Perception, Appearance and Kinesis: The Secret Doctrine of Plato's Theaetetus

Veda Cobb-Stevens

University of Lowell

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The Thesetetus is perhaps one of the most puzzling dialogues in the Platonic corpus. Its ostensible purpose lies in the attempt to define knowledge. Yet the highest objects of knowledge, the Forms, which are so prominent in other dialogues, are conspicuously absent here. Furthermore, the ontological region of becoming, to which Plato had already denied epistemological status, is quite extensively examined as a possible correlate of knowledge. Socrates gives an account of the realm of becoming by appealing to a theory of flux which would make kinesis the only ontological principle. This theory is elaborated at great length in the early part of the dialogue. Later, however, it is quite summarily refuted. Moreover, the refutation is directed not to the full explication of the doctrine which we find at 152 d-160 e, but to the bare statement of the theory itself. As Campbell remarks, the doctrine "is exploded by being precisely stated." Yet if the position could be refuted even before it is elaborated, why does Socrates bother with such a lengthy exposition?

The answer lies in his own statement at 155 d 10. He will help Theaetetus, he says, to penetrate to the ἀλήθειαν ἀποκακαμένην in the thoughts of those who held a theory of flux. Were the theory to be refuted immediately, we would avoid error, to be sure. But we would advance no further toward the grasping of truth. In his elaboration of the doctrine of flux, it might appear that Socrates is simply showing us the "usual confused statement" of someone who holds that "the universe is change (kinesis) and nothing else." (156 a 5) Yet something which, when experienced in the first person, could be a source of confusion and self-deception, could, when viewed from an external perspective, provide an occasion for genuine insight. Theaetetus, who is listening, and we, who are reading, are in a position to discern that confusion to which a proponent of the theory is too close to recognize.

People who hold that "the universe is change and nothing else" could invest that position with plausibility for themselves by failing to see the ambiguity of its formulation. Crombie expresses the ambiguity quite succinctly as the difference between claiming that "all properties result from change" and claiming that "all properties are subject to change." The former claim could be termed a doctrine of Mitigated Flux and the latter, a doctrine of Radical Flux. A doctrine of Radical Flux is elicited from the assertion that "the universe is change and nothing else" by emphasizing the phrase, 'nothing else.' If the assertion is taken as admitting no exceptions, then it would follow, as Socrates points out at 181ff., that all things are always in all kinds of change, in movement as well as in qualitative alteration. Once this is granted, then nothing could be "brought to a standstill" long enough to be designated as a perceived quality or as a perception. Hence, Socrates can conclude: ἐπιστήμην τε ἀληθείαν ὁδομεῖ τε μεθοδοῦ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πάντα kineíthai mēthodo. (183 c 1-3)

*I would like to thank Profs. J. P. Maguire and Hans-Georg Gadamer for their many helpful comments during the writing of this paper, although this in no way commits them to everything maintained herein.
As Crombie has noticed, however, this refutation destroys only one interpretation of the Flux Theory. Once the full radicality of the theory has been stated, we can then, by reading the exposition retroactively, see even more clearly an alternate interpretation of the theory to which the critique does not apply. This second interpretation, which we have called a theory of Mitigated Flux, claims that "the universe is change and nothing else" in the sense that the whole realm of appearances can be explained as being the effects of constant motion. There is (qualitative) change in the world of appearances, certainly. The wine appears now as sweet, now as sour. Yet the sweetness itself abides and is "brought to a standstill" at least long enough to be experienced. Hence, the extent of the existence of change is mitigated: it is not the case that all things are always in all kinds of change. On the other hand, the theory of Mitigated Flux is in one sense absolutely radical, in that it attempts to explain the whole realm of appearances by one and only one principle, *kinēsis*.

This doctrine of Mitigated Flux is elaborated in the course of the discussion concerning the nature of knowledge. According to the first definition of knowledge proposed by Theaetetus, knowledge is nothing other than *aisthēsis*.

(151 e 2-5) Protagoras, Socrates claims, had said the same thing, but had formulated the position in a slightly different manner. He said that "πᾶντα χρόνιαμα μέτρον ουδέσποτον εἶναι," "ἐὰν μὲν ἐκείναι ἐκ τοῦ, τὸν οὖς μὴ ἔγνως ὡς σύμπτωμα μὲν ἔστιν," (152 a 2-4). By this he meant that *οὐδὲς εἰσί αἷμα πάντων τούτων μὲν ἔστιν ἐμι, οὐδὲς καί, τούτως οὐκοῦν, ἄκριτος ὡς χάτι τε καὶ τε * (152 a 5-8) Socrates now proposes to "follow up" the statements of Protagoras, but in doing so he accomplishes, as we shall see, more than an innocuous deduction of consequences from a simple Protagorean position.

It sometimes happens, Socrates says, that when the same wind is blowing, one of us feels chilly, the other does not. (152 b) Given this situation, *πάλαι τὸ τὸ κατατάξοντα τὸ πνεύμα ψυχρὸν ἢ ὡς ψυχρὸν σφοδρὸν, ἡ πεποιθάμενος τῇ Πιθανοτηί, ἐὰν τό μὴ γνώνται ψυχρόν, τὸ οὐ δέν στη, (152 b 5-7) Theaetetus agrees to the latter and Socrates continues, saying that the wind "so appears" to each of us and that 'appearing' (φαινεται) means the same as 'perceiving' (aisthantei), in the case of what is hot and so forth. Thus, given that the wind appears warm to you and cold to me and that 'appearing' means the same as 'perceiving,' Protagoras' second proposition could be identified with Theaetetus' definition, since perception has the two necessary marks of knowledge. (152 c 5-6) Further, Protagoras' original assertion is founded on the same conditions. Since the wind appears warm to you and not cold, and since it appears cold to me and not warm, each of us is the measure both that a thing is (of a certain quality) and that it is not (of a certain quality).

