THE SECRET DOCTRINE: PLATO'S DEFENCE OF PROTAGORAS IN THE *THEAETETUS*

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1. Introduction

WHY does Plato introduce the so-called Secret Doctrine in his examination of Protagorean relativism in the *Theaetetus*? I argue (1) that the relation between Protagoras' claim and the Secret Doctrine is not one of mutual implication, but that the Secret Doctrine has the status of an independent hypothesis which Plato uses to defend Protagoras, (2) that the Secret Doctrine is not simply a doctrine of constant flux, but a collection of loosely related theses, and (3) that it is introduced to explain what it means for things to have properties only relative to perceivers.

Plato's discussion of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* is the most careful and perceptive examination of relativism in antiquity. It is, however, highly problematic, for in order to explain what Protagoras meant by his claim that 'man is the measure of all things: of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not' (*Theaet.* 152 A 2–4; see also S.E. *M.* 7. 60=80 B 1 DK; D.L. 9. 51=80 A 1 DK), Plato introduces a theory which is even more contentious and obscure. He calls this theory a 'Secret Doctrine', presumably to acknowledge that Protagoras himself never espoused any such

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doctrine and that it is of Plato's devising.[1] Its exact relation to Protagoras' claim is not clear. On the one hand, Protagoras' claim seems to be a doctrine of relativism, according to which something is the case for one if and only if it appears so to one. On the other hand, the Secret Doctrine seems to be a Heraclitean thesis of total flux, which recommends that everything is always changing in every respect:

ἐγὼ ἐρῶ καὶ μάλ' οὐ φαῦλον λόγον, ὡς ἄρα ἓν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ οὐδέν ἐστιν, οὐδ' ἄν τι προσείποις ὀρθῶς οὐδ' ὁποιονοῦν τι, ἀλλ' ἐὰν ὡς μέγα προσαγορεύῃς, καὶ σμικρὸν φανεῖται, καὶ ἐὰν βαρύ, κοῦφον, σύμπαντά τε οὕτως, ὡς μηδενὸς ὄντος ἑνὸς μήτε τινὸς μήτε ὁποιουοῦν· ἐκ δὲ δὴ φορᾶς τε καὶ κινήσεως καὶ κράσεως πρὸς ἄλληλα γίγνεται πάντα ἃ δή φαμεν εἶναι, οὐκ ὀρθῶς προσαγορεύοντες· ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτ' οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίγνεται.

I will tell you, and it is certainly no ordinary theory—I mean the theory that there is nothing which in itself is just one thing: nothing which you could rightly call anything or any kind of thing. If you call a thing large it will reveal itself as small, and if heavy, light, and so on with everything, because nothing is anything or any kind of thing. The things of which we naturally say that they 'are' are in process of coming to be, as the result of movement and change and blending with one another. We are wrong when we say they 'are', since nothing ever is, but everything is coming to be. (152 C 8–E 1)[2]

Anyone familiar with more modern varieties of relativism will be

[1] *Theaet.* 152 C 10–D 2: 'Was Protagoras one of those omniscient people? Did he perhaps put this out as a riddle for the common crowd of us, while he revealed the truth as a secret doctrine to his own pupils [*τοῖς δὲ μαθηταῖς ἐν ἀπορρήτῳ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἔλεγεν*]? . . . I will tell you; and this, now, is certainly no ordinary theory [*ἐγὼ ἐρῶ καὶ μάλ' οὐ φαῦλον λόγον*].' Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Plato's *Theaetetus* are from the M. J. Levett translation, revised by M. F. Burnyeat, in *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, with an introduction by M. F. Burnyeat [*Introduction*] (Indianapolis, 1990). The Greek text used in this paper is W. F. Hicken's revised Oxford Classical Text of the *Theaetetus*, in *Platonis Opera*, i, ed. Duke, Hicken, Nicoll, Robinson, and Strachan (Oxford, 1995).

[2] The Levett–Burnyeat translation takes *φανεῖται* as 'it will reveal itself as', not as 'will appear' (cf. F. M. Cornford's 'it will be found to be', in *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (*The* Theaetetus *and the* Sophist *of Plato Translated with a Commentary*) [*Plato's Theory of Knowledge*] (London, 1935), resulting not in the fairly weak claim that everything is subject to conflicting appearances, but in the stronger claim that if one tries to pin something down as being one thing, one will discover that it is also something opposite or different. Modifications to the Levett–Burnyeat translation: the second implicit *φανεῖται* in 152 D 5 is not translated by 'liable to appear', which spoils the translation of the first as 'reveal itself'; the contrasting and emphatic '. . . *δὲ δή*' in 152 D 7 is left untranslated to avoid importing 'true' into this sentence, as Levett's 'What is really true, is this' does.

puzzled about what this has to do with relativism. One might think that it is a doctrine of flux introduced to avoid committing the relativist to contradictions—for example, if Socrates perceives the wind as being hot and Theaetetus perceives it as being cold, then the doctrine of flux tells us that both beliefs are true because the world is constantly changing in such a way that both perceptions turn out to be true. For a relativist, however, the alleged problem is a non-starter. According to a more careful formulation of relativism, if someone believes that some x is F, then x is *F for her*. Once the statements have been suitably relativized, there is no contradiction which results from conflicting beliefs being true, and therefore no apparent role for a doctrine of flux or change to play.[3] (Indeed, the wind is supposed to be hot for one and cold for the other *simultaneously*.) Plato himself seems to have been clear about the importance of specifying qualifications completely in order to avoid the spectre of contradiction (*Rep.* 4, 436 E–437 A). I do not think Plato thought that Protagoras was, at least at this level, entangled in contradictions.[4] But then why did Plato introduce the Secret Doctrine?

During the nineteenth century commentators on the *Theaetetus* from Schleiermacher on tended to assume that Plato had other targets in mind besides Protagoras, and they devoted their efforts to identifying these unnamed opponents (e.g. Antisthenes, Aristippus, Cratylus, the Megarians, Democritus).[5] However, Jackson

[3] So too John M. Cooper, *Plato's* Theaetetus (Harvard dissertations in philosophy, 1967; New York, 1990), 17; R. M. Dancy, 'Theaetetus' First Baby: *Theaetetus* 151 E–160 E' ['Theaetetus' First Baby'], *Philosophical Topics*, 15/2 (Fall 1987), 61–108 at 79; John McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus [*Theaetetus*], translated with notes (Oxford, 1973), 125–6; David Bostock, *Plato's* Theaetetus (Oxford, 1988), 45. McDowell speculates that Parmenidean assumptions may have led Plato to view the contradictions as unresolved even when suitable qualifications have been added (*Theaetetus*, 125–6). See Cooper (*Plato's* Theaetetus, 16–58, esp. 39–58) and Dancy ('Theaetetus' First Baby') for the most critically acute discussions of the problems in fitting relativism and flux together.

[4] As I argue elsewhere, the problem with contradiction and self-refutation arises for Protagoras at the level of second-order judgements about beliefs (*Theaet.* 169 E–171 D) (book in preparation; see also *Conflicting Appearances: Protagoras and the Development of Early Greek Epistemology* (Harvard dissertation 1996), 147–77).

[5] See references and discussion in, *inter alia*, Lewis Campbell, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato, with a Revised Text and English Notes*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1883), pp. xxix–xlvi; Paul Natorp, 'Aristipp in Platons Theätet' ['Aristipp'], *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 3 (1890) 347–62; Annemarie Capelle, 'Zur Frage nach den κομψότεροι in Platons *Theaetet*, P. 156 A', *Hermes*, 90 (1862), 288–94; and Paul Friedländer, *Platon*, iii. *Die Platonischen Schriften, Zweite und Dritte Periode*, 2nd edn. (Berlin,

and Natorp, among others, argued that the Secret Doctrine cannot be conclusively identified with any particular figure and is almost certainly a creative invention of Plato's;[6] commentators then began to look instead for hints of Plato's own Theory of Ideas in the *Theaetetus*. In particular, they tended to focus on the striking resemblances between the Secret Doctrine and Plato's own statements about change and perception in other dialogues. The problems with this approach were examined in a number of important papers and commentaries, culminating in a brilliant and influential series of papers by Myles Burnyeat. As he argues, the question of whether Plato himself endorses the Secret Doctrine is the wrong question to ask here. For the Secret Doctrine is part of a complex dialectical construction woven together from three theses: (T) Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception, (P) Protagoras' claim that whatever appears to be the case to one is the case for one, and (H) the Heraclitean doctrine that everything is always changing. As Burnyeat argues, Socrates offers an extended argument that each of the three theses commits one to holding the others:

Theaetetus ⇔ Protagoras ⇔ Heraclitus.[7]

1960), trans. Hans Meyerhoff as *Plato*, iii. *The Dialogues: Second and Third Periods* (Princeton, 1969), 154–61. They also tended to see *Theaet.* 152–60 as developing not one 'Secret Doctrine' but several theories; for example, many distinguished the 'Heraclitean' doctrines at 152 D–153 D from those of the 'more subtle type [*κομψότεροι*]' at 156 A–157 C.

[6] H. Jackson, 'Plato's Later Theory of Ideas, IV: The *Theaetetus*', *Journal of Philology*, 13 (1884), 242–72; Natorp, 'Aristipp'.

[7] Burnyeat argues that the Secret Doctrine is supposed to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of Protagoras' thesis and Theaetetus' definition. As he puts it, 'It is thought to be reasonably clear that (1) Her ⇒ Prot ⇒ Th. The work goes into showing (2) Th ⇒ Prot ⇒ Her, and then, that both Protagoras and Heraclitus engender absurdity. (2) is hammered out step by step through the construction of the Protagorean–Heraclitean theory down to 160 DC' ('Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed' ['Idealism'], *Philosophical Review*, 91/1 (Jan. 1982), 3–40 at 6–7 n. 2; see also Burnyeat, *Introduction*, 7–19). Gail Fine endorses Burnyeat's reading here, but cautions the reader not to suppose that the relations between the three theses are strict implications—rather, each of the three best supports and is best supported by each of the others ('Protagorean Relativisms' ['Relativisms'], in J. Cleary and W. Wians (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, xix (Lanham, Md., 1996), 211–43 at 214–16, esp. 215 n. 10; 'Conflicting Appearances: *Theaetetus* 153 D–154 B' ['Conflicting Appearances'], in C. Gill and M. M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford, 1996), 105–33 at 108–9, esp. 108 n. 9). She then argues that we must use a 'connection criterion' in our reading of this part of the *Theaetetus*:

The next step is to demolish them one by one. Socrates is made to give one indirect *reductio* of (T) by offering arguments against (P), a second by arguing against (H), as well as one final direct refutation of (T). Such a strategy, if executed correctly, would provide a thorough and decisive way to investigate, then neatly dispatch, a set of problematic theses.

