Theaetetus

PLATO

c. 428–348 BC

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Θεαίτητος

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Theaetetus · Plato (c. 428–348 BC)

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INTRODUCTION

The dialogue begins in Megara, many years after Socrates' death. The mathematician Theaetetus has been carried home dying from a battle, and Euclides remembers a conversation Socrates had with him as a boy, just before Socrates' trial. He wrote it down, and has a slave read it aloud.

In that conversation Socrates, who calls himself a midwife to other people's ideas, asks the gifted young Theaetetus and his teacher Theodorus a single question: what is knowledge? Three answers are tried in turn. Knowledge is perception, which leads to Protagoras' claim that "man is the measure of all things" and to the idea that everything is in flux. Knowledge is true judgment, which raises the puzzle of how false judgment is possible at all, and the images of the mind as a wax tablet and an aviary. Finally, knowledge is true judgment with an account.

Each answer fails, and the dialogue ends without a definition. It is still one of the founding texts of the theory of knowledge.

Theaetetus

Megara, years after Socrates' death. Euclides has a slave read out his record of a conversation from just before the trial. Socrates, the young mathematician Theaetetus and his teacher Theodorus ask what knowledge is.

EUCLIDES 142a Just in from the country, Terpsion, or have you been back a while?[1]

TERPSION A good while. And I was looking for you in the marketplace, and wondering why I couldn't find you.

EUCLIDES Well, I wasn't in town.

TERPSION Where were you, then?

EUCLIDES I was going down to the harbor, and I ran into Theaetetus being carried from the army camp at Corinth to Athens.[2]

TERPSION Alive or dead?

EUCLIDES 142b Alive, but only just. He's in a bad way from some wounds, but what's really getting the better of him is the sickness that's broken out in the army.

TERPSION Not dysentery?

EUCLIDES Yes.

1 Euclides and Terpsion were followers of Socrates from Megara, a city about twenty-five miles west of Athens; both are named among those present at his death in the *Phaedo*.

2 Theaetetus (c. 415–369 BC) became one of the leading Greek mathematicians. The fighting at Corinth is probably that of 369 BC, though some date it to the Corinthian War of the 390s.

TERPSION What a man you're telling me is in danger!

EUCLIDES A fine and good man, Terpsion. Why, just now I was listening to some people singing his praises for the way he fought in the battle.

TERPSION Nothing strange in that. It would be far more surprising if 142c he weren't like that. But why didn't he stop over here in Megara?

EUCLIDES He was in a hurry to get home. I certainly begged him to stay and urged him to, but he wouldn't. So I saw him off, and as I was walking back I remembered, with amazement, how prophetically Socrates had spoken, about this among other things. I think he met Theaetetus shortly before his death, when Theaetetus was still a boy, and after spending time with him and talking with him he greatly admired his nature. And when I went to Athens he told me in detail the conversation he'd had 142d with him, which was very well worth hearing, and he said that it was absolutely inevitable that this boy would become distinguished, if he lived to grow up.

TERPSION And it seems he spoke the truth. But what was the conversation? Could you tell it to me?

EUCLIDES Good heavens, no, not just like that, from memory. 143a But as soon as I got home back then, I wrote down notes, and later I wrote it out at leisure as I recalled it, and whenever I went to Athens I would ask Socrates again about whatever I hadn't remembered, and when I got back here I would make corrections. So I have pretty much the whole conversation written down.

TERPSION That's true. I've heard you say so before, and I've always meant to ask you to show it to me, but I've kept putting it off until now. But what's to stop us going through it now? I certainly need a rest anyway, since I've come in from the country.

EUCLIDES [143b] Well, I myself saw Theaetetus off as far as Erineum, so I wouldn't mind a rest either. Let's go, and while we rest, the boy will read it to us.[3]

TERPSION Good idea.

EUCLIDES Here's the book, Terpsion. Now, this is how I wrote the conversation down: not with Socrates narrating it to me, the way he narrated it, but talking with the people he said he talked with. He said they were Theodorus the geometer and Theaetetus. So that in the [143c] writing the bits of narration between the speeches wouldn't be a nuisance—where Socrates says of himself, for example, "and I said" or "and I remarked," or of the person answering, "he agreed" or "he didn't accept that"—for that reason I wrote it as though he were talking directly with them, and cut out that sort of thing.[4]

TERPSION And that's perfectly reasonable, Euclides.

EUCLIDES Boy, take the book and read.

THEAETETUS AND THE MATHEMATICIANS

Theodorus praises young Theaetetus, who explains his work on square roots but cannot define knowledge.

SOCRATES [143d] If I cared more about things in Cyrene, Theodorus, I'd be asking you about things there and about the people there—whether any of the young men there are applying themselves to geometry or any other kind of philosophy. As it is, I love them less than the young men here, and I'm keener to know which of our young men are likely to turn out well. That's what I look into myself, as far as I can, and I ask the others whom I see the young men wanting to spend time with. And quite a lot of them come to you, [143e] and rightly so: you deserve it

3 Erineum lay on the road from Megara toward Eleusis and Athens. "The boy" is a slave who reads the text aloud.

4 Theodorus of Cyrene, in North Africa, was a mathematician known for his work on irrational magnitudes.

for your geometry, among other things. So if you've come across anyone worth mentioning, I'd be glad to hear about him.

THEODORUS Well, Socrates, it's very much worth my telling and your hearing what a boy I've come across among your fellow citizens. If he were good-looking, I'd be very afraid to speak of him, in case anyone thought I was in love with him. As it is—and don't be offended with me—he's not good-looking. He looks like you, with his snub nose and his bulging eyes, though he has these features less than you do. 144a So I speak without fear. Believe me, of all the people I've ever met—and I've spent time with a great many—I've never yet come across anyone with such an amazingly good nature. For someone to learn as easily as he does, which is hard for anyone else, and at the same time to be exceptionally gentle, and on top of that to be as brave as anyone—I'd never have thought it could happen, and I don't see it happening. Those who are quick like him, and sharp, and good at remembering, are mostly also quick to flare up in anger; they dart around like ships without 144b ballast, and they turn out more manic than brave. The steadier ones, on the other hand, come to their studies rather sluggishly and full of forgetfulness. But he goes at his studies and inquiries so smoothly, so surely and effectively, with such gentleness—like a stream of oil flowing without a sound—that you're amazed that someone his age gets all this done in this way.

SOCRATES That's good news. And whose son is he, among our citizens?

THEODORUS I've heard the name, but I don't remember it. But 144c actually, he's the one in the middle of the group coming toward us. Just now he and these friends of his were oiling themselves in the outer running track, and now I think they've finished and are coming this way. See if you recognize him.

SOCRATES I do. He's the son of Euphronius of Sunium—exactly the sort of man, my friend, you describe his son as being, and

well thought of in other ways too. What's more, he left a very large estate. But I don't know the boy's name.[5]

THEODORUS 144d His name is Theaetetus, Socrates. As for the estate, I think some trustees have squandered it. Still, he's amazingly generous with money too, Socrates.

SOCRATES He sounds a thoroughly noble person. Tell him to come and sit here by me.

THEODORUS I will. Theaetetus, come here beside Socrates.

SOCRATES Yes, do, Theaetetus, so that I can take a look at myself too and see what sort of face I have. Theodorus says 144e mine is like yours. But suppose each of us had a lyre and he said they were tuned alike: would we believe him straight away, or would we look into whether he was speaking as a musician?

THEAETETUS We'd look into it.

SOCRATES And if we found he was one, we'd believe him, but if he knew nothing of music, we'd distrust him?

THEAETETUS That's right.

SOCRATES And now, I think, if we care at all about our faces being 145a alike, we must look into whether he's speaking as someone skilled in drawing or not.

THEAETETUS I think so.

SOCRATES Well, is Theodorus a painter?

THEAETETUS No, not so far as I know.

SOCRATES Not a geometer either?

THEAETETUS Oh, he certainly is, Socrates.

SOCRATES And an astronomer, and skilled in arithmetic and music, and everything that belongs to education?

THEAETETUS I think so.

5 Sunium was an Attic deme (district), at the southern tip of Attica.

SOCRATES So if he says we're alike in some bodily feature, praising or criticizing us in some way, it isn't really worth paying attention to him.

THEAETETUS Perhaps not.

SOCRATES 145b But what if he were praising the soul of one of us for excellence and wisdom? Wouldn't it be worthwhile for the one who heard it to be eager to look closely at the one praised, and for that one to be eager to show himself?

THEAETETUS Very much so, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then it's time, my dear Theaetetus, for you to show yourself and for me to look. Believe me, Theodorus has praised a lot of people to me, foreigners and citizens alike, but he's never yet praised anyone the way he praised you just now.

THEAETETUS That would be nice, Socrates. But make sure he wasn't 145c joking.

SOCRATES That isn't Theodorus's way. Now don't go back on what we've agreed on the excuse that he's joking, or he may be forced to give evidence under oath—and nobody is going to charge him with perjury in any case. Take heart and stand by the agreement.

THEAETETUS Well, I must do it, if you think so.

SOCRATES Tell me, then: you're learning some geometry from Theodorus, I take it?

THEAETETUS I am.

SOCRATES 145d And some astronomy and harmony and arithmetic?

THEAETETUS I'm certainly trying.

SOCRATES So am I, my boy, from him and from anyone else I think knows something about these things. But even so, though I'm reasonably well off in other respects, there's a little thing I'm puzzled about, which I must look into with you and the others here. So tell me: isn't learning becoming wiser about what one is learning?

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES And it's by wisdom, I suppose, that the wise are wise.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES 145e And this doesn't differ at all from knowledge, does it?

THEAETETUS What doesn't?

SOCRATES Wisdom. Or aren't people wise about just the things they have knowledge of?

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES So knowledge and wisdom are the same thing?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Well, this is exactly what I'm puzzled about and can't adequately grasp by myself: what on earth knowledge actually is. 146a So can we say what it is? What do you all say? Which of us will speak first? Whoever gets it wrong, and whoever keeps getting it wrong, will sit down and be "donkey," as children playing ball say; and whoever comes through without a mistake will be our king and order us to answer whatever he likes. Why so quiet? I hope, Theodorus, my love of argument isn't making me rude, in my eagerness to get us talking and becoming friendly and sociable with one another?

THEODORUS 146b Something like that would be far from rude, Socrates. But tell one of the boys to answer you. I'm not used to this kind of conversation, and I'm past the age for getting used to it. It would suit them, though, and they'd improve a great deal more; youth really can improve at anything. So, as you began, don't let Theaetetus go—ask him.

SOCRATES You hear what Theodorus says, Theaetetus. I don't think you'll want 146c to disobey him, and it isn't right, in matters like these, for a younger man to disobey the orders of a wise one. So answer well and nobly: what do you think knowledge is?

THEAETETUS Well, I must, Socrates, since you both tell me to. In any case, if I make a mistake, you'll correct me.

SOCRATES Certainly, if we can.

THEAETETUS Well then, I think that the things one might learn from Theodorus are kinds of knowledge—geometry and the subjects you went through just now— 146d and then shoemaking and the crafts of the other craftsmen too: all of these together, and each of them, are nothing other than knowledge.

SOCRATES How noble and generous of you, my friend! Asked for one thing, you give many, and a varied assortment instead of something simple.

THEAETETUS What do you mean by that, Socrates?

SOCRATES Probably nothing. But I'll tell you what I think. When you say "shoemaking," you don't mean anything other than knowledge of making shoes, do you?

THEAETETUS Nothing else.

SOCRATES 146e And when you say "carpentry"? Anything other than knowledge of making wooden furniture?

THEAETETUS No, not that either.

SOCRATES So in both cases you're defining what each is knowledge of?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES But what you were asked, Theaetetus, wasn't that—what knowledge is knowledge of, or how many kinds of knowledge there are. We didn't ask because we wanted to count them, but to know what knowledge itself is. Or am I talking nonsense?

THEAETETUS No, you're quite right.

SOCRATES 147a Now consider this too. Suppose someone asked us about something ordinary and everyday—about mud, for example, what it is. If we answered him, "potters' mud, and oven-makers' mud, and brickmakers' mud," wouldn't we be ridiculous?

THEAETETUS Perhaps.

SOCRATES First, I suppose, for thinking that the questioner understands anything from our answer when we say "mud," whether we add "the [147b] figurine-makers'" or any other craftsmen's. Or do you think anyone understands the name of something when he doesn't know what it is?

THEAETETUS Not at all.

SOCRATES Then someone who doesn't know what knowledge is doesn't understand "knowledge of shoes" either.

THEAETETUS No.

SOCRATES So someone who is ignorant of knowledge doesn't understand shoemaking, or any other craft.

THEAETETUS That's so.

SOCRATES Then it's a ridiculous answer to someone who asks what knowledge is, to give him the name of some craft. The answer gives "knowledge of [147c] something," and that's not what was asked.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Second, when it's possible to give a plain, short answer, it takes an endless roundabout road. In the question about mud, for example, it would be plain and simple to say that mud would be earth mixed with liquid, and to let go of whose mud it is.

THEAETETUS Put like that, Socrates, it now seems easy. But you may be asking the sort of thing that occurred to us ourselves the other day while we were [147d] talking—me and your namesake here, Socrates.[6]

SOCRATES What was that, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS Theodorus here was drawing diagrams for us about powers, showing that the powers of three square feet and

6 The younger Socrates, a fellow student of Theaetetus, is present but silent; he takes part in Plato's *Statesman*.

of five square feet are not commensurable in length with the one-foot line, and taking each one in turn like that up to the power of seventeen square feet; and there, for some reason, he got stuck. So it occurred to us, since the powers seemed to be unlimited in number, to try to collect them into one thing by which we could 147e call all these powers.[7]

SOCRATES And did you find anything like that?

THEAETETUS I think we did. But you look at it too.

SOCRATES Go on.

THEAETETUS We divided all number into two. The number that can come out as an equal number times an equal number we likened to the square in shape, and called it square and equal-sided.

SOCRATES Well done.

THEAETETUS The numbers in between, then—which include three and 148a five and every number that can't come out as an equal times an equal, but comes out either as a larger times a smaller or a smaller times a larger, and is always enclosed by a larger and a smaller side—we likened to the oblong shape, and called oblong number.

SOCRATES Excellent. But what came next?

THEAETETUS All the lines that form the square of an equal-sided plane number we defined as length; all those that form the square of an oblong number, 148b as powers, since they aren't commensurable with the others in length, but only in the plane areas they have the power to produce. And there's another thing of the same kind about solids.

SOCRATES Superb, boys! So I don't think Theodorus will be liable for false testimony.

THEAETETUS Still, Socrates, what you're asking about knowledge, I couldn't answer the way I did about length and power.

And yet that seems to me the sort of thing you're looking for. So Theodorus turns out to be a liar after all.

SOCRATES 148c Well now, suppose he had praised you for running and said he'd never come across a young man so good at running, and then you raced and were beaten by the fastest runner in his prime: do you think his praise would be any less true?

THEAETETUS No, I don't.

SOCRATES But do you think finding out what knowledge is, as I was saying just now, is a small thing, and not something for those who are in every way at the top?

THEAETETUS Good heavens, I think it's for those at the very top.

SOCRATES Then take heart about yourself, and believe that Theodorus 148d is right, and do your utmost, both about other things and about knowledge, to get hold of an account of what it actually is.

THEAETETUS If it's a matter of effort, Socrates, it'll come to light.

SOCRATES Come on, then—you showed the way well just now—try to imitate your answer about the powers: just as you gathered them, many as they were, into one form, so too try to address the many kinds of knowledge with one account.

THEAETETUS 148e But believe me, Socrates, I've often tried to look into it, when I heard reports of the questions you were asking. But I can't convince myself that I have anything adequate to say, or hear anyone else speak about it the way you require; and yet I can't stop worrying about it either.

7 A "power" here is the side of a square of given area—in modern terms a square root. Theodorus showed that the sides of squares of 3, 5, ... 17 square feet are irrational relative to a one-foot line.

SOCRATES THE MIDWIFE

Socrates says he is barren of wisdom but delivers others' ideas and tests whether they are real.

SOCRATES That's because you're in labor, my dear Theaetetus—you're not empty, you're pregnant.

THEAETETUS I don't know, Socrates. I'm just telling you what I've been going through.

SOCRATES [149a] Well, you absurd boy, haven't you heard that I'm the son of a very fine and formidable midwife, Phaenarete?[8]

THEAETETUS Yes, I have heard that.

SOCRATES And have you also heard that I practice the same art?

THEAETETUS Never.

SOCRATES Well, believe me, I do. But don't give me away to the others. It's escaped their notice, my friend, that I have this art. They don't know it, so they don't say that about me; they say I'm utterly strange and that I reduce people to perplexity. Have you heard that too?

THEAETETUS [149b] I have.

SOCRATES Shall I tell you the reason for it?

THEAETETUS Yes, please.

SOCRATES Then think about the whole business of midwives, how it is with them, and you'll more easily understand what I mean. You know, I suppose, that none of them attends other women in childbirth while she herself is still conceiving and giving birth; only those who are no longer able to give birth do.

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES They say the cause of this is Artemis, because, though childless, she has been allotted childbirth as her

8 Phaenarete's name means roughly "she who brings excellence to light."

province. She didn't give midwifery to barren women, 149c because human nature is too weak to master a craft in matters it has no experience of; but she assigned it to those who are past bearing children because of their age, honoring their likeness to herself.[9]

THEAETETUS That's likely.

SOCRATES And isn't this likely too, even necessary: that midwives know better than anyone else whether women are pregnant or not?

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES What's more, by giving drugs and 149d singing incantations, midwives can bring on the pains of labor and make them milder if they want to; they bring women who are having a difficult labor to give birth, and, if it seems best to miscarry while the fetus is young, they bring on a miscarriage.

THEAETETUS That's so.

SOCRATES And have you noticed this about them too, that they are also the cleverest matchmakers, being thoroughly wise about recognizing what sort of woman should be with what sort of man in order to bear the best children?

THEAETETUS I didn't know that at all.

SOCRATES Well, believe me, they're prouder of this than of 149e cutting umbilical cords. Think about it: do you think it belongs to the same craft or a different one to tend and harvest the fruits of the earth and also to know what kind of plant or seed should be sown in what kind of soil?

THEAETETUS No, the same one.

SOCRATES And in the case of a woman, my friend, do you think there's one craft for this sort of thing and another for the harvest?

THEAETETUS It doesn't seem likely.

9 Artemis, a virgin goddess, was also the patron of childbirth.

SOCRATES 150a No. But because of the unjust and unskilled bringing together of man and woman, which is called procuring, midwives, being respectable women, avoid matchmaking too, for fear that through it they may fall under that charge. Yet it's surely only genuine midwives who can properly make matches.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES So much, then, for the midwives' role. But it is less than my performance. For women don't sometimes 150b give birth to phantoms and sometimes to real children, with the difference hard to tell. If they did, the greatest and finest task of midwives would be to judge what is real and what isn't. Don't you think so?

