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Simplicius on the *Theaetetus* (*In Physica* 17,38-18,23 Diels)

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Abstract

Aristotle in *Physics* I,1 says some strange-sounding things about how we come to know wholes and parts, universals and particulars. In explicating these, Simplicius distinguishes an initial rough cognition of a thing as a whole, an intermediate “cognition according to the definition and through the elements,” and a final cognition of how the thing’s many elements are united: only this last is ἐπιστήμη. Simplicius refers to the *Theaetetus* for the point about what is needed for ἐπιστήμη and the ways that cognition according to the definition and through the elements falls short. By unpacking this reference I try to reconstruct Simplicius’ reading of “Socrates’ Dream,” its place in the *Theaetetus*’ larger argument, and its harmony with other Platonic and Aristotelian texts. But this reconstruction depends on undoing some catastrophic emendations in Diels’s text of Simplicius. Diels’s emendations arise from his assumptions about definitions and elements, in Socrates’ Dream and elsewhere, and rethinking the Simplicius passage may help us rethink those assumptions.

Keywords

Aristotle, Simplicius, *Theaetetus*, Diels, element, definition

I

There is an interesting passage in Simplicius’ commentary on the first chapter of the *Physics* which sheds an unexpected light on his, and perhaps other late ancient Platonists’, reading of the *Theaetetus*; this is particularly valuable because there is no extant neo-Platonic commentary on this

¹ I would like to thank Sara Magrin, David Sedley, and the editors of *Phronesis* for their comments on this paper, and Rachel Barney, Ian Mueller and Robert Wardy for comments on the translation of Simplicius.

dialogue.² Unfortunately, Diels failed to understand the passage, and made a series of changes in the text (a catastrophic letter σ added at a crucial point, a mistakenly bracketed passage, a wrongly posited lacuna, as well as some misleading footnotes) which have made it hard for subsequent readers to see what Simplicius was saying. Diels did not have sufficient patience with what he regarded as Simplicius' neo-Platonic digressions, but if a scholar of his stature could not understand the passage, it is because the passage offers real difficulties, and these are worth exploring.

The difficulties of the passage arise in large part from the difficulties of the passage Simplicius is commenting on, which continue to vex modern scholars of the *Physics*. In *Physics* I,1 Aristotle stresses that in order to have scientific knowledge of any domain of things (his main present interest is in *natural* things) we have to know their principles and causes and elements. But these are not immediately given to us: we have to start with the things that are "more knowable to us," or more knowable to sensation, and proceed until we can grasp the prior things that are "more knowable by nature," or more intelligible. This much is standard Aristotelianism, but there are oddities in the way Aristotle develops the thought in the present passage. It is a bit strange that he speaks as if the reason why the thing immediately given is less than fully intelligible is that it is a "confused" composite which must be "divided" to reach the elements or principles. It is stranger that one conclusion he draws (apparently one of the main conclusions of the chapter) is that "we must proceed from the universals to the particulars" (184a23-4): we might have expected, on the contrary, that particulars would be more knowable to us, and that we would proceed from them to universals which are more knowable by nature. But Aristotle insists here that it is the other way around: "for the whole is more knowable according to sensation, and the universal is a kind of whole [$\acute{\omicron}\lambda\omicron\nu\ \tau\iota$]: for the universal comprehends many things [i.e. the many particulars that fall under it] as parts" (a24-6). He adds that "words stand in something

² Proclus did write a commentary, now lost, which he cites at *In Timaeum* I,255,25-6 Diehl; Asclepius *In Metaphysica* 70,29-31 apparently refers to a commentary (or lectures) by Ammonius. The *Theaetetus* is on the apparently standard curriculum of Platonic dialogues cited in the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, chapter 26; see Westerink's discussion in the introduction to his edition (*Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, introduction, text, translation and indices by L. G. Westerink, Amsterdam, 1962). Simplicius refers casually to a different part of the *Theaetetus* a few pages before our passage (*In Physica* 13,10-12), and was certainly thoroughly familiar with the text.

like this same relation to their formulae: for a word, like ‘circle,’ signifies something as a whole and indistinctly [ὅλον τι καὶ ἀδιορίστως], whereas its definition divides it into the particulars” (a26-b3). This makes sense in itself, but the “particulars” into which a definition divides the term would be something like its genera and differentiae, which are more universal than it is, and so the comparison does not seem to support the claim that the universal is more knowable to us and less knowable by nature. Aristotle adds, finally, that “little children at first call all men fathers and all women mothers, and afterwards distinguish each of these” (b3-5).

Simplicius has to make sense of all this: it does not seem fully coherent internally, it seems to conflict with things Aristotle says elsewhere about universals and particulars, and Simplicius as a Platonist will have difficulty saying that universals are posterior to their particulars. I will not try to retrace all the steps of Simplicius’ solution, but will say just enough to give context for the disputed passage 17,38-18,23.