Burnyeat goes on to offer a compelling answer to the question why Protagoras is committed to the flux doctrine: it offers the metaphysics necessary to guarantee the incorrigibility which Protagoras' measure doctrine claims for human perceivers. Consider the kind of world in which perceivers cannot be mistaken. If all their perceptions are true, then things must change according to their different and changing beliefs. This means that things cannot have continuing identity over time—whether for different perceivers, or for a single perceiver over time. For if there were any kind of stability in an object, this would imply that (1) it is that way independently of how anyone perceives it, and (2) it is possible to be mistaken about how it is. As Burnyeat puts it,

> If a thing is stable, or stable in some respect (the qualification makes no odds), that means there is an objective basis for correcting or confirming someone's judgement as to how it is, or how it is in that respect. There is a fact of the matter, independent of the person's judgement. The whole point of eliminating first objectivity between persons and then identity through time was to ensure that there would be no basis in the experience of other times and other people for charging anyone with untruth. . . . Stability, even for a moment, entails objectivity, even if only for that moment. (*Introduction*, 49)

The key idea is that if something remained stably *F*, this would constitute an objective state of affairs, on the basis of which a judgement about it could be convicted of being false; if then Protagoras' measure doctrine denies objectivity, it is committed to the Secret Doctrine and the doctrine of constant change.[8]

However, there are some problems with this line of interpretation.

'we should aim to interpret each of the three theses in a way that makes it plausible to suggest that each of them is committed to and best supported by the others' ('Relativisms', 217).

[8] Burnyeat's view is more nuanced than I can do justice to here, for he thinks that Plato works out the implications of Protagorean relativism by stages, and it is only at the final stage that this argument (that stability entails objectivity) is introduced ('Idealism', 11–13).

Consider whether a relativist is really committed to the doctrine of flux. Is flux really needed to eliminate objective truth? Is it even successful at eliminating objective truth? Take this cold wind which Theaetetus feels. The proposal is that if it is not constantly changing, then there will be an objective truth about how it is, about which one *could* be mistaken. But if there is a fact of the matter about the wind's being cold, how does it help to make the wind change? There will also be a fact of the matter about its changing. That is, *if* stability itself implies that there is an objective truth about an object, then one won't eliminate objectivity by introducing flux. In fact, stability does *not* by itself imply that there is an objective truth about an object. Stability should be possible even in a Protagorean world where there are no objective, perceiver-independent truths. If it appears to me for all my life that this stone is black, then the relativist ought to say that it will be black for me for that length of time; its remaining black does not, however, make it an 'objective fact', since it is that colour only because it appears so to me, and it may at the same time be different colours for different perceivers. There may be a fact of the matter—that it is black for me now—but this is none the less not an objective, perceiver-independent fact.

If one is persuaded by the thought that relativism does not commit one to the doctrine of constant flux, then one will want to consider two alternatives. (1) Protagoras' measure doctrine in the *Theaetetus* is not relativism.[9] (2) It *is* a kind of relativism, but it is not supposed to imply the doctrine of total flux.

I shall argue that option (2) is correct. Plato is not arguing that the three theses provide necessary and sufficient conditions for each other. In particular, he does not argue that (T) ⇒ (P) ⇒ (H). Rather, once he introduces the Secret Doctrine for consideration, he devotes his efforts to showing that (H) ⇒ (P) ⇒ (T).[10]

[9] In 'Relativisms' Fine argues that, since Plato is arguing that (P) implies a doctrine of constant flux and since relativism about truth does not in fact imply a doctrine of constant flux, one should interpret (P), on the principle of charity, not as relativism *about truth*, but as infallibilism, the position that all beliefs are true *simpliciter*. I am greatly indebted to her paper, but will not discuss her arguments here, since they raise complex questions about relativism about truth and Plato's self-refutation argument in the *Theaetetus* which I shall address elsewhere (book in preparation).

[10] Strictly speaking, Socrates only tries to show this in the case of perception and perceptible properties. Accordingly, he focuses on the perceptual case (152 C 1–2, 153 D 8–9, 156 E 7–9, 171 D 9–E 9).

That this is Plato's objective is suggested by Socrates' remarks concerning the relations among the theses.[11] After Socrates has completed the construction of the Secret Doctrine, he announces:

> So we find the various theories coincide [lit. 'have converged to the same thing', εἰς ταὐτὸν συμπέπτωκεν]: that of Homer and Heraclitus and all their tribe, that all things flow like streams; of Protagoras, wisest of men, that man is the measure of all things; and of Theaetetus that, *these things being so*, knowledge proves to be perception. (160 D 6–E 2)

This does not mean that the three theses have been shown to be equivalent. Rather, if Protagoras' thesis and the Secret Doctrine are true, then Theaetetus' definition comes out true as well. Again, at *Theaet.* 183 B 7–C 3 Socrates describes the enquiry into the truth of (T) and (P) as proceeding κατά γε τὴν τοῦ πάντα κινεῖσθαι μέθοδον, i.e. on the assumption that everything is in motion.[12]

Why, then, does Plato introduce the Secret Doctrine if it isn't a necessary commitment of (P) and (T)?

Plato introduces the Secret Doctrine in order to develop Protagoras' claim. Developing a philosophical position does not necessarily or even usually consist of working out the implications or necessary commitments of that view; one may fashion a theory out of whatever borrowed materials seem most promising for defending it. Theaetetus' thesis is vague and nebulous—Protagoras' thesis is introduced to firm it up.[13] Similarly, Protagoras' thesis is ambigu-

[11] Among the passages Burnyeat lists as containing 'stage directions' for the *Theaetetus*, three appear to indicate that Plato means to be arguing that Th ⇒ Prot ⇒ Her: 152 C–D (Heraclitus gives the 'real truth' behind Protagoras' riddling statements [Prot ⇒ Her]), 160 D–E (Socrates says that the three theses 'come to the same thing' [Prot ⇔ Her]), 183 B (the refutation of Heraclitus demolishes Protagoras [Prot ⇒ Her] and disposes of Theaetetus' definition [Th ⇒ Her]—unless Theaetetus can find some other method than Heraclitus' to work out his equation of knowledge and perception) ('Idealism', 6–7 n. 2). However, Socrates' saying at 152 C–D that the Secret Doctrine gives the 'real truth' behind Protagoras' riddling statements could mean Prot ⇒ Her, or it could mean Her ⇒ Prot; I argue for the latter. The other two passages seem to me to provide little evidence to indicate that Plato means to be arguing that Prot ⇒ Her. None of these passages is absolutely conclusive either way, and the case can only be settled by looking at the arguments themselves.

[12] See Richard Robinson on the puzzling use of μέθοδος here (*Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1953), 68–9).

[13] I argue for this in 'Thinking and Perception in Plato's *Theaetetus*', in Mark McPherran (ed.), *Recognition, Remembrance, and Reality: New Essays on Plato's Epistemology and Metaphysics* (*Apeiron*, 32/4; Dec. 1999), 37–54.

ous and puzzling on its own—the Secret Doctrine is introduced to amplify and support it. This follows a familiar strategy in Platonic dialogues, where Socrates investigates an initial thesis not by working out its implications, but by introducing ancillary premisses (see e.g. *Meno* 86 D ff.). Nowhere does Socrates represent the ancillary premisses as following from the initial thesis; the interlocutor must agree to them separately, sometimes with no small amount of coaxing from Socrates. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates must provide Theaetetus with reasons to suppose that the Secret Doctrine will in fact support Protagoras' claim, which in turn will make Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception come out true. He must show that: (H) ⇒ (P) ⇒ (T).[14]

The Secret Doctrine has the status of an independent hypothesis, which provides Socrates with substantial metaphysical resources for developing a Protagorean theory. And the problem which the Secret Doctrine is meant to address is the following: what does it mean to say that nothing is anything in itself, but is whatever it is *for* someone? How is it possible for heat or any other property to exist *for* or *in relation to* someone? That it is the function of the Secret Doctrine to explain what it means to say 'is *F* for *A*', and to show what the necessary relativization is to consist in, has been proposed by a number of commentators.[15] However, they generally admit that it is extremely difficult to see how the flux doctrine provides this explanation, and have not, in my view, hit upon the correct account of the role of the flux doctrine in the Secret Doctrine. The purpose of this paper is to show how to read the Secret Doctrine in this way.

[14] I do not agree with Burnyeat when he says, 'It is thought to be reasonably clear that (1) Her ⇒ Prot ⇒ Th. The work goes into showing (2) Th ⇒ Prot ⇒ Her . . .' ('Idealism', 7 n. 2). The thesis that everything is changing does *not* obviously imply that all beliefs and perceptions are true for someone, since, after all, things might change in ways which belie those beliefs and perceptions. (For example, the weather in Chicago is constantly changing, and I am invariably mistaken about it.) Showing that the elements of the Secret Doctrine *can* be made to provide a coherent and consistent defence for Protagoras seems to me difficult, if not impossible.

[15] Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 33, 39; Cooper, *Plato's* Theaetetus, 35–6; M. F. Burnyeat, 'Conflicting Appearances', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 65 (1979), 69–111 at 77; Mohan Matthen, 'Perception, Relativism, and Truth: Reflections on Plato's *Theaetetus* 152–160' ['Perception'], *Dialogue*, 24 (1985) 33–58 at 38; Robert J. Ketchum, 'Plato's "Refutation" of Protagorean Relativism: *Theaetetus* 170–171' ['Refutation'], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* [*OSAP*], 10 (1992), 73–105 at 81; Burnyeat, *Introduction*, 13.

First, in Section 2, I restate the problem which Protagoras' thesis poses in the *Theaetetus*. Next, in Section 3, I make some general remarks about the Secret Doctrine. In Section 4 I examine in detail the construction of the Secret Doctrine from 153 to 160, and show how it answers the problem posed by Protagoras' claim. The results are summarized in Section 5.

2. Protagoras: Restatement of the problem

Protagoras' claim—that whatever seems to be the case to one is the case for one[16]—is ambiguous. It can be taken as a simple conditional:

(P1) If x seems F to A, x is F (for A);

or as a biconditional:

(P) x is F for A if and only if x seems F to A.[17]

The conditional tells us that each person is a good measure of what is true and what is false: what one believes is true, what one

[16] *τὸ δοκοῦν ἑκάστῳ τοῦτο καὶ εἶναί φησί που ᾧ δοκεῖ* (170 A 3–4). Socrates says that he is quoting Protagoras directly from his book (*ἐκ τοῦ ἐκείνου λόγου*, 169 E 8).

