

The Definition of Knowledge and the Theory of Forms

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In recent years, regarding the *Theaetetus*, scholars have debated whether the so-called ‘middle period theory of Forms’ was indeed held or abandoned. In the *Republic*, written prior to the *Theaetetus*, knowledge was defined within the framework of the ‘middle period theory of Forms’, that is, the object of knowledge is ‘what is (being)’, while the object of belief is ‘what is and is not (being and not-being)’, which we use to describe perceptual objects. However, in the *Theaetetus*, which is said to be written either at the end of the middle period or the beginning of the later one, Plato could not differentiate knowledge from belief; thus, defining knowledge ends in failure without having explicit mention of the ‘middle period theory of Forms’. That is why the ending of the *Theaetetus* is strange compared to the *Republic*.

This is a serious problem concerning Plato’s theory of Forms from the middle period to the later one. In this article, we first survey recent interpretations of the *Theaetetus*. Secondly, we evaluate the Secret Doctrine in the *Theaetetus* from the texts. It reveals that the three theses in the first part of the *Theaetetus* is based on the Secret Doctrine that nothing is one being just by itself, thus opposing to Parmenides’ thesis. Therefore, I argue that Plato investigates the possibility of building a theory of knowledge based on the anti-Parmenideans’ theses. We must pay attention to the expression ‘one being just by itself’ which is used to refer the Forms as in the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, and the Secret Doctrine prohibits anyone from using it.

Then, we contend that this argument contains the same points of view that can be found in the *Theaetetus* by comparing the *Republic* V (474b3-480a13) with the *Theaetetus* (185a-186a). In conclusion, the argument in the *Republic* V (474b3-480a13) begins and ends with the cognitive approach, and Plato’s concerns in this respect continue on into the *Theaetetus*. Finally, we conclude that Plato does not discard the theory of Forms; he keeps the theory, which explains the relation between the Forms and perceptual objects, yet tries to brush up his theory by criticizing it from the viewpoint of Parmenides. Additionally, Plato considers the possibility of building a theory of knowledge without the presupposition of ‘what is (being)’, and he argues that there is no possibility of it in the *Theaetetus*.