THEAETETUS I do.

SOCRATES My art of midwifery has everything theirs has, but it differs in that I deliver men, not women, and in that I oversee their souls in labor, not their bodies. And the greatest thing in 150c our art is being able to test, in every way, whether the young man's thinking is giving birth to a phantom and a falsehood, or to something fertile and true. Because I have this in common with midwives: I'm barren of wisdom. Many people have reproached me before now for questioning others while making no pronouncement about anything myself, because I have no wisdom in me—and the reproach is true. The reason is this: the god compels me to act as midwife but has prevented me from giving birth. So I myself am 150d not at all wise, and no discovery of that kind has ever been born to me as the offspring of my own soul. But those who spend time with me, though at first some of them seem quite ignorant, all make amazing progress as our association goes on—those whom the god permits—as they themselves and everyone else can see. And it's clear that they've never learned anything from me; they've found and given birth to many fine things themselves, from within themselves. For the delivery, though, it's the god and I who are 150e responsible. Here's how it's clear. Many before now, not knowing this and

blaming themselves while thinking little of me, have gone away sooner than they should, either on their own or persuaded by others. Once gone, they've miscarried the rest through bad company, and they've lost the children I delivered by raising them badly, caring more for falsehoods and phantoms than for the truth; and in the end both they themselves and everyone else 151a have seen that they are ignorant. Aristides son of Lysimachus is one of them, and there are a great many others. When they come back begging to be with me again, and doing extraordinary things to get it, the divine sign that comes to me forbids me to associate with some of them but allows it with others, and these make progress again.[10] Those who spend time with me also have this in common with women giving birth: they suffer labor pains and are filled with perplexity night and day, far more than women are. And my art can bring on this labor and 151b bring it to an end. So that's how it is with them. But some, Theaetetus, who don't seem to me to be pregnant at all, I realize have no need of me, and I very kindly play matchmaker for them and—with the god's help, I may say—I'm quite good at guessing whose company would benefit them. I've given many of them away to Prodicus, and many to other wise and inspired men. I've gone on at such length, my excellent friend, for this reason: I suspect, as you yourself think, that you're pregnant with something inside and in labor.[11] So put yourself 151c in my hands, as the son of a midwife and a midwife myself, and do your best to answer whatever I ask as well as you can. And if, when I examine something you say, I judge it to be a phantom and not true, and then take it from you and throw it away, don't be savage with me, the way first-time mothers are about their babies. Many people before now, my wonderful friend, have been so disposed toward me that they were ready to bite, literally, when I took some bit of nonsense away from them. They

10 Aristides, grandson of the famous Athenian statesman of the same name, appears as a boy in Plato's *Laches*.

11 Prodicus of Ceos was a well-known sophist, famous for his fine distinctions between words.

don't think I'm doing it out of goodwill; they're far from knowing that 151d no god is ill-disposed to human beings, and that I don't do anything like this out of ill will either; it's just that it's not at all right for me to accept a falsehood and suppress the truth. So once again, from the beginning, Theaetetus, try to say what knowledge is. And never say that you can't. If the god is willing and you act like a man, you will be able to.

KNOWLEDGE IS PERCEPTION

Theaetetus says knowledge is perception, and Socrates links this to Protagoras' view that things are as they appear.

THEAETETUS Well, Socrates, with you urging me on like that, it would be shameful not to do my utmost to say what 151e I can. It seems to me, then, that someone who knows something perceives what he knows, and, as it appears now at least, knowledge is nothing other than perception.

SOCRATES Well done, my boy, that's a noble answer: that's how you should speak when you declare yourself. But come, let's examine it together, to see whether it turns out to be fertile or a wind-egg. Knowledge, you say, is perception?[12]

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES It looks as if you've given no ordinary account of 152a knowledge; it's the one Protagoras gave too. He said the same thing in a different way. He says, you know, that a human being is "the measure of all things: of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not." You've read it, I suppose?[13]

THEAETETUS I've read it, many times.

12 A "wind-egg" is an unfertilized egg, one that will never hatch.
13 Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490–420 BC) was the most famous of the sophists; this sentence opened his book *Truth*. The saying is traditionally rendered "man is the measure of all things."

SOCRATES Doesn't he mean something like this: that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so in turn it is for you—and you and I are each a human being?

THEAETETUS Yes, that's what he says.

SOCRATES [152b] Well, it's likely that a wise man isn't talking nonsense. So let's follow him. Isn't it the case that sometimes, when the same wind is blowing, one of us feels cold and the other doesn't? Or one feels slightly cold and the other very cold?

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Then shall we say that at that moment the wind itself, by itself, is cold or not cold? Or shall we be persuaded by Protagoras that it is cold for the one who feels cold, and not for the one who doesn't?

THEAETETUS It seems we should.

SOCRATES And it appears that way to each of them?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And "appears" is the same as "is perceived"?

THEAETETUS It is.

SOCRATES [152c] Then appearing and perception are the same, in the case of hot things and everything of that kind. For as each person perceives things, so they are likely to be for each person.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Then perception is always of what is, and it is free from falsehood, since it is knowledge.

THEAETETUS Apparently.

SOCRATES Then, by the Graces, was Protagoras some kind of all-wise man, who spoke this to the rest of us, the great rabble, in riddles, while telling the truth to his students in secret?

THEAETETUS [152d] What do you mean by that, Socrates?

SOCRATES I'll tell you, and it's no ordinary account: that nothing is one thing, itself by itself, and you can't correctly call it anything or any sort of thing. If you call it large, it will also

appear small, and if heavy, light, and so on with everything, since nothing is one thing or something or any sort of thing. It's from movement and motion and mixture with one another that all the things we say "are" come to be—though we're wrong to speak of them that way, [152e] since nothing ever is; things are always coming to be. And on this point let's take it that all the wise, one after another, except Parmenides, are in agreement: Protagoras, Heraclitus and Empedocles, and the leading poets in each kind of poetry, Epicharmus in comedy and Homer in tragedy. When Homer says "Ocean, origin of the gods, and mother Tethys," he has said that all things are the offspring of flowing and motion. Or don't you think that's what he means?[14]

THEAETETUS I do.

SOCRATES [153a] Then who could still dispute with such an army, and with Homer as its general, without making himself ridiculous?

THEAETETUS It wouldn't be easy, Socrates.

SOCRATES No, Theaetetus, it wouldn't. Here, in fact, are signs enough in support of the account: motion supplies what seems to be, and coming to be, while rest supplies not being and perishing. Heat and fire, which generate and govern everything else, are themselves generated from movement and friction, and these two are motions. Or aren't these the origins of fire?

THEAETETUS [153b] They certainly are.

SOCRATES And the race of living creatures grows from these same things.

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES Well then, isn't the condition of bodies destroyed by rest and idleness, and preserved, for the most part, by exercise and motion?

THEAETETUS Yes.

14 Parmenides of Elea held that what is is one and unchanging; Heraclitus of Ephesus and Empedocles of Acragas were philosophers of change; Epicharmus was a Sicilian comic poet. The line is *Iliad* 14.201.

SOCRATES And isn't it by learning and practice, which are motions, that the condition of the soul acquires things learned and is preserved and gets better; while through rest, which is lack of practice and [153c] lack of learning, it learns nothing and forgets whatever it has learned?

THEAETETUS Very much so.

SOCRATES So one thing, motion, is good for both soul and body, and the other the opposite?

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Do I need to go on and tell you about still air and calm seas and the like—that the stillness rots and destroys, while the other preserves? And to cap it all, must I compel you to agree that by the golden cord Homer means nothing other than the sun, [153d] and is showing that as long as the heavens and the sun go round in their motion, everything among gods and humans exists and is preserved, but if this were to stop as if tied fast, all things would be destroyed and, as the saying goes, everything would be turned upside down?[15]

THEAETETUS I think, Socrates, it shows just what you say.

SOCRATES Then take it this way, my excellent friend. Start with the eyes: what you call white color isn't itself some separate thing outside your eyes, or in your eyes either. Don't [153e] assign it any place, because then it would of course be somewhere in position, staying put, and it wouldn't come to be in the process of becoming.

THEAETETUS Then how?

SOCRATES Let's follow the account we gave just now and posit that nothing is one thing, itself by itself. In that way black and white and any other color will turn out to have come to be from the eyes meeting the appropriate movement, and what we say each color [154a] is will be neither what meets nor what is met, but

15 In *Iliad* 8.18–27 Zeus boasts that he could haul up earth and sea with a golden cord and leave them hanging in the air.

something in between, which has come to be private to each. Or would you insist that each color appears to a dog, or any other animal, just as it appears to you?

THEAETETUS Good heavens, no, I wouldn't.

SOCRATES Well, does anything appear the same to another human being as it does to you? Are you firmly convinced of that? Or much rather that it doesn't appear the same even to you yourself, because you are never in the same condition as yourself?

THEAETETUS I think that rather than the other.

SOCRATES 154b Now if what we measure ourselves against or touch were large or white or hot, it would never have become different by encountering something else, provided it didn't change in itself. And again, if what does the measuring or touching were any of these things, it wouldn't have become different when something else came up to it or was affected in some way, if it were not itself affected. As things are, my friend, we find ourselves rather casually forced to say amazing and ridiculous things, as Protagoras would say, and everyone who undertakes to say what he does.

THEAETETUS How do you mean? What sort of things?

SOCRATES 154c Take a small example and you'll know everything I mean. Take six dice: if you put four beside them, we say they are more than the four, half as many again; but if you put twelve, we say they are fewer—half as many. And it isn't tolerable to say anything else. Or will you tolerate it?

THEAETETUS No, I won't.

SOCRATES Well then, suppose Protagoras or someone else asks you, "Theaetetus, is it possible for anything to become larger or more in any way other than by being increased?" What will you answer?

THEAETETUS If I answer what I think in response to this 154d question, Socrates, I'll say it isn't possible. But if I answer with an eye to the earlier one, taking care not to contradict myself, I'll say it is.

SOCRATES By Hera, my friend, that's a fine answer, and inspired. But it seems that if you answer that it is possible, we'll get something out of Euripides: our tongue won't be refuted, but our mind will.[16]

THEAETETUS That's true.

SOCRATES Now if you and I were clever and wise and had examined everything in our minds, we would by now be spending the rest of our time 154e testing each other out of sheer abundance, coming together like sophists for this sort of battle and knocking each other's arguments down with arguments. As it is, being ordinary people, we'll want first to look at our thoughts themselves in relation to themselves and see what they really are, and whether they agree with one another or not in any way at all.

THEAETETUS That's certainly what I would want.

SOCRATES And so do I. Since that's how things stand, won't we look at it again quietly, as people with plenty of time on their hands, 155a not getting irritated but really examining ourselves, to see what on earth these apparitions in us are? Examining the first of them, we'll say, I think, that nothing could ever become larger or smaller, either in bulk or in number, as long as it was equal to itself. Isn't that so?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And second, that a thing to which nothing was added and from which nothing was taken away would never either increase or diminish, but would always be equal.

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES 155b And third, isn't it impossible for something to be later what it wasn't before, without having become it and coming to be?

THEAETETUS It does seem so.

16 An allusion to Hippolytus's line in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (612): "My tongue swore, but my mind is unsworn."

SOCRATES Now these three agreements, I think, are fighting among themselves in our soul when we speak about the dice, or when we say that I, at my age, neither having grown nor having undergone the opposite, am within a year larger than you, who are young, and later smaller—not because anything has been 155c taken away from my bulk, but because you have grown. For then I am later what I was not before, without having become it. For without coming to be it is impossible to have become, and without losing any of my bulk I could never have become smaller. And there are thousands upon thousands of other cases like this, if we are going to accept these. You follow me, I take it, Theaetetus. You certainly seem to me to be no stranger to this sort of thing.

THEAETETUS Yes, by the gods, Socrates, and I'm extraordinarily amazed at what on earth these things are; sometimes when I really look at them I get quite dizzy.

SOCRATES 155d That's because Theodorus, my friend, seems to have guessed rightly about your nature. This experience, wondering, belongs very much to a philosopher: there is no other starting point of philosophy than this. And it seems that whoever said that Iris is the child of Thaumas was not a bad genealogist. But do you understand yet why these things are as they are, according to what we are saying Protagoras says, or not yet?[17]

THEAETETUS Not yet, I think.

SOCRATES Then will you be grateful to me if I help you search out the truth hidden in the thinking of a famous man—or rather, famous men— 155e and get it out of them?

THEAETETUS How could I not be? Very grateful indeed.

17 In Hesiod's *Theogony* (265–66), Iris, goddess of the rainbow and messenger of the gods, is daughter of Thaumas, whose name suggests *thauma*, "wonder."

EVERYTHING IS IN MOTION

Socrates sets out a doctrine in which all is motion, and perceptions arise twinned with their objects.

SOCRATES Then look around and make sure none of the uninitiated are listening. These are the people who think that nothing exists except what they can grip tightly with both hands, and who don't accept actions and processes of becoming and everything invisible as part of being.

THEAETETUS Well, Socrates, they are hard and 156a stubborn people you're talking about.

SOCRATES Yes, my boy, they're very crude indeed. But there are others, much more refined, whose mysteries I am going to tell you. Their first principle, on which everything we were saying just now also depends, is this: that the universe was motion and nothing besides, and that there are two kinds of motion, each unlimited in number, one having the power to act, the other to be acted upon. From the intercourse and friction of these with each other come offspring, unlimited in number, 156b but twins: on the one hand what is perceived, on the other a perception, which always emerges and is born together with what is perceived. The perceptions have names like these for us: seeings, hearings, smellings, feelings of cold and of heat, and also what are called pleasures and pains and desires and fears, and others besides—the unnamed ones are countless, the named ones very numerous. And the kind that is perceived is born alongside each of these: 156c colors of all kinds with seeings of all kinds, sounds in the same way with hearings, and the other perceived things born akin to the other perceptions. So what does this story mean for us, Theaetetus, in relation to what we said before? Do you see?

THEAETETUS Not really, Socrates.

SOCRATES Well, watch and see whether it can be finished off somehow. What it means to say is that all these things are in

motion, as we say, but that there is speed and slowness in their motion. What is slow has its motion in the same place and in relation to what comes near it, 156d and in that way it generates; but the offspring generated in this way are faster. For they travel, and their motion naturally consists in travel. So when an eye and something else commensurate with it come near each other and generate whiteness and the perception born along with it—which would never have come about if either of them had met something else—then, as they travel in between, 156e sight from the eyes and whiteness from what joins in generating the color, the eye becomes full of sight and now sees, and has become not sight but a seeing eye; while what joined in generating the color is filled all round with whiteness and has become, in turn, not whiteness but white—whether it's wood or stone or anything else that happens to be colored with that sort of color. And so with the rest—hard and hot and everything. We must understand them in the same way: none of them is anything itself by 157a itself, as we were saying before; all things of every kind come to be from motion, in their intercourse with one another. For even the active and the passive among them cannot, they say, be firmly conceived as being anything on its own. Nothing is active until it comes together with what is passive, nor passive until it comes together with what is active; and what comes together with one thing and is active turns out to be passive when it encounters something else. So from all this, as we were saying at the start, nothing is one thing itself by itself; it is always coming to be 157b for something. And "being" must be removed from everywhere—although we ourselves, many times and just now too, have been forced by habit and lack of knowledge to use it. But according to the wise, we shouldn't allow "something" or "someone's" or "mine" or "this" or "that" or any other word that makes things stand still. We should speak in accordance with nature of things coming to be and being made and perishing and altering. For if someone makes anything stand still by the way he speaks, he is easily refuted. And we must speak this way both about individual things and about

many things gathered together—the aggregates [157c] to which people give the names "human being" and "stone" and each animal and kind. So, Theaetetus, do these things seem delightful to you, and would you taste them as something to your liking?

THEAETETUS I don't know, Socrates. I can't even make out, where you're concerned, whether you're saying these things because you believe them or you're testing me.

SOCRATES You don't remember, my friend, that I don't know anything of this sort and don't claim any of it as my own—I am barren of it. I'm acting as your midwife, and that's why I'm singing incantations and serving up [157d] tastes of each of the wise, until I can help bring your belief out into the light. Once it has been brought out, I'll examine whether it turns out to be a wind-egg or fertile. So take heart and be steadfast, and answer well and bravely whatever appears to you about what I ask.

THEAETETUS Go ahead and ask.

SOCRATES Then tell me again whether you like the view that nothing is, but that good and beautiful and all the things we went through just now are always coming to be.

THEAETETUS Well, since I've heard you go through it like this, it seems to me amazingly reasonable, and I think it should be accepted as you've set it out.

DREAMS, ILLNESS AND MADNESS

Socrates asks how the theory copes with dreams and madness: the sick and sleeping are different perceivers.

SOCRATES [157e] Then let's not leave out what remains of it. What remains is dreams and illnesses, madness in particular, and all the cases of what is called mishearing or misseeing or misperceiving in some other way. You know, I suppose, that in all of these the account we went through just now is by general agreement thought to be refuted, [158a] on the grounds that in them we certainly have false perceptions, and that it's far from true that

what appears to each person also is; on the contrary, none of what appears is.

THEAETETUS What you say is very true, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then what account is left, my boy, for someone who holds that perception is knowledge and that what appears to each person also is, for the person to whom it appears?

THEAETETUS I hesitate to say I don't know what to say, Socrates, because you scolded me just now for saying so. But I really 158b couldn't dispute that people who are deranged or dreaming judge falsely, when some of them think they are gods and others imagine in their sleep that they have wings and are flying.[18]

SOCRATES Then don't you have in mind this other dispute about them either, especially about dreaming and being awake?

THEAETETUS What dispute?

SOCRATES The one I think you've often heard people raise when they ask what proof one could give if someone asked, right now, at the present moment, whether we are asleep and dreaming all our thoughts, 158c or awake and talking to each other in waking life.

THEAETETUS Well, Socrates, it's hard to see what proof one should use to show it. Everything corresponds exactly, as if in counterpart. Nothing prevents us from seeming to talk to each other in our sleep too about what we've just been discussing; and when in a dream we seem to be telling dreams, the likeness of the one to the other is uncanny.

SOCRATES So you see that it isn't hard to raise a dispute, when 158d people even dispute whether it's waking or dreaming. And since the time we spend asleep is equal to the time we spend awake, in each our soul fights hard for whatever beliefs are present at the time as being true above all, so that for an equal

18 "Judge" and "judgment" render *doxazein* and *doxa*, often translated "believe" and "opinion"; the Greek covers whatever seems so to someone. This translation uses "judgment" throughout.

time we say these things are real and for an equal time those, and we insist on each with equal conviction.

