

## Plato's Socrates in the *Theaetetus*

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### Introduction

Plato's *Theaetetus* is sometimes thought to raise special difficulties for developmentalist accounts of Platonic philosophy.<sup>1</sup> It was apparently written late in Plato's middle period and yet it depicts Socrates as engaging in the same practice Socrates is depicted as practicing in the earlier so-called Socratic dialogues.<sup>2</sup> Of course, various explanations have been offered for this return to Socratic practice compatible with developmentalism, but they all concede that Plato reverts to a depiction of Socratic practice in the *Theaetetus*. It is this concession that I want to challenge in this essay. I maintain that Socrates' practice in the *Theaetetus* is subtly, but importantly, different from the practice Plato typically depicts in the earlier so-called Socratic dialogues.

I begin by briefly distinguishing two different practices depicted in the dialogues - a practice of examining the wisdom or knowledge of others described in the *Apology* and a practice of defending a view advanced by Socrates himself. The depiction of these two different practices roughly tracks the compositional chronology of Plato's dialogues. This difference is often characterized by the allegedly negative tone of the so-called early dialogues and the allegedly positive tone of the so-called middle and late dialogues.

I, then, turn to the apparent methodological anomaly of the *Theaetetus*. On the one hand, virtually everyone agrees that the *Theaetetus* was composed during Plato's middle, or even late

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<sup>1</sup>See (Annas 2002:5) who puts this objection "... why does Socrates say in the *Theaetetus* that he is a barren midwife who merely delivers the ideas of others? This is a question that too few doctrinal interpreters of Plato have asked themselves, particularly if they have a developmental view of Plato's thought into which *Theaetetus* does not neatly fit"; (see also (Annas 2002:7-8)). As will be seen I am less confident than Annas that developmentalists have failed to ask themselves this question. (Annas 2002:15) also thinks that the *Parmenides* raises a similar difficulty for developmentalism. See also (Chappell SEP 2011) although he sees the debate concerning the *Theaetetus* to be focused more on the middle and late dialogues contrast, while I am concerned (along with Annas) on the early and later (including middle) dialogues contrast.

<sup>2</sup>I will have more to say about the compositional chronology presupposed in this sentence below.

middle or early late, period.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the *Theaetetus* appears to revert to the primarily negative tone of the early dialogues. I briefly review various prominent attempts to account for this anomaly without abandoning (at least a moderate) developmentalism and contend that all of these attempts concede that Plato has reverted to depicting Socrates as engaging in the earlier practice.

Next, I argue that a comparison with Plato's *Charmides*, which Plato appears to invite, indicates that Plato's depiction of Socrates' practice in the *Theaetetus* is subtly, but importantly, different from his depiction of his practice in earlier dialogues like the *Charmides*. I maintain that Socrates is not depicted as examining the professed or reputed wisdom of Theaetetus as he does in those dialogues thought to depict the earlier Socratic practice of Plato's *Apology* (or if he does, he does so very briefly). Rather, Theaetetus is depicted as already quite willing to concede his ignorance (at least by 148b), and, as a result Socrates is not depicted as eliminating his false conceit of knowledge. Rather, Socrates is depicted as eliciting Theaetetus' beliefs and testing their consequences for cogency in order to proceed from Theaetetus' recognition of ignorance to the discovery of knowledge. As a result, Socrates' practice as depicted in the *Theaetetus* is not a return to the practice depicted in dialogues like the *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, or *Charmides*.<sup>4</sup> Rather, Socrates' practice in the *Theaetetus* is distinct from both his practice as depicted in the so-called Socratic dialogues and his practice in dialogues like the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.

Finally, I conclude by speculating about what the recognition of this third kind of philosophical practice means for a proper understanding of the dialogues as a whole. Recognizing that the *Theaetetus* depicts a third kind of philosophical practice suggests that the *Theaetetus* is unusual in depicting a mode of philosophical investigation distinct from attempting to learn from those who know<sup>5</sup> and from attempting to justify or defend views advanced by

<sup>3</sup>See quotation from (Sedley 2004:1 n 1) below.

<sup>4</sup>Or even, I would argue, the *Hippias Minor*, *Hippias Major*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Ion*. Obviously not the *Menexenus*. The *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Crito* are more problematic, but in these dialogues too I would argue that Socrates is not depicted as engaging an interlocutor who is at a loss (*aporia*) in discovering the knowledge he recognizes he lacks. See below.

<sup>5</sup>See (Benson 2011).

Socrates.<sup>6</sup> But, while such a depiction may be unusual, it is not unique. At *Meno* 84d-85c, Socrates is depicted as engaging a slave in an attempt to discover the knowledge that the slave has been led to see that he lacks.<sup>7</sup> The practice depicted in the *Theaetetus* should be read in light of this brief passage in the *Meno* (and perhaps the entire last third of the *Meno*),<sup>8</sup> not the practice of the typical so-called early Socratic dialogues, or even the practice depicted in dialogues like the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic*. Nevertheless, I readily concede all of this leaves open the debate between developmentalism (at least of a moderate sort) and neo-unitarianism (again, at least of a moderate sort). But, the *Theaetetus* no longer should pose a difficulty for developmentalism.

### **Dialogues of Examination and Dialogues of Defense**

I begin with Plato's *Apology*. At *Apology* 20d-24c Plato depicts Socrates describing his characteristic practice in an attempt to explain why he is accused (unofficially) of studying things in the sky and below the earth, making the worse argument the stronger, and teaching this to others (19b4-c1). As Plato presents it, Socrates recognizes that what he does must at least approximate what he is accused of doing or otherwise the accusations would carry no weight. And, of course, it is these accusations as opposed to the official or formal ones that Socrates expects to do him in. Socrates takes the official charges to be definitively rebutted at 24b-28a (see esp. 28a2-6).

In describing Socrates' characteristic practice, Plato presents his version of Chaerephon's trip to the Delphic oracle<sup>9</sup> and Socrates' attempt to understand it. As Socrates is made to explain, the Delphic oracle replied negatively to Chaerephon's question whether anyone is wiser than Socrates (21a4-7). Since Socrates (as depicted) was aware of not being wise at all (ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ

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<sup>6</sup>Although not necessarily views claimed to be known.

<sup>7</sup>See (Benson 1990) for an argument to the effect that this portion of the conversation with slave is not found in the earlier so-called Socratic dialogues.

<sup>8</sup>See (Benson 2003) for an argument that *Meno* 86c-96d depicts Plato's recommended method for acquiring the knowledge one lacks on one's own, i.e. *de novo* discovery. Nevertheless, I doubt that *Meno* 84d-85c can be seen as depicting the method of hypothesis depicted at *Meno* 86c-96d.

<sup>9</sup>Xenophon presents a different version.

οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν σύννοϊδα ἐμαντῶ σοφὸς ὢν),<sup>10</sup> he set out to determine what the oracle meant. Socrates goes to the politicians, poets, and craftsmen, all of whom have a reputation for knowledge, intending in each case to find someone who knows more than he, Socrates, does. He examines their reputed wisdom, hoping at the same time to learn something from them (ἴν' ἅμα τι καὶ μανθάνοιμι παρ' αὐτῶν), and discovers that while in some cases they did know things he failed to know (especially the craftsmen), in every case they thought they knew things which in fact they failed to know. He concludes that the oracle meant that

human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: 'This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless.' (ὅτι ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία ὀλίγου τινὸς ἀξία ἐστὶν καὶ οὐδενός. καὶ φαίνεται τοῦτον λέγειν τὸν Σωκράτη, προσκεχρησθαι δὲ τῷ ἐμῷ ὀνόματι, ἐμὲ παράδειγμα ποιούμενος, ὥσπερ ἂν <εἰ> εἶποι ὅτι "Οὗτος ὑμῶν, ὃ ἄνθρωποι, σοφώτατός ἐστιν, ὅστις ὥσπερ Σωκράτης ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ἀξίος ἐστὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν." ) [*Apology* 23a6-b4; Grube trans.]

Because of these examinations, Socrates explains, he was hated by many, slandered, and thought to be wise. It is this practice that accounts for why Socrates is thought to be guilty of the (unofficial) charges, at least as Plato presents it in his *Apology*.

A bit later in the *Apology*, Socrates is made to describe this practice as a divine mission - something ordered by the god, presumably by means of the oracle.<sup>11</sup> After reasserting his distinctive human wisdom of recognizing his ignorance,<sup>12</sup> Plato has Socrates respond to the jury's hypothetical offer to acquit him on the condition that he stop practicing this examination and cease philosophizing (τῇ ζητήσῃ διατρίβειν μηδὲ φιλοσοφεῖν; 29c8-9). Socrates is made to decline the offer, saying that he will not cease philosophising, exhorting, and showing in his usual way anyone he happens to meet that they should be ashamed of desiring wealth, reputation, and honor, rather than wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their souls (φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ -----

<sup>10</sup>It is, of course, controversial what precisely this means.

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of whether and how the divine mission is derived from the oracle see, for example, (Reeve 1989:24–28), (Brickhouse and Smith 1983), (Brickhouse and Smith 1989:87–100), and (McPherran 1986).

