

Knowledge Definition in Plato's *Theaetetus* and Theory of Forms from the Lens of Unitarians

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Abstract

The theory of Forms is both foundational and fundamental to Plato's philosophy. Its importance makes many scholars argue that the theory is contained in virtually all dialogues of Plato. There are debates over the presence or otherwise of the theory in, especially, *Theaetetus*. While the Revisionists argue against the presence of the theory, the Unitarians argue for its presence. This paper recognizes the fact that the burden of proof is not on the Revisionists; hence, it does not take into cognizance their position. Its attention is rather on the Unitarians who strongly believe that the theory of Forms is contained and evident in all of Plato's dialogues, including and especially, *Theaetetus*. While this paper argues for the presence of the theory of Forms in *Theaetetus*, it deviates from the argumentative route of the Unitarians. The intent of this paper is to show that the position of Unitarians is not acceptable. The paper concludes that the theory is not evidently apparent as argued by the Unitarians. Rather, its presence is hinted at and not fully blown.

Keywords: Unitarians, *Theaetetus*, theory of Forms, presence.

1. Introduction

Plato's *Theaetetus* plays, at least, two notable roles in platonic scholarship. These roles are fused together such that their distinct separation is not easily recognised. The roles are, however, neither fundamental nor foundational to knowledge discourse. Nevertheless, they deserve being mentioned. These are not mentioned when topical issues are up for discussion in *Theaetetus*. They are experimental and theoretical roles. Whereas, both are too obvious to ignore, yet they are apparently seen as second class issues that do not require serious attention. While theoretical role has been taken up elsewhere,¹ experimental role has not been attended to. This is because it is seen, perhaps, as pseudo issue. For the present author, it is, and should be, taken as a topical issue. This paper builds on the experimental role to make case for the issue at hand, which is that whether theory of Forms, a very important theory upon which Plato has built his entire philosophy, is contained in *Theaetetus*.

¹ See Olúkáyòdé R. Adésuyi, *Knowledge Definition in Plato's Theaetetus and the Argument from Hypothesis in the Phaedo*, (Unpublished) Ph.D Thesis, written in the Department of Philosophy, Submitted to the Postgraduate College, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, (2023).

In view of the above, this paper attempts to argue that, although, it is a difficult task to prove, the theory of Forms is present in *Theaetetus*. While this is said to be difficult, it is not the case that it is unachievable. It shall conclude that the theory is basically hinted in the dialogue to prepare the minds of serious followers of Plato's philosophy to what should be expected in the dialogue.

2. Unitarianism

Unitarianism² is the view which holds a consistent defence of a doctrine in series of works. It is the view that different works of the same author contain, either in part or whole, similar or exactly the same theme; such theme runs through the works. This doctrine is usually ascribed to Plato in relation to his works; hence, he is described as a Unitarian. This is because his theory of Forms, which is core to his philosophy, seems to underlie many of his dialogues (Wolfsdorf, 2011: 57). In addition, some topical issues which discussions commence in a dialogue are continued in another. An instance is the discussion of knowledge evident in *Meno*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus*.

Paul Shorey is one of those who categorise Plato as a Unitarian. He looks at his (Plato's) works holistically, relates them together and comes up with some reasonable assumptions. He believes that the works and ideas in Plato's works are not just to be treated in isolation during discussions. His position is that most of Plato's conclusions are drawn from discussions which are not gotten from a dialogue (Shorey, 1903: 130).³ In other words, Shorey's argument is the fact that some of Plato's ideas are better related together when discussing them (1903: 88).⁴

This is an indication that the theory of Forms, for instance, is evident in almost all the works of Plato whether extensively discussed or not. Hence, any view that purports to say that the *Theaetetus* does not have the theory of Forms because it is not explicitly presented and discussed is not tenable. For Shorey, Plato's *forma mentis* (theory of Forms)⁵ had been formed in early dialogues, and did not change in later dialogues. E. Christian Kopff (1991: 90-91) comments that "early 'aporetic' dialogues present problems, the answers to which are found in the *Republic*, he had in mind when he wrote them. Plato's late works developed, but never refuted, these answers."

² Unitarianism was borrowed from religious studies and its discussions entered into philosophical discourse. It is mainly dominant and popular in religious discourses with a historical survey as presented by Daniel Howe. For details see Daniel Walker Howe, "The Cambridge Platonists of Old England and the Cambridge Platonists of New England" *Church History*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), 470-485 and Philip F. Gura, "The Transcendentalist Commotion" *New England Review* (1990-), Vol. 28, No. 3 (2007), 50-78.

