

Preface

What is it to know a truth or a fact? Philosophers have long seen this question as having been posed by Socrates in at least two Platonic dialogues – maybe not only by him, but *importantly* by him. And an answer is *still* being sought. Why so? This Element will offer one reason why epistemology has made such scant progress on that front – and will suggest one way in which we might do better.

We will uncover a highly restrictive *methodological* mistake made by many epistemologists when trying to answer Socrates' question, when formulating theories as to knowledge's nature. Should we consider some competing forms of answer to Socrates' question? I suspect so. We can begin by expanding our sense of the *metaphysical* options. Specifically, might knowing, or at least its essence, be nothing more than *being correct in what one believes*? That is knowledge-*minimalism*. This Element takes a step towards endorsing it.

It is notable that epistemologists often regard these matters as initially arising, for Western philosophy, with those Platonic dialogues – but that almost no contemporary discussion of these issues holds itself *accountable* to those ancient writings. Is this because we assume that there is no real possibility that what we now say about knowledge's nature could need to *change* in light of what Socrates says? Perhaps. Yet that would be a mistaken assumption, as should become clear in what follows.

This Element will *blend* epistemology's Now with part of its Past. We need to learn some new lessons from those dialogues. And not only from them: Aristotle will also enter this story. (Plato and Aristotle are not the only ancient sources for aspects of contemporary epistemology. But they attract the most attention among current epistemologists, and I lack the space in this Element to travel more widely within the ancient world, such as by engaging with the Stoics and the Academic sceptics.) I will not contribute to strictly classical scholarship on ancient Greek philosophy. I draw upon it, though, in evaluating some current epistemology. In my experience, many epistemologists treat the issue of *defining knowledge* as a mainly modern concern, insofar as they are being 'purely conceptual'. Probably when teaching, and perhaps when introducing 'conceptual' discussions, they offer a professionally passing nod to Plato, always the *Meno* and often the *Theaetetus*, allowing that he made a solid start on this enterprise. For many, the next major 'conceptual' move was Edmund Gettier's in 1963, beginning our era of *post-Gettier* epistemology. I will argue, however, that Plato's relevance to this enterprise deserves more than a mere professional nod. Even while doing epistemology now, we should linger longer in Plato's company. His thinking about the natures of knowledge and of definition should make us wonder how well we have been approaching the challenge of defining knowledge. That moral is only strengthened when we invite Aristotle into the discussion, attending likewise to his views on the nature of definition.

Epistemologists have become comfortable with what, I will explain, is a potentially misleading formulation of what Socrates was asking when posing The Question that began Western philosophy's quest to uncover knowledge's nature. This Element's historical material invites epistemologists to revisit some of Socrates' thinking – and to be receptive to the idea that the contemporary project of trying to discover knowledge's nature should change in some vital respects. I will explain this in terms both methodological and metaphysical.

This will involve a focus on what we may call *modalised* epistemology. It might also be called post-Nozick epistemology, broadly considered, since its most apparent impetus was Robert Nozick's 1981 book *Philosophical Explanations*. It has been with us for almost as long as post-Gettier epistemology has been – which is since 1963, the year of Gettier's pivotal paper – and maybe much longer. Many philosophers thought that epistemology was taking a significantly new post-Gettier turn in 1981 when Nozick applied some bold yet delicate brushstrokes to Socrates' question and prior post-Gettier attempts to answer it. And in a few respects epistemology did alter direction slightly. Was that change enough, though? Not long after Nozick's book appeared, Richard Kirkham (1984) and Mark Kaplan (1985) described substantial cracks in post-Gettier epistemology's foundations. This could have lessened epistemologists' interest in post-Gettier thinking. But what happened was possibly a more happenstance shift of professional perspective: modalised epistemology looked interesting, as it started to form, to move, to grow. This continues, becoming more professionally attuned and technically accomplished.