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES And doesn't the same account hold for illnesses and madness, except that the time isn't equal?

THEAETETUS That's right.

SOCRATES Well then, will the truth be determined by length or shortness of time?

THEAETETUS [158e] That would be ridiculous in many ways.

SOCRATES But do you have anything else clear to point to, to show which of these judgments are true?

THEAETETUS I don't think so.

SOCRATES Then listen to me tell you what those who define whatever seems at any time as true for whoever it seems to would say about them. They speak, I think, by asking like this: "Theaetetus, can something that is completely different have the same power in any way as the other thing? And let's not take what we're asking about to be in one way the same and in another way different, but wholly different."

THEAETETUS [159a] Then it's impossible for it to have anything the same, either in power or in anything else, when it's entirely different.

SOCRATES Then mustn't we also agree that such a thing is unlike?

THEAETETUS I think so.

SOCRATES So if anything happens to become like or unlike something, either itself or something else, shall we say that in becoming like it becomes the same, and in becoming unlike, different?

THEAETETUS We must.

SOCRATES Now we were saying earlier that the things that act are many, indeed unlimited, and so are the things that are acted upon?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And also that a thing mixed with one thing and then with another will produce, not the same things, but different ones?

THEAETETUS 159b Certainly.

SOCRATES Then let's now speak of me and you and other things according to the same account: Socrates healthy, and again Socrates sick. Shall we say that the latter is like or unlike the former?

THEAETETUS You mean Socrates sick, this as a whole, compared with that as a whole, Socrates healthy?

SOCRATES You've taken my point perfectly: that's exactly what I mean.

THEAETETUS Unlike, surely.

SOCRATES And so different, just as it is unlike?

THEAETETUS Necessarily.

SOCRATES 159c And you'll say the same about Socrates asleep, and in all the states we went through just now?

THEAETETUS I will.

SOCRATES Now take each of the things whose nature it is to act on something. When it gets hold of Socrates healthy, won't it treat me as one person, and when it gets hold of Socrates sick, as a different one?

THEAETETUS Why wouldn't it?

SOCRATES And in each case the two of us, I who am acted on and that thing which acts, will generate different things?

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES Now when I drink wine while I'm healthy, it appears pleasant and sweet to me?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Yes, because on what we agreed earlier, the thing that [159d] acts and the thing acted on have generated sweetness and a perception, both moving at once. The perception, being on the side of what is acted on, has made the tongue perceiving; the sweetness, on the side of the wine and moving about it, has made the wine both be and appear sweet to the healthy tongue.

THEAETETUS Yes, that's certainly how we agreed on the earlier points.

SOCRATES But when it gets hold of me sick, isn't it the case, first of all, that in truth it hasn't got hold of the same man? It has come upon someone unlike.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES [159e] Then this sort of Socrates and the drinking of the wine have generated different things again: around the tongue, a perception of bitterness; around the wine, a bitterness coming into being and moving. And they've made the wine not bitterness but bitter, and me not perception but perceiving?

THEAETETUS Exactly.

SOCRATES So I will never become like this in perceiving anything else; a different object means a different perception, and it makes the perceiver of a different kind [160a] and a different person. Nor will the thing that acts on me ever, by meeting someone else and generating the same thing, become like this itself; by generating something else from someone else, it will become of a different kind.

THEAETETUS That's so.

SOCRATES Nor again will I become like this for myself, or it become like that for itself.

THEAETETUS No, they won't.

SOCRATES But when I become perceiving, I must become perceiving of something; to become perceiving, yet perceiving nothing, is [160b] impossible. And the thing, in turn, must become

so for someone, when it becomes sweet or bitter or anything of that sort; to become sweet, yet sweet to no one, is impossible.

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES What's left, I think, is that we are, if we are, or become, if we become, for each other, since necessity binds our being together, but binds it to nothing else, and not to ourselves either. So what's left is that we're bound to each other. Hence if anyone speaks of something as being, he must say it is for someone, or of something, or in relation to something; and the same if he speaks of it as becoming. But that anything is or becomes in and of itself he must neither 160c say himself nor accept when someone else says it, as the account we've gone through indicates.

THEAETETUS Absolutely, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then since what acts on me is for me and not for anyone else, am I not also the one who perceives it, and no one else?

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES So my perception is true for me, since it always belongs to my being; and I am the judge, as Protagoras says, of the things that are, for me, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES 160d Then if I'm free of falsehood and don't stumble in my thinking about what is or what becomes, how could I fail to have knowledge of the things I perceive?

THEAETETUS There's no way you could.

SOCRATES So it was a splendid thing you said, that knowledge is nothing other than perception. And it has all come to the same thing: according to Homer and Heraclitus and that whole tribe, everything is in motion like flowing streams; according to Protagoras, wisest of men, a human being is the measure of all things; and according to 160e Theaetetus, given that this is how things are, perception turns out to be knowledge. Isn't that right,

Theaetetus? Shall we say this is your newborn child, as it were, and my delivery? Or how would you put it?

THEAETETUS It has to be so, Socrates.

MAN IS THE MEASURE

Socrates asks why Protagoras is wiser than a pig or a tadpole, and tests whether seeing is knowing.

SOCRATES Well then, it seems we've managed at last, with difficulty, to give birth to this, whatever it turns out to be. But after the birth we must hold its naming rite and really run around it in a circle, in argument, making sure we don't overlook that what's been born isn't worth rearing, [161a] but an empty wind-egg, a falsehood. Or do you think your child must be reared no matter what, and not exposed? Or will you bear to see it put to the test, and not get terribly angry if someone takes it from you, though it's your first?[19]

THEODORUS Theaetetus will bear it, Socrates; he's not bad-tempered at all. But for heaven's sake, tell me: in what way is it not so after all?

SOCRATES You're a real lover of arguments, Theodorus, and a good fellow, to think I'm some sort of sack of arguments and can easily pull one out [161b] and say that this isn't so after all. You don't notice what's happening: none of the arguments comes from me; they always come from the person I'm talking with. I know nothing more than a little: just enough to take an argument from someone else who is wise and receive it fairly. So now too I'll try to do that with this boy, not to say anything myself.

THEODORUS That's better put, Socrates. Do it that way.

SOCRATES Do you know, then, Theodorus, what surprises me about your friend Protagoras?

THEODORUS [161c] What's that?

19 The Amphidromia ("running around") was a household rite a few days after birth: the baby was carried around the hearth and accepted into the family, and only then named. An unwanted infant might instead be exposed.

SOCRATES Most of what he said I like very much, that what seems to each person also is so. But I was surprised by the beginning of his account: that at the opening of his *Truth* he didn't say "a pig is the measure of all things," or "a baboon," or some even stranger creature that has perception. Then he would have begun addressing us in a grand and quite contemptuous style, showing that while we were admiring him like a god for his wisdom, he [161d] was actually no better in understanding than a tadpole, let alone any other human being. Or what should we say, Theodorus? For if what each person judges through perception is to be true for him, and no one is to discern another's experience better, and no one has more authority to examine another's judgment, whether it's correct or false, but, as has been said many times, each person alone will judge his own things, and these are all correct and true, then why on earth, my friend, was Protagoras wise, so as to be rightly thought fit to teach others [161e] for large fees, while we were more ignorant and had to go to school to him, when each of us is himself the measure of his own wisdom? How can we not say that Protagoras is playing to the crowd in saying this? As for me and my art of midwifery, I say nothing of how much ridicule we earn; and so, I think, does the whole business of dialogue. For to examine and try to refute one another's appearances and judgments, when each person's are correct, isn't that a long [162a] and resounding piece of nonsense, if the *Truth* of Protagoras is true, and wasn't joking when it uttered its words from the inner sanctum of his book?

THEODORUS Socrates, the man was my friend, as you said just now. So I wouldn't want Protagoras refuted through my agreeing, nor again to resist you against what I think. So take Theaetetus again. In any case he seemed just now to be following you very nicely.

SOCRATES [162b] Theodorus, if you went to Sparta and visited the wrestling grounds, would you think it right to watch others

naked, some of them in poor shape, and not strip off beside them and show your own figure in turn?

THEODORUS Why not, if they'd leave it to me and listen to me? Just as now I think I'll persuade you all to let me watch, and not drag me to the gymnasium, stiff as I already am, but to wrestle with the one who's younger and more supple.

SOCRATES Well, Theodorus, if that's dear to you, it's no enemy 162c to me, as the proverb-makers say. So back we must go to wise Theaetetus. Tell me first, Theaetetus, about what we went through just now: aren't you surprised if you're suddenly going to turn out no worse in wisdom than any human being, or even any god? Or do you think the Protagorean measure applies any less to gods than to human beings?

THEAETETUS By Zeus, I don't. And as for what you're asking, I'm very surprised. When we were going through the way they say that what seems 162d to each person also is, for the one it seems to, it seemed to me very well said. But now, all of a sudden, it has flipped over to the opposite.

SOCRATES That's because you're young, my dear boy, and so you're quick to listen to crowd-pleasing speeches and be persuaded. To this Protagoras, or someone else on his behalf, will say: "My fine boys and old men, you sit together making speeches to the crowd, and you drag in the gods, 162e whom I leave out of my speaking and writing, whether they exist or do not. And you say what the many would be glad to hear: how terrible it would be if each human being were no different in wisdom from any grazing beast. But you state no demonstration or proof whatever; you rely on likelihood. If Theodorus or any other geometer were willing to do geometry relying on that, he wouldn't be worth a thing. So consider, you and Theodorus, whether you'll accept arguments stated with plausible talk and likelihoods 163a about matters this important."[20]

20 Protagoras wrote that about the gods he could not know whether they exist or do not.

THEAETETUS But it wouldn't be just, Socrates; neither you nor we would say so.

SOCRATES Then we must look at it another way, it seems, as your account and Theodorus's say.

THEAETETUS Yes, another way, by all means.

SOCRATES Let's look at it like this, then: whether knowledge and perception are the same or different. That's what our whole argument has been aiming at, I suppose, and it was for its sake that we stirred up all these many strange things. Isn't it?

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES 163b Well then, shall we agree that whatever we perceive by seeing or hearing, all of it, we also know at the same time? For example, before we've learned the language of foreigners, shall we say we don't hear them when they speak, or that we both hear and know what they're saying? And again, when we don't know our letters and look at them, shall we insist that we don't see them, or that we know them, if we see them?

THEAETETUS Just that much of them, Socrates, that we see and hear, we'll say we know. In the one case we see and know the shape and the color; in the other we hear and at the same time know the 163c high and low pitch. But what the schoolteachers and interpreters teach about them we neither perceive by seeing or hearing, nor know.

SOCRATES Excellent, Theaetetus. It's not worth my disputing that with you, so that you can grow. But look, here's another thing coming at us, and consider how we'll fend it off.

THEAETETUS What's that?

SOCRATES 163d This sort of thing. Suppose someone asked: "If a person has once come to know something, and still has the memory of it and keeps it, is it possible that at the moment he remembers it he doesn't know the very thing he remembers?" I'm being long-winded, it seems, when all I want to ask is whether someone who has learned something and remembers it doesn't know it.

THEAETETUS How could that be, Socrates? What you're describing would be a monstrosity.

SOCRATES Am I talking nonsense, then? But consider. Don't you say that seeing is perceiving, and sight is perception?

THEAETETUS I do.

SOCRATES 163e Then someone who has seen something has come to know what he saw, according to what we said just now?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Well? You do say there's such a thing as memory?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Memory of nothing, or of something?

THEAETETUS Of something, surely.

SOCRATES Of things one has learned and perceived, things of that sort?

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES And what someone has seen, he sometimes remembers, I suppose?

THEAETETUS He does.

SOCRATES Even with his eyes shut? Or does he forget it when he does that?

THEAETETUS But that would be a terrible thing to say, Socrates.

SOCRATES 164a Yet we have to say it, if we're going to save the earlier account. If not, it's done for.

THEAETETUS I suspect so too, by Zeus, but I don't quite grasp it. Tell me how.

SOCRATES Like this. The one who sees has come to know what he sees, we say; for sight and perception and knowledge have been agreed to be the same.

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES But the one who has seen and come to know what he saw, if he shuts his eyes, remembers it but doesn't see it. Right?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES 164b But "doesn't see" is "doesn't know," if "sees" is "knows."

THEAETETUS True.

SOCRATES So the result is that someone who has come to know something doesn't know it though he still remembers it, since he doesn't see it. And that's what we said would be a monstrosity, if it happened.

THEAETETUS What you say is perfectly true.

SOCRATES So something impossible evidently follows if one says that knowledge and perception are the same.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Then we must say that each is different.

THEAETETUS It looks that way.

SOCRATES 164c Then what could knowledge be? We have to start again from the beginning, it seems. And yet, Theaetetus, what are we about to do?

THEAETETUS About what?

SOCRATES We seem to me to be like a cock of poor breeding: we've jumped away from the argument and started crowing before we've won.

THEAETETUS How so?

SOCRATES We seem to have been content, like professional debaters, to reach agreement on the basis of agreements about words, and to have got the better of the argument by some such means. And though we say we're not contestants but philosophers, 164d we don't notice we're doing the same things as those clever fellows.

THEAETETUS I still don't understand what you mean.

SOCRATES Well, I'll try to make clear what I have in mind about them. We asked whether someone who has learned something and remembers it doesn't know it; and having shown that

someone who saw and then shut his eyes remembers but doesn't see, we showed that he doesn't know and at the same time remembers, and that this was impossible. And so the Protagorean tale perished, and yours along with it, the one about knowledge and perception being the same.

THEAETETUS [164e] Apparently.

SOCRATES Not so, I think, my friend, if the father of the other tale were alive; he'd have done a lot to defend it. As it is, it's an orphan, and we're dragging it through the mud. Not even the guardians Protagoras left behind are willing to help it, and Theodorus here is one of them. Well then, we'll risk helping it ourselves, for justice's sake.

THEODORUS It isn't I, Socrates, but rather Callias [165a] son of Hipponicus who is guardian of his affairs. As for me, somehow I turned rather quickly from bare argument to geometry. But we'll be grateful to you if you help it.[21]

SOCRATES Well said, Theodorus. Then look at my help, at any rate. For someone who didn't pay attention to the words, the way we're mostly used to affirming and denying things, might agree to things more terrible than these just now. Shall I tell you how, or Theaetetus?

THEODORUS Tell us both; but let the younger one answer. [165b] If he trips, he'll disgrace himself less.

SOCRATES Then I'll put the most terrible question. It's something like this, I think: "Can the same person, knowing something, not know what he knows?"

THEODORUS What shall we answer, then, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS That it's impossible, I think.

SOCRATES Not if you hold that seeing is knowing. For what will you do with an inescapable question, trapped in a well, as the saying goes, when some unflappable man covers with his hand

21 Callias, the richest man in Athens, was a lavish patron of sophists; Protagoras stays at his house in Plato's *Protagoras*.

165c one of your eyes and asks whether you see his cloak with the covered one?

THEAETETUS I'll say not with this one, I suppose, but with the other.

SOCRATES Then you see and don't see the same thing at the same time?

THEAETETUS In a way, yes.

SOCRATES "That's not what I'm setting you," he'll say, "and I didn't ask about the how. I asked whether what you know you also don't know. As it is, you're plainly seeing what you don't see. And you happen to have agreed that seeing is knowing, and not seeing not knowing. So work out from this what follows for you."

THEAETETUS 165d Well, I work out that it's the opposite of what I proposed.

SOCRATES And perhaps, my wonderful friend, you'd have suffered more of this sort if someone had gone on to ask you whether it's possible to know sharply and dimly, and to know from close up but not from afar, and to know the same thing intensely and faintly, and countless other things. A light-armed mercenary in arguments would lie in ambush and ask them, once you'd laid it down that knowledge and perception are the same. He'd attack hearing and smelling and other perceptions like these, and keep refuting you, 165e pressing on and not letting go, until you, lost in wonder at his much-prayed-for wisdom, got your feet tangled up by him; and then, once he'd subdued and tied you up, he'd release you for whatever ransom you and he agreed on. So what argument, you might ask, will Protagoras put forward in support of his own? Shall we try to state it?

THEAETETUS Certainly.

PROTAGORAS ANSWERS BACK

Socrates speaks for Protagoras: the wise man does not make judgments truer, only better.