The identification of the three propositions (Protagoras' two statements and Theaetetus' definition), however, is not so simple as it might seem. No conclusion at all about the nature of the wind "in itself" is entailed by Protagoras' second statement. It would imply only that the wind-as-appearing-to-me is cold (in appearance), while the wind-as-appearing-to-you is warm (in appearance). At first glance it would seem that Socrates realizes this and properly formulates a Protagorean position: the wind is cold to the one who feels chilly and not to the other. Yet in the context of Socrates' query (152 b 6-7), the (implicit) subject of the (implicit) verb could not refer to what we could call the phenomenal wind, but rather to the wind in itself. The question he asks at 152 b 6-7 can be explicitly stated as: "Shall we be persuaded by Protagoras that the wind in itself is cold to the one who feels chilly, and
not to the other?" Given that the nature of the wind in itself is not a Protagorean issue, it can be seen that Socrates is manipulating the doctrine of Protagoras while claiming that he is only "following up" its implications. Beginning with the exposition of the Secret Doctrine at 156 a, we shall see that the problem of what something might be in itself and how it is related to appearances is the central concern of the discussion. As J. P. Maguire has noted, "the additional question (152 b 5), whether the wind in itself (οὔτος άφ' έκτισθ) is cold or not cold, is Plato's own, designed to shift the discussion from the subject to the object, from Protagoreanism to what he considered to be a necessarily correlative Heracliteanism."

Socrates' final remarks on the wind example reveal his manipulative techniques even more clearly. He concludes: Αισθησις...του άφετην και άφετην...έπετημη οδηγετει (152 c 5-6) The key phrase in this statement is 'αισθησις...του άφετην...έπετημη.' In light of Socrates' treatment of the wind example, the natural interpretation of this phrase would be that perception is always of something that is (of such and such a quality) insofar as it is perceived by a perceiver, whatever the extra-perceptual ontological status of the "thing in itself" might be.

There is another possibility of interpretation, however, which, although not justified fully by Socrates' preceding reflections on the wind example, can be justified after the following elaboration of the doctrine of flux. To say that perception is always of something that is could also mean that perception, as such, guarantees the ontological status of its object. This latter, in turn, is ambiguous in that it could be concerned with the phenomenal object in its status qua phenomenon, or it could be concerned with the transphenomenal object (e.g., the wind "in itself"). Were Protagoras concerned with the issue of ontology at all, presumably he would have been amenable to granting ontological status to the phenomenal object. Yet as two of Socrates' statements clearly imply, Protagoras' second proposition (and his first interpreted in light of the second) involves a claim, not about being or not-being as such, but about being or not being such (as one perceives)(cf. 152 a 6-8 and 152 c 1-3).

This second way of interpreting 152 c 5-6 (that perception guarantees its object) will appear later in the exposition as being applicable on both the phenomenal and the transphenomenal levels. We will find that an aisthēsin guarantees (and is guaranteed by) its correlative aisthēton and that the perceiving patient guarantees (and is guaranteed by) its correlative perceived agent. Thus, Socrates' final summation at 152 c 5-6 is expressed in such a way that, in virtue of its ambiguity, it points backward to his treatment of Protagoras and forward to his examination of the Secret Doctrine which will deal with the transphenomenal ground of appearances.

As a method of introducing the Secret Doctrine, Socrates suggests (152 c 8-10) that perhaps the doctrine just considered was that which Protagoras openly professed, whereas he may have endorsed another view which he revealed only to his disciples. Socrates does not conceal the fact that there is no evidence that Protagoras actually held such a view. Indeed, he refers later to the "theory which we are attributing to Protagoras." (155 d 6) In the immediate context, he indicates that the whole pre-socratic poetic and philosophic tradition, with the exception of the philosophy of Parmenides, is the authority to which we must look for the Secret Doctrine. The ultimate import of the doctrine, as we shall see, will lie in its role as providing an ontological foundation for the
epistemological doctrine expressed in the earlier Protagorean formulas.

Surprisingly, Socrates' initial statement of the Secret Doctrine would lead one to suppose that it is not the foundation of the Public Doctrine, but simply an alternate expression of it. He says: "Ενώ ἔρω καὶ μάλιστα καὶ πάντων ἴσα, ὡς ἄρα ἔν μὲν αὐτῷ καὶ ἄλλῳ ὀδύνην ἔστιν, οὐδὲν τι προσεπειτος ὄρειται; ὡς ἄλλῳ ὀδύνην τι, ἀλλὰ ἔν ὧς μέγα προσεπειτος, καὶ μικρὰν ἐμφανίζεται, καὶ ἔν ἄλλῳ ὄρειται, συμπαθών τις ὀόες, ὡς μπενός ὄντος ὦν μὴν τινὸς μὴν ὄρειται." (152 d 2-6) Such a formulation of the Secret Doctrine would allow one to subsume under it the wind example discussed in the immediately preceding passage. Nothing is one thing just by itself in the sense that anything which appears, e.g., the wind, will appear now as having one contrary quality, now as having the other. It would not be possible, then, to say without qualification that the wind is warm. One must say that it is not only warm but cold. Whatever the wind may be in itself, this is how it will appear (phaneitemai). Therefore, an interpretation of the status of the Secret Doctrine such as that suggested by Dióis would seem justified. He claims that it is "la thèse dont cet enseignement public de Protagoras n'est que la formule exotérique." 9 On this reading the verb 'to be' in the sentence 'nothing is one thing just by itself' would, as in Protagoras' Public Doctrine have only epistemological, not ontological import.