Yet is that professional energy *progress* towards accurately answering Socrates' initiating question? I am not sure that it is, given this Element's argument. We begin by revisiting Socrates. We sit beside him. We listen to him. We learn from him. Then we rejoin our current world of epistemology with an improved sense of how to approach his question. It is not the only question, of course, with which we might approach epistemology. Nonetheless, it remains elegantly simple and motivational – and not yet as well-answered as we might think. My suggestion is that something of *methodological* moment has been lost between his time and place, and ours. We might have 'packaged' too swiftly the epistemological challenge that was set in those seminal writings by Plato, and we might still be doing so.

I urge a correlative pause, an informed doubt, a humble recognition of the genuine possibility that epistemology as currently practised is not where it should be, even in how it has conceived of the initiating challenge set for it by Socrates' question about knowledge, let alone in its consequent efforts to answer that question. I will offer a thought as to where epistemology *should* be, in its conception of knowledge's nature. That will be this Element's second theme, its *metaphysical* element – the knowledge-minimalism just mentioned.

1 A Quest

1.1 A Socratic Question

It might have seemed simple at the time. But the time in question was so early – the dawn, or maybe a few minutes later, of Western philosophy. It was the dawn of Western epistemology. The word ‘epistemology’ did not yet exist. Yet initial tentative epistemological steps were being taken.

And *what* was the ‘it’ that might have seemed simple at that time? It was this all-but-everyday question: *what is knowledge?* Presumably most people are confident, in an everyday way, of knowing this, or knowing that – of *having* knowledge, even of being able to describe the knowledge’s content, what it is *of*. This is not the same as being able to describe what *makes* those instances of knowledge instances of knowledge. But (some will feel) how difficult could that be?

Many a person has walked into a Socratic web of doubt and hesitancy. To be fair, Socrates had a gift for encouraging others to be unwarrantedly confident in their answers to his earnest questions. One of those was the question of *what knowledge is*. This question arose for philosophers, for the first time as far as we know, most clearly in Plato’s *Meno*, and, later, his *Theaetetus*.¹

This Element begins, then, with a brief sense of how the question arose within those two settings.²

Meno. Near the close of this dialogue, we find Socrates conversing with Meno, seeking to know how ‘good men’ (96e)³ are formed, those people who are so important to the just functioning of society, who ‘give us correct guidance in our affairs’ (96e). What does this require of them? Simply proclaiming

¹ The *Meno* is among what are often called the *Socratic dialogues*, interpreted as portraying the historical Socrates (Benson 2013: 136, 342 n. 1). Nails (2006: 4) apparently accords credence to the thesis that ‘the dialogues with dramatic dates from 402 to 399 (especially *Meno*, *Theaetetus*, . . .) can be counted as sources for the kinds of conversations Plato, in his early twenties, experienced in the company of Socrates’. Prior (2006: 28) provides a dissenting interpretation: ‘there is no decisive reason to believe that the dialogues [even] of the early group represent the views of the historical Socrates rather than an early stage of Plato’s own philosophical thought’. Giannopoulou (2013: 2–3) puts the point thus: ‘Since Plato wrote no history, he cannot be assumed to have recorded actual conversations. The Socratic dialogues are sometimes seen as hybrid constructs occupying the fraught area between history and fiction.’ I will not engage with that scholarly issue. I use the term ‘Socratic’ as others have done, since this Element’s focus is on how contemporary epistemologists have sought – but failed – to engage aptly with some ideas that entered Western philosophy in these dialogues, ideas advanced or evaluated by the ‘character’ Socrates – or, to again quote from Giannopoulou, by ‘Socrates as the product of Plato’s literary imagination’ (3). On how to read Plato’s writings, see Sayre (1995) and Corlett (2005).

² They are not the only Platonic settings that engage with this question or that point to the sort of answer that we will be discussing. See, especially, *Timaeus* 51e: ‘we’re bound to claim that knowledge and true belief are different, because they occur under different circumstances and are dissimilar. . . . the former is always accompanied by a true account, while the latter cannot explain itself at all’ (translation from Waterfield (2008: 44)).

