

d THEAET. Oh, no, indeed, Theodorus! Not till you and Socrates have done what you proposed just now, and dealt with the other side, the people who say that the Universe stands still.

THEOD. What's this, Theaetetus? You at your age teaching your elders to be unjust and break their agreements? What you have got to do is to prepare to render account to Socrates yourself for the rest of the discussion.

THEAET. All right, if he likes. But I would rather have listened to a discussion of these views.

THEOD. Well, challenging Socrates to an argument is like inviting 'cavalry into the plain'. So ask your questions and you shall hear. Soc. But I don't think, Theodorus, that I am going to be persuaded by Theaetetus to do what he demands.

THEOD. But what is it makes you unwilling?

Soc. Shame. I am afraid our criticism might be a very cheap affair. And if I feel like this before the many who have made the universe one and unmoved, Melissus and the rest of them, I feel it still more in the face of the One—Parmenides. Parmenides seems to me, in the words of Homer, to be 'reverend' and 'awful'. I met him when I was very young and he was a very old man; and he seemed to me to have a wholly noble depth.⁴⁰ So I am afraid we might not understand even what he says; still less should we attain to his real thought. Above all, I am afraid that the very object of our discussion, the nature of knowledge, might be left unexamined amid the crowd of theories that will rush in upon us if we admit them, especially as the theory we have now brought up is one which involves unmanageably vast issues. To treat it as a side-show, would be insult and injury; while if it is adequately discussed, it is likely to spread out until it completely eclipses the problem of knowledge. We must not do either. What we must do is to make use of our midwife's art to deliver Theaetetus of the thoughts which he has conceived about the nature of knowledge.

THEOD. Well, if that is what you think proper, it must be done. Soc. Now, Theaetetus, I want you to think about one point in what has been said. Your answer was that knowledge is perception, wasn't it?

40. The reference is probably not to an actual historical meeting but to the discussion between Socrates and Parmenides in Plato's *Parmenides*. 'Depth' in Greek usage alludes not only to profundity of thought but also to the untruffled composure which is the proper bearing of a philosopher. In contrast to the unsteadiness of the Heracliteans (179e-180c), Parmenides' mind is one to which it is difficult for understanding or critical questioning to penetrate.

THEAET. Yes.

Soc. Now supposing you were asked: 'With what does a man see white and black, and with what does he hear high and low notes?' You would reply, I imagine, 'With his eyes and ears.'

THEAET. I should, yes.

Soc. Now as a rule it is no sign of ill-breeding to be easy in the use of language and take no particular care in one's choice of words; it is rather the opposite that gives a man away. But such exactness is sometimes necessary; and it is necessary here, for example, to fasten upon something in your answer that is not correct. Think now. Is it more correct to say that the eyes are that *with* which we see, or that *through* which we see? Do we hear *with* the ears or *through* the ears?

THEAET. Well, I should think, Socrates, that it is '*through* which' we perceive in each case, rather than '*with* which.'

Soc. Yes, my son. It would be a very strange thing, I must say, if there were a number of senses sitting inside us as if we were Wooden Horses, and there were not some single form, soul or whatever one ought to call it, to which all these converge—something *with* which, *through* the senses, as if they were instruments, we perceive all that is perceptible.

THEAET. That sounds to me better than the other way of putting it.

Soc. Now the reason why I am being so precise with you is this. I want to know if it is with one and the same part of ourselves that we reach, through our eyes to white and black, and through the other means to yet further things; and whether, if asked, you will be able to refer all these to the body. But perhaps it would be better if you stated the answers yourself, rather than that I should busy myself on your behalf. Tell me: the instruments through which you perceive hot, hard, light, sweet—do you consider that they all belong to the body? Or can they be referred elsewhere?

THEAET. No, they all belong to the body.

Soc. And are you also willing to admit that what you perceive through one power, you can't perceive through another? For instance, what you perceive through hearing, you couldn't perceive through sight, and similarly what you perceive through sight you couldn't perceive through hearing?

THEAET. I could hardly refuse to grant that.

Soc. Then suppose you think something about both; you can't possibly be having a perception about both, either through one of these instruments or through the other?

THEAET. No.