³ On this point, Campbell has earlier noted that it is sometimes difficult to understand properly and convincingly Plato's teachings if limited to a particular dialogue. For details, see L. B. Campbell, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), 276.

⁴ Comments of some scholars on this are innovative. The comments have been positive ones, and have assisted in understanding the position championed by Shorey. For details, see J. E. Raven, *Plato's Thought in the Making*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965), 41 and Rosamond Kent Sprague, "Platonic Unitarianism, or What Shorey Said" *Classical Philology*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan., 1976), 109-112.

⁵ *Forma mentis* means ideology or doctrine. I rely on this translation to interpret Plato's *forma mentis* to mean his theory of Forms. This is because his main doctrine and ideology is the theory of Forms. All other suppositions of his are dependent the theory.

3. Unitarians and their views on the theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus*

Francis M. Cornford's work is classical with regard to the presence of the theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus*, Cornford's viewpoint is that the main purpose of the dialogue is to show that discussants' inability to reach an acceptable definition of knowledge is as a result of the absence of the theory of Forms. According to him,

The *Theaetetus* formulates and examines the claim of the senses to yield knowledge. The discussion moves in the world of appearance and proves that, if we try to leave out the world of true being, we cannot extract knowledge from sensible experience (Cornford, 1935: 7).

It can be argued that, in much as the Forms are hinted, real definition can only be achieved in Plato's system with the Argument from Hypothesis which is articulated in the *Phaedo*, especially when Socrates' autobiographical passage in the *Phaedo* is considered (*Phaedo*, 96c).

For Cornford (1935: 28), that the theory of Forms is not mentioned is deliberate and intentional. One important component in the theory of Forms, *anamnesis*, is not to be mentioned because it presupposes that the answer to the question – what is the nature of knowledge and of its objects? – raised is known (Bonazzi, 2024: 167). Plato being silent about on it is deliberate in order that readers of Plato can get on without it. It could also be that it is already a background discussion for Plato's pupils and needs no repetition. The reason is that *Theaetetus* is a dialogue to test definition in the sensible world in order to determine whether or not an ideal and universally acceptable one can be arrived at. In addition, “the negative conclusion of the whole discussion means that, as Plato had taught ever since the [postulation] of the Forms, without them there is no knowledge at all” (Cornford, 1935: 28). Hence, the theory of Forms runs continuously in Plato's dialogues.

To further establish this, Cornford, adopting the tenet of unitarianism, makes reference to another dialogue of Plato, the *Republic*, to make case for his point. He argues that at a point, the two categories of existents, that is Forms and the objects of becoming will have a meeting point, which he calls, the receptacle of all becoming (Cornford, 1937: 182). It is at this point that changes do occur to some sensible objects for they imitate the Forms. The Forms themselves have unchanging characters.⁶ The nature of the objects of the sensible world does not allow stability and permanence. This is what happens when perception occurs. Arguing from this perspective, and relying on the Heraclitean constant flux, especially, Cornford says that it is the theory of Forms that is intended. He says;

Unless we recognise some class of knowable entities exempt from the Heraclitean flux and so capable of standing as the fixed meanings of words, no definition of knowledge can be any truer than its contradictory. Plato is determined to make us feel the need of his Forms without mentioning them (Cornford, 1935: 99).

Cornford's argument can be summarised as maintaining that the failure of the first definition is lack of the presence of the paradigm that a true definition of knowledge should have. This is supported by Eric Perl. Perl (1999: 339-362) is of the view that Plato's postulation of the theory of Forms, although, not explicitly evident in the *Theaetetus*, is a factor responsible for the

⁶ Some scholars interpret this view as implying that the Forms are characterless. This description may be unacceptable. That it is characterless means it does not have any unique and defined characters or features. Plato has not presented the Forms as characterless. If they are characterless, it will not make any sense for the sensible things to imitate them and allow for changes through their partaking in the Forms. See, for instance, A. K. Rogers, “Plato's Theory of Forms” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Jan., 1936), 66, who conceives the Forms in this manner. It is on this ground that J. M. E. Moravcsik will be calling for a re-interpretation of Plato's Forms. Moravcsik has argued that Plato's Forms are in about five manifolds. This means each scholar makes use of any of them according to choice and preference. See J. M. E. Moravcsik “The 'Third Man' Argument and Plato's Theory of Forms” *Phronesis*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1963), 50-62.

failure. The criteria agreed upon by both interlocutors are pointers to the theory of the Forms in *Theaetetus*. The inability to recognise this is considered a hindrance to arriving at an acceptable definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*.