³ I use Grube’s (1981) translation of the *Meno*.

pertinent truths? Telling us what is, as it happens, correct? Is that enough? No. Socrates is almost emphatic (by his famously non-committal standards) in assessing this vital issue (97a): ‘one cannot guide correctly if one does not have knowledge’. Unsurprisingly, Meno responds (97a) by inviting Socrates to develop this point further: ‘How do you mean?’ So, Socrates plunges powerfully into what is perhaps philosophy’s initial epistemological moment, seemingly its first attempt to answer the question of what knowledge *is*. He is claiming that knowledge is needed in a truly good leader – someone with virtue, who can both embody and teach it to others. Within this, he is implicitly seeing knowledge as somehow *better* than ... what? What might we *mistake* for knowledge, if we have not thought carefully about this?

The answer arrives speedily. Socrates asks Meno to contrast someone ‘who knew the way to Larissa’ (97a) with someone who ‘had a correct opinion as to which was the way but had not gone there nor indeed had knowledge of it’ (97b). What advantage does the former have over the latter? To answer this is to point to what knowing provides, beyond what a ‘correct opinion’ does. It thereby tells us something distinctive of what knowing *is* – at least when knowing is compared to having a correct opinion.

And what is that ‘something’? How are we to distinguish knowing from having a correct opinion? What marks, what signs, distinguish the former from the latter? Taking our cue from Socrates, we must seek an answer (98b): ‘I certainly do not think I am guessing that right opinion is a different thing than knowledge. If I claim to know anything else – and I would make that claim about few things – I would put this down as one of the things I know.’

Again, then, how does knowing differ from having a ‘correct opinion’? We return to this question in Section 2, when seeing how epistemologists have sought to do justice to the Socratic question with what has been seemingly the main *hypothesis*, about knowing’s nature, flowing from the question. My immediate aim is preparatory, highlighting the Socratic question. Although many epistemologists insist that the hypothesis is pressing, irrespective of its historical roots, I will show (from Section 4 onwards) how such discussions can go awry if we do not maintain a proper focus on that initial Socratic question – and on something substantively constraining about it.⁴

⁴ I follow the usual epistemological practice of interpreting Socrates’ question as concerning a ‘normal’ form of knowledge. What other form could there be? McEvilley (2002: 186–93) highlights the idea that Socrates was at least sometimes focused on a ‘special or yogic type of knowledge’ (192). The links between some of Plato’s writing here and some classic Indian philosophy are significant (187): ‘sometimes it seems overwhelmingly clear that [Plato] is . . . also including a higher intuition that might indeed be called mystical experience, trance, *samādhi*, and so on’. He gives us a ‘distinction between changing and unchanging types of knowledge [that] is paralleled in many passages of the Upaniṣads’ (188). This is an intriguing topic, but I will not stay with it here.

Theaetetus. The nature of knowledge is ostensibly this dialogue's topic. Epistemologists, however, generally attend only to its final ten or so Stephanus pages (201c–210c).⁵ Like the *Meno*, yet in this case only after disposing of some alternative views of what knowledge might be, the *Theaetetus* asks how knowledge is distinguished from 'true belief' – 'correct opinion'. What are those discarded views? Swept along by Socrates, we swiftly leave behind, swirling helplessly in our wake, the theses both that knowledge is perception and that it is true belief.⁶ The latter thesis, in Socrates' view, is easily shown to be false in a way that leads him, in almost a single breath, to asking what *is* enough, if true belief is not, for knowledge (201b–c):⁷

when a jury is rightly convinced of facts which can be known only by an eye-witness, then, judging by hearsay and accepting a true belief, they are judging without knowledge, although, if they find the right verdict, their conviction is correct. . . . But if true belief and knowledge were the same thing, the best of jurymen could never have a correct belief without knowledge. It now appears that they must be different things.

