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Episteme and *Logos* in Plato's Later Thought*

by Alexander Nehamas (Pittsburgh)

In returning to the form of his early elenctic dialogues in the *Theaetetus*, Plato once again brings into prominence Socrates' old definitional question as well as the apparent impossibility of ever answering it in a satisfactory manner. The essay that follows raises some problems about the general features of that question in the hope of coming to a better understanding of its specific object in this dialogue: the nature of knowledge, of *episteme*.¹

Socrates begins the main discussion of the *Theaetetus* by telling his young interlocutor, in very traditional manner, that he wants "to know what exactly knowledge itself is."² The construction *what knowledge is* and others similar to it are emphasized on a number of occasions at the opening stages of the investigation. When Socrates, for example, appeals to the definition of clay in order to explain why Theaetetus' first attempt to define knowledge fails, he asks him to suppose that "someone had asked concerning clay . . . what exactly it is." Further on, he speaks of "someone who does not know what something is" as well as of "someone who is asked what knowledge is." As a final instance, we can cite his exhortation to Theaetetus to try hard "to grasp the account of what knowledge is."³

Plato, however, had never been consistent in the terms he used in order to specify Socrates' concern. In the *Euthyphro*, for example, though Socrates wants the seer to "teach him exactly what the form [of

* This paper was prepared for the meeting of the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy in Philadelphia in December, 1981. Versions were read at Tufts University and at the Johns Hopkins University. M.F. Burnyeat, Gail Fine and J.M.E. Moravcsik made detailed comments on an earlier draft. My debt to them is deep and obvious. Hugo Bedau, Daniel Dennett, Charles Kahn, David Sachs, Jerome Schneewind and two anonymous readers for this journal made a number of helpful suggestions.

¹ I retain, with qualifications to follow, the usual translation for *episteme*.

² *Th.* 146 e9–10: γνῶναι ἐπιστήμην αὐτὸ δ, τι ποτ' ἐστίν.

³ *Th.* 147 a1–3: εἴ τις . . . ἐρωίτο . . . περὶ πηλοῦ δ, τι ποτ' ἐστίν . . . ; 147 b2: δ μὴ οἶδεν τί ἐστίν; 147 c10–11: . . . τῷ ἐρωτηθέντι ἐπιστήμη τί ἐστίν; 148 d1–2: . . . προθυμήθητι . . . [περὶ] ἐπιστήμης λαβεῖν λόγον τί ποτε τυγχάνει δν.

the pious] is,” he later on suggests ironically that surely Euthyphro knows “both the pious and the impious.”⁴ Similarly, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates often abandons the construction *what x is* as the object of verbs of questioning, answering, knowing and explaining, and substitutes instead the simpler construction *x*, the accusative of the noun in question. So, for example, he claims that “if someone does not know knowledge, he does not understand the knowledge of shoes either” and that “whoever ignores knowledge does not understand shoemaking or any other craft.”⁵ At another point he objects that Theaetetus’ answer is only “the knowledge of something,” while later on he discusses how difficult it is “to discover knowledge.”⁶

Plato’s grammatical inconsistency has recently been taken to indicate a deeper philosophical problem. Assuming that when the construction is *what x is*, the verb “to know” of which it is the object “needs to be taken in the sense in which we know that something is the case (French *savoir*),” while when the construction is the simple accusative “it would be natural to take ‘know’ in the sense in which we talk about knowing objects (French *connaitre*)”, John McDowell states the problem as follows. Plato’s idiom, he argues,

would . . . naturally incline him to understand knowing, say, what knowledge is as a matter of acquaintance with an object, designated indifferently by the phrase ‘what knowledge is’ or the word ‘knowledge’ . . . more generally, Plato’s idiom would be an obstacle in the way of his achieving clarity about the distinction between knowing objects and knowing that something is the case.⁷

Now it is actually not clear that the distinction between *connaitre* and *savoir* can be usefully applied to Plato’s account of episteme.⁸ More to

⁴ *Euth.* 6e3–4: . . . διδάξον τὴν ἰδέαν τίς ποτέ ἐστιν with 15d4–5: . . . εἰ μὴ ᾔδησθα . . . τό τε δαιον καὶ τὸ ἀνόσιον. Cp. 6d1–2 with 6d10–11 and 15e1. Cf. also *La.* 190b7–9 and 190c6, *Men.* 79d6–e3, *Parm.* 134b6–12. *Crat.* 439e–440b.

⁵ *Tht.* 147b4–5: Οὐδ’ ἄρα ἐπιστήμην ὑποδημάτων συνήσιν ὁ ἐπιστήμην μὴ εἰδώς; 147b7–8: Σκυτικὴν ἄρα οὐ συνήσιν ὅς ἂν ἐπιστήμην ἀγνοῆ, οὐδέ τινα ἄλλην τέχνην.

⁶ *Tht.* 147b11–c1: . . . τινός . . . ἐπιστήμην ἀποκρίνεται; 148c6–7: . . . ἐπιστήμην . . . ἐξευρεῖν.

⁷ John McDowell, *Plato: “Theaetetus”* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 119–120. McDowell detects this problem in various parts of the dialogue; see his references on p. 120.

⁸ M.F. Burnyeat, “The Simple and the Complex in the *Theaetetus*,” unpublished manuscript (1970), pp. 19–20.

our purposes, it is not at all clear that the distinction itself can be justified. As Gail Fine recently put it in discussing this issue, “*con-naître*-knowledge essentially involves knowledge of truths” and cannot therefore “be invoked as an alternative to propositional knowledge.”⁹ Fine disputes McDowell’s claim that Plato confuses the knowledge of propositions with the knowledge of objects. She argues that Plato was quite aware of the fact that all knowledge of objects involves knowledge of propositions. Her own position is that, with a minor qualification, the notion of propositional knowledge, knowledge that something is the case, captures fully what Socrates wants to know when he asks what *episteme*, virtue, beauty, or (for that matter) clay, is.¹⁰

This, however, is the first question I want to raise in what follows. How satisfactory an account of Plato’s view of *episteme* can we give by relying on the notion of propositional knowledge? The *Theaetetus* is the perfect text of which to ask this question, since its own question is “What is knowledge?” and thus allows us to approach our problem from two directions. Since to be able to answer Socrates’ question is to know what the thing to be defined is, we can look at the *sort* of answer which Socrates finds satisfactory. And since his present question concerns knowledge itself, we can look at the *specific* answers the dialogue has to offer.

It is clear that in one sense the knowledge Socrates is after will in fact be propositional. “If we know something, we can say what it is,” Plato claims in the *Laches* (190c6), combining our two constructions, and dismaying those of his commentators who find such a condition much too strong.¹¹ But this, I think, is only part of the story.

First, we should recall Socrates’ notorious complaint in the *Euthyphro* that to say that the pious is what is loved by the gods is not to indicate the being (*ousia*) of piety but only some less intrinsic feature of it (*pathos*).¹² Secondly, it can be argued that Socrates actually knows a number of truths about the objects of his search before he begins to try to define them. For example, in the *Theaetetus* itself, a guiding principle

⁹ Gail J. Fine, “Knowledge and *Logos* in the *Theaetetus*,” *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), p. 379.

¹⁰ Fine, “Knowledge and *Logos*,” p. 367. For the qualification, see *ibid.*

¹¹ For example, P. T. Geach, “Plato’s *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary,” *Monist* 50 (1966), pp. 369–382. But see my “Confusing Universals and Particulars in Plato’s Early Dialogues,” *Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1975), pp. 287–306. For a defense of Socrates along different lines, see T. H. Irwin, *Plato’s Moral Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 294. I discuss Irwin’s view briefly in n. 14 below.