SOC. Now take a sound and a colour. First of all, don't you think this same thing about both of them, namely, that they both are?

THEAET. I do.

SOC. Also that each of them is different from the other and the same as itself?

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THEAET. Of course.

SOC. And that both together are two, and each of them is one?

THEAET. Yes, I think that too.

SOC. Are you also able to consider whether they are like or unlike each other?

THEAET. Yes, I may be.

SOC. Now what is it through which you think all these things about them? It is not possible, you see, to grasp what is common to both either through sight or through hearing. Let us consider another thing which will show the truth of what we are saying. Suppose it were possible to enquire whether both are salty or not. You can tell me, of course, with what you would examine them. It would clearly be neither sight nor hearing, but something else.

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THEAET. Yes, of course; the power which functions through the tongue.

SOC. Good. Now through what does that power function which reveals to you what is common in the case both of all things and of these two—I mean that which you express by the words 'is' and 'is not' and the other terms used in our questions about them just now? What kind of instruments will you assign for all these? Through what does that which is perceptive in us perceive all of them?

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THEAET. You mean being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, same and different; also one, and any other number applied to them. And obviously too your question is about odd and even, and all that is involved with these attributes; and you want to know through what bodily instruments we perceive all these with the soul.

SOC. You follow me exceedingly well, Theaetetus. These are just the things I am asking about.

THEAET. But I couldn't possibly say. All I can tell you is that it doesn't seem to me that for these things there is any special instrument at all, as there is for the others. It seems to me that in investigating the common features of everything the soul functions through itself.

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SOC. Yes, Theaetetus, you would say that, because you are hand-

some and not ugly as Theodorus would have it.⁴¹ For handsome is as handsome says. And besides being handsome, you have done me a good turn; you have saved me a vast amount of talk if it seems to you that, while the soul considers some things through the bodily powers, there are others which it considers alone and through itself. This was what I thought myself, but I wanted you to think it too.

THEAET. Well, it does seem to me to be so.

SOC. Now in which class do you put being? For that, above all, is something that accompanies everything.

THEAET. I should put it among the things which the soul itself reaches out after by itself.

SOC. Also like and unlike, same and different?

THEAET. Yes.

SOC. What about beautiful and ugly, good and bad?

THEAET. Yes, these too; in these, above all, I think the soul examines the being they have as compared with one another. Here it seems to be making a calculation within itself of past and present in relation to future.

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SOC. Not so fast, now. Wouldn't you say that it is through touch that the soul perceives the hardness of what is hard, and similarly the softness of what is soft?

THEAET. Yes.

SOC. But as regards their being—the fact that they are—their opposition to one another, and the being, again, of this opposition, the matter is different. Here the soul itself attempts to reach a decision for us by rising to compare them with one another.

THEAET. Yes, undoubtedly.

SOC. And thus there are some things which all creatures, men and animals alike, are naturally able to perceive as soon as they are born; I mean, the experiences which reach the soul through the body. But calculations regarding their being and their advantage or disadvantage come, when they do, only as the result of a long and arduous development, involving a good deal of trouble and education.

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THEAET. Yes, that certainly is so.

SOC. Now is it possible for someone who does not even get at being to get at truth?

THEAET. No, it's impossible.

SOC. And if a man fails to get at the truth of a thing, will he ever be a person who knows that thing?

41. Cf. 143e.

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THEAET. I don't see how, Socrates.

SOC. Then knowledge is to be found not in the experiences but in the process of reasoning about them; it is here, seemingly, not in the experiences, that it is possible to grasp being and truth.

THEAET. So it appears.

SOC. Then in the face of such differences, would you call both by the same name?

THEAET. One would certainly have no right to.

SOC. Now what name do you give to the former—seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling cold or warm?

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THEAET. I call that perceiving—what else could I call it?

SOC. So the whole lot taken together you call perception?

THEAET. Necessarily.

SOC. Which, we say, has no share in the grasping of truth, since it has none in the grasping of being.

THEAET. No, it has none.

SOC. So it has no share in knowledge either.

THEAET. No.

SOC. Then, Theaetetus, perception and knowledge could never be the same thing.