<sup>12</sup>Both specifically with respect to things in the underworld (περὶ τῶν ἐν "Αἴδου; 29b5) and more generally (καίτοι πῶς οὐκ ἀμαθία ἐστὶν αὕτη ἢ ἐπονείδιστος, ἢ τοῦ οἴεσθαι εἰδέναι ἃ οὐκ οἶδεν; 29b1-2).

ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς βελτίστη; 29e1-2).<sup>13</sup> When he meets with someone who denies that he cares for wealth, reputation, and honor, rather than wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of his soul, Socrates is depicted as explaining that he will refuse to let him go, but will question, examine, and test him (ἀλλ' ἐρήσομαι αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξετάσω καὶ ἐλέγξω). And if it turns out that the individual does not care for what he professes to care about,<sup>14</sup> Socrates explains that he will reproach him for failing to care about greater rather than inferior things.

In this way, then, Socrates is made to describe in Plato's *Apology* his practice which he maintains will lead to his death. He describes it as an examination of the reputed and/or professed wisdom of others in order to acquire the knowledge he recognizes he lacks from those who have it<sup>15</sup> or to exhort those who lack it (as of course in time he recognizes they all do) to recognize their ignorance so that they will now seek along with him the knowledge they have come to recognize they lack. As a result he has become hated, slandered, and mistakenly thought to be wise.

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<sup>13</sup>Two features of this description of Socrates' usual practice appear different than Socrates' description of his practice of examining the oracle: (1) he approaches anyone he happens to meet rather than merely those who profess or are reputed to be wise, and (2) he assumes that those he happens to meet do not care for wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of the soul. He does not make this assumption in the description of the examination of the oracle.

But these differences are easily explained without attributing to the Socrates of the *Apology* two distinct practices. In assuming that those whom he meets do not care for wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of the soul, Socrates is assuming that those whom he meets do not have the knowledge, truth, and best possible state of the soul they think they do. This assumption is quite appropriate once Socrates has come to understand the oracle as indicating that Socrates is relatively (but not necessarily strictly) unique in recognizing his ignorance (or in his human wisdom). Consequently, in light of this understanding, he rightly reproaches everyone he happens to meet for failing to recognize his or her ignorance. If, as almost always happens, those whom he meets profess to care about wisdom more than wealth despite their pursuit of wealth on the grounds that they already have the wisdom they care about, Socrates examines them as the description of his practice in the oracle story suggests, hoping against hope to refute the oracle and show someone wiser than he. But when it turns out, again as it almost always does, that they do not have the wisdom they profess they have, he presses his reproach for failing to recognize their ignorance and for caring for inferior things in preference to greater things. Socrates does not suggest in the *Apology*, at least, that he ever met anyone who cared about wisdom, truth and the best possible state of his soul in the way Socrates does, i.e., by recognizing his ignorance and seeking to acquire the knowledge he recognizes he lacks. Perhaps, the *Theaetetus* represents such an encounter.

<sup>14</sup>In the words Socrates is made to use, 'if they have not acquired virtue (κεκτηῖσθαι ἀρετήν)', but that this must mean 'if they do not care about wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their soul' is indicated by 'as they said' (φάναι δέ) referring back to φη' ἐπιμελεῖσθαι at 29e3. Thus, to say that they do care about wisdom, truth, and the possible state of their soul is to say that they have attained virtue, perhaps alluding to the doctrine (whose ever it is) that virtue is knowledge; see, for example, *Protagoras* and *Laches*.

<sup>15</sup>I defend this claim at greater length in (Benson 2011).

In other Platonic dialogues Plato appears to depict Socrates engaging in the very practice which he maintains in the *Apology* will lead to his death. In the *Euthyphro*, for example, Socrates examines the professed wisdom of Euthyphro in order to learn from him the wisdom he professes to have (*Euthyphro* 5a3-4, 5a8, 5b1-5, 5c4-9, 15e5-16a4) and to lead him to the recognition of his ignorance once Socrates recognizes it himself. This latter motive is less explicit in the *Euthyphro*, but it is difficult to explain the repeated elenctic episodes in the dialogue, if the goal had been simply to uncover Euthyphro's ignorance. Socrates and the reader become aware of Euthyphro's ignorance relatively early on, I should think. It is Euthyphro who requires repeated *elenchoi* to convince him of his ignorance. In the end, Socrates does not appear to succeed in convincing him, and while Euthyphro may not hate Socrates, he clearly is in no mood to spend any further time with him.

Again, in the *Laches*, Socrates examines the reputed wisdom of the two Athenian generals, Laches and Nicias. The explicit motive of this examination is to determine whose advice ought to be followed in deciding whether to educate the sons of Lysimachus and Melisias in the art of fighting in armor. But at the end of the dialogue when the generals' lack of wisdom has apparently been recognized by all concerned and Socrates is wrongly suspected of having the wisdom they lack, Socrates exhorts both the two generals and the two fathers as follows:

what I say we ought to do ... is to join in searching for the best possible teacher, first for ourselves - we really need one - and then for the young men, sparing neither money nor anything else. What I don't advise is that we remain as we are. (ἐγὼ γάρ φημι χρῆναι, ὃ ἄνδρες—οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἔκφορος λόγος—κοινῇ πάντας ἡμᾶς ζητεῖν μάλιστα μὲν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς διδάσκαλον ὡς ἄριστον—δεόμεθα γάρ—ἔπειτα καὶ τοῖς μειρακίοις, μήτε χρημάτων φειδομένους μήτε ἄλλου μηδενός· ἔαν δὲ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἔχειν ὡς νῦν ἔχομεν οὐ συμβουλεύω.) [*Laches* 201a2-7; Sprague trans.]

To remain as they are is evidently to remain ignorant of the greatest things.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, in yet other dialogues Plato appears to depict Socrates behaving differently. In the *Phaedo*, after Socrates is depicted as arguing (λόγον ἀποδοῦναι; 63e9) that philosophers should be willing to die and face death cheerfully (61c-69e), Cebes is made to worry about the

<sup>16</sup>Other dialogues in which Socrates is depicted as engaging in the practice he describes in the *Apology* include *Charmides*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, and *Protagoras*.

presupposition of the argument, viz. that the soul is immortal, or at least that it continues to exist after death. Most of the rest of the dialogue between Socrates and the two Theban brothers consists of a series of arguments offered by Socrates on behalf of this presupposition. Plato's *Symposium* consists of a series of speeches in praise of love in which Socrates is depicted as having a relatively minor role (178a-197e). When Socrates is depicted as participating in the dialogue, he is first depicted as briefly refuting Agathon's speech in praise of love (199b-201c) and then relating for more than ten Stephanus pages Diotima's speech in praise of love (201d-212a) - a speech with which he is evidently in considerable agreement. Finally, following a first book that so resembles a dialogue of examination that some scholars take it to have originally beyond an independent dialogue, the remaining nine books of the *Republic* depict Socrates defending his belief that justice is a good welcomed for its own sake and for its consequences against the objections of Glaucon and Adeimantus.<sup>17</sup>

That Socrates' practice is depicted differently in various dialogues is, I think, agreed by all. In some dialogues, variously labelled 'aporetic', 'zetetic', or 'dialogues of search', but which I will call 'dialogues of examination', Socrates is made to practice the method he describes in the *Apology* as leading to his death. He *examines* and tests the reputed or professed wisdom of others in order to learn from them if they have the knowledge they are reputed or professed to have and in order to persuade them of their ignorance, if they lack it, so that they will join him in the search for the knowledge which he and they lack. In other dialogues, Socrates is made to promote in response to questions or to defend in response to objections his own views rather than the views of his interlocutors.<sup>18</sup> (I will refer to these latter dialogues as 'the dialogues of defense'

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<sup>17</sup>Even (Peterson 2011) would concede that the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Republic* appear to be depicting Socrates engaged in a different practice than that depicted in the dialogues of examination. Nevertheless, she argues that in the so-called dialogues of defense Socrates continues his practice of examination. In the so-called dialogues of defense Socrates is preoccupied with extracting the beliefs of his interlocutors to be examined, an examination which she concedes is not subsequently depicted.

<sup>18</sup>In drawing the distinction in this way I am not denying that positive Socratic or Platonic views can be uncovered in the dialogues of examination just as they can be uncovered in the dialogues of defense. Rather, my point is that the way in which the author, Plato, reveals these views, on the assumption that such views are there to be revealed, is different. In the dialogues of examination, Plato reveals these views to the reader by depicting Socrates examining the reputed or professed wisdom of his interlocutors. In dialogues like the *Phaedo* and *Republic* Plato reveals these views to his readers by depicting Socrates recommending his own views in response to questions and objections.

although the name may be less apt.) What is not agreed is how this diverse depiction of Socrates' practice is to be described and explained.

