KNOWLEDGE AND *LOGOS* IN THE *THEAETETUS*[1]

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I

At least as early as the *Meno*, Plato is aware that true belief, although necessary for knowledge, is not sufficient. In addition, he claims, true belief must be "fastened with an explanatory account (*aitias logismos*)" (98*a*). Plato's claim has often been linked to modern accounts of knowledge, according to which *S* knows that *p* if and only if *p* is true, *S* believes that *p*, and *S* has adequate justification or grounds for believing that *p*.[2] In the end I believe this linkage is correct, but it is as well to issue a caveat at the outset. In the modern account, the definiendum concerns one's knowledge that a particular proposition is true. Plato tends instead to speak of knowing things (virtue, knowledge, Theaetetus, and the sun are among the examples he gives of things one may know or fail to know). But this difference should not be pressed too far. First, the account that certifies that one knows a particular thing will itself be a proposition: one knows a thing through or by knowing certain propositions to be true of it. Knowledge of things, for Plato, is description-dependent, not description-independent. Second,

[1] The original stimulus for this paper was M. F. Burnyeat's rich and exciting paper, "The Simple and the Complex in the *Theaetetus*" (read at the Princeton Conference on Plato's Philosophy of Language, 1970). Unfortunately, this paper is still unpublished, although some parts of it appear in his "The Material and Sources of Plato's Dream," *Phronesis* 15 (1970), pp. 101–122. I acknowledge particular points of agreement and disagreement along the way. Some of the terminology I use later (KL, AL, AK, WP) is derived from his paper. I also wish to thank Carl Ginet, Terence Irwin, and Nicholas Sturgeon for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Parts of the paper (especially sections V–VII) were read at the APA Eastern Division meetings, Washington, D.C., December 1977; I thank Alexander Nehamas for his comments on that occasion.

[2] See, for example, R. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), pp. 5–7; D. M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 137 (where *Meno* 97–8 is miscited as 87–8). N. P. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis, 1976), p. 176f., issues a caveat like the first one I mention; unlike me, however, he takes this difference to show that comparisons between Plato's account and the modern one are therefore "misleading". See also J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), p. 232.

Plato tends to speak interchangeably of knowing x and knowing what x is (see, for example, *M.* 79*c*8–9; *Tht.* 147*b*2–5).[3] Thus a sentence of the form "*a* knows x" can always be transformed into a sentence of the form "*a* knows what x is"; and the latter, in turn, is readily transformed into "*a* knows that x is F." Hence even if Plato's primary concern is knowledge of objects, this concern can readily be phrased in the modern idiom as knowledge that a particular proposition is true.

A second difference between Plato's account and the modern one is also worth noting. The modern tradition has the broad interest of justifying one's claim to know that p, for any true proposition p. Plato, however, focusses only on a subset of such cases; he is concerned only with accounts specifying the nature of entities one claims to know, and knowledge of such accounts provides something like philosophical insight or understanding, not merely good grounds for believing that a particular proposition is true. But this narrower focus does not divorce Plato's concern from the modern one; and in particular, as we shall see, his account of knowledge leads to problems which also confront the modern one.

Plato's *logos* condition on knowledge concerns the content of one's claim to know: a *logos* must be suitably explanatory. In addition, Plato claims, one counts as knowing a particular object only if one also knows the referents of any terms contained in its *logos*. If my definition of x is in terms of y and z, I count as knowing x only if I also know y and z (*M.* 75*c*8–*d*7). Knowledge, Plato believes, must be based on knowledge (KBK): if I utter some true and even explanatory account which, however, I do not understand (I've accidentally uttered an appropriate Russian sentence, or learned some answer by rote that I could not explain), I do not have knowledge.

When we put KBK together with Plato's initial claim, that all knowledge requires a *logos* or account (KL), a familiar regress ensues: to know an object o, I must, by KL, produce a true account of o. But I must in addition, by KBK, know any objects mentioned in the account. Given KL, this requires

[3] McDowell, p. 115 and elsewhere, notes the equivalence but draws a different moral.

further true accounts which, given KBK, in turn requires knowledge of any objects mentioned in them, and so on. Does the ensuing regress have an end or not? And if not, is the regress linearly infinite, or circular? Plato does not explicitly consider these questions in the *Meno*. But he does consider them in some detail in the last pages of the *Theaetetus*.

II

Having argued earlier in the *Theaetetus* that knowledge is neither perception nor true belief, Plato returns to the *Meno's* claim that knowledge is true belief with an account (201*c*9–*d*1). The rest of the *Theaetetus* contains a two-pronged analysis of that claim: in the first stage, Socrates considers a dream he says he has had, according to which there are no accounts of some things, which are therefore unknowable. In the second stage he turns to the general thesis and investigates three interpretations of "logos."

Each of these stages considers a familiar response to the regress outlined above. According to Socrates' dream, the regress is finite: it halts with basic elements that lack accounts. Given KL, these basic elements must be unknowable, and so the dream theorist argues. Given KBK, however, no knowledge can be founded on unknowables; and it is by insisting on KBK that Plato ultimately rejects the dream theory. With KL and KBK intact, this leaves two options: the regress is either linearly infinite or circular. In the second stage of the discussion, Plato explores these options.[4]

Many philosophers have believed that there are fundamental objections to all of the suggested responses to the regress. It

[4] Aristotle considers the regress problem in the *Posterior Analytics*, I, 3; his response is different from any we shall find in the *Theaetetus*. He argues, with the dream theorist, that if knowledge is to be possible, accounts must end somewhere. But unlike the dream theorist, he does not think they end with unknowables: he argues instead that one grasps basic elements by an intuitive apprehension (*nous*) of them; and *nous*, he believes, does provide knowledge of elements or, at least, something cognitively just as good. Aristotle's position is discussed by T. H. Irwin in "Aristotle's Discovery of Metaphysics," *Review of Metaphysics*, 31 (1977), pp. 210–229. For some comparison of Plato and Aristotle, see G. R. Morrow, "Plato and the Mathematicians," *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970), pp. 309–333.

is not then surprising that the *Theaetetus* appears to end aporetically: "So it would seem, Theaetetus, that knowledge is neither perception, nor true belief, nor an account added to true belief" (201*b*). Since the regress is engendered by the joint endorsement of KL and KBK, it is often suggested that Plato abandons at least one of them. Perhaps the most familiar line of argument is that he rejects KL, and maintains instead that knowledge requires some sort of intuitive, nondiscursive access to objects known.[5]

I shall argue instead, however, that Plato retains at least a modified version of the thesis that knowledge is true belief with an account, a view advanced not only in the *Meno* but also throughout the middle dialogues (see, for example, *Phd.* 76*b*, 78*d*, *Rep.* 534*b*). He argues that knowledge involves mastery of a field, an ability systematically to interrelate the elements of a particular discipline.[6] If this interrelation model of knowledge, as I shall call it, carries with it any criticism of the claim that knowledge is true belief with an account, the criticism is only that knowledge involves true belief with *several* accounts, explaining the interrelations among the elements of a discipline. But this criticism neither abandons the basic commitment to a logos-based epistemology, nor requires its supplementation with any sort of nondiscursive access to objects known. In fact, as we shall see, Plato insists very strongly, perhaps too strongly, on descriptions as the only relevant factor in determining not only the objects of knowledge but also those of belief.

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[5] See, for example, I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines,* vol. II (London, 1963), p. 113f; W. G. Runciman, *Plato's Later Epistemology* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 40. R. Robinson, "Forms and Error in Plato's *Theaetetus*," *Philosophical Review* 59 (1950), reprinted in his *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 1969) (latter pagination), pp. 52–5, argues that KL is abandoned, but he does not explicitly invoke acquaintance in its stead. Burnyeat also argues that KL is abandoned, but rejects the view that acquaintance is thereby invoked. Some of these views are discussed below.