Simplicius thinks that while the relations of a whole to its parts, of a universal to its particulars, and of a name to the things mentioned in its definition are in some respects analogous, there are also important differences between the three cases. Aristotle has mentioned the universal and the whole at 184a23-6, and to clarify and support his claims about them he introduces the analogy of the name and its definition. But, Simplicius says, the name is really analogous only to the whole, not to the universal (so 17,5-8): the name is not predicated of any of the things mentioned in its definition, nor the whole of any of its parts, in the way that the universal is predicated of its particulars (17,8-13); putting it the other way around, since what is composed of elements is not predicated of any of its elements, the universal cannot be composed of its particulars as elements (17,33-7). So Aristotle adds a second analogy, the children learning language, which is more appropriate for clarifying the case of the universal (17,13-14). And it is true that if we know something under a universal description (like “father” in the childish sense in which it applies to all adult male humans) we know it less precisely than when we know it under a more particular description, and the less precise knowledge may come first for us: we recognize first that the thing approaching is an animal, then that it is human, then that it is Socrates (16,17-20).³ This does

³) This standard late ancient example (it is also in the parallel passages in Themistius, *In Physica* 2,5-9, and Philoponus, *In Physica* 11,11-18) becomes extremely common in

not mean that the universal in itself, as a separate intelligible form, is easier to comprehend than the particulars, but Simplicius takes the universals that are easy to know to be the dependent universals which arise by abstraction out of many particulars (18,20-23 and 19,12-17).⁴ But he also defuses the issue of universals by saying that the *Physics* is pursuing the analysis of natural things into their causes and elements, and that for this reason the examples of the whole and of the name will be more relevant to the present argument than the example of the universal, since we do not understand universals by analyzing them into individuals (17,33-7).

II

So far Simplicius has been explicating the sense in which Aristotle can maintain that the whole or the name or the universal is more knowable to us but less knowable in itself than are its parts, or the things mentioned in its definition, or its particulars. But Simplicius claims that in all three cases there is also a sense in which the whole or the name or the universal is less knowable to us, but intrinsically more worth knowing. This is supposed to be clearest in the case of the name, so Simplicius tries to use this case to illuminate the more obscure cases of the universal and the whole. This is what the disputed passage 17,38-18,23 is about. I will give first the text and then a translation. There are, in a sense, no real textual problems: the few differences among the four known independent manuscripts and the Aldine either do not affect the sense or are easy to decide, and in all but one case (which I will note) I will accept Diels's choices between the various manuscripts and the Aldine where they diverge, while rejecting all

medieval philosophy: some of the history is traced by Henrik Lagerlund, "Singular Terms and Vague Concepts in Late Medieval Mental Language Theory or the Decline and Fall of Mental Language," in Gyula Klima, ed., *Intentionality, Cognition and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy* (New York, forthcoming 2010).

⁴ Simplicius here follows and takes for granted Proclus' theory of the three kinds of universals, the universal existing *before* the particulars as a paradigm in $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, the universal existing immanently *in* the particulars, and the universal generated *after* the particulars, through an act of abstraction grasping what is common to the many particulars, and existing only in the soul. Proclus expounds this theory notably at *In Euclidem* 50,16-51,9 Friedlein, and Simplicius notably at *In Categoriae* 82,35-83,10.

of his emendations except one innocuous bracketing of a gloss. (My punctuation, however, will differ from his.)⁵

