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PLATO ON PERCEPTION AND 'COMMONS'

On the face of it, Plato's treatment of aisthesis is decidedly ambiguous. Sometimes he treats aisthesis as a faculty which, though distinct from all rational capacities, is nonetheless capable of forming judgments such as 'This stick is bent' or 'The same thing is hard and soft'. In the *Theaetetus*, however, he appears to separate aisthesis from judgment, isolating the former from all propositional, identificatory and recognitional capacities. The dilemma is easily expressed: Is perception a judgmental or cognitive capacity, or is it a non-judgmental, non-cognitive capacity? If the former, how does perception differ from belief? If the latter, is perception a faculty of the rational or irrational soul? Not surprisingly, the topic has received much scrutiny over the years. And equally unsurprisingly, the debate has turned as much on what it means for a capacity to be judgmental, cognitive, non-judgmental or non-cognitive, as on whether Plato says that it is of either kind.[1]

I believe that only in the *Timaeus* does Plato clearly say what kind of capacity aisthesis is. In the first section of this paper I argue that, according to the *Timaeus*, aisthesis is a non-cognitive capacity of the irrational soul whose objects are limited to the so-called special sensibles, e.g. colours, tastes, sounds, etc. In the next three sections of the paper I defend this interpretation and explore its implications, primarily through examination of the bewildering argument at 184–6 of the *Theaetetus*, and secondarily through consideration of alternative reconstructions of Plato's account of aisthesis based on this passage. I agree with those who see here a denial that aisthesis is a judgmental or cognitive capacity: aisthesis has no access to being nor to any of the so-called common constituents of thoughts. However, I see in this passage not just a denial that aisthesis has access to these commons, but also a denial that aisthesis has access to *any* of the constituents of thoughts, including those constituents which correspond to the special sensibles. I shall refer to the constituents of thoughts or beliefs as 'concepts'. In my view, therefore, aisthesis has access neither to common concepts such as being nor *special* concepts such as the concepts of red, bitter, etc. In keeping with this line of reasoning, I contend that the argument at 184–6 is both about the difference between perception and belief and about two different kinds of concepts, those for which there are no perceptible analogues, the so-called commons, and those for which there are perceptible analogues, the concepts of the special sensibles.[2]

[1] Throughout the paper I use 'aisthesis', 'perception' and 'sensation' (and similarly their cognates) interchangeably. I do not think that Plato distinguishes sensation from perception. Four of the more important recent papers are those of J. Cooper, 'Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (*Theaetetus* 184–6)', *Phronesis* 15 (1970), 123–46; M. Burnyeat, 'Plato on The Grammar of Perceiving', *CQ* 26 (1976), 29–51; D. Modrak, 'Perception and Judgment in the *Theaetetus*', *Phronesis* 26 (1981), 35–54; and M. Frede, 'Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues', in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis, 1987), pp. 3–8. Frede's paper, though delivered in 1973, was only published as recently as 1987.

[2] By 'concept' I mean nothing very elaborate. Concepts are the mental analogues of words, the elements of the language of thought. The guiding force behind the notion that thought is language is that the aboutness or meaning of words and the aboutness or intentionality of thought are either the same relation or so closely connected that to understand the one relation is to understand the other. To the extent that elenctic and dialectical inquiry is at once the study of language, concepts and things, the investigation of concepts is capable of yielding knowledge of things.

In combination with the conclusions of the *Timaeus*, such a reading of the *Theaetetus* generates two related problems with a long historical pedigree. One is an interaction problem, that is, the problem of how the non-cognitive perceptual faculty interacts with the cognitive or propositional capacities of the rational soul (or mind). The second is the problem of the acquisition of concepts. In the second section of this paper I discuss the interaction problem. Here my aim is limited to showing that interaction is no less a difficulty for those who think that aisthesis is a non-cognitive capacity of the single and self-same soul which thinks than it is for those, like myself, who think that it is a capacity of the irrational soul. The third section of the paper contends that the argument at *Theaetetus* 184–6 does not show that it is the same soul which both thinks and perceives; rather its concern is to show that the thinking mind must use the senses to fix the nature of sensible concepts but need use only its own resources to fix the nature of the 'common' concepts. The final section of the paper then considers how Plato might account for the acquisition of concepts. Since perception is a non-cognitive activity, I argue that no concepts can be derived from or abstracted out of perception. The argument has a positive and a negative aspect. The positive aspect is that nowhere in the later dialogues does Plato describe perception as propositional in nature.[3] While this is an *argumentum ex silentio*, the fact that the silence is omnipresent at least shifts the burden to those who would claim that it is propositional or cognitive in nature. The negative aspect consists of a demonstration that if perception is a cognitive or propositional activity, it follows that all our perceptual beliefs are in error. They would be in error because we believe that external physical objects are coloured, whereas, according to this view, what is coloured does not belong to the extra-mental physical world. Since I do not think that Plato has an error theory of perception (because, among other reasons, the reconstruction of the *Timaeus*' account suggests that the extra-mental physical objects are actually and absolutely coloured), I conclude that this approach is unacceptable. My alternative account of concept-acquisition is admittedly speculative. It is predicated on the Platonic notion that thought is language, the silent dialogue of the soul with itself. Given such a conception of not just occurrent thought, but of all conceptual activity, I go on to suggest that all concepts are acquired through language-learning. In sum, my interpretation of aisthesis in the later Platonic dialogues suggests that Plato's is a strongly rationalistic faculty psychology. He posits many different faculties to save the complex phenomena of mental experience, and he thinks that the resources of reason [*logos*] are too rich to be accounted for by the meagre stimuli of sensation. All judgments, including the most simple perceptual judgments, are the products of the mind. To borrow a turn of phrase from Frege, Plato in the end recognizes the need to separate the conceptual from the perceptual.

AISTHESIS IN THE *TIMAEUS*

The most thorough treatment of aisthesis is found in the *Timaeus*.[4] My investigation of this treatment consists of two parts. First, I argue that aisthesis is a capacity of the irrational soul. Since I think Plato's remarks leave little room for doubt on this score,

[3] If a capacity or faculty is propositional, then its activity is marked by a judgment and that judgment is either true or false. The constituents of these judgments are concepts, one of which is being.

[4] Virtually every Platonic dialogue says something about aisthesis. Besides the discussions in the *Timaeus* and *Theaetetus*, other important remarks on perception are found in the *Republic*, esp. 523–5 and 602–3, the *Phaedo*, *passim*, and the *Philebus*, 33c–39. I believe that the remarks

my argument is basically exegetical. I trace the role of aisthesis within the dialogue, focusing primarily on the passages at 45–7 and 61–9. Next I turn to the question of the metaphysical status of the objects of aisthesis, the special sensibles. Here the Platonic texts underdetermine the answer. While I believe that there is evidence to suggest that sensible qualities are absolute objective properties (of physical objects), my argument proceeds by elimination. None of the alternatives, e.g. that sensible qualities are dispositional properties, saves the phenomena of Plato's texts.

The main discussion of the *Timaeus* commences with the distinction between what always is and never becomes and what always becomes and never is. The former is grasped by intelligence with *logos*, the latter is judged by belief with '*irrational aisthesis*' (27d6–28a3). The whole physical cosmos is then declared to have come into being, 'for it is visible, tangible and has body, and all such things are sensible; and sensibles, grasped by belief with sensation, are things that become and have been generated' (28b7–c2). In this initial division of entities and the psychic capacities, Plato clearly postulates the material world, *qua* material, as the object of both belief and sensation. These two capacities are soon separated. Timaeus begins with the nature of the rational world-soul. This soul, fashioned by the Demiurge, is a mixture of Being, Same and Different. Its faculties are belief and knowledge. It is able to identify, differentiate and recognize objects. In general, it is capable of thinking and expressing its thoughts in language (37a2–c5). It does not have the faculty of aisthesis because its body, containing everything inside it, has no need of organs (33a–d). The Demiurge fashions the rational human soul out of a less pure mixture of the same ingredients. It has the same capacities as its pristine cousin and is able to identify, differentiate and have beliefs about external physical objects and their qualities. Having finished his work, the Demiurge then consigns to the lesser gods the job of fashioning mortal bodies, the necessary remaining part of the human soul and all the things that these entail. The remaining part is the mortal soul, built onto the immortal part after its embodiment (41d1–3, 42d5–e4). It is the 'bodily part' of the soul. Since it is not made from the same components as the rational soul, it does not possess the cognitive capacities that characterize the rational soul.[5]

When human souls are incarcerated, one of the consequences is sensation. The body, being a material object, has contacts with other material objects. The collisions of matter produce movements. Some of these movements are carried through the body and fall against the soul (43c4–7). The soul is affected by such movements and we call the movements 'sensations' (and 'emotions', 'pleasures', 'pains', etc.). These movements shake, impede and dislocate the circuits of the rational soul.

Whether these movements arising from bodily interactions pass directly through to the rational soul, or whether they are mediated by first passing through the irrational soul, is not here stated. In the course of the dialogue it turns out that it is the irrational

in the *Philebus* are consistent with the account of the *Timaeus*, although there is no detailed analysis of the causes of sensation or the sensory process. As for the middle period dialogues, I believe that equally plausible cases can be made for and against the view that their account of perception is consistent with the *Timaeus*' account: cf. Burnyeat, art. cit. (n. 1). As to the date of the *Timaeus*, I think that it is a late dialogue.

[5] 42b,e. The mortal part of the soul is never explicitly characterized as irrational (ἄλογον). Its capacities, pleasure, perception, etc., are so characterized. Since it is the seat of such capacities, and since its composition is totally unlike that of the rational soul, it is not illegitimate to describe it as the irrational soul. The later Platonists knew it under this description. That the irrational soul lacks the cognitive capacities had by the rational soul does not imply that it is without capacities. Somehow it is able to receive the movements from the sense-organs and then pass them on to the rational part of the soul.

mortal soul which serves as the initial terminus. But even here there are hints to this effect. First, the collisions of bodies and the movements of soul they produce are the effects that follow from the creation of the body and the mortal part of the soul (42e1). Second, the rational soul is never said to perceive. Sensations themselves are never deserибed as true or false or involving judgments at all. Whenever judgments or 'namings' occur, at first false ones about sameness and difference (of the sensible qualities of objects) and later true ones, they are said to be the product of (the circuits of) the rational soul. From this initial characterization we learn that sensation is a movement in the soul which, although capable of causing judgments, is not itself a judgment or concept-laden activity. Judging and naming are subsequent activities of the rational soul affected by these movements.