The shift to the ontological perspective is made at 152 d 7 - e 1. Socrates says: "Εἰ δὲ δὴ φορέσα τε καὶ κυνήγας καὶ κατώτερος πρὸς ἄλληλα γίγνεται πάντων ὧς ὀνεὶς ἔν τε διεῦθυν τε τοῖς, σοι ὁρείτες προσεπειτος· ὡς μὲν γὰρ ὀδύνην ὀδύνην, δὲ δὴ γίγνεται. Here, it is no longer possible to maintain a purely phenomenal viewpoint. Rather, we are given an indication of the ontological ground (movement, change) of which the phenomenal world is the effect (ἐν δὲ φοράς).

Yet curiously, the contrasting 'de' at the beginning of the above passage can refer back only to the preceding 'men' at 152 d 2-3: "ἀλλὰ καὶ οὐδὲν ὀδύνην ἔστιν." 10 Now Socrates' immediately following explication of this 'men' clause indicates that it is referring to the phenomenal level (cf. phaneitemai, 153 d 5), whereas the occurrence of the preposition 'ek' in the 'de' clause establishes its reference to the transphenomenal ground of appearances. On the other hand, the 'men-de' structure itself would suggest that the second clause is the corrective, affirmative formulation of the notion negatively expressed in the first. The structure of the passages represents, I believe, the first evidence of that forward looking ambiguity which was detected in the phrase. 'οὐδέν ὄντος ὀδύνην' (152 e 5) and this ambiguity will be carried, throughout the exposition, by the formula 'Εν μὲν αὐτῷ καὶ ὀδύνην ἔστιν.'

The epistemological significance of the formula is, as we have seen, identical to Protagoras' Public Doctrine. Nothing is just by itself (qualified in one way, without being qualified in another way). But what is meant by "being" qualified in this context is simply "appearing such to a perceiver." Accordingly, we might be misled if we concentrated only on the "objective" aspects of qualification mentioned by Socrates at 152 d 3 - 6. We will find ultimately that the epistemological interpretation of the formula, 'Εν μὲν αὐτῷ καὶ ὀδύνην ἔστιν,' involves the experiential correlativity of aisthēsis and aisthēton and that the ontological significance of the formula refers to the transphenomenal ground of the realm of appearances. But this ontological significance is not as easy to formulate as the epistemological reading. The following possibilities of interpretation will be found at various points of the exposition (for convenience...
these will be referred to as $\Omega_1$, $\Omega_2$, and $\Omega_3$:

- $\Omega_1$: Nothing is just by itself; rather, everything is involved in a process of becoming. (152 e 1)

- $\Omega_2$: Nothing is just by itself; rather, an agent exists (or becomes) only in relation to a patient and vice versa. (157 a 3-7)

- $\Omega_3$: Nothing is just by itself; rather, an stilathesis, considered as a fast motion, exists (or becomes) only in relation to an stilathetan, considered as a fast motion, and vice versa. (156 d 5)

The significance of the lines at 153 d 2- e 1 is, then, as follows. The grammatical structure indicates that the two clauses, although presenting contrasting (negative and affirmative) formulations, are directing themselves to the same level of reference. Socrates' explications of the respective clauses, however, inserted immediately after each, show that they are to be interpreted as referring to different levels: the phenomenal and the transphenomenal. By this structure itself we are forewarned to pay careful attention to the formula "αυτο χαθ*οôôεται*" which, in spite of the consistency in expression, will exhibit a chameleon-like mutability in meaning as it moves from one context in the exposition to another.

At 153 d 8- 154 a 9, Socrates makes a preliminary attempt to specify the implications of the Secret Doctrine. In phraseology which recalls that of 152 d 3, he says: κατά τά διάμετα πρώτου, ο δέ καλείς χρώμα λευκόν, μή είναι αὐτό ἐτερον τι, ἐξο τά σαν διαίτην μη' ἐν τοῖς διαίτης ὑπὸ τιν' αὐτῷ χίρον ὑποτάξεις. Πάντα γάρ ἐν εἴπ τε ὅτι ἄλλον ταύτας καὶ μένων καὶ σοώ ἄν ἐν γενέσθαι γεγονότα. (153 d 8- e 2) Whereas Socrates' explication of his earlier statement (152 d ff.) emphasized the contrary qualifications of (phenomenal) objects, his statements here focus on the nature of the qualities themselves. Furthermore, they do so with a view toward specifying the ontological ground of their appearance. A color is not "some distinct thing" either inside the eyes or outside the eyes (i.e., inherent in a transphenomenal object). Were either of these possibilities to hold, the general ontological import ($\Omega_1$) of the Secret Doctrine formula would be compromised, in that the quality would remain at rest (i.e., be) rather than arising in a process of becoming (i.e., movement). Given that nothing is one thing just by itself, it follows that: καὶ ὑμῖν οὖν μέλαν καὶ λευκόν όλλο χρώμα ἐκ τῆς προσβολῆς τῶν ὑμάτων πρὸς τὴν προσήκουσαν μορφὴν φανετάτε γεγονημένου, καὶ ο δέ ἐκάστου εἶναι καμεν χρώμα καὶ τοῦ προσβολῆμου ἐσταὶ, ἀλλὰ μεταξύ τι ἐκάστη τὴν γεγονύση γεγονότα. (153 e 5 - 154 a 2) In this context, the Secret Doctrine formula refers to the ontological ground of movement from which the appearances arise. It is clear that the "thing itself," e.g., a stone, is simply a movement which encounters the eye and generates the color, not a stable substance remaining at rest. It is not yet explicitly stated that the eye itself is a motion. This requirement is met as the theory is expounded in greater detail, beginning at 156 a.