Cornford concludes his argument by making allusion to the act of midwifery in both the *Meno* and *Theaetetus*. In the *Meno*, the slave boy is interrogated on questions that bother on geometry on how to double square (*Meno*, 84d-85b). His ability to answer establishes the tenability of recollection for Socrates. The slave boy has been guided to enable him respond to Socrates' questions. There is a similar scene in the *Theaetetus*. After the first suggestion, which is definition by example, Socrates puts himself in the position of a midwife. Cornford compares the act of asking the slave boy questions in the *Meno* to assisting *Theaetetus* give birth to his intellectual babies in the *Theaetetus*. He interprets the scene to mean that the position of midwife, assumed by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, is a reiteration of knowledge by recollection in the *Meno*. He concludes, therefore, that although, the theory of Forms is not explicitly mentioned in the *Theaetetus*. Nevertheless, it does not mean that it is not intended, and not implied.

This position of Cornford is not error free. He claims that the main purpose of the dialogue is to show that no acceptable definition of knowledge can be reached if the Forms are eventually left out of account (Cornford 1935: 90). This claim may not be acceptable on some grounds. Cornford's position can be compared with that of omniscient intelligence that knows everything about a person. In that sense, an omniscient intelligent being is that person who claims to know everything about each individual. This can be described as a bird's eye view of things. The knowledge includes those of the happenings in the mind. On the one hand, he may be correct that there are elements of the theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus*. On the other hand, Cornford's position should have been that the *Theaetetus* serves as thought experiment for the theory of Forms, such that issues are raised without the presence of the Forms to see whether such discourses can be credible. His position on the *presence* instead of arguing for semblance or hint is not tenable.

The purpose of the *Theaetetus* is to define knowledge (Zucchetti, 2016: 103-111). If the intended purpose, in Cornford's understanding and interpretation, is to show the epistemological foundation of the theory of Forms, that would have been stated from the beginning. That it is not stated suggests that there is no such intent to test the relevance of the theory. What is noticed is that, as at the time the two earlier definitions failed, the third definition that appears not to have been accepted, could be, possibly, rescued elsewhere.

3.1 *Memory vs recollection*

Kenneth Dorter (1990: 343-373) consistently argues for the presence of the theory of Forms in *Theaetetus*. Dorter expounds nearly all the suggested definitions and shows that a sign of the theory is present in all. However, reference will not be made to all that he mentions or enumerates. This is because in many of the enumerations, similar, if not entirely same, arguments are made to establish his claim.

Dorter's (1990: 343) first reference point is the opening of the dialogue. Here, he notes that the opening of the *Theaetetus* is meant to recall the words of the *Republic* [and the image of the Cave] (*The Republic*, 514a-519b).⁷ Before the arrival of Theaetetus, Theodorus has described Theaetetus to Socrates as having some qualities (*Theaetetus*, 144a-b). Dorter, arguing for the presence of the theory of Forms, makes reference to the memory and recollection as evident in the *Theaetetus* (*Theaetetus*, 162a-b; 165a-b). He indicates that Theodorus reminds Socrates of

⁷ This is equally shared by John Harrison, see his "Plato's Prologue: *Theaetetus*", *Tulane Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 27 (1978), 116

Theaetetus, but forgets his parents. However, Socrates, who has never met Theaetetus, knows his father and native city as soon as he (Socrates) sees him (Theaetetus). This suggests that Socrates is as old as Theaetetus' father; and that Theaetetus is as young as the slave boy in the *Meno*. Hence, his recollection should be sharp. This is one aspect that Dorter alludes to as having a semblance of theory of Forms, which is recollection. This is a clue from *Meno* which the *Theaetetus* often recalls (Dorter, 1990: 345). Establishing this in a better way, he argues thus;

Whether or not the *Theaetetus* has recollection in its background, it re-affirms the *Meno*'s claim that whatever theoretical knowledge may be, it is not something easily acquired. It requires the courage to persist amid difficulties and frustrations, and the boldness to pursue hypotheses that may fly in the face of common sense (Dorter, 1990: 345).

