with a brief historical survey of different interpretative strategies used to understand Plato’s corpus so that the dominant trends in Platonic interpretation can be laid bare—this should help frame the disagreement between Unitarians and Developmentalists. This will also help to reveal the various interpretive presumptions and tendencies that will characterize our reading of the *Theaetetus*. This information in hand, we will then undertake a short expository account of *Theaetetus* 151-187 in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will highlight the different readings Unitarians and Developmentalists employ, Readings A and B respectively. This will help establish the problem which we hope to help resolve, namely which interpretation is more plausible. This chapter will also lay out the groundwork for how to solve this problem, which relies on the mutually exclusive interpretations of Reading A and Reading B.



Specifically, it will pick out essential features of the theories mentioned in 151-187 and compare them with the notion of sense-impressions as laid out by the modern Empiricists showing that sense-impressions have similar features. Chapter 5 will then compare Plato's wax example with Locke's wax example in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.<sup>12</sup> Doing so will show that Plato rejects the notion of sense-impression but Locke accepts them. This rejection of sense-impressions later in the dialogue will show that Reading B's interpretation of section 151-187 is more in line with Plato's intention. A summary and closing remarks will be made in Chapter 6.

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<sup>12</sup> Located at 191-196 and 2.29.3, respectively.

## 2 DEBATING INTERPRETATION

Regarding interpretation, Aristotle states that “spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, understanding an author’s intent should be simple—the written word is just an extension of spoken ones, which in turn indicate his thoughts. Aristotle probably never thought it was as simple as that nor does it ever really turn out to be that simple. This is particularly the case with Plato. Unlike many of his predecessors and successors, Plato never directly states his positions. Homer often leads us by the “elbow, controlling rigorously our beliefs, our interests, and our sympathies,” in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and can scarcely go a “page without some kind of direct clarification of motives, of expectations, and of the relative importance of events.”<sup>14</sup> The Presocratics—whether in poetry or prose—spoke directly to their readers as well, for they saw themselves as possessors of the truth. Plato’s successors typically wrote discourses or treatises, and this is still the standard for philosophy today.<sup>15</sup> Plato, however, does not write poetry or treatises where his philosophical position is out in the open for all to see nor is he even a participant in his own works, being mentioned only twice.<sup>16</sup> Rather, whatever he thought is hidden

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<sup>13</sup> *On Interpretation*, 16a3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 5, 4. Although Aristotle does praise Homer for refraining from this type of “artificial authority” by “speaking in his own voice less than other poets” (4).

<sup>15</sup> John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, eds. *Plato: Complete Works*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), xix, xviii. The Presocratics were the first to experiment with prose although verse was still common [Jacqueline De Romilly, *A Short History of Greek Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 39-46]. Charles H. Kahn charts this development in “Writing Philosophy: Prose and Poetry from Thales to Plato,” in *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 139-161.

<sup>16</sup> R.B. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 7. Plato is mentioned as present at Socrates’ trial in the *Apology* (34a) and as absent at his death in the *Phaedo* (59b).

amongst the form of his genre—the Socratic dialogue.<sup>17</sup> In the dialogues, his thoughts are “presented without comment,” channeled through his various characters, “leaving the reader without the guidance of explicit evaluation.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, the “gulf that separates” Plato’s written words from his thoughts can sometimes “seem extraordinarily wide.”<sup>19</sup> The dialogue and its intricacies both point to what Plato thought as well as obscure it and have produced serious debates amongst scholars, both ancient and contemporary.

As our discussion hopes to weigh in on the subject, it would be wise for us to review the history of interpreting Plato to place our discussion in context. We are in good company in doing so, for it was common in the ancient world to do likewise. For example, the ancient commentators on Plato and Aristotle, in addition to their own philosophical inquiries:

were interested in the further objective of attaining the truth through their activity of interpreting the classical masters and started from the idea—which is not a completely detrimental one—that in order to attain the truth they needed to consider how previous philosophers had answered the questions they were concerned with.<sup>20</sup>

Even Aristotle considered such an activity to be worthwhile, for as he notes in his *Politics*, those who consider “things in their first growth and origin...will obtain the clearest view of them.”<sup>21</sup> Thus we shall do likewise and briefly examine Plato’s most immediate interpreters—his students and subsequent commentators in antiquity. Then we

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<sup>17</sup> The Socratic dialogue was a popular genre during Plato’s era but quickly fell out of favor for more direct writing styles after Plato’s death (Cooper and Hutchinson, xviii). Charles H. Kahn, in *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-35, offers a history of the genre and argues that Plato’s Socratic dialogues, rather than being “historical documents” are instead “work[s] of imagination designed to give the impression of a record of actual events, like a good historical novel” (3, 35). See §2.3.2 for more discussion regarding Plato and literary devices.

<sup>18</sup> Booth, 7. The quote is in reference to modern literature, but feels apt. It is often assumed, though contentious, that the main speaker of the dialogue is representative of Plato’s view.

<sup>19</sup> Harrold Tarrant, *Plato’s First Interpreters* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Miira Tuominen, *The Ancient Commentators on Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> 1252a24-26

will review modern interpreters of Plato and the advent of modern textual techniques, which helped bring about the most dominant interpretative approach in the last century. Following this, we will focus on contemporary interpreters and their debate which grew out of a reaction against the modern paradigm. Doing so will highlight the nebulous, difficult task of interpreting Plato, provide a historical backdrop of the Unitarian and Developmentalist debate, which will help to distinguish the differences between Reading A and Reading B of *Theaetetus*, and, finally, it will make known some of the interpretive presumptions that this essay employs.

## 2.1 Ancient

There has been a recent resurgence in critically examining ancient accounts of Plato's dialogues.<sup>22</sup> The ancients respected the wisdom of Plato almost to the point of deification; "their reverence for the virtually biblical authority of Plato's text undoubtedly" somewhat blinded them and made them "less philosophically sophisticated."<sup>23</sup> Yet their admiration for Plato, and the fact that they also "spoke something like the Greek he used" makes "them sensitive to aspects of the text which can easily slip past us today."<sup>24</sup> Thus, although we should be cautious with their accounts, they warrant review.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example Sedley's "Three Platonist Interpretations of the *Theaetetus*," in *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, eds. Christopher Gill and Mary Margaret McCabe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 79-104; *The Midwife of Platonism*; and "Socratic Irony in the Platonist Commentators" in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 37-58, as well as Julia Annas' "What are Plato's 'Middle' Dialogues in the Middle Of?", 1-24, in the same volume; additionally, her, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* and Tarrant, *Plato's First Interpreters*.

<sup>23</sup> Sedley, "Three Platonist" 79; Christopher Rowe, "Plato and Socrates," review of *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* by Julia Annas; *Plato's First Interpreters* by Harold Tarrant; *La Stoa e la tradizione socratica* by Francesca Alesse, *Phronesis* 46, No. 2 (May, 2001): 209.

<sup>24</sup> Rowe, "Plato and Socrates", 209; Sedley, "Three Platonist," 79.

### 2.1.1 The Skeptical Interpretation

Ancient commentators can be generally divided into two camps regarding the proper way to understand Plato's philosophy—those that emphasize the *skeptical* predilections of Plato's works and those that instead stress its dogmatic<sup>25</sup> or *doctrinal* nature.<sup>26</sup> Skeptics are those “who perpetually *looked* (the Greek verbs are *skochein*, *skopeistai*, the noun *skepsis*), without ever finding anything solid they could rely on.”<sup>27</sup> The students at the Academy a “few generations after Plato's death,” could be called such, as they held for some time that Plato was a skeptic—i.e., held no opinions, no positive positions, and only put forth a method for questioning the positions of others.<sup>28</sup> At the least, Academic skepticism saw Plato as a type of fallibilist “keen to avoid rash assent and to examine issues from all perspectives.”<sup>29</sup> There is, however, no evidence that when Plato was alive his contemporaries in the Academy held such a view. Regardless, the Academy eventually rejected a skeptical view for a doctrinal interpretation.<sup>30</sup> Other ancients viewed Plato as an extreme skeptic wherein he advocated an “unequivocal

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<sup>25</sup> Dogma and doctrine are used rather interchangeably in the literature, but I will stick with doctrine so as to avoid the connotations of rigidity and stagnation that the word dogma and its variations can invoke.

<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that we cannot describe current interpreters as such. Christopher Rowe, in *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), uses these two basic distinctions as an umbrella term to discuss the debate between unitarianism and developmentalism, loosely correlating unitarianism with a doctrinal view and developmentalism with a skeptical view (4n7).

<sup>27</sup> Rowe, *Plato and the Art*, 4n7. “The Greek word *skepsis* means enquiry or investigation” but it is not merely that, rather it is “distinctly shaped by the possibility of deception and error; and it is an important corrective to our credulous and sometimes gullible inclinations” [Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1].

<sup>28</sup> Rowe, *Plato and the Art*, 4n7; Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, 10. As the Anonymous Commentator on the *Theaetetus* notes “...some consider Plato an Academic, [by which he means skeptic] on the ground that he had no doctrines” (Sedley quoting the Anonymous Commentator, “Three Platonist,” 86). See note 48 on the Anonymous Commentator.

<sup>29</sup> Tarrant, 16. Fallibilism is the epistemological view that our beliefs need not be certain, grounded in certainty, rationally supported, conclusively justified, etc. It is often seen to imply skepticism but is a more moderate position wherein we can justify beliefs despite future evidence that may force revision [Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 135].

<sup>30</sup> T.H. Irwin, “The Platonic Corpus,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 85. Although Sedley, in “Three Platonist,” maintains that Academic Skepticism never truly died out and “persisted as contemporary rivals” to other interpretive schools (82-83).

embrace of suspension of judgement” because he rejected “all accounts of how cognition might be achieved.”<sup>31</sup> Some even claimed that Plato introduced the idea of skepticism.<sup>32</sup>

These ancient skeptics, regardless of the brand or extent of skepticism, could easily read Plato as a skeptic and conform his skeptical tendencies to match their own position.<sup>33</sup> Reading Plato in this manner is suggested by many factors. First, the dialogue form itself, consisting of the character’s viewpoints rather than the author’s, allows the author distance from “the positions presented and the arguments put forward for them” thereby lessening its authoritativeness and leaving readers to their own devices in understanding.<sup>34</sup> Second, dialectic was a “common sceptical strategy,” as it puts forward no positive positions.<sup>35</sup> Plato’s emphasis on dialectic, particularly the *elenctic*<sup>36</sup> method and its *peirastic* or *ad hominem*<sup>37</sup> nature thereby lends itself toward skepticism. Gregory Vlastos explains the process:

In its standard form it is a type of adversative argument in which Socrates refutes a thesis p, defended by the interlocutor as his personal belief, by eliciting from him additional premises, say {q, r}, whose conjunction entails the negation of p. The refutation is accomplished by “peirastic” argument: the refutand p, proposed and defended by the interlocutor, is refuted out of his own mouth: p is shown to be inconsistent with propositions in his own belief-system.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Tarrant, 16. For references to the ancients who held these positions as well as a summarization of the arguments for these positions see same volume, 10-16.

<sup>32</sup> This is suggested in the Prolegomena to Plato’s Philosophy, written in very late antiquity by an anonymous author in: “Some people, pushing Plato among those who suspend judgment and the Academics, talk as if he himself introduced the denial of cognition” (Sedley quoting the anonymous author, “Three Platonist,” 86).

<sup>33</sup> Tarrant, 16; Rowe, *Plato and the Art*, 4n7; Irwin also states that the “skeptical interpretation was an innovation that tried to enlist Plato in a Skeptical project” (“The Platonic Corpus,” 85).

<sup>34</sup> Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Thorsrud, 5. Although not a “necessary feature of ancient Scepticism.”

<sup>36</sup> “In ordinary Greek, the verb, *elenchein* means ‘to examine critically,’ ‘to cross-examine,’ ‘to censure’ or ‘find fault with someone or something’” [Murray Miles, *Inroads: Paths in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 174].

<sup>37</sup> Pierastic or ad hominem arguments, which does not refer to the fallacy, are those that attack “a position without relying on a position of the arguer’s own” (Annas, “What are Plato’s ‘Middle’ Dialogues in the Middle Of?”, 2n4, 2). However, it is not always clear that this is so (Miles, *Inroads*, 177).

<sup>38</sup> Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 266. See also his “The Socratic Elenchus,” in *Plato* ed. Gail Fine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38-65.

Third, the prevalence of the *maietuic* method or philosophical midwifery—a process of questioning whereby ideas already present in the questioned are brought forth by the questioner—helps to reinforce a skeptical reading of Plato in a similar manner in that Plato appears to, via Socrates, elicit positive positions from others without putting them forth himself.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the presence of the many instances of *aporia*, that is, an intellectual impasse or serious perplexity, whereby no positive conclusions are reached even after serious consideration, also contribute to skepticism.<sup>40</sup>

These various devices were interpreted by the skeptics as indicative of either a disavowal of our ability to find truth (or at least its improbability) or as a type of educative program on the part of Plato designed to “*make his readers think for themselves*” and to recognize the importance of questioning.<sup>41</sup> Indeed this is likely one of the reasons Plato wrote dialogues, for “by mirroring dialectic, the dialogues take on both its functions: they are at the same time instruments of education and live examples of the philosophical process.”<sup>42</sup> Such an educational program for Plato is not farfetched as Aristotle, according to one ancient commentator, employed obscurity to a similar purpose as it offers intelligent students “an opportunity to stretch their minds even further.”<sup>43</sup> Under this viewpoint, “only if we go on questioning our ideas can we ever hope to reach the truth if we can reach it at all.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “It by no means,” however, “follows that Plato himself does not know” that which he is trying to elicit from others (Sedley, *Midwife*, 11).

<sup>40</sup> See TC for a concise definition of *aporia* (239) and its potential role in the *Theaetetus* (22-3). These skeptical predilections are typical of Plato’s earlier dialogues, and “may superficially attract such a [skeptical] reading, but no modern interpreter would be likely to find it satisfactory” (Rowe, *Plato and the Art*, 4n7).

<sup>41</sup> Rowe, *Plato and the Art*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> C.J. Rowe, *Plato* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1984), 27.

<sup>43</sup> Tuominen, 3. The ancient commentator is Ammonius.

<sup>44</sup> Rowe, *Plato and the Art*, 7.

### 2.1.2 The Doctrinal Interpretation

Questioning our ability to reach the truth is not an option for the doctrinal interpreter of Plato, as Plato has already reached it. Accordingly, Plato's writing was not meant to merely generate a philosophical mindset but to convey dogma or doctrine—a set of “highly distinctive and connected set of views about human nature and existence, and about the world in general.”<sup>45</sup> This would include the textbook examples—“the doctrine of Ideas [or Forms], learning as Recollection, Nature or Reality, the Ideal Society, ‘Platonic’ Love, Virtue, and individual virtues, such as piety, justice, temperance, courage, friendship, and beauty”—that today we typically associate with Plato.<sup>46</sup> Under this view, “there are just too many occasions in the dialogues when even Socrates [who “claims” ignorance] not only appears to commit himself to positive ideas (to the extent that he commits himself to anything), but offers no reason for rejecting them.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, even when it appears he is rejecting any positive position, such as in the *maietuic* method, positive doctrine can be gleaned. The Anonymous Commentator<sup>48</sup> and other ancient Platonists saw the references to philosophical midwifery in the *Theaetetus* as evidence for the Theory of Recollection:

Socrates calls himself a midwife because his method of teaching was of that kind...for he prepared his pupils themselves to make statements about the subject by unfolding their natural ideas and articulating them, in accordance with the doctrine that what is called learning is really recollection, and that every human

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<sup>45</sup> Rowe, “Interpreting Plato,” in *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh Benson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 13.

<sup>46</sup> Gerald A. Press, ed., *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), 5-6.

<sup>47</sup> Rowe, “Interpreting Plato,” 14.

<sup>48</sup> The Anonymous Commentator is the author of the first extant commentary of Plato (circa 50 BC-150 AD), which specifically focuses on the *Theaetetus* and was first published in 1905 by Diels and Shubart. [David Sedley and Lesley Brown, “Plato, *Theaetetus* 145-147,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes 67 (1993): 125-126].



soul has had a vision of reality, and needs, not to have knowledge put into it, but to recollect.<sup>49</sup>

Also, as with the skeptics, it was easy to read one's own doctrine into Plato's works and "hard to deny that their own message had been intended by the author."<sup>50</sup> This is, for example, what happened to the Stoics who easily found in Plato a fellow believer in "the priority of virtue and its relation to knowledge."<sup>51</sup> That Plato held certain doctrines and was prepared to communicate them to those who were capable of learning them was for many unquestionable.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, this seemed to be the viewpoint of Aristotle, who makes it clear—by contrasting Plato to Socrates—that Plato did have doctrines.<sup>53</sup> He also makes vague mention of "unwritten" doctrines as well.<sup>54</sup> However, the accuracy of Aristotle's historical claims as well as the existence of unwritten Platonic doctrines, that is, doctrines that were passed down orally and not explicitly mentioned in his dialogues, are both contentious.<sup>55</sup> The prevalence of the doctrinal approach, apart from it being easy to

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<sup>49</sup> Chappell quoting the Anonymous Commentator, TC, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Tarrant, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *Metaphysics*, 987a29-988a15.

<sup>54</sup> *Physics*, 209b11-16. The Tübingen or esotericist school, represented by the likes of Thomas Szlezák, Giovanni Reale, Hans Joachim Krämer, and Konrad Gaiser, put great stock in the unwritten dialogues. Under this school, Plato does have "an interconnected system of doctrines, which is capable of explicit statement" but it "only be explained (orally) to those who have been cognitively prepared to understand this system," by reading Plato's dialogues [Christopher Gill, "Dialectic and the Dialogue Form," in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 147]. See Thomas A. Szlezák, *Reading Plato*, trans. by Graham Zanker, (New York: Routledge, 1999) for a concise representation of the school. For a more thorough treatment see: Giovanni Reale, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato*, trans. and ed. by John R. Catan and Richard Davies, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> See Charles H. Kahn, *Plato*, 79-87, for a negative take on the legitimacy of Aristotle's account. For a neutral take see Christopher Rowe, "Just How Socratic Are Plato's 'Socratic' Dialogues?" *Plato 2* (January 2002), under "The Value of Aristotle's Evidence for Socrates" par. 12-16, <<http://gramata.univ-paris1.fr/Plato/spip.php?article30>>. For a brief, but more favorable assessment of Aristotle's account see Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5-7, 8-11. For criticism of the unwritten doctrine see: Rutherford, 36-38; Rowe, *Plato*, 196-200; T.H. Irwin, "Plato: The Intellectual Background," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 77n82; Gerald A. Press, "The State of the Question in the Study of Plato," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 34 no. 4 (1996): 513n71.

assimilate Plato into one's own system, is due to its ability to subsume the skeptical view.<sup>56</sup> The skeptics' opposition to doctrine is "nevertheless defined by the concept of [doctrine] and is, therefore, essentially [doctrine]-centered."<sup>57</sup> Doctrinal interpreters see Plato's skepticism, the skepticism that "makes you less attached to your own views just because they are your own, and more willing to search for views that are true, whether or not you thought them up," as part of the system of doctrine itself.<sup>58</sup>

Regardless of whether the ancients were of the skeptical or doctrinal persuasion, they both "approached Plato in a largely unhistorical way."<sup>59</sup> That is, they were largely uninterested in the relative chronology of the dialogues' composition, thinking that "if it is relevant at all, [it] has no special claim to interpretative significance."<sup>60</sup> Nor did they seek to find such a chronology, for they conceived that their primary task was to showcase Plato's works, with all its subtle, nuanced, and important content, with "maximum comprehensiveness and clarity."<sup>61</sup> Thus, there were a variety of ways in which the dialogues were organized, but primarily "the order was determined by convenience of exposition."<sup>62</sup> One manner of doing so which eventually took hold was to arrange Plato's corpus thematically into tetralogies—groups of four—similar to how ancient tragedies were organized into trilogies. Thus, for example, the first tetralogy

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<sup>56</sup> Mauro Bonazzi, "The Commentary as Polemical Tool: The Anonymous Commentator on the *Theaetetus* against the Stoics" *Laval théologique et philosophique* 64, no. 3 (Oct. 2008): 597-605, shows how the Anonymous Commentator tries to "appropriate the doctrines of other schools" under Plato's philosophy (605).

