Theaetetus' *logos*: The epistemic significance of λόγος in Plato's *Theaetetus*

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Abstract

Plato's *Theaetetus* is a classic text on defining knowledge. But Socrates refutes Theaetetus' all three attempted definitions of knowledge in the dialogue. The dialogue ends in aporia and does not endorse any definition of knowledge at all. For, in my view, Plato holds that we embodied human beings cannot actually arrive at true knowledge, and this means that we cannot give an adequate definition of knowledge, either. However, this is not simply a Socratic disavowal of knowledge, but a more elaborate reconsideration of the epistemic significance of

λόγος. In this paper, I will try to interpret the *Theaetetus* by exploring the rich meaning of λόγος and its epistemic significance: though the dialogue does not reach a firm definition of knowledge, the whole discussion forms a rich λόγος and reveals a long process of examining beliefs, forming a coherent web of belief and thereby a good attempt of approaching knowledge. To a certain extent, my interpretation seems coherentist. But strictly speaking, it is not a coherence theory of knowledge. For the significance of λόγος is not a successful grasp of knowledge, but to show that what we grasp is not knowledge and thus stimulate a further philosophical inquiry. With the help of λόγος, Plato leads readers on the one hand to avoid mistaking beliefs to be knowledge, and on the other hand, more constructively, to examine beliefs in an endless inquiry into knowledge, such as one conducted by Socrates and Theaetetus in the *Theaetetus.*

Keywords: Knowledge, Belief, Coherence theory, The *Theaetetus*, Plato

Theaetetus' *logos*: The epistemic significance of λόγος in Plato's *Theaetetus* [*]

To the eye of puzzled readers, Plato's *Theaetetus* is led by the question "What is knowledge?", but at the end of the dialogue, that question is left unanswered. Socrates keeps encouraging a young mathematical pupil Theaetetus to answer the question. But each time Theaetetus submits a definition of knowledge, he is subjected to cross-examination by Socrates. This happens three times. In the end all three definitions of Theaetetus prove inadequate. Among them, the third definition — "knowledge is true belief with λόγος (an account)" (201c) — reminds readers of Plato's earlier claim about knowledge in the *Meno*. That is, once beliefs could be tied down as causes with reasoning (αἰτίας λογισμῷ),[1] they become knowledge. (98a) The *Meno* thus makes it seem that we may reach knowledge by refining true beliefs with λόγος. But if

[1] As a referee points out rightly, the αἰτίας here is not in neutral pl. as accusative of respect, but is feminine, corresponds to αὐτὰς and refers to beliefs (δόξας, feminine) in the text.

this is the case, Plato in the *Theaetetus* obviously abandons the thought, since he makes Theaetetus fail in his attempt to define knowledge on these lines.

Then, what does λόγος have to do with knowledge? That is what this paper aims to investigate. Since all the definitions offered by Theaetetus fail, including the third, it is clear that λόγος does not help in defining knowledge. However, this does not mean that it is irrelevant to an inquiry about knowledge. Λόγος is a very rich word. In this paper, I will try to interpret the *Theaetetus* by exploring the rich meaning of λόγος and its epistemic significance. This will be proved consistent with Plato's earlier emphasis on λόγος, and even an improvement of the early claim.

In order to break free from the impossible mission of defining knowledge and construct my interpretation, I will treat the dialogue as a reflection on our cognitive states rather than as a search for a firm definition. Leaving aside the question whether Plato changes his mind about the epistemic significance of λόγος, the *Theaetetus* shares two noticeable characteristics with the early dialogues: first, Socrates again picks up a question of definition as he often does in the early dialogues; second, as regards literary form, the dialogue has an aporetic ending. Confronted with these points, one may try to figure out a possible definition of knowledge with the aid of Plato's metaphysics which comes from outside the *Theaetetus*, typically from the discussion on Being and Not-being in the *Sophist*, as Cornford [2] and others do. Or, one may swallow the fact that there is no definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*

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[2] This refers to Cornford, 1935.

at all, although, outside the *Theaetetus*, there is left some possibility that one may form her concept of knowledge by the aid of metaphysics. I am inclined to the latter and this will be explained in the first section of the paper.

Though the dialogue does not provide any definition of knowledge, the whole discussion reveals a long process of examining beliefs, and thereby a good attempt of approaching knowledge. A discussion can be called a "λόγος" in a common use of this Greek word. Socrates tells us at the end of the dialogue, though aporetic, the result of their long discussion is positive. (210b-c)[3] Since the positive result is surely not a successful definition, the λόγος which constitutes the process of examining beliefs acquires more significance. As far as concerns the search for the definition of knowledge, λόγος plays its role only in the discussion of Theaetetus' third definition (201c-210a) and eventually fails to complete the task. But from another point of view, doesn't the dialogue itself present a rich λόγος? In the central sections of the paper, I will read each of the three trial definitions of Theaetetus as expressing a belief, and the whole discussion including questions and answers as "the λόγος of Theaetetus." Λόγος goes through all the three definitions. It plays a role as the examining of beliefs. On the one hand, it awakens a prudent reflection that beliefs are not knowledge, and thus always in need of examination; on the other hand, it helps us to construct the interrelation among beliefs through which we are approaching knowledge.

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[3] Even in the *Theaetetus,* "λόγος" has a wide range of meanings: Plato enumerates three meanings of "λόγος" in the passage 206c-210a; besides, his explanation of "inner words" (189e-190a) extends for richer meanings of this word. This will be investigated more below.