Timaeus has little to say about the rational soul and its activities after 44c4. That the principal and lengthy discussions of aisthesis still await is itself indicative that aisthesis is not a capacity of this soul. The remainder of the *Timaeus* furnishes the blueprint the rational soul is to follow in order to regain its best state. The plan requires that it learn to govern its tools – its body and irrational soul. This, in turn, requires that it understand how and why matter behaves in its own right. In the subsequent pages, the role of the irrational soul is brought to light. But Timaeus' immediate task is to explain how it comes to pass that bodies can interact to cause sensation. His first remarks illustrate how the process mentioned at 43 yields vision:

> The gods contrived that a certain kind of fire, one which doesn't burn but, rather, throws off a gentle light, become the proper body of the day. For they made the pure fire inside us, the brother of the fire of day, flow through the eyes, compressing the whole and especially the middle of the eye into a smooth, close-knit mass so as to shut out everything thick and filter through only that pure fire. Whenever, therefore, there is daylight about the stream of vision, then issuing forth like to like, becoming compacted, one appropriately similar body is constituted along the direct line of the eyes in whichever direction the stream from inside falls against and strikes any external object with which it comes into contact. The whole, having become similarly affected because of its similarity, passing on through the entire body to the soul the movements of whatever the stream of vision touches and whatever touches it, produces that sensation in virtue of which we say we are seeing. (45b4–d3)

This description precipitates a more detailed explanation of what enables matter to interact in the requisite fashion. The explanation has two parts. At 47e3–53c3 Timaeus introduces the factors in play at the creation of the physical cosmos.[6] This notorious section is followed by the account of the geometrization of matter and numerous examples of how the laws of geometry determine the combinations, dissolutions and transformations of the structured material bodies. The geometry is sufficient to explain some of the properties of bodies and to show that matter **can** in fact behave in the manner depicted at 45b4–d3. But matter and geometry alone are not enough to account for all the qualities of geometrized matter. The explanation of the sensible qualities of bodies requires the introduction of soul. Timaeus therefore ends the initial phase of the geometrical account at 61c2:

> The various forms brought about by shapes, combinations and transformations of one body into another have now, perhaps, been displayed. Now we must try to reveal the causes on

[6] Two features of this passage do have some impact on my topic. At 50a1–4 and probably at 52d4–e1 Timaeus mentions sensible qualities. The former suggests that there are Forms of such qualities. The latter indicates that these qualities, as they figure in the physical world, are *πάθη* of the more basic kinds of matter. They do not, pace F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (London, 1937), p. 198 n. 1, p. 199, comprise earth, air, fire and water. See R. Mohr, *The Platonic Cosmology* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 119–23. If there are Forms of the sensible qualities, they of course will not be sensible. The instances of these Forms, the *πάθη* of triangles and bodies, are sensible. What is left open in this passage is how we are to understand the kind of *πάθη* these qualities are.

account of which these bodies come to have their qualities. First then, it is necessary that aisthesis always belong to the things of which we are speaking, although we have not yet discussed the generation of flesh and what concerns flesh, or *the mortal part of the soul*. But no adequate account of these can be given without the qualities which concern aisthesis, nor of the latter without the former; and it is hardly possible to treat both together. We must, then, first assume one side, and afterwards turn back to examine what we have assumed. So, in order that the account proceed from the qualities by their kinds, let the beings concerned with body and soul be assumed. (61c3–d5)

What follows is a more exact delineation of how the species of geometrized matter causally contribute to the particular, determinate kinds of sensation, e.g., tasting the sweet(ness), touching the hard(ness), seeing the red(ness). Throughout the discussion, Timaeus distinguishes the causal mechanisms, e.g. the tearing and rending of matter by the fire particles, both from the sensations themselves, e.g. feeling heat, and from their external sources, hot objects. We *perceive* the sharp effect of the rending, but we *infer* the physical properties of the bodies that produce the effect from what we know about the formation of its (fire's) figure (61d5–62a5, cf. 66b–c on taste and 67b–c on sound). We do not perceive the material properties that are the causal grounds for the interacting particles or the interaction of the particles. Consider, for example, the mechanics of vision described at 67c4ff. The objects of sight are colours. A colour is a flame flowing from each body having parts symmetrical with vision. The parts of the efflux falling into the visual stream are of various sizes, some greater than, some less than and some equal to the parts of the visual stream. Those larger compact, those smaller separate the stream of vision. Those equal turn out to be transparent. We call the flame which compacts the stream 'black' and that which divides it 'white'. In no case, however, do we perceive the compaction and division of the stream of visual fire or even the off-flowing flame. Rather we perceive the coloured body, i.e. the external source of the flame which causes the appropriate material interaction that produces the seeing of white, black, etc. The regular interactions of these material effluxes of material sense-organs and external material bodies produce the limited range of phenomena which is seeing colours.

The role of matter in the sensory process is exhausted in these remarks. Geometry defines the types of interactions that may give rise to the psychic movements that are the particular kinds of sensation. The conclusion of the second discussion returns to the psychic element involved:

The gods, imitating the demiurge and having received the immortal principle of the soul, fashioned a mortal body for it and gave the whole body to it as a vehicle, and they built into that another *mortal kind of soul*, a soul having dread and necessary affections in itself; first pleasure, the greatest lure of evil, then pains that flee goods, and then confidence and fear, senseless counsellors, and spirit hard to assuage and hope which easily draws the soul astray. Mixing these with *irrational aisthesis* and passion which undertakes everything, in the necessary manner they put together the mortal element. (69c5–d6)

These passages unambiguously state that the (irrational) mortal soul is the ultimate locus of aisthesis. Its brief mention in the early discussions at 41ff. and 45 is due to the need to explain first how matter is capable of interacting in the appropriate fashion. With this task completed, Timaeus emphasizes at the outset of the second discussion that the mere interaction of body with body is inadequate to account for sensible qualities or sensation. If sensation is to occur, the effect of the collision of matter must be passed on to the soul. This is reiterated throughout the analyses of special sensation and hammered home at the conclusion of the discussion. Irrational soul is the locus of aisthesis. Sensation occurs when and only when these motions are translated to the irrational soul (64a2–65a5). To have a sensation it is enough to have

a mortal soul to which are carried the movements arising from the interactions of bodies. Various conclusions can be drawn from this identification.

The senses, *per se*, are passive in their reception of material influxes. What information they can convey is fixed by their geometrical structure and that of their objects. The rational soul can use these senses by training them on specific objects, but it cannot influence or alter the movements that result from this targeting. Since they are materially driven, the senses and sensation are independent of reason. What we think we perceive, or can perceive, does not change what we actually do perceive. The fact that most people think that they see medium-sized physical objects does not show that they do so. Sensation is also autonomous in that it does not require any contribution from reason such as consciousness or conceptualization. It is not necessary that the person (or rational soul) be conscious of the motions passing through his senses or irrational soul. Nor, perhaps, is it even necessary that he be aware that he is seeing something or 'having a visual experience'. All that is implied is that if one is to experience a sensation, then the motion must penetrate to the irrational soul. Finally, there is no indication that sensation requires the sensing of red, say, *as red*. This is not to say that a person cannot be aware of a sensation as being of a certain sort. Rather it indicates that recognition, identification or awareness of what one sees is not a necessary condition for seeing something. We can see red before we can identify what we are seeing as red. All of this is implied by the fact that aisthesis is a non-rational (ἄλογον) capacity of an irrational soul. It is a function of the rational soul to identify a sensation (or the object or quality sensed), or form a belief about it, or a belief concerning its ontological status. Aisthesis is, therefore, a non-rational capacity because it is materially driven, because it does not require conceptualization and because the course of its activity, once set in motion, is free from the influence of the mind. Sensation is just a certain kind of movement occurring in the irrational soul caused by the interaction of the appropriate material organs and external material bodies.

Concerning the metaphysical status of sensibles, the lessons of the *Timaeus* are less clear. For the bulk of his account, Timaeus treats as sensible the ordinary objects of the physical world. By the same token, he treats these physical objects as being coloured, hot., etc. (33a3–4, 43b7, 43e8–44c4). However, in his more deliberate remarks about aisthesis only the special or proper sensibles are, strictly speaking, sensible. Moreover, he is quite loose in these remarks about the proper locus of these qualities. In the account of vision at 67c4ff. he sometimes says that the off-flowing flames are to be called by the names of the colours, sometimes that the effects brought about in the organs are and at other times that the external bodies causing these effects deserve the title. For instance, 'dazzling' is the name of the *effect* (πάθος) that gives rise to all sorts of colours, while the thing producing it is called 'bright' and 'flashing' (68a5–b1). Moments later, 'bright' is the name for a colour, not the thing producing it, and it is treated as any other colour. Similarly in his treatment of other sensibles, what is called 'sharp', for instance, is sometimes the effect taking place in the organ, sometimes the interacting particles that cause these effects, and sometimes the external source of these particles (64b4–7, 62b).

The seeming indifference as to the proper nominatum of the names of the sensible qualities has provoked different accounts of their nature. In canvassing the possibilities, it is useful to keep in mind a pair of distinctions: Absolute/Relative and Subjective/Objective. Although anything more than cursory remarks about their interrelation is beyond the scope of this paper, some relationships are clear. First, I assume that all *dispositional* accounts of sensible qualities make them relative, if there

is no independent characterization of what a quality is apart from its power to cause certain effects in something else. In such a case the object (or its surface) itself actually is not coloured. However, the mere ability to cause effects on another does not entail the relativity of the sensible quality. Something may be actually or absolutely coloured and capable (perhaps in virtue of its being absolutely coloured) of causing effects on another. Second, although relativity does not imply subjectivity, it is usually the case that subjectivity implies relativity. A quality is relative if it cannot be characterized apart from the effects it gives rise to in another subject, in particular how it looks or feels to perceivers; it is subjective if such experiences are accessible only from a particular (experiential) point of view. If an external account cannot be provided, in other words an account that is independent of the experiences of a particular observer or independent of the perspectival circumstances of such an observer, then the quality is subjective and relative.[7] If, however, the sensible quality is relative to something else in a manner that can be given an objective characterization, for instance by appeal to the laws of science, then the quality is objective and relative.

There are, then, four possible ways for sensible qualities to be. Two of these, objective relativism and subjective relativism, have been prominent in the literature. After considering them, I will use the remarks of Theophrastus to argue for a third view: that sensible qualities are objective and absolute properties of objects. The last possibility, that they are absolute subjective properties (of minds), has no place in Plato.[8]

Objective relativism maintains that perceptible qualities are dispositional properties of objects. They are objective because they are not dependent upon the *mind* or *soul* of a percipient, but rather are dependent upon other bodies. They are παθήματα which come to be, along with their correlative sensation, in the *interaction* of primary bodies. Something is hot, for instance, when and only when it produces a certain effect on another body; fire is hot when it lacerates and tears in the appropriate way the matter of our bodies or *the matter of a log*.[9] This view looks for support to Plato's description of the causal mechanisms which allow the external object to interact with

[7] cf. B. A. O. Williams, *Descartes* (Harmondsworth, 1978), *passim*; T. Nagel, 'Subjective and Objective', in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge, 1979); and C. McGinn, *The Subjective View* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 9–16.