[17] See also Ketchum, 'Refutation', 79–81. Burnyeat argues that Protagoras 'commits himself to the full equivalence [i.e., the biconditional]' ('Protagoras and Self-refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', *Philosophical Review*, 85/2 (Apr. 1976), 172–95 at 178). Burnyeat starts with the example given to illustrate Protagoras' claim: the wind seems cold to one person, and does not seem so to the other, and thus it is cold for one, not cold for the other. He stresses that the example is not of two conflicting appearances or beliefs, but of one belief together with the absence of one. In order to infer anything from the absence of a belief, the conditional (P1) 'If x seems F to A, it is F for A' is not enough. We need in addition (P2) x is F for A only if x seems F to A. Thus Burnyeat concludes that Protagoras' example shows that he is committed to the full biconditional from the beginning. Ketchum argues, persuasively to me, to the contrary: 'Plato makes it abundantly clear that we are to understand the situation as one in which one person feels the wind as chilly and the other feels it to be not chilly. For immediately after pointing out that if we agree with Protagoras we shall have to claim that the wind is cold for the one who feels chilly and not for the one who does not, Socrates asks, "Does it appear thus to each person?" (152 B 9). The anticipated affirmative answer requires us to say that the wind appears some way to the person who does not feel chilly and the only "way" the example makes available to us is "not cold"' ('Refutation', 77). As I argue here and elsewhere, Protagoras' claim and the examples given to support it commit him only to (P1); it requires a second step to introduce (P2). See also G. Fine, 'Relativism and Self-refutation: Plato, Protagoras, and Burnyeat', in Jyl Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 1998), 138–63 at 140.

doesn't believe is false. The biconditional tells us, in addition, that only what one believes is true; man is not only a good criterion of what is true, but the sole determinant of what is true. Nothing we know Protagoras to have said settles the question of whether he took himself to be arguing for the full-blooded biconditional, or for the more modest conditional. That we do not have anything which would settle the question may be because his own arguments for this claim do not survive, or because he never gave any arguments in the first place. Protagoras' aim may have been to counter Parmenides' rejection of human belief and experience as sufficient for attaining the truth; *contra* Parmenides, human perceptions, experience, and beliefs are a reliable indicator of truth and falsity.[18] If so, Protagoras' Truth was a moderate empiricism, not radical relativism.

In any case, Plato pushes Protagoras further. His first concern upon introducing (P1) in the *Theaetetus* is to secure for Protagoras the second half of the biconditional, the converse rule of (P1):

(P2) *x* is *F* (for *A*) *only if x* seems *F* to *A*.

Because relativism is so familiar to us now, it may seem obvious that its special punch is delivered by *this* half of the biconditional. However, this is exactly what Socrates pauses to emphasize when he asks Theaetetus:

SOCRATES. Well, it's plausible that a wise man wouldn't be saying something silly; so let's follow him up. It sometimes happens, doesn't it, that when the same wind is blowing one of us feels cold and the other not? Or that one feels slightly cold and the other very?

THEAETETUS. Certainly.

SOCRATES. Now on those occasions, shall we say that the wind itself, taken by itself, is cold or not cold? Or shall we accept it from Protagoras that it's cold for the one who feels cold, and not for the one who doesn't?

THEAETETUS. That seems plausible. (152 B 1–9)

[18] See E. Kapp's review (in two parts) of Hermann Langerbeck's *Δόξις ἐπιρυσμίη* in *Gnomon*, 12 (1936), 65–77 and 158–69, at 70–3; endorsed by K. von Fritz, '*Nous, noein* and their Derivatives in Pre-Socratic Philosophy (Part II)', *Classical Philology*, 41 (1946), 12–34 at 22; G. Vlastos, 'Introduction', in *Plato,* Protagoras, Jowett's translation revised by Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis and New York, 1956), at xii n. 24; C. Farrar, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking: The Invention of Politics in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1988), 46–9; G. Striker, 'Methods of Sophistry', *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996), 3–21 at 15.

Socrates emphasizes that Protagoras is saying that the wind is not, taken by itself, cold or not cold, but rather is cold for the one who perceives it as such, and is not for the one who doesn't. But this now raises the question: what does it mean to say that the wind is not, in itself, hot or cold, but is only hot or cold for one who perceives it as such? What is being said about the perceived hotness or coldness? And how is it possible for hotness to exist only 'for' someone? By itself, Protagoras' claim (P1) states that human beliefs and perceptions are the measure of what is true, but we still thereby lack an explanation of what it means to say that nothing is anything in itself, but is whatever it is *for* one who is perceiving it. This is what the Secret Doctrine is meant to explain.

3. The Secret Doctrine

Let us now get clear about what the Secret Doctrine is. It is usually thought of as the thesis that everything is changing. For this reason many commentators call it the 'Heraclitean doctrine', a label Plato never uses, in honour of Heraclitus' famous image of a river constantly flowing.[19] It is quite telling that the exact formulation of the Heraclitean flux doctrine tends to differ from one commentator to another: one may select the formulation 'everything is in motion', another may hit upon 'only changes exist', a third will decide on 'nothing is any one thing by itself' as the most precise formulation of the Secret Doctrine. In fact, there is no single, well-formulated statement of the thesis to be found in the *Theaetetus*. What is introduced under the rubric of the Secret Doctrine is a bunch of slogans loosely strung together. Look again at the passage where Socrates introduces the Secret Doctrine, quoted above. In this passage alone I count at least three distinct ideas:

[19] Heraclitus B 12, B 91 DK. Whether Plato was right in freely rendering Heraclitus' river statement as *πάντα ῥεῖ* or *πάντα χωρεῖ* (*Crat.* 402 A 8–10; cf. Arist. *Phys.* 8. 3, $253^{b}9$, *Metaph. A* 6, $987^{a}32$), and what influenced him in this interpretation of the historical Heraclitus (Cratylus? 5th-cent. sophists?), is controversial. See G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1983), 194–7; W. K. C. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, i (Cambridge, 1962), 449–54; G. Vlastos, 'On Heraclitus', *American Journal of Philology*, 76/4 (1955), 337–68 at 338–44.

(1) Nothing is any *one* thing by itself—in the sense that where something is qualified by one property, substantial or non-substantial, it will also reveal itself (or appear, *φανεῖται*) to be qualified by the opposite property. (152 D 2–6)
(2) Nothing is anything *in itself*—in the sense that all things come to be what they are from change, movement, mixture *with respect to one another* (*πρὸς ἄλληλα*). (152 D 6–E 1)
(3) Nothing *is* anything in itself—in the sense that nothing *is* (anything at all), but everything is always coming to be (i.e. changing). (152 E 1)

These in turn can be construed in different ways. (1), for example, could mean that everything always gives rise to conflicting appearances (if something appears *F* it will also appear not-*F*—either to the same person or to some other perceiver (see 154 A 3–9)). Or it could mean that a thing *can* bear opposite properties, or even that everything *does* always bear opposite properties. (3) could mean that everything is always changing in *some* respect or in *every* respect. The semi-fanciful arguments for these ideas given at 152 E 1–153 D 7 attribute still other theses to the distinguished assembly (including Homer, Heraclitus, Empedocles) gathered by Socrates, e.g.

(4) Being (what passes for such) and becoming are produced by and are the offspring of change or motion, while not-being and passing-away result from a state of rest. (153 A 5–7)
(5) What is good is change, in both mind and body; what is bad is the opposite. (153 C 4–5)

Later Socrates introduces other theses, e.g.

(6) Everything is change. (156 A 5)

There may be others; I simply want to stress that there is a plurality of theses.[20] There is a chaotic variety of ideas sheltering under

[20] Others have also noted that the formula 'nothing is one thing by itself [*ἓν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ οὐδέν ἐστιν*]' can be read in several ways, which fact Socrates exploits in the development of the Secret Doctrine (McDowell, *Theaetetus*, 122; Robert Bolton, 'Plato's Distinction between Being and Becoming', *Review of Metaphysics*, 29 (1975), 66–95 at 69–70; Dancy, 'Theaetetus' First Baby', 72; Veda Cobb-Stevens, 'Perception, Appearance and *Kinêsis*: The Secret Doctrine in Plato's *Theaetetus*', in J. P. Anton and G. L. Kustas (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, iii (Albany, 1989), 247–65 at 253; Bostock, *Plato's* Theaetetus, 51). Against this, Fine argues

Protagoras' 'Secret Doctrine'. Plato makes no attempt—at least here at their debut—to show us how they fit together, or to indicate which is the most important. Some of these theses will make another entrance; for others, e.g. (5), this is their single appearance in the show. If there is a core idea and if there is a story to be told about how the other ideas fit together with it, it can only emerge in an interpretation of the Secret Doctrine as a whole—it is not given to us at the outset. For this reason, it is a mistake to label the theory Socrates and his interlocutors develop on behalf of Protagoras 'Heraclitean' and then assume that the entire doctrine can be summed up with the slogan 'everything is changing'. Nowhere does Socrates use the 'Heraclitean' label himself; he usually refers to it as 'the *logos*'.[21] And he attributes this *logos* to Homer just as often as to Heraclitus. This gives it an extravagant genealogy, which suggests that Plato is gesturing towards a way of thinking, a background picture, supposedly shared by the vast majority of Plato's predecessors and contemporaries—not a unified doctrine clearly articulated by any one person.[22] I shall abandon the traditional label 'the Heraclitean doctrine' entirely, and use the more neutral label 'Secret Doctrine' to refer not to a particular thesis among the many listed above, but rather to this collection of theses, and by extension the general strategy of defence Plato develops for Protagoras at *Theaet.* 152 D–160 D.

The most important element of the Secret Doctrine is not a flux doctrine, but a relativity principle: 'nothing is anything in itself, but

that it is not the case that Plato is only considering a family of loosely related Heraclitean doctrines. Rather, he develops Heracliteanism from a moderate version to a more extreme version as required for Protagoreanism ('Relativisms', 225 n. 28). This again proceeds on the assumption that Plato is trying to show that Th ⇔ Prot ⇔ Her.

[21] It is variously referred to or described in the following ways: *οὐ φαῦλον λόγον* 152 D 2; *περὶ τούτου* 152 E 2; *τῷ λόγῳ* 153 A 5; *ὑπόλαβε . . . οὑτωσί* 153 D 8; *ἐξ ὧν τὸν Πρωταγόραν φαμὲν λέγειν* 155 D 6; *τὰ μυστήρια* 156 A 3; *οὗτος ὁ μῦθος* 156 C 4; *ὁ λόγος* 160 C 2; *ὁ ὑπὲρ Πρωταγόρου λόγος* 179 D 2; *τούτου τοῦ λόγου* 179 D 8. Sometimes Socrates refers to the entire doctrine he develops for Protagoras; sometimes he refers to individual theses he uses in Protagoras' defence.

[22] References to Homer: *Theaet.* 152 E 5, 153 A 2, 153 C 10, 160 D 7, 179 E 4. References to Heraclitus: 152 E 3, 160 D 7, 179 E 4. The list of people who supposedly subscribed to the Secret Doctrine includes, besides Protagoras, 'virtually every wise man besides Parmenides', including Heraclitus, Empedocles, Homer, thinkers and poets who didn't agree with each other in any meaningful sense on this or any other metaphysical doctrine.

is whatever it is relative to some perceiver'. Since Protagoras' claim is neutral between the simple conditional (P1), that if something seems *F* to someone, it is *F* for her, and the full biconditional (P), it is only by bringing in the Secret Doctrine's relativity principle that Plato secures the converse rule (P2), that something is *F* (for a person) only if it seems so to that person. The flux doctrine, by contrast, plays a subsidiary role in the development of the Secret Doctrine. It describes the generation and behaviour of the main elements in the Protagorean theory of perception which Socrates constructs.

4. Constructing the Secret Doctrine (*Theaet.* 153–160)

Socrates starts from the tenets of the Secret Doctrine, and fashions them into a defence of Protagorean relativism. The aim of this defence is to explain how it is that perceptual properties and perceptions are relative to perceivers and to objects, respectively. The whiteness of a stone has no independent existence apart from someone's perceiving it; the sweetness of wine exists only for one perceiving it.