<sup>57</sup> Press, "The State," 508.

<sup>58</sup> Julia Annas, "What are Plato's 'Middle' Dialogues in the Middle Of?" in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 5; Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 6-7, also mentions how the doctrinal approach can accommodate some aspects of the skeptical approach, though he does not call it skeptical.

<sup>59</sup> C.C.W. Taylor, "The Origins of Our Present Paradigms," in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 74.

<sup>60</sup> Jacob Howland, "Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology," *Phoenix* 45 no. 3 (Autumn, 1991): 195.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

consisted of those works revolving around Socrates' last days.<sup>63</sup> Thrasyllus' arrangement is the one bequeathed to us from antiquity and was the dominant organizational schema until the early nineteenth century when "text-critical methods, such as stylometry" solidified a chronological schema.<sup>64</sup> This modern development created a rift deeper than that between skeptical and doctrinal interpreters of Plato. Modern interpretation divides between those that find interpretative significance in the chronology of the dialogues (and think it is crucial) and those that do not.

Table 1: Thrasyllus' Arrangement of Plato's Works

- I**    *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*
- II**   *Cratylus, Theatetus, Sophist, Statesmen*
- III**   *Parmenides, Philebus, Symposium, Phaedrus*
- IV**   *First Alcibiades,<sup>†</sup> Second Alcibiades, \* Hipparchus, \* Rival Lovers\**
- V**    *Theages, \* Charmides, Laches, Lysis*
- VI**   *Euthydemus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Meno*
- VII**   *Greater Hippias,<sup>†</sup> Lesser Hippias, Ion, Menexenus*
- VIII**   *Clitophon,<sup>†</sup> Republic, Timaeus, Critias,*
- IX**   *Minos, \* Laws, Epinomis, \* Letters<sup>‡</sup>*

Source: Adapted from John M. Cooper, and D. S. Hutchinson, eds. *Plato: Complete Works*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), v-vi.

<sup>†</sup> Plato's authorship disputed

\* Agreed upon that Plato is not the author

<sup>‡</sup> Authorship of individual letter is disputed

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<sup>63</sup> Cooper and Hutchinson, viii-xii.

<sup>64</sup> CT, 17.

## 2.2 Modern

The rise of Romanticism, seeing human nature as “the product of local conditions of time and place,” and the historical philosophy of Hegel, in which there is “a universal process of development,” provided the intellectual basis for seeing maturation and progress in Plato’s philosophy.<sup>65</sup> Each of Plato’s dialogues, thus, builds on the “achievement of its predecessor in the working out of a system whose later stages disclose more clearly and fully what was indeed preconceived, but only in an obscure and undeveloped form.”<sup>66</sup> Frederich Schleiermacher, an eighteenth and nineteenth century philosopher and theologian, was the first to advocate such a view. Taking a cue from the ancients, he saw Plato’s corpus as essentially the texts of a philosophical education whose proper order is that which best facilitates said education.<sup>67</sup> This educative track comes in a series of groups—“a division into early, middle, and late dialogues, each of the later stages presupposing the results of the earlier.”<sup>68</sup> Schleiermacher’s understanding of the dialogues, one where “the leading hypothesis... was a systematic interdependence of all works of Plato, each preparing for the next and prepared by the preceding,” is the genesis of the unitarian approach to Plato’s work.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Taylor, 74-5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>67</sup> Kahn, *Plato*, 38. Although the ancients differed on the best educative order, it was common to start with Aristotle’s works, for they were “authoritative when it comes to logic and natural philosophy” and must be studied first, before moving on to Plato’s more metaphysical works, which were ordered by difficulty, the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* being the apex of the program (Tuominen, 16).

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, 76.

<sup>69</sup> Chappell quoting Lutoslawski, CT, 17n12.

### 2.2.1 Unitarianism

Unitarianism claims that “Plato’s works display a unity of doctrine and a continuity of purpose throughout.”<sup>70</sup> This homogeneity in purpose and thought, similar to Schleiermacher’s view of Plato, is consistent throughout all of the dialogues but may be put forward in greater detail in some of the later ones. Under the Unitarian framework, Plato is akin to “philosophers like Descartes or Hume, whose philosophical position remains essentially unchanged once their thought attains maturity.”<sup>71</sup> Any diversity or conflict between the dialogues has a literary or pedagogical motivation behind it instead of a philosophical divergence. Thus, inconsistencies in the dialogues are seen as a result of viewing the same philosophical problem from a different perspective or are instead prompts to engage the reader more deeply in philosophical thinking.<sup>72</sup> For example, the Unitarian response to the absence of the Forms in the *Theaetetus*, which are clearly present in other dialogues, is that they are excluded explicitly to show their necessity in trying to understand knowledge. For Unitarians, a concept like the theory of Forms is always “fully-developed behind the scenes.”<sup>73</sup> Consider, for example, the *Euthyphro* when Socrates is probing for the definition of piety but instead receives several examples of piety rather than what that he was asking for, which is “that *form* itself that makes all pious actions pious.”<sup>74</sup> Although perhaps formally originating with Schleiermacher, many, if not all, ancient and medieval commentators should be considered Unitarians. Neither Aristotle or Diogenes Laertes wrote as though Plato had changed his philosophy.

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<sup>70</sup> CT, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Rutherford, 24; Kahn, *Plato*, xiv.

<sup>72</sup> Kahn, *Plato*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Rutherford, 24.

<sup>74</sup> 5d; 6d, my emphasis.

The Anonymous Commentator too assumes a Unitarian position. In fact, for the ancients “it was an almost unquestioned assumption.”<sup>75</sup>

### 2.2.2 Developmentalism

The unquestioned assumption of Unitarianism began to shift with the work of the nineteenth century philosopher and philologist Karl Hermann who accepted Schleiermacher’s basic premise that Plato’s work developed, but unlike Schleiermacher—who saw such development “as the working out of a preconceived doctrinal scheme”—Hermann located it in a historical context.<sup>76</sup> Plato’s development, according to Hermann, was firmly rooted in the social and political conditions that defined the course of his life with major turning points marking some of the differences seen across Plato’s dialogues. Grounding and explaining the diversity of the dialogues was achieved by appealing to “Plato’s intellectual biography,” rather than literary or pedagogical concerns.<sup>77</sup> Such a conception of the importance of life events in philosophical development led Hermann to place a large emphasis on the Socratic nature of Plato’s earliest dialogues, and to recognize it as a distinct period where Plato was trying to preserve the memory of the historical Socrates.<sup>78</sup>

The importance of historical context was solidified with the advent of stylometry—the study of linguistic style.<sup>79</sup> By analyzing Plato’s “style and use of words,

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<sup>75</sup> CT, 16; Kenneth Dorter, *Form and Good in Plato’s Eleatic Dialogues: The Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994) 3; Bonazzi, 605; Sedley, “Three Platonist,” 80.

<sup>76</sup> Taylor, 76.

<sup>77</sup> Taylor, 76; Kahn, *Plato*, 38.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> See Leonard Brandwood, “Stylometry and Chronology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 90, for a brief introduction to the subject of stylometry, and his *The Chronology of Plato’s Dialogues*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

particularly at the very small-scale level of ‘routine’ phrases, grammatical constructions, use of particles and conjunctions, and so forth—choices frequent enough to give a significant statistical sample and trivial enough to be (probably) almost unconscious” in his dialogues, scholars were able to divide Plato’s corpus in the three stylistic groups.<sup>80</sup>

Table 2: Stylometric Grouping of Platonic Dialogues

**Group One:** *Apology, Charmides, Crito, Cratylus, Euthydemus, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Lysis, Menexenus, Meno, Phaedo, Protogaras, Symposium*

**Group Two:** *Phaedrus, Republic, Parmenides, Theaetetus*

**Group Three:** *Sophist, Statesman, Philebus, Timaeus, Critias, Laws*

Source: Adapted from Charles Kahn, “On Platonic Chronology,” in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 94.

Note: I omitted works whose authenticity is still contentious.

This process was pioneered by Lewis Campbell from 1867 to 1896, and his general results were independently confirmed by several other scholars.<sup>81</sup> These groups, when compared with the scant information known concerning the composition dates for several of Plato’s dialogues—such as Aristotle’s claim in the *Politics* that the *Laws* was written after the *Republic* as well as with internal cross-references in the various dialogues themselves—provided a rough chronological order of the dialogues.<sup>82</sup> Specifically, it

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for a more in-depth treatment. Debra Nails, *Agora, Academy, and the Conduct of Philosophy* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995) provides a good survey of the evidence against stylometry and adds to it; see also, Howland, 189-214. Charles Kahn provides a brief defense of the original stylometric results, that is three distinct stylistic groups, in *Plato*, 42-48, and does so more thoroughly in “On Platonic Chronology,” in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 93-128.

<sup>80</sup> Rutherford, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Kahn, “On Platonic Chronology,” 91, 94n3. Additionally, they each used “entirely different criteria” (94n3).

<sup>82</sup> Brandwood, “Stylometry and Chronology,” 90.

proved that the *Critias*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* were all written late in Plato's career and constitutes a "separate, late group."<sup>83</sup> More generally, the stylistic evidence appeared to confirm Aristotle's account that the earlier dialogues were Socratic and the later, Platonic.<sup>84</sup>

Proposing development in Plato's philosophy necessitates determining "the relative chronological order of the dialogues," because it is only in doing so that the dialogues can be placed in certain periods of Plato's storied career, and without such information "there is no objective basis for any claims about how his thought developed."<sup>85</sup> Establishing historical facts regarding Plato is thus "the necessary precondition to the comprehension of Plato's work."<sup>86</sup> Stylometry provided that external, objective method to determine, as well as evidence for, the development of Plato's philosophy. By correlating Plato's various philosophical ideas with the dialogues in each group, one can ostensibly trace the course of Plato's ideas as they changed over time. Thus, Developmentalism—the idea that "Plato's works are full of revisions, retractions, and changes of directions"—was born.<sup>87</sup> According to Developmentalists, these various alterations in Plato's dialogues are evidence that "Plato has changed his mind," and hence any discontinuity in the dialogues is a reflection of "different stages in the evolution of

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<sup>83</sup> Cooper and Hutchinson, xiv.

<sup>84</sup> Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 13. Terry Penner remarks on its significance: "It is worth noting how important the convergence of the two bits of evidence is. What after all were the a priori probabilities that Aristotle's testimony would be strongly confirmed by what dialogues stylometry would two millennia later throw up as exclusively within the first (early) stylistic group? This is surely confirmation of the trust-worthiness of a Socratic-Platonic division along the general lines suggested by Aristotle" ("The Historical Socrates and Plato's Early Dialogues: Some Philosophical Questions" in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 190n3).

<sup>85</sup> William J. Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), 2.

<sup>86</sup> Brad Inwood, "Comments on Taylor," in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 86.

<sup>87</sup> CT, 17.



Plato's thought."<sup>88</sup> Hence, Plato is akin to "philosophers like Kant and Wittgenstein, whose conception of philosophy undergoes radical change."<sup>89</sup> For example, we can again consider the absence of Forms in the *Theaetetus*, which a Developmentalist will take as evidence that Plato must have changed his mind from earlier dialogues like the *Republic* where the Forms appear front and center.

Developmentalists, as Debra Nails describes, are:

committed to the interlocking premises that Plato's views evolved or developed over his productive lifetime, and that the chronological order of composition of the dialogues can be reconstructed with sufficient confidence to yield a mapping of doctrines to dialogues.<sup>90</sup>

She adds to this that they are also committed to one additional premise, that Plato's earliest dialogues are generally representative of the historical Socrates' viewpoints.

Nail's description of Developmentalism illustrates what became the de facto position from which to approach interpreting Plato's dialogues for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The "well-defined changes in minor features of language," which corresponded with relative notions of when certain dialogues were written, provided convincing evidence that there was a "chronological significance" to the stylistic differences in dialogues.<sup>91</sup> As this new Developmentalist "paradigm" grew and established itself into an interpretive thesis regarding Plato's doctrines and how they changed—particularly the idea that Plato's philosophy evolved over time from an earlier Socratic Period, where he

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<sup>88</sup> Kahn, *Plato*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, xiv. The radical change referenced here of course being the shift from Kant's Pre-Critical Period to his Critical Philosophy and Wittgenstein's move from the views espoused in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to his repudiation of that position in his posthumous *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>90</sup> Debra Nails, "Problems with Vlasto's Platonic Developmentalism," *Ancient Philosophy* 13, (1993): 273. As Nails notes in, *Agora*, the first two premises are the important ones for "'developmentalism'"—the third, though related, is more necessary for the Socratic problem than it is for Developmentalism (53).

<sup>91</sup> Kahn, "On Platonic Chronology," 95. As Taylor, 76-77, notes, the underpinnings of the Developmentalist "paradigm"—the division of the dialogues into Early, Middle and Late Periods as well as the sharp divide between the "Socratic" and Platonic dialogues—are present prior to stylometry through the scholarship of Schleiermacher and Hermann. Stylometry merely provided conformational evidence to ideas that were already in the mix.

was essentially relaying Socrates' philosophy, to a Middle Period critical of that philosophy, to a later Platonic Period where he espoused his own views—the original stylistic groupings were modified to accommodate this philosophical interpretation. Thus, the stylistic groups were altered into Plato's Early, Middle, and Late Periods and mistakenly presented as “representative of the generally accepted conclusions” of stylometry.<sup>92</sup>

Table 3: Stylometric and Philosophical Grouping of Platonic Dialogues

<b>Early:</b>	<i>Apology, Crito, Laches, Lysis, Charmides, Euthyphro, Hippias Minor, Protagoras, Gorgias, Ion</i>
<b>Middle:</b>	<i>Meno, Pheado, Republic, Symposium, Phaedrus, Euthydemus, Menexenus, Cratylus</i>
<b>Late:</b>	<i>Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, Politicus, Timaeus, Critias, Philebus, Laws</i>

Source: Adapted from Charles Kahn, “On Platonic Chronology,” in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*, eds. Julia Annas and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 96-7.

Note: I omitted works whose authenticity is still contentious.

It is perhaps, in part, this confusion that led to the systematic dismantling of the earlier stylometric results and the Developmentalist paradigm that arose from it starting in the late 1950's.

## 2.3 Contemporary

The Developmentalist viewpoint became entrenched in academic circles, particularly among Anglophone, analytic philosophers, alongside several other “long-

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<sup>92</sup> Kahn, “On Platonic Chronology,” 96.

standing interpretative commitments,” consistent with the doctrinal and skeptical interpretations provided by the ancients, and comprising a type of “paradigmatic” (some might even call it dogmatic) interpretative stance toward reading Plato.<sup>93</sup> Debate over these various points characterize much of the interpretive divide today and center on how much (or little) emphasis or importance commentators wish to give to the literary aspects of Plato’s dialogues. As “literary and dramatic orientations began to have greater influence” a split developed between those that recognize “the central importance of Plato’s use of the dialogue form,” and those who put emphasis upon “epistemology, logic, and linguistic analysis.”<sup>94</sup> We can speak of the former as the *literary* approach and the latter as the *analytic* approach.<sup>95</sup>

### 2.3.1 *The Analytic Approach*

As a concrete, interpretative project, the literary approach grew out of opposition to the analytic approach<sup>96</sup> and its closely attached Developmentalist leanings.<sup>97</sup> Thus, to understand it we should begin with the analytic approach. The analytic approach, as it applies to interpreting Plato, is the progeny of the broader analytic movement, which emphasizes intellectual clarity and rigor, especially of arguments, and applies such techniques to Plato’s dialogues. Therefore, analytic adherents look for and examine

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<sup>93</sup> Press, “The State,” 509.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 511.

<sup>95</sup> I am borrowing this classification from Dancy’s *Plato’s Introduction of Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), however, this language is standard.

<sup>96</sup> This does not mean, however, that others were, prior to the contemporary period, unaware of literary aspects of the dialogues, indeed it seems they were, e.g., Proculus and George Grote; rather, it just means that the importance of literary aspects came to the forefront in reaction and as (supposed) corrective to the analytic approach, which was neglecting such features (Press, *Plato’s Dialogues*, 2, 2n5; Inwood, 91).

<sup>97</sup> “A feature of this approach [the analytic approach] is the strong interest in revision of doctrines within Plato’s works (in what are taken to be distinct phases of Platonic thought)—aka Developmentalism [Gill, 147].

Plato's doctrines by eschewing the dialogues' literary features for their arguments.<sup>98</sup> These are then typically "rationally reconstructed," and refocused toward solving contemporary philosophical problems<sup>99</sup> or supporting or validating particular theses, usually regarding Plato's development.<sup>100</sup> Derived from such a methodology are these long-standing interpretative points: (1) *Doctrine*: Plato had various doctrines, such as the theory of Forms, recollection, etc., and an interpreter's main concern was deciding what those doctrines were and determining their value, that is, whether they are correct or good. (2) *Development*: Plato's philosophy evolved over time from an earlier Socratic Period, where he was essentially relaying Socrates' philosophy, to a Middle Period critical of that philosophy, to a later Platonic Period where he espoused his own views, and the main concern is to determine how Plato's philosophy developed and in what order Plato composed his works. (3) *Didactic*: The primary purpose of the dialogues is to communicate Plato's doctrines, for what other purpose could there be? (4) *Probative Arguments*: The arguments presented in the dialogues are Plato's own, used to promote his doctrines, and the concern is whether they are valid, and if not, what does one make of it? (5) *Seriousness*: Plato's dialogues are all business, meant to convey his doctrines. The many instances of levity Plato employs in dialogues are usually dismissed as inconsequential. (6) *Treatise*: The dialogues are essentially a disguised treatise meant to convey his doctrines where any literary or dramatic function is merely extraneous window dressing and the primary interlocutor is also representative of Plato's actual

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<sup>98</sup> Press, *Plato's Dialogues*, vii.

<sup>99</sup> Press quoting Rorty, *Plato's Dialogues*, vii. Regarding rational reconstruction, see in the same volume: Press, "Principles of Dramatic and Non-Dogmatic Plato Interpretation," 111n15, 114n23.