THEAET. No, apparently not, Socrates; we have now got the clearest possible proof that knowledge is something different from perception.

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SOC. But our object in beginning this discussion was not to find out what knowledge is not, but to find out what it is. However, we have made a little progress. We shall not now look for knowledge in sense-perception at all, but in whatever we call that activity of the soul when it is busy by itself about the things which are.

THEAET. Well, the name, Socrates, I suppose is judgement.

SOC. Your opinion, my dear lad, is correct. Now look back to the beginning. Wipe out all that we have said hitherto, and see if you can see any better from where you have now progressed to. Tell me again, what is knowledge?

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THEAET. Well, Socrates, one can't say that it is judgement in general, because there is also false judgement—but true judgement may well be knowledge. So let that be my answer. If the same thing happens again, and we find, as we go on, that it turns out not to be so, we'll try something else.

SOC. And even so, Theaetetus, you have answered me in the way one ought—with a good will, and not reluctantly, as you did at first. If we continue like this, one of two things will happen.

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Either we shall find what we are going out after; or we shall be less inclined to think we know things which we don't know at all—and even that would be a reward we could not fairly be dissatisfied with. Now what is this that you say? There are two forms of judgement, true and false; and your definition is that true judgement is knowledge?

THEAET. Yes. That is how it looks to me now.

SOC. Now I wonder if it's worth while, at this stage, to go back to an old point about judgement—

THEAET. What point do you mean?

SOC. I have something on my mind which has often bothered me before, and got me into great difficulty, both in my own thought and in discussion with other people—I mean, I can't say what it is, this experience we have, and how it arises in us.

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THEAET. What experience?

SOC. Judging what is false. Even now, you know, I'm still considering; I'm in two minds whether to let it go or whether to look into it in a different manner from a short while ago.

THEAET. Why not, Socrates, if this appears for any reason to be the right thing to do? As you and Theodorus were saying just now, and quite rightly, when you were talking about leisure, we are not pressed for time in talk of this kind.

SOC. A very proper reminder. Perhaps it would not be a bad moment to go back upon our tracks. It is better to accomplish a little well than a great deal unsatisfactorily.

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THEAET. Yes, it certainly is.

SOC. Now how are we to proceed? And actually what is it that we are saying? We claim, don't we, that false judgement repeatedly occurs and one of us judges falsely, the other truly, as if it was in the nature of things for this to happen?

THEAET. That is what we claim.

SOC. Now isn't it true about all things, together or individually, that we must either know them or not know them? I am ignoring for the moment the intermediate conditions of learning and forgetting, as they don't affect the argument here.

THEAET. Of course, Socrates, in that case there is no alternative. With each thing we either know it or we do not.

SOC. Then when a man judges, the objects of his judgement are necessarily either things which he knows or things which he doesn't know?

THEAET. Yes, that must be so.

knowledge but actually in virtue of his knowledge. Secondly, he judges that this is something else and that the other thing is it. Now surely this is utterly unreasonable; it means that the soul, when knowledge becomes present to it, knows nothing and is wholly ignorant. According to this argument, there is no reason why an accession of ignorance should not make one know something, or of blindness make one see something, if knowledge is ever going to make a man ignorant.

THEAET. Well, perhaps, Socrates, it wasn't a happy thought to make the birds only pieces of knowledge. Perhaps we ought to have supposed that there are pieces of ignorance also flying about in the soul along with them, and what happens is that the hunter sometimes catches a piece of knowledge and sometimes a piece of ignorance concerning the same thing; and the ignorance makes him judge falsely, while the knowledge makes him judge truly.

SOC. I can hardly refrain from expressing my admiration of you, Theaetetus; but do think again about that. Let us suppose it is as you say: then, you maintain, the man who catches a piece of ignorance will judge falsely. Is that it?

THEAET. Yes.

SOC. But presumably he will not think he is judging falsely?

THEAET. No, of course he won't.

SOC. He will think he is judging what is true; and his attitude towards the things about which he is in error will be as if he knew them.

THEAET. Of course.

SOC. He will think he has hunted down and 'has' a piece of knowledge and not a piece of ignorance.

THEAET. Yes, that's clear.

