

Theaetetus 187–210

Coursework Reminder. For 10 CATS points, you can (a) answer a selection of questions from coursework sheets like this one amounting to about 1,500 words in total, (b) write an essay of about the same length on a topic arranged with me, or (c) continuously work on a reflective course dairy, writing up your thoughts about the reading, your questions about it, remarks on the discussion, or how your understanding of Plato grows as the course progresses. The deadline for all coursework is **24 July**. I will write a summative feedback at the end of the course, but I aim also to provide formative assessment as we go. Note too that the coursework sheets are also intended to guide preparatory reading for class, and hence are useful even if you do not want credit. (The questions with asterisks are a bit more difficult or demanding.)

Introduction. The questions below begin after the second definition (D2), according to which knowledge is (perhaps) true judgement (187b).

1. What is the point that ‘bothers’ Socrates at 187d, and how does it connect to D2?
- 2.* What is judging, what is a judgement? (187a, 189a–b, 189e–190a)
3. After attempting to solve the puzzle of false judgement, Socrates still cannot ‘find any way out’ (191a). Why not?
4. What is the key idea behind the memory-trace (*mnēmeion*) or imprint (*sēmeion*)? (191c–e, 193b–c, 193e–194b)
5. Socrates seems annoyed at his own ‘stupidity’ (*dusmathia*) (195c). Explain why, perhaps using Socrates example about numbers (195e–196c).
- 6.* Stepping back from the discussion, Socrates realises that it seems problematic to discuss aspects of knowing without knowing knowledge itself (196d–197a). Do you agree?
- 7.* Sketch the difference between ‘having’ and ‘possessing’ knowledge (197b–d).
8. How does the aviary model explain false judgement? (197e–199c)
- 9.* What is the idea behind introducing pieces of ‘unknowing’? (199e–200c)
10. The final rejection of D2 comes at 201a–c: knowledge cannot be true judgement, because they may come apart. Explain this with an example.
11. How does Socrates’s dream illustrate the third definition (D3)? (201d–202c).
- 12.* Criticising the ‘dream theory’, Socrates formulates a dilemma (203c, see also 205d–e). What is the first option, and what is wrong with it? (203c–d)
13. At 206c, Socrates suggests that ‘account’ has three interpretations. Identify them. (206c–210a)
14. At the end, Socrates returns to the art (*technē*) of midwifery: what is the point he is making? (210b–c)
- 15.* Overlooking the discussion of the three attempts to define knowledge, do you think the dialogue is a failure?

Background Information. (a) The self-critical passage 196d–197a is similar to the paradox of inquiry in *Meno* 80e: a search or examination (*zētēsis*) is impossible: either we know x or we do not (cf. *Tht.* 188a, 198c). If we know x , there is no need for finding out about x ; and if we do not know x , then we do not know what we are looking for (unless we beg the question). (b) In the same passage, Socrates mentions a range of cognate words for knowledge is *epistēmē* (lat. *scientia*): *eidenai* or *oida*, which relates to *eidō* (to see), and thus could also mean knowledge by acquaintance (fr. *connaître*; ger. *kennen*), and *gignōskō* or *gnoēin*, which also links to discerning, recognising, distinguishing, or being aware. (c) The key addition to the third definition is ‘account’ (201d). The word translated is *logos* (λόγος), which can mean a range of things from word or that which is said, speech or narrative, but also reason, ground, or definition; ‘account’ seems apt for its explanatory connotations. Remember the passage where thinking and judging is described as an internal discussion and silent speech (189e–190a). The account or definition involved in D3 is dominated by analysis, i.e. a dissection of the *definiendum* into parts and elements. (d) The argumentative strategy following the ‘dream theory’ is complex. Two points are relevant: (i) there is a cognitive asymmetry: to give an account is to analyse the complexes (202b), and since elements could not be analysed (by definition), they are unaccountable and thus unknown; hence we can only know analysable complexes. (ii) Consequently, knowledge is grounded in elements that are themselves unknown, and this links to the perceptual ‘atoms’ that we have met in D1: the smells, sounds, etc. of an individual’s sensory experience. These elements are brute experiential facts. In this light, rejecting the ‘dream theory’ amounts to rejecting the idea that knowledge could be build up, or generated, from sensory atoms. (e) The dialectic situation surrounding the dilemma at 203c–206c is complex; we will clarify it in discussion. (f) For the discussion of what an account is, keep in view the argumentative strategy that was at work in the critique of D1: If knowledge is x (e.g., perception, true judgement with an account), then there could not be a case where one has x but *not* knowledge, or where one has knowledge but *not* x . If the two things can come apart, or if it is possible that one is present but not the other, then they cannot be the same. And thus the purported definition fails. Hence the strategy is to drive a wedge between the *definiendum* (i.e. the thing to be defined) and the *definiens* (i.e. whatever does the defining).