Three features of Socrates' construction of the Secret Doctrine require special attention. First, Socrates makes use of high-flown, mysterious language, presumably meant to evoke a secret language of proponents of this doctrine, to describe the participants in each perceptual encounter. The language is so obscure one suspects Plato is hamming it up. Socrates is made to speak of objects and perceivers which are 'parents' giving birth to 'offspring', i.e. perceptual properties and perceptions. He speaks of the offspring quickly zipping around between their parents, while the parents slowly change. Furthermore, his layers of description are not always consistent with each other—for example, he first says objects are constantly changing, later that they are themselves nothing but changes.[23] How all this translates into more sober language is never entirely clear.

Second, the centrepiece of Socrates' construction of the Secret

[23] This and other inconsistencies are noted and discussed by Jane M. Day in 'The Theory of Perception in Plato's *Theaetetus* 152–183' ['Theory'], *OSAP* 15 (1997), 51–80. She concludes that there is probably no way to iron them all out.

Doctrine is an analogy with relational properties like 'is taller' or 'is more in number'. This analogy is presented in the form of a puzzle, whose solution, Socrates tells us, lies in the Secret Doctrine. Unfortunately, he never spells the solution out in detail, and most commentators have concluded that the puzzles either involve a confusion on Plato's part about relational properties, or consist of Plato's attempt to show, in an underhanded way, how confused Protagoras is about relational properties. We need to reconsider the presentation of the puzzles and how it relates to the passages which come before and after it.

Third, the construction of the Secret Doctrine is slow going: it starts at 153 and is not pronounced finished until 160. In between, there are four stages of argumentation, each stage revising the result of the previous one. Each step is quite difficult to understand in itself, and how they all fit together is controversial. One should not attempt to read the final result wholesale back into the conclusion of any one of the arguments used to arrive at it. Commentators frequently object that, at the end of a given argument, Socrates does not tell us what the larger conclusion is supposed to be. But each argument refines the results of the previous step, and Socrates only reveals in the final stage how the Secret Doctrine is supposed to support Protagoras' thesis. Our aim is to read these four stages as part of one continuous argument to that end.

(*a*) *Stage I* (*153 D 8–154 B 6*)

Having introduced the basic tenets of the Secret Doctrine (152 D 2–153 D 7), Socrates begins by applying it to the case of colours:

> SOCRATES. Well then, you must think like this. In the case of the eyes, first, you mustn't think of what you call white colour as being some distinct thing outside your eyes, or in your eyes either—in fact you mustn't assign any place to it; because in that case it would, surely, be at its assigned place and in a state of rest, rather than coming to be. (153 D 8–E 2, trans. McDowell)

In accordance with the principle that nothing is but is always coming to be and in a constant state of motion, perceived colours must always 'come to be', and therefore cannot be at rest or be located anywhere, in the eyes or the object. But if one cannot locate the

colour in the eye or in the object, how should one think of it (153 E 3)?

Socrates recommends that they start with the thesis that nothing is one thing just by itself and proceed from there:

> SOCRATES. Let's follow what we said just now, and lay it down that nothing is one thing just by itself. On those lines, we'll find that black, white, or any other colour will turn out to have come into being, from the collision of the eyes with the appropriate motion. What we say a given colour is will be neither the thing which collides, nor the thing it collides with, but something which has come into being between them; something peculiar [Burnyeat, 'private'] to each one. (153 E 4–154 A 3)

They will find that the colour is neither the object nor the perceiver, but something which has come into existence between them, produced by the encounter of the eye with the object, and peculiar to the two.[24] Socrates will explain this further in Stage III (155 D 5–157 C 3). But first he must show that neither the eye nor the perceiver is coloured, but rather something in between them is coloured; or, as he also puts it, the colour should not be located in the eye or in the perceiver.

One potentially confusing aspect of Socrates' argument is his way of switching between these two statements. For Socrates, 'Whiteness is not in the stone' and 'The stone is not white' are equivalent. In the first sentence, whiteness is the subject; the grammar suggests that it is an independently existing entity which has location. In the second, 'white' is the predicate; whiteness appears to be a property borne by substances. Compare Aristotle's use of the locution '*F* is in *x*' in *Categories* 2 to characterize non-substantial individuals (e.g. individual qualities or quantities):

> Some things are in a subject, but are not said of any subject. By 'in a sub-

[24] Socrates repeats this—that colour should not be identified with the perceiver or the object—three more times: 156 E 4–6, 159 E 4–5, and 182 A 6–8. It might seem strange for Plato to postulate a third entity in between the eye and the stone, which will be coloured. What could this be? It must be the colour itself. The colour comes to be in between the eye and the stone, and *it* is coloured, not the eye or stone. It may seem peculiar to think that colours and other perceptual properties can be predicated of themselves, but this is simply another example of self-predication in Plato (cf. *Prot.* 330 C). That colours are coloured is a premiss in Socrates' refutation of the Secret Doctrine (182 D 1–5). There, the thesis that colours are coloured is put in Heraclitean terms: white is flowing white (*τὸ λευκὸν ῥεῖν τὸ ῥέον*).

ject' I mean what is in something not as a part and cannot be separated from what it is in. For example, individual grammatical knowledge is in a subject, the soul, but is not said of any subject, and individual white is in a subject, a body (for every colour is in a body), but is not said of any subject. (1ª23–9)

He uses '*F* is in *x*' as a way of characterizing non-substantial individuals, where '*x* is [*F*]' would presumably not yield such a characterization, since all the different kinds of predications superficially share this form. But for Aristotle, 'white is in the stone' is just another way of saying 'the stone is white'. To say, then, that colour is neither in the eye nor in the stone is to say that neither the eye nor the stone is coloured. This is important to keep in mind; the connection for Socrates between the location of a colour and its belonging to a particular object will always be very tight.[25]

Socrates' thesis is that neither the object nor the perceiver is coloured, i.e. that the colour is neither in the object nor in the perceiver, but rather 'something which has come into being between them, something peculiar to each one'. He argues:

> . . . Or would you be prepared to insist that every colour appears to a dog, or any other living thing, just the way it appears to you?
>
> THEAETETUS. Certainly not.
>
> SOCRATES. And what about another man? Is the way anything appears to him like the way it appears to you? Can you insist on that? Or wouldn't you much rather say that it doesn't appear the same even to yourself, because you're never in a similar condition to yourself?
>
> THEAETETUS. Yes, I think that's nearer the truth than the first alternative. (154 A 3–9)

He begins with the assumption (1) that whatever appears *F* will also appear not-*F*. Things appear differently to different people—or even to different animals.[26] Since, for Protagoras, whatever seems

[25] See also Burnyeat, 'Conflicting Appearances', 77; Matthen, 'Perception', 38, who puts it as follows: 'Plato makes Protagoras correlate *something's coming-to-be-coloured* with the *coming-to-be of a colour* (i.e. of the offspring's whiteness), which, in effect, allows him to reduce attribution and alteration to existence and creation.' Contrast Cornford, who thinks that Socrates is treating properties as things, not as qualities which need some other thing to support them (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 35). Consequently, he thinks that objects for Protagoras are simply collocations of these property-things.

[26] Why does Socrates assume that everything always appears differently to every perceiver, that nothing ever appears the same to different perceivers or to the

to be the case to one is the case for one, this means that anything which is *F* will also be not-*F*. It then follows that colours cannot be located either in perceived objects or in the perceivers themselves. Why? They become different (e.g. are coloured differently), depending on who comes into contact with them, without changing:

ΣΩΚ. οὐκοῦν εἰ μὲν ᾧ παραμετρούμεθα ἢ οὗ ἐφαπτόμεθα μέγα ἢ λευκὸν ἢ θερμὸν ἦν, οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἄλλῳ προσπεσὸν ἄλλο ἂν ἐγεγόνει, αὐτό γε μηδὲν μεταβάλλον· εἰ δὲ αὖ τὸ παραμετρούμενον ἢ ἐφαπτόμενον ἕκαστον ἦν τούτων, οὐκ ἂν αὖ ἄλλου προσελθόντος ἤ τι παθόντος αὐτὸ μηδὲν παθὸν ἄλλο ἂν ἐγένετο.

SOCRATES. Surely then, (1) if what we measure ourselves against or touch had been large, white or hot, it would never have become different by bumping into a different perceiver, at any rate not if it didn't undergo any change itself. (2) And on the other hand, if what does the measuring or touching had been any of those things, then again, it wouldn't have become different when another thing came up against it, or the thing which came up against it had something happen to it: not if it hadn't, itself, had anything happen to it. (154 B 1–6, trans. McDowell, with Burnyeat's modifications in 'Conflicting Appearances', 77 n. 1)

Here are two arguments: first, the perceived object does not have the colour, and second, the perceiver does not have it either. Each contains a counterfactual conditional. (1) If the perceived object were large, white, or hot, then if it did not itself change when something else came up against it, it would not thereby become different, i.e. not large, not white, not hot. But as it is, it *does* become different when something else comes up against it, though it does not

same perceiver at different times (McDowell, *Theaetetus*, 152–3; Bostock, *Plato's* Theaetetus, 49, 60–1)? This is, as Bostock puts it, 'an astounding claim. The suggestion that we cannot have qualitatively similar perceptions for any length of time is flatly contradicted by common sense, and surely not needed by the Protagorean thesis that all judgements of perception are true' (61). Burnyeat thinks it is none the less justified because 'The theory [Socrates] is elaborating is committed to the view that, if this were so, each appearance should still yield knowledge of a real state of affairs. If the theory is to hold good, it must be able to take in its stride the most extreme variation imaginable in the course of appearances. So we had better suppose, for the sake of the argument, that extreme variation actually obtains' ('Conflicting Appearances', 86; see also Fine, 'Conflicting Appearances', 132 n. 48). I think the explanation is simpler: the assumption is not required for Protagoras or Theaetetus. Socrates is entitled to use this assumption because it is already on the table, placed there as part of the Secret Doctrine: (1) whatever appears *F* will also appear not-*F* (152 D 4–6). (He uses it again at 159 E 7–8.)

change. Therefore, the object is not large, white, or hot. And likewise, (2) if the sense-organ were large, white, or hot, then when another thing approached it and the sense-organ was not affected, or when something happened to the first thing which approached it, it would not have become different. But it *does* become different (without being affected); therefore, the sense-organ is not large, white, or hot.[27]

One might wonder about the point of (2). Why would anyone suppose that the *eye* is large, white, or hot? As McDowell puts it, 'It is not clear what the point of this might be, since it is obscure why anyone might be thought to want to say (except for obviously irrelevant reasons) that an eye is white; this does not seem to be quite the same as locating the white colour which one

[27] Burnyeat argues that the aim of this passage (154 B 1–6) is 'to establish on behalf of Protagoras that sensible qualities like hot and cold, white and black, are essentially relative to the individual perceiving subject', that 'Neither the object seen nor the perceiving subject is in itself white (154 B)' ('Conflicting Appearances', 77). Fine summarizes Burnyeat's construal of the argument, which she calls 'perceptual relativism', as follows ('Conflicting Appearances', 114):

(A) There are, or at least seem to be, conflicting appearances; for example, the stone appears white to me, but not to you.
(B) If the stone is really, or in itself white, then (unless it changes) it will appear white to everyone.
(C) The stone hasn't changed between the different appearances.
(D) Therefore the stone isn't really, or in itself, white; rather, sensible qualities are relative to perceivers.