He proceeds further that pursuing hypothesis, which is claimed to have been attempted in the *Theaetetus* (*Theaetetus*, 152c) is not achievable in the definitions suggested by Theaetetus. Dorter is, therefore, of a strong belief that the pursuance of hypothesis is a sign that the theory of Forms is present at in the *Theaetetus*. As further shown, the first definition offered fails on the ground that, if allowed to stay, it will relativise knowledge. The failure of the definition necessitates the pressure of criticism, which will serve as models of the procedure for acquiring adequate understanding of the concept, in accordance with the dialectic in the method of hypothesis.⁸

It is, perhaps, apposite to mention here that Kenneth Sayre has earlier on suggested that the *Theaetetus* is an appropriate dialogue suitable for the application of the method of hypothesis in matters of philosophic argumentation (Sayre, 1969: 232). The reason given is that *Theaetetus* contains laid down rules, which are the criteria to be followed for an acceptable definition of knowledge to be achieved (*Theaetetus*, 152c). His contribution hints at the relevance of argument from hypothesis that is considered a probable solution to the problem of inability to arrive at an acceptable definition of knowledge in *Theaetetus*. By this, he reiterates the benefits derivable from adopting the method of hypothesis.

Dorter (1990: 350), in the remainder of his argument, makes allusion to *anamnesis* in the *Meno* and allegories of divided line and that of the cave in the *Republic* to establish his claim. He says that the case of the judicial proceedings discussed in the *Theaetetus* to refute the second definition is associated with testimony. Testimony raises a pointer to the role of the mind. "Memory [is] a metaphor for latent component to knowledge furnished not by the senses but by the mind itself" (Dorter, 1990: 350). Memory, no doubt, plays a significant role in knowledge acquisition. It is the link between the present stock of knowledge and the one the individual acquired in his/her prenatal world. This means there cannot be recollection without prior knowledge. It is in this sense that "recollection is pictured as an intellectual "seeing" of Forms" (Dorter, 1990: 350). Given that the theory of Forms is suggested in *Theaetetus* as argued, why did, for instance, the third definition fail?

Dorter relies on recollection to drive home his point from two perspectives. The first one is the encounter between Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus, where Theaetetus is introduced to Socrates. At that point, recollection, as contained in the *Meno* and *anamnesis perse*, is not meant. Knowledge by acquaintance, which cannot be relied upon as arguing for the presence of Forms in the *Theaetetus*, is intended there. The second perspective is reference to *Meno*. He should have identified the elements of the Forms without referring to some other dialogues. What is to be said here is simply that the theory of Forms is not explicitly, and is not intended to be, discussed as a subject-matter in the *Theaetetus*.

⁸ This method of hypothesis is best understood in the *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, for his interpretation of the method of hypothesis, see Kenneth Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 127-138.

There obtains, in some dialogues, suggestions regarding theory of Forms. It will be difficult to argue for such, if it has not been established elsewhere, and prior to the dialogue (*Theaetetus*). What is meant here is that there cannot be proof for the presence of the theory of Forms in isolation without making reference to preceding dialogues with the theory (Verde, 2024: 67-81).

In addition, if Dorter's attempt at discussing the theory, as contained in the *Theaetetus* without making reference to dialogues preceding it, where the elements of the theory of Forms occur, it may be seen or considered as straw-man. This is because he would have conjured what Plato has not said as words of Plato to make points. Again, not making reference to the previous dialogues denies them the opportunity of sharing in the Unitarian perspective. This is because the core of Unitarianism is the ability to thematically relate the dialogues one to another, and where possible, synchronise them.⁹

A possible objection that may be raised against Dorter is his allusion to hypothesis. He makes mention of this concept without linking it with anything. This means that it is not hinged on anything, instead it remains dangling. One will expect that he discusses this in relation to some other dialogues that have the method of hypothesis, like the *Phaedo*, though, the *Phaedo*, as it has been argued and shown elsewhere (Adésuyi, 2023: 91-92), comes after *Theaetetus*. Its position does not matter vis-à-vis the dialogue being discussed. All that needs to be done is to make a case for an issue as important as the method of hypothesis.