<sup>100</sup> Gill, 147.

philosophical view.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the analytic approach is one more akin to the natural sciences or mathematics, as its methodology is steeped in hypotheses, argument, and rigor. It recognizes the literary effects of Plato's dialogues as "charming to read, but not bearing upon him as a philosopher...."<sup>102</sup>

### 2.3.2 *The Literary Approach*

Rather than trying to reduce Plato's works "to a series of numbered (and impersonal) propositions," the literary approach starts from the "inconvertible fact that Plato's corpus is made up of works of literature, fictional in at least a minimal and formalistic sense."<sup>103</sup> It can be broadly summarized by two main points: a suspicion of the doctrinal interpretation, i.e., reading Plato as having or espousing doctrines in the dialogues, and the "belief that literary and dramatic matters are important (even essential) to proper understanding of the dialogues and Plato's philosophy as found in them."<sup>104</sup>

Tania L. Gergel explains the literary approach in more depth:

In very general terms this can be characterized as a tendency towards 'openness.' More specifically, this tendency is manifested in features such as the inclusion of a broad range of interpretative methodologies; an emphasis on dialogue form and how it militates against an overly dogmatic reading of Plato; the rejection of highly determinate chronological and developmentalist accounts; the idea that we must respect the integrity of individual dialogues as well as examining their role within the corpus; and the consideration of aspects such as the dramatic and rhetorical features of the texts, which may have been sidelined by other approaches.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Press, "The State," 509-510.

<sup>102</sup> Press quoting Grote, "The State," 510n27.

<sup>103</sup> Rowe, *Plato and the Art*, 9n22; Inwood, 86.

<sup>104</sup> Gerald A. Press, ed., *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 2. See also Press, *Plato's Dialogues*, 5-6.

<sup>105</sup> Tania L. Gergel, "Plato as Literature," review of *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient* by J. Annas and C. Rowe; *Plato as Author. The Rhetoric of Philosophy* by A. Michelini; *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* by S. Blondell, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 124 (2004): 174.

The rise of the literary and decline of the analytic approach stem from a variety of sources—pragmatism, existentialism, and phenomenology’s emphasis on the literary nature of Plato’s dialogues; the influence of classical and hermeneutical studies that emphasize the various modes of communication and functions that texts can possess; and attention to different types of writing and audiences provided by semiotics—all of which contributed to the systematic depreciation of the interpretive commitments mentioned above (§2.3.1), the net result being that the analytic paradigm those commitments comprised became less paradigmatic.<sup>106</sup>

That Plato had doctrines and put them forth has been undermined by scholars’ research on “Plato’s anonymity,” “frequent ambiguity,” and his own disclosure regarding his hesitancy of the written form’s usefulness for conveying philosophical ideas.<sup>107</sup> Developmentalism was undermined considerably by the discrediting of stylometric evidence, and serious doubt grew that it could in fact succeed in providing a chronology to the dialogues.<sup>108</sup> The dialogues’ simple, straight-forward nature has been questioned by a variety of evidence. Their didactic function can be doubted, for “at least some of them may have been intended as dialectical exercises, as philosophic training, as advertising for the Academy, irony, or political satire.”<sup>109</sup> This is compounded by evidence that the main interlocutor in Plato’s dialogues may not actually be Plato’s “mouthpiece” and that the arguments presented are either not held by Plato or are purposefully fallacious to serve a point. Thus, the probative nature of the dialogues’

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<sup>106</sup> Press, “The State,” 510-511.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 511, see especially notes 34-36.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 511-512. Nails, *Agora*, 53-135, provides a thorough review of this conclusion.

<sup>109</sup> Press, “The State,” 512, see especially notes 40-44.

arguments is dubious.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, the dialogues' seriousness must be approached with hesitancy. Plato himself doubted writing's value and constructiveness toward philosophy, which may explain "the prevalence and implications of humor, irony, and play throughout the corpus" as well as his use of rhetoric—all point to a distinct lack of seriousness in his writing.<sup>111</sup> Finally, congruent with the above, the idea that the dialogues are disguised treatises has been compromised. It runs aground against various criticisms. Some claim it is just *prima facie* false or falls prey to the intentional fallacy while others, under interpretive grounds, say it causes undue interpretative problems and provides impoverished interpretations. In addition, approaching the dialogues as treatises avoids their dramatic and historical context, that is, they exhibit literary characteristics atypical of treatises and may have even been interpreted as dramas to be performed or at least delivered out loud to audiences, which is more in line with the transition from an oral to a literate culture that Plato was a part of.<sup>112</sup>

As we can see, the literary approach is one that has more in common with the methodology of the humanities than it does with science, emphasizing the ambiguity and plethora of interpretations available to us when reading the dialogues. The growth of these various interpretations and their acceptance has weakened the Developmentalist

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<sup>110</sup> Press, "The State," 512, see especially notes 45-48. Although being wary of simply assuming that what is written is *prima facie* Plato's position is good advice, extending this to point of disavowing the possibility of discovering Plato's position at all seems misguided. As Booth notes, the mere act of writing forces authorial judgments and positions; everything an author presents or shows us will serve to tell us the author's intentions, as "the very choice of what [the author] tells will betray [the author] to the reader"; so no matter the artifice of literary devices used to hide the author from the reader, the author "can never choose to disappear" despite the author's disguises (20).

<sup>111</sup> Press, "The State," 512.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 512, see especially notes 54-61. According to Eric Havelock, it was this shift "which was responsible for the development of abstract and analytical thinking themselves and in various spheres of human inquiry, including history, science, and philosophy" [Harvey Yunis, "Introduction: Why Written Texts," in *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8-9]. See the essays and references in the same volume for more on this transition as well as Nails, *Agora*, 139-191, for more on Havelock's position as well as a critique.

position to the point where it is no longer considered the standard position. This has meant that the arrangement of Plato's corpus that accompanied it is also no longer certain. Contemporary scholars run the gamut when arranging Plato's works, some returning to the use of tetralogies, others sticking to the Early, Middle, and Late division of Developmentalism, while others create their own arrangements.<sup>113</sup> Some deny that any chronology is even possible or even worthwhile and therefore look at each dialogue individually, while others do so believing it is the preferable method to start any investigation in to Plato.<sup>114</sup>

## 2.4 Interpretative Principles

All of the dichotomous interpretive strategies mentioned above (§2.1-2.3) are more than likely wrong at their extremes. More moderate positions within the various approaches are probably closer to truth. However, dissecting and assessing them is made difficult due to their interrelatedness. Many of the approaches share certain affinities with each other. For example, the skeptical approach naturally lends itself to a sort of Developmentalism—Plato is showing us that philosophy is a matter of constantly testing, challenging, and reforming our ideas upon new or better information, which is evident in the method he uses in the dialogues as well as in the dialogues themselves as the positions they put forth evolve. By contrast, the doctrinal approach is akin to a Unitarian view, where “Platonic philosophy is essentially an interconnected system of doctrines, grounded on key principles, and explicitly presented in Plato's text through the mouth of

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<sup>113</sup> Catherin H. Zuckert's *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), is a good example of creating new arrangements. See page 9 for her arrangement.

<sup>114</sup> See for example: V. Tejera, *Plato's Dialogues One by One: A Structural Interpretation* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1984).



the main speaker.”<sup>115</sup> The idea that Plato is speaking through one of his main interlocutors brings up another issue—these approaches also revolve around similar interpretive problems within the dialogues. For example, the Socratic problem, which centers on “disentangling the Socrates who is a character in Plato’s dialogues from the historical Socrates,”<sup>116</sup> is central to the debate between Unitarianism and Developmentalism. Similarly, deciding to what extent—if any—Plato’s characters represent or are the mouthpiece for Plato’s own views is crucial for the literary and analytic approaches.

As we can see, the history of Platonic studies is mired in complicated, sometimes bitter debates, ones where it seemingly looks as though progress is hard fought and rare, for there is an overwhelming dearth of definitive evidence to persuade us one way or the other. Whereas there is a bounty of circumstantial evidence available to either side in a given interpretive debate. Thus, we are faced with a perennial problem regarding these Platonic debates, as “the factors that give support to either interpretation are never fully explicit or entirely free from ambiguity (little in Plato is), and so both sides consider themselves supported by the textual evidence.”<sup>117</sup> As such, it is necessary to be aware of these alternative ways of reading Plato so that the account any scholar provides can be weighed against the others for plausibility. This is what we hopefully achieved in preceding sections. Moreover, it has ideally had the benefit of pointing out what are

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<sup>115</sup> Gill, 147.

<sup>116</sup> George Klosko, *The Development of Plato’s Political Theory* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23. For a view on how to do untie such a Gordian knot see Gregory Vlastos, “The Paradox of Socrates,” in *Studies in Greek Philosophy: Volume II: Socrates, Plato and their Tradition*, ed. Daniel W. Graham (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3-18. For a more in-depth treatment see Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates*, 45-80.

<sup>117</sup> Dorter, *Form and Good*, 9.

certain to be interpretative presumptions that any Plato scholar will be forced to make while reading the dialogues. Let us examine some that will be taken in this essay.

The reading of the *Theaetetus* in this essay takes a middle ground between the two poles of skepticism and doctrinalism. It does so insofar that it seems apparent that in many cases Plato does indeed put forth certain philosophical positions. He takes a stance and pushes for it. However, Plato does not always do so explicitly, and the stance that he is taking may be pushing for certain methodological points rather than theories. For example, Plato probably did have certain theories regarding epistemology or ethics, which he tried to advocate, to some extent, in his dialogues, but it seems that what is more crucial to him is not so much the general conclusion we reach, but the way in which we do so. In this manner, the essay also takes a skeptical viewpoint inasmuch as this approach, in its milder forms, advocates such a methodology. Plato, like any good philosopher, had views on important matters and thought his were correct, but also recognized the precarious foundations that these views rested upon.

Although there is strong evidence for both Unitarianism and Developmentalism, and strong versions of either position are likely not the case,<sup>118</sup> this essay will be working under and arguing for a Developmentalist position insofar as the Developmentalist interpretation provides for a more cohesive reading of the *Theaetetus*, particularly when comparing the exposition of “knowledge is perception” at 151-187 and the wax example at 191-196.

The division between literary and analytic approaches to understanding Plato is another divide with respect to which this essay too will take a moderate course. Reducing Plato’s dialogues to a series of discrete, organized propositions can no doubt be helpful in

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<sup>118</sup> Klosko, 24-26.

trying to understand Plato's complex ideas. They cannot, however, come at the expense of ignoring the literary aspects of the dialogues. Plato's arguments are embedded in literary garb not extraneously but with purpose. If it seems to distract or to hide his arguments, it may be thus so that students must work them out themselves. Other times the literary devices supplement the argument by telling us what to pay attention to and what to avoid.<sup>119</sup> This does not mean of course that Plato's arguments are unimportant, rather it means Plato's philosophy is presented in tandem with his literary goals.

As previously mentioned, there is still much debate among commentators as to what extent the character of Socrates in Plato's works is the historical Socrates as well as to what extent he is the mouthpiece for Plato's own views. These issues cannot be fully addressed here. For the purpose of this essay, the question of whether Plato is representing the historical Socrates through the character Socrates will not be addressed except to the extent that the essay supports a Developmentalist position, which generally argues for and is amenable to that idea. Regarding whether the character Socrates represents Plato's thoughts, the working hypothesis will be that Socrates the character does generally express Plato's position. In this way, we need not make any hasty or precarious "assumptions about why he wrote, and why he wrote in dialogue form"; moreover, we are still free to include dramatic elements that challenge that hypothesis when it seems evident, and if it "helps us to understand the argument" or "gives us clues

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<sup>119</sup> As Booth notes, "every literary work of power—whether or not its author composed it with his audience in mind—is in fact an elaborate system of controls over the reader's involvement and detachment along various lines of interest" (123).

as to why the argument takes the course it does, so much the better for our interpretation.”<sup>120</sup>

Neither the complexity of Platonic interpretation nor the fact that we are taking a relatively moderate position within these interpretative traditions should hinder us from wading into the interpretative fray and trying to make some progress. Concerning the contemporary debate on Platonic interpretation, Michael Stokes remarks that, “Hellenists [classicists and philologists] and philosophers have vied with each other in our time for the soul of Plato, for the interpretation of Plato to our generation.”<sup>121</sup> As we have seen this point is applicable to all generations trying to understand Plato, for there is always a debate on how best to do so. To those who dedicate their life to studying and unraveling Plato, these intellectual struggles can seem like trench warfare, with neither side making any headway—delivering the coup de grâce to the other side staying always out of reach. But battles are won in a variety of ways. Tactical and strategic brilliance often plays a role, but so do the individual battles that soldiers themselves are engaged in. The preponderance of individual, seemingly insignificant struggles can add up to larger effects in the warfront. Something similar is what we are proposing here. The present discussion could in no way cover all the literature or decide these often static, vexing conflicts of minutia. It is, however, reasonable to focus in one particular front and provide evidence that at least in this place a specific view accounts more thoroughly for what is presented. That is what we hope to do here by focusing on the interpretative struggle concerning first definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*.

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<sup>120</sup> Kraut,” 29. See same volume, 25-30, for the justification and evidence behind such a view. For an opposing view see the many essays in Press, *Who Speaks for Plato?*

<sup>121</sup> Michael C. Stokes, *Plato's Socratic Conversations: Drama and Dialectic in Three Dialogues* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1.

### 3 KNOWLEDGE IS PERCEPTION

The *Theaetetus* focuses on the question: “What is knowledge?” Its main interlocutor, Socrates, considers three definitions of knowledge, all of which he eventually finds inadequate. Opening with a conversation between Eucleides and Terpsion in the city of Megeira, the *Theaetetus*, jumps to an exchange between a young mathematics student and the dialogue’s namesake, Theaetetus, his teacher Theodorus, and Socrates.<sup>122</sup> In typical Socratic fashion, Socrates tests Theaetetus by questioning him on the nature of knowledge and asking him to define it.<sup>123</sup> Theaetetus promptly provides examples of knowledge, but fails to deliver “what knowledge itself is.”<sup>124</sup> Socrates then offers his aid as a “midwife” to assist in giving birth to Theaetetus’ answer.<sup>125</sup> With this assistance, Theaetetus proposes the thesis that “Knowledge is simply perception” (KP).<sup>126</sup> This first definition is considered and rejected in 151-187.

#### 3.1 The Theories of Theaetetus, Protagoras, & Heraclitus

Socrates begins his analysis of KP by associating it with the philosophical theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus, which hold, respectively, that man is the measure

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<sup>122</sup> 142-143c.

<sup>123</sup> 143d-145e.

<sup>124</sup> 146a-d, 146e.

<sup>125</sup> 149-151d; The classic treatment of socratic midwifery is M.F. Burnyeat, “Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration.” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 24 (1977), 7-16. See also Sedely, *Midwife*.

<sup>126</sup> 151e. This is meant to be an identity statement, such that perceiving is knowing and vice-versa (CT, 53; BT, 10). It is unclear how “perception” or *aisthêsis* is to be understood. Michael Frede, “Perception in Plato’s Later Dialogues,” in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) argues that the word “perception” has several different subtle meanings: the first is “quite general” and is “used whenever someone becomes aware of something,” the second is “restricted to cases of awareness that somehow involve the body,” and the third is narrower still restricted to a “passive affection of the mind” and is akin to what we would call a “sense-perception” (3-4, 4, 8). See TC, 53-55, for a brief summary of the issue.

of all things (Measure Doctrine-MD)<sup>127</sup> and that everything is in flux (Heracleatian Flux-HF). Socrates notes that Theaetetus' definition is "no ordinary account of knowledge" but the very same that Protagoras used to hold albeit presented differently.<sup>128</sup> According to Socrates, Protagoras' MD is essentially a type of relativism or subjectivism, for "as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you."<sup>129</sup> Thus a blowing wind, cold to one person but not to the other, "according to Protagoras is cold for the one and not so for the other."<sup>130</sup> And if appearances and perceptions are equivalent, as Socrates and Theaetetus both agree, then "things *are* for the individual such as he perceives them."<sup>131</sup> Accordingly, KP, as understood through MD, seems like a good candidate for knowledge because it meets one of the conditions of knowledge that both Socrates and Theaetetus agreed to—that knowledge is unerring.<sup>132</sup> There is, however, a slight problem in that one individual's unerring perception can conflict with another's.

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<sup>127</sup> Protagoras' Measure Doctrine, as presented by Plato, is ambiguous in that the phrase can be translated in multiple ways (CT, 57-58).

<sup>128</sup> 152a. Although, "Plato himself knew that Protagoras' opinion about knowledge was not the same as Theaetetus'" [Chappell, quoting the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*, "Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), "under 6.1 The Definition of Knowledge as Perception: 151d-e," URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/plato-theaetetus/>].

<sup>129</sup> 152a. There is a host of literature debating whether Protagoras, as portrayed by Plato, is a relativist (about truth or perceptions) or subjectivist or even what we may call an infallibilist. Much of this revolves around how we understand the verb "appears" and "perceive" as well as qualifiers such as "for me" in the text. See David Bostock, *Plato's "Theaetetus"* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1988), 41-44, for a brief discussion about their ambiguity. See Myles Burnyeat, "Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Later Greek Philosophy," *Philosophical Review* 85, no. 1 (Jan. 1975): 44-69, and Myles Burnyeat, "Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Philosophical Review* 85, no. 2 (April 1976): 172-195, for arguments that Protagoras is a relativist. Arguments that Protagoras is a subjectivist or infallibilist are put forward by Gail Fine in "Protagorean Relativisms," 132-159, "Conflicting Appearances: *Theaetetus* 153D-154B," 160-183, and "Plato's Refutation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*," 183-212, all collected in *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays* (NY: Clarendon Press, 2003). Fine, in "Plato's Refutation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*," 202n3, also has listed a variety of sources which advocate for a view similar to Burnyeat's.

<sup>130</sup> 152b; BT, 11.

<sup>131</sup> 152b, 152c, my emphasis.

<sup>132</sup> 152c. The other condition being that it "is always of what is."

Therefore our incorrigible perceptions, which are both correct according to MD, seem to contradict each other.

To avoid this complication, Socrates brings up Protagoras' so-called "secret doctrine," the Flux theory of Heraclitus.<sup>133</sup> As Socrates describes it, under HF:

There is nothing which in itself is just one thing: nothing which you could rightly call anything or any kind of thing. If you call a thing large, it will reveal itself as small, and if you call it heavy, it is liable to appear as light, and so on with everything, because nothing is anything or any kind of thing. What is really true, is this: the things of which we naturally say that they 'are,' are in process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with another. We are wrong when we say they 'are,' since nothing ever is, but everything is coming to be."<sup>134</sup>

Socrates further expounds upon some of HF's implications.<sup>135</sup> As he explains, qualities such as a white color are "not itself a distinct entity," for to be such a discrete thing it would have to be "standing at its post," which is impossible according to HF's dictum that everything is in "flux and motion."<sup>136</sup> But, moreover, qualities only exist in the relationship between the perceiver and the object being perceived, and are "private to the individual percipient."<sup>137</sup> As a result, changes in the qualities of things are essentially changes in the perceptions of those things.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> 152c. This is probably not meant as an historical attribution i.e., Plato is not making the explicit claim that Protagoras actually taught or believed in HF, just that Protagoras' theory somehow implies or underlies it. In fact, according to Zina Giannopoulou, most commentators recognize that is unlikely that this secret doctrine is historically representative of either Protagoras or Heraclitus ("Plato's *Theaetetus*," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "under 3. Outline of the Dialogue: b. Knowledge as Perception (151d-186e), <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/theatetu/>>). Bostock, 47-58, provides a brief discussion of why MD might need HF.