¹² *Euth.* 11 a. Similar points are made at *Men.* 71 b, *Grg.* 448 e.

of the search is that *episteme* cannot involve error and falsehood.¹³ Yet this sort of knowledge is not considered to constitute even a partial answer to his question.¹⁴

A third factor suggesting that the notion of propositional knowledge does not exhaust Plato's interest in *episteme* is his very lack of concern as to whether what Socrates wants to discover is, say, knowledge or what knowledge is. It may be true, though it is far from clear, that "a sentence of the form 'a knows x' can always be transformed into a sentence of the form 'a knows what x is'; and the latter, in turn, is readily transformed into 'a knows that x is F,'"¹⁵ but the converse chain of implication certainly does not hold. If it did, then (to connect our present consideration with the previous two) Socrates would know what the pious is given his knowledge that it is loved by the gods. Yet despite this apparent asymmetry, Plato actually finds no difficulty in transforming sentences of the form "a knows what x is" into "a knows x" and conversely. His indifference suggests that what we have been calling propositional knowledge, knowledge to the effect that x is F for any quality F, is only necessary and not sufficient for knowledge of what x is. We could make this same point by saying that the chain of implications is convertible only when certain values of "F" are in-

¹³ *Tht.* 152c6: ἀψευδές. For the correct construal of Socrates' argument, see F.C. White, "Ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα: A Passage of Some Elegance in the *Theaetetus*," *Phronesis* 17 (1972), pp. 219–226.

¹⁴ It can be, and has been, objected to me that Socrates need not or that he cannot have knowledge of anything if he does not already know its definition. Accordingly, he must, at best, have true beliefs about it. This view has recently been defended by Irwin, *op. cit.*, p. 294 and Plato: "*Gorgias*" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 113. But it seems to me that the need to draw this distinction on Socrates' behalf springs from the antecedent conviction that *episteme* just is propositional knowledge. For if it is, and Socrates claims that he cannot have *episteme* of anything concerning some object unless he has *episteme* regarding its definition, then the only thing left for him to have is belief (the mental state which, when suitably justified, constitutes knowledge of fact). But if, as I am trying to suggest in this essay, we are not to see the *episteme/doxa* distinction as strictly parallel to the distinction between knowledge and belief, then this expedient is unnecessary. As I will argue, the notion of propositional knowledge is much broader than the notion of *episteme*. Socrates, therefore, can deny that he has *episteme* of something without denying that he knows, as a matter of fact, that it is so. My solution to Geach's criticism, *op. cit.*, depends on the view that what Socrates denies having *episteme* of (the teachability of virtue, the piety of prosecuting one's father, etc.) concerns highly controversial issues involving the essence of the objects in question.

¹⁵ Fine "Knowledge and *Logos*," p. 367. Whether 'a knows x' can be transformed into 'a knows what x is' depends on many factors. If 'knows' means *is acquainted with*, for example, and 'what x is' specifies x's essence, the inference clearly fails.

volved, namely, properties which constitute the nature or essence of x . For to know what x is and thus to know x itself is just to know its essential properties.

What all this is leading to is the far from novel view that Socrates is actually concerned only with the knowledge of essences, however that notion is to be construed. He cares neither about our direct acquaintance with objects nor about knowledge of any proposition that happens to be true.¹⁶ But before we put this old point to some original use, let us stop to notice a novel consideration in its favor. This is that our essentialist construal of Socrates' concern provides us with an adequate and satisfying interpretation of his notorious argument in the *Theaetetus* that any attempt to define *episteme* by listing its branches is bound to fail.¹⁷

Theaetetus' first answer to Socrates' question is that *episteme* is geometry, shoe-making, carpentry, and the other sciences and crafts (*Th.* 146 c–e). Socrates refutes this first by drawing an analogy. Had he been concerned with clay, he says, it would have been ridiculous to list different sorts of clay, since someone who does not know in general what clay is cannot be expected to know in particular what potters' clay is. And since, say, carpentry is knowledge of how to make things in wood, Socrates cannot be expected to know what it is since he does not know what knowledge in general is.

The argument has proved difficult to understand. For example, McDowell claims that it depends on the implausible principle that in order to understand a phrase of the form "knowledge of x " or an expression equivalent to it but not containing the word "knowledge" in it (e.g., "carpentry") one must already "in some sense know what knowledge is" (p. 114). But Burnyeat has shown that Socrates is not discussing linguistic expressions; he is after what Burnyeat calls "philosophical" knowledge. And though the argument does not depend, according to Burnyeat, on McDowell's implausible principle, it is nonetheless fallacious.¹⁸ For Plato, Burnyeat argues, rejects Theaetetus' answer on the basis of the following argument:

Socrates does not know what knowledge of making things in wood is.
Carpentry is knowledge of making things in wood.
Therefore, Socrates does not know what carpentry is.

¹⁶ Cf. Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 49–53.

¹⁷ *Th.* 147 a–b. The answer makes its givers ridiculous (*γελοῖοι*) for two reasons. First (*πρῶτον*, 147 a7) because of the issue we are discussing. Secondly (*ἔπειτα*, 147 c3) because it fails to encompass all *epistemai* and all clay within a short, single formulation. This second point is not sufficiently noticed. We shall return to it toward the end of our discussion.

¹⁸ M. F. Burnyeat, "Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus, and G. E. Moore," *Philosophy* 52 (1977), pp. 388–390.

Burnyeat thinks that this argument is fallacious because it depends on substituting “carpentry” for “knowledge of making things in wood” in the opaque context created by the verb “to know.” But, he claims, Socrates’ ignorance of carpentry does not follow from his ignorance of knowledge of making things in wood any more than his ignorance of Alcibiades follows from his ignorance of the defiler of the Herms.

Fine gives this argument a more sympathetic treatment. She is “inclined to think” that it is valid because, according to her, it depends on the Platonic principle that knowledge must be based on knowledge: to know something is to know the elements of its definition.¹⁹ But though Plato may accept some such principle, his present argument is much more direct and does not need to be fortified with extra premises. We can make a much simpler response to Burnyeat’s charge.

The response is the following. Admittedly, the verb “to know” does often generate an opaque context. But the construction *what x is*, which specifies the property which constitutes the essence of *x*, that is, the very nature of *x*, neutralizes that opacity. Suppose, for example, that I do not know what H₂O is. Then, given that H₂O is water, I do not know what water is. And I remain ignorant of this even if I can use the term “water” as fluently as anyone else in the world. Conversely, if I know what H₂O is, given again that it is water, I also know what water is, even if, as it may happen, I cannot use the term “water” properly. Even if I do not know what “water” means, I may still know what water is.

This suggestion has two interesting consequences for the interpretation of Plato, though I can do no more than mention them here. First, since essences are known transparently, it is possible for someone to know what something is without being in a position to describe oneself as having that knowledge. For example, though I may know that water is H₂O, I may not know that this is an essential feature of water or that the substance before me is in fact water. In both cases, there is the temptation to say that by becoming aware of these facts I recover knowledge that I already possessed without knowing that I did. This temptation, I think, is ultimately connected with some of Plato’s reasons for holding that knowledge is recollection. The second consequence is related to the fact that, according to such an essentialist construal of knowledge, in order to know what water is one must know what H₂O is and what in turn that is and so on until one can finally be said to know everything that water is. Since, always according to such a view, accidental features are not part of what things (“really”) are and since knowledge involves all the essential features of its objects, we might say that to know something at all is to know it fully and completely, to know it perfectly. These qualifications, in turn, capture both the linguistic flavor and the conceptual force of Plato’s attitude toward *episteme*.

Returning to our present argument, we can now see that, no matter how fluent his Greek, if Socrates does not know what knowledge of making things in wood is then he does not know what carpentry is. Knowledge of what things are is independent of being familiar with any

¹⁹ Fine, “Knowledge and *Logos*,” p. 393 n. 29. The principle (KBK) is originally introduced on p. 367.

particular expression that stands for them.²⁰ If there are essences, then to know a thing's essence is to know the thing itself: to know what x is is to know x . This, rather than a confusion between "propositional" and "direct" knowledge, is what lies behind the grammatical indifference which Plato exhibits and which started us on this discussion. To know the thing itself, moreover, is to know it under some privileged description permitting the inference that one (transparently) knows what that thing is even if one does not know that some other description applies to it. Socrates' refutation of Theaetetus' first answer is thus valid and straightforward.

