

## Five (More) Arguments Against D1

Socrates raises a range of arguments against D1. He begins with the ‘pig’ objection (161c) and ends with the ‘common predicables’ (*ta koina*) objection (185a ff.) These objections are increasingly compelling. Sandwiched in between them are two imagined replies by Protagoras, and the memorable ‘digressions’ (*parerga*). It is useful to keep in mind two overarching strategies: (a) Given D1, it is not possible to have cases of perception without knowledge, or cases of knowledge without perception. So, Socrates aims to find exactly such cases. (b) Given that D1 implies thesis P, and P implies thesis H, it is possible to attack D1 by undermining H or P (or both).

### 1. Self-refutation (170a–171c)

The key idea is simple. People disagree about their experiences: the wind is cold for S, but warm for S\*, etc. But according to P (measure doctrine), everyone is right about their experiences (and judgements). Now, apply this thought to P *itself*. Given P, if P is false for us, then it is *true* that P is false for us. So P is false.

Take 2: according to P, those who believe that P is false are right: they *truly* believe that P is false. So, P is false. Thus, by accepting P, Protagoras accepts that P is false.

Take 3: occasionally we believe that *p*, but others believe that *non-p*. Then we think the others are wrong to believe *non-p*, and *that* belief of ours is true. For: in claiming P, Protagoras says that all beliefs are true. Since every belief is held by someone or other, it is a fact that *all* beliefs are true: and so there are no false beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Now suppose one of these beliefs says that *not all beliefs are true*. By P, this belief is true too. So, it is true that not all beliefs are true. Hence Protagoras contradicts himself: he says that all, *and* not all, beliefs are true.

*Problem.* Socrates omits the ‘for me’ ‘for them’ qualifiers, which undermines this objection. But there is perhaps a *pragmatic* incoherence: one cannot claim the relative truth of all beliefs *and* hold that P (a belief, sic!) is true absolutely, i.e. non-relatively.

### 2. Conventional Morality (171e–172b)

*Background.* In the long speech, Protagoras concedes that some people are wiser than others; but he claims that their perceptions are not ‘truer’, just more ‘beneficial’ (167a–c).

The argument is hard to pin down, but the key idea seems to be that we all are experts on our own advantages or benefits. But some are superior in knowing what is healthy, what is just (here in the sense of ‘moral’), and what is pious. So, there is a tension between two ‘spheres’ (172b3); but the beneficial and the moral ought to be treated differently. The digression takes this up.

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1 Note that this becomes the focal point of Theaetetus’s second definition D2.

### 3. Expertise and the Future (178a–179b)

The objection in rough outline:

- (1) If everybody is a measure (*metron*) for judging things to be true for him or her (i.e. if P is true), then everybody is also an authority for judging *future* things to be true for him or her.
- (2) But this is not the case: the doctor anticipates a fever, the vine-grower predicts that a wine's sweetness, a cook knows how the dish shall please, Protagoras knows what will convince a jury, and legislators anticipate what benefits a state.
- (3) So, not everybody is a measure: some people are 'more' measure than others. And these are the wise.
- (4) P is false.

### 4. Impossibility of Definition (182c–183b)

This objection is against the 'fluxers'. (1) Perception is possible only if there is minimal constancy, e.g., to allow correct reference of colour words (182d4–6). More technical: H implies predicative instability of perception.<sup>2</sup> (2) Given H, all things flow and change: there is no such constancy. (Further complication: if there *were*, perceptual judgements would become falsifiable; and this clashes with P.<sup>3</sup> (3) So, perception is impossible. (4) Given D1, knowledge is impossible (182e9–10). *Corollaries*. It is not even possible to *define* knowledge: any definition would be equally 'correct' (183a7). And if so, language becomes indefinite, and *dialectic*, as a study of universal truths, impossible.<sup>4</sup>

### 5. Common Predicables (184b–186e)

This objection is the clearest case of knowledge without perception. So  $K \neq P$ , and hence D1 is false. Key ideas: (1) We perceive *with* the mind or soul, *by means of* the perceptual faculties. (2) We cannot hear colours, and cannot see sounds. (3) Some facts are shared by, or common to, objects: that they *are*, that they are *distinct*, or *two* (numerically different), that they are *similar*, or that they are *useful* (186b–c). We can know these. (4) Common predicables (*ta koina*) are not perceived by means of one or more senses (185b); this is ruled out by (2). (5) The only alternative is that the mind itself, *by means of itself* (i.e. *with* itself) these predicables are considered. (6) But this grasp is not sensory perception. (7) So, we know things we do not perceive. (7\*) To know is to grasp truth and being (186c–d), and neither truth nor being can be experienced. (8) D1 is false: knowledge  $\neq$  perception.

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2 Giannopoulou, Z. (2013). *Plato's Theaetetus as a Second Apology* (§3.9). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3 Sedley, D. (2004) *The Midwife of Platonism* (p. 96). Oxford: Clarendon Press

4 *Op. cit.* pp. 98–9.