SOCRATES Well, he'll say all the things we're saying in his defense, [166a] and he'll come to close quarters, I think, full of contempt for us, and say: This fine Socrates here, when a little boy was asked whether the same person can remember something and at the same time not know it, and got scared, and in his fright said no because he couldn't see ahead, made me a laughingstock in his arguments. But the truth, Socrates, you lazybones, is this. When you examine any of my views by questioning, if the person questioned gives the answers I would give and is tripped up, then I [166b] am refuted; but if he gives different ones, it's the one questioned himself. For instance, do you think anyone will concede to you that a person's memory of what he experienced, when he's no longer experiencing it, is the same sort of experience as he had when he was experiencing it? Far from it. Or again, that he'll shrink from agreeing that the same person can know and not know the same thing? Or, if he's afraid of that, that he'll ever grant that someone who is becoming unlike is the same as he was before becoming unlike? Or rather that there is a "someone" at all, and not "someones," and those becoming infinitely many, if [166c] unlikeness comes about, if we're going to have to guard against each other's hunting for words? No, my blessed friend—he'll say—go at what I actually say in a nobler way, and refute it if you can: show that our perceptions don't come about private to each of us; or that, if they are private, it wouldn't follow any the more that what appears comes to be, or, if we must use the word "is," is, for that person alone to whom it appears. And talking about pigs and baboons, you're not only behaving like a pig yourself, you're persuading your listeners to do the same with my writings, [166d] and that's not well done. For I say the truth is as I've written: each of us is the measure of what is and what is not. But one person differs

immensely from another in just this, that to one some things are and appear, and to another other things. And I'm far from saying there's no such thing as wisdom or a wise man. On the contrary, I call wise precisely the person who, when bad things appear and are to one of us, changes him and makes good things appear and be to him. But again, don't go after my account by attacking its wording; 166e learn more clearly still what I mean, like this. Recall what was said earlier: to someone sick, what he eats appears and is bitter, while to someone healthy it is and appears the opposite. Now neither of these needs to be 167a made wiser; that isn't even possible. Nor should one accuse the sick man of being ignorant because he judges things like that, and call the healthy man wise because he judges otherwise. A change must be made to the other condition, since the other state is better. In the same way in education, a change must be made from one state to the better one. But the doctor makes the change with drugs, the sophist with words. For no one ever made someone who judged falsely later judge truly: it isn't possible to judge what is not, or anything other than what one is experiencing, and these 167b are always true. Rather, I think, when someone with a bad condition of soul judges things akin to it, a good condition makes him judge other things of the corresponding kind. These appearances some people, out of inexperience, call true; I call some better than others, but not at all truer. And the wise, my dear Socrates, I'm far from calling frogs. Where bodies are concerned I call them doctors, and where plants are concerned, farmers. For I say that these too, whenever a plant is sick, instill in it, instead of bad 167c perceptions, good and healthy ones, and true ones too; and that wise and good orators make good things, instead of bad, seem just to their cities. For whatever things seem just and fine to each city are so for it, as long as it holds them to be; but the wise man makes good things, instead of the bad ones they had in each case, be and seem so for them. And by the same account the sophist too, who is able to guide his pupils in this way, is wise 167d and worth a lot of money to those he has taught. And in this way some are wiser than others, and no one

judges falsely; and you, whether you like it or not, must put up with being a measure. For this account is saved by these points. If you can dispute it from the start, dispute it by setting out an argument against it; if you'd rather do it through questions, then through questions. That's not something to avoid either; it's what a person of sense should pursue above all. But do 167e it this way: don't do wrong in your questioning. It makes very little sense for someone who claims to care about excellence to do nothing but go on doing wrong in arguments. Doing wrong, in this sort of thing, is when someone doesn't keep separate the time he spends competing from the time he spends in dialogue: in the one playing games and tripping people up as much as he can, but in dialogue being serious and setting his partner straight, pointing out to him only those 168a errors he had been led into by himself and by his earlier company. If you do it this way, those who spend time with you will blame themselves, not you, for their confusion and perplexity; they'll pursue you and love you, and hate themselves and flee from themselves into philosophy, so as to become different people and be rid of who they were before. But if you do the opposite of this, as most people do, the opposite will happen to you: you'll turn your companions, instead of into philosophers, 168b into people who hate this pursuit, once they grow older. So if you take my advice, as was said before as well, you'll sit down with a gracious mind, not in a hostile or combative spirit, and really examine what we mean when we declare that everything is in motion and that what seems to each, individual or city, also is. And from there you'll consider whether knowledge and perception are the same or different, and not, as just now, from the habitual use 168c of words and names, which most people drag around any way they happen to, causing each other every kind of perplexity. That, Theodorus, is the help I've made a start at giving your friend, to the best of my ability, small help from small resources. If he were alive himself, he would have helped his own more grandly.

THEODORUS You're joking, Socrates. You've come to the man's aid with real youthful vigor.

SOCRATES Kind of you, my friend. Now tell me: did you notice just now how Protagoras was speaking and reproaching us because, 168d carrying on our arguments with a child, we used the boy's fear to fight against his views? And how he called it a piece of frivolity, and, making much of his measure of all things, urged us to be serious about his account?

THEODORUS Of course I noticed, Socrates.

SOCRATES Well then? Do you tell me to obey him?

THEODORUS Very much so.

SOCRATES You see, then, that everyone here except you is a child. So if we're going to obey the man, you and I must question and 168e answer each other and be serious about his account, so that he can't at least charge us with examining his account while playing around with youngsters.

THEODORUS What? Wouldn't Theaetetus follow an argument under investigation better than lots of men with long beards?

SOCRATES But not better than you, Theodorus. So don't think that I must, in every possible way, 169a defend your dead friend, and you in no way at all. Come on, my good man, follow along a little, just until we find out whether you have to be the measure where diagrams are concerned, or whether everyone is as competent in their own eyes as you are in astronomy and the other subjects in which you're reputed to excel.

THEODORUS It isn't easy, Socrates, to sit beside you and not give an account. I was talking nonsense just now when I said you'd let me keep my clothes on, and wouldn't compel me the way the Spartans do. You seem to me, rather, to be going the way of Sciron. 169b The Spartans tell you to leave or strip, but you seem to me to be playing more the part of Antaeus: you don't let anyone who comes near go until you've stripped him and forced him to wrestle in arguments.[22]

22 Sciron and Antaeus were mythical villains: Sciron kicked travelers off a cliff, and Antaeus made passers-by wrestle him to the death. Theseus killed Sciron, and Heracles Antaeus.

SOCRATES You've pictured my sickness very well, Theodorus. But I'm tougher than they were. Countless Heracleses and Theseuses, mighty at argument, have met me and given me a thorough beating, but I don't hold back any the more; [169c] so terrible a passion for exercise in these things has got into me. So don't you begrudge me a bout either, and benefit yourself and me at the same time.

THEODORUS I won't argue any more. Lead on wherever you like. Whatever fate you spin for me in these matters, I must endure being refuted. But I won't be able to put myself at your disposal beyond what you propose.

SOCRATES That far is enough. And watch out especially for this: that we don't slip into some childish kind of argument without noticing, [169d] and someone reproach us for it again.

THEODORUS Well, I'll try, as far as I can.

IS EVERY JUDGMENT TRUE?

If every judgment is true, so is the judgment that Protagoras is wrong, and his theory undermines itself.

SOCRATES Then let's first get hold again of the same point as before, and see whether we were right or wrong to be dissatisfied when we criticized the account for making each person self-sufficient in understanding, and Protagoras conceded to us that some people are superior when it comes to the better and the worse, and that these are in fact the wise. Weren't we?

THEODORUS Yes.

SOCRATES Now if he himself were here agreeing to it, and it weren't we [169e] who conceded it in helping him, there'd be no need to take it up again and confirm it. But as it is, someone might well rule that we have no authority to agree on his behalf. So it's better to come to a clearer agreement on this very point; it makes no small difference whether it's so or otherwise.

THEODORUS That's true.

SOCRATES Then let's get the agreement not through others but from his own statement, [170a] as briefly as possible.

THEODORUS How?

SOCRATES Like this. He says, doesn't he, that what seems to each person also is, for the one it seems to?

THEODORUS Yes, he does.

SOCRATES Well then, Protagoras, we too are stating the judgments of a human being, or rather of all human beings, when we say that there is no one who doesn't consider himself wiser than others in some things, and others wiser than himself in other things. In the greatest dangers, at any rate, when they're in trouble on campaign, or in sickness, or in a storm at sea, people treat those in charge in each case like gods, expecting them to be their saviors, [170b] though they're superior in nothing else but knowing. And all of human life, I suppose, is full of people looking for teachers and rulers for themselves, for other living things, and for their work, and of people who think themselves competent to teach and competent to rule. In all these cases, what else shall we say but that human beings themselves consider that wisdom and ignorance exist among them?

THEODORUS Nothing else.

SOCRATES And they consider wisdom to be true thinking, and ignorance false judgment?

THEODORUS [170c] Of course.

SOCRATES Then what are we to make of the account, Protagoras? Shall we say that human beings always judge truly, or sometimes truly and sometimes falsely? Either way, it turns out that they don't always judge truly, but both truly and falsely. Consider, Theodorus: would any of Protagoras's followers, or you yourself, be willing to fight it out that no one thinks anyone else is ignorant and judges falsely?

THEODORUS No, Socrates, that's beyond belief.

SOCRATES [170d] And yet that's the necessity the account comes to, the one that says a human being is the measure of all things.

THEODORUS How so?

SOCRATES When you've decided something in your own mind and declare to me your judgment about it, let that be true for you, according to his account. But are the rest of us not allowed to act as judges of your decision? Or do we always decide that you judge truly? Or do countless people, every time, fight you with contrary judgments, holding that your decisions and beliefs are false?

THEODORUS [170e] By Zeus, Socrates, "countless thousands" indeed, as Homer says, and they give me all the trouble that people can.[23]

SOCRATES Well then? Do you want us to say that you then judge truly for yourself, but falsely for the countless others?

THEODORUS It seems it has to be so, on the account at any rate.

SOCRATES And what about Protagoras himself? Isn't it necessary that, if neither he himself believed that a human being is the measure, nor did the many, as indeed they don't, then this truth [171a] he wrote is true for no one? And if he believed it, but the majority don't share his belief, you know that, to begin with, it is not more than it is, by as much as those it doesn't seem so to outnumber those it does.

THEODORUS Necessarily, if it's going to be and not be according to each judgment.

SOCRATES Next, it has this most exquisite feature. He, for his part, concedes about his own belief that the belief of those who judge the contrary, by which they consider him mistaken, is true, I suppose, since he agrees that everyone judges things that are.

THEODORUS Certainly.

23 An echo of Homer's *Odyssey*, where the phrase describes a crowd of enemies.

SOCRATES [171b] Then he'd be conceding that his own belief is false, if he agrees that the belief of those who think he's mistaken is true?

THEODORUS Necessarily.

SOCRATES But the others don't concede that they themselves are mistaken?

THEODORUS No, they don't.

SOCRATES And he, in turn, agrees that this judgment of theirs is true too, from what he has written.

THEODORUS Apparently.

SOCRATES So it will be disputed by everyone, starting from Protagoras; or rather, he'll agree to it: when he concedes that the person saying the opposite judges truly, [171c] then Protagoras himself will concede that neither a dog nor any chance human being is the measure of even one thing he hasn't learned. Isn't that so?

THEODORUS It is.

SOCRATES Then since it's disputed by everyone, Protagoras's *Truth* would be true for no one, neither for anyone else nor for him himself.

THEODORUS We're running my friend down too hard, Socrates.

SOCRATES Yet it isn't clear, my friend, that we aren't also running past what is right. Of course it's likely that he, being older, is wiser [171d] than we are. And if he were to pop his head up out of the ground right here, as far as the neck, he'd very likely convict me many times over of talking nonsense, and you of agreeing, and then sink down again and be off at a run. But we, I think, have to make do with ourselves as we are, and always say what seems so to us. And so now too, shall we say that anyone at all would agree at least to this: that one person is wiser than another, and also more ignorant?

THEODORUS It seems so to me, at any rate.

SOCRATES And that the account would stand firmest in the way [171e] we sketched in helping Protagoras: that most things are, for each person, the way they seem, hot, dry, sweet, everything of that type. But if he'll grant anywhere that one person is superior to another, he'd be willing to say it's about what is healthy and diseased: that not every woman and child, or animal either, is capable of healing itself by knowing what's healthy for it; here, rather, one person is superior to another, if anywhere?

THEODORUS That seems right to me.

SOCRATES [172a] And in political matters too, fine and shameful, just and unjust, pious and not, whatever each city thinks and lays down as lawful for itself also is so in truth for each; and in these matters no individual is any wiser than another, and no city than another. But in laying down what is or isn't advantageous for itself, there, if anywhere, he'll agree in turn that one counselor is superior to another, and one city's judgment to another's, with respect to truth. And he would hardly dare [172b] to say that whatever a city lays down, thinking it advantageous for itself, will certainly turn out to its advantage. But in the area I'm speaking of, in just and unjust, pious and impious, people are willing to insist that none of these has by nature a being of its own, but that what seems so to people in common becomes true at the time it seems so, and for as long as it seems so. And all those who don't state Protagoras's account in full conduct their wisdom somewhat like this. But, Theodorus, one argument after another, each larger than the last, is [172c] overtaking us.

THEODORUS Well, don't we have leisure, Socrates?

THE DIGRESSION: THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE ORATOR

Socrates contrasts the courtroom speaker, a slave to the clock, with the free but awkward philosopher.

SOCRATES Apparently. And often, my remarkable friend, I've noticed before, and I notice now too, how natural it is that those

who have spent a long time in philosophy look ridiculous as speakers when they go into the law courts.

THEODORUS What do you mean?

SOCRATES It's likely that those who've been knocking about in law courts and such places since they were young have been brought up, compared with those raised in philosophy and in 172d this kind of pursuit, like household slaves compared with free men.

THEODORUS In what way?

SOCRATES In that the one sort always has what you mentioned, leisure, and they carry on their discussions in peace and at leisure. Just as we are now taking up a third argument, one after another, so do they, if the newcomer pleases them more than the one in hand, as it did us. And they don't care whether they speak at length or briefly, if only they hit upon what is. But the others always speak with no leisure 172e (the flowing water hurries them on), and they aren't free to make their speeches about whatever they want. The opposing party stands over them wielding compulsion, with the written charge read out alongside, beyond which nothing may be said: what they call the sworn statement. Their speeches are always about a fellow slave, addressed to a master who sits there with the case in his hand; and the contests are never about some other matter, but always about the speaker's own case, and often the race is run 173a for his very life. As a result of all this they become tense and sharp, knowing how to flatter their master in words and fawn on him in deeds; but they're small and crooked in their souls.[24] For their slavery from youth has robbed them of growth and straightness and freedom, forcing them to do crooked things and loading great dangers and fears on souls still tender. Unable to bear these with justice and truth, they turn straight to lies and to wronging each other in return, 173b and they're bent and broken in many ways, so that they pass from youths to men with nothing healthy in

24 Speeches in Athenian courts were timed by a water clock.

their thinking, having become clever and wise, so they think. That's what these people are like, Theodorus. As for those of our own chorus, do you want us to describe them, or leave them and turn back to the argument, so that we don't, as we were saying just now, abuse our freedom to change from argument to argument too much?

THEODORUS Not at all, Socrates; describe them. You put it very 173c well, that we who dance in this kind of chorus are not servants of our arguments; the arguments are ours, like household slaves, and each of them waits to be finished whenever we see fit. There's no juror over us, and no spectator, as with poets, to criticize us and give orders.

SOCRATES Let's talk, then, since that's what you want, about the leaders of the chorus; for why would anyone talk about those who spend their time in philosophy in a paltry way? These people, I suppose, from their youth first of all don't know the way to the 173d marketplace, or where the law court is, or the council chamber, or any other public meeting place of the city. Laws and decrees, spoken or written, they neither see nor hear. The eager efforts of political clubs to win office, their meetings and dinners and revels with flute-girls: it doesn't occur to them to take part in these even in a dream. Whether someone in the city is of good or bad birth, or what flaw has come down to someone from his ancestors, on the men's side or the women's, he knows no more than, as the saying goes, he knows how many 173e pints there are in the sea. And he doesn't even know that he doesn't know all this. For he doesn't keep away from it to win a good reputation; in reality only his body is situated and resides in the city, while his mind, having judged all these things petty and worthless, disdains them and flies everywhere, as Pindar says, "beneath the earth," measuring its surfaces, and "above the heaven," studying the stars, 174a and searching out every nature of each of the things that are, each as a whole, never lowering itself to anything close at hand.[25]

25 Pindar, the lyric poet of the fifth century BC; the words come from a lost poem.

THEODORUS What do you mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES Just as Thales, Theodorus, while studying the stars and looking upward, fell into a well, and a witty and charming Thracian servant girl is said to have joked that he was eager to know what was in the heavens, but didn't notice what was in front of him and at his feet. The same joke fits everyone 174b who spends his life in philosophy. For really, such a person fails to notice his neighbor, the man next door: not only what he's doing, but almost whether he's a human being or some other creature. But what a human being is, and what it befits such a nature to do or undergo differently from the others, that he searches for and takes pains to investigate. You understand, Theodorus, don't you?[26]

THEODORUS I do. And what you say is true.

SOCRATES That's why, my friend, when such a person deals 174c with anyone, privately or in public, as I was saying at the start, whenever he's forced in a law court or anywhere else to talk about what's at his feet and before his eyes, he gives a laugh not only to Thracian girls but to the rest of the crowd too, falling into wells and every kind of perplexity through inexperience. His awkwardness is dreadful, and gives an impression of stupidity. In exchanges of abuse he has nothing of his own to abuse anyone with, since he knows nothing bad about anyone, never having made a study of it. So, at a loss, 174d he looks ridiculous. And at people's praises and the boasting of others he is plainly laughing, not pretending but really, and so he seems a fool. For when a tyrant or king is being eulogized, he thinks he's hearing one of the herdsmen, a swineherd, say, or a shepherd or cowherd, being congratulated for getting a lot of milk; only he considers that they tend and milk an animal more ill-tempered and treacherous than those do, and that such a man is bound to become no less boorish and uneducated than the 174e herdsmen, for lack of leisure, with his city wall thrown around him like a

26 Thales of Miletus (sixth century BC) was traditionally counted the first Greek philosopher and was famed for his astronomy.

sheepfold in the hills. And when he hears that someone owns ten thousand plethra of land or more, and so possesses an amazing amount, it seems a tiny amount to him, used as he is to looking at the whole earth.[27] And when people sing the praises of family lines, that someone is noble because he can point to seven wealthy grandfathers, he thinks the praise comes from people with altogether dull vision, who look at something small, who 175a through lack of education can't keep their eyes on the whole, or work out that everyone has had countless tens of thousands of grandfathers and ancestors, among whom rich and poor, kings and slaves, foreigners and Greeks have often come by the tens of thousands, for anyone at all. And when people pride themselves on a list of twenty-five ancestors and trace their line back to Heracles son of Amphitryon, the pettiness of it strikes him as absurd; and that 175b the twenty-fifth ancestor going up from Amphitryon was whatever sort of man fortune happened to make him, and the fiftieth from him too, this he laughs at, since they can't do the reckoning and rid their foolish souls of vanity.[28] In all these things such a person is laughed at by the many, partly because he seems arrogant, partly because he's ignorant of what's at his feet and at a loss in every situation.

THEODORUS You describe exactly what happens, Socrates.

SOCRATES But when he himself, my friend, draws someone upward, and 175c the other is willing to step out of "What wrong am I doing you, or you me?" into an examination of justice and injustice themselves, what each of them is, and how they differ from everything else and from each other; or out of "whether a king is happy," or "a man who has gold in store," into an examination of kingship, and of human happiness and misery in general, what sort of things they are, and in what way it befits human nature to gain the one and escape the other: when that small-souled, sharp, litigious fellow has to 175d give an account of

27 The plethron was a Greek measure of about 100 feet, or, for land, about a quarter of an acre; the stadion, which appears later, was six plethra, about 600 feet.
28 Amphitryon was Heracles' mortal father (Zeus his divine one); many noble families claimed descent from Heracles.

all these things, he pays it back in reverse. Dizzy from hanging so high, gazing down from mid-air, unused to it, distressed and at a loss and stammering, he gives a laugh, not to Thracian girls or any other uneducated person, since they don't perceive it, but to everyone who has been brought up the opposite way from slaves. That, Theodorus, is the character of each. The one, 175e truly brought up in freedom and leisure, whom you call a philosopher, can't be blamed for seeming simple and a nobody when he runs into slavish chores: if, say, he doesn't know how to pack up bedding, or to season a dish or a flattering speech. The other can do all such services smartly and sharply, but doesn't know how to throw his cloak over his right shoulder like a free man, or to take up the harmony of words 176a and rightly hymn the true life of gods and happy men.[29]

THEODORUS If you could persuade everyone of what you say as you persuade me, Socrates, there would be more peace and fewer evils among human beings.