[6] G. E. L. Owen, in "Notes on Ryle's Plato" (in *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. O. P. Wood and G. Pitcher; New York, 1970), p. 365, urges that such later dialogues as the *Sophist* and *Philebus* advocate some such view, but he denies that the *Theaetetus* does. McDowell, pp. 254, 258, and Burnyeat see at least the germs of the interrelation model here. Burnyeat, however, thinks this shows that Plato has abandoned KL; I argue instead that it is a way of defending that thesis. See below, notes 16, 22, 30.

In defending the interrelation model of knowledge, Plato accepts one of the responses to the regress mentioned above: he endorses the view that there is no basic terminus towards which our justifications or explanations converge, no basis consisting of objects themselves knowable without appeal to further justification or explanation. Justification or explanation instead proceeds circularly, within a particular discipline or field. Plato thus retains KL and KBK, and outlines a theory of knowledge compatible with them.

In Part III, I consider the dream theory; in Part IV, Plato's criticism of it. Subsequent sections explore the three interpretations of "*logos*" and the development of Plato's interrelation model of knowledge.

III

The dream theorist distinguishes between primary elements (*ta prota stoicheia*; 201*e*1) and the compounds (*hai sullabai*; 202 *b*7) formed from them. Compounds, but not elements, are knowable, although elements are nameable and perceivable. This asymmetry in knowability (AK) between elements and compounds results from the dream theorist's view that all knowledge requires a *logos* (KL), coupled with the claim that compounds, but not elements, have accounts.[7] The asymmetry in *logos* (AL) between elements and compounds results from his interpretation of "*logos*": he suggests that a *logos* is a weaving together of the names of the elements of a thing. This *logos* model I call enumeration of elements (EE). Since elements, *ex hypothesi*, are not composed of further elements, it follows that they have no accounts. Thus KL and AL entail AK; and AL is in turn entailed by the dream theorist's *logos* model, EE.

The dream theorist's claim that elements are unknowable

[7] Some elements might have accounts, viz. those that themselves contain further elements. Thus syllables might be thought to be among the elements (or, at least, parts) of words, but to have accounts in terms of their elements, letters. But these are not the sorts of elements that interest the dream theorist: he is concerned with *primary* elements, those that are not further decomposable. Syllables are thus compounds just as much as words are, and Plato in fact later uses the example of syllables in explicating the dream theorist's notion of a compound.

because they have no *logos* can be explained in two quite different ways, depending upon how we interpret "*logos*." "*Logos*" can mean either "sentence" or "statement" (what I shall call logos_S); it can also mean something like "explanation" or "account," of the sort that produces or evidences knowledge (what I shall call logos_K). If "*logos*" here is logos_S, AL says that there are no sentences true of elements; elements are then unknowable because a necessary condition on knowledge of a thing is that that knowledge be expressible in a proposition. If no sentences or propositions are true of any element, no element is knowable. If, on the other hand, "*logos*" here is logos_K, then AL need not mean that there are no sentences of any sort true of elements, but only that there are no knowledge-producing accounts true of them. Elements are not knowable, not because they are indescribable, but because they are unanalyzable: no sentence true of an element—and there may be some—tells us what it is, or, therefore, yields knowledge of it. To be sure, on the logos_S interpretation it is also the case that elements are unanalyzable: for since analysis is propositional, the unavailability of logos_S entails the unavailability of logos_K. Nonetheless, the reasons for which elements are unanalyzable differ on the logos_S and logos_K interpretations.[8]

On the first view, a view championed by Ryle and others, the dream theorist is arguing that "knowledge requires for its expression not just a name but a sentence or statement. And what a sentence or statement expresses always contains a plurality, at least a duality of distinguishable elements or factors. Knowledge, as well as true or false belief and opinion, cannot be expressed just by a proper name or demonstrative for some

[8] One might argue that this way of phrasing the difference between logos_S and logos_K credits the dream theorist, or Plato, with too much sophistication, insofar as it presupposes clarity about the notion of a sentence or proposition. For the view that Plato does not evidence this sort of clarity, see McDowell, pp. 232ff. But this would not affect the distinction I draw. One could still, using McDowell's terminology, simply distinguish between various ways of putting elements into words. Logos_S then involves putting elements into words in some way or other; logos_K involves putting elements into words in such a way as to express something's essence or nature. Hence if logos_S is unavailable, one cannot put elements into words at all. If logos_K is unavailable, one cannot put elements into words in such a way as to express essence.

simple object, but only by a complex of words which together constitute a sentence."[9]

Ryle's interpretation may seem supported by at least the following considerations. First, in denying that elements have accounts, the dream theorist says that "the only thing that is possible for [an element] is for it to be named, because a name is the only thing it has" (202*a*8–*b*2). Surely the contrast here is between a name and a $logos_5$? Moreover, the dream theorist also says that elements, although unknowable, are perceivable, whereas compounds are "knowable and expressible and believable with true belief" (202*b*6–7). He does not say explicitly that there are no true beliefs about elements, but surely that is a natural conclusion from what he does say? But we should be justly surprised if $logos_5$, but not true beliefs, were available for elements; for true beliefs are expressed in a $logos_5$. If there are no true beliefs about elements, it is unlikely that there is any $logos_5$ about them either. Finally, in the *Sophist* Plato defines *logos*—and his concern there is clearly $logos_5$—as a combination of names (*onomata*) and verbs or predicates (*rhemata*) (261*d*4ff): a sentence possesses a special sort of complexity involving elements of different syntactic types. A name on its own does not "complete the business" (*perainein ti*) or achieve a truth-value (262*b* 9–*c*7);[10] what is further necessary is the absorption of the name into a certain syntactic framework, containing not only names but also verbs or predicates (*rhemata*). Surely the dream theorist's explanation of "*logos*," as a weaving together of names, is addressed to the same issues?

If so, the dream fits neatly into a familiar picture of Plato's development: in his early and middle periods, he is alleged to believe that Forms, his primary objects of knowledge, are "simple nameables," known by direct acquaintance, independently of

[9] G. Ryle, "Plato's *Parmenides*," *Mind* N.S. 48 (1939), reprinted in R. E. Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (New York, 1965) (latter pagination), p. 136f. Ryle's interpretation of the dream is followed, at least in part, by Crombie (e.g., p. 117), and by McDowell (e.g., p. 248 and passim). The alternative I propose is defended by Burnyeat as well, and my argument is indebted to his.

[10] For this interpretation, and for the felicitous rendering of *perainein ti,* see G. E. L. Owen, "Plato on Not-Being" in *Plato,* vol. I, ed. G. Vlastos (Garden City, 1970), p. 264.

associated descriptions. The *Theaetetus* now sees that, on the contrary, such simple elements, if only nameable, are not also knowable: all knowledge requires a *logos*. But the *Theaetetus*, unlike the *Sophist*, is not quite free from the old view. Although it sees that the mere utterance of one name does not "complete the business," it locates the relevant difference in complexity alone, as if a list of several names would do. And it is easy to see how this crude conception could lead to difficulties. For if the mention of one name does not amount to saying something, neither will the mention of several names. In the *Theaetetus* Plato sees that sentences are important; but it is not until the *Sophist* that he sees how they are to be construed.

I think this general picture of Plato's development is illdrawn. Here, however, I content myself with arguing that the dream theory does not fit into the picture in the suggested way. (I do not deny, of course, that in the *Theaetetus* Plato thinks knowledge requires propositional expression; indeed, I think Plato always assumes that knowledge is essentially articulate, and it is for this reason, among others, that I reject Ryle's picture of Plato's development.[11])

Whether the dream theorist's account of "*logos*" is of logos_S can only be decided by close attention to surrounding context and argument. "*Logos*" and "*onoma*" are used too variously in Greek to force any interpretation on us by themselves, and verbal similarities with the *Sophist* prove nothing.[12] The details of the dream and its context, however, suggest that logos_K, not logos_S, is at issue.