[8] Mohr adopts what he calls an 'epiphenomenal' interpretation of the sensible qualities. Sensible qualities are consequences of primary particles (p. 123 n. 26). Since Mohr is not especially concerned with sensible qualities, it is difficult to know what he thinks an epiphenomenal consequence is. Epiphenomenalism, traditionally construed, is a dualistic theory according to which mental events or properties are caused by physical events or properties but are themselves causally inefficacious. It is therefore odd for Mohr to claim that these epiphenomenal sensible qualities are motions (κίνησις). Since these motions have causal efficacy on souls (and matter?), they are not epiphenomenal. Modrak characterizes Plato's conception as 'phenomenalist' (pp. 35–41). On her account, the doctrine of the *Timaeus* is equivalent to the doctrine of the Twins stripped of its Heraclitean base. 'On the phenomenalist theory, the object that is grasped in perception, strictly speaking, does not belong to the extra-mental world, since its existence depends upon its being perceived' (p. 40). The objects of perception, on this account, are, in effect, sense-data. Since sense-data exist only when perceived, they are subjective. By stripping away the Heraclitean base, Modrak strives to bring some objectivity to the production of these objects. Like-structured organs, such as the eyes of different humans, and like-structured external bodies produce sense-data of the same kind (given that environmental conditions are the same). I infer from her analysis that sense-data have (are) their qualities absolutely. I see no evidence in Plato of anything like sense-data. I discuss the consequences of Modrak's interpretation in the last part of my paper.

[9] cf. A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 430–1.

the perceiver. That Plato does elaborate on the physical interaction of the particles from the external object and our bodies is clear. But he also distinguishes these physical interactions from both the psychical experience and the quality of the external object that gives rise to these psychical experiences. If sensible qualities and sensation could be explained wholly in terms of what bodies do to other bodies, Timaeus would not have had to break his account at 61c; both would be explicable in terms of the interchanges of matter. Another strike against such a view is that it would have the unfortunate consequence that logs would feel heat when they burn. In eliminating the soul in order to establish the objectivity of the relativistic account, this view loses sight of the peculiarly sensible aspects of these qualities.[10]

Once the soul is factored into Plato's account, there is the temptation to view his account of the sensible qualities as subjectivist and relativistic. In support of such a reading, the passages on aisthesis in the *Timaeus* are seen as espousing the same doctrine as the Twins passage of the *Theaetetus*. This doctrine is relativistic and subjectivist in that there is no characterization of a particular quality apart from the private and unique experience of the perceiving parent.[11] In order to determine whether the two dialogues present the same view of aisthesis, let us examine the Doctrine of the Twins.

The starting point of the Twins account of aisthesis is that nothing is anything in its own right. What everything is is just motion (κίνησις). Of motions there are two kinds, one having the power to act, one having the power to be acted upon. From their interaction there come to be twin offspring, an *aisthesis* and an *aistheton*. These offspring are also motions. The kinds of motion are also distinguished by the fact that some are slow and some are fast. The parents are the eye and object – a stone or log, say. They have their motion in the same place and with respect to what comes near, and hence are slow motions. When they come together the offspring they produce are faster motions, for they are moved from place to place:

> When therefore an eye and something else that is symmetrical with it comes near and produces whiteness and the sensation cognate with it – *entities which would not have come to be if either parent had come near anything else* – then, when the vision, from the eye, and the whiteness, from the entity which joins in producing the colour, are moving in between ⟨the parents⟩, the eye has become full of vision and then sees and has become not some vision, but a seeing eye. And the entity which joined in producing the colour has become filled around with whiteness and has become not whiteness, but white. (156d3–e5)

Comparison of the accounts from the two dialogues reveals a decided similarity of language. There is talk of impacts (προσπίπτειν and other πίπτειν compounds) arising from the confluence (ῥεῖν) of like natured (ὅμοιος, σύμμετρα) streams, and motions emanating from the eye and object producing various results. There are some differences. The *Theaetetus* speaks of the confluence of motions producing other motions. The *Timaeus* speaks of a body coming to be out of the intermingling of streams of differently sized particles flowing from the eye and object. The *Timaeus*

[10] Ibid., p. 430: 'In the sensation itself we directly become aware of what he [Timaeus] holds to be the "objective" fact that our flesh is being lacerated or pierced by the "hot" body.... heat is a directly "sensed" object.' Timaeus denies that we are directly aware of the laceration of the body. Whether heat as directly felt could be identical with the laceration of the body which is not directly felt is a thorny problem involving controversies about qualia, opacity and the nature of theoretical 'reduction'. I am dubious that Plato 'reduces' anything to anything else.

[11] cf. Cornford, op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 261–3: '...[T]he sense organ does play a part in making the hotness we perceive, and the fire is not hot save when perceived...The objects have dispositions or powers of producing sensation and hotness in conjunction with the organ' (p. 261 n. 1).

says that a motion arising from the intermingling of streams *may* cause seeing in the agent. In the *Theaetetus*, there is no contingency associated with the seeing. It comes to be from the intercourse of the parents and their subsequent offspring. In the *Theaetetus*, vision (and whiteness) are offspring that come to be. In the *Timaeus*, vision emanates from the eye. In the Twins passage, *two* motions are born from the confluence of two parent motions, one of which is carried to the agent, the other to the patient of the process. In the *Timaeus*, there is no coordinate motion generated by the contact which affects the patient.

These differences are critical. In the *Timaeus*, vision is an objective capacity of the soul or sense-organ. Though it plays a role in the activity of seeing, it does not come to be in, or as a consequence of, the activity. Similarly, the external object, the log, is an objective material entity. Both are something in their own right, in addition to being co-responsible in some way for the particular sensations that arise. Sensible qualities, in turn, are objective in that they are public, i.e. observable by many people, and in that their nature and the effects they produce are governed by the laws of geometrized matter. The qualities themselves recur throughout the physical world. Their effects are regular, determinate and repeatable, regardless of whether the proper designatum of 'white' is the motion engendered by the dilation of the visual stream, the dilation itself, the effluent flame from the external body or the external source of that flame. If the proper designatum is either the flame or the coloured external body, the sensible quality will be, like vision, objective and absolute. If the proper designatum is the dilation of the stream or the motion engendered by the dilation, these 'sensibles' will be relative only in that they arise from the interaction of the effluent streams. They will nonetheless be objective; anyone will have access to the given colours because each is determined by the shape and size of the particles emitted by the object. In the *Theaetetus*, the sensibles are not only relative, each is unique and partly constituted of an ephemeral, subjective state of a perceiver. Of the Twins account Plato rejects at least the notion that the senses and their objects are subjective. That there are senses and objects of sense in the physical world is due to the efforts of the gods who gave structure to matter. What remains relative is sensation, the *παθήματα* which result from the intercourse of these bodies and, perhaps, the sensible qualities.[12]

[12] J. McDowell, *Plato, Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 137–40, thinks that the experience is not unique, except in so far as it is particular instances of the (same) quality that are brought into being in the act of perceiving. See also Modrak, pp. 35–40. While it may be incredible, I think each set of parents and each set of offspring are unique. The Twins doctrine is designed to ensure that nothing is anything in its own right and that each parent is different from one moment to the next. My eye, at t_1, mixes with the log, at t_1, to beget whiteness and vision. These twin, fast motions cause my eye, now at t_2, to become a (white) seeing eye and the log, also at t_2, to become a white log. This second change guarantees that no object can remain the same so as to be a parent of two sets of offspring. If intercourse takes place at t_3 between some object and my eye, it will not be my eye simpliciter, but rather my white-seeing-eye that serves as the parent of the new offspring. It is important to notice that although parents and offspring come to be with respect to one another (*πρὸς ἄλληλα*), the offspring themselves change by being born and then *moving*, whereas the parents change by giving birth and then becoming altered in *quality*. In the final refutation of Protagoras-cum-Heraclitus, Socrates will emphasize that whiteness and vision must themselves be changing in *quality*. He uses this fact to refute the position. Whiteness and vision are fast motions because they move in between the two parents. The parents are identifiable only after they have been changed by these fast offspring. Therefore, if these offspring are themselves changing in quality, i.e. have no quality to bequeath to the eye and log, none of the parents or offspring will be identifiable. See Burnyeat for a similar reading at least with regard to the uniqueness of the agent in each act of perceiving.

The metaphysical status of the sensible quality remains indeterminate. Do material bodies possess their sensible qualities absolutely, i.e. are they actually coloured? Or are sensible properties dispositional in nature, i.e. are they just powers to cause changes? The problems with both of the foregoing accounts suggest that sensible qualities are not merely dispositions. Something is actually coloured, and there is no indication in the *Timaeus*, or any other dialogue, that what is so coloured is something subjective or intra-mental.[13] On the other hand, it is also clear that Timaeus' particular concern is to show how the geometrization of matter licenses an explanation of the regular and systematic interaction of objective qualities of material bodies and irrational souls. I think the account which best saves the disparate remarks about the nature of the sensibles views them as objective, absolute properties of physical objects and explains their ability to cause changes in matter and souls in virtue of this status. Such an account gains credence from a puzzling comment of Theophrastus. He says that Plato does not deprive nature of the sensibles (*ἀποστερῶν τῶν αἰσθητῶν τὴν φύσιν*) and he contrasts him with Democritus who makes all the sensible qualities effects of aisthesis. This seems to indicate that objects (in nature) are qualified absolutely. But Theophrastus also claims that Plato in the end assigns the 'being' of sensible qualities to the affections of sense (*De Sensibus* 60–1). The tension between these two comments is relieved if, as I suggest, Plato thinks that sensible qualities are *both* absolute properties of objects *and* the causes of the affections of sense. In virtue of what red is, red objects are capable of causing the determinate affections in the visual stream, sense-organ and soul that is seeing red. What determines whether something is red is not, as the dispositionalist would have it, how it looks to a perceiver. Rather, how something looks to a perceiver is determined by the colour it has (is). There is nothing inconsistent about this view. It is, I believe, the 'common-sense' view of colours. The advance marked by the *Timaeus* is that Plato can explain how qualified objects can produce the appropriate sensory responses without identifying the qualities with such powers. This is why he devotes his attention to how colour is transmitted from the surface of the object to the eye.[14]

To conclude our examination of the *Timaeus*: aisthesis, for Plato, is an autonomous, materially driven capacity of the irrational soul involving neither consciousness nor conceptualization. Hence perception does not require belief, though it no doubt influences the beliefs we come to have. Sensation itself is a relative phenomenon, an effect located in the irrational soul caused by a motion resulting from the interaction of a material sense-organ and a material body. On the other hand, sensible qualities are objective and absolute properties of material objects which produce a determinate range of effects in the sense-organs and soul. The whole

[13] If we consider other dialogues, there are indications that there are Forms of the sensible qualities and even clearer statements to the effect that physical objects possess sensible qualities absolutely. See the *Phaedo*, especially 106, *Cratylus* 423e, *Theaetetus* 184–6, *Meno* 74c1–76e9, *Republic* 524; and note 8 above.