Though, as we have said, the view that Socrates wants to know the essence of things is not new, its implications, as our preceding discussion may have suggested, have not always been clearly articulated. I now want to turn to one of this view's serious implications for the analysis of Plato's account of *episteme*. In its full force, this implication has so far, to the best of my knowledge, escaped the notice of previous discussions of this question.²¹ This is that if Socrates wants to determine the essence of the objects of his search, and if only correct definitions give *episteme* or knowledge of these objects, then it follows that not every true belief can be transformed into *episteme*. If it is appropriate to talk of "transforming" beliefs into knowledge at all, then at best only a subset of all true beliefs can be turned into knowledge, even if they satisfy some further conditions as well. These are beliefs that concern the essences, or features that follow from the essences, of the things they are about. Beliefs about accidental features of things, as we shall see, are excluded. A further crucial consequence of the interpretation we are discussing is that the very idea of "adding" some further condition to true belief in order to turn it into knowledge is misguided.

²⁰ It might be objected here that Plato's claim that one does not understand (*συνίησιν*) the name of something if one does not know what it is (*Th.* 147b2) suggests that he rejects the view I advocate here. But this would be a mistake. As Burnyeat argues ("Examples in Epistemology," pp. 387–388), the "understanding involved here is not identical with but presupposes linguistic familiarity with the terms in question". What Burnyeat does not see is that his view also allows him to construe the second version of this argument which he attributes to Plato as valid (p. 390).

²¹ One should except the statement by Fine referred to in n. 9 above. But Fine does not pursue the point and, I think, ultimately offers a construal of Plato's view of *episteme* that is incompatible with it. Burnyeat, too, makes a similar suggestion in "Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction between Knowledge and True Belief," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume LIV* (1980), p. 180, but follows it in a different direction.

These points become important when we turn to the third part of the *Theaetetus* (201c–210d) in which Plato, having previously failed to define *episteme* either as perception or as true belief, attempts to define it as true belief in addition to or accompanied with (*meta*) *logos*. He examines three ways of construing *logos* (as sentence, as enumeration of elements, and as a statement of the way in which an object differs from everything else) before he concludes that this last effort, too, is at least apparently unsuccessful. The expression “true belief plus a *logos*,” being the main object of investigation, occupies the center of his attention.²²

The prevalence of this expression in the third part of the *Theaetetus* and Plato’s ubiquitous insistence that *logos* and *episteme* are closely connected,²³ have led a number of philosophers to find in the dialogues the first statement of what is now widely accepted as the general form of the definition of knowledge. That *episteme* is said to be true belief plus *logos* has been taken as a version of the view that knowledge of a proposition *p* involves, first, the belief that *p*, secondly, the truth of that belief and, thirdly, an adequate justification for holding that belief. Accordingly, Plato’s failure to define *episteme* in these terms and the negative ending of the *Theaetetus* are accounted for by the inherent difficulty of this still unsolved problem.

Among philosophers concerned primarily with the theory of knowledge we find, for example, A. M. Quinton writing that “the argument for including justification as well as truth and belief in the definition of knowledge goes back to Plato’s *Theaetetus*.”²⁴ D. M. Armstrong locates the “first recorded occurrence” of this analysis of the concept of knowledge in the *Meno*.²⁵ Finally, Roderick Chisholm claims that “Plato himself suggests” that the problem of defining knowledge must be approached by assuming,

first, that if one man knows and another has true opinion but does not know, then the first man has everything that the second man has and something else as well. Then, having made this assumption, we ask: what is that which, when added to true belief, yields knowledge?²⁶

²² Cf. 201d1–2, 202c7–8, 206c3–5, 208b8–9, e3–5, 210b1.

²³ E. g., among many places, *Men.* 97e–98a; *Phd.* 73a, 76b, 78d; *Rep.* 534a–b; *Tim.* 28a, 51e; *Symp.* 202a; *Soph.* 253b.

²⁴ A. M. Quinton, *The Nature of Things* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 122.

²⁵ D. M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 137.

²⁶ Roderick M. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 5.

Such an approach to knowledge depends essentially on the view that any true proposition which is believed can be known if it is believed with justification. Though, according to some of the varieties of this general scheme, some propositions may be more basic than others, all true propositions that are believed justifiably are known. Further, the justification which is necessary to transform a belief into knowledge is thought to be added to the belief in question. That is, each belief is identifiable quite independently of its justification.

When we turn to philosophers concerned primarily with the explication of Plato we find, for example, Glenn Morrow writing: "By what procedure . . . can a true belief be transformed into a necessarily true belief? This . . . is the important question still unanswered at the end of the *Theaetetus* and the object of Plato's concern."²⁷ Paul Friedländer, to cite just one more instance, claims that "knowledge differs from true opinion or belief by virtue of the fact that an account, *logos*, is added to the latter. This is not far from Plato's own view."²⁸

Needless to say, this position has often been denied. Harold Cherniss, speaking for a number of scholars, has put the point forcefully: "If true opinion and knowledge are not identical, the former cannot be an essential element of the latter. The common assumption of a relationship between 'right opinion' and knowledge is due to the external similarity of their results, but the rightness of any particular opinion is simply accidental as Plato succinctly shows."²⁹ But the matter is not so simple. The passage to which Cherniss refers, Plato's discussion of the jury at *Tht.* 201a–c, does not in any way show that opinions can be right only accidentally. On the contrary, Plato allows that the judges can be justly persuaded (with a pun on *dikaiōs*) and still lack knowledge. So, too, in the *Meno*, the problem with correct opinion is not that it is correct only accidentally, or even that it is only momentary; the problem is that it does not remain in the soul "for a long time" (*polun . . . chronon*, 98a1), which is a different difficulty altogether. If anything, it might be argued, both dialogues may be taken to be suggesting just what Cherniss denies: that knowledge and belief may overlap. For Plato seems to be saying that the eyewitness can know what the judges can only have opinion about, and that the traveller knows the road to Larissa at which others can only guess.³⁰

²⁷ Glenn R. Morrow, "Plato and the Mathematicians. An Interpretation of Socrates' Dream in the *Theaetetus* (201e–206c)", *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970), p. 313.

²⁸ Paul Friedländer, *Plato: The Dialogues (Third Period)*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 184.

²⁹ Harold Cherniss, "The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas," in R.E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 6.

³⁰ Both passages, I must admit, are troublesome for the view advanced in this paper: neither seems to connect *episteme* with the knowledge of essence. But both passages are surrounded with difficulty in any case. For example, it is not clear how travelling the road to Larissa can provide one with the *aitias logismos* ("account of the explanation") which Plato considers necessary for *episteme* at *Me.* 98a3–4. The eyewitness passage, on the other hand, does not fit well with Plato's overall emphasis on the connection between *episteme* and understanding in the *Theaetetus*: for

More recently, Nicholas White has described the analogy between Plato's concerns and contemporary epistemology as "misleading" on the grounds that Plato "has in view, in the first instance, a notion of knowledge which figures, not in statements of the form 's knows that *p*', but in statements of the form 's knows *x*' where '*x*' does not stand for a sentence or proposition."³¹ But though, as we have seen, Plato is in fact interested in statements of the latter sort, we have also seen that their equivalence to statements of the form "s knows what *x* is" directly reintroduces propositions into the analysis of *episteme*. We cannot therefore sever the connection between Plato's concerns and contemporary interests so easily.

Two important recent discussions of the third and final part of the *Theaetetus* exhibit a qualified, even ambiguous attitude toward ascribing to Plato an interest parallel to the contemporary epistemological approach. The first is that of Gail Fine, who attributes to Plato what she calls an "interrelation" model of knowledge. This is the view that nothing can be known in itself, but only as an element occupying a particular place within a structured field, knowledge of which is involved in knowing all its elements.³² To know an object, therefore, is to know the field to which it belongs. Fine claims that, by making this model explicit, Plato comes to hold "a modified version of the thesis that knowledge is true belief with an account," a position she finds Plato to hold in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. But the modification is not serious: it is "only that knowledge involves true beliefs with several accounts, explaining the interrelations among the elements in a discipline" (p. 369). The idea that any true belief can be turned into knowledge is clearly involved in Fine's ultimate definition

difficulties in integrating this with Plato's overall strategy, see Burnyeat "Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction," pp. 186–188). But it can also be suggested that despite what Socrates says the eyewitness cannot be said to have *episteme* since all perceptual awareness is liable to the many errors discussed at *Tht.* 192a–194c. For this point, see E. S. Haring, "The *Theaetetus* Ends Well," *Review of Metaphysics*, 35 (1982), p. 512 with n. 9. Haring also finds a positive message in the dialogue's negative ending, and her discussion is worth consulting.