Some scholars have thought it too coincidental that the dialogues of examination are independently identified through stylistic considerations as among Plato's earlier dialogues.<sup>19</sup> This allegedly unlikely coincidence has led these scholars to see a development in the philosophical practice depicted in the dialogues - from a practice of examining the beliefs of others to defending or promoting the beliefs of the character Socrates.<sup>20</sup> Other scholars have gone further. Based on the supposition that the *Apology* is Plato's most historical dialogue,<sup>21</sup> these scholars maintain that this development reflects a movement from the historical Socrates' practice, described in the *Apology*'s Delphic oracle story and depicted in the dialogues of examination, to Plato's own recommended or preferred practice. This development of philosophical practice (whether from Socrates to Plato or from an earlier to later Plato or both) is further reflected in a development of philosophical views, doctrines, or theories.<sup>22</sup> Thus, alleged

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<sup>19</sup>See (Kahn 2002:esp. 94), among others, for the early, middle, and late groups based "on stylistic grounds alone". I here adopt without defense Kahn's stylistic groupings: Early (*Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Cratylus*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, [*Hippias Major*], *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Protagoras*, *Symposium*), Middle (*Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*), and Late (*Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus-Critias*, *Laws*). To the extent that one accepts groupings of the dialogues at all, they are the least objectionable because they are the philosophically weakest. Of course, Kahn is quick to point out that not all the stylistically early dialogues are dialogues of examination; see especially the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*. But, modulo the *Theaetetus* which I discuss below, my claim here is that all of the dialogues of examination are stylistically early. See (Irwin 2011:78) for a recent example of someone who takes what he calls a difference of character between two groups of dialogues ("Some dialogues are short, vividly characterized, and ostensibly negative in their conclusions. Some are more didactic than dramatic and seem to concentrate on the exposition of a doctrine rather than the cross-examination of interlocutors.") as corresponding to earlier and later dialogues based on stylistic considerations. Irwin concedes, however, that the *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Philebus* depict both characters and so "[a]pparently, Plato switched between dramatic and didactic styles as it suited him within a single dialogue." Given the way I draw the 'character' contrast these four dialogues remain in what Irwin calls the didactic group.

<sup>20</sup>In dialogues like the *Sophist*, *Politicus*, and *Laws*, where Socrates ceases to be the primary interlocutor in the dialogue, it appears to be the views or beliefs of the Eleatic stranger or the unnamed Athenian that are promoted or defended.

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, (Penner 2002:201), *pace* (Morrison 2000). This historical claim is also thought to be reinforced by the evidence of Aristotle. For a defense of Aristotle's evidence see, for example, (Penner 2002:204 n 2) and more recently (Irwin 2011:?), *pace*, for example, (Kahn 1996:79–87) and more recently (Peterson 2011:?).

<sup>22</sup>See note 16 above. See (Annas 2002:4): "What I want to stress here is that developmentalists owe us an explanation not only of alleged development in Plato's thought, but of the shift from the Socratic dialogues with their predominance of *ad hominem* arguing to the format of the 'middle' dialogues where such *ad hominem* argument disappears or recedes. Why should development in ideas accompany a downplaying or argument against the position of others?" I will not pursue an answer to this question here, but to the extent that one thinks the early dialogues are

inconsistencies and tensions among and between Plato's dialogues can be accounted for in terms of the philosophical development, represented in part by the development of the philosophical practice depicted in the dialogues. For example, and famously, Socrates appears to deny the possibility of *akrasia* in many (perhaps all) of the dialogues of examination (e.g, the *Protagoras*, *Laches*, and *Charmides*<sup>23</sup>), while he appears to maintain its possibility in the *Republic* where the practice of examining the alleged wisdom or knowledge of Glaucon and Adeimantus appears to have been abandoned in favor of defending something Socrates believes.<sup>24</sup>

Many other scholars, citing Plato's exceptional literary skill, point out that nothing prohibits Plato from composing a dialogue of examination followed by a dialogue of defense, only to return to writing a dialogue of examination later. Moreover, depicting a variety of philosophical practices may simply be Plato's way of encouraging his readers to employ diverse philosophical methods either for their own sake or for arriving at a unified Platonic doctrine.<sup>25</sup> The allegedly distinct doctrines or theories discovered in these dialogues of distinct practices are either best understood as encouraging philosophical (self-) examination or as considerably less at odds with each other than the former sort of interpretators have proposed. Indeed, it is often pointed out by these interpreters that the stylistically identified early group of dialogues contains both the dialogues in which Socrates apparently examines the wisdom of others as Socrates is made to describe his practice in the *Apology* as well as the dialogues in which Socrates is made to defend or promote his own positions.<sup>26</sup> For example, the *Phaedo* which appears to be a paradigmatic dialogue of defense, in which Socrates is depicted as promoting his own views

a more or less accurate historical reflection of Socrates' practice and doctrines, the answer would be relatively straightforward.

<sup>23</sup>The latter two dialogues might be thought to endorse the denial of *akrasia* to the extent that the denial of *akrasia* is a consequence of the identity of virtue with knowledge or wisdom.

<sup>24</sup>See (Penner 2002) who argues that the primary philosophical difference between the historical Socrates as depicted in what he considers to be the early Platonic dialogues and Plato is the former's commitment to 'Socratic intellectualism' and the latter's commitment to 'Platonic irrationalism'. The denial of *akrasia* is a corollary of Socratic intellectualism. Other developmentalists include (Irwin 1977), (Vlastos 1991), (Kraut 1992), (Brickhouse and Smith 1994), (Dancy 2004), among many others.

<sup>25</sup>See (Annas 2002) for a recent example of this latter approach.

<sup>26</sup>If we accept (Kahn 2002)'s ordering based on stylometry (see n. 19 above), the paradigm examples are the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and perhaps the *Meno*.

concerning a philosopher's attitude toward death and the immortality of the soul, is stylistically indistinguishable from paradigmatic dialogues of examination, like the *Euthyphro*, *Laches* and *Charmides*.

### **The Methodological Anomaly of the *Theaetetus***

Thus, the distinction between the dialogues of examination and the dialogues of defense can be - and, I think, should be - recognized by all - developmentalist of various stripes, neo-unitarians, and even those who decline to look for theories or doctrines underlying the dialogues. The question is not whether Socrates is sometimes depicted as examining the wisdom of others and other times depicted as recommending his own views; the question is rather what are we to make out of this. Nevertheless, it has sometimes been thought that the *Theaetetus* poses a special problem for developmentalism, especially for a developmentalism which appeals to the development of philosophical practice. The *Theaetetus* is agreed by all, at least those who give any thought to the compositional order of the dialogues, to be a middle, perhaps even late middle or early late, dialogue. As David Sedley has put it, "I am not aware that anyone in the last two centuries - since Schleiermacher,<sup>27</sup> in fact - has considered the *Theaetetus* one of Plato's earliest dialogues" (Sedley 2004:1 n 1). And yet, again as Sedley puts it, the *Theaetetus* "possesses nearly all of the hallmarks of the dialogues which we do normally attribute to [Plato's early Socratic] phase. To mention just the most obvious among these, the *Theaetetus* is a dialogue in which a confessedly ignorant Socrates asks for a definition of a problematic item, dialectically examines a series of candidate answers, and at the end admits failure. No other dialogue generally regarded as middle or late does this" (Sedley 2004:1).<sup>28</sup> That is, according to Sedley and many others, the *Theaetetus* is a middle dialogue (perhaps later) in which Socrates is depicted as engaged in the practice which he is made to describe in the *Apology* as the practice that will lead to his death. That is, the *Theaetetus* is a dialogue of examination which was

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<sup>27</sup>I assume Sedley has in mind (Schleiermacher 1973).

<sup>28</sup>Note that the 'hallmarks' of the early dialogues which Sedley mentions are not doctrinal hallmarks, but methodological ones.

composed in Plato's middle period, the same period in which he was composing paradigmatic dialogues of defense like the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. As a result developmentalists have some explaining to do. It was bad enough that Plato's early period (on stylistic grounds) was populated by paradigmatic dialogues of examination as well as a couple dialogues of defense, but now it appears that Plato's middle period is populated by both sorts of dialogues as well. The different practices depicted in Plato's dialogues apparently do not track any kind of development on Plato's part and a developmentalism that appeals to this distinction looks in trouble. Of course none of this is new to anyone, and various scholars inclined toward developmentalism have offered explanations of the alleged methodological anomaly that is the *Theaetetus*.

One explanation of this methodological anomaly is simply to accept it. Something like this explanation seems to underlie Myles Burnyeat's groundbreaking work on the *Theaetetus*. According to Burnyeat, "[t]he midwife figure signals a return to the aporetic style of those early dialogues and to the Socratic method which is the substance of that style" (Burnyeat 1977:[55]); see also (Burnyeat 1977:58?). But Burnyeat does not appear to think this return requires any special explanation. Rather, for Burnyeat, the point of this return is simply to encourage the thought that one can learn as much or more from raising questions and discovering what is wrong with purported answers as one can from being presented with definite answers proven or defended in the dialogues of defense; (see esp. (Burnyeat 1990:2–3)). Thus, while Burnyeat appears to allow a development of philosophical doctrine (if that is not too strong a description of it) in the Platonic dialogues, he apparently does not think that Plato's depiction of Socrates' practice tracks this development.

Frances Cornford famously maintained that the *Theaetetus* is roughly an extended *reductio* on any account of knowledge that fails to incorporate the Platonic epistemology and metaphysics of the dialogues of defense. Cornford does not explicitly offer an explanation for Plato's alleged reversion to the method depicted in the dialogues of examination. He does, however, explicitly maintain both that the *Theaetetus* is composed after dialogues of defense like the *Phaedo*, and *Republic* and before the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, and *Laws*

(Cornford 1935:1–2), and that the depiction of Socrates practicing the art of intellectual midwifery is to be identified with Socrates’ practice depicted at the beginning of the *Meno* and other dialogues of examination (Cornford 1935:27–28). As a result, a Cornfordian explanation of the methodological anomaly depicted in the *Theaetetus* might propose that Plato aims to defend his metaphysical and epistemological theory both directly in the dialogues of defense and indirectly, via *reductio*, in the *Theaetetus* (and perhaps *Parmenides*). Thus, in reverting to the practice depicted in the earlier dialogues, Plato is merely reverting to the practice of indirect defense,<sup>29</sup> and advocating different ways of supporting the same point.

