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A Shaggy Soul Story: How not to Read the Wax Tablet Model in Plato's *Theaetetus*

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This paper sets out to re-examine the famous Wax Tablet model in Plato's Theaetetus, in particular the section of it which appeals to the quality of individual souls' wax as an explanation of why some are more liable to make mistakes than others (194c-195a). This section has often been regarded as an ornamental flourish or a humorous appendage to the model's main explanatory business. Yet in their own appropriations both Aristotle and Locke treat the notion of variable wax quality as an important part of the model's utility in dealing with mistake. What, then, is its status for Plato? I shall argue that the section on variable wax quality is there to suggest to the reader a tempting way of misinterpreting the model. This will highlight the distinctive character of the model in its original version, and provide an unusual example of a philosopher describing how not to read one of his own doctrines.

The model of the mind as a wax tablet that receives impressions from objects has had an incalculable influence on ways of thinking about cognition since it was first promulgated by Socrates in Plato's *Theaetetus*. In this paper I want to take a close look at the original model that Socrates presents and argue that a certain way of reading it is mistaken. But the mistake is understandable. For on the face of it the reading in question is offered up by Socrates himself as a component of the model's explanatory success. I refer to that section of his exposition in which he appeals to the variable quality of wax in individual souls to explain why some are more liable to false judgement than others (194c-195a). I shall argue that this offering is more apparent than real, and that it in fact runs counter to the model's main explanatory strategy. If this is right, it is unsatisfactory to regard the passage as simply an ornamental flourish or a humorous appendage to the model's main explanatory business. Rather, Plato is here deliberately presenting us with a tempting but mistaken way of understanding his model, so as to provoke us into making sure we have properly understood the right way of reading it. It goes without saying that there is an intrinsic philosophical interest in getting clear about how the model is supposed to function in its archetypal form. The twist I

want to add is that it provides an unusual example of a philosopher also concerned to explore how one of his ideas is *not* supposed to function.

I

To show this I need first to sketch my view of the general structure of the portion of the *Theaetetus* in which the Wax Tablet model is embedded. Socrates and Theaetetus have reached the conclusion that knowledge is not to be defined as perception, and at 187b Theaetetus proposes that it be defined instead as true judgement.[1] Barely are the words out of his mouth when Socrates says that he has had great difficulty in explaining *false* judgement, and a lengthy discussion of this topic then ensues. It is common to read this discussion as consisting, roughly, of a negative movement followed by a positive movement. The negative movement consists of a series of puzzles purporting to show that false judgement is impossible. The positive movement consists of a series of models (including the Wax Tablet) which, despite their eventual failure, are constructive attempts to show how false judgement might be possible.

It is easy (and not wholly wrong) to suppose that the Wax Tablet, despite my referring to its failure, is really the most positive part of the whole false judgement discussion. That is because Socrates seems satisfied that it does succeed in explaining how false judgements of one type, namely those involving perception, occur. Its failure is simply one of scope: it cannot account for non-perceptual mistakes. One of the factors that encourages us to read the Wax Tablet this way is, I think, a certain expectation raised by viewing the preceding portion of the discussion as basically 'negative'. We have, so to speak, been made hungry for a positive account by the failure of the discussion that precedes the Wax Tablet to provide any explanation at all. So, excluding its brief prologue (187c-e), the structure of the false judgement discussion suggested by this view is something like the following (up to and including the portions of the Wax Tablet section that precede Socrates' critique of its scope):

1. A series of three puzzles purporting to show that false judgement is impossible (187e-191a).[2]

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1 As is becoming quite standard in this context, I translate the Greek *doxa* throughout as "judgement" rather than "belief" (the term that tends to feature in contemporary epistemology, and also a possible rendering). Socrates seems especially concerned with cognitive acts or events (such as judging that that is Theaetetus over there) for which the translation "belief" would suggest rather a state. Some implications of this concern will emerge in what follows.

2 This is certainly not the only way that commentators have read the puzzle component. Out of the five main sections that comprise the discussion of false judgement (Knowing/Not-Knowing; Being/Not-Being; Other-Judging; Wax Tablet; Aviary) some have seen only the first one as a puzzle, followed by four attempts at explanation (e.g. Paolo

2a. A solution purporting to explain false judgement in terms of the mismatch of perceptions with memory-impressions stamped on one's soul, the latter modelled as a wax tablet (191a-194b).
2b. An explanation of why some make false judgements and others not that exploits the notion of variable quality of wax in different souls (194c-195a).

What I want to suggest is a rather simpler structure, as follows:

1'. A series of attempted explanations of how false judgement is possible, each with a positive and negative moment.

For convenience of comparison, this maps onto the structure against which I am defining my position as follows:

1*. A series of three attempted explanations of how false judgement is possible, each with a positive and negative moment.
2a*. A solution purporting to explain false judgement in terms of the mismatch of perceptions with memory-impressions stamped on one's soul (the latter modelled as a wax tablet).
2b*. A passage designed to show us how not to read the Wax Tablet model as an explanation of false judgement.

Once we see that Socrates is positively oriented from the start, trying (albeit not succeeding) to show all along how false judgement is possible, we may be more tolerant of the idea that the Wax Tablet section is, even within its allotted scope, not wholly positive. Each of the so-called puzzles has some initial credibility as an explanation, and then runs into problems. So too the Wax Tablet, albeit in a slightly different sense. It is the most elaborate explanation offered thus far, but is itself divided into a positive and negative moment, the former intended as a serious explanation of perceptual mistakes, the latter as a warning demonstration of how it should not be used.

I want, then, to offer some reasons for treating the so-called puzzles as, instead, plausible but ultimately inadequate explanations. The difference between an inadequate explanation and a puzzle may seem rather a fine one, but I hope it will come to seem material in what follows.

First, consider Socrates' methodological approach in the *Theaetetus*. He famously compares his method to a kind of intellectual midwifery, by which

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Crivelli, "The Argument from Knowing and Not Knowing in Plato's *Theaetetus* (187e5-188c8)", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96 (1996), 177-96); others the first two, followed by three explanatory models (e.g. Hugh Benson, "Why is There a Discussion of False Belief in the *Theaetetus*?", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992), 171-99). What I want to reject is the idea that Socrates is in the business of setting puzzles here at all.

he helps interlocutors give birth to the ideas within them, before proceeding to test whether they are genuine offspring or wind-eggs: that is, whether they can stand up to critical scrutiny or not. What the method suggests, and its exemplification reinforces (particularly in the treatment of the definition of knowledge as perception), is that great care should be taken to maximize the strength of the interlocutor's idea before one moves on to the critical phase.

Now the ideas promulgated about false judgement are, dramatically speaking, Socrates' own. And it would be wrong to beg the question by denying in advance that some of them raise serious problems for the possibility of false judgement. None the less, it seems to me that it would go against the spirit of this methodology for Socrates to begin his discussion of false judgement by looking for ways of showing its impossibility, rather than seeking a constructive account. Part of what underlies the midwife's function is that the patient is trying to seek the truth, and the midwife's duty initially is to offer as much constructive support as possible. In the light of this it would be odd if Socrates' initial motivation in offering up some thoughts of his own were to demonstrate an apparent falsehood: that no one speaks false.

Apparent falsehood or striking paradox? Socrates is known as one of the great retailers of paradoxes; and yet, although he tells Theaetetus that a sense of wonder (*thauma*) is the root of all philosophy (155d), it is striking that he is *not* generally presented in the dialogues as a great puzzle-monger. In the vast majority of dialogues that end in puzzlement (*aporia*), the puzzlement arises not by Socrates setting some free-standing teaser, but as a result of some attempt at explanation or definition being shown to have flaws. The most famous puzzle in Plato, the paradox of inquiry in the *Meno*, is not of this latter type. But then it is introduced not by Socrates but by Meno himself. Socrates considers it eristic, by which I take him to mean (at least) that it is aimed at point-scoring rather than the discovery of truth. The *Euthydemus* consists of a barrage of puzzles spun by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus which threatens to overwhelm Socrates' attempts at more constructive philosophising.[3] So too in the *Theaetetus* Socrates condemns (and imagines Protagoras condemning) as too quick and superficial some initial efforts of his own to refute Protagoras' theory (164c-d, 166a-c). Earlier on in this section of the dialogue Socrates did appeal to a collection of puzzles about change (154c-155c), but this was in order to *motivate* Protagoras' theory by showing how it could handle such conundrums (154b, 155d).

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[3] This is not, of course, to claim that nothing of what the brothers say has genuine philosophical import. On the contrary, their remarks on not-being and falsehood carry the seeds of much that is to occupy Plato in both the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. But the brothers have no interest in constructive philosophising—in particular, in the business of explanation. Until one puts their ideas in the context of an explanatory project, their philosophical power (for good or ill) remains indeterminate.

The emphasis throughout the *Theaetetus* is on constructive philosophizing, on accentuating the positive as much as possible before unleashing criticism, and on avoidance of slickness for mere display. Consider in this regard the effort Socrates puts into trying out not just one but several alternative accounts of 'account' (*logos*) that might render the final proposed definition of knowledge, as true judgement with an account, satisfactory. Each fails, but all are given their turn. In fact this suggests a further reason for resisting a puzzle-oriented reading of the opening phase of the discussion of false judgement. Socrates offers a *variety* of stratagems for thinking about false judgement. This feature is straightforwardly accounted for if we see the alternative stratagems as just that: a succession of attempts to explain the phenomenon. When one attempt fails, one naturally, as a constructive philosopher, tries to find a different one. If one sees them, alternatively, as arguments targeted against the possibility of false judgement, the variety is much less satisfying. After all, if one shows false judgement to be impossible with one argument, a second and third is not going to make it any more impossible. This would be the philosophical equivalent of kicking a man when he is down (or dead), unappealing in itself and still more so when put in the context of Socrates' methodological aims.