³¹ Nicholas P. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 176–177.

³² Fine, "Knowledge and *Logos* in the *Theaetetus*." The interrelation model of knowledge was actually first located in the dialogue by May Yoh, "On the Third Attempted Definition of Knowledge, *Theaetetus* 201c–210d," *Dialogue* 14 (1975), p. 430: ". . . in Plato's view, to name [elements] involves an act of discrimination, and to discriminate is to set them in proper relation to each other. They are thus not isolated from others and will no longer be *alogon* (sic); for there will be some *logos* of their inter-relation." Yoh, however, proceeds to connect this promising model, quite gratuitously, with the theory of Forms.

of knowledge according to Plato as "correct belief about x with the ability to produce accounts properly relating x to other suitably inter-related objects in the same field" (p. 394).

The idea that Plato accepts such an interrelation model of knowledge seems to me correct, though I doubt that we can find that model in the *Theaetetus* itself. I will return to these issues below. For the moment I am concerned with the view that such a model allows us to establish a relatively close connection between Plato's account of *episteme* and the contemporary analysis of propositional knowledge.

We must first remark that, as Fine shows, the *logos* which Plato considers to be essentially involved with *episteme* is not sentence or statement in general, but an account or definition of the thing known (pp. 373–374, 387ff.). Plato immediately dismisses the construal of *logos* as statement on the grounds that if that were so, everyone who is not mute or congenitally deaf would be assured of having *episteme* in virtue of expressing true beliefs (*Tht.* 206d1–e3). Furthermore, the *Sophist*, in a part which explicitly construes *logos* as sentence (261d–264b), makes true and false belief, not *episteme*, coordinate with true and false *logos*.

But if the *logos* in question is an account or definition of what is known, it is not clear how its addition to a true belief about something can turn that true belief into knowledge. As Burnyeat has put it in "Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction between Knowledge and True Belief," the second of the discussions I mentioned above, it is not clear what this emphasis on *logos* as definition has to do with "the epistemological question 'why, or what grounds do you believe that p ?' Neither here [*Tht.* 201c–21d] nor anywhere else in the dialogue does Plato so much as mention the now familiar analysis of knowledge in terms of justified true belief" (p. 180). Burnyeat's own view is that Plato is not here concerned with our concept of knowledge, but with our concept of understanding instead.³³ This is also a view I accept; I return to it below as well. What I want to emphasize at this point is that although Burnyeat is eager to distinguish between Plato's account of *episteme* and the answer to the epistemological question above, he is

³³ "Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction," pp. 186–188. Cf. also Burnyeat's "Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge," in E. Berti (ed.), *Aristotle on Science: "The Posterior Analytics"* (Padua and New York: 1980), pp. 97–139, esp. 133–136. See also J. M. E. Moravcsik, "Understanding and Knowledge in Plato's Philosophy" in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 15/16 (1978), pp. 53–69. An extensive recent discussion can be found in Jon Moline, *Plato's Theory of Understanding* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

still willing to accept what I will call the “additive” model of *episteme*. According to this model, *episteme* is reached when a second, independent factor is combined with true belief.

In his discussion of the example of the wagon at *Tht.* 207 a–c and in his effort to show that what is at issue here is not knowledge but understanding, Burnyeat writes that

no extra increment of certainty, no further assurance that it is in truth a wagon (and not e.g. a cardboard mock-up), is achieved by being able to enumerate all the constituent parts of a wagon. What is added to correct belief is an understanding of what a wagon is. (“Paradoxes in Plato’s Distinction,” p. 188)

In parallel manner, in “Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge,” he claims that Plato believes “roughly, that what you need to add to true belief to yield *episteme* is something that will secure understanding” (p. 135).

This brings us to the second question I want to raise in this essay. Is it reasonable to suppose, and to attribute to Plato the supposition, that if I hold a true belief about something I can transform that true belief into *episteme* by adding to it a *logos* of the thing in question which connects it with other objects in its field and yields understanding of it?

Fine and Burnyeat seem to consider this a reasonable supposition, and thus accept the additive model of knowledge we mentioned above. In this, I think, they betray a deeper commitment to the essential appropriateness of the epistemological question. According to Fine, to know *x* is to have a correct belief about it plus an account connecting it to the other elements in its field. Let us apply this to one of Plato’s own examples, grammar (*Tht.* 206 a, *Soph.* 253 a, *Phil.* 17 a–b, 18 b–d). Given the above characterization and assuming that I am a grammarian who knows how the letters of the alphabet are interrelated, it follows that I can have *episteme* of the fact that (as I believe correctly) this particular token of *a* is in italics. A similar point is true in connection with Burnyeat’s view. For it implies that if I believe correctly that some particular wagon belongs to Laius and if I am an accomplished wagon-builder, then I have *episteme* of the fact that this is Laius’ wagon.

Put in this manner, the additive model is very difficult to accept. Why should knowledge of grammar make me better able than you to know that this *a* is in italics? Why should my understanding of what a wagon is enable me to know better than you do that this wagon belongs to Laius? Such considerations are irrelevant to the transformation of these true beliefs into *episteme*. To know that this *a* is in italics (if such a

thing is, for Plato, a matter of knowledge), I must be able to see it, to identify it correctly and to recognize italic font. To know that the wagon belongs to Laius, I must know its history. Nothing less, and nothing more, will do.³⁴ What is, without doubt, a correct emphasis on the function and importance of definition in Plato's view of *episteme* is forcing us to move away from the idea that its addition to a true belief can turn that belief into knowledge.

Apart from being in itself counterintuitive, the additive model conflicts with much of what Plato says about *episteme* in his later dialogues. He does often place *episteme* against fields of objects and thinks of possessing it as having the ability to articulate the modes of combination of the elements of these fields. "Not everyone," we read at *Soph.* 253a8–12, "knows which letters can combine with which"; one needs the grammatical art (*techne*) to be able to do this. Similarly, only the musically educated possess the art of knowing which notes mix with which (*Soph.* 253b1–4). This, Plato continues, is true of all the arts, and also of dialectic, which proceeds through knowledge (*episteme*) to demonstrate which Forms do and which do not combine with others (*Soph.* 253b8–c3). In the *Philebus*, too, to have musical and grammatical knowledge is to be capable of dealing with all the interrelations of notes and letters respectively: "No one can come to learn each [letter] itself by itself apart from all the rest"; the inventor of grammar, "considering that their connection (*desmos*) is one and makes them all in a way one, announced that there was one art concerning them, and called it 'grammar'" (17c–d2).

The crucial consequence of Plato's comments seems to me to be that the domain of every *episteme* and *techne* is in each case *exhausted* by the interrelations among its objects and the rules of their combination. Nothing that Plato says here suggests that he envisages that acquiring

³⁴ Gail Fine has objected to me that on her view more than knowledge of wagons (for example) is necessary for the knowledge that this wagon belongs to Laius: "I believe this wagon is Laius' when, e.g., I see him sitting in it; I know it's his when I add to this belief others about, e.g., how he came to be there, or ask him if it's his wagon, and so on." This may in general be correct, but I cannot see how it is applicable to Plato's concern with *episteme*, even on the additive model, if we accept the view that what must be added to true belief is *logos* and that *logos* is definition. For the beliefs cited here do not seem to be related to the *logos* of the object in question. They do not connect the wagon to other objects in an appropriate field. In addition, if we assume that the fact that 'this wagon is Laius' is a matter of knowledge, it is not clear that a definition of what a wagon is is necessary for knowledge of that fact.

episteme about some domain will turn every true belief one has about its members into an item of *episteme*.