First, the dream theorist's claim that one can have true beliefs about compounds no more implies that one cannot have true beliefs about elements than his claim that elements are perceivable implies that compounds are not also perceivable. All he says explicitly by way of contrasting elements and compounds is that the latter, unlike the former, are knowable and admit of *logos*. Our interpretation need assume no more.

[11] One need not assume, of course, that Plato is always as enlightened as he is in such later dialogues as the *Sophist*; the question is whether he is ever as unenlightened as to fall into the sort of view Ryle ascribes to him.

[12] For some discussion of Plato on *onomata* and *logos*, see my "Plato on Naming," *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977), pp. 289–301.

Nor does the dream theorist explicitly say that one cannot utter sentences true of elements—only that no such sentence says what an element is, or, therefore, yields knowledge of it. If we interpret "*logos*" as logos_k, this claim is readily intelligible. "A name is the only thing [an element] has," not in the sense that it is all one can say of an element, but rather in the sense that it is all one can say of an element *towards saying what it is*, towards analyzing or fully explaining it. Other words may be applicable to elements, but none results in a logos_k. Thus the dream theorist does not deny that "this is *x*" (a complete sentence) is applicable to an element just as much as the mere name "*x*" is; what he denies is that the addition of "this" or "is" gets us any further towards understanding what *x* is than "*x*" alone does. An account, he argues, should be proprietary (*oikeios*; 202*a*7) to the thing it is of; "this" and "is," however, apply equally well to things other than *x*, indeed, to everything that is, and so are of no help in explaining what *x* in particular is—they are not *oikeios* to *x*. It is this special restriction on suitable accounts which precludes elements having accounts, and not any claims about the availability of sentences as such.

There is further evidence of logos_k as well. The dream is introduced, after all, to explain or support Theaetetus' claim that knowledge is true belief with a *"logos"*. "*Logos*" here must be logos_k; for Plato later argues that *logos* in the sense in which it does no more than express a belief will not differentiate knowledge from belief (206*de*). But as we have defined logos_s, it does no more than that; hence logos_s does not differentiate knowledge from true belief. Plato's alternative suggestion is that a *logos* says what a given thing is by listing its elements (206*e*6–207*a*1). The claim that a *logos* says what something is ties the dream to the standard Socratic-Platonic "What is it?" question, a request for a logos_k, for an account yielding knowledge of a thing; and that request is clearly echoed in the dream's mention of "giving and receiving an account" (202*b*8–*c*5). The general context thus demands logos_k, and the dream theory meets that demand: EE is a certain model for knowledge-producing accounts, that they consist in an enumeration of a thing's elements, and not a model for sentence constitution as such.

On both the $logos_s$ and $logos_k$ interpretations, then, the dream theorist denies that elements are knowable; indeed, on both interpretations he denies that they are analyzable, too. But the reasons for these denials differ. With $logos_s$, the explanation is that elements cannot be described in propositions but only named; since an analysis is a particular sort of proposition, it follows that elements are unanalyzable. With $logos_k$ it is not denied that there are propositions true of elements; the claim instead is that no such sentence ever amounts to a $logos_k$, to an analytical account of a thing. For something to be known, the dream theorist believes, it must be fully analyzed; and a complete analysis consists in listing all the elements of a thing. For this project to yield knowledge, there must be basic elements that themselves lack accounts, that are not themselves composed of further elements. For otherwise, no list could be completed; no account could then be a complete analysis or, therefore, yield knowledge.

So read, the dream is still connected to atomism, as Ryle urged, although not quite in the way he suggested. Thus Russell, for example, says that "I confess it seems obvious to me (as it did to Leibniz) that what is complex must be composed of simples";[13] and the obviousness stems from the fact that Russell, too, thought knowledge required analysis, which in turn required a breakdown of the complex into its simple constituents: if simples are not postulated as the limit of analysis, no knowledge is possible. The view stretches back from Russell to Descartes, who claims that there are certain simple natures of which all else is composed, and that "the whole of human knowledge consists in a distinct perception of the way in which those simple natures combine in order to build up other objects."[14] On this view, knowledge of a compound consists in reducing it to, or

[13] B. Russell, "Logical Atomism", reprinted in *Logic and Knowledge,* ed. R. C. Marsh (New York, 1956), p. 337. The passage is also cited by McDowell, p. 231.

[14] R. Descartes, *Philosophical Works* (translated by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, Cambridge, 1911), vol. I, p. 46. It is worth noting that Descartes' simple natures include not only things he takes to be simple (such as extension, figure, motion) but also various purportedly simple truths and propositions; for the latter way of speaking, see, e.g., Rules V, XI.

analyzing it into, simpler constituents. To halt a regress of accounts, Descartes, Russell, and the dream theorist posit a simple base that cannot be further decomposed, that is unanalyzable and without account.

But although this similarity between the dream theorist and others is striking and important, a dissimilarity is even more noteworthy: for Descartes and Russell, simples are postulated not only as the limit of analysis, but also as what is most knowable and certain. To be sure, their simples are unanalyzable. But they argue that we have a firmer grasp of them than any account, or any proposition, could provide. Rather than proceeding through the intermediary of propositions of any sort, even of a logos_k, we apprehend simples directly: we have an "intuitive apprehension" of them (Descartes), or know them by some special sort of acquaintance (Russell). Despite the fact, perhaps because of the fact, that simples are known nonpropositionally, they provide a firm foundation to knowledge. And here is where the dream theorist disagrees: for his simples, although they, too, are the limit of analysis, are unknowable. He does not, to be sure, deny us all access to them, for he concedes that they are at least nameable and perceivable; but neither naming nor perceiving amounts to knowing. If the requisite sort of propositions—accounts—are unavailable, knowledge is unavailable, too.

It is not difficult to pinpoint the basis of the disagreement: the dream theorist is firmly wedded to the view that all knowledge requires a propositional account. That is a commitment Descartes and Russell are willing to abandon, at least in the case of simples.

We might find the dream theorist's view perplexing or peculiar: the usual point of postulating simples is not just to halt accounts somewhere, but to ground them in certain, secure knowledge. The dream theorist provides a foundation to knowledge, all right, but its utility is questionable, if the base is itself unknowable.

We might wish to dismiss the dream theory as an epistemological oddity, of no special interest or importance, a crude first approximation to views better articulated later on. But this would be a mistake. For the dream theory raises a crucial problem for anyone attracted to the view that analysis can't go on

forever, but must eventually reach bedrock. For what is the cognitive status of the basic elements? If they are unknowable, as the dream theorist believes, the project of analysis looks defeated rather than completed: far from leading us to a secure base, it has led us to unknowables. But if simples are knowable, as we would like, we face the not so easy task of specifying a sort of knowledge that can yield the requisite certainty, yet bypasses accounts. It will not do to say that we know them through propositions that fail to amount to accounts, for such propositions could at best yield true beliefs; but true belief without an account does not amount to knowledge. And so the task has usually been to specify a cognitive relation to simples that bypasses propositions altogether, yet yields the desired certainty. And here is where the trouble begins: for what sort of relation could there be that in itself provides knowledge while bypassing propositions? The ordinary *connaître* will not, as Ryle and others have mistakenly supposed, provide us with a handle on the notion: to say one knows (*connaître*) something is not at all to imply that one knows it independently of truths about it. On the contrary, one does not *know* (*connaître*) a person or thing, unless one also knows various truths about the person or thing; *connaître*-knowledge is always knowledge under a description, or acquaintance with something *as* being something. To count as knowing something, I must not merely have seen it; I must also be able to identify and recognize it, say various things about it. *Connaître*-knowledge is linked to, not divorced from, propositional knowledge. To be sure, "*connaître*" implies something more than descriptive ability; it also implies that one has met the object in question. But because *connaître*-knowledge essentially involves knowledge of truths, it cannot be invoked as an alternative to propositional knowledge, as bypassing it altogether; yet only such a notion would do here.