Next, Socrates himself indicates in introducing the topic that what he is seeking is an explanation of false judgement. He tells Theaetetus that he has been unable to say what the phenomenon is and how it comes about, and that this indeed has left him in perplexity (187d). He wonders whether they should examine the matter further, which raises the expectation that what is to come is an account either of Socrates' failed attempts at explanation or of some new ones (or, as actually seems to be the case, both). After the discussion of knowing and not-knowing that ensues he suggests (188c-d) that they should investigate what they are seeking in terms of being and not-being instead. What is it that they are seeking? Not, to be sure, a proof that false judgement is impossible, but an account of how it *is* possible. This implies that both the discussion of being and not-being *and* that of knowing and not-knowing fall under the rubric of attempted explanation. In the former case this is explicit. "Perhaps it is simply the case that the one who judges things that are not about anything will be doing nothing other than judging falsely" says Socrates at 188d3-4, before going on to show that things are not so simple. In similar fashion, the discussion of other-judging closes with Socrates remarking (190e2-3) that neither in this way nor in the previous ways (*kata ta protera*) has false judgement appeared; but, on pain of unacceptable consequences, he is going to try in *every* way (*pantachêi*) to unearth it (e5-8). Evidently, then, all three ways should be construed as unsuccessful attempts to make it appear.

Finally, all three discussions do offer at least the beginnings of rather plausible accounts of what false judgement might be. Socrates starts the first by establishing (at least for present purposes) that knowing and not-knowing comprise an exclusive and exhaustive disjunction of the relations that a subject may have to a given object of judgement. Evidently, one will not make mistakes in virtue of being a knower. Knowledge is incompatible with mistake, or so Socrates had earlier claimed (152c5-6, cf. 160d1-2). Every reason, though, to think that by the same token lack of knowledge is quite compatible with mistake. One of the problems that sinks the Aviary, according to Socrates, is its invocation of knowledge to explain lack of knowledge (199d). By implication, lack of knowledge would be the *right* cognitive state to appeal to in explaining false judgement. True, "false judgement occurs through lack of knowledge" doesn't by itself do much explaining (though cf. *Protagoras* 358c4-5 which analyses, albeit with the terms reversed, lack of knowledge as false judgement). My point is rather that, when Socrates sets up the disjunction, one (if only one) of the disjuncts looks as if it should provide a perfectly sound basis for a successful account. For the reader who has observed how Socrates previously singled out knowledge as incompatible with mistake, a similar fate for its opposite will come as a surprise, and rightly so.

With being and not-being we have a similar story. Surely 'judging things that are' is not the right analysis to offer of false judgement. Socrates had earlier represented as a mark of knowledge that its object be that which is (152c5-6, cf. 160c7-8). Equally, though, 'judging that which is not' looks like it might be an acceptable analysis of 'judging falsely'—trivially so if one takes 'that which is not' to mean 'that which is not *true*'; more substantively (and therefore controversially) if one interprets the phrase in other ways. Any reader of the *Republic* would of course be familiar with Socrates' correlation of knowledge with what is, judgement with what is and is not, and ignorance with what is not. So again the discovery by Socrates that analysing falsity in terms of not-being is fraught with difficulty will come as a surprise.[4]

To sum up: we should read these discussions as offering potentially plausible routes to explaining false judgement that don't (thus far) work, rather than as puzzles aiming to show that false judgement is impossible. Brief comparison with Meno's paradox may again be helpful here. Despite some affinity in content with the discussion of knowing and not-knowing in the *Theaetetus*, the paradox has no pretension to offer even a flawed account of

[4] I shall not discuss the section on other-judging at length in this regard, but clearly it falls under the same rubric. Explaining false judgement by appealing to the idea of substituting in one's thought one thing (the wrong one) for another (the right one), if a little involved, seems a perfectly plausible explanatory route.

how inquiry is possible. It is presented by Meno (and Socrates' reaction bears this out) as a straightforward attack on its possibility. The "puzzles" that open the discussion of false judgement are, I hope to have shown, of a different order. We can now read the whole of the false judgement section as containing a series of positive proposals (of greater or lesser elaboration) for explaining false judgement each of which fail (to a greater or lesser extent) to do the job at hand. In this way the section will mirror the overall structure of the *Theaetetus*: a series of positive proposals (of greater or lesser elaboration) for defining knowledge, each of which, under criticism, fail (to a greater or lesser extent) to do the job at hand; and this order reflects in turn the methodology of investigation promulgated by Socrates at the outset.[5]

II

Having argued for this dualistic structure, let me now focus on the "negative" moment of the proposals which precede the introduction of the Wax Tablet model. I want to uncover a certain presupposition about thought which I take to be one of the main reasons that these proposals fail to do their explanatory job. This result will then be put to use in motivating my interpretation of the Wax Tablet.

A familiar way of treating the knowing/not-knowing discussion (188a-c) is to say that it purports (unsuccessfully) to present an exhaustive (as well as

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5 For an account which, like mine, relates the structure of the discussion of false judgement to the structure of the whole dialogue (and also sees each section of the former as having some positive orientation), see Ronald Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge* (Lewisburg 1992), 202-4. Polansky's comparison is, however, framed in quite different terms than mine, and involves the extraordinary claim that the discussion of not-being and that of other-judging "are actually identical" (202), despite the fact that (as Polansky is well aware) the other-judging account is introduced explicitly to *avoid* the explication of false judgement in terms of not-being (189c2). "In actuality," Polansky assures us (181), "he [Socrates] and Theaetetus here [in the other-judging passage] merely arrive at the true sense of the previous attempt to account for false opinion as opining not-being", this sense being "the sort of *being* involved in something's *being other* than, or not being, other things" that we find in the *Sophist*. (His italics.) One can only admire the coolness with which Polansky converts Socrates' determination to avoid a further encounter with not-being into a welcoming embrace. If we protest that, the plain meaning of the text aside, this still leaves the discussion of not-being operating with a very different notion (namely, not-being as nothing) from the one at work in the discussion of other-judging, Polansky is on hand to inform us that this notion was merely an "erroneous understanding" on the part of Theaetetus. These manoeuvres, swallowed whole, then enable Polansky to claim that there are four (and not, as most commentators take it, five) sections to the discussion of false judgement to match up to the (supposedly) four main sections of the dialogue as a whole. The parallel obtains "quite marvelously", notes Polansky (202), apparently without irony, though in fairness, anxious to show that "this parallel structure might not seem too unlikely" (203), he refers us back to some earlier numerological machinations (188-9) involving the (supposedly) four sections into which can be divided the various combinations that do not allow for false judgement in the Wax Tablet model. This does not, one feels, greatly enhance the credibility of his reading.

exclusive) disjunction. For a given object of judgement, says Socrates, either I know it or I do not know it (and not both). In neither case, he concludes, is false judgement possible. In particular, to take the type of false judgement that serves as Socrates' paradigm case here, one cannot misidentify the thing in question, take it to be some other thing, whether one knows or does not know either or both items.[6]

Now on what conception of knowledge would knowing a thing rule out the possibility of misidentifying it? It seems that in order to be immune from misidentifying a given thing which I know, I must at least have in mind some uniquely identifying feature of the thing in question. And if we simply consider (as I suspect Socrates does) intrinsic features, then there may be no single feature of this kind. The snub nose that differentiates me from John may not be what differentiates me from Jim, and so on. It may be only in virtue of the sum of its features that one can differentiate a thing from all other things.[7] On this account, I would need to have in mind *everything* about (say) Theaetetus to rule out misidentification of him. But that in turn seems an extravagantly strong conception of knowledge. If, on the other hand, one does not know Theaetetus, Socrates says that he could not so much as be an object of one's thought (*dianoia*, 188b9) for one to make a mistake about. Thus not knowing a thing is incompatible with misidentifying it too. But it seems a correspondingly over-thin conception of not knowing that would infer from my not knowing Theaetetus (or nuclear physics) that he (or it) had never figured in my thought: the former in fact seems true and the latter false. If we are to regard neither knowing nor not knowing as compatible with mistake, then the pair hardly seem to form an exhaustive disjunction. There now seems to be much middle ground between the two that would be compatible with having a thing in mind such that one could then make a mistake about it. In the words of George Rudebusch, there seems to be a "giant hole" in the middle of Socrates' argument.[8]

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6 There is some controversy over whether Socrates sets out only to explain misidentifications in his discussion of false judgement, or whether misdescriptions fall within his purview as well; and if so, whether he holds that the latter can be analysed in terms of the former (so that, e.g. the misdescription "Socrates is ugly" would be conceived as the misidentification of beauty as ugliness). I favour the latter option, but shall not discuss this well-worn issue further here.

7 In cases of doppelganger not even this would suffice, but it may be that Socrates does not consider this a live option: at *Cratylus* 432b-c he imagines an exact duplicate of Cratylus to be the work of a god. By contrast, *resemblance* between individuals is to the forefront in the *Theaetetus*. Early on (143e7-144a1, 144d9-e1) it is emphasised that Socrates and Theaetetus look like one another (they each have a snub nose and bulging eyes), and they feature as Socrates' initial example of a candidate misidentification at 188b. Note that in both scenarios it is intrinsic features of individuals that Socrates has in mind.