<sup>134</sup> 152de. For more on Heraclitus see: Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus: Flux, Order, and Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, eds. Patricia Curd and Daniel W. Graham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169-188.

<sup>135</sup> 153d. Prior to this there was an ironic section of bad arguments and jokes arguing for Heraclitus (153ad), which may hint at how we should be reading it (BT, 13; CT, 66).

<sup>136</sup> 153d, 153e, 152e.

<sup>137</sup> 154a. BT, 14-15 notes the similarity with Berkeley and Russell to this section of the *Theaetetus*.

<sup>138</sup> 154a-155c; CT, 67. Socrates illustrates this with the dice paradox.

Socrates goes on to explain HF more thoroughly to enlighten Theaetetus noting that, according to the theory, “everything is really motion, and there is nothing but motion.”<sup>139</sup> These motions come in two types—active and passive—both of which are slow because they move “in one and the same place, and in relation to the things in the immediate neighborhood.”<sup>140</sup> These slow motions can be called parents, as they produce quick twin offspring—“what is perceived” and “the perception of it”—“which are inseparable from each other.”<sup>141</sup> This family of motions—the slow parents and the quick twin offspring—constitutes the world of perception, which Socrates illustrates with the concept of an eye seeing a white stone.<sup>142</sup> The eye—the slow, passive motion—interacts with the slow, active motion—the stone—that produces “what is perceived”—whiteness—and “the perception of it”—the sight or seeing that takes place (See Table 4 on page 49).<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> 156a. Thus in this “vast array of motions” there are “no things, only processes” (BT, 16).

<sup>140</sup> 156a-d.

<sup>141</sup> 156b-d; Bostock, 62.

<sup>142</sup> This description of perception is often compared to the one given in the *Timeaus*, which is particularly important in deciding between a Unitarian or Development reading depending on where one places the *Timeaus* chronologically. Finding similarities typically strengthens a Unitarian reading whereas dissimilarities tend to favor Developmentalism. For the former view see: I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* Vol. 2 (New York: The Humanities Press, 1963), 21-22; Francis MacDonald Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 49-50. For the latter see: John McDowell, *Plato "Theaetetus"*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 49-50, 139; Bostock, 63-65, 146-155; BT, 17-18. CT, 75-78, finds considerable similarities but that they are still fundamentally different. Andrea Tschemplik, *Knowledge and Self-Knowledge in Plato's "Theaetetus"*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 79-85, argues that it “mirrors Socrates’ description of erotic encounters in the *Phaedrus*” (9). The classic debate concerning the *Timeaus*’ chronological placement is between G. E. L. Owen, “The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues,” *The Classical Quarterly* 3, no.1/2 (Jan. - Apr., 1953): 79-95, and Harold Cherniss, “The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues,” *The American Journal of Philology* 78, no.3 (1957): 225-266.

<sup>143</sup> Bostock, 62. “The usual interpretation of this passage identifies the eye and the stone with the active and passive ‘slow changes’ that are introduced in the beginning. (It appears from 159d that it is the stone which acts and eye that is acted on.)” (62). See also 182a in support. Although see CT, 74, which, interprets the eye as active and the stone as passive. According to Alan Silverman, “Flux and Language in the *Theaetetus*,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 18 (2000): 140n46, one should read the eye as passive and the stone as active, but it can vary and it may be more appropriate to do otherwise given Protagoras’ Measure Doctrine.



Table 4: Socrates' Explanation of the Heraclitean Twin Theory of Perception

Motion			
Slow Passive	Quick	Quick	Slow Active
Eye	Sight	Whiteness	Stone
An eye sees a white stone			

Source: Adapted from Myles Burnyeat, *The "Theaetetus" of Plato*, trans. M.J. Levett, rev. and intro. Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1990), 16.

All things that can be perceived can be explained through the relationship and interaction of these motions, but we can never really say that any “one of them is anything in itself.”<sup>144</sup> Both the perceiver and the perceived “cease to have an independent status” for they are intimately and intricately linked to each other; neither can be said to exist or come to be outside of their bond to one another.<sup>145</sup> Under HF, everything is in so much flux or motion that even the verb ‘to be’ is unusable for nothing is stable across time; rather, we should “refer to things as ‘becoming’” because nothing can stand still.<sup>146</sup> This applies to both object and subject. For ‘men’ and ‘stones’ are really just aggregates of fleeting moments tied to their partner moments, such that a perception of one thing is an entirely new perception, and “makes another and a changed percipient.”<sup>147</sup> Thus,

<sup>144</sup> 157a.

<sup>145</sup> Robert J. Roeklein, *Plato versus Parmenides: The Debate over Coming-into-Being in Greek Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 165.

<sup>146</sup> 157b.

<sup>147</sup> 157c, 159e-160a. Even these aggregates cannot be said to be anything in themselves, as they are the “mere collocation of distinct items whose togetherness is an arbitrary imposition of ordinary language.” (BG, 32). Thus, as Mary Margaret McCabe, *Plato's Individuals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 271, notes, such a theory “is lethal to the individuation of objects; for they turn out to be bundles of perceptual episodes, with nothing to tie them together. It is equally lethal to the individuation of persons. No one is somebody, since every episode is new. There are, then, only stages, not persons for the stages to

“even the perceiver we call Socrates at one moment is distinct from the perceiver we call Socrates at any other moment.”<sup>148</sup> This point is accentuated by the theory in that even in instances where multiple perceptions are occurring at the same time, none can properly be said to belong the same perceiver, for it is the eye that is seeing or the tongue that is tasting.<sup>149</sup> Thus, “there is no more to this Socrates than his tasting tongue” conglomerating with his other senses.<sup>150</sup> As a consequence of this theory, Socrates, notes that all things must be discussed in terms of being “‘for somebody or ‘of something’ or ‘relatively to something,’” that is, “relativized to a single perceiver and to the time of their perception.”<sup>151</sup>

The end result of this theory highlights why Socrates suggests that HF and MD are linked. According to the theory, all perceptions are explained by the interactions between constant motions, thus no two perceptions can ever truly be in conflict with one another and neither can one individual’s perceptual judgment be refuted by another’s, for they are both the “products of instantaneous perceptual relations, obtaining between ever-changing perceived subjects and ever changing perceived objects.”<sup>152</sup> Put another way, if there is “no such thing as *the* temperature of the wind” as HF implies, then the appearances of MD can never conflict because there is no objective basis to do so—all experiences, all perceptions have as “much right to be considered veridical as any other;

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constitute. Individuals fall apart.” As CT, 84, notes, Plato’s discussion at 157-160 is perhaps the first instance of a “clearly articulated skeptical account of the self.”

<sup>148</sup> BG, 31. “According to the flux theorist, we have the same person if and only if we have the same combination of a perception and a perceiving” (CT, 79).

<sup>149</sup> BG, 31. See 156de, 159cd.

<sup>150</sup> BG, 31, see especially 31n10.

<sup>151</sup> 160c; BT, 17.

<sup>152</sup> Giannopoulou, “Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “under 3. Outline of the Dialogue: b. Knowledge as Perception (151d-186e), <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/theatetu/>>.”

all are on a par, all true for the individual subject who has them.”<sup>153</sup> Each person’s perceptions, because they are peculiarly and uniquely his or her own thus remain incorrigible and knowledge remains unerring. But this is only so if one accepts HF; that is to say, HF is “the necessary condition of perception’s infallibility.”<sup>154</sup> Therefore, if one is to accept KP, then one must also accept MD and HF, for “the various theories coincide.”<sup>155</sup>

### 3.2 Criticism of Theaetetus’ Definition

Having fully explained the implications of Theaetetus’ theory by associating it with the theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus, Socrates then starts to dismantle the linked theories one by one. First off is Protagoras’ theory. Socrates lays out a variety of criticisms, which can be broadly organized into three groups: the existence of wise men, the self-refutation of MD, and Protagoras’ faulty definition of expertise. Having shown that MD is faulty, Socrates turns to that Heraclitus’ theory, arguing that HF leads to absurdity. Finally, Socrates directly refutes Theaetetus’ theory that knowledge is perception without reference to either MD or HF.

#### 3.2.1 Refuting Protagoras

Plato has many to objections to MD, some of which are more farcical than others.<sup>156</sup> Regardless of whether a few of these points are meant purely for humor’s sake,

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<sup>153</sup> BT, 15, 18.

<sup>154</sup> 160cd; Sedley, *Midwife*, 40.

<sup>155</sup> 160d; “Literally, ‘have converged to the same thing’” (BT, 284n14). See also BT, 9-10. For a detailed defense of this convergence see Burnyeat, “Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed,” *Philosophical Review* 91 no. 1 (Jan. 1982): 6n2.

<sup>156</sup> CT, 88, 94. CT, 86-107 provides a point by point commentary for each objection, up to the self-refutation, with notes surveying the relevant literature. It is could place to start if one wishes to get a

the end result of the deluge of objections is the untenability of MD. To set up the first major objection to MD, Socrates poses a question:

if, as we have repeatedly said, only the individual himself can judge of his own world, and what he judges is always true and correct: how could it ever be, my friend, that Protagoras was a wise man, so wise as to think himself fit to be the teacher of other men and worth large fees; while we, in comparison with him the ignorant ones, needed to go and sit at his feet—we who are ourselves each the measure of his own wisdom?<sup>157</sup>

The mere existence of wise men, such as Protagoras himself, flies in the face of MD, which holds that everyone is equal in their wisdom and knowledge. Compare this to the *Cratylus*, where it is stated more succinctly: “if wisdom exists, and foolishness likewise, then Protagoras cannot be telling the truth. After all, if what each person believes to be true *is* true for him, no one can truly be wiser than anyone else?”<sup>158</sup> In the *Cratylus*, this appears to be a sufficient refutation of MD.<sup>159</sup> In the *Theaetetus*, however, Socrates continues to lay down charges against MD.

Not wishing to be unfair to his opponent, Socrates allows Protagoras to defend himself by having a fake conversation with the ghost of Protagoras.<sup>160</sup> “Protagoras” attempts to avoid Socrates’ first refutation by re-conceiving the notion of wisdom. The wise or experts are those who “change a worse state into a better state,” e.g., a doctor.<sup>161</sup> Thus, wisdom is not the shift from false beliefs to true beliefs, but rather from a

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broader picture concerning the status of these various objections. For brevity’s sake, I have only mentioned what seems them to be take the away message of this section. Sedley, *Midwife*, 54-55, provides a nice summarizing figure of these objections with both explicit and implicit responses on behalf of Protagoras.

<sup>157</sup> 161de.

<sup>158</sup> *Cratylus*, 386d.

<sup>159</sup> Giannopoulou, “Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “under 3. Outline of the Dialogue: b. Knowledge as Perception (151d-186e), <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/theatetu/>>.”

<sup>160</sup> 165e-168c. Mary Margaret McCabe, *Plato and his Predecessors: The Dramatisation of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially 40-50, gives an interesting interpretation of this section. In her view, these fictional personages of Plato’s predecessors helps to make apparent that their radical views of epistemology, logic, or metaphysics “renders vacuous their own defense of their principles: for it renders vacuous their own conceptions of themselves” (289).

<sup>161</sup> 167a.

detrimental to a beneficial state. All beliefs, therefore, can be true, but necessarily beneficial. After “Protagoras” has finished responding to Socrates, Socrates draws Theodorus, Protagoras’ friend and Theaetetus’ teacher, back into the dialogue, for it was suggested during that fake conversation that Socrates has been scaring Theaetetus into his position, who, as a “small boy... couldn’t see what was coming,” and is no appropriate advocate for Protagoras’ theories.<sup>162</sup>

Theodorus’ conversation with Socrates leads to a more potent but subtle criticism of MD, one that is evidently meant to be taken seriously and not be mistaken as “merely an amusing game” like some of the earlier arguments.<sup>163</sup> This, of course, is the famous *peritrope* or table-turning argument, which attempts to show that Protagoras’ theory is self-refuting.<sup>164</sup> Using Protagoras’ own commitments, Socrates shows that holding these commitments are seemingly contradictory. According to MD, there are no false judgments, but it is the case that many people think that there are false judgments, as exemplified by the “vast army of persons” who disagree with one’s decisions and think them false.<sup>165</sup> Thus, following MD, if all judgments are true, the judgment that there are false judgments is true, and hence there are false judgments. If MD is false and not all judgments are true, then there are false judgments. Regardless, the result is the same—

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<sup>162</sup> 167a-d; 166a.

<sup>163</sup> 168d.

<sup>164</sup> There is a host of literature surrounding the success or non-success of this argument, much of which revolves around the use of qualifiers. For a survey see the citations in note 129 and Bostock, 89-92. See also: Michael V. Wedin, “Animadversion on Burnyeat’s Theaetetus: On the Logic of the Exquisite Argument,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, no. 29 (2005): 171–91; Mehmet M. Erginel, “Relativism and self-Refutation in the ‘Theaetetus,’” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, no. 37 (2009): 1–45; T.D.J. Chappell, “Reading the Peritrope: Theaetetus 170c-171c,” *Phronesis* 51 no. 2 (April 2006): 109–139; Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, “Plato’s Self-Refutation Argument in ‘Theaetetus’ 171A-C Revisited,” *Phronesis* 39 no. 2 (1994): 136–149.

<sup>165</sup> 170d.

”men do not always judge what is true [and] judgments are both true and false.”<sup>166</sup>

Moreover, Socrates notes this most subtle, “exquisite feature”: Protagoras must, according to MD, grant that those who think MD false are right, and by conceding this point he is admitting that his own position is false.<sup>167</sup> On the other hand, those who think MD false “do not admit that they are wrong” and Protagoras must grant this as true as well.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, MD is disputed by everyone, including Protagoras, and “since it is disputed by everyone, the *Truth* of Protagoras is not true for anyone at all, not even for himself.”<sup>169</sup> Socrates, it seems, has at the very least shown that Protagoras’ position “has no claim on our attention” because of how patently undesirable and ridiculous it appears to be.<sup>170</sup> With MD seemingly on the run, Socrates digresses and considers the relationship between justice and prudence.<sup>171</sup> Having gone on at length, Socrates recognizes that their

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<sup>166</sup> 170c. In a more concise, logical form, and prima facie “the argument is as follows: If (A) every judgment is true, and (B) it is judged that A is false, then (C) it is true that (A) is false and, consequently, (D) (A) is false (Burnyeat, “Self-Refutation”, 173).

<sup>167</sup> 171ab.

<sup>168</sup> 171b.

<sup>169</sup> 171bc. “Truth” is a play on words and is reference to Protagoras’ book of the same name.

<sup>170</sup> Bostock, 95. Showing the impracticality of opponents’ positions appears to have been Plato’s primary goal as opposed to showing logical inconsistency: “we should limit ourselves to registering the purpose that Plato explicitly attributes to the self-refutation arguments that we have analysed: silencing his extremist opponents and showing to everyone else how undesirable and ridiculous their position is [Luca Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation: The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 234].

<sup>171</sup> 172-177b. This famous section of the *Theaetetus*, like much of the dialogue, is controversial. Opinions regarding its relevance vary widely: Gilbert Ryle, *Plato’s Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 158, is dismissive of the passage, while McDowell, 174, likens the passage to a footnote or appendix. Historically, however, it has proven to be quite influential (BT 35). For our discussion, the most relevant question is whether the digression mentions Forms or not, and if it does, what kind of Forms. But this question, though relevant in the larger picture of our discussion, is tangential in the smaller and so will not be discussed. For a survey regarding Forms in the digression see: Cornford, 85n1, 86n1, who answers in the affirmative; Richard Robinson, “Form and Error in Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” in *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 39-59, who answers in the negative; and R. Hackforth, “Platonic Forms in the *Theaetetus*” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, 7 no. 1/2 (Jan. - Apr., 1957): 53-58, who responds to Robinson; McDowell, 174, and Bostock, 98-99, take a neutral stance on the issue.

discussion is getting off track and insists they return to the original subject at hand before “a flood of new subjects” overwhelms them.<sup>172</sup>

Returning to the cause of refuting Protagoras, Socrates revisits the notion of wisdom and expertise, which Protagoras had recently defined in his defense beyond the grave. According to “Protagoras,” man is the measure of all things when it comes to sensible properties, such as “white and heavy and light and all that kind of thing without exceptions.”<sup>173</sup> But Socrates wonders how well that will work with “things that are going to be in the future.”<sup>174</sup> More directly, the question posed is this: “whether the individual himself is the best judge, for himself, of what is going to seem and be for him in the future?”<sup>175</sup> The answer is that he is not. Rather, the expert is going to be the better judge. If we have two people, one a layperson and the other a doctor, both making opposite judgments *now* concerning the layperson’s health in the *future*, the future will vindicate which judgment is correct, and most likely it will be the expert. In fact, this is how the expert is defined. Thus, the existence of experts being able to accurately predict future outcomes shows that there are indeed people who are wiser than others, refuting MD.<sup>176</sup> Despite raising apparently devastating objections to Protagoras’ theory, Socrates thinks that “we shall have to come to closer grips with the theory” to be sure, for there is an area—the “immediate present experience of the individual which gives rise to perceptions and to perceptual judgments”<sup>177</sup>—where it is far more difficult to show that

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<sup>172</sup> 177b.

<sup>173</sup> 178b.

<sup>174</sup> 178b.

<sup>175</sup> 178e.

<sup>176</sup> 178c-179b.

<sup>177</sup> 179d, 179c. It seems that we have not only thoroughly refuted Protagoras but KP as well, for the argument “has apparently been that the expert knows things about the future, whereas one does not perceive the future. Thus, some things are known but not perceived” (Bostock, 96).

“not every man’s judgment is true.”<sup>178</sup> Here, Socrates is suggesting that thus far, by refuting Protagoras, they have only shown that there are cases of knowledge which are not perception, but the converse—that every case of perception is a case knowledge,” is still untouched.<sup>179</sup> For KP to work, each appearance at the immediate point of experience must remain incorrigible. Investigating this requires considering the theory of Heraclitus, which underlies MD, in greater detail.

### 3.2.2 Refuting Heraclitus

Understanding Heraclitus and the followers of Flux, the Heracliteans, means “going back to [their] first principle,” and getting a better grasp on “this thing that they are talking about when they say that all things are in motion.”<sup>180</sup> Socrates had already established that HF was necessary for MD, as it guarantees the incorrigibility of appearances (§3.1). Now he needs “to find out how radical the flux needs to be *in order to preserve the definition of knowledge as perception*.”<sup>181</sup> Socrates and Theodorus both agree that there are at least two types of motion, alteration and spatial movement, which parallels the Heraclitean theory of perception mentioned in 155-158, alteration corresponding with the parent motions and spatial movement corresponding with the twin offspring motions.<sup>182</sup> They also concur that both forms of motion are occurring at the same time when Heracliteans say all things are in motion, for if we removed one type of motion, “things would be at rest or not moving as well as moving” and “it would be no

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<sup>178</sup> 179c.

<sup>179</sup> McDowell, 179.

<sup>180</sup> 179e, 181c.

<sup>181</sup> 152-157; Sedley, *Midwife* 90.