At the opening of the passage, Socrates states the first principle espoused by those who are initiated into the Secret Doctrine: τὸ πάντα κίνησις ἐν καὶ ἄλλο παρὰ τοῦτο συνέχον. (156 a 5) This statement is equivalent to the $\Omega_1$ ontological meaning of the Secret Doctrine as explicated at 152 e 1, and as re-asserted at 153 e 4-5. This ontological meaning, however, is ambiguous in that it could express a doctrine of Radical Flux or a doctrine of Mitigated Flux. The
implications of Radical Flux are left in abeyance until the refutation at 182ff., and the theory of Mitigated Flux forms the principal basis of the Secret Doctrine as elaborated in the exposition. It is the radicality of the bare claim contrasted with the mitigation of the development which creates tensions in the exposition.

Socrates begins his elaboration of the principle of universal kinesis by distinguishing two types: ἄνωθεν δὲ τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν ἔχον; τὸ δὲ πάσχειν. (156 a 6 - 7) As two motions of opposite powers meet, they give rise to offspring. The offspring are characterized as pairs of twins which come into existence simultaneously. A perception (e.g., seeing) is always correlative to something perceived (e.g., a color). Implicit in this account is the Secret Doctrine in its general ontological significance (that nothing is, but is always becoming), taken as the transphenomenal ground of phenomena. The intercourse and friction of these two types of motion with one another act as causes sufficient to produce the world of appearances in both its subjective (aisthēsis) and its objective (aisthēsia) aspects.

Thus, there exists a double correlativity. The simultaneous generation of the experiential perception and its object is stated clearly. That the parents of the offspring are also simultaneously generated (as parents) in and through their very act of producing offspring is hinted at by their classification as either active or passive powers. This second correlativity, along with an unexpected third, will be introduced explicitly in the next passage.

Kinesis are classifiable, we find, not only according to the categories of active or passive power, but also according to quickness or slowness in speed. Up to this point, the active or passive powers which join to produce the phenomena have been the sole motions referred to. We would expect, then, that some motions with active power are slow, others are fast, and that some motions with passive power, too, are slow whereas others move more quickly. Yet, oddly, Socrates groups both active and passive powers together as slow motions: ἄνωθεν δὲ τὰ τῆς κόσμου ἐκεῖ οὐδὲν οὐκ ἔχειν, ἀν τῇ κατακλυσμῷ τὴν κόσμου ἐκεῖν ἐκεῖν οὐδὲν ἔγενος. (156 c 8 - d 1) By contrast, the offspring generated by the slow motions move more quickly: τὰ δὲ γεννάμενα οὐδὲν ἄρα οὐκ έστιν. (156 d 1-2) From an examination of the immediately following lines, we see that the offspring are described in the same terms as in the preceding passage (156 b 1 - c 3). Here, however, they seem to have a radically different status. The offspring are not merely the phenomenal results of transphenomenal motions; they have themselves a transphenomenal kinetic aspect. The offspring, we are told, move quickly from place to place in between the two parents, but certainly, the (phenomenal) offspring do not appear to move. The white appears to remain in the region of the stone and the seeing in the region of the eye.

At 157 a 3 - 7, the correlativity of the parents of the offspring, which was only hinted at previously by their classification as powers, is brought out explicitly: ἡλικιαῖα, καὶ τὸ πολιτῶν εἰσίν τι ἐν τῷ πάσχοναι ἐντός τινας, δὲ εἰσίν τι, καὶ τὸ πάσχοναι ἐντός τινας, ὅτε γὰρ πολιτῶν ἐστι τί ποιοῦν τί πολιτῶν, καὶ τὸ πάσχοναι τὸ τί πολιτῶν εἰσίν. One can have no firm notion of either agent or patient as being anything (just by itself) in the sense that both come into being simultaneously in virtue of their encounter. But the impossibility that an agent or patient as such could exist by itself does not entail that its coming into being is an absolute coming to be. The motions may exist as processes previous to their encounter with one another. Indeed, this seems to be the import of Socrates' distinction between motions as active or passive powers. Although a motion with
an active power would not be an agent actually, it would be one potentially. Hence, we can have no notion of what is active or passive as having any being by itself qua actually active or passive (\(O_2\)).

Socrates concludes his reflections at 157 a 7 - b 1 by restating the Secret Doctrine formula that "nothing is one thing just by itself." This formula, taken as equivalent to the statement that "the universe is change and nothing else" would express the general ontological meaning of the doctrine (\(O_1\)). As such, it has been the archê upon which Socrates' various conclusions have been based. Here, however, Socrates characterizes it not as a premise, but as a conclusion (Εξ ουδένων τούτων, 157 a 7). Given that we have ascertained a certain elasticity in usage for this formula, we might suspect not that Socrates is presupposing what he is trying to prove, but that he is using the formula to express a different proposition.