Again, David Bostock has offered a provocative reading of the *Theaetetus* according to which it amounts to a sort of early Socratic examination and refutation of Platonic middle period wisdom. According to Bostock, the *Theaetetus*, like the *Parmenides*, “belong[s] to a period of doubt and self-questioning” in which Plato reverts to the critical examination of “some key concepts in philosophy,” one’s which Plato had depicted Socrates confidently espousing in the middle dialogues like the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*; (Bostock 1988:13–14). It is not until Plato’s later dialogues that Plato returns to the confidence of the dialogues of defense at which point Socrates virtually disappears as the interlocutor depicted as espousing the new views. Thus, for Bostock, *Theaetetus*’s methodological anomaly is to be explained as an application of Socrates’ (negative refutational) practice depicted in the early dialogues on Plato’s own theory espoused with confidence in the dialogues of defense.

And finally, David Sedley explains Plato’s reversion to the Socratic practice in the *Theaetetus* as “a kind of *autobiographical self-commentary* on Plato’s part” (Sedley 2004:7). According to Sedley, the reversion to Socratic practice indicates that the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* is no longer the mouthpiece of Platonic metaphysics and epistemology as he was in the dialogues of defense. Rather the Socratic character in the *Theaetetus* is the mouthpiece of the

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<sup>29</sup>Something like this understanding of the practice depicted in the earlier dialogues is how Vlastos understands the Socratic *elenchos*, as an indirect way of constructively arguing for *not-p*, by arguing constructively that *p* is false. See, famously, (Vlastos 1983). My use of ‘indirect way of constructively arguing for *not-p*’ is not to be confused with Vlastos’ indirect *elenchos*.

historical Socrates whose practice Plato depicted in the earlier *Apology* and dialogues of examination (Sedley 2004:8). In this way, Plato means to indicate to the reader how the doctrines of the dialogues of defense are a continuation of the practice (and perhaps doctrines) of the dialogues of examination. We, the readers of the *Theaetetus*, according to Sedley, are meant to see the Socratic origins of Plato's "own philosophical insights" (Sedley 2004:12).

All of these scholars concede that in the *Theaetetus* Plato reverts to depicting Socrates as engaged in the practice Socrates finds responsible for his conviction and death in the *Apology* and is depicted as practicing in the dialogues of examination.<sup>30</sup> They differ both in how to understand this earlier practice and in how to explain its return. According to Burnyeat, Plato depicts the earlier practice of questioning and examination in order encourage a questioning and critical attitude in the reader. Cornford sees the point of the Socratic practice as offering an alternative method of defense of key Platonic doctrines. On Bostock's interpretation, Plato depicts the Socratic practice of refutation in order to criticize and reject key Platonic doctrines. And finally, Sedley sees Plato's reversion to the earlier Socratic practice as an attempt to persuade the reader of the continuity of Platonic doctrine with Socratic practice. I maintain in the next section that their agreement that Plato has reverted to depicting Socrates in the same way he depicted Socrates in the dialogues of examination is premature.

### **Comparison of the *Theaetetus* with the *Charmides***

**Introductory Contrast.** The outer frame of the *Theaetetus* opens with Euclides returning to Megara from the harbor. He has unexpectedly happened upon Theaetetus being evacuated to Athens. Theaetetus, it seems, has been wounded in battle near Corinth and is suffering from dysentery. Euclides relates this chance encounter to Terpsion and the *Theaetetus* begins. The reader of this opening scene may be reminded of the opening scene of Plato's *Charmides*. There Plato depicts Socrates returning from the battle at Potidaea at which, like  
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<sup>30</sup>To be clear (Burnyeat 1977), does distinguish the Socratic midwifery depicted in the *Theaetetus* from the Socratic practice depicted in the early dialogues. But he does not see the significance of this distinction as I do, or if he does, he does not pursue it in the way that I do. Nevertheless, I want here to acknowledge the influence and inspiration of this article on my reading of Plato over the years.

Theaetetus at Corinth (142b7-c1), Socrates appears to have behaved bravely (*Apology* 28d10-29a1). To my knowledge no other Platonic dialogue refers to a battle in its opening scene. This might encourage the reader of the *Theaetetus* to compare, and perhaps contrast, the Theaetetus of the *Theaetetus* to the Socrates of the *Charmides*. Other features of the introductory scenes of the two dialogues, to which we will turn in a moment, however, indicate that it is Charmides who is to be compared, and contrasted, to Theaetetus. Nevertheless, the opening references to off-stage battles encourage the reader to have both dialogues in mind.

The outer frame of the *Theaetetus* continues. Besides the curious self-conscious explanation of the direct narration form of the inner frame,<sup>31</sup> the outer frame serves to remind the reader of the future career of Theaetetus, the primary interlocutor of the inner frame's conversation some years earlier.<sup>32</sup> While Theaetetus' specific future achievements are left unmentioned, Euclides responds to Terpsion's sorrow at losing such a fine man (Καλόν τε καὶ ἀγαθόν<sup>33</sup>) by relating the praise he had heard concerning Theaetetus' exploits on the battlefield. Terpsion remarks that it would have been surprising to hear otherwise, and Euclides is reminded of Socrates' earlier prophecy that Theaetetus would inevitably be held in high repute (ἐλλόγιμον). Terpsion responds that "He appears to have spoken truly" (142d4).

For the specific achievements which have led to Theaetetus' high repute we need to look elsewhere and, when we do, they appear to justify Plato's tribute.<sup>34</sup> According to later commentators on Greek mathematics, as Ian Mueller has put it, "essentially all of [Books] X and

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<sup>31</sup>As is familiar, the *Theaetetus* is unique among the Platonic dialogues in containing inner and outer frames both presented in direct narration. What we should make out of this special feature I will leave to others to decide. (McCabe 2000:51) provocatively maintains that the outer frame is aimed at highlighting higher-order reflection. I suggest a more mundane purpose. Given the dates of the conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus and their respective demises Plato uses the outer frame in order to remind the reader of Theaetetus's future career and so maintain the parallel with *Charmides*. Of course, this does not explain Plato's choice of direct as opposed to indirect narration.

<sup>32</sup>Exactly how many years earlier is a matter of some controversy. Until fairly recently, the outer frame was thought to take place in 369, 30 years following the action of the inner frame; see, for example, (Cornford 1935:15), (Burnyeat 1990:3), and (Stern 2008:2 n. 3). More recently, however, (Nails 2002:275–277) has argued persuasively for the date of the outer frame as 391, only eight years later; see also (Sedley 2004:1 n 1).

<sup>33</sup>These are actually Euclides' words (142b7). It should be noted, however, that we do not know for sure that Theaetetus is supposed to have died from these wounds and dysentery.

<sup>34</sup>See (Campbell 1861:liii) for an early statement of the idea that the *Theaetetus* "contains a tribute of affection to a friend or pupil who was no more ..."

XIII [of Euclid's *Elements*] is due to Theaetetus, and that Euclid's changes were more formal than substantive. However, we have no way of drawing an exact boundary between the work of the two men."<sup>35</sup> Further, in Proclus' judgment, Theaetetus is in the same league as Archytas and Eudoxus - two other pioneering mathematicians associated with Plato's Academy (*Commentary on Euclid's Elements, Book I* 66.8-67.8).

Consider now the eponymous interlocutor of Plato's *Charmides*. The contrast could hardly be greater. The average fourth century Athenian would not have to be reminded in an outer frame of Charmides' future career. Roughly 15 years following his conversation with Socrates<sup>36</sup> Charmides was accused of profaning the Eleusinian mysteries, convicted, deprived of his property, and sentenced to death *in absentia*. Having somehow recovered from this disgrace, a little over ten years later he was appointed by the notorious Thirty Tyrants, as they were known by Plato's Athenian readers, to govern the Piraeus as one of the Ten, and in 403 he was killed in the battle of Munychia between the supporters of the Thirty and the supporters of the victorious democracy.<sup>37</sup> Although both Charmides and Theaetetus meet their demise in battle, Charmides' subsequent career in Athens hardly indicates an individual held in high repute (ἐλλόγιμον) at least by the Athenians in the fourth century.

In the *Charmides* and the *Theaetetus*, then, Plato depicts one of the interlocutors - the older contemporary of Socrates (Critias and Theodorus) - introducing Socrates to a younger prodigy of sorts to whom the older interlocutor serves as a teacher, mentor, or guardian.<sup>38</sup> Socrates, thereupon, turns his attention to the younger prodigy for much of the remainder of the

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<sup>35</sup>(Mueller 1997:282). (Nails 2002:275–278) seems more skeptical concerning how much should actually be attributed to Theaetetus, based primarily on her argument for the earlier dating of the battle referred to in the opening lines of the dialogue and the improbability of achieving so much in less than a decade. (Mueller 1997:311 n 12) cites (van der Waerden 1963:179) at the other extreme in taking Theaetetus to have actually composed books X and XIII. All would agree, however, in attributing to Theaetetus "a surpassing mathematical intuition" (Nails 2002:275).