SOC. So, after going a long way round, we are back at our original difficulty. Our friend the expert in refutation will laugh. 'My very good people,' he will say, 'do you mean that a man who knows both knowledge and ignorance is thinking that one of them which he knows is the other which he knows? Or is it that he knows neither, and judges the one he doesn't know to be the other which he doesn't know? Or is it that he knows one and not the other, and judges that the one he knows is the one he doesn't know? Or does he think that the one he doesn't know is the one he does? Or are you going to start all over again and tell me that there's another set of pieces of knowledge concerning pieces of knowledge and ignorance, which a man may possess shut up in some other ridiculous avaries or waxen devices, which he knows so long as he

possesses them though he may not have them ready to hand in his soul—and in this way end up forced to come running round to the same place over and over again and never get any further? What are we going to say to that, Theaetetus?

THEAET. Oh, dear me, Socrates, I don't know what one ought to say.

SOC. Then don't you think, my boy, that the argument is perhaps dealing out a little proper chastisement, and showing us that we were wrong to leave the question about knowledge and proceed to enquire into false judgement first? While as a matter of fact it's impossible to know this until we have an adequate grasp of what knowledge is.

THEAET. Well, at the moment, Socrates, I feel bound to believe you.

SOC. Then, to go back to the beginning, what are we going to say knowledge is?—We are not, I suppose, going to give up yet?

THEAET. Certainly not, unless you give up yourself.

SOC. Tell me, then, how could we define it with the least risk of contradicting ourselves?

THEAET. In the way we were attempting before, Socrates; I can't think of any other.

SOC. In what way do you mean?

THEAET. By saying that knowledge is true judgement. Judging truly is at least something free of mistakes, I take it, and everything that results from it is admirable and good.

SOC. Well, Theaetetus, as the man who was leading the way across the river said, 'It will show you.'⁴⁹ If we go on and track this down, perhaps we may stumble on what we are looking for; if we stay where we are, nothing will come clear.

THEAET. You're right; let's go on and consider it.

SOC. Well, this won't take long to consider, anyway; there is a whole art indicating to you that knowledge is not what you say.

THEAET. How's that? What art do you mean?

SOC. The art of the greatest representatives of wisdom—the men called orators and lawyers. These men, I take it, use their art to produce conviction not by teaching people, but by making them judge whatever they themselves choose. Or do you think there are

49. According to the scholiast the story was: some travellers came to the bank of a river, which they wished to cross at the ford; one of them asked the guide, 'Is the water deep?' He said, 'It will show you', i.e. don't ask the guide, you must try it for yourself.

b any teachers so clever that within the short time allowed by the clock they can teach adequately the truth of what happened to people who have been robbed or assaulted, in a case where there were no eye-witnesses?

THEAET. No, I don't think they possibly could; but they might be able to *persuade* them.

SOC. And by 'persuading them', you mean 'causing them to judge', don't you?

THEAET. Of course.

c SOC. Then suppose a jury has been justly persuaded of some matter which only an eye-witness could know, and which cannot otherwise be known; suppose they come to their decision upon hearsay, forming a true judgement: then they have decided the case without knowledge, but, granted they did their job well, being correctly persuaded?

THEAET. Yes, certainly.

SOC. But, my dear lad, they couldn't have done that if true judgement is the same thing as knowledge; in that case the best jurymen in the world couldn't form a correct judgement without knowledge. So it seems they must be different things.

d THEAET. Oh, yes, Socrates, that's just what I once heard a man say; I had forgotten, but now it's coming back to me. He said that it is true judgement with an account⁵⁰ that is knowledge; true judgement without an account falls outside of knowledge. And he said that the things of which there is no account are not knowable (yes, he actually called them that),⁵¹ while those which have an account are knowable.

SOC. Very good indeed. Now tell me, how did he distinguish these knowables and unknowables? I want to see if you and I have heard the same version.

THEAET. I don't know if I can find that out; but I think I could follow if someone explained it.

e SOC. Listen then to a dream in return for a dream. In my dream, too, I thought I was listening to people saying that the primary elements, as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account. Each of them, in itself, can only be named;

50. 'Account' translates *logos*: see Introduction, p. xviii ff.