Russell's technical notion of knowledge by acquaintance is intended to bypass propositions: "We shall say we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths."[15] We may, for the sake of argument, allow

[15] B. Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (London, 1912), p. 46.

that sometimes one is directly confronted with an object without the intermediary of any truths about it. But if one is not aware of the object *as* anything—if one cannot identify or recognize it or say anything about it—then neither does one know it. So long as the acquaintance relation is direct, it does not amount to knowledge; once it amounts to knowledge, it ceases to be direct and immediate. To be sure, the direct relation may allow one, as it were, to read various truths off the object; and the obtaining of this relation may be independent of propositional knowledge. But this is not to say—as Russell needs to—that the presentation itself constitutes knowledge. The acquaintance relation, construed as a direct confrontation between person and object, is not mediated by truths; but for this very reason it fails to be knowledge. Knowledge obtains only when knowledge of truths is available. Russellian acquaintance thus either fails to be knowledge—if it proceeds without the aid of propositions—or else requires associated descriptions and beliefs. In neither case does it provide a certain epistemic access to simples that bypasses propositional knowledge altogether.

The dream theorist thus sees, as others have not, that all knowledge requires accounts. But although his firm linkage of knowledge and accounts is laudable, it highlights a central difficulty for the view that accounts must end somewhere: for now it emerges that the final resting place will be with unknowables—hardly a satisfying end to the project of analysis.

It is against this awkward result of the dream theory—that compounds are knowable although the elements of which they are composed and in terms of which they are analyzed are not—that Socrates launches his attack.

IV

The dream theorist has endorsed the view that knowledge is true belief with an account (KL). He has also provided a particular model of what an account is: enumeration of elements (EE). Given the assumption that there are elements, EE entails that there is an asymmetry of logos (AL) between elements and compounds. Coupled with KL, this entails an asymmetry of knowledge (AK) between elements and compounds.

Socrates launches his attack initially against AK, the dream's "most subtle point" (202*d*10–*e*1). KL, EE, AL, and not-AK are jointly inconsistent, however, and so Socrates must reject at least one of KL or AL. (Obviously the rejection of EE alone will not resolve the inconsistency.) On one view of the matter, Socrates rejects KL. Robinson, for example, suggests that Plato's point is that some "*aloga* must be knowable if there is any knowledge at all."[16] If this is the moral to be drawn, we might expect Plato to endorse a refurbished version of the dream, one closer to Descartes' and Russell's dreams: elements or simples are knowable, after all, but without the intermediary of accounts. And so Crombie suggests that Plato's point is that "knowledge must go beyond the ability to describe";[17] as Runciman puts it somewhat more picturesquely, "the philosopher's realm cannot be attained without that extra intuition which in the *Republic* was declared to be the reward of the consummate dialectician alone."[18]

For those fond of Descartes' or Russell's versions of the dream, this interpretation might seem attractive. For it seems to allow us suitable access to simples—unlike the dream theorist's lame concession of perceivability—while still avoiding the regress resulting from continued application of KL. Moreover, it is often thought that Plato proposes no alternative to EE which would allow elements to have accounts; perhaps his silence is best explained on the supposition that he has no need to propose such an alternative, since AL remains intact.

I shall argue that this interpretation is incorrect. Plato retains KL, insisting, along with the dream theorist, that all knowledge requires accounts. Instead, he rejects AL and EE. There may, to be sure, be simples or basic elements that are not themselves composed of further elements. Nonetheless, they have accounts,

[16] Robinson, p. 55. He does not say how he thinks Plato believes *aloga* are known. Burnyeat also argues that KL is abandoned, and replaced with the interrelation model (whereas I argue that the interrelation model explicates, and does not replace, KL). Alexander Nehamas has also tried to persuade me that the interrelation model replaces, rather than explicates, KL.

[17] Crombie, p. 114.

[18] W. G. Runciman, p. 40. For a similar view, see also J. H. Lesher, "*Gnōsis* and *Epistēmē* in Socrates' Dream in the *Theaetetus*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 89 (1969), pp. 72–8.

and so AL is false. But since one cannot, *ex hypothesi,* enumerate their elements, EE is false as well. The conviction that led to simples—that analysis must end somewhere—is, anyway, misplaced, and Plato abandons it in due course.

Socrates begins by tacitly endorsing KL: "what knowledge could there be without an account and correct belief?" (202 *d*6–7). He wants instead to attack AK (202*d*8–*e*1). The endorsement of KL, coupled with the rejection of AK, suggests that AL and, correspondingly, EE are also to be rejected: since elements are as knowable as compounds, and since all knowledge requires accounts, there must be accounts of elements.

This, I shall argue, is Socrates' eventual conclusion; but the ensuing discussion may seem to cast doubt on it. For Socrates seems next to endorse both AL and EE—the very assumptions we would expect him to reject, having endorsed KL and questioned AK. Using the model of letters and syllables for elements and compounds, Socrates suggests that the first syllable of his name, "*SO*," has an account, since it is readily decomposed into its elements: "*SO*" is "*S*" and "*O*." In so describing "*SO*" one has provided an account of it satisfying EE. But one cannot satisfy EE for the elements *S* and *O*, since there are no further elements into which they can be decomposed. As Theaetetus says, " '*S*' is an unvoiced consonant, only a noise, which occurs when the tongue hisses" (203*b*2–7).

Now Theaetetus may seem to accept AL. He does, at the least, claim that EE is unavailable for *S* and *O*, and concludes on that basis that elements have no accounts of any sort (203*b*7). But notice what Theaetetus has done: although he has not satisfied EE, he has classified *S*, locating it within a certain phonetic system. In the *Cratylus* (424*c*ff), which precedes the *Theaetetus*, and again in the *Philebus* (18*b*–*d*), which follows it, Plato also provides such classificatory accounts of letters; and there it is clear that he takes such accounts to yield knowledge. But since they do not satisfy EE, EE is implicitly rejected. Theaetetus' description of *S* is at least an inadvertent concession that AL and EE are, after all, mistaken. We shall soon see further evidence that this is the moral we are meant to draw.

Socrates' main attack on the dream theory is launched against AK. He presents a dilemma based on purportedly exhaustive

alternative accounts of what a syllable is: a syllable is either (*i*) its letters, or else (*ii*) a single entity with its own distinct form, arising out of, but different from, its letters. Either way, he claims, AK is false: (*i*) entails that letters and syllables are equally knowable, (*ii*) that they are equally unknowable. (The resultant falsity of AK does not by itself show, of course, that AL rather than KL is to be abandoned, but evidence that this is Socrates' conclusion will be forthcoming shortly.)

Neither argument that Socrates offers appears satisfactory at first glance, but a second look softens this appearance somewhat. Consider Socrates' argument under (*i*) first. If one knows the syllable "*SO*," he claims, one must know its letters, *S* and *O*, since, on (*i*), a syllable just is its letters. It follows that letters and syllables are equally knowable and so AK is false. This argument might seem to involve an invalid substitution into an intensional context, falsely assuming that if one knows *x*, and *x* is identical to *y*, then one also knows *y*. But Socrates' argument is not invalid in this way. According to the dream theorist, to know the syllable "*SO*" one must decompose it into its elements, *S* and *O*, which, he believes, are unknowable. But this violates a plausible condition on knowledge we have seen Socrates endorsing before: that knowledge must be based on knowledge (KBK). If one claims to know a syllable "*SO*" by referring to its elements, *S* and *O*, one must, by KBK, know each of *S* and *O*. But this is just what the dream theorist denies, in insisting on AK, the claim here under attack. Socrates insists, against AK, that if the adduced support is unknowable, no appeal to it justifies one's claim to knowledge.

If this is the force of Socrates' argument, his argument is not fallacious. Nonetheless, the argument, even so construed, will hardly persuade the dream theorist who, after all, assumes that KBK is false. It will hardly do, in arguing against him, simply to insist that it is true. Nonetheless, Plato rejects (*i*) on the strength of that conviction, and his own alternative, soon to be sketched, endorses KBK.