[14] The objectivity and absoluteness of the quality licenses the claim that, at bottom, looking red presupposes something's actually being red. If there are no sense-data, and since Forms are not perceptible, it can only be the physical objects themselves that are red. Physical objects are red regardless of whether they are perceived or whether there are perceivers. On the other hand, to explain their ability to affect perceivers, one must introduce sense-organs and irrational souls. How red objects appear is, of course, only partly a function of their being red. The environmental conditions must be normal – though normality is hard to define – and the sense organs must be functioning properly – though that too is hard to define. Moreover, red may appear differently to creatures whose organs differ in structure from ours. None the less, from the demiurge's perspective, what red is and which objects are red is not affected by the difference in how red objects appear.

process is the result of the gods' benevolent labours over the ordering of matter. The range of sensibles is limited to the so-called special sensibles. The interaction of sense and sensible causes the (efflux of the) sense to be compacted, divided, or something in between. Plato maintains that for each sense there is a limited range of effects which the sense can endure without being destroyed. These effects are all produced by bodies enjoying certain characteristics. The range is defined by two extremes, the hard and the soft, the light and the dark, etc. A number of intermediates fall within the extremes. Colours are similar to one another because they all compact or divide the stream of vision to a certain degree. They do so because both they and the visual stream are constituted in a particular fashion. The gods are most efficient on this score. The actual component bodies and structures of the objects of the senses and the senses themselves may vary, but the interactions of proper sensibles with their respective senses do not. The effects are the same, compaction or division, but they occur in different kinds of matter (*Tim.* 67e3).

THEAETETUS 184–6

The only detailed Platonic account of aisthesis is the one we have just examined. That aisthesis is a capacity of the irrational soul, and that it is non-cognitive, non-judgmental capacity, accords neither with most interpretations of aisthesis in the middle dialogues nor with most readings of aisthesis in the *Theaetetus*. Although it concurs with the *Republic*'s division of the soul into rational and irrational 'parts', it denies that the senses are autonomous judgmental agents; that is, agents whose judgments can conflict with the judgments of the rational soul. On the other hand, while it agrees with one reading of the *Theaetetus* that sees aisthesis as a non-judgmental, non-cognitive capacity, it denies that it is a single and self-same soul which engages in both thinking and perceiving.[15]

I shall not consider here what the middle dialogues have to say about aisthesis. In truth, I doubt that either the *Phaedo* or the *Republic* tells us very much about perception. In neither dialogue is there much evidence that Plato had, or was interested in, any differentiated concept of aisthesis that would allow us to sort out precisely what he attributed to the senses in sensory experience and what he attributed to the mind. Even the two famous passages of the *Republic*, Book VII's account of the study of fingers and qualities that summon the intellect and Book X's tale of perceptual illusions, are primarily aimed at establishing theses that have little to do with perception proper.

The *Theaetetus*, however, is a different matter. Apart from the *Timaeus*, this dialogue contains Plato's most extensive treatment of aisthesis. Its exquisitely intricate argument ranges over the interrelations of perception, appearance, belief and knowledge, in search of what knowledge is. The fulcrum upon which the argument turns is the passage at 184–6. This part of the dialogue serves as the transition from the Protagorean (cum-Heraclitean) and Theaetetan identification of knowledge with perception to the subsequent discussion of belief and its relation to knowledge. It is here that scholars find the rejection of Plato's earlier theory of aisthesis, an affirmation of the thesis that perception is a capacity of a single soul and, depending on one's view, evidence for the theses that perception does or does not involve conceptualization.

[15] See Cooper and especially Burnyeat for a review of the various positions and of the debate over whether Plato alters his account of perception from the middle to the later dialogues.

Before turning to the argument itself, a few methodological remarks are in order. Scholarly debate about this argument generally divides over whether perception is here said to be a judgmental capacity or whether it is denied such a status. Both sides seem to agree, however, that it is the same soul which both perceives and judges. This unanimity about the agent of perception is, in part, the result of their reading of the text, especially the opening stages of the argument from 184b8–e7, and, in part, the result of a philosophical conviction, namely that by making the same thing the agent of both perceiving and thinking Plato can avoid the problem of how two distinct elements interact with one another. Nowhere in this argument is it said that perception is judgmental, i.e. that a perception is true or false or that perception has access to being. Moreover, I think it is an open question whether the text or argument indicates that it is the same thing which both thinks and perceives. Since their qualms about interaction prompt some interpreters to read the argument in the way that they do, let us first consider the question of interaction.

Why should one hold that it is the same soul which both thinks and perceives? The answer seems to be this: unless it were the same thing, then the soul's awareness of or consciousness of what is perceived would be inexplicable. In other words, if the soul is to think about what is perceived, it must be the agent of perception.[16] Those who think that perception is judgmental do not have to worry about interaction, since in their view both perceiving and thinking about perception are conceptual or judgmental in nature. Perceiving is a (kind of first-order) judgment and thinking about perception is a (second-order) judgment, a judgment about judgment(s). An interaction problem results only if one holds that perception is non-conceptual and non-judgmental. But it remains a problem regardless of whether perception is an activity of the same soul which thinks or, as I hold, the activity of the irrational soul. For to claim that it is a single mind that both thinks and perceives, and then to characterize these capacities in incompatible terms, only moves the interaction difficulties 'inside' the single mind. It is no better and no worse a solution to the problem of interaction than is the postulation of an irrational soul that perceives and a rational soul which thinks and judges. Had Plato anywhere in the late dialogues declared that perception was judgmental, then he could have avoided the problem of interaction. But Plato does, I believe, isolate perception from all the rational, judgmental capacities, and he does so because it is non-propositional. It is precisely because the rational soul is the seat of the propositional capacities that Plato denies it a role in perception. He maintains instead that aisthesis is a non-judgmental, non-cognitive activity of the irrational soul.

What then of the problem of interaction? It is there and Plato has no solution to it.[17] That he has such a problem is not surprising. He is merely one of the first in a long line of philosophers who have such a problem. It is found in Aristotle and throughout the middle-ages under the guise of how the intellective soul and aisthetic

[16] cf. Burnyeat, art. cit. (n. 1), 47–50. He says that Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, came to discover the notion of the 'unity of the perceiving consciousness', i.e. '... the notion of the unity of a single thinking and perceiving subject...' (p. 50). The argument at 184–6 concerns that thesis: 'But a confirmation, if not an explicit proof, of the unity thesis is implicit in something the argument does emphasize, that the soul can reason and think about whatever we perceive. For the soul's consciousness of things perceived would be *unintelligible* if it was not the same soul that perceived them but another subject or subjects' (p. 47) (my emphasis).

[17] In fact, there are two problems of interaction, one concerning how the material sense-organs interact with whatever aspect of the soul it is that perceives, and a second concerning how this non-judgmental, non-cognitive aspect of the soul interacts with the rational capacity. He solves neither.

soul communicate. Even today those who think that the sensory systems are non-conceptual processors of perceptual information do not know how the sensory system furnishes information to the centres of conceptual activity, i.e. the brain.[18] It is certainly possible that the sensory systems perceive and somehow convey their non-cognitive information to a rational soul, which then forms perceptual judgments. It is simply not the case that in order for the mind to think about what is perceived it *must* be the agent in perception. What is true is that the rational mind must have access to the particular sensory information to be thought about. Plato, I believe, takes as primitive the notion that sensation somehow contains information for the mind to work on or with, but he also believes that in its own right sensory information is non-conceptual. He tries to meet the interaction problem by making the irrational soul the agent of perception, an entity intermediate between the material sense-organs and the rational mind. Because it is a psychic element, not a material organ, the irrational soul somehow can interact with its rational cousin. How the rational soul interprets the motion in the irrational soul to form a judgment about what is perceived is something Plato does not speculate upon. But to his credit, Plato does not, at least in the later dialogues, make the mistake of isolating the perceiving soul and thinking soul from one another, as if they were separate individuals doing their own jobs without ever communicating.

If the problem of interaction does not compel us to concede that the thinking mind must be the agent in perceiving, does the text force this conclusion upon us? The first point to note is that nowhere in the dialogue does one find mention of a divided soul or parts of the soul. Hence, every faculty considered is treated as a faculty of a single soul. If one takes the remarks about each of the faculties, but especially perception, to be Plato's own considered view, then obviously one must infer from the fact that only a single soul is mentioned that Plato believed that each of the capacities is a capacity of that soul. But one need not read the remarks in this way or draw this inference. There are dialogic considerations for limiting the discussion to a single soul. Since Socrates is playing midwife to Theaetetus, there are no grounds for introducing Platonic divisions into the argument. More importantly, since the inquiry always concerns knowledge, and since, because it has access to truth and being, knowledge can be assumed to be a capacity of the rational soul, it can also be assumed that any candidate for knowledge will itself be a capacity of the rational soul and have access to truth and being. So, when perception is introduced as an answer, it comes in its Protagorean form as a propositional capacity. Moreover, the main focus of the inquiry seems to be an examination of the nature of the objects of knowledge and the constituents of knowledge-claims, especially in relation to the objects and constituents of other faculties. Plato, therefore, needs to demonstrate only that the objects and constituents of perception are not suitable for knowledge. But once he has demonstrated that perception is non-propositional, there is no need for him to add that this fact has implications for whether the rational soul can be the agent of perception. Indeed, since his aim at 184–6 is to show that knowledge is to be found

[18] Aristotle takes as primitive the power of the sensory soul to 'take on the form of the sensible without the matter' and then invokes *phantasmata* as an intermediary, in some sense, between sensation and thought. The medievals debated whether it was through 'illumination' or 'abstraction' that sensory information was acquired by the intellective soul from the sensory soul. Descartes dispensed with the 'sensory soul' and turned perceptions into judgments of the single *res cogitans* (thereby creating a whole new set of problems). For modern accounts of the difficulties, see, e.g. J. Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind* (Cambridge, 1983), and F. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Cambridge, 1981).

in the activity of the rational soul investigating things which are (187a–b), the specification of the agent of perception would be a needless digression. In sum, Plato treats perception as a faculty of the same soul which knows not because he now believes this to be true, but because he wants to show that the investigation of the elements of even perceptual judgments is such that only the rational mind could undertake it.

Turning from the general to the particular, the best evidence for such a conclusion is 184d1–5. Here Socrates suggests that there is some one thing, 'whether the soul or whatever one should call it, to which all these things [*aistheseis*] converge; something with which we perceive all the perceptibles through the sense-organs, as if through instruments'. Given the 'accuracy' with which Socrates talks about the role of the organs in perception, this uncertainty about what it is that actually perceives is noteworthy.[19] Socrates' remark at 184d1–5 is simply non-committal as to whether it is the same one thing that perceives and thinks, or for that matter, what it is to which all the perceptions converge. It is a psychic element, but whether it is the irrational or rational soul is not stated. The specification of the agent of perception can only be decided through one's interpretation of the argument.