3.2 Presupposition of the theory of Forms

J. T. Bedu-Addo (1985: 301-311) concentrates on a section in the second definition and thus makes his position a categorical one that the theory of Forms is present in the *Theaetetus*. He notes that, although, there is nowhere in the entire dialogue where the theory of Forms is mentioned, nevertheless, that the theory is neither mentioned nor discussed does not translate to its being absent (Bedu-Addo, 1985: 301). Bedu-Addo argues that Plato's rejection of the thesis (definition of knowledge) is "on the ground that sensible objects are not sort of objects of which one could have knowledge; for knowledge is the achievement of the mind operating independently of the senses" (Bedu-Addo, 1985: 301). The reason adduced is that the argument is not on the distinction between sensible and intelligible worlds or objects, but rather on the distinction between sensation and judgment. Bedu-Addo's response to this is that Plato does not invoke the theory of Forms at any stage in the enquiry into the nature of knowledge. However, the arguments which Plato deploys to refute the second definition, and of course, the two other definitions of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* presuppose the theory of Forms (Bedu-Addo, 1985: 302).

Bedu-Addo's reliance on the second definition to argue for the theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus* is questionable. It should be noted that while he hinges his argument on the fact that Plato's *Theaetetus* contains the theory of Forms, there is nowhere in the dialogue where the theory is mentioned. To argue for this, he relies on the second definition. His reliance on the second definition calls for interrogation. Of the three suggested definitions, the obvious one that truly centres on mundane happenings is the second definition. The second definition says that knowledge is true judgement/belief (*Theaetetus*, 187b), which is, thereafter, refuted. Its refutation, given Bedu-Addo's view, is that the argument is on the distinction between sensation and judgement (Bedu-Addo, 1985: 302).

⁹ This is a recurrent feature in the arguments of the Unitarians. Any attempt to exclude the dialogues that establish the existence of the Forms is like deliberately expunging the important elements which will automatically render the entire argument useless. For more on this, see M. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

The capability of sensible objects to supply knowledge or to serve as the basis of knowledge is challenged in the first definition, but not the second. What is done in the second definition is to reiterate the thesis of the first definition. Again, it is to argue that popular opinion, no matter how true they are, cannot translate to knowledge. In fact, individual consciousness, most times, does not amount to knowledge. This is the point being made with the illustration of the Jury and instance of testimony being alluded to in order that the second definition be refuted. Given this, one can even argue that there is no reference to the theory of Forms.

Timothy Chappell (2005) adopts what he calls a “new translation of the whole of the *Theaetetus*” (Chappell, 2005: 9). His view is that the ideas presented in the dialogue are not Plato’s ideas; they are those of Socrates. This assertion of his may be interpreted to mean that he argues for the absence of the forms in the dialogue. Far from this, his claim is that the theory of Forms is evident in Plato’s *Theaetetus*.

Chappell (2005) intends to show that the arguments of those who make case for the absence of the theory are untenable. For instance, it is his opinion that when knowledge is to be defined in any sphere of life, Plato’s definition of the concept will be important since, he (Plato) is not concerned with the sources of knowledge as presented in the *Theaetetus*. What is important is for an acceptable knowledge definition to be gotten. He says “Plato would add that it is a waste of time trying to decide where knowledge comes from, or when knowledge-claims are justified, unless we already know what knowledge is” (Chappell, 2005: 12). This means one should not focus on the objects through which knowledge is sourced, which is attributed to sensation. This is because it is transient; hence their unstable nature is equally evident. For this, no acceptable definition can be gotten. Focus should be on what knowledge is. The definition should be one that does not rely on, and not sourced from, unceasingly changing objects. Chappell means here that Plato has already diverted attention from objects of the sensible and phenomenal world itself to the intelligible world, where there exists permanence.

Chappell’s analysis has, at least, one target. It is an attempt to show that empirical requirements, which the first definition suggests in the *Theaetetus*, as shown in the dialogue (*Theaetetus*, 151e), cannot give a satisfactory definition of knowledge, as experience itself does not avail us with the definition, given that experience itself is within the sensible world. While it may not be argued that sense experience, as source of knowledge, is not relevant, it is not the case that its relevance serves as a solution to the definitional problem of knowledge. It can be inferred that since the failure and total rejection of the definition is because it relies on sensation, there is the need to move away from the sensible world, and search for an acceptable definition in the intelligible world, where intellection is the target and where the Forms reside. It is on this ground that Chappell (2005: 51) argues for the presence of the forms in Plato’s *Theaetetus*. It, therefore, implies that because the theory of Forms is intended in the *Theaetetus* but not clearly deployed, the definitions so suggested are bound to fail.