<sup>182</sup> 181d; Giannopoulou, “Plato’s *Theaetetus*,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “under 3. Outline of the Dialogue: b. Knowledge as Perception (151d-186e),” <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/theatetu/>>. See §3.1.1.



more correct to say all things are in motion than to say that all things stand still.”<sup>183</sup>

Therefore, “all things are always in every kind of motion,” because the Heracliteans cannot countenance any stability at all.<sup>184</sup>

With both Socrates and Theodorus agreeing to this more radical or extended formulation of HF, Socrates reiterates the Heraclitean twin theory of perception—the interaction of active and passive motions producing twin offspring.<sup>185</sup> Socrates notes that these offspring, qualities such as white, cannot be said to stand still, since it was agreed that under HF all things are in every kind of motion, both through space and in alteration. Thus, whiteness is always in a constant “process of change” passing from white to another color such that “it is always quietly slipping away as you speak.”<sup>186</sup> This situation applies to all aspects of perception such that we cannot say that we are seeing as opposed to not-seeing if everything is in motion. So we are left with the inability to really say anything of import, for “if all things are in motion, every answer, on what-ever subject, is equally correct, both ‘it is thus’ and ‘it is not thus.’”<sup>187</sup> In other words, saying anything is “as wrong as it is right,” and, moreover, we cannot even rightly use words like ‘thus’ for uttering it would be to pin it down so it “would no longer be in motion.”<sup>188</sup> Under HF, language is not only “emptied of all positive meaning” but is impossible.<sup>189</sup> Such an

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<sup>183</sup> BT, 48; 181e.

<sup>184</sup> 181e; McDowell, 180. For the Heraclitean’s anti-stability sentiment see, 180b. This argument is “obviously spurious,” but is used by Plato to show how committed Heracliteans are to movement and change (McDowell, 180). But see BT, 48-49, for why it should be taken seriously.

<sup>185</sup> 182ab.

<sup>186</sup> 182d. See Sedley, *Midwife*, 92n5, for discussion whether this qualitative change is dealing with particular instances of whiteness or “abstract or universal” whiteness.

<sup>187</sup> 182e, 183a.

<sup>188</sup> BT, 45; 183b. As Silverman, “Flux,” 150-151, notes, “if there are no predicates or properties, if ‘flux’ cannot mean flux, or anything else either, then it is impossible for the Heraclitean to formulate any thesis.” For Cornford, 99, this is Plato’s way of making us “feel the need the need of his Forms without mentioning them.”

<sup>189</sup> BT, 45. Sedley, *Midwife*, 93-99, notes that this ‘collapse of language’ is, contrary to how it is often presented, “one made by the Heracliteans on their own behalf, and not by Socrates against them” with

outcome is absurd, and so it seems that HF is refuted.<sup>190</sup> Socrates has thus at long last freed Theaetetus' definition from both Protagoras and Heraclitus' clutches and shown that knowledge cannot be perception if it is associated with MD and HF... unless of course Theaetetus "has some other way of stating" KP.<sup>191</sup> Socrates blocks this avenue next.

### 3.2.3 Refuting Theaetetus

Having shown KP is unacceptable because it appears to entail the unsatisfactory, false theories of both Protagoras and Heraclitus, and leads to a variety of absurdities, Socrates proceeds to provide an argument against KP that does not go through a critique of MD or HF. He asks his fellow interlocutor, Theaetetus, whether it is *with* or *through* the senses that we perceive, and both agree that it is more proper to say "through." Saying "with" implies that each individual sense is doing the perceiving—the eyes are seeing, the ears are hearing, and so on.<sup>192</sup> But this makes it seem as though we have within us a number of senses sitting inside us, "like the warriors in the Wooden Horse at Troy, each doing its own perceiving with no coordination between them."<sup>193</sup> This would be strange indeed and both Socrates and Theaetetus agree it is more likely that "some single form,

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Socrates' aim being "to find out exactly how self-denying about language they must themselves be setting out to be in order to maintain their position (93, 95). The result being not the collapse of language, the view that "things cannot be adequately expressed in language," but that there "can be no dialectic, and, more specifically, no definitions. Consequently, Theaetetus' definition of knowledge really does undermine itself: it is a definition that presupposes a world in which there can be no definitions" (99).

<sup>190</sup> Silverman, "Flux," 110, notes that the argument takes the form of a type of self-refutation: "if everything is in flux, then language is impossible; but language is possible; therefore, it is not the case that everything is flux." He also notes, 110n4, that the end result plays out the same as a *reductio ad absurdum*, which is how it is often presented (see, for example, BT, 51).

<sup>191</sup> 183c.

<sup>192</sup> Socrates is unclear as to whether this is a faculty or an organ. He often switches back and forth between usages or is noncommittal, but nothing of philosophical substance, from Plato's point of view, turns on this (BG, 41-42). See also BT, 54n68.

<sup>193</sup> 184cd; BT, 54.

soul or whatever one ought to call it, to which all these [perceptions] converge—something *with* which, *through* the senses, as if they were instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible.”<sup>194</sup>

Socrates makes “clear that he does not believe in verbal niceties for their own sake” and that this question is important to resolve “if it is with one and the same part of ourselves that we reach” perceptible objects.<sup>195</sup> Noting that each sense has its own proper object—that “what you perceive through one power you can’t perceive through another” so that, e.g., sight cannot hear sounds—Socrates points out that commonalities exist between certain perceptions that do not correspond to any of the bodily senses.<sup>196</sup> These commonalities are qualities or properties such as “being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, same and different; also one, and any other number applied to them.”<sup>197</sup> Accordingly, there must be something, which corresponds to such features; when we consider, say a sound and a color, it is impossible “to grasp what is common to both either through sight or through hearing.”<sup>198</sup> Theaetetus thus concludes: “in investigating the common features of everything the soul functions through itself.”<sup>199</sup>

The most important of these common features is existence or being, as Socrates says this must be necessarily and logically prior to truth, which itself is a precondition for knowledge. If a person cannot get at being, then he or she cannot get to truth, “and if a

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<sup>194</sup> 184d. As Burnyeat notes, “strange” (δεινόν) can also be translated as “terrible,” which may be more apt “since the envisaged state of affairs deprives the self of percipience” (BG, 30n7).

<sup>195</sup> BG, 36; 184d.

<sup>196</sup> 185a. Determining proper objects for the senses is difficult. Bostock, 111-118, provides a nice summary of this problem. See also: Richard Sorabji, “Aristotle on Demarcating the Five Senses” in *The Senses: Classical and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Fiona Macpherson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64-82.

<sup>197</sup> 185ed.

<sup>198</sup> 185b.

<sup>199</sup> 185de; “As a later philosopher [Hume] might put it, there is no such thing as an impression of being or sameness or of unity. Which proves they are not grasped through the senses but through the mind’s own activity of thought” (BT, 58).

man [or woman] fails to get at the truth of a thing, will he [or she] ever be a person who knows that thing?”<sup>200</sup> Socrates and Theaetetus are inclined to say “no.” Thus, because perception cannot grasp being, which only the soul can access and is a precondition for truth, and truth is required for knowledge, KP is false—”perception and knowledge could never be the same thing.”<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> 186c.

<sup>201</sup> 186e. This passage is pretty controversial and complex. Some of these intricacies will be discussed in §4.1 and §4.2, but it would be impossible to go over them all in this essay, especially some of the more nuanced interpretations. For an introduction see: BT, 52-65; McDowell, 185-193. Bostock, 110-145, provides a detailed account of this section and provides a nice overview of scholar’s interpretations of it as well. For a more detailed look at this section’s controversies consider these classic treatments: John Cooper, “Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (*Theaetetus* 184-186),” *Phronesis* 15 no. 2 (1970): 123-146; D. K. Modrak, “Perception and Judgment in the *Theaetetus*,” *Phronesis* 26 (1981): 35-54; BG, 29-51. See also: Joseph Shea, “Judgment and Perception in *Theaetetus* 184-186,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 no.1 (January 1985): 1-14; Toomas Lott, “Plato on the Rationality of Belief. *Theaetetus* 184-7,” *Trames* 15 no. 4 (2011): 339-364; Allan Silverman, “Plato on Perception and ‘Commons,’” *The Classical Quarterly* 40 no. 1 (1990):148-175.

#### 4 TWO READINGS & ARGUMENT

Much ink has been spent in this essay to go over *Theaetetus* 151-187 and even more has been spilled debating how to read this section. Although there are a variety of ways to read this section, there are two dominant strains. The first, what we can call Reading A, naturally goes with a Unitarian position, and has been, “in one version or another,” the prevailing view amongst Plato scholars.<sup>202</sup> The second, Reading B, naturally goes with a Developmentalist viewpoint.<sup>203</sup> The difference between the two views is dependent on many small, interrelated textual arguments in *Theaetetus* 151-187, the rest of the dialogue, and how one sees it fitting in the context of Plato’s corpus, but it largely comes down to two main and interconnected questions. One, is the exclusion of the Forms a subtle argument meant to show their necessity in epistemology or is their exclusion indicative of Plato’s change in opinion regarding their efficacy in epistemology? Two, is Socrates’ account of perception, that is, the combined theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus, one that Plato himself accepts as accurate, but confined to a “distinctive area of application, the perceptible or sensible world” or does he reject them outright?<sup>204</sup> These questions come to a head in the final refutation of KP at 184-187, where they lead to quite different understandings of the overall argument presented in 151-187.

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<sup>202</sup> CT, 241; BT, 8n14.

<sup>203</sup> See Nicholas White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1976), 157-97; and BT, 61-65, for interpretations that take a middle road between Readings A and B. See also McDowell, 117-193, and Bostock, 41-156, for alternative interpretations that vary from the Reading A and B script on various points.

<sup>204</sup> CT, 48.

#### 4.1 Reading A/Unitarian

Although mentioned in brief several times, let us now turn to Reading A and how its interpretation of 151-187 plays out. According to Reading A, the theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus are true theories that Plato accepts as his own if they are “restricted to perception and the world of sensible things”<sup>205</sup> This means that Plato agrees with Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things,” and thus in our incorrigible awareness of sensible qualities.<sup>206</sup> It also means that Plato is on the same page with Heraclitus, that the sensible world is one of constant flux— things never being but always becoming. What the arguments of 151-187 show is that when one takes these theories to the extreme, that is, in an unrestricted manner, “as their authors did not take care to restrict them,” what results is a cavalcade of absurdities.<sup>207</sup> Thus, what is refuted are extreme, extended, or unrestricted versions of MD and HF, leaving moderate versions intact.<sup>208</sup> David Bostock summarizes this point clearly:

What happens in the refutation of Protagoras is that a clear distinction is drawn between the moderate thesis that all judgments *of perception* are true, and the much more extreme thesis that all judgments whatever are true. The ‘refutation of Protagoras’ refutes the extreme thesis, but leaves the moderate thesis still standing. Similarly, perhaps, with the ‘refutation of Heraclitus.’ Here again we may distinguish the extreme thesis that things are always changing in *every* respect from a moderate thesis...that nothing can persist as the same thing through a change. So an apparently persisting thing must really be a succession of different things, and hence a “collection.”<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> BT, 8. Ronald M. Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge: A Commentary of Plato's Theaetetus*, (Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press, 1992), 101n50, provides an excellent survey of the scholars who think that the theory of perception is one adhered to by Plato as well as those that disagree.

<sup>206</sup> Cornford, 92n1. Though see BT, 46n58.

<sup>207</sup> BT, 8.

<sup>208</sup> Exactly what these extreme and moderate theses are is disputed. See following block quote for Bostock's take. For, Crombie, 12, the moderate thesis is that “all properties result from activity” and the extreme thesis is “that there are no stable properties.” Cornford, 99, and Ryle, 273, find the extreme thesis to be extending flux to the meaning of words. See also McDowell 180-184.

<sup>209</sup> 108-109. It is not clear from the text that Plato makes a distinction between moderate and extreme Flux as is the case with Protagoras' Measure Doctrine (109). That there are two levels of Protagoreanism being considered is uncontroversial.

To avoid the absurdities of the extreme thesis while maintaining the more moderate versions requires positing “the *intelligible world* (the world of the Forms) alongside the *sensible world* (the world of perception).”<sup>210</sup> It is agreed that knowledge “is always of what is, and unerring.”<sup>211</sup> Perception, under Reading A, is something that both Protagoras and Heraclitus get right, but still cannot “yield knowledge” because it fails one of the two main criteria of knowledge.<sup>212</sup> Protagoras’ theory secures that perception is unerring, but Heraclitus’ theory fails to secure perception’s stability, that it is always of what is. Thus, perception cannot be knowledge. Knowledge requires a stability that perception does not provide, but the Forms do.

This point is illustrated in Reading A’s interpretation of 184-187, as it should be, for under this reading, it is “only now are we coming to the proof that perception is not knowledge.”<sup>213</sup> The Heraclitean twin notion of perception is still active in 184-187 such that both the Wooden Horse and its various senses, the subject and its organs, are still “themselves Heracleitean momentary existents.”<sup>214</sup> They are, however, not enough to account for our perceptual experiences in that we recognize common features among sensible things that are not the proper objects of the senses that perceive them. These common features, “being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, same and different” and the like are in fact, though he does not call them by this name, “what Plato calls ‘Forms’ or ‘Ideas,’” which must, the argument shows, be accessible through “one and the same

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<sup>210</sup> CT, 48.

<sup>211</sup> 152c.

<sup>212</sup> BT, 8.

<sup>213</sup> BT, 53.

<sup>214</sup> CT, 147.

part of ourselves.”<sup>215</sup> Socrates and Theodorus conclude this to be the mind or soul. With this mind added on to receive and coordinate the reports of the senses, we come to the conclusion that common features cannot be grasped through the senses but only through “the mind’s own activity of thought.”<sup>216</sup> This is crucial for one of these common features is *being* or existence, a precondition for truth which itself is a precondition for knowledge. Perception cannot be knowledge on this account because the perceptible world is one of *becoming* and not *being* and does not “grasp the changeless being of the Forms.”<sup>217</sup> The stability the Forms provide is a prerequisite for knowledge and “establishing the truth of definitions.”<sup>218</sup> Thus, for Reading A, Plato is indirectly arguing for the necessity of Forms by remaining relatively silent about them, only occasionally hinting at them.<sup>219</sup>

#### 4.2 Reading B/Developmentalist

The silence about Forms for Reading B is a not a result of their necessity; instead the silence is indicative of Plato’s reticence regarding the Forms’ efficacy for epistemology.<sup>220</sup> According to this reading, Plato also does not buy into the theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus. Rather, they are entertained as sufficient and necessary conditions for Theaetetus’ definition “to hold good.”<sup>221</sup> In other words, “the first part of

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<sup>215</sup> 185ed; Cornford, 106, 105; 184d.

<sup>216</sup> BT, 58.

<sup>217</sup> CT, 51; BT, 60.

<sup>218</sup> BT, 60. This is essentially Aristotle’s understanding of Plato’s position (*Metaphysics*, 987a32-b14, 1078b12-17).

<sup>219</sup> This is essentially Cornford’s position: “The Forms are excluded in order that we may see how we can get on without them; and the negative conclusion of the whole discussion means that, as Plato had taught ever since the discovery of the Forms, without them there is no knowledge at all (28). See also pages 99, 102-109.

<sup>220</sup> See for example: Crombie, 14; Owen, 85-86; Robinson, 39-59; W.G. Runciman, *Plato’s Later Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 6-58.

<sup>221</sup> BT, 9. See Burnyeat, “Idealism and Greek Philosophy, 6n2, for the details.



the *Theaetetus* is not a direct presentation of Plato's views on the nature of perception and its objects, but rather an examination of the assumptions necessary to make fully consistent the thesis that 'knowledge is perception.'<sup>222</sup> Thus, what appears to be Plato accepting the theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus is really Plato working out what must be the case for knowledge to be perception, and finding that these associated theories are full of absurdities. But unlike Reading A, the absurdities arise "not from trying to take the theories as *unrestrictedly* true, but from trying to take them as true *at all*."<sup>223</sup> Reading B sees 151-183 as a large "*reductio ad absurdum*: Theaetetus  $\rightarrow$  Protagoras  $\rightarrow$  Heraclitus  $\rightarrow$  the impossibility of language. Hence Theaetetus' definition is impossible," and KP cannot be true.<sup>224</sup> Moreover, Reading B sees the three theses as intricately linked, for they "coincide"; they are "necessary conditions (Theaetetus  $\rightarrow$  Protagoras  $\rightarrow$  Heraclitus as well as sufficient (Heraclitus  $\rightarrow$  Protagoras  $\rightarrow$  Theaetetus)."<sup>225</sup> Thus, if one fails they all fail. Subsequently, according to Reading B, KP has been thoroughly, but indirectly, refuted by 183 insofar as it is associated with MD and HF. It remains possible in principle that Theaetetus could ground KP in another manner. This possibility is sidelined, however, with a direct proof at 184-187.

The description of the Wooden Horse and its "warrior-senses" is not of the Heraclitean variety, as we would expect with an interpretation that holds that Plato

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<sup>222</sup> Norman Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1962), 77.

<sup>223</sup> CT, 49.

<sup>224</sup> BT, 9. CT, 51, notes that the *reductio*, as quoted in BT, does not specify whether it is to be applied to a restricted or unrestricted version of Protagoras' and Heraclitus' version theories and thus does not necessarily support Reading B. Reading A can be compatible with such a *reductio* as long as it can prove that is the unrestricted flux thesis that is refuted in 151-187, leaving the moderate theory intact. It should be pointed out that if one takes the argument at 181de seriously, as BT, 48-49, does, it shows "that there is no escaping the further developments which are to be the theory's [Heraclitean Flux] undoing" (Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy," 6n2). Thus, there is no restricted or moderate thesis to be had as one is forced to accept the extreme or unrestricted version.

<sup>225</sup> 160d; BT, 10. See Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy, 6n2, for greater detail. The closer the logical relations between these three theses the more support there is for Reading B, and the further they are shown to be apart the more support for Reading A (CT, 49).

refuted HF.<sup>226</sup> Rather, the “organs and objects...are the ordinary stable kind” with each one, however, being an “autonomous perceiving subject,” which is the result of the earlier Heraclitean story if flux through time is removed.<sup>227</sup> Where Reading A sees the common feature of “being” discussed in the argument as the world of being encapsulated by the Forms, Reading B sees it not as some “high-flown abstraction” but “simply the general notion corresponding to the ordinary everyday use of ‘is.’”<sup>228</sup> All judgments, either implicitly or explicitly, use the verb “to be,” and they all call “upon the capacity to think that if something is thus or that it is not thus.”<sup>229</sup> Judgments require thought—the ability to state what is the case, which the senses are incapable of doing.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, the reason why perception cannot grasp being “stems from an inability to frame even the simplest proposition of the form ‘x is F.’”<sup>231</sup>

#### 4.3 Two Divergent Paths in a Dialogue

We are left with two distinct interpretations at this point.<sup>232</sup> According to Reading A, Plato accepts a limited version of MD and HF as well as implicitly argues for the Forms. Reading B, on the other hand, sees Plato rejecting MD and HF and possibly moving away from the Forms. If we are to determine which interpretation is correct, we need to get a handle on the two questions mentioned above—the question of Forms and the question of Plato’s acceptance of Protagoras and Heraclitus’ theories..The Forms’

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<sup>226</sup> BT, 55.

<sup>227</sup> BT, 55, 56.

<sup>228</sup> BT, 59.

<sup>229</sup> BT, 59. See 185c and 183ab.

<sup>230</sup> BT, 59.

<sup>231</sup> BG, 45.