To a certain extent, I follow the coherentist interpretation of Gail Fine. [4] Λόγος helps in constructing interrelations among beliefs. A reasonable process of examining beliefs will form a coherent web of belief. However, in the final section of the paper, I will argue that, strictly speaking, this is not a coherence theory of knowledge. For, within the scope of the *Theaetetus*, namely the contingent world in which we embodied human beings live and inquire into knowledge,[5] the help of λόγος is not a successful grasp of knowledge, but on the contrary to show that what we grasp is not knowledge and thus stimulate a further philosophical inquiry. Though the *Theaetetus* seems to be led by the question "What is knowledge? ," one of its remarkable works in fact lies in examining beliefs which will never turn out to be knowledge, no matter how coherent the set of beliefs may be. At the same time, I will compare this with the tied-down beliefs described in the *Meno,* and in this way try to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the epistemic significance of λόγος.

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[4] This refers to the view shown in Fine 1990 and 1979a, though she has not yet used the word "coherentist" in the latter.

[5] Plato in the *Phaedo* claims that we may remove ourselves from body to attain toward the true knowledge as possible but can never attain it sufficiently as long as we have the body. (*Phaedo* 66a-b) This is also the thesis underlying the theory of anamnesis in the *Meno*. In the sense, Plato's knowledge is "beyond human reach" as long as a human being has her body.

The story in the *Sophist* is probably different. But this paper will not deal with the question whether Plato revises his claim in the *Sophist*. For now, let me mention Kahn 2007 as a possible thinking line. Kahn provides his interpretation which shows that the discussion on phenomena in the *Theaetetus* paves the way for the theory of mutual connections of Forms in the *Sophist*. This revision of the theory of Forms may help in avoiding the gnostic view that knowledge belongs to beings without body. However, I will not depend on the *Sophist* when I interpret the *Theaetetus*, in order to concentrate on the significance of the *Theaetetus* in inquiring into knowledge in the contingent world.

I. Λόγος in Failed Definitions

The *Theaetetus* is rightly considered to be one of the classics concerning knowledge. The whole discussion seems to be easily subsumed under the question "What is knowledge? ." After the opening prelude, there is an introductory conversation about what a definition is. Then, in the main body of the dialogue, Theaetetus submits three definitions of knowledge which are subjected to cross-examination by Socrates. Accordingly the discussion is usually divided into three parts: 1. 151d-186e, "perception is knowledge;" 2. 187a-201c, "true belief is knowledge;" 3. 201c-210b, "true belief with an account (λόγος) is knowledge". But at the end of the dialogue, they conclude that all the three definitions fail to define knowledge, and the dialogue ends in aporia. This leaves readers in aporia, too. Since the dialogue looks clearly led by a question of definition, readers are prepared to look for a definition.

In this way, it seems quite natural to seek for a definition of knowledge between the lines. In this respect, Cornford's influential study on the *Theaetetus* (Cornford 1935) is noteworthy. His interpretation holds that the failure to define knowledge in the *Theaetetus* is caused by the absence of the Forms. The line of thinking depends on Plato's metaphysical reflection on his theory of Forms in the *Sophist* heavily. However, I want to draw attention to the value of our inquiry into knowledge even in the cases that we fail to attain knowledge when we live with the body in the contingent world, rather than to the Forms. That is, I will not follow Cornford who interprets the *Theaetetus* through the eye of

its sequel, the *Sophist*. One of the underlying issues here is whether we should understand Plato's epistemology in terms of his metaphysics.[6] In the context of Plato's *Theaetetus*, this means whether we should understand Plato's inquiry into knowledge only in terms of the Forms. If we hold a positive answer as Cornford does, we may draw a sharp distinction between belief and knowledge by means of the contrast between sensible objects and the Forms.[7] Knowledge is always of Forms, and the definitions which Theaetetus submits are all about sensible world and therefore are irrelevant to knowledge as Plato conceives it.

This thinking may be also supported especially by the analogy of the Line in the *Republic* (509d-511e), since the analogy seems to align different cognitive states with their objects very neatly.[8] Yet if we take the *Meno* into consideration, a further problem appears. What is the meaning

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[6] Cornford's view may be argued in many ways. But I consider the issue about an epistemology with or without metaphysics the most fundamental one, for it does not concern only an interpretation of Plato's texts, but also a basic principle of philosophy. At any rate, I do not mean to "refute" Cornford, but to present a different line of thinking to see how meaningful the *Theaetetus* is, in epistemology, in spite of the absence of Forms.

[7] This is a very likely development if one claims that the true knowledge must be defined in terms of the Forms. The contrast between belief (δόξα) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is an epistemological dualism. The contrast between sensible objects or becoming and the Forms or being is a metaphysical dualism. A recent essay that emphasizes such a double dualism is Kahn 2007. Kahn's Plato revises his classical theory of Forms after the *Parmenides,* but still holds some kind of metaphysical dualism that entails an epistemological dualism. Among others, an earlier essay in this array is Adalier 2001. Adalier's essay is a nice defence for Cornford's position. Adalier also interprets the problems of the *Theaetetus* in the light of ontology, though he does not emphasize the dualism as obviously as Kahn does.

[8] This is arguable, too. For example, Gail Fine rejects the "object-analysis" of the Line and provides a coherentist interpretation of Plato's knowledge in the *Republic*. (Fine 1990) J. M. Cooper disagrees with Cornford's view from another angle: he thinks that to interpret the *Theaetetus* with what we found in the *Republic* is misleading. (Cooper 1970)

when Socrates says true beliefs could be tied down and become knowledge at the *Meno* 98a? Since there is such a sharp distinction based on cognitive objects of two totally different ontological levels, the beliefs concerned with sensible objects, no matter how much they are refined, will never be tied down and become knowledge of the Forms. For the refining of beliefs will never turn the sensible objects concerned into Forms. Beliefs are destined to be beliefs. It makes no difference whether they are accompanied by an account. Then, on this line of thinking, Plato's earlier requirement of λόγος in the *Meno* becomes meaningless, and so does the discussion of the third definition which adds λόγος to true belief of the second definition.