She rejects this, on the grounds that Plato's argument does *not* depend on the dubious assumption (B), and furthermore, it does not depend on the conflation of being really *F* and being *F* in itself. She argues, 'if to be really *F* is to be truly (i.e. in fact) *F*, and if to be *F* in itself is to be intrinsically (i.e. non-relationally) *F*, then the two are not the same. For objects can really (in fact) have relational properties' ('Conflicting Appearances', 115, 118–19; *contra* Burnyeat, 'Conflicting Appearances', 76–81, and Dancy, 'Theaetetus' First Baby', 66, 78 ff.). When 154 B 1–6 is translated more carefully, it does not contain this conflation. Her objections are sound, but Burnyeat's basic position can be modified to meet them. First, 'perceptual relativism' should not depend on assumption (B), that anything which appears *F* and not-*F* cannot itself be *F* (or not-*F*). Rather, (B) should read as follows: if the stone is in itself white, then it will not become different (for different people) without changing. Second, I do not think that Socrates conflates being really *F* with being intrinsically *F*. The argument is that things are (really) white and not white, without changing; the conclusion, drawn in Stage III, is that things are not white in themselves. Third, the argument begun at 154 B 1–6 is not yet complete; it is premature to say that it follows from 154 B 1–6 that 'Neither the object seen nor the perceiving subject is *in itself* white (154 B)' (Burnyeat, 'Conflicting Appearances', 77, emphasis added). 154 B 1–6 is just the first step in a larger argument leading to the conclusion, reached in Stage III, that colours and other perceptual properties are relational rather than intrinsic.

sees in the eyes, which we are told not to do at 153 D 8–E 2.'[28] It is indeed difficult to make sense of the idea that when the eye perceives something as white, the eye therefore might be white. However, as I have already argued, saying that the eye might be white *is* the same as saying whiteness might be in the eye. The question is, where should one locate the colour—in the eye, in the object, or somewhere else (153 D 8–E 1, 153 E 7–154 A 2)? Arguments (1) and (2) eliminate the possibilities: not in the perceiver, not in the perceived object, therefore somewhere else in between.

If one expected an argument that (P) implies flux, one might raise, as Fine does, the following objection: why would Socrates say that the perceiver and the perceived object do not change as they approach each other, when the Heraclitean doctrine tells us that everything is always changing?[29] I have interpreted argument (1) as follows:

> (1) If the object were large, white, or hot, then it would not become different (when it comes into contact with something else) without changing. But it does become different when it comes into contact with something else, without changing; *therefore it is not large, white, or hot.* (154 B 1–3)

[28] *Theaetetus*, 132. Because of this difficulty, McDowell proposes to understand argument (2) as follows: 'If a perceiver is seeing white and does not himself change, he does not come to be other than seeing white. But any perceiver of whom one might be inclined to say that he is seeing white does, without himself changing, come to be other than seeing white, either by coming to perceive a different object or because of a change in the original object. Therefore it cannot be true of any such perceiver that he is seeing white.' However, this construal of the Greek is implausible, for the reference of 'each of these' (*ἕκαστον τούτων*) is 'big or white or hot' (*μέγα ἢ λευκὸν ἢ θερμόν*); the translation would only be warranted if the text at 154 B 4 read 'But if, in turn, what was measuring or touching were ⟨perceiving⟩ any of these' (*εἰ δὲ αὖ τὸ παραμετρούμενον ἢ ἐφαπτόμενον ἕκαστον ⟨ᾔσθάνετο⟩ τούτων*) (see also Burnyeat, 'Conflicting Appearances', 80). Furthermore, the translation severs the connection between this passage and the previous one: both passages contribute to the argument that neither the object nor the eyes are white. McDowell thinks that we get a new argument here, that (1) what we measure ourselves against or touch *is not* but *becomes* large, white, or hot, and (2) we do not perceive, but *come to* perceive, large, white, or hot. Accordingly, he inserts a paragraph break between 154 A 9 and 154 B 1. On my interpretation, 154 B 1–6 is meant to confirm a claim that has already been stated twice before.

[29] Fine, 'Relativisms', 229–30; 'Conflicting Appearances', 115–17.

Shouldn't one rather construe the argument as an argument for Heraclitean flux?

(1′) If the object is large, white, or hot, it will not become different (when it comes into contact with something else) unless it changes. But it does become different when it comes into contact with something else; *therefore, it has changed*.[30]

The first problem with this construal is to explain what the second half of the argument is supposed to establish. On my reading, it goes as follows:

(2) If the sense-organ were large, white, or hot, then when something new approached it or when something happened to the first thing which approached it and the sense-organ was not affected, it would not have become different. But it does become different without being affected; *therefore, the sense-organ is not large, white, or hot.* (154 B 3–6)

Suppose that this sentence is understood as follows:

(2′) If the sense-organ is large, white, or hot, it will not become different when something new approaches it or when something happens to the first thing that approaches it, unless it changes. But it does become different; *therefore, it has changed*.

Together, (1′) and (2′) tell us that when a stone looks white to Socrates, the whiteness is *both* in Socrates' eye *and* in the stone, until they both change. But surely this is the exact opposite of what Socrates has been arguing so far: that the whiteness is in *neither*.[31] Secondly, the conditionals are present counterfactuals, with the imperfect *ἦν* in each of the antecedents ('if *X* were true, then *Y* would be true . . .'), which indicates that neither the consequents nor the antecedents are true. It is never true at any time that the stone or Socrates' eye is white—rather, as Socrates has already said twice before, the colour is somewhere in between the two, so that neither

[30] Fine, 'Conflicting Appearances', 119.

[31] Fine does not discuss argument (2) in 'Conflicting Appearances', but perhaps to avoid this problem, she would accept McDowell's reading of *ἕκαστον τούτων* as 'perceiving any of these [i.e. large, white, hot]'. For difficulties with this reading see n. 28.

the stone nor Socrates' eye can be said to 'have' the colour whiteness.

Arguments (1) and (2) are supposed to show that whiteness should not be located in the perceiver's eye or in the perceived object. In both arguments it is simply asserted that the object of perception and the perceiver become different without changing. But why does the stone become different when different perceivers approach it, without changing? If it becomes different, hasn't it changed? The answer lies in the next stage of the argument. In this notoriously difficult stretch of text, Socrates offers a number of puzzles which will trip one up if one fails to get the point of the Secret Doctrine. Unfortunately, he does not explicitly say how the Secret Doctrine solves the puzzles. I shall argue that we are supposed to see why it would be a mistake to locate the colours—against the dictates of the Secret Doctrine—anywhere but between the object and perceiver. Socrates first illustrates the confusions which would lead one to make that mistake (Stage II), then describes what is required to avoid the mistake (Stage III). The answer: things become different without changing because nothing is white or hot in itself. As we might put it, colours do not belong intrinsically to objects but are relational properties; things take on different perceptual, and relational, properties without undergoing change in themselves.

(*b*) *Stage II* (*154 B 6–155 D 5*)

Having stated that colours should not be located in the object or in the perceiver's eye, since these both become different without changing, Socrates says:

> SOCRATES. . . . *As it is*, you see, we may easily find ourselves forced into saying the most astonishing and ridiculous things, as Protagoras would point out or anyone who undertook to expound his views.
>
> THEAETETUS. What do you mean? What sort of ridiculous things?
>
> (154 B 6–10)

Socrates offers two examples of the 'ridiculous things' which will follow if one fails to grasp the point of the Secret Doctrine. Place six dice on a table. Put four beside them: the six dice are more than the four. Then put twelve dice beside the six dice. Now the six dice are less than the twelve. The six dice are 'more' when placed next to four dice, and 'less' when placed next to twelve, although they

have not themselves changed in number. One can easily become confused by this type of example, as Theaetetus does in trying to answer Socrates' next question:

SOCRATES. Well now, supposing Protagoras or anyone else were to ask you this question: 'Is it possible, Theaetetus, to become bigger or more in number in any other way than by being increased?' What is your answer to that?

THEAETETUS. Well, Socrates, if I answer what seems true in relation to the present question, I shall answer 'No, it is not possible'; but if I consider it in relation to the question that went before, then in order to avoid contradicting myself, I say, 'Yes, it is.'

SOCRATES. That's a good answer, my friend, by Jove it is; you are inspired. But, I think, if you answer 'Yes', it will be like that episode in Euripides—the tongue will be safe from refutation but the mind will not. . . .

(154 c 1–6)

When asked whether it is possible to become bigger or more in number in any other way than by being increased, Theaetetus is initially inclined to say No, that it is not possible to become bigger or more in number (i.e. different) without increasing. However, when he considers the dice, he is inclined to say Yes, that something *can* become more in number (i.e. different) without increasing or changing. Socrates' second example concerns relative size: suppose Socrates is said at one time to be bigger than Theaetetus, but a year later, after Theaetetus has grown, has become smaller than Theaetetus, though he has not changed in height. Though one may be initially inclined to say that it is not possible to become bigger or smaller without changing, it certainly seems that Socrates has become smaller without changing.

How do ordinary, non-Protagorean ways of speaking cause this confusion, and what does the Secret Doctrine recommend to solve the puzzles? McDowell sets out what he takes to be the two main options: 'We can distinguish two possible views as to the identity of the present practice which is said to lead to the puzzles. According to one view, it is the practice of using non-relational forms of statement where we ought to be using relational forms. According to the other, it is the practice of using "be", contrary to the Secret Doctrine' (*Theaetetus*, 133).[32] Both assume that the

[32] For endorsements—some more confident than others—of the first alternative see: Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 43–5; W. D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), 101–2; R. S. Bluck, 'The Puzzles of Size and Number in

puzzles exhibit apparent contradictions caused by ordinary ways of speaking: the dice are both more and less, Socrates is both taller and shorter. These contradictions are posed when Protagoras says that all beliefs, even contradictory ones, are true, and are supposed to be dissolved by the Secret Doctrine. How? According to the first view, we are supposed to qualify 'the dice are both more and less' by specifying what the dice are more and less *than*. According to the second view, we are supposed to replace the language of being with the language of flux. Socrates *does* change when approached by the taller Theaetetus, and the dice *do* change when approached by twelve dice. But why does Protagoras *need* to appeal to flux, when one can dissolve the contradictions by simply filling in the qualifications? Indeed, introducing flux seems to involve a mistake, since both Socrates and the dice clearly do *not* change while becoming 'shorter' and 'more'.[33] I believe the first solution is essentially correct, but the problem itself has been misdescribed.

The problem with the dice is not that they exhibit contradictions. Cornford, in just a few lines of his commentary, correctly identified both the confusion and the Secret Doctrine solution to the puzzles:

It is clear that the difficulty here exists only for one who thinks of 'large'

Plato's *Theaetetus*', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 7 (1961), 7–9 at 8; Burnyeat, *Introduction*, 13. For the second alternative see McDowell, *Theaetetus*, ad loc.; Dancy, 'Theaetetus' First Baby', 82, 87–8; P. L. Gottlieb, *Aristotle and the Measure of All Things* [*Aristotle*] (Ph.D. diss., Cornell, 1988), 21–9; Fine, 'Conflicting Appearances', 122–30.