8 See George Rudebusch, "Plato on Sense and Reference", *Mind* 104 (1985), 526-37, with the "giant hole" reference at 528. My exposition of Socrates' approach owes something of its orientation to Rudebusch's account, though it avoids the (misleadingly) Fregean

What presupposition would allow us to regard the knowing/not-knowing disjunction as having real bite? Surprisingly, we are already close to an answer. Socrates, in effect, seems to reduce the knowing/not-knowing disjunction to the question of whether or not something figures in my thought. Not knowing a thing entails, on his view, not even having it in one's thought. Knowing a thing, by contrast, will certainly entail having it in one's thought. Yet for Socrates this apparently means having everything about it in one's thought. Let me take this as a cue to suggest that Socrates is working with a conception of thinking of the following sort: call it the "transparency" view of thinking.[9] What follows is not the only presupposition (or set of presuppositions) that might be (or has been) adduced as underlying Socrates' difficulty with false judgement. But it is, I think, the simplest and most powerful, and one that seems endorsed by Socrates himself—implicitly here and explicitly later in the dialogue.[10]

We want to say: look, not having everything about Theaetetus right is perfectly compatible with my having him as an object of thought (and, for that matter, as an object of knowledge) that I might then make mistakes about. But the question then becomes: what counts as something's being an object of one's thought? The answer presupposed by Socrates is, it seems to me, that one's thought must be of *that very object*. So that if, say, I have in mind a mathematical young Athenian with bulbous eyes and a Roman nose, then I have failed to think of Theaetetus—who, of course, like Socrates, has a snub nose (143e8-9). The power of this position is that it seems to rest on no more than a truism: that to have (say) Theaetetus as an object of thought, it must be Theaetetus of whom I am thinking.[11] If I have in mind an object

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terms in which he couches his treatment. A further weakness of Rudebusch's paper is its claim that Socrates rejects wholesale the attempt to explain false judgement in terms of mismatching. It rather skates over the Wax Tablet model (the main passage in which mismatching explicitly features), which in my view (to be defended below) shows Socrates quite happy with a mismatch account, albeit in a limited range of cases. In characteristic fashion, Socrates rejects an explanatory model not because it cannot handle *any* case, but because it cannot handle every case. If, as here, the model purports to explain a whole and well-formed *category* of case (false judgement involving perception), one needs to ask how it does so.

9 I call it thus because the underlying idea is that one cannot be thinking of some object x "opaquely" and still be thinking of x at all. Unless I have in mind the object with just those features that x has, I have not succeeded in thinking of x.

10 See 209c and nn.13 and 31 below.

11 Tad Brennan has objected to me that the truistic appearance is merely illusory, and borrows what plausibility it has from a resemblance to Leibniz's Law that fails to hold given that "think of" introduces an intentional context. The objection raises a host of delicate issues. Yet it is hard even to formulate without the risk of question-begging. For it might be supposed that the notion of an intentional context simply helps itself to the idea that (for example) one can succeed in thinking of a given object without having thought of just those features that belong to it. But the point at issue is precisely what the conditions are for successfully thinking of a given object. Without some modern dogmas we are in a

with a feature that Theaetetus does not possess, or without a feature that Theaetetus does possess, then it just seems right to say that I have failed to think of *him*.[12] Failure to have Theaetetus as an object of my thought, then, will not necessarily mean I have a blank. Anything less than having *him* in mind on the terms outlined will qualify as failure to think of him, and hence as failure to know him. The disjunction is solidly exhaustive, and does seem to rule out false judgement.

Perhaps it might suffice to be thinking of Theaetetus if my thought has simply picked out some uniquely individuating feature (or combination of features) of his: his unique type of snubness, for example, or his being the only Athenian mathematician seriously wounded at Corinth in 369BC (assuming that to be uniquely true of him). And if this is so, I will still be immune from misidentifying him, given that even here I have *him* distinctively in mind. So one can generate Socrates' difficulty with a somewhat weaker conception of thinking than the transparency view. This, however, seems to me an unsatisfactory move.[13] Firstly (as noted above) it may take the sum of Theaetetus' features to individuate him, at least if we restrict ourselves to his intrinsic features. But secondly, and independently of such a restriction, the weaker view relies on the inference that to have picked out some *part* (or aspect) of Theaetetus—some albeit unique feature or combination thereof—is to have picked out *him*. But this surely does not go through. If what I am thinking of is an object with that feature plus some that Theaetetus does not have, then it just seems straightforwardly false to say

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better position to appreciate why the transparency view should seem plausible—or even truistic.

12 David Barton has proposed (in "The *Theaetetus* On How We Think", *Phronesis* 44 (1999), 163-80) that what causes the difficulty is something even more basic: the modelling of thinking as a kind of mental grasping, analogous to the literal grasping of material objects (such that, since I could never literally be grasping two things in my hands and think that one was the other, so I could never be thinking of two things and mistake one for the other). Barton claims (175 n.17), against Polansky (*Philosophy and Knowledge*, 183 n.18), that this is independent of the notion that we must have *complete* knowledge of whatever we are thinking of (which he regards as an "unpromising idea", 175). However, in rebutting the objection that one could certainly be grasping part of one object in one hand, and part of another in another, and think that each belonged to the same object, Barton remarks (176-7 n.18) that in such a case "what I grasp in each of my hands, in the sense of 'grasp' that Plato has in mind, is not a whole object but a part of an object", so that only grasping the whole object would (on Plato's model) count as grasping *it* (Barton speaks of "a kind of *enveloping* or *enclosing*", 177 n.18; his italics). But what *is* grasping the "whole object" (or "enveloping" or "enclosing" it), explicated in cognitive terms? Astonishingly, Barton provides no clue. But on the most obvious construal it would be something like having everything about the object right, or every feature of it in one's mind: that is to say, complete knowledge.

13 To Socrates as well. At 209c5-9 he stresses that one must not only have picked out (say) Theaetetus' distinctive snubness, but in like manner the other features of which he is composed, in order to be successfully thinking of *him* (note the emphatic positioning of *su*, "you", at c9). Cf. n.31 below.

that what I am thinking of is Theaetetus, given that Theaetetus does not have those other features. And if this is the only feature I have in mind, then all I have done is think of part of (or an aspect of) Theaetetus, not Theaetetus. Theaetetus is not his nose, however distinctive the latter may be.

Ruling out the "partial" account does indeed leave us with a very demanding conception of what it is to think of something, let alone know something. But rule it out we must, since it is fallacious to treat the φ-ing of part of x as entailing the φ-ing of x. If, for example, I pass part of the requirements for a degree then it would clearly be false to infer that I have passed the requirements for a degree. (If it were otherwise then our education would have been a much smoother affair!) We would, in only having passed part of the requirements, have failed to get our degree. In just the same way we would fail to be thinking of Theaetetus by only getting hold of part of him.

A related fallacy is on hand to tempt us. That is the fallacy of treating the φ-ing of part of x as if it were the partial φ-ing of x. The utility of this move (leaving aside for the moment its invalidity) is that it enables us to get x (rather than just a part of x) as the object of our φ-ing—our thinking, or whatever it may be. For our problem was that we needed to get Theaetetus as an object of our thought. If we can say: well, I don't have complete knowledge of Theaetetus, but I partially know him, then our object of cognition seems once more to be *him*, and it is about him (just in virtue of our only partial knowledge) that we can then make false judgements. Notice that some quite natural usage might encourage the fallacious route to this conclusion. For example, we might naturally talk of a partially eaten apple lying on the table, where we seem to have an object (the apple) in a certain state ("partially eaten"). What we generally mean by this, though, is precisely that *part* of the apple has been eaten. We do not tend to mean (if I can put this delicately) that an apple regurgitated at some interim stage of the digestive process is on the table. Surface grammar can make it look misleadingly easy to get to a partially known Theaetetus from a Theaetetus of whom part is known.

Perhaps we can make headway by thinking concretely of some suitable type of cognition to serve as substitute for "partial knowing". One of the common ways this kind of manoeuvre is fleshed out is by invoking the distinction between knowledge and true judgement. Thus I might have true judgement about Theaetetus and so (the argument runs) have him as an object of thought, and then, given that true judgement does not amount to knowledge I can unproblematically make some false judgements about him. In the context of the *Theaetetus*, the move is at first sight an attractive one because it makes use of the fact that the discussion of false judgement precedes the formal refutation of Theaetetus' proposed definition of knowledge as true judgement. Thus the discussion is operating under the constraint of an iden-

tity between knowledge and true judgement; so we cannot be permitted to say that we have true judgement about Theaetetus without knowing Theaetetus; and then we have no room for making the necessary distinctions. The problem is solved by seeing that true judgement and knowledge are not identical, and that the former does not entail the latter. The difficulty of accounting for false judgement under the constraint then motivates their forthcoming separation.[14]

Attractive as the move looks, it does not in fact seem to me to help at all. We seem, rather, to land in a dilemma. If I have everything right about Theaetetus, then this could in principle be a matter of mere true judgement, not knowledge. If so, true judgement about Theaetetus will be no more compatible with mistake about Theaetetus than knowledge is. On the other hand, we cannot appeal to the notion of true judgement to allow us the possibility of grasping Theaetetus by getting just *some* things about him right, and so some things wrong. Prior to the distinction we were already perfectly at liberty to speak of (say) knowing that Theaetetus is mathematical. The question was whether having that feature of Theaetetus known (right) and others not known (wrong or missing) sufficed for us to have thought of Theaetetus. It is hard to see how invoking the notion that what we did was truly judge Theaetetus to be mathematical makes any progress. In neither case have we shown how grasping part of Theaetetus—getting hold of some but not all of the features that he has—entails that we are thinking of Theaetetus.[15] That inference will still rely on the fallacious move from φ-ing part of x to partly φ-ing x, whether it be "knowing" or "truly judging" that is substituted for "φ-ing".

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[14] The clearest exposition of this type of strategy is Gail Fine, "False Belief in the *Theaetetus*", *Phronesis* 24 (1979), 70-80. Fine argues that the problem with the puzzle (as she calls it) about knowing and not-knowing is that it precludes the holding of knowledge-independent true beliefs (77 with 80 n.16), which Fine treats as occupying an intermediate position being knowing everything about the object and being totally ignorant of it. Thus once one distinguishes knowledge from true belief, we can then allow that something might figure as an object of one's judgement if one simply has (some) true beliefs about it, so that we can allow that one might then also have false beliefs about it. In my view this strategy fails to meet its explanatory objective, and so we should avoid attributing it to Plato if we can. Fine opts, in effect, for the second horn of the dilemma described in the following paragraph. Benson ("Why is There a Discussion of False Belief in the *Theaetetus*?") offers an alternative account, of considerable ingenuity and sophistication, of how the identification of knowledge with true judgement might exclude the possibility of false judgement, though one which relies heavily on importing epistemological principles that Benson claims are to be found elsewhere in the Platonic corpus: a risky strategy, given that the principles are themselves are a matter of exegetical dispute, but especially so with respect to the *Theaetetus*, whose relation to earlier Platonic epistemology remains a subject of much controversy.

[15] If the thought that Theaetetus is F involves thought of Theaetetus, then on the transparency view we will have thought of Theaetetus just as he is. My point is directed against the notion that just by having thought of a part or aspect of Theaetetus we thereby think of Theaetetus.