Will it be more meaningful if we read Plato's *Theaetetus* as providing an epistemology independent from his metaphysics?[9] This is not to suggest that epistemology is irrelevant to metaphysics, nor that knowledge, as conceived by Plato, is irrelevant to the Forms, but rather that it is possible to have an epistemological discussion of knowledge in merely epistemological terms. On this reading, the distinction between belief and knowledge can be understood in a different way. The distinction is sharp because belief and knowledge are two different cognitive states. But, although it is impossible for sensible objects to turn out to be Forms, we must remember that there is a wide range of beliefs. Although our beliefs may all involve the sensible world, they are not destined to be all the same.

Plato does not clearly proclaim that knowledge cannot be defined, but

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[9] Waterfield considers this as a "breakthrough" that appears in the *Theaetetus*—"epistemology has been freed from ontology." (Waterfield, 2004: 246)

it is a fact that he does not endorse any definition in the text. As said in the introductory section above, there is left some possibility outside the *Theaetetus*, that one may form her concept of knowledge by the aid of metaphysics. However, the *Theaetetus* exhibits Plato's deep thoughts concerning beliefs which we form in the contingent world. Actually, both beliefs (even false ones) and λόγος play indelible parts in the discussion in the dialogue. In the following sections, I will not call on the Forms nor search for a successful definition of knowledge dependent on metaphysics, but emphasize how a λόγος makes difference among beliefs. This may make better sense of Plato's effort in the failed definitions.

II. Λόγος of Examining Beliefs

When Theaetetus has understood what Socrates means by "definition," but lacks confidence to suggest his own definition of knowledge, Socrates encourages him: "You must try hard in every way to grasp an account about knowledge and the rest: what it ever happens to be. (προθυμήθητι δὲ παντὶ τρόπῳ τῶν τε ᾽άλλων πέρι καὶ ἐπιστήμης λαβεῖν λόγον τί ποτε τυγχάνει ᾽όν.)" (148d)[10] I believe that this is exactly what the whole discussion in the dialogue is doing.

The "λόγον" ("statement" or "account") here is not merely a simple expression[11] of "knowledge," nor is itself knowledge. For Theaetetus

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[10] On the translation, I thank the anonymous referee who provides good suggestions which fit my emphasis on the epistemic richness of λόγος well.

[11] "λαβεῖν λόγον" is normally translated as some verbal expression: e.g. "getting a statement" in Levett, 1990: 267, "to grasp a speech" in Benardete, 1986: I.11, "finding a

does not know what knowledge is. Each definition offered by Theaetetus can be at best a true belief, which is waiting to be examined. These definitions come from beliefs, and they are very likely to be false. But Socrates encourages Theaeteus to state his beliefs even though they are likely to be false. The "λαβεῖν λόγον" (to grasp an account) here is not merely a simple expression of "belief" either. For Socrates is not asking for a bare answer, but an answer with some kind of account. Otherwise, there would be no questions after Theaetetus submits his answer. Nor is an account a bare expression of "belief." It is waiting to be examined, too. Socrates' continuous questions lead Theaetetus to give an account for each belief he submits, including beliefs involved in his account.

All the attempted definitions are interrelated in this way. After the definition "perception is knowledge" has been abandoned, Plato introduces "belief" into the discussion because the call for an account of "belief" has emerged in the examination of the first definition; and after the definition "true belief is knowledge" has been abandoned, he introduces "true belief with an account" into the discussion because the call for "an account" of any kind of belief has emerged in the examination of the second definition. This constitutes a continuous process of examining beliefs.

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definition that tells us…" in Chappell, 2005: 40, "to express" in Waterfield, 2004: 25, and so on. But "to gain an understanding" in Fowler, 1987: 29, "to get hold of an account" in McDowell, 1973: 11, are also nice translations. Though it is reasonable to read this phrase as a simple expression, it is still possible for the word "λόγον" here to have as rich a meaning as (or even richer than) in Theaetetus' third definition in the dialogue.

1. From "perception is knowledge" to "true belief is knowledge"

Theaetetus' second definition "true belief is knowledge" has been gradually brought to light while Socrates examines his first definition. A rough way to trace it is to check occurrences of the nouns "δόξα", "δόξασμα" and the verb "δοξάζω."[12] In 151d-186e, "δόξα," "δόξασμα" and "δοξάζω" occur in many passages.[13] These terms first appear in the discussion of the idea that knowledge is perception and the Protagorean theory that is drawn from it. Initially therefore they appear to refer to perceptual appearances, but by 170a-171c they include other kinds of belief. The fact that beliefs may conflict is presented as a prima facie refutation of Protagoras. It is noticeable that in the agreement "not every belief of everyone is true" (179b-c), the term "belief" strategically excludes the beliefs of direct perception.[14]

When we scrutinize the contexts where these terms occur, we will find that Socrates gradually leads the discussion to go beyond beliefs of direct perception, and extends to beliefs about health, music, laws and justice, and even some metaphysical issues like identity (the same or the other, similar or dissimilar) and "οὐσία (being)."[15] Finally, by asking

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[12] In order to limit the checking to a modest extent, some relevant words are not considered here. For example, "δοκέω with a dative", "οἴομαι" and suchlike are ignored.

[13] They are found at 158b, 158e, 161d-162a, 167a, 170a-171c, 172b, 178c-d, 179b-c.

[14] As for belief immediately according to perception, the agreement is more difficult to prove, as Socrates observes here (and at 171 e), though it is not necessary to mean that Plato does not agree with it in the case of belief immediately according to perception.