What, therefore, is the difference? What marks the difference? What is knowledge, if not simply a true belief?⁸

⁵ Even then, those epistemologists tend not to take into account the dialogue's seemingly being about knowledge of *things* (both concrete and abstract), not truths or facts. White (1976: 177–8) sees the whole dialogue in that light; Bostock (1988: 239, 270) restricts this reading to its second half, encompassing the *Theaetetus* pages with which we are most concerned.

⁶ Some translations use 'judgement', not 'belief': McDowell (1973) does, while Cornford (1935) seems to use both (his Index entry for 'belief' directs us to 'judgment'). I follow Bostock (1988: 156): 'I have (for the most part) accepted McDowell's view that what Plato means to contrast with perception is *judgement*. But the Greek word in question . . . is more naturally taken to mean *belief*. . . and indeed belief is the more appropriate notion to compare and contrast with knowledge.' That fits well with contemporary epistemological interest in this segment of Socratic thinking.

⁷ Here, and in what follows, *Theaetetus* translations are Cornford's (1935: 141).

⁸ These two forms of question – the first seeking a mark of difference; the second focused on a general nature – will here be treated as functionally equivalent in their applications to the quest to understand knowing. Robinson (1971: 115–18) explains how both arise in Socrates' hands: 'many passages suggest that all he wants is a mark that shall serve as a pattern by which to judge of any given thing whether it is an X or not' (116).

In many other passages, however, Socrates' purpose in asking What is X? is evidently not, or not merely, to distinguish X from everything else. It is to get at what he calls the essence or the form of X, the one in the many, that single identical something whose presence in all the many Xes is guaranteed precisely by the fact that we call them all Xes. (117; with an accompanying citation of *Meno* 74d)

I treat the two kinds of question as functionally equivalent, since they have been merged in practise by epistemologists: to describe the *mark(s)* distinguishing true belief from knowledge is, it has been assumed in practise, to do what needs to be done, and hopefully is enough, if we are to *define* knowledge, with its essence (if that idea has merit) being revealed.

1.2 A Philosophical Quest

Seemingly, therefore, Socrates bequeathed to us a significant question and potentially an inviting quest. Before trying to answer his question, we should note something of what made it a philosophical question, or at least a *Socratically* philosophical question. This determines what kind of answer is to be sought.

In one sense, this is easy to say: we are to uncover what knowledge is, our quarry being the correct answer to ‘What is knowledge?’ Yet complexities soon creep closer. For example, what *form* will that correct answer take? Here we must attend, certainly at the outset, to the Socratic slant on the question as it arose in the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus*.⁹ We are setting out, with Socrates as our initial guide, to discover *what knowledge is*. What sort of discovery would this be? In particular, how metaphysical might our answer need to be? Some will wish to be less, not more, metaphysical. But this would not be true to the spirit in which Socrates posed his question. He apparently spoke with enough people, in a metaphysically sensitive way, that we can fairly (albeit inelegantly) claim that no answer would have satisfied him until it was revealing the nature of knowledge, or *knowledgeness*. Hugh Benson (2013: 136) says this: ‘One thing we seem to know about Socrates is that he was preoccupied with questions of the form “What is F-ness?”’¹⁰ In which case, to say *what knowledge is* was to say *what knowledgeness is*. Thus, it is natural to say that the Socratic aim is to understand (in whatever way and form this is possible) the *property* of being knowledge. This might include, or lead to, our understanding individual instances of knowing – in a specific way. We would be understanding their nature *as* knowledge. We would be understanding an individual instance of knowledge *qua* knowledge – its *being* knowledge, perhaps including its not being something else (such as mere ‘true belief’).

That is a metaphysical aspect of this Socratic quest.¹¹ We should also note a methodological or formal aspect, pointing to another Socratic *desideratum* via this question: can we find a *definition* that does justice to what it is to

⁹ This will accord with how the question has helped to impart both form and substance to many contemporary examinations of knowledge’s nature.

¹⁰ But recall note 8: Socrates also approached this challenge indirectly, by asking about *marks of difference*. Robinson (1971: 110) says that what he calls Socrates’ ‘primary questions’ take either the form ‘Is X Y?’ or ‘What is X?’ An example of the former would be our initial question, of how knowledge is different to true belief.