Next consider (*ii*). Socrates now argues that if a syllable is not its parts, as (*i*) assumes, then it has no parts at all. In that case, syllables are as incomposite, and so as unknowable, as elements are alleged to be. AK is again false.

It is certainly true that the dream theorist must conclude that if syllables, like elements, are incomposite, they are unknowable. But how does it follow from the fact that syllables are not their letters (*i*), that they are partless, incomposite (*ii*)? Even if the argument under (*ii*) is successful, we may object that (*i*) and (*ii*) are not exhaustive alternatives, and so AK has not yet been shown to be false. As a third possibility, consider the following: a syllable is not just its letters, as (*i*) assumes, not reducible to or fully explicable in terms of them; nor yet is it partless. A syllable is its parts in that it is composed of them; it does not follow that it is identical to them. Once we thus distinguish the "is" of identity from the "is" of composition, the move from (*i*) to (*ii*) is resistible.[19]

Socrates invokes a principle designed to make (*i*) and (*ii*) genuinely exhaustive. He argues that if a thing has parts, it is its parts (WP; 204*a*7–8). Read one way, WP is innocuous enough: if a thing has parts it is (composed of) its parts. So read, however, the rejection of (*i*) does not yield (*ii*). WP can be read another way, however: if a thing has parts, it is (identical to) its parts. So read, WP is false; but so read, the rejection of (*i*) does commit us to (*ii*), by a simple application of *modus tollens*. Socrates' argument for WP suggests that the second reading is the intended one.

Not only is WP false, but Plato also seems to reject it in the earlier *Parmenides*.[20] If so, either he unfairly uses against the dream theorist a principle he knows to be false, or else the dream theorist is committed to WP. In the latter case, there is of course no unfairness in using against him a principle to which he is committed. But is the dream theorist committed to WP? The following considerations lend some support to the view that he is. According to the dream theorist, to know something is to enumerate all its elements. Now if such enumeration may include mention of the order in which the elements are enumerated, then EE does not entail or presuppose WP. But if EE precludes appeal to order, then EE does entail WP. For in this second case, appeal to elements alone must be sufficient for

[19] Burnyeat also invokes the "is" of identity and the "is" of composition in discussing this passage.

[20] See esp. *Parmenides* 157*c*4–*e*2 and McDowell, pp. 243f.

knowledge, since EE is sufficient for knowledge. In that case, no appeal to anything other than elements is necessary in producing an account, and order is not an element.[21] Now if a mere list of elements is sufficient for knowledge, then a thing's elements must exhaust all there is to the thing, at least, all that is essential to knowledge of the thing. If a thing is something more than its elements, listing its elements will not specify what the thing completely is, and so satisfying EE is not sufficient for knowledge.

This shows that the dream theorist is committed to WP if he construes EE in such a way as to preclude appeal to order. Is EE so construed? It is, first of all, significant that neither Socrates nor the dream theorist ever explicitly appeals to order in elucidating the dream theory. Second, although it may seem a minimal concession to the dream theorist to allow appeal to order to distinguish between, for example, the syllables "*SO*" and "*OS*", the concession looks much more striking for another example Plato mentions: a wagon (207*a*). Here "wheels, axle, yoke" is no more appropriate than "axle, yoke, wheels". If EE may mention order, it will need, to accommodate this case, to specify all the complex interrelations of a thing's parts—and this no longer even looks like a doctrine for which "enumeration of elements" is an appropriate label, nor does the dream theorist ever so much as hint that such interrelations are appropriate. And it is easy to see, on reflection, why the dream theorist might have so restricted EE. An account, he believes, must be proprietary (*oikeios*) to what it is of (202*a*7); once one begins appealing to principles of arrangement, composition, and the like, one can no longer so easily provide accounts mentioning just the thing itself: principles for concatenating letters into words govern the production of all words and are proprietary to none; principles for

[21] Plato does sometimes use "*meros*" (part) broadly enough to cover the referent of any predicate true of something; on this broad view, order counts as a part (although whether or not it counts as an element (*stoicheion*) might be another question). But this broad view does not seem in play here. For one thing, the dream theorist never mentions such candidates as order for parts; for another, at 205*b*8–13 it seems agreed that if a syllable has parts, its parts can only be letters. Even if this is not correct, however, it is still true that merely adding a mention of order on to a list is not the right way in which to specify something's order; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Z.17. See further below.

linking wheels to yokes apply to all sorts of conveyances, not merely to wagons.

One might object to this suggestion along the following lines. Surely the *oikeios*-requirement on accounts states only that an account as a whole must be *oikeios* to what it is of, not that each of its parts must be. Hence the fact that principles of arrangement are common to other things does not entail that the *oikeios*-requirement has not been satisfied.

But this objection misfires. For the stronger reading of the *oikeios*-requirement is the one the dream theorist intends. As we have seen, he argued that since "is," "that," and so on are common to all things, they are *oikeios* to nothing, and so go no way towards providing accounts. This claim is explained only by the stronger reading of the *oikeios*-requirement. As the dream theorist intends the *oikeios*-requirement on accounts, then, it precludes accounts from mentioning order, arrangement, and the like.

Not only does the dream theorist intend the stronger reading of the *oikeios*-requirement; he also requires it if he is to maintain AL. For just as specifying the arrangements of a thing's parts provides a *logos* of the whole, so it provides a *logos* of the parts: "*O*" is that letter which belongs here; wheels are that part of a wagon that do thus and so, and the like. Once appeal to order is allowed in accounts, the dream theorist can no longer maintain that elements can only be named: for they can also be located and interrelated. Once this is conceded, however, it will be difficult for the dream theorist to deny that elements are knowable: for why should not the ability to locate and interrelate them—which, on the more generous construal of EE should count as providing a *logos*—provide knowledge of them?

Hence only if EE is construed so as to entail WP can the dream theorist maintain both AL and his conviction that accounts must be *oikeios* to what they are of. Socrates' argument is thus a plausible *ad hominem* attack on the dream theorist, highlighting the difficulties he encounters in attempting to explain compounds in terms of elements alone, and in terms of unknowable elements at that.

Socrates initially launched his attack ostensibly only against AK (203*c*), but his conclusion rejects AL as well: "So if, on the

one hand, the compound is many elements and a whole, and these are its parts, then compounds and elements are *similarly knowable and expressible,* since it was clear that all the parts are the same as the whole. If, on the other hand, it's one and partless, then an element and a compound are *similarly without account and unknowable*; for the same explanation will make them thus" (205*d*7–*e*4; emphasis added). If a compound is knowable, so too will its elements be. But then, given KL, there must be accounts of them too. If AK is rejected, AL goes with it. No special defense of KL, or independent argument against AL, has been advanced. But Socrates' remarks nonetheless clearly show that KL remains intact, and that AL is to be rejected.[22] It follows that EE is to be rejected as well. EE is false because, among other things, elements have accounts, but not all elements consist of further elements. Moreover, as the argument against (*ii*) hinted, and as Socrates urges in detail later, no appeal to elements alone conveys the special complexity characteristic of wholes like syllables.

He presses home his attack by now insisting that knowledge of elements, so far from being impossible, is in fact the fundamental case (206*a*-*c*). In learning to spell, he argues, one learns to discriminate letters from one another, so as to be able to avoid confusion when they occur in various combinations. Similarly, one has learnt music perfectly when one can "follow each note and say to which string each belongs" (206*a*10-*b*3). In music, as in grammar, attention to elements is essential; if one claimed to know musical or grammatical compounds—chords or syllables, say—but not elements—notes or letters—one would "be making a joke" (206*b*9-11).