<sup>232</sup> There are, as mentioned before, many interpretations, but, as we are talking about two general interpretative trends and trying to arbitrate between the two, we can talk as though these interpretations are exhaustive of our options.

presence in the *Theaetetus* is meant to be subtle, at least according to Reading A, as it is their absence that points to their necessity in explaining the nature of knowledge.

Therefore, there is, according to one interpretation, a purposeful dearth of evidence concerning the Forms in the dialogue itself. Using the question of Forms as a measure to determine which reading is correct is problematic. The latter question is less so.

Although Plato's overall commitment to the Protagorean and Heraclitean theses are dependent on his corpus as whole, his commitment to them in the *Theaetetus* itself should obviously be determined by evidence within the dialogue. Moreover, answering this question should lead us to a solution regarding the Forms in the *Theaetetus*. If Plato accepts some form of MD and HF, as we see with Reading A, he needs the stable and timeless Forms as objects of knowledge. The sensible world is one of becoming, not being, and it is only being which constitutes knowledge. Because HF and MD are true of perception, perception's inability to "grasp the changeless being of the Forms" and provide the "truth of definitions" shows perception cannot be knowledge.<sup>233</sup> Whereas, if Plato does not accept MD and HF, the Forms are not necessarily needed to supply the stability that knowledge requires. Their absence is just that—an absence. Perception cannot be knowledge, not because it cannot grasp the Forms, but because the senses are incapable of making judgments stating what is the case, which is the sole province of the mind.<sup>234</sup> Figuring out whether Plato truly accepts MD and HF thus offers a window into his opinion on the Forms. Moreover, it can help determine which reading is more likely to be correct for they are mutually exclusive; either Plato accepted moderate versions of

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<sup>233</sup> BT, 60.

<sup>234</sup> BT, 59.

MD and HF like in Reading A or he rejected it like in Reading B. The question remains how to determine which is the choice Plato made.

The final defeat of KP is a critical junction in the *Theaetetus*, for we have arrived at a divergence which will make all the difference, as once we have chosen our path we cannot turn back. If we take the first path, Reading A, we are committed to seeing Plato as subscribing to a theory of perception similar to what Protagoras and Heraclitus endorse. This should continue in the rest of dialogue if this truly was the path taken. If the second path, Reading B, was taken, however, we would expect not to find remnants of a Protagorean epistemology or Heraclitean ontology. As Burnyeat remarks concerning Reading A's interpretation of the final refutation, "so what is said about perception in 184a-186e should be consistent with what has gone before."<sup>235</sup> We can, however, extend Burnyeat's observation beyond the discussion of the first definition of knowledge. What is said about perception later in the dialogue also should be consistent with what has gone before. It this investigation we turn to now.

#### 4.3.1 Essential Features of MD & HF

We are faced with two mutually exclusive interpretations, Reading A and Reading B. Their exclusivity is primarily due to Reading A seeing Plato as accepting limited forms of MD and HF whereas Reading B sees Plato as rejecting any form of MD and HF. After KP's final refutation at 184-187, we would assume that whatever conclusions the dialogues' interlocutors came to regarding the viability of the first attempt at defining knowledge would continue into their subsequent attempts. Therefore, if we find evidence

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<sup>235</sup> BT, 53.

confirming or disconfirming Plato's acceptance of MD and HF later in the dialogue, after 184-187, then we should have substantiated one reading over the other.

Our investigation now hinges on two questions: (a) what are the features that comprise MD and HF so we know what to look for later in the dialogue, and (b) where is the best place to do so? Regarding the former, it is proposed that there are at least these salient features, some of which are interrelated, that constitute the moderate version of MD and HF in 151-187:

- (1) the incorrigibility of individual, private appearances;
- (2) objects and subjects consistent with moderate flux;
- (3) a raw mechanism of perception "wherein the [subject] perceives just when affected by the [object]" <sup>236</sup> and;
- (4) independent, autonomous senses which can identify what is presented to them and are a form of awareness in their own right.

All need further explanation.

Socrates' exposition of Protagoras and Heraclitus' theories in 151-160 seem to justify points (1)-(3). One of the conditions of knowledge that Socrates and Theaetetus agreed upon was its unerringness.<sup>237</sup> This was secured by appealing to MD, that "as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you"; therefore, "every perceptual appearance is shown to be the *unerring* apprehension of *how things are*

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<sup>236</sup> Mary Margaret McCabe, "Perceiving that we see and hear: Aristotle on Plato on judgment and reflection" in *Perspective on Perception*, eds. Mary Margaret McCabe and Mark Textor (Frankfurt, Germany: Ontos Verlag, 2007), 175. McCabe's original phrase is "wherein the agent perceives just when affected by the patient." I changed it to avoid confusion, for in the literature concerning 151-157 'agent' is often used to identify the object of perception and 'patient' is used to discuss the passive percipient (e.g., Roecklein, 165; Cornford, 46n3, 50). This change seems justified as the point is to get at the causal structure between the perceiver and the thing perceived. Most commentators find that the active motion is the thing perceived whereas the passive motion is the percipient, the point being that the causal direction is from object to subject. This seems to be the point behind McCabe's statement here as earlier when discussing the raw relation between subject and object we have a similar causal direction: "raw may be about the feel of it (I smell the buttered toast in some irreducibly subjective way) or about its causal structure (the buttered toast somehow impinges on my sensation directly). The subject-object relation in which Socrates is interested involves the second kind of rawness" (156n54).

<sup>237</sup> 152c.

for the perceiver.”<sup>238</sup> Avoiding the problem of conflicting appearances required resorting to HF so as to abolish stability through time lest there be something objective to contradict the incorrigibility of our individual, private appearances.<sup>239</sup> Under HF and its twin theory of perception, we have a very mechanistic account of perception. Perception is composed of several motions—the active and passive slow ones generating quick ones. Perception occurs when the active and passive slow motions—the object and subject—are in position to meet, and “*only then* does the perception take place” producing the quick motions of sight and the quality perceived.<sup>240</sup> Generally speaking, the subject is the passive party, and the object of perception is the active party.<sup>241</sup> Thus, we have a raw mechanical process, where the object impinges upon the subject. But aside from this mechanical process where the object impinges upon the subject only when both happen to be in position to do so, this mechanical process of motions and movements also underlies the flux necessary to secure the incorrigibility of our perceptions. As a result of these constant motions interacting with one another and generating other motions, at a given moment, “all percepts are the result of an interaction between *constantly changing* sense-organs and a *constantly changing* environment.”<sup>242</sup> Thus, at a time, what is true for me is really true for me because it is “a unique event with a unique content.”<sup>243</sup> Moreover, even the subject is technically unique, as “a perception of something else is another perception, and makes another and a changed percipient.”<sup>244</sup> Both object and

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<sup>238</sup> 152ab; BT, 11.

<sup>239</sup> See §3.1.

<sup>240</sup> McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 135.

<sup>241</sup> Roecklein, 165. I say generally because there is room for debate, see note 143. See also: Polansky, 97n41.

<sup>242</sup> Gulley, 78. See for, example, 153d-154b, 155d-157c, 157e-160a.

<sup>243</sup> CT, 77. See also, Silverman, “Commons,” 155, 156n12.

<sup>244</sup> 157e.

subject are to be understood wholly in relation to the other, which are in a constant state of becoming.<sup>245</sup>

The above state of affairs exists under both interpretations. For Reading B it is, however, merely for the sake of the argument whereas for Reading A, because Plato accepts those theories as true in the sensible world. Thus, for Reading A:

Sensible things are, Plato agrees, in a perpetual flux of becoming, and in perception each of us has a ‘measure’, i.e. an incorrigible awareness, of the sensible qualities whose coming and going constitute that flux. But Plato will then argue that this awareness, incorrigible though it be, is not *knowledge*, precisely because its objects belong to the realm of becoming, not being.<sup>246</sup>

Hence, we would expect (1) belief in the incorrigibility of individual, private appearances alongside; (2) objects and subjects consistent with moderate flux and; (3) a raw mechanism of perception to continue in the dialogue if Reading A is correct. These points seem correct given Plato’s exposition and, according to Reading A, his acceptance of moderate versions of MD and HF (see Table 5 on page 72).

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<sup>245</sup> “But nothing that can properly be called an agent or patient exists until the two come within range of one another” (Cornford, 50).

<sup>246</sup> BT, 8.

Table 5: Extreme and Moderate Versions of Protagoras and Heraclitus' Theses

Theses	Extreme/Unrestricted	Moderate/Restricted
<b>Protagoras' Measure Doctrine</b>	All Judgments <i>whatsoever</i> are true	All Judgments of <i>perception</i> are true
<b>Heraclitus' Flux Doctrine</b>	Things are always changing in <i>every</i> respect	Things cannot persist as the same numerically identical thing through change, so they are really just a succession of different things, a collection

Source: Adapted from David Bostock, *Plato's "Theaetetus"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 108-109.

If points (1)-(3) seem justified given the exposition of MD and HF at 151-160, point (4), the idea that the senses can in some respect identify their objects and are independent, comes into focus with the final refutation of KP, 184-187, where the two readings fully diverge. Recall that at the beginning of this section Socrates considers whether it is *with* or *through* the senses that we perceive, and ultimately Socrates favors *through*. The *with* idiom makes it seem as “if there were a number of senses sitting inside us” with “each doing its own perceiving with no coordination between them,” and Socrates finds this strange.<sup>247</sup> This oddity is avoided, however, if there is a “unitary centre to which the separate senses converge—the soul or mind”—“something *with* which, *through* the senses, as if they were instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible,” which Socrates later proves by showing that it is with this one thing that we grasp being.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> 184d; BT, 54.

<sup>248</sup> BT, 54; 184d.



For Reading A, the moderate version of flux is still in play; for Reading B, flux is gone. Hence, for Reading A, the sense-organs and the subject are still “themselves Heraclitean momentary existents,” that is, “mere motions or processes” as explicated in 151-160.<sup>249</sup> And like in that theory, the senses in the Wooden Horse are the ones doing the perceiving—the tongue is tasting; the eye is seeing—but it is necessary to “add a central enduring mind to receive and coordinate the information they supply.”<sup>250</sup> That the senses are separate, independent authorities, is not strange under this view. The strangeness of the Wooden Horse that Socrates recognizes comes from *not* having something “behind the separate organs...centrally receiving their reports,” and this is why it is rejected.<sup>251</sup>

According to Reading B, these warrior-senses in the Wooden Horse are stable and regular but also autonomous, each perceiving independently from each other the subject of those senses either being relegated to the senses or as an empty container like the Wooden Horse itself. It is just a remainder of the earlier theory of perception minus flux. The strangeness of the model that forces Socrates to reject it is a result of the entire model, particularly the autonomous senses with no role for a subject like Socrates. Thus, Plato’s rejection of the Wooden Horse is “the natural corollary of rejecting Theaetetus’ definition and everything that goes with it.”<sup>252</sup>

So Reading A is amenable to the idea that the senses can identify what is presented to them. This is what happens in the earlier Heraclitean theory of perception

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<sup>249</sup> CT, 147; BT, 56.

<sup>250</sup> BT, 56. See Cornford, 50n1, 105; McDowell, 143-144, 185. BG, 30-31, points out the similarity between the Wooden Horse and the theory of perception espoused earlier.

<sup>251</sup> Cornford, 105. “Plato’s present point is not that [the model] gives the wrong picture, but that it cannot be the whole picture” (BT, 56).

<sup>252</sup> BT, 55-56, 56.

and is still the case with the Wooden Horse. It just becomes necessary to add a central, perceiving mind to receive and coordinate the information they have identified independently. Such an understanding seems warranted also because Reading A is supported by a Unitarian viewpoint of Plato. Hence, we would expect to find a general congruency with Plato's other dialogues, particularly the Middle ones. This is exactly the case. For example, in the *Republic* the "senses are said to signify or report what it is they perceive to the soul."<sup>253</sup> On the other hand, Reading B's rejection of the Wooden Horse model is a rejection of the idea that the senses can identify what is presented to them, and is just a precursor to what Reading B says is the end result of 184-187, the separation of judgment from perception.<sup>254</sup>

#### 4.3.2 "*Knowledge is Perception*" and its Similarities to Empiricism

Having shown that points (1)-(4) are justified by the text and are reasonable features that constitute MD and HF, our task now turns to looking for them later in the dialogue. But where is the best place to do so? Let us review the points:

- (1) the incorrigibility of individual, private appearances;
- (2) objects and subjects consistent with moderate flux;
- (3) a raw mechanism of perception "wherein the [subject] perceives just when affected by the [object]" and;
- (4) independent, autonomous senses which can identify what is presented to them and are a form of awareness in their own right.

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<sup>253</sup> BG, 35. See Book VII, 523a-525a. BG, 33-36, and BT, 60-61, provides some additional references to the text where Plato seems to discuss the senses as having an identifying or judgmental capacity.

<sup>254</sup> It is debatable to what extent Plato divorces judgment from perception. Cooper, "Plato on Sense Perception," for example, argues that the senses can provide some very simple judgments whereas BG finds the separation much more thorough.

If after reviewing these we are reminded of empiricism, to borrow a phrase from Burnyeat, “things are as they should be.”<sup>255</sup> All are reminiscent of, if not the same as, features that can be found in various forms of empiricism.<sup>256</sup> This “decidedly empiricist” character has been recognized throughout history, although the lessons about empiricism we are meant to glean are less recognizable.<sup>257</sup> George Berkeley found within the *Theaetetus*’ pages the anticipation and affirmation of his own brand of empiricism whereas his near contemporary Richard Price instead found a refutation of such empiricism.<sup>258</sup> To see the connection we should briefly discuss empiricism.

Generally speaking, empiricism is the doctrine that the source of knowledge is sense-experience.<sup>259</sup> The basic idea is that we can build up complex systems of knowledge using basic, trustworthy perceptual experiences. Of course, creating such a system requires having “trustworthy” building blocks, which are for many empiricists, to speak broadly again, found in the “immediate awareness of sensible qualities.”<sup>260</sup>

Whatever else one may doubt, as Bertrand Russell puts it, “some at least of our

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<sup>255</sup> BG, 50n61.

<sup>256</sup> Point (2) may be the hardest to make this case for. However, insofar as this moderate flux theory sees objects and subjects as an aggregate or collection of sense-perceptions, then it is similar to the bundle theories of perception and self-identity of Berkeley and Hume. Hume, for example, was highly suspicious of the self’s very existence, for he could never find the impression that his idea of self was derived. When Hume went looking for it, he “always stumble[d] on some particular perception,” but never that of the self (*Treatise*, 1.4.6.3). All he ever encountered were perceptions, which successively fled about in inexhaustible configurations, and thus Hume concluded it was these “successive perceptions only that constitute the mind” (*Treatise*, 1.4.6.4). Thus, like in HF, the perceiving subject has “no simplicity in it at one time nor identity in different” (*Treatise*, 1.4.6.4). It is unencounterable “because it does not, properly speaking, exist at all” [Thomas C. Powell, *Kant’s Theory of Self-Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 5].

<sup>257</sup> BT, 10.

<sup>258</sup> BT, 1.

<sup>259</sup> More specifically it as “the thesis that there is no a priori metaphysical knowledge and all concepts are derived from experience” [Stephen Priest, *The British Empiricists* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5]. It should be noted that the *Theaetetus* considers a strict empiricism, one which equates perception with knowledge as opposed to the more generous empiricism that sees experience as its foundation (BT, 10).

<sup>260</sup> BT, 10.

immediate experiences seem absolutely certain.”<sup>261</sup> We have a similar a desire for certainty going on with the theories of Protagoras and Heraclitus.<sup>262</sup> The entire appeal to MD is to ensure that knowledge is unerring, that is, certain. Empiricism is definitely in the forefront of the dialogue, particularly in the section we have been discussing so far (151-187). If such a cursory glance shows a similarity, then a more probing look may prove fruitful.

What we are proposing is that the various features which comprise MD and HF, more specifically points (1), (3), and (4), are captured relatively well by the empiricist notion of sense-impressions.<sup>263</sup> The importance of this lies in the fact that in the second definition of knowledge—“knowledge is true judgment”—a model of the mind and perception, the wax model, is offered to account for false judgment, and is the predecessor to the model that Locke famously makes use of in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Although similar, there is an important difference between the two according to Burnyeat—the notion of a sense-impression, which is present in Locke but not in Plato.<sup>264</sup> If the notion of sense-impressions captures the essential features of MD and HF sufficiently, then the acceptance of sense-impressions by Plato should favor Reading A whereas its rejection should favor Reading B.

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<sup>261</sup> *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Cosimo, 1912), 9.

<sup>262</sup> Heraclitus for all intensive purposes is an empiricist (Priest, 14).

<sup>263</sup> Although it may be a little anachronistic to argue in this direction it is not overly so. Modern empiricists were heavily influenced by ancient empiricism, so many modern empiricist notions are direct descendants of ancient ones, and to turn to them to understand ancient ideas does not seem entirely impossible if we tread carefully. For the connection between the ancient and modern empiricism see, Michael Ayers, *Locke*, vol. 1, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 155, and especially Michael Frede, “An Empiricist View of Knowledge: Memorism,” in *Companions to Ancient Thought: Epistemology*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 225-250.

<sup>264</sup> BT, 100-101.

#### 4.3.2.1 Hume

If this program is to go forward, however, it will be necessary to show that these points do generally correspond with the notion of sense-impression. To do so, perhaps we can start with Hume who brought the term impression to the forefront. For him, impressions are “all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul,” which are to be distinguished from our ideas in terms of the “degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness.”<sup>265</sup> These impressions can be further divided into impressions of sensation and reflection. The first kind are those that “arise in the soul originally” and which “first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst or hunger, pleasure or pain of some kind or other. Of this impression there is a copy taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases; and this we call an idea.”<sup>266</sup> The second kind of impression are built upon these ideas.<sup>267</sup> These two categories constitute experience and are the foundation of knowledge. This gives us a good start with which to understand sense-impressions. According to Hume, sense-impressions are just those original sensations—pain, heat, thirst, etc.—that are forced upon our senses from, as he puts it, “unknown causes.”<sup>268</sup>

If this sounds strikingly familiar, it is because it brings to mind point (3) a raw mechanism of perception “wherein the [subject] perceives just when affected by the [object].” Notice the language with which Hume describes impressions: “strike upon,”

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<sup>265</sup> *Treatise*, 1.1.1.1.

<sup>266</sup> *Treatise*, 1.1.2.1.

<sup>267</sup> *Treatise*, 1.1.2.1..

<sup>268</sup> *Treatise*, 1.1.2.1. The *Treatise* “offers no explanation of how external objects (assuming there are such objects) affect our sense organs and thus become causes of what are called impressions of sensation, nor is there any attempt to prove that there is or is not an external or material world [David Fate Norton, “Editor’s Introduction,” in same volume, I19].