51. The parenthesis may alternatively be translated: '(that was the word he used)'. The translation in the text expresses surprise about the claim that some things are not knowable at all. The alternative translation calls attention to the particular Greek word used for 'knowable'.

it is not possible to say anything else of it, either that it is² or that it is not. That would mean that we were adding being or not-being to it; whereas we must not attach anything, if we are to speak of that thing itself alone. Indeed we ought not to apply to it even such words as 'itself' or 'that', 'each', 'alone', or 'this', or any other of the many words of this kind; for these go the round and are applied to all things alike, being other than the things to which they are added, whereas if it were possible to express the element itself and it had its own proprietary account, it would have to be expressed without any other thing. As it is, however, it is impossible that any of the primaries should be expressed in an account; it can only be named, for a name is all that it has. But with the things composed of these, it is another matter. Here, just in the same way as the elements themselves are woven together, so their names may be woven together and become an account of something—an account being essentially a complex⁵³ of names. Thus the elements are unaccountable and unknowable, but they are perceivable, whereas the complexes are both knowable and expressible and can be the objects of true judgement.

c Now when a man gets a true judgement about something without an account, his soul is in a state of truth as regards that thing, but he does not know it; for someone who cannot give and take an account of a thing is ignorant about it. But when he has also got an account of it, he is capable of all this and is made perfect in knowledge. Was the dream you heard the same as this or a different one?

THEAET. No, it was the same in every respect.

SOC. Do you like this then, and do you suggest that knowledge is true judgement with an account?

THEAET. Yes, certainly.

d SOC. Theaetetus, can it be that all in a moment, you and I have today laid hands upon something which many a wise man has searched for in the past—and gone grey before he found it?

52. The translation is intended to leave it unclear, as the original is unclear, whether 'anything else' refers here to the statement that it is, or to anything it might be said to be. The two construals come to much the same if the first is understood, as it probably ought to be, not as the statement that it exists, but as the incomplete initial portion of a statement saying that it is something or other. The whole sentence could then be printed thus: 'it is not possible to say anything else of it, either that it is . . . or that it is not . . .'

53. Literally, 'a weaving together'—the Greek noun *sunplōkē*, like the English word 'complex' itself, is related to the verb translated 'woven together' in the previous two lines.

less readily—I mean, indicate what he thinks about a thing, if he is not deaf or dumb to begin with? And that being so, anyone at all who makes a correct judgement will turn out to have it together with an account; correct judgement without knowledge will no longer be found anywhere.

THEAET. True.

SOC. Well then, we mustn't be too ready to condemn the author of the definition of knowledge now before us for talking nonsense. Perhaps he didn't mean this; perhaps he meant being able, when questioned about what a thing is, to give an answer by reference to its elements.

THEAET. As for example, Socrates?

SOC. As for example, what Hesiod is doing when he says 'One hundred are the timbers of a wagon.'⁶⁰ Now I couldn't say what they are; and I don't suppose you could either. If you and I were asked what a wagon is, we should be satisfied if we could answer, 'Wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke.'

THEAET. Yes, surely.

SOC. But he might think us ridiculous, just as he would if we were asked what your name is, and replied by giving the syllables. In that case, he would think us ridiculous because although we might be correct in our judgement and our expression of it, we should be fancying ourselves as scholars, thinking we knew and were expressing a scholar's account of Theaetetus' name. Whereas in fact no one gives an account of a thing with knowledge till, in addition to his true judgement, he goes right through the thing element by element—as I think we said before.

THEAET. We did, yes.

SOC. In the same way, in the example of the wagon, he would say that we have indeed correct judgement; but it is the man who can explore its being by going through those hundred items who has made the addition which adds an account to his true judgement. It is this man who has passed from mere judgement to expert knowledge of the being of a wagon; and he has done so in virtue of having gone over the whole by means of the elements.

THEAET. And doesn't that seem sound to you, Socrates?

SOC. Well, tell me if it seems sound to you, my friend. Tell me if you are prepared to accept the view that an account is a matter of going through a thing element by element, while going through it by 'syllables' or larger divisions falls short of being an account. Then we shall be able to discuss it.

60. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 456.