¹¹ I welcome these words from White (1992: 277):

For some time philosophers have thought of epistemology and metaphysics as different branches of philosophy, investigating, respectively, what can be known and the basic properties and nature of what there is. It is hard, though, to see any genuine boundary here. The issues irresistibly overlap. Certainly in Plato there is no such divide. . . . As a result his doctrines have a different shape from characteristically modern ones.

know – being sufficiently informative about what it is to know? Can we find a definition that describes knowing’s distinctive nature? More fully, can we find a definition that describes a nature, for knowledge, that is *at least* distinct from that of a mere true belief?

It is common to regard Socrates as someone for whom the only form of understanding that would do justice to F-ness – the property itself, not merely instances of F-ness – would be a *definition*. The Socratic search is for a definition both insightful and full – a definition that neither wants for words nor wastes them. Did Plato follow Socrates in that quest? This can be debated (see Rowett 2018, especially chapter 5). But it is a sufficiently robust interpretation of Socrates, for my purposes. Even Catherine Rowett (2018: 26) tells us that, in the *Meno*, ‘Socrates is not using definitions . . . to stipulate or teach the meaning of a word, but that his purpose is philosophical, probably aiming to *answer* questions of conceptual analysis by presenting a successful definition.’

Let us remember this as we continue our investigation. Next, we consider the *content* of the attempted Socratic definitions, in the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus*, of knowing. (Then, Section 3 leaps forward two millennia, meeting anew that kind of definition, as it resurfaced within contemporary epistemology.)

2 An Hypothesis

2.1 A Socratic Version

Section 1 introduced Socrates’ two famous moments of posing a question that helped to launch epistemology. Routinely, the word ‘epistemology’ is translated as ‘theory of knowledge’. I prefer the term ‘knowledgeology’ (Hetherington 2019a: 13). But, in one way or another, attempts to answer our Socratic question – what is knowledge? – have been a recurring presence within epistemology. Before evaluating recent answers, though, it will be valuable to appreciate what ideas were offered by Socrates. (Again we consider the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus*.)

Meno. We met Socrates when he was posing his question, in the *Meno*, about how to distinguish knowledge from true belief. He was confident in there *being* a real difference. But what is it? How did Socrates proceed, in the *Meno*, to answer his question?

For he *did* offer an answer. This was not his usual practice. But epistemology was the winner. Philosophical interpretations can differ as to how we should interpret

In a similar vein, Gerson (2009: 11) highlights ‘the assumption that epistemology is rooted in metaphysics’. He is discussing the ancient Greek presumption that knowledge has ‘a distinct essence’, a conception that ‘is usually not [part of] the modern view’. Epistemologists have drifted away from talking of knowledge in that metaphysically intense way. As we will find, however, that might reflect *mistaken* moves within current epistemology. (Section 6.3 will discuss the most prominent such move, by Timothy Williamson.)

Socrates' thinking here. Still, there is a recognisable orthodoxy (be it correct, or not) among epistemologists as to what lesson Socrates sought to impart. What he supposedly taught to Meno was developed in a few stages, beginning thus (97b–d):

as long as he has the right opinion [as to the way to Larissa] . . . he will not be a worse guide than the one who knows . . . So true opinion is in no way a worse guide to correct action than knowledge.¹² . . . [Meno:] But the man who has knowledge will always succeed, whereas he who has true opinion will only succeed at times. . . . [Socrates:] How do you mean? Will he who has the right opinion not always succeed, as long as his opinion is right? [Meno:] That appears to be so of necessity, and it makes me wonder . . . why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion, and why they are different.