So our negative answer to the question whether we should attribute the additive model of knowledge to Plato has, in turn, generated a new question: if it is not the case that all true beliefs are candidates for knowledge, which are those that are? To begin answering this question, it will be helpful to recall the problem with which we began our present discussion. That problem was that the *logos* of a thing is quite irrelevant to a large number of true beliefs about it – to the belief, for example, that this *a* is in italics or that that wagon belongs to Laius. The thing's *logos* is therefore also irrelevant to those characteristics which the beliefs in question concern. The first step toward our answer is thus to determine which set of beliefs about a thing, and which set of its characteristics, is suitably related to its *logos*. The second, as we shall see, is to give a clear characterization of this suitable relation.

The first step is easier to take than the second. What properly belongs to “dialectical knowledge” (*dialektikē episteme*), Plato writes in the *Sophist* (253d1–3), “is to divide according to kinds and not to think that the same Form is a different one or that a different Form is the same.” This characterization of dialectic is notoriously cryptic, but it will help to see it as parallel to Plato's statement in the *Theaetetus* (207d–208a) that one cannot know something (*epistemonā einai*) if one thinks that “the same thing sometimes belongs to the same thing and sometimes to a different one or that now one thing and now another belongs to the same.” This is not itself patently obvious, but Plato goes on to give an example of the second error: it would be to think that the first letter in the Greek for “Theaetetus” is Theta while that in “Theodorus” is Tau (both words begin with a Theta in Greek). And though he does not tell us what the first error consists in, we may easily surmise that it would be, for example, to think that the Greek words for “Theaetetus” and “Timon” both begin with a Theta.³⁵

Such characteristics of letters concern their interrelations with other letters, with those objects along with which they form the domain studied by grammar. This suggests that in general the characteristics for

³⁵ See Fine, “Knowledge and *Logos*,” pp. 387–388; White, p. 178 with n. 53; McDowell, pp. 253–254. All three discussions correct previous readings of this passage, e.g. those of F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), pp. 157–158 and Morrow, “Plato and the Mathematicians,” pp. 309–310. But, perhaps because of Plato's emphasis, they all seem to be aware only of the second and not also of the first of the errors which Plato discusses here.

which we are searching are those characteristics of things which constitute their interrelations with the other things of their domain. The same point is also suggested by the method of division, which is followed in the two dialogues that form the *Theaetetus*' dramatic sequel, the *Sophist* and the *Politicus*. For the aim of these dialogues, along with the never-composed *Philosopher*,³⁶ is in very traditional vocabulary "no mean task": it is to focus on the three kinds – sophist, statesman, philosopher – and "to define clearly in connection with each one what exactly it is."³⁷ Needless to say, the method of division itself, by means of which this traditional Socratic goal is to be pursued, is anything but traditional – we shall have more to say about this below. What is important for our current purposes is to notice that this method is directed precisely at the articulation of the connections between sophistry, statesmanship, philosophy and the other arts and sciences. To define the sophist is to locate the sophistic art (once we have, partly through the middle sections of the *Sophist*, determined that it is an art) within the structured family of the arts and crafts in general. The Socratic question, which, as we have seen, explicitly governs the dialectic of these late Platonic dialogues, concerns the essence of its objects. The correct answer to that question constitutes *episteme* of what is thereby defined. It follows, therefore, that the beliefs which are candidates for knowledge are those which concern a thing's essence. In addition, we have seen, such beliefs concern the interrelations of each thing with others belonging along with it to the same structured domain.³⁸

At least one welcome consequence of this idea is that it explains why the *logos* of a thing is relevant to its *episteme*. For the characteristics we have been discussing are all relevant to the *logos*, the definition, of the thing in question. The *logos* is a summary statement of the path within a network of objects which one will have to follow in order to locate a particular member of that network.³⁹ But each object along that path

³⁶ The attempt of Jacob Klein to show that the *Philosopher* was never to be written, but that what the philosopher is implicit in the practice of the dialectic art in these three dialogues, does not seem to me convincing. See his *Plato's Trilogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

³⁷ *Soph.* 217b2–3: καθ' ἕκαστον μὴν διορίσασθαι σαφῶς τί ποτ' ἔστιν, οὐ σμικρὸν οὐ ῥάδιον ἔργον. Cf. *Soph.* 218c6–7: . . . τί ποτ' ἔστιν, ὁ σοφιστής, and cp. *Pol.* 258b3, πολιτικὸν διαζητεῖν with *Tht.* 148c6–7, ἐπιστήμηγ . . . ἐξευρεῖν.

³⁸ These domains, I think, consist of types of which sensible objects are tokens. Such a view is suggested by J.M.E. Moravcsik, "Forms, Nature and the Good in the *Philebus*," *Phronesis* 24 (1979), pp. 88ff.

³⁹ See, for example, the final "weaving together of the name" of the sophist at *Soph.* 268c5–d5. For recent discussion of the method of division, see J.M.E. Moravcsik,

itself occupies a unique position within that network, and is defined by its interrelations to all other things and their positions. Thus a thing's *logos*, apparently short as it may be, is implicitly a very rich statement since it ultimately involves familiarity with the whole domain to which that particular object belongs. Those characteristics are therefore objects of *episteme* which concern a thing's interrelations within its field, since such characteristics are explicitly or implicitly connected with the *logos* of the thing in question. Accordingly, it is true beliefs about these characteristics which, when suitably related to a thing's *logos*, are candidates for *episteme*.

And this brings us to the second part of our question: What is the suitable relation for which we are looking? We have seen that the most explicit *logos* will not, by being added to a belief about a thing's accidental properties, turn that belief into *episteme*. This is at least part of what the negative ending of the *Theaetetus* suggests.⁴⁰ In this respect, Plato's view is a direct forerunner, perhaps even a competing contemporary, of Aristotle's explicit position that what is accidental is not knowable.⁴¹

"The Anatomy of Plato's Divisions," in E.N. Lee, A.P.D. Mourelatos, and R.M. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), pp. 324–348; also, J.L. Ackrill "In Defence of Platonic Division," in Oscar P. Wood and George Pitcher (eds.), *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 373–392, though Ackrill, in my opinion, places too much emphasis on the idea that Platonic division is an operation upon concepts and not upon natural objects and their kinds. An excellent earlier treatment is to be found in Julius Stenzel, *Plato's Method of Dialectic*, trans. by D.J. Allan (New York: Arno, 1973).

⁴⁰ On this issue, I disagree with Fine, who thinks that the dialogue's negative ending simply suggests that only several *logoi*, and not a single one, can turn a true belief into *episteme* and that this is all that Plato means to suggest ("Knowledge and *Logos*," pp. 394–397). I don't see how the addition of many *logoi* can help to turn a belief about a thing's accidental properties into *episteme* where a single one will fail (cf. McDowell, p. 257). Now Fine argues (p. 392 n. 28) that what may be needed is not the addition of any *logos* distinguishing a thing from others but that of a *logos* specifying a thing's essence. It is, however, still unclear how an essential *logos* (which is what I have been concerned with all along) can transform an accidental belief into *episteme*. Even if Plato, like Aristotle, believes that features that follow from a thing's essence but are not part of it are objects of *episteme*, this is still a far cry from his thinking that any true belief about an object can become *episteme* if it is accompanied by its *logos*. I therefore do not accept Fine's view that Plato's final argument against defining *episteme* as true belief accompanied by *logos* "fails for reasons Plato himself already provided" and that Plato does not take this failure seriously (p. 394). Plato, I think, is quite serious about the dialogue's failure. And this failure contains, as we shall see, an important additional lesson.

⁴¹ *An. Post.* A 6, 75 a18–27, A 30; *Met.* E 2, 1026 b2–24, 1027 a19–28, esp. 27–28: ἐπιστήμη οὐκ ἔστι αὐτοῦ. For an account motivating Aristotle's denial that we can

Will, then, the addition of *logos* to true beliefs about essential properties help matters? Suppose that you correctly believe that the letter Sigma cannot under any circumstances be preceded by the letter Gamma, while it can be both preceded and followed by the letter Alpha. Suppose, further, that in many respects your grammatical knowledge is still incomplete; perhaps you are even ignorant of some of the rules governing the use of Sigma: not being an Athenian, you do not know that double Sigma is interchangeable with double Tau. And now suppose that you become an expert grammarian, and that you thereby acquire the full *logos* of Sigma. Can you add it to your belief in order to turn it into knowledge? How can you, since this belief is part of the *logos* of Sigma in the first place? What turns it into *episteme* cannot be the addition of an independent *logos*, but its incorporation, along with similar beliefs, into a *logos* of Sigma.