“make their way into,” “makes us perceive.” Hume’s sense-impressions have a raw mechanism similar to that found in HF and MD, where the subject is passive in perceiving, becoming aware of sensations only when impinged upon by objects. Indeed, Hume goes on to emphasize the involuntary nature of impressions such as, “figure and extension, colour and sound.”<sup>269</sup> This is further solidified by his definition of perception or what he typically calls sensation, which is merely “a passive admission of the impressions thro’ the organs of sensation.”<sup>270</sup>

Aside from point (3), we find an approximate expression of point (1) the incorrigibility of individual, private appearances, as Hume finds impressions to have high reliability and certainty. They are “all strong and sensible” and unambiguous, and are so “full [of] light themselves” that they can shed “light on their correspondent ideas, which lie in obscurity.”<sup>271</sup> Stronger language exists as well. In the *Treatise*, Hume states, “that all sensations are felt by the mind, such as they really are,” and that any doubt that might exist does not concern their nature but only “their relations and situations.”<sup>272</sup> This last part is addressed a few paragraphs later:

Add to this, that every impression, external and internal, passions, affections, sensations, pains and pleasures, are originally on the same footing; and that whatever other differences we may observe among them, they appear, all of them, in their true colours, as impressions or perceptions. And indeed, if we consider the matter aright, ‘tis scarce possible it shou’d be otherwise, nor is it conceivable that our senses shou’d be more capable of deceiving us in the situation and relations, than in the nature of our impressions. For since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear. Everything that enters the mind, being in *reality* a perception, ‘tis impossible any thing shou’d to *feeling*

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<sup>269</sup> *Treatise*, 1.4.2.16-18.

<sup>270</sup> *Treatise*, 1.3.2.2

<sup>271</sup> *Inquiry*, §4, part 1, 352.

<sup>272</sup> *Treatise*, 1.4.2.5. Hume is arguing “that the character of sensations qua sensations is fully known to each person who feels or experience them” (Annotations, same volume, 473).

appear different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken.<sup>273</sup>

Thus, Hume, although perhaps not to the same degree as Protagoras, does seem to find that the senses, and the impressions they report, are incorrigible in some respect.<sup>274</sup>

Point (4), that the senses can identify what is presented to them, is suggested by the language Hume employs. He often speaks of the senses “presenting” or “conveying” their impressions, that is to say, they identify what is presented to them and then relay that information to the mind.<sup>275</sup> They are the ones doing the perceiving.<sup>276</sup> This is evocative of Reading A where the senses report their findings to the mind. Additionally, he speaks of the senses as judges, therefore again signifying that the senses are a form of awareness in their own right and an independent authority distinguished from the mind or reason.<sup>277</sup> According to Hume then, the notion of sense-impression aligns well with the majority of the points that constitute MD and HF. But since we are looking to compare Locke with Plato, it would behoove us to examine Locke’s notion of sense-impression as well.

#### 4.3.2.2 Locke

Like Hume, Locke too divides experience into two basic sources: (a) sensations that are conveyed into the mind by external objects, and (b) reflection, the mind’s

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<sup>273</sup> *Treatise*, 1.4.2.7.

<sup>274</sup> This incorrigibility should not be taken to suggest that Hume thinks that our senses can lead us to the existence of an external world. As David Landy, “Hume’s Impression/Idea Distinction,” *Hume Studies* 32, no. 1, (April 2006): 123-124, suggests, this passage does seem to imply some sort of incorrigibility, but its main point is to show that “the senses are not the source of our mistake about the distinction between the external world and our perceptions.”

<sup>275</sup> See for example: *Treatise* 1.4.2.3-5, 1.1.1.10, 1.1.6.1, 1.2.3.15; *Inquiry*, §2, 335.

<sup>276</sup> See for example: *Treatise*, 1.3.6.2, 1.1.6.1.

<sup>277</sup> See for example: *Treatise*, 1.4.2.13, 1.2.4.23-25, 1.3.1.4, 1.3.1.6, 3.3.3.2

awareness of its own operations.<sup>278</sup> These provide the ideas that “stand for whatever is the object of the understanding,” and are the building blocks of knowledge.<sup>279</sup> Sensations are the “impression or motion made in some part of the body,” by outward objects that “produces some perception in the understanding,” things we would call sensible qualities like “yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet,” etc.<sup>280</sup> Locke’s notion of sense-impression, similar to Hume’s, is one where the subject is affected by external sensations that force themselves upon the senses.

As the description of sensation suggests, Locke is also committed to point (3), the raw theory of perception.<sup>281</sup> Perception only occurs when outward objects impinge upon the senses. Mentioned in numerous places throughout the *Essay*, Locke is adamant about the passive subject in perception because it establishes two important, related ideas.<sup>282</sup> One, Locke thinks passivity guarantees the legitimacy of external objects, that they are truly distinct from the perceiver, and that the ideas they produce are real and not fictitious.<sup>283</sup> This is derived from the second idea, simple ideas provided by sensation “cannot but correspond to their causes.”<sup>284</sup> If the subject is purely and wholly passive in receiving sensations, then the simple ideas they cause must be adequate, that is, they must

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<sup>278</sup> *Essay*, 2.1.3-4.

<sup>279</sup> Intro. §8. For a nice classification of these “blocks” see figure 1 in Vere Chappell, “Introduction” in *Locke* ed. Vere Chappell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8. For an in-depth discussion see: Martha Brandt Bolton, “The Taxonomy of Ideas in Locke’s *Essay*” in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke’s “Essay Concerning Human Understanding,”* ed. Lex Newman (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67-100.

<sup>280</sup> *Essay*, 2.1.23; 2.1.3. See also 2.19.1.

<sup>281</sup> Johnathan Bennett, “Locke’s Philosophy of Mind,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* ed. Vere Chappell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 91.

<sup>282</sup> See for example: *Essay*, 2.1.23-25, 2.9.1, 2.12.1, 2.22.2, 2.30.3

<sup>283</sup> *Essay*, 2.31.2

<sup>284</sup> Keith Allen, “Perception,” in *The Continuum Companion to Locke*, eds. by S.-J. Savonius-Wroth, Paul Schurman, and Jonathan Walmsley, (London: Continuum, 2010), 195-196



“perfectly represent those archetypes which the mind supposes them taken from,” because, in a manner of speaking, there is nothing to corrupt them.<sup>285</sup>

The idea that sensations perfectly represent what causes them is extremely similar to point (1), the incorrigibility of appearances. The passivity of sensation ensures that those sensations “cannot be made other than they appear, by any voluntary determination of ours,” that is to say “that they do not *err* in the information they give us.”<sup>286</sup> In fact, Locke believes that the senses provide “evidence that puts us past doubting,” and despite not having the certainty of other types of knowledge he has laid out still “deserves the name of knowledge.”<sup>287</sup> This certainty is, however, tempered in a similar manner as it was with MD and HF, for what the senses convey to the mind:

We cannot but be satisfied that there doth something *at that time* really exist without us, which doth affect our senses... But this knowledge extends as far as the present testimony of our senses, employed about particular objects that do then affect them, and no further.<sup>288</sup>

So the certainty of the senses is limited to a particular time much like it was with MD and HF. Moreover, Locke solves the problem of conflicting appearances—“how the same water, at the same time, may produce the idea of cold by one hand and of heat by the other”<sup>289</sup>—much like Protagoras does, by claiming that both sensations are in effect veridical.<sup>290</sup> Here again, we find Locke aligning with MD and HF, and more importantly approximating the incorrigibility of appearances. This becomes all but certain when we consider that Locke files the information of the senses as knowledge, and knowledge

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<sup>285</sup> *Essay*, 2.31.1

<sup>286</sup> *Essay*, 2.22.2, editor’s note 3, *Essay*, 4.9.3, my emphasis.

<sup>287</sup> *Essay*, 4.2.14; 4.9.3. Lex Newman, “Locke on Knowledge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke’s “Essay Concerning Human Understanding,”* ed. by Lex Newman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 323–325, provides a brief overview of the types of knowledge and their relationship in regards to certainty.

<sup>288</sup> *Essay*, 4.11.9.

<sup>289</sup> *Essay*, 2.8.21.

<sup>290</sup> Ayers, *Locke*, 166.

cannot be the source of error, thus showing that in some important respect the senses are incorrigible.<sup>291</sup>

Much like the passivity of the subject leads to appearances being incorrigible, it also leads to point (4), that the senses are aware in their own right and an independent authority. By having sense-perception be a passive endeavor, Locke is able to secure a degree of certainty with it, and in doing so he puts the senses on par with, if not prior to, reason.<sup>292</sup> That the senses provide information that does not err and is a form of knowledge means that it stands in some degree independent from any reasoning which may take place after perception.<sup>293</sup> This point as well as points (1) and (3) are succinctly on display in this passage from Locke:

Whilst I write this, I have, by the paper affecting my eyes, that idea produced in my mind, which, whatever object causes, I call white; by which I know that that quality or accident (i.e. whose appearance before my eyes always causes that idea) doth really exist, and hath a being without me. And of this, the greatest assurance I can possibly have, and to which my faculties can attain, is the testimony of my eyes, which are the proper and sole judges of this thing.<sup>294</sup>

Having gone through Hume and Locke we find that their notion of sense-impressions encapsulates many of the features of MD and HF, thus showing that sense-impressions would be a good criterion for determining whether Plato accepts or rejects MD and HF. It remains now to see whether this notion of sense-impressions is absent or present in Plato's wax example

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<sup>291</sup> *Essay*, 4.20.1.

<sup>292</sup> Ayer, *Locke*, 94. See also: Ayer, *Locke*, 153, 155, 167; Michael R. Ayers, "The Foundations of Knowledge and the Logic of Substance: The Structure of Locke's General Philosophy," in *The Empiricists: Critical Essays on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume*, ed. Margaret Atherton, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 19-46.

<sup>293</sup> Although see *Essay*, 2.9.2-4, 2.9.8-9, which seems to place the mind in a more prominent and active role.

<sup>294</sup> *Essay*, 4.9.2

## 5 BLOCKS &amp; TABLETS

As mentioned above, Burnyeat's *The "Theaetetus" of Plato*, discusses the historical significance of the wax image that Plato invokes in 191-196 by citing Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* where the image continues to thrive centuries later, albeit with, what Burnyeat considers, one crucial distinction; a sense-impression. By comparing Plato's wax metaphor in the *Theaetetus* with Locke's wax metaphor in the *Essay*—paying close attention to literary clues and understanding more thoroughly what a sense-impression is—we can conclude that Burnyeat is right in his assessment and that there is a crucial distinction: Plato rejects sense-impressions whereas Locke accepts them.

The Wax Block example occurs at a point in the *Theaetetus* when Socrates and Theaetetus are considering Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge, that is, knowledge as "true judgment."<sup>295</sup> Instead of discussing this definition, however, Socrates diverges on what seems a tangent; he wonders how false judgment is possible?<sup>296</sup> Like the previous definition, it is rife with different interpretations. Many commentators see the following discussion (187-201) as a series of puzzles that consider whether false judgment is possible, where the Wax Block is the fourth puzzle or account.<sup>297</sup> However, before we explore Plato's wax model it will be necessary to determine whether the model is indeed Plato's own.

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<sup>295</sup> 187b. *Doxa* can be translated as either judgment or belief.

<sup>296</sup> 187d.

<sup>297</sup> The five main sections—"Knowing/Not-Knowing; Being/Not-Being; Other-Judging [or *allodoxia*]; Wax Tablet; Aviary"—comprising the discussion of false judgment can be organized in a variety of ways: either as individual puzzles, the later sections being possible solutions to one or two puzzles, or not puzzles at all. See Raphael Woolf, "A Shaggy Soul Story: How not to Read the Wax Tablet Model in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69, no. 3 (2004): 574n2.

### 5.1 Plato's Wax?

Determining whether this example is a genuine attempt by Plato to solve the problem of false judgment is essential. Our goal is to determine if Plato is committed to moderate versions of MD and HF, and to do that we must compare Plato's previous commitments with something that is genuinely his own to see if those commitments still stand. That the wax example is indeed Plato's is mildly supported near the end of the dialogue when Socrates casually reuses its language in what seems to be a tacit admission that the model works in a limited scope.<sup>298</sup> Aside from this small textual evidence, the majority of commentators concur that the wax example is Plato's own.<sup>299</sup> Indeed, some think the wax example and the entire discussion of false belief mirrors the larger structure of the *Theaetetus*, where there are a number of positive proposals for the definition of knowledge which are subsequently shown to be inadequate.<sup>300</sup> Under this view, each section is a serious attempt to explain false judgment.<sup>301</sup> But just because many scholars believe that the wax example is Plato's does not preclude the possibility that it is indeed someone else's.

The passage's empiricist overtones has led Timothy Chappell, following F.M. Cornford, to think that the wax example is instead an empiricist account of false judgment, which Plato finds fault with.<sup>302</sup> Arguing against Burnyeat, Chappell thinks that the difference between Locke and Plato's wax analogies "seems smaller than Burnyeat proposes," finding it hard to see "what important notion of a sense-impression" Locke's analogy has that Plato's does not; thus, reading it as an empiricist account, and not

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<sup>298</sup> 209b. Sedley, *Midwife*, 139, notes that Plato prefers this model later in the *Philebus*.

<sup>299</sup> McDowell, 209-218; White, 167; BT, 90-101; Bostock, 176; Sedley, *Midwife*, 134-140.

<sup>300</sup> Woolf, 573-579; Polansky, 202-204.

<sup>301</sup> Woolf, 578.

<sup>302</sup> CT, 182.

Plato's, remains plausible.<sup>303</sup> This plausibility goes away if we can show that Plato lacks a notion of sense-impression that Locke has. Thus, discovering whether Plato does or does not have a notion of sense-impression in the wax example has a dual purpose. Not only will it weaken the idea that the wax example is not Plato's but showing that sense-impressions are absent will also serve to show that Plato disagrees with the features attached to it, namely points (1), (3), and (4), hence showing that Plato does not accept moderate forms of MD and HF. With the likelihood of Plato's ownership of the wax example relatively secure and the importance of discovering whether sense-impressions are indeed in it, we move to comparing Plato and Locke's wax examples.

## 5.2 Exposition of Plato and Locke's Wax

### 5.2.1 Plato's Wax Block

Plato's Wax Block is an attempt to discover how false judgment is possible. After Socrates realizes that he and Theaetetus were "wrong to agree that it is impossible for a man to be in error through judging that things he knows are things he doesn't know," Theaetetus suggests that it is possible to misidentify someone from a distance.<sup>304</sup> Socrates extends this idea to memory. He proposes "for the sake of the argument, that we have in our souls a block of wax" that varies in size, purity and malleability from individual to individual and thus explains the inherent differences exhibited between people's

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<sup>303</sup> CT, 182.

<sup>304</sup> 191b. Commentators debate whether Plato's Wax Block (as well as the other sections) considers misidentification and/or misdescription, much of which depends on the nature of identity statements. I will not consider these debates here. See: CT, 154-157; Bostock, 177-8, 181-2, 196, 264; BT, 70-74, 104-5, see especially note 40; David Barton, "The *Theaetetus* on How We Think," *Phronesis* 44, no. 3 (1999): 163-80; Gail Fine, "False Belief in the *Theaetetus*," *Phronesis* 24 no. 1 (1979): 70-80; C.J.F., Williams, "Referential Opacity and False Belief in the *Theaetetus*," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 22, no. 89 (Oct. 1972): 289-302; Lyle E. Angene, "False Judgment in the *Theaetetus*," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 33 no. 4 (May 1978): 351-365.

memories.<sup>305</sup> This wax represents memory in that one's perceptions and thoughts are stamped in the wax much like "we take the imprints of signet rings."<sup>306</sup> Images imprinted in the wax are known and can be remembered as long as they remain and if they fail to be impressed or are destroyed then they are not known or forgotten.<sup>307</sup> Therefore, "knowing something is, on the model, just having its imprint on one's block," and knowing is thus equated to remembering.<sup>308</sup>

With the model in place, Socrates explains how false judgment could be possible, if one knows something and mismatches "it with either the perception alone or with the perception combined with knowledge of something else."<sup>309</sup> Thus, Socrates could misidentify his companions, knowing them through the wax imprints, but in haste, erroneously apply the perception of one to the imprint of the other. This, Socrates says, is where false judgment arises.<sup>310</sup> Emphasizing this, Socrates resurrects what he briefly mentioned before; people differ in the quality of their wax.<sup>311</sup> Some, as Socrates explains, have wax, "deep and abundant, smooth and worked to the proper consistency," conducive for leaving distinct, deep, lasting impressions allowing them to "learn easily," remember well, and "judge truly."<sup>312</sup> Others have soft, hard, or impure wax that lead to impressions

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<sup>305</sup> Paul Stern, *Knowledge and Politics in Plato's "Theaetetus,"* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 238; 191c.

<sup>306</sup> 191d.

<sup>307</sup> 191d.

<sup>308</sup> Gokhan Adalier, "The Case of Theaetetus," *Phronesis* 46, no. 1 Feb, (2001): 6. According to Bostock, 177n24, "Socrates henceforth reserves the notion of knowing an object for the case when one remembers it."

<sup>309</sup> Tschemplik, 109. Socrates is meticulous enumerating all the cases where "it is sheer impossibility that there should be false judgment" (192c). For tabulations of these possibilities see BT, 97; CT, 179-180; Polansky, 188-191; Brain D. Fogelman and D.S. Hutchinson, "Seventeen Subtleties in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Phronesis* 35, no. 3 (1990): 2n3.

<sup>310</sup> 193d.

<sup>311</sup> 191d.

<sup>312</sup> 194d.

that fade quickly, never set, or became marred and indistinct. Such people are prone to false judgment.<sup>313</sup>

### 5.2.2 Locke's Wax Tablet

Locke uses his wax example to explain the occasional defectiveness of our simple ideas, those derived directly from experience. Like Plato, Locke uses wax as an analog to memory. When we perceive, impressions are made in the wax and it is these impressions that we later recall. The quality of the wax is the key component to whether or not our ideas are *clear* (vivid and fresh) or *obscure* (faded or tarnished over time). If the wax is “over-hardened” then an impression will not set, if too soft the impression will not hold, and if the wax is of a “temper fit” its impression is still subject to obscurity, as it may not be applied with sufficient force to be clear.<sup>314</sup> In all of these cases, the “print left by the seal will be obscure.”<sup>315</sup>

### 5.3 Blocks versus Tablets

Having gone through both wax examples we can quickly see at least one significant difference between the two—Plato's Wax Block is larger and more detailed than Locke's Wax Tablet.<sup>316</sup> Locke's is limited to the difference in wax quality, the variability of which is the sole explanation for obscurity or error. Plato's model includes this, but adds contemplative or reflective acts, which also explain the possibility of false

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<sup>313</sup> 194e-195a.

<sup>314</sup> *Essay*, 2.29.3.

<sup>315</sup> *Essay*, 2.29.3.

<sup>316</sup> I use “tablet” to distinguish Locke's wax example from Plato's purely because of Locke's *tabula rasa* or “blank slate” concept of the mind, which is a reference to reusable writing tablets (because they were covered in wax) in antiquity. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, 292n34, provides a brief philosophical reason for why one may prefer ‘block’ over ‘tablet’ to refer to Plato's wax (she prefers tablet).

judgment. Thus, Plato's Block essentially includes Locke's entire Tablet and then some. The essential, salient feature of Locke's Tablet, the variability in wax quality, is but a part of Plato's Block. The importance of wax quality for Plato is, however, uncertain. Plato's original description of the wax seems sufficient for explaining the possibility of false judgment, but then goes on to discuss wax quality in more depth. Why does Plato feel the need to revisit the quality of a person's wax?<sup>317</sup> Is it merely to further explain, or does it serve another purpose?