[15] This seems a highly metaphysical word. However, in the present context 151d-186e, it is something with which belief is concerned. If one connects this word with concepts like "existence," "true being" and "the Form," it will be very confusing that we have belief (rather than knowledge) of "οὐσία" here. Perhaps this is why Cornford appeals to "a certain ambiguity" when he comments on 186a. (Cornford, 1935: 108-109) Thus I suggest that even

whether we perceive things "with the senses (in dative)" or "through the senses (δία with a genitive)" (184b), Socrates raises issues of the identity, likeness and "οὐσία" (185a ff.) and disentangles belief from perception. By the disentanglement of belief and perception, the discussion on perception is directed towards the cognitive faculty of forming belief at 187a, and "belief" becomes the next theme.

2. From "true belief is knowledge" to "true belief with an account is knowledge"

Theaetetus' second attempt is "true belief is knowledge." However, this part of the discussion in fact concerns "belief"— not only true beliefs, but also false ones. "Not every belief of everyone is true" is an important point of agreement. When people confront the conflict among beliefs, and the fact that not all beliefs are true, it becomes crucial to discern true from false. The step Plato takes here is to clarify how false beliefs are formed. So this part of the discussion is mainly an analysis of false belief, in spite of its title "true belief is knowledge."[16]

Speaking in a simplified way, Theaetetus' third definition seems no more than a minor revision of his second definition. That is, revising "true belief" by adding a phrase "μετὰ λόγου (with an account)." (201c)

"οὐσία" may hint at some metaphysical meaning, it should be understood in an epistemological context here. That is, how we "form beliefs" about whether one thing is similar or dissimilar to another and such kind of questions. There is nothing to prevent us from forming beliefs on these matters.

[16] About why falsity becomes the topic here, there is an interpretation in a context of practicing midwifery: see Sedley, 2004: 118-120.

"Λόγος" is the keyword of Theaetetus' third definition. The keyword of the second definition "belief (δόξα)" has significant occurrences in the examination of the first definition. Similarly, the keyword of the third definition "λόγος" also plays a special role in the examination of the second definition. It cannot be ignored that Socrates calls the activity of thinking "λόγον." (189e) The process of forming belief is vividly described as an inner dialogue. In other words the soul converses with herself. The soul questions herself and also answers by herself. Thus Plato [17] defines "τὸ δοξάζειν (to form belief)" as "λέγειν (to talk)" and defines "τὴν δόξαν (the belief)" as "λόγον εἰρημένον (words being said) ." (190a)

Read within its context, the core task in this part of discussion is to explain how false beliefs come about. The appeal to "λόγος" does not solve this puzzle. The passage examines the idea that false belief is to be explained as the interchange of beliefs. Plato's argument here is as follows:

(1) We do have false beliefs.

(2) False belief is interchange of beliefs.

(3) To form beliefs is like a soul speaking to herself.

(4) It is impossible for one to say to herself that A is B.[18]

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[17] I follow Chappell that "unlike many of the other assumptions in 187-201, this model of thought is obviously Plato's own." (Chappell, 2005: 167 n. 132) Cf. Plato's metaphor of inner words in the *Sophist* and *Philebus* (see below).

[18] "A is B" represents any identity statement that is discussed in the misidentification puzzle at 187e-188c as well as the interchange puzzle at 189b-190e. A and B could possibly be particular objects, and could also be general terms. Cf. Burnyeat, 1990: 323 n. 43, though Burnyeat seems inclined to read them as general terms. Whether they are general terms will

(5) Conclusion from 3 and 4: it is impossible for one to have false beliefs.

(1 is presumed since 187d; 2, 3, 4, 5 are all to be found in 189b-190e.)

Thus the problem remains. There is no satisfactory account to explain how false beliefs come about. Besides, the conclusion contradicts 1. Since all these depend on the assumption that "true belief is knowledge," one may use the contradiction to construct a reductio ad absurdum or an indirect refutation of one of 1-5, or of the assumption itself.[19] But a more direct result is, as it seems to me, that we are still unable to find a satisfactory way to discern true beliefs from false ones.

Returning to Plato's argument, the premise 4 is not convincing, unless one is sure what A refers to, and what B refers to, and says A is B. But how could one be sure what A is and what B is? Has the person concerned conversed with herself about A and B before she says A is B? If one forms a belief in a very short time,[20] perhaps too short to have a real conversation inside with herself, she is more likely to form a false

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make some difference in an analysis on subject and predicate in a sentence of such kind of false belief. Cf. Bostock's reply to Ackrill's interpretation in Bostock, 1988: 170-174.

[19] The rejection of the assumption is suggested in Burnyeat, 1990: 66 and Fine, 1979b. (And Fine constructs a further proof against the acquaintance model of knowledge by denying Theaetetus' second definition.)

[20] How long a time it takes to form a belief does matter. It can be shown in 172b-177c, where Plato emphasizes a contrast between philosophers and law-court experts: philosophers do not care to spend time when they are pursuing the truth, while law-court experts need to persuade audience to form beliefs in a short time which is limited by water-clock. The importance of "leisure" is mentioned again at 187d, through Theaetetus' mouth.

belief than in the case when she converses with herself for a long time.

The image of the inner dialogue is very nice. But how far does the inner dialogue go? In other words: what does "λόγος" mean? According to Plato's description of the inner "λόγος" at 189e-190a, a "λόγος" can be merely a simple utterance, an affirmation, a denial, a question, an answer, a series of questions and answers, a short or long process of conversation and so on. But the richness of this description is not investigated here, nor is it applied to the case of false belief. The inner λόγος here may have reference to the *Sophist* 263e-264a and the *Philebus* 38c-39c.[21] In the passage of *Philebus*, Plato uses the image of the writer writing words in the soul (similarly the painter painting pictures in the soul) to describe how one forms her beliefs. In the passage of *Sophist*, he uses the image of the dialogue within the soul to argue that thought and "λόγος" are the same and mentions two meanings of "λόγος." One is utterance, and the other is affirmation and denial. Both passages provide an image of inner λόγος. But for the rich meaning of "λόγος" in forming beliefs, the most relevant text should be the discussion of Theaetetus' third definition.[22] The meaning of "λόγος" asks to be explored more fully when the discussion reaches the third definition "true belief with λόγος."