Many scholars hear in this argument a Platonic claim that the thinking mind is the agent in perception and they think that the refutation of the thesis that knowledge is perception requires some assumption about the sense's lack of access to certain features of objects.[20] They are mistaken on both points. The thrust of the argument is to show that knowledge cannot be perception because perception is somehow unable to get at something that is required for knowledge, namely οὐσία or being. It is also clear that the argument is supposed to move us from a consideration of perception and its nature or constituents to belief and its nature or constituents. If one emphasizes the former point, then one tries to argue that the οὐσία to which perception lacks access is not the minimal sort required for judgment, but rather is the οὐσία that stands for something's essence or nature. One then mounts an argument to show that since knowledge is of essences, then since perceptual judgments are unable to penetrate to anything's essence, perception cannot be knowledge.[21] In the final section of this paper I shall argue that perception lacks access to being of any kind. Knowledge of essences, while hinted at in the argument at 184–6, is not the means by which Plato refutes the Protagorean–Theaetetan equation.

If one emphasizes the latter point, then one contends that perception lacks access to being of any sort, that perception is unable to frame any judgment of any kind about anything. But I do not think that Plato's argument for this claim relies on an inaccessibility assumption to the effect that the soul in perceiving has access to sensible concepts like red but lacks access to concepts such as being. Rather, his aim is to show that knowledge cannot be perception because perception *as a whole* lacks access to the sort of things that are the constituents of any judgment and, *a fortiori*, of any knowledge-claim. *Nothing* that figures in a belief, whether a common like

[19] Burnyeat brilliantly analyzes the difference between the dative of means and the *dia* idiom and the nuances of the *dia* idiom. The uncertainty about what perceives is supposedly eliminated by Plato's discovery of the unity of the perceiving consciousness, though Burnyeat concludes in the end that perception is a hard-to-characterize activity of this single soul.

[20] cf. Cooper and Burnyeat, who uses the phrase 'features of objects'. What a feature might be is wisely left unspecified, since it may range from a sensible quality to an essence, and perhaps may include relational properties or second-order properties.

[21] On the assumptions that, for Plato, knowledge is of essences and that essences are discovered by dialectical or philosophical inquiry of some sort.

being or a concept like red, is available to or in perception. The shift from perception to belief, let alone knowledge, is wholesale.

The fundamental difference between the constituents of beliefs, what I am calling 'concepts', and the constituents of perceptions, what I will call 'percepts', is that the former are conceptual in nature, the latter non-conceptual.[22] Concepts are such that they are found in many different beliefs. All concepts therefore are, in this sense, common or repeatable. Percepts, too, are common, in so far as one person's perception of red is the same as another's: it is the same motion in the irrational soul brought about by the interaction of the appropriate material effluxes of the eye and object. But this is Plato's account, not the account of a defender of the Protagorean equation of knowledge and perception. According to a Protagorean, at least one stripped of a Heraclitean ontology, all mental faculties and states collapse into appearance, all appearances are propositional, and the constituents of each appearance are unique or relative to the appearance in which it figures. In viewing the argument as directed against a Protagorean, I do not mean a Protagorean of the sort apparently dismissed at 183c. What Socrates says there is that 'we are not going to concede that knowledge is perception, at any rate according to the line of argument that all things change.' I think that the argument at 184–6 is aimed at a Protagorean who accepts a stable ontology of objects and perceivers, but who still insists that what appears, i.e. what is perceived or is thought to be perceived, is relative to the perceiver. The notion of the single thing which perceives and subsequently is able to think about what is perceived is a Trojan horse left for the defender of the Protagorean equation. It is the reflections upon perceptions by a single agent which show that the constituents of Protagorean appearances are repeatable, and hence not relative to some individual appearance.

When viewed in this light, the inaccessibility assumption turns out not to be a crucial premiss in the argument. Its role is to highlight the fact that there is something which can think about appearances, so that Plato can motivate the claim that the constituents of even perceptual judgments are common to many judgments. In this fashion, Plato can move the argument of the dialogue towards belief and finally lay to rest the Protagorean notion that knowledge is perception (184b4–6). Perception cannot be knowledge, not because certain items required for knowledge are unavailable to it, but because everything required for belief and knowledge is unavailable to it. Perception cannot be knowledge, because knowledge, like belief, is conceptual or propositional in nature whereas perception is not.

Even if the inaccessibility assumption is not crucial to the argument's success, it does subserve a properly Platonic purpose. It helps to demonstrate that the constituents of judgments are not all on a par. There are differences among concepts, differences which are illuminated when one considers their nature, origin, and connections to thought and perception. The division between commons, such as being, same, different, and sensibles, such as hardness, red, and C#, is, on one level, a difference between concepts and the non-conceptual elements of perception and, on

[22] cf. Frede. On my use of 'concept' see note 2 above. I do not think that concepts are to be found apart from judgments, nor do I think that judgments are composed of non-conceptual elements and conceptual elements. I therefore discount the possibility, bruited by Cooper, that there is a level of conceptual activity 'below' judging (or thinking) such as naming or labelling. Plato does entertain the notion that there is naming apart from saying, e.g. at *Sophist* 262b–c and *Theaetetus* 201eff., but he never embraces the view. Even when he discusses sensible qualities, he uses demonstrative sentences to express the mind's cognition of them. See below note 48.

another level, a difference *between concepts*: those somehow mobilized through perception versus those for which there are no perceptual analogues. The two kinds of mental activity Plato distinguishes in the text, that through-the-body and the independent activity of the mind, concern the nature and origin of these different conceptual elements which figure in perceptual judgments. Plato remains neutral throughout the argument about what perceives and what perception is. What he asserts is that the agent of an inquiry into what anything is, whether it be red or being, is the mind.

THE ARGUMENT

Especially striking in the *Theaetetus* passage is the contrast of sensibles, what the soul grasps through the senses, and commons, what the soul grasps through itself. The soul senses through touch the hardness of the hard thing and the softness of the soft thing. It independently grasps their being (οὐσία), that they are, their oppositeness and the being of this oppositeness (186b2–9). The sensibles are naturally sensed by both men and animals immediately upon birth. To grasp the οὐσία of the sensibles requires reflection (ἀναλογίσματα) on the former, that is, reflection on the affections transmitted through the body to the soul. Such a reflective awareness is acquired by those who acquire it only with difficulty and through much long effort and training (186b11–c5).

The population of the class of sensibles is seemingly given by the assumption Theaetetus grants at 184e8–185a2: 'Will you agree that what one perceives (αἰσθάνῃ) through one sense it is impossible to perceive through another. For instance, what ⟨one perceives⟩ through hearing ⟨it is impossible to perceive⟩ through sight, or what ⟨one perceives⟩ through sight ⟨it is impossible to perceive⟩ through hearing.' Call this the Inaccessibility Assumption. The assumption stipulates that for each sense there is a class of objects which it alone perceives. It does not dictate whether each sense is restricted to its special objects. If the senses are restricted, then the special sensibles are the only sensibles (The Strong Version). If they are not restricted, then included in the class of sensibles will be at least Theaetetus, trees and other physical objects (The Weak Version). The population of the class of commons is seemingly everything that is not sensible. In the passage at 184–6, however, the only commons mentioned are highly general items such as being, sameness, and difference. The text, therefore, underdetermines the membership of both classes. Left unaccounted for are physical objects and features of objects such as shape. If they are sensible at all, they are common to more than one modality.[23]

[23] cf. Burnyeat, art. cit. (n. 1), 47–8. Cooper (art. cit. (n. 1), 127) and Modrak (art. cit. (n. 1), 35–40) come down on the side of the strong, restricted reading of the assumption. The commons are applicable to the objects of more than one sense, but that there be a plurality of senses is not necessary for their discovery or application. Were there a rational being with only one sense modality, the commons would be applicable to the objects of its sense, as 186b2–9 illustrates. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1935), p. 105, and H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Early Academy*, vol. 1 (Baltimore, 1944), p. 236 n. 141, think that the *koina* 'are, in fact, the meanings of common names – what Plato calls Forms or ideas.' Cooper (art. cit. (n. 1), 128 n. 8) disagrees: '*koina* are predicates belonging to the objects of more than one sense.' If physical objects are the objects of more than one sense, and if their names can be construed as predicates, then these qualify as *koina* on Cooper's account. See Modrak (art. cit. (n. 1), 36–7) on Burnyeat's talk of 'features of sounds and colours'. I want it both ways. Commons are concepts or predicates that apply to all objects, sensible and insensible alike. There are, however, concepts or predicates such as 'white' or 'hard' which, though not commons in the specific sense, are applicable to many objects of a *single* sense. Of course if physical objects are sensible, then these predicates would be commons in the specific sense.

Plato repeatedly characterizes the distinction between sensibles and commons in terms of how the soul is aware of each. The soul grasps sensibles through the senses. It grasps the commons through its own independent activity. This holds out the prospect of fixing the population of each class by analyzing what each kind of activity consists in. In the case of sensibles there is no mystery about what soul works on,[24] but Plato says little about the kind of psychic activity aisthesis is. In the case of the commons, the opposite is true. It is generally agreed that the independent activity of the soul is thought, the silent dialogue of the soul with itself. What remains a mystery is what the independently engaged soul works on or with.

In an effort to fix the difference between perception and judgment, sensibles and commons, many scholars have appealed to the presence of the common 'being' in the mind's independent activity and its absence in perception. They have concluded from this fact that the crucial philosophical advance marked in this passage is the exclusive assignment of judgment to the mind. This exclusivity is thought to be a consequence of two related facts: (1) being is a common, not a sensible; and (2) judgment minimally requires being.[25] That is, to judge at least requires that one think that something *is* F, for some value of 'F':

> Moreover, when Plato begins the second part of the dialogue, it is clear to him that this earlier contrast between perception and the mind's independent activity with respect to common features like being is in fact a distinction between perception as such, on the one hand, and judgement, whether true or false, on the other. This is firmly stated at 187ab. We thus have it on Plato's own authority that the crucial limitation on perception is that it does not, considered on its own, contain a power of judgement. The inability of perception to grasp being stems from an inability to frame even the simplest proposition of the form 'x is F'.[26]

Such a distinction is made here and it is of much philosophical moment. But if the crucial difference between perception and the mind's independent activity is that judgment is the exclusive preserve of the mind, then it will not do to assign only one, or even some, of the constituents of judgments exclusively to the mind's independent activity. All the elements of judgments are equally the exclusive preserve of the mind. The importance of the being component of such judgments has resulted in too little attention being paid to these other constituents, namely the substituenda for 'x' and 'F'.[27] As soon as one focuses on *all* the constituents of judgments, one's understanding of the argument and of the full range of its consequences is affected. If we are to

[24] Provided that we can determine the membership of the class of sensibles. If the only sensibles, strictly speaking, are the special sensibles, then the critical issue is why we think that we can perceive so much else. Perhaps Plato, in the later dialogues, has a nascent notion of *phantasia* which might serve as part of the answer to this question. See *Sophist* 264a and *Philebus* 39–40.