Chappell’s most important contribution is interpreting, in details, the idea that the whole of the *Theaetetus* is nothing other than an extended proof of the difficulties of empiricism (Chappell, 2005: 51). However, his assertion that Plato’s basic argument, that the empiricist has no way to explain how semantic contents are got out of sense-data as implicit lesson of the *Theaetetus* (Chappell, 2005: 51), is untenable. It may be argued that as far as Heraclitean world is concerned, there may not be standard concept or unchanging proposition about objects of the phenomenal world. Nevertheless, it is also to be noted that this is neither the theme nor the focus of *Theaetetus*. If any definition is to be referenced, then, it should be the third definition – knowledge is true belief with *logos* (an account). This is because it is in this that linguistic analysis is attempted. However, the third definition analysed using a seemingly linguistic tool to buttress the point has nothing to do with the fact that semantic contents are gotten out of sense-data.

Chappell (2005: 161) argues in line with this to identify the loopholes of the definitions suggested and rejected in the dialogue. It is obvious that the first definition is rejected on the basis of the unceasing changing characters of the objects of the phenomenal world. However, against Protagoras and Heraclitus, Protagoras statement is subjective; hence, it is self-defeating. The self-defeatism is as a result of its reliance on sensible world (Chappell, 2005: 161). Change is a constant feature for the empiricist; hence, Heraclitus constant flux makes it difficult for perception to give an acceptable definition of knowledge. What is noted here is that in all, meanings in the describable phenomenal world are ultimately transient.

A critical look at J. M. Rist's analysis and argument show that he argues for the presence of the theory of Forms in Plato's *Theaetetus* (Rist, 1975: 336-357). This observation is premised on the analysis of some of Plato's dialogues as done by Rist. He follows R. E. Allen (1970) to argue for the presence of the theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus*. Allen has identified the theory of Forms in some earlier theories (1970: 121). Hence, he opines that earlier dialogues differ in their exposition and discussion of the theory of Forms from the latter dialogues. This is, of course, expected because Socrates' definitions are more elementary than concepts from *anamnesis*, the allegories, or argument from hypothesis.

Rist, examining the theory of Forms in many of the dialogues of Plato, opines that the theory could not have been present in some dialogues and absent in some other dialogues (Rist, 1975: 340). In his argument, there is an important concept that is associated with theory of Forms, and which is common to all the dialogues. Wherever, the theory of Forms is either discussed or intended, such is done directly or indirectly. This concept is an idea that is always and closely associated with the theory of Forms. This implies that they are like two sides of a coin, wherever one is found, the other, if and when sought for, will be found. Each of the dialogues contains an idea that becomes topical issue. To discuss such topical issue, there is the need for the theory of Forms to be assumed. Such an idea is explainable in the light of the theory of Forms. Since each dialogue contains an idea, therefore, each dialogue implies the theory of Forms (Rist, 1975: 339-340).

Rist (1975: 337) adopts the analysis of "the holy" as espoused in the *Euthyphro* (*Euthyphro*, 6d). By doing this, what is to be done is to show the inseparable relationship between the concept, 'idea', and 'the holy' inherent in the theory of Forms (Rist, 1975: 337). "The holy" is not subject of discourse, but the implication that can be drawn from this, which is that genuine goodness is unity; piety is goodness, unified in the form of goodness. Nevertheless, it can be argued that if knowledge is goodness, then, all virtues, such as piety, will be part of goodness. There, the intellectual effort to determine the relation between piety and goodness, invariably discusses goodness as the supreme form. So, holy or piety is still a subject of discussion.

One may then assume that the argument is not tenable, since Rist has not made reference to the *Theaetetus* specifically. It is expected of him to have specifically mentioned *Theaetetus*, as finding the theory of Forms in it. In other words, it may be the case that the argument may not be in support of the claim for the presence of the theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus*. This assumption will also not be correct. One of the premises is making use of universal instantiation, where it is said that "each of the dialogues contains an idea that becomes a topical issue" (Rist, 1975: 339). In addition, the premise that follows makes case for necessity of theory of Forms. Each of the dialogues means that the *Theaetetus* is included. This is heavily relied upon. This means, necessarily, there is the presence of the Theory of forms in *Theaetetus*.

The above argument may be interpreted to mean that there is nothing to suggest that the theory of Forms is evident in the *Theaetetus*, since it is not mentioned (Farness, 1988: 27-46). To explain this further, it is correct to say that not mentioning it does not suggest that it is not intended. Again, the premise alluded to and conclusion gives support to the overall claim that the theory is implied in the *Theaetetus*. This argument is similar to Heinaman's argument for

communion of Forms, wherein he argues that each dialogue has an element of the theory of Forms (Heinaman, 1982-1983: 189-190).