Plato has sometimes been taken to be saying that "the whole business of learning letters is the effort to pick out each one by itself."[23] But this is not his point. Learning musical notes, for

[22] The only alternative I see to my conclusion is that Socrates is being ironical in the cited passages, in an effort to highlight the absurdity of KL; this is, in effect, the view defended by Burnyeat. But I see no absurdity in defending KL; and if I am right, Plato does propose an alternative to EE that shows that elements do have accounts. In that case, the passage is perfectly straightforward.

[23] Owen, "Notes on Ryle's Plato," p. 265. Cf. also White, p. 178.

example, involves not merely the ability to identify each in isolation, but also, and especially, saying "to which string each belongs"; analogously, and as Plato argues later, learning letters involves learning what words they combine to form. Nor is the resultant knowledge simply an elementary grasp of notes or letters, a halting first step on the way to more complicated knowledge of compounds. Rather, Plato says that when one has the ability to handle elements in these diverse ways, one knows music or words perfectly: knowledge of a complex system such as music consists in the ability to identify and interrelate its elements. One does not understand a discipline's elements until one understands the system to which they belong; conversely, understanding any system consists in understanding how its elements are interrelated.

This shows more than that there is some knowledge of elements (of perhaps a weak or halting sort—"elementary" in its sense of "simple-minded" rather than of "fundamental"); it also rejects EE. First, Socrates has now explicitly provided an alternative to EE that is available for elements: accounts of elements consist in locating them within a systematic framework, interconnecting and interrelating them. Second, Socrates claims that an interrelation account is necessary for knowledge of compounds as well. It is not just a special sort of account available for recalcitrant elements, but fundamental to knowledge of any sort of entity, elementary or compound. Knowledge always requires the ability to interrelate—not merely to list—the parts of a thing (if it has parts) to one another, and to relate one entity, elementary or compound, to others within the same systematic framework.

In replacing EE with his interrelation model of knowledge, Socrates has insisted that KL is to be retained at every stage of analysis. Analysis does not end with *logos*-lacking elements. Rather, one knows compounds, at least in part, by knowing their constituents, and knowledge of constituents, in turn, consists in relating them to one another and to various compounds. Accounts proceed in a circular fashion, relating the elements covered by a discipline to one another in a systematic way. Plato thus abandons the dream's conviction that accounts end somewhere; instead, they continue on circularly within a given field.

Socrates says there are other proofs of his claim (206*c*1-2). We

shall, at the least, find him defending the interrelation model just outlined, both against the rival claims of EE, and also against various problems it might seem to engender.

V

In arguing against the dream theory, Socrates attacked its special claim that there are *logos*-lacking elements. His rejection of that claim carried with it endorsement of the general thesis that knowledge is true belief with an account, and so it is appropriate that he turns next to a more detailed investigation of that thesis, and defends again his interrelation model of knowledge.

Three interpretations of "account" are proposed and criticized: that to have an account of x is (1) to be able to express one's thoughts about x verbally (206*d*1-5); (2) to be able to enumerate all of x's elementary parts (206*e*7-207*a*1); and (3) to be able to state a mark by which x differs from everything else. (1) is quickly rejected on the plausible ground that it will not distinguish knowledge from true belief (or, indeed, from any beliefs one might happen to hold), since anyone can say what he thinks, but not all thoughts are true (206*d*7-*e*2). (1) will not concern us further in what follows.[24] The more detailed arguments against (2) and (3), however, are of some interest.

(2) corresponds to the dream's interpretation of "account," and Socrates' criticism follows familiar lines. Reverting to the example of spelling, he considers a child who spells the name "Theaetetus" correctly. EE then certifies that he knows the name, since its letters have been correctly listed. Suppose, however, he then goes on to misspell "Theodorus" as "Teodorus." This shows, Socrates argues, that he did not know the first syllable of Theaetetus' name since, on another occasion, he misspelled it. It has already been argued that one cannot know a compound if one does not know its elements; hence, since the child does not know the first syllable of Theaetetus' name, he does not know the name either. Spelling a name correctly, then, is not sufficient for knowledge, and so EE is false.

Plato has not argued that the child does not know "Theaetetus"

[24] The rejection of (1) again suggests, however, that "*logos*" in the dream means "account" or logos_k, not merely "sentence," or logos_s.

because he sometimes misspells that word.[25] Were that Plato's point, he might mean no more than that spelling a word correctly on one occasion is not sufficient for knowledge, although spelling it correctly on several occasions is. The problem is rather that the child misspells *other* words, containing the same letters and syllables. Enumeration of elements is not sufficient for knowledge since it might not issue, as knowledge must, from the proper understanding. To know a word involves not just spelling it correctly some number of times, but also the ability to handle its constituents in a variety of contexts; one must be able to display a grasp of the combinatorial powers of letters and the like. Knowledge of words requires knowledge of their constituents, and knowledge of constituents requires an ability to use them in different contexts. As Plato claims in the *Philebus* (18*c*), one does not know one letter until one knows them all: knowledge does not consist in isolated acts of recognition, but in an ability systematically to interrelate the elements of a discipline. And this ability, as Plato has already argued, confers knowledge of elements no less than of compounds. EE thus remains firmly rejected, replaced by the interrelation model of knowledge.

VI

The third and final interpretation of "account" considered here is that to give an account of a thing is to state some mark by which the thing differs from everything else (208*c*7-8). On this interpretation, one knows the sun, for example, when one can say that it is the brightest of the heavenly bodies that go around the earth (208*d*1-3). A true belief about the sun that does not amount to knowledge would presumably be something like "the sun is a bright star." This claim is true of the sun, but of other things as well. Knowledge, but not true belief, it is suggested, requires the ability to provide a uniquely referring definite description.

Plato presents a dilemma for this interpretation of "account": it either fails to distinguish knowledge from true belief, or else is circular. In presenting the first horn of the dilemma, Plato

[25] The point is noticed by White (pp. 178, 196, n. 53) and by McDowell (p. 253f.).

insists on the importance of descriptions for having beliefs, just as, earlier, he insisted on *logos* as the crucial factor in knowledge. In presenting the second horn, he shows that the circularity resulting from his interrelation model is virtuous, not vicious. I consider the first horn of the dilemma first.

Socrates agrees with the third suggestion to this extent: accounts must at least involve uniquely referring descriptions. But he emphasizes that they are not sufficient for knowledge, since they are also necessary for true belief. In that case, they cannot be what distinguishes knowledge from true belief. Plato's claim contains an important truth: that one must be able to identify descriptively the objects of one's beliefs no less than the objects of one's knowledge. But the particular way in which he presses the claim is obscure, and perhaps not fully consistent.

The argument proceeds in three stages. Socrates first considers the sentence "Theaetetus is the one who is a man, and has a nose, eyes, and mouth." He argues that this sentence cannot express a belief about Theaetetus in particular, let alone knowledge of him, since it is equally true of Socrates, Theodorus, and perhaps even the meanest of the Mysians (209*b*8).[26] I do not express even a belief about just Theaetetus until I provide a description true of him alone.

In the second stage Socrates considers a sentence containing a more finely honed description: "Theaetetus is the man with a snub nose and prominent eyes." But since the description this sentence contains may be true of other people, it is no more satisfactory than the first.

So far Socrates has insisted that a sentence that expresses a belief about just one object must be true of that object alone; and the only sorts of descriptions he has mentioned concern intrinsic features of a thing. Generalizing, one might suppose that Plato believes that to express a belief about x, one must specify unique intrinsic features of x.

But the third stage may weaken the conditions for having beliefs. At 209*c*4-9 Plato writes: "In fact it won't, I think, be

[26] One might argue that the use of a proper name forestalls this worry. To this Plato would object that the use of a proper name is worthless without descriptive backing; in that case, the content of the sentence falls back onto the description it contains, and it is clear why that description is unsatisfactory. See n. 12.

Theaetetus who figures in a judgment in me until precisely that snubness has imprinted and deposited in me a memory trace different from those of the other snubnesses I've seen, and similarly with the other things you're composed of. Then if I meet you tomorrow, that snubness will remind me and make me judge correctly about you."