[25] Burnyeat thinks that the sense of being (οὐσία) that sensibles have in their own right is to be understood in light of the work of M. Frede, *Predikation und Existenzaussage* (*Hypomnemata* 15; Goettingen, 1967); G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on Not-Being', in *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. G. Vlastos (Garden City, 1970), pp. 223–67; and C. H. Kahn, 'The Greek Verb "To Be" and the Concept of Being', *Foundations of Language*, ii. 1966: 'I take it to mean at least that there are values of F such that the colour or the sound is F' (p. 44). I concur, though throughout the paper I talk of Being simpliciter. I want to leave open whether Being has only one sense here (and elsewhere in Plato). I believe that there are two senses of the notion, one concerned with essence and restricted to Forms, and one concerned with 'having a property' and characteristic of both Forms and particulars. Since I think that perception gets at neither kind of being, I refrain from pressing the issue. My talk of existence is not meant to suggest a third sense of being. Both Forms and particulars exist.

[26] Burnyeat, art. cit. (n. 1), 47.

[27] But see Frede (op. cit., n. 1 above), pp. 6–8.

appreciate all the implications of this passage, I think that it is necessary to answer three questions: (1) How does the argument refute the Protagorean thesis that knowledge is perception? (2) What are the substituenda for 'x' and 'F' in the minimal judgments of the form 'x is F'? (3) What results from the reflections on perceptions mentioned at 186b11ff.?

One line of interpretation is that the Protagorean view is refuted by the fact that perception is not propositional whereas knowledge is. Knowledge requires the common being, but being is not an object of perception. How is it demonstrated that being is not an object of perception? One tack has the proof rely on the Inaccessibility Assumption: one does not through sight have access to sounds or features of sounds, nor through hearing to colours or features of colours. If then we are aware of a feature common to a colour seen and a sound heard, for instance, we think that there are two things here, that each is one, etc., it follows that something besides sight or hearing is responsible for such an awareness.[28]

Although Theaetetus grants the Inaccessibility Assumption, an erstwhile defender of the Protagorean equation would not be moved by this argument. First, he would not grant the Inaccessibility Assumption in any form. A Protagorean collapses all states into the generic kind 'appearance'. He therefore allows for any object or feature of objects to occur in appearances, regardless of whether we might assign a particular object or feature to a particular state or sense. Second, were he to grant the assumption his position would self-destruct. To see the centrality of the assumption, consider how an exchange between a proponent of this interpretation and a Protagorean might go. If asked how we are aware of a feature common to two sensations, the Protagorean will claim that it is by reflection on the sensation {Colour is} and the sensation {Sound is}. The proponent will then appeal to the Inaccessibility Assumption: if Being is common, then it is not accessible through sensation. But if it is not accessible through sensation, then there are no sensations of the form {sound is} and {colour is}. Therefore, it is by some other means that we are aware that sound is. The Protagorean simply has to deny the Inaccessibility Assumption.

Regardless of whether one envisages a more erstwhile defender lurking in the background, if this line of argument is to employ an Inaccessibility Assumption, it must be the strong version. Recall that the weak version stipulates that *some* sensibles are such that if one is sensed by one modality it is sensed by no other. This weak version does not rule out the possibility that something could be a sensible and yet be sensed by many modalities. The strong version does, for it stipulates that *all* sensibles are such that if anything is sensed by one modality it is sensed by no other. Since the crucial inference moves from the claim that we are aware of a feature common to two sensibles to the conclusion that the feature is not sensible, it must rely on the strong version.[29]

The need for the strong version is also recognizable in the supposition of the next step of the argument. The second step trades on our awareness of a feature common to both a colour and a sound. This admits of two readings: is the awareness (1) an awareness merely of the feature, which is in fact common; or rather (2) an awareness that the feature is common? Suppose that being is a feature of both sounds and colours. I might then be aware of the being of a colour through sight and the being of a sound through hearing. In this situation we can say that each modality is aware *of* the feature, but neither modality is aware *that* the feature is common to the other

[28] cf. Burnyeat, art. cit. (n. 1), 48.

[29] Modrak, art. cit. (n. 1), 36–7 argues in a similar fashion, though she also thinks that the argument requires the strong Inaccessibility Assumption.

modality's object. The awareness *that* being is common to two modalities cannot be the product of either of them. The awareness *that* something is common to two perceptions plays the lead in the refutation of the Protagorean equation.[30]

The failure of this argument suggests that we are looking in the wrong place for the means to refute the thesis that knowledge is perception. A Protagorean will resist any argument that relies on the distinction between one mental state and another, or between perceptible or imperceptible features. Plato attacks on a different front. His target is the nature or status of the elements that comprise a Protagorean appearance. Plato has already demonstrated the incoherence of the Heraclitean version of relativism. If everything were changing in every respect at every moment, then thought and language would be impossible. The purified Protagorean allows that the constituents of appearances are stable (and that the subject of such appearances is stable, i.e. one person). He insists, however, that each constituent of each appearance is relative to the particular appearance it occurs in. Plato now questions whether this position permits the possibility of thought. If the constituents are stable, either a given constituent occurs only once or it recurs in distinct appearances. Consider the following appearances:

(1) {Sound is}
(2) {Colour is}
(3) {Both sound and colour are} (185a2–9)

If the predicate, here, 'is', is common to all three, then it is independent of, i.e. not relative to, any particular appearance. Since Plato thinks that (3) shows that the predicate is common, he assumes that the Protagorean has to choose the first horn of the dilemma. Hence the constituents of Protagorean appearances are not relative.

Plato's aim, then, is to establish that the constituents of thoughts and Protagorean appearances are such as to recur in many thoughts or appearances. How does the argument work? The third appearance, {Both sound and colour are}, is derived from the questions at 185a4 and a8. At a4 Socrates asks 'If, therefore, there is something (τι) you think (διανοῇ) about *both* [these perceptions, = appearances], you could not perceive ⟨it⟩ about both through either organ.' The switch from *perceive* to *think about both* indicates that something new is happening. The question is what.

There are three possible explanations. One cites the peculiar nature of the *something* that one thinks about both. From a8 and following we know that it is some common, such as being, that we are thinking. We infer that the shift is due to the particular kind of concept applied. Since perception does not have access to this concept, a different mode of apprehension must be at work. This account is adequate only to the extent that one accepts the strong Inaccessibility Assumption. Nothing in the claim at 184e8–185a2 precludes the possibility that each modality has access to being, provided that each is restricted to the being of its own special objects, e.g. sight to the being of colours, hearing to the being of sound. But even if we accept the strong version of the assumption, the distinction we drew between awareness that something

[30] There is no reason to think that the Protagorean would grant that being is not a perceptible feature. If appearances are appropriately propositional, and if being is given a properly relativized account, then we are, he will aver, aware of being in perception. Since all Protagorean appearances cited throughout the dialogue are propositional in form, when Plato commences the argument with the Inaccessibility Assumption, each sense's perception should be understood as propositional in form: '[This] sound is' and '[This] colour is'. The assumption is used to illustrate most vividly that these are, *ex hypothesi*, two *distinct* appearances, the constituents of each supposedly relative to that appearance which they respectively constitute. It does not matter, as Burnyeat notes, which predicate completes the proposition.

is common and awareness of something common shows that it is not the peculiar predicate as such that is important. What the third appearance demonstrates is that one can take *both* perceptions together and realize *that* being is common to each. This realization could not be the product of either modality, not because being is involved, but because the sensible object of each modality is unavailable to the other modality. One could therefore grant that being is perceptible, since it is not the mere presence of the common in perception that is doing the work in this brief argument. Rather, what is critical to its success is the fact that being is thought to be common to two or more perceptions.

A different explanation would rely on the unity claim: what is important is the fact that the agent of both the thought and the perceptions are the same. While this is a necessary condition for the argument's success, it is not sufficient. Everyone agrees to it, including the Protagorean defender, and there is no mention in the subsequent argument of the agent of the perceptions or appearances.

I believe that the best explanation appeals primarily to the peculiar nature of the act, i.e. the fact that there is *thinking about both* other appearances. What is special about the third appearance, {Both sound and colour are}, is that it has as its constituents the (same) elements of the first two. While it is true that this act would be impossible if the agent of all three appearances were not the same, it is the recurrence of all the constituents that shows that the powers of thought outstrip the resources of perception. This explanation has the benefit of not having to rely on any specification of the nature of the perceptions which are thought about. It does not matter whether each modality has access to the being of its own special objects (nor does it matter whether the sounds and colours referred to at 185a8–b4 are tokens or types). It does, however, employ the weak version of the Inaccessibility Assumption, since it assumes that a given modality cannot perceive the special objects of another modality.[31] In addition, such an explanation once and for all lays to rest the Protagorean. The fact that one can think about appearances or, in Protagorean terms, have an appearance of an appearance, shows that the elements of Protagorean appearances are repeatable. This is true independent of any Inaccessibility Assumption. Let any modality have access to all the objects of appearance. Once the Protagorean grants that one can reflect upon appearances, the recurrence of the constituents of appearances becomes apparent. What destroys the Protagorean view is the fact that the constituents of his perceptions are repeatable. Protagoreanism fails because what is common to many appearances is not relative to any particular one.

Note that the argument shows that what is grasped in any such psychic activity is something common. While it is true that Plato makes this point by using a particular group of concepts, the so-called commons, any will do. Thus the recurrence of {sound} and {colour} in 3 above is, philosophically speaking, as significant as the recurrence of {being}. It is of course true that the common 'being' (οὐσία) has special advantages: first, it is imperceptible; second, it does occur in every thought; and third, it enjoys special links to knowledge, since οὐσία also serves as the object of knowledge. But that the so-called commons do not play an indispensable role is evidenced by the fact that the other commons cited throughout the argument, similarity, difference, unity, etc., are not in any straightforward way a part of any minimal judgment.

[31] Plato accepts at least a weak version of the Inaccessibility Assumption for reasons explored in the *Timaeus*. The material structure of a given individual sense is not receptive of the structured matter of the sensibles proper to another sense. Whether Plato accepts the strong version hinges on, among other details, whether the optics of the *Timaeus* enables him to say that shapes and sizes are perceptible.