[33] Some have proposed that Plato has fallen victim to a confusion himself—for example, that he does not know how to distinguish between so-called Cambridge changes (for example, the mug on my right 'changes' when I move to the other side of it) and real changes (McDowell, *Theaetetus*, ad loc., 137; C. Kirwan, 'Plato and Relativity', *Phronesis*, 19 (1974), 112–29 at 127–8; Day, 'Theory', 55). Others think that Plato unfairly attributes such a confusion to Protagoras to make the case against him appear stronger (E. S. Haring, 'Socratic Duplicity: *Theaetetus* 154 B 1–156 A 3' ['Duplicity'], *Review of Metaphysics*, 45 (1992), 525–42). Still others argue that Plato is *right* to charge Protagoras with this confusion. As Fine argues, 'Roughly, his idea seems to be that we can distinguish between genuine and mere Cambridge change only if an object is something in itself; since Protagoras claims that nothing is anything by itself (153 E 4–5), he cannot distinguish between genuine and mere Cambridge change. Plato then commits him to the view that every case of appearing different involves a genuine change in the object that appears different' ('Conflicting Appearances', 130; see also Gottlieb, *Aristotle*, 21–9, and T. H. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1977), 1–13 at 5–6).

as a quality residing in the thing which is larger than something else, with 'small' as the answering quality residing in the smaller thing. If that is so, then, when the large thing is compared with something larger instead of something smaller, he will suppose that it has lost its quality 'large' and gained instead the quality 'small'. By suffering this internal change it will have 'become small'. He will then be puzzled when we point out that the thing has not altered in size. (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 43–4)

Those who persist—despite what the Secret Doctrine tells us—in locating largeness and smallness *in* objects will assume that change with respect to these properties constitutes internal change. They will then be unable to understand how something can 'become different'—e.g. larger or smaller—without changing in itself. We find it difficult to understand that things can become different without changing, but the argument at 154 B 1–6 depends on it. Consider again the first part of it:

(1) If whiteness were in the stone, then when something approaches the stone, but the stone isn't affected, the stone wouldn't become different. But the stone *does* become different when something else approaches it (though it is not affected). Thus the whiteness is not in the stone.

The argument turns on seeing that the stone *does* become different without changing. The puzzles are meant to soften up Theaetetus, and the reader, by getting us to see two points.

First, coming to be larger or smaller, more or less, does not necessarily constitute internal change. Socrates' becoming shorter and the dice becoming less are both changes in relational properties produced purely through comparison of Socrates with other objects. Thus, it is possible for something to cease to be the subject of some attribute without undergoing change itself. Second, the reason for this is that things are not intrinsically large, small, more, or less, but only so in relation to something else. One shouldn't locate 'larger', 'smaller', 'more', and 'less' *in* objects themselves—if one does, changes in predicate will appear to constitute changes in the things themselves.

Let me summarize what we have so far. In Stage I Socrates argues that whiteness and other perceptual properties should not be located in the perceiver or in the object itself. For the object is now white, now dark, now hot, now cold, as different per-

ceivers approach it; it becomes different for different perceivers without changing itself. How is it possible for something to 'become different without changing'? In Stage II Socrates presents us with two puzzling examples whose solution answers that question. Six dice become more and less, Socrates becomes taller then shorter, without changing, because these properties do not belong intrinsically, but in relation to other objects. Once one has grasped this point concerning 'larger', 'smaller', 'more', and 'less', one can apply it to whiteness and other perceptual properties. Socrates does this in Stage III. Perceptual properties are neither in perceivers nor in the objects they perceive. Thus, when we are asked whether something can change with respect to perceptual properties without undergoing change in itself, the correct answer is Yes; as with relational properties, perceptual properties do not belong to anything intrinsically.[34] The object and the eye become different—by coming to be coloured and coming to perceive—without changing just because they do not change in themselves, but take on qualitative alterations in relation to each other.

(*c*) *Stage III* (*155 D 5–157 C 3*)

When Theaetetus confesses that he does not see the point of the puzzles, Socrates *seems* to change the topic. For he simply announces that 'everything is change and nothing else' and then returns to the perceptual theory which he was describing before he introduced the puzzles. Has Socrates, as Dancy puts it, simply 'bullie[d] a bewildered Theaetetus into accepting the theory of perception (157 C–D) without returning to his puzzles to tell us how to handle them'?[35] On closer examination one can see

[34] Socrates initially discourages Theaetetus from saying Yes not because it is the wrong answer, but because he does not want Theaetetus to give the right answer without a proper understanding of it. Otherwise 'it will be like that episode in Euripides—the tongue will be safe from refutation but the mind will not' (154 D 3–6). To arrive at a proper understanding, they must examine the three 'apparitions' (*τὰ φάσματα*, 155 A 2) battling against one another, causing Theaetetus' confusion. I cannot discuss them here. But once one sees that the point is that predicates like 'is larger' are relational, two-place predicates, one can show that the three apparitions, properly qualified, do not in fact conflict.

[35] Dancy, 'Theaetetus' First Baby', 80. Most commentators take this view, but Cornford and Ross thought that there were at least *hints* of a solution in the theory of perception which follows (*Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 44–5; *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, 101–2).

that he does spell out the parallels between relational properties (e.g. being taller) and perceptual properties (e.g. being red), although he does not explicitly refer back to the puzzles themselves.

Socrates begins with the principle that 'everything is change, and there is nothing but change' (156 A 5). He tells a genealogical *mythos* on the basis of this principle:

> The universe is change and nothing else [*τὸ πᾶν κίνησις ἦν καὶ ἄλλο παρὰ τοῦτο οὐδέν*]. There are two kinds of change, each unlimited in number, the one having the power of acting and the other the power of being acted on. From their intercourse, and their friction against one another, there come to be offspring, unlimited in number but coming in pairs of twins, of which one is a perceived thing [*τὸ αἰσθητόν*] and the other a perception, which is on every occasion generated and brought to birth together with the perceived thing. (156 A 5–B 2, trans. McDowell)

There are two kinds of change—active and passive in power—whose intercourse produces a perceptible property (e.g. a colour) and its inseparable twin, the perception of it. For each encounter there are two parents (the sense-organ and the object of perception) plus twin offspring (the perceptible property and the perception).[36] Each encounter between parents issues in twin offspring which cannot exist apart from each other. The offspring are perceivings (e.g. seeings, smellings, hearings) and perceptible properties (e.g. colours, sounds, smells). Despite their apparent reification, the offspring are not objects but properties of the parents.

The key players have been introduced and the stage is set for Socrates' main point, including the solution to the puzzles. He launches into his explanation by saying, 'Well now Theaetetus, what does this story [*οὗτος ὁ μῦθος*] mean to convey to us? What is its bearing on what came before? Do you see?' (156 C 3–5, trans. McDowell). When Theaetetus replies quite understandably that he does not, Socrates spells out the *mythos* with what I take to be a corresponding *logos* at 156 C 7–157 B 1:

> Well, have a look at it, and see if we can get it finished off somehow.

[36] Strictly speaking, Socrates does not yet talk of 'perceptible properties', but uses only the more imprecise expression *τὸ αἰσθητόν*, or 'what is perceived'. Plato coins the more precise expression *ἡ ποιότης*, 'quality', later when he refutes the Secret Doctrine (182 A 9–B 1).

What it means to say is this. All those things are involved in change, as we were saying; but there's quickness or slowness in their changing. Now anything that is slow keeps its changing in the same place, and in relation to the things which approach it, and that's how it generates. But the things which are generated are quicker; because they move, and their changing naturally consists in motion. (156 C 7–D 3, trans. McDowell)

Here Socrates introduces a new distinction between types of change: slow and fast. The offspring (perceptual property and perception) undergo 'fast' change; they move around between the parents, and do not remain in one place.[37] The parents undergo 'slow' change. We are told that slow change does not consist of change of place, and that it occurs 'in relation to the things which approach it'.

Insufficient attention has been paid to Socrates' distinction between slow and fast changes; I believe it holds the key to the Secret Doctrine. 'Slow change' is Socrates' way of describing relational change, i.e. becoming different without changing intrinsically, which occurs for objects and perceivers in perception. First, we must get clear about what slow changes are. Though everyone agrees that the offspring—the colour and the perception of it—undergo fast changes, that the parents undergo slow changes, and that fast changes consist of local motion, opinions differ as to what slow changes are. One view (A) is that fast and slow changes are both kinds of movement, the former being fast motions from place to place, the latter being slow revolutions in one place. Another (B) is that fast changes are motions, whereas slow changes are qualitative *alterations*. (*κίνησις* can be translated either way.) Most who advocate this reading seem to think that (B1) these slow changes occur *prior* to any encounter between the parents. I will argue, against this, that (B2) slow changes result from encounters between parents.

The principal reasons both for favouring and for rejecting (B) come from Socrates' fuller descriptions of change and its two species at 181 C 2–D 6. There he notes that there are two kinds

[37] At 156 D 1–2, where one would expect further explanation of why these are called *fast* changes, there unfortunately seems to be a lacuna, because *οὕτω δή* at 156 D 2 has no obvious referent. The new OCT edition of the *Theaetetus* prints the passage with a lacuna. Most translators delete *οὕτω δή* (McDowell, Levett). However, we are also lacking an explanation of what 'slow change' means, with no reason to think that it too has dropped out from the text.

of change: (1) moving from place to place or revolving in the same place (φορά), and (2) remaining in the same place, but growing old, becoming black or hard, i.e. undergoing qualitative alteration (ἀλλοίωσις).[38] Is this distinction the same as the earlier distinction between fast and slow change? Day says No, arguing that 'there is too close a verbal echo between "flux in the same place" characteristic of "slow fluxes" of 156 C and the "turning about in the same place" which is classed at 181 C 7 as a kind of *motion*, i.e., specifically *not* as change'.[39] (Presumably, on this view, parents engender offspring by rotating slowly in the vicinity of each other.) However, remaining in one place is characteristic both of things revolving in one place and of things undergoing qualitative alteration. Thus, going on verbal echoes alone, we can identify either one with slow changes. Since the passages seem to map on to each other, where the latter passage spells out in more prosaic language the distinction made earlier, most opt for (B).[40]

If slow changes are qualitative alterations of the parents, then do these qualitative alterations occur prior to an encounter between parents (B1), or because of them (B2)? According to (B1), parents, i.e. objects and perceivers, undergo slow, gradual qualitative alteration; they become older, paler, healthier, sicker. Depending on their changing qualitative conditions, they produce different sorts of offspring—i.e. different kinds of perceptions. The main attraction of this reading is that it gives us at least a hint of a causal account of how perception takes place. But its main difficulty is precisely that we then have to say that objects have perceptual properties like heat and whiteness prior to and therefore independently of an encounter between parents. We have been repeatedly told not to locate perceptual properties like whiteness or heat in the objects but between the perceiver and the object (154 A 2, 156 D 6). Nothing

[38] Plato makes the same distinction much more concisely at *Parm.* 138 B, where he says that there are only two kinds of change: change of quality (or alteration) and change of place (motion).