Δεύτερον δὲ ἐπιστάσεως ἄξιον, ὅτι διττὴ ἐστὶ τοῦ ὅλου καὶ τοῦ καθόλου ἡ γνώσις ὡσπερ καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος, ἡ μὲν ὀλοσχερῆς καὶ συγκεχυμένη καὶ κατὰ ψιλὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ γνώστου γινομένη, ἥτις καὶ παχυτέρα ἐστὶ τῆς κατὰ τὸν ὀρισμὸν γνώσεως, ἡ δὲ συνηρημένη καὶ ἠνωμένη καὶ τὰ κατὰ μέρος περιειληφυῖα, νοερά τις αὐτῆ καὶ ἀπλῆ, φανταστικῆ⁶ δὲ μᾶλλον ἐκείνη καὶ ἀπεστενωμένη· καὶ ἡ μὲν τοῖς πολλοῖς συνήθης [ἡ ὀλοσχερῆς],⁷ ἡ δὲ τοῖς ἀκροτάτοις. καὶ γὰρ τὸ καθόλου οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ κατὰ τὸ κοινὸν νοοῦσι τὸ ἐν τοῖς κατὰ μέρος ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως αὐτοῦ ψιλὴν τὴν ιδιότητα λαμβάνοντες προλάμπουσιν μᾶλλον διὰ τὸ ἐπικρατεῖν τῶν διαφορῶν τὴν κοινότητα, οἱ δὲ τὴν ὅλην αὐτοῦ τῶν κατὰ μέρος περέληψιν καὶ τὴν διὰ πάντων δίξιζιν καὶ τὴν τὰς διαφορὰς συνηρηκυῖαν κοινότητα νοερῶς συναίρουσι· καὶ τὸ ὄνομα δὲ ἀκούσας τὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰ τύχοι ὁ μὲν πολλὸς εἰς τὴν ὀλοσχερῆ φαντασίαν ἀποφέρεται, ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος τὸν ὀρισμὸν ἐν ἀπλότητι μίᾳ συναίρει, ὡστε ἠνωμένον τὸ τοῦ ὀρισμοῦ πλῆθος νοῆσαι καὶ ἅμα τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τὶ ἐν λαβεῖν· ὅπερ ἴδιον ἐπιστήμης, ὃ καὶ ὁ ἐν Θεαιτήτῳ Σωκράτης ἠνίξατο· ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸν ὀρισμὸν καὶ ἡ διὰ τῶν στοιχείων γνώσις μέση τις ἐστὶν ἀμφοῖν, διανοητικὴ μᾶλλον οὔσα ἢ καὶ δοξαστικὴ, καὶ τῆς μὲν χειρόνος κατὰ τὸ ἀκριβὲς ὑπερέχουσα, τῆς δὲ κρείττονος ἀπολειπομένη κατὰ τὸ διηρημένον καὶ ἡ μᾶλλον ἢ ἦττον κεχηνός. οὕτω δὲ καὶ τῶν κοινῶν ἡ γνώσις ἡ μὲν ὀλοσχερῆς προτρέχει τῆς κατὰ τὰς διαφορὰς διαρθρώσεως, ἡ δὲ ἀκριβῆς ἐπιγίνεται συναιροῦσα ἐν τῇ κοινότητι τὰς διαφορὰς, ὅταν οὖν ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης τὴν τῶν κοινῶν γνώσιν πρώτην μὲν ὡς πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὑστέραν δὲ τῇ φύσει λέγῃ, τὴν ὀλοσχερῆ ταύτην φησὶ τὴν ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως τῆς κοινότητος ψιλῆς γινομένην, ἥτις οὐδὲ ὑφέστηκε καθ' ἑαυτήν.⁸ (17,38-18,23)

⁵ On the stemma of Simplicius' *Physics* commentary see Dieter Harlfinger, "Einige Aspekte der handschriftlichen Überlieferung des Physikkommentars des Simplicios," in Ilsetraut Hadot, ed., *Simplicius, sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 267-86. For the first four books of the commentary Diels reports three manuscripts, D, E and F, as well as the Aldine; Harlfinger shows that there is another independent witness, the Moscow manuscript Codex Mosquensis Muz. 3649. (Harlfinger also shows that E follows different exemplars in different parts, and may well be dependent on D in the part I cite.) Through the kindness of the Aristoteles-Archiv of the Freie Universität Berlin I have been able to check the Moscow manuscript for this passage, and I report its readings below, but none of its readings that might be right would make a significant difference in the sense. (This is not true in other passages.)

⁶ With the Aldine deleting the manuscripts' καὶ before φανταστικῆ; see below for discussion.

⁷ Accepting Diels's bracketing of ἡ ὀλοσχερῆς as a gloss; if we leave the words in the text, the sense will not be seriously different.

⁸ The Moscow manuscript differs from the text I print only on the following points: the scribe (the 13th-century Byzantine princess Theodora Palaiologina Rhaulaina) omits τὰ ἐν τὰ κατὰ μέρος, with the other manuscripts and against the Aldine; writes λοιπὸν for κοινὸν ἐν κατὰ τὸ κοινὸν νοοῦσι, a reading peculiar to herself and certainly wrong; omits ὃ ἐν ὃ

This would mean something like:

Second, it is worth noting that there is a twofold cognition of the whole and of the universal, just as there is of the name, one kind of cognition being crude and confused and arising from a bare notion of the thing known – and this is rougher than cognition according to the definition – and another [kind of cognition] which is synthesized and united and comprehends the particulars, the latter being intellectual and simple while the former is imaginative and restricted, and the former being familiar to the many, the latter to those at the summit. For the many understand the universal, as what is common in the particulars, grasping by abstraction its bare specificity, which shines out when what is common dominates the differences. The others intellectually synthesize the whole grasp of its particulars and the traversal of all of them and the commonality which synthesizes the differences. And [likewise] when the many hear the name (for example) “man,” they are brought back to [i.e. reminded of] the crude imagination, but the philosopher synthesizes the definition in a single simplicity, so that he thinks the multiplicity of the definition united, and grasps simultaneously the multiplicity and the one. And this is proper to scientific knowledge, as was hinted also by the Socrates of the *Theaetetus*. The cognition according to the definition and through the elements is intermediate between the two, being, rather, discursive or else opinionative, surpassing the inferior kind of cognition in its precision, but falling short of the superior kind of cognition through being divided and also through being more or less lacunose. And in this way too the crude cognition of the common things precedes the articulation of the differences, but the precise cognition arises afterwards by synthesizing the differences in the commonality. So whenever Aristotle says that the cognition of common things is first in relation to us, but posterior by nature, he means the crude cognition arising from abstraction of the bare commonality, which also does not subsist by itself.