Plato emphasizes two features of the commons, like being: each has its own nature, and each has other properties (= concepts), such as being one, being different from all others, etc. Both the commons themselves and these features recur. But the same is true of every concept, e.g. red has its own nature and is one. Since all concepts share these features (having a nature and sharing certain properties), and fearing that the impression might arise that all concepts have the same aetiology, Plato turns next to distinguishing different types of concepts. It is this effort that finally brings us to the two different kinds of psychic activities. It begins from the recognition that being is omnipresent in all thoughts, or appearances, and that the other commons are needed to arrive at the notion of any concept, even those of the special sensibles. The special role of the so-called common concepts is the part they play in the rational reconstruction of how the mind can engage in thought; for these commons make possible the acquisition of all concepts and hence propositional thought itself.[32]

THE ACQUISITION OF CONCEPTS

Many scholars rightly emphasize that thought and perception differ in nature. Thought is propositional whereas perception is not. The difference between sensibles and commons, however, is not completely isomorphic with this distinction. Sensibles are constituents of sensations, commons constituents of thoughts. But the commons are not the only constituents of thoughts. Consider again minimal judgments of the form 'x is F'. Besides the copula, which is a common, these judgments are composed of whatever are the substituenda for 'x' and 'F'. The judgments used in the refutation of the Protagorean equation illustrate the problem of the substituenda. They all involve perceptual features such as sound and colour. Therefore their constituents include *concepts* of the special sensibles. What then is the relation between the perceptual features as they figure in perceptions and those features as they figure in judgments about what is perceived?

Three alternatives are open to the interpreter. One is to contend that perceptions are, in fact, judgments, and therefore that, by definition, percepts are concepts. These judgments are simple, demonstrative ones such as 'This is red'.[33] Perceptual judgments differ from non-perceptual judgments in that the concepts mobilized are all 'implicitly contained', or 'given' in sense experience. Non-perceptual judgments are construed to involve either the 'explicit' awareness of the implicitly contained concepts, or an awareness of a concept that is not given in experience, a vase for instance. A second possibility is to posit that sensibles are concepts of a minimal type – the sort of concepts involved in some form of cognitive activity below judgment, such as labelling or naming. The third possibility is that the concepts involved in judgments about what is perceived are analogues of the percepts involved in perceptions. This view differs from the first two in that perception remains a non-cognitive activity.

Once the need to account for the *concepts* of the special sensibles surfaces, the

[32] This is recognized by Frede, Burnyeat and Cooper. Comparison and contrast are involved in concept formation. One needs to discriminate the colour from the background, distinguish it from other colours, note its recurrence, and so on. (This is not an 'and so on' to be taken for granted.)

[33] The position taken by Modrak and offered as a possibility by Cooper. The formula 'implicitly contained' is borrowed from Modrak, though the idea is not exclusive to her. Talk of what is 'given' is rampant throughout the history of philosophy. See W. Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', in *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York, 1963).

difference between the two kinds of psychic activity takes on a different hue. One can no longer both identify the mind's through-the-senses activity with perception and hold that perception involves neither judgment nor conceptualization. Options one and two affirm the identity, but the former insists that perception involves judgment, the latter that it involves conceptualization. Option three, on the other hand, affirms that perception involves neither, but denies that the through-the-senses activity is identical with perception. I take this option. The distinction between the two kinds of activity is intended to capture a difference between two different kinds of concepts. The concepts of the sensibles are somehow related to the mind's through-the-body activity, just as the concepts of the commons are related to its independent activity.[34] In order to understand the difference between the two kinds of concepts, we must try to clarify how the mind works in these modes.

The *arche* of this distinction of concepts is Plato's assumption that thought is propositional in form. This fact immediately eliminates the second option. If the mind is engaged in perceiving, it is thinking, as opposed to merely labelling. The debate between the remaining options concerns whence the concepts used in thinking are derived. It should be said from the outset that we have no Platonic discussion of concept-acquisition.[35] Thus the debate is conducted largely in terms of what inferences we can draw from Platonic discussions of language, belief, thought, knowledge, etc. Those who think that perception is judgmental or cognitive have the option of deriving concepts from perception. If one holds that perception, *per se*, is non-judgmental and non-cognitive, then concepts must be derived from another source.

Both sides distinguish two types of thoughtful activity: on the one hand, there is thinking that involves merely the use of concepts; on the other hand, there is thinking that involves conscious reflection on the concepts used in non-reflective thought. The ideal end-point of this reflective activity is knowledge.[36] The distinction is most clear in the case of the common 'being'. Since all thought is propositional, it requires the use of this common. Since all normal adults think, all have access to being. Few, however, have reflected on the nature of this concept and even fewer still have acquired knowledge of it, i.e. can say what being is.[37] The distinction applies to all concepts. We can use them in thought without having to articulate their origin or

[34] cf. Frede: 'All questions are settled by the mind, though for some it does rely on perception' (op. cit. (n. 1 above), p. 7). Frede does not articulate what it is to rely on perception (any more than I do (or can)). For neither of us can it mean that it relies on some judgments that perception makes, for only the mind makes judgments. I suspect that he means that the mind uses what the individual thinks of as perceptual judgments, i.e. judgments about what we see, hear, taste.

[35] At least none of the ilk, for example, of *Posterior Analytics* B 19. The passages on recollection in the *Phaedo* and *Meno*, the discussion of what summons the mind in Book VII of the *Republic*, *Philebus* 33–40, and numerous others all concern activities of a soul that has already acquired concepts, i.e. already talks, thinks, and believes.

[36] The end result of our reflections on our beliefs and perceptions is knowledge of what there is. Talk of knowledge of concepts does double duty for both the Forms and the objects in the world the properties corresponding to these concepts qualify. I want to identify the concept that is known at least with the Form and perhaps with the instances of the Form. The former gives us the traditional objects of knowledge, the latter the possibility that there is knowledge of the external world. How concepts, or names, can apply to both the Forms, the instances of the Forms, and the particular bearers of those instances, is not discussed in this paper.

[37] It is arguable whether Plato thinks that there is a Form, Being Itself, let alone whether one could know it. Perhaps all that is knowable are the beings, e.g. Forms, and perhaps material particulars. Much turns on the way one reads the *Sophist* and what one thinks metaphysics, for Plato, is.

nature. Reflective thought involves a kind of bootstrapping. When we reflect upon the nature of a concept of a special sensible, for instance, red, we use, at a minimum, the common concepts of being, same and different to establish the nature of this concept. Ultimately, when we finally turn to the investigation of the commons themselves, the very concepts we are reflecting upon are used in the reflective activity.

When we ask whence the soul derives a particular concept, we must separate what is involved in the mind's original acquisition of the concept from what conscious reflection reveals about the origin and nature of the concept. The proponent of option one maintains that, according to Plato, some concepts are implicitly given in sense experience. They are acquired through such experience and reflection reveals their origin as concepts in such experience. If I am right that perception, given its non-propositional nature, is incapable of furnishing concepts, another source is required. I believe that, according to Plato, all concepts are acquired through recollection and the learning of language. This is a corollary of his thesis that thought is *logos*, language, spoken silently to oneself.[38] Because we are by nature linguistic animals, concepts are something we acquire by nature. We learn to speak about what we take ourselves to be seeing, hearing, touching, etc. Knowledge of the concepts so acquired, including the knowledge of the concepts of the sensibles, does not, however, come easily. Through elenctic questioning and dialectical give and take, we learn that some concepts are not what we might have initially thought them to be and that others have no reality at all.[39] Moreover, although all concepts are acquired through learning a language, conscious reflection about the origin and nature of the concepts of the sensibles reveals that they are connected to perception in a way that other concepts are not. We do not discover that *they are found* in perception. Rather we discover that both the concepts themselves and how we learn their use are systematically related to what we sense.[40]

The argument concerning the commons and the sensibles might tempt one to think that Plato is telling us not only how we acquire both kinds of concepts but also how we gain knowledge about both kinds. The concern, however, is to show that we must use the common concepts even to discover the nature or being of the sensible concepts. It shows that the independently engaged mind is required in all reflective inquiry. The conclusion of the argument signals that the concern is knowledge of the being (οὐσία) *of sensible concepts*, not *being itself*:[41]

> Some things, then, as many are the affections that stretch through the body to the soul, are such that men and animals are naturally able to perceive them immediately upon birth. Reflections on them [sensations], on the other hand, both with regard to their being (οὐσία) and utility

[38] See *Theaetetus* 189e4–190a6, *Sophist* 263d6–e13.

[39] So, for instance, we might give up our beliefs about what courage is, or justice, largeness, etc., and replace them with other beliefs. Or we might simply abandon a concept like 'barbarian' when we learn that the 'cut' does not yield a 'kind'. Again, I repeat that concepts are just the mental analogue of words and are 'of' the same things to which words refer. It is of course terribly difficult to say what Plato thought words referred to, or how they refer to whatever they do. Concepts perhaps change when we learn that they do not refer to what we thought they referred to, and when we discover that they refer to what they do for reasons different from what we might once have thought.

[40] It is not the case that we acquire a concept as soon as we learn to say the word. Even as children we must practice using the language and learn when to use the word properly. It takes time to learn to say 'Red' or 'This is red' when in the presence of red objects.

[41] cf. Cooper, art. cit. (n. 1), 126. This is a fatal flaw in Cornford's interpretation. It is prompted by his eagerness to find negative arguments for the Forms in the dialogue. Cooper rightly takes him to task for this.

(ὠφέλεια) come, to those to whom they come at all, only with difficulty and over a long time through much effort and training. (186c2–5)

Plato's point is not that only a few individuals acquire the concepts of redness or hardness. His point is that to understand their nature is difficult and something that few achieve. The immediately preceding argument addresses how this feat is accomplished. The process involves both the use of the commons and the comparison and contrast of sensations. It is the use of the commons that misleads one into thinking that we are about to learn how we acquire knowledge of them. At 186a2, 5–6, and 8 Socrates asks Theaetetus about the commons being, same, different, like, unlike, good and bad, fair and foul. About the first five Theaetetus says that the mind on its own reaches after them. About good and bad, fair and foul, however, he says:

They, too, seem to me especially to be of the kind whose being the mind considers in relation to one another, reflecting in itself on past and present things in regard to future things. (186a9–b1)

Socrates abruptly checks him (ἔχε δή):

The soul perceives through touch the hardness of the hard thing and the softness of the soft thing in the same way. But their being, and that they are, and their oppositeness to each other, and the being of this oppositeness are things the mind tries to determine for us, by going over and comparing them with one another. (186b2–9)

The tenor of these remarks suggests that Socrates stops him because he fears that Theaetetus mistakenly thinks that there are either sensations of these concepts or sensations from which the mind can derive these concepts via reflection.[42] There are no such sensations. Commons just are concepts. Nowhere in this argument does Plato discuss how the mind gains knowledge of the commons. But what he does say about them allows an answer to be given. They are grasped by the mind acting independently. We acquire them by learning to think and speak. Since the commons are acquired in learning how to think and are used by the independently engaged, i.e. thinking, mind, the mind need reflect only upon its independent activity to gain knowledge of them. Knowledge of the commons is acquired through reflection on thought and language themselves. This same process also reveals that their origin is in thought itself. We discover that neither are they available in perception nor is any analogue of them involved in perception.