It then took but a moment for Socrates to proffer a view as to *what* that difference is (97d–98a; my emphasis):¹³

Do you know why you wonder, or shall I tell you? . . . It is because you have not paid attention to the statues of Daedalus . . . [T]hey . . . run away and escape if one does not tie them down but remain in place if tied down. . . . To acquire an untied work of Daedalus is not worth much . . . for it does not remain, but it is worth much if tied down, for his works are very beautiful. What am I thinking of when I say this? True opinions. For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much *until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why*. . . . After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down.

What should we take from this thinking? I italicised the key move. Translating this phrase does admit of some flexibility, as suggested by this observation from Myles Burnyeat (1990: 240):¹⁴

The Greek word *logos* also signifies reason, the faculty by which the mature human being is distinguished from children and animals which have only the power of perception (186bc). So why not suggest that each sense of 'account' picks out one function or group of functions that reason can perform? Articulate statement; definition, analysis, and classification; differentiation; justification, proof, and explanation – most of these can in

¹² This is an observation made also by Theaetetus when he returns, after discussing the nature of false judgement, to the hypothesis that 'true belief is knowledge. Surely there can at least be no mistake in believing what is true *and the consequences are always satisfactory*' (*Theaetetus* 200e; emphasis added).

¹³ I say 'view' because Socrates describes himself as 'guessing' (98b), not knowing, the nature of the difference between knowing and true belief. In contrast, he claims (98b) to know knowledge's *being* different to true belief.

¹⁴ In the same vein, see Cornford (1935: 142 n. 1).

suitable contexts be counted a *reason* for something, all of them can help us to gain knowledge and understanding both of objects and of true propositions about them.

Epistemologists have generally been content to take a specific moral from Socrates' picture. They standardly treat him as distinguishing between a *true belief* (*doxa*) 'on its own' and a true belief that has been tied down – tethered, bound – with a *logos* – involving, more fully, an activity of 'calculating' (to use Bluck's (1961: 412) translation), an *aitias logismos*. 'Account' is the standard English term used in translating the Socratic term. A fuller translation is 'account of how it is true'.¹⁵ This 'how' is not what we now deem causal, detailing how a specific state of affairs 'entered' the world as a contingently produced consequence of something already present in the world. Rather, what epistemologists see as meant by Socrates is how we might fruitfully 'analyse' or 'explain' – thereby conveying an understanding of – what it is in the world that *amounts to* the state of affairs that is making the belief true.¹⁶

Imagine entering an examination, hopefully knowing truths that you will soon be writing on the examination paper. You open the questions booklet, and . . . you have forgotten several of those truths. You know that you knew them, though. How can you regain them? Nothing guarantees your doing so. On the Socratic picture, however, your having *known* them includes your having had in mind a *logos* for each, and, so long as *that* has not been forgotten, you should be able to 'reconstruct' those truths, using one *logos* after another.

Conversely, if you *do* still have in mind a true belief, how do you make it an instance of knowledge? How do you impart to it a more secure status, in the sense of its not remaining vulnerable to being lost, departing your mind as an untethered statue by Daedalus will depart? The Socratic answer was clear, as far as it went: you add a *logos*; you hold on to it.¹⁷

Theaetetus. This time, the Socratic answer is less clear (and might not easily blend with the *Meno*'s): we end this dialogue without agreement on what a *logos* is if it is to mark the difference between true belief and knowledge. We may

¹⁵ For more on translational subtleties encircling this, see Bluck (1961: 412, 413); Sayre (1969: 3 n. 2, 133; 1995: 228–31); Fine (1979: 366–7); Grube (1981: 86); Scott (2006: 179); Schwab (2015: 1); and Rowett (2018: 96).

¹⁶ In more overtly Platonic terms, we may also understand this by adverting to the use of '*aitia*' in the *Phaedo* (100b–101d), where Socrates is discussing his 'theory of causation' (100b – Tredennick's translation, in Hamilton and Cairns 1961). By this, he means to be illuminating a thing's *formal* cause – how it is, once all has occurred to bring it into existence *as* this thing at all, *this* and not *that* F (for a kind F), hence *this* instance of the Form of F-ness. In this sense, these causes *are* the Forms (Sayre 1969: 7). Discussing the *Sophist*, Sayre says that 'The one Form . . . is the [*logos*] of the thing to be defined' (179).