Thus on Simplicius’ account it is not simply, as *Physics* I,1 by itself might suggest, that we start with a rough grasp of a universal and arrive at a more precise knowledge of the particulars. Rather, we proceed in at least three stages to a knowledge of what is more knowable in itself but less knowable to us: first a rough grasp of a universal, then an understanding of the particulars, and then a more precise understanding of the universal, dependent on the understanding of the particulars but somehow “synthesizing

καὶ ὁ ἐν Θεαιτήτῳ Σωκράτης, with F and the Aldine against DE; and at the beginning of the penultimate sentence has οὕτως instead of οὕτω and at the beginning of the last sentence ὅταν δ’ οὖν Ἀριστοτέλης instead of ὅταν οὖν ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης, variants apparently peculiar to herself but so trivial that Diels may well not have reported them in the other manuscripts. The omission of the ὁ (and the comma before it) in ὁ καὶ ὁ ἐν Θεαιτήτῳ Σωκράτης might be right, in which case we should translate “which the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* also hinted to be proper to scientific knowledge.”

the differences” in a single grasp. (So we might proceed from a rough grasp of “animal” – a sort of average of the individuals we have seen? – to an understanding of each of the particular kinds of animal, and thence to an understanding of the genus animal that allows us to grasp all the possible differentiae and species arising from the δύναμις of the genus.)⁹ There is a similar progression in our understanding of a name: first we associate the name with an image; then we determine the concept by giving a definition, that is, by enumerating a series of marks of the thing; and then we comprehend the essence in a single grasp that unites these many marks. (Recall that Aristotle thinks that a scientific definition must be one in such a way as to be *of* one thing, so that understanding the essence will involve understanding why the different things mentioned in the definition are united with each other.) Presumably something similar happens in our grasping some whole, e.g. a certain kind of animal: first we have a rough apprehension of the animal as a whole; then we come to understand each of the functional parts of the animal (each of which will distinguish it from other kinds of animals, and will be mentioned in a full scientific definition of this species), and then we put our knowledge of the parts together into a scientific grasp of the whole consisting of these parts necessarily united to each other.¹⁰

In each of these cognitive progressions, the first rough grasp of the universal or the whole or the name is φανταστική (18,3, cp. 18,11 τὴν ὀλοσχερῆ φαντασίαν), the intermediate cognition “according to the definition and through the elements” is either δοξαστική or διανοητική

⁹ The Aristotelian position (see esp. *Metaphysics* Z12) is that the genus must be in potentiality to all its differentiae at once, and therefore that the genus cannot exist separately, since what is separate and eternal and unchanging has no potentiality for contraries. The standard neo-Platonic response (thus Ammonius *In Isagogen* 103,9-104,31) is that the genus existing paradigmatically before its species and individuals contains paradigmatic versions of all its differentiae *in actuality*; it has them in potentiality only in the sense that it has the *active* power to produce them in the species and individuals which causally depend on it (for this distinction, applied to the One, see Plotinus V,3,15).

¹⁰ Simplicius speaks in this way a little before (16,12-17), although mentioning earth, water, air and fire rather than the organic parts of the animal: “we readily know of each animal and plant that *this* is a human being or a horse, and that *this* is a fig-tree or a vine, but it does not belong to everyone to know that these things are composed out of the four elements; and *how* the elements are disposed so as to make an animal, and *this* animal, and how so as to make a plant, and *this* plant, belongs only to those who have attained the summit of philosophy” (compare “summit” at 18,5).

(18,14-16), and the final grasp of the one and the many together is “proper to ἐπιστήμη” (18,13). Simplicius surely intends to correlate these kinds of cognition with the segments of the divided line of *Republic* VI 509d6-511e5: Plato calls the two lower segments together δόξα, and the lowest segment εἰκασία, but since he goes back and forth between calling its objects εἰκόνες and φαντάσματα (compare 509e1-510a2 with 510e2-3), it is presumably also legitimate to call the lowest segment φαντασία, and to use δόξα more narrowly for the segment above it (Plato calls it πίστις, 511e1 and 534a1,5). Διάνοια is Plato’s name for the second-highest segment, and while he calls the highest segment νοῦς or νόησις in *Republic* VI, he consistently calls it ἐπιστήμη in the reprise at *Republic* VII 533c7-534a8. When we go beyond φαντασία to δόξα or διάνοια, we are going beyond an image of the whole or an image associated with a name, to something like the “elements” [στοιχεῖα] that Aristotle discusses in *Physics* I,1, perhaps the parts of a whole or the marks included in a definition; ἐπιστήμη depends on grasping these many elements but goes beyond them to grasp their necessary unity.

III

Diels’s emendations, and his remarks in his critical apparatus, show that he understood the passage very differently from what I have just sketched. He made what I think are catastrophic interventions in two places.

