

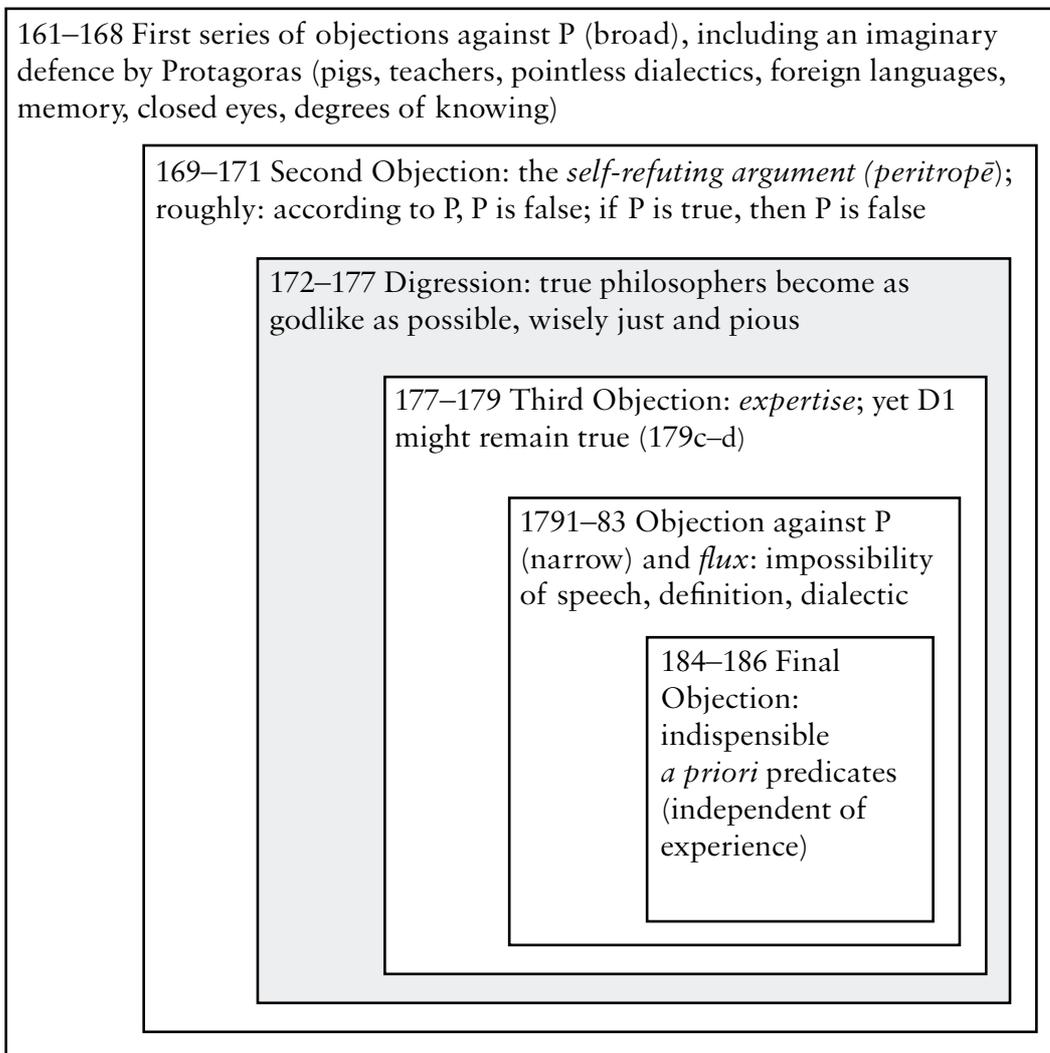
Theaetetus 161–186

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 first definition (D1) has been born, including the associated theses of relativism and flux. Now, in line with Socratic midwifery, the inspection of Theaetetus's first 'child' begins.

1. In a first objection, Socrates mentions pigs, baboons, and tadpoles. What is his point? (161b–d)
2. A second criticism concerns Protagoras's role as a teacher. Explain Socrates's worry. (161d–162a)
- 3.* In the same passages, there is a third objection that invokes dialectics(161e). Do you think any of these challenges are plausible? Give reasons.
4. Next come a range of objections that involve language (163b–c), memory (163d–164c), covered eyes (165b–d), and degrees of knowing (165d–e). Which one seems the most plausible objection to you? Why, or why not?
- 5.* The second group of objections (163a–165e) contains a hint about how to read them: interpret the passage where Socrates comments on their 'logic-chopping' (i.e. *antilogikōs*) approach (164c).
- 6.* Study Socrates's long reply on behalf of Protagoras (166a–168c). Can you match some of the passages with the preceding objections?
- 7.* At 171c, Socrates claims that Protagoras's *Truth* is false for everyone, including Protagoras himself. How did he arrive at this point?
8. What is the central idea in the digression (*parergon*)? (172c–177c)
9. The final objection against Protagoreanism begins after the digression and ends before returning to the flux thesis (177c–179c). Count the instances of the word 'future': what is their relevance for the argument?
10. The central passage of the final argument against thesis P is at 179b. How does this argument work?
11. At the core of the next objection is again colour perception in a world of flow (182d). Identify the *conclusion* of Socrates's argument.
- 12.* What is the relevance of shared or common predicates, such as *same*, *one*, *being*, *like* (185a–e), and also *beautiful* and *bad* (186a) for the final refutation of D1 (186e)?

Background Information. (a) For the structure of Plato’s critique of D1, see the figure below. (b) Thesis P seems ambiguous. On a *broad* interpretation, the truth of all beliefs based on appearances is relative, and on a *narrow* interpretation, all sensory experience is infallible; in this way, Plato argues against both *relativism* and *empiricism*.¹ (c) At 179c, Socrates concedes that the objections so far fail to refute that immediate experience or sensory awareness could be falsified. Hence: since D1 depends on P, which in turn depend on H, the critique now turns to H, the ‘fluxers’ (*hoi rheontai*, see 181a). With this, the objections turn to narrow Protagoreanism. (d) Parmenides is mentioned twice (180e, 183e): think of him as holding the ultimate anti-flux position. (e) The final objection appeals to things common to everything (*ta koina*, e.g., 185e): the essential thought is that we do not *see* that two things are *alike*, say, just as we do not *see* that a pen *necessarily* falls down when we let it go.



1 See Sedley, D. (2004). *The Midwife of Platonism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (pp. 49–53).