The additive model of knowledge thus faces a dilemma. Either a *logos* can be added to a true belief, but this cannot generate *episteme* since the belief in question can only be accidental; or (the content of) a true belief can become (the content of) *episteme*, but not by the addition of a *logos* of which, since it is an essential belief, it is actually already a part.⁴²

A great virtue of the approach I am suggesting we take is that it allows us, in no uncertain terms, to take Plato fully and literally at his word when at the end of the *Theaetetus* he writes that

it would seem . . . that knowledge is neither perception, nor true belief, nor an account added to true belief.⁴³

have *episteme* of "perceptible physical objects and their contingent (accidental) properties" see Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge," pp. 114–115. See also Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle's "Posterior Analytics"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 124–128.

⁴² There do remain beliefs about features of things which, though not parts of their essence, in some way follow from it. But, as I will suggest, the *logos* of a thing, though apparently short, involves a large number of its features because it is a summary specification of the relations between that thing and all the other members of its domain along with their features, which consist in further such relations.

⁴³ *Th.* 210 a9–b2. McDowell, p. 257, begins to suggest the point I am insisting on, but pursues it in a very different direction: "The argument of [209 d4–210 a9] might well prompt the following thought: true judgement concerning a thing, and knowledge as to what it is, are not related in such a way that an addition to the first can convert it into the second. "This," he infers, "suggests that true judgement concerning a thing already implies knowledge as to what it is." The inference is resistible, however. The point may suggest that those true judgements constitute knowledge as to what a thing is which are expressed (not in addition to, but) through *logoi*. Notice, in

Now Plato, to be sure, does not argue along the lines I suggested in the previous paragraph. He argues that if *logos* is simply a statement, then its addition to true belief turns every expressed true belief into *episteme*, which is impossible (206d1–e3); that if *logos* is the simple enumeration of the elements constituting a thing, then its addition to a true belief is not sufficient to turn it into *episteme* (206e3–208c3); and, finally, that if *logos* is the ability to distinguish a thing from everything else, then its simple addition will either be presupposed by all true belief or the addition of its knowledge will make our definition circular (208c4–210a9). I think that these arguments are sound even if *logos* is construed according to the interrelation model of *episteme*. And though I cannot offer a detailed justification of this claim here, I hope that this can be excused since Plato ultimately depends for his conclusion on the considerations we have raised in the preceding part of our discussion. If this is so, then, Plato is quite correct to end the dialogue negatively and to close with the claim that *episteme* cannot consist in the addition of *logos* to true belief.

What has prevented everyone so far from taking this negative conclusion at face value is Plato's rhetorical question at *Tht.* 202d6–7:

For what *episteme* could there be apart from both *logos* and true belief?

It is clear that Plato takes this question seriously, and that he accepts the view that *episteme* involves both true belief and *logos*. But at this point, the commitment to the additive model of knowledge, which is motivated by the influence of the epistemological question even on those who deny its immediate relevance to Plato, leads in a misleading and dangerous direction. For it forces the assumption that if such a connection exists it must consist in the addition of *logos* to true belief in order to yield *episteme*. In fact, it forces the assumption that this is exactly the connection that Plato envisages in others of his dialogues and that therefore he cannot be giving it up in the *Theaetetus*.⁴⁴

this connection, that even Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 162–163, does not take Plato at his word. The problem, as he sees it, is that Plato has deliberately not appealed to the proper sense of *logos*, which concerns the Forms.

⁴⁴ Cf. Fine, "Knowledge and *Logos*," p. 369; Yoh, pp. 420–421; McDowell, p. 229; Julia Annas, "Knowledge and Language: The *Theaetetus* and the *Cratylus*," in Malcolm Schofield and Martha Craven Nussbaum (eds.), *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 137 with n. 1.

Now it is undeniable that the connection between *episteme* and *logos* is ever-present in Plato. In the *Phaedo*, for example, which is almost always cited in this connection, Plato writes of people in whom “*episteme* and correct *logos* are present;” he later claims that “if someone knows, then he is capable of giving a *logos* of what he knows;” again, he mentions the “being itself of which we give an account as to what it is.”⁴⁵ In the *Republic* he describes the dialectician (dialectic being, of course, the supreme *episteme*) as one “who is capable of grasping the account of each thing.”⁴⁶ In the *Symposium* he asks: “Don’t you know . . . that to have true belief and not to be able to give a *logos* is neither to have *episteme* – how could something without *logos* be *episteme*? – nor ignorance?”⁴⁷

Yet *not once* does in any of these contexts the expression “true belief plus (*meta*) *logos*,” which is rampant in the *Theaetetus*, appear. Even in the *Meno*, which is appealed to more than any other dialogue in this context, true beliefs are only said not to “be worth much until one binds them down with an account of the explanation . . . *episteme* differs from true belief by this bond.”⁴⁸ Surely nothing but an antecedent commitment to the additive model would convince one without further argument that the connection Plato envisages between belief and *logos* is that of addition.

The expression *meta logou* (“along with an account”) occurs, in connection with knowledge and outside the *Theaetetus*, only in two instances in the *Timaeus*. In the first, Plato is contrasting the world of the Forms with the world of becoming and describes it as “comprehensible with thought along with an account.”⁴⁹ It is clear, however, that there can be no question in this context of adding this account to belief, since what it is said to accompany is “thought” (*noesis*) from which belief (*doxa*), which relates only to the world of becoming, is being sharply distinguished. Furthermore, the preposition *meta*, which depends on “comprehensible” at least as directly as it depends on “thought”, carries more its sense of accompaniment rather than the sense of addition which is primary in the *Theaetetus*. In the second instance, Plato is contrasting true belief with intelligence, and describes the latter as being “always along with true account.”⁵⁰ And again, it is clear, the question of adding *logos* to belief does not arise. Interestingly

⁴⁵ *Phd.* 73 a9–10: . . . ἐπιστήμη ἐνοῦσα καὶ ὀρθὸς λόγος; 76 b5: ἀνὴρ ἐπιστάμενος περὶ ὧν ἐπίσταται ἔχει ἂν δοῦναι λόγον; 78 d1: αὐτὴ ἢ οὐσία ἧς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι.

⁴⁶ *Rep.* 534 b3–4: Ἡ καὶ διαλεκτικὸν καλεῖς τὸν λόγον ἐκάστου λαμβάνοντα τῆς οὐσίας; Cf. b4–6, b8–d1.

⁴⁷ *Symp.* 202 a5–7: Τὸ ὀρθὰ δοξάζειν καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ἔχειν λόγον δοῦναι οὐκ οἶσθ’ . . . ὅτι οὔτε ἐπίστασθαι ἔστιν – ἄλογον γὰρ πρᾶγμα πῶς ἂν εἶη ἐπιστήμη; – οὔτε ἄμαθία;

⁴⁸ *Me.* 98 a3–8: . . . οὐ πολλοῦ ἀξιαί εἰσιν, ἕως ἂν τις αὐτὰς δῆση αἰτίας λογισμῶ . . . καὶ διαφέρει δεσμῶ ἐπιστήμη ὀρθῆς δόξης. For some discussion, see R. S. Bluck, *Plato's "Meno"* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 412–413.

⁴⁹ *Tim.* 28 a1–2: . . . νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν.