Nor can we appeal in support of the move to the way Plato himself presents the distinction between knowledge and true judgement. Whatever its precise import, the "jury" passage (201a-c) where he does this invokes as one of its main ways of explicating the distinction a contrast between seeing for oneself and being told by others—shades, perhaps, of Meno's slave working out the answer to the geometrical problem for himself rather than being told it by Socrates. And of course it may well be that any truths that I do see for myself are less liable to be dislodged than those I am merely told—another *Meno* point. In this sense the example certainly weakens the notion that the categories "knowing" and "not knowing" are as fine-grained as we can get. It allows "true judgement" in as a separate (if you like, intermediate) third category, one that does not amount to knowledge but is certainly distinguishable from (say) blank ignorance. But not in a way that helps to account for false judgement. By contrast with the *Meno*, Socrates is not here concerned with how one might *pass* from one state to another, ignorance to knowledge (in the case of the *Meno*) or vice-versa. That is why, in setting up the discussion of knowing and not-knowing, he pointedly excludes learning and forgetting as irrelevant (188a2-4). What he denies, rather, is that one who knows a thing can (sc. at the same time) not know the same thing (188a10-b1)—on my interpretation, that one who has everything about a thing right can have anything about it wrong. This denial does seem to have the force of a logical truth.[16]

So the jury may well have been told the whole truth and nothing but the truth about what went on, without having knowledge.[17] By hypothesis, then, the jury will have everything right. True judgement is not functioning here as something that, by contrast with knowledge, is compatible with mistake. It only does so once we say that I *don't* have everything right about the case at hand. But this may apply whether the truths I do have are those I have seen for myself or not: whether, that is, they are cases of knowledge or mere true judgement.[18] And then, in any event, we must wonder once more whether (in

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16 In the Wax Tablet discussion and elsewhere Socrates actually seems to be working with the more nuanced denial that one who has all the *intrinsic* features of a thing in mind can mistake it for something else (cf. n.38 below): but the refinement does not, as far as I can see, open up any particular explanatory role for a distinction between knowledge and true judgement. Note that the *Meno* itself offers no comfort in this regard. Far from viewing the distinction between knowledge and true belief as mapping on to a distinction between having everything right and not, the dialogue treats knowledge acquisition as simply the conversion (via reasoned explanation) of true beliefs that we already possess.

17 By the same token (to consider briefly the jury passage's other main contrast), they may well have been persuaded of the whole truth without having been taught it.

18 Is there a more promising avenue to be explored in the ramifications of the final proposed definition of knowledge as true judgement with an account? Myles Burnyeat (*The Theaetetus of Plato*, Indianapolis 1990) employs a variant on Fine's strategy of distinguishing true judgement from knowledge to help deal with the problem of false judgement. In particular he claims (179; cf. 118, 123) that progress could be made if we rec-

either case) I have actually managed thereby to think of the case at hand. So invoking true judgement as distinct from knowledge has made no progress in explaining false judgement.

To take stock: I have argued that what causes the analysis of falsehood in terms of knowing and not knowing to fail is the assumption that in order so much as to be thinking of an object I must be thinking of that very object, neither adding nor subtracting features, since this would simply mean that it was not that very object that I had in mind. Knowing an object, then, will (a fortiori) be incompatible with getting anything about it wrong; and not knowing it, even if taken in as rich a sense as would allow this to be compatible with having in mind a host (but not all) of the features of the object in question, would fail to make *it* the object of one's judgement and so (a fortiori) the object of one's false judgement.

The same, what I am calling a virtually truistic, idea about thought and judgement, can be seen to underlie the failure of "other-judging" as a way to explain falsity (189b-190e).[19] As with the discussion of knowing and not

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ognise that subjects may grasp an object "in part but not whole" (and vice-versa; but since both amount on his reading to having only some truths about the object the difference seems immaterial). Backing for this idea might, according to Burnyeat, be found in the second ("analysis") model of "account" that Socrates offers, such that with true judgement we can say what an object's macro-components are, whereas knowledge requires an analysis into its basic elements. One would need to determine whether conceiving of true judgement in this way helps explain how having (only) part of the truth about an object meant we had grasped *it*. Assessment of whether Plato (albeit suggestively) is none the less commending such an approach is complicated by the fact that Socrates eventually rejects this and the two other explications of "account" that he offers.

19 The discussion of false judgement as judging what is not (188d-189b) seems to run independently of any particular conception of thinking. By way of examples from sense-perception (which lend rhetorical force though non-cognitive examples would serve as well from a logical point of view) it offers the quite general problem that to φ what is not is to φ nothing, and to φ nothing is not to φ at all. One then simply substitutes "think" or "judge" for "φ" to generate the idea that to judge what is not is not to judge at all, so (a fortiori) not to judge falsely. The *Theaetetus* does not, I think, attempt to repair this account. At 194d6, with the Wax Tablet solution on the table, it is implied that those who judge truly judge "things that are" (*onta*). But Socrates notably refrains from making the parallel claim that those who judge falsely after all judge what is not. (By contrast, as we shall see below, he claims that the Wax Tablet can show how both knowing and other-judging can be accommodated into an account of false judgement; and other-judging was introduced specifically as a way of explaining false judgement with only things that are as its objects, 189b11-c4). The *Sophist* (crudely to boil down a much more complex story) will attempt repairs by seeking to block the inference from "what is not" to "nothing". Still, the independence of these logical investigations from questions of thinking is superficial. If I judge (falsely) that Socrates is ugly, then it seems that the object of my judgement is something that is not: for there is (by hypothesis) no such thing as ugly Socrates. Grant that I am not thereby thinking of nothing. What makes it positively the case that I am thinking of *Socrates*? The intriguing question is whether the *Sophist*'s strategy carries with it, implicitly or otherwise, an answer to this question. Rudebusch ("Does Plato Think False Speech is Speech?" *Nous* 24 (1990), 599-609) has suggested that in the absence of an answer the *Theaetetus* may actually reject the *Sophist*'s apparent solution. But he is

knowing, so too the failure of other-judging to account for false judgement can seem at first blush rather unpersuasive. Socrates argues that to think that one thing is another thing is absurd. Why so? Because thinking is simply the soul's silent dialogue with itself. And who would ever say to themselves that (say) Theodorus is Theaetetus, or a horse is a cow? Certainly, we might mistakenly think that "horse" and "cow" are names of the same (kind of) object. But that is not the kind of mistake that Socrates is trying to analyse. He is not discussing mis-*labelling*, but those regular kinds of mistake that people who know full well that horses and cows are different animals make when they espy a distant horse and take it to be bovine. If explaining false judgement requires us to posit the subject saying to himself "that horse is a cow" then clearly no explaining has been done.

Socrates' account of thought as silent speech, although he makes much of it, is not itself the root of the problem. For it would be just as absurd, without any explicit mention of thought as a kind of internal speech, to posit our subject as *thinking* "that horse is a cow", albeit that we are tacitly here giving the thought a propositional structure, which is no doubt part of Socrates' point. But what we want to say is that no one who makes a false judgement thinks anything like that; it would indeed be absurd. We are inclined to say that the actual content of the thought would be something like "that is a cow", not "that horse is a cow". Why does Socrates think we might somehow be committed to the absurd version?

The key lies in Socrates' and Theaetetus' agreement that in order to be mistaking one thing for another *both* things must be objects of my thought (190d8-11). Once we grant this, then Socrates' position (as we shall see) becomes quite plausible. But should we grant it? Certainly, if I mistakenly think that yonder horse is a cow, and we are not simply talking about mislabelling (thinking that horses are *called* "cows"), I must be thinking of a cow. But for the judgement to count as a mistake about a horse—and we surely do want to say this about the judgement in question—it is easy to suppose that I must be thinking of a horse too, given that nothing less than this seems to make it true that a horse is the object of my judgement, and therefore of my false judgement. But then it does seem impossible, on the transparency view of thought, that I could successfully be thinking of both a

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left avowedly unable to explain why Plato should have set things up this way, given that the *Sophist* is written to be read after the *Theaetetus*. It seems to me (though I cannot argue the point here) that the *Sophist* does *not* provide an answer but that this does not commit us to Rudebusch's view. I would surmise, rather, that the expertise in psychology required for a full response is beyond the ken of an Eleatic Stranger, as advanced logic and metaphysics of the sort required to grapple with not-being were beyond the reach of Socrates. So the *Sophist* is not over-ridden by its predecessor; but with only the resources of Elea to draw upon it is incomplete.

horse and a cow and yet mistake the one for the other. Horses are, after all, distinct from cows.

Now we cannot offer quite the same account of what it is to think of "a cow" (the type, as opposed to Farmer Giles's token cow Daisy) as we did in the case of thinking about Theaetetus. None the less, essentially the same presupposition about thought is at work. To be thinking of a cow is to have in mind just those features that cows have (as a species), as to be thinking of Theaetetus is to have in mind just those features that Theaetetus has (as an individual). So to be thinking of a horse is to have in mind just those features that horses (as a species) have. But these, of course, are quite different sets of features, given that the species horse is distinct from the species cow. And it is surely absurd that, having in mind one set of features, one would think they were identical with some quite different set of features one also had in mind. It would in fact be exactly as absurd as thinking "a horse is a cow."

III

When we come to consider the Wax Tablet approach to tackling the problem of false judgement, the point I want to emphasise is that the transparency assumption remains in force throughout. The model focuses on the idea of *mismatching* as the way to explain at least mistakes involving sense-perception. False judgement occurs when one mismatches a perception with a memory impression. The Tablet itself is a model of memory. When we remember or memorise something either perceived or thought, this is compared to an impression made by a signet-ring on wax (191d). The model, then, suggests two key notions: firstly, representation. The comparison with the marks made by a ring on wax suggests that memory works by representing the features of the remembered object. Secondly, permanence (or at least a degree thereof—some have better memories than others). Memory endows us with the remarkable ability to carry an enduring record of objects that we may not be occurrently perceiving or thinking of.

