

Meta Logou* in Plato's *Theaetetus

Boris Hennig

Abstract

The account of knowledge in Plato's *Theaetetus*, as true belief *meta logou*, seems to lead to a regress, which may be avoided by defining one kind of knowledge as true belief that rests on a different kind of knowledge. I explore a specific version of this move: to define knowledge as true belief that results from a successful and proper exercise of a *rational capacity* (a *dunamis meta logou*).

Keywords: Plato, Theaetetus, Knowledge, Rational Capacities

1. Introduction

Plato's *Theaetetus* famously ends with an apparent failure in defining knowledge as true belief based on an account (*meta logou alēthēs doxa*, 201c10). One of the main flaws of this definition appears to be that an account is itself either something known, and thus an instance of knowledge, or it is a mere true belief. If it is the first, the definition turns out to be circular (210a7–9). It cannot be the second, however, because no mere true belief will turn into knowledge by being supported by another mere true belief (209d8–e5).

In this paper, I will explore the following way of escaping this apparent dilemma. If we

assume that the sort of knowledge that Theaetetus is trying to define is only one among many, we can further assume that this sort of knowledge, call it theoretical knowledge, is true belief that is based on a different sort of knowledge, which might not be a form of belief at all.

I will begin by motivating this proposal. First, I will point out that many of the forms of knowledge that are implicitly present in the *Theaetetus* are not actually forms of belief. Then I will turn to the *Statesman*, where political expertise is described as knowledge of due measure, which is never fully expressed in its tangible manifestations. Rather, political expertise is embodied, as it were, in the person of the political expert herself. Having thus motivated the proposal that there might be forms of non-doxastic knowledge behind each instance of theoretical knowledge, my next step will be to articulate this proposal in terms of Aristotle's notion of a rational capacity (*dunamis meta logou*). I will attempt to characterize theoretical knowledge as true belief that results from a proper and successful exercise of such a capacity. Then I will consider several more or less substantive objections to this move, and conclude by reviewing whether and in what shape my proposal has survived the criticism.

...