Rist's argument also suggests that since, in any of the dialogues, where there is a concept to be defined, and definition is well structured as to invoke the relevance of forms, that is, what is intended is the theory of Forms. In other words, what is targeted is "ontological status" (Rist, 1975: 338) in conformity with the Forms. Here, the allegory of the sun is relevant. It can be inferred, thereof, relying on the application of his use of universal instantiation, that the *Theaetetus* is also meant. This inference is adopted relying on Rist's caution that one should not allow him/herself the privilege of interpreting any dialogue in isolation of other dialogues (Rist, 1975: 338). This is because he believes and argues thus that there are, at least, two dialogues of Plato that are contributions to a topical issue. For instance, *The Republic* and *Phaedo* are dialogues that discuss the theory of Forms. This is a Unitarian approach. The belief is that each of the dialogues contains an important ingredient of explanation that is evident in, and similarly found in, other dialogues.

Having considered the arguments of some Unitarians, although what is argued for is the presence of the theory of Forms, it is obvious that the theory is not explicit in the dialogues. What can be said about the dialogue is that allusion is made to the theory of Forms to see the reason why an acceptable definition of knowledge cannot be got in the *Theaetetus* without the intellectual aspiration for forms. I think all that is obvious in the *Theaetetus* is that the theory of Forms is hinted at. Therefore, the presence of the theory is not an actual presence, writ large, rather it is hinted at, or that allusion is made to it. The significance of the allusion is such that a reader of Plato, who already has in mind how architectonically important the theory of Forms is, in his ontology, bears in mind its application and how it is used to resolve and make amendments for inconsistencies encountered in the overall drive to understand Plato's philosophy. Where it is alluded to but the discussion ends in *aporia*, it suggests that if the theory properly applied, then, a positive end is possible.

4. Making case for the presence of the theory of Forms in *Theaetetus*

There are three points to make here. The first one is a case where absence of a thing can imply its presence. Here, intent is important. What is intended is to show that if it is absent, then, the goal of arriving at an acceptable definition becomes unachievable. The first two definitions suggested by *Theaetetus* do not qualify to be acceptable definitions of knowledge because they rely so much on the objects of the sensible world. The changing characters of the perceptual activities will also determine the propositions to express them. This means that changes in the perceptual activities will equally lead to changes in the propositions. The implication of this is that the absence of the theory of Forms as girding examplers renders the definitions unacceptable. This is a way to show that the theory of Forms is hinted at; for had it been fully operative, one of them would have been considered as acceptable. In other words, if it had been *present* in one of the two definitions, may be one would have been accepted. Its importance as validating principle is highlighted, even though absent.

The second point to note is where the theory of Forms is intended. This has been stated from the beginning of the dialogue. It is to direct the discussants as to what they should be looking for. There are two conditions to be met before an acceptable definition of knowledge can be got. Knowledge must always be of what is; it must be infallible (*Theaetetus*, 152c). These conditions apply to the constituents of the intelligible world, and not to those of the sensible world. It is only in the intelligible world, as postulated by Plato, that these conditions can be met. This implies that the theory of Forms is hinted at. The conditions are not of the sensible world. Again, this is another way of intending the theory of Forms. In other words, it is hinted at.

The third point is evident in the third definition – knowledge is true belief with *logos* (*Theaetetus*, 201d). This definition already suggests the theory of Forms. This is because *logos*, in some of its connotations in Greek language, refers to the workability of unhindered predicating reason. It is operable in the intelligible world where the forms exist, refer to the allegories of line/cave, but allegory of cave especially is not a phenomenon of the sensible world but that of the intelligible world. The definition is a pointer to the world of forms where true and undisputable definition can be apprehended after an arduous and difficult intellectual voyage. So, if the theory is not fully blown in the *Theaetetus*, allusion to it cannot be denied.

The above points are ways, I think, the Unitarians should argue instead of insisting on the presence of the forms. In other words, what is argued for here is that the presence of the theory of Forms is not fully manifested in the *Theaetetus*. A tenable position would be that it is sometimes hinted at. An instance is the beginning where Theaetetus gives examples as definition. The correction made at that point is to further point to the fact that a universally acceptable definition usually has some eternal and unchanging features (*Theaetetus*, 146d). Another instance has to do with the criteria agreed upon. Both agree to give a definition that will be error free and can remain unchanged irrespective of spacio-temporal condition (*Theaetetus*, 152c). Yet another instance is the third definition (*Theaetetus*, 201d-210d). At another point, it is alluded to, and to an extent, where the definitions fail due to its absence, what is intended would be that if it had been present, the definitions would, perhaps, not have failed.