<sup>36</sup>Given the reference to the battle at Potidaea, the action of the *Charmides* can be dated fairly securely between 432 to 429; for the earlier date see, for example, (Kahn 1996:185 n 3); for the later date, see (Nails 2002:311–312). The profanation of the mysteries takes place in 415.

<sup>37</sup>I here follow (Nails 2002:92) who maintains the Charmides was not himself a member a member of the Thirty on the grounds that he does not appear in the ancient list. If, however, we follow the majority of modern commentators (see (Nails 2002:92) for a representative list) and take Charmides to be a member of the Thirty along with his cousin Critias, Charmides' future ill-repute is only worsened.

<sup>38</sup>Compare *Theaetetus* 143d1-e3 with *Charmides* 153d2-5.

dialogue. Indeed, these are the only two Platonic dialogues in which a young interlocutor is engaged by Socrates whose subsequent career we know anything much about.<sup>39</sup> And the contrast could not be much more stark. Moreover, the contrast appears to be highlighted by the external appearance of the two youngsters. Charmides is described by Critias as the most beautiful youth of the day (καλλίστου). Socrates is amazed by his stature and beauty (ἐκεῖνος ἐμοὶ θαυμαστὸς ἐφάνη τό τε μέγεθος καὶ τὸ κάλλος) and reports that everyone stared at him as though he were a statue (ἀλλὰ πάντες ὥσπερ ἄγαλμα ἐθεῶντο αὐτόν). By contrast, Theaetetus is explicitly described by Theodorus as not beautiful (οὐκ ἔστι καλός), with a snub nose and bulging eyes like Socrates (προσέεικε δὲ σοὶ τήν τε σιμότητα καὶ τὸ ἔξω τῶν ὀμμάτων). These relatively external similarities and contrasts between Charmides and Theaetetus<sup>40</sup> indicate a deeper internal - or in Platonic terms, psychic - contrast between the two interlocutors.

**A Deeper Contrast.** To see this, let us turn to the *Charmides* following the introduction of the dialogues' namesake. Socrates remarks that the youngster would be unconquerable if he had in addition one small thing (σμικρόν τι)<sup>41</sup> - a well-formed soul (Εἰ τὴν ψυχὴν ... τυγχάνει εὖ πεφυκώς), to adopt Sprague's felicitous translation. When Critias remarks that Charmides does have a well-formed soul, Socrates proposes to examine it by engaging him in conversation (διαλέγεσθαι) and Critias reports that Charmides will be quite willing to do so, "since he is not only a philosopher but also, both in his own opinion and that of others, quite a poet." (Καὶ πάνυ γε, ἔφη ὁ Κριτίας, ἐπεὶ τοι καὶ ἔστιν φιλόσοφος τε καί, ὥς δοκεῖ ἄλλοις τε καὶ ἑαυτῷ, πάνυ ποιητικός) [*Charmides* 154e8-155a1; Sprague trans.].

<sup>39</sup>An exception here might be the *Alcibiades I*, but besides its dubious authorship, other similarities with the *Charmides* or the *Theaetetus* are missing.

<sup>40</sup>Once one sees the parallel between the *Theaetetus* and the *Charmides* the similarities and contrasts seem to proliferate. At both *Theaetetus* 144c5 and *Charmides* 154b3, Socrates professes to know the respective youths. The fathers of both are mentioned at *Theaetetus* 144c5-8 and *Charmides* 154a8-b2. Even their respective entrances are suggestive. Charmides enters in the lead of a group of fawning admirers, while Theaetetus is simply in the middle of group of equals walking towards them.

<sup>41</sup>For the irony associated with the phrase σμικρόν τι in the dialogues, see *Protagoras* 329b5. See also the 'μικρόν ... τι' at *Theaetetus* 145d6 and again at 148c6-8.

Two features of Critias' report are worth highlighting. First, not only does Critias report that others take Charmides to be a philosopher and a poet, but Charmides does as well.<sup>42</sup> That is, Charmides is both reputed by others and professes himself to possess a certain kind of knowledge or wisdom, the kind associated with philosophy and poetry. Second, Critias not only claims that Charmides is reputed and professes to be a philosopher (however precisely we are supposed to understand the notion of a philosopher here), but also quite a poet! The former is a reasonable response to Socrates' desire to engage Charmides in conversation, while the latter is more difficult to explain. Perhaps it indicates a special willingness to be examined. In any case, in being reputed and professing to be a poet Charmides falls immediately into the second group of interlocutors Socrates describes himself as approaching in his attempt to 'refute' the Delphic oracle in the story from the *Apology*. Thus, we should expect that the examination of Charmides' soul which we are about to get in the *Charmides* is just the sort of practice Socrates blames for his ultimate conviction and death in the *Apology*.

To a certain extent our expectation is disappointed. Socrates does not take up Charmides' poems and ask him what they mean in order to learn from him, as he says he does with the poets in the *Apology* (22b2-5). Rather, Socrates resorts to the rather curious deception of offering to treat Charmides' headache.<sup>43</sup> He explains that in order to treat his headache with a leaf (φύλλον) he must first treat Charmides' soul with incantations (ἐπωδή) to insure that it is *sôphrôn*.<sup>44</sup> If, however, Charmides' soul already possesses *sôphrosunê*, the incantations apparently will be

<sup>42</sup>This passage appears to conflict with Charmides' alleged modesty. (Hyland 1981:34 n 50) is the only commentator I am aware of who appreciates this conflict, but he also notes that while most editions of the *Charmides* have ἐαυτῷ, one has ἐμαυτῷ.

<sup>43</sup>It should be noted that the deception is Critias' idea, but Socrates is not made to demur; see 155b1-7. (McPherran 2004), for one, seems less confident that all of this is simply intended to be a ruse.

<sup>44</sup>I do not translate *sôphrosunê* and its cognates here since to some extent that is the problem of the *Charmides*. Nevertheless, to the extent that Socrates is depicted in the dialogues of examination as endorsing intellectualism - the view that knowledge is in some way necessary and sufficient for the virtues, professing to possess *sôphrosunê* amounts to professing to possess knowledge or wisdom of some sort.

unnecessary and so Socrates asks Charmides whether he is *sôphrôn*.<sup>45</sup> Charmides finds himself unable to answer this question without either immodestly professing his *sôphrosunê* or impolitely accusing Critias of speaking falsely when he asserted that Charmides was *sôphrôn* (*Charmides* 158d1-6).<sup>46</sup> As a result Socrates proposes to determine Charmides' *sôphrosunê* by asking him to say what he thinks *sôphrosunê* is<sup>47</sup> and the 'What is *sôphrosunê*?' portion of the *Charmides* is off and running. But notice that in depicting Socrates' procedure in this way Plato has, nevertheless, managed to depict Socrates engaged in the practice he describes as responsible for his conviction and death in the *Apology*. For just as Socrates in the *Apology* is made to explain that he questions, examines, and tests anyone who professes (or is reputed) to care for wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of the soul, so here in the *Charmides* Socrates is made to question and examine Charmides in a dialogue in order to test his soul which is reputed and professed (whether modestly or immodestly) to be well-formed, *sôphrôn*, and so wise (in some way).

The *Charmides*, then, provides a paradigm instance of the practice Socrates is made to describe in the *Apology*. It is a paradigmatic dialogue of examination. Charmides is characterized as reputed by others (Critias among them) and professing himself to be philosophic and poetic. While his (perhaps false) modesty causes him some discomfort, he takes himself to care for wisdom, truth and the best possible state of his soul. Socrates is depicted as examining

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<sup>45</sup>(Coolidge 1993) correctly argues that Socrates' comments concerning the incantations between 155e5 and 157c6 are not wholly consistent. (McPherran 2004) proposes resolving this tension by introducing two different incantations - the ones that will produce *sôphrosunê* in Charmides if needed, and the ones that test whether Charmides already possesses *sôphrosunê*. Perhaps all of this is to read too much into the ruse to treat Charmides' headache. But, in any case, Charmides and Critias indicate at the end of the dialogue (176a6-c3) that Charmides is in need of incantations. Whatever has occurred between 158c5 and 176a6-c3 it is apparently not an application of the incantations that produce *sôphrosunê* in an individual.

<sup>46</sup>It is difficult to know how to understand Charmides' response here. Does he genuinely find himself in between Scylla and Charybdis or is he rather proud of himself for finding a clever way to respond to Socrates without refuting his *sôphrosunê*? See, for example, (Santas 1973:107) "Charmides manages to avoid praising himself without at the same time denying that he possesses this desirable quality."; (Schmid 1981:142) "Generally the youth is credited with intelligent modesty for this reaction and response, though it might be that Socrates has uncovered a secret conceit on Charmides' part which makes him blush - the conceit that he is virtuous, just as the others say;" and (Kosman 1983:203) "Modest and reticent, [Charmides] is at first reluctant to answer." We have already seen reason above to doubt Charmides genuine modesty.

<sup>47</sup>Socrates is made to offer an argument at 158e6-159a10 to the effect that if Charmides is *sôphrôn*, then he can say what *sôphrosunê* is. Whether or not Plato intends to endorse this argument, it motivates the remainder of the dialogue.