In the long and complicated sentence 18,5-17, Simplicius contrasts a crude with a sophisticated grasp, first of the universal (18,5-10) and then of the name (18,10-14); then he says, in the text as I have printed it above, ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸν ὀρισμὸν καὶ ἡ διὰ τῶν στοιχείων γνῶσις μέση τίς ἐστὶν ἀμφοῖν, διανοητικὴ μᾶλλον οὕσα ἢ καὶ δοξαστικὴ, surpassing the inferior kind of cognition in one respect but falling short of the superior kind of cognition in another. Diels, however, posits a lacuna before ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸν ὀρισμὸν, and he brackets ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸν ὀρισμὸν καὶ ἡ διὰ τῶν στοιχείων as a gloss on ἀμφοῖν; he thinks that once this gloss was copied (from the margin or from between two lines) into the text, and the phrase ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸν ὀρισμὸν καὶ ἡ διὰ τῶν στοιχείων γνῶσις was read as a unit, then whatever Simplicius had written before γνῶσις seemed extraneous and was dropped from the text – he conjectures that Simplicius originally wrote something like ἄλλη δὲ γνῶσις μέση τίς ἐστὶν ἀμφοῖν.

What this means is that Diels takes ἡ κατὰ τὸν ὄρισμὸν γνῶσις and ἡ διὰ τῶν στοιχείων γνῶσις not to be identical or analogous cognitions intermediate between the crude and sophisticated cognitions that Simplicius has been describing in lines 5-14, but rather to be two opposed extreme types of cognition that Simplicius has been describing: ἡ διὰ τῶν στοιχείων γνῶσις would be the crude cognitions, ἡ κατὰ τὸν ὄρισμὸν γνῶσις would be the sophisticated cognitions, and Simplicius would now be saying that there is a third type of cognition intermediate between the two.¹¹

Diels's way of understanding knowledge according to the definition and knowledge through the elements also lies behind his other emendation in our passage. At the beginning of the passage as I have printed it, Simplicius says that "there is a twofold cognition of the whole and of the universal, as also of the name, one kind of cognition being crude and confused and arising from a bare notion of the thing known – and this is rougher than cognition according to the definition," ἡ δὲ συνηρημένη καὶ ἡνωμένη καὶ τὰ κατὰ μέρος περιειληφυῖα, νοερά τις αὐτὴ καὶ ἀπλή, φανταστικὴ δὲ μᾶλλον ἐκείνη καὶ ἀπεστενωμένη. Diels, however, prints ἡ δὲ συνηρημένη καὶ ἡνωμένη καὶ τὰ κατὰ μέρος περιειληφυῖα νοερά τις αὐτὴ καὶ ἀπλή καὶ φανταστικὴ δὲ μᾶλλον ἐκείνης καὶ ἀπεστενωμένη, so without the commas, reading καὶ before φανταστικὴ (with the manuscripts, where I have deleted it with the Aldine), and most importantly emending ἐκείνη to ἐκείνης. This extra σ has radical effects on the meaning. I have translated "and another [kind of cognition] which is synthesized and united and comprehends the particulars, the latter being intellectual and simple while the former is imaginative and restricted." Diels, although he gives no explanation, must take the clause to mean something like "and another [kind of cognition] which is synthesized and united and comprehends the particulars, being intellectual and simple and also more imaginative and restricted than the former."¹² Thus instead of Simplicius contrasting an

¹¹ Ἡ διὰ τῶν στοιχείων γνῶσις and ἡ κατὰ τὸν ὄρισμὸν γνῶσις would on Diels's account not be Simplicius' own words, but would be a glossator's – presumably correct – explication of what two things Simplicius was referring to. Simplicius does speak of ἡ κατὰ τὸν ὄρισμὸν γνῶσις at 18,2, in a passage whose text is uncontested.

¹² As David Sedley suggests, it may be possible to save the manuscripts' καὶ against the Aldine without Diels's emendation, reading νοερά τις αὐτὴ καὶ ἀπλή, καὶ φανταστικὴ δὲ μᾶλλον ἐκείνη καὶ ἀπεστενωμένη, and translating "the latter being intellectual and simple while the former is *both* imaginative and restricted." But I can't see any reason why

intellectual with an imaginative kind of cognition, he would be lumping intellectual and imaginative cognitions together, presumably to contrast them with a crude or rough *sensory* cognition. This is surely wrong, since a few lines below, at 18,10-11, Simplicius describes the crude cognition of a name as turning on a “crude φαντασία”.¹³ More importantly, however, when Simplicius says that the crude cognition of the whole or universal or name is “rougher than the cognition according to the definition,” and that the sophisticated cognition is (in the translation I have suggested for Diels’s text) “intellectual and simple and also more imaginative and restricted than the former,” Diels must understand these descriptions as comparing the crude and the sophisticated kind of cognition *with each other*. So he takes “the cognition according to the definition,” not to be an intermediate kind of cognition more refined than the first crude cognition but cruder than the “synthesized and united” scientific cognition, but rather to be simply identical with the “synthesized and united [cognition which] comprehends the particulars.” And this corresponds to Diels’s interpretation of “the cognition according to the definition” at 18,14-15, which, as we saw, he takes to be a gloss referring to the sophisticated scientific cognition. On Diels’s reading the intermediate kind of cognition would not be introduced until 18,15, and would apparently be a kind of parenthesis digressing from the main point of the paragraph, which is just to contrast sensory with intellectual cognitions.