⁵⁰ *Tim.* 51 e3: . . . ἀεὶ μετ’ ἀληθοῦς λόγου.

enough, Plato simply does not use the expression *meta logou* in connection with knowledge with anything like the frequency exclusive attention to the *Theaetetus* would suggest; in fact, as we have just seen, he hardly uses it at all. When he does use it, he generally is concerned with the idea of action under reason's guidance, and with self-control.⁵¹

If, then, the connection between *logos* and true belief is not one of addition, and if Plato seriously thinks that both of them are elements of *episteme*, what can their connection be? When does a true belief become knowledge? Our answer to this question is bound to be speculative since Plato has nothing explicit to say on this subject after the *Theaetetus*. We have seen that those true beliefs are candidates for knowledge that concern the essence of the things they are about. We have also seen that, having become knowledge, such beliefs are parts of the *logos* of the thing in question. We might therefore suggest that those beliefs can qualify as *episteme* concerning something that are expressed in or through that thing's *logos*.

This suggestion seems immediately open to the objection that it limits the range of *episteme* intolerably, since it apparently implies that very few beliefs about each object will ever count as knowledge of it. What about, the objection continues, all those beliefs which, though not contained or expressed in the *logos* of something, are still intimately connected with it? What about, that is, the rich structure of the knowledge of things which, as Aristotle shows in the *Posterior Analytics*, we can have about things given their definitions, the principles of the science that concerns them, and the syllogistic rules?⁵²

It is at this point, I think, that the interrelation model of *episteme* comes to our assistance. For on this model, as we have seen, the *logos* of each thing is intimately connected with the *logos* of everything else in its domain. And what counts as *episteme* is the large set of beliefs that is expressed through the totality of statements about the interrelations of the members of that domain. This is why, in my opinion, Plato, though willing to use the singular *logos* in writing that we must "seek and present what [the sophist] is through a *logos*," is equally willing to use the term's plural and write that "it is always necessary in connection with everything to come to an agreement through *logoi*

⁵¹ E.g., *Prot.* 324b1–2; *Rep.* 517b4–7; *Phdr.* 256a5–6; *Lg.* 647d4–6, 772a1–3; *Soph.* 265c7–9 mentions *logos* and *episteme* together, but it is not telling. Cf. Aristotle, *An. Post.* B19, 100b10: . . . ἐπιστήμη δ' ἅπαντα μετὰ λόγου ἐστί, which cannot support the additive model, and *E.N.* VI 6, 1140b33.

⁵² Myles Burnyeat kindly discussed this point with me.

about the thing itself rather than about its name only without *logos*.”⁵³ And though the expression *dia logōn* can simply mean “conversing,” it can also take on the narrower meaning we have attributed to it here. It certainly has that narrower meaning in Plato’s statement that if the dialectician is to “demonstrate correctly which kinds combine with which and which do not admit one another [he] must proceed with a certain knowledge through *logoi*” (*Soph.* 253b9–c1). Plato, in any case, is willing to use the expression in a suggestively ambiguous manner. So, in the *Politicus*, Socrates says that while he and the younger Socrates have their name in common, it is much more important to see whether they are akin to one another through *logoi*: through conversation, we get to know others better; through definition, we get to know what is akin to what and so, strictly speaking, what each thing is.⁵⁴

Though it seems that, at least in Plato’s later thought, not every true belief is in principle a candidate for knowledge it also seems clear that he does not believe that the domains of *episteme* and belief are completely separate.⁵⁵ On the contrary, Plato appears willing to allow that there can be *episteme* of anything that belongs to the structured fields which we have been discussing. The letters and musical notes which are his main examples in the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist* and the *Philebus* are sensible objects about which we can have beliefs and about which, when our beliefs are structured appropriately, we can also have *episteme*. At the very least, Plato seems to believe that we can have *episteme* of the types to which such objects belong.

Plato makes this point in general terms at *Phil.* 61d10–e4, where he freely envisages *epistemai* of changing things, differing from *epistemai* of unchanging things only in being “less true”, and elaborates his view at 62a2–d6. Even *Phil.* 58e–59c, which some find incompatible with this position, does not challenge it.⁵⁶ The passage does not deny that

⁵³ *Soph.* 218b7–c1: . . . λόγῳ . . . ; c4–5: . . . διὰ λόγων.

⁵⁴ *Pol.* 257d2–258a3: . . . διὰ λόγων . . . ; on the contrast between name and thing, see, for example, *Pol.* 262d4–6 and *Soph.* 218c1–3.

⁵⁵ Such a view is held, for example, by Cherniss, “The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas,” and, of course, by Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*. For an argument against finding this view in the *Republic*, see Gail Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978), pp.121–139, with full references. Though I am not always in agreement with Fine’s reconstruction of Plato’s argument, I am in substantial agreement with her conclusions.

⁵⁶ Fine, “Knowledge and Belief,” p.122 n. 3 considers this passage inimical to her position. But see I.M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato’s Doctrines*, vol. I (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 57.

there is knowledge of changing, sensible objects but only that there is "intelligence or knowledge possessing the greatest truth" about them (59b7–8). This, it should be clear, is not to say that we can have no knowledge of the sensible world; it is only to say, as Plato does say, that the further a domain is amenable to mathematical and hence systematic treatment, the clearer and truer its *episteme* will be. The metaphysical basis of Plato's view seems to be the idea that the more changeable some objects are, the more unstable their interrelations are going to be. And since knowledge, for Plato, concerns only what is unchanging and stable, there will be that much less to have *episteme* of in connection with them. And along with this degrees-of-truth theory of *episteme* Plato tends, in his later period, to emphasize more and more the systematic understanding of fields rather than the knowledge of particular facts.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Burnyeat discusses such a view in detail, and makes some necessary qualifications, in "Paradoxes in Plato's Distinction," pp. 180–188. He points out that this construal explains Plato's insistence that to have *episteme* one must become master of a proof or explanation oneself, his finding teaching as problematic as he does, and his emphasis on definition as part of *episteme* (pp. 186–187). Burnyeat also seems to draw a distinction, however, between teaching morals and mathematics on the one hand, where "teaching does not produce knowledge" (i.e. understanding), and practical skills on the other, where "there is an honest job for teaching to do" (p. 187). I am inclined to think that, whether or not Plato was aware of it, the problem is the same in all cases. Though one can indeed be taught to be a shoemaker, it is not clear that one can be taught to be a *good* shoemaker – this is where the difficulty is. Similarly, one can be taught some mathematics – most people do; but how does one teach a student to be a good mathematician, "really to understand" mathematics? The question of morals is naturally the most complicated by far. Whereas in shoemaking, mathematics and the other crafts we can distinguish being a shoemaker, say, and a good shoemaker, the distinction collapses in regard to virtue. The only thing that is to be taught here is how to be *good*, pure and simple: there is nothing else to teach.

Following C. A. J. Coady, "Testimony and Observation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (1975), pp. 149–155, esp. p. 154, and B. A. O. Williams, "Knowledge and Reasons," in G. H. von Wright (ed.), *Problems in the Theory of Knowledge* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972), pp. 1–11, Burnyeat makes a number of interesting comments about the transmissibility of knowledge as opposed to the intransmissibility of understanding. A suggestive parallel asymmetry holds between description and interpretation (activities which, to some extent, are coordinate with knowledge and understanding). If I describe an object *x* to you, and I am in an appropriate position for doing so, you can go on to describe *x* yourself; but you cannot do the same with an interpretation of *x* unless, in some way, you go through the interpretation yourself (notice that nothing prevents you from describing my interpretation without engaging in it yourself, and that the object of description and interpretation need not be distinct). This seems to me a much more promising manner of distinguishing between these two activities than the effort to find differences between their truth-claims and truth-conditions. For the latter approach, see Robert J. Matthews, "Describing and Interpreting a Work of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36 (1977), pp. 5–14.

Perhaps, then, we have now answered the question why the *Theaetetus* ends negatively: none of its candidates is satisfactory; adding *logos* to true belief does not yield knowledge. But in so doing, we have raised a new question, to which I now turn in closing. If Plato does have an alternative view of *episteme*, that is, true belief expressed in accounts, why does he not produce it in the *Theaetetus*? Why, moreover, does he not in any of the dialogues following the *Theaetetus* present the answer we have attributed to him?