¹⁷ 'What is a *logos*? Does Socrates have an illuminating description of it?' Very soon, we will attend to details here.

wonder whether a *logos* is needed at all in order to distinguish knowledge from a true belief: the dialogue's 'attempts to define *episteme* [by using the term *logos*] fail, and no new model of how to proceed is on offer' (Rowett 2018: 170). Socrates considers three possible meanings of *logos*, rejecting each. The first asks for 'giving overt expression to one's thought by means of vocal sound' (206d). The second requires 'being able to reply to the question, what any given thing is, by enumerating its elements' (206e) – 'a complete analysis of a thing' (Giannopoulou 2013: 18).¹⁸ The third is what 'most people would give: being able to name some mark by which the thing one is asked about differs from anything else' (208c) – 'a statement of the uniqueness of the thing known' (Giannopoulou 2013: 18). Have all possible meanings for *logos* been arrayed before us? If these proposals fail, must we discard the idea of a *logos* when trying to define what it is to know?¹⁹

Presumably not, given the meaning, albeit programmatic, for *logos* extracted so far from the *Meno*. We can briefly reinforce that optimistic thought, by lingering with the second and third suggestions.²⁰

Socrates dismisses the second by focusing on the example of a word being analysed into its component letters and syllables, before envisaging Theaetetus as a boy, learning to read and write. As Cornford (1935: 158) says, on Socrates'

¹⁸ Here we might be reminded of the 1942 poem usually called 'Naming of Parts', by the British poet Henry Reed, featuring this first stanza: 'To-day we have naming of parts, Yesterday, / We had daily cleaning. And to-morrow morning, / We shall have what to do after firing. But to-day, / To-day we have naming of parts. Japonica / Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring gardens, / And to-day we have naming of parts.' Reed was capturing some of the analytic tedium in wartime service: the parts in question are a gun's parts. Socrates is asking us to consider *logos* as 'naming of parts' – 'itemizing all its parts' as part of knowing a wagon, for example (Sayre 1969: 134).

¹⁹ Socrates' reasoning seems to move from (i) admitting that none of the attempts to define knowledge that he has considered, including his three attempts to use the idea of a *logos*, has succeeded, to (ii) this stronger thesis (Cornford's translation): 'So, Theaetetus, neither perception, nor true belief, nor the addition of an "account" to true belief can be knowledge' (210a–b); whereupon he apparently turns away from regarding 'the addition of an "account"' even as *needed* within knowledge. Epistemologists rarely, if ever, examine this idea; we will do so.

²⁰ A note on the first suggestion could be useful, though, if only to defuse incredulity at its presence, given how *clearly* inadequate it initially seems. It resonates with the philosophical element (341b–344d) in Letter VII, the Seventh Epistle. Some doubt this letter's having been written by Plato; others favour its being his. For discussion, see Morrow (1962: 3–17, 60–81) and Sayre (1995: xviii–xxiii), each of whom leans towards seeing the letter as Plato's. Certainly, *if* Letter VII was his, this adds interest to the first *Theaetetus* suggestion as to what a *logos* is, *if* a *logos* is to be a constitutive component within any instance of knowing. Letter VII includes an explanation (342b–344d) of why truly philosophical knowledge, at least, cannot be expressed, let alone conveyed, by words, either verbal or written. And this thesis about language and knowledge is far from trivial, true or not. As Morrow (1962: 12) says, 'if it were not the custom to ignore the letter, this passage [within it] would long ago have been regarded as of great importance for our interpretation of Plato's later theory of knowledge'. Cornford (1935: 169), too, seems to share such confidence: 'as we know from his Seventh Letter, Plato's final decision was that the ultimate truth could never be set down on paper, and ought not to be, even if it could'. For further comments in a similar vein (and definitely from Plato), see the *Phaedrus* (275c–276a, 277d), again on writing and speech.