The structure of the passage offers, I think, sufficient evidence that this is the case. We find a grammatical construction similar to the one by which the Secret Doctrine was first introduced (viz., the 'men-de' construction at 152 d). Socrates says: οὐκ ἐσμέν ἔναν ἔνα σῶμα μαθόμενον, ἀλλὰ τινι ἐρεί προσαγορεῖν. (157 a 8 - b 1). The contrasting οὐλα serves here a function similar to the 'men-de' structure previously used. Given the insertion of 'τινι' into the contrasting clause, along with the points made in the preceding passage, the role of 'τινι' in the first clause takes on a new significance. In the general ontological interpretation of the formula (\(O_1\)) the 'τινι' all but disappears in light of the emphasis placed on 'ἐστι' In this passage, however, it is taken for granted that being is to be eliminated from any ontological theory and only becoming (κίνησις) is to be allowed as an explanatory principle. This having been assumed as an archê, attention is then turned to specifying the types of motion. But as it has turned out, the classification of motions according to various categories is not a mere (one is tempted to say, static) ordering, but a description which entails explanatory principles concerning the interactions of these motions. The distinctions between active and passive, quick and slow motions, has led to a triple correlativity: between (1) the agent and patient and between aisthësis and aisthētôn, considered as (2) experiential phenomena and as (3) transphenomenal fast motions.

The conclusion from these considerations is, certainly, that nothing is one thing just by itself, rather τινι ἐρέω γνωρεῖν. But the import of 'τινι' goes beyond its usual translation as "for someone." Since the context is emphasizing co-relativity, it would seem that "for something" as well as "for someone" is implied. Patients are not single things by themselves, but come to be in relation to agents, and agents are not single things by themselves, but come to be for patients. The same relationship would hold between aisthësis and aisthētôn on both phenomenal and transphenomenal levels.

In the present context, then, the principle that "nothing is one thing by itself" (that there is universal kinesis) is taken as an archê for the further contention that "nothing is one thing just by itself." This latter, in turn, involves the correlativity of the experiential aisthësis and aisthētôn (which is entailed by the Public Doctrine) and the correlativity of fast motions, on the one hand, and slow motions as parents, on the other (cf. \(O_2\) and \(O_3\)).

The lines immediately following the restatement of the Secret Doctrine formula, when juxtaposed with the assertions made at 156 a 1 - 157 b 1, reveal the special manipulative nature of Socrates' exposition. After having used
The formula to express correlativity, he switches immediately to the general ontological significance of the theory of flux (O). As we noted earlier, O is equivalent to the assertion of universal linearity, but this assertion is ambiguous in that it could express a theory of either Radical or Mitigated Flux.

The line 157 b 1 - 8 states, but does not draw the consequences of, a theory of Radical flux: "οὖν ὃτι ὑμεῖς πολλὰ καὶ ἀποτελοῦσθαι ἦσαν, ὥσπερ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀναλαμβανόμενης ξυλαξίας, ὧν ἐστὶν ἀποτελεῖσθαι μὲν τοιαύτα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐν τῇ ἀποτελεσματικῇ ἀναλαμβανόμενῃ, ὧν ἐστὶν ἀποτελεῖσθαι ἑπτά, ὥσπερ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀναλαμβανόμενης ξυλαξίας." The lit is 157 b 1 - 8 states, but does not draw the consequences of, a theory of Radical flux. The theory of Radical flux is here entailed, not necessarily by the kind of language which is allowed, but by the kind which is forbidden. We should not use, it is claimed, words like 'something', 'somebody', 'this', or 'that.' If "nature" really does not have these locutions, then, indeed, all things would always be in all kinds of change.

The passage which we have just dealt with (136 a 1 -157 b 1) requires that we be able to use these expressions. Given that beneath the appearances there is no being (rest) but only becoming (motion), we are still able to distinguish one appearance from another. This is the sense of mitigation which we specified previously. But in addition, it can be seen from the investigation of the ground of appearances, that further mitigations are required on the transphenomenal level itself. Granted that there are only motions on this level, the whole account of the various kinds of motions requires that we be able to distinguish one motion from another. Hence, there must be some element of constancy in the motions themselves to serve as the basis for the distinctions which are drawn. Furthermore, both the fast and the slow motions are said to possess their particular type of motion "by nature" (156 d 2-3, 159 c 4). Therefore, we would be speaking "according to nature" by speaking of the "becoming" of parents and offspring rather than of their being. Yet something which has a definite nature is, in a sense, "brought to a standstill" even though that nature consists in a certain type of motion. Given that Socrates is speaking for those who believe themselves to be affirming a theory of Radical Flux, there is a special irony in the demand that one speak "according to nature." If "nature" is in radical flux, then, contrary to the preceding account of fast and slow motions, there will be no distinct "natures," and if there are distinct "natures," then there cannot be radical flux.

The same tension will be evident in the last stage of Socrates' exposition. At 157 e 1 - 160 c 2 he addresses himself to an objection which appeals to so-called cases of misperceiving. In occurrences of dreams, illnesses, and so on, it is not the case, so the objection runs, that what one perceives also is. Socrates attempts to refute the objection by appeal to the Secret Doctrine of flux, making claims which would accord with the Radical interpretation, but using examples in accordance with the Mitigated Theory. He introduces the notion of being "wholly different" (διότι ἐτεκνοῦ) and he and Theaetetus agree that when one thing is wholly different from another they can have nothing in common, either in terms of a dunamis or in any other respect. In addition, it is said that such a thing (that is wholly different) is unlike the other. In general, εἷς ἐὰν τὸ οὐδὲν ἄλλον τῇ γίγνεσθαι ἡ γίγνεσθαι, ἡ γίγνεσθαι ἐκείνη ἐκείνου, ἐκείνου ἐκείνου ἐκείνου τῷ τοῖς τῷ πιθανὸν γίγνεσθαι, ἀλλάζοντος τῇ ἐτεκνων (159 a 6 -8) The manner in which the "wholly different" is characterized does not at all follow the theory of Mitigated Flux as developed at 156 aff. The distinctions of types of motions
according to different powers and speeds, precludes rather than entails their being "wholly different" from one another. Any two motions with a passive dunamis would not be wholly different from one another in the sense here required, nor would a certain passive dunamis at one time be wholly different from itself at another time.