Charmides' soul by means of his 'What is *sôphrosunê*?' question and he finds it wanting. He is not depicted as wanting to learn from Charmides, as he is, for example, from Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro*, (although perhaps he wants to learn from his contemporary Critias), but he does seem concerned to encourage Charmides to recognize his failure to have achieved wisdom, truth or the best possible state of his soul. Until Charmides recognizes his failure and manages to rectify it, Socrates cannot 'apply the leaf for his headache.' If Socrates has incantations which produce *sôphrosunê* or knowledge in Charmides, he does not practice or chant them in this dialogue. Socrates' evident goal in the *Charmides* is to determine whether Charmides is in need of such incantations. Of course, whether Charmides is depicted as having been persuaded of his ignorance and so recognizes his need of such incantations depends on how sincere one takes Charmides' profession of ignorance at the end of the dialogue (176a6-b4). But, on the surface at least, it appears that Socrates has been successful in leading Charmides (and perhaps Critias) to see the need to acquire the *sôphrosunê* or knowledge that they lack. How or whether Charmides takes up this pursuit to acquire the knowledge he now apparently recognizes that he lacks is not depicted in the *Charmides*, although his subsequent career may indicate that, if he did, the pursuit was rather unsuccessful.

Compare this with the way in which Plato motivates the introduction of his 'What is *epistêmê*?' question in the *Theaetetus*. After disparaging Theaetetus' looks, Theodorus describes him as naturally gifted (οὕτω θαυμαστῶς εὖ πεφυκότα), ready or quick to learn (εὐμαθῆ), gentle (πρᾶον), courageous (ἀνδρεῖον), acute (ὀξεῖς), keen (ἀγχίνοι), and retentive (μνήμονες). After expressing surprise at this combination of characteristics, Theodorus concludes by attesting that Theaetetus approaches his lessons and inquiries (τὰς μαθήσεις τε καὶ ζητήσεις) smoothly (λείως), reliably (ἀπταίστως), efficiently (ἀνυσίμως), and with great gentleness (πραότητος). These are all remarkable psychic characteristics, but with the possible of exception of courage (in light of intellectualism),<sup>48</sup> Theodorus refrains from attributing wisdom or knowledge to Theaetetus.

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<sup>48</sup>But, see n. 51 below.

Indeed, as Lewis Campbell noted long ago<sup>49</sup> it is difficult not to think here of Plato's discussion of the natural endowments *necessary for becoming* a philosopher-ruler in *Republic* VI.

At *Republic* 487a ff Socrates is made to respond to Adeimantus' objection to the hypothesis that Socrates has been defending since around 473b that philosophy and political power coincide. Adeimantus objects that philosophers in fact are either useless or vicious (487c-d). Socrates does not deny Adeimantus' claim, but rather explains why it does not refute his hypothesis. He describes the parable of the ship in order to explain why philosophers are useless (487d-489d), and turns to explaining why philosophers are vicious at 489d10. The argument is rather long and complex<sup>50</sup> but at least part of the argument consists in making the point that those who possess the philosophical nature (τῆς φιλοσόφου φύσεως) - the necessary conditions for becoming philosophers when properly trained and educated - are often corrupted by inappropriate or inadequate training and education. The features which make up this philosophical nature when corrupted yield an especially vicious individual. The features that Socrates explicitly mentions are readiness or quickness to learn (εὐμάθεια), courage (ἀνδρεία),<sup>51</sup> retentiveness (μνήμη), and high-mindedness (μεγαλοπρέπεια) (490c8-e1).<sup>52</sup> A bit later in Book VI, at the beginning of an argument aimed at describing the appropriate education of those naturally gifted for philosophy, Socrates is made to describe the rarity of such philosophical natures as follows:

You know that ease of learning (Εὐμαθεῖς), good memory (μνήμονες), quick wits (ἀγχίνοι), smartness (ὀξεῖς), youthful passion (νεανικοί), high-mindedness (μεγαλοπρεπεῖς), and all the other things that go along with these are rarely willing to grow together in a mind that will choose an orderly (κοσμίως) life that is quiet (ἡσυχίας) and completely stable (βεβαιότητος), for the people who possess the former traits are carried by their quick wits wherever chance leads them and have no stability at all.  
[*Republic* 6 503c2-8; G/R trans.]

Theodorus' introductory description of Theaetetus, then, does not amount to a reputation for wisdom (or even some part of wisdom) as Critias' introductory description of Charmides does. Rather it amounts to a reputation for the necessary natural features for becoming wise - at

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<sup>49</sup>(Campbell 1861:9–10).

<sup>50</sup>For a longer defense of the structure of the argument from 473b to 502c see (Benson 2008).

<sup>51</sup>The *andreia* referred to here is evidently an *andreia* that can be possessed prior to knowledge of the good which only the appropriately trained and educated person has acquired.

<sup>52</sup>The same four features are repeated at 494b1-3.

least when subjected to the appropriate education and training. Critias describes Charmides as someone whose education and training is complete, or nearly so - someone to be displayed and admired. Theodorus describes Theaetetus as someone in need of appropriate education and training.

Moreover, as the introductory scene continues there is little indication that Theaetetus thinks himself to be wise or knowledgeable. After Theaetetus takes his seat next to Socrates (without the comedy of the *Charmides*), Socrates is made to ask Theaetetus if Theodorus had praised someone for his virtue and wisdom (ἀρετὴν τε καὶ σοφίαν) whether one should examine (ἀνασκέψασθαι) the object of such praise and whether the object of such praise should be willing to display himself. Theaetetus answers affirmatively, and then Socrates explains to Theaetetus that he had never heard Theodorus praise anyone as highly as he had just praised Theaetetus. Of course, Socrates does not say here that Theodorus praised Theaetetus for his virtue and wisdom, and indeed we have seen that except for the possible exception of courage, Theodorus did not. But I concede that perhaps only one who was concerned to make the point I am after would be inclined to deny the conversational implicature of this passage.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Theaetetus' response is unequivocal.

THEAETETUS: That's all very well, Socrates; but take care he wasn't saying that for a joke. (ΘΕΑΙ. Εὖ ἂν ἔχοι, ὦ Σώκρατες· ἀλλ' ὅρα μὴ παίζων ἔλεγεν.) [*Theaetetus* 145b10-c1; L/B trans.]

Unlike Charmides, Theaetetus has no trouble denying Theodorus' praise, without calling him a liar. He simply assumes Theodorus was kidding. But when Socrates insists that joking is not Theodorus' style, and discourages Theaetetus from avoiding his agreement (presumably to be examined by Socrates and display himself at 145b1-5) in this way, Theaetetus concedes to be examined. Theaetetus at no point in this introductory conversation indicates that he takes

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<sup>53</sup>It is for this reason that I qualified my thesis statement on the second page of this essay. I concede that there is a natural way of reading 143c8-145c6 so that the *Theaetetus* looks to be an examination of Theaetetus' reputed (although not professed) wisdom. But by 148e1-5 it is evident that Theaetetus fails to know the nature of knowledge and recognizes that he does, and yet the dialogue continues pursuing the 'What is knowledge?' question for another 50 plus pages. This is not found in either the dialogues of examination or the dialogues of defense. The closest parallel is the *Meno*.

himself to possess the knowledge and wisdom that Theodorus may (or may not) have reputed that he has. On the contrary, he manages to politely deny it.

So, beneath the external contrast between Charmides and Theaetetus lies a psychological one. Charmides is reputed by others and professes himself to be philosophic, poetic and *sôphrôn*. If he ever concedes his lack of knowledge and wisdom it is not until the conclusion of the dialogue.<sup>54</sup> Theaetetus, on the other hand, is neither reputed by others nor does he profess himself to be wise in any way. Plato signals that Theaetetus has all the necessary ingredients for knowledge or wisdom, but does not yet possess it nor does Theaetetus think he does. Theodorus mentions every feature necessary for the philosopher delineated in the *Republic*, and despite his high praise never actually attributes knowledge or wisdom or *aretê* to Theaetetus. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Theaetetus forswears whatever praise Theodorus offers and, as we will see in a moment, explicitly denies his ability to answer Socrates' 'What is *epistêmê*?' question.

**A Contrast in Socratic Practice: The Midwife Image.** This contrast between Charmides' conceit of wisdom and knowledge and Theaetetus's lack thereof prompts a difference in practice. Socrates can no longer engage Theaetetus in the practice he describes in the *Apology* as responsible for his prosecution and death. He cannot examine Theaetetus for his reputed and professed wisdom in order to learn from him if he has the knowledge he is reputed and professed to have nor to persuade him of his ignorance if he lacks it. Theaetetus is neither reputed by others nor professed by himself to have such knowledge or wisdom. Whatever Socrates goes on to do with Theaetetus in the *Theaetetus* it cannot be what he does with Charmides in the *Charmides* and describes in the *Apology*. Socrates cannot be engaging Theaetetus in a question-and-answer examination in order to learn from him the knowledge he is reputed or professed to have because he is neither reputed nor professed to have it. Nor can Socrates be engaging Theaetetus in order to persuade him of his lack of such knowledge so that

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<sup>54</sup>Or perhaps at 162b9-10, when the dialogue turns to an examination of Critias self-professed knowledge.