THEAET. I'm certainly prepared to accept that.
SOC. And do you at the same time think that a man has knowledge of anything when he believes the same thing now to be part of one thing and now part of something else? Or when he judges that now one thing and now something different belongs to one and the same object?

THEAET. No, indeed I don't.

SOC. Then have you forgotten that at first when you were learning to read and write that is just what you and the other boys used to do?

THEAET. You mean we used to think that sometimes one letter and sometimes another belonged to the same syllable, and used to put the same letter sometimes into its proper syllable and sometimes into another?

SOC. Yes, that is what I mean.

THEAET. Well, I certainly haven't forgotten; and I don't think people at that stage can be said to have knowledge yet.

SOC. Well, suppose now that someone who is at this sort of stage is writing the name 'Theaetetus'; he thinks he ought to write THE and does so.⁶¹ Then suppose another time he is trying to write 'Theodorus', and this time he thinks he should write TE and proceeds to do so. Are we going to say that he knows the first syllable of your names?

THEAET. No. We've admitted that anyone who is at that stage has not yet knowledge.

SOC. And is there anything to prevent the same person being in that situation as regards the second and third and fourth syllables?

THEAET. No, nothing.

SOC. Now at the time when he does this, he will be writing 'Theaetetus' not only with correct judgement, but with command of the way through its letters; that must be so whenever he writes them out one after another in their order.

THEAET. Yes, clearly.

SOC. And still without knowledge though with correct judgement—isn't that our view?

THEAET. Yes.

SOC. Yet possessing an account of it along with his correct judgement. He was writing it, you see, with command of the way through its letters; and we agreed that that is an account.

61. Socrates actually says, 'he thinks he ought to write theta and epsilon', using the names of the Greek letters in the first syllable of 'Theaetetus' name. There are only two such letters because Greek represents the sound of TH by the single letter theta.

judgement' be? If, on the one hand, it means that we must make another judgement about the way in which a thing differs from the rest of things, we are being required to do something very absurd.

THEAET. How's that?

SOC. Because we already have a correct judgement about the way a thing differs from other things; and we are then directed to add a correct judgement about the way it differs from other things. At that rate, the way a roller goes round or a pestle or anything else proverbial would be nothing compared with such directions; they might be more justly called a matter of 'the blind leading the blind'. To tell us to add what we already have, in order to come to know what we are judging about, bears a generous resemblance to the behaviour of a man benighted.

THEAET. Whereas if, on the other hand, . . . ? What else were you going to suggest when you started this enquiry just now?

SOC. Well, if 'adding an account' means that we are required to get to know the difference, not merely judge it, this most splendid of our accounts of knowledge turns out to be a very amusing affair. For getting to know of course is acquiring knowledge, isn't it?

THEAET. Yes.

SOC. So, it seems, the answer to the question 'What is knowledge?' will be 'Correct judgement accompanied by knowledge of the difference'—for this is what we are asked to understand by the 'addition of an account'.

THEAET. Apparently so.

SOC. And it is surely just silly to tell us, when we are trying to discover what knowledge is, that it is correct judgement accompanied by knowledge, whether of difference or of anything else? And so, Theaetetus, knowledge is neither perception nor true judgement, nor an account added to true judgement.

THEAET. It seems not.

SOC. Well now, dear lad, are we still pregnant, still in labour with any thoughts about knowledge? Or have we been delivered of them all?

THEAET. As far as I'm concerned, Socrates, you've made me say far more than ever was in me, Heaven knows.

SOC. Well then, our art of midwifery tells us that all of these offspring are wind-eggs and not worth bringing up?

THEAET. Undoubtedly.

SOC. And so, Theaetetus, if ever in the future you should attempt to conceive or should succeed in conceiving other theories, they will be better ones as the result of this enquiry. And if you remain

barren, your companions will find you gentler and less tiresome; you will be modest and not think you know what you don't know. This is all my art can achieve—nothing more. I do not know any of the things that other men know—the great and inspired men of today and yesterday. But this art of midwifery my mother and I had allotted to us by God; she to deliver women, I to deliver men that are young and generous of spirit, all that have any beauty. And now I must go to the King's Porch to meet the indictment that Meletus has brought against me; but let us meet here again in the morning, Theodorus.