Unfortunately, the claim is ambiguous, depending on how the memory trace of Theaetetus' snubness is "different." On one interpretation, the claim is that the memory trace of Theaetetus is qualitatively different from all my memory traces of other snubnesses. Now from this it of course does not follow that my description of Theaetetus' snubness will not also fit the meanest of the Mysians. Perhaps, then, Plato now claims that although suitable referring descriptions may only mention intrinsic features of a thing, they need not distinguish the thing from everything else, but only from everything else within one's experience. If so, Plato now relaxes the initial condition that a sentence that expresses a belief about *x* must contain descriptions true of *x* alone. On this construal, although 209*c*4-9 may seem more plausible than the preceding two stages, it is incompatible with them.

A second interpretation preserves compatibility with the first two stages: Plato may believe that having seen and studied Theaetetus enables one to acquire a description of his snubness that is in fact finely honed enough to distinguish him from everything else. On this interpretation, one has a description of Theaetetus' snubness that qualitatively distinguishes it from all other snubnesses, not merely from those within one's experience. In support of this view is the following consideration: Plato suggests that the description I acquire will be sufficient for recognizing Theaetetus on another occasion. If the description also fits the meanest of the Mysians, however, and he comes to greet me tomorrow along with Theaetetus, this would not be the case. And in the first two stages, Plato argued that this possibility shows that I do not yet have a belief about just Theaetetus.

There is a third possibility. Plato may mean that my belief is about Theaetetus alone, not because I have a description of his unique snubness, but because I stand in a unique causal relation to him. My memory trace is not qualitatively different from all

others; but it has different causal relations from all my other memory traces; and this in turn provides a uniquely referring description: Theaetetus is the only person so related to me. This view retains the initial claim that, to have a belief about x, I must have available a description true of x alone; but it allows that such descriptions may specify causal connections. This view is compatible with the initial claim if we are not meant to generalize from Plato's initial examples to the conclusion that only intrinsic features of a thing are appropriate in expressing a belief about it.

I do not see how to decide between these three views. But on each of them, 209*c*4-9 seems to accord memory some role in belief. We might suppose the point of doing so is to show that "nothing propositional (whether you call it belief or knowledge) can ever be strictly about x unless the person who makes the proposition is directly acquainted with x, and retains in his memory an impression of x which transcends his ability to describe it. For one can only describe by attaching predicates, and however many predicates I string together, it is always logically possible that there is something else, y, to which they apply equally well."[27] We have already seen reason to doubt that Plato relies on acquaintance in his account of knowledge; but perhaps he believes that acquaintance of some sort is necessary for belief? Plato's recognition of the importance of memory to belief—or, for that matter, to knowledge—supports no such view. It is, surely, plausible to suppose that only creatures with memories can have knowledge or beliefs; without memory, there is no knowledge or belief (see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 1). To have beliefs I must have some experiences and be able to retain memories of them; and experiences of course include acquaintance with objects in the world. But this does not imply that the objects about which I have beliefs must themselves figure in any direct way in my experience: if I read about DNA in a reliable textbook, I acquire beliefs about DNA that register in my memory,

[27] Crombie, p. 114. The sort of reason Crombie suggests for his interpretation ("For . . . ") is criticized by Strawson, *Individuals* (London, 1959), pp. 6–19. Aristotle discusses problems about descriptions couched in general terms at *Met.* Z 15. Plato seems to believe that a finely enough honed description is in principle (if not in fact) always available.

even though I am not directly acquainted with DNA itself; this is because DNA is suitably linked to experiences I have had, although I have not experienced DNA directly. Nor does an appeal to memory imply that my belief defies linguistic expression: to say that one needs experience and memories to have beliefs is not to say that one cannot fully express the content of these beliefs propositionally; it is at most to say that belief is context-dependent.

The point of primary interest to Plato, however, is not so much the relevance of context per se as that one must be able descriptively to identify the objects of one's beliefs—whatever sorts of descriptions such identifications will involve. It is because Plato insists on uniquely referring descriptions—unique within my experience or unique *tout court*—that he finds fault with the third account of *logos*: for on this third account, knowledge of x is true belief about x, plus having x's differentness in mind. But since true belief about x also requires having x's differentness in mind, the suggestion will not distinguish knowledge from true belief. If having something's difference in mind is necessary for true belief no less than for knowledge, having something's difference in mind cannot be what distinguishes knowledge from true belief.[28]

[28] Even if uniquely referring descriptions are necessary for true belief no less than for knowledge, one might think that there are relevant differences among sorts of distinguishing phrases, such that some, but not others, are necessary for knowledge; if so, Plato's first objection to the third account of *logos* fails. Thus, for example, I might initially distinguish Theaetetus from everyone else by reference to his peculiar nervous twitch; since I have his differentness in mind, this certifies that I have a true belief about Theaetetus. But perhaps I do not know Theaetetus until I can add to the initial description another one specifying his essence. If this is right, the following objection of McDowell's fails: "it is surely absurd to suppose that if one distinguishing judgment does not constitute knowledge of a thing, two such judgments do. Why should mere weight of numbers have that sort of effect?" (p. 257. See also White, p. 187, n. 58). McDowell is right to say that *weight* of numbers does not matter; but perhaps the *sort* of description does—if, for example, we can distinguish among accidental and essential descriptions. The cogency of this suggestion, of course, depends on what it is to specify a thing's essence. If a thing's essence may be completely specified by reference to intrinsic features of a thing, say Theaetetus' special character-traits, then the suggestion is helpful. However, Socrates has already argued, in criticizing the second sense of *logos*, that no description of an isolated entity ever amounts to knowledge. In that case, no description of Theaetetus, on his own, will provide knowledge

VII

This still leaves the second horn of the dilemma, however. Socrates argues next that, to avoid the first horn of the dilemma, the definition should be revised to read "knowledge of *x* is correct belief about *x* with knowledge of *x*'s differentness" (210*a*3-5). This avoids the first horn of the dilemma by building a reference to knowledge into the definiens so that the definition now distinguishes knowledge from true belief, as the first horn, it was argued, did not—for obviously, true belief does not require *knowing* something's difference.

Socrates' criticism of the revised definition is disappointingly brief. He says only that "when we're investigating knowledge, it would be very silly to say it's correct belief with knowledge of difference or of anything at all" (210*a*7-9). This time it is not the notion of difference as such that causes the difficulty, but the mention of knowledge in the definiens, for the revised definition is circular. Commentators have generally matched Socrates' brevity, and simply dismissed this option.[29] Then, since the first line of attack was successful, it is concluded that the third account

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of him. Nonetheless, it would still be wrong to say, as McDowell does, that there are *no* important differences among types of uniquely referring descriptions, even though, in the end, this fact may not help to rescue the third account of *logos* from Plato's first criticism.

[29] White, for example (p. 180), dismisses this option cursorily in a parenthesis. McDowell does discuss the problem of circularity (254, 256-7). But he does not suggest that Plato proposed a way out of the difficulty, and instead suggests that perhaps the problem of circularity accounts for the aporetic conclusion of the *Tht.*

Interestingly enough, the issue of circularity is also broached at the beginning of the *Tht.* At 146*d* Theaetetus suggests that (1) knowledge is the art of shoemaking; Socrates objects that (2) the art of shoemaking is knowledge of how to make shoes, which in turn is equivalent to (3) knowledge is knowledge of shoemaking; but (3) is circular. Plato does not fault (3) simply because it is circular, however. His point is rather that (3) violates KBK: if you ask me what knowledge is, and I tell you that it is knowledge of how to make shoes, you won't thereby understand what knowledge is, since I've used "knowledge," the term you didn't know, in the definiens (147*b*). The point is the same as that made at *Meno* 75*c*8–*d*7. For some discussion, see M. F. Burnyeat, "Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus, and G. E. Moore," *Philosophy* 52 (1977), 381-398. Burnyeat believes that Plato's argument is invalid; I am inclined to think KBK renders it valid.

of *logos* fails. Socrates' brief criticism merits more attention than it has received.