On this reading, the "λόγος" mentioned in the discussion of Theaetetus' second definition, though it does not solve the false belief puzzle, establishes an important connection between "λόγος" and belief,

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[21] Cf. Chappell, 2005: 167 n. 132; Sedley, 2004: 130; Waterfield, 2004: 96 n.3. Sedley also mentions the *Timaeus* 37b.

[22] Cornford mentions the *Sophist* passage (1935: 118 n. 1) and in his note for the *Sophist* 263e, he makes a reference to the *Theaetetus* 206d. (318 n. 1) That is the first meaning of "λόγος" among three in the examination of Theaetetus' third definition. But I expect a richer meaning.

and also leads towards a deeper investigation into the rich meaning of "λόγος."

III. Belief Μετὰ Λόγου

Theaetetus' three trial definitions are submitted as beliefs, and Socrates' examination draws out many accounts from Theaetetus and even from Theodorus who is reluctant to answer questions. It is a discussion among discrete individuals. One may of course imagine a similar examination occurring inside one's soul. According to Plato's image of belief as inner "λόγος," the long process of examining beliefs may be considered as a kind of "λόγος" as well as an interweaving of beliefs. The discussion proceeds from perception to belief and from belief to "λόγος". It seems that Plato returns to his earlier view that knowledge requires an account.[23] However, the *Theaetetus* rejects the claim that knowledge is true belief with an account.

"Λόγος" is the key word of Theaetetus' third definition. But, to be fair, even in this part of discussion, the rich meaning of "λόγος" is not exhausted. Plato only examines three meanings of "λόγος" in this part of the discussion. They are firstly, a vocal utterance (206d-e), secondly, going through the elements of a compound (206e-208b), and thirdly, signifying some distinguishing mark that makes a thing different from

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[23] It is a common claim in Plato's early dialogues (and in the transitional dialogue *Meno*), called KL in Fine, 1979a and Fine, 1990. "L" stands for λόγος. It is called KR in Waterfield, 2004: 228 ff., where "R" stands for a rational account.

others (208c-210a). Some dialectical meanings mentioned at 189e-190a, like a certain kind of conversation within the soul itself, asking questions and answering, are not included. Just as the appeal to "λόγος" does not solve the false belief puzzle, it does not accomplish a final definition of knowledge, either. However, just as it promotes the transition from the second stage of discussion to the third, so it promotes a transition from the examination of Theaetetus' third definition, towards a reflection on our concept of knowledge.

In the last part of the dialogue, Plato examines three meanings of "λόγος" to see whether a true belief with each kind of "λόγος" can turn out to be knowledge. In each case the answer is negative. Though the *Theaetetus* ends in aporia, Socrates in this dialogue makes a positive claim:[24] Theaetetus, if he becomes pregnant, will have something better, and if he is empty, will have "self-knowledge"[25] not thinking himself to know what he does not know. (210b-c) The latter half of this positive claim responds to Socrates' earlier comment about their inquiry: they will either find the object of their inquiry, or they will be less inclined to think themselves to know what they do not know at all. (187b-c) It is clear that a final definition of knowledge is never the only aim of the discussion.

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[24] In Sedley's words, "the overall effect of Socrates' midwifery is nevertheless beneficial". Sedley also makes a reference to the historic Socrates' lifelong practice of such midwifery. (2004: 36-37) But I do not follow Sedley's main claim that Socrates is the midwife of Platonism (importantly referring to Plato's metaphysics) in interpreting the *Theaetetus*.

[25] On the word "σωφρόνως" here, I follow Waterfield's reference to "knowledge of knowledge" in the *Charmides* (166e). He reminds readers that this definition is rejected in the *Charmides*. (2004: 130 n. 1) But a rejected false belief is still worthy of considering, as the three rejected definitions of knowledge here.

The alternative aim of preventing one from thinking oneself to know what one does not know is achieved successfully. It is achieved through a long discussion of defining knowledge that leads the interlocutors as well as readers to reflect on their concept of knowledge. Through Plato's image of belief as inner "λόγος," the long discussion may provide a much better meaning of "λόγος" than an explicit final definition, and also better than each "λόγος" of the three that Plato examines.

Suppose there is a final definition of knowledge, does the definition itself provide knowledge, or merely a belief no matter whether it is true or false, with an account or without? Returning to the introductory passage of the whole discussion, where Socrates clarifies what kind of definition he is asking, the example he gives of a definition is that "clay would be earth mixed with moisture." (147c) It is a short sentence. One who accepts the definition may form a belief about clay without any further account [26] (except a "λόγος" in the sense of a simple vocal utterance) in a very short time. Socrates also appreciates Theaetetus' definition of "surds". (147e-148b) It is longer compared with the definition of "clay," but still quite short compared with their long discussion on the definition of knowledge. Socrates states his standard for a definition as "ταύτας πολλὰς οὐσας 'ενὶ εἰδει περιέλαβες (to seize around these things being many within one form)", and asks for a definition of knowledge as "τὰς

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[26] Bostock calls this "the lower-level knowledge ('tacit' or 'inarticulate')" and says that "there is no call to say that we need an explicit account of earth and of water", provided an ordinary everyday understanding of earth, water and mixing. (1988: 33-34) I call it belief. I feel unsecured to call it "knowledge". For the "tacit" and the so-called "ordinary" "everyday" understanding often fails to be ordinary for people. We may find many cases of misunderstanding caused by the "tacit" knowledge in our everyday life.

