

Theaetetus

Family



Greek philosopher Plato was the of Socrates and the teacher of Aristotle. His philosophical dis s were in the form of dialogues, in the form of questions being asked and answered. In most of Plato's dialogues the main character is his own teacher, Socrates. The Theaetetus is considered to be one of his middle to later dialogues. In this Socrates engages himself with the boy Theaeteus and his mathematics teacher, Theodorus. The dialogue is about the question of what is knowledge. But the dialogue fails to give us a concrete definition of knowledge. It tells the reader more about what is not knowledge more than what is knowledge. Thus the dialogue ends inconclusively. Though there is no definite answer to the question posed in the dialogue this work by Plato had been an object of great intellectual fascination among researchers. Though the main emphasis in the dialogue is on the nature of cognition, the work considers a variety of philosophical issues like the Socratic Dialectic, Protagorian Relativism, Heraclitean Flux, rhetorical versus philosophical life and false judgment. One factor in the Theaetetus that baffled all researchers is the picture of the philosopher that Socrates paints out here. The philosopher that Socrates paints out here is in digression. He is a man cut away from worldly things around him, without any interest in the affairs in the city and the people who live there. He is more God like . This concept of the philosophical life is anti-Socratic. The chief concern of Socrates was how the republic can be made beneficial to the people. Of the three characters involved in the dialogue Theaetetus is portrayed as an ugly being. Though physically ugly he is very astute a boy intellectually. The Oxford Classical dictionary informs that Theaetetus was an eminent geometer who lived in Athens (c. 415-369 BCE) He is credited with the preposition of the theory of irrational lines in geometry. Theodorus lived <https://assignbuster.com/theaetetus/>

in Cyrene in the late fifth century BCE. Plato portrays him as a friend of Protagoras well versed in Sophist teachings but totally unaware of the Socratic Dialectic. In the introduction the reader is informed that Theaetetus, is being carried home dying of wounds and dysentery after a battle near Corinth. Theaetetus's injury and dying state is informed to the reader by the preface dialogue or just conversation between Terpsion and Euclid. (" Euc. As I was going down to the harbor, I met Theaetetus-he was being carried up to Athens from the army at Corinth. Terp. Was he alive or dead? Euc. He was scarcely alive, for he has been badly wounded; but he was suffering even more from the sickness which has broken out in the army. Terp. The dysentery, you mean? Euc. Yes. Terp. Alas! What a loss he will be!" --, Internet Classic Archive) The dialogues as such are presented as a memoir of Euclid who heard the dialogues between Socrates, Theaetetus and Theodorus. Thus the work is written just after the death of Theaetetus . From this information given in the introduction, most scholars reach the conclusion that the Theaetetus is written around 369 -367 BCE. As mentioned earlier the dialogue examines the question " What is knowledge"? Different answers pop up during the dialogue to this question, which can be broadly summed as the following four. 1) Knowledge is the various Arts and Sciences. 2) Knowledge is perception. 3) Knowledge is true judgment. 4) Knowledge is true judgment with an " account " or logos. The proposition that knowledge is Arts and sciences comes up when Theaetetus responds to the question of Socrates, " What is knowledge?" by giving different examples of knowledge as arithmetic , harmonics , astronomy, geometry and even crafts and skills like cobbling and so on. Here Theaetetus is wrongly assuming that the different branches of knowledge are knowledge itself, because the examples

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he gives are only branches of knowledge and not knowledge itself. Socrates rightly corrects him. He says that there are three defects in his observation, saying that he (Socrates) is not interested the multiplicity of these branches of knowledge but in a particular single thing common to all these branches. That might lead to a definition of knowledge. Though cobbling is a knowledge that helps one to make shoes, with out knowing what exactly the knowledge is, one cannot know what cobbling is. Thus Socrates complains that the young boy's response here was circular and not pointed. The third defect is that the young boy has failed give a concrete formula as an answer to his question. Thus this preposition is left incomplete. Now Theaetetus comes up with another preposition that knowledge is perception. Socrates is much more satisfied with this preposition because there is at least a form of definition to it. But Socrates points out that the definition is too general. He evokes the Protagorean thesis that underscores the fact that perception is infallible. The perceptions are very individualistic or subjective. The things appearing to be something for an individual may not be the same thing for another individual. Knowledge on the hand had to be objective not subjective. Thus perception is an inadequate equal to knowledge. So this preposition also fails. The dialogues progress into the soul's perception of things leading to judgments about things. It is here that Theaetetus proposes knowledge as True Judgment. But Socrates argues against this preposition too saying that one cannot make proper sense of the notion of the so called " true judgment." with out defining what wrong judgment . The judgments of any jury is is not based on good judgment. The jury is persuaded to make a judgment based the facts given by the witnesses. The veracity of these facts cannot be judged truly . An opinion formed by means of persuasion, by

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another method in this case by seeing. This cannot be considered as ultimately true a judgment. Thus knowledge and the true judgment cannot be the same. This leads to the final proposition by Theaetetus that knowledge can be true judgment followed by logos or account. This is based on the Dream theory that the universe is composed of elements and complexes. The complexes have logos while the elements have none. Thus elements cannot be known, where as the complexes can be known. But Socrates denies this saying that logos cannot lead one to correct judgment. A man cannot be judged by his physical features which make the logos or signs of identification. A true judgment of his can be achieved only through other factors which cannot be known easily. Thus Socrates rejects this proposition too and the dialogue ends with out giving a clear answer or definition to the question " What is knowledge?" ----- Source quoted: 1)Theaetetus by Plato, Internet Classic Archive, classics. mit.edu/Plato/theatu. html