Not only is the notion of being wholly different not in accord with the Mitigated Theory developed at 156 aff., but it also fails to be in accord with the cases to which Socrates appeals, ostensibly, as examples of the notion. He says that something which is wholly different is unlike the other (159 a 3) and that when something is unlike, it becomes different (159 a 8). Hence, 'being wholly different' and 'being unlike' are used equivalently. Since 'being like' is negated by 'being unlike,' it is also negated by 'being wholly different.' Now 'being like' is correlated to 'being the same.' If what is the same (or like) is simply what is not wholly different, it could include, on the one hand, varying degrees of similarity which could progress all the way to total (specific) identity, or on the other hand, simple numerical self-identity. On the basis of the claim that there exist various motions having similarities in power, it seems quite reasonable to assume that a certain motion (e.g., Socrates) could have a relatively stable self-identity (or "frequency") and could be specifically identical to another motion (e.g., Theaetetus).

Socrates' treatment of the example must be examined to show how it is implicitly subsumed under these considerations of likeness or sameness. It has been established that 'being unlike' is equivalent to 'being wholly different' such that anything which could be characterized in one way could also be characterized in the other (presuming, of course, that one could make sense at all of something wholly different in the manner described). Socrates suggests that a concrete example of the principle be considered. Socrates ill, he maintains, is (presumably, totally) different from Socrates well. The ground for this is that Socrates well, taken as a whole, is unlike Socrates ill and, implicitly, that 'being different' and 'being unlike' are equivalent. Yet from these premises, it would not follow that Socrates well is wholly different from Socrates ill, but only that he is different as a whole. And being different as a whole allows for the possibility that the thing we speak of is in some respects the same, though different in others (cf. 158 e 9 - 10). In fact, this passive motion which is Socrates must be the same to a degree sufficient to designate it as Socrates. That Socrates well is not wholly different from Socrates ill is indicated also by the statement at 159 c 4-6 that an agent will treat Socrates ill as something different from Socrates well. It is not said that the agent finds something which is (wholly) different. We may agree that ultimately everything is in motion, but to be able to speak of Socrates at all, a Socrates which could take on contrary attributes (το ίονον τον χρόνον τον δύναμιν, 159 e 1), it is necessary to posit that this motion which constitutes Socrates' being (or becoming) has some element of constancy.

As the discussion continues, it is noted (159 c 11 - 12) that when Socrates is in health the wine tastes sweet. The manner in which this αισθητόν is to be accounted for is that: έγέννησε γάρ δη έκ τῶν παραισθημένων τὸ τε ποιόν καὶ τὸ πάχον γλυκύτατά τε καὶ αλεόδησιν, οίκιος φιλόσοφου άληθέρα.(159 c 14-16) So far, this is basically in accord with the account given at 156 aff. The next lines, however, add something new: ἡ μεν αλεόδησις προς τὸ πάχοις ὡς αλεόδησιν τῶν γλυκῶν αμόρφαντα, ἡ δὲ γλυκύτης πρὸς τὸ οὖν εἴναι παρὰ αὐτῶν φερομένη γλυκόν τὸν οὖν τῇ ὑγιαννιστῇ γλάστῃ ἐποίοευν καὶ εὔναι καὶ...
According to the earlier account, the movement of the agent encountering the movement of the patient generates twin offspring—the phenomenal aisthēsia and aisthēton. Although these latter do not appear as motions, they were subsequently said to have a transphenomenal aspect as fast motions. Thus, an agent and patient act as causes, whereas the offspring (whether phenomenal or transphenomenal) are effects. What are we to make of the causal situation in the present passage?

It would seem that the offspring themselves are acting as causes. Yet in what sense is offspring to be understood? If we suppose the passage to be concerned with phenomenal offspring, then a literal interpretation of causality is unintelligible. If agent and patient interact to produce the double aspect of a perceptual experience, how could these offspring act causally upon the agent and patient? A metaphorical interpretation of the "causality" here operative would seem more tenable. To say that the aisthēsis "makes" the tongue percipient and the aisthēton "makes" the wine sweet would be no more than to say that the patient, so modified by the action of the agent, becomes percipient of the agent qua perceived.

However, a metaphorical interpretation is not the only one possible. The phrase "καὶ ἐπεφέροντο ἀμφότερα" is generally taken to mean that the sweetness and the perception which are generated by agent and patient are simultaneously borne in movement. If this is the case, then, since the perceived quality (sweetness) does not appear to move, the passage must be referring to offspring as transphenomenal fast motions, which would make a literal interpretation of causality possible. I think that this latter interpretation gives a more adequate account of the significance of the passage.

It is stated at 159 d 3 that the aisthēton of sweetness, moving around the wine causes the wine both "to be and appear" sweet. According to the metaphorical interpretation of causality, the meaning of the wine's "being" sweet would be exhausted by saying that it appears sweet. This would amount to no more than the Public Doctrine of Protagoras. Man is the measure of the "being" of all things (but only such as and insofar as they are appearances). When it was said originally that "perception is always of something that is" we noted that this statement could be interpreted in several ways. From the purely Protagorean perspective of a sensualistic epistemology, it meant no more than that perception is always of something that "is" such and such to a perceiver. But from a Platonic perspective, an adequate epistemology must provide some guarantee that it is connected to something more than a merely private perceptual object. In other words, it must have an adequate objective ontological ground. Admittedly, Socrates' exposition of the flux ontology does not represent Plato's ultimate stance on ontology as such, but his basic presupposition about objectivity is nonetheless operative here. Although agreeing that perceptions are absolutely private and unique, he would see it to be necessary that, if they are to count as knowledge in any sense, they must have an objective ground (in this case, the causal actions of various motions). If we take the offspring mentioned in this passage to be transphenomenal fast motions, which are really able to interact with slow motions, then the extra-perceptual ontological ground for Protagoras' views can be provided.