SOCRATES But it isn't possible for bad things to be done away with, Theodorus—there must always be something opposed to the good—nor for them to have their seat among the gods. Of necessity they haunt mortal nature and this region here. That is why we should try to flee from here 176b to there as quickly as we can. And fleeing means becoming like god so far as possible; and becoming like god means becoming just and holy, with understanding. But really, my excellent friend, it isn't at all easy to persuade people that the reasons most of them give for fleeing wickedness and pursuing excellence are not the reasons for practicing the one and not the other. They say it's so as not to seem bad and to seem good. That, as it seems to me, is what's called an old wives' tale. Let's put the truth like this. God is in no way 176c and by no means unjust, but as just as it is possible to be, and nothing is more like him than whichever of us becomes as just as he can. It is here that a man's true cleverness is to be

29 Wearing one's cloak draped neatly over the right shoulder was a mark of a well-bred man.

found—and his worthlessness and cowardice too. For knowing this is wisdom and true excellence, and not knowing it is plain ignorance and badness. All the other things that pass for cleverness and wisdom are vulgar when they turn up in political power, and in the crafts, 176d mere drudgery. So when someone does wrong and says or does unholy things, much the best course is not to concede that he's clever because he's unscrupulous. Such people glory in the reproach: they think they're being told they aren't fools, "useless burdens on the earth," but the kind of men a city needs if they're to come through safely.[30] So we must tell them the truth: they are all the more what they don't think they are because they don't think it. They don't know the penalty for injustice, which is the last thing anyone should be ignorant of. It isn't what they suppose—beatings and executions, which people sometimes suffer 176e without doing any wrong at all—but a penalty there is no escaping.

THEODORUS What penalty do you mean?

SOCRATES There are two patterns, my friend, set up in reality: one divine and supremely happy, the other godless and supremely wretched. Not seeing that this is so, in their foolishness and utter 177a senselessness they fail to notice that by their unjust actions they are growing like the one and unlike the other. They pay the penalty for this by living the life that matches the pattern they resemble. And if we tell them that unless they get rid of their cleverness, then when they die that place that is pure of evils will not receive them, but here on earth they will always have the kind of life that resembles them, bad men keeping company with bad—why then, being so clever and unscrupulous, they'll listen to all this as the talk of fools.

THEODORUS Very much so, Socrates.

SOCRATES 177b I know it, my friend. But there's one thing that does happen to them. When they have to give and receive an account in private about the things they disparage, and are will-

30 The phrase "burdens on the earth" echoes Homer (*Iliad* 18.104).

ing to stand their ground like men for a good long while and not run away like cowards, then, strangely enough, my remarkable friend, in the end they aren't satisfied with what they themselves are saying. That rhetoric of theirs somehow withers away, so that they seem no different from children. But let's leave these matters, since they are really a digression—otherwise more and more 177c will keep pouring in and bury our original argument—and let's go back to what we were discussing before, if you agree.

THEODORUS For my part, Socrates, things like this are no less pleasant to listen to; at my age they're easier to follow. Still, if you think best, let's go back.

JUDGING THE FUTURE

Socrates argues that about what will benefit us in the future, experts judge better than laymen.

SOCRATES Well then, we were at about this point in the argument. We were saying that those who claim that being is in motion, and that whatever seems to each person at any time also is so for the one it seems to, are willing to insist on this in other matters, and not least about what is just: 177d that whatever a city decides seems just to it and lays down, this really is just for the city that laid it down, for as long as it stays laid down. But about good things, we said, no one is any longer brave enough to dare to fight it out and claim that whatever a city lays down thinking it beneficial to itself really is beneficial, for as long as it stays laid down—unless he meant the name; and that, surely, would make a mockery of what we're talking about. Isn't that so?

THEODORUS Certainly.

SOCRATES 177e Right—he mustn't speak of the name, but consider the thing that is named.

THEODORUS No, he mustn't.

SOCRATES But whatever the city calls it, that is surely what it aims at when it legislates, and it makes all its laws, so far as it believes and is able, as beneficial to itself as possible. Or does it legislate with an eye to something else?

THEODORUS 178a Not at all.

SOCRATES Then does every city always hit the mark, or does it often miss as well?

THEODORUS I think they miss as well.

SOCRATES Well, everyone would be still more ready to agree to these same points if the question were asked about the whole class to which the beneficial belongs. And that, I take it, has to do with the time to come as well. When we legislate, we lay down laws on the understanding that they will be beneficial in the time that follows—and this we would rightly call "the future."

THEODORUS 178b Certainly.

SOCRATES Come on, then, let's put our question to Protagoras, or to anyone else who says the same as he does, like this. "A human being is the measure of all things," as you people say, Protagoras—of white things, heavy things, light things, of every such thing without exception. For he has the standard for judging them within himself, and when he thinks they are the way he experiences them, he thinks what is true for him, and what is. Isn't that it?

THEODORUS It is.

SOCRATES "And does he also have within himself the standard for the things that are going to be, Protagoras," we'll say, 178c "so that whatever he thinks will be actually comes about for the one who thought it? Take heat. When a layman thinks he's going to catch a fever and that his temperature will go up, and someone else, a doctor, thinks the opposite, whose judgment shall we say the future will bear out? Or will it bear out both, so that for the doctor the man won't become hot or feverish, but for himself he'll be both?"

THEODORUS That would be ridiculous.

SOCRATES Rather, I imagine, when it's a question of whether a wine is going to be sweet or dry, [178d] it's the farmer's judgment that carries authority, not the lyre player's.

THEODORUS Of course.

SOCRATES Nor, again, when it's a question of what will be out of tune or in tune, would a gymnastics trainer judge better than a musician what will later seem in tune even to the trainer himself.

THEODORUS Not at all.

SOCRATES And when a feast is being prepared, the verdict of the man who is going to dine, if he knows nothing of cooking, carries less authority than the chef's about the pleasure it will give. Let's not yet fight it out about what is already [178e] pleasant to each person, or has been. The question is about what is going to seem and to be for each person in the future: is each of us the best judge of that for himself? Or would you, Protagoras—at least about what arguments will be persuasive to each of us in a law court—judge beforehand better than any layman you like?

THEODORUS Very much so, Socrates. That, at any rate, was where he emphatically promised to outdo everyone.

SOCRATES Yes, by Zeus, my good fellow. Otherwise no one would have paid him a great deal of money [179a] to talk with him, if he hadn't persuaded his pupils that about what will be and will seem in the future, too, no seer or anyone else could judge better than he could himself.

THEODORUS Very true.

SOCRATES Then legislation, too, and the beneficial concern the future, and everyone would agree that a city, when it legislates, must often miss what is most beneficial?

THEODORUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Then it will be fair for us to say to your teacher [179b] that he must agree that one person is wiser than another, and

that such a person is a measure, while I, who don't know, have no need whatsoever to become a measure—though the argument on his behalf was forcing me just now to be one, whether I liked it or not.

THEODORUS It seems to me, Socrates, that it's at that point above all that the argument is caught—though it is caught here too, where it makes other people's judgments authoritative, and those judgments turned out to hold that his own claims are not true at all.

THE FLOWERS AND THE PARTISANS OF THE WHOLE

Socrates shows that if everything changes in every way, nothing can be correctly said at all.

SOCRATES [179c] There are many other ways too, Theodorus, in which a claim like that could be caught, the claim that every judgment of every person is true. But where it's a matter of each person's present experience, from which our perceptions and the judgments that go with them arise, it's harder to catch them out as untrue. Though perhaps I'm talking nonsense. They may well be uncatchable, and those who claim that they are self-evident and are knowledge may be telling the truth, and Theaetetus here was not wide of the mark when he [179d] said that perception and knowledge are the same. So we must come to closer quarters, as the argument on Protagoras's behalf told us to, and examine this being that is in motion, tapping it to hear whether it rings sound or cracked. There has certainly been a fight over it, and no small one, nor among only a few.

THEODORUS Far from being small—in Ionia it's even growing enormously. The followers of Heraclitus are leading the chorus for this theory with tremendous vigor.

SOCRATES All the more reason, my dear Theodorus, to examine it from the [179e] beginning, just as they themselves put it forward.

THEODORUS Absolutely. In fact, Socrates, as for these Heraclitean doctrines—or, as you say, Homeric, and older still—you

can no more discuss them with the people around Ephesus themselves, the ones who claim to be experts, than with people driven mad by a gadfly. They are simply in motion, true to their own writings. As for sticking to an argument or a question and calmly 180a answering and asking in turn, there's less than nothing of that in them. Or rather, "not even nothing" overstates the case, so little calm is there in these men. If you ask one of them anything, they pull out little riddling phrases as if from a quiver and shoot them off at you; and if you try to get an account of what he meant by that one, you'll be struck by another, newly fashioned with some fresh name. You'll never get anywhere with any of them. Nor do they themselves with one another. They're very careful not to allow anything to be settled, 180b either in an argument or in their own souls—thinking, I suppose, that that would be something standing still. That is what they wage all-out war on, and drive out from everywhere as far as they can.

SOCRATES Perhaps, Theodorus, you've seen these men fighting but haven't been with them in peacetime—they aren't friends of yours. But I imagine they explain such things at their leisure to their students, whom they want to make like themselves.

THEODORUS What students, my remarkable friend? Among people like that, nobody becomes 180c anybody's student. They spring up on their own, wherever each one happens to have caught his inspiration, and each thinks the other knows nothing. So from these people, as I was about to say, you'll never get an account, willingly or unwillingly. We have to take the matter over ourselves and examine it like a problem.

SOCRATES That's fair enough. And as for the problem, haven't we inherited it from the ancients, who hid it from the many in poetry— 180d that the origin of all other things is Oceanus and Tethys, who are flowing streams, and that nothing stands still—and from later thinkers, who, being wiser, demonstrate it openly, so that even cobblers can hear and learn their wisdom, stop foolishly thinking that some things are at rest and others in

motion, and, having learned that everything is in motion, hold them in honor? But I almost forgot, Theodorus, that others again have declared the opposite of this, 180e such as "Unmoved is the name for the whole," and all the other things that the likes of Melissus and Parmenides insist on in opposition to all these: that all things are one, and that this one stands still in itself, having no place in which to move.[31] So what are we to do with all these people, my friend? Advancing little by little, we've fallen without noticing into the middle between the two sides, and unless we 181a somehow defend ourselves and escape, we'll pay the price, like the players in the wrestling schools who play tug-of-war across a line, when they get caught by both teams and dragged in opposite directions. So I think we should first examine the side we set out after, the flowers. If they appear to be talking sense, we'll pull alongside them and try to escape the others. But if the partisans of the Whole seem to speak more truly, we'll run over to 181b them, away from those who would move even what is unmovable. And if both turn out to be saying nothing reasonable, we'll be ridiculous for thinking that we, insignificant as we are, have something to say, after rejecting men so very ancient and so very wise. So consider, Theodorus, whether it pays to venture into such danger.[32]

THEODORUS Oh no, Socrates, it would be intolerable not to examine thoroughly what each side is saying.

SOCRATES Then we must examine it, since you're so eager. It seems 181c to me, then, that the starting point of our inquiry is motion: what sort of thing do they mean when they say that everything is in motion? What I mean is this. Do they speak of one kind of motion, or, as it seems to me, two? But don't let it be only my view; you take part too, so that we share whatever we have to suffer. So tell me: do you call it motion when something changes from place to place, or turns around in the same place?

31 Melissus of Samos was a follower of Parmenides; the words quoted come from Parmenides' poem.

32 A pun: *rheontes*, "flowers," are those who say everything flows; *stasiōtai*, "partisans," suggests *stasis*, standing still—apt for those who say the Whole is at rest.

THEODORUS I do.

SOCRATES Let that be one kind, then. But when a thing stays in [181d] the same place but grows old, or becomes black from white or hard from soft, or undergoes some other alteration, isn't it right to call this another kind of motion?

THEODORUS It seems to me it has to be.

SOCRATES Then I say there are these two kinds of motion: alteration and movement from place to place.

THEODORUS And you're right.

SOCRATES Having made this distinction, then, let's now talk with those who say that everything is in motion, and ask them: "Do you say that everything [181e] is in motion in both ways, both moving from place to place and altering, or that some things move in both ways and others in only one?"

THEODORUS By Zeus, I can't say. But I think they would say in both ways.

SOCRATES If not, my friend, things will turn out for them to be both in motion and at rest, and it will be no more correct to say that everything is in motion than that everything is at rest.

THEODORUS Very true.

SOCRATES So since they must be in motion, and there must be no absence of motion [182a] in anything, all things are always in every kind of motion.

THEODORUS Necessarily.

SOCRATES Then consider this point in their theory. Didn't we say that they explain the coming-to-be of heat, or whiteness, or anything else, roughly like this: each of these moves, together with a perception, between what acts and what is acted on; and what is acted on becomes perceiving but not a perception, while what acts becomes something of a certain quality but not a quality? Perhaps "quality" seems a strange word to you, and you don't understand it when it's put so generally. So hear it [182b] piece by piece. What acts doesn't become heat or whiteness, but hot

and white, and so on with the rest. You remember, I think, that earlier we said that nothing is one thing, itself by itself, and neither again is what acts or what is acted on; but that from the two of them coming together with each other, perceptions and things perceived are born, and the one side become things of a certain quality, the other perceivers.[33]

THEODORUS I remember—of course I do.

SOCRATES [182c] Let's say goodbye to the rest, then, whether they put it this way or some other. Let's keep an eye only on the point we're discussing, and ask: "Everything is in motion and flows, as you say? Isn't that it?"

THEODORUS Yes.

SOCRATES With both the motions we distinguished, moving from place to place and altering?

THEODORUS Of course, if it's to be completely in motion.

SOCRATES Now if things only moved from place to place and didn't alter, we could presumably say what the things are like that flow as they move. Or how do we put it?

THEODORUS Like that.

SOCRATES [182d] But since not even this stays fixed—that what flows flows white—but it changes, so that there is a flowing of this very thing too, the whiteness, and a change into another color, so that it can't be caught staying put in this respect, is it ever possible to call anything by the name of a color in such a way as to name it correctly?

THEODORUS How could anyone, Socrates? Or anything else of that sort, if it always slips away while one is speaking, flowing as it does?

SOCRATES And what shall we say about any perception whatever—for example [182e] seeing or hearing? That it ever stays put in the very act of seeing or hearing?

33 "Quality" (*poiotēs*) seems to be a word Plato coined here, from *poios*, "of what sort."

THEODORUS It can't, if everything is in motion.

SOCRATES Then we should no more call anything seeing than not seeing, nor any other perception than not, since everything is in every way in motion.

THEODORUS No, we shouldn't.

SOCRATES And yet perception is knowledge, as Theaetetus and I said.

THEODORUS You did say that.

SOCRATES So when we were asked what knowledge is, the answer we gave was no more knowledge than not knowledge.

THEODORUS [183a] So it seems.

SOCRATES A fine way this would turn out to correct our answer! We were so eager to show that everything is in motion, precisely so that that answer would turn out to be correct. But what has turned up, it seems, is that if everything is in motion, every answer, whatever it's about, is equally correct—to say that it is so and that it is not so, or, if you like, that it "becomes" so, so as not to bring these people to a standstill by our words.

THEODORUS You're right.

SOCRATES Except, Theodorus, that I said "so" and "not so." One mustn't even say this "so"—for then [183b] the "so" would no longer be in motion—nor again "not so"—for that isn't motion either. The people who propound this theory need to establish some other language, since as things stand they have no words for their own hypothesis—unless perhaps "not even so": that would suit them best, said with no limit.

THEODORUS That would certainly be the idiom most natural to them.

SOCRATES So, Theodorus, we're rid of your friend, and we don't yet grant him that every man is the measure of all [183c] things, unless he's a man of understanding. And we won't grant that knowledge is perception, at least not on the approach that

everything is in motion—unless Theaetetus here has some other way of putting it.

THEODORUS Very well said, Socrates. With these points settled, I too was to be released from answering you, by our agreement, once the discussion of Protagoras's theory came to an end.

THEAETETUS Not before, Theodorus, you and Socrates [183d] have gone through the people who say that the whole stands still, as you proposed just now.

THEODORUS Theaetetus, young as you are, are you teaching your elders to do wrong by breaking their agreements? No—get ready to give Socrates an account of what remains.

THEAETETUS Yes, if he wants. But I'd very much have liked to hear about the people I mean.

THEODORUS When you challenge Socrates to argument, you're "challenging horsemen to the plain." So ask, and you'll hear.[34]

SOCRATES But I don't think, Theodorus, I'll do what [183e] Theaetetus is asking.

THEODORUS Why won't you do it?

SOCRATES Melissus and the others who say that the whole is one and stands still—I'm ashamed to examine them crudely, but I'm less ashamed before them than before Parmenides, who is one. Parmenides seems to me, in Homer's words, "one to be revered" and at the same time "awesome." I met the man when I was very young and he was very old, [184a] and he seemed to me to have a depth that was altogether noble. So I'm afraid we may not understand what he says, and fall still further short of what he meant by it; and, most important, that the question our discussion set out to answer—what knowledge is—may go unexamined because of the arguments crowding in on us like a band of revelers, if we let them in. Besides, the argument we're rousing now is unmanageably large. If one examines it in passing, it would be treated unworthily; and if one does it justice, it will stretch out

34 A proverb: inviting someone to fight on the ground where they are strongest.

and make the question of knowledge disappear.[35] We must do neither, but try to use the art of midwifery to deliver 184b Theaetetus of what he's carrying in the womb about knowledge.

THEODORUS Well, if you think so, that's what we should do.

THE SOUL AND THE SENSES

Being, sameness and difference are grasped by the soul itself, not through the senses, so perception is not knowledge.

SOCRATES Then, Theaetetus, consider one more point about what's been said. You answered that perception is knowledge, didn't you?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Now suppose someone asked you: "With what does a person see white and black things, and with what does he hear high and low sounds?" You'd say, I imagine, "With the eyes and ears."

THEAETETUS I would.

SOCRATES 184c Being easygoing with words and phrases, and not scrutinizing them with precision, is for the most part not ill-bred; if anything, the opposite is small-minded. But sometimes it's necessary—as now it's necessary to take hold of the answer you're giving, where it isn't correct. Consider: which answer is more correct—that the eyes are what we see with, or what we see through; and the ears what we hear with, or what we hear through?

THEAETETUS It seems to me, Socrates, that they are what we perceive each thing through, rather than with.

SOCRATES 184d Yes, it would surely be strange, my boy, if a lot of senses sat inside us as if in wooden horses, and they didn't all converge on some single form—soul, or whatever one should call it—with which we perceive, through these as instruments, everything that is perceptible.