It is true that the definition as initially stated— "knowledge of x is correct belief about x with knowledge of x's difference"—is circular, for "knowledge" occurs in both the definiens and definiendum. This result is not troubling, however, if the second occurrence of "knowledge" can be eliminated; for in that case, obviously, the definition is not ultimately circular. We need to ask, then, what it is to have knowledge of something's difference. Happily, Plato has already answered this question for us, and in such a way as to show that the definition is not ultimately circular.

In presenting his interrelation model of knowledge, Plato argued that one knows a given object o just in case one can properly relate o to other objects in the same field. One never knows just one object in isolation from others to which it is connected; knowledge always requires the ability systematically to interconnect the elements covered by a particular discipline via a series of interlocking true accounts. Thus, a person P knows an object o just in case o belongs in a single discipline such that P has the capacity properly to relate each of the objects contained in the discipline to all the others. An object is known only if it belongs to a suitably large set of objects of which each is known. Now to know any object, Plato has already told us, is to be able to provide an account of it relating it to other objects in the same field, objects whose interrelations, in turn, can also be suitably specified. This view allows us to eliminate the occurrence of "knowledge" in the definiens, as follows: "Knowledge of x is correct belief about x with the ability to produce accounts properly relating x to other suitably interrelated objects in the same field." This revised definition, it should be clear, is not circular. Although it is not circular as stated, however, one may well raise other problems for it: I turn to one of these below. But it is at least clear that the interrelation model of knowledge allows us to rewrite the initial definition noncircularly in the way just specified. And in that case, the second horn of Plato's dilemmatic argument against the third account of *logos* fails—for reasons Plato has himself already provided.

To be sure, he does not draw this conclusion for us explicitly

himself; instead, he ends the dialogue aporetically, as though his criticism is successful. But we need not take this *aporia* seriously. Just as Plato's conclusion to the *Protagoras* does not show that he doubts whether virtue is really knowledge and so teachable, so his ostensible conclusion here does not indicate genuine loss. Indeed, the prevalence of the interrelation model of knowledge in such later dialogues as the *Sophist*, *Politicus*, and *Philebus* shows that it is along such lines Plato was thinking.[30]

So far I have argued that Plato's interrelation model of knowledge allows us to rewrite the definition of knowledge noncircularly. The revised definition, however, may seem to raise other problems of its own. Plato has argued that to know a given object *o*, one must be able suitably to relate *o* to other objects in the same field, say *m* and *n*. Moreover, such interrelations count as knowledge only if *m* and *n* are themselves known: knowledge must be based on knowledge (KBK). Given KL, however, one counts as knowing *m* and *n* only if one can produce true accounts of them properly relating them to yet further objects in the same field, say *a* and *b*, which must themselves, given KBK, also be known. But now it looks as though either an infinite regress, or else a regress that is finite but circular, ensues. In the first case, to know anything, one will need to know an infinite number of

[30] Burnyeat has objected to me that the prevalence of the interrelation model in later dialogues does not by itself show that Plato retains KL; indeed, Burnyeat argues that the interrelation model *replaces* KL. He suggests it is a difficulty for my view that nowhere in the later dialogues does Plato explicitly say that specifying interrelations provides a *logos* of an element. Of course, the absence of such explicit textual evidence would no more vitiate my view than it would prove Burnyeat's; defense of either view, with respect to the later dialogues, must involve a detailed study of them. But it is not entirely clear to me that there is no textual evidence for my view. See, for example, *Sophist* 253*b*10 (*dia ton logon*); Cornford translates "on the voyage of discourse," implying logos_3; but logos_1 seems more appropriate here, where the context explicitly concerns knowing interrelations. At 252*c*, it is said that one cannot help but include "is," "that" and the like in one's *logoi*, when speaking of elements; there are clear echoes of the dream theory here. To be sure, "*logos*" here might be logos_3; but as the ensuing argument makes clear, admitting that "is" and so on are applicable to elements involves conceding more than this: some set of statements involving "is" will say what an element is, that is, will provide a logos_1 of it. Cf. also the pun at *Phil.* 17*e*4-6. At *Pol.* 277*b*7-8 *ho logos* clearly means account; to be sure, the account at issue is of a statesman, which may from some points of view be a compound; but it is also an element, e.g. in statecraft.

things. In the second case, a new sort of circularity has emerged—not, as initially, in the definition of knowledge but rather in the account-giving process: to know *o* one will need to appeal to, say, *m* and *n*, and so on, back again to *o*.[31]

Plato began by considering the view that accounts end with primary elements that themselves lack accounts. Given KL, such elements are unknowable. He then argued, correctly, that no appeal to unknowable elements will explain our purported knowledge of compounds: knowledge must be based on knowledge (KBK). Nor will it do to suggest that elements are known in some way other than through accounts: all knowledge requires a propositional account (KL). Plato then argued that there are suitable accounts for elements: one knows elements by locating and interrelating them in a systematic framework. But in thus retaining KL, along with KBK, at every stage of analysis, Plato commits himself to the view that accounts do not halt at any terminus; they continue on either linearly or circularly. It is a prospect anyone who maintains KL, along with KBK, must face. But is this result as unfortunate as Aristotle and others have supposed?

The view that the regress is infinite and linear need not concern us further here, for Plato's interrelation model of knowledge avoids it: on his view, one does not continue supporting claims to knowledge linearly *ad infinitum*, but only within the confines of a particular framework, music or medicine, say. Still, this leaves us admitting that accounts will circle back on themselves, within a particular discipline. I agree that this sort of circularity results from Plato's interrelation model. But it is not an unfortunate problem. Rather, it is one of Plato's significant contributions to epistemology to have seen that we do not possess bits of knowledge in isolated, fragmented segments. One never knows a single entity, in isolation from its ties to other things; all knowledge involves systematic interconnecting. Correspondingly, that one knows a particular object cannot be ascertained solely by looking at what one says about it, in isolation from one's general epistemic repertoire; one might have uttered an ap-

[31] The regress problem is clearly set out, and related to the *Theaetetus*, by D. M. Armstrong, p. 153.

propriate account by accident, without the proper understanding, and so not know the object at hand. But when one can expand one's claims beyond an isolated description of one object to a description of its interconnections in a systematic framework, such doubts are dispelled, for it would be unreasonable to suppose that that ability could also be exercised in the absence of knowledge. If the circle of our beliefs is sufficiently large, and the interconnections suitably comprehensive, the links in the circle are transformed from true beliefs into pieces of knowledge.[32]

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[32] Burnyeat also praises Plato for focussing on interrelations rather than on conditions for knowing an isolated entity. Armstrong, by contrast, considers but rejects the sort of position I have attributed to Plato, asking "what criterion can be given to show that a circle of true beliefs is 'sufficiently comprehensive'? It is not easy to say. And might there not be a sufficiently comprehensive circle of true beliefs which was arrived at so irregularly and luckily that we would not want to call it knowledge?" (p. 156). I agree that it is not easy to say what exactly sufficient comprehension consists in; but this of course does not show that the general approach is misguided. As to the second question, I think Plato's answer would be "no." He allows that an isolated claim to know does not qualify as knowledge since it may be arrived at haphazardly or accidentally: that is the point of KBK. But if one's accounts are sufficiently comprehensive, one has knowledge and satisfies KBK. Plato may believe that in fact one can provide suitably interrelated accounts only by engaging in dialectic. But the criterion of knowledge, like the criterion of belief, focuses on what one can say—although one needs to say rather more on Plato's view than on some other views to count as knowing. Interestingly enough, Armstrong criticizes Plato in the *Meno* for rejecting what he calls a "reliability" theory of knowledge; see p. 159. KBK explains Plato's rejection of such a theory as well.