[39] Day, 'Theory', 64, endorsing Campbell, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 58–9, 147; Matthen, 'Perception', 37.

[40] Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 49–50; McDowell, *Theaetetus*, 138; Cooper, *Plato's* Theaetetus, 39; George Nakhnikian, 'Plato's Theory of Sensation, I', *Review of Metaphysics*, 9 (Sept. 1955), 129–48 at 135; I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (2 vols.; London, 1963), ii. 23.

should be said to be, or become, pale or hot outside of a perceptual encounter.

For this reason, I think that (B2) slow changes must occur in parents not prior to a perceptual encounter, but because of one. Consider Socrates' description of an encounter between parents, which follows on the heels of his introduction of fast and slow changes. We expect Socrates to incorporate these distinctions into his description, and I think he does.

> When an eye, then, and something else, one of the things commensurable with it, approach one another and generate the whiteness they do, and a perception cognate with it—things which would never have come into being if either of the former pair had come up against something different—then at that moment, when (A) the seeing, from the eyes, and (B) whiteness, from the thing which joins in giving birth to the colour, are moving in between, (C) *the eye has come to be full of seeing*; it sees at that moment, and has come to be, not by any means seeing, but an eye that sees. (D) *And the thing which joined in generating the colour has been filled all round with whiteness*; it has come to be, again, not whiteness, but white—a white piece of wood, or stone, or whatever it is that happens to have that sort of colour. (156 D 3–E 7, trans. McDowell)

In any given encounter between parents, the parents undergo change along with their offspring. The offspring—seeing and whiteness—change by 'moving in between' (see A and B). These movements are clearly the 'fast changes' Socrates has just described a few lines before. The second set of changes happen to the parents (C, D); the eye 'comes to be full of seeing' and 'becomes an eye that sees', and the object becomes 'filled all round with whiteness', and 'comes to be white'. I think that just as the first set of changes specifies 'fast changes' more fully, so too with this second set of changes—qualitative alterations of the eye and the object—Socrates is specifying 'slow changes' more fully.[41]

Socrates never says so explicitly. But notice that his very next point is that qualitative alterations occur for a parent only when it encounters a partner.[42]

[41] Why are such changes 'slow'? I do not think there is any particular significance to this term other than that 'slow' is the opposite of 'fast', and qualitative changes are to be contrasted with movement. Perhaps the label is in keeping with the strange mystery sect Socrates pretends to be describing. In his refutation of the Secret Doctrine he is free to introduce a more technical and precise term, *ἀλλοίωσις*, to describe the kind of change he is referring to (181 D 2).

[42] See also 182 A–B, where Socrates summarizes it, stating that the parents 'give

We must think of the other cases, too, in the same way: we must take it that *nothing is hard, hot, or anything, just by itself*—we were actually saying that some time ago—*but that in their intercourse with one another things come to be all things and qualified in all ways as a result of their change*. Because even in the case of those of them which act and those which are acted on, it isn't possible to arrive at a firm conception, as they say, of either of them, taken singly, as being anything. It isn't true that something is a thing which acts before it comes into contact with the thing which is acted on by it; nor that something is a thing which is acted on before it comes into contact with the thing which acts on it. And what acts when it comes into contact with one thing can turn out a thing which is acted on when it bumps into something else. The upshot of all this is that, as we've been saying since the beginning, nothing is one thing just by itself, but things are always coming to be for someone [*ὥστε ἐξ ἁπάντων τούτων, ὅπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐλέγομεν, οὐδὲν εἶναι ἓν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτό, ἀλλά τινι ἀεὶ γίγνεσθαι*]. (156 E 7–157 B 1, trans. McDowell)

Here Socrates finally spells out how the *mythos* at 156 A 2–C 3 'bears on what came before', i.e. on the puzzles: nothing is anything in itself, but comes to be in relation to something else. Even the active and passive powers of parents, in virtue of which they generate their offspring, must be applied in a given relation, not absolutely. What perceives in one relation may be the object of perception in another. Thus, according to the theory of perception Socrates and Theaetetus have developed for Protagoras, 'seeings' and colours do not exist by themselves: they would not have come into being except for the intercourse between perceiver and object. They are relational properties: thus, a perceptual property belongs to a thing only in relation to a perceiver, and a perception can be attributed to a perceiver only in relation to the perceived object.

We now have a continuous line of argument from Stage I to

birth to perceptions and perceived things, and one lot come to be qualified in certain ways while the others come to be perceiving' (182 B 5–7). Since qualitative alterations are said at 181 C 2–D 6 to include changes like becoming older, one might object that slow changes are meant to cover a wider range of changes than those produced by a perceptual encounter. I think Plato says explicitly that all alterations and changes are perceiver-dependent, and thus we can infer that even alterations like becoming older must in some way be the product of a perceptual encounter. For those who think otherwise (and espouse B1), I would argue that one cannot then also claim that Protagoras is *committed* to there being slow changes.

Stage III. In Stage I we are told that whiteness and hotness should not be located in perceivers or objects, but in between, and that objects should not be said to have these properties, lest we fall into the confusions illustrated by the example of the dice in Stage II. The dice show that properties like 'more than' do not belong to objects in themselves, but can be attributed to them because of their interactions with or relations to other objects. In Stage III Socrates applies that lesson to perceptual properties and perceptions: they do not belong to objects in themselves, but can be attributed to them because of their interactions with or relations to other objects.

Perceptual properties and perceptions are similar to relational properties like 'more' and 'bigger' in the following way:[43] like relational properties, perceptual properties and perceivings can only be applied in a given relation. Just as nothing is, or becomes, taller just by itself, so too nothing becomes white, or percipient, just by itself. Perceptual properties and perceptions do not belong intrinsically to anything; they come into being given particular relations, and then go out of existence when those relations no longer obtain. And just as things can take on different relational properties without changing in themselves, so too a stone can become different—white or black—without changing. When a stone comes to be white for someone, it becomes different—since it was not white before—but does not change itself. Rather, it undergoes 'slow change', i.e. quali-

[43] The analogy between relational predicates like 'is taller than' and perceptual properties like 'is white' is only meant to go so far. Bostock wonders what the relevance of the puzzles is, since looking white arises as a result of a complex physical interaction, whereas being taller does not. Similarly, McDowell rejects the relational reading of the puzzles because 'comparative adjectives need to be applied to things only in relation to objects of comparison', whereas 'perceptual qualities should be ascribed to things only in relation to perceivers.' And Haring seems to be seriously misled by the fact that being larger and being smaller can be measured and therefore there is a fact of the matter about them, whereas whiteness and hotness do not for Protagoras have inter-subjective existence ('Duplicity', 527). This leads Haring to conclude that Socrates means to confuse Theaetetus and undermine Protagoras with these examples. But Plato is not claiming that the two types of predicates are identical in every respect. One does not need to assume that the logic of relational predicates depends on anyone's beliefs; rather, they are meant as a paradigm for understanding what it means to say that 'nothing is anything in itself'. (George Grote already saw that one should distinguish here between the two senses in which something can be relative; see *Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, new [4th] edn. (4 vols.; London, 1888), iii. 127–8.)

tative alteration, in relation to something else.[44] That Socrates calls these alterations 'slow changes' may seem peculiar if one assumes that only *intrinsic* changes can be *real* changes. However, it allows him to apply the principle of constant change to the theory of perception while at the same time respecting and accommodating a point which the puzzles demand that we make: when a stone comes to be white for one person, it is not undergoing change in itself, but is none the less coming to have a property which it did not have before.

(*d*) *Stage IV* (*157 c 4–160 e 5*)

In the final stage of the construction of the Secret Doctrine, Socrates shows how the account of perception and perceptual properties developed so far can be used to support and defend Protagoras' claim. He addresses the following objection: what about dreamers and madmen—are their perceptions and beliefs just as true as those of the sane person? Can the Secret Doctrine help Protagoras show

[44] These 'slow changes' are the same as Peter Geach's Cambridge changes in the *strict* sense in which he uses that term (*God and the Soul* (New York, 1969)). He defines Cambridge changes as occurring when contradictory properties hold successively of one thing. 'The only sharp criterion for a thing's having changed is what we may call the Cambridge criterion (since it keeps on occurring in Cambridge philosophers of the great days, like Russell and McTaggart): The thing called "x" has changed if we have "F(x) at time t" true and "F(x) at time t1" false, for some interpretation of "F", "t", and "t1". But this account is, intuitively quite unsatisfactory. By this account Socrates would after all change by coming to be shorter than Theaetetus; moreover, Socrates would change posthumously (even if he had no immortal soul) every time a fresh schoolboy came to admire him. . . . The changes I have mentioned, we wish to protest, are not "real" changes. . . . I cannot dismiss from my mind the feeling that there is a difference here. . . . But it would be quite another thing to offer a criterion for selecting, from among propositions that report at least "Cambridge" changes, those that also report "real" change (given that they are true); and I have no idea how I could do that—except that I am certain that there is no "real" change of numbers' (71–2).

Slow changes are also coextensive with Irwin's category of 'aspect-changes', which he defines as follows: 'x a-changes iff x is F in one respect, not-F in another, and x is in the same condition where it is F and when it is not-F (e.g., x is big in comparison with y, small in comparison with z).' Irwin distinguishes 'aspect-change' from 'self-change', which he defines as follows: 'x s-changes iff at time t1 x is F and at time t2 x is not-F, and x itself is not in the same condition at t2 as it was at t1' ('Plato's Heracliteanism', 5–6). But I do not agree that '*Theaet.* 155 B–C argues from aspect-change to self-change'; the conclusion at 156 E 8–157 A 2 states explicitly that things change in relation to each other, *not* in themselves.

that all perceptions, even those which we ordinarily think of as false, are in fact true?

Socrates offers two replies. First, he mentions the disputes he imagines Theaetetus has often heard people engaged in: what evidence could one point to, if someone asked at this very moment whether one is asleep and dreaming everything one has in mind, or awake and having a discussion with another (158 B 5–E 4)? These disputes consist of undecidability arguments, according to which there are no non-arbitrary ways of determining which beliefs in a set of beliefs are true and which are false. These arguments undermine Theaetetus' confidence that there is any way to tell which beliefs are true and which are false. However, they give no positive reason to suppose that all beliefs are *true*.

This is the point of Socrates' second reply, in which he uses the Secret Doctrine to argue that all beliefs and perceptions are true (158 E 5–160 E 5).[45] If Socrates ill and Socrates healthy, or Socrates dreaming and Socrates awake, are different, then they must be different in their powers to affect and be affected. It follows, Socrates claims, that the perception and perceptual property generated by a perceiver and object are unique to each episode. The argument depends on some fairly dubious but familiar assumptions taken from the Secret Doctrine: (3) that things are always changing and becoming different, and (1) that things always appear differently and in contrary ways. If Socrates dreaming and Socrates awake are indeed completely different in their powers to affect and be affected, then they will produce different offspring—e.g. sweetness and the perception of sweet—when they encounter the wine on different occasions. Both the perception and the perceived reality will shift from one encounter to another.