35 Homer, *Iliad* 3.172, where Helen addresses Priam.

THEAETETUS Well, I think it's this way rather than that.

SOCRATES Here's why I'm being so precise with you. I want to know whether it's with some one and the same part of ourselves that we reach white and black [184e] things through the eyes, and other things again through the other senses; and whether, if asked, you'll be able to refer all such things to the body. But perhaps it's better for you to say these things in answering than for me to do the work on your behalf. So tell me: the things through which you perceive what is hot and hard and light and sweet—do you count each of them as belonging to the body, or to something else?

THEAETETUS To nothing else.

SOCRATES And will you also be willing to agree that what you perceive through one power [185a] it is impossible to perceive through another—for example, what you perceive through hearing, to perceive through sight, or what through sight, through hearing?

THEAETETUS Of course I'll be willing.

SOCRATES So if you think something about both, you couldn't be perceiving it about both through either the one organ or the other.

THEAETETUS No, I couldn't.

SOCRATES Now take a sound and a color. First of all, don't you think this very thing about both of them, that both of them are?

THEAETETUS I do.

SOCRATES And also that each of them is different from the other and the same as itself?

THEAETETUS [185b] Of course.

SOCRATES And that both together are two, and each is one?

THEAETETUS That too.

SOCRATES And are you also able to consider whether they are unlike or like each other?

THEAETETUS Perhaps.

SOCRATES Now through what do you think all these things about them? It's not possible to grasp what they have in common either through hearing or through sight. Here's further evidence for what we're saying. If it were possible to consider whether both are salty or not, 185c you know you'll be able to say what you would consider it with; and that is clearly neither sight nor hearing, but something else.

THEAETETUS Of course it is—the power that works through the tongue.

SOCRATES Well said. But through what does the power work that makes plain to you what is common to all things, and to these in particular—what you apply the words "is" and "is not" to, and the other things we were just asking about them? What organs will you assign to all these, through which the perceiving part of us perceives each of them?

THEAETETUS You mean being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, the same and the different, and also 185d one and the rest of number as applied to them. And clearly you're also asking about even and odd, and everything else that goes with these—through which of the body's parts do we perceive them with the soul?

SOCRATES You're following me splendidly, Theaetetus. Those are exactly the things I'm asking about.

THEAETETUS By Zeus, Socrates, I couldn't say—except that it seems to me there isn't any special organ for these things at all, as there is for the others. Rather, 185e it seems to me that the soul itself, through itself, examines what is common to all things.

SOCRATES That's because you're beautiful, Theaetetus, and not ugly, as Theodorus was saying—for whoever speaks beautifully is beautiful and good. And besides being beautiful, you've done me a kindness: you've released me from a very long argument, if it seems to you that the soul examines some things itself

through itself, and others through the body's powers. That was what I thought myself, and I wanted you to think so too.[36]

THEAETETUS 186a Well, it certainly does seem so.

SOCRATES To which of the two, then, do you assign being? For this, above all, goes along with everything.

THEAETETUS I assign it to the things the soul reaches out for itself, by itself.

SOCRATES And like and unlike too, and same and different?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES What about beautiful and ugly, good and bad?

THEAETETUS These too, I think, are among the things whose being it examines most of all in relation to one another, weighing up within itself the 186b past and the present against the future.

SOCRATES Hold on. Won't it perceive the hardness of what is hard through touch, and the softness of what is soft in the same way?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES But their being, and the fact that they are, and their opposition to each other, and again the being of that opposition —these the soul itself tries to judge for us, by going back over them and comparing them with one another.

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES So there are some things that humans and animals alike are naturally able to perceive 186c from the moment they're born: the experiences that reach the soul through the body. But reflections on these, as regards their being and usefulness, come only with difficulty and over time, through a great deal of trouble and education, to those they come to at all?

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

36 At the start of the dialogue Theodorus said Theaetetus was not handsome, being snub-nosed and bulging-eyed like Socrates.

SOCRATES Now can someone reach truth who doesn't even reach being?

THEAETETUS Impossible.

SOCRATES And if someone fails to reach the truth of something, will he ever have knowledge of it?

THEAETETUS 186d How could he, Socrates?

SOCRATES So knowledge is not in our experiences but in our reasoning about them. For in reasoning, it seems, it is possible to grasp being and truth, but in experiences it's impossible.

THEAETETUS Apparently.

SOCRATES Then will you call the two by the same name, when they differ so greatly?

THEAETETUS That wouldn't be right, anyway.

SOCRATES Then what name do you give to the first—seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling cold, feeling hot?

THEAETETUS 186e Perceiving. What else?

SOCRATES So all of it together you call perception?

THEAETETUS Necessarily.

SOCRATES Which, we say, has no share in grasping truth—since it has none in grasping being either.

THEAETETUS No, it hasn't.

SOCRATES Nor, then, in knowledge.

THEAETETUS No.

SOCRATES Then perception and knowledge could never be the same thing, Theaetetus.

THEAETETUS Apparently not, Socrates. And now, above all, it has become perfectly plain that knowledge is something other than perception.

SOCRATES 187a But we certainly didn't begin our conversation in order to find out what knowledge is not, but what it is. Still, we've come this far: we won't look for it in perception at all, but

in whatever name the soul has when it is occupied, itself by itself, with the things that are.

THEAETETUS Well, Socrates, that, I think, is called judging.

KNOWLEDGE IS TRUE JUDGMENT

Theaetetus proposes that knowledge is true judgment, and Socrates asks how false judgment is possible.

SOCRATES You think rightly, my friend. Now look again from the [187b] beginning. Wipe out everything that came before and see whether you can see any better, now that you've come this far. And tell me again what knowledge is.

THEAETETUS It's impossible to say it's judgment of every kind, Socrates, since there is false judgment too. But it looks as if true judgment is knowledge; let that be my answer. If it doesn't turn out that way as we go on, as happened this time, we'll try to say something else.

SOCRATES That's the way to speak, Theaetetus—eagerly, rather than the way you hesitated to answer at first. For if [187c] we act like this, one of two things will happen: either we'll find what we're after, or we'll be less inclined to think we know what we don't know at all—and that would be no contemptible reward. So what do you say now? There being two kinds of judgment, one true and the other false, do you define knowledge as true judgment?

THEAETETUS I do. That, in turn, is how it looks to me now.

SOCRATES Then is it still worth going back over something about judgment—

THEAETETUS What do you mean?

SOCRATES [187d] Something troubles me—now, and often before too—so that I've been in great perplexity, both by myself and with others, unable to say what this experience in us is and how it comes about.

THEAETETUS What experience?

SOCRATES Someone's judging falsely. Even now I'm still in two minds, considering whether we should let it go, or examine it in a different way from a little while ago.

THEAETETUS Why not, Socrates, if it seems in any way necessary? Just now you and Theodorus were saying, and rightly, about leisure, that in discussions like these nothing presses us.

SOCRATES [187e] You're right to remind me. Perhaps it's not a bad moment to go back over our tracks, as it were. It's surely better to get through a little well than a lot inadequately.

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES Well then, what are we actually saying? Do we say that there is false judgment on each occasion, and that one of us judges falsely and another truly, as if that were how things naturally are?

THEAETETUS Yes, we do.

SOCRATES [188a] Now isn't it true for us, about all things together and each in particular, that either we know it or we don't know it? Learning and forgetting, as things in between, I'll leave aside for now; they have nothing to do with our argument at present.

THEAETETUS Well, Socrates, there's nothing else left about each thing except knowing it or not knowing it.

SOCRATES Then it follows that anyone who judges must judge either something he knows or something he doesn't know?

THEAETETUS It must.

SOCRATES And it's certainly impossible for someone who knows a thing not to know it, or for someone who doesn't know it [188b] to know it.

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES Then does someone who judges falsely think that things he knows are not those things but some others of the things he knows—so that, knowing both, he is also ignorant of both?

THEAETETUS That's impossible, Socrates.

SOCRATES Well then, does he think that things he doesn't know are some others of the things he doesn't know? Is it possible for someone who knows neither Theaetetus nor Socrates to get it into his head that Socrates is Theaetetus, or Theaetetus Socrates?

THEAETETUS 188c How could he?

SOCRATES But surely a person doesn't think that things he knows are things he doesn't know, or again that things he doesn't know are things he knows.

THEAETETUS That would be monstrous.

SOCRATES Then how could anyone still judge falsely? Outside these cases, surely, it is impossible to judge, since everything is either known or not known by us; and within them it appears nowhere possible to judge falsely.

THEAETETUS Very true.

SOCRATES Then shouldn't we look for what we're seeking not this way, going by 188d knowing and not knowing, but by being and not being?

THEAETETUS What do you mean?

SOCRATES It may simply be that someone who judges about anything things that are not cannot fail to judge falsely, however things stand with his thinking otherwise.

THEAETETUS That's likely too, Socrates.

SOCRATES Well then, what shall we say, Theaetetus, if someone cross-examines us: "Is what you describe possible for anyone? Will any human being judge what is not, whether about one of the things that are or just by itself?" And we, it seems, will reply: "Yes, when 188e he thinks, but thinks what is not true." Or what shall we say?

THEAETETUS That.

SOCRATES Then is there something like this anywhere else too?

THEAETETUS Like what?

SOCRATES Someone's seeing something, yet seeing nothing.

THEAETETUS How could that be?

SOCRATES But surely if he sees some one thing, he sees one of the things that are. Or do you think that what is one can ever be among the things that are not?

THEAETETUS I don't.

SOCRATES So whoever sees some one thing sees something that is.

THEAETETUS Apparently.

SOCRATES 189a And whoever hears something hears some one thing, and something that is.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And whoever touches something touches some one thing, and something that is, if it's one?

THEAETETUS That too.

SOCRATES And doesn't whoever judges judge some one thing?

THEAETETUS He must.

SOCRATES And whoever judges some one thing judges something that is?

THEAETETUS I agree.

SOCRATES So whoever judges what is not judges nothing.

THEAETETUS Apparently.

SOCRATES But whoever judges nothing doesn't judge at all.

THEAETETUS That seems clear.

SOCRATES 189b So it isn't possible to judge what is not, either about the things that are or just by itself.

THEAETETUS Apparently not.

SOCRATES So judging falsely is something other than judging things that are not.

THEAETETUS It seems to be something other.

SOCRATES So neither this way nor the way we were examining it a little while ago is there false judgment in us.

THEAETETUS No, there isn't.

SOCRATES Well, is it when it happens like this that we give it that name?

THEAETETUS How?

SOCRATES We say that false judgment is a kind of other-judging, [189c] when someone, having swapped one of the things that are for another of the things that are in his thinking, says that it is that other. For in this way he always judges something that is, but one thing in place of another; and since he misses what he was aiming at, he could fairly be called someone who judges falsely.

THEAETETUS Now I think you've put it exactly right. When someone judges ugly in place of beautiful, or beautiful in place of ugly, then he truly judges falsely.

SOCRATES It's obvious, Theaetetus, that you look down on me and aren't afraid of me.

THEAETETUS Why do you say that?

SOCRATES You don't think, I imagine, that I'd pounce on your "truly falsely" [189d] and ask whether it's possible for what is swift to come about slowly, or what is light heavily, or for any other opposite to come about, not according to its own nature but according to that of its opposite, in a way opposite to itself. I'll let that pass, then, so that your boldness won't go for nothing. But you're satisfied, you say, that judging falsely is other-judging?

THEAETETUS I am.

SOCRATES So in your judgment it is possible to set down in one's thinking one thing as another and not as what it is.

THEAETETUS Yes, it is.

SOCRATES [189e] Now when someone's thinking does this, mustn't it be thinking either of both things or of one of them?

THEAETETUS Yes, it must—either both at once or in turn.

SOCRATES Excellent. And by thinking do you mean what I mean?

THEAETETUS What do you mean by it?

SOCRATES An account that the soul goes through with itself about whatever it's considering. I'm telling you this, mind you, as someone who doesn't know. But this is the picture I have of it: when the soul thinks, it is simply conversing, 190a asking itself questions and answering them, saying yes and saying no. And when it has come to a decision, whether slowly or with a sudden leap, and is now saying the same thing and not in two minds, we call this its judgment. So what I call judging is speaking, and a judgment is a statement that has been made—not to someone else, though, and not aloud, but silently to oneself. What about you?

THEAETETUS I call it that too.

SOCRATES So when someone judges one thing to be another, it seems he is also saying to himself that the one thing is the other.

THEAETETUS 190b Of course.

SOCRATES Now try to remember whether you've ever said to yourself that beyond all doubt what is beautiful is ugly, or what is unjust is just. Or—to sum it all up—consider whether you've ever tried to persuade yourself that beyond all doubt one thing is another. Isn't it quite the reverse? Not even in your sleep have you ever dared to say to yourself that odd numbers are, after all, completely even, or anything else of that sort.

THEAETETUS That's true.

SOCRATES 190c And do you think anyone else, sane or mad, would dare to say to himself in earnest, trying to talk himself into it, that the ox must be a horse, or two must be one?

THEAETETUS By Zeus, I don't.

SOCRATES So if speaking to oneself is judging, no one who speaks of both things and judges both, grasping both with his

soul, could say and judge that the one is the other. But you too must let the word "other" pass; 190d what I mean by it is this: that no one judges that the ugly is beautiful, or anything else of that sort.

THEAETETUS Yes, Socrates, I'll let it pass, and I think it's as you say.

SOCRATES So it is impossible for someone who is judging both things to judge that the one is the other.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES But then if he judges only one of them, and not the other at all, he will never judge that the one is the other.

THEAETETUS True. He'd be forced to grasp the one he isn't judging too.

SOCRATES So neither someone who judges both nor someone who judges one of them can 190e other-judge. And so anyone who defines false judgment as other-judging would be talking nonsense. Neither this way nor the earlier ways does false judgment appear to exist in us.

THEAETETUS It seems not.

SOCRATES And yet, Theaetetus, if it turns out that this doesn't exist, we'll be forced to agree to many absurd things.

THEAETETUS What sort of things?

SOCRATES I won't tell you until I've tried examining it in every way. I'd be ashamed on our behalf if, while we're still at a loss, we were forced 191a to agree to what I have in mind. But if we find the answer and get free, then we'll talk about other people as the ones this happens to, while we stand clear of the ridicule. And if we're completely at a loss, then I suppose we'll be humbled, and like seasick passengers we'll let the argument trample on us and do whatever it likes with us. So listen to where I still find a way through our problem.

THEAETETUS Just tell me.

SOCRATES I'll deny that we were right to agree, when we agreed that it's impossible for someone to judge that things he knows are things he doesn't know, [191b] and to be deceived. It is possible, in a way.

THEAETETUS Do you mean what I suspected myself at the time we said it was like this: that sometimes I, who know Socrates, see someone else in the distance whom I don't know, and think it is Socrates, whom I know? That sort of thing you're talking about does happen in a case like that.

SOCRATES And didn't we back away from that, because it made us both know and not know what we know?

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Let's not put it that way, then, but like this. Perhaps it will [191c] give way to us, perhaps it will resist. But really we're in such a tight spot that we have to turn every argument over and put it to the test. So see whether I'm talking sense. Is it possible for someone who didn't know something before to learn it later?

THEAETETUS Yes, it is.

SOCRATES And again another thing, and another?

THEAETETUS Of course.

THE WAX BLOCK

Memory is pictured as a block of wax taking imprints; false judgment mismatches perception and imprint.

SOCRATES Then suppose, for the sake of argument, that there is a block of wax in our souls—larger in one person, smaller in another; of purer wax in one, dirtier in another; harder in some, [191d] softer in others, and in some of just the right consistency.

THEAETETUS I'll suppose it.

SOCRATES Let's say, then, that it is a gift from Memory, the mother of the Muses, and that whenever we want to remember something we see or hear or think of ourselves, we hold this block under our perceptions and thoughts and take an imprint

of it, as if we were stamping the marks of signet rings. Whatever is imprinted, we remember and know for as long as its image is there; whatever is wiped out, or can't [191e] be imprinted, we have forgotten and don't know.[37]

THEAETETUS Let it be so.

SOCRATES Now take someone who knows these things and is considering something he is seeing or hearing. Look and see whether he might judge falsely in the following way.

THEAETETUS What way?

SOCRATES By thinking that things he knows are sometimes things he knows, and sometimes things he doesn't. In our earlier discussion we were wrong to agree that these things are impossible.

THEAETETUS And what do you say now?

SOCRATES [192a] We must put it like this, drawing our distinctions from the beginning. Take something a person knows, having a record of it in his soul, but isn't perceiving: it is impossible for him to think it is some other thing he knows, of which he also has an imprint but which he isn't perceiving. And to think that something he knows is something he doesn't know and has no seal-impression of; and that something he doesn't know is something else he doesn't know; and that something he doesn't know is something he knows. And to think that something he is perceiving is some other thing he is perceiving; and that something he is perceiving is something he isn't perceiving; and [192b] that something he isn't perceiving is something else he isn't perceiving; and that something he isn't perceiving is something he is perceiving. And again, further: to think that something he knows and is perceiving, and has the mark of in line with his perception, is some other thing he knows and is perceiving, and again has the mark of in line with his perception—that is still more impossible than those, if that can be. And it is impossible to think that something he knows and is perceiving, keeping the

37 Memory (Mnemosyne) was the mother of the nine Muses by Zeus.

record correctly, is something he knows; or that something he knows and is perceiving, keeping it [192c] the same way, is something he is perceiving; or again that something he neither knows nor is perceiving is something he neither knows nor is perceiving; or that something he neither knows nor is perceiving is something he doesn't know; or that something he neither knows nor is perceiving is something he isn't perceiving. In all these cases it is utterly impossible to judge anything falsely. What remains is that something like that happens, if it happens anywhere at all, in cases of the following sort.

THEAETETUS In which cases? Maybe I'll understand better from them; at the moment I can't follow.

SOCRATES In cases where he thinks that things he knows are some other things that he knows and is perceiving; or that he doesn't know but is perceiving; or that things [192d] he knows and is perceiving are other things that, again, he knows and is perceiving.

THEAETETUS Now I'm left much further behind than before.

SOCRATES Then listen to it again, this way. I know Theodorus, and remember within myself what he is like, and Theaetetus in the same way. Don't I sometimes see them and sometimes not; sometimes touch them and sometimes not; and hear them or perceive them by some other sense, and at other times have no perception of the two of you at all, but remember you nonetheless and know you within myself?

THEAETETUS [192e] Certainly.

SOCRATES Then here is the first of the things I want to make clear—learn this: that it is possible not to perceive things one knows, and possible to perceive them.

THEAETETUS True.

SOCRATES And things one doesn't know, often it is possible not to perceive them either, and often possible only to perceive them?

THEAETETUS That's possible too.