φανταστική and ἀπεστενωμένη, but not the contrasted νοερά and ἀπλή, should be marked with a “both-and.”

¹³ Another unfortunate result of Diels’s emendation is that Simplicius would be saying of the higher cognition not just that it is τὰ κατὰ μέρος περιειληφύια and ἀπλή but also that it is ἀπεστενωμένη, when in fact these are contrasting characterizations of two opposed kinds of cognition. To say that a cognition is ἀπεστενωμένη, rather than περιειληφύια, means that it does not comprehend all the particulars, that its content is limited and excludes certain things. (At Simplicius *In de Caelo* 484,27-485,2, commenting on *De Caelo* II,12 292b7-10, the good of a plant is ἀπεστενωμένον in comparison with that of a human being, i.e. it comprehends a narrower range of activities.) The word seems to be particularly associated with Damascius, and in other writers may be a sign of his influence: Damascius several times, like Simplicius here, contrasts a higher ἀπλοῦν unity, which embraces many things without being differentiated by them, with something inferior which keeps its unity only by being ἀπεστενωμένον and excluding other things. For this kind of thought see Damascius *De principiis* I,81,5-11, I,85,6-12, II,59,19-22 and II,62,10-15 Westerink-Combès, of which especially the last has close verbal echoes with our passage of Simplicius.

Diels's difficulty was in part that he could not see how the cognition of a thing through its definition could fall short of full scientific knowledge (although Simplicius makes clear enough what more is needed when he says that "the philosopher synthesizes the definition in a single simplicity, so that he thinks the multiplicity of the definition united, and grasps simultaneously the multiplicity and the one; and this is proper to scientific knowledge," 18,11-13). Another part of Diels's difficulty was that he could not see what the cognition through the elements would be and how it would be connected with the cognition through the definition, because he assumes that the elements are always the material constituents of a thing, and therefore that the cognition through the elements is crude sensory cognition – although Simplicius is very emphatic, when he explains what Aristotle means by "principles or causes or elements" in the first sentence of the *Physics*, in insisting that "element" covers all intrinsic [ἐνυπάρχοντα] causes, thus both material and formal causes, by contrast with the extrinsic efficient and paradigmatic and final causes.¹⁴ Both difficulties on Diels's part are connected with each other, and with his difficulty in explaining what Simplicius is referring to when he says that to "think the multiplicity of the definition united, and grasp simultaneously the multiplicity and the one" is "proper to scientific knowledge [ἐπιστήμη], as was hinted [not only by Aristotle here, but] also by the Socrates of the *Theaetetus*" (18,13-14). Diels says in his apparatus, "Θεαιτήτω puto p.146D". This is the passage where Socrates explains to Theaetetus why it is not right to define ἐπιστήμη as geometry and shoemaking and so on: because this gives many things which are ἐπιστήμαι rather than what ἐπιστήμη itself is, and because it defines ἐπιστήμη as ἐπιστήμη of X and Y, which is uninformative if we do not already know what ἐπιστήμη is. But this has little to do with Simplicius' concerns here. He is citing the *Theaetetus*, not for the unity needed in a *definition* of scientific knowledge (or

¹⁴) For Simplicius on what Aristotle means by "principles or causes or elements," and his criticisms of Eudemus and Alexander who take only matter and not form to be an element, see *In Physica* 10,8-11,36 and 3,16-19. Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Δ3 says that all elements are ἐνυπάρχοντα (so 1014b14-15; some principles are ἐνυπάρχοντα and some are not, Δ1 1013a19-20), but leaves it unclear whether the form counts as ἐνυπάρχον and therefore as an element. *Metaphysics* Ζ17 1041b30-33, drawing on Δ3, says that the form is not an element and that only the matter is an element, and Eudemus and Alexander follow this authority; but *Metaphysics* Λ4 1070b22-6, equally drawing on Δ3, says that both form and matter (and privation) are elements, and Simplicius follows this authority.

in a definition of anything else), but for the grasp of unity, which is the distinguishing property of scientific knowledge itself. And Diels's "puto" is an admission that this passage does not really fit.