Theaetetus will join Socrates in the pursuit of wisdom. Theaetetus is already on board. Such an examination is a rare occurrence in the dialogues,<sup>55</sup> and when it does occur we must wonder about its point.

To begin to see its point we must turn to yet another contrast between the *Theaetetus* and *Charmides* - the contrast in the images Plato depicts Socrates as employing in the course of motivating the subsequent conversations with Theaetetus and Charmides. Recall, in the *Charmides* Socrates appeals to the deception of the cure for a headache and the need to examine Charmides' soul to motivate the 'What is *sôphrosunê*?' question. As we have seen, Socrates explains that before he can cure Charmides' headache he must chant incantations to insure the presence of *sôphrosunê* in Charmides soul, but if *sôphrosunê* is already present these incantations will be unnecessary. So, Socrates asks Charmides to answer the 'What is *sôphrosunê*?' question in order to determine the necessity of the incantations. But in the *Theaetetus* Socrates is depicted as appealing to a different image - the image of the midwife - in order to motivate Theaetetus' continued attempt to answer the 'What is *epistêmê*?' question.

Socrates is made to introduce the *Theaetetus*' 'one small difficulty' immediately following Theaetetus' introduction (145d6). He offers a brief argument for the identity of *epistêmê* and wisdom (145d7-e7) and explains that his difficulty concerns what *epistêmê* is (ἐπιστήμη ὅτι ποτὲ τυγχάνει ὄν; 145e9). When both Theodorus and Theaetetus remain silent in response to this question, Socrates expresses his fear that he has been somehow rude. Theodorus reassures him that the question is a good one, but declines to answer and encourages Socrates to make Theaetetus do the answering. Theaetetus, thereupon, reluctantly (146c4-5) answers that 'the things that Theodorus teaches are *epistêmai*' (ἃ παρὰ Θεοδώρου ἂν τις μάθοι ἐπιστήμαι εἶναι; 146c7-8). Socrates' objection to this answer has received considerable scholarly

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<sup>55</sup>See nn. 64 and 65 below.

attention,<sup>56</sup> but however it is to be understood, it is evident that Theaetetus takes the objection to be sufficient. For after explaining that he now understands that Socrates' question is like the question he and the younger Socrates attempted to answer concerning the nature of powers (δυνάμεις),<sup>57</sup> Theaetetus remarks

And yet, Socrates, I shouldn't be able to answer your question about knowledge in the same way that I answered the one about lengths and powers - though you seem to me to be looking for something of the same sort. So Theodorus turns out a false witness after all. (ΘΕΑΙ. Καὶ μὲν, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὃ γε ἐρωτᾷς περὶ ἐπιστήμης οὐκ ἂν δυνάμην ἀποκρίνασθαι ὥσπερ περὶ τοῦ μήκους τε καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως. καίτοι σύ γέ μοι δοκεῖς τοιοῦτόν τι ζητεῖν· ὥστε πάλιν αὖ φαίνεται ψευδὴς ὁ Θεόδωρος. ) [*Theaetetus* 148b5-8; L/B trans.]<sup>58</sup>

If Theaetetus ever thought he did know the answer to Socrates' question, already by 148b he evidently recognizes that he does not. If Socrates is to continue his dialogue with Theaetetus concerning the 'What is *epistēmē*?' question, it will not be in order to persuade Theaetetus of his ignorance. Theaetetus is evidently aware of that already, and so Socrates appeals to the image of the midwife to continue the dialogue.

The midwife image is an enduring image of Platonic/Socratic philosophy and the subject of much enlightening discussion. There are issues concerning its comparison with the theory of recollection found in dialogues like the *Meno*, the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, with psychic pregnancy in the *Symposium*, and, of course, with the Socratic/aporetic method of the dialogues of examination.<sup>59</sup> I cannot here treat the image in the detail it deserves, but I do want to point to

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<sup>56</sup>I will not pursue this discussion except to say that it is often maintained that Theaetetus first answer fails in a way similar to the failure of the first answers in the dialogues of examination. See, for example, (McDowell 1973:115) and (Bostock 1988:32). But this is misleading. No other dialogue of examination depicts a first answer that consists of a list, except the *Meno* and the *Meno* as we will see is hardly a paradigmatic dialogue of examination. Nevertheless, Theaetetus subsequent discussion of powers does suggest that Theaetetus's first answer consists in a misunderstanding of Socrates' question. This failure on the part of the interlocutors is more common in the dialogues of examination; see, for example, *Laches* 190e-191c, *Euthyphro* 6c-d, and of course, *Meno* 74b-77a. See (Nehamas 1975) and (Benson 1990).

<sup>57</sup>See, (Burnyeat 1978:511) for the suggestion that what is illustrated here is the successful beginning, not the completion, of "a far-reaching study of irrational quantities."

<sup>58</sup>See also 148e1-5.

<sup>59</sup>See (Burnyeat 1977) for an excellent discussion, especially concerning how Socratic midwifery is importantly distinct from all three of these other features of the Platonic dialogues. In the future I hope to pursue the comparison of the practice fostered by the midwife image with the theory of recollection and the *Symposium*'s commitment to psychic pregnancy. For now my attention is focused on the comparison with the practice of the dialogues of examination. Like Burnyeat, I see the practice fostered by the midwife image to begin with doubt and perplexity. Unlike Burnyeat, I see the practice suggested by the midwife image to follow the practice of the dialogues of

a single feature which is especially salient to our comparison with the *Charmides*. As Socrates puts it, like actual midwives who possess drugs and incantations (αἱ μᾶται φαρμάκια καὶ ἐπάδουσαι) by which they can bring on and relieve the pains of pregnancy (149c9-d4), so Socrates' *technê* of midwifery permits him to bring on and relieve the pains of psychic pregnancy (151a5-b1). Not only does this image call to mind the deception of the cure for bodily pains which Socrates is supposed to possess in the *Charmides*, but it also highlights that Theaetetus, unlike Charmides, is already suffering the pains of psychic pregnancy - *aporia* (148e6-7). The image of the midwife employed at this stage in the *Theaetetus* is not aimed at reflecting the practice of eliminating Theaetetus' false conceit of knowledge - if he ever had it, although the image makes clear that Socrates' drugs and incantations can do that as well, as in fact they do in the *Charmides*.<sup>60</sup> Rather the image is employed to reveal Socrates' practice of eliminating the pain that the recognition of this ignorance has produced - a practice which Socrates is not depicted as performing in the *Charmides*. To accomplish this Socrates proposes to deliver Theaetetus of his psychic offspring (which Theaetetus is unaware of possessing) and testing those offspring for truth or falsehood. In the remainder of the dialogue, then, Socrates does not propose to examine Theaetetus's soul to determine whether he has the knowledge or wisdom he *may* have been reputed by Theodorus to have (but does not consider himself to have) as Socrates does with Charmides. Rather he proposes to relieve Theaetetus of the psychic pain of recognizing his lack of knowledge by helping to search himself for his psychic offspring (of which Theaetetus is unaware) and test them for truth or falsehood. The false ones evidently are to be discarded and the true ones to be retained and perhaps pursued. The midwife image of the

examination which aims at producing this doubt and perplexity. See (Burnyeat 1977:[58]) and also, for example, (Sheffield 2001) and (Sedley 2004).

<sup>60</sup>Recall (McPherran 2004)'s argument that the image in the *Charmides* requires two different sorts of incantations - those that test for the presence of *sôphrosunê* and those that promote the presence of *sôphrosunê* in a soul which lacks it; n. 45 above. The midwife image in the *Theaetetus* appears to indicate that Socrates thinks that the same incantations can be used for either purpose. They can both bring on and relieve the pain of *aporia*. The point, however, is that in the *Charmides* Socrates 'chanted his incantations' (if that is what he did) in order to test for the presence of *sôphrosunê*, while in the *Theaetetus* the absence of knowledge has already been determined and Socrates 'chants his incantations' in order to promote the presence of knowledge in the soul by either disposing of false pregnancies or pursuing the occurrence of true ones.

*Theaetetus*, then, is employed not to reflect the practice of eliminating the false conceit of knowledge depicted in the *Charmides*. Rather, the practice reflected by the midwife image follows such an elimination, if such an elimination is necessary. The image is employed to reflect a practice of discovery from within the interlocutor, him or herself, the latent knowledge or wisdom therein (if there is any)<sup>61</sup> - a practice depicted in the remainder of the *Theaetetus* (151d-210d).<sup>62</sup>

**Conclusion.** Let's take stock. When we compare the practice of the *Theaetetus* with a paradigmatic dialogue of examination like the *Charmides* we see that the practices are importantly, yet perhaps subtly, distinct. The one - depicted in the *Charmides* - is a practice of examining individual souls to see whether they possess the knowledge or wisdom they are reputed and/or professed to have in order to learn from them if they have it or to persuade them of their lack so that they will seek to acquire it as he describes it in the *Apology*. Charmides is depicted as both reputed by others and himself as being philosophic, poetic, and in possession of *sôphrosunê*. And the deception of the cure for the headache is aimed at motivating an examination of Charmides' soul, via the 'What is *sôphrosunê*? question, in order to determine whether Charmides *is* philosophic, poetic, and *sôphrôn* and in order to eliminate Charmides' false conceit when it becomes clear to Socrates at least that he is none of the above. The practice depicted in the *Charmides*, then, is one of producing psychic pain or *aporia*, at least for most of us.<sup>63</sup>

The other practice - depicted in the *Theaetetus* - is a practice of leading an interlocutor, who already recognizes his ignorance and is seeking to acquire knowledge - who is already experiencing psychic pain - to discover within himself the latent knowledge he may already have but of which he is unaware. Theaetetus is depicted not as someone who is already philosophic or

<sup>61</sup>Here according to (Burnyeat 1977:[56–57]) is one of the differences with the theory of recollection. The theory of recollection supposes that *everyone* has the knowledge within to be discovered. The image of the midwife appears to allow that some of us will be barren.