SOCRATES See, then, whether you can follow better now. If Socrates [193a] knows Theodorus and Theaetetus, but sees neither of them and has no other perception of them either, he could never judge within himself that Theaetetus is Theodorus. Am I talking sense or not?

THEAETETUS Yes, that's true.

SOCRATES Well, that was the first of the cases I was describing.

THEAETETUS Yes, it was.

SOCRATES The second, then: if I know one of you and don't know the other, and perceive neither, I could never think that the one I know is the one I don't know.

THEAETETUS Right.

SOCRATES [193b] And the third: if I neither know nor perceive either of you, I could not think that the one I don't know is some other person I don't know. And imagine you've heard all the other earlier cases again in order, in which I will never judge falsely about you and Theodorus, whether I know both of you or neither, or know one and not the other. And the same goes for the cases involving perception, if you're following.

THEAETETUS I'm following.

SOCRATES Then the only place left for judging falsely is here. Suppose I know you and Theodorus, and I have the marks of you both in that wax block, [193c] like the imprints of signet rings. I see you both from a distance, and not clearly enough, and I'm eager to assign the proper mark of each to the proper sight, fitting the sight into its own track so that recognition can take place. Then I fail at this: like people who put their shoes on the wrong feet, I switch them round and apply the sight of each of you to the other's mark. Or else the same thing happens to me as happens to sight in mirrors, when right flows over into [193d] left, and I go wrong. That's when mistaking one thing for another, and judging falsely, comes about.

THEAETETUS Yes, it seems so, Socrates. It's wonderful how well you describe what happens to judgment.

SOCRATES Then there's also the case where I know you both, and besides knowing one of you I perceive him, but not the other, and the knowledge I have of the other isn't matched with my perception. That's what I was describing earlier, and you didn't understand me then.

THEAETETUS No, I didn't.

SOCRATES Well, what I was saying was this: if someone knows one person and [193e] perceives him, and has his knowledge of him matched with his perception of him, he will never think that person is someone else whom he knows and perceives and whose knowledge he likewise has matched with his perception. Wasn't that it?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES What was left out, I think, is the case we're describing now, where we say false judgment arises: someone knows both people and sees both, [194a] or has some other perception of both, but doesn't hold each of the two marks up against the perception that belongs to it. Like a poor archer, he shoots wide of the target and misses—and that, of course, is just what we've named falsehood.

THEAETETUS Reasonably enough.

SOCRATES And when perception is present for one of the marks but not for the other, and the mind fits the mark belonging to the absent perception to the present one, in every such case the mind is deceived. In a word: about things a person doesn't know and has never perceived, it seems there can be no [194b] being deceived and no false judgment, if what we're saying now makes any sense. It's about the very things we know and perceive that judgment twists and turns, becoming false or true. When it brings the proper stamps and imprints together squarely and directly, it's true; when it brings them together askew and crooked, it's false.

THEAETETUS Well, isn't that finely put, Socrates?

SOCRATES 194c You'll say so all the more when you've heard this too. Judging truly is a fine thing, and being deceived a shameful one.

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES Well, they say these come about like this. When the wax in someone's soul is deep, plentiful, smooth, and worked to just the right softness, the things that come in through the perceptions are stamped on this "heart" of the soul—Homer's word, hinting at its likeness to wax. In people like that 194d the marks that form are clean and deep enough, and they last a long time. Such people are, first, quick to learn; second, good at remembering; and third, they don't mismatch the marks of their perceptions, but judge truly. Since the marks are clear and have plenty of room, they quickly assign each thing to its own imprint—to what are called the things that are—and these people are called wise. Don't you think so?[38]

THEAETETUS Extraordinarily so.

SOCRATES 194e Now when someone's heart is "shaggy"—the thing the all-wise poet praised—or dirty, of impure wax, or very soft or hard: those with soft wax are quick to learn but forgetful, and those with hard wax the opposite. Those whose wax is shaggy and rough, something stony, full of earth or dirt mixed in, get unclear imprints. So do those with hard wax, since there's no depth in it. And those with soft wax get 195a unclear imprints too, because they quickly run together and blur. And if, on top of all this, the imprints are crowded on top of one another for lack of room, because someone's little soul is small, they're even less clear than those. So all these people turn out to be the sort who judge falsely.[39] For when they see or hear or think of something, they can't quickly assign each thing to its own mark. They're slow, and because they assign things to the wrong places they

38 Greek *kear* ("heart") echoes *kēros* ("wax"); Homer uses the related word *kēr*.
39 Homer speaks of a hero's "shaggy heart" (e.g. *Iliad* 2.851)—a hairy chest, the sign of a brave man.

mostly missee, mishear and misthink. And these people in turn are said to be deceived about the things that are, and ignorant.

THEAETETUS [195b] Nobody could put it more rightly, Socrates.

SOCRATES Shall we say, then, that there are false judgments in us?

THEAETETUS Very much so.

SOCRATES And true ones too?

THEAETETUS True ones too.

SOCRATES So do we now think it's been adequately agreed that both these kinds of judgment certainly exist?

THEAETETUS Emphatically.

SOCRATES Theaetetus, a man who babbles really is a terrible and tiresome thing, it seems.

THEAETETUS What? What made you say that?

SOCRATES [195c] I'm annoyed at my own slowness—and at what really is babbling. What else would you call it when someone drags arguments up and down because he's too dull to be convinced, and can't bear to let go of any of them?

THEAETETUS But what are you annoyed about?

SOCRATES I'm not just annoyed; I'm also afraid of what I'll answer if someone asks me: "Socrates, so you've discovered false judgment: it's not in perceptions in relation to each other, nor [195d] in thoughts, but in the fitting of perception to thought?" I expect I'll say yes, preening myself as though we'd discovered something fine.

THEAETETUS It seems to me, Socrates, that what we've just shown is nothing to be ashamed of.

SOCRATES "Then," he'll say, "you're claiming that we could never think a man we're only thinking of, and not seeing, is a horse, which again we neither see nor touch but only think of, without perceiving anything else about it?" I expect I'll say that's what I mean.

THEAETETUS And rightly.

SOCRATES 195e "Well then," he'll say, "by this argument, wouldn't it follow that someone could never think that eleven, which he does nothing but think of, is twelve, which again he only thinks of?" Come on, then—you answer.

THEAETETUS Well, I'll answer that someone who sees or touches eleven things might think they're twelve, but that about the eleven and twelve he has in his thought he could never judge that.

SOCRATES Really? Take five and 196a seven. Do you think anyone has ever considered, in his own mind—I don't mean setting out seven men and five to look at, or anything like that, but five and seven themselves, which we say are records there in the wax block, about which there can be no false judgment—has anyone ever considered these very things, talking to himself and asking how many they are, and one person thought and said they were eleven, and another twelve? Or does everyone say and think they're twelve?

THEAETETUS 196b No, by Zeus. Plenty say eleven. And if you consider it with larger numbers, people go wrong more often. I take it you're talking about numbers in general.

SOCRATES You take it rightly. And consider whether what happens then is anything other than thinking that the twelve itself, the one in the wax block, is eleven.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Then doesn't that bring us back to our first arguments? Anyone to whom this happens thinks that something he knows is another of the things he knows, which we said was impossible. And that was exactly how we were forced to say that there's no 196c false judgment: so that the same person wouldn't be forced to know and not know the same things at the same time.

THEAETETUS Very true.

SOCRATES Then we have to show that judging falsely is something other than a mismatch of thought with perception. If that were what it was, we'd never be deceived in our thoughts by themselves. As things stand, either there's no false judgment, or it's possible not to know what one knows. Which of these do you choose?

THEAETETUS That's no choice at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES 196d And yet the argument will probably not allow both. Still—since we must dare everything—what if we tried being shameless?

THEAETETUS How?

SOCRATES By being willing to say what knowing is like.

THEAETETUS And what's shameless about that?

SOCRATES You don't seem to realize that our whole discussion from the start has been a search for knowledge, on the assumption that we don't know what it is.

THEAETETUS No, I do realize it.

SOCRATES Then don't you think it's shameless, when we don't know what knowledge is, to declare what knowing is like? But in fact, 196e Theaetetus, we've been infected all along with an impure way of talking. Countless times we've said "we know" and "we don't know," "we have knowledge" and "we don't have knowledge," as if we understood each other at all while we're still ignorant of knowledge. And, if you like, even at this very moment we've used "be ignorant" and "understand" again, as if it were proper for us to use them when we lack knowledge.

THEAETETUS But how will you carry on a discussion, Socrates, if you keep away from these words?

SOCRATES 197a Not at all, being the man I am—though I could if I were an expert in contradiction. If a man like that were here now, he'd tell us to keep away from them, and he'd come down hard on us for the things I'm saying. But since we're no good at

it, do you want me to be bold and say what knowing is like? I think it might be of some use.

THEAETETUS Be bold, then, by Zeus. You'll be fully forgiven for not keeping away from those words.

THE AVIARY

The mind is pictured as an aviary of pieces of knowledge, where one can catch the wrong bird.

SOCRATES Well, have you heard what people nowadays say knowing is?

THEAETETUS Perhaps; but I don't remember at the moment.

SOCRATES [197b] They say, I think, that it's the having of knowledge.

THEAETETUS That's true.

SOCRATES Well, let's make a small change and say it's the possession of knowledge.

THEAETETUS And how will you say that differs from the other?

SOCRATES Perhaps not at all. But hear what I think and help me test it.

THEAETETUS If I can.

SOCRATES Well, to me possessing doesn't look the same as having. For example, if someone bought a cloak and it was his to use but he wasn't wearing it, we wouldn't say he had it, though we would say he possessed it.

THEAETETUS Rightly.

SOCRATES [197c] Now see whether it's possible in the same way to possess knowledge without having it. Suppose someone hunted wild birds—pigeons or some other kind—and kept them in an aviary he'd built at home. In one sense we might say he always has them, because he possesses them, mightn't we?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES But in another sense he has none of them. Rather, he's acquired a power over them, since he's brought them under his control in an enclosure of his own: he can take them and hold them whenever [197d] he wants, catching whichever one he likes, and let them go again, and he's free to do this as often as he sees fit.

THEAETETUS That's so.

SOCRATES Once again, then: just as before we built a wax model of some kind in our souls—I don't know what— let's now make in each soul a kind of aviary of all sorts of birds, some in flocks apart from the others, some in small groups, and some alone, flying among all the rest wherever they happen to go.

THEAETETUS [197e] Consider it made. But what next?

SOCRATES We must say that while we're children this container is empty, and think of pieces of knowledge in place of the birds. Whatever piece of knowledge someone acquires and shuts up in the enclosure, we must say he has learned or discovered the thing this knowledge was of, and that this is what knowing is.

THEAETETUS Let's say so.

SOCRATES [198a] Now consider what words are needed for hunting again for whichever piece of knowledge he wants, taking and holding it, and letting it go again—whether the same ones as when he first acquired it, or different ones. You'll understand what I mean more clearly from this. You call arithmetic an art, don't you?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Then take it to be a hunt for pieces of knowledge of everything odd and even.

THEAETETUS I take it that way.

SOCRATES And it's by this art, I think, that someone both has the [198b] pieces of knowledge of numbers under his control himself, and hands them on to someone else, if he hands them on.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And we call handing them on "teaching," taking them over "learning," and having them, by possessing them in that aviary, "knowing."

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Now pay attention to what follows. The complete arithmetician knows all numbers, doesn't he? He has pieces of knowledge of all numbers in his soul.

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES 198c Then would such a person ever count anything—either numbers themselves, to himself, or some external thing that has number?

THEAETETUS Of course he would.

SOCRATES And we'll say that counting is nothing other than examining how large some number happens to be.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Then it appears that the man we agreed knows every number is examining what he knows as if he didn't know it. I'm sure you've heard such puzzles argued.

THEAETETUS I have.

SOCRATES 198d So, drawing our likeness from the possessing and hunting of pigeons, we'll say the hunting was of two kinds: one before possession, for the sake of possessing; the other, once one possesses them, to take and hold in one's hands what one possessed long ago. In the same way, with things he had pieces of knowledge of long ago, having learned them, and knew—isn't it possible to learn these very same things again, by taking up the knowledge of each and holding it, knowledge he possessed long ago but didn't have ready to hand in his thought?

THEAETETUS True.

SOCRATES 198e That's just what I was asking a moment ago: how should we use our words in speaking of this, when the arithmetician sets out to count or the man who knows his letters to read

something? Should we say that in such a case, although he knows, he comes to learn again from himself what he knows?

THEAETETUS But that's absurd, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then should we say he'll read [199a] and count what he doesn't know, when we've granted that he knows all the letters and every number?

THEAETETUS That's unreasonable too.

SOCRATES Then do you want us to say that we don't care about the words—let anyone drag "knowing" and "learning" wherever he likes—but since we've defined possessing knowledge as one thing and having it as another, we say it's impossible for someone not to possess what he possesses, so that it never happens that someone doesn't know what he knows, and yet it is possible to get a false judgment about it?

[199b] For it's possible not to have the knowledge of that thing but another instead of it: when, hunting for some piece of knowledge as they fly about, he misses and takes one instead of another. That's when he thought eleven was twelve: he took the knowledge of eleven instead of the knowledge of twelve, the one inside him—a ring dove, as it were, instead of a pigeon.

THEAETETUS Yes, that makes sense.

SOCRATES But when he takes the one he's trying to take, then he's free of deception and judges what is. And so there is both true and [199c] false judgment, and none of the things that troubled us earlier stands in the way? Perhaps you'll agree with me. Or what will you do?

THEAETETUS I agree.

SOCRATES Yes, we're rid of the business of people not knowing what they know; for it no longer turns out anywhere that we don't possess what we possess, whether we're deceived about something or not. But I think another, stranger difficulty is coming into view.

THEAETETUS What's that?

SOCRATES Whether a swap of pieces of knowledge could ever turn out to be false judgment.

THEAETETUS How do you mean?

SOCRATES [199d] First, that someone who has knowledge of something should be ignorant of that very thing—not through lack of knowledge but through his own knowledge. Then, that he should judge this thing to be that, and that to be this. Isn't it utterly unreasonable that when knowledge comes to it the soul should recognize nothing and be ignorant of everything? By this argument nothing stops ignorance, when it comes, from making someone know something, and blindness from making him see —if knowledge is ever going to make someone ignorant.

THEAETETUS [199e] Perhaps, Socrates, we weren't right to make the birds only pieces of knowledge. We should have put pieces of ignorance in the soul too, flying about along with them. Then the hunter, catching now a piece of knowledge and now a piece of ignorance of the same thing, judges falsely by the ignorance and truly by the knowledge.

SOCRATES It's not easy not to praise you, Theaetetus. But look again at what you said. Let it be as you say: then the man who catches the [200a] piece of ignorance will judge falsely, you say. Right?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES But surely he won't also believe he's judging falsely.

THEAETETUS Of course not.

SOCRATES No—truly; and he'll be in the frame of mind of someone who knows about the things he's deceived about.

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES So he'll think he's caught and has a piece of knowledge, not a piece of ignorance.

THEAETETUS Clearly.

SOCRATES So after going a long way round we're back at our first puzzle. That expert in refutation will laugh and say: [200b] "My

excellent friends, does someone who knows both, a piece of knowledge and a piece of ignorance, think the one he knows is another of the ones he knows? Or, knowing neither, does he judge the one he doesn't know to be another of the ones he doesn't know? Or, knowing one and not the other, does he judge the one he knows to be the one he doesn't? Or believe the one he doesn't know is the one he knows? Or will you tell me again that there are pieces of knowledge of the pieces of knowledge and ignorance, which their possessor has shut up in some other ridiculous [200c] aviaries or wax models, and knows as long as he possesses them, even if he doesn't have them ready to hand in his soul? Will you be forced in this way to keep running round to the same place countless times and get nowhere?" What shall we answer to that, Theaetetus?

THEAETETUS By Zeus, Socrates, I don't know what to say.

SOCRATES Well then, my boy, isn't the argument right to rebuke us, and to point out that we're wrong to look for false judgment before [200d] knowledge, and let knowledge go? It's impossible to understand false judgment until one has adequately grasped what knowledge is.

THEAETETUS As things stand, Socrates, I have to think it's as you say.

TRUE JUDGMENT WITH AN ACCOUNT

Jurors judge truly without knowing, so Theaetetus proposes that knowledge is true judgment with an account.

SOCRATES Then what will someone say knowledge is, starting again from the beginning? Surely we're not going to give up yet?

THEAETETUS Not at all—unless you give up.

SOCRATES Tell me, then: what could we say it is that would least contradict ourselves?

THEAETETUS [200e] What we tried before, Socrates. I don't have anything else.

SOCRATES What was that?

THEAETETUS That true judgment is knowledge. Judging truly is surely free of error, and everything that comes of it turns out fine and good.

SOCRATES The man leading the way across the river, Theaetetus, said, "It will show you." So with this: if we go on and search into it, it may turn up [201a] in our path and reveal what we're looking for; if we stay put, nothing will become clear.[40]

THEAETETUS You're right. Let's go on and examine it.

SOCRATES Well, this won't take long to examine. There's a whole art that tells you it isn't knowledge.

THEAETETUS How so? What art is that?

SOCRATES The art of the greatest in wisdom—the people called orators and lawyers. They persuade by their art, I think, not by teaching but by making people judge whatever they want. Or do you think there are teachers so clever [201b] that, in the little time the water clock allows, they can adequately teach the truth of what happened to people who weren't there when others were robbed of money or suffered some other violence?

THEAETETUS I don't think so at all; but they can persuade them.

SOCRATES And by "persuade" don't you mean "make them judge"?

THEAETETUS Of course.

SOCRATES Then when jurors are justly persuaded about things only an eyewitness can know, and no one else, then, judging these things from [201c] hearsay and getting a true judgment, they've judged without knowledge, though they were rightly persuaded, if they gave a good verdict?

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES But, my friend, if true judgment and knowledge were the same, even in the law courts, the best of jurors would

never judge correctly without knowledge. As it is, they seem to be two different things.

THEAETETUS Yes, Socrates—I'd forgotten it, but I heard someone say this, and now I'm thinking of it. He said that true judgment with an account 201d is knowledge, and that true judgment without an account falls outside knowledge. And things of which there is no account are not knowable—that was the very word he used—while those that have one are knowable.

SOCRATES That's well said. But tell me how he distinguished these knowable and unknowable things, so we can see whether you and I have heard the same version.

THEAETETUS I don't know whether I'll be able to work it out; but if someone else stated it, I think I could follow.

THE DREAM

A theory holds that elements are unknowable and complexes knowable; Socrates tests it on letters and syllables.