The above expositions are highlighted because of the fact that knowledge is a phenomenon of the intelligible, at least, in Plato's understanding. Knowledge is a hierarchical ascent of the soul/mind by progressive questioning of presumed true hypothesis, till unassailable standard of truth is intellectually envisioned in *noesis*. The theory of Forms is present by the failure of the three definitions. This failure is a suggestion that the *Theaetetus* lacks the facility for the soul's ascent to knowledge. This facility is the argument from hypothesis, which is outlined and argued for in the *Phaedo* in which the operative idea is the immortality of the soul, which in Plato's system, is kin to the forms. This immortal intelligence, which is the subject of knowledge, is referred to by Plato as kin of the Forms.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of *Theaetetus* is not to show that any theory without the forms will automatically fail. Instead, it is to search for an acceptable knowledge definition that will be error free. In doing so, different reasons have been given as to why the interlocutors could not arrive at that. For instance, many Revisionists, pretentiously, argue that the theory of Forms is not present in *Theaetetus*. This is because it cannot be found in the sensible world. *Theaetetus* shows essentially that knowledge definition is not achievable in the phenomenal world. This world displays a basic feature of unceasing change (Adésuyi, 2022: 108-127). For them, this is a tangible reason for the failure of the interlocutors to arrive at an acceptable knowledge definition.

It should be noted that the Unitarians, who have argued for the presence of forms in the *Theaetetus*, as shown in this paper, have only done that, partly because of their belief that the theory is very important in Plato's philosophical world. Many of them have not been able to reconcile their perception of the presence of Forms in *Theaetetus* to the failure of the definition or the inability of the interlocutors to arrive at an acceptable definition of knowledge. Whereas, their task should not be limited to mere establishing the presence alone, it should also include the link between the presence of the theory and the apparent failure of the definition in the *Theaetetus*.

What is obvious is that the theory is not as apparent as Unitarians would want readers to admit. At best, what can be argued is that it is hinted at, and not that it is there for everyone to see. Only this position, for me, is tenable. In other words, while one cannot discard the fact that it

is present, as argued by Unitarians, such presence is not apparently evident. It is known by drawing implications from their analyses and arguments as presented in the dialogue.

The conditions agreed upon by, especially Socrates and Theaetetus, from the beginning of the dialogue are extracts from the intelligible world where the conditions are stated thus: “it is always of something that is, and as being knowledge, it is infallible” (*Theaetetus*, 152c). The features of the conditions are those of the unchanging perfect world, such as *noesis* in the intelligible world. Here, the theory is hinted as a guide; hence, presence is implied.

One possible reason for this is the hint given in the last definition, which is the introduction of *logos*. Introduction of *logos*, as done in the last definition, is a suggestion that an acceptable definition cannot be arrived at in *Theaetetus*. This is due to the fact that all analyses are premised on sensible world. Following Plato’s philosophy, the *logos* envisaged is not a phenomenon of the sensible world. The *Republic* has hinted in the Allegory of the cave that *logos* can be found at *noesis* (*Republic*, 596a). If that is the case, its introduction in the third definition is apparently suggesting that the definition should be sought where it belongs. This, again, may be responsible for the inability of Theaetetus to reason beyond the sensible world. It is difficult for him to understand *logos* even when he claims he has heard people discussing knowledge informally and *logos* being mentioned (*Theaetetus*, 201d).

In conclusion, while this paper agrees with Unitarians that the theory of Forms is present in the *Theaetetus*, it differs on the mode of such presence. It must be maintained that in the entire dialogue, there is no particular section dedicated to treatment of the theory of Forms. This, nevertheless, does not imply that it is totally absent. Hence, by ‘presence’ here, it means any of the following; hint, link, allusion, suggestion to the Forms as guarantors of essence, validity, truth and objectivity in Plato. While it may not be argued that the theory of Forms is evidently present in the *Theaetetus*, it is equally difficult to out-rightly deny allusions to it in the dialogue. By presence here, therefore, it does not mean it is evidently present; rather there are instances of allusion, link, hint, suggestions and resemblances.

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