Notice that the model implies, by contrast, that perception is not in itself, so to speak, memorial; and this seems plausible. When I walk down the street it seems that I will remember very little of what I perceive (though perhaps more than I suppose). So memory ought to be regarded as a separate mechanism over and above sense-perception. Similarly (and more controversially, at least as far as subsequent philosophical history is concerned) perception is not treated as representational. To perceive something is not in itself to represent that thing as having a given set of features. Myles Burnyeat has pointed out that Plato lacks the notion of a sense-impression, and that it was Aristotle who extended the wax analogy to cases of perceiving.[20] But the lack

[20] *The Theaetetus of Plato*, 100-1. Burnyeat points out (quoting the *Essay*, II 29.3) that the model is still alive and well in John Locke, and calls its application to sense-perception "a

(whether deliberate or accidental) does important work for Plato in enabling him to explain falsity, as we shall see.

A third idea which is fairly prominent in the wax analogy (in addition to permanence and representation) is that of the *quality* of the impression. This idea is planted in the reader's mind at the very beginning of the analogy: some subjects' wax will be purer, some less pure, some will be too hard, some too moist; others just right! (191c10-d2). Thus some have better memories than others. One of my main contentions will be that this idea of quality plays *no* role in the explanation of false judgement that the model offers. So let us note that, having been introduced, the issue of quality does not recur in what purports to be Socrates' official explanation of falsehood (191e-194b). It reappears only at 194c, after Socrates has already laid out in detail the explanation of falsehood in terms of the mismatch of a perceived item with the memory-impression of a known item. I talk of Socrates "official" explanation because Socrates' speech at 194a6-b6 reads just like a summary of an account that has now been delivered (note in particular the summary phrase *heni logôi*—"in short"—at 194a9). Moreover Theaetetus seems to take it as such, exclaiming what a fine account has been given (b7). Socrates can only concur, while adding that Theaetetus will find it even finer when he hears what follows (c1). So even before considering the discussion of wax quality which does follow, we ought to be curious about its place, given that Plato has done his best to foster the impression that Socrates has already offered us a satisfactory account.

I noted above that the quality issue plays no role in Socrates' main exposition. And there is every reason to believe that it should play no role at all. For Socrates is quite clear that the item to which the perception is mismatched in cases of mistake is a *known* item (e.g. 192c9-d1, 193d5-7). The earlier discussion of knowing and not knowing had claimed that I cannot mistakenly judge that A is B (say that Theodorus is Theaetetus) no matter whether A is known or not known, or B known or not known—i.e. in apparently all cases. What Socrates does when he turns to the Wax Tablet model is affirm that mistake is possible in cases where A is perceived and B is known. A *may* also be known, and B perceived, but A *must* be perceived and B known. So, for example, when I see Theodorus at a distance and say "That's Theaetetus" Socrates maintains that I must know Theaetetus in order for this to happen.

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critical difference" between Locke's treatment and Plato's. He might have added another critical difference: for Locke (as the quotation makes clear) the salience of the model lies chiefly in that feature which (I shall argue) has no explanatory role to play in Plato's account of mistake, namely the notion of variable wax quality. Aristotle too, when he employs the wax imagery to model perceptual memory, places wax quality at the forefront of his discussion (see *De Memoria* 450a27-b11).

The question, then, is this: can the notion that my memory-impression of Theaetetus has been undermined by the poor quality of my wax play any role in an explanation which insists that I must have *knowledge* of Theaetetus even when mistakenly judging that Theodorus is he?[21] It depends on what one's criteria for knowledge are. But we should take Socrates' official criteria in the Wax Tablet section to be just as stringent as they were in the original discussion of knowing and not knowing. For Socrates frames his explanation of falsehood in terms of that original discussion. He says that they were wrong to deny that one can think that something one knows is something one doesn't know (191a8-b1), or (better) vice-versa: Theaetetus explicates this (b2-6) as the thought that someone one does not know but perceives is someone one knows. They were wrong also to deny that one can think that something one knows is something else one knows (191e7-9). The Wax Tablet model, as we noted above, rests on the thought that so long as one item is perceived and the other known, misidentifications can be explained.

Socrates' insistence on linking back the Wax Tablet to the earlier discussion means that we have to hold as fixed the conception of knowledge between the two that he is working with. Otherwise he has simply given a false advertisement of what he is doing, and his linkage of the two passages will be disingenuous. What he tells us in effect is that one *can* (and in the case of the remembered item must) know the items and yet still mistake one for the other so long as perception is appropriately involved. This surely indicates that knowledge is to retain whatever sense it had in the earlier passage, and that it is the role of perception that makes the difference.[22] If there were a lowering in the standard of knowledge as between the two passages then we would in any event have a right to feel cheated by the earlier one. For why work with a particular standard for knowledge, such that it would rule out falsity, only to tackle the problem by changing the standard? Why bother to insist on such a strong (and to many unlikely) conception in the first place? That would leave the earlier discussion as little more than a piece of sophistry. We should for these reasons take it that knowledge retains its sense from the earlier passage to the later.[23]

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21 "Can there be distorted knowledge?" as Polansky succinctly puts it (*Philosophy and Knowledge*, 193). But it is important to note that this is a genuine, not (as he seems to take it) a rhetorical question. It is too quick to say that the official explanation conceives of false judgement as a mismatch between perception and *knowledge*, whereas the discussion of wax quality just contradicts this by treating *bad* quality impressions as the source of mismatching. A bad quality impression might be regarded as a case of knowledge if one had a sufficiently relaxed conception of the latter.

22 At 192a Socrates stresses that cases which involve only knowing or not knowing (without perception) remain unyielding of false judgement.

23 This point is confirmed by the critique of the Wax Tablet that Socrates subsequently mounts. Turning to cases not involving perception, he and Theaetetus agree (195d-e) that one would never think that the number eleven itself was the number twelve. But why not,

This sense, as we discussed earlier, entails that in knowing x I have in mind just those features that x has, neither more nor less. Indeed I argued that so much as thinking of x has the same requirement—what I have been calling the "transparency" view of thought. It is of course an equation that Socrates himself suggests in the discussion of knowing and not-knowing (188b7-10) by explicating not knowing a thing in terms of not having it in one's thought (*dianoia*, b9), with the implication that knowledge of a thing is to be explained in terms of having it in one's thought. If one then asks why (long before perception is brought in) there should be any problem making mistakes about things one merely has in one's thought (it seems we do this all the time), the answer is that no "merely" is involved. To be thinking of x is to have that very thing x in mind, just as it is. Otherwise it seems false to say that x actually is the object of my thought.

It should be no surprise, then, that the Wax Tablet model distinguishes sharply not just between knowledge and perception (that distinction is built into the very structure of its solution) but between thought and perception. One way in which the latter distinction is brought out is in the way that Socrates is careful to say in introducing the model (191d4-e1) that we can stamp either perceptions or thoughts (*ennoiai*, d7) on our wax. While marking a separation of the two this also draws attention to a similarity. Non-perceptual thoughts, like perceptions, are (or at least can be) simply occurrent; and for the most part their content will be forgotten (indeed never remembered). At the same time a distinction between thought and knowledge is also being marked. Socrates says (191d9) that we don't have knowledge until the stamping has taken place, which suggests (plausibly enough) that whereas thoughts may just be occurrent, knowledge must have some degree of endurance.[24]

Thought and perception, then, are treated as separate categories, albeit with a common feature. A distinction between them is further encouraged by the way that Socrates goes on to employ the Wax Tablet model purely as a way of dealing with mistakes involving perception. Indeed he insists (195c-e) that it can at most deal with such mistakes, imagining an objector complain that they have left mistakes involving just thoughts (*dianoiai*, d1) unaccounted

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if one can have an impression of twelve (cf. "the twelve itself on the block", 196b5) that is either degraded or faulty at the outset? The point is essentially the same, if more vivid, with Socrates' other example here of man and horse (195d), but it is the arithmetical case that goes on to form the basis of the Aviary model, whose distinction between "possessing knowledge" (having something in one's memory) and "having knowledge" (bringing it to mind) would be unmotivated as an explanation of mistake were the strong conception of knowledge no longer operative.

[24] Here, then, one should mark another reasonable distinction (which without the Wax Tablet apparatus to hand was rather glossed over in the preceding paragraph), between thinking and having in one's thought. The latter but not the former will imply that the thought's content has been "stamped", so that thinking (occurrently) of x is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowing x.

for. It is startling, then, to find Socrates, in his discussion of wax quality (a passage on which I have already begun to cast aspersions), claiming brightly that bad wax accounts for mismatching, and hence mistake, not just in the case of perceptions but in the case of thoughts (the other source of impressions) too (195a5-8).[25] No, Socrates, one should rightly riposte, you are shortly going to berate yourself for *failing* to explain mistakes other than by the mismatch of a perception. You started by saying that we can make progress with respect to the knowing/not-knowing discussion by introducing perception. Misperception is all you will conclude the Wax Tablet has been able to deal with, and in fact (195a5-8 notwithstanding) all it does deal with in explanatory terms. Our suspicion of the wax quality discussion should duly deepen.

Suspicion will be ratcheted up further in due course, but it is first necessary to ask how the Wax Tablet actually does its explaining, and to pick up on the distinction between perception and thought that I have been alluding to. What is the basis for such a distinction? Thought, we have seen, is contrasted both with knowledge (with having an impression on one's wax) and with perception. In the former case, the distinction seemed straightforwardly a matter of permanence. Knowledge means that something has been learned or recorded, whereas I can think a thought that never becomes imprinted in memory. But thoughts and perceptions are clearly on all fours in this regard—both, according to Socrates, can but neither must be stamped on one's wax and so become knowledge. What, then, is the difference? Partly, no doubt, it is a difference of object. People and rocks and trees (or at least certain features thereof) are perceptible whereas objects such as numbers (the main focus of Socrates' discussion of non-perceptual mistakes in the subsequent Aviary section) are not.[26] But simply invoking a distinction of object does not explain why Socrates thinks the Wax Tablet fails to deal with non-perceptual error. If one can mismatch perceptions to imprints, why cannot one do this with thoughts? Thus far, the latter seem just as available for mismatch as the former.