SOCRATES Then listen to a dream in return for a dream. I too seemed 201e to hear some people say that the first elements, as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account. Each of them, itself by itself, can only be named; nothing else can be said of it, neither that it is nor that it is not, for then being or not-being would 202a already be attached to it, whereas nothing must be added if one is to speak of that thing alone. Not even "itself" or "that" or "each" or "alone" or "this" should be added, nor many other such words. For these run around and attach to everything, being different from the things they're added to; whereas if it were possible to express the element itself, and it had an account all its own, it would have to be expressed without all the others.[41] As it is, it's impossible for 202b

40 A proverb: asked how deep the river was, the guide answered that wading in would show.

41 Greek *stoicheion* means both "element" and "letter of the alphabet," and *syllabē* both "syllable" and "combination"; the discussion that follows plays on both senses.

any of the first things to be expressed in an account: it can only be named, since a name is all it has. But with the things composed of them, just as they themselves are woven together, so their names woven together become an account, since a weaving together of names is what an account is. So the elements are without an account and unknowable, but perceivable, while the syllables are knowable and expressible and can be judged with true judgment. So when someone gets a true judgment of something without an account, 202c his soul is truthful about it but doesn't know it; for anyone who can't give and receive an account of a thing lacks knowledge of it. But when he has added an account, he has become capable of all this and is perfectly placed for knowledge. Is that how you heard the dream, or differently?

THEAETETUS Exactly like that.

SOCRATES So you're satisfied, and you put it this way: that true judgment with an account is knowledge?

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES 202d Have we, Theaetetus, now, on this very day, caught what many wise men have long been searching for and grown old before finding?

THEAETETUS It seems to me, at any rate, Socrates, that what's just been said is well said.

SOCRATES And it's likely that this very thing is so; for what knowledge could there still be apart from an account and correct judgment? But one of the things that were said displeases me.

THEAETETUS Which one?

SOCRATES The very one that seems to have been said most cleverly: that the 202e elements are unknowable, but the kind made up of syllables is knowable.

THEAETETUS Isn't that right?

SOCRATES We must find out. We have as hostages, so to speak, for the theory the examples he used when he said all this.

THEAETETUS What examples?

SOCRATES The elements of writing—the letters—and syllables. Or do you think the person who said what we're discussing had anything else in view when he said it?

THEAETETUS No, just these.

SOCRATES 203a Then let's take them up again and put them to the test—or rather ourselves: did we learn our letters this way or not? Come on, first: do syllables have an account, while elements have none?

THEAETETUS Perhaps.

SOCRATES It certainly looks that way to me too. At any rate, if someone asked you about the first syllable of "Socrates" like this: "Theaetetus, tell me, what is SO?" what will you answer?

THEAETETUS That it's sigma and omega.[42]

SOCRATES So that's your account of the syllable?

THEAETETUS It is.

SOCRATES 203b Come on, then, give me the account of sigma in the same way.

THEAETETUS But how can anyone give the elements of an element? Besides, Socrates, sigma is one of the voiceless letters—just a noise, like the tongue hissing—and beta has neither voice nor noise, and neither do most of the elements. So it's quite right to say they have no account, since even the clearest of them, the seven themselves, have only voice, and no account at all.[43]

SOCRATES Then this, my friend, is something we've got right about knowledge.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

42 Theaetetus uses the Greek letter names: sigma is S and omega a long O; below, beta is B, and later theta is TH, epsilon E and tau T—theta being a single letter in Greek.

43 The seven are the vowels of the Greek alphabet.

SOCRATES 203c What about this? Have we been right to declare that the element isn't knowable, but the syllable is?

THEAETETUS It seems likely.

SOCRATES Come, then: do we say the syllable is both elements —or, if there are more than two, all of them—or some single form that has come into being when they're put together?

THEAETETUS I think we mean all of them.

SOCRATES Then consider the case of two, sigma and omega. Together they're the first syllable of my name. Doesn't someone who knows the syllable know both of them?

THEAETETUS 203d Of course.

SOCRATES So he knows sigma and omega.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES What? Is he ignorant of each, and does he know both while knowing neither?

THEAETETUS But that's monstrous and absurd, Socrates.

SOCRATES And yet if one has to know each in order to know both, then anyone who is ever going to know a syllable absolutely must know the elements first; and so our fine theory will have run off and vanished.

THEAETETUS 203e And very suddenly too.

SOCRATES Because we're not guarding it well. Perhaps we should have made the syllable not the elements but some single form that has come into being out of them, with one character of its own, different from the elements.

THEAETETUS Certainly. And perhaps it's more like that than the other way.

SOCRATES We must look into it, and not betray a great and imposing theory in such a cowardly way.

THEAETETUS No, we mustn't.

SOCRATES [204a] Then let it be as we now say: the syllable is a single form arising from the several elements fitted together, in letters and in everything else alike.

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Then it mustn't have parts.

THEAETETUS Why?

SOCRATES Because where something has parts, the whole must be all the parts. Or do you say that the whole, too, which has come to be from the parts, is a single form different from all the parts?

THEAETETUS I do.

SOCRATES And do you call the sum and the whole the same thing, or [204b] each different from the other?

THEAETETUS I have nothing clear to say. But since you tell me to answer readily, I'll take the risk and say they're different.

SOCRATES Your readiness, Theaetetus, is right. Whether your answer is too, we must look into.

THEAETETUS Yes, we must.

SOCRATES Then the whole would differ from the sum, according to the present argument?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Well then: is there any difference between all the things and the sum? For example, when we say one, two, three, four, five, six, or [204c] twice three, or three times two, or four and two, or three and two and one—are we saying the same thing in all these cases, or something different?

THEAETETUS The same.

SOCRATES Anything other than six?

THEAETETUS Nothing.

SOCRATES So with each expression we've said all six?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And when we say all of them, aren't we speaking of a sum?

THEAETETUS We must be.

SOCRATES Anything other than the six?

THEAETETUS Nothing.

SOCRATES [204d] So in things that consist of number, at least, what we call the sum and all the things are the same?

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Then let's talk about them like this. The number of a plethron and the plethron are the same, aren't they?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And the number of a stadion, likewise.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And again the number of an army and the army, and all such things alike? For in each case the whole number is all that the thing is.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES [204e] And is the number of each anything other than parts?

THEAETETUS Nothing.

SOCRATES So whatever has parts would consist of parts?

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES And it's been agreed that all the parts are the sum, if the whole number is to be the sum.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Then the whole doesn't consist of parts. For then it would be a sum, being all the parts.

THEAETETUS It seems not.

SOCRATES But is a part, as such, a part of anything other than the whole?

THEAETETUS Of the sum, yes.

SOCRATES 205a You're putting up a manly fight, Theaetetus. But isn't the sum, when nothing is missing, precisely that—a sum?

THEAETETUS Necessarily.

SOCRATES And won't a whole be this same thing—that from which nothing is missing anywhere? And whatever has something missing is neither a whole nor a sum, both at once, for the same reason?

THEAETETUS It seems to me now that sum and whole don't differ at all.

SOCRATES Weren't we saying that where there are parts, the whole and the sum will be all the parts?

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Then again, as I was trying to show just now: if the 205b syllable is not the elements, mustn't it follow that it doesn't have the elements as its parts? Or else, if it's the same as them, that it's just as knowable as they are?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And it was to avoid that, wasn't it, that we made the syllable different from them?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Well then, if the elements aren't parts of the syllable, can you name some other things that are parts of a syllable but aren't its elements?

THEAETETUS Not at all. If I granted it had some parts, Socrates, it would surely be ridiculous to set aside the elements and go looking for other things.

SOCRATES 205c Then, Theaetetus, by the present argument a syllable would be altogether a single, indivisible form.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Then do you remember, my friend, that a little earlier we accepted, thinking it well said, that there's no account

of the first things of which the rest are composed, because each, itself by itself, is not composite; that it isn't correct even to attach "being" to it when speaking of it, nor "this," since these are said as things different from it and foreign to it; and that this was the reason that made it without an account and unknowable?

THEAETETUS I remember.

SOCRATES 205d Is there any reason other than this for its being single in form and indivisible? I don't see any other.

THEAETETUS No, there doesn't seem to be.

SOCRATES So hasn't the syllable fallen into the same class as the element, if it has no parts and is a single form?

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES So if the syllable is many elements and a kind of whole, with these as its parts, then syllables and elements are alike knowable and expressible, since all the parts turned out to be the same as the whole.

THEAETETUS 205e Very much so.

SOCRATES But if it's one and without parts, then a syllable and an element alike are without an account and unknowable; the same cause will make them so.

THEAETETUS I can't say otherwise.

SOCRATES Then let's not accept it from anyone who says a syllable is knowable and expressible, and an element the opposite.

THEAETETUS No, if we're persuaded by the argument.

SOCRATES 206a And what about this? If someone said the opposite, wouldn't you be more ready to accept it, from what you know of your own experience in learning your letters?

THEAETETUS What experience?

SOCRATES That all through your learning you did nothing but try to tell the elements apart, each itself by itself, by sight and

by hearing, so that their order wouldn't confuse you when they were spoken or written.

THEAETETUS That's very true.

SOCRATES And at the lyre teacher's, was having learned completely anything other [206b] than being able to follow each note and tell which string it came from? And everyone would agree that these are called the elements of music.

THEAETETUS Nothing else.

SOCRATES So from the elements and syllables we ourselves have experience of, if we're to infer from them to the rest, we'll say that the class of elements gives a knowledge far clearer than the syllable does, and more decisive for completely grasping each subject; and if anyone says that a syllable is by nature knowable and an element unknowable, we'll think he's joking, whether he means to or not.

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES [206c] Well, I think still other proofs of this could be found. But let's not let them make us forget to look at the question before us: what can it mean to say that an account, added to true judgment, makes knowledge in its most complete form?

THEAETETUS Yes, we must look at that.

THREE MEANINGS OF ACCOUNT

Account as speech, as a list of elements, or as a distinguishing mark: each fails, and the inquiry ends.

SOCRATES Come then: what does "account" mean to tell us? I think it means one of three things.

THEAETETUS Which three?

SOCRATES [206d] The first would be making one's thought evident through sound, with verbs and nouns, imprinting one's judgment on the stream that flows through the mouth, as on a mirror or water. Or don't you think that sort of thing is an account?

THEAETETUS I do. At any rate we say that someone who does that is speaking.

SOCRATES Well, anyone can do that, sooner or later—show what he thinks about each thing—unless he's been mute or deaf from birth. And so everyone who judges something [206e] correctly will turn out to have it with an account, and there will no longer be correct judgment anywhere without knowledge.

THEAETETUS True.

SOCRATES Then let's not be quick to condemn the person who declared that knowledge is what we're now examining, as if he'd said nothing. Perhaps that isn't what he meant, but rather being able, when asked what each thing is, to give an answer through its elements [207a] to the person asking.

THEAETETUS Such as what, Socrates?

SOCRATES Such as Hesiod's line about a wagon: "A hundred timbers make a wagon." I couldn't name them, and I don't think you could either. But if asked what a wagon is, we'd be content if we could say: wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke.[44]

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES But he might think that we—just like people asked your name who answered syllable by syllable—were [207b] ridiculous: judging correctly and saying what we say, but thinking we were experts in letters and had and could state, as an expert in letters would, the account of the name "Theaetetus." Whereas speaking with knowledge, he'd say, isn't possible until one goes through each thing element by element, along with true judgment—as was said earlier, I think.

THEAETETUS Yes, it was.

SOCRATES In the same way, then, we have a correct judgment about a wagon, but the one who can go through [207c] what it is by way of those hundred parts has, by adding this, added an account to his true judgment; instead of merely judging, he's

44 Hesiod, *Works and Days* 456.

become an expert and a knower about what a wagon is, having gone through the whole by way of its elements.

THEAETETUS Don't you think that's right, Socrates?

SOCRATES If you think so, my friend, and accept that going through each thing element by element is its account, while going through it by syllables, or by still larger units, is lack of account, tell me, [207d] so that we can examine it.

THEAETETUS Well, I certainly accept it.

SOCRATES Do you, thinking that anyone at all knows anything at all when the same thing seems to him sometimes to belong to one thing and sometimes to another? Or when he judges now one thing, now another, to belong to the same thing?

THEAETETUS By Zeus, no, I don't.

SOCRATES Then have you forgotten that at the start of learning your letters, you and the others did just that?

THEAETETUS Do you mean thinking that now one letter, [207e] now another belonged to the same syllable, and putting the same letter sometimes into the proper syllable and sometimes into another?

SOCRATES That's what I mean.

THEAETETUS By Zeus, I haven't forgotten, then; and I don't think that people in that state have knowledge yet.

SOCRATES Well then: at such a stage, when someone writing "Theaetetus" thinks he should write theta and epsilon, and writes them, [208a] and again, trying to write "Theodorus," thinks he should write tau and epsilon, and writes them—will we say he knows the first syllable of your names?

THEAETETUS But we agreed just now that someone in that state doesn't know yet.

SOCRATES Does anything stop the same person being in that state about the second, third, and fourth syllables too?

THEAETETUS Nothing.

SOCRATES Then when he writes "Theaetetus" in order, will he be writing it with correct judgment and with the going-through by elements?

THEAETETUS Clearly.

SOCRATES [208b] While still lacking knowledge, though judging correctly, as we say?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And yet having an account along with correct judgment. For he wrote with the way through the elements, and that, we agreed, is an account.

THEAETETUS True.

SOCRATES So, my friend, there is correct judgment with an account that we mustn't yet call knowledge.

THEAETETUS It looks that way.

SOCRATES So it seems we got rich in a dream, thinking we had the truest account of knowledge. Or shouldn't we condemn it yet?

Perhaps this isn't how someone will define "account," but as the remaining one of the three kinds, one of which, we said, would be proposed as account by whoever defines knowledge as correct judgment with an account.

THEAETETUS [208c] You've reminded me rightly: there's still one left. The first was a sort of image of thought in sound; the one just discussed was the way to the whole through the elements. What do you say the third is?

SOCRATES What most people would say: being able to state some sign by which the thing asked about differs from everything else.

THEAETETUS Can you give me an example of such an account of something?

SOCRATES [208d] For example, if you like, in the case of the sun, I think it's enough for you to accept that it's the brightest of the things that travel through the heavens around the earth.

THEAETETUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Grasp the point of saying it. It's what we were saying just now: if you grasp the difference by which each thing differs from the others, you'll grasp its account, as some say; but as long as you touch on something common, your account will be about those things the common feature belongs to.

THEAETETUS 208e I understand; and I think it's right to call that sort of thing an account.

SOCRATES And whoever, together with correct judgment about any of the things that are, grasps in addition its difference from the others, will have become a knower of what he was previously only judging.

THEAETETUS That's what we say, anyway.

SOCRATES Well, Theaetetus, now that I've come up close to what's being said, as if to a piece of scene painting, I understand none of it at all; while I was standing far off, it seemed to me to make some sense.[45]

THEAETETUS How do you mean?

SOCRATES 209a I'll tell you, if I can. If I have a correct judgment about you and add your account, then I know you; if not, I only judge you.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES And an account was the expression of your differentness.

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES So when I was only judging, wasn't it the case that I wasn't grasping in my thought any of the things by which you differ from others?

THEAETETUS It seems not.

SOCRATES So I was thinking of one of the common things, which you have no more than anyone else.

45 Scene painting used broad strokes meant to be seen from a distance.

THEAETETUS [209b] Necessarily.

SOCRATES Come, then, by Zeus: how in that case was I judging you rather than anyone else? Suppose I'm thinking, "This is Theaetetus: whoever is a human being and has a nose and eyes and a mouth," and so on through each of the limbs. Will this thought make me think of Theaetetus rather than Theodorus, or of the proverbial last of the Mysians?[46]

THEAETETUS How could it?

SOCRATES But if I think not only of the one with a nose and eyes, [209c] but of the one with a snub nose and bulging eyes, will I be judging you any more than myself or anyone else like that?

THEAETETUS Not at all.

SOCRATES No—Theaetetus, I think, won't be judged in me until this snub-nosedness of yours has stamped and deposited in me a record different from the other snub-nosednesses I've seen—and likewise with the other features you're made of. Then, even if I meet you tomorrow, it will remind me and make me judge correctly about you.

THEAETETUS Very true.

SOCRATES [209d] So correct judgment too would be about the differentness of each thing.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES Then what would adding an account to correct judgment still be? If it means judging in addition how something differs from the others, the instruction becomes quite ridiculous.

THEAETETUS How?

SOCRATES Things of which we have a correct judgment of how they differ from others—it tells us to add a correct judgment of how they differ from others. Next to this instruction, the twirling of a stick or a pestle or whatever it's [209e] called would be

46 "The last of the Mysians" was a proverbial phrase for the most insignificant person imaginable.

nothing; it would more justly be called a blind man's advice. Telling us to add what we already have, so as to learn what we already judge, looks exactly like someone thoroughly in the dark.[47]

THEAETETUS Tell me, then: what were you going to say when you put that "if" to me just now?

SOCRATES If adding an account, my boy, means we're told to know the differentness, and not just judge it, then this finest of accounts of knowledge would be a charming affair. For knowing 210a is surely getting knowledge, isn't it?

THEAETETUS Yes.

SOCRATES Then when asked what knowledge is, it seems he'll answer that it's correct judgment together with knowledge of differentness. For on his view that's what adding an account would be.

THEAETETUS It seems so.

SOCRATES And it's utterly silly, when we're looking for knowledge, to say it's correct judgment together with knowledge, whether of differentness or of anything else. So, Theaetetus, knowledge would be neither perception, nor 210b true judgment, nor an account added to true judgment.

THEAETETUS It seems not.

SOCRATES Well then, my friend, are we still pregnant and in labor with anything about knowledge, or have we given birth to everything?

THEAETETUS Yes, by Zeus, I have—and thanks to you I've said more than I had in me.

SOCRATES And our art of midwifery tells us that all of these have turned out to be wind-eggs, not worth rearing?

THEAETETUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES Then if after this you try to become 210c pregnant with other things, Theaetetus, and you do, you'll be full of better

ones because of today's examination; and if you stay empty, you'll be less of a burden to the people around you, and gentler, sensibly not thinking you know what you don't know. That's all my art can do, and nothing more; nor do I know any of the things that others know, all the great and wonderful men who are and have been. But this midwifery my mother and I were allotted by the god—she for women, 210d and I for young men who are well born, and all who are beautiful. Now I must go to the Stoa of the King to meet the indictment Meletus has brought against me. But tomorrow morning, Theodorus, let's meet here again.[48]

47 "Twirling a pestle" was proverbial for pointless, repetitive effort.
48 The King Archon, whose office was at this stoa, handled charges of impiety; Meletus's indictment led to Socrates' trial and death in 399 BC.