Like all questions that concern an absence this one, too, can only receive a speculative (though, I hope, not idly speculative) answer. In the *Theaetetus*, the first answer Socrates receives to his question consists of a list of different sorts of *epistemai* in no particular order and with no explanation of why they are given as they are. Having offered the argument we discussed at the beginning of this paper, Socrates presents a second reason for rejecting this answer. Though one could reply to his question simply and shortly, he says, Theaetetus' answer forces one to "traverse an interminable road."⁵⁸ The word *aperantos*, "interminable", is closely connected etymologically and semantically with the word *apeiros*, "unlimited", "indefinite" or "infinite".⁵⁹ Theaetetus understands this connection since, in explaining his method for defining the notion of power, he appeals to the fact that this goal could not be reached by enumeration given the fact that the powers are *apeiroi* (*Tht.* 147d7). Socrates then asks him to do the same with *epistemai*: as he encompassed all powers, many as they are, in one form, he must now express all *epistemai* in one account (*Tht.* 148d5–7). And, following their discussion about Socrates' midwifery, Theaetetus makes his first effort: *episteme*, he says, is perception (*Tht.* 151e1–3).

What is remarkable about this procedure is its similarity to the method of Plato's early dialogues, which receives its most explicit discussion at *Men.* 71d–77b. Here, too, we have things of many sorts – virtues, bees, and shapes. All of them differ from the others in many respects and some are even opposite to one another (*enantia*, 74d7). Nevertheless, Socrates wants to know that respect in which the members of each kind of thing do not differ (72c2–3), that form which they all have and which makes them all what they are (72c7–8), that which is in all of them the same (75a4–5).

⁵⁸ *Tht.* 147c2–6. Socrates is here referring to the example of clay, but the context shows that his point is intended to apply to knowledge as well.

⁵⁹ Cf. for example, *Criti.* 119a4: ἀπέραντος . . . ἀριθμῶς ἀνθρώπων.

But turn now to the opening pages of the *Philebus*, and the impression is overwhelming that Socrates and his interlocutors have exchanged roles. For it is now Protarchus who claims that pleasures cannot differ from each other insofar as they are pleasures (*Phil.* 13c5; cf. 12d8–e2), as Socrates had earlier claimed about bees and virtues. And it is now Socrates who insists that pleasures do indeed differ from one another just as colors and shapes do; for though shape is “all one in kind”, its parts can be very different from, even “most opposite” (*enantiōtata*) to, one another (12c–13b). Now it is not Socrates’ willingness to distinguish parts within a unity that is important: he had already done this in the *Meno*. What is remarkable in its stark contrast to his earlier practice is his insistence that both pleasures and *epistēmai* must be investigated not only in their unity but also, in fact primarily, in their difference and multiplicity: he no longer seems to want the short unitary answer which he had so passionately sought earlier.⁶⁰

In the ensuing obscure discussion of the one and the many (*Phil.* 14c ff.), Socrates uses the examples of grammar and music. He is illustrating his view that in trying to establish what something is we must look for the determinate number of sorts of things that belong to it – not for its basic absolute unity or for its ultimate unlimited multiplicity (16c–17a). We must, he says, construct something like a table of the precise interrelations of these sorts. Voice, for example, is both one and unlimited (17b3–4). But since this is true of everything,

we are not yet wise in virtue of either of them, on account, that is, of knowing either its unlimitedness or its unity; what makes each one of us grammatical is knowing how many things it is and of what sorts. (17b6–9)

Socrates makes a similar point about music (17c11–e6) and recapitulates at 18a6 ff. It is crucial, he says, to grasp the specific number of the sorts of voices (i. e. phonetic sounds) there are and of the connections that govern them and make them one; we must rush neither from the

⁶⁰ *Phil.* 13e–14a, esp. 14a8–9: πολλὰ . . . καὶ διάφοροι. T. H. Irwin has remarked that Socrates’ practice in the *Philebus* may not after all be so different from his practice in the early *Charmides*, where he carefully distinguishes different kinds of knowledge from each other. But the main difference consists in Plato’s view in the *Philebus* that the answer to the question about knowledge must be *simply* a vast map specifying the position of each kind of knowledge within it. The very distinctions among the kinds of knowledge, suitably articulated, constitute those very kinds, and the total articulation constitutes knowledge itself.

one to the unlimited, nor from the unlimited to the one. What makes these all one, he rather startlingly concludes (18c–d), is not the single Form he had previously been looking for but their manner of combination (*desmos*) which, in the nature of the case, must itself consist of a large number of interrelations. He finally returns to pleasure and knowledge at 18e3–4. Though they are each one he says, “our argument requires us” to explain how each is both one and many, and how many precisely each one is before it appears in its unlimitedness (18e8–19a2).

What emerges from this is that Socrates' definitional question remains strikingly unchanged throughout Plato's life from his earliest dialogues to, for example, the *Sophist* (218c5–7). But equally strikingly, the sort of answer that Plato considers proper to that question alters drastically between his writing of the *Theaetetus* and of the *Philebus*. And my speculation is that though Plato may well have reached a unitary answer to the question “What is knowledge?” by the end of the *Theaetetus*, he refrains from giving it because he has also reached the view that any such unitary answer is bound to be misleading, or at least uninformative.⁶¹

We must not, the *Philebus* tells us, rush “straight at the one” (18b1). Yet the unitary answer we have been discussing does just that. What we need instead is a clear and exhaustive determination of how many *epistemai* there are, to what sorts they belong, how they are related to one another, and how they combine in terms of generality, clarity and truth to form the hierarchical structure discussed at *Philebus* 55d–59c. The answer to Socrates' question, whether it is about knowledge or

⁶¹ At this point, I must qualify my agreement with Fine on the question of Plato's acceptance of the interrelation model of *episteme* in the *Theaetetus*. This model is clearly involved in the examples of the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*, in the practice of the *Sophist* and the *Politicus* (that is, in the method of division), and in the theory of the *Philebus*. But I am not certain that it is spelled out in the *Theaetetus*, though Plato is clearly working his way toward it. The only strong evidence Fine presents for her view is the passage 206a–b (“Knowledge and *Logos*,” p. 385). Now Plato does claim that to know a musical note is to know to what strings it belongs (206b1–2), which supports the interrelation model. But he does not say this of letters: on the contrary, he speaks of coming to learn “each itself by itself” (206a6–7), which is precisely what he considers impossible at *Phil.* 18c7–8. At best, then, the evidence is equivocal, and we should take a cautious attitude toward this issue. G. E. L. Owen, “Notes on Ryle's Plato,” in Wood and Pitcher, *Ryle*, p. 365, unequivocally rejects the view Fine supports.

anything else, can never – if it is to give knowledge – consist either of a haphazard list or simply of an all-encompassing formula.

The answer can only be given by means of the long and complicated divisions through which the *Sophist* and the *Politicus* attempt to define their subject-matter. Both dialogues try to define a species of art (*techne*) or science (*episteme*), that of the sophist and that of the statesman (cf. *Pol.* 258b2–7). In both dialogues the art in question is defined by being located within a determinate network of other arts and sciences. And the process by means of which the definition is reached provides, at the same time, both an explanation of the aporetic ending of the *Theaetetus* and an illustration of the obscure opening of the *Philebus*.

Plato, therefore, does try to answer the question of *Theaetetus*. But his answer is not cryptically contained within the dialogue itself, either negatively (as Cornford argued) or positively (as Fine suggested). His answer is given in the two dialogues that follow the *Theaetetus*. Or, rather, part of this answer only is given in those dialogues. For the project of definition has now been shown to involve the mastery of the whole field to which the object of definition belongs, and hence a science of the field in question. Despite the immense importance of the *Sophist* for Plato's metaphysics, the dialogue, along with the *Politicus*, is only a small part of the grandiose project of defining *episteme*, the outlines of which we glimpse rather darkly at *Philebus* 55d–62d.

By seeing knowledge as the object of knowledge in Plato's late dialogues, we are now able to see how the dramatic sequels to the *Theaetetus* are also its doctrinal complements. And by making knowledge the object of knowledge, Plato himself was able to exhibit, in one stroke, both the correct method and the content of dialectic, which he took, after all, as the very essence of knowledge itself.