Something more is needed, and that, I suggest, is the notion that thoughts are representational and perceptions are not.[27] In his account of other-judging

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25 This is noted by Polansky (*Philosophy and Knowledge*, 193 n.32). That we are supposed to notice an incongruity here is clear from the way that Socrates has, by contrast, carefully delimited the good waxers' achievement to the avoidance of misallocating *perceptions* to imprints (194d3-4).

26 Note, though, that the miscounting of items that are percieved is allowed within the apparatus of the Wax Tablet (195e5-6), reinforcing the notion that the latter does its work only where perception is the source of the mistake.

27 Burnyeat has argued (see in particular "Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving", *Classical Quarterly* 26 (1976), 29-51) that the view of perception already established in the earlier refutation of the thesis that knowledge is perception at 184b-186e is that to perceive something is not (as such) to be aware of it as anything in particular. This point is then

Socrates described thinking (*dianoeisthai*) as a kind of speech (*logos*) that the soul has with itself (189e-190a); and in my earlier discussion of the passage I argued that the problem this generates for the account is best explicated by appeal to the underlying idea that in (say) mistakenly judging Theodorus to be Theaetetus I must have in mind the features of both those gentlemen—in other words, my thought of them is representational. This interpretation will give, firstly, quite a neat sorting of the categorical distinctions that Socrates implies in his initial treatment of the Wax Tablet.[28] Knowledge (impressions on the wax) will be permanent and representational, perceptions neither permanent nor representational, and thoughts, which are evidently not in themselves permanent, will be representational.[29] Secondly, it will provide a firm basis for explaining why the Wax Tablet does not work for thoughts. The non-representational character of perception is the key to its success. For it gives a way of explaining how my judgement can be about (say) Theodorus (it is in virtue of my perceiving him) without making it mysterious that he could be an object of my *false* judgement.

How, then, does the Wax Tablet do its work? Let us keep in mind that it does not work by weakening the standards for knowledge (or indeed thought)[30] established in the previous discussion of falsehood. As we have seen, the way Socrates links back to the earlier discussion strongly suggests that this is not

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naturally (and fruitfully) brought to bear in his interpretation of the Wax Tablet (*The Theaetetus of Plato*, 91). But 184-6 remains controversial: and it is by no means clear that a uniform view of perception can be wrested from that passage. (The classic account of its tensions is John Cooper, "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (*Theaetetus* 184-186)", *Phronesis* 15 (1970), 123-46.) Best, then, to argue independently for the way perception is conceived in the Wax Tablet section.

28 It is no objection to observe that, since thoughts are not in themselves imprints, the representational character of thought will have to get by without a waxen underlay. Socrates is not claiming that we literally have a soul of wax, which must be stamped for representation to take place. He calls the Wax Tablet a "construct" (*plasma*, 197d6), introduced "for the sake of argument" (*logou heneka*, 191c8), i.e. as an explanatory aide. What the imagery is particularly good at bringing out is the combination of representation *with* permanence. Where permanence is not a feature, Socrates has no cause to invoke it.

29 Again, the distinction has a certain plausibility. As I give a lecture, I perceive the wall at the back of the class. My eyes are open, they are functioning properly, and the wall is there in front of them. But, caught up in my lecturing, it seems that I can perceive it without my mind's representing the wall as having any features in particular: so representation is, perhaps, not a feature of perception as such. Much harder to suppose that I could be thinking (non-perceptually) of the wall and still not be representing it as anything in particular.

30 At 193d1 Socrates makes a back-reference to other-judging, and says this has now been shown to take place. We should assume that the view of what it is to be an object of judgement at work in the original discussion of other-judging has not tacitly shifted. As with the earlier linking back to the discussion of knowing and not knowing, it would be an uncharacteristically lumbering piece of construction on Plato's part if Socrates' "solution" were simply to disavow the conception of thinking by which he had appeared so recently to be gripped.

what is happening.[31] Rather, it is perception's role that is vital. The model works not by claiming that I can, after all, succeed in thinking of an item and still be able to make a mistake about it, but that mistakes get made when thought is not involved. Take, then, the case of my falsely judging yonder Theodorus to be Theaetetus. Theodorus is in my line of sight; I perceive him (non-representationally). The false judgement arises, according to Socrates, when in attempting to allocate the perception to its proprietary impression (i.e. the image of Theodorus on my wax, if there is one) I actually allocate it to a different one, let us say that of Theaetetus. How can this happen? From, so to speak, the perceiving end, there is no great mystery. To identify the perceived object I have to match it to something on my wax—preferably to the right impression, but of course the perception itself, since it does not represent the object's features, gives me no clue as to what the right one may be. Of *course* I'm going to make mistakes. Whether I get things right or wrong will be a matter of hazard.

The model suggests, by invoking perception, how my mind can connect up with Theodorus without my thinking of him. What, though, of Theaetetus, whose impression is on my wax? If I think of him in the process of coming to make the identification, then by the same token (given the strong conception of thought that is operative) I seem to have ruled out misidentification. Bringing my knowledge to bear could never result in a mistake. So it is vital here that the content of the impression does not figure in my thinking when I come to make the mismatch. The perception must be the active element—it must be the one that (so to speak) goes looking for the

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31 In fact there is good reason to think that the strong conception carries right through to the end of the *Theaetetus*. In his closing refutation of knowledge as true judgement with an account, we find Socrates insisting, in a clear back reference to the Wax Tablet section, that to have Theaetetus as an object of judgement (not just true judgement: judgement) one must have his particular snub-nosedness stamped in one's memory, and so on for the other features of which he is composed (209c5-9). The corresponding list at b3-6 is equally broad: nose, eyes, mouth and each one of the parts (*hen hekaston tôn melôn*, b5-6.) Note that for the refutation of 'having an account' as having the stamp of a thing's difference from all other things, Socrates need have done no more than say that the stamping of Theaetetus' distinctive snubness was necessary for Theaetetus to figure as an object of my judgement. The fact that he also speaks of Theaetetus' *other* features having to be stamped indicates that the transparency view has independent and enduring force in the dialogue. It seems to me that to understand Socrates here as referring to a unique *causal* relation between object and impression is not a live option (*pace* Fine, "Knowledge and *Logos* in the *Theaetetus*", *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), 390). The natural import of Socrates' words is that without having registered Theaetetus' particular intrinsic qualities one does not have an impression of *him*, even if (as is presumably the case) Theaetetus must stand in a particular causal relation to that impression. We are in fact told back at 143e9-144a1 that Theaetetus does not have his features of snub nose and bulging eyes as prominently as Socrates does: a hint, perhaps, that in the later passage we are to take individuation as achievable by qualitative discrimination.

impression.[32] In fact, even before we reach the Wax Tablet we have good reason to believe that this will be Socrates' position. Just prior to setting up the model, he indicates a reluctance to accept the thesis that it is one's knowledge that could cause one not to know (191b7-10)—i.e. (in the context) to make a mistake. Socrates suggests to Theaetetus that they consider matters "in the following way" (*hôde*, b10) instead, which leads to the introduction of the model and implies that its purpose is to explain how mistake can occur *without* invoking knowledge as the active element.

And this of course is just the right way round. The question the perceiver is trying to answer (though not one he need actually formulate) is: what is that out there? He is not asking, contrarily, what in the world a given impression on his wax corresponds to. Socrates is actually quite careful about this. He describes (193c2-3) the subject as being eager to identify the object by allocating the impression to its proper perception, which seems the "wrong" way round.[33] Now as a description of what needs to have been done to get the desired result that is fine: it doesn't matter whether we say that impression has been allocated to perception or vice-versa. In fact Socrates immediately goes on (c3-4) to reverse the order and speak of the subject setting about to fit the perception into its own "trace" (*ichnos*), i.e. impression. But this is not altogether a matter of indifference. When Socrates describes what the eager subject actually does, he is clear that the perception gets applied to the impression (*prosbalô tên... opsin pros to ... sêmeion*, 193c6-7). Only then, when I make the false judgement "That is Theaetetus", is there thought. The process of arriving at it has been quite literally thoughtless. I have not thought of Theodorus at all (but merely perceived him). And I have not thought of Theaetetus until it is too late.[34]

There is a danger that this model will explain too much. After all, when a perceived object whose image I have on my wax is within reasonable range I am generally pretty reliable at identifying it.[35] Why so if, as my account implies, the process is essentially a matter of guesswork? It is important to clarify the sense in which getting things right *is* on this view a matter of hazard or guesswork. Socrates goes out of his way to emphasise that, in

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32 Doubtless it will have certain properties in virtue of which it ranks as a match for the appropriate impression; but these need not have a representational function, any more than (to borrow Socrates' example) do the properties of a shoe that fits a foot.

33 Cf. Socrates' similar remarks (complete with conative simile of the archer failing to hit the target) at 193e6-194a8.

34 Burnyeat's worry (*The Theaetetus of Plato*, 116) about how "applying one's imprint of [Theaetetus] could lead to a mistake about [Theaetetus]", which motivates his subsequent appeal to true judgement as an intermediate category (see n.18 above), can be met if it is perception that is applied to imprint, not vice-versa. Thus we need not take it that thinking of [Theaetetus] is part of the process by which I come to make the false judgement, as Burnyeat seems to imply (95). (Burnyeat does not use Theaetetus as his example.)

35 Socrates' own paradigm case of perceptual misidentification involves an object seen from afar (193c1-2, cf. 191b4).

some sense, this is how he conceives of the situation, as is clear from the similes of mismatching that he offers at 193c-d. He compares the mismatch of a perception with an impression to putting shoes on the wrong feet, or getting right and left swapped round in a mirror. What this second example in particular emphasises is the passivity of the subject (cf. *pathôn*, d1). Its seeming to me that left is right in the mirror comes about as a result of a process that happened quite independently of my control. Even in the case of the shoes, although this is a process I could have directed, what Socrates is surely thinking of is the typical more or less thoughtless application of shoe to foot. When I get it wrong (or even right), I have not generally tried to *work out* where the shoe goes in advance.