The aisthēton as a fast motion causes the wine to be (or become) sweet
in that a real alteration takes place in its (the wine's) motion, and as a result of this alteration it appears sweet (i.e., gives rise to the aisthēton in the phenomenal sense). A parallel analysis could be constructed for Socrates and the sensation of sourness. In effect, the aisthēton is more than an appearance of the quality, more even than an underlying fast motion. It is ultimately an alteration in the "being" of the object itself, which varies in virtue of alterations in the conditions of the percipient. Hence, human beings are indeed the measure of what is, of what exists outside the subject vs. realm of appearances.

Socrates summarizes the results of his reflections on the percipient-as-well/percipient-as-ill example and concludes that: ὡστε εἶτε ἔτι εἶναι τι άνωτέρω, των εἶναι ή τινός ή πούς τι ἐπέτευ παρά, εἶτε γίγνεσθαι τινός δὲ ἐν τῷ ὦν ή γεννημένον ὃτε αὐτῷ λεκτέων ἐλλοι λέγοντος ὁποίος ἡτέαν, ὥς ὁ λόγος ἐν διελθήσεις συνελήφη. (160 b 8 - c 2) Here again we find the Secret Doctrine formula that "nothing is just by itself." Given the manner in which it is explicited, it is obvious that it is not to be interpreted in the general ontological sense of Οὐ. Nor, given the preceding reflections, does it express mere correlativity of coming into being, but as further in expressing the causal activity of the offspring on the parents.

The significance of Socrates' concluding remarks now becomes clear. At 160 c 4-5 he says: οὐκόμον έστι έν τῷ έξει πολον έμοι έστιν καί έικόν άλλης γε καί αναθηκαίαι αὐτῶν, άλλος δέ έστι: The wine, in acting on Socrates, "is" for him and for no one else, in one sense because, by acting on him it actualizes its potential as agent and his potential as patient. (This involves no more than the correlativity of agent and patient whose actualization at any moment a matter of contingency.) But once this actualization has taken place, then we can say that what acts on Socrates "is" for him in that, by virtue of its being perceived by him, it suffers changes in its own "being." Hence, Socrates can say: άλλος μὲν έμοι ἡ έμι αοδήθης—τῆς γυα έμις ουσίας άλλος εὶς έστιν—καί έγὼ κριτής κατὰ τόν Προταγόραν τόν τε άτονον έμοι ὡς ἔστιν, καί τον μὴ άτονον ὡς έμοι έστιν. (160 c 7 - 9) The phrase τῆς έμις ουσίας plays more than a Protagorean role here. It refers not merely to Socrates' reality insofar as it appears to him, but to the reality which his act of perception has generated on the transphenomenal level. He then concludes: ποὺς έξει λογικὴς δόμης γε καί μὴ πατρὶ τῷ άθομων περί τό δικαία ἡ γεννημένα οὐκ ἐπιστήμην ὧν έξει λογικής δοκιμής (160 d 1 - 3) Again, given an ontological foundation to the process of perception, the "things of which I have perception" are no longer simply the phenomenal aisthetas. They include as well the "things themselves" which are (more than merely) correlative to the perceptions. The ontological ground is provided which, for Plato, is a necessary part of any attempt whatsoever to formulate an epistemology.

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Looking back on the exposition of the doctrine of flux, we can see that it has suffered many vicissitudes. Although continually expressed by the same formula ('nothing in one thing just by itself'), the significance which that formula bears, varies from one stage of the discussion to the next. The most important fluctuation in meaning was seen to occur within the first ontological interpretation of the formula (0). On this interpretation, the formula is to be read, "nothing is (estis) just by itself, rather everything is in a process of becoming (pignetai)." The ambiguity of this interpretation is expressed by the distinction between "all things are in change" and "all things result from change."
As we noted earlier, when the flux theory is refuted later in the dialogue, it is the Radical and not the Mitigated Theory which is overturned. Hence, when Socrates says that we cannot admit that knowledge is perception, at least in the basis of a theory of (radical) flux, this does not preclude the possibility that a theory of Mitigated Flux could provide the ground for Thaetetus' definition.

As it turns out Socrates does offer another argument to show that knowledge is not perception. This argument does not consist, however, in a parallel refutation of the theory of Mitigated Flux, but has its basis in an appeal to the existence and functioning of the soul. Therefore, it would seem that, implicitly at least, the theory of Mitigated Flux stands as an adequate account of the functioning of the senses. It could account for the mechanical pre-conditions of sense experience, although not for the experience itself. As we are told at 184 d, we do not perceive with our senses. Rather our soul, using them as instruments, perceives through them.

At the end of the examination of the first definition of knowledge, then, we find that both the definition and its (radical) ontological ground have been refuted. Yet in neither case have we been left with the mere negativity of the avoidance of error. For the refutations are not mere refutations. The overturning of the theory of Radical Flux leaves us free to return to the exposition with a clearer eye for the previously hidden truth (ἀλήθειαν ἔκθεσιν) of the theory of Mitigated Flux; and the destruction of the definition of knowledge as aisthesis by an appeal to the functioning of the soul provides the basis for the formulation and examination of yet another definition.