Now Socrates can show how the Secret Doctrine supports Protagoras' claim:

[45] Burnyeat, Bostock, and others have argued that Socrates is going for a more extreme conclusion: Theaetetus and Protagoras are ultimately committed to the total dissolution of identity of objects and perceiving subjects. The argument has progressed from the initial assumption of public objects to instability, and finally to the dissolution of objects and perceivers into bundles of momentary perceptions. For arguments against this reading see Matthen, 'Perception', and Lesley Brown, 'Understanding the *Theaetetus*: A Discussion of David Bostock, *Plato's* Theaetetus, and Myles Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*', *OSAP* 11 (1993), 199–224 at 205–9.

SOCRATES. . . . Whenever I come to be perceiving, I necessarily come to be perceiving something; because it's impossible to come to be perceiving, but not perceiving anything. And whenever it comes to be sweet, bitter, or anything of that kind, it necessarily comes to be so for someone; because it's impossible to come to be sweet, but not sweet for anyone [*γλυκὺ γάρ, μηδενὶ δὲ γλυκὺ ἀδύνατον γενέσθαι*].

THEAETETUS. That's quite so.

SOCRATES. Then what we're left with, I think, is that it's for each other that we are, if we are, or come to be, if we come to be, since necessity ties our being together, but doesn't tie it to anything else, or indeed to ourselves. So what we're left with is that we're tied to each other. It follows that, whether one uses 'be' or 'come to be' of something, one should speak of it as being, or coming to be, *for* someone or *of* someone or *in relation to* something. As for speaking of a thing as being or coming to be anything just by itself, one shouldn't do that oneself, and one shouldn't accept it from anyone else either. That's what's indicated by the argument we've been setting out. (160 A 8–C 2, trans. McDowell)

Two features of the Secret Doctrine guarantee the truth of each perception. First, perceptions and perceptual properties are necessarily tied together: it is impossible to have a perception without perceiving the property which was generated together with it, and, conversely, nothing is sweet, bitter, etc. without appearing and being sweet for someone. This is a more prosaic way of expressing Socrates' now familiar assertion that perceptual properties and perceptions are twin offspring. Furthermore, there is no room for mismatch between the perception and what it is a perception of: Socrates' perception cannot fail to be true of the object he has perceived. Second, sensible qualities are relative to perceivers, and are perceiver-dependent. At 160 B 8–9 Socrates remarks that it does not really matter whether one says of something that it 'becomes' or 'is'. Nor does it really matter whether one indicates the relations by means of the dative, genitive, or by *πρός τι*. The important thing is to avoid saying that a thing is *F* in itself. What one perceives is what is for one, i.e. the colour or sweetness which came into being in relation to one. Socrates has now made good on his promise to show how the Secret Doctrine supports Protagoras' thesis, and Theaetetus' claim in turn.

SOCRATES. Now since what acts on me is for me and not someone else, it's also the case that I, and not someone else, perceive it?

THEAETETUS. Certainly.

SOCRATES. So my perception is true for me—because it's always of the being that's mine—and, as Protagoras said, it's for me to decide, of the things which are for me, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not.

THEAETETUS. Apparently.

SOCRATES. Well, then, if I'm free from falsehood, and don't trip up in my thinking about the things which are, or come to be, how could I fail to have knowledge of the things I'm a perceiver of?

THEAETETUS. You couldn't.

SOCRATES. So you were quite right to say that knowledge is nothing but perception. The three theories have turned out to coincide [*καὶ εἰς ταὐτὸν συμπέπτωκεν*]; that all things change, like streams, as Homer and Heraclitus and all that lot say; that a man is the measure of all things, as Protagoras, the wisest of men, says; and that, these things being so [*τούτων οὕτως ἐχόντων*], knowledge proves to be perception, as Theaetetus says. (160 C 4–E 2, trans. McDowell, with modifications)

The three theses have converged to the same theory: given the truth of the Secret Doctrine and Protagoras' claim, Theaetetus' definition of knowledge comes out true.

5. Conclusion

The Secret Doctrine is introduced in the *Theaetetus* to develop and provide support for Protagoras' claim that something is the case for one if and only if it appears so to one. It contains a number of metaphysical theses couched in highly metaphorical language, which are vehicles for introducing the components needed to construct a model of perceptual properties and perception for Protagoras. This model recommends a way to think about perceptual properties and perception by analogy with relational properties. A property does not belong to anything intrinsically, but comes into and passes out of existence depending on relations which the object has with other things. Thus, as Burnyeat puts it, the Secret Doctrine offers us 'a perspicuous model for the thoroughgoing relativization which Protagoras' claim recommends' (*Introduction*, 12).

According to this model, the four elements—perceiver, perceived object, perceptual property, and perception—are 'tied together' and inseparable. Because they are generated together in each encounter between perceiver and perceived object, one cannot separate the

perception from what it is supposed to be of. Reality is tied to one's perception of it—neither one is prior to the other. Note that even if reality depends on these perceptual encounters, that does not mean it is nothing more than perceptions or ideas. We are not being presented with some kind of thoroughgoing phenomenalism or idealism, where nothing exists but one's thoughts and perceptions. As Burnyeat argues, the *Theaetetus* is remarkable because it never takes the step which modern readers might expect, that of making everything dependent on perceivers and ideas. Throughout the exposition of the Secret Doctrine, perceptions and objects of perception are generated by some independent, uncharacterizable reality.

According to the interpretation I have offered, Plato's Secret Doctrine is exploratory and somewhat unsystematic. It consists of slogans like 'nothing is one thing by itself', 'whatever is *F* will reveal itself as not-*F*', and 'everything is changing', which are used in various ways to construct a theory of perception for Protagoras. Socrates does not even try to show that Protagoras is committed to these doctrines. He uses them instead as starting-points for a defence of Protagoras. As I noted in Section 3, at least five ideas were introduced as part of the Secret Doctrine, and Socrates uses them for different purposes in different contexts. (2) is interpreted as a statement of relativism:

(2) Nothing is anything in itself, but is (or becomes) relative to some (perceiver),

and is central to Socrates' conclusion that the Secret Doctrine confirms the truth of Protagoras' claim. (1) is used at 154 A 2–9 to state the fact of conflicting appearances: anything which appears red to one person will appear otherwise to someone else. And the third,

(3) Nothing is, but is coming to be (i.e. is changing),

is used as a principle of generation to introduce and describe the four items involved in any perceptual encounter. Colours and perceivings of colours come into being and literally move around between perceiver and object without coming to rest. Eyes and perceptual objects themselves undergo relational change with respect to each other. Thus, we should avoid saying that anything is white or hot in itself, rather than in relation to some perceiver.

And we should exclude 'be' from everywhere, because it would imply that things have intrinsic properties apart from perceptual encounters. (In both Stage III and Stage IV, though, Socrates emphasizes that it is more important to avoid saying that anything has intrinsic properties like coldness *in itself* than to avoid saying that anything *is*.)

Some may see tighter connections among these theses, and among (T), (P), and the Secret Doctrine, than has been argued for in this paper. For this, further discussion of the rest of the *Theaetetus* is needed, especially of the relations between Socrates' refutations of Theaetetus' thesis, of Protagoras' claim, and of the Secret Doctrine. But even if one is sympathetic to the interpretation offered here, one might still wonder how successful the Secret Doctrine is as a strategy for developing Protagoras' claim.

It seems to me that the Secret Doctrine cannot be the only way to defend or understand Protagorean relativism—and that Plato never says that it is. The Secret Doctrine is an experiment in thinking about relativism; it is not a conclusive proof with far-reaching implications for modern-day versions of Protagoras' claim. It is simply a line of argument which Plato thinks is the most promising one to pursue for a relativist. Plato presumably wanted to undermine any reasons one might have for holding Protagoras' claim, and thought that the metaphysical principles which make up the Secret Doctrine were among a cluster of vague ideas in the air, which form part of the backdrop against which Protagoras' claim seems plausible.

If anything, the direction of implication goes the other way: Plato is not arguing that Protagoras must or ought to have been a secret Heraclitean, but that many philosophers, indeed virtually everyone except Parmenides, think and talk in ways which appear to commit them to some version of Protagorean relativism and to Theaetetus' definition of knowledge. Thus, linking the Protagorean doctrine with those background ideas provides a neat opportunity to examine—and then to demolish—those ideas themselves. If it turns out on independent grounds that Protagorean relativism is insupportable, this provides one more way to undermine these other philosophical views.

Whether Plato's strategy in constructing a defence for Protagoras will succeed is never taken for granted, and is always an open question. In one respect, it is successful, for he uses the elements

of the Secret Doctrine to construct a theory of perception which serves as a model for the kind of relativization which would make Protagoras' claim turn out true. We are offered an explanation of what it means to say that nothing is anything in itself, but is whatever it is *for* a perceiver.

However, there *is* something peculiar about the Secret Doctrine, which makes it the last experiment of its kind. Notice that each one of the five ideas presented above as component parts of the Secret Doctrine conflicts in at least two ways with Protagoras' thesis. First, each of them imposes certain linguistic prohibitions: for example, it is incorrect to say that anything is one thing by itself—for example, that the sky is blue as opposed to red. It is also incorrect to say that anything is red, period, as opposed to becoming red. If I think that the sky is *really* blue, that it is blue and *not* any other colour, and that it is blue for everyone—which is, after all, what we usually mean when we make assertions—then doesn't the Secret Doctrine say that I am, strictly speaking, mistaken? If so, then doesn't this contradict Protagoras, who was trying to tell us that we are never mistaken about anything?

Second, each one of the theses in the Secret Doctrine conflicts with Protagoras' thesis in that they make claims about how the world is, absolutely and objectively. They say that things are a certain way for everyone—for example, that everything is changing—and that this is true for all people, regardless of whether they believe it, although Protagoras seems to tell us that there are no such truths. And they are asserted as objective truths, facts about the world which obtain regardless of whether anyone believes them or not. Protagoras' thesis seems to tell us that there is no way the world is in itself, apart from how it appears to one; the Secret Doctrine seems to tell us how the world must be, in itself, for Protagoras' thesis to hold true.[46]

These are very real problems for the Secret Doctrine. The conflicts arise because the Secret Doctrine attempts to describe a world in which Protagoras' thesis holds true. They are nothing less than corollaries of Plato's proof that Protagoras' thesis conflicts with

[46] The second type of inconsistency has been noticed by Dancy, 'Theaetetus' First Baby', 62 and all of sect. 4, 74; R. A. H. Waterfield, *Plato:* Theaetetus, trans. with an essay (Harmondsworth, 1987), 151; Ketchum, 'Refutation', 81; Fine, 'Relativisms', 223 and n. 26.

itself. In his refutation of Protagoras' thesis Plato raises the question 'Does Protagoras' thesis hold whether or not anyone thinks it does?' If Protagoras says that it does, then it will follow that some beliefs are false. If Protagoras says that it does not, then he has taken back his claim that whatever seems to be the case to one is the case for one. A corollary of this problem arises for the Secret Doctrine: is the Secret Doctrine true of the world regardless of whether anyone believes it or not? Plato pointed out and articulated this very problem in his refutation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. And it is the main reason why no attempt at reviving the Secret Doctrine to describe a relativistic world could ever work.

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