So it is the sense in which I do not direct or control the process by which the identification is made that captures Socrates' idea. For it is not that I take a particular impression to be the right one and then go on to match the perception to it—that is, identify the perceived object. Such taking would already *be* an identification, presupposing that impression and perception have been matched (or mismatched). The process by which I come to make an identification is hazardous in the way in which (to use a different simile) telepathy, if a genuine phenomenon, might be.[36] Asked to guess (note the perfectly natural use of the word in this context) what number I am thinking of, the genuine telepath might simply have the right number pop into his head. He did not control or direct the process by which it did so, but that does not mean there *was* no process, one which might work reliably in some circumstances, less so in others. So in the case of perceptual identification one can adduce all sorts of explanations at the mechanical level as to why I seem to be better at identifying close objects than distant ones. It is important to note that Socrates' account refrains from offering, and is entirely compatible with, some underlying theory of the mechanics of perceptual recognition that would explain both the matching process itself and its variant reliability.[37] His point is that cases of this type generally involve no control by the subject of the process by which the judgement comes to be made.

We have seen, then, that in the Wax Tablet section Socrates continues, as he should do, to work with the same conception of both knowledge and thought that governed the earlier portion of the discussion of false judgement. He can continue to disallow the possibility that I entertain a thought involving Theaetetus without having just his features in mind. But he can still give

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36 Compare the well-known "clairvoyance" examples of Laurence BonJour in *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass. 1985). Here I use a similar case to make a constructive point, though I shall suggest in section IV below that a certain anti-reliabilist streak can in fact be detected in Socrates' discussion of perceptual judgement.

37 Plato has Timaeus offer an account of the mechanics of vision at *Timaeus* 45b-46c, which, interestingly enough, Timaeus uses to explain the phenomenon of things appearing in reverse when reflected.

an explanation of the judgement by which I misidentify a perceived object as Theaetetus.[38]

What he cannot do, given his strategy thus far, is explain it by making any reference to poor quality wax.[39] Translating the retention of his conception of knowledge into the language of the Wax Tablet gives us the position that a rough or blurry image of Theaetetus simply won't count as knowledge of Theaetetus, or indeed as an image of Theaetetus at all. A fortiori, invoking the matching of a perception to such an impression will have no power to explain how this can issue in a false judgement about Theaetetus. Generalising, one can say that no mistake of such a type could be explained in this way. Thus I have already argued that Socrates—rightly—does *not* explain false judgement by making any reference to quality issues. Socrates and Theaetetus both indicate at 194b-c, prior to the first mention of unclear impressions at 194e, that matters have been nicely explained as it is.

It is tempting to go further and say that, in the account Socrates offers, only those cases where the image is perfectly made could feature explanatorily. And this then seems problematic. For surely the memories (and memorisings) of most of us are far from perfect, and it seems at the least paradoxical to require perfect memory as a condition of mistake. The correct response, I think, is to accept the paradox while realising that the whole issue of quality is alien to Socrates' approach. One of the points I have been emphasising is that for Socrates the notion of a quality variable for representations doesn't really even make sense. It is not that one can have excellent or good or poor representations; there is only one kind, the one that represents just the features of the object in question. To call this a "perfect" representation would

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38 In a trivial sense of course it will remain the case that I know Theaetetus (this Socrates insists upon) and yet have something about him wrong (namely that it is him out there). Does this imply a Socratic concession that one can after all know and not know the same thing? John McDowell suggests not: in terms of the wax imagery, the concession would mean "that one both has and fails to have an imprint of the same thing. And there is no plausibility in the idea that the making of such a mistake [viz. the mismatching] shows that one does not have an imprint of the thing in question." (*Plato, Theaetetus* (Oxford 1973), 213). To this one might respond that it all depends what counts as an imprint's being *of* a thing. If having an imprint of Theaetetus means having everything about him right, then any mistake will be in danger of showing that I do *not* have his imprint. In fact one should probably say that it is only the intrinsic features of x that need representing for there to be an imprint of x, rather than relational features such as being out there in front of me. This will place minimal strain on the whole metaphor of stamping, which most naturally suggests an object's intrinsic features are being recorded. If this is right, it was not a problem for Socrates that I might know x and make a "bare" false judgement such as "that is x over there": failure to *locate* x does not in itself amount to a failure to know x. The problem was how a subject could know the intrinsic qualities of x and still proceed to identify something that did not have those same qualities as x.

39 I do not agree with Polansky (*Philosophy and Knowledge*, 193) that the imminent discussion of poor quality wax is therefore supposed to *undercut* the earlier model. It is the weight of the earlier material that helps cast doubt on the later discussion, a process to which the latter makes no small contribution itself.

be to fall back into the trap of treating quality as a variable that can be applied to representations.

One can talk of the quality of impressions; Socrates is about to do so. But one does not have to. It is not part of the very concept of a representation that it have quality as a dimension. Recall that when he presents his main explanation of perceptual mistake, Socrates does not invoke the issue one way or the other, despite his initial brief review of kinds of wax at 191c9-d2. What, I have suggested, he finds explanatorily useful are the notions of representation and permanence that the wax imagery highlights and which stand in implicit contrast to the character of perception. The question of what *counts* as a representation is an independent one.[40] Thus when the process of forming impressions is actually described at 191d, Socrates simply says that whatever is stamped one remembers and knows, for as long as the impression is there; and when it is wiped off one forgets and does not know. It is this simple on/off dualism that will then govern the forthcoming explanation. Since this gives him all he needs for that account, there is no call for him to move beyond it.

IV

Why, then, *does* Socrates eventually move beyond it? By way of preliminary let us note that it is not obviously *he* who does move beyond it. When Socrates tells Theaetetus at 194c1 that he will praise the account of falsehood even more when he hears what is to come—this being the discussion of good and bad wax respectively at 194c-195a—what follows is put into the mouths of an anonymous "they" (cf. "they say", *phasin*, at c5).[41] Further distancing

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[40] Once we factor in this question then clearly we have a highly revisionary picture of the incidence of false judgement, though such "tightening" is a regular outcome of theoretical enquiry. A zoologist who sets out to investigate what a fish is may in the process end up recognizing a smaller class of creatures that are fish. Or, in principle, a larger one—the point being that adjustment of extension comes with the territory of explanation. Admittedly, the adjustment is drastic in the present case. But it is characteristic of Socratic procedure not to put limits on the extent to which the project of explanation may subvert what we took as read to begin with (compare, for example, his denial of akrasia in the *Protagoras*). One paradox, however, that does *not* arise here is that we all become sages (just the conclusion that Socrates had fought so strenuously to resist against Protagorean relativism earlier in the dialogue). It is hardly cognitive progress to have avoided false judgement about Theaetetus (or justice) by failing to have made a judgement about Theaetetus (or justice) at all. Indeed, far from being automatic, *true* judgement will be equally subject to the stringencies of this conception of thinking. "[T]hinking is the untouched goal, not the daily achievement", as Rudebusch nicely puts it ("Plato on Sense and Reference", 536).

[41] The distancing effect of this term is rightly noted by Burnyeat (*The Theaetetus of Plato*, 92 n.33) who takes it to indicate a lack of explicit commitment to any particular way of spelling out the metaphorical language in non-pictorial terms. I take the distancing to be more radical: a disavowal of the very idea that appeal to the quality of the impressions can play an explanatory role in tackling the problem of false judgement.

is achieved by the humorous, and punning, appeal to the authority of Homer as unlikely progenitor of the notion that the soul (heart; *kear*) might be regarded as wax (*kêros*). Nor does Socrates present the principal contribution of the forthcoming discussion as precisely the explanation of how falsehood arises. Rather, it seems to be offered up as an explanation of the respectively good and bad quality of true and false judgement. Socrates introduces the discussion as follows:

> SOC: True judgement is a fine (*kalon*) thing, falsehood a poor (*aischron*) one.
> THEAET: Of course.
> SOC: They say these things arise as follows. (194c2-5)

"These things" presumably refers not to true and false judgement but to their being fine and poor respectively (else the mention of these qualities seems pointless). And so we find, by a kind of 'like to like' principle, that high quality wax leads to high quality judgement, and low quality wax to the opposite. Those whose wax is smooth and deep and of a nice consistency have good memories and learn well (194c5-d3). They don't mismatch their perceptions to their impressions (d3-4), so judge truly and are called wise (*sophoi*, 194d6), than which there is no finer quality in Socrates' book. Those whose wax is (to use the Homeric vernacular) "shaggy" (e1) or dirty, too hard or too runny, have problems learning and remembering; they mismatch all over the place and so err and are called foolish (*amatheis*, 195a9), the poorest of humans on a Socratic view.

But in explaining the quality of minds in terms of the quality of their wax Socrates is at the same time appealing to good quality impressions (*kathara ta sêmeia*, 194d1) as the basis of true judgements and bad quality impressions (*asaphê ta ekmageia*, 194e6) as the basis of false ones. At the heart of this discussion, then, is a form of explanation which, I have argued, runs philosophically counter to the main explanatory strategy that Socrates had previously developed with reference to the Wax Tablet model. I have also suggested that Plato deploys sufficient literary or dramatic indications to indicate that we might take the discussion of good and bad waxers with a pinch of salt.[42] Yet we observed earlier that the issue of wax quality is introduced (albeit not exploited until this point) right at the start of the Wax Tablet section, where the tone is nothing other than perfectly serious. And although it is hard to miss the humour of the discussion of good and bad waxers, it would be equally hard to heap too much censure on a reader who came away

[42] One might add in this regard the somewhat hyperbolic responses of Theaetetus here. He agrees "exceedingly" (*huperphuôs*, 194d8) with Socrates about the good waxers, and Socrates speaks "most rightly of men" (*orthotata anthrôpôn*, 195b1) about the bad.

with the feeling that it has a proper role to play in the explanation of falsehood, and perhaps is even its culmination:[43] Plato is not averse to making serious points with a light touch. Precisely because there is a fair degree of plausibility in the idea that blurry impressions might lie at the root of mistake in an account which models the mind for this purpose as a wax tablet, it would not be satisfactory to dismiss the passage as a mere jeu d'esprit.