IV

There is, however, another passage of the *Theaetetus* which might – if we do not read it Diels's way – be seen as making Simplicius' point, and which fits very well with Simplicius' discussion, erased by Diels's intervention, of "the cognition according to the definition and through the elements" and the ways that it falls short of ἐπιστήμη. Simplicius is thinking of Socrates' Dream (i.e. the theory discussed at *Theaetetus* 201d8-208b12), where the hypothesis that ἐπιστήμη is true opinion accompanied by a λόγος is explicated by saying that to give a λόγος of a thing is to spell it out into its simple elements or letters [στοιχεῖα].¹⁵ Socrates raises a series of objections to this hypothesis, some of which might be taken as pointing out ways in which the cognition of a thing through its elements, unless supplemented by something further, falls short of being scientific knowledge. Apparently Diels, like most scholars of his time, took the elements here to be material constituents or perhaps sense-data, and took the passage to be a Platonic critique of materialist or empiricist theories of knowledge;¹⁶ but it is very

¹⁵ What I am calling the "Dream" passage is signposted by the mentions of "dream" at each end, 201d8 and 208b11. Some scholars demarcate the "Dream" more narrowly: thus David Sedley in *The Midwife of Platonism* (Oxford, 2004) speaks of the Dream theory as being stated at 201b6-202d7 and criticized at 202d8-206c2, distinguishing a "second 'element' theory" at 206e6-208b12. I see only one theory here, although 202d8-206c2 aims at refuting only one thesis of this theory, namely that the complexes are knowable while their elements are unknowable, while 206e6-208b12 also brings out other inadequacies of the Dream theory in accounting for knowledge. Modern scholars often think that the Dream is reporting some other philosopher's theory of elements, which Plato does not himself endorse; I take Simplicius to think that Plato accepts the theory of elements, but argues that the cognitive states which the Dream describes as knowledge in fact fall short of knowledge, although they come closer to it than the sensations and true opinions which were the candidates for knowledge earlier in the dialogue.

¹⁶ Diels gives both of these interpretations (saying that Plato probably intended the ambiguity between the "logical" [= epistemological] and the "ontological" reading) in his *Elementum: eine Vorarbeit zum griechischen und lateinischen Thesaurus* (Leipzig, 1899), pp. 18-19; since this was considerably later than his edition of the first four books of Simplicius' *Physics* commentary (1882), it is not certain that Diels was already thinking about the

unlikely that Simplicius took the passage this way, because as we have seen he insists that formal as well as material causes are elements. Rather, the elements of a thing will be anything that is mentioned in its definition (at least, anything intrinsic to the thing that is mentioned in its definition), and “the cognition through the elements” will be just the same as “the cognition according to the definition.”¹⁷

How might Simplicius take Socrates as pointing out the deficiencies of cognition according to the definition and through the elements? Some of Socrates’ objections are just to the assertion that complex objects (“syllables”) are scientifically knowable [ἐπιστητά] while their elements are not scientifically knowable but only perceptible [αἰσθητά]; and these objections can be solved by saying that the elements, while not scientifically knowable, are grasped by a kind of cognition superior to ἐπιστήμη, namely νοῦς as Aristotle describes it at *Posterior Analytics* II,19 100b5-17 (and that this is what Plato’s word “αἰσθητά” is hinting at, to signify an immediate grasp without mental composition).¹⁸ But other objections may not be so

Theaetetus in this way in editing our passage. In *Elementum* he takes the *Theaetetus* to be showing in its three main parts that knowledge is neither sense-perception, nor the combination of sense-perceptions into opinions (Vorstellungen), nor true opinions brought together under a concept by Socratic induction, with the implicit conclusion that knowledge is, rather, Platonic dialectic. He takes the Dream to be recapitulating this whole development, with the letters (under the “logical” interpretation) corresponding to sense-perceptions, the syllables to (true?) opinions, and the whole words to concepts; the Dream theory would be saying that right opinions need to be brought together under a concept to be transformed into knowledge, and Plato’s refutation of the Dream theory would show that even this is not sufficient for knowledge.

¹⁷) Note that Aristotle routinely speaks of the constituents of a definition as στοιχεῖα, and that he attributes to Plato or Platonists the thesis that the genera of a thing are its στοιχεῖα: so *Metaphysics* B3 998a20-b14 (esp. b3-14), and note *Metaphysics* Δ3 1014b9-11 ἐπεὶ οὖν τὰ καλούμενα γένη καθόλου καὶ ἀδιαίρετα (οὐ γὰρ ἔστι λόγος αὐτῶν), στοιχεῖα τὰ γένη λέγουσιν τινες, where the remark about not having a λόγος suggests that he is thinking of the *Theaetetus* or something closely related to it. In H3, cited below, he apparently accuses Plato or Platonists of citing only the στοιχεῖα in giving the λόγος of a thing. On Aristotle on Plato and the physicists on στοιχεῖα, see my “*Metaphysics* Z10-16 and the Argument-Structure of *Metaphysics* Z,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, v. 21, Winter 2001, pp. 83-134.