πολλὰς ἐπιστήμας ʿενὶ λόγῳ προσειπεῖν (to address the many kinds of knowledge within one sentence)." (148d) The "λόγος" here means one sentence, or at most one single statement. The definition of clay, the definition of surds, and Theaetetus' three trial definitions of knowledge are each trying to make such a single statement. But when one hears such a single statement, without a further "λόγος," without any presumed knowledge about the thing being defined, she can form only a belief that she does not have sufficient knowledge to say whether it is true or false. If the thing in question is something we do not know, when we are provided a definition, we need to examine it since it may very possibly be a false belief.[27] The examination Socrates undertakes in their conversation (or a similar examination running silently inside one's soul) is a long "λόγος". Λόγος may hopefully help one to exclude false beliefs. Socrates is proud that the greatest and finest work of his midwifery is to discern true from false. (150 b) This is not what a final definition can offer.

I do not mean to save Theaetetus' third definition by suggesting a richer meaning of "λόγος." The main weakness of the third definition is circularity. That is, when we define knowledge as true belief with an account, the definiendum "knowledge" appears in the definiens, since an account consists of knowledge. Plato obviously uses the circularity to object to the third definition with the third meaning of "λόγος."

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[27] In the cases of clay and surds, if we do not have relevant knowledge, we may likewise take false beliefs as definitions. One may be curious why Socrates accepts the definitions of clay and surds without examination, but not of knowledge. Bostock's distinction between "the lower-level" and "higher-level knowledge" is one possible reply. (Ibid.) My reply is simply that Plato does not care whether the definitions of clay and other things are true or false as much as the inquiry of knowledge. For to find out knowledge is "μάλα γε τῶν ἀκροτάτων (the greatest among the topmost things)". (148c)

(208c-210a) Further, perhaps not so obviously, all three meanings of "λόγος" that Plato examines suffer the same problem.[28] For the first, true belief with a vocal utterance, we can claim that it is knowledge only if the utterance expresses some knowledge. For the second, true belief with a list of elements, the list can convert our true belief into knowledge only if we have knowledge about those elements. As for the third, true belief with signifying a distinguishing mark, Plato clearly points out that we have knowledge only if we already have the knowledge of that distinguishing mark. Therefore, in the cases where we do not have knowledge, we cannot make true belief with an account become knowledge. We are troubled by the dilemma that either we call for knowledge in the definiens or we stay with beliefs forever.

Even a long dialectical "λόγος" will fall into the circularity problem that makes Theaetetus' third definition fail. The same question can be inserted at every point of the long discussion: is this already knowledge? Once the answer is "yes", we have a circle; but if all the answers are "no," no matter how long the "λόγος" is and how thorough the examination in the "λόγος" is, we still stay with beliefs.

So, in the sense of defining knowledge, Plato does not return to the claim that knowledge requires an account. This claim is not sufficient for a definition of knowledge. But it is worth noting that for the question I

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[28] At this point, I totally agree with Bostock that the circularity objection "appears to apply whatever view we take of what an 'account' should be". (Ibid. 237) His observation that "many other accounts of what knowledge is are open to a similar charge of circularity" (including the once popular definition of knowledge by three conditions that is objected in Gettier's famous article "Is justified true belief knowledge?" (1963: 121-3)) is noteworthy. (238-9)

asked above, "Does a final definition of knowledge itself provide knowledge?", the answer is "no". In our inquiry into knowledge it is not necessary to aim for a final definition; belief μετὰ λόγου (with an account) is more fertile. However, an embarrassing fact is that a "λόγος" in the sense of a thorough examination cannot offer knowledge, either.

IV. Λόγος without Knowledge

Let us make a brief review: if we still remain with beliefs, how does the "λόγος" benefit us in our inquiry into knowledge? In the passage cited above we learn that the greatest and finest work of Socratic midwives is to discern true from false. (150b) The inquiry into knowledge in the *Theaetetus* has two aims: either to find the object of our inquiry, i.e. what knowledge is, or to ask ourselves whether we take ourselves to know what we do not in fact know. (187b-c) Though "λόγος" cannot offer us knowledge, it may help us to discern true from false, and it makes us less likely to suppose that we know what we do not know. Both are more important in the inquiry into knowledge than a final definition would be if there was such a thing.

However, the important benefits of "λόγος" are limited.

Notice that Socratic midwifery which discerns true from false is strongly connected with a reflection on our lack of knowledge. We shall not be misled by Theaetetus' third definition that true belief with an account is knowledge. By the third definition, it seems that we have some true belief, and then add an account. But the account by its very nature leads us to examine whether the belief is true. We do not know the belief

in question is true before we examine the relevant account accompanied with it and thus we always need "λόγος" in the sense of examining belief to discern true from false, or strictly speaking, not to take false beliefs blindly since truth probably can never be assured. If one thinks oneself to know what she does not know, there is no room for discerning true from false, and she may judge a belief to be true before she examines it. Not thinking oneself to know what she does not know is a necessary condition for practicing the Socratic midwifery. Only if we do not think ourselves to have knowledge at all, we earn more opportunities to discern true beliefs from false ones. However, this does not endorse that we will definitely find the truth. The task of discerning true from false may be never completed. But in order not to accept false beliefs and think they are true beliefs or even knowledge, one should make efforts to discern true from false. In the sense that we are less likely to accept false beliefs blindly, given the agreement that knowledge cannot be false beliefs (187b), we can achieve a closer approach to knowledge.

Our beliefs approach more closely to knowledge but they never become knowledge. When we undertake the task of discerning true from false, we examine our web of belief through a long "λόγος." In speaking of "a web of belief" I am very close to a coherentist interpretation. But for Plato, it is not appropriate to directly define knowledge in terms of a coherent web of belief as a modern coherentist might do, because we shall not suppose ourselves to have knowledge. Beliefs in the process of examination cannot be regarded as pieces of knowledge.