2. Crombie, EPP, V. II, p. 11. Crombie speaks of these positions as “normal” and “rampant” Heracliteanism, respectively (p. 12).


4. Three words in this statement (‘anthrópos’, ‘hós’, ‘chrēmata’) are notoriously ambiguous. W.K.C. Guthrie, The Sophists (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 188-192, offers a concise discussion of a very elaborate debate. Regarding ‘anthrópos,’ scholars question whether Protagoras was using it to refer to the human species or to individual human beings or whether he did not think to make the distinction. Guthrie holds that Protagoras was referring to individuals, and it is clear from the discussion in The Theaetetus that Socrates interprets the term in this way.

The word ‘hós’ in the phrase ‘hós estin’ could have two possible meanings: (a) as equivalent to ‘hóti,’ so that ‘hós estin’ would mean “that they are”; (b) as indicating manner, so that ‘hós estin’ would mean “how they are.” Guthrie maintains that, although ‘hós’ can mean “how,” “that” is more likely in the present context, because of the occurrence of ‘hós’ in the following negative clause, ‘hós ouk esti.’ Guthrie goes on to point out that the meaning of ‘estí’ is just as crucial as the meaning of ‘hós.’ He agrees with Kahn (“The Greek Verb “to be” and the Concept of Being,” Foundations of Language, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1966, pp. 245-65) in holding that the basic sense of ‘estí’ is not “to exist” but “to be so,” “to be the case,” or “to be true,” and that the existential meaning is a special example of the general factual statement intended by Protagoras’ ‘hós esti.’ Thus, given this view of ‘estí,’ Protagoras’ statement would cover claims concerning both existence and qualification, i.e., claims that something is, as well as claims how something is. However, if one had assumed that ‘hós’ indicates manner only, then the meaning of ‘estí’ would have to be correspondingly restricted. In The Theaetetus, Socrates explicitly takes Protagoras’ statement in this more limited sense (152 a 6-8 and 152 c 1-3). Nonetheless, when he equates Theaetetus’ definition of knowledge with Protagoras’ two statements, he also emphasizes that perception (and knowledge) is of that which exists (152 c 5) and, as Socrates’ exposition continues, we find that “that which exists” includes a transphenomenal being (or becoming) that is distinct from appearances. This emphasis and development, however, seem to be the work of Plato. Guthrie would appear to agree on this point, since he said earlier (p. 186) that Protagoras was an extreme subjectivist. Furthermore, although he supports Kahn’s contention that according to Protagoras, a person is “the measure of the existence or non-existence of atoms just as he is the measure of the being-cold or not-being-cold of the wind.” (Kahn, p. 250), he enters a disclaimer regarding the transphenomenal implications of Kahn’s thesis.

‘Chrema’ is a word of very diverse meanings, but Guthrie suggests (p. 191) that it be translated by the indeterminate ‘thing,’ which would include...
properties or attributes such as heat or cold, as well as justice and injustice. As Plato has Socrates "follow up" Protagoras' statements by means of the theory of flux, chrēmata would include the transphenomenal motions which are taken to be the reality of phenomenal "substances" as well as those which are taken to be the reality of phenomenal properties (cf. the discussion of parents and offspring at 156 aff.).

5. There is some disagreement among translators of this passage due to the ambiguity of λέγειν, which can mean either "to mean" or "to say." Socrates' words at 152 a 6 could mean that Protagoras speaks in some such way (i.e., this is another Protagorean quote) or that he means (the previous "man is the measure" statement) in some such way. McDowell, citing Cratylus 396 a 1-3, favors the former (cf. Plato, Theaetetus, translated with notes by John McDowell (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 119). Cornford, also citing the Cratylus, agrees (cf. F. M. Cornford, Plato's Theory of Knowledge (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1957), p. 32, n. 1). At any rate, whether or not 152 a 6 indicates another quote from Protagoras, Socrates assimilates this statement to the former one.

6. I would thus disagree with Cornford who maintains that Protagoras probably held that the wind in itself is both warm and cold (Cornford, PTK, p. 34). The weakness of Cornford's arguments is shown by Guthrie, The Sophists, pp. 184-186 and by J. P. Maguire, "Protagoras—or Plato?" Phronesis, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, 1973, p. 120. Cf. also McDowell, Theaetetus, p. 119.

7. J. P. Maguire, "Protagoras—or Plato?" p. 121.

8. I am referring, of course, to Socrates' emphasis upon how the wind appears (152 a - c), not to the "innocent" insertion of the phrase υπαρχείν ἐκ ἐκείνου.'


10. Although aisthēsis and aisthēton will also be interpreted transphenomenally, this does not destroy their basic phenomenal status.

11. It is certainly implied, however, by Socrates' suggestion at 154 a 8 that a person is never in a condition similar to himself. Yet this statement is more in accord with the radical interpretation of the flux doctrine and will find its echo at, among other places, 158 e 10 with its mention of άλλον ἄλλον.

12. This transphenomenal status of the offspring is perhaps implicit at 154 a 2, but it is veiled by the insistent use of phainesthai at 153 e 7 and 154 a 3.


14. Crombie explores the possibility of a metaphorical interpretation in an even more radical way by positing a phenomenalism in which even agent and patient are purely phenomenal (EPP, V. II, p. 22-23).

15. Cf. Cornford's translation, PTK, p. 55; and McDowell's, Theaetetus, p. 28.

16. Crombie, after elaborating the (radical) metaphorical interpretation, admits that it does not account for everything Plato says, since Plato also holds that slow and fast motions are physical processes (EPP, V. II, p. 23). He thus concludes that Plato's doctrine is probably inconsistent (p. 24). On our interpretation, Plato is not inconsistent.