¹⁸) In the *Posterior Analytics* passage Aristotle argues that since ἐπιστήμη ἅπαντα μετὰ λόγου ἐστὶ (100b10), there cannot be ἐπιστήμη of the ἀρχαί, and since the ἀρχαί must be better known than the things demonstrated from them, the ἀρχαί must be grasped by something superior to ἐπιστήμη, which can only be νοῦς. Aristotle seems here to be giving a reading of the *Theaetetus*’ Dream passage, and endorsing it himself.

easy to solve. Thus at 203c4-205e5 Socrates asks whether the whole is the same thing as all its parts together, or is something other than them: if it is the same as its parts, then to know it is to know them, so the whole cannot be knowable when its elements are unknowable; but if it is other than the parts, it seems that it must be another simple unanalyzable thing like the elements, and if they are unknowable it will be unknowable for the same reason. We can answer that the whole is indeed the same as its parts, and that when the whole is known by ἐπιστήμη the elements are grasped by νοῦς, but difficulties will remain. If the whole is just all the parts, and to know the whole is therefore just to know all the parts, it seems that if I know all the letters of the alphabet, I will also know all the words in the language, and also all the tragedies and comedies. And, in an example that Plato gives (207e7-208b10), if I do not know how to spell the syllable θε, but happen to guess it right in “Theaetetus” (while guessing wrong the spelling of the same syllable in “Theodorus”), and if I likewise guess right with each other syllable of the name “Theaetetus,” then I will have a λόγος spelling out the name into its letters, but I will still have only true opinion and not knowledge about what the name is, and about what letters belong in the name.

What more then do we need, beyond the cognition “according to the definition and through the elements,” in order to have scientific knowledge of the thing? Simplicius says that we must “grasp simultaneously the multiplicity and the one.” That is: it is not enough to grasp just the unity, as when we initially perceived the unanalyzed syllable θε (and if the syllable were simple and unanalyzable we would always remain in this state), but it is also not enough just to list the plurality of letters θ, ε; we need to understand why precisely *these* letters need to go in this syllable, or why precisely these letters go together, and in what order, rather than just guessing which letters to include or which letters to group together. Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* Z17 and H3 that the syllable is something over and above the letters (Z17 1041b11-19, H3 1043b10-13), and he criticizes people who, in giving the λόγος of a thing, just give its στοιχεῖα, the constituents of the definition, without being able to explain what accounts for their unity (H3 1043b4-14, 1043b32-1044a11, with related discussions in Z12 and H6). Aristotle appears at least in the H3 passage to intend this as a criticism of Plato, but Simplicius takes Plato to have anticipated this criticism in the *Theaetetus*’ Dream passage, and to have said that a whole cannot be known if it is considered either as merely identical with its many parts or as purely

one and simple, and that going through the many στοιχεῖα in the definition of a thing without grasping their unity cannot give you scientific knowledge but, at best, δῖάνοια.

As Simplicius says, “the cognition according to the definition and through the elements is intermediate between the two [i.e. between the sensory/imaginative and the scientific cognitions of the whole or of the *definiendum*], being, rather, discursive [διανοητική] or else opinionative [δόξαστική], surpassing the inferior kind of cognition in its precision, but falling short of the superior kind of cognition through being divided and also through being more or less lacunose.” When is it δῖάνοια and when is it δόξα? Plato says, while speaking from the point of view of the Dream theory of knowledge, that “the pieces of wood in a wagon are one hundred” (*Theaetetus* 207a3-4, quoting Hesiod *Works and Days* 456), and that, if we can name only a few major parts such as the wheels and the axle, we have only δόξα about the wagon and not ἐπιστήμη. We might be falling short here by analyzing the wagon only into its syllables and not into its letters, or by leaving some letters out entirely, or both; at least the latter deficiency counts as being “lacunose,” and either deficiency means that we will have only δόξα, and will fall short of what the Dream theory represents as ἐπιστήμη. But, as Simplicius interprets the *Theaetetus*, even what the Dream theory represents as ἐπιστήμη is really only δῖάνοια, and we must add a synthesizing grasp of the many elements to convert it into scientific knowledge.¹⁹ Read this way, the *Theaetetus* “hints” at a positive account of knowledge, and sets out an ascending chain of types of cognition leading up to knowledge, not just from sensation to δόξα to ἐπιστήμη of complexes to νοῦς of simples, but from sensation or imagination to δόξα to δῖάνοια to ἐπιστήμη of complexes (and doubtless above that the νοῦς of simples as well, hinted at by saying that the simples are not ἐπιστητά but

¹⁹) And it is very likely, as David Sedley suggests to me, that Simplicius takes the *Theaetetus*’ discussion of the “difference” or “differentia” of a thing as the λόγος that might convert true δόξα into knowledge (208b12-210b2) to anticipate Aristotle’s account, in *Metaphysics* Z12 and Z17-H, of the ultimate differentia of a thing as constituting its λόγος. Aristotle there takes the differentia as unifying all the elements in the λόγος, and if that view were Plato’s too (although *Theaetetus* 208b12-210b2 does not explicitly say so), that would give Simplicius a Platonic antecedent for saying that what must be grasped in knowledge is the unifying differentia (allowing us to “grasp simultaneously the multiplicity and the one”) and not a mere list of elements.

αἰσθητό). And, very much in accord with Simplicius' overall program, the *Theaetetus* can be harmonized not only with the *Republic* but also with Aristotle's account of scientific definition, so as to show that what seem to be Aristotle's criticisms of Plato are criticisms of a position that Plato had already refuted, and are not really directed against Plato.