Consider Fine's coherentist concept of KBK [29] — on this

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[29] The term KBK is introduced in Fine, 1979a: 99; 1990: 253.

interpretation, knowledge, for Plato, must be based on knowledge. That is, knowledge requires mutually supporting accounts which coherently connect every piece of knowledge with each other. In modern epistemological terms, the mutually supporting accounts provide justification of our beliefs and emphasize a holistic conception of knowledge. This point of view treats knowledge as a whole. Each piece of knowledge cannot be understood in isolation. Thus knowledge is not tied down by a certain single vision towards an isolated Form (and therefore there will not be a one-to-one correspondence between what is known and some real entity concerned as the correspondence theory of knowledge may suppose). Knowledge requires very rich explanatory accounts which interweave pieces of knowledge into a whole. This is Fine's interrelation model of knowledge. The model is introduced in her discussion on the dream theory passage (201d-206b) and is defended by Plato's circularity objection in the three meanings of "λόγος" passage (206c-210a).[30] In the interrelation model of knowledge, circularity can be virtuous if it interrelates beliefs or pieces of knowledge correctly. Further, circularity is necessary if what we grasp is meant to be knowledge, because different pieces of knowledge are not isolated from each other, but need to be understood within an interrelated context.

The concept of KBK and the interrelation model of knowledge are attractive in the following aspects. First, they are perfectly compatible with KL.[31] The "λόγος" that knowledge requires in KL is the account that

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[30] Fine, 1979a: 111 ff.

[31] I. e. Knowledge requires an account. See n. 23 above.

locates or interrelates what is at issue within a systematic framework of KBK.[32] Λόγος plays a significant role here because it helps us to explain and thus to interrelate different elements within the holistic knowledge. Second, according to KBK, the circularity is not really a problem. There may be some virtuous circularity when we do not simply define knowledge by knowledge, but relate them to each other in an account-giving process.[33] Both these points show the significance of λόγος which I aim to emphasize. However, I hesitate to agree with Fine when she says in her conclusion, "If the circle of our beliefs is sufficiently large, and the interconnections suitably comprehensive, the links in the circle are transformed from true beliefs into pieces of knowledge."[34] Is it fair to interpret knowledge, as Plato understands it, by a "sufficiently large" "circle" of beliefs?

The requirement of "sufficiently large" circle might be misleading if one is bound to draw a distinction between belief and knowledge by it. Even the largest circle of beliefs is not knowledge. The largest circle I can assume in theory is a "maximal consistent set" of beliefs. A "maximal

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[32] The view is stated in Fine, 1979a. Fine applies the same view to the *Republic* V-VII, and argues straightforwardly that Plato is not a foundationalist, but a coherentist. (Fine, 1990: 255 ff.) She strengthens her view that "knowledge requires, not a vision, and not some special sort of certainty or infallibility, but sufficiently rich, mutually supporting, explanatory accounts". (Ibid. 259) There, "certainty" or "infallibility" seems to be in a negative sense. This may be compared with her interpretation on Protagoras' doctrine in the *Theaetetus.* She calls it "infallibilism". See Fine, 1996: 105-133. The reluctance for "infallibility" is also consistent with her coherentist position. Her interpretation is very charming especially on the compatibility of KL and KBK. But I am not sure whether knowledge does not require certainty and infallibility. For Plato obvious points out that knowledge is different from belief by its "infallibility" at the *Republic* 477e.

[33] Fine, 1979a: 116-118.

[34] Ibid. 118.

consistent set" of beliefs is a consistent set of beliefs to which no belief can be added without inconsistency. That is, the set has got all beliefs it can take.[35] It is logically possible that we examine our beliefs through a very long "λόγος" and finally, having examined all beliefs and excluded inconsistency, we have a maximal consistent set of beliefs. The process is as follows. Once a new belief comes to our mind, we may examine it within our web of belief. We accept it if it is consistent with others; we dismiss it if it is inconsistent with others (or we accept it but dismiss some given beliefs that are inconsistent with it). The same work can be repeated again whenever a new belief comes to mind, and finally we form a maximal consistent set. Because the set takes in all beliefs it can take, there is no room to add any new belief. This means that there is no more belief that may cause inconsistency and thus the set arrives at "infallibility." However, this is practically impossible. Examination needs time. Before we thoroughly examine a belief, there a new belief will come to mind. The examination is not merely limited in the respect of time. It is also limited in the respect of scope. It is simply impossible for one to consider everything. Then the set of beliefs is always fallible. Besides, even if we achieved a maximal consistent set, we are still not sure whether beliefs in such set are true. False beliefs may be perfectly consistent with each other, but they cannot be knowledge. The goal of our inquiry into knowledge is beyond human reach.[36]

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[35] This is based on the definition of "a maximal p-consistent set of PS" in Hunter, 1973: 108. ("P-consistent" is proof-theoretically consistent; "PS" is a formal system for propositional logic.) Coherence requires more than consistence. So any set of coherent beliefs will not be larger than it.

[36] As for the epistemic limit for us embodied human beings, also see n. 5.

In the text, Plato does indeed use circularity to object to Theaetetus' third definition. (210a) Fine's interpretation reduces the strength of Plato's objection, and reads his objection as a hidden suggestion. Accordingly, she does not take the aporetic ending of the *Theaetetus* seriously.[37] Such a reading is awkward because it turns an obvious objection and a genuine aporia into subtle hints of a positive conclusion that is far from obvious. Moreover, the general questions for any form of coherentism remain: "How large does the circle of our beliefs have to be before it can be considered 'sufficiently large'?"[38] and "How can beliefs become knowledge if there is no clear criterion for 'sufficiently large'?." The large circle may always be composed of beliefs based on beliefs (BBB), not knowledge based on knowledge (KBK).