What, then, is Plato up to? By now, I think, we should be struck by the idea that the passage is beautifully poised to allow readers to decide for themselves whether to take the issue of wax quality to have a genuine explanatory role or not.[44] My remark above that the quality issue has some explanatory plausibility is perhaps an understatement. It seems in a way *obvious* that such a model should appeal to blurry or otherwise poor images as the basis of mistake. Certainly that was one of its main sources of appeal for both Aristotle and Locke (n. 20 above). To put it the other way round, it might easily seem a *waste* of its proprietary resources that the model be introduced and this dimension not be exploited. It may be that others share my experience of early readings of the *Theaetetus* in which the long (wax quality free) discussion of knowledge, perception and mismatching seemed (to judge by its tone and complexity) to be doing something important if not altogether clear; yet the treatment of wax quality, though shorter and lighter, seemed to tell us most or all of what we needed to know. I think (or at least hope) that I understand Plato's use of the model better now. But any understanding that has arisen can be attributed to much to-ing and fro-ing between the two discussions. This, I suggest, is exactly Plato's intent. The methodology of midwifery that he puts into Socrates' mouth emphasises the importance both of helping intellectually pregnant subjects fully to elaborate their ideas and of subjecting those ideas to serious critical scrutiny. This two-pronged method is exemplified throughout the dialogue, particularly in the discussion of knowledge as perception and knowledge as true judgement with an account. I have argued for a similar structure in our reading of the discussions of false judgement that precede the Wax Tablet model, even if in some of these cases

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43 If only by way of elaborating "in luxuriant detail" (Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, 91) the various ways in which impressions can be badly formed or badly retained. McDowell rather more bluntly insists that "[Socrates] does not here add anything to the explanation already given..." (*Plato, Theaetetus*, 214). But in taking the passage to be essentially ornamental, both commentators are apparently happy in principle to accept that mismatches with bad quality impressions can feature consistently in the explanation: just the tempting but erroneous assumption that the passage both invites and prompts the reader to question.

44 Notice in this regard that the first of Theaetetus' responses mentioned in n.42 also occurs a little later (195b8) in a context (the summary of the whole Wax Tablet discussion) where it might be taken perfectly straight. So one should say that even in the discussion of wax quality his responses are suggestive but not compulsive of a sceptical reading.

the positive moment is little more than the suggestion of a possible explanatory route—and now I am arguing for it in the case of the model itself.

What we find here, though, is a little different. Instead of elaboration of an idea followed by critique of same, we have with the Wax Tablet, in the guise of continuous exposition, the juxtaposition of two ideas, one representing the right way to treat the Wax Tablet model in its role of explaining false judgement, the other the (or at least a) wrong way. What this difference adds is a particular involvement on the part of the reader. The way in which the discussion of wax quality is balanced between humour and agreeable idea, drawing us in by its plausibility and at the same time suggesting, by a variety of dramatic devices, distance; and the way in which in turn this combination of plausibility and humour throws into relief the more difficult and sober discussion that precedes it; all this should incite the philosophically inclined reader to compare, contrast and question, and try to locate exactly where the real explanatory work is being done.

The reader, therefore, need not in this instance simply observe Socrates as constructor and critic (as the latter he is rather muted here, restricted to his complaint about scope), but is encouraged to take on these dual roles. Plato has in effect given us more pieces than are required to construct the model. It is up to us to see what fits and what does not.[45] He is not, in Socratic spirit, going to tell us the answer (midwives have no answers to give), though if my interpretation is right he has a fairly determinate view. But to have simply left out the wrong approach would have failed to do justice to Socratic principles. Plato draws us in and goads us into working through the model's possibilities for ourselves, thereby to foster a deeper understanding of its real contribution. In apparently aporetic passages (not least in the *Theaetetus* itself) Plato is frequently suspected of having more that is positive to say than he is letting on. Here we have a contrary example: a philosopher (the same philosopher; the same dialogue) offering up an approach he actually takes to be misguided. But the effect is equally bracing. By such devices the reader becomes an active participant in the dialogue.

Where does this leave the evaluative distinction drawn here between true and false judgement? If differences in wax quality turn out not to be an issue, we should expect signs that the evaluative distinction on which it is based is being undermined as well.[46] Is there any indication of this? The question can

[45] Burnyeat has argued (*The Theaetetus of Plato*, 136) that a later section of the dialogue, the Dream passage (201d-202c), invites us by its spareness and indeterminacy to construct the underlying theory for ourselves. If I am right, a similar task is being demanded of us in the case of the Wax Tablet, albeit here with a superabundance of resources at hand and an indeterminacy created by juxtaposition and tone rather than the ambiguity of a key term (*logos* in the case of the Dream).

[46] One might think that true judgements (however arrived at) are better than false, and so deserve their appellation. But in the *Meno* (98a) Socrates had argued that they are not worth much until converted into knowledge. In the *Theaetetus*, then, it should be no sur-

be fruitfully linked with a different and important one that I have already touched upon. Notoriously, the long discussion of false judgement fills out most of the section of the *Theaetetus* that is officially dedicated to Theaetetus' proposed definition of knowledge as *true* judgement. Theaetetus has barely got his definition out when Socrates says he has been much troubled by how to explain false judgement; true judgement only returns, to be briefly dismissed as an adequate definition of knowledge, at 201a-c (the jury passage). Commentators have therefore rightly been exercised by the question of what light (if any) the discussion of false judgement sheds on the relation between knowledge and true judgement that should have been the prime topic at this point. So I want to show that the Wax Tablet model has plenty to say about the difference between the two, and that in this respect the discussion of wax quality has something to add. Even it has a positive dimension: not in explaining false judgement but in helping to make it obvious why true judgement cannot be knowledge.

Recall how the Wax Tablet model understands perceptual identification in terms of the functioning of a certain process that is not under the subject's direction or control. I don't notice or work out that a particular impression is the right one for a given perception. Rather, my judgement that that is Theaetetus over there presupposes that impression and perception have already been matched (or mismatched). Although the discussion is about false judgement we can also ask ourselves about the status of *correct* perceptual identifications. Would the true judgement that that is Theaetetus over there count as knowledge? Socrates suggests not. His two similes for cognitive mismatching—the swapping of left and right in a mirror and the shoes put on the wrong feet—present a picture of a process that is not directed by the subject. And of course the two cases are not just similes of mismatching but examples of mistake. If by the same process I had got the shoes on the right feet or, *per impossibile*, had had my left hand appear to me, when reflected, to be my left, it would be hard to credit either of these achievements as knowledge: right or wrong they are mere haphazard, insofar as they are the results of processes not directed by the subject.

It is not as if knowledge has no part to play in these proceedings. On the contrary, a different process—that by which we come to have impressions on our wax in the first place—is said to result in our remembering and knowing (191d9). And the underlying difference is not hard to find. The process of stamping is one directed by the subject. Socrates says (191d5-8) that we present our wax for stamping to whichever item we *want* to remember, going out of his way with this language to emphasise the active and selective nature

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prise if it is only the identity between knowledge and true judgement still operative at this point that enables the latter to take on the lustre of the former with, as we shall see, an incongruity suggestive of divorce.

of the process. This may seem rather artificially narrow on Socrates' part: he is clearly talking about memorising rather than other, more passive kinds of memory-formation.[47] But the artificiality is explained if we take Socrates to be signalling here one way of distinguishing knowledge from true judgement, and Plato to be honouring thereby his implicit pledge to shed light on their relation in this section of the dialogue. What is to be said for the idea of distinguishing knowledge from (mere) true judgement according to whether the subject has been active in the process by which the outcome in question arises? It has, I take it, a certain intuitive force. If I am right, it also shows Plato to have something of an anti-reliabilist streak about knowledge. Not any old process that functions reliably in given conditions will on this view thereby count as capable of endowing us with knowledge.

In line with their respective general characters, while the main discussion of the Wax Tablet model offers this rather subtle view of the distinction between knowledge and true judgement, the discussion of wax quality provides a ribald coda. It presents a simple dualism between being wise and being foolish: those with good wax make true judgements and so are wise (194d); those with bad wax get things wrong and so are foolish (195a). Officially, then, getting things right is sufficient for being wise. But the very blatancy of this move should arouse our suspicion. Can true judgement really be equated with knowledge if it allows wisdom to be bought so cheaply? The judgements at issue have simply been ones of perceptual recognition. Even if we were willing to talk of perceptual knowledge in such cases (and I have argued that Socrates in the main section has not even allowed that) one does not, unfortunately, become a sage by recognising Theaetetus in the street.[48] Socrates actually says that people who match their perceptions to their imprints are "called" wise (194d6-7). Not by him, and not (despite Theaetetus' effusive endorsement at d8) by anyone else, except perhaps an "all-wise poet" such as Homer. But then Homer in his wisdom praises the shaggy-hearted (e1-2), whose foolishness Socrates is about to condemn. Not, I hope to have shown, as the real culprits of false judgement, but as an irrele-

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47 In order to explain the active selection of an object for memorising one must presuppose that it has been picked out as an object with certain features. In wanting (say) to memorise a particular face I must at least recognise it *as* a face and thus bring to bear the concepts involved in such recognition. These will have been formed (stamped on my wax) in the normal course of my interaction with other people and the environment. Although Socrates shows little interest in this process, his model has no difficulty accommodating it.

48 As Polansky puts it (though without connecting the point to the identification of knowledge with true judgement), "the imagery over-extends itself when it attributes all differences in human intellect to differences in memories" (*Philosophy and Knowledge*, 191). Polansky himself over-extends in calling this something that "Socrates shows" (191). Rather, the text is written to encourage a sceptical reading of his words.

vance in the explanation of that phenomenon. Plato is willing to let *us* be the victims of his shaggy soul story if that means we might also get the joke.[49]

[49] The bulk of the work on this paper was completed during my tenure of a Mellon Fellowship for 2002/3 at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. An abridged version was read to a workshop on Plato's epistemology held at Cornell University in April 2003. I would like to thank all participants (in particular my commentator Tad Brennan) for helpful discussion.