A possible clue lies in the unidentified "they" that Socrates refers to when discussing wax: "Well, this then, *they* say, is why the two things occur."<sup>318</sup> Socrates is ambiguous to whom he is referring, possibly to distance "himself from the story he is about to tell."<sup>319</sup> Socrates leaves a few hints that this is his aim. One such hint is the "somewhat hyperbolic" language used by Theaetetus and Socrates in this section.<sup>320</sup> Another indicator is his wordplay, humorously referencing Homer, which is a typical sophistic technique to add authority to one's work.<sup>321</sup> This could just be the normal use of an ancient literary device, but it could also be a warning to the reader that the following account is sophistic in nature, and, thus, to be taken with a grain of salt.<sup>322</sup> The latter possibility seems more likely as we continue, for sophistical clues lurk in the text.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Originally mentioned at 191d and revisited at 194c-195a

<sup>318</sup> 194c, emphasis added.

<sup>319</sup> Tschemplik, 109. The word "they" could refer to common opinion or the poets of the *Meno* 81a-d (109n 9). BT, 92n33, thinks it provides distance. Woolf, 598n41, takes the distance more radically as the "disavowal of the very idea that appeal to the quality of the impressions can play an explanatory role in tackling the problem of false judgment."

<sup>320</sup> Woolf, 599n42.

<sup>321</sup> Polansky, 192n29. See also, Woolf, 598-9.

<sup>322</sup> CT, 176n141, notes, that "the appeal to Homer's authority is clearly ironic."

<sup>323</sup> The importance of these textual clues hinges on a certain extent to the weight one gives them in discerning Plato's intent.



Socrates' description of deep wax and the wise people who have it is reminiscent of the "capacities of sophistically trained orators" that could quickly and accurately match perceptions with imprints mirroring the type of "wisdom... valued among the cave dwellers in the *Republic* (516c-d) who guess at the passing shadows."<sup>324</sup> Deep wax was also earlier attributed to the orators in the digression, who have "small and warped" souls whereas the small souls in this account do not.<sup>325</sup> This discrepancy is either a mistake on Plato's part, a result of discussing two unrelated examples, or a possible sign that the reader should be wary of Socrates' description. These small unfavorable indications—the likening to sophistry or cave shadows—suggest that Plato did not want the wax quality part of his model taken seriously.

This is of great import, though, when comparing Plato's Block to Locke's Tablet, because Plato somewhat disapproves of using wax quality as the sole analog for memory. Paul Stern, in *Knowledge and Politics in Plato's Theaetetus*, provides a useful reading of this. He thinks the wax quality presentation of Plato's account "portrays the mind as a passive, merely receptive mechanism."<sup>326</sup> Thinking and error is explained by wax quality alone, because unlike the previous part of the model, which contained a contemplative faculty, this section "abstracts from the soul's power of reflection."<sup>327</sup> Guided by the Homer allusion, Stern notes, "Socrates takes as real what is clearly in Homer an image."<sup>328</sup> This outlandish, improbable interpretation of the image leads him to think Plato is emphasizing the "act of interpretation and the latitude of understanding it implies," which would be impossible and entirely unnecessary were human memory and

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<sup>324</sup> Polansky, 192.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid, 192n31. The digression occurs at 173a.

<sup>326</sup> Stern, 240.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 240, 241.

understanding the “automatic, unreflective” process described in the wax quality description.<sup>329</sup> Stern thinks Plato is highlighting a “*human* capacity whose power is wholly obscured if memory is only the immediate, mechanical process Socrates describes” in this section of the Wax Block model.<sup>330</sup>

Stern’s reading provides one reason why Plato may dismiss the wax quality model. Raphael Woolf’s “A Shaggy Soul Story: How not to Read the Wax Tablet Model in Plato’s *Theaetetus*” provides another. His interpretation sees Plato’s wax example and the entire discussion of false judgment as lying within the methodology of intellectual midwifery. When Plato introduces the notion of varying wax quality for the second time he is “deliberately presenting us with a tempting but mistaken way of understanding his model, so as to provoke us into making sure we have properly understood the right way of reading it.”<sup>331</sup> Socrates and Theaetetus have already indicated that things have been explained thoroughly enough by this point.<sup>332</sup> Woolf’s claim is that the quality of wax plays no explanatory role in the model, for what does the explanatory lifting “are the notions of representation and permanence that the wax imagery highlights and which stand in implicit contrast to the character of perception.”<sup>333</sup>

Thus, we have a variety of literary clues intimating, as well as two different interpretations arguing, that Plato is either wary of wax quality or purposely trying to show us the inadequacy of wax quality in the wax model. This suggests some interesting conclusions. It shows that their models are, in fact, quite different. The salient feature of Locke’s model, variable wax quality, is the only explanation for error. Whereas with

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<sup>329</sup> Stern, 240, 241.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Woolf, 573. See 194c-195a for the second introduction.

<sup>332</sup> Woolf, 597. See 194bc.

<sup>333</sup> Woolf, 589, 598.

Plato not only is wax quality seemingly not as crucial, but also Plato has additional features in the model that can explain error. Burnyeat's "critical difference," the notion of sense-impressions, thus might have its basis in Plato's recognition and denial of the ramifications of using wax quality as the significant feature of a model used to explain perception and memory. In comparing the two wax examples we will find that there are two different, but related, distinctions going on between the models: a difference in the level of activity versus passivity and a divergence between the thinkers on the relation connecting thoughts and perceptions. This is borne out by the text upon closer examination.

### 5.3.1 Activity & Passivity

Returning to the wax examples, we see a large difference between the two models in their levels of activity. Plato's description of memorization in the Wax Block is deliberate and active: "we *make* impressions upon this of everything we *wish* to remember among the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves; we *hold* the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and *take* a stamp from them."<sup>334</sup> Socrates goes "out of his way with this language to emphasize the active and selective nature of the process."<sup>335</sup> Locke's account, however, is passive; no *one* does the stamping. Rather it takes place without a stamper, as the wax submissively receives the "slight and transient impressions *made by the objects*."<sup>336</sup> Thus, we see that with Plato it is the active subject that makes impressions on the wax whereas with Locke the impressions are made by an object on a passive subject.

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<sup>334</sup> 191d, emphasis added.

<sup>335</sup> Woolf, 602.

<sup>336</sup> *Essay*, 2.29.3, emphasis added.

After this stamping process occurs, the level of activity remains uneven between the two models. In Plato's Block the attempt at matching the perception with the impression indicates a high level of activity. Socrates describes this process in a variety of ways: hurrying, misplacing shoes, mistaking left and right, and aiming, but missing a target.<sup>337</sup> All showcase an active process that can be "avoided and corrected through care and attention" if one just focuses lining up perceptions and imprints "in straight lines" as opposed to "obliquely and crosswise."<sup>338</sup>

Contrast this with Locke's *Essay* where such activity is hardly mentioned. Many cases show the mind as "purely passive in receiving" impressions.<sup>339</sup> As Locke says, "the objects of our senses do...obtrude their particular ideas upon our minds whether we will or not; and the operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least some obscure notions of them."<sup>340</sup> In this case there is no matching of impressions to perceptions to be had, as the making of an impression is the perception. Unlike Plato, where the option of stamping the impression into wax exists, Locke's impressions are passive and stamped seemingly without choice. The difference in activity and passivity between the two authors seems apparent.

This is something that Chappell recognizes but finds unconvincing when it comes to abandoning the idea of Plato's Wax Block as an empiricist account. He thinks that Burnyeat's critical difference is the involuntary nature of impressions in Locke as opposed to their voluntary nature in Plato. But as he points out, "minimally, the difference might only" amount to Plato holding that "*attention* always has a role to play

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<sup>337</sup> 193cd, 194a.

<sup>338</sup> Tschemplik, 109; 194b.

<sup>339</sup> Chappell, "Introduction," 8. See for example: *Essay*, 2.1.3, 2.1.22-5, 2.12.1, 2.31.2, 2.4.11. This of course really only applies to simple ideas, complex ideas are not passive in that the mind makes them.

<sup>340</sup> *Essay*, 2.1.25

in the formation of impressions,” something he thinks Locke would not “go to the stake to deny.”<sup>341</sup> Chappell makes a good point: Locke probably would not deny that attention is always necessary, for whenever an impression is made “some idea is actually produced, and present in the understanding.”<sup>342</sup> Hence, some level of awareness or attention seems present during the making of impressions and might always be warranted under Locke’s account; but this is not the case.

For Locke, perception and thinking are the same thing, different only in degree and nomenclature. Thinking signifies the mind as “active, where it, with some degree of voluntary attention, considers anything.”<sup>343</sup> Perception, however, is more inert; “for in bare naked perception, the mind is for the most part only passive. And what it perceives, it cannot avoid perceiving.”<sup>344</sup> At its most basic, the mind is “forced to receive the impressions.”<sup>345</sup> But Locke defines attention as “when the mind with great earnestness, and of choice, fixes its view on any idea.”<sup>346</sup> Given the inclusion of choice in Locke’s definition of attention it seems that attention must not be necessary in the formation of impressions, because the mind often has no choice in the matter. Moreover, Locke admits of varying degrees of attention, and that the mind when otherwise preoccupied “takes no notice of the ordinary impressions made then on the senses.”<sup>347</sup> Attention may factor in the vivacity and retention of impressions, but its role seems nonexistent or extremely limited regarding the actual stamping of the impression.

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<sup>341</sup> CT, 182.

<sup>342</sup> *Essay*, 2.9.4.

<sup>343</sup> *Essay*, 2.9.1.

<sup>344</sup> *Essay*, 2.9.1.

<sup>345</sup> *Essay*, 2.1.25.

<sup>346</sup> *Essay*, 2.19.1, emphasis added.

<sup>347</sup> *Essay*, 2.9.3.

Locke may not go to the stake to deny that attention is always necessary when forming impressions, as Chappell states, but neither would he go out of his way to defend it. Attention, for Locke, though important, is not always necessary when making impressions. So then, the difference that Chappell thinks minor still seems relevant and larger than he wishes it be. The two models will become more distinct as we move forward, for not only is there a difference between activity and passivity but one between thought and perception.

### 5.3.2 *Thought & Perception*

Within Plato's Wax Block there is a demarcation between thoughts and perception. As Burnyeat explains, "Plato keeps memory quite separate from perception," as impressions are not made by perception but by a "deliberate act of memorization."<sup>348</sup> This contrasts with Locke where "perception is already the receiving of an impression," which subsequently can be retained by memory.<sup>349</sup> Plato has a level of separation between the faculties of thinking and perceiving that Locke does not. Plato emphasizes this distance by having Socrates tell "Theaetetus that the wax block is 'in' the soul. It is not, therefore, perfectly contiguous with it."<sup>350</sup> This separation between the wax block and the soul indicates a difference between perception and memorization. Moreover, impressions can be made "among the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves" by just holding our "wax under our perceptions *and* thoughts" and taking a

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<sup>348</sup> BT, 100.

<sup>349</sup> BT, 100.

<sup>350</sup> Stern, 239; The distance between soul and wax could serve a pedagogical function much as the various levels of remove in the framing dialogue at the beginning of the *Theaetetus* alert the reader to pay attention to the relationship between reading philosophy and doing philosophy [William Johnson, "Dramatic Frame and Philosophic Idea in Plato," *The American Journal of Philology* 119 no. 4 (Winter 1998), 557-598].

stamp.<sup>351</sup> Thoughts and perceptions then are distinguished from each other despite sharing a similar feature, the ability to be stamped. Furthermore, this distinction is reiterated when the Wax Block fails to accurately account for mistakes dealing purely with thoughts as the model was designed to account for perceptual mistakes.<sup>352</sup> The distinction between thoughts and perceptions seems clear in Plato's example, but is fuzzier with Locke's.

Locke considers thought and perception, that is, sensation, as intricately linked. This close relationship is evident throughout much of the *Essay*. Ideas, for Locke, are what stand for the “*object* of the understanding” whenever a person thinks.<sup>353</sup> These ideas come from what “the mind perceives *in itself*” or from “sensations or perceptions in our understanding.”<sup>354</sup> The link between ideas, that is, what we are thinking about, and sensation is quite tight. Locke emphasizes their correspondence:

Since there does not appear to be any ideas in the mind before the senses have conveyed any in, I conceive that ideas in the understanding are coeval with sensation—which is such an impression or motion made in some part of the body as produces some perception in the understanding. It is about these impressions made on our senses by outward objects that the mind seems first to employ itself in such operations as we call perception, remembering, consideration, reasoning, etc.<sup>355</sup>

For Locke, ideas or thoughts, at the initial impressing, are essentially coexistent with the sensation or perception that created it, as “the mind is forced to receive the impression and cannot avoid the perception of those ideas that are annexed to them.”<sup>356</sup> Having an impression is to have perceived something and, necessarily, to have the accompanying

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<sup>351</sup> 191d, emphasis added.

<sup>352</sup> Woolf, 591; As Adalier explains, “false judgment arises in mismatching of perception with thought...not of perception with perception or of thought with thought.” (6).

<sup>353</sup> *Essay*, Intro, §8.

<sup>354</sup> *Essay*, 2.8.8.

<sup>355</sup> *Essay*, 2.1.23.

<sup>356</sup> *Essay*, 2.3.25.

idea or thought. The distance between thoughts and perceptions then seems minuscule, especially in comparison to Plato.<sup>357</sup> By combining the distinction between activity and passivity with thought and perception, the notion of a sense-impression that is absent in Plato but present in Locke becomes clear.

### 5.3.3 Sense-impressions

The difference between Plato and Locke's wax examples lies in their respective texts and the models within. Locke's Wax Tablet is a passive receptacle for sensory information impressed whenever an object impinges upon the subject. These impressions necessarily convey basic information to a perceiver and are immediately and passively stored concurrently creating an idea or thought that can be contemplated or later remembered. Thus, thoughts and perceptions appear coextensive. Looking at Plato's Block, we see something completely different. Sensory information must actively be remembered and imprinted on the Block; "the process of stamping is one directed by the subject."<sup>358</sup> Impressions are not mandated by sensory perceptions, and thoughts and perceptions are "treated as separate categories, albeit with a common feature."<sup>359</sup> Sense perceptions must be brought before a higher awareness prior to anything being done with

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<sup>357</sup> Comparing Locke to his fellow British Empiricists can further emphasize Locke's lack of distance between thoughts and perceptions. Berkeley, following Locke's method, had no distance between the two, sensations and ideas being the same [*Principles of Human Knowledge*, I §3, in *Readings in Modern Philosophy Vol. II: Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Associated Texts*, eds. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 139]. For Berkeley, ideas from without are sensations, from within they are thoughts, and to perceive is to have an idea. So for example to perceive colors is to perceive ideas (Frederick Coppleston S.J., *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1993-1994), 5:221). Hume thought Locke was misleading with his use of the word idea, making it stand for "any of our perceptions, our sensations, and passions as well as thoughts" as well as impressions. This is why Hume made apparent the distinction between ideas and impressions in his own work (*Inquiry*, §2, 335 note 3; *Treatise*, 1.1.1 note 2).

<sup>358</sup> Woolf, 602.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid, 591.



them.<sup>360</sup> If the description of the two wax examples above are accurate, then Plato's account of the Wax Block does not adhere to the notion of sense-impressions.

In Plato's wax example there are two descriptions given to explain the possibility of false judgment. The second, the quality of one's wax, is, according to the various literary indications in the text and several philosophers' interpretations, one that Plato is dismissive of and finds inadequate to explain false judgment. The quality of one's wax, however, comprises the entirety of Locke's wax example and is its most salient feature, as it highlights the role that sense-impressions play in explaining the defectiveness of our simple ideas; a very similar project to Plato's explanation of false judgment. However, where Locke finds wax quality and its sense-impressions as a satisfactory explanation, Plato does not. This has important repercussions, for inasmuch as Plato rejects wax quality and sense-impressions, he also seems to reject MD and HF. To the extent that sense-impressions share the essential features of moderate MD and HF:

- (1) the incorrigibility of individual, private appearances;
- (2) objects and subjects consistent with moderate flux;
- (3) a raw mechanism of perception "wherein the [subject] perceives just when affected by the [object]" and;
- (4) independent, autonomous senses which can identify what is presented to them and are a form of awareness in their own right;

Plato's rejection of sense-impressions seems a tacit rejection of those essential features that comprise MD and HF. If this is so, then Plato has given us an indication that he does not, himself, adhere to MD and HF. This conclusion is more consistent with Reading B,

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<sup>360</sup> According to Helen S Lang, "On Memory: Aristotle's Corrections of Plato," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 18 no 4 (Oct. 1980): 383, such an account is reiterated in the *Philebus*, where "sensation is nothing other than soul, through memory, immediately interpreting the affections of body and so rendering them partially intelligible. Although the body may provide an occasion for sensation, it makes absolutely no meaningful contribution to sensation."

which holds that Plato is only discussing MD and HF for the sake of argument as opposed to Reading A, which claims that Plato accepts moderate versions of MD and HF.

## 6 CONCLUSION

During the course of this essay we have gone through the history of interpreting Plato and its debates. This was done to explain the difficulty of interpreting Plato, to frame the larger debate between Unitarianism and Developmentalism that this essay is a participant in, and to make apparent any interpretive presumptions which may be present in the essay. Having done this, we then went through a brief exposition of Socrates and Theaetetus' first attempt at defining knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. Doing so put into the context the two broad interpretative strategies for the section we were considering, Reading A—a Unitarian interpretation—and Reading B—a Developmentalist interpretation.

It was shown how these two interpretations were essentially two mutually exclusive alternatives for reading 151-187, the first attempt at defining knowledge. According to Reading A, Plato accepts moderate versions of MD and HF as part of his own philosophy. Whereas, Reading B thinks that Plato rejects both in their entirety. We then picked out several essential characteristics that comprise the moderate forms of MD and HF, showed that they were reasonable choices, and then suggested that these features were also characteristic of modern empiricism's notion of sense-impressions. Having shown the relationship between those features and the notion of sense-impressions was also reasonable, we then proceeded to compare Plato and Locke's wax examples where there was supposedly a critical difference, the notion of a sense-impression.

By comparing the two, we saw that this critical difference was indeed present. Plato did not include sense-impressions in his wax example in the manner of Locke. Further, it was also suggested that Plato was dismissive of sense-impressions in that he

subtly argued against wax quality as a salient feature of his model. As wax quality was the sole salient feature of Locke's wax model and highlighted his notion of sense-impression, Plato's rejection of such a feature is indicative of his rejection of sense-impressions. Having shown that this was the case, and that it is safe to see Plato's wax example as his own, we have effectively argued against the Unitarian, Reading A, interpretation of 151-187.

Insofar as sense-impressions encapsulate several of the features necessary in moderate versions of MD and HF, and insofar as Plato rejects sense-impressions in the wax example, we can safely say that we have corroborating evidence that the Developmentalist interpretation, Reading B, is more accurate and cohesive given the text. Under Reading A, Plato is supposed to be committed to moderate versions of MD and HF, but as we have shown with sense-impressions, this commitment does not carry forward to the rest of the dialogue. In fact, it seems as though Plato is rejecting MD and HF inasmuch as he rejects sense-impressions, whose constituent features are also characteristic and constitutive of moderate MD and HF, later in the dialogue. Since a hallmark of any good interpretation is internal consistency with the given text, we can take it that having Plato committed to several theories only to disavow them later in the dialogue is not a good thing, and thus any interpretation that requires us doing so should be met with suspicion.

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