The circularity problem, thus confronts us with the dilemma mentioned earlier: either we fall into a circular account of knowledge or we stay with beliefs forever. According to my reading shown above, we should stay with beliefs instead of falling into a circular account of knowledge. It cannot be obliterated that Plato uses circularity to object to Theaetetus' definition, suggesting that the circularity is considered as a kind of weakness. So it is clear that Plato will not accept a definition of knowledge if it commits circularity. As shown in my section III, though

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[37] Fine, 1979a: 117. Differently from Fine, I take the aporetic ending very seriously. I agree with Fine that Plato's "ostensible conclusion here does not indicate genuine loss." But it is because Socrates successfully makes Theaetetus less thinking himself to know what he does not know, it is not a loss. As for the definition of knowledge, surely Plato does not provide any definite answer but aporia.

[38] Fine considers this problem. She mentions that Armstrong (1973: 156) asks the question about such a criterion. Though she seems quite confident about the approach, she agrees that it is not easy to point out the criterion. (Fine, 1979a: 122 n. 32)

there is a wide range of meanings of λόγος, "true belief with λόγος" can never define knowledge because it always commits circularity. Due to this, an interrelated circle of knowledge cannot be the proper answer for "What is knowledge?." This fits the aporetic ending of our dialogue. So, we shall not understand "circularity" in too positive a sense on the issue "What is knowledge?". On the other hand, it can be emphasized again that we shall not suppose that we have knowledge, when in fact we do not. This is important, because this is at any rate the noticeable success that Socrates achieves after such a long "λόγος" in the dialogue. We do not have knowledge. Even if we examine our beliefs for long and interrelate them within a large circle, we shall not suppose that the circle constitutes knowledge. Thus I abandon the circularity of knowledge. The result is that all we have are only beliefs.

Does this contradict the *Meno*? When will beliefs be really tied down (δεθῶσι) and become stable (μόνιμοι), as Plato says at the *Meno* 98a? Let us ask the question and examine our belief about the *Meno.* The text does not deny that knowledge is unattainable.[39] The text obviously says "ἐπειδὰν δὲ δεθῶσι (whenever they could be tied down)". The temporal conjunction and the subjunctive mood do not promise us that we can really attain knowledge. Socrates does not warrant that such tied down beliefs do exist. Even if one tries her best to examine beliefs by a lifetime

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[39] Weiss concludes the unattainability of knowledge in a different context. Cf. Weiss, 2001. Waterfield doubts her interpretation for several reasons. Among them, he says "since Plato says at 98a that true belief can be converted into knowledge… Weiss has to deny the obvious meaning of these words". (Waterfield, 2005: xxxix) But I shall point out that the obvious meaning of those words is not necessarily against Weiss.

of examination,[40] firstly she cannot complete examining all possible beliefs, and secondly she cannot make sure her coherent beliefs are true. Therefore, her set of beliefs will never become knowledge.

This is not to frustrate our inquiry into knowledge. On the contrary, we shall be encouraged to submit beliefs bravely and examine them with λόγος. Just because the inquiry into knowledge is endless, it always requires λόγος. Our beliefs must constantly be subjected to a λόγος as Theaetetus' beliefs to his λόγος in the dialogue. Remember the positive result in the *Theaetetus*. Such kind of positive result comes from a long "λόγος" of questions and answers, spoken out among people or silent inside one's soul. The longer our "λόγος" is, the more beliefs are examined, and the set of beliefs becomes larger. A large consistent set of beliefs differs from a small one. When the set becomes larger, it becomes more difficult to keep its consistency, more difficult to keep its coherence, and thus requires a longer and longer λόγος. The epistemic significance of "λόγος" is on the one hand, to urge us to discern true from false especially in the case that truth can never be assured, because it is always possible for our beliefs to be false, and on the other hand to make us less prone to think that we know what we do not know, because no one really attains knowledge. It is not frustrating that we stay with beliefs and form a circle of beliefs based on beliefs. In the process, constructively, every belief deserves to be examined, even a false one. In fact, we never know

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[40] Again, when we say "a lifetime of examination," it refers to our inquiry of knowledge in this contingent world. (Cf. n. 5 above) Weiss considers Socrates as such an example. Even if Socrates ties beliefs "by arguments of iron and adamant," (*Gorgias* 509a) even at the end of his life after a lifelong practice of elenchus, (*Crito*) these beliefs cannot be counted as knowledge. (Weiss, 2001: 158-159 and n. 62)

whether a belief is true or false. But in the long endless examination, we are performing our task of discerning true from false, reducing our tendency to think that we know what we do not know. In other words we are encouraged by Plato to submit our beliefs to examination, just as Theaetetus is encouraged to do by Socrates.

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泰鄂提得斯的「說明」：「λόγος」在柏拉圖《泰鄂提得斯》中的知識意涵

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摘要

　　柏拉圖的《泰鄂提得斯》主要在探討知識的定義。但文中，泰鄂提得斯對知識所提出的三個定義，全都被蘇格拉底否決了。最後對話以「無解」作終。本文試圖解釋：這是因為柏拉圖認為舉凡活著的人都是無法真正達臻「知識」的，這表示，我們根本不可能提出對「知識」的恰當定義；然而，這篇對話並不是單純重複所謂「蘇格拉底對知識的否認」，而是在對「λόγος／說明」的知識意涵作更進一步的審思。「λόγος」無法用來定義知識，但豐富的哲學的「λόγος」卻能引領我們，一方面避免把錯誤信念當作知識，另方面持續檢驗信念的真假，朝向永不終止的對知識的探尋。

關鍵詞：知識、信念、融貫論、《泰鄂提得斯》、柏拉圖