<sup>62</sup>See *Theaetetus* 210b4-d1 for the return to the midwife image.

<sup>63</sup>This practice will not lead to psychic pain, of course, in those who have the knowledge or wisdom they are reputed or profess to have. Of course, Plato never depicts Socrates engaging such interlocutors in any of the dialogues, although he does describe Socrates' encounters with the craftsmen in this way at least in part.

wise, but rather as someone who possesses all of the necessary traits for becoming so. Nor is Theaetetus depicted as someone who falsely professes to be philosophic or wise. Rather, if he was ever inclined to such a false conceit of knowledge, that has been eliminated already by 148b. As a result Plato does not revert to the Socratic practice of the dialogues of examination, i.e., the practice of examining the reputed and professed wisdom of his interlocutors and the elimination of their false conceit, in the *Theaetetus* despite initial appearances. Rather Plato depicts Socrates as engaging in the practice which follows this elimination of conceit - a practice of eliminating the psychic pain brought on by this elimination of conceit. This is the practice of leading the interlocutor to discover the knowledge within, if it is there to be discovered. The subsequent careers of Charmides and Theaetetus suggests that Charmides might well have benefited from this subsequent phase in Socrates' dialectical engagement.

### **A Third Socratic Practice and Developmentalism Again**

If something like this reading of the practices depicted in the *Charmides* and *Theaetetus* is correct, it follows that in the *Theaetetus* Plato depicts Socrates as engaging in a third kind of practice unmentioned at the beginning of this essay. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates is neither depicted as defending a view advanced by himself as he is in the dialogues of defense, nor is he depicted as examining the reputed or professed wisdom of an interlocutor in order to learn from him if he turns out to possess such wisdom or to eliminate his mistaken belief that he possesses it as he is in the dialogues of examination. Rather Socrates is depicted as attempting to lead an interlocutor who already (or rather quickly) recognizes his lack of wisdom to discover the wisdom that potentially lies within. It might be wondered, however, whether this third practice is really so different from the practice depicted in the dialogues of examination. Both practices aim to examine the wisdom of the interlocutor. The difference lies merely in whether the interlocutor takes himself or is reputed by others to possess that wisdom or not. But why should this difference be significant?

Now is not the time to take up this question in detail, but I want to close by mentioning a number of considerations which suggest that such a difference is significant. First, Plato is fairly

explicit that he takes this difference to be pivotal. He maintains that one will not be prepared to engage in the practice of discovering the knowledge within until one first is made aware that one lacks the knowledge one is reputed or professed to have. Something like this seems to be the import of the divine mission in the *Apology* and the value of human wisdom in the Delphic oracle story. It may even be suggested in the image of the Cave in the *Republic*. But it is explicit in the distinction between good and bad ignorance at *Lysis* 218a2-b5, and, of course, in the commentary on the conversation with the slave following the latter's recognition of his ignorance in the *Meno*. As Socrates is made to put it there

S: Have we done [the slave] any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does? ...

S: Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now, as he does not know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said that it must have a base twice as long. ...

S: Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know? (ΣΩ. Ἀπορεῖν οὖν αὐτὸν ποιήσαντες καὶ ναρκᾶν ὥσπερ ἡ νάρκη, μῶν τι ἐβλάψαμεν; ... ΣΩ. Προὔργου γοῦν τι πεποιήκαμεν, ὥς ἔοικε, πρὸς τὸ ἐξευρεῖν ὅπῃ ἔχει· νῦν μὲν γὰρ καὶ ζητήσκειν ἂν ἡδέως οὐκ εἰδώς, τότε δὲ ῥαδίως ἂν καὶ πρὸς πολλοὺς καὶ πολλάκις ᾤετ' ἂν εὖ λέγειν περὶ τοῦ διπλασίου χωρίου, ὥς δεῖ διπλασίαν τὴν γραμμὴν ἔχειν μήκει. ... ΣΩ. Οἶει οὖν ἂν αὐτὸν πρότερον ἐπιχειρήσαι ζητεῖν ἢ μανθάνειν τοῦτο ὃ ᾔετο εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, πρὶν εἰς ἀπορίαν κατέπεσεν ἡγησάμενος μὴ εἰδέναι, καὶ ἐπόθησεν τὸ εἰδέναι.) [*Meno* 84b6-c6; Grube trans.]

Indeed, this reference to the *Meno* should remind us how unique a dialogue the *Meno* is. It is the only stylistically early dialogue in which an interlocutor is depicted as engaged in the pursuit of the discovery of knowledge following his recognition of ignorance. Of the 18 interlocutors in the stylistically early dialogues of examination 14 fail to recognize their ignorance.<sup>64</sup> In the case of those three who do, either the dialogue ends immediately following this recognition (Ion) or Socrates turns to a new interlocutor reputed or professed to be wise and

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<sup>64</sup>Among the dialogues of examination I count the *Apology* (in part), *Charmides*, *Crito* (in part), *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic* I. The interlocutors examined in these dialogues are Meletus, Charmides, Critias, Crito, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Polus, Callicles, Hippias (twice), Ion, Laches, Nicias, Hippocrates, Protagoras, Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus. I do not count various relatively minor interlocutors because they are neither examined nor otherwise engaged in the pursuit of wisdom. I also do not count Meno, the slave, or Anytus from the *Meno* for reasons I indicate below. Of those interlocutors who do not recognize their ignorance, some may be thought to come closer than others. For more on this issue see (Benson 1990:146–147) and (Benson 2011).

a new examination of that wisdom is initiated (Charmides and Hippocrates) or Plato depicts the speech of the laws (Crito). Consequently, in none of the other stylistically early dialogues of examination is Socrates depicted as attempting to lead an interlocutor who recognizes his ignorance to discover the wisdom within.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, I have argued elsewhere that in the last third of the *Meno* (86c ff) Socrates is depicted as practicing a method of knowledge acquisition when there is no one who knows from whom to learn, i.e. *de novo* discovery, which Socrates is also depicted as practicing very briefly in the *Phaedo* and as describing at some length in the *Republic* VI-VII.<sup>66</sup> As a result, we have reason to think that the practice depicted in the *Theaetetus* is not a reversion to a practice commonly depicted in the stylistically early dialogues. Rather the *Theaetetus* represents a more complete depiction of a practice depicted rather uniquely and superficially in the *Meno* and described with some detailed in the stylistically middle *Republic*.

## Conclusion

What does any of this mean for the debate between developmentalists and neo-unitarians with which the essay began? Not much.

*Theaetetus* does not appear to raise a special problem for developmentalists. Plato does not depict Socrates reverting to the typical practice of the earlier dialogues. Rather he depicts Socrates as engaging in a practice introduced in the *Meno* and perhaps described in the *Republic* but not otherwise practiced (either before or later).

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<sup>65</sup>Among the remaining stylistically identified early dialogues *Phaedo* and *Symposium* are dialogues of defense. In the case of the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis*, their interlocutors either fail to recognize their ignorance (Euthydemus, Dionysodorus, and Menexenus) or their recognition of ignorance is reinforced (*Lysis*) or the value and nature of the wisdom lacked are examined (Cleinias). In no case is Socrates made to attempt to lead the interlocutor to discover knowledge within himself. Finally, the *Cratylus* and the *Menexenus* are anomalous but one would be hard pressed to see these as examples of Socrates attempting to lead the interlocutors to discover knowledge within themselves following the recognition of their ignorance.

<sup>66</sup>See (Benson 2003), (Benson 2006), (Benson 2010), and (Benson 2011). It is noteworthy that Plato's description of a portion of this practice of *de novo* discovery is very similar to the practice of examining the reputed or professed wisdom of an interlocutor. See *Republic* 7.534b8-d2. This may help explain why the *Theaetetus* has been so readily assimilated to the practice of the dialogues of examination. See also (Irwin 1973–1974) and (Fine 1992) for the assimilation of the post-recognition of ignorance portion of the conversation with the slave in the *Meno* with the practice depicted in the dialogues of examination.

On the other hand, it does not appear to raise a problem for neo-unitarians either. For all we know from the very beginning of Plato's philosophical thinking he recognized three distinct philosophical practices - examination of reputed or professed knowledge, defense of positions (at least tentatively) maintained, and *de novo* discovery of the knowledge one lacks - and he periodically displayed Socrates as engaging them over the course of his writing career.

The debate between these two ways of reading the dialogues, then, will continue and that is perhaps as it should be. For me, at least, the debate stimulates and provokes a careful reading and comparison of the dialogues. Again, for me at least, such readings and comparisons have fruitful and provocative results. If one or the other of these ways of reading the dialogues is based on a myth, it is a myth worth taking seriously enough to see what *logoi* can be extracted from it.

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