The exchange with Theaetetus shows that the commons are used in the reflective inquiry into the nature of the sensible concepts. Since the commons are used in the inquiry, and since only the mind can use such commons, it is the mind that conducts the investigation. Through a long and arduous effort, we finally determine the οὐσία of hardness, for example. The inquiry starts from the comparison and contrast of sensations and includes reflection on how we come by these concepts.[43] However, unlike the result of an inquiry into the commons, this enterprise shows that the concepts of the special sensibles do have links with what we perceive. It is this *result*, and not the fact that we *start from* reflection on sensation, that justifies Plato's claim that the sensibles are investigated by the soul through-the-senses. As Theaetetus bears

[42] cf. McDowell, op. cit. (n. 12), p. 190.

[43] To acquire knowledge even of the sensibles involves much more than the comparison and contrast of sensations, or, more properly, perceptual judgments. The process probably does not differ greatly from that which is required to understand anything. There will be collection and division, elenctic examination of what people think and do, considerations of perspective, abnormal conditions and the nature of perception, and the locating of these concepts in a field of related concepts.

witness, an investigation into what anything is, is likely to start from reflection upon what we (think we) perceive. But that alone is insufficient to merit its claim to be something which the soul grasps through the senses. Only when we discover the role that perception plays in its acquisition does a given concept deserve the title.

Those who hold that perceptions are judgments think that perception's role is literally to furnish the concepts of the special sensibles. The independently engaged soul must study the through-the-body activities because such activities just are perceptions, and perceptions implicitly contain the concepts to be studied. While they distinguish conscious reflection upon the concepts used in judgments from the non-reflective judgments in which they are used, they identify these non-reflective judgments with perception and hence with the through-the-body activity of the soul. In their view, perceptual judgments use the concept of being, but they have no explicit awareness of what that concept is, and, a fortiori, no explicit awareness of the οὐσία of the sensible concept found in the perceptual judgment.[44] The difference between the simple use of a concept and the explicit awareness of its οὐσία allows them to claim that knowledge is not perception. For the explicit awareness and reflection required to know what red is is not available through perception. If perceptual judgments cannot, by stipulation, be reflective, then I have no disagreement about perception's inability to develop the articulate concepts required for knowledge.[45] On the other hand, it is important to be clear about what the claim that perception involves judgment comes to. It will not do to say, as scholars do, that certain judgments *come about as a result*, or even a *direct result*, of sensation or sense-experience.[46] There is no dispute about whether we can (or do) judge on the basis of perception. The question is whether perceptions, *per se*, are judgments, that is whether perceptions use the concept being.

Is perception a judgmental capacity? Many considerations militate against answering this question affirmatively. First, Plato, especially in the later dialogues, never claims that perceptions have truth-values. The passages of the *Theaetetus* cited in support of this claim all involve Protagorean appearances or 'perceptions' of a kind different from the simple demonstrative judgments postulated by option one.[47] In the *Sophist* 263d6–8, perceptions are not included in those activities that involve truth and falsehood. φαντασία does concern truth and falsehood, but it is explicitly introduced as a combination of perception and judgment. The *Philebus* is even more emphatic. Not only are perceptions not said to be true or false, something must be added to perception and memory to generate a belief. This would be odd were perceptions themselves a kind of judgment. One who thinks that perception is judgmental could respond here that in each dialogue we find only an argument from silence. This is not entirely accurate. In each case the failure to mention that aisthesis is propositional seems deliberate. In the *Sophist*, the stranger presents a catalogue of mental states that have a share of being and not-being, he explicitly mentions

[44] See, for instance, Modrak, art. cit. (n. 1), 44: 'A simple perceptual judgment is an articulation of a state of affairs directly given in perception. It uses concepts that are implicitly given in sensuous representation. The explicitly held concept, although distinguishable from the implicitly given concept, is an articulation of the latter.' Cf. Cooper, art. cit. (n. 1), 141ff.

[45] I am uncertain as to when judgments are explicitly made and when implicitly made. It seems to turn on how familiar we are with the concepts we are employing, i.e. the subject matter we are judging, and how entrenched the judgment is in our web of beliefs. Since I think nothing is 'given' in perception, I think no judgments are implicit *by nature* or necessity. In claiming that perceptual judgments are not reflective, I mean that they do not take other judgments as their objects, or even into consideration as evidence.

[46] cf. Modrak, art. cit. (n. 1), 42.

[47] ibid., p. 53 n. 15.

aisthesis, and he does not choose to include it in the catalogue. Nor does it seem likely that in a discussion of aisthesis which culminates in the puzzling claim that there are true and false pleasures, it is a mere oversight on Plato's part not to mention that aisthesis too is true and false. At the very least, the fact that Plato nowhere in a late dialogue says that aisthesis is propositional shifts the burden to those who would argue the contrary.

This brings us to a second and most important consideration. If perceptual judgments even use the concept of being, it must be implicitly contained in sense-experience. Not only does Plato apparently deny this in the *Theaetetus*, it is hard to see how anything could be excluded from sense-experience if being is implicitly contained in it. But exclude we must, for if perceptual judgments can be about anything, perception threatens to become identical with belief. In order to ground the claim that being is found in perception, it is posited that we perceive states of affairs or facts. Coupled with the need to exclude physical objects from perception, this move has severe consequences. What we non-reflectively judge that we see are coloured objects in the external world. If we do perceive states of affairs or facts, their constituents would seem to be colours out there in the world and physical objects which are coloured. Since this would allow the concepts of physical objects to be implicitly contained in perception, the proponent of the view denies that the state of affairs perceived is part of the external world. What is perceived, what the demonstrative subject of the perceptual judgment actually refers to, is, in effect, a sense-datum. Now this could only be a philosophical discovery. We do not take ourselves to be identifying or judging sense-data, or even our own internal experiences. We believe that we are seeing and making judgments about the external world. If we discover that we are really making judgments about sense-data and not about physical objects, we thereby determine that all our perceptual judgments about the external world are entirely in error. There is no hint of sense-data in Plato.[48] Nor is there the suggestion that when we finally gain knowledge of what red or anything else is, we realize that *all* our perceptual judgments were mistaken. Our beliefs that the sea is wine dark or that the Parthenon is white remain true, even after we discover what wine dark and white are.

The two options under consideration share the view that what the conscious reflecting mind considers are judgments about what is perceived. On the first option, the mind is said to have access to perceptions, even though it reflects upon judgments, because perceptions simply are judgments. But the result of these reflections is the revelation that what we perceive are sense-data and that all our non-reflective beliefs about what we see are false. On the third option, the reflecting mind considers judgments because it can access only judgments. When we have concluded our reflective inquiry, we realize that, whatever we may have initially thought, we never get at raw sensation. We learn that we are reflecting on beliefs about what we perceive. But we also learn how sensation itself works and thereby confirm the truth of our beliefs about what we see – that is, the truth of our beliefs about coloured objects in

[48] cf. Modrak. How Russellian knowledge-by-acquaintance and sense-data came to figure in Platonic scholarship is a long tale. One of its roots can be traced back to G. Ryle, 'Plato's *Parmenides*', *Mind* n.s. 48 (1939), 129–51, 303–25 (see, for instance, pp. 36–7), and through him to Owen's paper 'Plato On Not-Being' (see, for instance, pp. 244–5). The impetus was from thinking of knowledge of Forms in the middle period as roughly equivalent to knowledge-by-acquaintance and, concomitantly, thinking of the meaning of names as simple proxyhood. I do not think this is a fair representation of Plato's epistemology or theory of meaning. On the epistemological front, knowledge, throughout the corpus, is of definitions, i.e. of *what x is*.

the external world. Knowledge causes us to revise our beliefs about what is perceptible, not our beliefs that the objects of the physical world are coloured.

CONCLUSION

The extraordinary consequences of the first view are due to its conviction that certain concepts are implicitly contained in sense experience. This conviction is, I think, not only mistaken, but fundamentally foreign to Plato. It suggests a continuum between perception and knowledge such that we can somehow abstract or elevate concepts out of perception into cognition, work on them, and eventually gain knowledge of them. But Plato never looks kindly upon abstractionism, and the attack on Protagoras suggests that nothing is 'given' in sensation. We can obtain knowledge starting from perception and belief not because of what perception and belief are about; rather, because of what knowledge is about, we can attain it even though we start from perception and belief. In Platonic idiom, it is what is at the top of the divided line that allows us to ascend from the bottom up and then descend from the top down.

The argument at 184–6 reveals the same moral. There is a fundamental difference between perception and conception. We do not derive explicit judgments from perceptual judgments containing those concepts implicitly. There are no judgments or concepts there to begin with. We somehow impose concepts on the information supplied by the senses. We learn to talk, think and reason. In applying the learned concepts to our perceptions we make perceptual judgments. Our perceptual judgments are not limited to demonstrative identifications of sensible qualities, probably not even at the beginning. Perhaps Plato believed that we first learn about colours, then shapes, and finally physical objects. But when we begin to reflect upon what we see, we reflect upon judgments about coloured objects in the world, Those who eventually understand the nature of sensation learn that, strictly speaking, they see only colours. Plato says very little about the perception of common qualities such as shape, or the perception of physical objects. If, as I would conjecture, they are seen only through colours, the philosopher will give up his previous beliefs about their inherent perceptibility. He will not, however, give up his previous beliefs about their being coloured or shaped. On the contrary, what he learns about sensation and sensible qualities will confirm those beliefs.

Plato takes the last of the three options presented above. Perception is independent of conceptualization. It is an autonomous capacity of the irrational soul. It is an irrational capacity because it involves neither judgment nor identification. It is an autonomous capacity in that its activity is a consequence of the material structure of the senses and the material objects of the external world. It is autonomous also because the information it provides is independent of our beliefs. Perception is impervious to cognition. Sensibles are the proper objects of the five senses, materially related to the affections which stretch through the body to the soul. They are limited to the proper sensibles. We sense only the special sensibles, because they alone have the appropriate structure to interact with our senses. The cognitive analogues of these sensibles are the concepts of red, hard, sweet, etc. These analogous concepts are the constituents of the appropriate perceptual judgments such as 'This is red', 'The wall is red', and so on. As we become rational, we form judgments based on perception. As we grow more rational, the range of perceptual judgments expands. The acquisition of the concepts of the 'commons' is more clearcut. We are born with souls comprised of analogues of some of these concepts. We acquire the concepts themselves as we learn to speak and think. Once equipped with a battery of concepts,

most people become wedded to their beliefs about what is sensible. Uninterested in the nature of their cognitive and perceptual capacities, they live at the second stage of the divided line. They take for granted what they think they see. Some learn enough to use their senses to transcend those beliefs. By inquiring into the foundations of their activities, they learn to separate perception from cognition and certain concepts from others. They realize not that their prior beliefs were false, but that they were merely beliefs. They ascend the divided line, eschewing contacts with the observable world in pursuit of its foundations. What they see never changes. Where they look does.[49]

Ohio State University ALLAN SILVERMAN

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